On the Diversity of Friendship and Network Ties: A Comparison of Religious Versus Nonreligious Group Membership in the Rural American South

Jeremy Porter
Mississippi State University

Susannah M. Brown
Mississippi State University

ON THE DIVERSITY OF FRIENDSHIP AND NETWORK TIES: A COMPARISON OF RELIGIOUS VERSUS NONRELIGIOUS GROUP MEMBERSHIP IN THE RURAL AMERICAN SOUTH

JEREMY PORTER

MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

and

SUSANNAH M. BROWN

MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

Social science has long been interested in the effects and predictors of community participation, especially regarding voluntary membership or civic participation. Likewise, the role of social institutions has been given much attention in understanding their possible effect as an outlet for both individual desires to become civically engaged as well the institution's ability to shelter an individual and surround them with others like themselves. We use data from the 2000 Social Capital Benchmark Survey to examine the effect of group membership on the overall diversity of friendships. The diversity of friendships gives us a good proxy to the degree of the closure created by existing in-group dynamics. Furthermore, the effect of membership is comparatively examined between religious group membership and the degree of nonreligious group membership. Our findings indicate differing effects based on the type of membership on the diversity of friendships at the individual level.

Introduction

There has been a long-standing interest in the sociology of and the politics related to the voluntary associations of individuals in society (for a brief review see Tolbert, Lyson, and Irwin 1998). Some research has examined the causes of civic engagement (or lack of) based on self-interest versus collective-interest behaviors (Funk 1998). Still others have offered the explanation that the lack of civic engagement is more a perception associated with the perceived decline in political efficacy and the capacity of citizens to organize themselves (Dudley and Gitelson 2002). As one can deduce, the current state of the literature concerning civic engagement is often mixed. Furthermore, most of the existing literature is concerned with the predictors of individual level propensity to develop associations through memberships. This leaves an interesting hole in the literature concerning the effects of membership in organizations and the types of associations that those memberships produce.

One such organization, which inherently involves membership and group association are religious institutions (Blanchard 2007, Putnam 2000). The research

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concerning the effect of community participation related to religious denominations is also mixed. In a cross-national comparative study on civic engagement in North America, Smidt (1999) found the effect of religious tradition and attendance to promote civic engagement in the greater community. However, previous work reported the effect of religious membership to cause strong in-group ties and cause a withdrawal from the greater civil society (Putnam 1993). Furthermore, more recent literature has shown that the overall societal structure often accounts for the differing levels of civic participation between countries with more liberal (nonstatist) societies often having a higher degree of civic participation (Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2001).

Understanding the effect of organizations on individuals allows for a better understanding of the underlying dynamics associated with the attractiveness of membership. Again, individuals may choose certain categories of organizations as a way of withdrawal from society while others are simply looking to broaden their own life-experience. Whatever the case, there are several individual level characteristics, which when related back to the types of organizations that they are associated with, allow for the further evolution of understanding concerning the role of organization type on its members. For instance, religious organizations often create tight in-group networks. Our thesis here is that such a network is limited in its diversity, and that individuals who are members of nonreligious organizations, to an increasing degree, will have a more diverse friendship network than those reporting to be members of a religiously affiliated organization. Thus, helping to explain some missing literature in the field on the types of memberships and the subsequent types of relationships developed as a result.

This thesis is tested taking into account degree of religious salience, membership, and service attendance. These variables are used for this study because of previous findings that suggest that religious salience and worship service attendance are essential to understanding the effect of religion on several behaviors (Lehrer 2004a, 2004b). Previous literature suggests that the "effects of religious influence should be stronger for those individuals who adhere more closely to the teachings of their faith." (Lehrer 2004b:168). Because we suggest that conservative Protestant groups will have the least diverse friendships, acknowledging the finding that the effect of religiosity was most pronounced for this group is important (Lehrer 2004a, 2004b). "Attendance at religious services and activities indicates the amount of time spent at church and the level of involvement in religious social networks" (Call and Heaton 1997:383), which in turn influences the strength of the tie a person has with a specific religious theology. In other words, if a theology

encourages/discourages out-group relations, we suggest that increased attendance will intensify those teachings.

Review of Relevant Literature
Social Institutions and the Development of In-Group/Out-Group Dynamics

The role of community level social institutions and their relationship to the development of several individual and community-based outcomes, is an important relationship to understand. Previous literature has shown mixed results on the effects of membership in voluntary association (Paxton 2002; Putnam, Feldstein, and Cohen 2003; Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinas 2001; Uslaner 1999; Warren 2001). However, the mixed results may in fact be due to the type of association to which the individual is a member (Newton 1999, Paxton 2004). Individuals join groups for many reasons. Sometimes an individual may be looking simply to diversify his/her experiences and, in other cases, one may join to share company with other individuals similar to them. The two scenarios above would be both different in whom they attract, as well as the eventual effect of the association. Literature has shown that the former may foster "trust and civic embeddedness," while the latter tend to "decrease civic engagement" (Putnam 1993). Research has shown the latter to be prevalent among some religious denominations often resulting in the development of strong in-group and weak out-group ties[1] (Iannaconne 1988, 1994; Wuthnow 2002). This attitude has been most prevalent within conservative Protestantism and other conservative/orthodox Christian groups (German 2004). According to Blanchard (2007), it is the "theological orientation of white Conservative Protestant congregations that results in strong network closure and an emphasis on in-group ties" (p. 417). We use this thesis to support our assumption that some religious individuals, especially those belonging to conservative Protestant groups, have fewer diverse relationships than those belonging to other religious groups and those with no religious affiliation.

Buddenbaum (1999) found that regular church attendance increased community activity except for Christian fundamentalists (German 2004). Similarly, Welch et al. (2004) analyzed relationships between religion and social trust and found that those belonging to some conservative Protestant groups displayed lower levels of social trust. This suggests that these individuals would most likely be distrustful

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[1] "For the most part, researchers assume that one's belief or actions is a function of the majority of expectations of those people with whom one interacts. Out-group and in-group association is, therefore, measured on one continuum: the proportion of one's network who belong (or don't belong) to the same religious group" (Cornwall 1987:44).

of those outside their group, further strengthening ties with those inside their group and weakening ties with those outside their group. However, they also found that this pattern reversed among those that attend church more often and those that report placing a great deal of reliance on religion in their everyday lives. This is in contrast to Putnam who asserts that those who attend church most regularly are often the least civic minded (Tolbert et al. 1998:406). For example, Putnam suggests that "organized institutions such as the Catholic Church in Italy tend to constrain interactions to within-group activity, thus actually decreasing civic engagement" (Tolbert et al. 1998:406). Similarly, Irwin, Tolbert and Lyson (1997) argue that, "church attendance acts to embed people in communities and decrease outmigrants" (Tolbert et al. 1998:406). On the other hand, Greeley (1997) found that religious structures are important in promoting community involvement through volunteerism and other church-related activities (Tolbert et al. 1998).

Often these organizations are hierarchically structured in an authoritarian model and are thought to be intellectually dependent on rigid ideologies (Altemeyer 2003). These belief systems typically involve strong support for traditional values and conventionality, and are fearful of out-groups who are often perceived to threaten their ideology and authority structure (Altemeyer 2003). In other words, these organizations are often attractive to individuals who are characterized by low openness to experience (Butler 2000), no doubt internalized by their fear of anything unlike them and the "in-group" to which they belong. Research on the effect of group dynamics has yielded interesting results concerning the long-term results of the dynamics of the membership group. For instance the closeness of the group, degree of in-group positivity, degree of out-group negativity and out-group contact, quality of pre-existing cross-group friendships, surface/deep level similarities among group members, and a simple feeling of belonging all significantly affected the members associated with the organizations and groups (Carpenter, Zarate, and Garza 2007; Lansford et al. 2006; Lipponenen and Leskinen 2006; Philips, Norcraft, and Neale 2006; Tropp 2007; Vonofakou, Hewstone, and Voci 2007). As mentioned earlier, religious institutions are one prime candidate for the development of strong in-group ties (Blanchard 2007, Putnam et al. 2003).

The Role of Religion in Group Formation

This development of strong in-group ties has been documented by several researchers, especially regarding Conservative Protestants and their strong internal values and lack of external engagement (Iannaconne 1988, 1994, Wilson and Janowski 1995; Wuthnow 2002;). Blanchard (2007) documented this trend of

network closure while proposing a closed community thesis. He suggests that the emphasis on in-group ties, "negatively impacts community cohesion because conservative Protestants are disconnected from the broader community. This theological and value orientation of Conservative Protestant congregations, then, undermines the creation of bridging group ties" (pp. 416-7). Blanchard uses this thesis to examine a community's level of inequality with the presence of having a Conservative Protestant congregation. The closed community thesis then allows for the further examination of individuals and communities based on the types of organizations to which individuals belong and the types of organizations that exist in the larger community.

This study uses Christian Smith's (1998) subcultural identity theory of religious strength as a guiding framework. Smith developed this theory of religious strength in response to today's rapid social changes, and highlighted the profound cultural complexities that have emerged within conservative Protestantism. This theoretical framework suggests that in a pluralistic society, such as the U.S., various religious organizations can survive and thrive by the coupling of distinction (i.e., separating themselves from other groups) and engagement (i.e., adapting to the changing sociocultural environment). This means that, according to Smith, various religious organizations can obtain their respective subcultural identities by distinguishing themselves from others and by strengthening their intragroup solidarity, resource mobilization, and membership retention. As a result, religious subcultural uniqueness and identity have become cornerstones that underlie and promote the remarkable growth of religious pluralism.

Smith contends that confronted with enormous and rapid social changes religious organizations can make adaptations and accommodations. However, he forcefully argues that

> Many accommodation interpretations tend to assume, wrongly, that religion and modernity are playing a zero-sum game: that religious groups have a fixed number of orthodox 'goods' to try to protect, which are gradually depleted through accommodation. The truth is, religious actors are quite capable of reclaiming and reinvigorating lost and dormant sacred themes, traditions and practices; of generating new religious goods while relinquishing others; and of using quintessentially modern tools to strengthen and promote their traditional worldviews and ways of life. In assessing contemporary religious change, then, we need not choose between a static view of historical orthodoxy and a vacuous religious relativism. The

alternative and preferred choice is that which reflects the way most traditional religious groups actually operate in history in the real world: they work fairly successfully to sustain relatively stable distinctive religious identity while ever reformulating it to engage the conditions of the times (Smith 1998: 100).

Consequently, while engaging in the ever-changing society, some Protestant organizations have become less or more accommodating than others. For example, traditional (fundamentalist) Protestantism is particularly distinctive because of its unwavering biblical literalism, which is less tolerant of new lifestyles and life course transitions characteristic of modern society, such as divorce and remarriage. On the other hand, in an attempt to retain membership, some Protestant organizations have made appropriate accommodations to such changes. By applying this argument to the long-standing linkages between religion and family life, it is argued that there ought to be striking religious subcultural variations in such important social and family issues as family structure, friendship networks, and the propensity to engage in nonreligious activities outside the religious group.

Smith traces evangelicalism throughout history, from the height of its dominance in the 19th century to its decline at the hands of several factors, including "the rise of liberal theology, the secularization of academic institutions and the urbanization of rural America" (Magee 1999: 1). According to Smith, mainstream evangelicals responded to this decline in a few different ways. Some joined the liberal movement, others chose to "ride out the storm," but a large portion "became the fundamentalist backlash within the American church" (Magee 1999: 1). By the early to mid 20th century, a group of young fundamentalists, led by Billy Graham, chose to revive evangelicalism, which emphasized unity, reflecting the times and mirroring the ecumenical movements of moderate and liberal Christian groups. Most significantly, however, the new group began a movement that could be distinguished as evangelical and that was separate from conservative fundamentalism (Magee 1999: 1).

Formulated from a series of propositions, Smith derives what he terms a "subcultural identity theory of religious strength." Smith believes that humans have a drive to belong and it is only by being within social groups that humans satisfy this drive and come to develop an identity. These social groups, then, separate themselves from other groups by creating distinctions between themselves and others, which must constantly be renegotiated to satisfy the changing sociocultural environment. Consequently, individuals define themselves and their norms and

values in relation to other dissimilar groups that "may serve as negative reference groups" (Smith 1998: 104). Modernization, according to Smith, promotes the formation of these strong subcultures and "potentially 'deviant' identities, including religious subcultures and identities" (Smith 1998: 107). Smith asserts that if conflict arises between these groups, it only serves to strengthen in-group solidarity. Therefore, "Modernity can actually increase religion's appeal, by creating social conditions, which intensify the kinds of felt needs and desires that religion is especially well-positioned to satisfy" (Smith 1998: 116). From these propositions, Smith derives his subcultural identity theory of religion in which he states that, instead of religion being hindered by a pluralistic modern society, it "survives and thrives" by religious groups' ability to distinguish themselves from other groups and provide "meaning and belonging" to its members (Smith 1998: 118-119). Also from these propositions, he derives his subcultural theory of religious strength, which suggests that those religious groups that are most distinctive will be the strongest and most dominant. Consequently, according to Smith, the groups that see themselves as the most distinctive and, therefore, most dissimilar to other groups will display the strongest in-group ties and the weakest out-group ties leading to a limited amount of diversification in relationships.

Based on Smith's theory of religious subcultures, engagement and accommodation, this study explores religious subcultural variations in established friendship networks. As Smith contends, in a pluralistic society, religious groups can distinguish themselves by creating distinctive norms and values that fit into their belief system. These norms and values, in turn, affect many day-to-day activities of the individuals belonging to these religious subcultures, including their beliefs regarding the open-minded acceptance of individuals unlike themselves.

Research has shown that "religious groups can be arrayed on a continuum from conservative (e.g., Southern Baptist, other evangelical or fundamentalist), to moderate (e.g., Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist), to liberal (e.g., Episcopal, Reformed Jewish faith tradition)" (Gay, Ellison, and Powers 1996:4). Greenberg (1999) purports that "Members of liberal (or nonfundamentalist) denominations are likely to reach out beyond their own faith community to work with others and to help people in need who are different from themselves. Fundamentalists will respond to the spiritual demand to do good works but will focus their efforts on people like themselves" (Uslaner 2002:239). Interestingly however, Uslaner's own research found that fundamentalist values increased the likelihood of civic participation (p. 246). Catholics may be interpreted one of two ways. On one hand, the Catholic faith is thought to be of a more liberal tradition and, therefore, more open to those

outside their group. On the other hand, as Putnam suggests, tight-knit Catholic groups such as the Italian Catholic Church may be less likely to participate in civic affairs (Uslaner 2002, Greenberg 1999, Putnam 1993).

We hypothesize that, based on the sub-cultural identity theory posited by Christian Smith and elements of the closed community thesis implemented by Blanchard (2007), there will be significant differences between religious affiliations concerning the likelihood of creating an exclusionary in-group/out-group system, thus resulting in the lower adoption diverse friendship networks. This suggests that, due to the strong in-group tendencies of religious institutions, those individuals with a higher degree of group belonging in nonreligious organizations will have a significantly higher diversity of friendships compared with those that display a high degree of belonging to religiously affiliated organizations.

Methodology

Data

The data used in this analysis was obtained from the Social Capital Benchmark Survey, 2000. The survey was conducted by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research via telephone and is hierarchically structured with a national sample of 3,003 respondents and a community level sample of 41 selected communities across the U.S. consisting of 26,230 respondents. This article is concerned with a subset of respondents from the rural American South region as delineated by the U.S. Census Bureau (N=2,143). Researchers have found that religious behavior is affected by both rural-urban and regional residence variations (Chalfant and Heller 1991).

It is our belief that limiting our research to the rural South was important because of the significant over-representation of Conservative Protestant religious groups in that region. Previous literature has shown that the most prevalent religious influence in the South has been Conservative Protestantism (see Chalfant and Heller 1991). Hill (1998) did a report on the presence of evangelicalism and, more recently fundamentalism, in the South and suggests that, "Protestant Evangelicalism has long been the largest Christian tradition and its most prominent and dominant religious form. As part heir to the huge and culturally dominant Evangelical community, activist Fundamentalism has become a force in the South and the Southern version of Fundamentalism is largely an extension of its traditionally popular Protestant base" (Hill 1998). Previous literature also suggests that rural areas are often more religious and more conservative in their beliefs (see Chalfant and Heller 1991). Rural areas "tend to be more orthodox in their beliefs,

tend toward fundamentalism, Puritanical attitudes and general conservatism and have disproportionate percentage of evangelical Christians" (Chalfant and Heller 1991:76). It has been shown in previous research that these groups are often the most distinctive and most conservative and, therefore, if we follow Christian Smith's theory, the least likely to have a diversity of relationships (Greenberg 1999, Smith 1998). Therefore, it is for these reasons that we have focused our analysis on this portion of the country.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of concern in this study is the diversity of the friendship networks of the respondents. It is measured by the number of friendships the respondent has across many diverse characteristics of the respondents' friends including race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, etc. (Roper 2000). The variable ranges from one, which is the lowest level of diversity, to eleven, which is the highest level of diversity concerning the respondent's friendships.

Independent Variables

The Independent variables of primary concern are associated with denominational affiliation, religious salience, religious membership, and religious service attendance. The denominational affiliations were coded into the following six categories:

1. Catholic
2. Conservative Protestant (Baptist/Southern Baptist, Church of Christ and fundamentalist Protestant)
3. Mainline Protestant (Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Episcopal)
4. Other Protestant (Mormon and other unspecified Protestants)
5. Other Faith Traditions (e.g., Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist)
6. Not Affiliated (religious nones)

This variable was further dummy-coded with unaffiliated as the reference category to delineate denominational variations in the following multivariate analytic techniques.

Religious salience was measured by how important religion was to the individual. Worship service attendance was measured by how often a person attended services, both via a Likert scale. There is a significant amount of diversity among researchers' views about what religiousness and/or spirituality are as

constructs and there have been a variety of definitions given for both. For the purposes of this study, however, we turn to the work of Zinnbauer, Pargament and Scott (1999). They found that, "Coherent and consistent policies were identified for the majority of the students and clergy but only one cue was used by a majority of students to define religiousness, personal benefits and only one cue was used by a majority of clergy to define religiousness, church attendance" (Zinnbauer et al. 1999:894). Therefore, we felt that these variables were most appropriate for our research to measure how influential ones' religion may be on their everyday decision-making. Additionally, membership was determined simply by whether the individual was a self-reported church or synagogue member.

Lastly, for comparison, a scale representing the number of organizations the person belonged to, not including religious groups, was used. The scale was operationalized as four categories with the values ranging from 1-4 and representing zero nonreligious organization memberships, one/two nonreligious organization memberships, three/four nonreligious organization memberships, and five or more nonreligious organization memberships. Furthermore, based on previous studies, several sociodemographic characteristics such as respondents' sex (dummy/male), race (three dummies/reference white), employment status (dummy/employed), political orientation (liberalism/six categories), total family income (eight categories) and educational attainment (seven categories) were statistically controlled.

Analysis

This study adopted a two-phase analytic approach. In the first phase, bivariate analysis was conducted to compare the diversity of the individual's friendship network with several independent variables, including denominational affiliation, religious salience and worship service attendance. The previous literature review highlights the importance of all three of these variables in relation to the topic of study. Some religious groups encourage civic engagement and promote their members' active role in the community (Uslaner 2002). Others, however, lead their members away from such activities and, therefore, away from civic engagement (Uslaner 2002). Consequently, examining one's level of civic engagement considering their religious affiliation is very important. The previous body of literature has also suggested that religious belief and attendance can strengthen the influence that a particular doctrine has on individuals' degree of civic engagement. Yet as reported by Lehrer (2004a, 2004b), effects of religiosity (i.e., religious belief and attendance) were also not uniform across various faith traditions. Some

conservative Protestants, for example attended church more frequently, thus "if analyses do not consider differences in religious involvement, some of the estimated 'conservative Protestant' effect may actually be a religiosity effect" (p. 721). The statistical methods for the bivariate analysis include mean differences of friendship diversity across denominations and correlation between friendship diversity and religious salience and attendance. These bivariate analyses yielded exploratory results allowing for a preliminary examination of friendship diversity differences across denominations and in its possible relationship to religious salience and attendance.

The second phase of the analytical approach involved multivariate statistical analysis, namely, multivariate regression analysis to examine the role of religion in the propensity to establish diverse friendship networks. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was used to examine the score on the friendship diversity scale for denominational affiliation, religious salience and worship service attendance. Nested models were developed and estimated to explore the net effects of denominational affiliation, religious salience, and worship service attendance on the propensity to develop diverse friendship networks with all sociodemographic variables controlled.

The nested multivariate OLS approach resulted in a total of five nested models in testing the proposed research hypotheses. Model 1 was the baseline model that simply enlisted all sociodemographic control variables, including age, race, education, employment status, total family income, and political orientation to test the effects of these variables on the propensity to have a diverse friendship network. Model 2 featured all sociodemographic variables included in Model 1 plus denominational affiliation to test for denominational subcultural variations in the dependent variable among different faith traditions as well as unaffiliated while controlling for sociodemographics. With denominational affiliation removed, Model 3 added religious membership to test for its independent influence on the dependent variable controlling for sociodemographics. Similarly, Model 4 removed religious salience and added worship service attendance to test for its independent effects on the propensity to develop a diverse friendship network, again with sociodemographics controlled. Also, Model 5 incorporated religious salience to examine its independent effect on the dependent variable.

Models 3, 4 and 5 were designed to test the role of religious salience and worship service attendance as opposed to denominational affiliation. Model 6 included the categorical variable representing the number of nonreligious organizations the individual was a member of, to test for the possible differential

TABLE 1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF DEPENDENT AND INDEPENDENT VARIABLES (N = 2,143).

| | DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS | | |
	%	N	MEAN	SD
Diversity of friendships............................	–	2,143	6.18	2.62
Black.	13.5%	290	–	–
Hispanic.	4.8%	81	–	–
Asian.	0.5%	11	–	–
White...	78.2%	1,650	–	–
Age..	–	2,101	44.97	15.92
Unemployed..	33.3%	713	–	–
Employed..	66.7%	1,430	–	–
Total family income.	–	2,143	2.90	1.86
Married.	61.9%	1,327	–	–
Not married.	38.1%	816	–	–
Male..	40.2%	862	–	–
Female...	59.8%	1,281	–	–
Education.	–	2,143	2.49	1.81
Political ideology (liberalism).................	–	2,143	2.48	1.16
Catholic.	9.7%	207	–	–
Conservative protestant............................	40.0%	857	–	–
Mainline protestant.	19.2%	411	–	–
Other protestant.	8.2%	175	–	–
Other faith traditions...............................	13.8%	295	–	–
No religious affiliation.............................	7.7%	165	–	–
Church/synagogue membership.............	75.0%	1,956	–	–
Religious salience.	–	2,114	3.63	0.76
Religious attendance................................	–	1,951	3.79	1.40
Nonreligious group membership.	–	2,143	2.59	1.08

effect of religious group membership vs. nonreligious group membership comparatively. Finally, Model 7, which is the full model, included all variables allowing for the examination of the dependent variable across religious denominations while controlling for the religious membership, religious salience, worship service attendance, and the quantity of nonreligious group memberships along with all sociodemographic variables. This nested and rotating modeling strategy is advantageous because 1) it tests the independent effects of religious variables individually, and 2) it tests the nonspurious effects of religious variables collectively and holistically.

Results

Bivariate Analysis

As mentioned above, the initial descriptives of all variables involved in this analysis are in Table 1. The descriptives in Table 1 show that there is a mean score of 6.18 across the sub-sample, representing the average respondent's friendship diversity score. Table 2 examines the diversity of friendship networks by denominational mean. The difference in means is significant at the .001 level, meaning that there are denominational differences in the average member's diversity of friendships. These exploratory findings show that Conservative Protestants seem to have the least diverse friendship networks, as expected via the closed community thesis, while individuals who report to be of "other" faith traditions have the highest score on the scale. Also of interest, individuals who reported to be of no religious affiliation have the second lowest score on the

TABLE 2.   MEAN DIFFERENCE OF FRIENDSHIP DIVERSITY BY DENOMINATION

CURRENT DENOMINATION	MEAN	N	STD. DEVIATION
No affiliation.	5.99	165	2.82
Catholic.	6.45	207	2.52
Other faith tradition	6.53	337	2.76
Conservative protestant.	5.91	848	2.59
Mainline protestant.	6.39	411	2.50
Other protestant.	6.14	175	2.56
Total.	6.18	2,143	2.62

F = 4.11, p < .001

diversity scale and Catholics have the second highest score. These findings often support previous literature that report both Catholics and individuals of "other" religious affiliations to be more liberal and accepting of individuals different from themselves (Greenberg 1999).

Table 3 examines the correlations of the dependent variable, diversity of the individual's friendship network, with the religious variables concerning membership, attendance, and salience. The findings show significant correlations between the dependent variable and, both, religious membership and attendance. However, the religious salience variable was not significantly correlated with the diversity of friendship scale. The magnitude and direction of both significant relationships are similar in that both religious membership and attendance have a small but significant correlation in the positive direction. This means that individuals that are church or synagogue members are, on average, more likely to have diverse friendship networks than those who are not members. Also, as the individual's reported attendance increases, the corresponding diversity of friendships score increases. As mentioned, religious salience was not significant in its correlation to the dependent variable.

TABLE 3. CORRELATIONS BETWEEN FRIENDSHIP DIVERSITY, RELIGIOUS MEMBERSHIP, RELIGIOUS SALIENCE, AND WORSHIP SERVICE ATTENDANCE

	RELIGIOUS MEMBERSHIP	WORSHIP SERVICE ATTENDANCE	RELIGIOUS SALIENCE
Friendship diversity	-.13[***]	.09[***]	.00
Religious membership		.55[***]	.35[***]
Worship service attendance			-.40[***]

[***]p < .001

Multivariate Analysis

The multivariate analysis is reported in Table 4. The findings reported are set up to represent nested models examining both independent and controlled effects for all of the variables mentioned above. Model 1 examines simply the effect of the sociodemographic variables of import in the existing literature. The findings from Model 1 suggest that all races are less likely to have a diverse friendship network when compared with whites. Also, employed individuals, more liberal

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TABLE 4. UNSTANDARDIZED COEFFICIENTS OF OLS REGRESSIONS TO PREDICT FRIENDSHIP DIVERSITY.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE	MODEL						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Black	-.42**	-.39*	-.54**	-.57**	-.49**	-.63***	-.64**
Asian	-1.40	-1.49*	-.78	-.78	-1.35	-.91	-.68
Hispanic	-1.37***	-1.51***	-1.11***	-1.21***	-1.32***	-1.01***	-.94**
Gender	-.05	-.05	-.17	-.12	-.08	-.07	-.14
Age	.00	.00	-.01	-.01	.00	-.01*	-.01
Marital status	.14	.14	.09	.12	.12	.07	.11
Employment	.42***	.43***	.35*	.39**	.42***	.36**	.31*
Political ideology	.24***	.23***	.27***	.28***	.27***	.20***	.22***
Education	.27***	.26***	.23***	.22***	.27***	.12***	.10**
Total family income	.17***	.17***	.17***	.17***	.17***	.10**	.10**
Catholic		.41					.36
Conservative protestant		-.05					-.02
Mainline protestant		.05					-.10
Other protestant		.26					.23
Other faith traditions		.50*					.48
Religious membership			.63***				.36*
Religious attendance				.16***			.01
Religious salience					.13		-.05
Nonreligious group membership						.82***	.78***
Constant	4.15***	3.99***	4.17***	3.83***	3.66***	3.21***	3.16***
R²	.12***	.12***	.12***	.12***	.12***	.21***	.21***
N	2,081	2,081	1,910	1,898	2,059	2,081	1,885

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

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individuals, more highly educated individuals, and those with higher household income are, on average, more diverse in their friendship networks. Gender, age, marital status, and being Asian were all insignificant in predicting the dependent variable of interest. Lastly, the sociodemographic variables in model 1 were, overall, significant predictors accounting for about 12% of the variation in the model.

The remaining findings show that the same relative patterns exist for all sociodemographic control variables. Model 2 examines the effect of each religious denomination, dummy-coded in reference to individuals with no religious affiliation. Also, only one denomination was reported as a significant predictor of the dependent variable with "other" faith traditions having a significantly higher diversity of friendships than those with no religious affiliation. Again, the model was significant with about 12.5% of the variation accounted for by the independent variables as a group. Model 3 examines the independent effect of religious membership showing that being a member of a church or synagogue increases the individual's score on the diversity of friendship scale by .630 units. Similarly, model 4 reports that as an individual's reported religious attendance increases their corresponding diversity of friendships decreases.

Model 5 reports on the independent effect of religious importance (salience) in the individual's life on the dependent variable. The effect, unlike the religious membership and attendance effect, was insignificant. For comparative purposes, model 6 examines the individual's involvement in nonreligious organizations. The findings show that increases in the belonging to a nonreligious organization greatly increases the diversity of the individual's friendship networks by .822 units. The inclusion of the variable greatly increases the variation accounted from 12% to around 21%. Finally, model 7 examines the full model, controlling for all variables in the study. The findings report that, while controlling for all variables in the model, none of the religious denominational variables nor the religious attendance and salience variables are significant predictors. However, being a member of a church or synagogue significantly and belonging to a nonreligious group significantly increases the diversity of friendships. The effects are much larger for the nonreligious group membership (Beta .33) than the religious group membership (Beta .06).

Conclusions and Discussion

As a result, it seems the most important predictors relate to simply being a member of a group. That is to say that simply being in any type of group organization makes an individual more likely to develop a diverse friendship

network in relation to those with a lower degree of belonging. Furthermore, this effect holds for the act of belonging to a religious organization as opposed to the magnitude of belonging, as measured by attendance and salience. However, the findings report interesting results based on the type of membership in terms of being religiously associated or not. Keeping in line with Smith's sub-cultural theory of religion, it is possible that individuals who report to be members of a church or synagogue are, on average, more open to creating friendships with individuals unlike themselves than those who report not to be members of a church or synagogue. The theory itself is concerned with the creation of an in-group/out-group dynamic in which the "us versus them" mentality does not allow for the openness needed in the acceptance of others unlike themselves and the subsequent creation of a diverse friendship network.

However, noting that the results in table 2 point out that, although group belonging overall has a positive influence on the development of diverse friendship networks, it varies significantly across denominations is important. Evidently, more liberal religions, such as Catholicism, often have more diverse friendship networks in relation to more established conservative religions such as Protestantism, especially Conservative Protestantism. This finding falls in line with some literature on the development of in-group networks and the degree to which those networks are exclusive. In fact, Smith (1998) points out that more conservative religions are often exclusionary in their group formations, primarily due to their higher levels of nonacceptance of secular ideas. Seeing how this can be directly related to their development and adoption of friendships with individuals unlike themselves is easy.

According to research, the ability to trust strangers, especially those that are different from oneself, promotes civic engagement and community building, which have been associated with several social and economic benefits for communities (Fukuyama 1995; Putman 1993; Uslaner 2002; Bahry et al. 2005). Those with a high degree of "generalized trust"[2] are more active in the community, are more cooperative and are more likely to engage and get along with people from different backgrounds (Bahry et al. 2005). Some religious groups, especially evangelical Protestant groups, "foster a retreat from certain types of communication behaviors, contributing to several negative effects on social trust" (Nisbet, Moy, and Scheufele 2003). Because previous literature suggests that rural areas are often more religious

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[2] "Generalized trust helps promote the norms of reciprocity and cooperation that underpin civil society. It appears to reflect an individuals belief that most others share the same fundamental values, and belong to the same 'moral community'" (Putnam 2000; Fukuyama 1995; Uslaner 2002).

and more conservative in their beliefs (see Chalfant and Heller 1991, Greenberg 1999, Smith 1998), those areas will display lower levels of social trust and diversity of relationships.

The positive relationship between the act of belonging and the development of diverse friendship networks is consistent with the hypothesis when examining the effect of membership in nonreligious organizations. It seems that the involvement of individuals in nonreligious organizations is a good predictor of the propensity of the individual being open to other individuals and experiences unlike themselves to a much larger degree than religious membership. One possible explanation of this is that they are markedly different from members of religious institutions in that they tend not to create the same in-group/out-group dynamic, which looks to limit the diversity of the friendship networks of those individuals when strictly compared with those individuals who are members of groups and organizations of a nonreligious category.

Although, it is possible that secular organizational belonging may create the same in-group/out-group dynamics as religious organizations (i.e., fraternity/sorority), the results here suggest that they do not attract individuals simply for being around others like themselves to the same degree. It may be, then, that individuals join these groups more for purposes of activity and civic engagement as opposed to the obligatory belonging often associated with religious involvement.

Perhaps this final point should be mentioned as a possible limitation to the data being used in this project. It may be interesting to break down the actual types of organizations joined as a way of better understanding the true impact of group belonging on the development of diverse networks through which an individual interacts. Also, as for improving upon this study, breaking down the subgroups within the religious categories mentioned in this study may be beneficial. As with any group aggregation, there is certain dilution of variance that may be hiding interesting sub-denominational patterns of social closure and group exclusion. Lastly, while this study is interested in the examination of the effect of religious versus nonreligious belonging in the rural south, future studies should implement a more nationally representative sample, in both metropolitan proximity and geographic region, to establish more generalizable theory.

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