

ABSTRACT

Congregational Growth, Closure, Identity, and Diversity

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Despite stories of secularization in America, congregations still possess power as one of America's most prolific social organizations. Their power can be seen by the fact that congregations receive the highest proportion of philanthropic donations of any social institution (Hoge, Zech, McNamara, and Donahue 1996), and are the greatest outlet of voluntarism in the United States (Putnam 2000). This dissertation explores four central issues pertaining to congregations: growth, closure, identity, and diversity. Heterogeneity by age is related to growth in American congregations, while homogeneity by belief is related to congregational growth in Evangelical congregations. Age liabilities of newness and oldness are associated with closure in congregations that have a free-church tradition. Beliefs stand out above denominational affiliation and self-identification in terms of identifying who is Evangelical. Finally, there is potential of racially diverse congregations to assist in the changing of attitudes and actions toward people of a different race.

Congregational Growth, Decline, Diversity, and Identity

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A Dissertation

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Accepted by the Graduate School
May 2010

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Kevin Dougherty for all of the time and effort he has spent in helping me better understand congregations. I would like to thank my wife, Kelly Maier, for her sacrifices that have made this possible and I would like to thank my cat for her companionship of sitting in my lap as I wrote.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Sunday is rigorously observed. I have seen streets barred off before churches during divine service; the law commands these things imperiously, and public opinion, much stronger than the law, obliges every one to show himself at church and to abstain from all diversion.

-- Alexis de Toqueville, 1831 (Pierson 1996: 153)

Since colonial times, religious organizations have played a formidable role in American culture. Congregations are one of the longest lasting, and most important, institutions in the American landscape. The oft-quoted, and sometimes misquoted, Frenchman Alexis de Toqueville could not help but notice the power American congregations held on people in the early 19th century. As cited above, the church possessed a power on American society like no other institution. It shaped government, education, national expansion, westward settlement, and work ethic conducive to growth (Weber 2001). Whether it was due to American piety or social expectation and networks, the prominence congregations in America shaped every aspect of the new nation. Though their roles have adjusted some over the last four centuries, it is undeniable that they still possess great power.

A sign of the importance of congregations in society can be seen even in light of quotations attributed to de Toqueville that he never made.

I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her commodious harbors and her ample rivers - and it was not there . . . in her fertile fields and boundless forests and it was not there . . . in her rich mines and her vast world commerce - and it was not there . . . in her democratic Congress and her matchless Constitution - and it was not there. Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her

genius and power. America is great because she is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, she will cease to be great (Eddy 1941:6).

Politicians as varied as Dwight Eisenhower, Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan, and Jesse Helms have quoted this passage either in part or full, attributing it to de Toqueville, though its source can accurately go no further back than Sherwood Eddy's *The Kingdom of God and the American Dream* (1941: 6), which falsely attributes it to de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. Regardless of where this quote came from, it is telling that it is still being propagated by the nation's most powerful leaders in a contemporary context. Values of a nation can easily be ascertained via the written speeches of its leaders.

In contemporary American society the religious organization may not possess the relative power to guide politics and culture that it once did, but we need go no further back in time than the 2004 Presidential election, or the Faith Based Initiatives movement, to see the power that they still have in the political realm. It is highly questionable whether congregations and religion, in general, are losing power in America as a result of individualism yet, this path we will postpone for a later time. Instead, we will tread down a path of better understanding the American religious organization. Growth, death, diversity, and identity are four very important features of any organization. To the religious organization they are paramount. Capital is necessary for organizations to grow, and as de Toqueville noted in a personal letter to his cousin, Count Louis de Kergorlay, the American Protestant ministers were "businessmen of religion" (Pierson 1996). The unique relationship between church and state encourages such an entrepreneurial spirit among clergy, which makes growth, death, diversity, and identity all the more important to the life of a congregation.

Each of the four elements will be studied to examine what might be associated with them and how they might affect society at large. New studies on the social relationships at play in leading to congregational growth and closure will allow sociologists and congregational specialists to better understand their unique organizational nature and allow them to change approaches to improve chances of viability. Research centered on the effects of congregational diversity on attendees will allow for better understanding of network ties, as well as the role of faith and congregational homogeneity in forming racial attitudes and actions. Finally, assessing how Evangelicals are best defined will better inform scholars of religion in the social relationships at play in shaping an attendee's political and moral attitudes and actions. Does religious affiliation, individual self-identity, or individual religious belief best determine how one will relate to society?

To execute these studies and provide as accurate a depiction of the American congregation as possible, both congregational level and individual level indicators will be examined. Much of the weakness in former studies has been a lack of recognition of one of these two levels. Both approaches are necessary to provide the best description of the social relationships present in congregational growth, death, diversity, and religious identity.

Study 1: People Like Us: Homophily and Congregational Growth

What makes churches grow? What keeps them from growing? These questions are on the minds of many clergy regardless of the religious tradition they espouse. The desire to have these questions answered led to a full fledged social movement beginning in the 1970s which still exists today: the Church Growth Movement. At the center of this

movement is one man, a man that many deem the “Father of Church Growth”: Donald McGavran. After years of experience as a Christian missionary, McGavran came back to the United States to become a professor and eventually was made the founding dean of Fuller Theological Seminary's School of World Mission. As a professor he trained many future missionaries in evangelistic techniques which he came to believe in as a result of many years of personal experience. One of those techniques later became known as the “Homogeneous Unit Principle.” In short, McGavran observed that, “Disciples are more readily made by people within their own homogeneous unit, and congregations develop into healthy communities when they concentrate on only one kind of people” (McGavran 1990: 4). This principle set off a firestorm within most of American Christianity. For decades the theological and ethical implications were hashed and rehashed, yet no one attempted to test McGavran’s theory empirically. Research on the topic predominately focused on the case study method. In 1995 Gordon Sims administered a test of the theory using a random sample of 591 North American Baptist congregations with an average attendance of 50 to 290. Surprisingly, he found that the more heterogeneous a congregation’s occupations, age, and income, the more likely they were to grow, based upon Chi-Square analysis. The only demographical item to show homogeneity leading to growth was ethnic composition. Since, several more case studies have been employed with other purposes in mind, yet have elicited exceptions to the Homogeneous Unit Principle. Most of these “exceptions” have dealt with cases where multicultural congregations exhibited great numerical growth (Ammerman 1997; Becker 1998; Christerson and Emerson 2003; Ellingson 2007; Leonard 1983).

Study 1 will attempt to quantitatively test the Homogeneous Unit Principle using Regression modeling techniques on attendees of a random sample of American congregations. Due to the fact that the Homogeneous Unit Principle is based on many of the same principles within the theories of homophily and niche theory (Blau, Blum, and Swartz 1982; Hannan, Carroll, and Polos 2003: 321; Hannan and Freeman 1977; Lazarsfeld and Merton's 1954; Marsden 1987; McPherson 1983; McPherson and Ranger-Moore 1991; McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1987), these two fields of study will provide a theoretical basis for sociological inquiry. To execute this study, a special data set was needed that possessed congregational attendance figures over a period of years, measures of social demography within given congregations, and measures of religious belief within the given congregations. Thus, the dataset had to have congregational and individual level analyses. There was only one which fit all of these requirements perfectly, the United States Congregational Life Survey (henceforth USCLS).

The USCLS surveyed attendees of a random sample of over 2,000 congregations from across America which participated in the USCLS. It is the largest survey of worshipers in America ever conducted. Three types of surveys were completed in each participating congregation: 1) attendee surveys were completed by all worshipers age 15 and older who attended worship services during the weekend of April 29, 2001, 2) a Congregational Profile was completed by one person in the congregation which acquired a description of the congregation's facilities, staff, programs, and worship service, and 3) a Leader Survey was completed by the pastor, priest, minister, rabbi, or other leader of the congregation. The effective sample size of congregations yielded an N of 424 and attendees yielded an N of 122,404.

Study 2: Death Revisited

The rate of congregational closure in the United States has long been conjectured, but lacking in quantitative support. Church growth literature has often cited that one percent of American congregations close each year (see McIntosh 1990), but the source of this statistic remains unclear. Most of the studies employed on congregational decline have focused on case studies which did not follow the congregation all the way to the point where they closed their doors (e.g. Ammerman 1997) or were written for practitioners from a theological or “church growth” perspective (e.g. Regele 1995; Whitesel 2004). Prior to 2008, the works that employed empirical methodologies were rather dated (Kincheloe 1929; Kloetzli 1961). As a response to this dearth of literature on congregational closure, two studies have recently attempted to fill this void in the literature. Dougherty, Maier and Vander Lugt (2008) quantitatively described and assessed closure within two American Protestant Christian denominations: the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Church of the Nazarene. Despite differing in size, denominational growth trends, theology, and socio-political foci both of these denominations closed around one percent of their congregations yearly between 1980 and 2005. In addition, trends were found which related death to congregational age. Death was most imminent in the first 10 years, between 35-50 years of age, and after 75 years of age. Further regression analyses tested the relative power of age liabilities in predicting death by also controlling for social capital variables, congregational giving and average weekly worship attendance. The study found that age liabilities persisted even when these variables were included.

Anderson, et al. (2008) provided a projection of the number of congregational closures per year. In revisiting the congregations that were involved in the 1998 National Congregations Survey, they found that the congregations closed at a rate of 1% per year. This rate is by far the lowest of any organization examined in the United States and shows the strength and longevity of American congregations, regardless of religious tradition. The congregations that had closed were less likely to be affiliated with a denomination, were younger, possessed less active members, and received less in donations than congregations that were still open.

The current study attempts to test the efficacy of the aforementioned relationships among the largest Protestant Christian denomination in the United States. The theoretical basis used in Dougherty, Maier, and Vander Lugt (2008) will be borrowed to test for age liabilities and social capital effects in the Southern Baptist Convention. Age Liabilities are best summarized by dividing the theory into three realms: newness liability, adolescent liability, and late life liabilities. Newness liability originated with Stinchcombe (1965). He presented four reasons for early organizational failure: first, new roles have to be learned which takes time and effort, second, the new roles can clash until standardized in an efficient way, third, new organizations are based on relations between strangers, and fourth, new organizations must find a way to establish external relationships. These hurdles must be crossed in order for organizations to survive infancy and are rarely experienced later in life.

Liabilities of adolescence suggest that in many organizations the first years are immune to death due to varying sources of initial support, yet after the well of support runs dry, many organizations experience death. Those that have created viability after

this period experience less of a threat of death (Bruderl and Schussler 1990). Reasons for initial low mortality vary from initial endowments (Bruderl and Schussler 1990; Fichman and Levinthal 1991; Hannan 1998) to high levels of commitment due to the excitement of inception early in life (Bruderl 1990). This application is also seen in religious organizations which receive denominational support early in life (Hannan (1998).

Old age liabilities are harder to attach time periods to. Depending on the organization, “old age” can refer to any time period beyond the normal state of sustainability. Thus, the most frequently used liabilities of late life are understood by senescence, obsolescence, and leadership transition (Barron, West, and Hannan 1994; Haveman 1993). Senescence deals with the “iron cage” of bureaucratization (Weber 2001), the organizational structure makes needed organizational change impossible, leading to death. Obsolescence focuses on the effects of external environmental shifts which make the organizational purpose obsolete. Finally, transition of leadership also poses a threat to organizational viability. Haveman (1993) found that small organizations that lost their first president were 100 times more likely to close in the subsequent year than small organizations not experiencing leadership succession.

The current study will attempt to complement the current literature by seeking for similar results within the largest Protestant Christian denomination in the United States. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is a very diverse association of congregations that spans the entire nation, despite its regional label. Due to different approaches to congregational planting as compared to other denominations and a different data method of handling congregations which have left the denomination or merged with other congregations, the results are not expected to perfectly mirror the PCUSA nor the Church

of the Nazarene. Yet, the overall patterns of newness, adolescence, and late life liabilities will be examined. SBC congregational census data as provided via Annual Church Profiles will be utilized. These data are reported by each individual congregation to the convention each year. Being the largest denominational census in United States, it is a perfect dataset to use for the desired analysis.

Study 3: Defining Evangelicalism

One of the hottest topics in contemporary studies of religion is the affects on society of those that possess the religious identity, “Evangelical.” From the ballot box to the box office, this oft cited label is recognized as a significant presence in American culture. Yet, the question remains: how do we determine who is an “Evangelical?” Over 20 years of research has yielded three approaches which have stood the test of time and serious debate between social scientists. Studies have historically centered on only one of these approaches, without testing the comparative salience of the three at the same time. In addition, comparable identities such as “bible believing,” “theologically conservative,” and “born again” have fallen by the wayside as the new term, “Evangelical,” has come into vogue in the news and among academics. Yet, it is unknown whether these older labels might hold more predictive power in social attitudes and behaviors. Resolving these two issues within the study of religious identity will be examined in the current work.

The first approach to religious identification as an “Evangelical” is simply whether an individual self-identifies as one. Based upon Smith’s (1998) subcultural identity thesis, this approach separates those who respond “Yes” when asked if they are an “Evangelical” from those that respond “No” to the question. This approach is the

most obvious and arguably the most logical way to assess one's religious identity. Yet, things are not always as easy as they seem. The term "Evangelical" evokes different meanings dependent on the lens through which it is viewed. In some circles, the word has gained a negative connotation due to its pejorative use in the socio-political realm. This has led to many separating the politically tinged use of the word as a "movement" from the use of the term as a descriptor of a common religious system. Some might promote the religious belief system, but disagree with the baggage that goes along with identifying with the political movement. Others may affiliate with the conservative political movement, yet not possess belief in all of the historical tenants of Protestant Evangelicalism. These issues bring to light the innate problems associated with applying a label to individuals across a wide cultural gamut. As a result, one can inadvertently end up placing their own preconceived understandings of a label upon people that might not share a similar definition of the same word.

The study will test Evangelical identity against two other popularly used categorical approaches to identifying "Evangelicals." The second categorical approach is to group congregations by the Religious Tradition which it is historically related to. This approach was originally based off of Smith (1990), and was later refined by Steensland, et al. (2000). This work categorized all American congregations into seven groups: Mainline Protestant, Evangelical Protestant, Black Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, other (e.g., Unitarian, Hindu, Muslim, Mormon, and Jehovah's Witness), and no religious tradition (those who respond that they do not belong to any religious tradition). Following Steensland, et al. (2000) respondents will be categorized by whether they attend a congregation that is historically associated with Evangelicalism or not.

The third, and final, categorization is based on traditional Evangelical belief indicators. Even these indicators are disputed, from Barna's (2007) eight-fold construction to Hunter's (1983) four-part construction. The consensus from previous literature is that Evangelical belief is best defined by asserting that the Bible is either to be taken literally or is perfectly true, that faith in Jesus Christ alone brings eternal salvation, that the respondent has had a religious conversion experience, and that sharing their faith with others is of primary importance. These four stipulations will be used to create a dichotomous variable separating those that give assent to all four from those that do not, effectively creating an "Evangelical" variable by belief.

The first wave of the Baylor Religion Survey (BRS) possesses a thorough collection of religious identity, behavior, and attitudinal variables needed to complete such a study; thus it will be utilized. The BRS is a nationally representative sample of 1721 Americans collected by the Gallup Organization in the winter of 2005. It possesses the variables necessary to assess Evangelicals by identity, belief, and religious tradition. The survey also possesses the variables that are necessary to control for social location, race, and religiosity, while providing ideal dependent measures that will provide traditional Evangelical values. The dependent variables to be measured are sexual attitudes, abortion attitudes, political party affiliation, and support for public religiosity.

The number of Evangelicals in America has been argued for quite some time. Estimates depend on the method used (Hackett and Lindsay 2008). In Study 3, the population of Evangelicals in America will be examined using the BRS and comparisons will be made to previous findings. In order to measure the relative effectiveness and utility of these variables with dependent beliefs, OLS Regression will be utilized in order

to compare the relative effects of a respondent's Evangelical self-identity, Evangelical religious tradition, and Evangelical belief on the dependent variables mentioned above. The study offers comprehensive findings on which of the three possesses the strongest effect on belief and socio-political attitudes.

Study 4: Contact Theory Tested

Since Emerson and Smith's *Divided by Faith* (2000), religious congregations have become a popular realm within which to study multiracial organizational contexts. Much has been chronicled about these unique places of worship in a rather short period of time (Ammerman 1997; Becker 1998; Christerson, Emerson and Edwards 2005; DeYoung et al. 2003; Dougherty 2003; Dougherty and Huyser 2008; Emerson 2006; Emerson and Kim 2003; Marti 2005; Yancey 2003). Yet, few studies have found statistically significant effects of cross-racial congregational contexts on society. Maier (2007) found that individuals who attend congregations which are 99-100 percent the same race as them are more likely to distrust those of another race, more likely to find the adoption of a child of a different race to be wrong, and are less likely to be a part of a racial or ethnic organization. Yancey (1999) found that whites who attended church with at least one black individual exhibited more racially tolerant attitudes. The same study showed that whites who lived in integrated communities exhibited more racially tolerant attitudes than other whites.

In light of the results of these two studies, it seems that the "belonging" that is associated with religious organizations has a powerful effect on the attitudes and action of attendees. As Maier (2007: 26) states, "Though overt racism may not be preached from the pulpits, the uniform coloration of the frequenters casts an indelible shadow on

the racial perceptions of those sitting in the pew.” Since congregations are the source of attendee’s belief structure, they seem to possess a very powerful hidden potential for creating and alleviating racial conflict and strife. This further supports the case that DeYoung et al. (2003) make for congregations being the best hope for overcoming racial division in society.

Despite these powerful findings, it has yet to be exhibited that the effects of congregational diversity hold firm in light of experiential diversity in other realms of social location. For instance, do these effects remain significant even when residential racial diversity and workplace racial diversity are controlled for? The ability to simultaneously control for the racial diversity experienced by an individual in multiple realms of life such as work, home, and church offer an interesting glimpse into the argument of which of these interactional locations possesses the more powerful socializing relationship with how Americans act and see those of a different race. This type of comparison has been quite elusive, yet the second wave of the Baylor Religion Survey (BRS2) provides all of the variables that are needed to accomplish such an analysis.

The BRS2 provides an effective array of racial attitude variables, racial contact variables, congregational demographical variables, and social location variables. The BRS2 is a national random sample of Americans focusing on religious attitudes and actions. It possesses 1648 cases and was collected by the Gallup Organization in the fall of 2007. It makes for an ideal assessment of individual-level racial beliefs and actions and their relationships with various items dealing with religion. Specifically, this analysis attempts to provide a better understanding of whether racial diversity in

religious, residential, and/or work contexts affect individual's attitudes toward those of another race, biracial marriage of a child, having someone of a different race in their house for dinner, having a neighbor of a different race, whether the person has dated or been romantically involved with a person of a different race, and comfort in working with someone of a different race. Logistic and OLS Regression will be utilized in order to measure the relative relationships of an individual's congregational racial diversity, residential diversity, and workplace diversity on these attitudes and actions while controlling for a thorough list of social and demographic variables.

This comprehensive study essentially allows an opportunity to better understand what social contexts are most powerful in creating and alleviating prejudicial racial attitudes and actions. Various attempts via private and public institutions have been tried in the hopes of lessening racial prejudice. Yet, few have been found to have lasting effects beyond the simple principles of Contact Theory (Allport 1954). Now it is possible to test whether an individual's belief structures as derived from participation in a congregation, neighborhood, or work may have a relationship with the perception of a racialized "other." Is it true as proposed in Maier (2007: 27) that "the most effective avenue to positive change may also be the engine that has been the driving force of racism all along: the religious congregation"?

Conclusion

Despite stories of secularization in America, congregations still possess power as one of its most prolific social organizations. Their power can be seen in the fact that congregations receive the highest proportion of philanthropic donations of any social institution (Hoge, Zech, McNamara, and Donahue 1996), and are the greatest outlet of

voluntarism in the United States (Putnam 2000). Given these dynamics within American society, the congregation stands as a gateway to understanding social and religious life.

Central to religious organizations are growth, closure, identity, and diversity. Findings in this work will focus on these four areas. Prominent among these findings are that heterogeneity by age is related to growth in American congregations, while homogeneity by belief is related to congregational growth in Evangelical congregations. Late life liabilities are found to be less of a risk in Southern Baptist congregations as compared to PCUSA or Nazarene congregations, while early life liabilities are greater. It is very possible that these dynamics exist due to differences in external linkages. When traditional social values such as attitudes toward sexual practices, abortion, and public religiosity are measured, possessing Evangelical beliefs is a better indicator of social attitudes and action than either Evangelical church membership or self-identification as an Evangelical. Congregational racial diversity is found to be more strongly related to prejudicial attitudes of congregants than either, residential or vocational racial diversity.

CHAPTER TWO

People Like Us: Homophily and Congregational Growth

We like people who are like us. This desire for homophily in social networks affects every aspect of society. Life is built around the fact that living creatures group together to build communities, organizations, families, schools, and faiths. Some would say that without this inherent need to congregate, there would be no life (Durkheim 1995). Thus, the idea of examining whom individuals group with is inevitable. Even before the first such study was administered, there were commonly understood dynamics of homogeneity at work in grouping. It is so inherent to one's being that it mostly goes unquestioned. Despite this natural understanding of people grouping, few, if any within the field of social theory saw the topic as worthy of intense theoretical construction until the latter half of the 20th century. Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) are credited with its formal construction in an ecological sense, by moving it from the individual realm to the organizational realm. This opened the door to a world of analysis centered upon discovering which traits are most powerful in the division of people into groups.

The same dynamics that exist in general social experience are also found in religious congregations. As a matter of fact, for some religious groups the principles of homophily have become the dominant theoretical tool used in recruitment of new members. At the same time as Lazarsfeld and Merton were writing about homophily in society, a Christian missionary named Donald McGavran was chronicling about the same effects to fellow ministers. His focus was solely on the transmission and proliferation of Christianity, yet his understanding of the power of homophily in social networks varied

little from Lazarsfeld and Merton. Ultimately, he formally collected his thoughts and understandings of homophilous social grouping in a book which became the genesis of what is now called the “Church Growth Movement.” *Understanding Church Growth* was first published in 1970 and caused quite a stir among Christian missionaries. Some deemed it “unbiblical” and others saw it as the missing link to total evangelization of the world to Christianity (Simms 1995). McGavran became famous for quotes such as “People like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers” (McGavran 1970: 198). This idea became popularly known in Church Growth circles as the “Homogeneous Unit Principle” (henceforth HUP). This proposition claimed that congregations would be best suited to aim at a given demographic or belief structure of which they possessed a high level of homogeneity. Peter Wagner even went as far as to say, “Although I do not have empirical evidence to confirm it, my impression is that if any truly heterogeneous churches in America are growing, they are exceptions to the general rule” (Wagner 1979: 16). Debates on the ethical status of this principle persisted and the HUP was called “the most controversial statement in contemporary evangelistic efforts” even up to the early 1990s (Towns 1989; Simms 1995).

Despite years of study in the fields of social niches and years of debate about the ethical and moral repercussions of the HUP within congregational growth literature, few quantitative studies have formally taken on the role of testing the effects of diversity on congregational growth (for exceptions, see Simms 1995; Schietle 2007; Yancey 2003). Though it has been taken for granted that these relationships are present, little definitive statistical support exists (Simms 1995). Thus, this study aims to quantitatively assess the Homogeneous Unit Principle and the relationships of social and belief homophily across

the gamut of American congregations. Before this can be done the path from homophily to congregational specialization must be further illuminated.

A History of Homophily

Though Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) were not the first to talk about homophily, they were the first to present it sociologically as a concept to be studied. Their focus was on race, gender, age, religion, education, occupation, social class, network position, behavior, attitudes, abilities, beliefs, and aspirations. This all-encompassing list was grouped into two types of homophily: *status homophily* and *value homophily*. Status homophily was seen as any grouping based on similar forms of informal, formal, or ascribed statuses. This included race, gender, age, education, occupation, social class, and network position. Value homophily was seen as any grouping based on similar values, attitudes, and beliefs. This included religion, behavior, attitudes, abilities, beliefs, and aspirations.

All of these aspects of homogeneity have been tested quantitatively over the years and have been found to have strong support. Individuals have been found to exhibit significant grouping around similarities in age, education, occupation, social status, race and even music (Blau, Blum, and Swartz 1982; Galton 1883; Marsden 1987; Schiller 1932; Mark 1998; Hadaway 1993). McPherson (1983) established the precedent for the future in homophily studies by promoting the idea that voluntary organizations are the best groups from which to test such theories. He argued that they are much more diverse than business organizations and that their memberships are less ambiguous than other types of organizations. Following this suggestion, much testing has been done among

voluntary organizations (McPherson, Popielarz, and Drobnic 1992; McPherson and Ranger-Moore 1991; McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1987).

Among the traits mentioned, some have been found to be more powerful separators than others. The one that has traditionally stood out in the American context is race. McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2001:420) found that, “Race and ethnicity are clearly the biggest divide in social networks today in the United States...” This partly explains the plethora of research done on racial diversity within congregations (Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson 2003; DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey, and Kim 2003; Dhingra 2004; Dougherty 2003; Emerson and Kim 2003; Emerson, Kimbro and Yancey 2002; Emerson and Smith 2000; Emerson and Woo 2006; Marti 2005; Yancey 1999). Though some of these works highlight perceived exceptions, the overwhelmingly accepted approach to social contexts are that, “Individuals want to form relationships and networks with individuals similar to themselves. The more heterogeneous and generalist an organization, the more difficult it is for individuals to create these relationships” (Scheitle 2007: 6).

Theoretical Construction of the Niche

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Michael Hannan, John Freeman, and Miller McPherson changed the way homophily was studied. Much like homophily, “niches” had been studied for decades, yet it had been predominately confined to the world of biology. Hannan and Freeman (1977) took ecological theory and while applying it to organizations, made the “niche theory” approach to homophily the dominate course of interpretation within the field. In organizational terms they referred to all organizations

which share a “blueprint for organizational action, for transforming inputs into outputs” as niches (Hannan and Freeman 1977: 935).

It took a few years for someone to develop a method to effectively test niche theory. McPherson (1983) made niche theory quantifiable by creating “niches” within social space around the various demographic and belief traits which Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) had presented. This understanding of niches as occupying social “space” was further polarized Peter Blau (1997). These works have created an effective quantitative basis for studying organizational niches.

Several aspects of niche theory have special importance to the work at hand. The first of these is that “breadth of niche comes... at the expense of lowered appeal at some positions” (Hannan, Carroll, and Polos 2003: 321; Hannan and Freeman 1977; Scheitle 2007: 6). Members who especially value the social characteristics that are experiencing a widening of niche breadth should begin to lose their sense of value and closeness to the organization as a whole. If this occurs, the tightening of another niche is necessary to solidify those individuals’ position within the whole. For religious organizations, this would mean that if a church grows in diversity in one area such as racial diversity, then it must contract in another realm, such as uniformity of religious belief, in order to continue to recruit members. This very relationship was discovered by Scheitle (2007), with the contracting variable being religious belief.

Second, the more density of overlap organizations have within a niche in a given population, the higher the mortality rate will be (Baum and Singh 1994; Podolny, Stuart, and Hannan 1996; Sorensen 2000). Closely related to this theory is the idea that an organization’s success in obtaining members relies on the carrying capacity of the

environment and the amount of niche overlaps in the competitive landscape (McPherson 1983; Popielarz and Neal 2007). Within each environment which an organization finds itself, there is a limited amount of prospective members or clients. This is the carrying capacity. Even within the total environment there are a limited number of people that will find the prospective organization desirable. Organizations consciously and unconsciously navigate various niches to maximize their membership and avoid organizational closure. Yet, this must be done with carrying capacity in mind. In religious organizations, the various niches could be theological, style of worship, denominational, size, age make-up, types of ministries offered, etc... The less overlap a congregation has in these fields and the more people that find the given field desirable, the greater possibility for growth. The more niche overlap that exists in an environment with other congregations, the less possibility there is for growth.

A third relevant principle is that, specialists will always outperform generalists when they possess the same levels of resources (Hannan and Freeman 1977). The only time that generalism is seen to experience the positive effects of growth and viability is when an organization is in an unstable environment. Where stable environments exist, specialism will naturally increase and become the preferable organizational model. A few examples of an unstable environment are where the population may be shrinking, transient, or experiencing a change in social makeup. In the realm of religious organizations, generalists would be congregations that are rather diverse in many ascribed and value fields. Whereas, a specialist might be a congregation that targets a specific demographic group by having only one style of worship, one age group, one racial group, one socio-economic group, etc...

In further relating these principles to religious organizations, it is important to note that the most common method of recruitment is through current members' social networks (Popielarz and Neal 2007). Religious transmission and recruitment are at the core of the mission of most religious organizations. These two goals are vital in order to attain sustainability and viability. If current members' social networks are that important, then it is obvious that understanding the power of individual affinity is paramount to the success of these organizations. Social networks have been found to be central in religious conversion and in deciding where individuals choose to affiliate religiously (Lofland and Stark 1965; Stark and Bainbridge 1980).

In addition to the socio-demographic niches assessed by most scholars, Scheitle (2007) includes religious tension as an additional niche. In light of the market theory approach to religious organizational growth and viability (Stark and Finke 2000), Scheitle develops a niche based on the level of tension that religious traditions have with society. This niche is derived from traditional beliefs, values, and rituals of the denomination as a whole and fits perfectly within the bounds of value homophily. Utilizing structural equation modeling, he finds that demographic niche width only affects growth via intermediating effects through religious width. Though it was done within denominations instead of local congregations as the level of analysis, Scheitle's findings present value homophily as more powerful than ascribed homophily in religious contexts. In light of the growing number of multiracial congregations in the United States, Schietle stated "...religious groups that increase diversity in one respect, such as demographic or socioeconomic composition, tend to compensate by increasing homogeneity in another respect, such as religious behavior or beliefs" (Scheitle 2007: 21).

The Homogeneous Unit Principle

The principles of homophily and specialization were formally converged within the arena of religious organizations by Donald McGavran. He used the social traits of niche breadth, density, and specialization to recruit prospective church members. In his words, “Disciples are more readily made by people within their own homogeneous unit, and congregations develop into healthy communities when they concentrate on only one kind of people” (McGavran 1990: 4). This thesis statement was later dubbed the “Homogeneous Unit Principle.” Citing his personal experiences in Christian missions, McGavran chronicled the methods which he had found effective in those cultures and published them for other missionaries to use. He formally collected his thoughts on Christian missions in what is considered the genesis of the Church Growth movement, *Understanding Church Growth* (1970). As a result of this book and the new school he headed within Fuller Theological Seminary, McGavran became known as the Father of the Church Growth Movement. At the center of his approach to evangelization was intentional recruitment based on homogeneity. He claimed that the best way to bring about religious conversion was to focus on seeking those whom are most like you. This eventually created a firestorm of controversy which did not center on any social analysis, for neither McGavran, nor his supporters, had any statistical support to his claims.

Case Studies supporting the HUP were done by Wagner (1979) in the United States and McGavran (1979) in India. Another case study was employed by Leonard (1983) on Philadelphia congregations which found perceived exceptions to the HUP. Simms (1995) administered a quantitative test of the theory utilizing a random sample of 591 North American Baptist congregations with an average attendance of 50 to 290.

Surprisingly, in bivariate Chi-Square analyses he found that among these congregations, the more heterogeneous a congregation's occupations, age, and income, the more likely they were to grow. The only demographical item to show homogeneity related to growth was ethnic composition. When perceptions were analyzed, self-reported totals of "interest groups of their kind" and kinfolk ties were significantly related to growth. Due to the fact that the HUP simply states that at least one homogeneous unit will be present, the principle was technically supported by this work due to the fact that race was significant (despite all of the other items were significantly related to heterogeneity). This further supports McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook's (2001) claim that race and/or ethnicity is the biggest divider in social networks.

The ideological power that McGavran created with his work is seen by the fact that one section of *Understanding Church Growth* (McGavran 1970: 214-215) called "An Urban Exception" was taken out of later editions of the book that were edited by C. Peter Wagner. In this exception, he states that in some metropolitan centers in Africa, Latin America, and Asia where a true melting pot has occurred, heterogeneous, supratribal churches were growing rapidly. This is of interest because it seems to contradict all that is said elsewhere in the book, as well as homophily and niche theories. Despite this "exception," McGavran had brought homophily and specialization to the world of religious congregations.

The Case for Heterogeneous Growth

It seems that for many of the congregants of this church, the value they have placed on worshipping in a diverse congregation is so high that they have simply ruled out the option of returning to a homogeneous congregation, even when they recognize the greater benefits they would receive by doing so. This is an important finding because it offers a potential explanation for the existence of

multiethnic churches despite the costs that they place on their members (Christerson and Emerson 2003: 177).

Despite the tendency to submit to a deterministic relationship between homogeneity and organizational growth, complete social homogeneity is not possible. Due to this, various studies have been done that examine cases where heterogeneity not only exists, but might be associated with congregational growth. Support for such cases as the one mentioned above by Christerson and Emerson does exist. Despite the overall theoretical relationship of growth and homogeneity, most works have left “escape clauses” for the theoretical possibility of such cases as was alluded to in Scheitle’s (2007) study of niche theory within religious traditions and McGavran’s (1970) “Urban Exception.”

More than one work has made mention of relationships between heterogeneity and growth. In addition to Christerson and Emerson (2003), there have been several qualitative studies that have found social demographic heterogeneity in congregations that are growing (Ammerman 1997; Becker 1998; Ellingson 2007; Leonard 1983). Christerson and Emerson (2003: 179) stated that, “It could be the case, that justifications for diversity that are rooted in a transcendent theology are a stronger counterforce to the influences that produce organizational homogeneity than are other justifications for diversity.” Social theory of homophily and specialization would argue that in these cases the congregations must have contracted in niche breadth in some other area to be able to overcome widening of niche breadth in another area. Given the nature and limitations of the methodology employed in the studies mentioned, it is impossible to know if this was occurring.

Differences in Growth and Recruitment by Religious Tradition

Scholars have found that great differences exist between churches in the importance of recruitment and the approaches to recruitment (Balmer 1989; Finke and Stark 2005; Hadaway 1993). Evangelical Protestant approaches differ greatly from Mainline Protestant and Catholic congregations (Hadaway 1990; Hadaway 1993; Smith 1998). The Homogeneous Unit Principle had greater effects within Evangelicalism than it did Mainline of Catholic congregations (Emerson and Smith 2000). The fact that McGavran was an Evangelical and taught in a prominent Evangelical seminary imposed greater effects from his ideas on Evangelical congregations than other traditions. In addition, the very nature of Evangelicals is different in regard to growth. The very name “Evangelical” connotes the importance of evangelizing or proselytizing others. Though most religious traditions desire to grow numerically, Evangelicals value it as primary part of their faith (Smith 1998). Due to these relationships, Evangelical Protestant congregations should be more likely to experience the characteristics of homophilous growth.

Catholic parishes in the United States have been found to be the most likely of any religious tradition to be multiracial (Emerson and Woo 2006). Much of this is due to the geographic size of parishes and the amount of immigration to the United States from predominately Catholic nations. Though many of these new parishioners attend separate, non-English speaking masses, on paper it has made many previously homogenous parishes more diverse. It is very possible that this dynamic could result in a heterogeneous exception, much like what Ammerman (1997) saw in racially

heterogeneous congregations growing. This makes the separation of Catholic parishioners into their own category necessary.

Mainline Protestant congregations have suffered drastic declines in attendance over the last 50 years (Finke and Stark 2005). These congregations are known more for fighting social justice issues than for doing door-to-door evangelism. For better or worse, these congregations differ greatly from Evangelical and Catholic congregations both culturally and theologically. Mainline Protestant congregations tend to be very uniform socio-economically and racially (Emerson and Smith 2000). Given the fact that recruitment in these churches is traditionally done more organically and relationally, growing congregations should be growing more homogeneous, yet for possibly different reasons than Evangelical Protestant congregations. As stated earlier, we like people who are like us, and it is from these homogeneous friend networks that Mainline Protestant congregations should be most likely to grow out of. Due to the differences in culture, theology, and the nature of recruitment for these three types of American congregations, they will be studied corporately, as well as separately.

Hypotheses

At the heart of the Homogeneous Unit Principle is congregational growth. It posits that for a congregation to grow it must reach those for which the congregation is most comfortable. Comfort, in a congregational sense, is best found via social networks. Given the theoretical uniformity of homophily theory, niche theory, and the homogeneous unit principle, the current study will focus on two hypotheses:

H1- Religious congregations that are growing will possess homogeneous ascribed or value characteristics.

This will effectively test the validity of the HUP on a congregational level utilizing advanced methodological techniques. Due to the amount of qualitative work that has found multiracial contexts to be proliferating and Scheitle's (2007) finding of diversity in one area being countered by greater homogeneity in another, a second hypothesis will be tested:

H2- In the case of growing congregations exhibiting significant heterogeneity, significant homogeneity will also exist on some other dimension.

Data and Methodology

Few datasets exist that include socio-demographic variables of a congregation, religious belief questions of congregants, and attendance rates of a congregation over a matter of several years. The United States Congregational Life Survey (henceforth USCLS) possesses all such variables. The dataset includes attendees of a random sample of over 2,000 congregations across America. It is the largest survey of worshipers in America ever conducted. Three types of surveys were completed in each participating congregation: 1) attendee surveys completed by all worshipers age 15 and older who attended worship services during the weekend of April 29, 2001; 2) a Congregational Profile completed by one person in the congregation to acquire a description of the congregation's facilities, staff, programs, and worship service; and 3) a Leader Survey completed by the pastor, priest, minister, rabbi, or other leader of the congregation.

Due to the nature of religious traditions possessing different expectations for congregational growth, four different sets of the data were used in the analyses. The first set of models was done using all of the churches in the dataset. This analysis will examine whether there are universal relationships with growth for all congregations in the

United States. The second model will be run using a subset of Evangelical Protestant congregations; the third will be a subset of Mainline Protestant congregations; and the final subset will be run using Catholic parishes. The USCLS measures congregational size going back five years, but the socio-demographic values of the church are only available at the time of the survey. This makes it impossible to know how homogeneous the congregation was prior to its measurement of growth or decline. Due to this limitation, growth/decline over the past year was assessed. Due to this shortened window of time, the dependent variable of congregational growth was assessed dichotomously. If the congregation increased by at least 1 member over the course of the year, it was considered “Growing.” If the number of attendees was the same or less than it was one year ago, the congregation was considered “Not Growing.” The dichotomous dependent variable will henceforth be referred to as “Grow.”

In order to test congregational homophily, entropy variables for each congregation were created using data from the attendees of each church. The resultant values were then merged to congregational profile data. The Entropy index was chosen due to its ability to measure the “evenness” in diversity within a given group (Dougherty 2003; White 1986).¹ The standard level of measurement of an entropy index ranges from 0 to 1 with 1 being perfect evenness of diversity and 0 being perfect homophily. Due to the nature of the work dealing with homophily, the order was reversed. For instance, if a congregation possesses exactly equal amounts of all of the possible race categories, then

¹ Concentration indices were calculated as follows: $H = 1 - \frac{\sum_{k=1}^K P_k \log P_k}{\log K}$, where

P = Survey Response Value and K = Number of Valid Response Options.

it would receive a 0. If the congregation only has members of one race, it receives a 1. Due to this change of direction from a standard entropy variable, the resultant value will be referred to as a “Concentration Index.” All other measures of variation range between these two points. Ascribed homophily entropies of age, gender, income, race, and education were created. Age was coded continuously, while gender was coded dichotomously. Income was coded: 1) Less 10K, 2) 10K-24,999, 3) 25K-49,999, 4) 50K-74,999, 5) 75K-99,999, and 6) 100K plus. Race was coded: 1) Asian, Pacific Islander, 2) Black, 3) Hispanic, Non-White, 4) Native American, 5) White, and 6) Other. Education was coded: 1) No formal, 2) K-8, 3) Some HS, 4) High school, 5) Trade cert, 6) Associates degree, 7) Bachelors, and 8) Graduate degree. In addition, value or belief homophily entropies were created that measured the congregational diversity in basic theological beliefs. The first variable to be used was the level of literalism toward the Bible, which was coded: 1) Literal interpretation, 2) Cultural interpretation, 3) Historical interpretation, 4) Contains word of God, and 5) Not word of God or Little Value. The second belief variable to be used was the exclusivity of one’s faith, or whether one’s faith is the only way to get into heaven. This variable was coded: 1) Strongly agree, 2) Agree, 3) Neutral, 4) Disagree, and 5) Strongly disagree.

In addition to the concentration indices, several control variables were utilized. Congregational age, size (attendance), median income level of the area within neighborhood around the church, percent of female headed household around the church, and percent change in population around the church from 1990 to 2000 were used.²

² The Whole Sample, Catholic, Mainline, and Evangelical models used neighborhood values within a 3 mile radius of the church.

These variables allowed for demographic influences to be assessed and controlled in order to more rigorously test the effect of homophily/diversity.

Two other variables drawn from past church growth studies were controlled. The first was a dichotomous variable indicating whether the congregation has a contemporary worship style. This variable was acquired by simply asking the congregation's key informant whether they had a worship service with contemporary worship.

Interpretations of what constituted "contemporary" were left up to the respondent.

Contemporary Worship styles have been found to be related to congregational growth (Dougherty 2002; Roozen 2009). A second dichotomous variable, the use of small group Bible studies, was also included in the models. Prior research has supported a relationship between the presence of small group Bible studies and congregational growth (Dougherty 2002; Stark and Finke 2000).

One last dichotomous control variable ("Target Recruitment") was included where the church was designated a "1" if the pastor responded that the church focuses recruitment on any of the following: 1) certain age groups, 2) a certain language or racial-ethnicity, 3) certain group of common interests, 4) certain lifestyles, 5) certain socio-economic group, or 6) another type of group. This variable will allow for intentional homophily to be tested, though the type of targeting that was being done is not specified. Logistic Regression analysis will be utilized to test the hypotheses. Standardized values will be reported.³

³ Usually, odds ratios are reported with Logistic Regression, but since they are rendered uninterpretable in the case of the entropies, standardized coefficients created by SAS 9.1 will be reported.

Descriptive Statistics

When descriptive statistics for the four sets of congregations are examined, there are interesting differences across the three religious traditions. From the beginning, there are far more Mainline Protestant congregations that reported having grown from 2000 to 2001 than either Evangelical Protestant or Catholics. This is somewhat surprising, given the level of decline spoken of in Mainline Protestant denominations over the past 50 years (Kelley 1986; Finke and Stark 2005; Dougherty et al 2008). Based solely on descriptive statistics, little support exists for the hypothesis that homophily leads to growth. Though Mainline Protestant congregations reported the greatest rate of growing congregations, they were found to be the most homophilous in only two of the seven entropy measures: gender and race. Evangelicals tended to be more homophilous than Mainline or Catholic congregations overall, exhibiting the most homophilous levels of the three religious traditions in five of the seven entropies. As might be expected, all congregations are most homophilous by race. None of the other entropies come close to the level of uniformity found by race in American congregations. Race continues to be the great divider of religious organizations. The second highest level of uniformity was belief in the Bible, followed by education and age. Two other interesting dynamics that stood out are that Evangelicals had the lowest rate of small group ministry and Catholics had the highest level of “Target Recruitment.” Catholic parishes have not been known for target recruitment, but it may be that key informants for the parishes (presumably the priest) answered “yes” to this question because they are to focus on a given geographic location. Where Evangelical ministers might interpret this question demographically, Catholic priests might be more likely to read it geographically.

Logistic Regression

Table 2 reports results from logistic regression. Logistic standardized coefficients are reported. Logistic regressions for the Mainline Protestant and Catholic congregations do not converge into a significant model, while the Whole Sample and Evangelical Protestant models are significant. Likelihood Ratios for the Mainline Protestant and Catholic models do not exhibit sufficient levels of significance, and thus no single

Table 1
*Characteristics of Variables used to Examine Congregational Growth
(Means reported with Standard Deviations in parentheses)*

Variables	Whole Sample	Evangelical	Mainline	Catholic
Grow	.621 (.49)	.631 (.48)	.709 (.46)	.489 (.50)
Age Concentration	.206 (.12)	.234 (.11)	.202 (.09)	.147 (.12)
Gender Concentration	.064 (.08)	.056 (.07)	.069 (.09)	.054 (.05)
Education Concentration	.258 (.10)	.271 (.13)	.264 (.08)	.218 (.09)
Income Concentration	.143 (.11)	.163 (.11)	.128 (.08)	.124 (.12)
Race Concentration	.824 (.16)	.831 (.16)	.892 (.10)	.701 (.18)
Bible Belief Concentration	.475 (.13)	.599 (.14)	.400 (.06)	.435 (.07)
Exclusivity Concentration	.158 (.11)	.189 (.15)	.138 (.07)	.147 (.07)
Target Recruitment	.170 (.38)	.170 (.38)	.130 (.34)	.263 (.44)
Congregation Age	1913 (57)	1933 (51)	1889 (58)	1924 (46)
Congregation Size	610 (896)	385 (592)	258 (278)	1570 (1253)
Contemp. Worship	.322 (.47)	.378 (.49)	.325 (.47)	.333 (.47)
Small Groups	.760 (.43)	.689 (.46)	.805 (.40)	.788 (.41)
Population Change	.117 (.23)	.125 (.17)	.129 (.32)	.083 (.14)
% Female Head HH	.073 (.03)	.076 (.03)	.069 (.03)	.077 (.04)
Area Median Income	52042 (17952)	47543 (13151)	53321 (18478)	53728 (19764)

element that was controlled for in the model is statistically related to congregational growth. This fact supports the very reasoning for separating the various groups for comparative analysis.

Though Catholic parishes were found to be the most likely to do target recruitment, it is not leading them to grow. This further supports the idea that it is a geographic target which they read into the question. It is traditionally believed that Mainline Protestant and Catholic traditions do not place as much of an emphasis on homophilous recruitment as Evangelical Protestant congregations, and some say that they do not place as much emphasis on growth at large (Finke and Stark 2005; Kelley 1986). One other possible reason for the lack of significance could be that there were so many Mainline Protestant congregations that reported having grown. Though it is impossible to know whether the congregations really had grown, given past research and knowledge of declines in Mainline Protestant denominations such as the PCUSA (Dougherty, et al 2008) it would seem that the reported rate of growth being 8.8% higher than the sample mean is too high. This may be watering down the logistic model. Even if this is true, the model is still assessing the same thing as the other two models: social factors of growth and decline in congregations that report having grown. Catholic congregations had a far lower number of parishes which reported having grown from 2000 to 2001, some 22% less than Mainline Protestant congregations. This lower number, and possibly more accurate count, of congregations still did not exhibit any significant factors.

The Whole Sample and Evangelical models were statistically significant. In the Whole Sample one concentration variable is statistically significant in a heterogeneous direction, age. This refutes both hypotheses, for the model does not possess significant

homophilous effects of any kind. Not only is McGavran refuted by this model, by Scheitle is as well. Two additional variables are found to possess significant relationships with congregational growth: Congregational Size and Population Change of Area. Smaller congregations were more likely to have grown over the year than larger ones. Population Change being significantly related to congregational growth is nothing

Table 2
Effects on Congregational Growth (Logistic Estimates)

Variables	Whole Sample	Evangelical	Mainline	Catholic
Age Concentration	-.315*	-.477*	-.099	-.175
Gender Concentration	-.040	.225	-.158	-.155
Education Concentration	-.054	.001	-.023	.617
Income Concentration	-.102	.037	.237	.130
Race Concentration	.091	-.134	-.225	-.239
Bible Belief Concentration	-.032	.363*	-.049	-.474
Exclusivity Concentration	-.026	-.037	.047	-.130
Target Recruitment	.010	-.105	-.026	.174
Congregation Age	.005	-.133	.049	.363
Congregation Size	-.162*	.193	.203	-.200
Contemporary Worship	-.019	.007	-.111	.176
Small Groups	-.009	.061	-.057	-.031
Population Change of Area	.427***	.195	.518	.218
% Female Headed HH	-.082	-.247	-.118	.130
Median Income of Area	-.043	.014	-.003	.070
Likelihood Ratio	30.051*	27.017*	17.767	17.625
R-Square	.1071	.2811	--	--
N	368	118	148	81

*** P<.001 ** P<.01 * P<.05

Note: Values are Standardized Estimates

new to church planters and denominational leaders. It is one of the first things that is studied when locations are being decided upon for new congregations.

Two variables possessed a significant relationship with a congregational growth in Evangelical Protestant congregations. The Age Concentration variable was significantly related to growth but in the opposite direction of which was hypothesized by Homophily theory and the Homogeneous Unit Principle. This means that the more evenly spread out a congregation's age pattern, the more likely it was to grow and the more clumped a congregation was by age, the more likely it was to decline. If a congregation decides to aim all of its resources at one age group, it is being counterproductive if the goal is growth. Where as, using resources in a way to achieve greater age diversity seems to be advantageous. Not only does this finding have ramifications theoretically, it also has great utility methodologically for Evangelical congregations.

Age is not the only variable related to growth and decline in the Evangelical subset. The Bible Belief entropy was also significant. Growth is reported in congregations that possess higher rates of homophilous belief in the nature of the Bible. Concentration indices do not allow for one response to be weighted more than any other, so the importance does not lie in answering this question a certain way, but instead that everyone in the church answers it the same way. Given the important role of the Bible in the Evangelical Protestant tradition (Barna 2007; Dayton and Johnston 1991; Hunter 1983), it is not surprising to find this related to their growth. A relationship between homophilous belief and growth is somewhat surprising though, considering that it is more powerful than the other concentration variables such as race and income, as well as the

demographic control variables such as population change and the percent of female headed households. This supports both hypotheses, for not only is a homophilous relationship found as McGavran (1970) theorized, but it is also found in conjunction with a heterogeneous value variable as Scheitle (2007) theorized.

Conclusion

Diversity of age groupings is the most consistent indicator of growth in American congregations. This is counter what previous social and congregational theory states, yet it does make some logical sense. If a congregation can widen the range of ages that it can effectively recruit and keep, there is a greater possibility of growth. The fact that the whole sample possesses this relationship without any significant homogenizing factor provides ample evidence to reject both hypotheses. For the first hypothesis states that there will be a homogenizing factor related to growth and the second hypothesis states that if there is a heterogeneous factor related to growth, it will be accompanied by a contracting, homogeneous factor as well. Neither of these statements is true in the case of the whole sample.

The significance of age diversity in growing congregations has great utility for congregational and denominational leaders. One popular approach to congregational growth has been age-specific cultures. Hadaway (1993) found that age structure was one of the most powerful indicators of congregational growth. Yet, his findings do not sway either toward homogenization or diversity. He stated that congregations most able to reach the “baby boomers” were more likely to grow. On the surface this seems to support homophily, yet he goes on to say that they are more likely to grow than congregations dominated by the elderly. What he seems to be saying is that churches

able to tap into the younger, and larger, cohort with children will be more likely to grow. This is actually a finding of significant relationships with age diversity, for recruiting young adults with children will diversify the age structure.

In the case of Evangelical congregations, finding that age diversity and homophilous belief are related to congregational growth adds a twist. The two hypotheses were found to be supported by the Evangelical Protestant subset. The first hypothesis was that there would either be homogeneous ascribed and value characteristics present. This was the case for Evangelical Protestant congregations, for the Bible Belief Concentration index was significant in the direction of homogeneity. The second hypothesis was supported by the Evangelical Protestant subset, for just as Scheitle (2007) found, heterogeneity (age) is significant but not without significant homogeneity in another area (Bible Belief).

Value homophily plays a large role in conservative Christian congregations (Iannaccone 1994). Strict congregations attempt to focus the belief structure of its members and place a high value on homophilous belief. This strictness has been found to be related to denominational growth due to the screening out of “free-riders” and contrasting beliefs (Stark and Finke 2000). This provides an explanation for why homophilous belief is found to be related to growth in Evangelical congregations but not in the Catholic, Mainline Protestant, or whole samples. Catholic and Mainline congregations are known more for their openness and diversity of belief than Evangelical congregations. This very characteristic has been argued to be leading to denominational decline as a whole (Kelley 1986; Finke and Stark 2005), and can be seen here by their failure to be related to congregational growth.

Yet, theoretically a large part of the story is in what was not found. In the case of testing homophily and the Homogenous Unit Principle among American congregations, much that was expected to be found was not. Many have made the case for race affecting congregational growth (Ammerman 1997; Becker 1998; Christerson and Emerson 2003; Ellingson 2007; Leonard 1983), and church decline (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954; McGavran 1970; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). In testing American congregations, neither received support. This leaves some interesting questions to ponder: What are the implications of racial diversity/homophily not being related to growth or decline? Might this knowledge lead more congregations to intentionally attempt it? Might this knowledge lead fewer congregations to consider it?

The act of intentional homophilous recruitment was not related to congregational growth in the ways that have been most popularized by homophily theory and church growth literature (McGavran 1970). Despite the fact that Niche theory is based off of the natural attraction of what exists socially, there is something to be said for intentional homogenous recruitment (Target Recruitment) not leading to growth. It seems that intentions are not being realized. One would have also expected strong correlations between intentional homogenous recruitment and a few of the concentration indices, but this did not exist either. It seems that those congregations that are attempting to attract a certain type of individual are either not keeping them once they get there, losing current members that do not fit the mold, or not able to get that type of person to attend in the first place. Regardless of the case in which they fit, it is not a good situation to be in.

Despite the congregational pop culture that has made contemporary worship and small groups the panacea of jump starting a congregation, these items failed to stand up

in multivariate models that included the concentration indices and population change. Though other academic works have found these items to be relevant to growth (Dougherty 2002; Roozen 2009), no relationships were exhibited in the three sets of data.

As stated earlier, this study relies on perceptual reports from a key informant, which introduces the possibility for measurement error. Though perceived issues with the method of attendance reporting are understandable, measurement error can still be assumed to be stable as long as the same rate of rate exists across the whole sample. There is no reason to believe that one type of congregation is more accurate (or virtuous) in reporting than any other, which allows us to assume that the measurement error is stable. An ideal dataset to test the present findings would include official congregational records on attendance with a complete congregational survey. Another possible follow-up to this study would be a retest with the next wave of the USCLS that is set to take place in 2010-2011. Findings from such a longitudinal dataset would prove to be very helpful in retesting the relationships of homophily/diversity and growth 10 years later. It may be possible that cultural shifts have created new relationships.

For congregations that desire to grow, there is good news. Demographic changes are related with growth. Though congregational size and area population changes do have effects, making changes to appeal to a broader generational scope can be profitable. Such changes must be handled carefully, for change in any organization poses risks. Yet, gain rarely comes without some level of risk. Such changes could look drastically different according to geographic location and the age cohort that is missing in the congregation. Finding out who those people are is the first step to finding out how the congregation might best fill their needs. For Evangelical congregations, when this is

done with a focus on uniform belief structures, the opportunity for growth increases that much more.

CHAPTER THREE

Death Revisited

The rate of congregational closure in the United States has long been conjectured. Church growth literature has often cited that one percent of American congregations close each year (McIntosh 1990), but the source of this statistic remains unclear. Most of the studies employed on congregational decline have focused on case studies which did not follow the congregation all the way to the point where they closed their doors (Ammerman 1997) or were written for practitioners from a theological or “church growth” perspective (Regele 1995; Whitesel 2004). In addition, prior to 2008, many works that employed empirical methodologies were rather dated (Kincheloe 1929; Kloetzli 1961).

In response to this dearth of literature on congregational closure, two studies have recently attempted to fill this void in the literature. Dougherty, Maier, and Vander Lugt (2008) quantitatively described, and assessed, closure within two American Protestant Christian denominations: the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Church of the Nazarene. Despite differing in size, denominational growth trends, theology, and socio-political foci we found that both of these denominations closed around one percent of their congregations yearly between 1980 and 2005. In addition, trends were found which related death to congregational age. Death was found to be most likely in the first 10 years, between 35-50 years of age, and after 75 years of age. Further regression analyses tested the relative power of age liabilities in predicting death by also controlling for a

variety of demographic variables, congregational giving, and average weekly worship attendance.

In the same year, a second study was published which examined the number of congregational closures per year (Anderson, et al. 2008). In revisiting the congregations that were involved in the 1998 National Congregations Study, they also confirmed in a national sample that congregations close at a rate of 1% per year. This rate is one of the lowest of any organization examined in the United States and shows the strength and longevity of American congregations, regardless of religious tradition (Phillips and Kirchoff 1989; Kosticka 1988; Castrogiovanni, Justis, and Julian 1993). Anderson, et al. (2008) found that the congregations which had closed were less likely to be affiliated with a denomination, were younger, possessed less active members, and received less in donations than congregations that were still open. All but the first of these relationships are shared by Dougherty, et al. (2008).

The goal of this study is to examine rates of closure and the effects of age liabilities within America's largest Protestant Christian denomination. The study focuses on closure in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC hereafter) and will also compare findings to previous work on the Presbyterian Church (USA) (PCUSA hereafter) and the Church of the Nazarene. This study attempts to assess the nature and prevalence of congregational closure in the "free-church" tradition. Past studies have focused on either congregations at large or congregations from more centralized denominational polities. The Southern Baptist Convention is the largest of the "free-church" Protestant denominations and, thus, represents a useful extension to previous research on congregational closure.

Rates of Closure, Congregational Polity, and Age Liabilities

With two recent studies both confirming the rates of congregational closure to be around 1%, it would seem that the case is closed on this research. Yet, the goal of Dougherty, et al. (2008) was far wider reaching than to simply discover the rate of closure among two American denominations. The study also attempted to test for age liabilities within congregations. The PCUSA and Church of the Nazarene were chosen for multiple reasons, but primarily because they differ in so many ways. Whether it is size, theology, traditional regional strength, age, or political leanings, they reside on opposite ends of the spectrum. One arena that we lacked the foresight for differentiation though was denominational polity. The PCUSA and Church of the Nazarene both possess versions of a hierarchical authority structure. This difference may seem miniscule compared to the other traits mentioned, yet social theory of organizations claim very high levels of relationship between authority structures and organizational vitality, especially in the realm of newness liability (Freeman, et al. 1983).

Newness liability originated with Stinchcombe (1965), when he presented four reasons for early organizational failure. First, he stated that new roles have to be learned which takes time and effort; second, the new roles can clash until standardized in an efficient way; third, new organizations are based on relations between strangers whom have little no previous social contact; and fourth, new organizations must find a way to establish external relationships. These hurdles must be crossed in order for organizations to survive infancy and are rarely experienced later in life. In the case of religious organizations and authoritative structures, point four is most relevant. Congregations associated with denominations that have a Presbyterian or Episcopal authority structure

innately possess more advantageous external relationships in early life than are congregations from the “free-church” tradition. Freeman, et al. (1983) supports this theory by finding that the strength of “top-down” authority structures decrease the rate of congregational closure in an organization. The effects are most powerfully seen in the first years of an organization’s life due to the external linkages and creation of bureaucratic structures spoken of by Stinchcombe, creating liabilities of newness.

Congregations stemming from the “free-church” tradition value independence (or local autonomy) and technically do not answer to any higher bureaucratic structure (McBeth 1987). Though many of these congregations “associate” with each other, they firmly hold to a “bottom-up” structure of authority. At any point a given congregation can elect to disassociate with the larger body, join another body, or remain independent of any denominational structure. In many free-church denominations it may be argued that external linkages exist for new churches that are similar to those found in Presbyterian structures. Many congregations in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) are known to sponsor “mission” churches by providing monetary and/or leadership assistance in their creation (McBeth 1998). Though this form of support is helpful, it does not possess the same breadth of commitment as a Presbyterian or Episcopal authority structure. It is for this reason that a study of congregational closure within a free-church denomination is needed. Differences should exist which lead free-church denominations to close at a higher rate, especially in its formative years.

In addition to liability of newness, there is also the liability of adolescence. Most organizations are founded with some level of seed money or endowment (Bruderl and Schussler 1990; Finchman and Levinthal 1991; Hannan 1998). This is intended to help

the organization make it through the formative years and endure through newness liabilities. As previously mentioned, congregations can receive this level of support from denominational entities or other congregations. These linkages may defer the closure of an organization until the seed money is gone or sources of support have matured.

Another cause of adolescent liability is leadership change. If an organization experiences change in senior leadership, stress is placed upon the organization which it may not be able to survive. Haveman (1993) found that small organizations which lose their founding president are 100 times more likely to close than small organizations that did not experience such a transition. A problem with this liability is defining exactly what is “adolescent.” The relationship between leadership transition and closure was conjectured by Dougherty, et al. (2008), yet what might be considered “adolescent” in an older denomination might be considered “old age” in a younger denomination.

Old age liabilities are hard to attach to time periods. Depending on the organization, “old age” can refer to any time period beyond the normal state of sustainability. Thus, the most frequently used liabilities of old age are understood by senescence, obsolescence, and leadership transition (Barron, West, and Hannan 1994; Haveman 1993). Senescence deals with the “iron cage” of bureaucratization (Weber 2001). The organizational structure makes needed organizational change impossible, leading to death. Obsolescence focuses on the effects of external environmental shifts which make the organizational purpose obsolete. Organizations may become unnecessary due to ecological shifts such as technology or population change. Due to the perceived relativity of age liabilities, they will jointly be referred to as “late life” liabilities.

Dougherty, et al. (2008) found one occasion of late life liability present among the Church of the Nazarene and two occasions of late life liability among PCUSA congregations. The first occasion of late life liability was uniform in both denominations, a rise in congregational closure existed for both between the ages of 36 and 50. It was theorized that this was a possible sign of senescence and/or leadership succession. For, at this point there must be a transition in authority from one generation of the congregation to another. Whether it is a transition from founding members, a founding pastor, or both, this rise in congregational closure fits well with dynamics found in other organizations by Haveman (1993) and Barron, et al. (1994). This relationship will be sought in the SBC to test for denominational uniformity in closure between the ages of 36 and 50.

The PCUSA possessed a second wave of late life liability after 75 years of age. This is primarily linked to a second wave of transition among the congregational leadership and local authority. As stated earlier, senescence and obsolescence increase the risk of closure for an organization and congregations seem to deal with these issues in generational waves of 36 to 50 years. It was not possible to test for this relationship among the Nazarene congregations due to the shorter history of the denomination. The lack of support for the second wave of late life liability within a given denomination further encouraged another testing of age liabilities in a denomination with at least 150 years of history. The SBC provides this length of history since its official organization was in 1845 and many of the founding congregations had colonial roots (McBeth 1998).

Hypotheses

The study focuses on four hypotheses that deal with age liabilities:

H1-SBC congregations will be more likely to close within the first 10 years of existence. This will persist even while controlling for participation.

H2- SBC congregations will be more likely to close between the ages of 35 and 50. This will persist even while controlling for participation.

H3- SBC congregations will be more likely to close between the after the age of 75. This will persist even while controlling for participation.

Data and Methods

In 2005, the SBC had 16,270,315 members and 43,669 churches according to the American Religious Data Archives (http://www.thearda.com/Denoms/D_1087.asp 2009). Being a part of the “free-church” tradition, congregations turn in their yearly statistics based on personal initiative, and a slight nudge from associational directors. The congregational structure provides little incentive to report congregational values, yet a surprisingly high rate of congregations turn in their statistics given these social dynamics. The report that SBC congregations turn in is called the “Annual Church Profile” or “ACP” for short. The ACP includes information on a congregation, including but not limited to address, year organized, average Sunday School attendance, and total amount of receipts received. The study utilizes all ACP reports from 1994 to 2007. The response rate to the ACP in 2007 was 80.13 percent. There has been a slight decline over the last 10 years from close to 90 percent response rates in the mid-1990s, but the rate is still well within the bounds needed for effective analysis.

The SBC differentiates between two types of congregations: churches and missions. Churches are those that are self-reliant and usually have gone through at least a

year of “watchcare” by a local association. Missions are those congregations that are under either denominational support, or assistance from a nearby congregation. Of the 58,035 congregations that have been listed in the SBC ACP from 1994 to 2007, 8,933 (15%) remained listed as missions in 2007. Other denominations share this pattern of organization, though they have different nomenclatures for it (Dougherty, Maier, Vander Lugt 2008). In order to better understand the rates of death in the SBC, both missions and churches were assessed.

A uniqueness of SBC data collection is that there is no notation made when a congregation dies. Due to the nature of the SBC polity being “Associational,” the dataset is in essence a collection of churches that “associate” with the SBC. Mainly what dictates “association” is whether the congregation gave money to any SBC entity. When a congregation discontinues funding SBC entities, they are omitted from the ACP. In addition, when congregations merge, the old congregations are considered dead and dropped from the dataset. A new church identification number is assigned to the resultant congregation, and the resultant congregation is added to the dataset akin to a new church.⁴ An issue with this strategy is that congregations who have closed their doors or merged are not differentiated from those that merely decided to discontinue “association” with the SBC and are still alive.

From 1995 to 2007, 5,330 congregations were dropped from the SBC ACP. With no way of knowing which of these congregations were still alive, it was necessary to utilize the first step of the methodology used in Anderson, et al. (2008) to search for existing congregations. The goal was to determine whether the congregation was active at any point between January of 2008 and December of 2008. To be considered “active”

⁴ This is the same way that mergers were handled by Dougherty, et al. (2008).

the congregation must be holding regular worship services. If this could not be substantiated, the congregation was considered “Inactive.” Given that the address for the congregation was provided in the ACP, the first step was to “google” the name and at least part of the address of the congregation. As in Anderson, et al. (2008), this was very fruitful. Congregational activity was searched via church websites, chambers of commerce websites, newspaper listings, state non-profit websites, and websites for traveling ministerial groups. (Southern Gospel Quartet websites proved quite helpful.) Where a given date on the page was not available, web site date stamps were examined for activity post-January 2008. When all 5,330 congregations had been searched, 1,871 (35%) were found to still be active. This left 3,459 to be designated as “Inactive” and became the dependent variable for all analyses.⁵ The 1,871 active congregations that had disassociated from the SBC were deleted from all waves utilized in the analyses.

In order to assess the relationships that age liabilities and congregational participation have with death, two logistic regression models were run on each of 13 waves of the SBC ACP. The dichotomous dependent variable “Inactive” was coded with a “1” if the given congregation became inactive in that year and was coded with a “0” if it was still active. This variable was created for each of the 13 waves of data. Multiple Logistic regression models were needed for each wave due to the high levels of inter-correlation between the variables being used. The two models are shown in Table 3.

Models that included “Attendance” could not also include variables that utilized “Total Receipts” due to their high level of correlation. Congregational age-cubed and

⁵ Due to the method used, this number is unavoidably exaggerated, for there are undoubtedly some congregations that are alive that have no presence on the internet. Any affect on subsequent analyses would be to weaken the statistical effects rather than strengthening them. This more conservative approach was deemed most appropriate.

age-squared are included in order to examine whether the age liability of adolescence or oldness exists in congregations. If this variable is significant and in the opposite direction of “Age” then a significant curvilinear relationship between age and closure exists. This would mean that SBC congregational closure is more likely to occur at three (age-cubed) or two (age-squared) “peak” periods of time. These variables will be run in separate models to avoid issues of multicollinearity.

Participation is necessary for congregations to remain viable. It takes physical and monetary resources to keep congregations operating (Twombly 2003; Hager et al. 2004; Iannaccone, Olson, and Stark 1995). A strong test of age liabilities on congregational closure requires controlling for participation. To control for participation, the last average Sunday School value and the last “Total Receipts” value reported by the congregation were included in the analyses.

Table 3
Logistic Regression on Congregational Closure in a Given Year

Variables	Model 1	Model 2
Church Age	*	*
Church Age-Squared/Age-Cubed	*	*
Attendance	*	
Total Receipts		*
Region (South excluded)		
Northeast	*	*
Midwest	*	*
West	*	*

Finally, I control for regional location of the congregation. The four regions (North, South, East, and West) used by the U.S. Census Bureau were created in order to control for differences in congregational closure by regional difference. Due to the majority of SBC congregations being found in the South (Jones, et al. 2002), this category was omitted from the analyses as a comparison category.

The variables used in the analysis were average Sunday School attendance, total receipts, year of organization, regional location in the United States, and whether the congregation died. Descriptive statistics were employed in order to check for variation in the number of missing cases for all of these variables. No abnormal proportions were found between congregations that were still alive as compared to those that had died. Fourteen percent of the census had never reported Total Receipts and 11.7% had never turned in a value for average Sunday School attendance in the 14 waves of data that were assessed. There were 3031 congregations in the data set (5% of the whole census) that had never reported a year of organization.⁶ This left an effective dataset containing more than 80% of total possible SBC congregations.

Analyses initially center on how many SBC congregations close each year. Second, they show when congregations die. Lastly, they focus on what factors led to congregational closure. Logistic regression analyses will be utilized with odds ratios being reported. Any odds ratio above one represents a positive relationship with the dependent variable, while any value under one signifies a negative relationship with the dependent variable.

⁶ SBC datasets going back to 1972 were used to find years of organization. If multiple years of organization were reported, the older was taken.

Number of Closings

Table 4 shows that the percentage of congregations that close in the SBC is around one-half of a percent. The mean amount of congregations that closed per year from 1995 to 2007 was .567% or 266 churches a year. The range was from .17% in 2000 to .96% in 2003. This is lower than both the PCUSA (mean of .77%) and Nazarene (mean of 1.22%) rates found by Dougherty, et al. (2008), even though the SBC data includes “mission” churches. This supports what has previously been found that congregations have much lower rates than other organizational forms (Phillips and Kirchoff 1989). SBC data refute the idea that free-church denominations have higher rates of closure than more hierarchical forms of denominational polity. It may not be possible to completely refute the theory based on one denomination, but when the one denomination is the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, it severely weakens the case.

Rates of Survival

SBC church plants are a successful lot. Not only do SBC churches close as an aggregate at much slower rates than PCUSA and Nazarene congregations, new church starts also have a much higher rate of survival. From 1985 to 2005, the PCUSA had a net increase of 822 congregations, with a survival rate of 88%. The Nazarenes had a greater net increase of 908 congregations, but had a lower survival rate of 77%. Though not exactly comparable due to the differences in time span, Table 5 shows that in eight less years, the SBC had a net increase of 11,438 congregations with an incredible survival rate of 94%. What makes this even more surprising is that less obstacles exist for a SBC congregation to reach “mission” status (thus being included in the count), than is required

for a PCUSA congregation to become officially “constituted.” It is hard to project how the survival rate would differ if an additional 10 years were added, but assuming a stable variance in the amount of congregations organized and in the amount that closed within the SBC from 1985 to 1995, the rate would be the same, but with an almost doubled net gain in congregations. The rates of congregational closure among new churches in the SBC are comparatively much lower than the PCUSA, which allows for alternative explanations of congregational vitality (Kelley 1986; Stark and Finke 2000; Finke and Stark 2005).

Table 4
Number and Percentage of SBC Congregations Closed Annually, 1995-2007

Year	Number	Percent
1995	131	0.28
1996	129	0.27
1997	316	0.66
1998	400	0.83
1999	346	0.72
2000	82	0.17
2001	151	0.30
2002	279	0.55
2003	500	0.96
2004	404	0.77
2005	284	0.53
2006	228	0.42
2007	209	0.38
Mean	266.08	0.567

Congregational Age at Death

High rates of closure were found by Dougherty, et al. (2008) to exist in the PCUSA in three ranges of life: the first 10 years, between the ages of 36-50, and from 75 to 125. The Nazarene data exhibited the same dynamics for the first two age ranges but did not share age liability from 75 to 125. It was impossible to test this age range on Nazarene data due to the shorter history of the denomination. Yet, it was hypothesized that as the denomination aged the same effect would be seen. SBC data lend doubt to this assumption.

Table 5
Rates of Survival for SBC Congregations Founded Since 1995

Denomination	Organized	Closed	Net	Survival Rate
SBC	12160	722	11438	94.06%

Of congregational closures in the SBC, 37% occur within the first 10 years. This compares to 10% of PCUSA closures being within the first 10 years and 18% of Nazarene closures being within the first 10 years. This supports the presence of newness liabilities (H1) within the SBC. A liability of oldness was hypothesized in H2 that stated congregations possess a secondary rise in rate of closure between the ages of 36 and 50. Figure 1 lends support to this hypothesis, with 15% of SBC closures being reported between these ages. A rise in the graph is visible during this period. In comparison, 10% of PCUSA closures occurred during this period and 23% of Nazarene closures did so. Though SBC closure rates are less than the PCUSA and Nazarenes during the “middle-ages” of 36 to 50, they are more proportionately centered there than are closures in the

PCUSA. In comparison, Nazarene closures are more proportionately centered in the 36-50 range than the SBC.

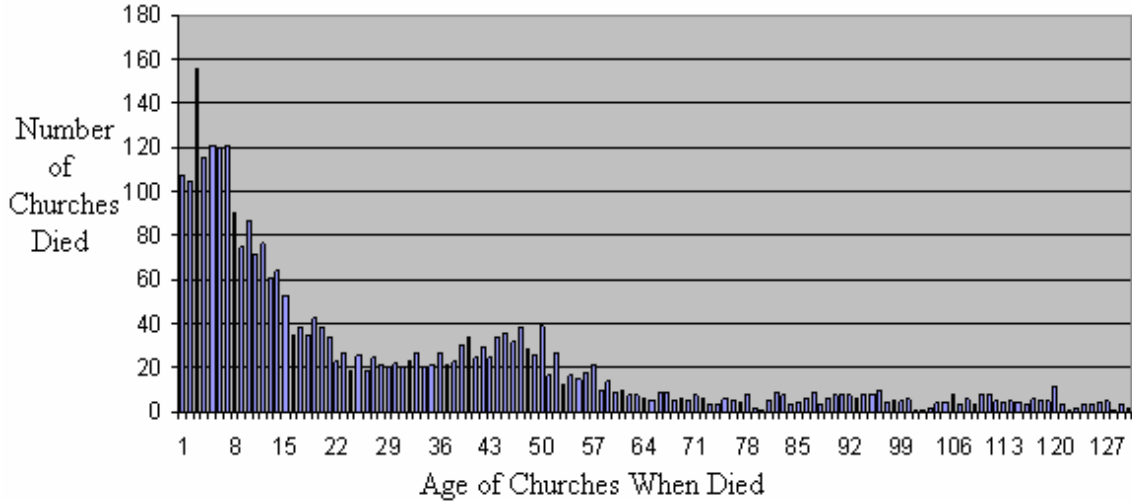


Figure 1: Age Distribution of Congregations at Time of Closure in the SBC, 1995-2007

The last hypothesis (H3) claimed that there would be a second liability of oldness present between the ages of 75 and 125. The largest set of closure within the PCUSA congregations (38% of total closures) occurred during this period. As stated earlier, the Church of the Nazarene did not have a long enough history to test for this relationship, but the age and history of the SBC provide an opportunity for comparisons. SBC data show that only 8.67% of SBC closures occur during this period. Figure 1 supports the fact that no tertiary rise in closure is present in this period of late life for SBC congregations. Further, 19,850 SBC congregations were at least 75 years old by 2007 and only 342 congregations died between 1995 and 2007 that were at least 75 years old. That is a survival rate of 98.31%. Thus, there is not enough evidence in SBC data to support H3. This lends enough support to warrant the inclusion of an age-squared variable in the multivariate analysis, which will test for a curvilinear effect of age on

congregational closure. Due to the lack of a tertiary increase in congregational closure, there is no need to run logistic regression with an age-cubed variable. Thus, only models with the age-squared variable are presented.⁷

Factors in Congregational Closure

Many factors affect congregational decline and eventually, closure. From conflict to the changing face of neighborhoods, churches can be affected by any number of issues (Kincheloe 1929; Kloetzli 1961; Ammerman 1997). It would be impossible to account for all issues that lead a congregation to closure, but it is possible to assume that age and participation have much to do with when these problems are more likely to occur.

In order to more rigorously test the hypotheses, 26 Logistic regression models were run over the span of 13 years of data. As mentioned earlier, closures of a given year were first regressed upon by “Church Age,” “Church Age-Squared,” “Attendance,” and the regional designations. Then, a second set of similar regression models were run with the exception of an inclusion of “Total Receipts” instead of “Attendance.” The regression models further confirm the support found for H1 in Figure 1. “Church Age” is found to be significantly related to congregational closure in all of the models using yearly ACPs, even while controlling for participation variables. This further supports the idea that early life is the primary age liability among religious organizations.

H2 finds strong support among SBC congregations. In Tables 6, 7, and 8, eight of the 13 years of data exhibit a significant curvilinear relationship for age on congregational closure. Each year from 1995 to 2001 possesses such a relationship. This means that there is statistical evidence of a high rate of closure, followed by a lower rate

⁷ Models were run that included the age-cubed variable in order to verify *Figure 1*. The variable did not exhibit statistical significance.

of closure, which is then followed by another high rate of closure. The regression models do not uniquely confirm it when the changes in rate occur, yet the frequencies in Figure 1 support that this is likely due to the surge of closures seen between the ages of 35 and 50.

Table 6
Effects on Closure by Age and Size in SBC Congregations
(Logistic Regression, Odds Ratios)

Variables	1995	1995	1996	1996	1997	1997	1998	1998
Church Age	.257*	.209*	.169*	.140*	.278*	.231*	.217*	.199*
Church Age-Squared	1.719*	1.868*	1.634	2.115*	1.606*	1.672*	1.549*	1.579*
Attendance	.001*	-	.006*	-	.001*	-	.056*	-
Total Receipts	-	.001*	-	.001*	-	.001*	-	.014*
Region (South excluded)								
Northeast	.001	.947	.001	.001	1.514	1.953*	.587	.434
Midwest	.965	1.352	.104*	.380*	2.537*	2.589*	1.543*	1.450*
West	.522	1.091	1.350	1.693	1.100	1.230	1.104	1.350
Likelihood Ratio	93.2*	120.5*	121.3*	190.2*	408.0*	448.5*	389.9*	412.0*
Attend. Pseudo R ²	.1536	-	.1670	-	.1809	-	.1419	-
Attend. N	36183	-	36245	-	36644	-	37255	-
Rcpts Pseudo-R ²	-	.1382	-	.1906	-	.1706	-	.1379
Rcpts. N	-	37756	-	38026	-	36740	-	36413

*p<.05

Note: Dependent variable is congregational closure during each interval (0=church still open, 1=church closed).

In comparison, there was only one set of data (of seven) that found a significant curvilinear relationship in closure among PCUSA and Nazarene congregations

(Dougherty, et al. 2008). The finding of a curvilinear relationship with closure must be tempered though, given the lower percentage of closure for SBC congregations found in Figure 1 as compared to higher rates of death in the 35 to 50 age range for the two denominations looked at by Dougherty, et al. (2008). Though one can be more confident that a curvilinear relationship with closure exists in SBC churches than PCUSA or Nazarene churches, the rates of closure are far less.

Interestingly, the robust finding of curvilinear age liabilities for the first half of the data sets is not found in the most recent data (2002-2004 and 2006-2007). This suggests that the upsurge in congregational closure among churches that are 36 to 50 years old disappeared after 2001, leaving the danger of death to only be felt early in life. If Dougherty, et al. (2008) are correct in proposing that the upsurge in congregational death between the ages of 36 and 50 is related to a generational exchange of the congregation from its retiring founders or founding pastor to a younger cohort, implications in its disappearance deserve contemplation. One possible interpretation of these data is that previous weaknesses in congregational transfer of power are not as significant as they were pre-2002. Any number of social or cultural factors could have improved the ability to transfer power among congregations in the SBC. Whether this is unique to the SBC or a wider movement among congregations in the free-church tradition, it is impossible to conjecture. Yet, it seems that congregations in the SBC did a much better job of surviving congregational succession after 2001 than they did previously.

As expected, “Attendance” and “Total Receipts” were found to be significant in all 26 regression models. Participation plays a powerful role in the survival of

congregations, for without resources, organizations cannot exist (Ammerman 1997; Barron et al. 1994; Ranger-Moore 1997). The median average Sunday School attendance of the 3,459 churches that closed in the SBC from 1995 to 2007 was 18. The median Total Receipts was \$20,090.98. These are very low rates of participation, which exhibit the resiliency of SBC congregations.

Table 7
Effects on Closure by Age and Size in SBC Congregations
(Logistic Regression, Odds Ratios)

Variables	1999	1999	2000	2000	2001	2001	2002	2002
Church Age	.209*	.167*	.221*	.215*	.272*	.276*	.222*	.210*
Church Age-Squared	1.913*	2.092*	2.117*	2.096*	1.710*	1.647*	1.217	1.182
Attendance	.007*	-	.001*	-	.023*	-	.001*	-
Total Receipts	-	.064*	-	.001*	-	.001*	-	.001*
Region (South excluded)								
Northeast	2.237*	2.685*	.660	.747	3.752*	3.701*	.143	.338
Midwest	1.873*	1.919*	3.070*	3.503*	2.697*	2.416*	1.420	1.497*
West	1.429*	1.486*	2.786*	2.745*	.837	1.037	.627*	.692
Likelihood Ratio	517.5*	474.4*	217.5*	186.2*	201.3*	216.5*	361.2*	306.1*
Attend. Pseudo-R ²	.1900	-	.2297	-	.1375	-	.1709	-
Attend. N	37166	-	37452	-	37201	-	39813	-
Rcpts Pseudo-R ²	-	.1658	-	.1976	-	.1464	-	.1471
Rcpts. N	-	35881	-	36427	-	36045	-	38656

*p<.05

Note: Dependent variable is congregational closure during each interval (0=church still open, 1=church closed).

Regional designations were included for control purposes only in the analyses, yet one robust finding deserves mention. In ten of the 13 yearly profiles, including the last

Table 8
Effects on Closure by Age and Size in SBC Congregations
(Logistic Regression, Odds Ratios)

Variables	2003	2003	2004	2004	2005	2005
Church Age	.272*	.244*	.327*	.326*	.242*	.259*
Church Age-Squared	.975	1.117	1.192	1.116	1.142	1.319*
Attendance	.002*	-	.004*	-	.001*	-
Total Receipts	-	.003*	-	.001*	-	.001*
Region (South excluded)						
Northeast	1.149	1.382	.933	1.122	.537	.560
Midwest	.992	.945	1.601*	1.769*	1.736*	1.719*
West	1.019	1.031	1.896*	1.838*	.634*	.744
Likelihood Ratio	598.8*	558.4*	446.9*	443.2*	445.1*	382.3*
Attend. Pseudo- R ²	.1568	-	.1416	-	.1723	-
Attend. N	41169	-	41950	-	42589	-
Rcpts Pseudo- R ²	-	.1426	-	.1416	-	.1518
Rcpts. N	-	40079	-	40750	-	41417

*: p<.05

Note: Dependent variable is congregational closure during each interval (0=church still open, 1=church closed).

four, Midwestern congregations were two to three times more likely to close than Southern congregations, even while controlling for age and participation. Granted, the SBC is strongest in the South, but longitudinal congregational weakness in this region being more prevalent than the West or Northeast should alarm denominational leaders.

Table 9
Effects on Closure by Age and Size in SBC Congregations, continued
(Logistic Regression, Odds Ratios)

Variables	2006	2006	2007	2007
Church Age	.378*	.411*	.336*	.321*
Church Age-Squared	1.160	1.072	1.221	1.275
Attendance	.001*	-	.004*	-
Total Receipts	-	.001*	-	.004*
Region (South excluded)				
Northeast	1.574	2.270*	1.400	1.335
Midwest	2.888*	2.838*	1.922*	1.834*
West	.840	.959	1.295	1.582*
Likelihood Ratio	274.5*	250.6*	246.2*	224.9*
Attend. Psuedo- R ²	.1295	-	.1141	-
Attend. N	43153	-	43908	-
Rcpts Psuedo- R ²	-	.1213	-	.1075
Rcpts. N	-	41883	-	42426

*: p<.05

Note: Dependent variable is congregational closure during each interval (0=church still open, 1=church closed).

Conclusions

SBC congregations are a vital and resilient lot. Though “free-churches” receive less hierarchical guidance, it seems that SBC congregations close at a lower rate than PCUSA congregations. Polity seems to have little to do with the rate of congregational closure over the long haul, and the survival of new church starts in the short term. Though a higher proportion of SBC deaths happen in the first 10 years of existence than

either the PCUSA or Nazarene denominations, the rates of closure are much lower with survival rates of more than 90% among new churches. Congregational vitality has long been linked to factors such as strictness and theology (Kelley 1986; Stark and Finke 2000; Finke and Stark 2005). This study does nothing to refute this possibility, which may provide a better explanation for the comparable rates of closure within these two denominations than polity.

It also must be said that the study does not measure the effects of endowment or financial assistance for new congregations or “missions.” The issue at hand is the hierarchical authority structure and not outside assistance. External linkages via authority structures are all that is being assessed. It is likely that financial and social support from a separate entity, regardless of authority structure, is a good predictor of whether a church survives the first ten years of existence. A thorough study of the short and long term effects of financial assistance for “mission churches” in various denominational entities would be a wise extension to the current work.

Age liabilities are supported in the SBC for the first ten years of life and during the transitional period of 36 to 50 years of age. This support for both H1 and H2 goes beyond the findings of previous work in showing robustly significant curvilinear age liabilities for congregations. Lack of resources likely plays a strong role in closure during this early period, but regression models show that it is more than just resources that are needed. There are innate traits that exist in early age that cause organizations to be more likely to close. Stinchcombe (1965) posits that it is the social isolation that an organization must inevitably overcome to survive. The expectation that an increased rate of death would be present after 75 years of age (H3) lacks support in SBC data. Closure

among SBC congregations levels off after 60 years of age and continues a low rate of closure.

In summary, these findings provide further support for age liabilities of newness and late life among congregations even while controlling for participation. The relationship of death with denominational polity is not supported among religious congregations when comparing PCUSA to SBC congregations. The unique dynamics present that lead to growth and decline among congregations and denominations (Kelley 1986; Stark and Finke 2000; Finke and Stark 2005) seem to overshadow any effects of organizational structure.

Denominational leaders should be wary of the needs of congregations in the formative stages of their existence. Social linkages and support are necessary in surviving the first 10 years of their existence. Generational succession is also of utmost importance to congregations of all types. This research exhibits that assistance for congregations to safely navigate pastoral succession is greatly needed. Yet, denominational support for congregational succession does not stop there. It is also needed for congregations to best handle generational succession among members. Lay leadership and recruitment of new members must be done in such a way that one age group is not controlling the congregation. The repercussions of such dynamics are evidenced by an increase in congregational closure between 36 and 50 years of age. Founding members will eventually die or retire from church life, and if proper recruitment of younger cohorts within church leadership and the general life of the church are not undertaken, the church will close.

Specifically for the SBC, the proliferation of the denomination has been due to its success at creating vibrant, new congregations. Extremely high survival rates among new churches and the stability of extremely low rates of closure have resulted in dynamic growth. Thirty-five percent (1,871) of the churches that have dropped from the ACP over the past 13 years have not been churches that have died, but instead are mostly independent Baptist churches that have not been supporting the SBC financially. This should be of little concern to denominational leadership and has somewhat masked the vitality of the denomination's congregations. Between 1995 and 2007, 3,459 SBC congregations closed, while 11,438 congregations were started and were still alive in 2007. This is the case of a vital denomination.

Limitations in the study include the lack of complete assurance of closure or inactivity within the data. There is a difference between "closure" and "inactive." It is impossible to know how many congregations that were deemed "inactive" by the SBC are still open yet lack a presence on the internet to be found. Though most organizations of any kind can be found through governmental record websites, the method is not fool-proof. The method used is the best one available, and provides ample accuracy and expedience as compared to alternative methods. Future research should be two-fold. First, the relative effects of resources lent to new congregations by denominations needs to be measured. It would be helpful to know exactly how much financial resource is enough and what external linkages are most helpful in starting a congregation. Another area of research that is needed is succession in congregations. How could succession be most effectively transferred in such a personality-based position as the senior leader of a congregation? The answer to this question would provide a better understanding of

organizational change and give congregations the best blueprint to avoid late life liabilities.

CHAPTER FOUR

Defining Evangelicalism

Evangelical historian Timothy Weber states that “(d)efining evangelicalism has become one of the biggest problems in American religious historiography (1991, 12).” This ambiguity regarding the major tenets of Evangelicalism is not a recent phenomenon and has grown in difficulty since he made this observation. The difficulty can be seen in the task of searching for the genesis of the movement. From Martin Luther to Billy Graham, scholars have claimed the source of contemporary American Evangelicalism to be found at different points over a span of some 400 years. Given this ambiguity and uncertainty, scholars of religion are inevitably faced with the quandary of how best to operationalize Evangelicalism. Despite the immense literature focusing on Evangelicals (Dayton and Johnston 1991; Hunter 1983; Kellstedt, Green, Guth, and Smidt 1996; Kohut, Green, Keeter, and Toth 2000; Leege and Kellstedt 1991; Smith 1998; Steensland, et al. 2000), there has failed to be a consensus on one uniform operationalization. The need and desire to better understand who Evangelicals are, how many of them there are, and what real affect on society they possess continues to be an important point of conversation (Hackett and Lindsay 2008). This work attempts to fill these gaps in the present literature.

Why the Lack of Consensus?

A lack of consensus exists due to a differentiation in theoretical assumptions. What it means to be an “Evangelical” is interpreted differently depending on whom one

asks. Sociology of religion scholars operationalized the label in three primary ways: self-identity, religious tradition, and belief.

One approach posits that to define an Evangelical is to simply ask a person if they are one. The self-identification approach to categorizing Evangelicals was popularized by Christian Smith (1998). Smith's Subcultural Identity Thesis, of which he uses to support the case for religious self-identification, "consists of four essential elements: defining (creating social representations), coding (creating rules to signify identity with them), affirming (enacting and validating identity claim), and policing (protecting meaning and enforcing the identity code) (Page 95)." The Evangelical subculture in America fits the necessary guidelines to be considered powerful enough to allow for self-identification via survey methods. The advantages of identifying evangelicals by this approach are obvious, for it is easy to ask and easy to collect. Yet nothing is ever as simple as it first seems.

The weakness though in enumerating Evangelicals according to the method Smith employed is that it leans on the assumption that the label means the same thing across the whole of the universe being measured. Smith, himself, stated that the majority of people either responded that they did not know if there was a difference between Fundamentalists and Evangelicals, or that they did not know what "Evangelical" meant (Page 180). This illuminates a fundamental weakness in the methodology. The word, "Evangelical," may incite powerful feelings within some Americans due to the current political milieu, and due to frequent negative rhetoric on the national level. This may lead many people whom espouse traditional evangelical ideals to distance themselves from what they perceive as attacks on a "movement" with which they do not wish to

associate. While some may not claim to be Evangelical due to fact they possess a certain comparison group, others do not claim status as an Evangelical because they do not have a comparison group at all. Self-identification becomes tricky when it assumes consistent knowledge of a term, being used for social science research, across all social demographics of race, region, education, and religious tradition. This is evidenced by the fact that of the 239 Southern Baptists Smith surveyed, more reported to be “mainline” (96), than “evangelical” (66) or “fundamentalist” (77) (Page 241). The theological, political, and cultural histories of Southern Baptists would challenge the appropriateness of the mainline label. Despite these perceived weaknesses, it may be rightly argued that all labels are going to possess some variation in definition, and this measurement error must not preclude the use of labeling all together. Evangelical self-identity among Americans was found to be significantly related to numerous questions dealing with public and civic expressions of religion in American society (Smith 1998), which shows that it possesses relevance and utility. Smith found 7% of Americans to state that they were a Protestant, attended church, found faith to be important in their life, and identified themselves as an “Evangelical.” In comparison, Gallup and Lindsay (1999) found 39% of Americans who identified themselves as a “born-again, or evangelical, Christian.”

The second framework scholars work from in categorizing Evangelicals is religious tradition. This framework stems from the theoretical effects of “belonging” (Kellstedt, et al. 1996). This states that there are socializing affects of one’s congregation that affect the attitudes and actions of those in the pews. This may seem obvious, but where the theory becomes interesting is when one states that they believe one thing, their congregation espouses another, and modeling shows relationships with the religious

tradition to be more powerful. This intermingling of socialization of belonging, belief, and action has been found in a variety of political and social stances (Kellstedt, Green, Guth, and Smidt 1996; Kohut, Green, Keeter, and Toth 2000; Leege and Kellstedt 1991).

The standard by which all religious traditions are categorized has popularly become known as “RELTRAD” (Steensland, et al 2000). This categorization of denominations in the United States was a response to the then popular grouping done by T. W. Smith (1990). Smith’s work focused on placing all American denominations along a fundamentalist-moderate-liberal continuum. Steensland, et al. found this system lacking, namely that a variable which should be nominal in nature was categorized as an ordinal variable. The goal for many studies could be confused by including a variable that is grading denominations on a quasi-political/theological factor, especially when they might espouse politically liberal and theologically conservative viewpoints, or vice versa. Instead, Steensland, et al. argued for categorization of denominations by similar religious traditions. This approach not only allowed the nature of the denominations’ political and theological natures to be considered, but also their denominational histories. This approach also touched on an aspect of their social nature that reached beyond ideology. The effects of one’s belonging to a given group could be assessed independently from their beliefs. Seven distinct groups form the RELTRAD variable: Mainline Protestant, Evangelical Protestant, Black Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Other, and No Religious Tradition.

Despite all of the positives of this categorization, weaknesses are not absent. For one, the percentage of people in non-denominational and no denomination congregations is growing (Dougherty, Johnson, and Polson 2007). Due to the necessary element of a

denominational history and tradition to allow categorization, these congregations are left without a proper home. It is impossible to tell simply from survey data where these congregations fall. The deciding factor in the RELTRAD taxonomy is church attendance. Those that report attending church “about once a month” or more are placed in the Evangelical Protestant group, where as all others are labeled as Mainline Protestants. Introducing action into the equation of affiliation contradicts the foundation upon which the variable attempts to stand. A second weakness to RELTRAD is the fact that despite its effective division of Protestants group according to conservatism and history, it does not do the same for Roman Catholics and Jews. RELTRAD does not allow for Progressive or Orthodox natures of individual congregations to be evaluated. It can be argued that the lack of a division in these cases weaken the potential predictive value of the Roman Catholic category. Lastly, the “other” category proves problematic in several ways. This grouping combines Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Unitarians, and other minority religious groups in the United States. Obviously, this category is intended to play the roll of a “catch-all” but its effects become hard to interpret due to the diverse group of people being encapsulated by it. It would seem that this group would simply take on a mediated effect of the characteristics of the dominant minority religious group in the United States.

Again, despite the perceived weaknesses that opponents may bring against the method, it continues to be used with little concern for methodological issue. It has even become convention that it is required in religion research in some form as a control variable. Its utility and significance in religion research even prompted Dougherty, Johnson, and Polson (2007) to attempt to solve the issues mentioned above in creating a

refined methodology for categorizing religious tradition in survey research. Dougherty et al. found 33.6% of Americans to be a member of an Evangelical congregation.

The third framework to operationalize Evangelicals is in defining their belief. The approach posits that the very idea of an Evangelical identity is inseparably linked to an assumed belief structure (Hunter 1983). This approach possesses the longest history of the three frameworks. Mark Noll claims that “evangelicalism was and is a set of defining beliefs and practices easier to see as an adjective than as a simple noun” (2003, 21). No matter what dates one attributes to the birth of Evangelicalism, the group of people in this category collected over a series of similar religious beliefs. The only question is whether Evangelicalism is defined as a continuous movement that possesses a dynamic belief structure, or whether it is best seen as a combination of several unique movements based on unique belief structures that are loosely defined and related to one another. Either way, it would be beneficial to examine how these various belief structures may have been defined.

The advent of a rising Protestation within the religious norms of 16th century Europe brought a new set of beliefs. Possibly the most central of these beliefs was that salvation comes through the euaggelion or “good news” of Jesus Christ. The transliteration of this Greek word into English is where the source of the word “evangelical” is found. At this time the words “evangelical” and “protestant” became synonymous for the labeling of this religious sect. Noll summarized the belief of these seminal evangelicals in five ways: 1) “justification by faith instead of trust in human works as the path to salvation; 2) ...the sole sufficiency of Christ for salvation instead of the human (and often corrupted) mediations of the church; 3) ...the once-for-all triumph

of Christ's death on the cross instead of the repetition of Christ's sacrifice in the Catholic mass; 4) ...final authority in the Bible as read by believers in general...; and 5) ...the priesthood of all Christian believers instead of inappropriate reliance on a class of priests ordained by the church" (2003; 16-17). These beliefs defined the movement until the early 18th-century, when a new movement within the old emerged.

One of the most effective definitions of this new movement, called the "Evangelical Revival" in Europe and the "Great Awakening" within the colonies which would later become the United States, is offered by David Bebbington (1989). He identified "four key ingredients to evangelicalism." The first ingredient is conversion, which presupposes that lives need to be changed. The second ingredient was that all spiritual truth is found in the Bible. The third ingredient is a dedication of life to serve God, especially through evangelism. The last ingredient is that Christ's death was necessary to atone for sin (Bebbington 1989). These four "ingredients" can still be found within most definitions of contemporary evangelical belief.

Interestingly, the man who brought the most attention to belief as the center of evangelical study provided a different genesis for the movement. Hunter (1983) claims that contemporary Evangelicalism has its source in the late 19th-century themes of Reformed theology's absolute sovereignty of God in individual, Millennialism and Holiness teachings. This is more popularly known as age of the genesis of contemporary Fundamentalism, which is a religious movement which arose out of the previous Evangelical movement described by Bebbington. Hunter (1983:7) claims that "(t)he world view of Evangelicalism is deeply rooted in the theological tradition of the Reformation, in northern European Puritanism, and later in American Puritanism and the

First and Second Great Awakenings in North America;” this is the movement which can most effectively be described as birthing contemporary Evangelicalism.

This brings the discussion to the present-day understanding of what contemporary Evangelicals believe. Though, Hunter stated that its foundations are firmly planted on Fundamentalist beliefs of the 19th century, the current lot is best defined by their “adherence to 1) the belief that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, 2) the belief in the divinity of Christ, 3) the belief in the efficacy of Christ’s life, death , and physical resurrection for the salvation of the human soul,” and 4) a religious conversion experience which is uniquely explained through a salvific act of Jesus Christ (1983: 7).

Since 1983 many alternatives have been proposed, yet only three stand out as having garnered the attention of most religion scholars. The first two are very similar to Hunter. George Marsden stated that in the sense of a conceptual unity, Christians typically emphasize “1) the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of Scripture; 2) the real, historical character of God’s saving work recorded in Scripture; 3) eternal salvation through personal trust in Christ; 4) the importance of evangelism and missions; and 5) the importance of a spiritually transformed life” (1984: x). This definition omits the divinity of Christ, but includes God’s saving work and the importance of sharing the faith with others.

Kellstedt and Green (1996) mix these two approaches to create a four-point level of belief necessary to define Evangelicals: 1) belief that salvation comes only through faith in Jesus Christ; 2) experience of conversion; 3) belief that it is necessary to spread the gospel through missions and evangelism; and 4) belief in the truth or inerrancy of

Scripture. This definition takes the nature of Scripture, salvation, and conversion from Hunter and adds the importance of sharing the faith with others from Marsden.

The last popular approach for defining Evangelicals by belief comes from George Barna. Though his standards have not been replicated by anyone else, they possess a great level of popularity within the movement of contemporary Evangelicalism itself. He claims that Evangelicals are those who state that 1) they are born again, 2) faith is very important in their life today, 3) they possess a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs, 4) they believe Satan exists, 5) they believe eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works, 6) they believe Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth, 7) assert the Bible is accurate in all that it teaches, and 8) God is an all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today (Barna 2007). Obviously, this formula is much more involved than any other and few, if any, data-sets beside his own would be able to replicate this. Due to the extensive amount of belief statements necessary to be defined as an Evangelical, Barna reports the lowest proportion of the American public as being Evangelical by belief. He found that only 7% of Americans are Evangelical. When compared to Hunter's (1983) stipulations for belief (22.46% of Americans), it becomes obvious that as more questions are used, the total drops substantially.

Operationalizing Evangelicals by belief is more difficult than it might seem on the surface, for it is hard to perfectly define such an amorphous and loosely defined belief structure. Evangelicals claim to know what they believe, yet there is loss in the communication and measurement of it. It is also unrealistic to assume that all Evangelicals are going to agree to the finest theological points. Yet, some like Barna

would argue that you must agree to the finest points to truly be called “Evangelical,” as he interprets religious history and theology.

The Methodological Divide

If the division in categorizing Evangelicals was merely a theoretical one, the divide would fail to be long-lasting. The utilitarian nature of quantitative methodology would solve the divide by rendering two of the approaches as “weaker” or less explanatory. In some regard this has occurred in narrowing the definitional approaches to three. Yet, this is as few as quantitative methods have been able to whittle the contenders down to. The three left standing have withstood rigorous testing and retesting and a dominant winner has yet to be crowned. Due to this, much recent research in sociology of religion has focused on the enumeration of Evangelicals and the relationships between a given categorization and religious actions or attitudes (Hackett and Lindsay 2008, Alwin, et al. 2006; Smith 2000; Kellstedt, et al. 1996). The main reasoning for this is that the three tend to be found to have significant independent effects with many of the same questions and data that allow researchers to control for all three of them in the same statistical model has been lacking.

Following the method utilized by Steensland, et al. (2000), four dependent variables, three of which were constructed as scales, were chosen to test the effectiveness of the three Evangelical categorizations. Scholars have found that abortion attitudes, political party affiliation, sexual attitudes, and public or civic displays of religion are related to Evangelical Religious Tradition, Evangelical Identity, and Evangelical Belief. All three categorizations are expected to be related to more conservative perspectives on abortion, political party affiliation, sexual attitudes, and public religiosity per previous

research (Steensland, et al. 2000; Hunter 1983; Guth, Smidt, Kellstedt, and Green 1993; Guth, Green, Kellstedt, and Smidt 2002; Kellstedt, Green, Guth, and Smidt 1996; Kohut, Green, Keeter, and Toth 2000; Leege and Kellstedt 1991; Smith 1998). These items are almost identical to the items used in Steensland, et al. (2000) to measure the effectiveness of their RELTRAD categorization technique. They will provide benchmarks for understanding whether religious identity, religious tradition, or religious belief is the stronger indicator of these various social and political attitudes. Just as Steensland, et al (2000) validated their usage of RELTRAD by relative association with these variables, the same will be done while comparing the relative effects of all three categorizations at the same time.

Data and Methods

The first wave of the Baylor Religion Survey (BRS) provides a superior dataset to test the three Evangelical categorizations and measure their relative relationships with various social and political attitudes. The survey is a nationally random sample of 1721 English speaking adults collected by the Gallup Organization in 2005. The response rate was 46.4% (Bader, et al. 2007). It possesses items needed to build variables corresponding to the three approaches.

“Evangelical Identity” was constructed as a dichotomous variable, assigning 1 to all respondents who answer “Yes” to the question, “Do the following terms describe your religious identity? E.) Evangelical.” The variable, “Evangelical Protestant,” was constructed as a dichotomous variable that assigned 1 to all cases where the respondent’s reported religious tradition fits into the RELTRAD coding schema of Steensland, et al. (2001) and enhanced by Dougherty, Johnson, and Polson (2007).

The third category contained those that possessed “Evangelical Belief.” This dichotomous variable identifies all cases where the respondent gave unique responses to 4 different questions which represent what is seen as the basic beliefs of Evangelicals as expressed earlier. The first question used was “Which one statement comes closest to your personal view of religious salvation?” The first stipulation was to answer this question “My religion is the one, true faith that leads to salvation” as opposed to “Many religions lead to salvation,” “I do not believe in religious salvation,” and “I don’t know.” The second question utilized was “Which one of the following statements comes closest to your personal beliefs about Jesus?” The respondent must have answered this question, “Jesus is the Son of God” as opposed to “Jesus is a fictional character,” “Jesus probably existed, but he was not special,” “Jesus was an extraordinary person, but he was not a messenger of God,” “Jesus was one of many messengers or prophets of God,” or “I have no opinion.” The third question used was “Which one statement comes closest to your personal beliefs about the Bible?” To fit in the “Evangelical Belief” category, the respondent must have answered either “The Bible means exactly what it says. It should be taken literally, word-for-word, on all subjects” or “The Bible is perfectly true, but it should not be taken literally, word-for-word. We must interpret its meaning” as opposed to “The Bible contains some human error,” “The Bible is an ancient book of history and legends,” or “I don’t know.” The final stipulation in determining whether a respondent held an evangelical belief system involved responses to the question, “Please indicate whether or not you have ever had any of the following experiences: I had a religious conversion experience.” The respondent must have answered “Yes” to this question.

Cronbach's Alpha for these four unique items was .683, thus supporting the creation of one variable.

As stated earlier, besides containing all of the necessary religion variables needed to complete the study, a dataset was needed that also possessed sufficient dependent variables which have been traditionally found to be closely related to the Evangelicalism. Abortion attitudes were measured via an "Abortion Scale." Factor analyses and correlations were run on five questions that dealt with attitudes toward abortion. These questions were asked in a single battery which was formed thus, "How do you feel about abortion in the following circumstances?: a.) The baby may have a serious defect. b.) The woman's health is in danger. c.) The pregnancy is a result of rape. d.) The family cannot afford the child. e.) The family does not want the child." The possible responses for each of these questions were "Always wrong," "Almost always wrong," "Only wrong sometimes," and "Not wrong at all." The Cronbach's Alpha was .907, granting support for its creation. The higher the scale value, the more conservative the individual is toward abortion. The resultant maximum value on the scale is 20 and the minimum value is 5. The mean across the entire sample was 12.18 and the standard deviation was 5.18

The second dependent variable, Party Affiliation, was measured using its original ordinal scale from the survey. The question was asked, "How would you describe yourself politically?" The possible responses vary from 1 = "Strong Democrat" to 7 = "Strong Republican." The mean of this variable was 4.06 and the standard deviation was 2.03.

The third dependent variable consisted of a scale on "Sexual Attitudes." Three questions were asked in a battery: "How do you feel about sexual relations in the

following circumstances? a.) Before marriage; b.) Between two adults of the same sex; c.) With someone other than the marriage partner.” Possible responses were “Always wrong,” “Almost always wrong,” “Only wrong sometimes,” and “Not wrong at all.” The resultant Cronbach’s Alpha was .751. This provided ample support for a “Sex Scale” which consisted of adding the responses to the three questions. The range for this variable was 3-12, with a mean of 8.87 and a standard deviation of 2.84. Higher values on the scale correspond to more conservative sexual attitudes.

The last dependent variable was a scale of “Public Religion” attitudes. This consisted of adding the responses to a battery of five questions, “To what extent do you agree or disagree that the federal government should: d.) Advocate Christian values; e.) Defend Christian values; k.) Fund faith-based organizations; l.) Allow the display of religious symbols in public spaces; and, m.) Allow prayer in public schools.” Possible responses ranged from “Always wrong,” “Almost always wrong,” “Only wrong sometimes,” and “Not wrong at all.” The Cronbach’s Alpha for these five questions was .893. The maximum value for this scale was 25 and the minimum value was 5. The mean for the entire sample was 16.12 and the standard deviation was 5.97. Again, the higher the value, the more conservative the individual is toward religion in the public sphere.

The current study attempts to fill a gap in the literature by searching for the best indicator of socio-political attitudes of the three Evangelical categorizations. Ordinary Least Squares Regression is the method of analysis. In all four models standardized coefficients for the three dichotomous Evangelical categorizations will be compared in order to find the most powerful and consistent indicator of socio-political attitudes. Control

variables utilized in the analyses were, “Age” (continuous), “Education” (ranging from 1 = “No High School Diploma” to 7 = “Postgraduate work/Degree”), “Income” (ranging from 1 = “\$10,000 or less” to 7 = “\$150,000 or more”), “Region” (“South,” “East,” “West,” and “Midwest”), “White” (used as a dummy), and “Married” (used as a dummy).

Findings

The percentage of Evangelicals in the United States has been reported anywhere from 47% (Gallup and Lindsay 1999) to 7% (Barna 2007). Hackett and Lindsay (2008) go into great depth reporting the various possibilities for the frequency of Evangelicals in America using the 1998 GSS. To better evaluate the inter-relationships of the three Evangelical categories, a 3 set, area-proportional Venn Diagram was constructed using a web-based application developed by S. Chow and P. Rodgers (2005). This provides a visual depiction of how these three categories are interrelated and shows how the population of Evangelicals in America differs according to the measurement being used.

The frequencies found in the BRS compares relatively closely to those found by Hackett and Lindsay with the exception of RELTRAD. Hackett and Lindsay find 25% of the sample to be a member in an Evangelical Tradition, whereas the BRS finds 33.56%. The main reason for this difference is that this study uses the more aggressive RELTRAD use created by Dougherty, Johnson, and Polson (2007). Another reason for this difference may be the use of more recent data.

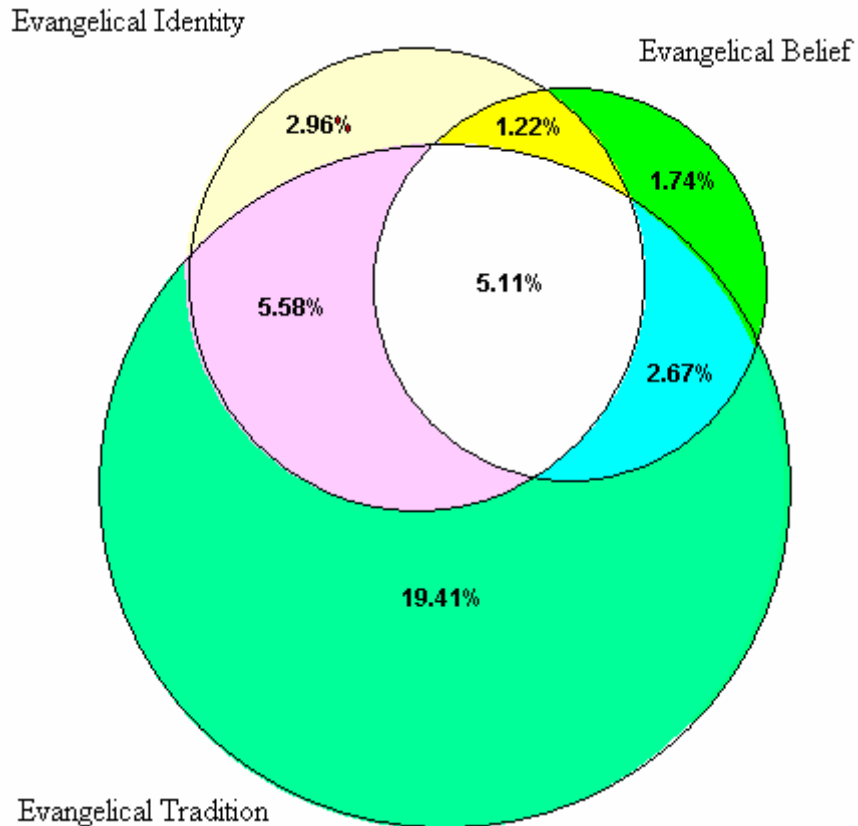


Figure 2: Area Proportional Venn Diagram of Evangelical Identity, Evangelical Tradition, and Evangelical Belief⁸

Compared to the 33.56% of Americans that the BRS finds to be a part of an Evangelical Tradition, it finds that 14.86% of Americans claim the identity of “Evangelical,” and 10.78% responded affirmatively to the 4 belief questions traditionally linked to Evangelicalism. As can be seen in Figure 2, few “Evangelicals” lie outside the realm of Evangelical Religious Tradition. Overall, roughly 40% of Americans can be categorized as an Evangelical in one of these three ways. This means that approximately 85% of those that could be considered an Evangelical by one of the three approaches are

⁸ Evangelical Tradition Values differ slightly (<1%) from Table 1 due to the inclusion of 41 missing cases in the N, which were not missing in the Evangelical Identity and Evangelical Belief categories. This table is representative of the total American population.

encapsulated within an Evangelical Religious Tradition. This signifies that there are some Evangelicals that are residing in a foreign land denominationally, but few.

The descriptive statistics in Table 9 exhibit the inter-relationships between the three Evangelical categories, their relative stance on the four dependent variable scales

Table 10
Sample Characteristics (Proportions and Means)

Variables	Sample	Evangelical Identity	Evangelical Tradition	Evangelical Belief
Evangelical Identity	14.86%	-	32.64%	58.84%
Evangelical Protestant Tradition	33.56%	72.10%	-	74.59%
Evangelical Belief	10.78%	42.68%	24.47%	-
Evan. Ident. & Evan. Trad.	10.95 %	-	-	47.58%
Evan Ident. & Evan. Bel.	6.34%	-	15.61%	-
Evan. Bel & Evan. Trad.	8.21%	34.49%	-	-
Evan. Ident. & Evan. Trad. & Evan. Bel.	5.24%	-	-	-
Dependent Variable Scales				
Abortion Attitude Scale	12.18	16.16	14.86	17.46
Party Identification	4.06	4.95	4.76	5.14
Sexual Attitude Scale	8.87	11.11	10.43	11.66
Public Religion Scale	16.12	20.25	19.37	20.94
Demographics				
Age	49.84	48.15	48.66	47.09
White	86.40%	88.30%	91.75%	88.51%
Married	56.88%	71.22%	63.07%	67.35%
Education	4.60	4.75	4.18	4.67
Income	4.16	4.27	3.92	4.07
Region				
East	22.66%	12.95%	8.95%	11.54%
Midwest	24.42%	28.46%	24.60%	23.34%
South	30.25%	38.99%	45.21%	44.63%
West	22.67%	19.60%	21.23%	20.49%

(Weighted Data)

(higher is more conservative) and their relative difference demographically. It is interesting to note that “Evangelical Belief” ranks the highest in conservatism on all

three scales and “Evangelical Tradition” ranks lowest in conservatism on all three scales. Yet, all of the values are above the means for the entire sample.

Demographically, all three categories are younger than the sample mean, with the Belief category being the youngest. All three are also statistically more likely to be married than the sample at large and are more heavily populated in the South and less populated in the East. The only two variables that seem to lack any uniform deviation from the sample means are income and education.

The cultural and belief orientation of Evangelicals has come to be known for a variety of causes, included are the promotion of religion in the public sphere, sexual conservatism, opposition to abortion, and political party conservatism. Using OLS regression techniques and various control variables, models were run on these 4 dependent variables. Due to the level of interrelation between the three categorical entities, extensive multicollinearity testing was done. Although bivariate correlations were as high as .46, VIF scores were assessed and no values above 1.6 were present. As evidenced by Figure 2 and Table 9, the categories possess substantial uniqueness from each other. With multicollinearity issues assuaged the OLS models can be interpreted with confidence.

All three of the Evangelical categories are significant in each of the four models. This shows that all three categories possess unique properties which lead to unique relationships with social and political attitudes. This underlines the importance of each of the categories and supports further research on each. The debate left to consider is the strength of the various relationships, which might shed some light on what unique properties each of the categories tap into socially.

Table 11
Effects of Sociodemographic and Religious Controls on Public Religiosity, Sexual Attitudes, Party Affiliation, and Abortion Attitudes (OLS Regression, Standardized Coefficients)

Variables	Public Religion	Sex	Party	Abortion
Evangelical Identity	.114***	.114***	.087**	.073**
Evangelical Protestant Tradition	.165***	.150***	.111***	.132***
Evangelical Belief	.079**	.198***	.116***	.220***
Demographics				
Age	.066**	.175***	-.022	-.012
White	-.121***	-.069***	.164***	-.080**
Married	.095***	.134***	.082**	.095***
Education	-.181***	-.106***	-.088**	-.123***
Income	-.146***	-.180***	.106**	-.145***
Political Party	.400***	.269***	-	.326***
Region				
East	.004	-.079**	-.119***	.041
Midwest	.004	-.000	-.120***	.084**
West	-.079**	-.091**	-.103**	-.052
Intercept	16.89***	7.92***	3.08***	12.77***
R-Square	.4135	.3953	.1429	.3587
N	1151	1177	1197	1158

*** P<.001 ** P<.01 * P<.05

In the case of Public Religiosity, Religious Tradition possesses the most powerful relationship of the three categories. Though all of the variables are positive and significant, Evangelical Belief possesses the weakest relationship with the promotion of religious items in the public sphere. This may be surprising to some, for it is not so much of one possessing Evangelical beliefs that encourage them to support a weaker wall between religion and government as it is the socialization that they are experiencing in their religious tradition. The most powerful variable in the model is political party affiliation, which should be expected, yet the power of the relationships present with the

Evangelical categorizations must be noted even with party affiliation being controlled for in the model.

The last three models possess the exact same order of relational power in regard to the categorizations. For sexual attitudes, party affiliation, and abortion attitudes Evangelical Belief possesses the strongest relationship, while Evangelical Identity possesses the weakest. In these cases, possessing the traditional beliefs about Jesus, the nature of the Bible, and conversion are more powerful predictors than Tradition and Identity. This shows that the socializing effects of belonging and identity are less powerful in relation to private socio-political attitudes. Attitudes that are held in the private sphere are more affected by the religious belief structure of Evangelicals. Interestingly, Table 10 shows that public sphere attitudes are best predicted by public religious activity and private sphere attitudes are best predicted by private religious beliefs.

Discussion and Conclusion

Sociological studies of religion have bantered about belief, belonging, and identity for quite some time (Hunter 1983; Kellstedt, Green, Guth, and Smidt 1996; Smith 1998). Yet, the arguments have previously failed in their attempts to include the rival perspectives. When the three measures are tested in relation to each other they all exhibit significant relationships with the various socio-political issues being examined. This supports the fact that they are all representing something uniquely different. Scholars have been correct in studying each of these domains separately, for they all have some level of importance in affecting social attitudes. More than a quarter of those that possess the Evangelical Beliefs that were measured are not members of a church whose

religious tradition is Evangelical. In addition, 76.3 percent of those sitting in a pew of a church that has an Evangelical Tradition do not adhere to the four traditional tenets of the faith movement. As for identity, more than half (57%) of those that identified as an Evangelical do not possess the four traditional tenets of the faith movement. These figures show the differences that exist between the categories.

The questions left are: What are the unique properties of each of these categories? What social and religious properties are they exhibiting? Why does belief make the better predictor of private attitudes and tradition the better predictor of public attitudes? What is different about them? Granted, these questions lack definitive answers due to the limits of the analysis, yet I argue that the robustness of Evangelical Belief has to do with more than just its private nature.

One possibility is that this category represents the core of Evangelicalism. The most consistent and robust correlate for action is Evangelical Belief. Religious belief better predicts an individual's attitudes about abortion, sexual practices, and political affiliation. These findings support the focus of future study to be on measuring what people believe as opposed to where they go to church or what they self-identify as. Individuals who state that they have had a conversion experience, believe that Jesus is the Son of God, believe in the exclusivity of salvation within Christianity, and believe that the Bible is perfectly true or should be taken literally create the crux of Evangelicalism. This is not without precedent, Kellstedt, et al. (1996) make a similar case for a distinction between core and periphery in Evangelicalism while assessing political attitudes. It may be that the methodological core of Evangelicalism exists in those that adhere to the belief structure, though Evangelicalism consists of at least two more significantly related

concentric circles that combine with belief to define the whole. Maybe Figure 2 represents the scope of Evangelicalism with belief as the center. The methodological center of Evangelicalism being a group of beliefs shows the methodological expression of the movement is best mirrored by its theological and philosophical focus, not its organization or political mobilization.

Congregational affiliation does not ensure homophily in belief (Dougherty, et al. 2009). Yet, belief does predict action. This fact illustrates the weakness of religious tradition as a predictor of traditionally held evangelical values. Though the pastor of a church may promote a certain value, does not mean that the whole of the congregation is going to assent to that value or belief. Utilizing religious tradition as an independent predictor of action may have some value, but is merely a proxy for an evangelical's belief. Future research would do well to focus on various belief questions that best define the group or social movement that is being studied. Questions focusing on belief and values that best identify other religious movements or traditions such as Catholicism and Mainline Protestantism should be explored in order to refine quantitative measurement.

CHAPTER FIVE

Contact Theory Tested

The Nature of Prejudice (1954) by Gordon Allport, introduced the world to the reality of prejudice in America and ways in which prejudicial attitudes toward race might be alleviated. The resultant “Contact Theory” claims that the way to lessen prejudicial attitudes is to have contact on a socially equal level with those one possesses prejudicial attitudes toward. Attempts to employ this theory can be seen in any number of governmental actions such as desegregation, busing, and affirmative action which have had varying levels of success in alleviating racial prejudice.

Though Allport’s thesis was presented more than fifty years ago, the question still remains: what realms of social context are most powerful in leading to this kind of intimate contact? Much research has been done on the effects of racial diversity residentially (Ihlanfeldt and Scafidi, 2002, 2004; Wilson 1996; Galster, 1977, 1988; Massey & Denton, 1993; Yinger, 1978, 1995, 1998; Leven et al. 1976; King and Mieszkowski 1973; Schafer 1980; Kiel and Zabel 1996) and in the workplace (Ihlanfeldt and Scafidi 2004; Wilson 1996). Yet, the affects of racial diversity in the congregational context has been understudied (Emerson and Smith 2000). Religious congregations are the most prolific voluntary organization in the United States (Putnam 2001) and possess open, democratic memberships which make it a perfect social context for the alleviation of racial prejudice. Yet, many congregations in the United States are monochromatic when it comes to race (Dougherty 2003). This study will attempt to fill a gap in the current literature with an assessment of the relationships between religious

congregation's racial diversity and prejudicial attitudes in America, while controlling for neighborhood and workplace racial diversity.

Differing Social Contexts

Many social contexts exist, but three types in particular dominate the American landscape. Those contexts are residential neighborhoods, the workplace, and religious congregations. These three types provide opportunities for the type of continuous and intimate relationship that is theorized by Allport (1954).

Residential neighborhoods have been a popular focus for social research on race. From racial effects on neighborhood attachment (Greif 2009) to the popular field of segregation studies (Ihlanfeldt and Scafidi, 2002, 2004; Wilson 1996; Galster, 1977, 1988; Massey & Denton, 1993; Yinger, 1978, 1995, 1998; Leven et al. 1976; King and Mieszkowski 1973; Schafer 1980; Kiel and Zabel 1996), scholarly work on the intermingling of different races within the neighborhood has provided many helpful insights into the nature of prejudice.

Support for Allport's (1954) theory of equal standing in the residential sphere was found by Ihlanfeldt and Scafidi (2002, 2004). Their work discovered that greater neighborhood contact with blacks increased whites' tolerance of black neighbors. Yet, this only occurred if the black neighbor possessed a similar level of higher educational attainment as the white resident. Though this does support Allport's thesis, it also exhibits the prejudicial amalgamation of race and social class. Leven et al. (1976) went one step further and suggested that white's living preferences reflect class prejudice more than racial prejudice. Race and class both possess powerful socializing effects and to choose one over the other risks a dangerous devaluation. Despite the entangling effects

of race and class, these works support Allport's theory that equal interaction between those of different races will lead to the alleviation of prejudicial attitudes in the case of residential organization.

The workplace involves both equal, and hierarchical, relationships which provide opportunities for prejudicial alleviation but also for racial conflict. This fact leads many people to work in racially homogeneous environments (Ihlanfeldt and Scafidi 2004). Yet, research has found the workplace to provide positive effects on racial attitudes. Wilson (1996) found that equal, interracial workplace relationships reduce social distance. Ihlanfeldt and Scafidi (2004) furthered research on race in the workplace by exhibiting that whites who worked with blacks were more willing to live with blacks. The fact that workplace desegregation possessed an independent effect on racial residential patterns exhibits its potentiality for alleviating prejudicial racial attitudes. Assessing true effects of interracial contact in the workplace is made difficult by the nature of hierarchical relationships. Most places of work possess bureaucratic structures which lead to hierarchical relationships between employees. Despite this, the dominant role of work in society cannot be ignored and its ability to lead to the alleviation of prejudicial attitudes must be recognized.

A lesser recognized context for cross-racial contact is the religious congregation. Since Emerson and Smith's *Divided by Faith* (2000), religious congregations have become a popular realm within which to study multiracial contexts in organizational literature. Much has been chronicled about these unique places of worship in a rather short period of time (Ammerman 1997; Becker 1998; Christerson, Emerson and Edwards 2005; DeYoung et al. 2003; Dougherty 2003; Dougherty and Huyser 2008; Emerson

2006; Emerson and Kim 2003; Marti 2005; Yancey 2003). Despite Emerson and Smith's (2000) call for more research to be done on the interrelationships of congregational diversity and prejudicial attitudes, few studies have been able to find social effects of cross-racial congregational contexts. Maier (2007) found that individuals who attend congregations which are 99-100 percent the same race as them are more likely to distrust those of another race, more likely to find the adoption of a child of a different race to be wrong, and are less likely to be a part of a racial or ethnic organization. This may all sound rather bleak, but if the directions of these findings are reversed, multiracial contexts of just two percent or more are found to possess drastically different racial attitudes. Further support for strong effects within a rather small amount of multiracial contact is found by Yancey (1999). He found that whites who attended church with at least one black individual exhibited more racially tolerant attitudes. These findings offer the possibility that religious congregations may possess the power to ameliorate prejudice.

Three possible advantages that congregations may have over other social contexts are democratic structures, open membership, and supernatural orientation. Though members of boards and prominent financial supporters may have elevated statuses, average members of a congregation comparatively possess very similar social statuses within the congregation. This, combined with the fact that religious congregations in America have open memberships, allows for members that feel a lack of social standing to leave for another congregation where they might possess a more equality. Open membership also allows those of any race the formal ability to join. A final possible advantage for congregations in alleviating racial prejudice is the potential to use

supernatural rhetoric to provoke members to see it as a mandate from the divine.

Research has found that some congregations have experienced numerical growth through increased levels of racial diversity in response to congregational leaders communicating a divine mandate to do so (Ammerman 1997; Becker 1998; Christerson and Emerson 2003; Ellingson 2007).

Hypothesis

The relative effects of these three contexts are mostly unknown. Though research has been done on the three independently, they have mostly remained separated within their own fields of social research. DeYoung, et al. (2003) make a case for congregations being the best hope for overcoming racial division in society, yet at this point statements such as this remain largely conjecture. The current work attempts to fill this void by assessing all three realms of social context on various racial attitudes. In response to the research that has been discussed, the following relationship will be tested:

H1- Increasing levels of racial diversity in one's religious organizations will be related to more racially accepting attitudes, while controlling for the racial diversity of one's residential location and workplace.

Data

Many datasets possess the necessary variables to complete tests of Control Theory in residential location or the workplace, but few possess the necessary items to test this theory in religious organizations. The second wave of the Baylor Religion Survey (BRS2) not only provides all of the variables that are needed to accomplish such an analysis, but it also allows the simultaneous measurement of the racial diversity experienced by an individual in the neighborhood and work as well. The wide breadth of

analysis in the BRS2 provides an effective array of racial attitudinal variables, congregational demographical variables, and social location variables which make this analysis possible. The BRS2 is a national random survey designed by the Institute for Studies of Religion and conducted by the Gallup organization. The second wave of the survey was administered in the fall of 2007. Utilizing a mixed-method sampling design (telephone and self-administered mailed survey) a total of 1,648 adults responded to more than 350 items. This comprehensive survey allows an opportunity to better understand what social contexts possess power in creating and alleviating prejudicial racial attitudes. Various attempts via governmental, private, and public institutions have been undertaken in hopes of lessening racial prejudice. This dataset makes it possible to test the relative relationships that diversity in a congregation, neighborhood, or workplace has with perceptions of a racialized “other.”

In order to examine the relationships existent between one’s congregational, residential, and workplace racial diversity, sufficient variables to construct these realms were needed. Congregational diversity was constructed using a variable that asked the respondent, “About what percent of the people who attend your current place of worship are of the following races or ethnicities?” Spaces allowed for the respondent to fill in percentages for “White (Non-Hispanic),” “Hispanic,” “Black or African-American,” “Asian,” and “Some other race or ethnicity.” A dichotomous variable (“DIVCONG”) was created to designate those respondents in a congregation that does not possess a critical mass of 80% or more of a single race. If the respondent answered the question and listed all racial categories as accounting for less than 80% of the total, the individual was assigned a 1. If a respondent stated that any racial group in their congregation

accounted for 80% or more of the people in their church, the respondent was assigned a value of 0. Respondents that did not report going to church also were assigned a value of 0. Scholars have accepted an 80/20 split in a congregation to be the threshold for a racially diverse congregation (Emerson and Smith 2000; Emerson and Woo 2006). This approach relies on the work of Pettigrew (1975), Kanter (1977), and Pettigrew and Martin (1985) which state that in order to possess a critical mass, a group must make up 80% or more of the whole. Use of the dichotomous DIVCONG variable is in keeping with the dominant practice in this line of research.

The second realm of measurement was the residential neighborhood. The BRS2 possesses a unique measurement of residential neighborhood diversity. The question asked of the respondent was, "How many people in your neighborhood are... a. White, non-Hispanic? b. Black or African-American? c. Hispanic or Latino? d. Asian?" Responses were measured via a six-point Likert scale with the following range: "All," "Most," "About Half," "Some," "A few," and "None." To allow for an individual's total contact with other races in the workplace to be measured, a summation of these responses was created for those questions that dealt with races other than the respondent's own race. For example, Asian respondents only had a., b., and c. included in their summation, thus providing a possible range from 0 to 15. For respondents who were not White, Black, Hispanic, or Asian, all four responses were added together resulting in a range from 0 to 20. The higher the value on the additive scale, the more exposure an individual theoretically has to people of different races. Due to the difference in range for this racial group, all responses were centered around their means. The resultant variable was named "DIVRES" for diversity of residence.

The third context, the workplace, was measured exactly as was residential neighborhoods. A question asks the respondent: “If you are currently employed, how many of the people you work with are... a. White, non-Hispanic? b. Black or African-American? c. Hispanic or Latino? d. Asian?” Responses were measured via the six-point Likert scale ranging from “All” to “None” that was previously discussed. Responses to the four variations of the question were summated and centered utilizing the same method as explained above for neighborhood diversity. The resultant variable was named “DIVWORK” for diversity of the workplace. Any variable pertaining to workplace leads to the omission of those respondents that do not work. Fifty-nine percent of the sample answered all four the questions about workplace racial diversity. This accounts for more than 85% of the missing cases in models. Tests were run with the workplace variable excluded in order to test for robust relationships outside of just working Americans and the findings held. The omission of this variable does not alter the findings, thus lending confidence that the relationships found hold true even for those that do not have a job.

Several control variables theoretically related to racial prejudice were utilized as well. Assessing the causal linkages of racial prejudice is a quite harrowing task. A comprehensive list would be almost impossible to collect, yet at the top of this list are several agreed upon relationships which shape prejudicial studies. The first independent variable is AGE (continuous). Research has found that older Americans exhibit more racialized attitudes than younger Americans (Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, and Kryson 1997; Allport 1954; Firebaugh and Davis 1988; Hasher, Zacks, and May 1999; Radvansky, Zacks, and Hasher 2005; Wilson 1996).

Possibly the most obvious independent relationship to racial prejudice is race itself. Race was controlled for using dichotomous controls for “WHITE” “BLACK,” “HISPANIC,” and “OTHERRACE.” “WHITE” was omitted from the models for comparative reasons. Practically all studies on racial attitudes include race in some way (Wilson 1996; Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, and Kryson 1997; Allport 1954; Ihlanfeldt and Scafidi 2002, 2004; Firebaugh and Davis 1988; Yancey 1999; Hadaway, Hackett, and Miller 1984; Ihlanfeldt and Scafidi 2002). As mentioned earlier, the relationship between the social location of class and race have strong relationships. Increasing levels of educational attainment, “EDUC” measured on a 7-point ordinal scale, and “INCOME”, measured on a 7-point ordinal scale, decreases the amount of racial prejudice mostly through increased levels of interracial contact (Schuman et al. 1997; Allport 1958; Blau 1997; Brewer 1965; Marsden 1987; Hadaway, Hackett, and Miller 1984). Political liberalism/conservatism (“POLID” 7-point Likert scale with 1= Extremely Conservative and 7= Extremely Liberal) has also been found to be related to racial prejudice (Sidanius and Pratto 1999; Jackman 1994; Kinder and Mendelberg 2000; Kinder and Sears 1981; Sidanius, Pratto, and Bobo 1996). These scholars support the idea that more conservative ideologies are related to increasing levels of racial prejudice, while more liberal ideologies are related to lower levels of racial prejudice. It seems that most scholars have accepted that ideology and racial prejudice have become intertwined in forming attitudes toward political issues (Kuklinski, et al. 1997).

Religious commitment has been found to possess a curvilinear relationship with racial prejudice. Low levels of religious involvement have been found to relate to more explicit racial prejudice than the religiously uninvolved; yet prejudice has been found to

decrease as the religiously involved become more so (Chalfant and Peek 1983; Gorsuch and Aleshire 1974; Batson et al. 1993; Rowatt and Franklin 2004). In this study, religious commitment is measured by a variable named “CHURCHATTEND” (9-point ordinal scale from 1= Never Attend to 9= Several Times a Week). Non-creedal religious Fundamentalism has been linked to increasing racial prejudice (Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1992; Laythe et al. 2002; Wylie and Forest 1992; Rowatt 2005). In addition, Conservative Protestant attendees are more likely to report racial prejudice than those that attend Catholic or Mainline Protestant congregations (Chalfant and Peek 1983; Gorsuch and Aleshire 1974; Emerson and Smith 2000). Thus, Religious Tradition was categorized into five dichotomous groups: “CONSPROT” (Conservative Protestants), “MAINPROT” (Mainline Protestants), “CATH” (Catholics), “OTHERREL” (other religious group), and “NOREL” (no religious affiliation).

Regional variation in prejudicial attitudes has mainly focused on Southern effects in comparison to the other regions of the United States (Firebaugh and Davis 1988; Wilson 1996). Though Firebaugh and Davis (1988) found prejudicial levels to be higher in the South than other regions, they also found that the rate of decline in prejudicial attitudes to be higher in the South than in the other regions even while controlling for migrants. Regional location within the United States was categorized into the dichotomous U.S. Census Bureau groupings of “WEST,” “EAST,” “MIDWEST,” and “SOUTH.” The “SOUTH” category was left out of multivariate models for comparative reasons.

Gender differences in racial attitudes propose that males possess more prejudicial attitudes than women (Carter 1990; Schuman, et al. 1997; Pope-Davis and Ottavi 1994).

Carter (1990) claims that a major reason for this relationship is that sex discrimination might be related to levels of racial awareness, so “FEMALE” (dichotomous) was used as a control variable.

Dependent Indicators of Racial Prejudice

Specifically, this analysis attempts to provide a better understanding of whether racial diversity in religious, residential, and/or work contexts are related to an individual’s attitudes toward those of another race. The BRS2 possesses multiple prejudice variables that range from attitudes toward those of another race to discrimination variables of concrete actions taken toward someone of another race. Six variables were examined for independent relationships with the variables listed above.

Four dependent variables were created as a summation of multiple 3-point Likert scales. These questions asked about the respondent’s comfort in different racial situations. The first question asked was “RACEWORK,” “How comfortable would you be working with someone who is... a. White, Non-Hispanic... b. Black or African-American... c. Hispanic or Latino... d. Asian...” The second question was “RACENBOR,” “How comfortable would you be if a family moved next door to you with about the same income and education as you and is..... a. White, Non-Hispanic... b. Black or African-American... c. Hispanic or Latino... d. Asian...” The third question asked was “RACEDIN,” “How comfortable would you be if a member of your family wanted to bring a friend home to dinner who is... a. White, Non-Hispanic... b. Black or African-American... c. Hispanic or Latino... d. Asian...” The fourth question was “RACEMAR,” “How comfortable would you be if a daughter of yours married someone who is... a. White, Non-Hispanic... b. Black or African-American... c. Hispanic or

Latino... d. Asian...” Possible responses to these questions were on a three-point Likert scale (“Very comfortable,” “Somewhat comfortable,” and “Not at all comfortable”). A summation of responses was created for each respondent dependent upon race. Only the questions that targeted those of a different race than the respondent were used. All of the categories dealing with groups of a different race from the respondent were added together. Due to there only being four racial categories possessing questions and there being more than 4 racial categories that the respondent could identify as, values were added only for those questions dealing with races other than the respondent’s. Thus, for white respondents the valid range was from 0 to 6. For a respondent whose race was not White, Black, Hispanic, or Asian, the valid range was from 0 to 8. Cronbach’s alpha for the 4 questions that were used to create “RACEWORK” is .864. The four questions used to create “RACENBOR” possess an alpha of .881. The questions used to create “RACEDIN” have an alpha of .873 and the four questions used to create “RACEMAR” have a Cronbach’s alpha of .824. Due to there being differing ranges for the variables across the dataset, the scores were standardized by centering the values around their related means.

Another dependent variable dealt with trusting those of another race. A summation was created to responses from the question “RACETRUST,” “How much would you say that you trust the following people or groups? c. White, Non-Hispanics... d. Blacks or African-Americans... e. Hispanics or Latinos...” Possible responses to this question ranged on a 4-point Likert scale from “A lot” to “Not at All.” All of the categories dealing with groups of a different race from the respondent were added together. For Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics, the valid range was from 0 to 6. For other

racess, the valid range was from 0 to 9. Due to only three racial categories possessing questions, values were standardized by centering the values around the related means. The Cronbach's alpha for the three questions is .902. The final dependent variable used was "INTERDATE," "Have you ever dated or been romantically involved with a person of another race?" Responses were "Yes" or "No."

Methods

Two types of modeling techniques were utilized. The first five dependent variables (RACEWORK, RACENBOR, RACEDIN, RACEMAR, and RACETRUST) were all measured using additive scales. OLS regression was chosen in order to test these variables.⁹ Respondent's congregational racial diversity, residential diversity, and workplace diversity were assessed while controlling for age, gender, race, income level, educational attainment, regional location, church attendance, religious tradition, and political ideology. Regression models were run in such a way that positive relationships signify a more accepting view toward the given racial variable. Negative relationships with the dependent variable exhibit more prejudicial or discriminatory views. All of the regression models utilized unweighted data as suggested by Winship and Radbill (1994).

The last dependent variable, INTERDATE, was measured dichotomously. Due to the level of measurement, Logistic regression was chosen in order to assess relative relationships with an individual's congregational racial diversity, residential diversity, and workplace diversity while controlling for age, gender, race, income level, educational attainment, regional location, church attendance, religious tradition, and political

⁹ Due to the nature of RACEWORK, RACENBOR, RACEDIN, RACEMAR, and RACETRUST having a limited range of responses, Tobit regression models were performed. The Tobit results were identical to the OLS regression findings. Following common practice, OLS models are presented.

ideology. Odds ratios are reported, so values above one signify a positive relationship and values below one signify a negative relationship with the dependent variable.

Findings

The first five dependent variables deal with explicit attitudes of relational comfort toward someone of a different race. According to Contact Theory (Allport 1954), we

Table 12
Effects on Racial Prejudicial Attitudes (OLS Regressions, Standardized Coefficients)

Variables	RACE WORK	RACE NBOR	RACE DIN	RACE MAR	RACE TRUST
DIVCONG	.099***	.092*	.105*	.140***	.033
DIVRES	.041	.091**	.072	.113**	.033
DIVWORK	-.006	-.032	-.043	-.030	-.059
AGE	-.044	-.133***	-.126***	-.138***	.135***
EDUCATION	.174***	.160***	.114**	.115**	.042
INCOME	.169***	.154***	.177***	.047	.138***
FEMALE	.025	.044	.017	.020	.055
POLID	.059	.050	.089*	.219***	.147***
CHURCHATTEND	-.051	-.007	-.021	.009	.155***
Race					
BLACK	-.115***	-.065	-.048	.032	-.095**
HISPANIC	-.009	.004	.007	.068*	.001
OTHERRACE	-.033	.005	-.009	-.032	-.091**
Region					
EAST	.017	.062	.046	.075*	.004
WEST	-.018	.076	.060	.137***	.088*
MIDWEST	.026	.054	.051	.123***	.044
Religious Tradition					
MAINPROT	-.122**	-.138***	-.105**	-.068	-.078*
CATH	-.113**	-.147***	-.151***	-.073	-.005
OTHERREL	-.040	-.071	-.034	-.006	-.010
NOREL	-.079	-.058	-.068	.104*	-.006
INTERCEPT	-.795***	-.616**	-.606**	-.777**	-1.64***
R-SQUARE	.1146	.1282	.1153	.2039	.1033
N	890	889	890	870	887

*** P<.001 ** P<.01 * P<.05

Note: Values are Standardized Estimates

would expect that increasing levels of racial diversity at work would be positively related to a respondent being comfortable working with someone of a different race. This is not the case. The only social network variable significantly related to RACEWORK is DIVCONG. Income and education are found to be positively related to comfort with racial diversity at work, where as Blacks are less comfortable with working with other races than Whites are. Mainline Protestants and Catholics were significantly less likely to be comfortable with racial diversity at work than Conservative Protestants. Previous research has supported the opposite (Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1992; Laythe et al. 2002; Wylie and Forest 1992; Rowatt 2005; Chalfant and Peek 1983; Gorsuch and Aleshire 1974); yet further exceptions to this rule are found in four of the six models. Due to the robustness of significance in the models, it is unlikely that the finding is unique to a given attitude or action. There is a differential level of prejudicial discomfort present for Mainline Protestants and Catholics as compared to Conservative Protestants. Why this is present is beyond the scope of the present study. More research in this arena is needed to better understand these differential findings.

Control Theory would also posit that comfort with those of a different race in a neighborhood would be significantly related with the racial diversity of one's neighborhood. This theory is supported by Table 11, yet a more powerful relationship exists with the diversity of one's congregation. Age, income, and education are found to be related with neighborhood comfort in directions that are expected. The rather surprising finding that Mainline Protestants and Catholics possess more prejudicial attitudes than Conservative Protestants is further supported. Age possesses a

significantly negative relationship with diverse contact in the residence, as it does with the last two variables, RACEDIN and RACEMAR.

The variable, RACEDIN has much of the same relationships. Congregational diversity is found to be related to one being more comfortable with asking someone of a different race into their home for dinner. Age, education, and income all share

Table 13
Effects on Racial Prejudicial Attitudes (Logistic Regressions, Odds Ratios)

Variables	INTERDATE
DIVCONG	1.987**
DIVRES	1.164
DIVWORK	1.005
AGE	.991
EDUCATION	1.138*
INCOME	.868*
FEMALE	.556***
POLID	1.249***
CHURCHATTEND	.930*
Race	
BLACK	1.881
HISPANIC	2.998**
OTERRACE	2.800
Region	
EAST	.977
WEST	1.946**
MIDWEST	.900
Religious Tradition	
MAINPROT	.685
CATH	.674
OTHERREL	1.604
NOREL	.906
LIKELIHOOD RATIO	154.02***
R-SQUARE	.2260
N	834

*** P<.001 ** P<.01 * P<.05

Note: Values are Odds Ratios

relationships with the expected effect. Again, Mainline Protestants and Catholics were found to show less racial comfort than Conservative Protestants, this time in inviting someone to dinner. Yet, there is no relationship with residential diversity. Just because one has a diverse neighborhood does not mean that residents will make the jump to a close enough relationship where they will invite people of another race into their home for dinner. As seen in previous literature, the more politically liberal a respondent was, the more open they were to having someone of a different race in their home for dinner (Sidanius and Pratto 1999; Jackman 1994; Kinder and Mendelberg 2000; Kinder and Sears 1981; Sidanius, Pratto, and Bobo 1996).

The fourth dependent variable was comfort with a daughter marrying someone of a different race. Attendees of diverse congregations were more likely to assent to such action, as were those that live in more diverse neighborhoods. Again, age, education, and political ideology are related in the directions previously seen. Strangely absent is income. Comfort with marriage is the only dependent variable which does not possess a significant relationship with income. A theory for this will be shared a little later. Hispanics are more likely to assent to inter-ethnicity marriage than are whites, as are all other regions of the United States compared to the south. Finally, those of no religious affiliation are more likely to assent to a daughter marrying someone of a different race than are Conservative Protestants.

The only dependent variable to lack a relationship with congregational diversity, or any of the diversity variables for that matter, is RACETRUST. A logical explanation for its differentiation from the other five dependent variables is social desirability. It is possible that simply asking whether one trusts someone else is not specific enough to

evoke answers other than what is socially acceptable. It is also possible that gaining trust is a lower barrier to cross than having someone over for dinner or romantic involvement.

Control variables that possess a relationship with cross-racial trust are: income, age, political ideology, church attendance, race, regional location, and religious tradition. Age is found to be positively related to the respondent trusting someone of a different race, but it is negatively related to comfort in having a neighbor of a different race, dinner with someone of a different race, and having a daughter marry someone of a different race. There are different levels of social distance between simply stating that you trust someone of a different race and being comfortable with them living next to you or dating a daughter. The presence of age being positively related to racial trust negates the theory of inhibitory control (Hasher, Zacks, and May 1999; Radvansky, Zacks, and Hasher 2005) and supports the finding of age being positively related to reintegration attitudes (Pope-Davis and Ottavi 1994).

Income, a liberal political ideology, church attendance, and western residence are all positively related to racial trust, whereas BLACK and OTHERRACE respondents were less likely to trust someone of a different race than Whites were. Attendance at a congregation possessed a positive relationship with racial trust. Again, as hypothesized with age, it may be that the level of social distance inherent in the question makes it easier to answer in a socially desirable way. Teachings of racial acceptance are more socially accepted in the United States and affirmation of trust in those of all races follows such a verbal script. Despite the perceived increase of religious traditions making statements of racial trust, Mainline Protestants again exhibit significantly less racial trust than Evangelical Protestants.

The last regression model to be run was on romantic involvement with someone of a different race. This variable allows for the bridge to be crossed from attitude to action. It possesses a relationship with congregational diversity. Attendees of multiracial congregations are 98.7% more likely to have been romantically involved with someone of a different race than those that attend other congregations. This relationship supports Contact Theory ideals that one's relationships with those of a different race are expanded by contact in social discourse. It must also be noted that diversity of residence and of workplace lack relationships with interracial dating.

Additional relationships that exist with this variable are educational attainment, income, gender, political ideology, church attendance, race, and regional location in the United States. Education and income possess differential relationships with interracial romantic involvement. Though, previous literature finds higher socio-demographic levels related to less prejudicial feelings (Schuman et al. 1997; Allport 1958; Blau 1997; Brewer 1965; Marsden 1987; Hadaway, Hackett, and Miller 1984), the opposite case is found for income in this situation. The only other dependent variable to lack a positive relationship with income is marriage of a daughter to someone of a different race. It is possible that the socialized situation that income presents an individual limits their choice of dating partners along racial lines, though education expands the bounds for which to choose a partner. Females are almost two times less likely than males to have been romantically involved with someone of a different race. Though this question does not focus exclusively on racial prejudice, it is interesting nonetheless that it possesses a contrary relationship to previous research on racial prejudice (Carter 1990; Schuman, et al. 1997; Pope-Davis and Ottavi 1994).

Respondents with more liberal political ideologies are significantly more likely to have dated someone of a different race, as are Hispanics when compared to Whites. Hispanics are three times more likely to have dated someone of a different race than Whites. This is likely due to cultural reasons. The social distance between Whites and Hispanics has been closer than the social distance between Whites and Blacks throughout American history. People who lived in the Western part of the United States are two times more likely than Southerners to have been romantically involved with someone of a different race. This relationship can also be attributed to the historically more distant relationship between Whites and other races in the South. Finally, higher levels of church attendance are found to be related to less likelihood of having dated someone of a different race. Social networks of homogeneity in congregations cannot be the total cause for this because the diversity of the congregation is being controlled for. This leads the cause to originate somehow in the very nature of attending church. Though it leads one to be more comfortable and accepting of other races, it creates a barrier for greater intimacy.

Discussion and Conclusions

Social contact among equals has long been seen as providing the best opportunity for the elimination of racial prejudice (Allport 1954). Few realms of society provide this opportunity on a level that nurtures friendship instead of competition. Congregations are one of these realms. The findings in this study affirm the potential of congregations for improving race relations.

In five out of six dependent variables studied, being a part of a congregation that possessed less than an 80 % critical racial mass significantly increased openness to

interracial contact. This strongly supports the hypothesis that diverse social contact in congregations can lead to less prejudicial attitudes. Being a part of a multiracial congregation may be a hidden conduit for prejudicial amelioration. In comparison, residential diversity is found to lead to more accepting racial attitudes in two of the six models. The dependent variables that residential diversity possessed a relationship with were: comfort in living around those of another race and having a daughter date someone of a different race. Workplace diversity showed no signs of having any relative effects on racial attitudes. This is likely due to the inherent inequalities in position, power, and pay within work settings. As stated earlier, one of the most important parts of Allport's thesis is that the social contact between races is done so on an equal level.

Religious congregations seem to possess the most inherently equal of statuses among the three social contexts, followed by residential location. Socio-economic levels tend to dictate where one lives, which evens the playing field somewhat. Though even in a given apartment building most inhabitants know who has the most coveted location in the building, the level of differentiation is not near what is experienced in the workplace. The congregation is by no means devoid of social ranking; yet each body adds the same value to the attendance roll on a given day of worship. Despite the differentiation of leadership and financial contribution, it may be that equal social footing is most effectively acquired in the religious congregation. Congregational members may measure themselves less in regard to level of spirituality as they do in their neighborhood by size of home or in their workplace by prestige or pay.

Another uniqueness of the religious congregation is that choice exists in affiliation due to their inherently open nature to membership. Technically, anyone can

decide at anytime to associate with a given religious congregation. Though religious capital and socialization do often affect where an individual decides to attend (Stark and Finke 2000), congregations are open structures that allow for free choice in affiliation and disaffiliation. Allusions to mandates of the supernatural must also be mentioned. Such frequent religious teachings may affect the attitudes of attendees. These unique dynamics of open choice of affiliation, relative equality existing within a social structure that is so prevalent in American culture (Jones, et al. 2002), and religious doctrine may combine to possess the best opportunity for widespread alleviation of racial prejudice. This very case has previously been made by DeYoung, et al. (2003) and Maier (2007). We can now affirm this thesis with stronger quantitative support.

One possible weakness to the study is that causal direction might be questioned. If the respondent had not felt comfortable living around those of a different race, they would obviously be less likely to live in a neighborhood that is racially diverse. The fact that neighborhood diversity is related to interracial dating of a daughter is important because it more strongly validates racial contact in the neighborhood as having valid effects outside of reverse causation, and especially in cases that deal with the most intimate of relationships. Though Americans seem to be participating less in community organizations and tend to see the home as a retreat from others instead of a place of existence with others (Putnam 2001; Kelbaugh 1997), there is support for residential racial diversity to have some impact on racial attitudes though not as strong as the congregation.

A second possible weakness of the study is that the diversity variables are measured using the respondent's perception instead of impartial counts. This allows for

the possibility of social desirability, yet this should not cause severe harm to the models, for it is likely to assume that levels of social desirability are steady across all of the independent variables being used. There is no reason to believe that any of the independent variables possesses more or less measurement error in regard to prejudicial attitudes.

Future research is needed in testing for relationships of being in a multiracial congregation with other racial and social attitudinal variables. Further research is needed to test for the robustness of the hypothesis. In addition, a few unexpected relationships should be examined. First, a better understanding is needed of why non-attending Americans are more prejudicial than Americans who do attend religious services. This relationship has little precedence and deserves a second look. Second, it would be helpful to know how prevalent teachings on racial diversity and acceptance are within attendee's religious congregation and workplace. Examining the relative effectiveness of such seminars and sermons would be helpful. Finally, further research needs to be done on when and why Mainline Protestants and Catholics possess more prejudicial attitudes than Evangelical Protestants. This relationship is counter to most previous research (Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1992; Laythe et al. 2002; Wylie and Forest 1992; Rowatt 2005; Chalfant and Peek 1983; Gorsuch and Aleshire 1974). Whether this is due to a uniqueness of the data or a new shift in racial attitudes needs to be determined. It is very possible that DeYoung, et al.'s (2003) case for congregations being the best hope for overcoming racial division in society is not overstated. At least it is now more than purely conjecture.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions

Congregations are a productive and important part of the American landscape of social organizations. This work has aimed to create a better understanding of American congregations and those that inhabit them. From growth to death, and from religious identity to racial diversity, social properties of congregations have powerful effects on attendees and society at large. When a church dies, social capital is lost by the attendees (Stark and Finke 2000) and community is lessened among those the live in the area (Putnam 2000). When a church grows, the opposite effects are experienced. When religious identity is used to unite people for an agreed upon cause, the resultant movement possesses the potential to change history and society. When a church experiences racial diversity, prejudicial attitudes are less prevalent. All of these cases exhibit the power of religious congregations and the potential that they have to enact change.

The research presented in the four previous chapters attempts to fill gaps that have existed within social literature and strengthen research that has previously been done. It is my hope that these studies may be used by scholars and religious leaders in the future to better understand the role that congregations play in American society. Of utmost importance to me is that this research might have practical applicability for practitioners, as well as theoretical utility for scholars. In these concluding pages, selected results from the four chapters will be presented and implications discussed.

Growth and Decline of American Congregations

What makes churches grow? What keeps them from growing? These are the questions that I initially began with in the introduction for Study One. Yet, they are not the only focus of the first study. Homophily Theory and the Homogenous Unit Principle were tested quantitatively using the United States Congregational Life Survey. The initial hypotheses were that if a value or ascribed variable was related to growth it would do so in the direction of homogenization. In other words, congregations that are growing are doing so because they are very uniform. In addition, if heterogeneity exists, homogeneity would be needed on some other congregational characteristic in order for congregations to grow.

Neither of the hypotheses were supported, nor denied, by the Mainline Protestant or Catholic congregations. Contrasting support comes from the Whole Sample and the Evangelical Protestant sample. The Whole Sample of congregations showed growth to be related to a heterogeneous age as well as population growth and smaller congregation sizes. This refutes both of the stated hypotheses. American congregations, as a whole, grow as a result of possessing a wide range of age groupings.

In the case of Evangelical Protestant congregations, those that possessed greater levels of diversity of age also were more likely to have grown. Yet these congregations were also more likely to grow if they possessed greater homophily of belief in the Bible. This is an important finding because it lends support to the two stated hypotheses, though not necessarily in the way most Church Growth and Niche Theorists would have expected.

This study has implications for scholars and practitioners alike. It presents a new look at the theories of homophily for the social theorist and at the Homogenous Unit Principle for church growth practitioners. Recruiting members by demographics, on average, is not fruitful unless the church is intentionally aiming to recruit an age group which is under-represented. This finding has the potential to change the course of congregational growth practices and empowers congregations and denominations to more wisely focus their energies in evangelism.

Evangelical congregations will most likely be pleased to find homogeneity of belief about the Bible to be related to growth. Due to the unique role of the Bible in these congregations, it will be seen as a validation of their interpretation of it. Socially, it seems to be playing a role of niche contraction so that the congregations can experience niche expansion in other areas such as age or any of the demographic variables that were statistically insignificant. An Evangelical congregation can confidently expand its width in race or socio-economic status if it possesses a uniform standard of belief about the Bible. This has the potential to change the way many Evangelical leaders understand growth. Anecdotally, I have had pastors tell me that they were avoiding intentional recruitment of other races because they had always understood that it would cause the church to decline. The fact that this is found to be statistically false opens the door for congregations to intentionally become more racially diverse.

From the growth of American congregations, the next step was to study the closure of American congregations. Study 2 formally tested three hypotheses which were formed in light of the findings (and data implications) of Dougherty, et al. (2008). It was hypothesized that age liabilities, both oldness and newness, will lead to greater levels of

congregational closure in the Southern Baptist Convention. Congregational data from 1994 to 2007 lend support to the hypothesis on newness as well as one hypothesis on oldness. Yet, the hypothesis predicting a greater amount of closure after 75 years of age failed to gain support.

“Free-churches” may receive less hierarchical guidance, but polity does not seem to affect SBC congregation’s closure rates in the long run. There is some evidence that polity may have an effect on early life closure. Age liabilities were found in the SBC during the first ten years of congregational life and during the transitional period of 35 to 50 years of age, just as they were in the PCUSA and Church of the Nazarene (Dougherty, et al. 2008). A lack of resources plays a strong role in closure during this early period, for there are innate traits that exist in early age that cause organizations to be more likely to close. For one, social linkages must be gained between the organization and other entities so that social isolation of the organization may be overcome (Stinchcombe 1965).

SBC congregations exhibited a much higher rate of death in the first 10 years of existence than either the PCUSA or Nazarene denominations. Due to the fact that free-churches possess less social connectedness to a higher authoritative structure, higher risks of death exist for them in early life. As hypothesized, there was a greater risk of congregational closure in the transitional period of 35 to 50 years of age. Support for this is found in the regression models, but the frequencies of death show that though it may be significantly related to death, it does not occur at as high of a rate as seen in the PCUSA and Church of the Nazarene. It is possible that the “free-church” hierarchical structure might lend itself to lower rates of closure in late life. It is easier for a central authority

structure to close the doors of a congregation than it is for the few that are still gathering each week.

Further support for this idea lies in the fact that there is no increased rate of death after 75 years of age in SBC data, like there was in PCUSA data. Regression modeling and frequency figures find no support for this old age liability in the SBC. Closure among SBC congregations levels off after 60 years of age and continues the same low rate of closure thereafter. SBC congregations seem to be able to survive on less social resources, prolonging their life.

Implications of the findings are mixed for denominational leaders. On one hand, it could be said that more hierarchical denominations should think of leaving congregations open longer. Yet, the nature of their structure makes this a greater financial burden. Another view, which I have personally heard from more than one Southern Baptist, is that it would be better if many of the smallest congregations closed and the members moved their membership to another SBC church. The theory goes that the members would be better served in the long run to move to a congregation with more resources which leads to greater ministry efforts. This would especially be true in the southern part of the United States where there is a proliferation of SBC churches. Either way, it is important for congregational leaders to understand the dynamics of congregational closure and the nature of the risks that are unique to age liabilities. Two actions that the SBC would be wise to consider in light of the findings are: 1) to increase the level of assistance to church plants in the first 10 years of age, and 2) to educate churches about the risks of generational transmission. Instead of charter and early members of the church being in control of it until their death, church leaders would be

wise to intentionally involve younger leaders as well throughout the life of the church. This would avoid a drastic shift in leadership or a general lack of leadership once the original leaders are gone.

It is my desire that this study be used by social theorists to better understand the dynamics of closure and age liabilities within a unique, and prolific, form of social organization. Though the bureaucratic structure of the denomination seems to have no effects on age liabilities, newness and oldness liabilities are still present. It is also my desire for this study to be used by practitioners and for social dynamics among congregations to be illumined. This study may just include one denomination, but when compared to the findings of two other denominations (Dougherty, et al. 2008) and a random national sample of congregations (Anderson, et al. 2008), a better understanding of American congregations can be attained.

Evangelicalism

Sociological studies of religion have discussed the intermingling affects of belief, belonging, and identity for quite some time (Hunter 1983; Kellstedt, Green, Guth, and Smidt 1996; Smith 1998). Yet, discussions have failed in their attempts to include all of the rival perspectives. When all three approaches to categorizing Evangelicals are included in the same models, they all three exhibit significant relationships with abortion attitudes, sexual attitudes, political party affiliation, and public religiosity. Evangelical Belief is found to possess the strongest relationships, yet they are all comparable to each other.

I posit that Evangelical Belief may represent the core of Evangelicalism. Individuals who state that they have had a conversion experience, believe that Jesus is the

Son of God, believe in the exclusivity of salvation within Christianity, and believe that the Bible is perfectly true or should be taken literally create the crux of Evangelicalism. More than a quarter of those that possess such beliefs are not a member of an Evangelical church. This shows the potential power of these individuals outside traditional, institutionalized Evangelicalism. In addition, 76.3 percent of those that sit in the pews of an Evangelical church do not adhere to the four traditional tenets of the faith movement. It seems that this issue methodologically weakens its use in predicting social and political outcomes. As for identity, the fact that more than half (57%) of those that identified as an Evangelical do not possess the four traditional tenets of the faith movement shows that the problems mentioned earlier about its measurement may, in fact, be measuring something other than a “religious” identity. The methodological ramifications of this are that the movement would be best mirrored by its theological and philosophical assessment, not its organization or political mobilization.

Even if one crowns Evangelical Belief as the strongest indicator, it must be recognized that “Evangelicalism” consists of all three properties. Scholars have been correct in studying each of these categories separately, for they all have some level of importance in affecting social attitudes. The job for future work is to better define the unique characteristics of those in each category and to better understand the traits that the three categories are tapping into. Thus, the next step in research on Evangelicals is to accurately define exactly who these three categories are grouping and how they can be unique while still existing under the umbrella of Evangelicalism.

There is an inherent problem with self-identification as an Evangelical. For some the problem lies with a religious connotation that has been shaped by religious culture

and mass media. For others, the problem lies with a political connotation that has been shaped by political parties and mass media. Self-identification, in itself, is not bad. It is when that label becomes over-used by political and religious rhetoric that it becomes bad. The effect of belonging to a certain organization or demographic defines a core basis of sociology. Society and culture do shape people and determine their course. Yet, we must be careful of becoming too deterministic. As unsociological as it might sound, agency does exist. Religious belief is a strange amalgamation of agency, social background, and the super-empirical. Because of this it is an easy target to discredit sociologically, but the effects of it are clear.

Diversity and the American Congregation

Equal social contact has long been seen as providing the best opportunity for the elimination of racial prejudice (Allport 1954). Being a part of a multiracial congregation is significantly related to increased openness to inter-racial contact. Specifically, it is related to comfort working with, living by, eating with, dating, or having a daughter date someone of a different race. These variables span the gamut of interracial contact from the prejudicial to the discriminatory. Despite the level of inter-racial contact a person has in their neighborhood or workplace, the relationships persist.

Residential diversity possesses relationships with the alleviation of prejudicial attitudes in with comfort in living next to someone of a different race, having someone of a different race over to eat at your house, and having a daughter date someone of a different race; yet workplace diversity exhibits no relationship with racial prejudicial amelioration. As stated earlier, one of the most important parts of Allport's thesis is that the social contact between races is done so on an equal level. The workplace is

inherently filled with levels of importance, wage, and power. Residential location also possesses unequal statuses. Though it would seem to possess some level of equal status due to socio-economic levels dictate where one lives, even in a seemingly homophilous neighborhood, we all know the values of the homes around us. Social ranking exists in congregations but not to the extent found residentially or professionally. This equal social footing provides a perfect domain for the study of Contact Theory.

Another important aspect of the religious congregation is that choice exists in affiliation due to open membership. Technically, anyone can decide at anytime to associate with a given religious congregation. Though religious capital and socialization do often affect where an individual decides to attend (Stark and Finke 2000), congregations are open structures that allow for free choice in affiliation and disaffiliation. I find that congregations possess a great opportunity for widespread alleviation of racial prejudice. This very case has previously been made by DeYoung, et al. (2003) and Maier (2007), yet now we can affirm this thesis with stronger quantitative support.

My hope is that this study will fill a void in the previous literature on Contact Theory by allowing for the relative racial diversity of multiple social frameworks to be controlled for at the same time. It has powerful implications for racial reconciliation and American congregations. The findings lead one to believe that racial diversity in congregations should be strongly encouraged not only for the betterment of the congregation, but for the whole of American society as well. Not only is racial diversity a socially acceptable thing to do, it is also a socially beneficial thing to do. Congregations possess the power to positively change America in a way other

organizations can only dream. They also possess the power to negatively affect Americans in ways that are unthinkable. Given the proliferation of congregations in America, it is easy to get caught up in the potential they possess. Yet, temperance of such excitement is necessary given their history. Without them the Civil Rights Movement might never have happened, yet without them there might not have been burnt crosses either. Such is the situation of American congregations, for better or worse.

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