

**Church in Black and White: Racially-Integrated Churches and  
Whites' Explanations for Racial Inequalities**

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**Abstract**

Research by Emerson and Smith (1999) finds that conservative Protestants tend to blame racial inequalities on individual traits like motivation or ability as opposed to structural constraints such as oppression or discrimination. Emerson and Smith have also established that churches tend to be racially homogenous organizations. The purpose of this study is to determine whether or not members of racially-integrated congregations differ from members of racially-homogenous congregations in their explanations for racial inequalities.

I am interested in further exploring interracial relations in the context of United States' Protestant churches, particularly how the level of contact with persons of another race might affect whites' perceptions of reasons for racial inequality. I expect to find that individuals who attend racially-homogeneous churches will be less likely to recognize social constraints that may contribute to socioeconomic inequalities between whites and blacks than those who attend racially-integrated churches. In other words, I expect that attending a racially-integrated congregation will have a positive effect on giving structural-level explanations for racial inequality. Using existing data from the 1994 General Social Survey, I analyze the relationship between attendance in a multi-racial congregation and explanations for racial inequalities. The data do not support the hypothesis.

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## **I. Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study is to understand how racial diversity in United States' Protestant congregations contributes to varying types of explanations for racial inequality given by church attendees. I argue that whites who attend multi-racial churches will be less likely to believe racial stereotypes than those who attend all-white churches and will more readily accept social-structural limitations that contribute to racial inequality. I will analyze data from the 1994 General Social Survey (GSS) to test the hypothesis that attendance in a multi-racial congregation promotes structural explanations of racial inequality.

This research builds on the work of Michael Emerson, Christian Smith and David Sikkink (1999) and George Yancey (1999) who have written about the role of religion on race relations and inequality in the United States. Emerson and Smith (1999) argue that white conservative Protestants are significantly different from other white Americans in the explanations they give for racial inequalities by attributing inequalities to individual weaknesses rather than structural constraints. Yancey (1999) argues that interracial contact in primary relationships fosters intolerance of racial stereotypes. Through analysis of GSS data, I plan to determine how interracial contact in Protestant churches affects members' explanations of racial inequality. I expect that whites who attend multi-racial churches will be more likely to use structural explanations for racial inequalities than attendees of racially-homogenous congregations.

## **II. Review of the Literature**

### **Reasons for Inequality**

Attribution is a process that begins with social perception, progresses through a causal judgment and ends with some behavioral consequence (Crittenden 1983: 426). In this study, attribution is reflected in the reasons people give for the economic outcomes of blacks relative to whites. According to Crittenden (1983), interpersonal relationships are closely related to the ways in which people interpret the behavior and outcomes of others. In this study, I will focus on the impact of multi-racial interpersonal relationships in churches and how they may impact the attributions given for racial inequality by church members.

Emerson and Smith (2000) argue that black Americans are three times more likely than non-Hispanic whites to fall below the poverty line. Blacks are less likely to own homes than their white counterparts, and their median household wealth is only eight percent of whites'. While white evangelicals are aware that economic inequality exists between blacks and whites, they tend to see the "race problem" as distinct from economic inequalities. In general, Protestants believe that everyone is created equal and has equal opportunities. Therefore, when blacks and whites have unequal economic outcomes, some other variable must be the cause.

James Kluegel (1990) studied how whites' explanations of black-white economic inequality have changed over time. In a secondary analysis of the General Social Survey between 1977 and 1989, he found that although there has been a decline in the proportion of whites who attribute socioeconomic gaps between whites and blacks to some innate

characteristics, individualistic explanations are still predominantly used. Kluegel asserts that research on whites' reasons for inequality is important because these explanations influence attitudes towards government policies aimed at improving the status of racial minorities.

Whites tend to minimize and individualize race problems, often assigning blame to blacks themselves for racial inequalities. Whites “obscure inequality as part of racial division” (Emerson and Smith 2000: 76). Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003) would argue that one reason whites blame racial inequality on individual factors is because, for the most part, whites think that racism has been resolved. Because traditional forms of racial discrimination and exclusion from the Jim Crow era are diminished in today's society, whites argue that racism is no longer a problem. Therefore, when racial inequalities exist, whites are unlikely to attribute them to a racist society, leaving the blame with blacks themselves (Bonilla-Silva 2003: 273).

Bonilla-Silva (2003) argues that “new racism”—the subtle, systematic practices that reproduce racial hierarchies—is as effective as slavery was at maintaining the status quo. Two of the main elements of this new racism are the increasingly covert nature of racism and the invisibility of the mechanisms that reproduce inequalities (Bonilla-Silva 2003: 272). Examples of “new racism” range from gentle to violent and include being ignored in retail stores, denials of job promotions, harassment, housing segregation through informal means, and other forms of daily discrimination.

So how have beliefs about blacks and racial inequality changed as racism has shifted from Jim Crow to “new racism”? Do whites still subscribe to the idea that blacks

are at fault for their own low position in society? Bonilla-Silva (2003) argues that while most whites no longer subscribe to these tenets in a straightforward fashion, they do “blame the victim” and justify the contemporary racial order with a color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2003: 275). In short, whites continue to ignore the social structures that perpetuate inequality—even if in a more subtle fashion.

DiTomaso, Parks-Yancy and Post (2003) would argue that it is easy for whites to ignore the constraining social forces that contribute to racial inequality because racial inequality is reproduced without active participation by individual whites and is often hidden from their view. Other reasons for whites’ inability to see social structures contributing to racial inequality include attribution error, emphasis on equal opportunity, and focus on individual achievement. First, the authors argue that whites are subject to attribution error—they believe that they got ahead because of their own personal characteristics and minimize situational or contextual factors that may have contributed to their success. Second, a societal emphasis on equal opportunity encourages the assumption that if everyone has equal formal opportunities, then inequalities must be due to the individual not taking advantage of those opportunities. Society therefore ignores informal processes such as favoritism or exclusion that lead to unequal outcomes. Finally, whites have difficulty thinking of themselves as part of a racial group and think that their life outcomes are the result of their individual choices and values. Whites therefore do not “easily recall the group basis of their life outcomes” and are less likely to see the structural constraints affecting other groups (DiTomaso, Parks-Yancy and Post 2003: 190).



While white Americans, regardless of their religious involvement, tend to give individual-level reasons for racial inequality with lack of motivation being the most frequently cited, Emerson, Smith and Sikkink (1999) argue that religion has an independent effect on explanations of racial inequality given by whites. Two-thirds of white conservative Protestants think blacks are poor because they lack motivation compared to only one-half of other whites. Likewise, only one-third of white Protestants cite discrimination as the main reason for inequality compared to one-half of other whites. Interestingly, black conservative Protestants are less individualistic and more structural than other blacks. Emerson and Smith argue that white conservative Protestants are more likely than other whites to affirm individualism and deny the role of social structures unless those structures somehow hinder individual determination (Emerson and Smith 2000: 95).

Stark and Glock (1969) argue that theological beliefs contribute to racial prejudice. Protestants characterize (hu)man(s) as free actors, “unfettered by social circumstances”, free to choose (Stark and Glock 1969: 80). These concepts are central to the Christian themes of sin and salvation: because people are free, they can be held responsible for their actions. Notions of free will and personal accountability serve as the lens through which Protestants view and judge not only their own, but other people’s behavior, leaving them unable to perceive the effects of social-structural forces that may shape their circumstances. Stark and Glock (1969) argue that Protestants are not failing to condone social forces—they do not recognize them at all. While church-goers may acknowledge a collective disadvantage among blacks, they continue to blame that disadvantage on

individual shortcomings that they think are related to race rather than social-structural constraints.

Religion influences how people negotiate realities not only through theological beliefs, but because it provides a set of cultural tools for its participants (Emerson, Smith and Sikkink 1999). Emerson, Smith and Sikkink link white Protestants' attributions of inequality to their use of three specific sub-cultural tools: accountable free will individualism, "anti-structuralism", and relationalism. Individualism or anti-structuralism refer to traditional Christian thought that humans are free actors and individually accountable for their own actions. Relationalism refers to the emphasis Protestants place on having a right relationship with God and others. Emerson, Smith and Sikkink (1999) argue that conservative Protestants tend to see social problems as rooted in poor relationships or negative interpersonal influences and therefore may blame racial inequalities on dysfunctional interpersonal relationships.

While Protestants have access to a wider cultural "tool kit" based on their social locations, they appear to rely more heavily on their own sub-cultural tools provided through their religion (Swidler 1986). Conservative Protestants, limited by these sub-cultural tools, may be unable to perceive or unwilling to accept the influence of macro-level social influences on individual economic outcomes. Emerson, Smith and Sikkink (1999) argue that while other Americans allow their individualism to be shaped by institutions, Protestants tend to see individualism as constructed independent of social structures.

## **Interracial contact in Churches**

Heterogeneity is “the existence of differences and differential relationships within a bounded category” (Lowe as cited in Omi: 2000). Like other volunteer organizations, churches tend toward internal similarity (Emerson and Smith 2000). Emerson and colleagues involved in the Multiracial Congregations Project (Hartford Institute for Religion Research) regard a “mixed” congregation as one where no one racial group makes up more than 80 percent of the congregation. According to the Project, mixed race congregations are rare—accounting for only eight percent of all churches in the United States. Likewise, the National Congregation Study (1998) reveals that about 90% of American congregations are made up of at least 90% of people of the same race (Chavez 1998).

The contact hypothesis states that interracial contact promotes harmonious race relations. However, interracial contact occurs in many settings and mere propinquity is not enough to reduce racial stereotyping. George Yancey (1999) examines the effects of church integration on racial attitudes of whites, arguing that whites who belong to interracial groups exhibit less social distance from African-Americans. Yancey found that after basic demographic controls, whites who attend racially heterogeneous churches have a lower tendency to stereotype blacks than those whites who merely lived in the same neighborhoods as blacks (Yancey 1999: 280).

Yancey argues that certain conditions must be in place for interracial contact to be “harmonious.” The contact must be egalitarian, cooperative, intimate, and sanctioned by authority (Barnard and Benn, 1988 as cited in Yancey). Interracial contact may only

produce respect between different groups if the contact has the four above-mentioned characteristics; otherwise, the contact may foster resentment and further racialization (Yancey 1999).

When individuals are on unequal footing, contact is likely to foster resentment rather than harmony. Noncompetitive interaction is important because “contact that produces fear or defensiveness may worsen race relations rather than improve them” (Yancey 1999: 282). Intimacy in interracial settings is important because studies have shown that superficial contact is not likely to produce attitudinal change (Cole, Steinburg, and Burkheimer 1968 as cited in Yancey). Finally, because authority figures are able to define new norms for groups, sanctioning from relevant authority figures is key to producing harmonious relationships in inter-racial settings.

Yancey (1999) argues that interracial contact in churches is more likely to produce the effects of the contact hypothesis than other settings because in theory, religious settings are more effective than others in promoting primary relationships that are egalitarian, cooperative, intimate and sanctioned. Other types of integration, such as residential neighborhoods or educational programs, are more likely to promote secondary relationships, may be based on competition, or may not foster intimacy. Yancey found that whites who attended integrated churches engaged in less stereotyping and had lower levels of social distance than those who attend segregated churches.

## **Other Considerations**

Peter Berger (1967) argues that institutions do not exist in and of themselves—rather they are constructed by (hu)man(s). He warns that just as sociologists should not speak of humans as individuals apart from institutions, neither should they speak of institutions without an analysis on some level of the individuals who create and interact with the institutions. For this research, it is useful to keep in mind some of the social-psychological aspects of religion, including how individuals may come to affiliate themselves with a particular congregation.

Two widely used models related to how individuals come to belong to religious groups are the class model and the culture model. Thaddeus Coreno (2002) echoes Smith in that he describes religious groups, particularly fundamental ones, as sub-cultures. However, he attempts to break the common dichotomy among sociology of religion scholars by arguing that fundamentalism is neither purely a result of one's class nor purely a result of one's culture, but a meeting of the two. His analysis of secondary data confirms that both class and cultural explanations for fundamentalism can be useful and argues that fundamentalist subcultures are embedded in class cultures. He adds that class and culture impact an individual's affiliation with a denomination (particularly whether one is fundamentalist or mainline).

Are the phenomena described by the contact hypothesis strong enough to overcome the cultural tools of evangelicals, particularly anti-structuralism and accountable free will individualism? In other words, can conservative Protestants, by racially integrating local

churches, exhibit less social distance from other races to the point that they no longer attribute inequalities to individualistic, innate factors (or do so to a lesser degree)?

Some may question the importance of this kind of research, arguing perhaps that religion's impact on social change is minimal. I argue that this research is important for two key reasons. First, conservative Protestants make up 25 percent of the United States population and therefore have an influence on public policies aimed at reducing inequalities (Woodberry and Smith 1998). Primary interracial relationships affect social and political attitudes. Whites who attend multi-racial churches should demonstrate less overt racism and have more progressive political views (Yancey 1999). Understanding how interracial contact within church settings affects the whites' attitudes about racial inequality is important because of the implications for public policies aimed at reducing such inequalities. White Protestants' views on the use of affirmative action and welfare policies, for instance, may be affected by their level of contact with non-whites, particularly in church settings.

Second, as the number of mixed-race churches increases, the impact of this study will also increase. If interracial contact in churches changes its attendees' attitudes about inequalities, then as mixed race churches become more common, we can expect that white church-goers' notions of racial inequality will gradually become more structural in nature.

“The character of [a society's] institutions is determined, not by immutable...laws, but by the values, preferences, interests and ideals which rule at any moment in a given society” (R.H. Tawney as quoted in Oliver and Shapiro 1997). Understanding churches' impact on whites' attitudes about racism and racial inequality is important because their

attitudes contribute to the “new racism” that Bonilla-Silva describes, ultimately maintaining the racial hierarchies that exist (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Churches, while they aspire to ideals like brotherhood and loving thy neighbor as thyself, may be doing more to perpetuate a racialized society than to improve it (Emerson and Smith 2000). If in fact interracial contact in churches can impact white churchgoers’ attitudes about racial inequality, then perhaps efforts to racially integrate churches may help whites recognize the social-structural factors that lead to racial inequality. As DeYoung, Emerson, Yanci and Kim (2003) argue, perhaps the multi-racial church is one of the solutions to reducing racial inequality in America.

### **III. Research Model**

Several key points from the literature have helped me frame my research question. First, I adopt the proposition supported through recent research by Emerson, Smith and Sikkink (1990) that white Protestants differ significantly from other Americans in the reasons they give for racial inequality: they tend to individualize blame for racial inequalities, often ignoring problems within social structure as possible forces of unequal status. Second, I adopt the notion of the contact hypothesis reviewed by Yancey relative to race relations, which argues that increased contact with another race—when it is egalitarian, cooperative, intimate, and sanctioned by authority—will encourage racial harmony. Finally, I adopt and utilize the concept taken from Peter Berger (1967), and more recently Roberto Unger (1987) that encourages a critical approach to social institutions—in this case, religion: Society, and more specifically, social institutions, are produced by humans and therefore can be remade. If we create, objectify, and internalize social structures such as the church, then we should be able to remake them for social change in the direction of racial harmony.

For this study, the unit of analysis and observation is the individual respondent. The independent variable, attendance in a multi-racial congregation, is nominally defined by whether or not an individual attends a church of one race only or of multiple races. The dependent variable, explanations of racial inequalities, refers to the individual member of a church and is nominally defined in this study as reasons that church members give for differences in socioeconomic status between whites and blacks. Explanations for inequality will vary in kind between structural-level and individual-level explanations.



The population scope of the study will be white respondents living in the United States who attend protestant churches. The sample will be limited to whites only because black respondents already tend to give structural-level explanations for inequality.

Is Yancey's (1999) finding that interracial contact in churches creates less racial stereotyping able to overcome the argument of Emerson and Smith (2000) that white conservative Protestants do not recognize the social structures that contribute to racial inequality? My hypothesis is that it can—to the extent that multiracial congregations are intimate, cooperative, egalitarian and sanctioned. I hypothesize that whites who attend multi-racial churches, by having increased opportunities for relationships with blacks, will be more likely than their counterparts attending single-race churches to recognize social structures that contribute to inequality.

#### **IV. Research Methods**

##### **Sample**

The sample for this research is existing data collected through the General Social Survey of 1994—the most recent data available at the time of this paper that addresses the research question. In 1994, the General Social Survey (GSS) was a full probability sample collected by researchers through face-to-face and computer-assisted personal interviews. In 1994, the response rate was 70 percent, producing a sample size of 2,992 respondents (ICPSR 2005). Of these, 1,977 were asked the questions that make up the dependent variable in this research project. Since, for the purposes of this particular research question, I am interested in how attendance in a multiracial congregation will affect white respondents' opinions regarding reasons for inequality, I have selected white respondents from the sample, reducing the N to 1,640. The sample was further reduced by eliminating those respondents who did not provide an answer to one or more of the questions used to form the dependent variable, reasons for inequality. There were 217 cases deleted from the sample in order to eliminate “don't know” responses for the dependent variable. This represents 13% of the sample (white respondents) and after being eliminated, reduces the sample to 1,403 cases. The sample was then reduced to 793 once Protestants were selected. Finally, after deleting the missing cases (those who were not asked the question) for the independent variable, attendance in a multiracial congregation, the sample was finally reduced to 102 respondents.

## **Variables**

The dependent variable, attendees' explanations for black-white inequality, is operationally defined as reasons that individuals give when asked to account for differences between black people and white people along the lines of economic status. Varying in kind, it is determined by the parameters given in the General Social Survey. When respondents are told, "On average, blacks have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people. Do you think those differences are...", respondents are then asked to answer yes or no to each of four possible explanations which include (1) *ability*- "because most black have less in-born ability to learn," (2) *motivation*- "because most blacks just don't have the motivation or will power to pull themselves up out of poverty," (3) *chances*- "because most blacks just don't have the chance for education that it takes to rise up out of poverty," or (4) *discrimination*- "mainly due to discrimination".

In order to prepare each of these variables for use in an index with high values meaning more structural and low values meaning more individualistic, I recoded the variables accordingly: "Yes" responses to the measures for chances and discrimination were recoded with a value of one (1) and "No" responses as zero (0). Conversely, I coded "Yes" responses to the questions for ability and motivation as zero (0) and "No" responses as one (1). This coding method assumes that respondents who tend to think that racial inequalities are mainly due to structural-level issues will also tend to think that those inequalities are not due to individual-level issues. Some of the items had missing data and a full description of the missing data can be found in Appendix A.

### **Creation of the index**

Before creating an index, I ran a correlation matrix to determine how well the four independent variables are correlated to each other (see Table 1). I expect the variables to be fairly well correlated—that those who tend to answer yes to individualistic responses will also answer no to structural-level responses and vice versa.

**Table 1. Correlation matrix of independent variables for the index**

	Discrimination (Structural)	Chances (Structural)	Ability (Individual)	Motivation (Individual)
Discrimination N	--	.357** 786	.053 787	.309** 786
Chances N		--	.066 786	.307** 785
Ability N			--	.282** 785
Motivation				--

\*\* : Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Although the correlation values are relatively low, they are all statistically significant, most at the 0.01 level and occur in the expected direction. Because *ability* and *motivation* were recoded so that positive responses equal zero and negative responses equal one, their correlations did not come out negative. Next, I imputed the missing data (those respondents who did not provide a response to the question) by mean substitution. Thirty-eight (38) cases were imputed with the series mean substituting the missing value. The responses to the four items were added for each respondent to create an index. Therefore, a score of 4 for this index would indicate a respondent with all structural level or non-individualistic responses, and a score of 0 would indicate the respondent had a completely individualistic (non-structural) set of responses. The Cronbach's alpha for this index is .5449. The frequencies and percentages for this index are shown in Table 2.

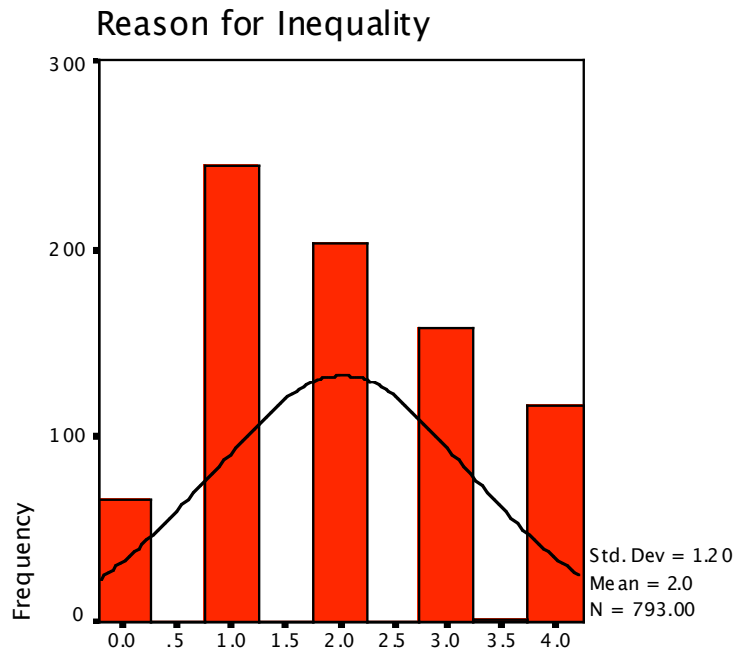
**Table 2: Frequencies and percentages of index variable, reasons for inequality**

<b>Value</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
0	66	8.3
.35	1	.1
1.00	244	30.8
1.34	1	.1
1.93	1	.1
2.00	200	25.2
2.15	3	.4
2.45	1	.1
2.86	1	.1
3.00	157	19.8
3.45	1	.1
3.48	1	.1
4.00	116	14.6
Total	793	100

N=793

The frequency distribution for index variable forms the following curve:

**Figure 1: Frequency distribution of index variable**



←Individualistic-----Structural→



Operationally defined, the independent variable, attendance in a multi-racial congregation, means that a white respondent attends a church where African Americans or blacks also attend. The corresponding question on the GSS is: (as phrased for white respondents only): “Do African Americans/blacks attend the same church that you, yourself, most often attend, or not?” Although integration in real life is much more complex (varying in degree from more or less integrated), for the purposes of this study, integration will be a dichotomous variable—either integrated or not integrated.

## **Control Variables**

The control variables used in this analysis are race, religious affiliation, gender, age, income, education, and region. Race and religious affiliation have been controlled through selection—only whites and Protestants are included in the analyses. Gender is coded as a dichotomous variable with male as the reference group. Region is also coded as a dichotomous variable, distinguishing between respondents who live in the South and non-South regions of the United States. Age, education, and income are continuous variables.

I chose these control variables because I expect them to have an impact on the dependent variable, reasons for inequality. I expect females to be more structural in their responses, as they may be more aware of social-structural constraints they have experienced in a gender-unequal society. I expect that as age and income increase, the respondent's level of conservatism would also increase, causing responses to be more individualistic. Finally, I expect respondents living in the South to give more individualistic explanations for racial inequality.

## **Plan for analyses**

I will use correlations, multiple regression and logistic regression to statistically describe the relationship between racial integration in churches and explanations for black-white inequality. While the correlations will give information about the simultaneous outcomes of observations on two discrete variables, the regressions will help determine if the level of integration in a congregation has any causal effect on the individual members' explanations for racial inequality. Hypotheses based on type of analysis are listed below.

### **Correlations**

Attendance in a multi-racial congregation will be positively correlated with the structural-level variables (*discrimination* and *chances*) and negatively correlated with the individual-level variables (*ability* and *motivation*). Attendance in a multi-racial congregation will be positively correlated with the index variable, *reasons for inequality*.

### **Multiple Regression of the index variable**

Attendance in a multi-racial congregation will have a positive causal relationship with the index variable.

### **Logistic Regression: *Discrimination***

Attendance in a multi-racial congregation will have a positive causal relationship with *discrimination*. Respondents who attend multi-racial congregations will be more likely (Beta greater than 1) to cite discrimination as a reason for racial inequality than respondents who do not attend multi-racial congregations.

**Logistic Regression: *Chances***

Attendance in a multi-racial congregation will have a positive causal relationship with *chances*. Respondents who attend multi-racial congregations will be more likely (Beta greater than 1) to cite lack of chances as a reason for racial inequality than respondents who do not attend multi-racial congregations.

**Logistic Regression: *Ability***

Attendance in a multi-racial congregation will have a positive causal relationship with *ability*. Because *ability* has been recoded so that positive responses are zero and negative responses are one, I expect that respondents who attend multi-racial congregations will be more likely (Beta greater than 1) to not cite lack of individual ability as a reason for racial inequality than respondents who do not attend multi-racial congregations.

**Logistic Regression: *Motivation***

Attendance in a multi-racial congregation will have a positive causal relationship with *motivation*. Because *motivation* has been recoded so that positive responses are zero and negative responses are one, I expect that respondents who attend multi-racial congregations will be more likely (Beta greater than 1) to not cite lack of motivation as a reason for racial inequality than respondents who do not attend multi-racial congregations.

## **V. Analyses and Results**

### **Correlations**

To evaluate how one's attendance in a multi-racial congregation impacts his or her explanations for racial inequality, I initially ran a set of correlations: first for each of the dichotomous variables then for the summed index variable (see Table 3). While *discrimination*, *chances*, *motivation* and the index variable do not have significant correlations with the independent variable, the relationship between attendance in a multiracial congregation and *ability* yielded a statistically significant, negative relationship. Because the variable *ability* was recoded in the inverse direction, this means that attending church in a multi-racial congregation is negatively related to not giving lack of individual ability as a reason for racial inequality. In other words, attending a multi-racial congregation is positively related to giving lack of individual ability as a reason for racial inequality.

**Table 3. Correlations between attendance in a multi-racial congregation and explanations for inequality**

<u>Explanation for Inequality</u>	<u>r</u>
Discrimination	.006
Chances	-.078
Ability	-.241*
Motivation	-.109
Index (Sum)	-.148

\*significant at the .05 level.

N= 104

## **OLS Regression**

While correlations give information about the nature of the relationship between two variables, multiple regression allows us to see how changes to one variable might cause changes to another. To assess how the index variable, *reasons for inequality*, changes related to attendance in a multi-racial congregation, I ran a multiple regression (see Table 4).

**Table 4. Explanations for inequality<sup>+</sup> regressed upon attendance in multi-racial congregation using OLS regression<sup>^</sup>.**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Constant	2.947	3.055	2.918	2.238	2.853	2.217
Attend MRC	-.392***	-.337	-.343	-.215	-.154	-.156
Southern		-.632*	-.632*	-.642*	-.680**	-.627*
Female			.279	.483	.467	.468
Income				.041*	.029	.017
Age					-.012	-.012
Education						.051
R Square	.23	.79	.92	.145	.171	.186
N=102						

<sup>^</sup>Unstandardized Coefficients shown  
<sup>+</sup>Index variable sum of four dummy variables discrimination, chance, ability, and motivation.  
\*\*\*: significant at the .000 level  
\*\*: significant at the .01 level  
\*: significant at the .05 level



Before controls, attendance in a multiracial congregation (compared to a single-race congregation) is a statistically significant predictor of the explanations the respondent gives for racial inequality. As attendance in a multi-racial congregation increases, reasons given for racial inequality become more individualistic (less structural in nature). However, once controls are added, the relationship becomes statistically insignificant.

Living in the Southern region of the United States (compared to non-Southern) is a statistically significant predictor of explanations for inequality. Living in the South reduces the likelihood of the white respondent to give structural-level explanations for racial inequality.

Before controls, income is a statistically significant predictor of explanations for inequality. The higher the income, the more likely the respondent is to give structural-level responses for inequality. While the direction of this relationship remains positive, the statistical significance diminishes once controls are added. In this model, gender, age and education are not statistically significant predictors of the dependent variable.

## **Logistic Regression**

While the multiple regression evaluated the relationship between attendance in a multi-racial congregation and the continuous index variable, *reasons for inequality*, I am also interested in how each of the dichotomous variables might be affected by attendance in a multiracial congregation. Logistic regression allows me to evaluate any causal relationship between the variables by giving me odds ratios. See tables 5, 6, 7, and 8.

**Table 5. Odds ratios of *discrimination* regressed upon attendance in multi-racial congregation**

	<u>Model 1</u>	<u>Model 2</u>	<u>Model 3</u>	<u>Model 4</u>	<u>Model 5</u>	<u>Model 6</u>
Attend MRC	.951	1.026	1.027	.965	1.127	1.124
Southern		.395	.395	.390	.330*	.358*
Female			.972	.890	.843	.853
Income				.982	.950	.917*
Age					.968*	.968*
Education						1.162
R Square	.000	.039	.040	.043	.097	.128

N= 102

\*significant at the 0.05 level

Attendance in a multi-racial church is not a statistically significant predictor of citing discrimination as an explanation for racial inequality. If it were significant in Model 1, it would be a weak negative relationship.

In Models 5 and 6, being Southern predicts a reduced likelihood of citing discrimination as an explanation for inequality. Southerners are about one-third as likely as non-Southerners to cite discrimination as a reason for inequality. Additionally, the higher one's income and age, the less likely he or she is to cite discrimination as a reason for inequality. Although statistically significant, the relationship between age and *discrimination* is weak (close to 1 for every year of age). Gender and education are not significant predictors of *discrimination* in any of the models.

**Table 6. Odds ratios of *chances* regressed upon attendance in a multi-racial congregation**

	<u>Model 1</u>	<u>Model 2</u>	<u>Model 3</u>	<u>Model 4</u>	<u>Model 5</u>	<u>Model 6</u>
Attend MRC	.646	.672	.654	.742	.671	.672
Southern		.607	.599	.586	.605	.636
Female			1.897	2.364	2.490*	2.496*
Income				1.042	1.063	1.052
Age					1.018	1.018
Education						1.051
R Square	.010	.023	.047	.064	.081	.086

N= 102

\*significant at the 0.05 level

The relationship between attendance in a multi-racial church and citing lack of chances for racial inequality is not statistically significant. In Models 5 and 6 we see that females are approximately two and one-half times more likely than males to cite lack of chances as a reason for racial inequality. Region, income, age and education are all insignificant predictors of *chance*.

**Table 7. Odds ratios of *ability* regressed upon attendance in a multiracial congregation**

	<u>Model 1</u>	<u>Model 2</u>	<u>Model 3</u>	<u>Model 4</u>	<u>Model 5</u>	<u>Model 6</u>
Attend MRC	.111*	.116*	.116*	.159	.225	.222
Southern		.502	.502	.333	.261	.342
Female			1.034	2.148	2.698	2.377
Income				1.237**	1.161*	1.134
Age					.952*	.952*
Education						1.141
R Square	.070	.082	.082	.220	.268	.279

N= 102

\*significant at the 0.05 level

\*\*significant at the 0.01 level

Attending a multi-racial church is a statistically significant predictor of citing ability as a reason for racial inequality with a negative odds ratio. Because *ability* was re-coded so that positive responses are low and negative responses are high, the results in Model 1 mean that respondents who attend a multiracial congregation are less likely (by about one-tenth) to not cite lack of inborn ability as a reason for inequality. In other words, attendees of multi-racial churches are more likely to cite lack of inborn ability as a reason for inequality. This relationship remains significant after region and gender are controlled, but not after controls for income, age, and education are added.

In Models 4 and 5 we see that income is a statistically significant control variable: as income increases, the likelihood for respondents not to give lack of individual ability as a reason for inequality goes up. The opposite is true for age. Region, gender, and education are not significant predictors of *ability*.



**Table 8. Odds ratios of *motivation* regressed upon attendance in a multiracial congregation**

	<u>Model 1</u>	<u>Model 2</u>	<u>Model 3</u>	<u>Model 4</u>	<u>Model 5</u>	<u>Model 6</u>
Attend MRC	.680	.718	.711	.876	.925	.925
Southern		.412*	.407*	.379*	.369*	.369*
Female			1.730	2.625*	2.571*	2.571*
Income				1.081*	1.069*	1.070
Age					.990	.990
Education						.833
R Square	.008	.048	.064	.120	.125	.125

N= 102

\*significant at the 0.05 level

Attendance in a multi-racial congregation is not a statistically significant predictor of citing lack of motivation as a reason for racial inequality. Southerners are less likely than non-Southerners to not cite motivation as a reason for inequality (Southerners are more likely to cite motivation as a reason). Females are more than twice as likely as males not to cite motivation as a reason for racial inequality. In other words, females are less likely than males to cite motivation as a reason for racial inequality. Having a higher income is associated with greater likelihood not to cite motivation as a reason for inequality. Age and education do not have a significant relationship to the dependent variable.

## **VI. Discussion**

According to the contact hypothesis, white Protestants who attend multiracial congregations will exhibit less social distance from blacks and will be less likely to believe racial stereotypes. This hypothesis should hold true to the extent that interracial interaction within multi-racial congregations is intimate, cooperative, egalitarian and sanctioned (Yancey 1999). If whites who attend multi-racial congregations do in fact engage in this kind of contact with blacks, then the effect should be a decrease in stereotyping and blaming individual blacks for racial inequality.

The present research project has sought to determine if the contact hypothesis in multi-racial churches is strong enough to override the use of Protestant sub-cultural tools like free will individualism, resulting in a reduced use of individualistic attributions and an increased use of structural-level attributions of racial inequality. I hypothesized that those who attend multi-racial congregations would be more likely than those who do not to give structural rather than individualistic explanations for racial inequality.

Overall, the findings do not support the hypotheses. The correlation did not reveal significant relationships between the dichotomous variables *discrimination*, *chances*, *motivation* or the index variable *reasons for inequality*. There was statistical significance for *ability*. These findings indicate that a respondent's explanations for inequality are not significantly related to whether or not they attend a multi-racial church. The results also indicate, contrary to the hypothesis, that attending an integrated church is actually positively related to citing lack of individual ability as a reason for racial inequality.

The multiple regression yields a statistically significant negative relationship between attendance in a racially-integrated church and explanations for inequality: as attendance in a racially-integrated church increases, so do individual-level explanations for inequality. However, this relationship is made insignificant once region is controlled. From this analysis, the evidence that respondents experience a change in their explanations for racial inequality as a result of inter-racial contact in churches is explained by whether the respondent lives in the South or not.

The logistic regressions for *discrimination*, *chances*, and *motivation* did not yield statistically significant relationships with the independent variable. Respondents' attendance in a racially-integrated congregation does not cause a significant change in their use of discrimination, lack of chances, or lack of motivation as reasons for racial inequality.

The logistic regression for *ability* yielded a statistically significant negative relationship with the independent variable. Contrary to the hypothesis, respondents who attend racially-integrated churches are more likely to cite lack of individual ability as a reason for racial inequality than those who attend racially homogenous churches.

Given the theoretical framework and empirical evidence from previous research, the results are puzzling. I propose several possible reasons why the hypotheses were not supported. The first group of explanations assume that the hypotheses were indeed correct, but were not supported through the methods used in this study. The second set of explanations addresses the possibility that the hypotheses may, in fact, be false.

First, because of missing data, the N for this study was only 102 respondents, resulting in a conservative test of the hypotheses and possibly producing falsely insignificant results. Second, the operationalization of the independent variable, attendance in a multi-racial congregation, was less than ideal. The question as phrased on the General Social Survey is a dichotomous variable—either blacks attend the same church with the white respondent or they do not. Phrased this way, a white respondent could answer affirmatively to the question even if only one other black person or family attends the same church that they attend. DeYoung et. al. (2003) define a multi-racial congregation as one in which “no racial group accounts for 80 percent or more of the congregation” (DeYoung et al 2003: 3). The GSS data in this project most likely overestimates the number of respondents who attend integrated churches as defined by DeYoung et.al. (2003), again producing a conservative test of the hypothesis and possibly resulting in falsely insignificant results.

Third, perhaps churches are not as effective at meeting the criteria of the contact hypothesis as Yancey (1999) argued. It is possible that interracial contact in churches, particularly those that are not multiracial in the DeYoung et.al. (2003) definition, foster superficial rather than intimate and competitive rather than egalitarian and cooperative relationships between blacks and whites. While churches may be better at encouraging intimate, cooperative primary relationships than other social institutions, the relationships they foster may not be strong enough to overcome the theologically- and culturally-driven individualism that exists among its white attendees.

Another possible reason for the lack of significant findings in this study may be the difference that exists between the term “stereotyping” as Yancey (1999) calls it, and “explanations for inequality”. One of the assumptions of this study is that explanations for inequality—referring to individual-level qualities versus structural constraints—mirrored the conceptualizations of stereotyping (“blacks are lazy”, for instance) in Yancey’s study. If this assumption is true then we would expect similar results in the current study: that interracial contact in churches promotes harmonious race relations (or less individual blame). However, it is possible that Yancey’s results differ from mine because the dependent variables are conceptualized differently by the respondents.

Some other issues not addressed in this study that may have impacted the outcomes include the nature of interracial contact that takes place in churches, the effect of denomination on the findings, and the impact of age. Allport (as cited in Oliver and Wong 2003) argues that inter-group relations may be improved by increased contact with the out-group as individuals “correct negative racial stereotypes with first hand social experience” (Oliver and Wong 2003: 569). Allport regarded contact as concrete, daily work experiences shared by members of the in- and the out-group. This study does not examine the type of “work” that is being done in multi-racial congregations. It is possible that the interaction between blacks and whites in multiracial congregations does not produce the kind of harmonious race relations because it is not occurring on a daily basis or is “spiritual” rather than concrete in nature.

Denominational characteristics may have affected the outcome of the study: it is possible that Yancey’s findings were more a result of the kind of church than the

interracial contact within the church. In other words, some denominations may be more or less likely to be integrated or to meet the criteria of the contact hypothesis than others. A sample with a disproportionate distribution of Baptists, for instance, would affect the outcome. In the present study, of the 793 Protestants, 220 (28 percent) identified with the Baptist denomination. Of those, 139 lived in the Southern Region. The characteristics of the Baptist denomination, particularly as it is practiced in the South, may have shaped the outcome of this study.

Finally, although age was a control variable for the analyses, the research design did not account for the impact age might have on the results. It could be argued that the racial attitudes of younger people are more likely to change than the attitudes of older generations. However, younger people are less likely to be in church than their older counterparts. Of the 793 Protestants in this study, 43% were age 50 or older.

It is possible that the findings were indeed true: that attendance in a multi-racial congregation is associated with an increase in individual-level explanations for racial inequality. According to the Multiracial Congregations Project, a racially diverse neighborhood usually precedes a multi-racial congregation—those who responded “yes” to attending a racially-integrated congregation may also live in racially-diverse neighborhoods. Some research suggests that residential neighborhoods with a high concentration of blacks may actually present a threat to the whites in the area. This is what Bobo (as cited in Oliver and Wong 2000) calls the “power threat” hypothesis: that larger proximate populations of blacks correspond to greater racial animosity by whites. According to Stein, Post and Rinden (2000), contextual contact literature finds that whites

who reside in areas with a high concentration of minorities have more negative attitudes towards them than their counterparts living in segregated areas.



## **Suggestions for Future Research**

Further investigation is needed to understand how racially-integrated churches may impact members' views of racial inequality. Future research of this sort should focus on churches that are truly multi-racial by the DeYoung et. al. (2003) definition—comprised of not more than eighty percent of any one race. Qualitative studies might provide the most appropriate model for the research questions left unanswered by the current project: How do people come to be involved in a multi-racial congregation? How are the social networks within the churches organized? How well does a particular multi-racial congregation embody egalitarianism, intimacy, and cooperation? What kind of work takes place in multi-racial congregations? Likewise, in order to understand how racially-homogenous churches may or may not contribute to racial inequality, a more in-depth qualitative approach may be useful in answering currently unresolved research questions.

If quantitative methods similar to the current project are used, two suggestions might help. First, combining multiple years of data would yield a higher sample size and might yield more significant results. Second, the measure for attendance in a racially-integrated church should be a continuous, rather than dichotomous variable so that different levels of integration may be compared.

## **A Final Word**

“My face is black. This is the central fact of my existence, the focal point of all meaning so long as I live in America. I cannot transcend my blackness, but this is only a personal inconvenience. The fact that America cannot transcend it—this is the tragedy of America” (Lincoln 1964). Given the fact that Christians place ultimate value on concepts such as brotherhood and loving thy neighbor, it is equally tragic that churches in the United States remain segregated by race. It is also discouraging to find that the integration of the eleven o’clock hour on Sunday morning may not be sufficient to impact the racist attitudes of whites. What was true in 1969 when *Prejudice USA* was published seems to remain true today: “Many Christians are able to justify racial...prejudice despite the official position of the churches to which they adhere” (Stark and Glock 1969: 77). Additional research is needed to understand the church’s impact on race relations in the United States, particularly how they contribute to maintaining current racial hierarchies so that we may work to transcend even the “new racism” of the day.

## **Appendix A: Missing Values**

These values represent the sample of respondents who were asked the questions for the independent variable (N=1,977). The percentages represent the percentage of the missing values only. [Percentage=number divided by total missing multiplied by 100]. The rightmost column indicates the percentage of the 1,977 that is made up of the Don't Know or No Answer data.

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Don't Know (Eliminated)</b>		<b>No Answer (Imputed)</b>		<b>Total Missing</b>	<b>Percentage of sample</b>
<i>Discrimination</i> "Mainly due to discrimination"	101	91.8%	9	8.2%	110	5.6%
<i>Ability</i> "Because most (Negroes/Blacks/African- Americans) have less in-born ability to learn?"	79	87.8%	11	12.2%	90	4.6%
<i>Chance</i> "Because most (Negroes/Blacks/African- Americans) don't have the chance for education that it takes to rise out of poverty?"	70	85.4%	12	14.6%	82	4.1%
<i>Motivation</i> "Because most (Negroes/Blacks/African- Americans) just don't have the motivation or will power to pull themselves up out of poverty?"	115	87.8%	16	12.2%	131	6.7%

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