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HOW AMERICANS UNDERSTAND RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES: A Test of Parallel Items from a National Survey

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How can we better conceptualize attitudes about difference in an increasingly diverse, multicultural United States? This article uses data from a recent, nationally representative telephone survey with oversamples of African Americans and Hispanics to analyze attitudes about two prominent sources of distinction in the United States. Race and religion were selected because they tend to be understood in very different ways—race as a social problem, religion as an individual choice and collective good. To assess the utility of these contrasting emphases built into common survey measures, we constructed a battery of questions that included parallel items for both. Our findings indicate that, with some notable exceptions, Americans' attitudes tend to be more similar than different, such that respondents see comparable (rather than contrasting) positive and negative aspects of race and religion in the United States. Based upon these results, we argue for a more multifaceted approach to the conceptualization, measurement, and analysis of race and religion, with implications for how we generally approach difference, diversity, and multiculturalism.

INTRODUCTION

In both scholarly literature and public discourse, we hear a great deal about the challenges and possibilities of diversity and difference in contemporary American society. Some commentators, both Left and Right, highlight the purported problems of diversity—how difference can lead to discrimination and prejudice and/or undermine broader commitments to social justice and equality (Anderson 1999; Duggan 2003; Michaels 2006), erode a common culture or moral order (Schlesinger 1991; Miller 1998), or create and intensify divisive "culture wars" (Gitlin 1995). Others, again from a range of ideological perspectives, have emphasized diversity's supposed positive attributes, arguing that experience with difference adds to the depth and range of personal identities and worldviews (Wolfe 2000), that peoples' diverse attachments can actually spur them to make sacrifices for a broader good (Giroux 1992), or both (Taylor 2004). Indeed, diversity itself has even been conceptualized by at least one scholar as a new mode of solidarity and incorporation (Faist 2009). Given the diversity of opinions about diversity (for an interesting, if ideologically driven historical account, see Wood 2003), one of the major challenges for scholars who study public opinion about social

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distinction and cultural diversity more generally is how to best conceptualize and measure attitudes about difference in social scientific research.

Drawing on data from a recent, nationally representative telephone survey (2003, N = 2,081) with purposive oversamples of African Americans and Hispanics, we develop and assess survey measures of two prominent categories of distinction in the contemporary United States—race and religion. Race and religion are selected not only because they are two of the most prominent axes of differentiation in American society but also because they provide distinctive windows onto dominant positive and negative understandings of diversity. When it comes to the pros and cons attributed to difference in modern American society, race and religion are often understood and operationalized in starkly contrasting ways. Specifically, race is commonly understood in both public discourse and the scholarly literature as a social marker rife with problems (inequality, intolerance, prejudice, discrimination, and the like), while religion tends to be viewed as a dimension of social distinction that is chosen and contributes to personal meaning and identity as well as a broader civic good. These common assumptions, moreover, are built into standard survey items, in which questions about race focus largely on discrimination, prejudice, conflict, and inequality, while items about religion emphasize personal belief and practice, individual choice, and the common good.

These overlapping and reinforcing popular conceptions and academic conventions come together most clearly in the recent work of the renowned Harvard social scientist Robert Putnam. In trying to unpack the complexities of diversity in America, Putnam has tended to see and analyze racial (and ethnic) differences as associated with lower levels of social capital, community, and trust (Putnam 2007), while his newest book emphasizes tolerance in the face of religious diversity and highlights the personal and societal benefits of religion (Putnam and Campbell 2010; see also Lim and Putnam 2010).

To assess the utility of these common measures and conceptions and thus assess the need for a broader, multifaceted conception of social difference, we constructed a battery of questions that included parallel items about the perceived challenges and benefits of both race and religion in contemporary American society. These paired items were organized across four conceptual axes: identity salience, perceived source of order or conflict, locus of racial and religious commitment (e.g., individual versus group), and public/private conceptualizations.

Findings indicate that the differences between racial and religious attitudes are not as great as is often assumed or implied. While there are interesting variations and exceptions to this general pattern, our most consistent and compelling general result is that American conceptions of race and religion appear far less divergent (or, conversely, far more compatible) than conventional assumptions and measurements expect or allow. Moreover, this pattern of relative similarity holds fairly consistently across racial and religious lines. The implications of these findings for the operationalization, measurement, and theorization of race, religion, and social difference in social scientific research, both survey-based and otherwise, are discussed by way of conclusion.

CONCEPTUALIZING AND OPERATIONALIZING RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES

We begin this section by expanding on the observation that race and religion tend to be understood—in both the scholarly literature and the wider public discourse—in very different and essentially alternative ways. In the public discourse, race is typically at the center of debates concerning public problems, social inequities, and personal constraints. Debates over affirmative action, for example, revolve around often-heated discussions concerning practices of exclusion, discrimination, and "reverse discrimination" (Gamson 1992; Skrentny 1996). Race, in these exchanges, is seen as a source of conflict, an unfortunate social boundary that divides in a way that significantly benefits some Americans and disadvantages others. Even the popular vision of a "colorblind" society (a pervasive racial ideology that critical race scholars have strongly critiqued for its empirical shortcomings [Bonilla-Silva 2003]) implies that race is something that should ideally disappear, that it is a part of social life that individuals ought to completely ignore or seek to overcome. Religion, in contrast, is most often embraced in American civil society as a matter of personal choice and conviction (Ammerman 1997), a source of identity and community for both individuals and groups (Warner 1993). Religion is further understood to provide meaning and purpose for people's lives (Wuthnow 1998; Roof 2001), and faith-based associations are viewed as a means to enhancing democratic culture (Bellah et al. 1985; Wuthnow 2004).

These contrasting assumptions about race and religion are prominent in the scholarly literature as well. There is a massive social scientific literature documenting racial inequalities and injustices in domains ranging from education, employment, and wealth to health care, housing, arrests, and incarceration. In this work, concepts such as prejudice, discrimination, conflict, competition, oppression, and domination tend to carry the day, while the more positive dimensions and productive import of racial identities, values, and cultural practices tend to be downplayed or ignored altogether (for one exemplary and illustrative overview, see Desmond and Emirbayer 2010). Scholarship on religion, conversely, tends to focus more on issues of personal identity and practice (Ammerman 2003; McGuire 2008) and community building and civic culture (Wuthnow 1999; Becker and Dhingra 2001), with an emphasis on increasing diversity (Eck 2002) and personal freedom and choice (Hammond 1992). The possibilities of intolerance, constraint, and divisiveness (much less discrimination) associated with religious organizations, identities, and beliefs are minimized.

These contrasting normative presuppositions and analytic assumptions are revealed and reproduced in the kinds of survey questions researchers typically ask about each subject. With regard to race, for example, survey items often highlight issues of discrimination, prejudice, and inequality with questions such as:

- Do blacks have as good a chance as white people in your community to get any kind of job for which they are qualified?
- Would you prefer to live in a neighborhood with mostly whites, mostly blacks, or a neighborhood that is mixed half and half?

- Should the government make every possible effort to improve the social and economic position of minorities?[1]

The vast majority of survey questions on religion, in contrast, emphasize issues of practice, personal choice, and community life and service. For example:

- How often do you attend religious services?
- How important would you say religion is in your own life?
- Should religious congregations provide aid and services to local communities?[2]

These contrasting emphases and characteristics are obviously rooted in the unique history and institutional structure of race and religion in the United States. The terrible history of slavery and Jim Crow creates a social and legal context that deeply structures how racial (and ethnic) differences are experienced, understood, and dealt with at all levels of American society. A history of disestablishment, protection by the free-exercise clause, and tax-exempt status has allowed religious institutions, on the other hand, to be and be seen as member-driven organizations—a historical–institutional situation Warner (1993) has famously termed "de facto congregationalism." This unique status has allowed American religious organizations to provide members with opportunities to bond with each other, engage in positively valued activities (from scouting and running food pantries to leading environmental justice discussion groups), and participate in community outreach (Chaves 2004; Lichterman 2005). Religious organizations have also provided valuable spaces of communal autonomy and identity for new immigrant groups (Warner 1998) and other racial or religious minorities (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Given this particular history and institutional configuration, it comes a little surprise that the religious field in the United States is as often characterized as fundamentally empowering, inclusive, and tolerant and set in contrast to the challenges and problems perceived to be posed by race.

Nevertheless, there are reasons to be skeptical of and cautious about an emphasis on and measurement of race and religion that is too divergent or starkly opposed. With regard to race, for example, Cornell and Hartmann (2007) point out that the last American century witnessed the celebration of racial distinctiveness and difference. Omi and Winant (1994:99) argue that the process of redefining racial identity and subsequently the meaning of race itself "made possible the [civil rights] movement's greatest triumphs, its most permanent successes" by forging new, more positive racial consciousnesses and politics. American blacks, for example, long defined as inferior by the white majority, embraced new self-definitions revolving around statements of "black power" and "black is beautiful." Asian Americans and Native Americans have engaged in similar processes of pan-ethnic redefinition (see Espiritu 1992 and Cornell 1988, respectively), and even whites have asserted their racial and ethnic "pride."[3] Celebratory discourses about multiculturalism and diversity have so inundated American culture that one eminent American social scientist has declared, if not enthusiastically, "We are all multiculturalists now" (Glazer 1997; see Bell and Hartmann 2007 for additional documentation and analysis).

There are also some significant reasons to question the appropriateness of survey measures that focus only on the positive dimensions of religious life. While no doubt

tolerant and inclusive in many respects, religion in the United States has witnessed a troubling increase in anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination, especially following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (Howell and Shryock 2003; Kalkan, Ayman, and Uslaner 2009), and one recent study found significant prejudice against and distrust of atheists (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2006). It also seems too easy to forget about the country's long and troubled history of nativism, anti-Catholicism, and anti-Semitism (see also Higham 1955) and racial segregation (Emerson and Smith 2000), or that religion can be a site of considerable inter- and intragroup hostilities as congregations and other faith-based communities struggle over what constitutes correct belief, practice, religious authority, and tradition (Becker 1999; Bolzendahl and Brooks 2005; Trinitapoli 2007).

There are at least two specific problems with the fact that the scholarly treatment of race and religion so closely mirrors the taken-for-granted assumptions that underlie our popular discourse in contemporary American society. First, it may mean that our methods and measurements are not picking up certain attitudes and opinions—problems (with respect to religion), for example, or more optimistic scenarios (when it comes to race)—simply because people were not asked about them. In survey research, after all (as with any form of subject-centered research), what one finds depends directly on what one asks. Second, the conflation of one-sided popular and academic presuppositions may be limiting our ability to appreciate the shared or related ways in which race and religion are understood and experienced and, perhaps more importantly, the deeper cultural understandings about difference that may link them together. This possibility has broad implications for our theoretical conceptions of difference, diversity, and multiculturalism.

To address these concerns and possibilities, we designed a survey consisting of sets of paired, parallel items dealing with the positive and problematic aspects of both race and religion. At a very basic level, we believe this parallel set design allows us to test empirically whether common survey measures regarding racial and religious difference are adequate for capturing Americans' opinions about these forms of social difference. Whether race and religion are believed to have positive social consequences (for example, civic engagement) or negative ones (discrimination or inequality, for example), in other words, becomes an empirical question in any given case, not an a priori assumption. These results will allow us to assess the potential contributions of a more general theory of difference and diversity, which would attend to commonalities and parallels across domains of social distinction as well as analyze how different dimensions vary in their conceptualization and impact depending upon actors and/or social conditions.

DATA, METHOD, AND DESIGN

The data that this analysis is based upon come from a nationally representative, 30-minute, random-digit-dial telephone survey (N = 2,081) fielded during summer 2003 by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center for the American Mosaic Project

(AMP) of the University of Minnesota.[4] Taken as a whole, the survey was designed to answer questions about the role that race and religion play in contemporary American culture with special attention given to diversity, broadly and generally conceived. The response rate of the survey is between 26 percent and 39 percent, with the more conservative figure corresponding to the recommended American Association for Public Opinion Research definition.[5] Respondents were randomly selected, with African Americans and Hispanics over-sampled to provide accurate data on these populations. To facilitate oversampling, the survey was also conducted in Spanish if the respondent preferred.

We focus the present analysis on a specific battery of parallel items asked about both race and religion. Drawing from surveys on religious attitudes, we took a series of standard questions about personal identity, social integration, and civic participation typically addressed to religious beliefs and practices and constructed parallel sets of questions on these issues for race. Likewise, we drew standard questions operationalizing discrimination, prejudice, and conflict from surveys of racial attitudes and developed parallel questions that related to religion. (A full list of the items and actual questions constructed for and used in this analysis is available in the Appendix.)

Our parallel survey questions were aggregated along four common dimensions, each corresponding to a major theme of divergence in the race and religion literatures.[6] The first dimension was *identity salience*, in which we asked respondents how important their religious and racial identities and cultures were to them personally. These question items were either borrowed or constructed from standard items of this sort on religion questionnaires. Given the dominant discourse that suggests that religion is a well-spring of personal self-meaning, one would expect religious attitudes to measure high on this dimension and racial attitudes to be much lower.

It is important to note here that identity items for race do not work quite as neatly as they do for religion. Some Americans do not self-identify in racial terms (and can see such questions as awkward or invasive) or use terms and categories that are different from those researchers and policy makers might prefer (even in the U.S. Census, for example, "Hispanic" is an ethnic not a racial category). Others—especially whites and Hispanics—can be more likely and able to respond if questions about collective identity are posed in ethnic terms (for a more extensive discussion of the distinctions and overlaps of ethnicity and race as both analytical categories and sources of identification, see Cornell and Hartmann 2007). To account for these challenges and variations, we asked respondents to self-identify in standard social scientific terms/census categories but also then asked (as a follow-up) if any other ethnic identity was more salient than the standard (self-identified) racial classification. We then posed follow-up questions that referred to whichever racial or ethnic category the respondent self-identified as most salient. So, for example, in asking about desire for cultural preservation, we framed the questions as "[the racial/ethnic group I identify with] has a culture worth preserving." In other words, where both race and ethnicity were indicated for an item, respondents may be responding to their presumably more salient ethnic identity rather than an imposed racial classification.

The second dimension involved *social order and conflict*. These items were meant to capture how respondents' view race and religion as contributors to the larger social order (through civic impact or social integration) or, conversely, to social conflict (through discrimination or divisiveness). Questions here included items that asked respondents how strongly they agreed or disagreed with statements such as: "[racial/religious] differences divide Americans a lot" or "I have been discriminated against because of my [race/religion]." Given that, as discussed earlier, religion is largely seen as an important source of community and civic life, we would expect religion to score higher on the social order measures; conversely, given the association of race with discrimination and inequality, we would expect race to score higher on the social conflict measures.

The third dimension we examined was the *locus of racial and religious commitments*. This dimension was meant to measure whether individuals think one should make commitments to racial/religious communities and identities based more on individual needs and preferences or based more on the needs of the religious or racial group. This question block included items drawn from standard civic participation surveys such as "people need to make sacrifices for the good of their [religious/racial] community" or "going to religious services is something you should do only if it meets your personal needs." Because religion is largely characterized as a matter of personal preference and choice, our orienting assumption was that it would score higher on individual measures, while race would be seen as based more on a sense of group position and obligation.

Our fourth and final dimension examined *public and private dimensions* of race and religion. Here, we meant to measure attitudes about how much public involvement respondents feel is desirable with regard to race and religion. Our focal item was a question asking if public schools should be required to teach about [racial/religious] diversity. Since religion is largely conceptualized as a private matter, separate from the authority of the state, we would expect religion to score lower on this measure of desired public involvement.

The parallel item, paired design allowed us to utilize a fairly simple and straightforward set of analytical procedures. In essence, we compare the results of all of the various parallel indicators for race and religion where divergent results would confirm conventional assumptions and measures, and more convergent patterns would suggest a need to rethink these basic assumptions and measures. We conducted these comparisons for the entire national sample and then for separate racial and religious subgroups. We report our findings—most of which are statistically significant as a result of the large size of our survey sample—in that order in the following section.

RESULTS

Our general, baseline findings about the relative similarity or variability with which Americans understand racial and religious differences are presented in Table 1. With few exceptions, our general findings across the four conceptual axes show a great deal of similarity in American attitudes and perceptions of race and religion.

Responses to our identity salience questions, for example, show that while 58 percent of Americans feel their religion is very important, 46 percent also feel that their racial/ethnic identity is very important. Extremely high percentages of Americans strongly agree that *both* their religion (88 percent) and their racial/ethnic group (81 percent) have "cultures worth preserving." Thus, while there is some support for the conventional idea that religion is more important to a person's identity than race, the difference between the two dimensions is not only not great (only a 12 percent difference on the first question and 7 percent on the second), it's not nearly so significant as conventional popular assumptions would imply (or measurement tools would detect). Furthermore, the fact that nearly half of respondents (46 percent) stated that their racial/ethnic identity was very important to them (and a full 78 percent answered either "Very Important" or "Important") seems to contradict the notion that Americans are predominantly "colorblind," at least in terms of their understandings of their personal racial/ethnic identities.

Turning to questions of social order and conflict, we do have findings consistent with the idea that people perceive religion to be a stronger contributor to social order. Once

TABLE 1. Attitudes about Racial and Religious Difference in the United States (All Americans)

	Percent in the affirmative
Identity salience	
The racial/ethnic group I identify with has a culture worth preserving	80.7 (strongly agree)
My religion has a culture worth preserving	87.6 (strongly agree)
Personal importance of racial/ethnic identity	45.9 (very important)
Personal importance of religion	57.7 (very important)
Social order and conflict	
Being a member of a racial/ethnic organization is a good way to become established in a local community	18.8 (strongly agree)
Being a church member is a good way to become established in a local community	36.7 (strongly agree)
How much do racial differences divide Americans	51.8 (a lot)
How much do religious differences divide Americans	41.4 (a lot)
I have been discriminated against because of my race	39.4 (yes)
I have been discriminated against because of my religion	22.8 (yes)
Locus of commitment	
Celebrating your ethnic or racial heritage is something you should do only if it meets your personal needs	25.7 (strongly agree)
Going to religious services is something you should do only if it meets your personal needs	34.2 (strongly agree)
Members of racial or ethnic groups should make sacrifices for the good of their community	32.6 (strongly agree)
Sometimes people need to make sacrifices for their religious community	31.0 (strongly agree)
Public/private	
Public schools should teach about the racial and ethnic diversity of the American people	63.3 (strongly agree)
Public schools should teach about the religious diversity of the American people	41.8 (strongly agree)

again, however, the differences are not particularly striking. People are nearly twice more likely to strongly agree that being a member of a religious organization is a good way to become established in a local community than they are to strongly agree when asked the same question about a racial/ethnic organization (37 percent and 19 percent, respectively). And when we look at those who "somewhat agree" as opposed to "strongly agree" on this item, the discrepancy between race and religion nearly disappears (42 percent for religion and 41 percent for race). It is also significant that most Americans do not "strongly agree" that either type of organization is a good way to establish oneself in a community; this calls into question the assumption that faith-based associations are considered cornerstones of community life for many Americans.

On the other side of this coin—social conflict—we find some support for the common view that race is perceived to be a greater contributor to social conflict than religion. Again, though, the differences are smaller than one might expect. For instance, 39 percent of respondents state they have been discriminated against because of their race, while 23 percent say the same with regard to their religion. When it comes to perceptions of social divisiveness or disunity, 52 percent of Americans believe that racial differences divide Americans "a lot," but 41 percent of respondents also strongly agree that religious differences divide Americans "a lot." And once again, if one takes into account both "some" and "a lot" answers, then 89 and 82 percent of Americans believe that racial and religious differences, respectively, divide Americans to at least some considerable degree.

Given that the dominant public discourse and scholarly assumptions about religion are characterized by ideas of solidarity, inclusiveness, and tolerance, it seems surprising that so many Americans view it as almost as problematic as race, especially with regard to the issue of national divisiveness. While people are slightly more likely to see race as a source of conflict, their perception of religion as a source of division and discrimination does not lag far behind, demonstrating the parallels and similarities in respondents' understandings of the divisiveness of race and religion in America rather than their differences.

Our results for the locus of commitment dimension also show surprisingly little contrast. Interestingly, scores for race and religion are high for *both* individual needs *and* group obligation measures. With regard to race, 61 percent of respondents either "strongly" or "somewhat" agree that one should celebrate one's racial heritage only if it meets personal needs, and 72 percent either "strongly" or "somewhat" agree that members of racial or ethnic groups should make sacrifices for their communities. With regard to religion, 59 percent of respondents either "strongly" or "somewhat" agree that going to religious services is something one should do only if it meets personal needs, and 77 percent "strongly" or "somewhat" agree that people need to make sacrifices for their religious communities. What we find here is that, for both race and religion, respondents believe that one should make choices *both* in terms of individual needs *and* in terms of group obligations. While much of the academic literature would see these kinds of choices as mutually exclusive, everyday Americans clearly do not.

Finally, we turn to those items designed to measure peoples' preferences regarding the public place and implications of race and religion. Our findings here diverge somewhat from those of other thematic sets. When we ask about teaching religious and racial difference in public schools, we see that Americans are much more likely to strongly agree that public schools should teach about racial and ethnic diversity than they are to strongly agree that public schools should teach about religious diversity (63 percent versus 42 percent, respectively). When we combine "strongly" and "somewhat" agree, the discrepancy gets a bit smaller (89 percent to 74 percent), but it is notable that a full 27 percent of respondents disagree with the statement that public schools should teach about the religious diversity of the American people. Clearly something different is going on with this item and issue, and we will discuss this important difference further in the concluding sections of our article.

To summarize, then, we find that for three of our four key conceptual axes, American attitudes about race and religion are distinct (and in the anticipated, common-sense directions) but far less so than common scholarly assumptions and measures would suggest. There is, in other words, some support for conventional understandings of race and religion, but taken as a whole, Americans' attitudes about race and religion seem to be characterized more by similarity than by difference. Across a number of dimensions, Americans in the aggregate appear to understand *both* race and religion in terms of positive elements (as sources of identity and contributors to social order), but also in terms of negative elements (as sources of discrimination and divisiveness); that is, they are salient for identity, entail aspects of both personal choice and communal responsibility, and have implications for both social order and social conflict.

Racial and Religious Group Analyses

Do these general patterns hold across specific racial groups and religious communities? To answer this question, we broke down our baseline findings by racial and religious subgroups. The results presented in Tables 2 and 3 reveal some distinctive patterns, some of which accord with conventional assumptions and expectations, others of which do not.

Racial Group Comparisons

Considering racial group comparisons (Table 2), one pattern that jumps out immediately is that African Americans and Hispanics are more likely to appreciate the salience of racial identity, culture, and organizations than white Americans. They are also more likely to believe that race is associated with discrimination and divisiveness. Some of these differences are quite pronounced. In terms of racial identity salience, for example, African Americans and Hispanics are far more likely to state that their racial/ethnic identity is very important to them than white Americans—73 percent and 68 percent, respectively, compared with 37 percent for whites. Conversely, only 30 percent of white Americans claim to have had problems with discrimination. While a surprisingly large percentage in many respects, this figure still pales in comparison to the 76 percent of African Americans and 61 percent of Hispanics who reported discrimination.

TABLE 2. Attitudes about Racial and Religious Difference in the United States by Race

	Percent in the affirmative		
	Whites	Blacks	Hispanics
Identity salience			
The racial/ethnic group I identify with has a culture worth preserving	77.5	86.2	92.3
My religion has a culture worth preserving	85.8	92.5	94.0
Racial/ethnic identity very important	37.2	73.3	68.4
Religion very important	54.0	80.1	64.9
Social order and conflict			
Being a member of a racial/ethnic organization is a good way to become established in a local community	15.3	31.4	28.9
Being a church member is a good way to become established in a local community	35.3	41.3	45.6
Racial differences divide Americans a lot	49.9	59.3	52.7
Religious differences divide Americans a lot	39.9	52.0	39.5
I have been discriminated against because of my race	30.1	75.5	61.1
I have been discriminated against because of my religion	23.3	19.7	19.3
Locus of commitment			
Celebrating your ethnic or racial heritage is something you should do only if it meets your personal needs	25.0	28.5	27.4
Going to religious services is something you should do only if it meets your personal needs	36.2	25.6	27.0
Members of racial or ethnic groups should make sacrifices for the good of their community	28.6	46.8	46.3
Sometimes people need to make sacrifices for their religious community	28.0	45.9	39.2
Public/private			
Public schools should teach about the racial and ethnic diversity of the American people	60.0	82.2	66.3
Public schools should teach about the religious diversity of the American people	39.8	57.8	37.8

Given what we know from previous survey research and the history of racism and discrimination against racial minorities in the United States (see above), the racial contrasts are not entirely new. Still, it is important to point out that the emphasis and value Hispanics and African Americans place on ethno-racial identity and culture seems to be something important that would otherwise be missed if we were to think of racial differences only as associated with conflicts and problems. Moreover, some of the results begin to cut even more strongly against previous findings and conventional assumptions. The item asking whether one's race or ethnic group has "a culture worth preserving" is one such area.

Surprisingly, 78 percent of whites (compared with 86 percent of blacks and 92 percent of Hispanics) strongly agree with the proposition that their group has a culture worth preserving. Along these lines, combining the responses of "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree" (not reported in the table), we find that almost three-quarters of

TABLE 3. Attitudes about Racial and Religious Difference in the United States by Religious Subgroup

	Percent in the affirmative				
	Catholics	Liberal Protestants	Conservative Protestants	Jews	Nonbelievers
Identity salience					
The racial/ethnic group I identify with has a culture worth preserving	77.5	80.1	81.3	87.5	73.4
My religion has a culture worth preserving	92.0	86.3	90.7	100.0	56.0
Racial/ethnic identity very important	47.6	38.8	53.3	40.7	42.1
Religion very important	56.8	55.0	82.8	30.8	9.8
Social order and conflict					
Being a member of a racial/ethnic organization is a good way to become established in a local community	15.5	18.9	21.3	25.9	19.7
Being a church member is a good way to become established in a local community	35.7	36.9	48.9	14.8	15.5
Racial differences divide Americans a lot	50.3	42.6	52.2	46.2	62.5
Religious differences divide Americans a lot	30.1	33.1	44.2	50.0	62.6
I have been discriminated against because of my race	36.3	36.7	38.9	46.2	43.6
I have been discriminated against because of my religion	20.3	11.2	27.0	59.3	31.3
Locus of commitment					
Celebrating your ethnic or racial heritage is something you should do only if it meets your personal needs	23.8	33.1	22.4	37.0	37.8
Going to religious services is something you should do only if it meets your personal needs	34.1	35.7	24.9	63.0	51.8
Members of racial or ethnic groups should make sacrifices for the good of their community	35.0	32.2	34.5	24.0	27.2
Sometimes people need to make sacrifices for their religious community	32.1	24.8	43.5	15.4	12.6
Public/private					
Public schools should teach about the racial and ethnic diversity of the American people	61.7	69.0	60.7	80.8	59.9
Public schools should teach about the religious diversity of the American people	37.0	42.5	46.3	73.1	39.4

white Americans—74 percent as compared with 89 percent for nonwhites—attest to the salience of their racial/ethnic identity. Here, it is important to point out that while we did allow white Americans to reference (or claim) an ethnic affiliation for these identity and culture items, only about 15 percent of our white respondents went this route. In other words, the large majority of whites in our survey did indeed attest to the significance and meaning of race—that is, of being white—in America (for additional analysis, see Croll 2007; Hartmann, Gerteis, and Croll 2009; and Torkelson and Hartmann 2010).

With our larger interest in comparing attitudes about race and religion, of course, the comparisons that are most important to examine are those between the paired racial and religious items for the three racial groups. In terms of unique group-based patterns, a few numbers stand out. Hispanic Americans (possibly cutting against popular perceptions) tend to see their racial or ethnic identity as more important than their religious one, though only slightly so (68.4 percent as compared with 64.9 percent). Also, African Americans and Hispanics are unwilling to claim that discrimination on the basis of religion is anywhere close to as prevalent as that of discrimination on the basis of race. Whites, for their part, are more likely to strongly agree (36 percent) that attending religious services is a matter of personal choice, while Hispanics are the only group that strongly agrees that sacrifices for the racial/ethnic group are more important than sacrifices for religion.

Nevertheless, these comparisons appear to largely confirm our findings and analysis of the aggregated numbers. On the one hand, religious differences are generally perceived as more meaningful, more socially useful, and less problematic than racial ones. On the other hand, these differences are less pronounced than our conventional expectations and measures might otherwise allow. For example, in looking at the items on divisiveness, we see that African Americans (52 percent) are more likely to say that religion is divisive than are whites or Hispanics (40 percent for both), and Hispanics are more likely to say that race is more divisive than religion by a larger margin (13 percent) than either African Americans (7 percent) or whites (10 percent). Still, cutting across these comparisons is the fact that all groups see race as more divisive than religion but that these differences are less extreme than our theories and measures would usually predict.

The biggest exception to this general pattern, once again, involves the items about the appropriateness of teaching about difference in public schools. Indeed, perhaps the most striking statistical result in the entire table is that African Americans (82 percent) are about 20 percent more likely than others to strongly agree that public schools should teach about racial diversity. The proportions are the same regarding teaching religious diversity in schools, though the numbers are lower overall: African Americans (58 percent) are much more likely than either whites (40 percent) or Hispanics (38 percent) to strongly agree.

Religious Group Comparisons

In terms of response patterns for religious subgroups (Table 3), several interesting group-based differences readily appear. For example, conservative Protestants were most

likely to strongly agree that a religious group was a good way to become established in the community (49 percent strongly agreed with this statement compared with 37 percent for the next closest group), while Jews and nonbelievers[7] were more likely to say they have been discriminated against because of their religion than others (59 percent and 31 percent, respectively). But the broader point in the previous aggregate and racial subgroup analyses are essentially replicated here once again: members of various religious communities see religious differences as more positive and less problematic than racial ones; however, the differences in these perceptions are not particularly pronounced. Indeed, the differences here are even smaller on average than those that appeared in the racial group analysis.

The main exception to this general pattern involves self-identified Jews. In contrast to all other religious groups, Jewish Americans tended to see membership in a racial/ethnic organization as a better way to get established in a community than membership in a religious organization. They were also the most likely to claim discrimination on either racial or religious grounds. This may well have to do with the unique cultural history of Jews in America and the conflation of ethnic and religious categories as well as the central role that synagogues play in community life (a point we shall return to shortly). It is perhaps worth noting that the group with results closest to the Jewish pattern was self-identified nonbelievers, an extremely small group of people who (perhaps for obvious reasons) did not see religion as salient or important personally.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Conventional frameworks for understanding race and religion in contemporary American society have tended to focus on the positive aspects of religion and religious differentiation, on the one hand, and the problems associated with race, on the other. These contrasting emphases—which appear in both the popular discourse and scholarly conceptualizations—are reflected in the questions about race and religion posed in standard public opinion polling and survey research. In view of the possibility that these questions simply reproduce the received wisdom (and thus fail to capture the more positive valuations that may be associated with race or the problems that may be associated with religion), we developed and fielded a set of parallel survey items that asked about both positive and negative dimensions of both aspects of social distinction.

The results of our parallel question strategy have offered some support for conventional ways of thinking about race and religion as mirror images of social organization and differentiation. In general, race is more likely than religion to be associated with social conflict and less likely than religion to be seen as chosen or as deeply connected with personal identity or a common moral culture. Additionally, individuals from minority groups are more likely to see the problems associated with both race and religion. These findings hold for a range of racial and religious groups, albeit with some slightly more pronounced contrasts in the expected directions.

However, in other ways, we find that American perceptions of race and religion defy the popular and scholarly conventional wisdom. A strong majority of Americans across racial and religious lines view both race and religion as a salient source of identity and a basis for community life. And while Americans view racial differences as more conflictual than religious distinctions, these differences are smaller than we expected. Almost one-quarter of Americans (23 percent) view religion as a source of discrimination (compared with 40 percent who say this about race), and about 4 in 10 say that religious differences are a significant source of division (as compared with 52 percent who say this about race). Finally, Americans appear to believe that when it comes to both racial and religious identities, it is important to balance individual interests and preferences with the needs of communities.

Taken together, these findings present an empirical picture of race and religion that is considerably more mixed and multifaceted than dominant discourses and conventional methods indicate. Generally, race is not seen as problematic, nor is religion understood as essentially positive and beneficial; rather, both are believed to have constructive and problematic dimensions, to be a potential source for both positive identification and social division, to involve both structural and cultural elements, and to pose challenges when balancing individual needs while forming stable communities. Put somewhat differently, our results suggest that race and religion do not adhere to the divergent, either/or configuration that the conventional discourses and methodological approaches might lead us to believe. Instead, attitudes toward race and religion exhibit what we have come to think of as a "similarity pattern," a more ambivalent, both/and configuration where both are seen as positive and inclusive sources of identification and meaning as well as potential sources of division and social exclusion.

Replication and validation of these survey items and results are of course vital, among the most important initial tasks for future research. And assuming that these basic findings about the relative comparability of racial and religious attitudes hold, they have some fairly significant implications for how we conceptualize and study race and religion as well as difference, diversity, and multiculturalism more generally.

The most basic and concrete implications are for research on race and religion. If these results are indeed picking up social realities we are otherwise missing with conventional tools and frames, then religion researchers will clearly need to begin paying more attention to issues of conflict and prejudice, just as scholars interested in race will need to do for the positive and meaningful aspects of racial affiliations. What we are envisioning here goes far beyond the survey data and methods we have used in this exploratory study. In part, it would involve more extensive and in-depth research into the perception and meaning of these dimensions of social difference in contemporary culture—assessing the intensity of these attitudes, documenting the specific kinds of experiences or various subgroup referents that Americans have in mind with these evaluations, etc. Ascertaining the extent to which these results represent new social phenomena (or reflect longer standing patterns that simply have not been detected

because of prevailing assumptions and techniques) would also be essential. These findings would also call for systematic efforts, probably using more behavioral measures, to evaluate the actual impacts of racial and religious formations on individuals and groups.

And here, we should also make clear that we do not anticipate that such research will demonstrate that race and religion are fundamentally or essentially the same in terms of how they are understood, experienced, and implicated in American social life. Quite the contrary, our expectation is that additional, multimethod research will give us a better understanding of the unique form, content, complexity, and impact of both. Such a comparative vision might, in fact, inspire researchers and commentators to delve back into the historical conditions and institutional arrangements that account for the differences commonly associated with race and religion in contemporary America as well help more precisely identify the social changes and cultural transformations—shifting demographics and the emergence of new groups like Muslim or Mexican Americans, for example, or the expansion of rights (Skrentny 2002) and the rise of multiculturalism (Glazer 1997)—underlying the contrasts and transformations of the current period. This broader context could help us to understand some of the countervailing patterns and results in our survey as well. For example, the fact that Americans are more comfortable with the teaching of racial rather than religious diversity in public schools is probably because of prevailing church/state separation statutes and ideals, while the unique response patterns exhibited by Jewish Americans may be explained by the particular way in which ethnicity and religion are combined in both their collective history as well as their primary communal institutions. All of this is made possible, we believe, when researchers are freed from a priori assumptions about the positive nature of religious formations and the negative nature of racial ones and forced to think more seriously, systematically, and substantively about the form and content of race, religion, and the differences associated with them.

This point has obvious implications for the study of other forms of social difference. In recent years, a rather significant sociological literature has emerged around the idea of symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnar 2002; Pachucki, Pendergrass, and Lamont 2007). This work reminds us that boundaries always and inevitably exclude or marginalize some groups of people (see also Alexander 1992; Hall 1992; Zerubavel 1993; Taylor 2001). Similarly, we would suggest that social boundaries and the differences associated with them (not to mention diversity itself) can and often do include both positive and problematic dimensions as well as cultural and structural features. As researchers, we need to be open to these possibilities, use a variety of methods and evidence to explore them, and situate these findings in their broader social and historical contexts.

What is at stake here is not just a different way of thinking about racial and religious boundaries and difference in American culture. These results and interpretations could potentially lead to a new, more substantive understanding of American culture itself. The discovery of positive and negative attitudes about both race and religion does *not*, in and of itself, answer the question of whether cultural fragmentation is increasing in

the United States (see also Fischer and Mattson 2009). However, it can help us think about how difference, again broadly conceived, is dealt with.

Part of the project here would be to develop a more sophisticated, multidimensional understanding of out-group prejudice, stigma, and stereotyping—one which distinguishes specific dimensions (such as distrust, moral outrage, fear, or cultural threat) and their targets. On this front, sociologists would do well to link up with the work of social psychologists on socio-functionalist threats (Cottrell and Neuberg 2005; Schaller and Neuberg 2008) and intergroup affect and stereotyping (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2007; see also Kalkan et al. 2009) for a related, more sociological approach to anti-Muslim attitudes).

Perhaps even more promising and important are how the findings in this study can help us think about incorporation—alternately called inclusion or integration. The vision of incorporation that might be implied or inferred from these results and interpretations obviously goes well beyond the assimilationist's paradigms of previous generations (where racial and religious differences often overlapped, and the basic goal was to minimize their public visibility and impact [see also Herberg 1960; Gordon 1964]) toward theories that have been discussed under the heading of multiculturalism (Parekh 2000; Hartmann and Gerteis 2005; Modood 2007; Kivisto forthcoming). On the one hand, demonstrating the parallels between race (which is always involved in multicultural theorizing, and usually at its core) and religion (typically not included in the multicultural menu) contributes to these theories by suggesting that we need to think more carefully about which groups and categories of difference deserve our attention and why. But multiculturalism needs to be more than a laundry list of differences. The relative comparability of positive and negative valuations of race and religion also suggests that multicultural theories of incorporation need to grapple with the various challenges and benefits that difference in all its forms and varieties presents. Here, it is useful to recall that prevailing multicultural movements are sometimes organized into two basic types, one that emphasizes the positive valuations of identity and culture (the politics of recognition, as it might be called, following Charles Taylor), the other which focuses more on the social consequences and implications of inequality (the politics of redistribution, in Iris Young's terms). The basic but fundamental suggestion out of this research—which plays off of the work of some intersectional theorizing (Anderson 1999)—is that both orientations are necessary to any theoretical or practical conception of the challenges of incorporation in a diverse, multicultural context.

Extending from this, we are also inclined to think that a closer, more systematic examination of the range of perceived benefits of difference across an array of social categories could yield a fuller understanding of the beliefs and practices that constitute the content and cultural core of American nationalism, citizenship, and solidarity. There is a lot that could be said here. In work associated with the larger research initiative that this particular study comes out of, for example, we have examined the expansion of American cultural solidarity with the emergence of a "Judeo-Christian" ethos (Hartmann, Zhang, and Wischstadt 2005). But the broader, more general point is to develop,

along the lines sketched in Jeffrey Alexander's (2006) magnum treatment of American civil society, a richer, more substantive conception of the cultural core—who we are, what we share, and what is good about the distinctiveness we all bring to the table—of contemporary American solidarity.

In the face of an increasingly diverse, multicultural world as well as an emergent backlash against multiculturalism (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010), we clearly need to continue to track and evaluate how Americans understand difference and diversity, and the challenges and possibilities both present. Our theories and methods need to be broad and flexible enough to accommodate these complexities—to realize the benefits and challenges that come with any differences in contemporary social life—but also focused enough to be able to delve into the complexities and variations of these differences and the social, institutional, and historical contingencies that account for them. This may be an elementary point but sometimes our methodologies and conceptions can lose sight of the basic empirical realities, possibilities, and complexities that regular, ordinary folks perceive and experience on an everyday basis.

NOTES

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[1]These survey questions come from the seminal work *Racial Attitudes in America* (Schuman et al. 1997).

[2]The first two items come from the Religion and Public Life 2002 survey conducted by the Pew Center. The third item was adapted from multiple variations of an item that is popular on many different congregational surveys.

[3]As the voluminous new literature on whiteness would suggest, the racial identification of white Americans is quite complicated and multifaceted—sometimes it is hidden or invisible (Doane 1997), sometimes it is expressed in virulent forms of white supremacy, and in other cases through the more benign re-adoption of "symbolic" white ethnic identities (Waters 1990). More on this below.

[4]As of December 2010, the data and code books for the American Mosaic Project survey are housed at the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan (Hartmann, Gerteis, and Edgell 2003). This can be accessed online at http://dx.doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR28821.

[5]This response rate compares favorably with that of most recent national RDD-based studies. For example, a recent American National Election Study (ANES) had a response rate of about 35 percent using a fairly generous definition, compared with the AMP response rate of 36 percent using the same definition. Here, it is also worth noting that the Council on Market and Opinion Research (CMOR) maintains an ongoing study of response rates, using calculation methods consistent with what we used, and their study shows that the current mean response rate for RDD telephone surveys is 10.16 percent.

[6]We do not claim that these four are the only key conceptual dimensions for measuring attitudes about difference in U.S. society, but these four seem to be those most commonly addressed in the race and religion literatures and surveys.

[7]For these analyses, "nonbelievers" are those claiming no religious identity (also called religious "nones" in some contemporary accounts). We chose this to parallel our other measures used in the religious subgroup analysis, which are based on self-identification.

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APPENDIX. Question Wording for Race and Religion Comparison Items

Identity Salience

"How important is [your racial/ethnic identity] to you?" (Item #135)
"How important is your religion to you?" (138)
"Do you feel [your racial or ethnic group] has a culture that should be preserved?" (130, 134)
"Do you feel your religious group has a culture that is worth preserving?" (144)

Social Order and Conflict

"Being a member of a racial or ethnic organization is a good way for people to become established in a local community." (137a)
"Being a church member is an important way to become established in a community." (147a)
"Have you ever experienced any discrimination because of your race?" (136)
"Have you ever experienced any discrimination because of [your religion]?" (149)
"How much do you think racial differences divide people in American today?" (137f)
"How much do you think religion divides people in American today?" (147i)

Locus of Commitment

"Celebrating your ethnic or racial heritage is something you should do only if it meets your personal needs." (137b)

"Going to religious services is something you should do only if it meets your personal needs." (147b)

"Members of racial or ethnic groups should make sacrifices for the good of their community." (137c)

"Sometimes people need to make sacrifices for their religious community." (147c)

Public/Private

"Public schools should teach about the racial and ethnic diversity of the American people." (137e)

"Public schools should teach about the religious diversity of the American people." (147e)