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Black-White variations in the lagged reciprocal relationship between religiosity and perceived control

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Abstract

This national longitudinal data-based multi-population LISREL study, the most comprehensive assessment to date of racial variations in the (in)congruity between religiosity and perceived control, gauges variation among Black and White Americans in the lagged reciprocal relationship between religiosity dimensions and mastery. Racial variation in the *reciprocal* religiosity-perceived control relationship has hitherto gone un-addressed. Prior investigations have also typically utilised cross-sectional samples – often from regional or age-specific populations. The observed *public* religiosity-mastery relationship over time exhibits signs of *mutual reinforcement* among Blacks: public religiosity enhances Blacks’ subsequent mastery, while prior mastery borderline-significantly enhances their public religiosity. The *subjective* religiosity-mastery relationship among Whites evinces a marginally *countervailing* pattern: Subjective religiosity *diminishes* Whites’ mastery, while mastery borderline-significantly enhances their subjective religiosity. The inordinately positive public religiosity-effect on Blacks’ mastery notably constitutes solid support for the “*resource compensation*” perspective on the impact of religiosity on mastery across dominant and subordinate groups.

Keywords

race; religiosity; mastery; mental health; stress and coping

The congruence, or lack thereof, between religiosity and the perception of control over one’s circumstances has received moderate attention (e.g., Acevedo, 2008; Ai, Peterson, Rodgers, & Tice, 2005; Calhoun-Brown, 1998; Ellison, 1993; Fiori, Brown, Cortina, & Antonucci, 2006; Greenfield, Vaillant, & Marks 2009; Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliot, 2003; Schieman, Pudroskova, Pearli, & Ellison, 2006; Stewart, 1999). Religiosity has been exclusively conceptualised as the *independent* variable in these investigations of its connection to perceived control – all explicitly or implicitly adjudicating between the “resource compensation” and “resource amplification” perspectives (Schieman et al., 2003, pp. 204–206). The compensation perspective presumes religiosity to be a countervailing force against subordinate status and other structural forces that might undermine perceived control. Religiosity thus offsets what, for subordinate groups especially, might be an impetus toward fatalism. The amplification perspective views religiosity as fostering the sense that a powerful *other* controls life’s occurrences. In this scenario, religiosity *augments* structural forces promoting fatalism. This investigation goes beyond the goal of simply adjudicating between the resource compensation and amplification perspectives. It marshals longitudinal data to assess variations among Black and White Americans in the *reciprocal* relationship over time between mastery and dimensions of religiosity. Mastery is one of several largely

interchangeable cognates of perceived control. Others include self-efficacy, instrumentalism, personal autonomy, internal locus of control, and (on the negative side) fatalism and external locus of control (Ross & Mirowsky, 2003, pp. 423–424).

Ultimately, this research addresses the following core questions: Is there evidence of mutual causation over-time time between mastery and dimensions of religiosity (i.e., reciprocal “loops”)? Are any such loops characterised by mutual *reinforcement* or symbiosis (with each construct enhancing the other), mutual *incongruity* (each suppressing the other), or a *countervailing* reciprocal pattern (whereby the first construct enhances the second, while the second resource suppresses the first)? And does the nature of such loops hinge upon race?

The assessment of the lagged reciprocal relationship between mastery and religiosity addresses a neglected domain within the *stress and coping* perspective – which posits that unequal distributions of mental health problems across superordinate and subordinate groups are substantially explainable by stress exposure, inadequate access to psychological and social resources, and social context. Investigations guided by this paradigm have *insufficiently* addressed “processes of selection or reverse causality”, and may thus have “skipped over important theoretical and empirical problems” that could boost understanding of “how mental *health* is retained and enhanced by the vast majority of individuals” (Thoits, 2006, p. 311). Largely overlooked questions include the possible *impact* of mental health “outcomes” like psychological distress on coping resources and stress exposure, effects of coping resources on stressors, and *on each other* (Pearlin, 1999; Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, & Mullan, 1981; Thoits, 1995, 2006). As mastery and religiosity are widely construed as coping resources (e.g., Acevedo, 2008; Ellison, 1993; Fiori et al., 2006; Greenfield et al., 2009; Pearlin, 1999; Ross & Mirowsky, 2003; Schieman et al., 2003; Schieman et al., 2006; Thoits, 1995, 2006), it is the latter under-explored issue of how specific resources influence others that this research addresses most directly.

Coping resources buffer the potentially injurious impact of *stressors*—“environmental, social or internal” demands requiring readjustment of individuals’ typical behaviour patterns (Thoits, 1995, p. 54) – on mental health. While coping resources may reflect disparate facets of the individual’s personality or social experience (as with mastery and religiosity), they share the capacity to change the situation from which stressors spring, alter the meaning of stressors in ways that reduce their threat, hinder stress proliferation, or reduce the intensity of distress (Pearlin, 1999, p. 406). Coping resources may thus influence mental health directly, indirectly via “mediational” effects on stressors or other coping resources, or through “moderating” mechanisms involving tempering of deleterious effects of stressors by the resource (Pearlin et al., 1981; Pearlin, 1999; Thoits, 1995).

On possible Black-White variation in effects of religiosity and mastery on each other: theory and evidence

The meticulous attention to possible Black-White variation in the religiosity-mastery relationship heeds Thoits’ (1995) important caution that the stress and coping perspective might not apply uniformly to individuals at different social structural locations. The reciprocal religiosity-mastery relationship may vary across these races for two main reasons. Firstly, Black and White Americans have historically experienced sharply different levels of exposure to each resource: Blacks generally demonstrate substantially higher levels of religiosity (Brown, 2006; Fiori et al., 2006; Krause, 2003; Pattillo-McCoy, 1998; Schieman et al., 2006; Sherkat, 2002), and Whites typically perceive greater levels of control (Hughes & Demo, 1989; Oates, 2004). Effects of religiosity/mastery on specific outcomes may thus be more conspicuous in the group with a stronger tradition of exposure. Secondly, the tension between religiosity and mastery has been alternately portrayed as intensified or

inhibited by the African-American experience (see Calhoun-Brown, 1998; Ellison, 1993; Greenfield et al., 2009; Schieman et al., 2006; Stewart, 1999). Assessment of the magnitude/direction of the impact of religiosity and mastery *on each other* evidently facilitates a more comprehensive examination of their congruity, or lack thereof, within each race.

Religiosity is best construed as multi-faceted, and involving public, subjective, and private manifestations (Levin, Taylor, & Chatters, 1995). Multi-dimensional operationalisation facilitates detection of the “distinctive ways” in which individual religiosity dimensions may influence outcomes (Levin et al., 1995, p. 168), and be influenced by specific predictors. *Public* religiosity signals behaviour, for example, attendance or auxiliary group-participation, occurring within the context of communal religious settings. Black-White religiosity differentials are especially pronounced in this realm (Schieman et al., 2006; Sherkat, 2002). *Private* religiosity denotes sacred activities, for example, prayer or consumption of religious material/programming, occurring outside public contexts. *Subjective* religiosity reflects religion-focused thoughts or dispositions, for example, professed centrality of religion to daily life, and impression of oneself as religious (Levin et al., 1995, p. 161). The absence of private religiosity indicators at both waves of the assessed longitudinal survey results in only the public and subjective dimensions being analysed here.

The respective traditions of higher religiosity and mastery among Black and White Americans have deep structural foundations. Explanations for African-Americans’ greater religiosity typically emphasise religiosity’s value to Blacks as a coping mechanism, and prominent facilitator of socioeconomic progress. Socioeconomic and psychic adversities wrought by racism necessitate this requirement (Ellison, 1993; Krause, 2003; Schieman et al., 2006). Krause (2003) stresses that the strong emphasis on religion in the African-American community has solidly sociological explanations, with the *Black church* figuring centrally. Centuries of anti-Black prejudice and discrimination underlie the church’s sustained status as the social hub of the African-American community. The church, for example, was the birthplace of African-American formal education and many other vital community services. Such services originated in the Black church because it was the only social institution built, financed, and controlled entirely by Blacks. Alongside these historical foundations, Krause ties cultural factors to the Black church’s immense social reach. These include an emphasis within African-American culture on “harmony, cooperation, collective responsibility, groupness and sameness” (p. 98).

Brown (2006) and Pattillo-McCoy (1998) highlight another distinct facet to the Black church’s importance: its major historical and contemporary role in mobilising community activism focused on social and economic justice. The Black church’s strong record of involvement in extra-religious civic and political activities substantially eclipses that of White congregations. Such activities, augmented by engaging, distinctively African-American traditions like the “call-and-response” worshipping style, offer continuing opportunities for recruitment of new African-Americans into the *public* religious fold especially (Pattillo-McCoy, 1998, pp. 766–770).

African-Americans’ lower sense of mastery has also been portrayed as racism and socioeconomic inequality-induced. Consciousness of a social structural environment that routinely undermines their progress constitutes “good reason” for Blacks’ inefficacious streak (Oates, 2004, p. 18). Social contexts that are especially conducive to efficacious activity are institutional in their essence – part of society’s macrostructure. Thus formal and informal discriminatory processes that exclude Blacks from positions of power and authority in America also undermine their self-efficacy (Hughes & Demo, 1989, pp. 138, 154).

As noted earlier, assessments of the (in)congruity between religiosity and mastery, and its possible intensification by the Black experience, have consistently represented religiosity as the *influencing* force. The notion of religiosity and mastery as *incongruous* is palpable, for example, in the Ai et al. (2005, p. 472) discussion of “spiritual surrender” and its concomitant New Testament-located “not as I will, but as you will, Lord” canon. Essential to surrender is the need for the believer to abandon the inclination to personally control uncontrollable fate. Similarly, Schieman et al. (2003) highlight a possible connection between dependence on an omnipotent other and blanket relinquishment of control to that “potent deity.” In that same discussion, the authors invoke classic Weberian and Durkheimian themes to explore the alternate possibility of *compatibility* between religiosity and mastery. Religious beliefs and actions can have “an instrumental, rational ... orientation”, that can assist people in solving problems and reducing uncertainty. Such actions “not only possess integrative and affective functions”, but may also “instill a *sense of personal potency and mastery*” (emphasis added).

Findings consistent with the notion of tension between religiosity and mastery have been reported by Ai et al. (2005), Fiori et al. (2006), and Greenfield et al. (2009). Patterns signalling *compatibility* between religiosity and mastery are reported in the same Ai et al. and Fiori et al. investigations, and by Schieman et al. (2003). Ellison (1993) reports another contradictory pattern: ultimately non-significant effects of religiosity dimensions on mastery. All of these investigations utilise cross-sectional samples. Such data facilitate neither the unequivocal temporal sequencing of some posited “independent” and “dependent” variables, nor statistical adjustment for prior levels of dependent constructs. Additionally, since some of these samples are from regional and/or age-specific populations, their findings may not foretell patterns obtaining nationally or across ages.

Calhoun-Brown’s proposition of a pronounced intertwining of African-American religious tradition, the “sweet ole’ by and by”, and ensuing “neglect of the here and now” (1998, p. 427) is an eye-catching example of portrayals of *Black* religiosity as uniquely incongruous with personal control. This same theme is evoked by Ellison (1993, pp. 1028–1030) and Greenfield et al. (2009, p. 208). Schieman et al. (2006, p. 531) moot an alternate, similarly intriguing depiction of Black religiosity as distinctively congruent with mastery. In this contending scenario, the divine other morphs into an empowering “co-pilot” who renders all things possible for the Black religious. Stewart’s (1999, p. 56) depiction of African-American religious tradition as fostering “means of self-determination” among Blacks, emitting from conceptions of God as working directly at the side of believers, echoes this same mastery-promoting sentiment.

As to the capacity for mastery to influence religiosity, there is no prior work directly addressing the subject that can be invoked. This capacity does however seem intertwined with the purported problem-solving property of perceived control (Pearlin, 1989, 1999; Ross & Mirowsky, 2003). Ross and Mirowsky (2003, p. 433) underline the positive impact of perceived control on the inclination “to actively solve problems.” Similarly, Pearlin (1999, p. 409) highlights mastery’s facilitation of “more active” coping with a more abundant repertoire of resources, and more effective mobilisation and usage of support networks. These problem solving-oriented benefits augment other mental health-related derivatives. Beneficiaries of mastery view stressors as less foreboding; and mastery may be a “self-fulfilling prophesy”, with beneficiaries acting in accordance with the perception of control. To the degree then that religious activities or cognitions are deemed facilitative of one’s problem-solving objectives, the impact of mastery on religiosity ought to be propitious. To the degree that religiosity is construed as *an obstacle* to problem-solving, an inhibitive impact of mastery on religiosity should then prevail.

Revealing insight into how religiosity could be construed as inimical to problemsolving emerges via the *negative religious coping* phenomenon (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998). An iffy relationship with one's God, alienation-infused struggle for meaning, and view of the world as menacing define this process. Ensuing from this weak religious foundation are a range of problematic coping behaviours and cognitions – involving “punitive religious appraisals, demonic religious reappraisals, (negative) reappraisals of God's power, spiritual discontent, self-directing religious coping, and interpersonal religious discontent” (Pargament et al., 1998, p. 712). To the extent that these negative phenomena dominate individuals' conceptions of what religiosity entails, the view of religiosity as inimical to problem-solving efforts would be strengthened, and inhibitive mastery-upon-religiosity effects fostered. [Additionally of course, to the extent that processes delineative of “negative religious coping” dominate individuals' *experiences* of religiosity, inhibitive reciprocal religiosity-upon-mastery effects would likely ensue].

Two related forces, both explored at length earlier, coalesce to suggest a more positive mastery-to-religiosity effect among African-Americans. The first is Blacks' substantially greater level of religiosity vis-à-vis Whites in the public sphere especially. The second is the Black church's central role in seeing to the social-psychological well-being of its worshippers and the wider African-American community. The first factor especially points to religiosity being a much more salient phenomenon in the lives of Black versus White Americans – a notion explicitly endorsed by multiple investigators (e.g., Brown, 2006; Ellison, 1993; Jang, Borenstein-Graves, Haley, Small, & Mortimer, 2003; Krause, 2003; Pattillo-McCoy, 1998). Given such salience, causal relationships involving religiosity (as both an independent *and* dependent variable), should be stronger among Blacks. If the first factor invoked above speaks primarily to Black-White variations in the *magnitude* of the mastery-to-religiosity effect, the second pertains more to its *direction*. The seamlessly ensuing expectation is for a relatively positive impact among Blacks – given their unique, centuries-old proclivity to utilise religious involvement for coping and confronting diverse socioeconomic and political obstacles, and the significant success of such efforts (Brown, 2006; Ellison, 1993; Krause, 2003; Pattillo-McCoy, 1998; Schieman et al., 2006).

It bears emphasising that the endorsed pre-supposition – of causal coefficients involving “religiosity” as a predictor and outcome being relatively positive among Blacks – is especially applicable to the public (versus subjective) manifestation. It is in the public realm after all where the Black-White religiosity gap is strongest (Schieman et al., 2006; Sherkat, 2002), and where notions of the inordinate salience of religiosity to African-Americans' well-being are primarily rooted (Brown, 2006; Ellison, 1993; Jang et al., 2003; Krause, 2003; Pattillo-McCoy, 1998).

Modelling Black-White variations in the reciprocal religiosity-mastery relationship over time

To reiterate, this investigation gauges variations among Black and White Americans in the reciprocal relationship over time between religiosity dimensions and mastery. The question of across-race variation in the religiosity-to-mastery component has garnered some attention, but findings have been mixed. The inconsistencies may be tied to the exclusive reliance on cross sectional, and in some instances, region- and/or age-specific samples. The portion of the analysis addressing the impact of religiosity on mastery has hitherto gone un-addressed.

Data

Data from the 874 Black and 1906 White participants in both the first (1986) and second (1989) waves of the Americans' Changing Lives (ACL) longitudinal face-to-face surveys

(House, 1995) address the questions at issue. Cases are weighted to adjust for differential probabilities of inclusion in wave one. ACL is a stratified, multistage, area probability sample of non-institutionalised persons in the contiguous United States. The data are well-suited for the present study, with decent indicators of public/subjective religiosity and mastery at both waves, and a range of their possible predictors. Utilisation of the first two ACL waves (versus any of the two later waves collected in 1993 and 2004) yields two critical pragmatic advantages: a Black sample size across both waves large enough to inspire confidence in observed patterns; a relatively short inter-wave time lag; and the opportunity for multi-dimensional operationalisation of religiosity. The inclusion of religiosity and mastery indicators at both of the assessed waves facilitates controlling for *prior* religiosity and mastery in equations predicting the respective outcomes. The earlier noted exclusive reliance on cross-sectional samples in foregoing work signals the absence of this critical feature in those investigations.

Variables

Personal mastery, public, and subjective religiosity are both the dependent and focal independent variables. All three constructs are gauged at both waves; and each wave one measure is included among the predictors of its wave two counterpart.

Public religiosity indexes reported “usual” attendance at religious services (1=never, 2=less than once a month, 3=about once a month, 4=2 or 3 times a month, 5=once a week, 6=more than once a week), and volunteer work in the preceding year for a religious organisation (0=no, 1=yes). The two *subjective religiosity* items query importance of religious beliefs in day-to-day life (1=not at all important ... 4=very important), and frequency of seeking “spiritual support and comfort” when faced with work-/family-/personal life-related problems (1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=almost always). Measures of *private* religiosity are included at wave one, but are unfortunately absent from the wave two survey.

Mastery combines the three items from the Pearlin Mastery Scale (Pearlin et al., 1981) included at each wave: “I can do just about anything I really set my mind to do” (1=strongly disagree ... 4=strongly agree), “Sometimes I feel that I am being pushed around in life”, and “There is no way I can solve the problems I have” (1=strongly agree ... 4=strongly disagree for the latter two).

Psychological distress, positioned at the negative end of the emotional well-being continuum, denotes an “an unpleasant emotional state” manifested typically in symptoms of depression and anxiety (Ross & Mirowsky, 2003, pp. 411–416). It is gauged at wave one via 11 CES-D Depression Scale items querying the frequency during the past week (1=hardly ever, 2=some of the time, 3=most of the time) that the respondent felt depressed or like everything was an effort, endured restless sleep, etc. (see Table 1). Distress is typically modelled as an *outcome* of stress exposure and coping resource availability. Its inclusion here as a predictor of religiosity and mastery acknowledges the under-addressed potential for mental health status to shape access to coping resources (Pearlin, 1999; Pearlin et al., 1981; Thoits, 1995, 2006).

Stress exposure, which may substantially suppress mental health *and* access to coping resources (Pearlin, 1999; Pearlin et al., 1981; Thoits, 1995, 2006), is tapped via *chronic financial stress*, *illnesses*, and (*negative*) *life-events* indicators constructed by ACL personnel. *Chronic financial stress* is a standardised wave one measure reflecting responses across three items querying satisfaction with present financial situation (1=completely satisfied ... 5=completely dissatisfied), difficulty posed by meeting monthly bills (1=not difficult ... 5=extremely difficult), and whether “finances usually work out” at each month’s end such that money usually is/isn’t left over (1=some money left over, 2=just enough,

3=not enough. *Chronic illnesses*, gauged at wave two, is the sum of “yes” (coded 1, vs. “no” coded 0) responses across items investigating the experience over the preceding year of the following ailments: Arthritis or rheumatism, lung disease, hypertension, heart trouble, diabetes or high blood sugar (or medication for such), cancer or a malignant tumour of any kind, foot problems (e.g., circulation-, corn- or callous-related), stroke, broken or fractured bones, and urine-control problems.

(*Negative*) *Life events* is also a wave two measure, and denotes the total number of such events (excluding health-related ones) besetting the respondent in the years *since* the wave one interview. The nine possible experiences include death of a spouse, child, parent, or other close relative/friend, divorce, assault, job loss, burglary of home, or other “anything else bad.”

Social support is often simulative of mental health (Pearlin, 1999; Ross & Mirowsky, 2003; Thoits, 2006), and could well shape access to other coping resources. Collectively, the two wave one-estimated latent constructs capture the positive *and* negative aspects that social support incorporates (Lincoln, Chatters, & Taylor, 2003). *Positive social support* is a second-order construct comprising two latent variables: *Support network size* reflects reports of the actual number of friends/relatives available to “call on for advice or help”, and “share very private feelings with” (seven or more coded 7). *Positive interactions* with close friends and relatives (spouse and children aside) combines two items: “On the whole, how much do your friends and other relatives make you feel loved and cared for?”, and “How much are these friends and relatives willing to listen when you need to talk about your worries or problems?” (5=a great deal, 4=quite a bit, 3=some, 2=a little, and 1=not at all for both). These same response options accompany the two items indexing the *negative interaction* with close friends and relatives first-order latent construct: how much they make “too many demands?”, and are “critical of you or what you do?”

Six single-indicator *sociodemographic control* variables are gauged at wave one: *Gender* (*female*=1), *education* and *age* (in actual years), *marital status* (*married*=1, not married=0), *employment status* (1= employed, 0=not employed for pay), and annual *family income* (1=<\$5,000, 2=\$5g–\$9,999, ... 5=\$20g–\$24,999, 6=\$25g–\$29,999 ... 9=\$60g–\$79,999, 10=\$80,000 or >).

Missing values on all observed variables are replaced with imputed ones generated via the

“Multiple Imputation” facility of PRELIS8.5 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2003). This feature substitutes simulated values reflecting within-case patterns occurring across other specified variables with non-missing data. The Black and White sub-samples are separated during the imputation procedure. It bears noting that the overwhelming majority of variables assessed here have *no missing data*; and imputed values are required only for a *small* number of responses to items tapping mastery, distress, positive and negative interaction, and size of support network.

Furthermore, to forestall inflation of correlations between constructs generated partially from imputed cases (specifically, mastery at both waves and distress and social support constructs at wave one) and other analysed variables, the string of variables from which imputed values are generated is restricted *only* to indicators of the given construct. Thus case-values for specific indicators of wave one mastery or distress, for example, are imputed solely on the basis of patterns observed across other wave one mastery/distress indicators with non-missing case-values. Notably therefore, among the correlations not inflated by imputation is the “stability” relationship between the wave one and two mastery constructs. Descriptive statistics and LISREL8.8-generated factor loadings (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2003) for indicators of all analysed variables are presented in Table 1. To forestall problems in

obtaining model-convergence, “latent factor score”-equivalents of the multi-indicator constructs are used throughout the causal portion of the analysis. These factor scores, generated by LISREL(8.8) during the measurement phase, are effectively single-indicator equivalents of their multi-item counterparts.

The model

Solid utilisation of the ACL’s longitudinal component, and rootedness in the stress and coping perspective and prominent theorising on implications of racial differences in religiosity, distinguish the multi-population LISREL model assessing the lagged reciprocal relationship between religiosity dimensions and mastery (diagrammed in Figure 1).

Given the multi-population setup, separate equations are estimated for the Black and White American sub-samples. To minimise clutter, the thick arrow in Figure 1 represents the modelled effects of the *multiple* control variables on each dependent variable; and thin arrows signal modelled effects of *individual* predictors on specific outcomes. Included among the predictors of each dependent variable – public religiosity, subjective religiosity, and mastery at wave two – is the corresponding construct at wave one. This “autoregressive” approach to assessing causation is common in well placed, directly relevant longitudinal data-based analyses (e.g., Caplan & Schooler, 2007; Levin & Taylor, 1998; Oates, 2004; Pearlin et al., 1981). The magnitudes of the fully standardised “cross-lag” paths (i.e., from mastery at wave one to public and subjective religiosity at wave two, and from public and subjective religiosity at wave one to mastery at wave two) are of central interest given the research question at issue. These coefficients signal the relative effect, within each race, of mastery and religiosity dimensions on increments in each other over time. There is clear temporal separation of independent and dependent variables, since outcomes are assessed at the point of the wave two interview, while virtually all predictors are gauged three years prior (at wave one). The gauging of illnesses and life-events at wave *two* poses no significant temporal sequencing concerns, as the coverage-period of each construct precedes entirely or substantially the actual focal period of the wave two outcomes.

As indicated in note “a” beneath Figure 1, effects of the individual religiosity constructs are estimated in *separate* iterations rather than simultaneously in one equation. This alternating of religiosity dimensions is necessitated by the very high correlations between the public and subjective constructs at wave one, and the related evidence of multicollinearity when they are included simultaneously as predictors of mastery. Among Whites/Blacks, the correlation between wave one public and subjective religiosity is 756/0.682. While space limitations preclude detailed documentation, the multicollinearity evidence generally involves dramatic shifts within both races in the size/direction of the coefficients representing effects of each religiosity dimension. Fiori et al. (2006) also encountered multicollinearity while modelling public and subjective religiosity-effects on life-satisfaction with wave one of the ACL. Given the importance stressed by Levin, Taylor, and Chatters of assessing religiosity dimensions *individually*, I forgo their adopted strategy of combining the indicators into an umbrella “religiosity” construct. As forthcoming results reveal, effects of public and subjective religiosity prove far from entirely duplicative when the constructs are alternated as predictors – their high correlations notwithstanding.

To test whether the impact of the wave one-gauged public and subjective religiosity or mastery on mastery or public and subjective religiosity at wave two is greater among Blacks or Whites, separate pairs of multi-population models are estimated; and the impact of the focal predictor is alternately “freed” (i.e., specified as different) and “fixed” (constrained to be equal) across races. Significance of the Black-White difference in the impact of the religiosity dimensions or mastery is adjudged based on whether the difference between the two model Chi-Squares (i.e., the ones with the specific effect fixed vs. freed) exceeds the

0.05 significance threshold of 3.84. The baseline or “null hypothesis” models during these significance test procedures are the ones in which with error variances of dependent variables, and effects of all predictors, are freed across races. These models yield the coefficients presented in the forthcoming Table 2. The “alternative” models are the ones with the *path at issue* fixed across the two groups (e.g., the mastery-impact on a religiosity dimension, or a religiosity dimension’s impact on mastery *but no other path*). The alternative models utilise one additional degree of freedom vis-à-vis their baseline model-counterparts; and the 3.84 benchmark is the value associated with the 0.05 significance level for one df given a two-tailed test.

Limitations of the model

The estimated model ignores possible causal relationships among control variables. Specific sociodemographic measures, for example, likely influence other sociodemographic factor(s), as well as stressors and coping resources gauged at wave one. The seriousness of this limitation is, however, mitigated by the fact that the main interest is in the *combined* effect of these controls. Possible multicollinearity-induced counterintuitive effects of individual control variables are thus not seriously bothersome. The utilisation of multiple *two*-indicator latent variables is also less-than-ideal, since three or more indicators are preferable for latent variable-construction (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2003). Unavailability in the ACL of additional viable indicators of affected constructs necessitates this circumstance. Additionally, but for the “spiritual comfort” indicator of subjective religiosity, the items constituting the religiosity constructs do not capture the *substantive content* of specific practices/cognitions. This content might vary substantially across people reporting identical religious behaviours or thoughts, or across different stressors in the *same* individual (Pargament et al., 1998).

The model also does not adjust for possible period-specific variation in the impact of religiosity and mastery on each other. Thus if the impact of a religiosity dimension on mastery or mastery on a manifestation of religiosity differed appreciably prior to the “ACL one-through-two” slice of Black and White American life that is assessed here, that variation would be missed. On a related point, the possible time-boundedness of the observed patterns also warrants noting, given the now somewhat distant (late 1980’s) collection period of the data. Findings should thus be digested with this caveat in mind.

Results

Findings affirm the worthwhileness of assessing both the impact of religiosity on mastery and the overlooked question of how mastery influences religiosity. Furthermore, there is strong indication that race conditions both (a) the congruity or lack thereof between religiosity and mastery, and (b) the nature of prevailing over-time reciprocal “loops” between specific religiosity dimensions and mastery. The meticulous attention to possible Black-White variation in the essence of the religiosity-mastery relationship is thus validated.

Table 2 lists effects of predictors gauged overwhelmingly at wave one, on mastery, public, and subjective religiosity at wave two. The fully standardised coefficients facilitate direct comparisons of effects of specific predictors. Model-Chi-Square differentials associated with constraining the cross-lagged effects of religiosity dimensions on mastery, and mastery on religiosity dimensions to be equal across races are also displayed. Chi-Square differences linked to “freeing” versus “fixing” effects of control variables on mastery and religiosity dimensions were not calculated – given the secondary theoretical import of those differences. The acknowledgement in Table 2 of 0.10-level/“borderline”-significant within-race effects seems reasonable, given the relative smallness of the Black sample.

Beginning with the religiosity-upon-mastery effects, patterns are more consistent with the resource compensation (vs. amplification) perspective. Public religiosity significantly enhances subsequent mastery among Blacks (0.066**) but is inconsequential to Whites' (0.001 ns). The Chi-Square differential column confirms that this across-race difference is significant (4.46*). This pattern signals solid support for the compensation perspective, since evidence of mastery being elevated by religiosity appears precisely within the (subordinate) racial group where the perspective most anticipates it. Subjective religiosity exerts a trivial impact on mastery among Blacks (−0.010), while significantly *depressing* Whites' (−0.070**). Inasmuch as Blacks' perceptions of control appear “shielded” from an inhibitive impact of subjective religiosity while Whites' are not, this pattern could also be deemed congruent with the compensation thesis. That congruence however, is evidently quite mild. Furthermore, since the Chi-Square differential associated with fixing the subjective religiosity-to-mastery path across races is trivial, the effect cannot be unequivocally declared “more negative” among Whites.

Turning to effects of mastery on subsequent religiosity, there is appreciable support for the endorsed proposition of mastery-effects being more positive among Blacks. This support though is confined to the public manifestation of religiosity. Mastery exerts a borderline-significantly positive impact on Blacks' subsequent public religiosity (0.048+), while significantly *depressing* the same activity among Whites (−0.052**). These effects differ significantly across races, with the Chi-Square difference linked to an equality constraint being 13.71***. Mastery exerts statistically similar positive effects on subjective religiosity across races – “similar” inasmuch as the Chi-Square differential linked to the equality constraint is trivial. The non-significance of the 0.041 coefficient among Blacks is initially eye-raising, since the “smaller” 0.023 effect among Whites is borderline-significant. That non-significance stems from the relative smallness of the Black sample.

The findings can also of course be framed with reference to specific questions raised earlier: Is there evidence of mutual causation over-time between mastery and religiosity dimensions – that is, “reciprocal loops” within each race? Do any such within-race loops signal mutual reinforcement, mutual incongruity, or a countervailing pattern? Approximate reciprocal loops prevail between public religiosity and mastery among Blacks, and between *subjective* religiosity and mastery among Whites. The virtual public religiosity-mastery loop among Blacks suggests mutual reinforcement: Public religiosity enhances subsequent mastery (0.066*); and the lagged reciprocal effect is also positive, though only borderline-significantly so (0.048+). While Mastery significantly *suppresses* public religiosity among Whites (−0.052**), the reciprocal lagged reflect is infinitesimal (−0.006). The subjective religiosity-mastery loop among whites approaches a counter-vailing reciprocal pattern: Subjective religiosity suppresses feelings of mastery (−0.070**); but prior mastery borderline-significantly *enhances* religious cognitions (0.023+). Mastery mildly but non-significantly enhances Blacks' subjective religiosity (0.041 ns); and the reciprocal lagged effect is trivial (−0.010 ns).

Summary and discussion

This unique investigation set out to assess variation among Black and White Americans in the lagged reciprocal relationship between public and subjective religiosity on one hand, and mastery on the other. The impact of religiosity on mastery has received moderate prior attention, with findings yielding inconsistent levels of affirmation for the competing “resource compensation” and “amplification” hypotheses. The mastery-upon-religiosity segment of this reciprocal relationship has hitherto gone un-addressed – an apparent consequence of the scant attention to the broader question of possible mutual causation among coping resources, and between coping resources and stressors or stress outcomes

(Pearlin, 1999; Thoits, 1995, 2006). The emphasis on Black-White variation in the focal causal relationships addresses the also under-explored theme of (un)equivalent applicability of the stress and coping paradigm to different social structurally located groups (Thoits, 1995). From a narrower social psychology of race perspective, these findings inform – with unprecedented comprehensiveness – the still un-settled question of whether the African-American experience enhances or tempers the (in)congruity between religiosity and mastery.

As anticipated, the religiosity-mastery relationship exhibits significantly more evidence of mutual reinforcement among Blacks than among Whites. The evidence of mutual synergy is notably confined to the *public* religiosity-mastery “loop” among Blacks: Public religiosity significantly enhances subsequent feelings of mastery, and prior mastery borderline-significantly enhances their public religious involvement. The mutual causation-related evidence among Whites signals marginally *countervailing* influences: Subjective religiosity diminishes Whites’ subsequent mastery, while prior mastery borderline-significantly enhances their subjective religiosity. Additionally, given the significantly more propitious impact of public religiosity on mastery among Blacks versus Whites, the “resource compensation” perspective is affirmed quite solidly in this investigation. This pattern concurs with the notion of religiosity counteracting subordinate status-related forces that may undermine perceived control, and belies the amplification thesis-based proposition that religiosity facilitates such forces within subordinate groups. The reliance on solid, nationally representative longitudinal data, and statistical adjustment for an extensive range of potentially relevant factors combine to enhance confidence in these main findings.

To the degree that the reciprocal religiosity-mastery connection among Blacks involves reinforcement rather than tension, the criticalness of the Black church to this synergy warrants underscoring (see Brown, 2006; Ellison, 1993; Krause, 2003; Pattillo-McCoy, 1998; Schieman et al., 2006). Findings here indicate that the *public* rather than subjective religious realm is the source of mastery-promotion among Blacks; and credit redounds to the Black church inasmuch as public religious activity among African-Americans still occurs overwhelmingly within *Black church* contexts (Brown, 2006; Sherkat, 2002). For African-Americans especially, the Black church may represent not merely a potent structural mechanism for fostering public religious activity, but also for translating such activity into palpable rewards. Elevation of perceived control apparently figures among the mental health-embedded “rewards.”

To the extent that history and tradition socialise African-Americans in particular into viewing religiosity as an effective route to problem-solving (Brown, 2006; Ellison, 1993; Krause, 2003; Pattillo-McCoy, 1998; Schieman et al., 2006), the significantly more salubrious impact of mastery on subsequent public religious involvement among Blacks (vis-à-vis Whites) becomes easily foreseeable. The marginally more positive impact of mastery upon public versus subjective religiosity among Blacks is also understandable if, as Krause (2003) suggests, African-American culture emphasises “harmony, cooperation, collective responsibility, groupness and sameness.” Each of these themes seemingly promotes movement toward socially embedded public religiosity, more so than individually located subjective religiosity.

An inordinate pre-disposition among Blacks to construe religiosity as an effective route to problem-solving, and *experience* religiosity in such a fashion, would evidently militate against processes intertwined with the earlier-described “negative religious coping” phenomenon (Pargament et al., 1998). It is thus unsurprising that *no* patterns evocative of negative religious coping appear among Blacks. The two such patterns – the significantly inhibitive subjective religiosity-effect on mastery, and inhibitive mastery-effect on public religiosity – prevail among Whites. This investigation thus corroborates a notion quite

discernible in prior theoretical work (Brown, 2006; Ellison, 1993; Krause, 2003; Pattillo-McCoy, 1998; Schieman et al., 2006): Socio-cultural and historical forces fostering benign conceptualisations of and experiences with religiosity, are more solidly entwined with the Black versus White American experience.

There is significant accord as well between these findings and periodic recommendations for harnessing of the inoculative potential of Black churches. McRae, Carey, and Anderson-Scott term Black churches “systems of primary prevention in Black communities” ... places where “professionals can engage in assisting in the development of psychological methods of mental health promotion.” They urge a broadening of connections between the professional community and Black churches, given the “indigenous solution to many mental health problems” that these institutions represent (1998, p. 788). Any such initiatives might wisely begin with clergy of these congregations. Their involvement in counselling-related work is substantial, routinely addresses varied stressors, eclipses that of clergy in general, and is distinguished further by openness to referrals with the secular community (Young, Griffith, & Williams, 2003). These patterns inspire the investigators’ call for promotion of efforts to boost continuing education of Black church clergy, and their direct incorporation in secular mental health settings. The evidence obtained here further validates such portrayals of Black churches as tappable mental health-sustaining resources, in communities that remain under-served.

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Figure 1.

Multi-population model assessing the lagged reciprocal relationship between religiosity dimensions^a and mastery: Black and White Americans sub-samples (ACL Waves one and two).

^aEffects of individual religiosity dimensions are estimated in *separate* iterations (vs. simultaneously in a single model).

Note: The thicker arrow (“→”) represents the *multiple* causal paths emitting from each control variable to each dependent variable. Thinner arrows (“ ”) signify *specific* causal paths that are estimated (see Table 2 for further clarification).

Completely standardised LISREL loadings^a and weighted descriptive statistics for analysed variables: Blacks and Whites in ACL Waves 1 (1986) and 2 (1989).

Table 1

Variables	Factor loading		Mean		Standard Dev.	
	Blacks	Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks	Whites
<i>Public religiosity (Wave1)</i>						
– Attendance@religious services	0.740	0.861	3.940	3.253	1.659	1.801
– Volunteer for relig's organiz's.	0.568	0.622	0.294	0.247	0.456	0.432
<i>Subjective religiosity (Wave1)</i>						
– Importance of religious beliefs	0.747	0.810	3.698	3.192	0.608	0.898
– Seeks spiritual comfort ...	0.658	0.784	3.857	3.170	1.284	1.487
<i>Public religiosity (Wave 2)</i>						
– Attendance@religious services	0.763	0.856	3.829	3.245	1.685	1.831
– Volunteer for relig's organiz's.	0.595	0.617	0.291	0.263	0.455	0.440
<i>Subjective religiosity (Wave2)</i>						
– Importance of religious beliefs	0.737	0.828	3.748	3.281	0.585	0.872
– Seeks spiritual comfort ...	0.603	0.847	3.913	3.341	1.246	1.398
<i>Personal mastery (Wave1)</i>						
– I can do just about anything	0.269	0.293	3.448	0.726	0.714	
I set my mind to			3.526			
– Sometimes I feel ...pushed around in life (reversed)	0.587	0.500	2.796	2.995	1.050	0.971
– There is no way I can solve ... problems I have (reversed)	0.589	0.531	3.211	3.429	1.003	0.854
<i>Personal mastery (Wave2)</i>						
– I can do just about anything	0.290	0.297	3.526	3.385	0.726	0.757
I set my mind to						
– Sometimes I feel ... pushed around in life (reversed)	0.581	0.490	2.796	3.031	1.050	0.953
– There is no way I can solve ... problems I have (reversed)	0.533	0.581	3.211	3.442	0.958	0.867
<i>Psychological distress (Wave1) (#Times in last week R ...)</i>						
– Felt depressed	0.704	0.746	1.522	1.350	0.608	0.541
– Felt everything was an effort	0.415	0.480	1.792	1.396	0.761	0.604

Variables	Factor loading		Mean		Standard Dev.	
	Blacks	Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks	Whites
– Sleep was restless	0.503	0.483	1.660	1.598	0.675	0.655
– Was happy	–0.562	–0.652	2.554	2.616	0.605	0.607
– Felt lonely	0.670	0.626	1.459	1.348	0.599	0.568
– Felt people were unfriendly	0.494	0.339	1.386	1.186	0.567	0.434
– Enjoyed life	–0.499	–0.576	2.669	2.699	0.569	0.561
– Did not feel like eating	0.500	0.385	1.452	1.249	0.617	0.523
– Felt sad	0.483	0.738	1.459	1.389	0.590	0.564
– Felt people disliked me	0.524	0.444	1.309	1.140	0.557	0.383
– Could not get going	0.499	0.483	1.556	1.399	0.629	0.554
<i>Financial stress</i> (Wave 1)	1.000	1.000	0.369	–0.082	1.046	0.958
<i>Illnesses</i> (Wave 2)	1.000	1.000	1.300	1.011	1.365	1.241
<i>Negative life events</i> (Wave 2)	1.000	1.000	1.034	0.802	0.936	0.823
<i>Positive social support</i> (Wave 1)						
– Positive interactions ...	0.764	0.932	0.056	0.047	0.981	0.966
– Support network size	0.939	0.700	–0.047	–0.017	0.939	0.987
<i>Positive interactions with friends/relatives</i> (Wave1)						
– How often do friends/relatives make R <i>feel loved & cared for</i>	0.743	0.798	4.071	4.102	0.984	0.887
– How often friends/relatives <i>willing to listen</i> (re: problems)	0.777	0.753	3.781	3.819	1.121	1.060
<i>Support network size</i> (Wave 1)						
– # of friends/relatives R can call on for advice or help	0.489	0.485	7.594	10.088	10.782	12.390
– # of friends/relatives R can <i>share private feelings with</i>	0.544	0.537	2.037	2.355	1.675	1.823
<i>Employed</i> (Wave 1)	1.000	1.000	0.657	0.677	0.476	0.468
<i>Family income</i> (Wave 1)	1.000	1.000	4.223	5.717	2.638	2.499
<i>Education</i> (Wave1)	1.000	1.000	11.415	12.768	3.457	2.847
<i>Age</i> (Wave1)	1.000	1.000	46.236	46.878	15.035	15.996
<i>Gender</i> (Female)	1.000	1.000	0.590	0.539	0.493	0.499
<i>Married</i> (vs. not, at Wave1))	1.000	1.000	0.560	0.721	0.497	0.449

^aNote: All factor loadings of latent variable-indicators are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

Standardised coefficients from baseline multi-population LISREL models predicting religiosity dimensions and mastery at Wave 2, along with chi-square differentials associated with constraining selected effects to be equal across races: Blacks and Whites in ACL Waves 1 (1986) and 2 (1989).^a

Table 2

Predictors (Gauged at Wave 1, unless otherwise denoted)	Public religiosity (Wave 2)			Subjective religiosity (Wave 2)			Mastery (Wave 2)		Chi-square difference
	Blacks	Whites	Chi-square difference	Blacks	Whites	Chi-square difference	Blacks	Whites	
Public religiosity ^a	0.803 ***	0.931 ***	-	-	-	-	0.066 *	-0.006	4.46 *
Subjective religiosity ^a	-	-	-	0.690 ***	0.943 ***	-	-0.010	-0.070 **	0.32
Mastery	0.048 +	-0.052 **	13.71 ***	0.041	0.023 +	0.03	0.140 ***	0.445 ***	-
Psychological distress	0.001	-0.019 +	-	0.188 ***	0.025 *	-	-0.280 ***	-0.148 ***	-
Financial stress	0.008	-0.021 *	-	-0.009	-0.014	-	-0.060 +	-0.020	-
Illnesses (Wave 2)	-0.026	-0.014	-	-0.029	0.008	-	-0.087 *	-0.089 ***	-
Life-events (Wave 2)	-0.025	0.013	-	-0.006	0.003	-	-0.116 ***	-0.038 *	-
Positive social support	0.049 *	0.009	-	0.015	-0.023 *	-	0.111 ***	0.116	-
Negative interactions	-0.029	0.014	-	-0.124 ***	-0.001	-	0.031	0.035 +	-
Employed	0.032	-0.003	-	0.052 +	0.003	-	0.048	0.032	-
Family income	0.007	-0.004	-	0.024	0.018	-	0.093 *	0.041	-
Education	0.028	0.016	-	-0.060 +	0.020 *	-	0.035	0.006	-
Age	0.015	-0.002	-	0.016	-0.004	-	0.026	0.000	-
Female	0.031 +	0.014	-	0.020	0.043 ***	-	-0.025	-0.008	-
Married	0.001	0.016 +	-	-0.001	-0.002	-	-0.081 **	-0.028	-

Notes: $n=874$ (Blacks)/1906 (Whites)

* $p<0.05$,

** $p<0.01$,

*** $p<0.001$

+ $p<0.10$ (and thus “borderline”-significant).

^a Due to multicollinearity, the public and subjective religiosity-effects on mastery are obtained from *separate* models (with the “public”, and “subjective” measures alternated). Coefficients in the equation predicting mastery (save for the *subjective* religiosity-effect) are from the model featuring public religiosity. They barely differ from their counterparts in the version featuring subjective religiosity.