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## THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGIOUS RESOURCES IN THE PREDICTION OF MATTERING TO OTHERS: AFRICAN AMERICAN AND WHITE CONTRASTS

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*The perception of mattering, defined as one's perceived significance to others, is likely influenced by the interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of religious faith. Using data from a community study conducted in Miami-Dade County, this study examines whether private and public aspects of religiosity are independently as well as mutually associated with perceptions of mattering, net of secular social resources. We also consider whether the availability of religious and secular resources varies by race/ethnicity, and whether such differences account for race/ethnic differences in perceptions of mattering. Findings demonstrate that private religiosity and membership in a religious organization, in addition to secular social support and integration, are independently associated with perceptions of mattering. Findings also reveal that, compared to Whites, the higher levels of mattering reported by African Americans are largely explained by their higher levels of private religiosity and greater likelihood of belonging to religious organizations and attending religious services.*

What makes an individual feel that his or her life matters to others? For the devout, religion is a key aspect of this self-orientation likely founded on both interpersonal and intrapersonal spiritual experiences. Religion, as a formal institution, provides the devout with a social resource that promotes a sense of solidarity

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and clarity of purpose shared with like-minded others. From this perspective, it would follow that religious involvement is positively related to the self-concept because it encourages perceptions of social support and social integration (Ellison and Levin 1998; Idler et al. 2003) which, in turn, bolster one's sense of self. However, the benefits of religiosity likely extend beyond the rewarding interpersonal ties formed through formal religious activity. One's personal connection with a higher being may transcend the social bonds formed through religious activity, and may provide the individual emotional security and fulfillment. After all, a basic tenet of most of the world's major religions is that a relationship with God provides purpose and meaning in the lives of the devout. In sum, interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of religiosity are likely beneficial because they instill individuals with the sense that they matter to God and others.

Although the relationship between religiosity and the perception of mattering is theoretically intuitive, to our knowledge no prior research has examined this association. Thus, it is not yet known to what extent each dimension of religiosity described above contributes to one's sense of mattering. This study extends previous work on religiosity and the self-concept by examining the extent to which private religiosity and public religious involvement contribute to the perception of mattering. In addition, given the considerable body of research indicating that African Americans and Whites tend to differ in their religious involvement (Baldwin and Hopkins 1990; Krause 2002; Krause and Chatters 2005; Levin et al. 1994; Mattis and Jagers 2001; Taylor et al. 1996), and in their appraisals of secular social resources (Lee et al. 1998; Mendes de Leon et al. 2001; Mindel et al. 1986; Miner 1995; Miner and Tolnay 1998; Mutran 1985; Taylor et al. 1990), it is likely that these religious and secular resources may mediate and/or moderate racial/ethnic differences in perceptions of mattering.

Vis-à-vis these observations, in this article we employ data from a community-based sample of adults ( $n = 791$ ), one third of whom self-reported being physically disabled, to address three research objectives. First, we assess the independent and joint linkages between interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of religiosity, respectively, and mattering. Second, we examine whether these relationships make independent contributions in the prediction of mattering in the context of secular social support and social integration. Finally, we examine the extent to which these dimensions of religiosity condition or account for African American/White differences in perceptions of mattering.

## BACKGROUND

Rosenberg conceptualized mattering as a primary and distinct dimension of the self-concept (Rosenberg and McCullough 1981).<sup>1,2</sup> Perceptions of mattering are characterized by beliefs that (1) others are dependent upon us, (2) we are the object of others' attention, (3) we are important to others, and (4) that others see our lives as an extension of their own. The perception of mattering, simply put, is an existential belief in our own relevance to others.

<sup>1</sup>Mattering shares conceptual and empirical linkages with other aspects of the self-concept. For example, there are theoretical grounds for anticipating that mattering is related to mastery. Because the experience of mattering includes the perception that others depend upon us, one must possess a minimum level of interpersonal and/or instrumental competence to successfully meet this obligation. Also, interpersonal skills are necessary to establish intimacy and to engage in emotionally meaningful relationships. Thus, those people who lack the skills necessary for developing satisfying and supportive relationships with others should tend to score low on measures of both mattering and mastery.

Given the apparent similarities between mattering and self-esteem, much of the attention of previous research on mattering has focused on identifying conceptual and operational distinctions. These prior investigations have found mattering to be positively related to, yet empirically and conceptually distinct from, self-esteem (Rosenberg and McCullough 1981; Pearlin and LeBlanc 2006; Marcus 1991; Taylor and Turner 2001). For example, Rosenberg and McCullough distinguish mattering from self-esteem (1981, p. 168) by explaining: "To feel that we matter to others is conceptually distinct from feeling that [they] think well of us."

A second basis for differentiating mattering from self-esteem lies in the fact that feelings of positive self-worth can be experienced by some people *regardless* of how others view them, but feelings of mattering are directly related to information received from the important people in our lives. From this perspective mattering can be conceptualized as a measure of social or interpersonal esteem. In contrast, it is unlikely that someone could maintain perceptions of significance to others without this information being expressed in some manner. On the other hand, self-esteem (perceptions that one has a number of good qualities, or is a person of at least equal worth to others) can conceivably be derived independently from the opinions of others.

<sup>2</sup>Mattering has been shown to be empirically linked to perceptions of social support (see Taylor and Turner 2001 for a detailed analysis of this issue), and some have argued that mattering is essentially the inverse of received social support (Pearlin and LeBlanc 2006; Rosenberg and McCullough 1981). Acknowledging the give and take of social relationships, it seems reasonable that interpersonal relationships that promote perceptions of social support may also increase one's sense of mattering to others.

However, there are also theoretical bases that distinguish these constructs from one another. For instance, individuals may receive ample support, but live in relative isolation, or engage in numerous superficial or negative interactions that do not warrant the exchange of support and are not emotionally rewarding. Such bonds might fail to satisfy a true sense of interpersonal salience and belonging because they lack the continuity and cohesion that is contingent for psychological well-being (Baumeister and Leary 1995). Alternatively, social involvement may influence perceptions of mattering primarily by increasing the pool of potential supporters in an individual's life (Pearlin 1989; Turner and Turner 1999). The factor analyses presented here address this issue.

We propose that perceptions of mattering may be shaped by one's religious faith and involvement in religious activities. As argued above, these activities provide dual resources for perceptions of mattering. On the one hand, religious participation is a source of social integration and support. On the other hand, religious commitment can provide access to and guidance from a higher being who is concerned about the welfare of His followers.

The hypothesized relevance of religion for the latter dimension of religiosity for perceptions of mattering is supported by Koenig's (1994) observation that religious faith "involves a deep, intimate, stable, and exclusive relationship with God" (p. 124), one that is characterized by beliefs that God is omnipresent and concerned about the faithful. From this perspective, religiosity, we believe, captures three of the dimensions of mattering proposed by Rosenberg and McCullough (1981)—that we are the object of another's attention, important to this other, and that our actions may be viewed as an ego-extension of the other. Perceptions of mattering to the divine may also enhance relationships with other people, as is demonstrated by recent research (Krause 2005; Schieman et al. 2005). As an illustration, Schwartz and Huisman's (1995) study examining four faith traditions in 20 countries found that highly-religious people are more concerned with the needs and well-being of others compared to people who are not religious. It seems likely that, because of the emphasis placed on altruistic behavior in many religious faiths (Ellison 1994), devout persons may perceive an enhanced capability to enact positive change in others' lives. Such perceptions, it stands to reason, are rooted in beliefs that one's own life can or should make a difference to others. Thus, we suggest that feelings of spiritual connectedness with and concern for other people may inspire a unique source of mattering.

Perceptions of mattering may also be enhanced by formally participating in a religious organization. Involvement with a public religious institution is commonly assessed by measuring one's frequency of attendance at religious services (Koenig et al. 2001). Indeed, the associations of frequent religious service attendance with higher levels of social integration and social support are relatively well-established (Bradley 1995; Ellison and George 1994; Ellison and Levin 1998; Idler et al. 2003). Attending religious services may also influence perceptions of mattering because such services include rituals designed to enhance group solidarity by affirming the values and beliefs of the religion (Stark and Finke 2000). In addition, simply being a member of a religious organization provides social support and integration for many, as is illustrated by the tangible and

intangible forms of care that religious congregations often provide for home-bound members (Idler et al. 2003). Consequently, religious membership is also likely related to perceptions of mattering.

It is also plausible that these public aspects of religious involvement may reinforce or enhance one's personal sense of connection with a higher power and, thus, indirectly influence perceptions of mattering. Supporting this view, previous studies indicate that religious attendance can lead to greater feelings of connectedness with a higher power (Krause 2002) and reinforce the belief that a higher power controls one's life and life course outcomes (Schieman et al. 2005; Schieman and Bierman 2007). Thus, the analyses that follow examine both the independent and joint aspects of private and public religiosity for perceptions of mattering.

Finally, the benefits of religious ties may be limited to the social aspects of religion derived from church membership and attendance. On the other hand, religious service attendance and membership in a religious organization may be more positively related to perceptions of mattering than secular types of social integration because such forms of involvement are largely based upon the pursuit of emotionally and spiritually fulfilling interactions. For these reasons, we examine whether religious social involvement provides a distinct source of mattering in addition to secular social ties.

However, research indicates that the social and religious resources we have discussed tend to be experienced differently by African Americans and Whites. Given this circumstance, it seems likely that perceptions of mattering derived from these resources may vary by race/ethnicity.

### ***Race/Ethnic Differences in Religious and Secular Resources***

It is now well-established that African Americans are more likely to belong to religious organizations and attend religious services than Whites (Baldwin and Hopkins 1990; Krause and Chatters 2005; Levin et al. 1994; Schieman and Bierman 2007; Taylor et al. 1996). Previous research also finds that the positive relationship between religious involvement and social support is more salient for African Americans compared to Whites (Ellison 1993; Krause 2002; Mattis and Jagers 2001). For example, Krause's (2002) study among African American and White older adults found that African Americans who attend religious services feel closer to God largely because of the social aspects of their religious attendance, including congregational cohesiveness, emotional support, and instrumental support.

African Americans and Whites are also found to differ with respect to private or nonformal religiosity. Mattis and Jagers (2001) have observed that many African American religious traditions emphasize “a profound sense of intimacy with the divine, and a horizontal extension of that intimacy into the human community” (p. 523). Other work demonstrates that, in general, African Americans consider religion to be a more prominent aspect of their daily lives, and feel more connected to God than Whites (Krause 2002; Levin et al. 1994). This discussion suggests two possible types of relationships between race, religious involvement, and perceptions of mattering. On the one hand, because African Americans tend to be more religious than Whites from comparable backgrounds, controlling for variations in levels of religiousness may help to explain race differences in perceptions of mattering. This implies either a mediator or suppressor pattern, in which the estimated net effect of race changes when controls for religiousness are added to models predicting perceptions of mattering. On the other hand, it is possible that each one-unit increment in religious involvement contributes to mattering differently for African Americans as compared to Whites. If that is indeed the case, then we expect to find an interaction between race and religious variables in our models.

The complex interplay of race, religion, and mattering may be partly a function of differences in secular social involvement. For example, African Americans tend to participate less than Whites in nonreligious groups and activities (Mendes de Leon et al. 2001; Miner and Tolnay 1998; Musick et al. 2000). This pattern may partly reflect the tendency of many social organizations (trade unions, social clubs, etc.) to exclude African Americans from their membership (Mendes de Leon et al. 2001). As a result of such discriminatory practices, African Americans tended to gravitate toward one of the few social institutions that has been organized and controlled by African Americans: The Black Church. According to many observers, membership and participation in the Church has often served as an emblem of social legitimacy and respectability, as well as a gateway to participation in civic affairs (Nelsen and Nelsen 1982; Ross and Wheeler 1971; Taylor et al. 1987). Indeed, particularly in contexts with few secular social opportunities, social network ties are closely connected with church participation among African Americans (Ellison and Sherkat 1995). In addition, although few studies have addressed this issue, there is some evidence that religious involvement is strongly linked with familial closeness among African Americans (Ellison 1997). Taken together, these arguments support the view that

religious involvement may provide African Americans with a sense of mattering that secular social integration does not.

However, African Americans may gain a sense of mattering from their social and family relationships, as well as religious resources. Several strands of work hint at this possibility. First, some studies report that African Americans derive more support from friends and relatives than their white counterparts (Lee et al. 1998; Miner 1995); although, other studies suggest rough racial parity in levels of perceived social support (Bengtson et al. 1996; Silverstein and Waite 1993). In addition, a long tradition of research highlights the close family ties and fictive kin relations that characterize some African American communities (e.g., Stack 1974) although, here again other works paint a less flattering picture of African Americans' extended kin relations (e.g., Kennedy 1980). At least one comparative study has shown that both religious involvement and familial relationships are stronger predictors of life satisfaction among African Americans than Whites (Thomas and Holmes 1992).

In summary, prior theoretical and empirical work provides grounds for anticipating that perceptions of mattering may be independently influenced by religious resources, net of secular social support and integration. Previous work also suggests that potential race/ethnic differences in perceptions of mattering may be tempered by the allocation of these religious and secular resources. Consequently, the present study addresses three research objectives. First, we examine the extent to which religious resources are independently and mutually associated with perceptions of mattering. Second, we examine whether these associations remain robust net of secular social support and integration. Third, we assess whether race/ethnic differences in religious faith and participation, as well as social resources, account for potential race/ethnic differences in perceptions of mattering. In addressing the latter objective, we also examine whether these religious and secular resources condition the relationship between race/ethnicity and mattering.

## **METHOD**

### ***Sample***

Data are derived from a study of Miami-Dade county residents that included a substantial oversampling of individuals with a physical disability. A representative sample of 10,000 households was screened with respect to sex, age, race/ethnicity, disability status, and language preference. Using this sampling frame, the study sample was drawn such that

there were even numbers of women and men, even numbers of people screened as having a physical disability and those not, and equivalent numbers of the four major ethnic groups comprising approximately 95 percent of all Miami-Dade County residents (non-Hispanic Whites, Cubans, non-Cuban Hispanics, and African Americans).

A total of 1,917 interviews were completed from 2000 to 2001 with a success rate of 82 percent. The oversampling of individuals screened as disabled, and the fact that those screened as having no physical limitation were matched with the disabled sample on age, as well as sex and race/ethnicity, resulted in a greater proportion of older respondents than in the general population. Ages in the sample ranged from 18 to 93 with a median of 59. Of those whom, within the screening process, self-reported or were reported by a family member as having activity limitations, only 559 confirmed this status within the actual interview. Presumably, this discrepancy arises from differing views about the level of activity limitation that defines disability.

In the findings presented below, we limit analyses to data collected from the 791 individuals who self-identified as non-Hispanic White or African American. Of these respondents, 262 confirmed the presence of a physical limitation within the interview. The decision to exclude Hispanic respondents in these analyses was made because the theoretical grounds for anticipating African American/White differences in the association between mattering and social and religious resources might not be applicable to the Hispanic groups sampled. In particular, we are aware of no study that has examined the importance attached to religious resources among African Americans, Hispanics and non-Hispanic Whites. While such study would be useful, we believe it falls beyond the scope of this article.

## *Measures*

### *Mattering*

The dependent variable, mattering, is assessed by a five-item index designed by Morris Rosenberg that was first validated in a community study in Toronto, Canada (Taylor and Turner 2001). This measure ( $\alpha = .81$ ) is a standardized count of the following items: (1) "How important do you feel you are to other people?"; (2) "How much do you feel other people pay attention to you?"; (3) "How much do you feel others would miss you if you went away?"; (4) "How interested are people generally in what you say?"; and (5) "How much do other people depend on you?". Responses range from "not at all" to "a lot," and are coded so that higher values reflect a higher sense of mattering.

Included as independent variables are race/ethnicity, three measures of religious resources (private religiosity, religious service attendance, and religious membership), and three measures of social resources (family support, friend support, and social integration). Race/ethnicity is coded 1 for African Americans and 0 for non-Hispanic Whites.

### *Religious Resources*

Private religiosity is measured by a two-item standardized index ( $\alpha = .73$ ) that gauges two aspects of religious experience: (1) perception of self as being religious (How religious are you?); and (2) frequency of prayer (About how often do you pray?).

As previously noted, involvement with a formal public religious institution is most often assessed by measuring the frequency of attendance at religious services (Koenig et al. 2001). However, several scholars have noted that persons with physical limitations may benefit from different aspects of religious involvement than individuals who are not so impaired (e.g., Idler et al. 2003). For instance, because the experience of physical disability often prevents one from attending religious services, membership in a religious organization may instead serve as an important aspect of religious involvement, particularly given the forms of support a congregation provides to its members in times of crisis (Idler et al. 2003). Supporting this view, in the present sample, individuals who self-identify as physically disabled are less likely to attend religious services compared to respondents without a disability, yet are more likely to report membership in a religious organization. Given this circumstance, we include both religious service attendance and religious membership as measures of formal religious involvement.

Religious service attendance is measured by a standardized scale item regarding how often respondents attend services at a church, temple, synagogue, or mosque. Scores range from never to more than every week. Religious membership assesses whether a respondent self-identifies as belonging to a church, temple, synagogue, or mosque. Respondents are classified as never having belonged to such an organization, formerly belonging and currently belonging. In the analyses to be presented, respondents who have never belonged or no longer belong to a religious organization serve as the reference category.

### *Social Resources*

Because perceptions of mattering and social support have been shown to be highly correlated, some have suggested that measures of these characteristics may reflect similar underlying factors

(Taylor and Turner 2001). To address this concern, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis of these survey items. This analysis confirms that the mattering, family support, and friend support measures that we employ load on separate underlying factors. This analysis also indicates that, although family support and friend support are correlated with one another, they are better represented as separate measures. Significant improvements in model fit are observed when three factors are specified. Factor loadings for these three measures are presented as Table 1. The results of these analyses, in our opinion, demonstrate the empirical distinctiveness of each measure and justify the inclusion of family support and friend support as separate predictors of mattering.

As Table 1 indicates, respondents were asked 16 questions regarding whether it is (1) very true; (2) moderately true;

**Table 1. Factor analysis of items measuring mattering, family support, and friend support (N = 791)**

Items and Factor Loadings	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
<i>Mattering Items</i>			
Importance to others	.088	.181	.661
Others pay attention to you	.135	.171	.691
Others would miss you	.155	.207	.670
Others interested in what you say	.150	.169	.704
Others depend on you	.099	.093	.516
<i>Family Social Support Items</i>			
Feel close to relatives	.081	.672	.107
Can talk to relatives about problems	.125	.696	.155
Relatives think you are worthwhile	.114	.730	.164
Are able to relax with relatives	.121	.645	.103
Relatives will always be there	.125	.753	.152
Relatives have confidence in you	.074	.797	.148
Relatives really care about you	.087	.766	.139
Relatives really appreciate you	.081	.801	.119
<i>Friend Social Support Items</i>			
Friends think you are worthwhile	.752	.084	.101
Are able to relax with friends	.796	.098	.112
Friends will always be there	.830	.103	.138
Friends have confidence in you	.844	.123	.116
Friends really care about you	.853	.131	.118
Friends really appreciate you	.879	.145	.132
You feel close to your friends	.868	.155	.153
Can talk to friends about problems	.852	.142	.145

*Notes:* Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring; Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization; rotation converged in five iterations.

(3) somewhat true; or (4) not at all true that they feel loved and cared for by their family and friends. An index of friend support was formed from the sum of the eight items regarding support received from friends ( $\alpha = .95$ ) and an index of family support was created from the 16 items gauging support from one's family ( $\alpha = .88$ ). Items were coded such that higher values reflect higher levels of support. The social integration measure ( $\alpha = .63$ ) is a standardized count of ten items which assess how frequently a respondent engages in informal social activities such as visiting friends or going to concerts, and formal social activities such as participating in club meetings or attending educational activities.

#### *Control Variables*

Because the screening process involved an oversampling of individuals who self-identified as having a physical disability, we control on self-defined disability in the analyses that follow. Also, given the well-established variation among African Americans and Whites with respect to parental status, marital status, and employment status, coupled with evidence that these statuses are positively associated with perceptions of mattering (Schieman and Taylor 2001), we control for these statuses. We also control for the demographic variables age, gender, and socioeconomic status. Physical disability status is coded 1 for "yes" and 0 for "no" in response to the question of whether a respondent self-identified as physically-disabled. Parental status is coded 1 for "yes" and 0 for "no" in response to the question of whether a respondent is a parent. Marital status is coded 1 if the respondent is currently married and 0 if the respondent is not currently married. Employment status is coded 1 for respondents who are currently working full-time or part-time, and 0 for respondents who are unemployed or retired.

#### *Demographic Variables*

Gender is coded 1 for females and 0 for males. Age is employed as a continuous measure in years. Socioeconomic status is estimated in terms of three components—household income, education, and occupational prestige level (Hollingshead 1957). This option provides a relatively general assessment of socioeconomic status while reducing sample loss associated with missing data. We feel that such an approach is necessary because information regarding household income is missing for 22 percent of African Americans and 14 percent of Whites sampled. Scores on these three dimensions were standardized, summed, and divided by the number of measures on which each respondent provided data.

## RESULTS

Mean contrasts for each study variable are presented across race/ethnic category in Table 2. The significance of race/ethnicity for the perception of mattering is suggested by comparison tests using the Scheffe post-hoc method. Whites, on average, report substantially lower levels of mattering compared to African Americans. The distributions of the religious and social resources variables are also consistent with expectation. African Americans report significantly higher private religiosity, attend religious services more frequently, and are more apt to be a member of a religious organization than Whites.

**Table 2. Mean distributions of all study variables by race/ethnicity (N = 791)**

Characteristics	Total	White	African American
Mattering	.161 (.905)	-.013 <sup>a</sup> (.951)	.289 (.832)
Private Religiosity	.091 (1.040)	-.514 <sup>a</sup> (1.104)	.557 (.692)
Religious Attendance	.151 (1.044)	-.323 <sup>a</sup> (1.008)	.519 (.915)
Religious Membership	.191 (.944)	-.234 <sup>a</sup> (1.026)	.520 (.718)
Family Support	.098 (.953)	-.043 <sup>a</sup> (1.100)	.206 (.807)
Friend Support	.189 (.931)	.208 (.944)	.175 (.921)
Social Integration	.158 (.890)	.299 <sup>a</sup> (.898)	.050 (.869)
Female	.535 (.499)	.497 (.501)	.564 (.496)
Age	60.875 (16.638)	63.600 (16.955)	58.763 (16.088)
Socioeconomic Status	.130 (.971)	.579 <sup>a</sup> (.875)	-.218 (.896)
Physical Disability (1 = yes)	.331 (.470)	.279 <sup>a</sup> (.451)	.368 (.482)
Parental Status	.833 (.373)	.787 (.410)	.869 (.338)
Marital Status	.465 (.499)	.527 <sup>a</sup> (.499)	.417 (.494)
Employment Status	.395 (.489)	.429 <sup>a</sup> (.495)	.369 (.483)

*Note:* Values in parentheses are standard deviations; <sup>a</sup>significantly different from African Americans ( $p < .05$ ).

Although African Americans report higher levels of family support than Whites, Whites appear to be significantly more socially-integrated than African Americans. Patterns with regard to other variables are generally as expected: Compared to African Americans, Whites occupy a higher SES position, experience fewer activity limitations, and are more likely to be married and employed.

Table 3 presents the results of OLS regression analyses addressing two of the three questions central to this study. First, we examine whether religious resources are independently and mutually associated with perceptions of mattering, net of secular support and integration. As Models 2–4 reveal, private religiosity, religious service attendance, and religious membership are each independently associated with higher levels of mattering; however, when considered together, only religious membership remains a significant predictor of mattering (Model 5). In Model 6, the joint effects of family support, friend support and social integration for mattering are considered. Each of these social resources exerts an independent influence on perceptions of mattering. The R-square coefficient indicates that family and friend support, along with social integration, account for about 25 percent of variation in mattering.

The full model (equation 7) indicates that all but one of the social and religious resources examined (religious attendance) are associated with perceptions of mattering. Collectively, these resources account for about 26 percent of the variation in mattering. Noteworthy is that the coefficient for private religiosity increased by 42 percent from .043 in Model 5 to .074 in Model 7, suggesting that lower levels of secular resources may counterbalance the beneficial effects of private religiosity for mattering. Alternatively, low levels of personal religiosity may be detrimentally related to mattering and, thus, individuals with low levels of personal religiosity may accumulate secular social support and social integration resources to guard against the otherwise detrimental effects of low personal religiosity for mattering.

Table 3 also presents analyses examining the extent to which religious and secular resources mediate African American/White differences in mattering. Model 1 reveals that African Americans possess a stronger sense of mattering compared to Whites, net of control variables. Private religiosity, religious service attendance, and religious membership each appear to provide a substantial source of mattering among African Americans. Compared to Model 1, private religiosity explains about 49 percent of the coefficient for African Americans (Model 2). Model 3 indicates that religious service attendance accounts for approximately 48 percent of African

**Table 3. OLS regression of mattering on race/ethnicity, religiosity, and social resources (N = 791)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
b <sub>a</sub> : African American	.302***	.153	.158*	.139	.096	.237***	.098
Female	.220**	.169**	.189**	.165*	.157*	.144*	.095
Age	-.003	-.004	-.004*	-.004*	-.004*	-.004	-.005*
Socioeconomic Status	.004	.013	-.002	-.014	-.007	-.058	-.058
Physical Disability (1 = yes)	-.154*	-.144*	-.116	-.129	-.119	-.081	-.068
Parent	.151	.143	.125	.117	.117	.148	.128*
Married	.227**	.203**	.202**	.195**	.189**	.244***	.217**
Employed	.056	.056	.056	.067	.063	.048	.054
Private Religiosity		.134***			.043		.074*
Religious Attendance			.151***		.063		-.012
Religious Membership				.178***	.110**		.087*
Family Support						.232***	.228***
Friend Support						.203***	.190***
Social Integration						.157**	.156***
Constant	-.126	.036	.030	.055	.103	-.113	.049
R-squared	.072	.092	.096	.098	.104	.248	.264
% change in b <sub>a</sub> with adjustment		-49%	-48%	-54%	-69%	-22%	-68%

Note: Unstandardized regression coefficients; \* significant at .05; \*\* significant at .01; \*\*\* significant at .001.

American/White differences in mattering. In addition, religious membership accounts for about 54 percent of race/ethnic differences (Model 4). Collectively, private religiosity, religious service attendance and religious membership explain about 70 percent of the observed race/ethnic difference in perceptions of mattering, from .302 in Model 1 to .096 in Model 5.

Accounting for the effects of social support and social integration also partly explains the observed African American/White difference in mattering. Together, the effects of social support and social integration explain about 22 percent of the race/ethnic differences observed in perceptions of mattering, from .302 in Model 1 to .237 in Model 6. Analyses (not shown), however, indicate that these secular resources have countervailing influences on the observed race/ethnic differences in mattering. Family support and friend support account for about 28 percent of the African American/White difference in mattering. Findings with respect to social integration indicate that, were it not for the lower social integration reported by African Americans, their sense of mattering would be increased by about 14 percent.

The full model indicates that the religious and secular resources examined account for about 68 percent of the observed race/ethnic differences in mattering. These findings thus indicate that religious resources are perhaps more important than social resources in accounting for race/ethnic differences in perceptions of mattering.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, we assess whether these religious and secular resources condition racial/ethnic differences in perceptions of mattering. Table 4 presents interaction terms for each of these resources by race/ethnicity entered one at a time into the full model (Model 7) presented in Table 3. The significant interaction term for race/ethnicity by religious membership demonstrates that African Americans who currently belong to a religious organization report significantly higher levels of mattering compared to Whites who belong to a religious organization. A significant interaction is also observed for family support by race/ethnicity.<sup>4</sup> As Figure 1

<sup>3</sup>That a large proportion of the study sample reports a physical disability may have some bearing on the findings presented. As noted, religious service attendance and membership in a religious organization are found to vary by physical disability status among this sample; however, these differences were reduced to nonsignificance when additional control variables were added to the model. Moreover, the relationships reported between mattering and the religious and secular resources examined, as well as the observed race/ethnic differences in these associations, are not explained by variation in physical disability status.

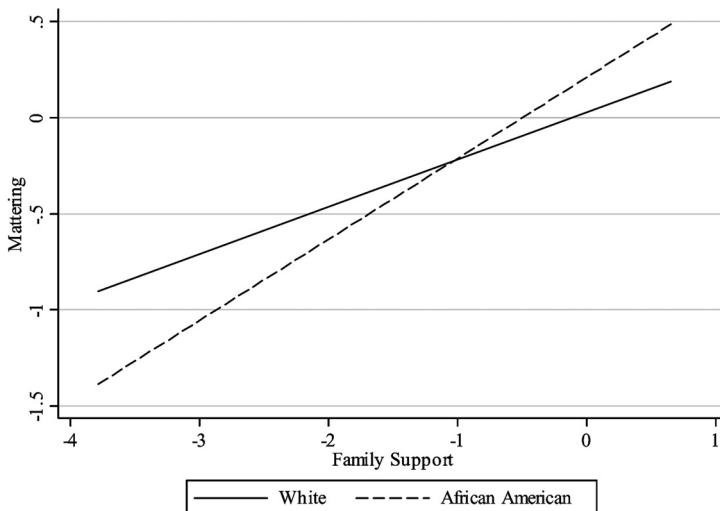
<sup>4</sup>In addition, several other potentially conditional relationships were tested. Physical disability by race and physical disability by each of the religiosity variables were computed and entered into the full model; however, none of these variables were statistically significant.

**Table 4. Interaction terms from OLS regression of mattering on race/ethnicity, religiosity, and social resources (N = 791)**

African American * Family Support	.147** (.059)
African American * Friend Support	.103 (.062)
African American * Social Integration	.024 (.065)
African American * Private Religiosity	-.031 (.082)
African American * Religious Attendance	-.112 (.085)
African American * Religious Membership	.116* (.086)

*Note:* Unstandardized regression coefficients; \*significant at .05; \*\*significant at .01; \*\*\* significant at .001.

illustrates, the lowest levels of family support are associated with lower levels of mattering for African Americans compared to Whites. As family support increases, perceptions of mattering increase at a steeper rate for African Americans than for Whites. This relationship is such that, among those who report the highest levels of family support, African Americans report greater perceptions of mattering compared to Whites.



**Figure 1. Mattering regressed on the interaction of race/ethnicity and family support (N = 791).**

**DISCUSSION**

The analyses presented here were guided by three research questions. What is the role and significance of the three dimensions of religiosity considered here in the perception of mattering? Are these religious resources independently and mutually associated with perceptions of mattering, net of secular social support and integration? And, how do these measures, assessed collectively and individually, contribute to an understanding of racial/ethnic differences in mattering?

We find that private religiosity and religious membership, and each of the secular social resources examined (family support, friend support, and social integration) are independently associated with perceptions of mattering. With respect to the religious resources examined, the strongest relationship is found between religious membership and the perception of mattering, and this association is largely unaffected by the presence of secular social resources; however, the availability of secular resources does appear to influence the importance of private religiosity for perceptions of mattering. Results indicate that private religiosity is a significant predictor of mattering only in the final model when social support and social integration are controlled. This suggests two possibilities: The benefits of one's spirituality may be counterbalanced by lower levels of secular resources. Alternatively, low levels of personal religiosity may be detrimentally related to mattering and, thus, individuals with low levels of personal religiosity may accumulate secular social resources to guard against the otherwise detrimental effects of low personal religiosity for mattering. In our view, these findings highlight the importance of each of these aspects of religious and secular life for perceptions of mattering and provide grounds for further study to examine other factors underlying perceptions of mattering.

Another contribution of the present study is the finding of race/ethnic differences in sources of mattering. Previous studies have demonstrated the greater importance of religion in the lives of African Americans compared to Whites (Krause 2002; Levin et al. 1994). Consistent with this research, our results reveal that the higher levels of mattering reported by African Americans are largely explained by their higher levels of private religiosity and greater likelihood of belonging to religious organizations and attending religious services compared to Whites. These religious resources collectively explain about 70 percent of the observed race/ethnic differences in perceptions of mattering. However, we do not find evidence that the importance of religion for perceptions of mattering among African Americans is due to a deficit in secular social resources.

In fact, although the social resources examined account for only about 22 percent of African American/White differences in perceptions of mattering, it appears that family support is more strongly associated with perceptions of mattering among African Americans compared to Whites (Ellison 1995).

In addition, previous work suggests that the African American church has historically provided a place of solace in times of frustration or cynicism regarding other social institutions (Nelsen and Nelsen 1982). We find that membership in a religious organization is associated with significantly higher levels of mattering for African Americans than for Whites when controlling for other forms of social support and integration. This finding is consistent with other work demonstrating that the importance of religious affiliation for African Americans extends beyond religious practice and social involvement to other personal gains.

The evaluation of these results should take into account three cautions. First, the majority of the residential population of Miami-Dade County dwells in a highly-urbanized environment. Life in such a setting may be more secular than that in more rural areas. There is also evidence that the African American church is a less pivotal community organization in non-Southern regions (Ellison and Sherkat 1995). For these reasons, our findings may not be generalizable to other areas of the country. This consideration, however, should be weighed against evidence from a national sample of African Americans and Whites that also found that African Americans rated their private religiosity higher and attended religious services more frequently than Whites (Taylor et al. 2007).

Second, a study of this nature would ideally take into consideration an individual's religious affiliation, insofar as different religious traditions may offer unique explanations of one's relationship with the divine as well as other people. Unfortunately, data limitations prevented such consideration. This said, we believe that the findings presented above provide compelling evidence about the role and significance of social and religious resources in the prediction of mattering, and the salience of religiosity, variously conceived, in African Americans' perceptions of mattering to others.

Finally, the fact that we relied on cross-sectional data analysis is limiting in two important ways. Cross-sectional analysis prevents us from identifying the direction of the relationship between religiosity and mattering. Although we hypothesized that religiosity is a precursor for mattering, it is also possible that the opposite is true or that the relationship between these variables is reciprocal. In addition, the data we use do not allow us to observe changes in the relationship

between religiosity and mattering over time. Although it is beyond our capacity to address these important issues, we encourage future research to do so.

These limitations notwithstanding, the present study demonstrates the importance of private religiosity and membership in a religious organization for perceptions of mattering among a representative sample of individuals with and without a physical disability. These findings also highlight the importance of these aspects of religiosity, as well as religious service attendance, for understanding African American/White differences in perceptions of mattering.

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