

SUNDAY MORNING SEGREGATION:
AFRICAN AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN AMERICAN CHRISTIAN CHURCH
LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS ON SEGREGATION WITHIN THE CHURCH

by

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(Under the Direction of MARIA CAROLINA ACOSTA-ALZURU)

ABSTRACT

Drawing on standpoint theory, this study examines at the perceptions of African American and European American church leaders regarding church segregation. Through in-depth interviews, it gathers opinions and viewpoints and explores the leaders' perceptions of the media's potential role on church segregation.

INDEX WORDS: Church Segregation, Standpoint Theory, Media

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“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female for you are all one.” Galatians 3:28

“A new commandment I give you: love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another.” John 13:34

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer is credited with saying that the most segregated place on earth is America on Sunday mornings (Price, 2001). Millions of Christians attend churches in the United States to worship and to enjoy fellowship with other believers, but often the racial makeup of the congregation offers little to no diversity. There are still issues of racial prejudice and discrimination throughout our society, but if there is going to be one place and time when everyone can come together under one roof to worship and celebrate the same God, one would think a Christian church service on Sunday morning may be a likely place and time. Because this is not the case, questions arise such as: Is it that specific denominations lend themselves to a particular racial or ethnic group? Is the separation due to cultural differences? Are discrimination and prejudice within the Christian community the cause of this segregation, or perhaps it is the strength of societal forces and institutions that elicit Sunday morning segregation within one “body of Christ”? What are the perceptions of church leaders regarding the racial makeup of their place of worship? What do they believe the causes are for church segregation? Do the media play any role in this?

This thesis examines the latter three questions. As a Christian, a student of mass media and an individual holding strong beliefs and a passion for civil rights, I aim to better understand the “why” of church segregation through its leaders. This is an exploratory study of their perceptions.

Price posits that integration and an end to racist thought and action can and should occur in the Christian community, thus utilizing the church as a model for, and bridge to, anti-racist thought for all areas of society:

If the church takes on its role as the salt of the earth and the light of the world so that all Christians cease to hold racist thoughts in their minds and practice racism in their lives, if all Christians everywhere condemn racism as the sin it is, the “huge racial chasm” will finally close (Price, 2001, p. 135).

It is apparent that racism and segregation still exist within the Christian community and in many facets of our society, and though issues of race are extremely complicated, I hope that this research will promote change and positive growth on some level and perhaps prompt the church at-large to become more racially united.

My Standpoint

I have selected this topic for a few different reasons. The first is that I am a Christian and have noticed through attending a number of different Christian churches, there is little racial/ethnic diversity in most congregations. In addition, as a student of mass communication, I am well aware of the media’s prominence in our society and its effect on us all in terms of normalcy, beauty, success and other such social constructions that the media is constantly bombarding us with. My third reason for this topic, is a passion that I possess for a society freed of

racism and discrimination; a nation working toward true equality. In addition, I agree with Price (2001) in that the church truly can be a force that aids in the elimination of racist thought and action. It seems completely paradoxical that a faith institution based on love can be one of such hypocrisy and separation in so many instances.

I believe that this topic is important in that it has the potential to push the church community toward acting as an example for effective interracial communication. I believe that this research is also valuable because it is adding to the body of knowledge concerning interracial communication, which is an important and growing field because “race continues to be one of the most important issues in the United States” (Orbe & Harris, 2001, p. 8). Any knowledge that can be added to the discipline will hopefully bring about educational and attitudinal shifts. Finally, I think that the church is a good place to start because it is an established institution that has a long societal history and a strong presence in the U.S. thus giving the church a strong voice and network from which to communicate the changes needed concerning interracial communication in all aspects of our society.

My own racial identity as a white woman has been shaped and better understood by my interactions and relationships with those of a different race than my own. I have been able to understand my position of white privilege through conversations and observations of non-whites in a racially hierarchical society. A particular time of growth in my racial identity came through my involvement in an interracial dating relationship in college. Hearing stories of

racism and sometimes witnessing these unfair treatments gave me a deeper understanding of how race, though often unconsidered by a white member of society such as me, does play a larger role in daily encounters than I had previously understood and acknowledged. Additionally, my extensive travel experience to more than fifteen countries and five continents provided opportunities to witness racial constructions in locations such as India and South Africa where issues of a caste system and Apartheid, respectively, play a major role in interracial interactions. Living among and talking with natives throughout my travel experiences showed me that skin color holds unwarranted importance globally. Finally, my enrollment in an interracial communications course while completing my graduate studies at UGA taught me even more about interracial issues and caused me to examine my own cultural identity. Though an often draining and difficult topic, matters of race, ethnicity and culture have continually intrigued me and have been important in shaping who I am, how I perceive myself and how I perceive and interact with others, particularly in interracial settings.

Christian Identity, White Supremacy, The Black Church and Segregation

In order to better understand the issue of church segregation, it is crucial to look back into the history of how the church became a segregated institution. For additional background to frame this study, a brief discussion on Christian Identity and its opposition identifying as a Christian is laid out. Identifying as a Christian and Christian Identity are not the same thing in America. Christianity is defined as "Professing belief in Jesus as Christ or following the religion based on the life

and teachings of Jesus; Christ like; showing a loving concern for others; humane” (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2000). In other words, to identify as a Christian is to find your identity in Christ and to follow his teachings and commandments. Christian Identity, in contrast, is a movement involving extremely conservative Christian groups, the largest of which is the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). But the KKK is not the only group that subscribes to Christian Identity. Churches that believe in and practice white supremacy, anti-Semitism and racism are also part of this umbrella group. (Ostendorf, 2002). More than 50,000 people in the United States alone practice this anti-Semitic, racist ideology (Robinson, 2005). Of course those followers of the Christian Identity movement also identify as Christians, but their belief system and practices are far from the teachings of Jesus Christ (Ostendorf, 2002).

The Christian Identity movement dates back to the early 1900s when a growing social club, The American Anglo-Saxon Federation, popularized British-Israelism, which is the belief that Northern Europe and Great Britain are the gathering place for the twelve lost tribes of Israel (Barkan, 1997). For about 50 years following the introduction of British-Israelism in the U.S., it became more racist and anti-Semitic, breeding The Christian Identity movement (Barkan, 1997). Obviously, this Christian Identity movement is one that perpetuates segregation within the Christian community, and Ostendorf (2002) believes that it will continue to do so as long as these groups continue to follow and practice the beliefs of the Christian Identity movement.

Though it may be difficult to believe that members of these extremist groups will change, it is possible, as in the case of Tom Tarrants, a former KKK member turned Christian (Kingsolving, 1993). Following his conversion to Christianity, Tarrants became a pastor of an interracial church where he preaches the message of ending racism in the church. Even though respected Reverend Billy Graham (1993) said, "Of all people, Christians should be the most active in reaching out to those of other races, instead of accepting the status quo of division and animosity" (p. 27), Tarrants does not believe many white churches in general are concerned with racial issues inside the church, nor are black churches interested in an integrationist movement (cited in Kingsolving, 1993). Though Christians do need to be active in combating racism and segregation to demonstrate Christ's love for all people, Sharp (2002) posits that many who claim Christianity ignore, and are not concerned with, the "devastation" of racism. Sharp claims that these actions of ignorance "bring insult and injury to God and desecrate the humanity of others and themselves" (p. 251).

In an interview, author Juan Williams explained that it is essential to understand that racial separation in the church stems from societal segregation of blacks from whites (cited in Hodges & Siegel, 2003). A segregated society causes not only the absence of blacks from certain churches, but also the creation of new churches. For instance, the black Baptist movement started in 18th century when former slaves of ministers worked to create a separate church for blacks to participate in fellowship and worship (Hodges & Siegel, 2003). Some then feared that integration could take away some of the power of

leadership and freedom to worship however they chose that the black church had fought for before and during the Civil Rights Movement and that these churches may become non-existent. This fear exists even today. Because the freedom allowed through the black church is tied to the Civil Rights struggle for freedom, it plays an important leadership role in the black community and is a source of strength and a place of acceptance. It is a community, unlike society at large, that does not come from an Eurocentric framework (Hodges & Siegel, 2003).

Despite this opportunity for leadership and power, Williams (2003) underscores the potential harm of ignoring the integrationist agenda:

The integrationist agenda is about achieving justice. It's not about selling out or exacting retribution. African Americans should have the confidence to sit at America's tables as equals—as citizens without regard to race. They can say in all honesty, 'Listen, we have been instrumental in generating the wealth of this country. We are equal citizens and have equal political rights and a voice in this country. We're not going to surrender it by not voting or not raising our hand to speak about key social-policy issues. We're not going to be minimized.' The integrationist agenda shouldn't be dismissed as old hat, old school or silly idealism. Integration is essential if African-Americans are going to have a hand at the lever of power in American society. King recognized that, and recognized that anyone whose conscious has been formed by Christianity must see the truth in the integrationist agenda (quoted in Hodges & Siegel, 2003, p. 48).

Though it is important to understand the roots of the black church, I believe Williams is trying to underline the importance of African Americans not defining the Christian part, or any other part of their identity, as simply the opposite of white and dominant culture. "Mere contradiction becomes black identity," (quoted in Hodges & Siegel, 2003, p. 48) which gives a tremendous amount of power to whites and narrows who the black individual is apart from "simply a representation of a white person's shadow" (quoted in Hodges &

Siegel, 2003, p. 48). The goal is to identify with the black church and to use it as a source of unity, as well as a means by which to create greater good within the broader society. Conversely, Simms (2000) states that black Christianity “is not simply white religion with a cosmetic face lift. Rather the quintessence of African-American spiritual-mindedness is grounded in the social and political experience of Black people” (Simms, 2000, p. 100). His argument would be on the side of continued, and voluntary, segregation between the two churches. Likewise, the writings of Donald McGavan and C. Peter Wagner beginning in the 70s, posit that monoracial churches are “socially-relevant and biblically based” (quoted in DeYoung, et. al., 2003, p. 123). Their thought is that it is inevitable that societies will be racially and culturally separated, so rather than putting time and effort into “trying to change this reality” (p. 123), time would be better spent toward evangelistic efforts. They believe, however, that an exception to this would be forming multiracial congregations where the society is already diversified. In other words, they see society as the impetus for change in the church and not the other way around.

Significance of the Study

These opposing views on black Christianity and white Christianity, the power struggle between them, and whether complete integration is a plus or not has been debated for years by such scholars as DuBois, Nicholson, Lincoln, and Baum and Coleman (Pollard & Welchel, 2003), and opinions will most likely continue to vary. This conflict is one reason why there is a need for this type of

research, so that the issue of the segregated church is still thought through, discussed and, most importantly, acted upon. Prejudices and anti-integrationist sentiment within both black and white Christian communities further complicate the situation of segregation within the Christian community. As we know, race is still an issue in our society, even with those who identify as Christian, and despite some progress on the surface, there is still a significant amount of underlying tension where race is concerned that can be seen in several aspects of our Eurocentric society. My personal belief is that the church can act as a leader toward a more integrated society.

I believe in the importance of this study because of the continual misrepresentation and misuse of Christianity. What I mean by this is that, too often, white supremacists groups, such as the KKK, look to the Bible as their source of justification for racist actions (Perkinson, 2004). Also, many whites, Christian or not, simply are not aware of the “cultural” and “institutional” racism that exists even today in our societal customs, institutions, language, structure and standards (Davies & Hennessee, 1998). This lack of awareness is often due to privilege (Orbe & Harris, 2001), which is the idea that whites often have certain benefits in society simply based on their skin color. It is the privilege that whites have to be ignorant about the history of other people, and to those possessing this privilege, it is not apparent, while to those without it, it is the most apparent (Tait & Gorder, 2004). It could be this inequality of societal privilege that leads to instances of prejudice from blacks toward whites. These barriers that are created based on religious teachings are, in my opinion, not the original intent of

spirituality, thus the need for ways in which to study and break down these barriers. This study is also important because, whether we recognize it or not, radicalized thinking is embedded within Eurocentric academic thought processes, which has been challenged since the 1970's and needs to be continually challenged in order to discontinue the reducing of "cultures or societies to a central core or feature" (Johnson et. al., 2004, p. 12). Instead, we need to find ways in which to understand the differences in history and cultures and operate from a viewpoint of coming together to learn about and embrace these variations.

Contrary to the current social landscape, in which identity is likely to be determined by opposition, violence, and brutality to others (whether by race, culture, tradition, language, wealth, credentials, sexual orientation or gender), the Christian response calls for an affirmation of community and the counter-themes of trust, mutual respect, and the vision of a new world (Matsuoka, 1998, p.6).

Essentially, as Christians, we have a responsibility towards social justice and peace.

As the literature suggests, identifying as a Christian can mean different things for blacks and whites. The black Christian community holds many differences in terms of history, and, in some cases, practices from the white Christian community, which contributes to segregation within the community instead of melding these different groups and fostering a spirit of love and oneness within the Christian body as a whole. It is important to account for the history behind these differences and the segregation, history rooted in slavery and the Civil Rights movement. The black Christian community, again, is tied to a specific struggle and the gaining of power, freedom and leadership which white Christians can understand to an extent, but not completely identify with. Despite

not being able to identify with these struggles, it is imperative that whites discontinue their ignorance to both historical and present day inequalities, and that black and white Christians make strides together toward uniting the church. With these thoughts in mind, I draw on the opinions and viewpoints of both black and white Christian leaders, using in-depth interviews to better understand church segregation and the possible influence that the media have on perpetuating this issue.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Segregation in the church violates something that is basic in the nature of the church. How can the church exclude from the 'Church of God' those who are children of God? How can it, as the 'Body of Christ,' withhold the privilege of worship from those who have been brought into union with Christ? How can a group that claims to be a part of a fellowship of the Spirit refuse to share with any of the redeemed, or deny admission to its place of worship to those who seek that redemption? Unthinkable! Yes, unthinkable, and yet there are many groups that call themselves churches that are doing that very thing. –T.B. Maston, 1959.

Church Segregation

Despite the lengthy history of church segregation and many books assessing the situation, there is not a large body of knowledge regarding actual research on the subject. Furthermore, most of the academic literature found is from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and though it provides an historical framework on the issue, it does not delve into the actual experiences of the phenomena. Arguably, however, the issue is pertinent and should be addressed more often.

Paul wrote that the church is one body made up of many diverse components. Our diversity need not be a reason for division. The church of Jesus, which is one church in theory, must become one church in reality. Unity is not optional (Tait & Gorder, 2004, p. 176).

The segregation between the black and white church dates back to colonial times and the arrival of slaves to North America (Hough, 1968, p. 171), which not only took the freedom of countless men, women and children, but also divided the opinions of whites in the North and whites in the South on the issue of

slavery. While northerners were generally opposed to slavery, it was southern pastors and other church leaders who believed slavery to be God's will (Hough, 1968). As slavery continued, some slave owners, but not all, began to encourage slaves to attend church (Maffly-Kipp, 2004). While some owners would encourage attending churches with worship styles similar to that of the patterns of traditional African worship, often Methodist and Baptist, others insisted on the slaves attending white-controlled churches, frequently Presbyterian, in order to counteract the potential of rebellion (Maffly-Kipp, 2004). Prior to the Civil War, northern church leaders argued against church segregation, claiming it not to be the will of God, while southern church leaders argued the opposite (Hough, 1968). Since this time in history, ideas and opinions on how to bring together the black and white church or how to keep it separate have been debated. Hough (1968) wrote:

...it is my fervent hope that this white Protestant response to the new development in the Negro community can become some small part of the continuing interfaith dialogue on the problems of race relations which is so necessary if we Americans are ever to achieve racial justice (p. 21).

Essays over the years analyzing thoughts and ideas of various religious persons in terms of prejudice and segregation have arrived at different conclusions. Glock and Stark (1966) found that the more orthodox a Christian believer is, the more anti-Semitic he will be. Argyle (1959) found that Protestants who did not attend church regularly were more prejudiced than those who do, and atheists and agnostics were also found to be less racially prejudiced than the non-church-attending Protestants. This may lead to the conclusion that some Christians are just as prejudiced, or in the case of the non-practicing Christians in

this study, more prejudiced than non-believers, which of course goes against the very basis of Christ's teaching on love.

Another reason for church segregation was the belief that despite efforts of national denominational counsels to eradicate racist behavior in the church, this was not always followed throughout the denominations on a local level (Hough, 1968). These opponents to church integration were more often found in the South than the North. Frequently, they justified their idea of segregation as Biblically-based (Hough, 1968).

In his book, *Is God a White Racist?* (1973), Jones looks at the idea of "divine racism." He analyzes both scholarly and theological works and argues that the oppression of the black community could be due to this "divine racism" from God himself. Jones concludes that his stance, though arrogant, is to continue a debate. He claims that "to speak of God as the ground for black hope—without the prior refutation of divine racism—is sheer theological illusion and pipe dreaming" (p. 202). He concludes by posing a question: "Have we removed a substantial hope, or exposed a comfortable but ill-advised illusion?" (p. 202).

Jones' analysis as a white man is far different from that of Barbour (1967) who believes that the white man's role in race relations is crucial, that white pastors and ministers were missing opportunities for unity and integration. Barbour writes of a discussion that took place in the late 1960s among both black and whites of the National Council of Churches. They concluded that for church integration to truly work, it would be necessary for blacks and whites to keep the

communication going, to love all people—even the segregationists—and to be prepared for the struggles and divisions among congregations, business and even families (Barbour, 1967). Barbour also found that it was necessary for church leaders to initiate and work together in the fight toward integration, and although some progress has been made, this is still a pertinent necessity.

In an earlier study, in the form of a survey by the *Catholic Digest* was administered to 2,000 people (500 northern whites, 500 northern blacks, 500 southern whites and 500 southern blacks) between December 1955 and February 1956 (Tumin, 1956). The study was the “first comprehensive survey of public attitudes toward suggested solutions to the racial problems in the U.S.” (Tumin, 1956, p. 94). The findings suggested that there were more similarities between white northerners’ and blacks’ than between white northerners and white southerners. Overall, 48 percent of whites and 90 percent of blacks were for integration. The main reasons offered for what they perceived was “standing in the way of solving the Negro-white problem” (p. 99) were prejudice, fear and misunderstanding. Fourteen percent of white northerners thought that it was the southern whites and the South that were “standing in the way of solving the Negro-white problem” (p.99), while 14 percent of southern whites believed that desegregation was the problem. This obviously reflects the divide in the opinions of northern and southern whites and how Northerners interpret segregation as the actual “problem” while Southerners saw integration to be the “problem.” In terms of the church, white southerners believed that “church segregation hurts (the) solution of the “ ‘Negro-white problem’ ” (Tumin, 1956, p. 99).

Shortly after, Maston (1959) also found that the need for white leaders to be active in integrationist efforts was crucial. In 1957, 80 Protestant ministers admitted their “own example of brotherhood and neighborliness has been all too imperfect” (Maston, 1959, p. 35). In Dallas, in 1958, about 300 white Protestant ministers, of 13 varying denominations, signed a statement admitting their prejudices and failures at trying to solve racial problems (Maston, 1959). This signing was followed by a group of black ministers who also agreed to the need for integration. Despite these statements at a national level, Maston found that actions did not always follow at the local level, and prejudice thoughts and pro-segregation attitudes still lingered. Another declaration formulated by a White Citizens’ Council leader and signed by many white ministers followed. The document defended the patterns of segregation (Maston, 1959).

From his critique, Matson concluded that there were roughly three types of Christian leaders in the South: (1) those who believe in segregation as the will of God, (2) those who believe segregation is not God’s will, but chose to remain silent, and (3) those who do not believe in segregation and would openly state that both in public and in private. Matson’s (1959) argument, though over forty-years-old, may hold some bearing today as traditions and thought processes are handed down from one generation to the next.

Over a decade later, Reist (1975) discussed the work of Troelsch (1912), who acknowledged “historical individuality,” but believed in the understanding and agreement of differing individuals. Despite this desire to agree and understand each other, as blacks and whites, while remaining individuals, Reist

argued that the integration of the church ended with the growth of civil rights and the movement into the Black Revolution, which was a time of ethnic and racial liberation and separation. He felt that blacks desired voluntary separation due to the oppression of their culture by whites. This is in agreement with Frazier (1974) who argued that because slaves were “Christianized,” their freedom brought about a strong desire to build separate church organizations in which they were free to have their own religious expressions without the watchful eye of the white man. Even with this desire of the black community to become united, Roberts (1980) in an in-depth study of the black church from a historical and theological view, found that there is not as much unity as there should be. He concluded that black families and churches must work together in uniting the black community and that failure to do so “appropriately and urgently...will hasten its own death” (p. 132).

It is clear from these results that outward integration issues have come a long way in the past 50 years, though, I would argue, there are probably more prejudiced attitudes in society than can be measured through non-verbal expressions than by outward racist actions. Ultimately, there is still progress to be made and research yet to be conducted for the continual progress and attempt to eradicate prejudices and racism in the church as well as other areas of society.

One such example of progress is a case study of the Minnesota Council of Churches (MCC) (Schoen, cited in Davies & Hennessee, 1998). In 1992, the Council, which was made up of 18 different denominations, decided to take

action toward eradicating racism (Schoen, cited in Davies & Hennessee, 1998). With goals, strategies and actions, the Council was successful conducted anti-racism seminars for 283 congregations and 66 other organizations. In 1989, Milwaukee's Interfaith Conference designed a similar program called Beyond Racism. The program was based around the need for multicultural dialogues with congregations, ministerial associations, neighborhood groups and denominational staff (Holloman & Murtaugh cited in Davies & Hennessee, 1998). Additionally, the program hosted retreats, educational seminars and children's camps. The program organizers concluded that participants grew in their understanding of the "cost of racism" (p. 47) and were able to "enter one another's worlds and have, therefore, seen the realities and effects of racism in new ways" (Holloman & Murtaugh, quoted in Davies & Hennessee, 1998, p. 48). They also found that the dialogues were effective in that they allowed for an initial "interest in participating at a deeper level" in race relations (Holloman & Murtaugh, quoted in Davies & Hennessee, 1998, p. 48). Despite some research on church segregation and some progress toward church integration, it is apparent that there is plenty of work yet to be done. More recently, DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey & Kim (2003) argue that, "when possible congregations should strive to become multiracial, but this view is not held universally and certainly not widely practiced" (p. 96). This is true, yet it is crucial to continue to understand and break down the causes for church segregation and solutions toward church integration.

Media and Religion

“Many of the social institutions and patterns of everyday life with which we are now so familiar, assumed their present forms in the four decades between 1880 and 1920. Their development was inextricably tied up with the growth of modern media” (Murdock, 1982, p. 40).

For many years the media has held a large degree of power in our society and the ability to influence and affect individuals as well as societies at large (Hall, 1982). Though we may not initially look to the media as an influence in church segregation, and it has yet to be considered in the literature about church segregation, there is literature concerning the media’s power and its role in our socialization. And more specific to this study, there is an existing body of literature on the topic of media and religion. Rosengren, Johnson-Smaragdi and Sonesson (1994) found that mass media intake contributes to the shaping of young peoples’ live both presently and in the future. They posit that in aspects of socialization such as shaping beliefs, values and opinions, young people often look to the mass media (Rosengren et. al., 1994). In agreement with this, Miegel (1994) states:

There is no doubt that popular culture and the mass media constitute leading sources from which young people receive the images and ideas that they use in their identity and lifestyle work. The mass media, therefore, have an important role in agents of socialization and as transmitters of values, norms and attitudes, something which obviously has considerable impact on the importance of the role of the family in the process of socialization (p. 283).

As an institution so prevalent and powerful in our society, the media have the potential to be a source of both positive and negative influence in our lives. The mass media socialize us to know what kind of people are important and dictate and show us how to create our dreams such as being beautiful and

powerful (Johnson-Smaragdi & Jönsson, 1994). These dreams however are often unobtainable and can lead to a negative self-image if left unfulfilled (Johnson- Smaragdi & Jönsson, 1994). In a study by Steele and Brown (1995), 27 teens were interviewed about media in their everyday lives. They concluded that teens select, interact with and apply media to their daily lives, thus it plays a role in shaping their identities. However the researchers did note that because the media are so present and constant in everyday activities, it makes for a complex relationship (Steele & Brown, 1995). Because the relationship is so complex and such a constant in our daily lives, it is difficult to determine the depths of the effects that the media have on our identity, socialization and all aspects of our society including the church.

Though it has not been studied in abundance, some literature does exist on media and religion. Schultze (2003) posits:

The mass media in America were grounded in the particularly Protestant notion that communication, including the press, had the power to change people, to beneficially altar their perspective, and to usher them into a new community of shared hope (p. 10).

It is true that religion and mass media have been in a partnership of sorts since the 1830s with mass printing of the Bible and other religious materials (Schultze, 2003). Today, of course, the Christian community has advanced its media outlets significantly to venues such as televangelists and church web sites. Despite the roots and presence of religion in the media, the secular media has a tremendous presence in society as well. So much so that today, as Shaw (1999) argues, stories about life and value systems are more frequently told by and learned from the media rather than our families, churches and schools. Newman (1996) posits

that the conflict between media and religion lie not only in the discussion of which is the moral educator, but also in the debate of both religion and the media acting as businesses attempting to manipulate society for their political and economic agendas. These debates will most likely continue as both the media and religion play a role in the formation of cultures (Newman, 1996).

Though much of the research concerning media and religion position the two against each other, Hoover and Clark (2002) argue that the two are converging rather than remaining separated by clear-cut boundaries. The idea is to prompt communities and individuals to be active in the construction of meaning rather than focusing on “social structure, or institutions, or formal claims about meanings and values” (Hoover & Clark, 2002, p. 2). So rather than feeling overwhelmed or bombarded with messages and images, individuals need to take steps toward understanding the messages and creating their own meanings from the output surrounding them. Schement & Stephenson (1996) agree that the line between the mass media and religion will continue to cross over and become less clear-cut with time. Although, this concept of the convergence of media and religion is a new idea, there seems to be a growing trend toward the idea of taking an active role in understanding and constructing meaning in the media (Shaw, 1999). The Center for Media Literacy in Los Angeles is one such place that is putting these concepts into action (Shaw, 1999). The center, incorporated in 1989 aims to do the following:

Dedicated to promoting and supporting media literacy education as a framework for accessing, analyzing, evaluating and creating media content, CML works to help citizens, especially the young, develop critical thinking and media production skills needed to live fully in the 21st century

media culture. The ultimate goal is to make wise choices possible (medialit.org).

The need and existence for institutes such as this, demonstrate the impact of the media and our need to effectively interpret it.

Knowing what we do about the effect of the media on all aspects of our life, I argue that the potential role that the media play in church segregation is an area that should be explored, as media are a constant in our everyday lives. As early as 1967, Barbour wrote:

Our world of instant communication conveys to each of us—in city, town, suburb, or open country—every facet of the issues and confrontations in race. We may not have the minority members living near us, but our lives are interrelated through mass media (p.18).

If a “world of instant communication” could be claimed in 1967, it is obvious that we are only making this more true each day and that our instant relations are far greater today with the continuing growth of mass media. If we are not involved in interracial communication, this lack of interaction can lead us to learning about one another through the mass media, thus leading to stereotypes that can further perpetuate segregation.

One study involving these stereotypes was conducted by Means Coleman’s (2000). The study involved black and white participants and their opinions on black sitcom characters. Several participants noted that there are not enough portrayals of black families going to church. Some participants also mentioned that when a black church is depicted on television and in movies, it presents a stereotypic view of loud shouting and dancing. Perhaps it is these

negative depictions or lack of media depictions of Christians altogether that is a contributing factor to church segregation, or perhaps, it is the other way around.

The media may also be a factor in church segregation due to the unlimited access of information through the Internet and the speed at which the mass media deliver messages. The Internet allows church segregation to continue as many hate groups and Christian Identity supporters have websites, allowing them to quickly and inexpensively distribute their information to the masses and perpetuate segregation on some level (Apple & Messner, 2001). Due to the lack of scholarship relating the media to church segregation, this study will also explore the opinions of church leaders in regard to the media's influence. As Gros (quoted in Davies & Hennessee, 1998) states, there is still a significant need for research regarding church segregation.

Despite the dramatic strides that have been made, the churches remain divided, and among these divisions racism remains a scandal to the Christian gospel and to the biblical doctrine of the church. Theological discussions and congregational study need to be intensified to provide their appropriate contribution to a nonracial communion of Word and Sacrament. These studies raise significant questions for scholars, church leader, educators, and anyone who takes on the responsibility of Christ's cross in baptism (p. 126).

Research Questions

RQ1: How do leaders of a racially diverse congregation, a predominantly African American congregation and a predominantly European American congregation perceive the racial makeup of their church and the Christian church at large?

RQ2: What do leaders of a racially diverse congregation, a predominantly African

American congregation and a predominantly European American congregation perceive as the cause(s) for church segregation?

RQ3: Do leaders of a racially diverse congregation, a predominantly African American congregation and a predominantly European American congregation perceive the media as an influence in church segregation?

CHAPTER 3

THEORY AND METHODS

Standpoint Theory

Each of us holds viewpoints on issues in the world around us that stem from our life experiences. We will form opinions based on what we know, have been taught or from the position that we find ourselves within our society. In essence, our societal standings will determine how we view the world in comparison to those individuals in differing societal positions (Allen, 1998). Acknowledging these different viewpoints, this thesis draws on standpoint theory.

According to Orbe and Harris (2001),

Standpoint theory is based on the premise that our perceptions of the world around us are largely influenced by social group membership. In other words, our set of life experiences shape-and are shaped by-our membership with different cultural groups like those based on sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on...In explicit and implicit ways, our standpoints affect how we communicate as well as how we perceive the communication of others. Acknowledging the standpoint of different social groups, then, is an important step in effective communication (p.13).

Thus it is crucial that we understand racial standpoints in order to communicate with high levels of effectiveness.

The origins of standpoint theory are largely rooted in the difference between men and women in their worldviews (Hartsock, 1983, Harding, 1987). In addition, as Pels (1996) suggests, standpoint theories also have primary origins in Marxist and Machiavellian epistemologies. Marxist standpoint on class positioning in societies sets the framework for what standpoints are based upon today. In regard to Machiavellian origins, Pels (1996) explains:

The common point of departure inherited from classical standpoint thinking is the conviction, already clearly supported by Machiavelli, that in a hierarchically structured and conflict-ridden society 'you cannot see everything from everywhere.' In such a society, there are objectively opposed locations generating disparate social experiences, which in turn define divergent, partial viewpoints with variable chances of faithfully representing social reality (p. 66).

Within society's hierarchy, especially racial hierarchy, "widespread" viewpoints are limited to those of the dominant groups, thus presenting an inaccurate "reality."

Scholars such as Harding (1987, 1991), Hartsock (1983), Collins (1986, 1989, 1990), and Smith (1987) have conducted a significant amount of research using feminist standpoint theory. These studies aim to give a voice to women, considered one of society's marginalized groups. They believe that, as societies are organized in a hierarchy of power, only a partial view is provided, which again paints only a biased interpretation of the realistic makeup of those societies (Hartsock, 1983).

Feminist standpoint theory is based on several tenets. First, each individual's life experience will contribute to their understanding of life and the world, thus those with the least power and those with the most will have opposing viewpoints (Swigonski, 1994). Groups of lesser power must develop their standpoint through education. She asserts that, "Without conscious effort to reinterpret reality, without political consciousness, marginalized populations are likely to accept the dominant worldview" (p. 391). Thus is it crucial to be aware and well-educated in order to challenge the dominant viewpoint. Another tenet of feminist standpoint theory is the difference of perspectives developed through

daily life experiences between dominant and marginalized group members. This everyday life experience as a marginalized group member outside of the dominant group acts as an appropriate viewpoint for research, presenting a perspective that may otherwise go unnoticed (Swigonski, 1994). Finally, marginalized group members are seen as “valuable strangers to the social order” and not always simply as outsiders, but “outsiders within” (Swigonski, 1994, p. 392). The term “outsiders within” does not apply only to women. Though much of the original research utilizing standpoint theory, is rooted in a desire to give voice to women, there is not a large difference in standpoint theory and feminist standpoint theory. Both are concerned with whose voices are being heard.

More recent studies that utilize standpoint theory go beyond women and address other marginalized groups such as racial/ethnic minority groups and gays and lesbians (Neilsen, 1990; Rich, 1980). The recurring theme of alienation and being the “stranger within” (Pels, 1996) is a cornerstone of standpoint theory showing the importance of understanding and giving voice to those in non-dominant societal positions. Standpoint theorists (Harding, 1991; Hartsock, 1983) articulate that individuals who belong to marginalized groups must learn survival skills to dealing with dominant perspectives of class, race, gender, etc., as well as understanding their own perspectives. Swigonski (1994) describes this process as double vision or double consciousness. Since knowledge, sensitivity, and awareness of both their own and the dominant worldview must be learned by members of marginalized groups.

There is significant scholarship focusing on black feminist standpoint theory, which specifies the voice of black women. Collins (1986), the leading scholar on black feminist thought, asserts that individuals who have lived through vulnerable experiences are far more credible about those experiences than those who have not participated in such experiences of marginalization. She concludes that dominant groups have even greater power as they minimize subordinate groups' access to knowledge (Collins, 1990). Additionally, she argues that outsiders, struggling with being between two groups, are able to be more objective in their observations (Collins, 1986).

Standpoints are not only used in the understanding of our own lived experiences, but also in how we see others' experiences both in real life situations as well as in the media's portrayals. In their audience study of the film *Imitation of Life*, Harris and Donmoyer (2000) found that the participants' views and standpoints regarding the film and its depiction of racial, gender and gendered/racial stereotypes varied in accordance to their lived experiences. The film depicts two single mothers, one African American and one European American, who become friends and roommates as they are raising their daughters in New York in the 60s. Two of the four participants in the study were African American women while two were European American. One of the women saw the film through her identity as a Christian, while others based their opinions on race or gender. They each used a different lens to view, relate to and interpret the film and its characters (Harris & Donmoyer, 2000). This is one study that

shows how standpoints of race and gender may factor into opinions and our individual views of race and our own cultural identity.

Standpoint theory is also used in the literary analysis of Jamaica Kincaid's novel *Lucy*, in which a black, Caribbean female lives her life as an “outsider within” (Lenz, 2004). The character of Lucy is one who is trying to find her identity as a young woman raised in Antigua by her authoritative mother while living in New York as a maid/nanny. She relates to her employer to a certain degree, but never feels like “one of the family”, yet at the same time, she does not want to identify with her mother and past life in Antigua (Lenz, 2004). The book reflects, “Lucy’s deliberate attempts to reaffirm her outsider within status, aligning herself with neither her subjugated past identity nor with her present opportunities to internalize dominant ideologies” (p. 110). Throughout the book and according to reviews, the questioning of how standpoints are developed as well as the processes of defining identity and the realizations of authority are analyzed (Lenz, 2004). This book is a literary outlet for discovering standpoints and intercultural relationships as it explores Lucy’s life and gives voice to her identity struggles as a black, Caribbean woman in a Eurocentric society.

Orbe and Harris (2001) use the differing opinions of African American and European Americans toward the O.J. Simpson trial as a means for exemplifying intercultural use of standpoint theory. They posit that while most African Americans could see the perspective of O.J.’s innocence, most European American’s did not consider this possibility, and thought him to be guilty. This is an example of the dominant perspective versus the non-dominant and how race

can play a role in how we perceive our lived experiences as well as what we see in the lives of others through the media. Orbe and Harris (2001) also cite the work of Carbaugh (1998) on differing communication styles for various groups. Carbaugh found that Native Americans, when communicating with elders, utilize silence differently than do European Americans. We can imagine how this one aspect of communication between these two cultures could create misunderstanding or misinterpretations, thus underpinning the complexities of lived experiences and cultural values, which shape our standpoints. Both of these examples demonstrate the span of standpoint theory in understanding non-dominant groups, in that they are both showing a perspective differing from the dominant European-American perspective. They show the span of standpoint theory as far as perceptions of media and the justice system and communication styles, verbal or non-verbal.

Critics have pointed out the limitations of standpoint theory. For instance, Janack (2001) argues that “epistemic privilege”, the privilege that the dominant group possesses and “epistemic authority”, the authority that members of the dominant group possess, need not be linked. The idea is to move from the linking of the two toward a questioning of the authority, political practices and justifications that uphold the exclusions of marginalized group voices and for the theorists and researchers to ask what can be done to make changes in getting those voices heard and into a position where they hold some authority along with other groups (Janack, 2001).

Another limitation is the difficulty of giving voice to a specific group, while simultaneously avoiding the notion of the group's thoughts being homogeneous. In a critique of Harding's standpoint epistemology, Pohlhaus (2002) concludes that:

...while drawing our attention to knowledge as a socially situated process, standpoint theory is not social *enough*. That is, in emphasizing my relations with others as where I stand in opposition to particular aspects of the social order, my knowing is still an individual knowing (albeit of an individual in relation)...Thus, I suggest that while noting where individuals stand in relation to others is important, more emphasis needs to be placed on how diverse *communities* may move together in knowing relations with the world...Our question concerning how to understand the world more objectively will require us to ask, not how I might see from a particular standpoint, but rather how I may move with (or forge) new knowing communities (p. 292).

In sum, Pohlhaus warns that a danger of standpoint epistemology is that we must not forget to emphasize shared meanings, even as we learn from a previously silenced voice. There needs to be recognition of differing individuals within these groups, allowing for diverse voices in the "new knowing community" for everyone's benefit and progression. In addition, scholarship needs to be open to new ways of thinking and knowing stemming from these groups.

But finding that commonality is also difficult. Collins (1997) argues that using standpoint theory trying to give a common voice to racially or economically oppressed groups makes more sense than trying to give all women one voice. Her argument is that there is no place where black and white women all live together and work together and are facing oppression together. That is, there are neighborhoods segregated along racial and economic lines, but rarely or never are neighborhoods segregated in terms of gender. So where it is common to see

neighborhoods of all blacks, whites, Latinos, Asians or poor people, giving them a shared experience, we do not often see an all female neighborhood that allows them to share this experience. This is not to say that racialized experiences always override those of gender, but simply that where standpoint theory is concerned, it is easier for scholars to give a more homogeneous and communal voice to racially or economically oppressed groups due to a greater shared experience in general than that of women.

Pel's (1996) critique of Harding's work discussed the tensions between trying to be heard in a society and participating in a sort of voluntary alienation due to a desire to keep one's racial or ethnic identity. He argues:

In a distinct sense, therefore, theory also liberates from standpoints: the 'correct' consciousness opens up to the 'correct' standpoint, even if one 'naturally' occupies an 'incorrect' one. Theory provides an alienative methodology, a procedural code of distancing, which in principle is accessible for all of rational or emancipatory good will. Once again we are returned full circle to the methodological voluntarism which standpoint theory started out to combat (p. 73).

Though it is important to find a standpoint and voice in society, it also makes the feminist, black, lesbian, etc. lens strange and unfamiliar to the dominant group. What Harding argued is that because the dominant viewpoint is seen as the "norm," to present another way of thinking automatically makes it "other." And while this does give voice to non-dominant worldviews, it still does not allow them to be placed as the status quo, thus the comparison to the dominant thought processes and the perpetuated cycle of being heard, but perhaps still not valued.

Though shortcomings and criticisms of the standpoint theory do exist, it is important for scholars to continue to critique and modify theories and to take

them into new directions for differing outcomes. “[Standpoint theory] recognizes that there are no perfect or universal answers (or questions). But, even in the face of these constraints, we must nonetheless struggle to understand, to ask our questions, and to listen to each other” (Swigonski, 1994, p. 390).

The fact that standpoint theory is being used more frequently “as a framework for studying race relations” (Orbe & Harris, 2001, p. 13) makes its usage appropriate for this study of religious leaders’ perspectives on church segregation. Additionally, I believe that Pohlhaus’ (2002) recommendation for shifting toward “knowing communities” is exactly what the church is capable of being and doing for the whole of society. I believe that this suggestion to shift toward gathering communal viewpoints is possible in this study by first studying the individual voices of the various church leaders through standpoint theory. Then an opportunity to discover this collective voice and collective themes concerning church integration can be better established and utilized. The church is a community, like any other, with shared beliefs and values, yet with many individual voices that need to be heard. It also is a huge network because there are thousands of churches all over the world, which gives it a position of power in terms of size and presence. So, if the Christian community became a “knowing community” in terms of racial issues and worked toward true integration by listening to each others individual standpoints, I believe that it could accomplish a lot in terms of being a source of positive influence for integration for the whole of society. Standpoint theory lends itself to this study also because there are certain assumptions and stereotypes associated with Christianity, but rarely are

individual voices heard within or outside of the Christian community. I think that establishing varying views and creating a dialogue within the community can further a consensus on issues such as segregation and perhaps eventually establish a stance and lead to progressive action. If the church's standpoint via the standpoint of individual voices became forward thinking and active in eliminating segregation within the Christian community, perhaps it could have an influence enough to affect other societal institutions.

This research and other interracial-based research is necessary because "the degree of racial segregation between Blacks and Whites as *groups* is routinely underestimated" (Collins, 1997, p. 376). I think that this underestimation and ignoring of segregation in so many institutions of our society is a reality that should be on the forefront of investigation, giving light to this troubling truth.

Method: In-Depth Interviews

To investigate questions concerning the perceptions of Christian church leaders regarding segregation within the church as a whole, I conducted in-depth interviews with church leaders from three different churches in the Athens community—a predominantly African American church, a predominantly white church and a church with a more racially diversified congregation. The congregations were Baptist, Assembly of God and Church of God, respectively, though denomination was not a factor in this study. Three leaders were interviewed from the predominantly African American church, four from the predominantly white church and three from the racially diverse church, totaling

ten interviews.¹ Each interview was 45-90 minutes long. A church leader in this study is defined as any person who currently holds any type of direction, management or guidance position in the church. This person can be a pastor, pastor's wife, director of a specific ministry (i.e, music, youth, adults, etc.), deacon, church board member, etc. I interviewed four pastors, three pastor's wives (one of which is also a church secretary and another is a music teacher at the church), a youth leader, a deacon and a teacher at one of the church's childrens programs.

To obtain participants, I contacted the leaders of the church that I regularly attend in Athens, which served as the racially diverse church. From this initial contact, I used the snowball sampling technique, getting names of other church leaders from my initial contact, to obtain the other seven participants from both a black and a white church. My thought was that this methodology and the selection of the three different churches, by use of snowball sampling, in the same geographical location would allow for a good basis of comparing and contrasting attitudes, beliefs and opinions. Additionally, because racial tensions seem to be more prevalent in the South between blacks and whites (Maffly-Kipp, 2004), I thought that the geographical location of this study would be beneficial to the topic under exploration.

Priest (1996) defines in-depth interviewing as, "an open-ended conversational exploration of an individual's world view or some aspect of it" (p. 26). Because this research aimed to examine church leaders' worldview in regard to segregation within the Christian community and their perceptions of the

¹ Kvale (1996) argues that the number of in-depth interviews for a study like this one should be 15±10.

media's possible impact, I believe that in-depth interviews provide an appropriate methodology for this study.

As a researcher, it was crucial to keep in mind that “people do not always say what they think or mean what they say,” (Jensen, 2002, p. 240), which is why it was important for me to be able to develop the most effective interview guide from which to pull information from the participant. In this research, the topic of racial segregation could cause some participants to “hold back” in their responses, but I tried to prevent this as best I could by developing a strong rapport with the participants and by an effective presentation of the questions in regard to wording, phrasing, order and specific tone and demeanor.

Rapport was critical to the interviewing process. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) describe rapport as “a quality of a communication event, not of a relationship” and posit that it “begins with the researcher’s clarity of purpose” (p. 189). Demeanor, professional appearance and self-disclosure in terms of the researcher’s intentions also contribute positively to building rapport. In addition, active listening was extremely crucial to building rapport and to the entire interviewing process (Lindlof & Talyor, 2002). This development of rapport was especially important in dealing with the often private or sensitive topics of race and religion. For example, in Frankenberg’s (1993) study of white women and their various experiences with race and racism, she made certain to handle the subject carefully and to share some of her own experiences as a white female in order to build trust and a common ground with her participants. Further, it was important to remember that “our identities as male/female, black/white,

younger/older researchers crucially affects the research encounters and the openness, or otherwise, of our respondents and interviewees” (Gray, 2003).

The interviews for this study were conducted at the churches either in the participant’s office, the sanctuary or in a church classroom. Each participant received and signed two consent forms (see Appendix B); I kept one copy and gave them the other copy. Each interview was also audio recorded. After conducting the interviews, I transcribed them, and each participant was assigned a pseudonym (see Appendix A) for confidentiality purposes. Following the transcription process, I analyzed the data in light of standpoint theory. This process involved several read-throughs of the transcripts in which I attempted to find themes that were determined by frequency (Lindolf & Taylor, 2002). When a possible theme arose, I searched the other transcripts to find that same theme. When the themes were established, I was able to piece together the analysis.

In summary, this study draws on standpoint epistemology and uses in-depth interviews to explore church leaders’ perceptions of segregation in the Christian church and the possible influence of the media in this process.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

This chapter is organized into the themes that emerged during the analysis of the transcripts. The five themes are (1) percentage discrepancies; (2) justifications for racial makeup of congregation and “othering;” (3) fear, lack of understanding and the need for dialogue; (4) perceptions of the media’s role regarding church segregation; and (5) responsibility of pastors. Through quotations of several participants, viewpoints on each of the themes will be discussed. Not all of the participants are quoted for each theme. Analysis of each theme is dispersed among the quotations.

Pseudonyms are used throughout the analysis and a brief description of each participant is included in Appendix A. The participants from the predominantly African American church are all African American and listed under the names of Douglas, Anna and Henry. The participants from the predominantly European American church are Patrick, Jane and Debbie, who are all European American, and Nicole, who is African American. Two of the three participants from the more racially diverse church are European American, Beverly and Brad, and the third participant, Chris, is African American (see Table 1).

Table 1:

| Church | Participant | Race |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Predominantly African American | Douglas Anna Henry | African American African American African American |
| Predominantly European American | Patrick Jane Debbie Nicole | European American European American European American African American |
| Racially Diverse | Beverly Brad Chris | European American European American African American |

Perceptions of Congregation's Racial Makeup

Each of the participants was asked to describe, using percentages, the racial makeup of their church. There were important discrepancies in the participants' perceptions of the percentage of non-white congregants. In the predominantly white church Debbie estimated the percentage of non-whites to be 20 percent. Patrick said, "...we're talking about somewhere probably in the range of about 30 percent, 27 or 30 percent." In contradiction to those percentages, Jane described the congregation as "majority white, middle class," and estimated the percentage of non-whites to be 1 to 2 percent. Finally, Nicole did not give a percentage, but actually counted the number of non-whites, coming up with a total of 15 individuals. The congregation total is approximately 150 and has 15 individuals who are non-white would only account for 10 percent of the

congregation, a lower number than those reported by Debbie and Patrick. The fact that Nicole counted the congregation's minority members suggests that the other participants' higher estimates are inaccurate.

Interestingly, if these percentage estimations are influenced by our racial standpoints, I had to consider why one of the white leaders interviewed at the predominantly white church had a perception so different from the other two white leaders in this church. I found it interesting that Jane, who perceived one to two percent non-white congregants, holds a less prominent leadership role, more of a volunteer role than that of Patrick or Debbie, who perceived a much higher percentage of non-whites. As a less visible leader, Jane may have a less skewed opinion or be less likely to have an embellished perception of the racial make-up of the congregation. On the other hand, she may be more likely to have a skewed perception, as she is perhaps not as actively involved as a leader on a daily basis. Another point of interest is Jane's stating, "...I personally would not go to a church that did not have other races. I've never gone to a church that only was one race." For her to make this bold statement of personally valuing churches that have races other than her own, one might think that she would seek out a congregation that had more non-whites than one to two percent. It seems that either her estimation is off, having a small percentage of diversity is sufficient for her, or like the other white participants, she sees even the small percentage as making a big difference in terms of diversity.

Analyzing this predominantly white church as a micro-society, we can speculate that the racially hierarchical power structure paints only a partial view

of the realistic makeup (Hartsock, 1983). Standpoint theory tells us that people outside of the dominant group develop more realistic perceptions and viewpoints from their lived experiences as marginalized individuals than those in the dominant group (Swigonski, 1994).

A similar pattern of percentage discrepancies and varied views was found while interviewing the participants at the more racially diverse church. Beverly did not venture a guess regarding the percentage, but did mention seeing “lots of different kinds of faces in the congregation.” Brad said:

The church is about 25 percent black and 75 percent white, and that has grown in the past 12, 15 months since we hired a black pastor on staff. Um, it was always, it was probably about 15 percent prior to him, but we’ve probably grown another 10 percent, and I think a lot of that was because of him. One of my goals was to create a church that was reflective of Heaven, and Heaven is gonna be red, yellow, black and white, and I don’t have anything against all white or all black churches, but I don’t think they’re a reflection of Heaven.

Chris, the black pastor to whom Brad referenced, said that, “the percentage of non-whites in the congregation is growing, I’ll just say that it’s growing...Right now I’d say it’s about five percent...when I first got here it was like one percent.” The fact that he used the phrase, “I’ll just say” suggests that perhaps there was more that he wanted to say but did not, either for privacy issues or due to discomfort.

The discrepancy between Chris’ five percent and Brad’s twenty-five percent is significant, but both leaders have seen the growth since the intentional hiring of a non-white pastor. However, Brad estimated 15 percent non-whites and Chris estimated only 1 percent at the beginning of Chris’ work when he was intentionally hired for purposed of diversity as the non-white pastor. Each of the

three participants from this church stated at some point during the interview that hiring a non-white pastor was intentional to increase racial diversity within their church, thus acknowledging some degree of segregation in their church and their intention to remedy this.

There were no percentage discrepancies in the African-American church, as all three participants acknowledged that their congregation is 100 percent African-American. This theme of percentage discrepancies in the racial makeup of congregations of the other two churches however, suggests an interesting contradiction. Even though the participants are involved with the same congregation, that is, they “see” and work with the same group of people, it is important to note that their perceptions of that group vary. This could be the cause of poor estimation, but more likely varying perceptions of dominant and non-dominant group members are the cause of these percentage discrepancies. One of the premises of standpoint theory is that as life experience contributes to our understanding of the world, viewpoints of those with the least power and those with the most power will oppose one another (Swigonski, 1994).

Idealizing their Church’s Racial Composition

In several instances throughout the interviewing process, participants tried to paint a picture of a more racially diverse church than the one depicted by their reported percentages. Several of the leaders interviewed tried to make known the “why” or tried to inform me of some facts that would position them as more diverse than it may look or be in reality. Though the leaders of the predominantly

African American church were all in agreement that the church was 100 percent African American, Anna did mention:

Actually, um, we did have a couple of whites to join um, where they're at, I'm not really sure, but I know that it was a young lady and her son had joined, but I hadn't seen them lately. And then we had a one of the mus, mus, I'm sorry musicians, he was a white man. And um so, they, I mean basically, I guess you could say predominantly black.

It is almost as though she felt compelled to let me know that white people were welcome and accepted in their congregation. Perhaps she wanted to justify what may be a "partial viewpoint" (Pels, 1996) that she thought I was getting from the percentage given. Douglas gave me a reason as to why he thought their congregation is all black, stating that it was because of a more rural location. Although this may be a factor, church segregation is still prevalent even in large cities, though I am sure that his standpoint as a minority in a rural location is a factor in his perceptions of the subject of church segregation and segregation in general.

Brad and Beverly, the two white leaders interviewed at the racially diverse church, also seemed to be justifying the racial makeup of the congregation by first mentioning the diversity of the Christian school and daycare, which is affiliated with the church and located on the same grounds. Beverly responded by saying:

"...the preschool and the academy here are the most racially diverse private schools in this area. The academy, which has about 60 children in grades K-5 is pretty close to um, half black and half white. The preschool, um, has, um, Chinese, quite a few Chinese children, Indian children, Hispanic children, many black children, many white children, even in one class you might have four or five ethnic groups represented. So other than the university preschool, it's probably also the most racially diverse. Um,

congregation, um, I wouldn't know percentages, but um, we certainly see lots of different kinds of faces in the congregation."

As she justified the element of diversity in the school, she avoided the question of the racial makeup of the church altogether. Though it is a positive point on diversity affiliated with the church, the racial makeup of the school and day care are not representative of, or connected to, the congregation itself.

Brad used a seemingly similar argument:

Um, let me, I'll give you the school and the church. Um, because we're much prouder of the school, the school is reflective of where we want to go with the church. Um, the school right now is about 40 percent black, about 40 percent white and about 10 percent Asian or Hispanic.

In contrast to Debbie's use of the school and daycare as substitutes for the church congregation, Brad mentions the school's and daycare's diversity as the goal to be achieved regarding the church's racial composition. It should be noted, however, that while both white leaders of this racially diverse church mentioned the diversity of the school, Chris, the black pastor, made no mention of it during our interview. This suggests that the white leaders may have felt the need to paint a more racially-diverse image of their church, while the African-American pastor did not.

Debbie, a leader at the predominantly white church, provides another example:

Um we do have a lot, a number of African Americans in our congregation on Sunday, and we have some international students from the university, some from the Philippines, some from Africa, and um, and we also have some people in our congregation, that are not students, that are also from other countries. We have one lady from Thailand. We have one from the Philippines, and we have a teacher from Kuwait; she and her family are here in our congregation.

Similar to the leader of the predominantly black church, Debbie's comments suggest the idea that when you put a handful of minority members in a setting among the majority, the whole group may be perceived as being more diverse than it actually is.

Some of the participants placed the responsibility for the lack of diversity on non-white shoulders:

Well um, (the church) is (segregated) to some extent. Some churches particularly, there are just white churches and just black churches and just Hispanic churches, that is definitely true in this city. Uh, in our particular church, it's not like that, you know it's pretty well mixed, but there are some you know Afro-Americans that do not feel comfortable except in their own church, even though they're invited to come here (Debbie).

Though Debbie recognizes that church segregation is a concern, she excludes her congregation from the problem, stating that "we try to bring them all together here on a regular basis," and reiterating that minority discomfort is an issue, "there's some that just don't feel comfortable, you know in a Caucasian church." In this way, Debbie illustrates Turner's (1982) argument: "People sustain their own positive social identity by comparing the in-group favorably to out-groups" (p.141). In other words, we will look for ways and reasons to justify our behavior and the behavior of our in-group as a means to feel validated.

Debbie's remarks also suggest "othering." This is wording that was used by some participants in a "we" versus "them" positioning. Keller (1985) describes this as a dichotomous thinking that categorizes people or things. It can be male/female, good/bad, black/white, etc. The implication is that there is something opposite with which to compare, which, in a sense, does not allow the one to exist without the juxtaposition against its opposite. By using the terms

“some” and “they” as in not us, Debbie makes clear that *they* are welcome and despite *our* efforts and *their* being invited, *they* just don’t feel comfortable. Never does she reverse the situation, but it is always an “us” and “them” scenario. This dichotomous way of thinking, goes beyond just being different, but places the marginalized group as “other” thus objectifying the subordinate group (Collins, 1996). From her standpoint, she and her congregation reach out and have various international students and families. She sees that as sufficient.

In contrast, Brad noted that even though a lot of effort is being made toward unity and further diversifying his congregation, not enough is being done. In addition, Brad’s comments break the “othering” trend by insisting, “It’s not us and them; it’s us.”

Causes of Segregation in the Church

Throughout the interviewing process, participants gave their opinions on what they believe causes church segregation. There were numerous mentions of fear of stepping out and getting to know one another and lack of understanding between the two races as causes for church segregation, which were often likened to cultural differences and historical separations. Going along with those themes was the continued mention of the need for dialogue between the churches. Another proposed cause was fear of the “other,” those who are different from us. The above themes were reiterated and are supported through the various participants’ quotes.

Chris simply said, “people are afraid,” while Brad commented, “we just don’t know each other the way we should or could.” In addition, Nicole commented:

I think (church segregation) is a huge problem, huge problem. It’s a huge problem that dates back, what 300 years, and it’s because of tradition and religiosity. There are black churches that will reject me; there are white churches that will reject me. And they’ll reject me simply because I’m not traditional...And you know black churches have a way of doing things, white churches have a way of doing things, and because they’re stuck in their patterns and traditions, it makes it very hard for a completely black community church to come together with a completely white church.

Nicole’s statement highlights the rigid nature of racial perceptions and realities within the church, and how these are grounded in history. Nicole also shows an awareness of the debate between the integrationist and anti-integrationist thought process regarding the black church that she mentioned having learned about in a course she took while attending a her HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) . She describes herself as not being “traditional,” referring to the stereotypical images and cultural markings of a black Christian (Simms, 2000). She takes on the “outsiders within” (Swigonski, 1994, p. 392) mentality of being a minority leader in a predominantly white church. Though Nicole does mention her comfort in that church, she knows that it is not the norm and that because of her non-traditional role, she may not find acceptance in all churches, white or black.

Chris emphasized the role of preconceived notions and their ensuing fear in church segregation, noting that, “we have certain thoughts about other groups, we have certain fears about other groups just by our experiences what we’ve heard, you know like from others.” He later added:

...we don't take the time out to, to get to know one another, we're so afraid to get to know one another and to see that, hey that person thinks more like I do, you know... what I see is just from day to day we don't want to get to know each another. This is how we do things, and this is how they do things, and wow they do that and they don't like us, or whatever it is.

This idea of not wanting to get to know one another comes from our life experiences, viewpoints and that our comfort zone includes mostly those who are like us (Jones, 2002). We carry certain racial and other prejudices and stereotypes that don't allow us to "step out of our comfort zone." Nicole said:

(God) said love your brother, he didn't say love your white brother or love your black brother. I see it as love everybody whether you know them or not, you know? And um, you treat them in love. Racism is just, it's just bondage. It is absolutely your mind being conformed to a way of thinking that died a long time ago. So, it's a huge problem (laughs). It's going to take a lot of prayer. But it's also going to take us to be willing to have our hearts changed. And um, not to approach people with stereotypes either.

Like Nicole, other participants acknowledged that racism is at odds with the teachings of Jesus. For instance, Patrick remarked:

There is not color; there is not creed; there is not up and out and the down and out. There is the, simply the fact that we are all the same. We must model that to the unsaved. Jesus said that there's something about us, that we are all one, and that we can exhibit harmony and not division.

He also added that, "We are all the same at the foot of the cross." Though there is truth to this, I think recognizing the cultural difference is important in order to better communicate. He did mention that "there is not color," but the fact is there is, and though it should not be a factor of segregation, it should be acknowledged. Orbe and Harris (2001) posit that we should value our racial and ethnic differences and reexamine our thought processes as opposed to attempting to "downplay or ignore" these differences. Interestingly, Nicole's

standpoint as a young black woman draws on the historical element of racism that she claims “died a long time ago.” Unfortunately we know that this is not entirely true. Racism is still present in our society, and more than a mentality, racism is “the systematic subordination of certain racial groups by those in power” (Orbe & Harris, 2001, p. 6). In his interview, Patrick recognized these cultural differences by stating:

Uh, there is an enormous amount of segregation in a number of the corporate worship services, but there’s also segregation in styles of worship; there’s segregation in liturgy. There is segregation in those areas, and what we, what is sad to say is many times that the church is a reflection of society, and it’s to be a reflection of the word of God. So just as much as in society we gather on points of common interest and commonality, we also find that in the church. People gather who have common interests, common color, common language, common identification.

Similarly, Brad said:

We have to learn how to deal with it because our two cultures are different, the black culture and the white culture, they’re definitely different. Um, and music is definitely driving that, white folks to want to go to black churches and black folks to want to go to white churches; it’s music, you know that’s pulling them, and if that’s going to happen, pastors, black pastors have to learn how to adapt and understand and counsel folks who are coming out of a white culture and vice-versa.

His standpoint as the pastor of a more racially diverse congregation and perhaps other experiences allow him to better recognize the differences. Though many Christians and non-Christians foster the belief that we are all one and all alike, which holds some truth, it is important to acknowledge our differences and allow them to be recognized, but not to separate us or to be fearful of them.

This leads to another proposed cause of church segregation, the lack of dialogue. Several of the participants mentioned the need for an open dialogue

among churches of differing races, despite the differences. Because once these differences are recognized and understood and not feared, we can then take the steps necessary to appreciate each others' standpoints and work from there.

Swigonski (1994) posits that we have to make concerted efforts to get to know one another and to listen. Brad had some suggestions for meeting the needs of a multiracial church:

...offering different levels of crisis intervention, having a black counselor on staff and a white counselor on staff that can meet the needs of whatever the cultural element that comes in. Um, doing, doing workshops on understanding one another, um we're just different, our two cultures are different, and no one can deny that. We're not the same, yeah, we have red blood, but that's about it, you know our cultures are as different as our skin is in many, many cases, and we don't know each other, you know?

This again shows his recognition of the cultural differences and the desire to approach them with open communication and a need for understanding, thus leading to the theme of dialogue. At the same time, his remarks illustrate the paradox underpinning church segregation, "we're not the same" but Christian beliefs tell us that we are.

Most of the leaders interviewed mentioned the importance of communication, at some point. The examples below represent opinions of participants from the predominantly black church, predominantly white church and the racially diverse church, respectively, about the importance of communication:

I think it would break some of these barriers if we did more talking and dialoged a little more on it. I think we could come together if we understood each other better. But right now we don't understand each other, and we don't fellowship enough to understand... We need to fellowship more and come together more and have dialogue. (Henry)

...we have got to come together as a church regardless of race, regardless of denomination. Um, we are supposed to be unified in the cross. So, opening the doors to each other, taking each other's phone calls, (laughs) yeah, would be great! (Nicole)

There needs to be more dialogue, absolutely. That's a big part of it, um we have got to be able to, I don't know how we can teach one another to trust one another, I guess we have to act in a way to trust each other. People just don't trust one another. (Chris)

These church leaders agree that interracial communication needs to occur in the Christian community in order to achieve unity. As stated by Orbe and Harris (2001), "Acknowledging the standpoint of different social groups, then, is an important step in effective communication (p.13)." As many of the leaders expressed, through discussion, a better understanding of each other's standpoints, which are shaped by life experiences, will be understood. (Orbe & Harris, 2001).

In the passage below, Brad discussed a conversation that he had with a black pastor and friend of another church in the area. He recounts the conversation and what he learned and came to realize about church segregation:

Um, but I had a black pastor here in town at a prominent black church, the prominent black church, said something to me that I didn't, I didn't want to believe. Um, but he um, he proved it to me, and that is he said that is that white folks love to hear a black man preach. White folks love to hear a black preacher, but a white man doesn't want to call a black man his pastor, and he said that's still an issue today, and I said that's not true and he said it is true, and I said it's not true, and I said we're past that, and he said well then why is T.D. Jakes (prominent black pastor) known as the greatest preacher in America? And his congregation is 25 thousand, 20,25 thousand strong, and you know maybe 5 or 6 hundred white people, maybe that many. And Rod Parsley, who is another big televangelist, you know maybe 10,15 thousand people in Columbus, Ohio, he's a white man, pastors a church with you know 10 or 15 thousand people and probably 3 or 4 thousand black folks. Um, because black people aren't afraid to call a white man their pastor, and white people still struggle to call a black man

their pastor. You know, you look over at Eddie Long in Atlanta and Creflo Dollar (both are prominent Black pastors), it's the same type of thing. You look at the larger white churches in Atlanta, and you have many, many more black people coming to the white churches and than white people going to the black churches.

Interestingly, in this interracial discussion, Brad initially does not want to believe this statement. In the beginning of the above passage, the two differing standpoints of the black and white pastors conflict. The roots of the standpoint theory tell us that because of societal hierarchies, we are only able to get a partial view of reality (Hartsock, 1983). In this case, Brad's perspective did not allow him to see outside of his dominant position, and it took dialogue and exposure to a minority standpoint for him to gain understanding of that differing viewpoint.

The participants recognized that much of church segregation is caused by fear of stepping out and getting to know people of different races and a lack of understanding of races other than our own as well as historical and cultural differences. There is a need for dialogue and interaction in order to build more unity among churches of different races. This unity is, however, a process that takes time given our history of racial and cultural differences that play into our fears and lack of understanding between racial groups.

The Media's Role

The themes of fear and lack of understanding contributing to church segregation have been established, but as a student of mass media, I found it interesting to note what the participants' thoughts were regarding the influence of the media on the church and church segregation. Kellner (1995) argues that

media images are a significant factor in our construction of “us” and “them.” It is likely and common for us to take the stereotypical images in the media and determine what makes “them” different from “us.” There is no denying that the media are influential players in our society. For many years the media have held a large degree of power in our society and the ability to influence and affect individuals as well as societies at large (Hall, 1982). These effects have been studied since the 1940s. In addition, the media’s ideological work has also garnered the attention of media scholars (Hall, 1982). Meanwhile, the media continue to influence and create societal norms through power and a reinforcing of dominant paradigms and social constructions (Hall, 1982).

It is nearly impossible to go through even a single day without being exposed to some form of media content. We are continually bombarded with messages from countless media outlets and sources and depend on these sources to keep us informed on current events and important happenings. But yet, as we all know, there are plenty of messages that are not-so-important, and thus we must filter as consumers of such a large volume of media messages. Even when we try to keep our “filters” on high, it is evident that we are indeed influenced by the media as they shape our social constructions. One of these social constructions is that of race. This is not to assume that all media content is racist, but there is no denying the presence of racism in the media either. Hall (1981) suggests some racist depictions are overt while others are inferential and will go unquestioned. This is true, and sadly it is not only the inferential depictions that go unquestioned, but sometimes the media’s overt racist depictions as well.

If these racial stereotypes and ideologies are so accepted as the norm, then it is possible that these attitudes and actions are present in all areas of society, the church included.

When the topic of the media was discussed in the interviews, thoughts and opinions differed from participant to participant, as well as within each individual interview, indicating an internal conflict. Several participants struggled to find the line between Christian principles and their conflict with a lot of what the media depicts and how its influences go against these Christian values. Conflicting opinions within and among participants were also present in trying to determine if the media does in fact play a role in church segregation. Finally, the question of whether the media influences society or society shapes the media was discussed by some participants.

Um, there are a lot of things that the media has [sic] to offer that conflicts with our, what the fundamentals of Christianity, and a lot of those fundamentals, I believe stem from the word of God. And I just think that a lot of what the media has [sic] to offer just contradicts that, but a lot of Christians have been lulled into this false sense of, hey that's just entertainment; it's just great. We can just continue to observe it, bring it into our homes, let our kids fall for it. To me that's just scary, cause it's very wrong. (Chris)

Chris' identity as a Christian gives him a view of the media that he compares to the word of God, and these two viewpoints conflict with one another. Patrick also vocalizes his conflicting opinions in terms of the media's power and influence.

...understanding that the spirit that is behind the media simply because it is not of the kingdom of God, it, by nature, would be of the kingdom of darkness, thus its authorship is one that would not be uh, uh in the kingdom of God. So we don't view it in an adversarial role...Uh, the media can bring us information, but the final report on what we believe is the word of God.

The above quote, of course, is of a Christian worldview, but Patrick later stated, “All that have influence have a level of responsibility, and they (the media) definitely have influence,” when asked if the media held any responsibility for church segregation. Though he believes that the nature of the media is that of “darkness” and non-adversarial, he recognizes the influence and level of responsibility to some degree. Finally Patrick continues by stating:

The depravity of man and the fact that we’ve allowed our self-centeredness to become so commonplace in the church is more of a causal factor to the segregation. Whenever we become self-centered, we become prejudicial, and whenever we become prejudicial we become bigoted, and thus we entrench ourselves in those ways. I don’t see that the media is a causal factor (for church segregation), I see the fact that our self-centeredness has caused it.

From one statement to the next, conflict over the degree of power and influence the media have on the church and church segregation is exhibited in the participants’ conflicting views. Interestingly, several of the participants went through what seemed like an internal conflict of sorts in knowing that the media is influential and powerful, but wanting to hold strong to the power of God’s word as a Christian leader. Debbie made the two following comments:

Um, we want (the media) to tell the truth. So I guess you know we’re looking for truth, we’re looking for truth, and maybe sometimes we feel that it doesn’t always tell sometimes the truth.

Well, because of our Christian standards um, we probably do not watch some things that other people would watch concerning particular television programs or um, you know or that type of thing. As far as news or newspapers or things of that nature, you know, we pretty much read whatever, you know I think, read newspapers, Christians and non-Christians would both read the newspaper and we would listen to the news and that type of thing. But I think particular programs on television or in movies that we feel that would go against our standards we may not watch.

Though she does not directly discuss the media's influence, she alludes to it by saying that there are certain programs that Christians may not watch due to "standards," but her wording leads to the implications that she believes there is a strong power in the media, otherwise why would consuming or not consuming it make a difference? In fact, the recognition of the media's influence in the Christian community is so apparent that Jane even mentioned owning a satellite system called Sky Angel, which is a Christian-based programming of 36 radio and TV channels, aimed to control the intake of "negative influences" in the media (Sky Angel at a Glance, 2005). Other all-Christian media stations are present as well, such as Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), and I think this shows the efforts of some in the Christian community to not only reach more people through these outlets, but to give an alternative to the mainstream media and its persuasions. Again, many of the participants seemed to be conflicted on what they believe is appropriate and in-line with the values and principles of Christianity and what should be avoided in the media.

For his part, Douglas depicts the conflict possibly felt by many Christians regarding media intake. "Christians should view the media from a very spiritual eye...you better get in the mainstream and find out what's going on at the same time keep that spiritual eye and that ear that you can be discerned." Brad agrees that Christians should view the media differently than non-Christians, but said he has read studies showing that they don't. Nicole also had conflicting thoughts on the media:

The division, as long as we in the media stay divided, we as a people are going to stay divided. And um, there's the black stations, the white

stations, and it's sad. It's just so sad (laughs) 'cause that's just not the type of world we live in. But like you have the white side of town, the black side of town, especially here in the south.

The interviewee says that the division in the media is “not the type of world we live in,” yet in the following sentence she makes reference to the segregation of society. It is notable that many of the leaders tried to subconsciously work through the question of whether it is society's influencing the media or the media influencing society.

I don't think that the media portrays reality; I think that society portrays what they see on the media... I think that society is taking on the image of the media, not, for the most part, media is taking on the image of society. I think that the media's driving it, not following it. (Brad)

Brad later states:

I believe that when the church allows the media to begin governing our potential, our mandate, well then we look to the wrong source. I think we've got to be bigger than that. We've got to have a greater influence than the media has in the lives of people over their conscience. I don't think that it should, does that make sense?

Interviewer: Right, so you don't think that (the media should contribute to racial segregation), but you don't really think that it does too much either?

I think that it does, um, I think, I think it does because I think that the media somewhat segregates society, and because the church is a part of society, then it just follows suit...to an extent it does just because the church is a part of society. The church is full of people who are, who live in this mass society that is influenced by the media... It's the most influential force in our world. So, it has to affect it some, there's no way that it couldn't that I could see. Um, but it, but it shouldn't. And what I'm saying is that as church leaders we're called to be bigger than that. You know, we can't afford ourselves to be influenced by the media and accept it as the norm. Um, so my position is that the church on Earth is to reflect the church in Heaven, and um it doesn't right now, it doesn't. The church is one of the most segregated places in our community every Sunday morning. It is.

Here we see Brad trying to differentiate between the influences of the media on all aspects of our society, but also trying to fight that influence as a Christian. Again, this struggle seems to be one expressed by many of the participants. The media's power and influence cannot be ignored or denied, nor should it be. Instead, it should be acknowledged, understood and dealt with by whatever standards the individual chooses. Similarly, acknowledging and understanding the cultural differences, in terms of how blacks and whites are socialized into church culture, is also necessary. Both of these issues are realities and seem to have some level of influence in regard to church segregation, but if Christians are not aware of and do not understand them, it is difficult to proceed toward unifying the church.

In contrast to some participants' conflicting views regarding the media, other participants firmly stated that they do not see the media as influential in church segregation. Both Debbie and Chris recognize the media's influence in some areas, but do not see it as influential in regard to church segregation. They, instead, saw people's upbringing and cultural differences as contributors to segregation. Debbie stated:

I wouldn't think (church segregation) has anything to do with the media. I think it would have more to do with people. Peoples' individual families and cultures that they've grown up in...But I would say peoples' prejudices and peoples' ideas about other ethnic groups have more to do with their up-bringing than with any responsibility of the media.

Chris stated:

...we don't take the time out to, to get to know one another, we're so afraid to get to know one another and to see that, hey that person thinks more like I do. You know? And um, for me personally, I don't see the media um creating that problem for me. I just, what I see is just from day to day we

don't want to get to know each another. This is how we do things, and this is how they do things, and wow they do that and they don't like us, or whatever it is? And I don't think the media is really a huge problem with that right now.

Some of the leaders spoke of what the media does or does not do in terms of the church and religion:

...the media could bring (church segregation) front and center and put the ball in our lap where we would have to deal with it...by asking one simple question just one Saturday, how come y'all ain't together?...(The media) ought to be saying, well how come we can't bring the black churches and the white churches?

Douglas argues that because the media is such a source of influence, there are times when it could be using that influence to help the church or other aspects of society to unify. The media has the power to ask the questions of why something is or is not happening, and in the opinion of this leader, they should ask why the church is still so segregated. Nicole said that:

But as far as Headline News, CNN, Fox, no, they don't address religion, they won't address um, Supreme Court appeals against religion, but they don't address churches unless they have to with some Catholic priest molesting some young boy. It's all about the big story, especially when it's bad, but if it's anything good supporting religion, it normally isn't reported because they don't want they backlash of them supporting religion, church or God. And so um, that's kinda taboo for them. They don't wade in that water.

Henry disagreed and saw the media as "playing a big role in the church." He further stated:

The media can create a problem where there's not a problem, where there's not a greater problem, they can make it seem like it's a bigger problem than it is. The media plays a big role in how a lot of churches come together or stay apart, so they listen to the media, it's something you know, how they open, it's not a sacred thing. All they got to do is turn the TV on and get the news and how you receive this stuff is what makes it either, either it'll put a barrier there or create a barrier, or it'll take down

some barriers. The media plays a big role in the church and in the community too.

The media can very easily create or destroy racial barriers in our society, and one leader of the predominantly black church saw racial unity in society, regardless of media influences. Anna stated:

Yeah, so I mean um, it's just that now I'm starting to see a lot, you know the different races coming together, um, regardless of what the media says or the television, you know, me personally, I'm starting to see more unity.

Chris felt that same way about seeing more racial unity, but thought it was due to a positive contribution of the media. He also believes that the media is not so much contributing to racial issues in the church, but is contributing negatively in other church-related aspects:

Again, I think the media is probably just reflective of what people have been doing for years, you know what I mean, if the media wasn't there, segregation would still be there, you know. It'd still be there. I think, if you really want to know, there are some shows and some documentaries that I think help to open the eyes of people, you know what I mean, more so than, than create segregation. I think they're being more sensitive toward things nowadays than they would be in the past... It's just other aspects of the media that bother me, and that's not one that usually sticks out to me as a problem.

Interviewer: What are some those other aspects that bother you?

Um, family life, that's one big thing that sticks out to me, right and wrong, just understanding what's right and wrong, and then just again spiritual aspects. How much um anti-Christian, anti-Bible, anti-God themes that are there. Those worry me, even in the things that they preach to kids, you know?

Chris' opinion is in line with a year-long study by the Parent's Television Council (Eichenberg, 2004), which concluded that negative depictions of religion and

church far outweighed positive portrayals particularly concerning church doctrine and leaders.

Though not all of the participants interviewed saw a connection between the media and church segregation, most did agree that the media does, in fact, contribute to the shaping of our societal attitudes toward race on some level. The participants' conflicting opinions in terms of Christian principles versus the media's influence, the degree to which media does or should influence the Christian society and the question of media influencing society or society influencing media highlighted interesting and varied points, and I think these conflicts speak for themselves and give an indication of the media's true power.

Responsibility of Pastors

All of the participants in this study acknowledged the existence of church segregation and gave their views on the sources and contributors influencing the matter. The questions remain in my mind: "what can be done and where do we start? Throughout the interviews, participants pointed to themselves, the church leaders and church pastors, in particular, as the ones who need to be at the forefront of racial integration within the church. At this point, it is important to mention that in 1967, Barbour already wrote about the pastor's importance in matters of desegregation. The participants' statements suggest that this is still a concern.

Jane stated, "I think that there are some [leaders] that are concerned about [church segregation], and I think that there's some leadership that thinks that that's the way it ought to be." In the case of the racially diverse church, Brad

told of his purposeful plan to diversify his congregation by starting with the leaders:

I just really feel like the Lord told me, you better reflect on your platform what you want to see in your pews because the pew will always be reflective of the pulpit, and I knew that we had, I wasn't necessarily going for a black guy, but I was going for other, Hispanic, or Asian or Black, so that's kind of how we're taking it on, and we're growing on through it.

In interviewing Chris, who was hired specifically because he is non-white, according to both himself and Brad, I asked if race was a factor in his hiring. He replied, "absolutely." He also said:

...I had black churches offer me positions, and I said, you know what, I've been there, I've done that. And if we are to better understand how the white brother in our church feels, and how they think, and how they operate, we must cross the line.

Notably, both pastors recognized this need and agreed on the first step which is toward integrating within their congregation. Chris later added:

...there are leaders that are trying to make a difference, but they need to be more aggressive with it, they really do need to be more aggressive with it... we do need to work harder at bringing together...leaders of the church must be on the forefront of that, if they're not, who will be? You know?

As their responses suggest, participants believe that the leaders are crucial to this endeavor of integrating the church. Patrick agreed with the need for diversity among the leaders.

One thing that has to happen is our platforms have to reflect the diversity that's in the congregation, so the leaderships of the congregation must also be diversified, and that's relatively not taking place.

Another reason for the hesitation to "cross the line" was mentioned by Brad:

(Unity has) to start with the pastors, we are very territorial by nature, um, you know, that's my flock, don't come to talk to people from my flock, but we have this ownership mentality that's not real. It's God's flock, you know? Um, so I think that you know, insecurity is a strong word to use, but

I'll use the word insecurity from the top, from the leadership have to be tore down. Um, you know, we can't be afraid of people leaving our church and going to another church. Um, because it's our image, and I think that's gotta happen, and when it starts with the pastors the people will choose to follow him. And, and then again, a biracial staff will create a biracial body and it's just that simple.

He also suggested the following:

And um, that's going to involve pastors coming together and um, in local congregations and fellowship groups and accountability groups, talk sessions, coffee talk stuff, prayer groups um, because people follow their pastors.

This belief from the vantage point of the participants is representative of the dialogue needed to gain understanding of other's standpoints. Their responses suggest that if the dialogue and change started at the leadership level, then the congregation is likely to change and grow toward understanding and integration.

Douglas also underscored the important influence of leadership.

Going back again, leaders, the leaders, the church is only as strong as the pastor. The church is only as friendly as the pastor. See it's more power with me standing here (stands at pulpit) then [sic] in the Bible, it shouldn't be, but it is. And if the leaders could get together...I guarantee that you'll see a change.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

As the responses suggest, there were several common themes throughout the interviews regarding church segregation, the first of which was the discrepancies among leaders' perceptions regarding the racial makeup of their congregations. This leads us to RQ1: How do leaders of a racially diverse congregation, a predominantly African American congregation and a predominantly European American congregation perceive the racial makeup of their church and the Christian church at large?

Though the analysis showed percentage discrepancies of non-whites given by the leaders in the racially diverse congregation, Brad, Chris and Beverly agreed that they have seen the racial makeup of their church become more diverse in the past year due to the hiring of a non-white leader. Their perceptions varied in terms of their own congregation, with the two white leaders perceiving a higher level of diversity, and the black leader seeing the diversity as "growing" and estimating the percentage of non-whites to be 20 percent lower than that of the white male leader's estimate. Collins (1986) asserts that outsiders, struggling between two groups, have the ability to be more objective in their observations. This would lead to the assumption that the minority group members' percentage estimates within their congregation are more accurate than those of the members of the dominant group, which could be because racialized group members are

typically more attuned to race and racial diversity than whites who rarely have to consider race.

Clearly, participant perceptions vary within their congregation; however, in terms of the Christian church at large, all three of the leaders interviewed from the racially diverse church saw it as segregated. The leaders of the predominantly African American church were all in agreement that their congregation was 100 percent African American and that the church at large was racially segregated. In hearing these largely varied estimations among the leaders of the other two churches a plausible explanation is that the varying estimates are a matter of differing standpoints which are based on world perceptions and are influenced by social group membership (Orbe & Harris, 2001). These standpoints might also influence definitions, such as what each individual perceives as “diverse.” One person’s idea of a “racially diverse” atmosphere could be completely different from another’s. Keeping that in mind, perhaps when a white leader sees a handful of non-whites in what was a predominantly white congregation prior to the hiring of an African American pastor, his standpoint interprets this change as being one of diversity. However, for the African American pastor, Chris, who stated that this was his first experience working at or attending a church that is not predominantly African American, his standpoint may magnify him as “other” because this experience is very different from other church groups of which he has been a part. The same holds true for the predominantly white church. Again, the perception is that when you put even a small number of minority group members in a setting among the

majority, it may be perceived as being more diverse than it is in reality or from someone else's standpoint.

Within the societal racial hierarchy, viewpoints are often limited to those of the dominant group, thus presenting an inaccurate and skewed view and "reality" of society (Pels, 1996). Standpoint theory also tells us that due to our societal hierarchies, only partial views of reality are seen because of our position (Hartsock, 1983), which again paints an incomplete view, in this case, of the racial makeup of one's church.

I believe the potentially exaggerated percentages of non-whites in the congregations shared by the participants could also be due to an idea of not wanting the church to "look bad." Social identity theory (SIT) tells us that our efforts to maintain a positive self-concept are largely based upon our social group membership. As such, we will have favorable opinions regarding our group, and thus feel good about belonging to it (Turner, 1982).

The general finding from this question is that all 10 of the leaders saw the Christian community as being racially segregated. Some participants perceived the segregation as significant, describing it as "very segregated," "a huge problem," "an enormous amount of segregation," "extremely segregated" and so on, while other participants were less adamant, but still in agreement that racial segregation does exist in the Christian community. Regarding their own churches, it was harder for most of the white leaders to perceive the segregation in their own congregation. I believe this is due to the race of the individual. Depending on our worldviews and vantage points of various situations, we will

perceive the world around us on small and large scales differently than others, regardless of their being in the same situation as us (Swigonski, 1994).

After church segregation is acknowledged, it is then logical to explore its causes, which leads to RQ2: What do leaders of a racially diverse congregation, a predominantly African American congregation and a predominantly European American congregation perceive as the cause(s) of church segregation? Unlike RQ1, there were no differences in participants' answers according to their church affiliation. Like causes were not limited to participants from the same congregation. The most common perceived causes were fear, lack of understanding, cultural and historical differences and traditions, a lack of dialogue and the need for the church leaders to take action. One black leader felt that in the black Christian community the fear of being called a "sellout" for "crossing the line" from the black church into a diversified or predominantly white congregation is a causal factor in church segregation. Also, as discussed in the analysis, a white pastor learned, through his interracial friendship with a black male pastor, that many white Christians do not want to "call a black man their pastor." It is the fear of getting to know and being led by one another in worship Christian teachings, the fear of taking a risk and reaching out, and simply, the fear of the unknown in regard to what one might encounter or how they may be perceived by both their in and out groups. This fear grounded in the unknown leads to a perpetuation of not understanding one another, thus perpetuating the racial segregation that continues to plague the Christian church of the 21st century.

Although the fears are an integral part of our culture, it is a hopeful sign that leaders from the three churches identified similar causes for this division. This shows that they are all on the same page and can strive toward solutions from there. Racism is still present in our society and is more than a mentality; racism is “the systematic subordination of certain racial groups by those in power” (Orbe & Harris, 2001, p. 6). So racism is the action, outward expression of hatred, whereas prejudices are the beliefs that guide the actions. If the church and society as a whole were able to acknowledge, understand and appreciate these differences, rather than ignore them, I believe more rapid progress toward integration would occur.

Finally, the church leaders’ perception of the media’s influence in regard to church segregation was explored through RQ3: Do leaders of a racially diverse congregation, a predominantly African American congregation and a predominantly European American congregation perceive the media as an influence in church segregation?

This question seemed to cause the most internal conflict and debate within the participant pool. Though the media may not seem to be a likely causal factor in church segregation, when prompted about their thoughts on the media’s contribution to this phenomenon, many participants had to stop and think. Unlike the causal factors for church segregation, there did not seem to be common themes among the participants, but more individual answers from each participant. Initially, many responded that the media did not play a part in church segregation, yet later said that because of the media’s power and influence on

society as a whole, they did contribute to church segregation. Though none of the leaders mentioned the media as a cause for church segregation, it is possible that the thought may have crossed their mind. It is also possible that none of the leaders would have come to the conclusion of media playing a role in church segregation without prompting. Either way, the question did make them think and recognize the media's influence in all areas of society, despite our recognition of it or our efforts to escape it, especially within the Christian community.

I would argue that the conflict between Christian principles and media influence that so many of the participants struggled with speaks to media's power to influence all aspects of society. From the perspective of the standpoint theory, the opinions and beliefs of members of the Christian community concerning the media represent the non-dominant perspective in our society. It shows the "stranger within" (Pels, 1996) thought process, or in Biblical terms being "in the world, but not of it" (The Holy Bible, 1984, John 15:19).

Further, because the media is guilty of racial stereotyping (Bogle, 1990; Entman, 1994; Evoleocha & Ugbah, 1989; MacDonald, 1992; Seiter, 1986), for some it may be their only exposure to different cultures. As such, the media perpetuate thought processes and assumptions that simplify the perceptions of different groups. Consequently, what we learn from and see in the media will often affect us and our actions in other areas of life including our faith and church community.

All 10 participants came to conclusions about church segregation and offered their opinions by means of their own lived experiences. I believe that it

was not necessarily their church affiliation and its racial makeup that categorized similar answers, but answers were shaped by each individual's racial identity. Though there are numerous theories used to understand and explain cultural identity, according to Phinney (1993), the process of identity formation involves three phases. The first is unexamined cultural identity in which we take our cultural values, customs, beliefs, etc. for granted (Orbe & Harris, 2001). In the second phase, cultural identity search, we explore and contemplate our culture and how we do or do not fit into different cultural groups. Finally, the third phase is our cultural identity achievement. In this phase, "we develop a clear, confident understanding and acceptance of ourselves...we internalize a strong cultural identity" (Orbe & Harris, 2001, p. 81).

In regard to this study, some individuals displayed a different levels of understanding and awareness of the issues. Typically, members of the dominant European American culture are less aware of their cultural identity than members of non-dominant groups simply because customs, beliefs and values of the European American society in our country are perceived as the "norm" (Orbe & Harris, 2001). So, in some instances, in this study, a black participant seemed more aware of racial issues than a white participant, and I believe that this is due to where each participant was in the process of understanding their cultural identity. It is also important to remember that cultural identities are complex and can change and shift depending on certain experiences throughout our lives (Orbe & Harris, 2001). I think that understanding how cultural identities couple with standpoints help to further explain various dimensions of this study and

allow us to understand why the churches of different racial composition did not seem to be a factor in participants' sharing the same opinions. Rather, it was more a matter of a specific individual participant in one church having a similar opinion to another individual in a different church. This is an important discovery because it suggests that church leaders are holding similar beliefs, opinions and ideas, and there is common regard at least regarding their concerns about segregation in the church.

Limitations

As with any study, there are limitations that are realized during or after the process. The first limitation concerns the lack of questions concerning cultural identity in the interview guide. In order to gain a better understanding of the participants' standpoints, more questions regarding their cultural identity should have been asked. Another limitation in this study was the concentrated location. Due to time and financial constraints, the interviews were conducted in only one small, southern city located in Northeast Georgia. If more time and resources were allotted, it would be interesting to find out how opinions may vary in terms of region. A comparison between viewpoints in the North and South would be particularly fascinating due to the often heightened racial tensions between blacks and whites present in the South. It may also have been beneficial to include a larger pool of participants to determine more clarity in the themes

The snowballing method of gathering the participants may also have been a limitation to this study. Gathering opinions of church leaders who are not related or referred to by one another may have provided for a more diverse set of

answers and perceptions. Denomination may be another factor to consider for future studies. This study happened to have three different denominations included, but having all of the same denomination may have changed the views on some level and allowed for a more controlled comparison. Additionally, including not only church leaders, but also congregants would add a different set of perspectives to the study. It may be that congregants would offer more candid viewpoints.

Controlling for other demographic variables such as gender, age and even including different racial and ethnic groups may also provide an interesting level for comparing and contrasting. I also think that assuring the racial makeup of the churches as closer to 50 percent black and 50 percent white for the racially diverse church, 100 percent white and 100 percent black might have made the answers more distinct between churches. Finally, my racial identity as a white female could have been a limitation as well during the interviews. Some participants may have been hesitant to discuss certain issues because of my race or gender. A possible solution to this may be to have two researchers of two different races conduct the interviews to heighten the comfort level of the participants when discussing racial issues.

Overall, one of my goals for this project was to start a dialogue. I believe that asking the questions and having the conversations that I had through the research interviews might have planted some seeds or consequently increased the possibility of having a dialogue on the topic of church segregation which I hope may lead to some changes toward church integration.

Despite these limitations, I can conclude that the standpoints gathered through in-depth interviewing can show us both similarities and differences between and among groups as it is based on personal life experiences and worldviews (Collins, 1986). The important thing is that we seek these viewpoints of others, listen to those views and engage in a dialogue to better understand and use our new knowledge to increase effective interracial communication and integration. Though the dialogue is important, the actions are of greater importance. In 1966, Eugene Carson Blake, an evangelist and member of both national and world church councils, wrote:

Unless the churches can move forward to the actual and voluntary establishment of a new pluralistic nondiscriminatory pattern of race relations here and abroad, they will have failed at a crucial moment of history (p.16).

Have we failed to establish a “nondiscriminatory pattern of race relations” at the “crucial moment”, or is the process a lot more complicated and slow-moving than we anticipated? Regardless of the past, the productivity of an integrated church in the future lies in the Christian community actually demonstrating with progressive actions to all of society a true picture of love and acceptance to all through integration. It may be best to adopt the advice given by one of the leaders during his interview in terms of where we go from here. I think he summed it up when he said, “Let’s just get up off our butts and do something!”

The lack of a clear distinction between the opinions and thoughts of the participants in each of the three congregations is a positive sign. Black and white leaders are coming to similar conclusions and voicing similar concerns and solutions in each of their churches. Seeking out the individual voices within the

Christian community can lead toward Pohlhaus' (2002) suggestion toward "knowing communities" (p.292). The challenge now is to come together and share these thoughts in agreement toward a solution and making changes within the Christian community, a supposed community of love and grace, to foster as an example for society as a whole.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEWEE PROFILES

Racially Diverse Church Leaders

- 1) Chris: African American male, 35-40 years-old, leadership position: minister of music, years serving at current church: 1 year, 4 months, total years in church leadership: about 17. His father is a pastor; grew up in all black churches all of his life in a Northeastern state, but chose to take a position at a non-black church and knew he was being hired partially because of his not being white.
- 2) Brad: European American male, 30-35 years-old, leadership position: head pastor, years serving at current church: 5, total years in church leadership: 19. Worked as a youth pastor for 10 years; father is a pastor intentionally hired a non-white leader to diversify his congregation; attended church all his life.
- 3) Beverly: European American female, 55-60 years-old, leadership position: church music teacher and associate pastor's wife, years serving at current church: 9, total years in church leadership: 30+. Moved from a small Midwestern town to LA after college, where she lived for eight years. Has an adopted, Hispanic daughter; attended church all her life.

African American Church Leaders

- 1) Douglas: African American female, 30-35 years-old, leadership position: pastor's wife, years serving at current church: 2, total years in church leadership: 2; attended church all his life.
- 2) Anna: African American male, 40-45 years-old, leadership position: pastor, years serving at current church: 9, total years in church leadership: 12; attended church all her life.
- 3) Henry: African American male, 50-55 years-old, leadership position: deacon, years serving at current church: 10, total years in church leadership: 10; attended church since age nine.

European American Church Leaders

- 1) Nicole: African American female, 20-25 years-old, leadership position: youth ministries leader, years serving at current church: 1, total years in

- church leadership: 1; attended racially diverse congregations all her life; attended an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities).
- 2) Patrick: European American male 50-55 years-old, leadership position: pastor, years serving at current church: 11, total years in church leadership: 27. Has a degree in psychology, active in overseas mission projects; attended church all his life.
 - 3) Jane: European American female 30-35 years-old, leadership position: children's ministry teacher, years serving at current church: 2, total years in church leadership: 2. Works full-time at an international, Christian-based facility for troubled youth and adults; attended church all her life.
 - 4) Debbie: European American female 60-65 years-old, leadership position: church secretary, coordinator & teacher of girls discipleship program, and pastor's wife, years serving at current church: 30, total years in church leadership: 40; attended church all her life.

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

I _____ agree to participate in the research titled “African American and European Church Leaders’ Perceptions on Segregation within the Church” which is being conducted by Felicitas McKinnon Boldin, Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication public relations master’s student, University of Georgia (724-840-0393). I understand that this participation is entire voluntary, and I can withdraw consent at any time without penalty and have the results of the participation, to the extent that it can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from research records or destroyed. The following points have been explained to me:

- 1) The reason for this research is to explore the links between racial stereotyping in the media and segregation within the Christian community.
- 2) There are no direct benefits associated with my research.
- 3) The procedures are as follows:
 - a. Interviews will be set up by phone or e-mail at a location and time convenient for the participant.
 - b. I will read and be asked to sign a consent form regarding my participation in the study.
 - c. Interviews should last approximately 45-90 minutes. (The interview will be audio taped. The researcher will take notes. Follow-up interviews are not anticipated.)
- 4) No discomforts or stresses are foreseen.
- 5) No risks are foreseen.
- 6) The results of this participation will be confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without prior consent, unless otherwise required by law. For the purposes of confidentiality, tapes and transcriptions of the interviews will be labeled with pseudonyms. Tapes will be kept for one year after the interview takes place, in order to ensure adequate analysis and publication of results.
- 7) The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at: 724-840-0393. The researcher can also be reached by e-mail at: fboldin@uga.edu.

Please sign both copies of this form. Keep one, and return the other to the investigator.

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------|
| Signature of Researcher | Date |
| Printed name of researcher | E-mail |
| Signature of Participant | Date |
| Printed name of participant | E-mail |

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D. Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW GUIDE

- 1) Describe your identity as a Christian.
- 2) How long have you been involved in the church, and what denomination(s) have you been a part of?
- 3) How long have you been a church leader?
- 4) How do you believe Christians do or should view the media in comparison to non-Christians?
- 5) What is the size and the racial makeup of your current church, both the congregation and the leaders?
- 6) As a Christian, do you and/or your congregation worship and/or participate in fellowship with Christians of a different race than your own? If so, how often and in what capacity?
- 7) How do you see that the Christian community is racially segregated? Do you see this as a major concern and topic of discussion among the church community?
- 8) If you see the church as racially segregated, how responsible, if at all, is the media for that segregation?
- 9) As a Christian, how do you view the media's portrayal of race?
- 10) What kinds of stereotyping do you see in the media, or would you say the media accurately depicts most racial/ethnic groups the majority of the time?
- 11) In what ways do you see the media holding responsibility for increasing racial tensions within our society and to what extent?
- 12) In what way is the Christian community responsible in society to act as a positive example for integration and racial diversity? How can this be achieved?