

*Race, Diversity, and Membership Duration in Religious Congregations**

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It has long been noted that religious congregations tend to be racially homogeneous. Previous case studies assert that members of a numerical minority group face individual and organizational pressures that lead them to leave congregations faster than majority members. This can create a constant pull toward homogeneity despite congregational efforts to diversify. Building on theory in organizational ecology, we test this assertion using national, multi level data from the U.S. Congregational Life Survey. The analysis shows that members of a numerical minority do have shorter durations of membership than majority members and that the gap between the two increases with the size of the majority.

From the pulpit of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church on November 4, 1956, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke to a nation: “You must face the tragic fact that when you stand at 11:00 on Sunday morning to sing ‘All Hail the Power of Jesus Name’ and ‘Dear Lord and Father of all Mankind,’ you stand in the most segregated hour of Christian America.” Half a century later Rev. King’s words still echo. It is estimated that nearly half of all U.S. congregations do not have a single member of another racial group (Dougherty and Huyser 2008) and nine in 10 congregations have a single racial group comprising more than 80 percent of its membership (Emerson and Woo 2006). Maybe most striking was a 1992 survey which found that people were less likely to have a conversation with a person of another race in church than they were to have one while shopping, while at work, while at entertainment events, or while doing activities with their children (Sigelman et al. 1996). All of this is despite a variety of formal denominational “task forces” and “initiatives” and informal efforts by attendees and leaders to increase racial diversity in congregations (e.g., Peers 1995). Individuals’ political, moral, and theological beliefs about the value of diversity motivate these efforts, but organizational realities frequently trump these idealistic principles and prevent congregations from successfully diversifying.

Why is it so difficult for congregations to diversify? In their ground-breaking work on race and contemporary U.S. religion, Emerson and Smith (2000)

provided one answer. They presented elements of a theory concerning the organizational and social processes that lead to racial homogeneity in congregations. They argued that minority members are at a social disadvantage in racially mixed congregations, which causes them to be disproportionately likely to leave the congregation. Hence, there is a constant trend toward racial homogeneity despite the best efforts of congregational attendees and leaders. Case studies on multiracial religious organizations of varied compositions offer supporting evidence (Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson 2005; Christerson and Emerson 2003; Garces-Foley 2007). Although Emerson and Smith focused on religious congregations, the social and organizational dynamics they highlighted can be found in other types of organizations, particularly voluntary ones.

This mechanism has not been tested using a broad sample of congregations. Do minority members leave homogenous congregations faster than majority members and if so why? In the remainder of this paper we review, expand and test this argument using data from the U.S. Congregational Life Survey (USCLS), a large multi level study of congregations and their attendees. The interplay between minority status and congregational environment is inherently a multi level question and the multi level nature of USCLS data allow us to sort out characteristics of the individual from characteristics of the congregation. More importantly, the data structure allows us to test for interactions between individual (e.g., race/ethnicity) and organizational characteristics (e.g., level of homogeneity).

Pressures Toward Homogeneity

Talk of racial diversity, integration and reconciliation has become prominent in contemporary American religion. The changing complexion of U.S. society makes the implications of race and ethnicity hard to ignore. A nascent movement of multiracial/multiethnic congregations has appeared. Some of these congregations are driven by mission, others by denominational mandate and still others by a sense of necessity (Emerson and Woo 2006). There is a segment of the population—younger, educated, and with some cross-racial experience—that finds these congregations attractive (Emerson and Woo 2006; Garces-Foley 2007). Despite their growing prominence and appeal, congregations that bring together multiple racial or ethnic groups continue to face organizational challenges. As demonstrated in a number of case studies (Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson 2005; Christerson and Emerson 2003; Garces-Foley 2007), diversity often comes with costs, particularly for those who are part of the numerical minority. These costs manifest themselves at both the individual and organizational level, but both can be conceptualized by thinking about how diversity affects the organization's resource base or "niche" (Hannan, Carroll, and Polos 2003).

Every organization attempts to extract resources from a particular part or niche of society (Hannan, Carroll, and Polos 2003; Hannan and Freeman 1977; McPherson 1983). Organizations vary in the size or width of their niche. Some attempt to extract resources from a very narrow part of society, while others draw from a broader range of people and groups. This is theoretically illustrated in Figure 1. The first organizational field has three populations (P) served by three organizations (O) specializing in those populations. In the second organizational field, however, one organization (O2) attempts to serve all three populations. This stretches the organization's niche across the other two organizations. Resources previously dedicated to only one population are now divided among three populations. As a result, the second population is less satisfied than they were with a specialized organization. Anyone from populations 2 and 3 who join this organization will quickly find that the more specialized organizations in the field (O1 and O3) serve them better because they can devote more resources to their population. When a specialized organization decides to stretch its niche or become a generalist, they often end up overlapping with other specialist organizations. This means that the organizations compete directly for resources and in a stable environment a specialist organization will tend to outperform a generalist (Hannan and Freeman 1977, p. 952). The reduced effectiveness and increased competition can lead to a loss of resources for diverse organizations.

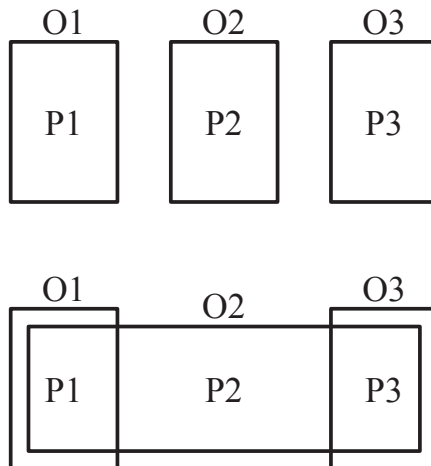


Figure 1
Diversity, Niche Width, and Niche Overlap.

Congregations may seem like an exception to the narrow niche orientation of other organizations. After all, one congregation may be home to persons of varying ages, education levels, and income brackets. Yet only a small segment of U.S. congregations successfully span racial/ethnic boundaries. The stories of these congregations are notable because they are unique. For example, Mosaic in Los Angeles attracts a multiethnic mix of worshippers by appealing to individuals on other dimensions, such as theology, artistry, innovation, and age (Marti 2005). For most congregations, race remains a source of specialization. Emerson and Smith (2000: 142, emphasis added) explained

In the process of competing, of developing niches and assuring internal strength, congregations come to be made up of highly similar people. Individual congregations tend to be made up of people from similar geographic locations, similar socioeconomic statuses, similar ethnicities, and, perhaps *first and foremost, predominantly the same race.*

Racial specialization has implications for congregational performance.

Consider a congregation whose membership has traditionally been entirely Korean but tries to incorporate members of other ethnicities. Other congregations already specialize in those ethnicities, so from the start the traditionally Korean congregation is at a competitive disadvantage serving non-Koreans. However successful the congregation is at attracting non-Koreans, it is still likely to serve its traditional majority better than its new minority members. This is not necessarily a conscious or malicious decision; it is simply a matter of habit and the greater visibility of the majority. Studying a congregation going through this exact process, Dhingra (2004) observed a variety of problems resulting from the presence of a secondary group. These problems ranged from the type of food to serve at the congregation, the type of ministries to offer, and the use of Korean language in the congregation. Because there was still a clear majority in the congregation, it was often easier to serve that core membership than it was to change everything the congregation was used to doing. If the congregation does serve the minority members, it might do so at the expense of alienating its current majority. Consequently, the minority group is often underserved.

Due to the existence of more specialized organizations serving their needs (O1 and O3 in Figure 1) and the inferior service provided by this generalist organization, members “on the edge” of the niche are at greater risk to leave the organization (Popielarz and McPherson 1995). As Emerson and Smith (2000: 149) summarized regarding religious congregations: “atypical group members are not only more likely to leave a group due to a lack of intraorganizational ties, but because competition for them to join other groups is more intense than it is for core group members.”

Like any macro process, this corresponds to more concrete micro forces (Collins 1988). At the individual level, most people have difficulty identifying

with and becoming part of a diverse group.¹ Communication and social network integration flow through homogenous ties more efficiently than diverse ties (Louch 2000). Hence, an individual who is part of the minority in a diverse organization can feel like they are constantly looking in from the outside.

The problems for an individual in a racially or ethnically diverse organization can be especially difficult because trying to “fit in” would mean abandoning a central feature of one’s identity. Foerster’s (2004) study of a historically black labor union is illustrative. She observed how many of the members became uncomfortable with the growing numbers of Caribbean and other “immigrant blacks” in the union. Older members felt that this diversity harmed the racial identity and “collective feeling” of the union. This animosity is likely to be felt by minority members, lowering their satisfaction in belonging to the organization (O’Farrell and Harlan 1982). The minority members may feel like they can never become a part of the pre-existing identity of the group. Christerson and Emerson’s (2003: 173) study of a traditionally Filipino congregation discovered that non-Filipino members tended to have fewer friendships within the congregation and expressed frustration in feeling “like an outsider.” This frustration could lead those in the numerical minority to look elsewhere for a congregation.

A line of research on “organizational demography” (Pfeffer 1983) provides support for not only the social-psychological pressures created by diversity but also for its effects on membership stability. Heterogeneity can lower individual’s psychological attachment to groups, increase absenteeism and lower the individual’s intent to stay with the group (Tsui, Egan, and O’Reilly 1992), while demographic similarity can increase social integration within organizations and lower turnover rates (Jackson et al. 1991; McCain, O’Reilly, and Pfeffer 1983; O’Reilly, Caldwell, and Barnett 1989). For example, Sacco and Schmitt (2005) found that being a “demographic misfit” was positively related to restaurant employees’ risk of turnover. Employees that did not match the overall age, gender and racial composition of the restaurant were more likely to leave than those that did “fit.” This leads to our first hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: Members of a racial group that is a numerical minority within a congregation will have shorter durations of membership than members of the majority racial group.

Tipping Points and Group–Individual Interactions

The costs of being a numerical minority likely vary depending on the context of the congregation. If the pressures on minorities to leave result from a lack of organizational visibility and social ties, then these pressures should diminish as the size of the minority increases. Being a minority in a

congregation where the majority holds 98 percent of the membership might be very different than being in congregation where the majority only holds 60 percent of the membership. It relates to issues of power. A statistical minority group in a congregation often stands on the margins of organizational decision-making. The internal culture of a congregation typically reflects the dominant group. Such power imbalances serve as a poignant barrier to successful integration in congregations (DeYoung et al. 2003; Emerson and Woo 2006). Some suggest that there is a numerical “tipping point” at which a minority member is no longer at a disadvantage in an organization. Kanter (1977) argued that when a minority group does not have a critical mass, they tend to become tokens. Tokens suffer from disproportionate visibility in the organization and heightened feelings of difference. With enough minority members, however, these negative “token effects” lessen and minority members can form cohesive bonds within the organization.

Kanter’s research identified this critical mass as occurring once 20 percent or more of the membership belonged to the minority group. Others advance a similar argument based on the statistical property that contact between minority and majority members in a group becomes almost certain once 20 percent of the membership belongs to the minority (Emerson and Kim 2003; Sigelman et al. 1996). If this is true, then we would expect the benefits of majority membership to lessen as the dominance of the majority group gets closer to 80 percent of the total membership. There is some empirical support for an interaction between the size of the numerical minority and the disadvantages of being a minority member. Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler (2005) demonstrated that the positive effect of female legislators on policy decisions and on women’s confidence in the legislature increased with the proportion of women in the legislature.

The theory and research reviewed above lead to a second hypothesis concerning the interplay between membership duration, diversity, and minority status in congregations.

Hypothesis 2: The difference in membership duration between majority and minority members increases with the size of the majority group.

Data and Methods

Data for this analysis come from the U.S. Congregational Life Survey (USCLS) (Woolever and Bruce 2002). USCLS data were drawn using hyper-network sampling, which is a method to produce a sample of organizations from a sample of individual memberships (McPherson 1982). Respondents to the 2000 General Social Survey who said that they attend worship services were asked to name the congregation that they attended. This produced a

sample of 1,329 unique congregations. Of these, 434 completed a congregational profile and attender surveys. The congregational profiles provide organizational data about the congregation (e.g., denominational affiliation, year founded, size, income). The attender surveys collected data on all individuals who attended worship services on or about April 29, 2001. Each person attending services that week over the age of 14 filled out their own responses to the attender surveys, while the congregational profile was typically completed by an individual leader. This methodology produced multilevel data. Attender surveys provide individual-level data for people within each congregation and congregational profiles provide contextual data at the organizational level that apply to all those individuals.

While USCLS data offer an important extension to previous case studies, we want to be clear in acknowledging the limitations associated with these data. Most notably, we cannot measure membership turn over in congregations, although this is central to our theoretical explanation. Shorter membership duration for numerical minorities may result from minority members joining congregations later, rather than the difficulty racially mixed congregations have retaining minority race members. Ideally, to assess the retention rates of congregations and membership duration of individuals, we would have data that are both multi level *and* longitudinal. This would allow for the measurement of individuals' movement in and out of congregations, enabling us to test the rival hypothesis of later entry dates for minority members. Unfortunately, no such data exist. We attempt to address this possible rival hypothesis, but our analysis represents only a proximate test of the niche-dynamic theory. Nevertheless, if we find that membership duration is contingent on minority/majority status and/or size, it will support the possibility of niche-dynamics as an explanation.

To utilize the multi level nature of USCLS data, we use hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). HLM corrects inaccurate standard errors resulting from observations being dependent on each other (i.e., clustered) and allows examination of the interactions between organizational properties and individual level effects. The software used in the analyses is HLM 6.0.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable comes from the attender surveys of the USCLS. The USCLS asked each attender, "How long have you been going to worship services or activities at this congregation?" Responses are coded (1) less than 1 year, (2) 1–2 years, (3) 3–5 years, (4) 6–10 years, (5) 11–20 years, and (6) more than 20 years. At the individual level the model is for the duration of

membership within congregations. At the organizational level the model is for the mean duration of membership across congregations.

Independent Variables: Individual Level

Most importantly for our research questions, we expect those who belong to the majority racial group in a congregation to have longer membership durations than minority members. Hence, we include a measure coded 1 if the individual belongs to the same racial group that holds the largest proportion of the membership within the congregation and 0 if they belong to any group without a majority membership.

People are likely to remain active in organizations where they have strong social ties (Hechter 1987). Hence, at the individual level we measured social ties through a measure asking, “Do you have any close friends in this congregation?” Responses are coded (1) no, I have little contact with others from this congregation outside of activities here; (2) no, I have some friends in this congregation, but my closest friends are not involved here; (3) yes, I have some close friends in this congregation as well as other close friends who are not part of this congregation; (4) yes, most of my closest friends are part of this congregation.

Because an individual’s dependence on an organization increases with the lack of other options, we include a control for if the individual views religion as exclusive or inclusive. This measure asks, “All the different religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth.” Responses are coded (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neutral or unsure, (4) disagree, (5) strongly disagree. Individuals who disagree with this statement should perceive fewer organizational options than those that agree with it. Hence, those with exclusive beliefs should have longer membership durations than those without these beliefs.

We also include individual-level controls for age, gender, education, income, and race. This last control is particularly important because some ethnicities have grown in the United States due to immigration and hence these individuals have had less opportunity to have long durations of membership.

Independent Variables: Congregational Level

At the congregational level, we include a measure for the level of racial homogeneity. This measure is the proportion of the membership held by the largest racial or ethnic group and comes from the attender surveys. For example, if the largest racial group in a congregation is Asian and they hold 75 percent of the membership, then the homogeneity value for the congregation is .75. Theoretically, this variable ranges from 1 (total homogeneity) to $(1/k)$ where k is the number of categories in the variable. The race variable has

seven categories (Asian or Pacific Islander; black or African American; Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin; Indian American or Alaska Native; white or Caucasian; some other race; multiple races); hence if a congregation's membership is equally distributed between these races and ethnicities, the homogeneity value would be .143.

We measure the age at which the congregation began worshipping at its current location. This is obviously necessary since individuals cannot belong to an organization longer than it has existed. In addition, we include a measure for the amount of congregation growth in recent years, computed by dividing the average weekly attendance in 2001 by the average weekly attendance in 1996. This control is necessary because a congregation that has grown recently will have many individuals with short durations of membership.

Finally, since we expect network embeddedness to increase an individual's membership duration, we also expect the overall network density within a congregation to increase the stability of congregational membership. Congregations with dense friendship networks can more effectively monitor individual's behavior and raise the overall length of membership in a congregation by keeping individuals active in the group. This is measured as the mean number of friends within each congregation as taken from the attender surveys. We also include controls for religious tradition, coded following the classification system of Steensland et al. (2000), and the number of regular participants in the congregation.

Results

Table 1 reports descriptive statistics for all individual and congregational variables. We see from the individual level predictors that 86 percent of all congregational members belong to a congregation where they are the racial majority. Likewise, the congregational level predictors show that the average level of racial homogeneity in congregations is 91 percent. In other words, one racial group dominates most congregations.

Our interest is in the effect of racial composition on membership duration. We expect persons belonging to a numerical minority group to have shorter tenures than members of the majority race in a congregation. Table 2 offers a preliminary test of this hypothesis. There is a statistically significant relationship between majority/minority status and membership tenure (Chi-Square = 736, $df = 5$, $p < .001$). Almost half of minority race members (45%) were members of their congregations for 5 years or less, as compared to just over a third of persons (36%) in the majority race. Indeed, members of a majority race are nearly as likely to have been in their congregations for more than 20 years (31%). Less than a quarter of minority race members have

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	SD
Dependent variable		
Membership duration	4.05	1.67
Level 1 Independent variables (<i>N</i> = 63,496)		
Age	49.97	17.08
Female	.60	–
Education	5.58	1.77
Income	3.67	1.51
Exclusive theology	2.81	1.27
Number of friends	2.66	.90
Black	.03	–
Asian	.04	–
Hispanic	.10	–
Other Race	.04	–
White	.80	–
Member of majority race	.86	.35
Level 2 Independent variables (<i>N</i> = 311)		
Number of regular participants (log)	2.58	.54
Age of congregation	65.98	49.79
Evangelical	.29	–
Mainline	.41	–
Catholic	.24	–
Other	.07	–
Friendship density	2.77	.25
Congregational growth (1996–2001)	1.28	1.03
Level of racial homogeneity	.91	.12

this long of a history with their congregations. While the differences may not seem striking, they are statistically significant and align with the expectations of Hypothesis 1.

We move next to multivariate tests of Hypotheses 1 and Hypothesis 2. Table 3 displays the analysis predicting membership duration at both the individual and the congregational level. Individual- and congregational-level predictors that are not dichotomous are centered around their respective grand means. The intercept is the value when these variables equal the overall mean,

Table 2
Membership Duration for Numerical Majority and Minority Group Members

	Minority member (%)	Majority member (%)
Less than 1 year	14.7	9.4
1–2 years	13.2	10.4
3–5 years	16.9	15.5
6–10 years	15.9	15.9
11–20 years	17.1	18.2
More than 20 years	22.5	30.5
Total	100	100
<i>N</i>	15,669	91,571

Pearson's chi-square = 736, *df* = 5, *p* < .001.

not when they equal zero (which often does not have much substantive meaning). This does not change the actual substantive findings of the analysis.

In Model 1, an unconditional analysis of variance, 14 percent of the variance in membership duration is due to differences between congregations, while the remaining variance occurs within congregations. Model 2 displays the analysis including only individual-level predictors. As expected, individuals with more exclusive theological beliefs tend to have longer membership durations than individuals in the same congregation with more inclusive beliefs. Also, social ties or embeddedness is strongly associated with increased membership duration. Hispanic individuals report shorter lengths of membership than whites. This might be explained by the possibility that some of these individuals may be immigrants and therefore have not had the chance to match the membership durations of whites. Most germane to our research, members of the numerical majority in the congregation have longer durations of membership than those in the minority. This finding supports Hypothesis 1. As seen in the variation components, the individual-level predictors explain 21 percent of the variance in membership duration at the individual level (2.422–1.912/2.422) and 16 percent of the variance between congregations (.397 – .334/.397).

Model 2 introduces the congregational-level predictors. Not surprisingly, older congregations have longer mean durations of membership than younger ones and congregations that have grown recently have shorter durations of

Table 3
Two-Level Model for Predicting Membership Duration

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Level 1 Dependent variable: Duration of membership				
Age	–	.027**	.028**	.028**
Female	–	.060**	.060**	.060**
Education	–	–.045**	–.045**	–.045**
Income	–	.061**	.062**	.062**
Exclusive theology	–	.018*	.021**	.021**
Number of friends	–	.485**	.484**	.484**
Black	–	–.042	–.011	.014
Asian	–	–.167	–.151	–.140
Hispanic	–	–.130*	–.121	–.104
Other race	–	.000	.004	.029
Member of majority race	–	.122*	.127*	.179*
Level 2 Dependent variable: Level 1 intercept (mean duration of membership in congregations)				
Number of regular participants	–	–	–.044	–.040
Age of congregation	–	–	.003**	.003**
Evangelical	–	–	–.289**	–.288**
Catholic	–	–	.275**	.281**
Other	–	–	–.079	–.071
Friendship density	–	–	.611**	.601**
Congregational growth	–	–	–.092**	–.090**
Size of majority group	–	–	.213	–.107
Cross level interaction				
Member of majority × size of majority	–	–	–	.583**
Variance components				
Level 1	2.422	1.912	1.912	1.912
Level 2	.397	.334	.272	.255

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$.

membership since they have many new members. Compared to congregations belonging to a mainline Protestant denomination, evangelical Protestant congregations have lower mean membership durations while Catholic congregations have a higher mean duration. The friendship density within a

congregation is positively correlated with mean membership duration. As with the finding at the individual level, it is difficult to sort out the causal nature of this relationship. It is reasonable to think that having friends in the congregation increases the motivation for staying in the congregation and increases the costs of leaving. However, it is also reasonable to think that staying in the congregation for a longer period of time increases the likelihood of having friends in the congregation. The size of the racial majority in a congregation has no significant effect on the mean level of membership duration above and beyond the individual level effect of being part of the majority.² We would expect this to be significant only if there was a context effect of having a homogenous congregation that led even those who were not part of the majority to have longer membership durations. Previous research did not provide any reason to hypothesize such a finding, nor do these data support such a context effect. However, as noted in Hypothesis 2, there are reasons to believe that the individual-level effect of being part of the majority may differ by the size of the majority. The next model addresses that hypothesis.

Model 4 includes the cross-level interaction between majority membership status and majority size. The coefficient is significant and strong. Supporting our second hypothesis, the difference in duration of membership between majority and minority members increases with the size of the majority.³ Figure 2 displays this interaction graphically. The predicted durations of

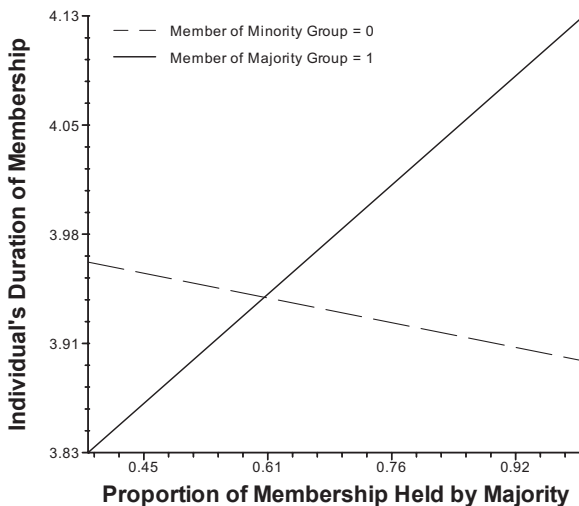


Figure 2

Predicted Membership Duration by Size of Majority and Majority Membership Status.

membership for majority and minority members become equal when the size of the majority is about 60 percent of the membership.⁴ The individual coefficient for being part of the majority changes from .127 to .179 simply because it now represents the majority-minority gap at the grand mean of congregational homogeneity (.91).

The cross-sectional nature of the data presents some limitations to this analysis (as it does for much research). Congregational efforts to diversify membership follow larger societal trends toward racial reconciliation that gained momentum in the past 20 years (Garces-Foley 2007). It is increasingly common for congregations and denominations to express a desire for diversity. With this in mind, it is possible that those members who joined a congregation, say, 30–40 years ago, could potentially bias the analysis because there was not any non-majority counterpart when they joined; whereas, those joining congregations in the last 15–20 years are more likely to have joined a congregation where non-majority members also belong. If there are not members from that cohort (i.e., those who have belonged to the congregation for 15 years), then this must be due to those individuals having left the congregation at some point since then. Similarly, if there are majority members who have been there for 15 years, then the majority race must be retained better than the minority races since they have remained while their minority counterparts have not. To test this potential, we ran a separate analysis of only those who have joined the congregation in the last 20 years. This eliminates older members (about 30% of the sample) who joined a congregation when it was possible there were no minority races attending. The results were identical to the full sample.

Discussion and Conclusions

Racial homogeneity in congregations has a long history in the United States. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr decried the segregation he saw inside churches in the 1950s. Contemporary voices repeat the critique. Religious groups and religious leaders are attempting to respond. The quest to become multiracial or multiethnic is a topic of denominational initiatives, national conventions and a proliferation of books. Nevertheless, integrating congregations remains a challenging endeavor. The purpose of this study is to extend empirical investigation on why this is so. Previous case studies document that members of the numerical minority suffer the highest costs in a congregation (Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson 2005; Christerson and Emerson 2003; Garces-Foley 2007). These costs create a pressure for minority members to leave a congregation and find one that is more specialized in their own racial demographic. A significant amount of support exists for this process in the “organizational demography” literature, although it focuses primarily on

business environments (e.g., Jackson et al. 1991; McCain, O'Reilly, and Pfeffer 1983; O'Reilly, Caldwell, and Barnett 1989). Our goal was to test this mechanism and the interaction between minority status and majority size with a national sample of religious congregations. We find that majority members do tend to have longer durations of membership and this gap increases with the size of the majority.

While data limitations make it impossible to fully dismiss all rival explanations, our results are commensurate with an organizational ecology perspective. Homogenous organizations have more specialized niches than diverse ones. This specialization allows the organization to more effectively serve members and results in a more cohesive organization. Correspondingly, homogenous organizations produce more effective and extensive social networks. Minority members who remain in an organization dominated by a majority tend to suffer relative to majority members as they struggle to become integrated into the social networks. There are other factors involved besides the building of social ties, as the analysis showed a gap between majority and minority members even after controlling for number of friendships held in the congregation. Being underserved by the organization's programs, the "pull" of competing organizations that specialize in their demographic, internal identity conflicts and even animosity from majority members are all identified in previous research as other mechanisms producing lower retention rates for those in the numerical minority regardless of the latter's ties to the organization.

Some contend that the costs of minority membership in a homogenous organization dissipate once a "critical mass" of minorities is able to create their own social networks and force an organization to address their needs (Kanter 1977). A popular belief is that this critical mass or tipping point occurs when 20 percent of an organization's membership is part of the minority group. If true, we should expect from our analysis that the regression lines predicting membership duration for majority members and minority members would intersect when the majority group holds 80 percent. As shown in Figure 2, the lines do intersect but it takes a much larger share of minority members before majority and minority membership durations approach equivalency. Given the results of the analysis here, reaching this level would be quite difficult for a congregation that starts out highly homogenous since the minority members they do add would likely leave faster than the congregation could add more. Understanding how some congregations are able to create such a critical mass is a natural question for future research, as is the relationship of group size to power.

The instability in the minority's membership goes a long way to explaining why it proves so difficult for congregations to diversify their attendees

despite significant efforts to do so. Furthermore, the analysis raises difficult questions concerning the consequences of trying to put majority and minority members on equal ground. Theoretically, a congregation could try to build a large enough minority to equalize their membership stability relative to the majority. However, the duration of majority members falls as the size of the majority decreases. By helping the minority, a congregation may inadvertently harm overall membership stability. For congregational leaders this creates a difficult dilemma. They may value the idea of having a diverse congregation, but they are attempting to maintain an organization that survives on voluntary contributions of time and money. Pursuing one goal may lower a congregation's ability to pursue the other.

There is no reason to believe that congregations, just because of their religious nature, are unique to these dynamics. Indeed, research indicates that a wide range of voluntary organizations face these homogenizing forces (McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1987). Organizations or institutions that overcome them often do so because of political, legal, or economic mandates and incentives (Yancey and Emerson 2003:116). One potentially effective "mandate" for religious organizations might come from groups' theology. That is, if individuals come to see diversity as theologically required or to define their social groups in more theological than racial terms, then they might be able to attenuate the challenges faced by a diverse organization.

More comparisons to other types of voluntary organizations might be a useful direction for research on congregational diversity. We do not know, for example, if congregations are becoming more diverse than other comparable voluntary organizations even while still being quite homogenous, or whether they are slower to diversify than other organizations. If such a difference could be found it might provide some clue as to how congregations or voluntary organizations overcome the barriers to diversity.

ENDNOTES

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¹There are some for whom racial and ethnic diversity defines their social networks and sense of identity. Garces-Foley (2007) refers to these individuals as "boundary crossers." Emerson and Woo (2006) call them "Sixth Americans" (those whose social lives are not confined to any one of the five major "melting pots"—Native American, black, white, Hispanic, or Asian). Such individuals are relatively uncommon in society. In fact, Emerson and Woo (2006) contend that multiracial congregations are largely responsible for making these boundary-crossing, Sixth Americans.

²We also tested for a possible curvilinear effect of majority group size on membership duration. Neither majority size nor majority size squared were statistically significant in the model (not shown).

³In alternate models we included a measure that represented the number of racial groups in each congregation. This was defined as the sum of groups that have at least one member within a congregation. However, this measure was not significant when included in model 3 or model 4.

⁴Our focus in this paper is on the overall advantage of the majority group in a congregation. However, in a model not shown here we replaced the “majority member” indicator with a set of dummy variables representing minority group sizes in an attempt to see if the disadvantage of minority groups differs by the size of the group (e.g., 1% of the congregation versus 25% of the congregation). This analysis showed that being part of a very small group, specifically less than 5% of the congregation, has a significant negative effect on membership duration relative to those individuals whose group represents more than 40 percent of the congregation. However, groups that are between 5 percent and 40 percent of the congregation do not significantly differ. Looking at the lines in Figure 2, this finding makes sense as the majority-minority gap becomes larger and significant when the majority holds most (i.e. 90+%) of the congregation, which means any minority group(s) likely holds 5 percent or less of the remaining congregation. When the majority only holds a lower percentage (such as 75 percent or less), the minority groups tend to become larger and this gap becomes smaller and insignificant. While interesting, we focus our analysis and interpretation on the majority group for reasons of parity and simplicity. Majority race and majority size variables allow reasonable tests of our two hypotheses that are easier to estimate and interpret using HLM. To produce estimates for an HLM model with minority size groupings included required eliminating other valuable control variables (e.g., individual racial groups at Level 1) due to multicollinearity.

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