

Pilot Project: *“Religion and Cognitive Functioning: Race-Ethnicity and Gender Differences in Older Adults”*

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Abstract

Although clear disparities by race and gender exist in cognitive functioning of older adults, little work has considered how cognition varies at the intersection of these social status categories. Religious involvement is also important to aging adults and may play a protective role in maintaining healthy cognition. Using the Health and Retirement Study, a nationally representative sample of US adults aged 50 and older, this study aims to examine whether the association between various dimensions of religious involvement and cognition varies by race-ethnicity and gender simultaneously, and if this relationship is explained by psychosocial mechanisms. We find that religiosity is positively associated with cognitive functioning among black women but results in lower cognitive functioning among older white men. Psychosocial mechanism, like purpose in life and self-esteem, do not explain the association. These findings suggest a number of promising research directions for the religion-cognition connection among older Americans at the intersection race-ethnicity and gender.