

Examining the Influence of Religiosity and Spirituality on Shame among African American College Women

MEYA Y. B. MONGKUO & KIMBERLY BOYD

Virginia Social Science Journal | Volume 53 | 2019 | Pages 79–86

ABSTRACT Existing literature has examined the correlation between the level of religiosity and spirituality on shame among African American college women. However, recently, there has been a collective shift to diverge religiosity and spirituality as two separate constructs as they operate differently especially within the psychosocial lives of African American women. The goal of this study was to begin a line of inquiry to resolve this problem. Using data collected from self-report questionnaires, the study revealed that religiosity was a significant negative predictor of shame response; and spirituality was a significant positive predictor of shame amongst African American college women.

Keywords: Religiosity, spirituality, shame, African-American women, multiple regression analysis, historically black university

AUTHOR MEYA Y. B. MONGKUO & KIMBERLY BOYD Virginia State University

INTRODUCTION

Shame refers to a self-conscious emotion that is experienced when an individual's behavior is negatively judged by others or does not match the standards of one's culture (Lewis, 1992; Irvine, 2009; Gilland, 2011). Sheff (2000) defined shame as a moral regulator of social behavior with the purpose of balancing the behaviors of an individual to the norms of society. More specifically, shame is the social transmission of taboo (Scheff, 2000). As a result of receiving negative evaluation from others, the self internalizes the message of shame and is unable to separate the public depiction with the true, inner nature (Murray, Ciarrocchi, & Murray-Swank, 2007; Gilland, 2011). Shame has been associated with overt psychological maladaptive behaviors such as alcohol use (Treeby & Bruno, 2012); illicit substance use (Prosek et al., 2017); depression (Tangney & Dearing, 2002); low self-esteem (Pulku et al., 2014) and withdrawal or avoidance of shame-inducing situations (Elison, Lennon, & Pulos, 2001). Previous research have proposed the need to investigate the potential predictors of shame especially among African American females who research has shown to be disproportionately endowed with faith-related shame (Crenshaw, 1994; Grodensky et al., 2015).

Historically this effort has been impeded by conceptualizing the key constructs of faith (i.e., religion and spirituality) as overlapping constructs for African Americans (Sandfort, & Haworth, 2002; Lewis, 2008; Miller & Thorensen, 2003). In recent years, there has been conceptual para-

digm shift which proposed a distinction between religiosity and spirituality on its impact on the emotions and behaviors for African American women (Boyd-Starke, Hill, Fife, & Taylor, Chatters, Bullard, & Jackson, 2008; Overstreet, 2010; Mattis, 2002). According to this paradigm, religion and spirituality for African American women have been a foundation for character expression and a guide for moral human behavior (Abrams, Maxwell, Pope, & Belgrave, 2014). When facing adverse situations, African American women commonly turn to religion or spirituality as a means to cope with difficult emotions (Mattis, 2002).

For African American women, religiosity is viewed as community focused, objective, and behavior-based; while spirituality is individualistic, subjective and emotionally oriented. (Lewis, 2008). Jacqueline Mattis's intricate research on African American faith theology, defines religiosity for African American women as an organized system of beliefs, practices, and rituals to facilitate spirituality and a closeness to God. She further explains spirituality existing as a phenomenal experience between an individual to herself, other people, nature, and to God/Higher Power that acts as a vehicle of transcendence and connectedness to all. This view cultivates an active belief of interpersonal relationships between living humans and spirits or ascended ancestors (Mattis, 2002). Religiosity is essentially a tool or set of behaviors to achieve spirituality; while spirituality is the relational experience that demonstrates the connectedness with and to God. Hence,

according to this view, religion itself is a pathway to spirituality in the world of the African American woman.

Numerous studies have found that religiosity and spirituality directly influence a host of psychological outcomes for African American women such as increased well-being (Braxton, Lang, Sales, Wingood, & DiClemente, 2007), act as a coping mechanism to racial stigma (Butler-Barnes et al., 2018), and decrease in depressive and PTSD symptomatology (Watlington & Murphy, 2006). Religious Black women even view belief in God and daily prayer as health-protective behaviors (Musgrave, Allen, & Allen, 2002). Despite this impressive research, few have investigated the distinct predictive impact of religiosity and spirituality of African American women on negative self-emotions such as shame (Murray, Ciarrocchi, Murray-Swank, 2007). Therefore, the aim of this study was to assess whether religiosity and spirituality can predict feelings of shame within young adult African American women. We proposed the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Religiosity will be a significant predictor of shame amongst African American college women.

Hypothesis 2: Spirituality will be significant predictor of shame amongst African American college women.

METHOD

Research Design & Instrumentation

The present study utilized a correlation design to determine if religiosity and spirituality, are predictors of shame. The predictor variables are religiosity and spirituality as separate constructs; and the criterion variable was shame.

Religiosity was conceptualized as daily spiritual experiences, values/beliefs, private religious practices, religious and spiritual coping, religious support, religious/spiritual history, commitment, and organizational religiousness on The Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality (BMMRS). The BMMRS consists of 34 items that measures these concepts scored on a 5-point Likert scale which includes questions such as “I feel God’s presence”; “I believe in a God who watches over me”; “How often do you pray privately in place other than at church or temple?”; and “How often do you attend religious services?”. The items on the BMMRS have been found to have an internal consistency of Cronbach’s alpha ≥ 0.70 . (Pargament, 1999).

Spirituality was measured by items on The Expression of

Spirituality Inventory-Revised (ESI-R) (MacDonald, 2000) that assessed experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and practices of the participant regarding spirituality. The ESI-R has five subscales: Cognitive Orientation towards Spirituality, Experiential/Phenomenological Dimension, Existential Well-Being, Paranormal Beliefs, and Religiousness. Examples of questions include “I have had an experience in which seemed to be deeply connected to everything”; “I feel a sense of closeness to higher power”; “Spirituality is an essential part of human existence”; and “I believe witchcraft is real”. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The ESI-R has been validated among various cultures including Ugandan samples (MacDonald, et al., 2015).

Shame assessed by the Compass of Shame Scale (CoSS) ((Elison, Lennon, & Pulos, 2006) a 48-item questionnaire which measures the four shame responses/coping styles: Avoidance, Attack Self, Withdrawal, and Attack Other. Attack Self shame coping style accepts the shame message as valid and negative and directs anger inside. Withdrawal accepts the shame message negative and valid and attempts to withdraw or hide from the situation. Attack Other may interpret the shame message as valid or negative and attempts to make others feel bad about themselves. Avoidance shame response does not accept the message as true and attempts to distract from the negative experience. Examples include “When I feel others think poorly of me”; “When I feel rejected by someone”; “When I feel humiliated.” Responses were scored on a 5 point-Likert scale ranging from 1 = never to 5=almost always. Previous studies estimated internal consistency the scale to be Cronbach’s alpha = .92, and test-retest reliability to be (88) = .83 (Elison, Lennon, & Pulos, 2006).

Participants

Participants in this study were a total of 287 college students, majority African American women (N= 281, 97.6%) between the ages of 18-55 (SD = 3.11), attending a Historically Black University in southeastern United States. Professors at a Historically Black University were contacted via email or in person to recruit and administer the survey to students in their classes. As an incentive to increase participation rate, the professors were also asked if they would be willing to give extra credit to students who were willing to participate in the survey. Once the some of the professors who agreed to both requests, the survey was administered online via Qualtrics. The participants were also allowed to take the survey on their cellphones. Before taking the survey, an informed consent form which was on the front page of the survey instrument was verbally communicated to the participants. Participants were instructed to sign and date the informed consent before beginning the survey. Participants were also informed that completion of the entire survey will qualify

for extra credit points. The survey took approximately 13-25 minutes to complete. At the end of the survey, participants were asked to indicate their current course professor in order to receive extra credit for taking the survey.

Data Analysis

Data for this study was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 26.0. Correlations, simple linear regressions, and multiple regression analyses were performed to determine if the two predictor variables, religiosity and spirituality, have an association or predictive effect on shame. The magnitude of the effect of each predictor variable to the outcome variables was generated and detailed. The strength of using standard multiple linear regression is that it displays the entire picture of the regression outcome. A limitation of this statistical procedure is that the predictive characteristics of the predictor variables may be afforded a low weight which can potentially skew predictors and lead researchers to draw inadequate results (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2016).

RESULTS

A series of multiple regression and bivariate correlation analyses were performed to determine the Pearson correlation coefficients for religiosity, spirituality, and shame. For our first hypothesis, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between religiosity and overall shame. This result indicates the higher level of religiosity, the less likely one would feel shame. This was corroborated by a small negative correlation found between religiosity and shame ($R = -.183, p < 0.01$) indicating participants with higher religiosity scores tend to have decreased feelings of shame. A significant small Pearson correlation was found between religiosity and attack-self shame coping script, ($R = -.238, p < 0.001$) which relays as religiosity increases, participants are less likely to turn anger inward and directed towards the self. A significant negative Pearson correlation was found between religiosity and withdrawal shame coping script ($R = -.279, p < 0.001$) suggesting a negative significant linear relationship. This finding suggests that as an African American woman's religiosity increases, the least likely that she will want to hide from a shameful situation.

Our second hypothesis regarding spirituality's ability to predict shame, there were several findings. A small negative correlation was found between spirituality and overall shame ($R = -.175, p < 0.001$) suggesting that as spirituality increases, overall shame decreases. A signifi-

cant negative correlation was found between spirituality and attack self-coping response, ($R = -.221, p < 0.001$) indicating that as spirituality increases, the least likely will a participant the anger from shame inward. A significant negative correlation was found between spirituality and withdrawal ($R = -.224, p < 0.001$). This signifies that the higher the level of spirituality of a participant, the lower the likelihood of withdrawing and hiding from a shaming situation. A small negative significant correlation was found between spirituality and attack others, ($R = -.121, p < 0.05$) suggesting that higher spirituality decreases likelihood of a respondent to attack others as a response to shame.

A standard multiple linear regression was conducted to determine the accuracy of religiosity and spirituality in predicting participants' religiosity and spirituality on African American female student's shame. The regression result indicate that the overall model significantly predicts African American college women's shame ($F(2, 282) = 5.031, p < 0.05$) with $R^2 = .034$). This result indicates that as an African American female's religiosity increases, her shame decreases.

Table 1 displays the estimated unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients associated with each of the independent variables in multiple regression model. Spirituality has a large positive and significant predictive influence of shame ($b=1.197, SE=0.200, Beta=0.96, t=5.077, p=0.001$). Religiosity has a meaningless predictive influence on shame ($b=0.023, SE=0.176, Beta=0.02, t=0.130, p=0.896$). The overall model has a significant predictive influence on shame ($F(2,283)=121.264, p=0.001; R^2 = 0.945$).

Dependent Variable: Level of Shame
N=283; Square Multivariate Correlation=94.6%

DISCUSSION

This study sought to provide a predictive model which clinical psychologists, social science researchers, and social service practitioners could use to assess the impact of religious behavior and spiritual beliefs on the emotion of shame among African American females. Based on the sample data, the major findings of the study do mixingly support the primary hypotheses of religiosity and spirituality as significant predictors of shame for African American college women. An African American women was less likely to experience shame if she was a highly religious individual. Previous findings have yielded similar results (Murray, Ciarrocchi, Murray-Swank, 2007; Grant & Fletcher, 2018). For example, Grant and Fletcher (2018) similar-

ly found that organized religiosity did not predict shameful affect in African Americans; however, the less religious behavior did indicate less shame. These findings imply for African American college women who engage in more religious practices; attend religious services; and pray more frequently will experience less shame in a shaming experience. Additionally, religiosity was found to have a significant negative relationship with two shame coping responses, withdrawal and attacking self. The theory of top-down processing can assist in understanding the cognitive and emotional processing of shame for religious African American women. Top-down processing can inform perceptions, judgements, and attitudes (Wood & Wood, 2002). Based on this theory, religiosity can operate within top-down processing where those engage in religious behaviors can over time can inform our judgements and emotional responses to social information such as shame.

Within religious texts and doctrines, the concept of forgiveness may be factor that contributes to negative relationship between religiosity and shame (Konstam, Chernoff & Deveney, 2001). Highly religious African American women that hold previous knowledge that their 'shameful' actions will be forgiven by the Higher Power, could inform the mind to be less susceptible to shame messages from the self and from others. Declarations about forgiveness and shame have been referenced in sacred texts such as:

"If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. 11 As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame" (Romans 10:9-11, New International Version).

"According to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death" (Philippians 1:20, New American Standard Bible).

"You will have plenty to eat and be satisfied And praise the name of the LORD your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you; Then My people will never be put to shame" (Joel 2:26, New American Standard Bible).

"Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name" (1 Peter 4:16, New American Standard Bible).

"And keep your duty to Allah, and shame me not!" (Quran, Al-Hijr, 15:69)

These findings suggest that a relationship may exist between religiosity and shame; however, more investigation is needed to determine if causality exists between the variables.

Interestingly, this study's finding of spirituality as a positive predictor of shame indicates a need to further nuance and separate the construct from religiosity. Considering the difference in predictive effect of religiosity and spirituality within this sample, it would seem that each construct operates differently. The overall findings support the goal of this research to profile the operation of religiosity and spirituality as separate aspects that can either positively or negatively influence our feelings of shame.

Limitations/Recommendations/Implications for Further Research

This study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, there was a lack of a control group and the data for the study was collected from students at solely one Historically Black university; thereby limiting external validity of the findings. Forthcoming studies should be conducted among other black female groups such as differing age, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation to inform future theory building. Second, the data was collected using self-reported instruments which often have the problem of respondent dishonesty. Finally, the student sample used in this study was not randomly selected, and therefore the findings may not be representative of faith-based shameful behavior African American females in general. These limitations suggest that interpretation or generalization of the findings of this study may be limited to African American female students attending this specific Historical Black university under investigation or universities with similar population mix or characteristics.

In addition, there are several suggestions to improving the outcome of the study. Future research can progress the scope of this study by utilizing a confirmatory factor analysis to determine the specific factors on the BMMRS and ESI reliably measure religiosity and spirituality for each measure then running a regression model. One suggestion is to utilize a factor analysis on the BMMRS and ESI to determine which factors on each measure inductively determine the religiosity and spirituality. The addition of forgiveness as a variable to explore further into the predictive impact religiosity and spirituality factors predict to shame. The present research has practical and clinical implications for psychologists, therapists,

and mental health professionals to consider the religious and spiritual beliefs of African American women in order to further develop interventions that involve religious behaviors for the processing and healing of shame within experiences with this population.

Table 1: Multiple Regression Unstandardized and Standardized Regression Weights of Religiosity and Spirituality of African American female College Students attending a Historically Black University

Independent Variable	b	Std. Error		t-value		CI Lower	CI Upper	Tolerance	VIF
Level of Religiosity			0.02	0.130		-0.328	0.939	0.015	650249
Level of Spirituality			0.93	5.977		0.803	1.592	0.015	65.249

Dependent Variable: Level of Shame

N=283; Square Multivariate Correlation=94.6%

REFERENCES

- Abrams, J. A., Maxwell, M., Pope, M., & Belgrave, F. Z. (2014). Carrying the world with the grace of a lady and the grit of a warrior: Deepening our understanding of the “Strong Black Woman” schema. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 38(4), 503-518.
- Boyd-Starke, K., Hill, O. W., Fife, J., & Whittington, M. (2011). Religiosity and HIV risk behaviors in African-American students. *Psychological Reports*, 108(2), 528-536.
- Braxton, N. D., Lang, D. L., Sales, J. M., Wingood, G. M., & DiClemente, R. J. (2007). The role of spirituality in sustaining the psychological well-being of HIV-positive black women. *Women & Health*, 46(2-3), pp. 113-129.
- Butler-Barnes, S. T., Martin, P. P., Hope, E. C., Cope-land-Linder, N., & Scott, M. L. (2018). Religiosity and Coping: Racial Stigma and Psychological Well-Being among African American Girls. *Journal of religion and health*, 57(5), 1980-1995.
- Chatters, L. M., Taylor, R. J., Bullard, K. M., & Jackson, J. S. (2009). Race and ethnic differences in religious involvement: African Americans, Caribbean blacks and non-Hispanic whites. *Ethnic and racial studies*, 32(7), 1143-1163.
- Crenshaw, K. W. (1994). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. In M.A. Fineman & R. Mykituk (Eds.) *The public nature of private violence*, pp. 93-118. New York: Routledge.
- Elison, J., Lennon, R., & Pulos, S. (2006). Investigating the compass of shame: The development of the Compass of Shame Scale. *Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal*, 34(3), pp. 221-238.
- Gilliland, R., South, M., Carpenter, B. N., & Hardy, S. A. (2011). The roles of shame and guilt in hypersexual behavior. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 18(1), pp. 12-29.
- Grodensky, C. A., Golin, C. E., Jones, C., Mamo, M., Dennis, A. C., Abernethy, M. G., & Patterson, K. B. (2015). “I should know better”: The roles of relationships, spirituality, disclosure, stigma, and shame for older women living with HIV seeking support in the South. *Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care*, 26(1), pp. 12-23.
- Irvine, J. M. (2009). Shame comes out of the closet. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*, 6(1), pp. 70.
- Konstam, V., Chernoff, M., & Deveney, S. (2001). Toward forgiveness: The role of shame, guilt anger, and empathy. *Counseling and Values*, 46(1), 26-39.
- Lewis, H. B. (1971). Shame and guilt in neurosis. *Psychoanalytic review*, 58(3), 419.
- Hensel, D. J., Fortenberry, J. D., O’Sullivan, L. F., & Orr, D. P. (2011). The developmental association of sexual self-concept with sexual behavior among adolescent women. *Journal of Adolescence*, 34(4), pp. 675-684.
- Lewis, L. M. (2008). Spiritual assessment in African-Americans: A review of measures of spirituality used in health research. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 47(4), pp. 458-475.
- Lewis, M. (1992). *Shame: The exposed self*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- MacDonald, D. A. (2000). *The Expressions of Spirituality Inventory: Test development, validation and scoring information*. *Unpublished test manual*, pp. 1-23.
- MacDonald, D. A., Friedman, H. L., Brewczynski, J., Holland, D., Salagame, K. K., Mohan, K. K., & Cheong, H. W. (2015). Spirituality as a scientific construct: Testing its universality across cultures and languages. *PLoS One*, 10(3), pp. 44-77.
- Mattis, J. S. (2002). Religion and spirituality in the meaning-making and coping experiences of African American women: A qualitative analysis. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 26(4), pp. 309-321.
- Meyers, L. S., Gamst, G., & Guarino, A. J. (2016). *Applied multivariate research: Design and interpretation*. Sage publications. pp. 157-188.
- Miller, W. R., & Thoresen, C. E. (2003). Spirituality, religion, and health: An emerging research field. *American Psychologist*, 58(1), pp. 24.
- Murray, K. M., Ciarrocchi, J. W., & Murray-Swank, N. A. (2007). Spirituality, religiosity, shame and guilt as predictors of sexual attitudes and experiences. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 35(3), pp. 222-234.
- Musgrave, C. F., Allen, C. E., & Allen, G. J. (2002). Spirituality and health for women of color. *American Journal of Public Health*, 92(4), 557-560.
- Overstreet, D. V. (2010). Spiritual vs. religious: Perspectives from today’s undergraduate Catholics. *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, 14(2), pp. 238-263.
- Potamianos, A. (2014). Cognitive multimodal processing: from signal to behavior. In *Proceedings of the 2014 Workshop on Roadmapping the Future of Multimodal Interaction Research including Business Opportunities and Challenges* (pp. 27-34).
- Pargament, K. I. (1999b). Religious/Spiritual Coping. In *Multidimensional measurement of religiosity/spirituality for use in health research: A report of the Fetzer institute/National Institute on Aging working group* (pp. 43-56). Kalamazoo, MI: Fetzer Institute.
- Patten, M. L. (2009). *Understanding research methods: An overview of the essentials* (pp. 95). Glendale, CA: Pryczak Publishing.

- Prosek, E. A., Giordano, A. L., Holm, J. M., Bevly, C. M., Sender, K. M., Ramsey, Z. B., & Abernathy, M. R. (2017). Experiencing Shame: Collegiate Alcohol Abuse, Religiosity, and Spirituality. *Journal of College Counseling, 20*(2), pp. 126-138.
- Pulcu, E., Lythe, K., Elliott, R., Green, S., Moll, J., Deakin, J.F., Zahn, R., 2014. Increased amygdala response to shame in remitted major depressive disorder. *NeuroImage: Clinical, 4*, pp. 701-710.
- Sandfort, M. H., & Haworth, J. G. (2002). Whassup? A glimpse into the attitudes and beliefs of the millennial generation. *Journal of College and Character, 3*(3).
- Scheff, T. J. (2000). Shame and the social bond: A sociological theory. *Sociological theory, 18*(1), 84-99.
- Tangey, J. P., & Dearing R. L. (2002) Shame and guilt. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Treeby, M., & Bruno, R. (2012). Shame and guilt-proneness: Divergent implications for problematic alcohol use and drinking to cope with anxiety and depression symptomatology. *Personality and Individual Differences, 53*(5), pp. 613-617.
- Watlington, C. G., & Murphy, C. M. (2006). The roles of religion and spirituality among African American survivors of domestic violence. *Journal of clinical psychology, 62*(7), 837-857.
- Wood, S. E., & Wood, E. G. (2002). Sensation and Perception. *The World of Psychology, 4*(1) pp. 79-121. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

AUTHOR NOTE

Acknowledgments: The authors would like to express gratitude to Dr. Maurice Mongkuo, Dr. Patrice Perkins, and Dr. Reginald Hopkins for their support during this process.

SUGGESTED CITATION

mongkuo, M. & Boyd, K. (2019). Examining the Influence of Religiosity and Spirituality on Shame among African American College Women. *Virginia Social Science Journal*, Vol. 53 pp. 82-89.