Published in final edited form as:

Cultur Divers Ethnic Minor Psychol. 2016 July ; 22(3): 386–394. doi:10.1037/cdp0000071.

The Role of Mothers' and Fathers' Religiosity in African American Adolescents' Religious Beliefs and Practices

Linda C. Halgunseth,
University of Connecticut

Alexander C. Jensen,
Brigham Young University

Kari-Lyn Sakuma, and
Oregon State University

Susan M. McHale
The Pennsylvania State University

Abstract

Objectives—To advance understanding of youth religiosity in its sociocultural context, this study examined the associations between parents' and adolescents' religious beliefs and practices and tested the roles of parent and youth gender and youth ethnic identity in these linkages.

Methods—The sample included 130, two-parent, African American families. Adolescents (49% female) averaged 14.43 years old. Mothers, fathers, and adolescents were interviewed in their homes about their family and personal characteristics, including their religious beliefs. In a series of seven nightly phone calls, adolescents reported on their daily practices, including time spent in religious practices (e.g., attending services, prayer), and parents reported on their time spent in religious practices with their adolescents.

Results—Findings indicated that mothers' beliefs were linked to the beliefs of sons and daughters, but fathers' beliefs were only associated with the beliefs of sons. Mothers' practices were associated with youths' practices, but the link was stronger when mothers' held moderately strong religious beliefs. Fathers' practices were also linked to youth practices, but the association was stronger for daughters than for sons.

Conclusions—Findings highlight the understudied role of fathers in African American families, the importance of examining religiosity as a multidimensional construct, and the utility of ethnic homogeneous designs for illuminating the implications of sociocultural factors in the development of African American youth.

Keywords

African American; Ethnic identity; Family dynamics; Gender; Parent-child relations; Religiosity

Introduction

African American adolescents who have strong religious beliefs and who engage in regular religious practices are less likely to attempt suicide, abuse substances, report depressive symptoms, and engage in risky sexual behaviors or other conduct problems (Ball, Armistead, & Austin, 2003; Ellison, 1993; McCree, Wingood, Diclemente, Davies, & Harrington, 2003; Simons, Simons, & Conger, 2004). Such findings underscore the importance of identifying factors that give rise to religiosity in this sociocultural group, particularly given that African American youth are at higher risk for adjustment problems relative to other groups of U.S. youth (Hill, Mann, & Fitzgerald, 2011). Although parents', particularly mothers', religiosity is associated with adolescents' religious beliefs and practices, most research on family influences has focused on European American samples, and an important direction for research is to study such processes in African American families for whom religiosity is a central feature of the sociocultural milieu (Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006; Juang & Syed, 2008; Kim-Spoon, Longo, & McCullough, 2012; Leonard et al., 2013; Taylor & Chatters, 2010).

Religiosity encompasses both religious beliefs-- the importance of religion in individuals' lives-- and religious practices-- the extent of individuals' involvement in religious activities (Hardy, White, Zhang, & Ruchty, 2011; Hill & Pargament, 2008). Prior research documents that beliefs and practices constitute distinct dimensions of religiosity (Brown, Parks, & Zimmerman, 2001). Individuals can have strong religious beliefs but not engage in overt practices-- or vice versa. Most studies on adolescents' religiosity, however, have assessed religiosity as a unidimensional construct (Landor, Simons, Simons, Brody, & Gibbons, 2011; Leonard et al.; Kim-Spoon et al., 2012), or focused solely on one of these two dimensions (Desrosiers, Kelley, & Miller, 2011; Simons et al., 2004). Thus, research is needed to determine whether dimensions of religiosity for adolescents are related to those of their parents in similar or distinct ways.

From a cultural ecological perspective, youth religiosity is best understood in relation to its larger sociocultural context. Adolescents do not develop within a vacuum, but adapt, learn, respond, and are influenced by a myriad of sociocultural, familial, and historical influences including cultural values, culturally directed socialization practices, or in the case of ethnic-minorities, a history of prejudice, racism, and discrimination (Chen, 2011; Garcia Coll and Szalacha, 2006; Shweder et al., 2007). These diverse socialization influences intersect and create a cultural niche wherein ethnic minority families are embedded (Super & Harkness, 1986; Trommsdorff & Cole, 2011). In order to understand adolescent development in relation to its larger sociocultural context, past researchers have argued for the use of ethnically homogeneous designs, which allow researchers to identify culturally salient variables and to examine within group variations in family processes. Such an approach contrasts with cross-cultural comparative designs, which overlook sociocultural and historical influences and may portray cultural differences that emerge as cultural deficiencies or deviance (Garcia Coll et al., 1996; Updegraff, McHale, Whiteman, Thayer, & Delgado, 2005).

In this study, we used an ethnically-homogeneous sample of two-parent, African American families and examined the links between both mothers' and fathers' religious beliefs and practices and the beliefs and practices of their adolescent-aged offspring. In addition to assessing each dimension of religiosity separately, we also tested the combined effects of beliefs and practices. Further, to advance understanding of sociocultural processes in African American families, we examined youth ethnic identity as well as youth gender as potential moderators of the links between parents' and adolescents' religiosity.

Parents' and Adolescents' Religious Beliefs and Practices

Adolescents' religious beliefs and practices develop, in part, through social learning processes (Bandura, 1986; Boyatzis et al., 2006; Oman & Thoresen, 2003), as when youth observe their parents and assimilate information about the significance of religion in their parents' lives and on parents' everyday religious practices. Through their observations, adolescents learn about structured (e.g., attending services) and unstructured (e.g., prayer) religious practices and assimilate parents' messages about their beliefs and the meaning and significance of those beliefs in their lives. Indeed, parents may be uniquely positioned to influence adolescents' religious beliefs and practices given that youth are most likely to model the characteristics of those whom they perceive as powerful and/or nurturing (Bandura, 1986) and because adolescents have ample opportunities to observe their parents (Grusec & Kuczynski, 1997; Ozorak, 1989).

As noted, however, religiosity involves both religious beliefs and religious practices (Brown et al., 2001; Hardy et al., 2011; Hill & Pargament, 2008). And, from a social learning perspective, the extent to which models display congruent messages and behaviors facilitates learning and performance in children (Bandura, 1999; Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, & Regalia, 2001). Thus, adolescents may be more likely to internalize religious beliefs and spend more time in religious practices when parents hold stronger beliefs *and* engage in more religious practices (Oman & Thoresen 2003). Thus, in addition to examining bivariate associations, we also assessed whether the combination of parents' beliefs and practices served as a unique predictor of adolescents' beliefs and/or practices.

Family Gender Dynamics and Adolescents' Religiosity

Prior research on Euro-American families highlights that girls are more involved in religious practices and hold stronger religious beliefs than boys (Carleton, Esparza, Thaxter, & Grant, 2008; Molock & Barksdale 2013; Smith, Denton, Faris, & Regnerus, 2002). This pattern continues into adulthood, with mothers typically reporting higher levels of religiosity than fathers (Boyatzis et al., 2006). Yet, it is unclear whether this effect holds in African American samples. Also, to the extent that religiosity is gendered, girls may be more responsive to parental socialization in this domain than boys. Further, the gendered nature of religiosity may mean that mothers play a particularly important role in this domain of youth socialization. For example, studying an ethnically diverse sample of adolescents, Desrosiers et al. (2011) found that youths' reports of their mothers' religious support were more strongly related than were their reports of fathers' support to both sons' and daughters' religious beliefs, with religious support defined as parents' openness and comfort in discussing and supporting adolescents' religiosity. Based on retrospective accounts, Gutierrez, Goodwin,

Kirkinis, and Mattis (2014) found that mothers were perceived as having had the greatest positive influence on African American adults' religious beliefs and commitment. These findings suggest that the maternal role may involve transmission of religious values and instilling of practices more so than the paternal role; thus, we expected that mothers' religiosity would be more strongly linked to youth religiosity than fathers' (Acock & Bengtson, 1978; Bao, Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Conger, 1999; Boyatzis et al., 2006; Gutierrez et al., 2014).

A tenet of social learning theory, however, is that youth are most likely to model individuals who are more objectively similar to themselves (Bandura, 1986)—which implies that associations between parent and youth characteristics may be stronger for same gender (mother-daughter and father-son) dyads than mixed gender dyads. Studies of family gender dynamics that use within-family designs to assess mothers', fathers', and adolescents' experiences are rare (McHale, Crouter, & Whiteman, 2003), and the experiences of fathers have been especially neglected in research on African American families, in part due to the field's focus on single-parent, female-headed families in this sociocultural group (McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000). Further, when data on mothers and fathers rely exclusively on youth reports, patterns of associations between adolescent and parent characteristics and behaviors may be biased by youths' gender schemas. Thus, in the current study we used mothers' and fathers' reports of their religious values and their practices together with adolescents to illuminate their possibly distinctive roles in sons' and daughters' religiosity.

Youth Ethnic Identity and Religiosity

Ethnic identity refers to the sense of belonging, self-identification, and pride with one's ethnic group (Phinney, Lochner, & Murphy, 1990). Ethnic identity has been associated with religiosity in adolescence (Juang & Syed, 2008; King 2003; Lopez, Huynh, & Fuligni, 2011), including in African American youth (Spencer et al., 2003). The developmental process of ethnic identity includes periods of exploration and commitment. *Exploration* consists of seeking information about one's ethnicity, while *commitment* refers to a sense of belonging to one's ethnic group (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Preliminary findings suggest a positive relation with both dimensions of ethnic identity and religiosity in ethnic-minority youth (Lopez et al., 2011).

Among African Americans, the link between ethnic identity and religiosity may have its roots in the historical role of the Black Church: In the face of slavery, segregation, and discrimination, the Church's religious teachings helped to promote positive self-concepts and feelings of a collective identity (Juang & Syed, 2008; Oman & Thoresen, 2003; Wortham, 2009). The Church continues to serve as a social structure that promotes coping, social support, cultural traditions, community support, and positive role models for African American youth and their families (Taylor & Chatters, 2010; Taylor, Chatters, & Levin, 2004). Thus, strong ethnic identities in youth may help to promote the transmission of religious beliefs and practices between African American parents and adolescents; in contrast, youth with weaker identities may be less receptive to internalizing the religious beliefs and modeling the practices of their parents (King, 2003). As noted, most research on

youth religiosity has focused on European American samples (Kim-Spoon et al., 2012; Leonard et al., 2013) or has used ethnic comparative designs (Brown et al., 2001; Greenberg & Stoppelbein, 2002; Molock & Barksdale, 2013). Thus, to advance understanding of the role of sociocultural factors that may be unique to African American families, we tested two dimensions of ethnic identity (i.e., exploration and commitment) as potential moderators of the links between parents' and youths' religiosity.

Current Study

In sum, studying a sample of two-parent African American families with adolescents, we tested the hypothesis that mothers' and fathers' religious beliefs and practices would be positively related to those of their children. In addition to assessing these main effects, we also examined the interaction between parental beliefs and practices, testing the hypothesis that the combination of strong beliefs and more time spent with youth in religious practices would be linked to stronger beliefs and more involvement in religious practices by adolescents. We also assessed whether adolescent gender and/or ethnic identity moderated these associations. Based on prior research on the gendered nature of religiosity, we expected that mothers' religiosity would be more strongly linked to adolescents' religiosity than would fathers', but given the limited research on African American fathers' religious involvement, we also tested the social learning hypothesis that associations between parent and adolescent beliefs would be stronger among same-gender dyads (i.e., mothers and daughters and fathers and sons) as compared to mixed gender dyads. Finally, we expected that links between parents' and adolescents' religiosity would be stronger for adolescents who rated themselves higher on the exploration and commitment dimensions of ethnic identity. All analyses controlled for parental education, biological status of fathers, and adolescent age and birth order due to their potential roles in African American parent-adolescent relationships (Crouter, Baril, Davis, & McHale, 2008).

Methods

Participants

The data came from mothers, fathers, and two adolescent-age siblings in 130 families who participated in the third phase of a short-term longitudinal study on family relationships in two-parent Black/African American families (*author citation*). The sample was recruited from urban areas in the mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. using recruiters from local communities and via a purchased marketing list. Letters provided to potentially interested families described the study, and those who met the study criteria, including self-identifying as a Black/African American family and having a mother and father living together with at least two adolescent-aged offspring, responded by postcard or called a toll-free number. Project staff then determined eligibility and scheduled the first family interview. Study procedures were approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

We used data from Wave 3 of the study, when information on both parent and youth religiosity were collected. From the original sample ($N = 202$) in Wave 1, we omitted 10 families with a parent who was not African American; 8 families with coparents who were

not in a couple relationship (e.g., mother and her brother); 22 families in which parents divorced during the period of the study; 9 families with siblings older than age 20 at Wave 3; 10 families in which fathers declined to be interviewed at Wave 3; 9 families who withdrew from the study before Wave 3; and 4 families with missing data on the measures of interest here. Families in the analysis sample were similar to those omitted on most demographic characteristics with the exception that youth who remained in the sample were significantly younger ($M = 16.76$ versus $M = 16.09$ for older and $M = 12.68$ versus $M = 12.50$ for younger siblings). For this reason, youth age was included as a control in all analyses.

Of the 130 families in the current study, mothers' average age was 43.18 ($SD = 5.47$) and fathers' was 45.74 ($SD = 6.56$), and mothers and fathers averaged 14.82 ($SD = 1.89$) and 14.50 ($SD = 2.35$), respectively on a measure of education where a score of 12 indicated high school graduate, 14 indicated some college, and 16 indicated a bachelor's degree. Because mothers' and fathers' education levels were highly correlated ($r = .52$), an average was calculated and included as a control. The majority of parents were employed (82% of mothers and 90% of fathers) and worked full-time (mothers, $M = 31.48$, $SD = 18.18$; fathers, $M = 42.02$, $SD = 18.29$ hours per week), and average annual family income for these primarily dual earner families was \$101,968 ($SD = \$83,100$). The majority of couples (88%) were married ($M = 16.83$ years, $SD = 6.53$), and the remainder were in cohabiting relationships ($M = 10.80$ years, $SD = 7.02$). Family size averaged 4.65 people including parents ($SD = 1.30$).

Turning to adolescents, older siblings averaged 16.09 ($SD = 1.94$) and younger siblings averaged 12.50 ($SD = 1.15$) years of age. Most adolescents were biologically related to both mothers (92% of older and 96% of younger adolescents) and fathers (79% of older and 86% of younger adolescents). The sample was approximately equally divided by gender (49% girls) and dyad gender constellation (50% same gender).

Procedures

Data were collected using home and telephone interviews. In individual home interviews, mothers, fathers and both adolescents reported on their personal characteristics and experiences and their family relationships during the past year. Interviews were conducted by African American interviewers and lasted about 2 hours for parents and 1 hour for adolescents. Families received a \$200 honorarium at the completion of interviews. During the subsequent month, seven telephone interviews were conducted (five on weekday evenings and two on weekend evenings) with parents and adolescents to obtain information about adolescents' daily practices and about parents' daily practices with adolescents. All calls were scheduled in the evening. Using a cued recall procedure, during each call, youth reported on the day's practices outside of regular school hours including the type of activity, how long the activity lasted, and with whom they had engaged in each activity. Mothers and fathers were each interviewed on four of the seven calls (one weekend and three weekday evenings). Parents reported on their household tasks and on their practices with each of the two target adolescents.

Measures

Parental religious beliefs—In the home interviews, mothers' and fathers' rated their religious beliefs using the 12-item vertical subscale of the Mature Faith Scale (Benson & Elkin, 1990), which assesses individuals' life transforming relationship with a deity (e.g., “My faith shapes how I think and act each day;” and, “My faith helps me know right from wrong.”) Possible responses ranged from 1= *never true* to 7= *always true*. Ratings were averaged, and Cronbach's alphas were .87 (mothers) and .83 (fathers).

Parental religious practices—In each phone interview, mothers and fathers reported how many minutes that day they had engaged in religious practices with each of their adolescents. Religious practices included: attended a religious service; attended religious class; said prayers; attended a religious celebration like baptisms; and participated in related practices with the religious community. Mothers' and fathers' total hours spent on religious practices with each adolescent were summed to create indices of their time spent in practices with each of their children.

Adolescent religious beliefs—Adolescents' religious beliefs were assessed in the home interviews using an eight-item measure adapted from the Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality (Fetzer Institute, 1999). Example items include: “God watches over me;” and “God is all around me;” and possible responses ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. Ratings were averaged, and Cronbach's alpha was .91 for older siblings and .90 for younger siblings.

Adolescent religious practices—During each phone call adolescents reported the number of minutes spent that day in religious practices. Their reports were summed across the seven calls to create a measure of total hours spent on religious practices including prayer and attending services, classes, celebrations or other practices with the religious community.

Ethnic identity—Two dimensions of adolescent ethnic identity were assessed using the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992): commitment and exploration (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Each dimension consisted of the mean of three items: commitment (e.g., “I have a clear sense of being Black, African American, or part Black/African American and what that means for me”) and exploration (e.g., “I have spent time trying to find out more about African Americans, such as their history, traditions, and customs”). Responses to items were rated using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. Ratings were averaged, and Cronbach's alpha was .69 for commitment and .53 for exploration.

Family background—Parents reported on adolescents' age and birth order and parents' biological status *vis a vis* both children, age, marital status and relationship duration, education, income and work hours.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for all study variables are presented in Table 1. These data indicate that parents and adolescents reported relatively strong religious beliefs, on average: on a 7-point scale, mothers averaged 5.76 ($SD = .91$), fathers averaged 5.25 ($SD = 1.25$), and on a 4-point scale, adolescents averaged 3.67 ($SD = .43$). Average number of hours spent in religious practices with the target adolescents across 4 days were: $M = 1.20$ ($SD = 2.07$) for mothers and $M = .65$ ($SD = 1.35$) for fathers. Across 7 days, adolescents averaged 1.97 ($SD = 2.74$) hours in religious practices. Beliefs and practices were positively but not strongly correlated among mothers, fathers, and adolescents; correlations between mothers' and fathers' practices and values also were positively but not strongly correlated, suggesting that these are separate constructs.

Analytic Strategy

We used multilevel modeling (MLM) to account for the clustered (siblings within families) design, focusing on fixed effects given that we studied two adolescents per family, and we estimated separate sets of models for youth religious beliefs and religious practices. Each set of models was tested hierarchically. In the first step, we entered all control and potential moderator variables, namely parental education, father's biological status (0 = biological father; 1 = not biological father), adolescent age, birth order (0 = older sibling; 1 = younger sibling), commitment to ethnic identity, exploration of ethnic identity, and youth gender (0 = female; 1 = male). Also, in the first step, we entered mothers' religious practices, mothers' religious beliefs, fathers' religious practices, and fathers' religious beliefs. All continuous variables were mean centered. We tested for moderation in the second step, entering 14 two-way interactions: mothers' practices X mothers' beliefs, mothers' practices X gender, mothers' practices X commitment to ethnic identity, mothers' practices X exploration of ethnic identity, mothers' beliefs X gender, mothers' beliefs X commitment to ethnic identity, mothers' beliefs X exploration of ethnic identity, fathers' practices X fathers' beliefs, fathers' practices X gender, fathers' practices X commitment to ethnic identity, fathers' practices X exploration of ethnic identity, fathers' beliefs X gender, and fathers' beliefs X commitment to ethnic identity. Following Aiken and West (1991), after testing the original models we removed all non-significant interactions and retested the models and then plotted the significant interactions at 1 SD above and below the mean. Additionally we tested the simple slopes to test the significance of each association within the interaction. Because of the high means on parents' religious beliefs (see Table 1), the groups 1 SD above the mean are referred to as "high in religious beliefs" and the groups 1 SD below the mean are referred to as "moderate in religious beliefs." Using a scale from 1-7, average scores for the high religious beliefs group was 6.67 whereas average scores for the moderate religious beliefs group was 4.85. In terms of practices, "0 hours per week" and "3 hours per week" were the cut offs used to define groups of parents that were 1 SD below and above the mean, respectively.

Correlates of Adolescents' Religious Beliefs

Results for adolescents' religious beliefs are presented in Table 2. In Model 1, two main effects emerged: mothers', but not fathers' beliefs as well as adolescents' commitment to and

exploration of ethnic identity were positively associated with adolescents' religious beliefs. Further, a two-way interaction emerged between fathers' beliefs and youth gender. Fathers' beliefs (Figure 1) were positively associated with sons' beliefs ($\gamma = .08$, $SE = .03$, $p < .01$), but not daughters' ($\gamma = -.02$, $SE = .03$, ns).

Correlates of Adolescents' Religious Practices

Findings on adolescents' religious practices are presented in Table 3. Consistent with our hypotheses, both mothers' and fathers' reports of religious practices with their adolescents were positively related to adolescents' practices: For every hour that mothers or fathers reported spending in religious practices with their adolescents over four days, older and younger adolescents reported spending 47 and 52 minutes, respectively, across seven days. Multiple two-way interactions also emerged in testing Model 2. First, an interaction between mothers' practices and mothers' beliefs (Figure 2) revealed positive associations between mothers' practices and adolescents' practices when mothers reported both high ($\gamma = .51$, $SE = .08$, $p < .001$) and more moderate levels of beliefs ($\gamma = 1.20$, $SE = .10$, $p < .001$), but contrary to our hypothesis, the association was stronger when mothers reported more moderate beliefs. Our results also indicated an interaction between fathers' practices and gender (Figure 3). More time with their child spent in religious practices by fathers was positively related to time in religious practices for both sons ($\gamma = .73$, $SE = .11$, $p < .001$) and daughters ($\gamma = 1.03$, $SE = .10$, $p < .001$), but in contrast to a social learning hypothesis, the association was stronger for daughters.

Discussion

Grounded in a cultural ecological model and guided by social learning theory predictions, in this study we examined the roles of mothers' and fathers' religious beliefs and practices in the religiosity of African American adolescents and the moderating effects of youth gender and ethnic identity in these linkages. Substantial evidence suggests that religiosity can play a protective role in the adjustment and well-being of African American adolescents (Ball et al., 2003; Ellison, 1993; McCree et al., 2003; Simons et al., 2004). Thus, it is important to identify the sociocultural and familial processes that give rise to religiosity in these youth, particularly given that externalizing and internalizing behaviors peak in adolescence, and that these problems are more pronounced in African American relative to other groups of youth (Eccles et al., 1993; Hill et al., 2011). Taken together, the findings from this study advance research by revealing the utility of assessing religiosity as a multidimensional construct, by documenting African American fathers' unique role in their adolescents' development, and by demonstrating the importance of ethnic homogeneous designs in examining the role of sociocultural factors in the development of African American youth.

Religious Beliefs and Practices

Findings from this study highlight the importance of examining religiosity as a multidimensional construct. By assessing religious practices *and* beliefs, as well as their interaction, a more nuanced understanding on the association between parents' and adolescents' religiosity in African American families was possible. As predicted, adolescents were less likely to report engaging in religious practices when mothers reported low levels of

both religious beliefs and practices with adolescents, *and* when mothers reported high religious beliefs but spent less time in religious practices with adolescents. Hence, adolescents with mothers who do not practice what they preach (i.e., do not engage their adolescents in religious practices despite having strong beliefs) may be less inclined toward religious practice. These effects did not emerge for fathers, however, and in this way, our findings support past descriptions of mothers as the primary transmitters of religiosity (Boyatzis et al., 2006; Desrosiers et al., 2011), particularly in African American families (Gutierrez et al., 2014). Importantly, the effect of the interaction between maternal beliefs and practices on youth practices was stronger when mothers' beliefs were moderate, at around the midpoint of the 7-point scale we used. It may be that mothers with extreme beliefs are perceived as too intense for adolescents who are in the process of exploring the role of religion in their lives. More research is needed on adolescents' perceptions of maternal religious beliefs and how these perceptions may promote or hinder the development of religiosity in African American adolescents.

The Role of Fathers

African American fathers are understudied with respect to their positive contributions to youth development, including in research on adolescents' religiosity. Our findings revealed that with mothers' practices and beliefs in the models, fathers' religiosity emerged as a unique predictor of adolescents' beliefs and practices and thus underscore the importance of including fathers in research on African American youth. We found, however, that fathers' socialization effects were gendered. According to social learning theory, adolescents tend to model individuals who are more objectively similar to themselves—and this would include their same-gender parent (Bandura, 1986). Our findings were consistent with this tenet in showing that, controlling for mothers' religious beliefs and practices, fathers' *beliefs* were associated with sons', but not daughters' beliefs. Whereas fathers' *practices* were associated with the practices of both sons and daughters, inconsistent with social learning theory, this association was stronger for daughters. Although gender differences in youth religiosity were not apparent in our sample, past studies have found that girls' are more likely to participate in religious practices than boys (McCullough et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2002); hence, girls' may be more responsive to religious socialization in the domain of practice. Future research on the role of fathers in the development of African American youth should be directed at illuminating when and why youth gender matters.

Sociocultural Factors

Using an ethnic homogeneous design, a primary goal of this study was to illuminate the role of sociocultural factors in the links between African American parents' and adolescents' religiosity. From a cultural ecological perspective, adolescent development is best understood in relation to the larger contexts in which adolescents are embedded. Religiosity has served as a central feature in African American history and culture (Taylor & Chatter 2010; Taylor et al., 2004; Wortham, 2009), and our design allowed us to examine ethnic identity, a culturally salient factor, as a potential explanation for within group variations in youth religiosity and the family processes that promote it. Although ethnic identity commitment and exploration were linked to youth religiosity as main effects, contrary to our hypothesis, these dimensions of ethnic identity did not moderate the associations between

parents' and adolescents' religious beliefs and practices. Power to detect interactions was limited given this study's sample of 130 families and a low internal consistency score for the exploration subscale ($\alpha = .53$) of the MEIM (Phinney & Ong, 2007); thus, future research should continue to implement ethnic homogeneous designs to better understand the role of sociocultural factors that may be unique to African American families.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study is not without limitations. First, our correlational design precluded our ability to make causal inferences about the role of parents' religiosity: Adolescents may also influence their parents' religious beliefs and practices. Thus, future studies should implement longitudinal designs that would inform understanding of the directionality of these family influences. In addition, experimental interventions aimed at promoting beliefs and increasing youth and/or parental time in religious practices could shed light on the causal role of parents' religiosity in their children's development. Second, parenting processes that were not considered in this study, such as parental monitoring or warmth, may underlie the relations between parent and adolescents' religiosity. For example, parental warmth may facilitate the transmission of values and behaviors between parents and their adolescents (Bandura, 1986; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). An important direction for research is to examine such dynamics in African American families. Third, families in this study consisted of two co-residential parents with adolescent offspring who were relatively economically advantaged and came from a limited geographic region. As such, findings cannot be generalized beyond this sample, and future research should consider examining these socialization processes in diverse family structures and economic circumstances. Fourth, our measure of parents' religious practices was limited to parents' reports of religious practices *with* their adolescents. Because adolescents are more likely to observe their parents in joint religious practices, these reports were relevant to our social learning-based hypothesis regarding parental modeling. However, these reports were intrinsically correlated with youth practices and also may have not captured other forms of religious participation by parents. Future research should examine the range of parents' religious participation as well as the various domains in which parents engage in these religious activities (Ellison, 1993) in order to determine which types are most beneficial for promoting religiosity in African American adolescents.

Conclusion

In sum, the current study advanced understanding of African American youths' religiosity within its sociocultural and familial contexts in important ways. First, we focused on examining youth religiosity as a multidimensional construct, a domain of experience that is central to African American families and linked to positive developmental outcomes for African American adolescents (Ball et al., 2003; McCree et al., 2003; Simons et al., 2004). Second, we used an ethnic homogeneous design to better understand variations among African American youth. Although past research has examined the implications of religiosity for these youth, less attention has been given to familial and sociocultural factors that give rise to differences among African American youths' religious beliefs and practices. Our findings demonstrated the significance of both mothers' and fathers' religiosity for

adolescents' beliefs and practices, and also showed how youth gender characteristics moderated these linkages. Third, findings documented the unique contributions of African American fathers to adolescents' religiosity. In sum, by building on cultural strengths, information from this study could be used to develop new and adapt existing prevention and intervention programs that seek to promote positive development in minority youth who face substantial risk within the larger and dominant societal context (Garcia Coll & Szalacha, 2006).

Acknowledgments

Authors' Note: We thank the graduate and undergraduate assistants, staff, and faculty collaborators for their help in conducting this study, as well as the participating families for their time and insight about youth development. This research was supported by National Institute on Child Health and Development grant R01-HD32336, Susan McHale and Ann Crouter, Co-PIs. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institute on Child Health and Development.

References

- Acock AC, Bengtson VL. On the relative influence of mothers and fathers: A covariance analysis of political and religious socialization. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 1978; 40:519–530. DOI: 10.2307/350932
- Aiken, LS.; West, SG. *Multiple Regression: Testing and Interpreting Interactions*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage; 1991.
- Ball J, Armistead L, Austin BJ. The relationship between religiosity and adjustment among African-American, female, urban adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence*. 2003; 26:431–446. DOI: 10.1016/S0140-1971(03)00037-X [PubMed: 12887932]
- Bandura, A. *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall; 1986.
- Bandura A. Moral disengagement in the perpetration of inhumanities. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*. 1999; 3:193–209. DOI: 10.1207/s15327957pspr0303_3 [PubMed: 15661671]
- Bandura A, Caprara GV, Barbaranelli C, Pastorelli C, Regalia C. Sociocognitive self-regulatory mechanisms governing transgressive behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 2001; 80:125–135. DOI: 10.1037/0022-3514.80.1.125 [PubMed: 11195885]
- Bao WN, Whitbeck LB, Hoyt DR, Conger RD. Perceived parental acceptance as a moderator of religious transmission among adolescent boys and girls. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 1999; 61:362–374. DOI: 10.2307/353754
- Benson, PL.; Elkin, CH. *Effective Christian education: A national study of protestant congregations – A summary report on faith, loyalty, and congregational life*. Minneapolis: Search Institute; 1990.
- Boyatzis, CJ.; Dollahite, DC.; Marks, LD. The family as a context for religious and spiritual development in children and youth. In: Roehlkepartian, EC.; King, PE.; Wagener, L.; Benson, PL., editors. *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; 2006. p. 297-309.
- Brown T, Parks G, Zimmerman R. The role of religions in predicting adolescent alcohol use and problem drinking. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*. 2001; 62(5):696–705. [PubMed: 11702809]
- Carleton RA, Esparza P, Thaxter PJ, Grant KE. Stress, religious coping resources, and depressive symptoms in an urban adolescent sample. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 2008; 47:113–121. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-5906.2008.00395.x
- Chen, X. Culture and children's socioemotional functioning. In: Chen, X.; Rubin, KH., editors. *Socioemotional development in cultural context*. New York: The Guilford Press; 2011. p. 29-52.
- Crouter AC, Baril ME, Davis KD, McHale S. Processes linking social class and racial socialization in African American dual-earner families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 2008; 70:1311–1325. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2008.00568.x [PubMed: 21709729]

- Darling N, Steinberg L. Parenting style as context: An integrative model. *Psychological Bulletin*. 1993; 113:487–496. DOI: 10.1037/0033-2909.113.3.487
- Desrosiers A, Kelley BS, Miller L. Parent and peer relationships and relational spirituality in adolescents and young adults. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*. 2011; 3:39–54. DOI: 10.1037/a0020037
- Eccles JS, Midgley C, Wigfield A, Buchanan CM, Reuman D, Flanagan C, Mac Iver D. Development during adolescence: the impact of stage-environment fit on young adolescents' experiences in schools and in families. *American Psychologist*. 1993; 48:90–101. DOI: 10.1037/0003-066X.48.2.90 [PubMed: 8442578]
- Ellison CG. Religious involvement and self-perception among black Americans. *Social Forces*. 1993; 71(4):1027–1055. DOI: 10.1093/sf/71.4.1027
- Fetzer Institute. Multidimensional Measurement of Religiousness/Spirituality for use in Health Research. Kalamazoo, MI: 1999.
- Garcia Coll, C.; Szalacha, LA. The multiple contexts of middle childhood. *Children of Immigrant Families; Future of Children*. 2006. p. 81-97. Online: http://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/docs/14_02_05.pdf
- Greening L, Stoppelbein L. Religiosity, attributional style, and social support as psychological buffers for African American and White adolescents' perceived for suicide. *Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior*. 2002; 32:404–417. DOI: 10.1521/suli.32.4.404.22333 [PubMed: 12501965]
- Grusec, JE.; Kuczynski, LE. Parenting and children's internalization of values: A handbook of contemporary theory. John Wiley & Sons Inc; 1997.
- Gutierrez IA, Goodwin LJ, Kirkinis K, Mattis JS. Religious socialization in African American families: The relative influence of parents, grandparents, and siblings. *Journal of Family Psychology*. 2014; doi: 10.1037/a0035732
- Hardy SA, White JA, Zhang Z, Ruchty J. Parenting and the socialization of religiousness and spirituality. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*. 2011; 3:217–230. DOI: 10.1037/a0021600
- Hill, NE.; Mann, TL.; Fitzgerald, HE. African American children and mental health. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger; 2011.
- Hill PC, Pargament KI. Advances in the conceptualization and measurement of religion and spirituality: Implications for physical and mental health research. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*. 2008; S1:3–17. DOI: 10.1037/1941-1022.S.1.3
- Juang, L.; Syed, M. Ethnic identity and spirituality. In: Lerner, RM.; Roeser, RW.; Phelps, E., editors. *Positive youth development and spirituality: From theory to research*. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press; 2008. p. 262-284.
- Kim-Spoon J, Longo GS, McCullough ME. Parent-adolescent relationship quality as a moderator for the influences of parents' religiousness on adolescents' religiousness and adjustment. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. 2012; 41:1576–1587. DOI: 10.1007/s10964-012-9796-1 [PubMed: 22836938]
- King PE. Religion and identity: The role of ideological, social, and spiritual contexts. *Applied Developmental Science*. 2003; 7:197–204. DOI: 10.1207/S1532480XADS0703_11
- Landor A, Simons LG, Simons RL, Brody GH, Gibbons FX. The role of religiosity in the relationship between parents, peers, and adolescent risky sexual behavior. *Journal of Youth Adolescence*. 2011; 40:296–309. DOI: 10.1007/s10964-010-9598-2 [PubMed: 21052800]
- Leonard KC, Cook KV, Boyatzis CJ, Kiimball CN, Flanagan KS. Parent-child dynamics and emerging adult religiosity: Attachment, parental beliefs, and faith support. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*. 2013; 5:5–14. DOI: 10.1037/a0029404
- Lopez A, Huynh VW, Fuligni A. A longitudinal study of religious identity and participation during adolescence. *Child Development*. 2011; :1297–1309. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2011.01609.x [PubMed: 21679174]
- McCree DH, Wingood GM, Diclemente R, Davies S, Harrington KF. Religiosity and risky sexual behavior in African-American adolescent females. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2003; 33:2–8. DOI: 10.1016/S1054-139X(02)00460-3 [PubMed: 12834991]

- McCulloch ME, Tsang J, Brion S. Personality traits in adolescence as predictors of religiousness in early adulthood: Findings from the Terman Longitudinal Study. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. 2003; 29:980–991. DOI: 10.1177/0146167203253210 [PubMed: 15189617]
- McHale SM, Crouter AC, Whiteman SD. The family contexts of gender development in childhood and adolescence. *Social Development*. 2003; 12:125–148. DOI: 10.1111/1467-9507.00225
- McLoyd VC, Cauce AM, Takeuchi D, Wilson L. Marital processes and parental socialization in families of color: A decade review of research. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 2000; 62:1070–1093. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.01070.x
- Molock SD, Barksdale CL. Relationship Between Religiosity and Conduct Problems Among African American and Caucasian Adolescents. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*. 2013; 22:4–14. DOI: 10.1007/s10826-012-9584-2
- Oman D, Thoresen CE. Spiritual modeling: A key to spiritual and religious growth? *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*. 2003; 13:149–165. DOI: 10.1207/S15327582IJPR1303_01
- Ozorak EW. Social and cognitive influences on the development of religious beliefs and commitment in adolescence. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 1989; 28:448–463. DOI: 10.2307/1386576
- Phinney JS. The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure: A new scale for use with diverse groups. *Journal of Adolescent Research*. 1992; 7:156–176. DOI: 10.1177/074355489272003
- Phinney, JS.; Lochner, BT.; Murphy, R. Ethnic identity development and psychological adjustment in adolescence. Sage Publications, Inc; 1990.
- Phinney JS, Ong AD. Conceptualization and measurement of ethnic identity: Current status and future directions. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*. 2007; 54:271–281. DOI: 10.1037/0022-0167.54.3.271
- Shweder, RA.; Goodnow, J.; Hatano, G.; LeVine, R.; Markus, H.; Miller, P. The cultural psychology of development: One mind, many mentalities. In: Hader, W., editor. *Handbook of Psychology*. 2007. p. 865-937.
- Simons LG, Simons RL, Conger RD. Identifying the mechanisms whereby family religiosity influences the probability of adolescent antisocial behavior. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*. 2004:547–563.
- Smith C, Denton ML, Faris R, Regnerus M. Mapping American adolescent religious participation. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 2002; 41:597–612. DOI: 10.1111/1468-5906.00148
- Spencer MB, Fegley SG, Harpalani V. A theoretical and empirical examination of identity as coping: Linking coping resources to the self-processes of African American youth. *Applied Developmental Science*. 2003; 7:181–188. DOI: 10.1207/S1532480XADS0703_9
- Super CM, Harkness S. The developmental niche: A conceptualization at the interface of child and culture. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*. 1986; 9:545–569. DOI: 10.1177/016502548600900409
- Taylor RJ, Chatters LM. Importance of religion and spirituality in the lives of African Americans, Caribbean Blacks, and Non-Hispanic Whites. *The Journal of Negro Education*. 2010; 79:280–294.
- Taylor, RJ.; Chatters, LM.; Levin, J. Religion in the lives of African Americans: Social, psychological, and health perspectives. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; 2004.
- Trommsdorf, G.; Cole, PM. Emotion, self-regulation, and social behavior in cultural contexts. In: Chen, X.; Rubin, KH., editors. *Socioemotional development in cultural context*. New York: The Guilford Press; 2011. p. 131-163.
- Updegraff KA, McHale SM, Whiteman S, Thayer SM, Delgado MY. Adolescent sibling relationships in Mexican American families: Exploring the role of familism. *Journal of Family Psychology*. 2005; 19:512–522. DOI: 10.1037/0893-3200.19.4.512 [PubMed: 16402866]
- Wortham RA. WEB Du Bois, the Black Church, and the sociological study of Religion. *Sociological Spectrum*. 2009; 29:144–172. DOI: 10.1080/027321708025813

Figure 1.
The association between fathers' religious beliefs and adolescents' religious beliefs as moderated by adolescents' gender.

Figure 2.

The association between mothers' religious practices and adolescents' religious practices as moderated by mothers' religious beliefs.

Figure 3.

The association between fathers' religious practices and adolescents' religious practices as moderated by adolescents' gender.

Table 1
Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations (SD) for Study Variables (N = 259 adolescents)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Parent education	-												
2. Biological father ^a	-.25***	-											
3. Age	.04	.08	-										
4. Birth order ^b	.00	-.09	-.75***	-									
5. EI Commitment	-.05	.03	.01	.00	-								
6. EI Exploration	-.15**	.01	.01	.00	.44***	-							
7. Gender ^c	.02	-.08	.08	-.04	-.11	-.09	-						
8. Mothers' beliefs	.01	-.06	.03	.00	.05	.06	-.08	-					
9. Fathers' beliefs	-.03	-.19**	.01	.00	.02	.02	.06	.34***	-				
10. Mothers' practices	.04	.00	.10	.00	.09	.08	-.06	.15*	.17**	-			
11. Fathers' practices	-.04	.03	.01	.00	.11	.07	.01	.21***	.29***	.27***	-		
12. Adolescent beliefs	-.15*	-.03	-.15*	.13	.30***	.26***	-.11	.24***	.16**	.10	.15*	-	
13. Adolescent practices	.01	.00	.05	.04	.11	.08	-.07	.21***	.30***	.73***	.62***	.20**	-
<i>M</i>	14.66	.17	14.28	.50	3.16	2.67	.51	5.76	5.25	1.20	.65	3.67	1.97
<i>SD</i>	1.85	.38	2.39	.50	.65	.65	.50	.91	1.25	2.07	1.35	.43	2.74

Note: EI = Ethnic Identity;

^aBiological Father: 0 = biological father, 1 = not biological father.

^bBirth order: 0 = *firstborn*, 1 = *secondborn*.

^cGender: 0 = *female*, 1 = *male*.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 2
Summary of Results of Multilevel Modeling Analysis Predicting African American
Youths' Religious Beliefs (N = 259 adolescents)

Variables	Mode 1		Model 2	
	γ	SE	γ	SE
Intercept	3.70***	.05	3.67***	.05
Parent Education	-.03	.02	-.02	.02
Biological Father	-.05	.07	-.04	.07
Age	-.01	.02	-.01	.02
Birth Order	.05	.07	.08	.07
EI Commitment	.13**	.04	.13**	.04
EI Exploration	.09*	.04	.10*	.04
Gender	-.06	.05	-.06	.05
Mothers' Practices (MP)	.01	.01	.01	.01
Mothers' Beliefs (MB)	.08**	.03	.08*	.03
Fathers' Practices (FP)	.02	.02	.02	.02
Fathers' Beliefs (FB)	.02	.02	-.02	.03
FB X Gender			.10**	.04

Note: All continuous variables were mean centered; IE = Ethnic Identity

*
 $p < .05$,

**
 $p < .01$,

 $p < .001$

Table 3
Summary of Results of Multilevel Modeling Analysis Predicting African American
Youths' Religious Practices (N = 247 adolescents)

Variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	γ	SE	γ	SE
Intercept	1.95***	.19	2.11***	.19
Parent Education	.02	.06	-.03	.06
Biological Father	-.08	.28	-.20	.27
Age	.00	.07	.00	.06
Birth Order	.23	.27	.16	.26
EI Commitment	.13	.16	.12	.15
EI Exploration	.06	.16	.03	.15
Gender	-.21	.18	-.21	.17
Mothers' Practices (MP)	.79***	.06	.86***	.05
Mothers' Beliefs (MB)	-.03	.13	-.18	.12
Fathers' Practices (FP)	.86***	.09	1.03***	.10
Fathers' Beliefs (FB)	.14	.10	.06	.09
MP X MB			-.38**	.08
FP X Gender			-.31*	.13

Note: All continuous variables were mean centered; IE = Ethnic Identity

*
 $p < .05$,

**
 $p < .01$,

 $p < .001$