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Intersecting Identities as a Source of Religious Incongruence

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Chaves (2010) argues that much of the work in the sociology of religion is susceptible to the religious congruence fallacy—the tendency to assume consistency between religious beliefs and one's attitudes and behaviors across situations when they are in fact highly variable. We build on and extend this argument by focusing on intersecting group identities as a mechanism for identifying such incongruence, not only within religious contexts, but also at the intersection of categories such as gender and race. To illustrate this argument, the analysis draws on data from the 2006 Panel Study of American Religion and Ethnicity (PS-ARE) to assess how race, gender, and religion interact to produce different levels of attitude and behavior incongruencies on key issues of the day, specifically conservative social values and voting behaviors. The results find marked differences and inconsistent relationships between attitudes and behaviors across racial-gender groups. We use the analysis to highlight the conditions that result in incongruence at the intersections of identity categories and pinpoint where social scientists are most vulnerable to committing the congruence fallacy.

Keywords: *intersectionality, congruence fallacy, gender, race, identity politics.*

INTRODUCTION

Religion matters. It is associated with a host of individual and collective attitudes and actions in important, though not always clear or straightforward, ways. Sociologists and social theorists have long examined these associations. Marx and Engels ([1844] 1978) began an influential line of thought by asking the extent to which religion serves as an opiate that stifles social change. Durkheim ([1912] 2001) explored the degree to which it is a source of cohesion that stimulates collective action. Other lines of inquiry include: "Is religion a source of solidarity and peace or a legitimating agent for violence, dissent, and oppression?" and "How does religion interact with race, class, gender, and other social categories to shape attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors?" For the most part, these questions assume causality in religion's relationship with a host of outcomes.

Recently, Chaves (2010) challenged this assumption and added a new line of reasoning to the ongoing discussion about the relative importance of religious beliefs and practices in contemporary social life. Chaves argues that much of the work in the sociology of religion is susceptible to what he terms the religious congruence fallacy—the tendency to assume consistency in an individual's religious beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors across contexts and situations when they are in fact often highly variable. Put differently, this fallacy occurs when we assume that religious beliefs are highly correlated with specific behaviors and that they correspond in logical, predictable, and mutually reinforcing ways, when in fact they do not. One reason that congruence is so rare is because it requires individuals to be exposed repeatedly to conditions that create

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internalized, automatic responses to religious beliefs.[1] In reality, individuals are very rarely in such sterile conditions, particularly on a repeated basis. Conditions and situations change, and behaviors change with them.

In this article, we focus on intersecting identities—the idea that individuals possess multiple, competing group identities that shape their life chances and attitudes and behaviors—as a mechanism for locating where incongruence emerges. Our analysis proceeds from the theoretical foundation that religion is just one of many identity categories that interact to produce mixed, unanticipated, and, sometimes, contradictory outcomes (Calhoun 1994; Stryker and Burke 2000; Wuthnow and Lewis 2008). We focus on the relationship between religious identities, beliefs, and practices and conservative social values at the intersection of race and gender to provide an empirical test of our more general argument that religion's association with attitudes and behaviors is strongly influenced by other social identities.

To make this case, we draw on data from the first wave of the 2006 Panel Study of American Religion and Ethnicity (PS-ARE) to highlight some of the various conditions under which religion matters. The primary objective is to examine how race, gender, and religion interact to influence attitudes and behaviors on key issues of the day—specifically, conservative social values and voting behaviors. We are particularly interested in whether the association between religious identity and these outcomes varies by race and by gender. We examine both religious affiliation and degree of religiosity, as past research indicates these to be distinct components of religious identity with differing effects on attitudes and behaviors (Read 2007). In addition to examining the link between religion and attitudes and religion and behaviors, we assess whether the strength of the relationship between attitudes and behaviors varies across racial and gender groups. In other words, we ask: "To what extent do religiously-based attitudes correlate with behaviors one might expect to follow from those attitudes, and how does this vary at the intersection of race and gender?"

By focusing on these objectives, we aim to contribute to existing research in several ways. First, we extend Chaves's (2010) argument by identifying intersecting identities as a mechanism for exploring why incongruence is ubiquitous, not just within religion but also within other forms of identity. Second, we provide an empirical illustration of our argument, which also allows us to demonstrate where and how the fallacy emerges. Finally, we highlight the complexities surrounding analyses of religion in the context of intersecting identities in modern life and offer suggestions for avoiding the congruence fallacy in future research.

Intersecting Identities as a Source of Religious Incongruence

Understanding how religion relates to attitudes and behaviors is not merely an academic exercise: religion has been implicated in an array of consequential social outcomes, including physical and mental health (Ellison and Levin 1998), wealth accumulation (Keister 2003), the formation of racist beliefs (Duriez and Hutsebaut 2000), and in the enduring prevalence of the culture wars in American politics (Layman 1997), just to name a few. The 2004 presidential election underscored the importance of religion's connection to politics—the strong support of the Republican Party by white conservative voters proved pivotal in the outcome of the election. More recently, in the debates about U.S. health care reform, various religiously-based conservative social values coalitions have asserted that health care reforms must not preempt state rights to restrict or ban abortions.

In each of these instances, religion is typically treated as operating in isolation from other bases of social action—like social class, gender, and race—or at minimum, is seen as the primary catalyst for broad-based collective action. Consequently, the picture that emerges is one of

[1] Chaves identifies cognitive and social effort as other conditions that would lead to congruence (both difficult to achieve) but identifies the variability of situations and contexts as the biggest obstacle to congruence.

a unified, straightforward relationship between religious beliefs and outcomes. But in fact, the evidence is mixed on this point—white conservative Protestants overwhelmingly vote with the Republican Party while black conservative Protestants fall in line with Democrats (Layman and Green 2006; Olson and Green 2006; Regnerus, Sikkink, and Smith 1999); pro-feminist attitudes coexist with high levels of religiosity among blacks while the opposite is true among whites (Boisnier 2003; Calhoun-Brown 1999); frequent religious attendance increases the political participation of Arab-American men while dampening that of their female peers (Read 2007). As Chaves (2010) points out, we should expect such mixed results if we acknowledge that religious incongruence is ubiquitous.

In this article, we draw from two theoretical perspectives to argue that intersecting social identities are a primary source for incongruence. The first, social identity theory, posits that individuals derive a sense of identity from belonging to a group. Because individuals belong to an array of groups over the life course, they possess multiple social identities that change and fluctuate over time and place. It is the intersection and competition of these multiple identities that result in incongruence. Even within any one given social identity, such as religion, ideas and practices are fragmentary and loosely connected (Chaves 2010); thus it should not be surprising that the collision of multiple identities results in even greater incongruence. Congruence is rare because beliefs and practices grounded in any one identity exist alongside, and compete with, beliefs and practices grounded in other identities (Swidler 1986; Vaisey 2009).

Evidence that intersecting identities are an obstacle to congruency exists outside of research on the sociology of religion, though the term congruency is rarely invoked. This evidence is most readily found in the vast literature on intersectionality, a perspective that contends that multiple social inequalities, particularly those based on race, class, and gender, interact to create the social location and life chances of groups and individuals (Baca Zinn and Dill 1996; Collins 1990, 2005). The utility of intersectionality theory for this study is that it highlights the structural aspect of intersecting identities—the ability of individuals to choose the groups to which they belong is finite. Individuals are not born with a master status or a coherent set of values that they draw from to guide their behaviors. Rather, individuals' set of life chances shape which parts of their identity they invoke in different contexts over the life course. These social locations—some achieved and some ascribed—not only shape beliefs and behaviors, but also define which behaviors are viewed as pragmatic and practical at any given point in time. Incongruence can arise when ideas and beliefs grounded in one identity are trumped by behaviors seen as more pragmatic in another.

This may all sound very abstract, so here are some concrete cases in point from past research. Women consistently report high levels of support for gender equality, but women rarely act collectively in ways that would result in greater gender equity. Instead, other forms of identity emerge as more critical in shaping their behaviors, such as racial/ethnic or class status (Marshall and Read 2003; Ryan 2001). This is not necessarily intentional, but rather the result of women defining pragmatic action on the basis of social locations other than gender, such as class or age or region (Chaves 2010). If women define practical action as that which will benefit the family, then they will act in ways that benefit women only if it also benefits the family, what Chaves (2010:2) refers to as supplementing rather than replacing practical action. It is even more complex because the salience of different identities changes for individuals in different settings and at different times in their lives. The same woman who opposed gun control in her youth may support it once she becomes a mother; the same black man who supported health care reform in Texas may oppose it after moving to California; the same Muslim who supported Bush in 2000 may have voted against him in 2004. These possibilities exist because as contexts change, the salience of different identities and subsequent behaviors change with them.

Congruence is rare because of intersecting identities; the fallacy is common because of the way we link those identities to specific outcomes. To illustrate this point, this article explores

the intersection of racial, gender, and religious identity and their association with conservative social values and political behaviors. The analysis also examines whether these intersecting identities link beliefs to behaviors. We expect religion to be intertwined with other major categories of identity, specifically race and gender, in the formation and expression of identity. We aim to demonstrate where and how the fallacy emerges so that future research can avoid it.

Data and Methods

As an illustration of our argument, we draw on data from the PS-ARE, a national, face-to-face survey of the noninstitutionalized adult population in the United States with an intentional oversample of ethnic minorities. It contains 2,610 cases, gathered through a multilevel, clustered design, and has a response rate of 58 percent. In this study, we limit our cases to those who indicated their race was either white or black ($N = 1{,}268$ and 532, respectively). Latinos and to a lesser extent Asian minorities contain within them large proportions of recent immigrants (among Latinos, 42.9 percent are foreign born, Asians 15.6 percent). Because our analysis is illustrative, we wish to present one example of intersecting identities, that between race, gender, and religion, without adding the additional complexity of immigrant dynamics. Table 1 provides detailed information about the sample and the variables we use in our analysis.

Our dependent variables aim to tap issues associated not only with religion, but also with each other: conservative social values and voting behaviors. Following Hertel and Hughes (1987), we define conservative social values as moral attitudes against abortion, premarital sex, homosexuality, and pornography. Hertel and Hughes also include traditional gender roles in their definition of conservative social values but the PS-ARE did not include questions on this topic, which is of less importance for this study given findings from past research (Gay, Ellison, and Powers 1996). To measure the strength of an individual's conservative social values, we created a scale using six items, totaling the number of "strongly agree" responses to each question. The scale ranges from 0 to 6 and is internally consistent (Cronbach's alpha of 0.71). The Appendix lists the items in the scale.

Our two additional dependent variables focus on voting behaviors, specifically whether the respondent voted in the 2004 presidential election and whether he or she voted for President George W. Bush. We chose voting because it is a relatively simple, routine behavior that we expect to be significantly correlated with religiosity and conservative social values attitudes. We do not suggest that voting behavior is a proxy for an individual's broader level of political engagement, but merely that it provides a window into understanding the connections between attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.

The three key independent variables for this study are religious identity, race, and gender. We separate religious identity into two distinct components, religious affiliation and religiosity. Past research indicates they are distinct. Religious affiliation is measured with dummy variables for evangelical Protestant, black Protestant, mainline Protestant, Catholic, and others (Steensland et al. 2000). We dropped the category "black Protestant" because it was highly collinear with our dummy variable for "black." We then split the historically African-American denominations into evangelical and mainline groups. Subsequent analyses revealed that Catholics, mainline Protestants, and others were not significantly different from each other. Therefore, in our regression tables we only report the coefficient for evangelicals against other religious groups. Following past research, we divide religiosity into three dimensions—active, biblical literalism, and subjective—and run the analyses with individual and composite indicators of each dimension to demonstrate the complexities that exist within any one given identity. Active religiosity is gauged with an individual indicator for weekly or more attendance at religious services and a composite

Table 1: Summary statistics

		Whites					Blacks					
	Full Sample	All	Males	Females	a	b	All	Males	Females	c	d	e
Conservative social values												
Conservative social values scale (0–6)	2.35	2.27	2.09	2.45	***	***	2.87	2.43	3.22		***	***
Legal marriage only between man and woman	.5	.49	.52	.46	***	*	.6	.55	.64		*	***
Sexual intercourse before marriage is wrong	.19	.18	.15	.21	**	*	.27	.21	.32		**	**
Couples should not live together before marriage	.26	.25	.24	.25	***		.33	.31	.35			***
Having an abortion is morally wrong	.56	.54	.49	.59	***	***	.65	.55	.73		***	***
Destroying embryos is always wrong	.3	.28	.24	.32	***	**	.44	.4	.47	***		***
Viewing pornography is morally wrong	.55	.54	.45	.63			.58	.42	.71			
Political behaviors												
Voted	.72	.73	.72	.74	**		.66	.56	.73	***	***	
Voted for Bush	.38	.42	.43	.41	***		.11	.09	.12	***		***
Religious identity												
Evangelical	.3	.32	.32	.32	***		.15	.1	.18	***	***	***
Catholic	.2	.22	.21	.23	***		.06	.06	.05	***		***
Protestant	.58	.55	.54	.57	***		.74	.61	.85		***	***
Other religion	.04	.04	.05	.03			.03	.04	.03			

(*Continued*)

Table 1 (*Continued*)

	Full Sample	Whites					Blacks					
		All	Males	Females	a	b	All	Males	Females	c	d	e
Individual indicators												
God created world in six days	.26	.24	.22	.27	***		.38	.3	.44		**	***
Attends service weekly or more	.24	.24	.21	.27		**	.26	.18	.31		**	
Has personal relationship with God	.34	.32	.27	.37	***	***	.49	.4	.56	**	**	***
Composite scales												
Biblical literalism scale (0–4)	1.48	1.41	1.28	1.53	***	***	1.98	1.63	2.27		***	***
Active religiosity scale (0–5)	1.08	1.02	.88	1.17	***	***	1.45	.96	1.85	*	***	***
Subjective religiosity scale (0–5)	2.06	1.99	1.79	2.19	***	**	2.53	2.14	2.86	*	***	***
Demographics												
Bachelor's degree+	.3	.33	.33	.32	***		.16	.18	.15	***		***
Income $40,000+	.6	.64	.68	.6	***	**	.39	.49	.3	***	***	***
Married	.59	.62	.65	.58	***	*	.38	.47	.31	***	***	***
Age, mean	46.52	47.01	46.45	47.77	***	*	42.83	41.45	43.94	***		***
N	1,800	1,272	527	745			532	203	329			

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.
[a]All whites vs. all blacks.
[b]White males vs. white females.
[c]White males vs. black males.
[d]Black males vs. black females.
[e]Black females vs. white females.

measure of five variables regarding attendance at organized religious events (Cronbach's alpha = 0.77; see Appendix). Biblical literalism is tapped with a single indicator that asks respondents if they believe in a literal six-day creation and a four-item scale related to a literalist approach to the Bible (Cronbach's alpha = 0.78). Subjective religious identity is measured with a single indicator that asks about the significance of the respondent's personal relationship with God and a five-item scale about a range of subjective religious orientations (Cronbach's alpha = 0.74). Finally, we control for several other factors known to be associated with our dependent and independent variables, including marital status (1 = *married*, 0 = *other*), educational attainment (1 = *bachelor's degree or higher*, 0 = *other*), and income (1 = *income of $40,000 per year or more*, 0 = *other*). We also control for age in the models. In ancillary analysis, regressing our dependent variables on age and age squared did not produce coefficients significantly different from zero, thus we retain only age in our models.

Analysis

Our analytic strategy follows the conventional approach of moving from simple statistics (Table 1), to correlations (Table 2), to multivariate analysis (Tables 3, 4a, and 4b). The goal of this strategy is to pinpoint where we are most vulnerable to the congruence fallacy in reporting and interpreting our results. Table 1 presents means and percentages of sample characteristics by race and gender. Table 2 examines correlations between each dimension of religiosity and voting behaviors. We calculated odds ratios to determine the association between voting and each indicator of religiosity and apply Wald tests to determine the significance level. We repeat this procedure for whether or not respondents indicated they voted for President Bush. Rather than reporting numerical values, we present plusses to indicate significant positive associations and minuses to indicate significant negative correlations.

Tables 3, 4a, and 4b use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models to predict conservative social values and logistic regression models to predict voting and voting for Bush. Multivariate analyses are run both with and without the weights applied. Following the advice of Winship and Radbill (1994), we use *F*-tests to compare the results of the weighted and unweighted regression models; these tests do not show a significant difference between the two. Therefore, the models are run without weights included, which produces the smallest standard errors. In order to test differences in means, weighted, clustered *t*-tests are performed, with standard confidence limits applied. Given our interest in the interactions between race, gender, and religious identity, we run separate regression models for white men, white women, black men, and black women. This approach is recommended by Jaccard and Turrisi (2006) when multicollinearity is a major problem, which we found to be the case given the large number of interactions we were attempting to test.

Results

Establishing Facts

Table 1 demonstrates significant differences in conservative social values and voting behaviors across race and gender groups. The mean score is 2.35 on a scale of 0–6, but this average obscures the fact that white men are the least conservative (2.09), black females are the most (3.22), and white women and black men fall somewhere in between (2.45 and 2.43, respectively). Voting behaviors likewise vary tremendously, particularly by race, with whites being significantly more likely to vote than blacks (73.3 and 65.6 percent) and to have voted for Bush in 2004 (42.2 compared to 11.2 percent). Again, gender adds another layer of complexity, with black women

Table 2: Significant correlations ($p < .05$) between voting for Bush and measures of conservative social values scale and religion variables

	Voted				Voted Bush			
	Whites		Blacks		Whites		Blacks	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Conservative social values								
Marriage only btw man and woman	.	.	−	.	+	+	.	.
Sex before marriage is wrong	.	.	.	.	+	+	+	+
Not good for couple to cohabit	.	.	+	.	+	+	+	.
Having an abortion is wrong	.	−	−	.	+	+	.	.
Destroying embryos is wrong	.	−	−	.	+	+	+	.
Viewing pornography is wrong	+	−	.	.	+	+	+	.
Biblical literalism								
No errors in religious text on moral/spirituality	+	.	.	.	+	+	+	.
God created the world in six days	.	.	.	.	+	+	.	.
No errors in religious text on science or history	+	.	.	.	+	+	+	.
Religious text inspired by God	.	.	.	.	+	+	.	.
Active religiosity								
Attends worship services weekly	+	+	+	.	+	+	.	.
Attends religious education classes weekly	.	.	.	.	+	+	+	.
Reads religious text weekly	+	+	.	.	+	+	.	.
Part of a small group studying religious text	+	.	.	.	+	+	+	.
Actively proselytized	.	.	.	.	+	+	.	+
Subjective religiosity								
Try hard to live according to religious beliefs	.	.	.	.	+	+	.	.
God loves me and cares about me	.	+	.	.	+	+	.	.
Religion is important to me	+	+	.	+	+	+	+	.
Has personal relationship with God	+	.	+	+	+	+	.	.
Definitely believes in God	.	.	.	.	+	+	.	.
N	527	745	203	329	379	554	113	228

Note: All correlations are significant at the $p < .05$ level; "+" indicates positive and "−" indicates negative correlations.

Table 3: OLS regression coefficients from models predicting conservative social values, by race and gender; standard errors are in parentheses

Panel A: Individual measures of religious identity[a]							
		Whites			Blacks		
	Full Sample	All	Males	Females	All	Males	Females
(Intercept)	.826***	.833***	.893***	.978***	1.401***	1.848***	1.645***
	(.131)	(.146)	(.200)	(.193)	(.231)	(.360)	(.268)
Religious identity							
Evangelical	.779***	.722***	.647***	.757***	.794***	.867*	.634**
	(.084)	(.093)	(.141)	(.125)	(.190)	(.366)	(.224)
God created world in six days	.558***	.548***	.734***	.418**	.572***	.769**	.471**
	(.082)	(.102)	(.156)	(.135)	(.140)	(.235)	(.173)
Attends service weekly or more	1.100***	1.349***	1.448***	1.282***	.574***	1.229***	.329
	(.088)	(.105)	(.170)	(.134)	(.162)	(.302)	(.192)
Has personal relationship with God	.774***	.823***	.817***	.829***	.661***	.164	.944***
	(.080)	(.096)	(.153)	(.125)	(.142)	(.229)	(.180)
N	1,688	1,191	501	690	500	192	308
R^2	.402	.443	.455	.432	.254	.295	.225

(*Continued*)

Table 3 (*Continued*)

Panel B: Composite measures of religious identity[a]							
		Whites			Blacks		
	Full Sample	All	Males	Females	All	Males	Females
(Intercept)	.383**	.335*	.389*	.330	.742**	1.29***	.395
	(.122)	(.136)	(.190)	(.182)	(.239)	(.371)	(.302)
Religious identity							
Evangelical	.325***	.224*	.262	.194	.539**	.764*	.405*
	(.080)	(.090)	(.136)	(.122)	(.176)	(.349)	(.203)
Biblical literalism scale	.321***	.326***	.345***	.314***	.319***	.328***	.310***
	(.029)	(.035)	(.054)	(.047)	(.053)	(.090)	(.065)
Active religiosity scale	.282***	.320***	.294***	.337***	.218***	.230**	.199**
	(.028)	(.033)	(.053)	(.043)	(.049)	(.086)	(.060)
Subjective religiosity scale	.235***	.237***	.245***	.228***	.204***	.111	.323***
	(.025)	(.029)	(.045)	(.039)	(.051)	(.075)	(.071)
R^2	.400	.430	.452	.415	.295	.303	.276

Note: Religious identities other than evangelical were nonsignificant and thus were not included.

[a]All models control for education, income, marital status, and age. Standard errors are in parentheses.

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Table 4a: Logistic regression coefficients from models predicting political behaviors (voted in 2004 election), by race and gender, standard errors are in parentheses

		Whites			Blacks		
	Full Sample	All	Males	Females	All	Males	Females
Religious identity—individual indicators							
Evangelical	.001	(.086)	(.239)	.001	.381	.044	.436
	(.139)	(.160)	(.248)	(.213)	(.310)	(.575)	(.388)
God created world in six days	.006	.132	.146	.122	(.147)	(.275)	(.058)
	(.136)	(.180)	(.285)	(.237)	(.216)	(.368)	(.276)
Attends service weekly or more	.257	.502*	.668	.424	(.146)	.442	(.341)
	(.155)	(.202)	(.349)	(.252)	(.253)	(.487)	(.304)
Has personal relationship with God	.314*	.169	.313	.092	.526*	.721*	.415
	(.135)	(.175)	(.286)	(.226)	(.218)	(.358)	(.287)
N	1,688	1,191	501	690	500	192	308
Pseudo-R^2	.164	.201	.218	.196	.12	.136	.091
Substitution of composite scales							
Religious identity—composite scales							
Evangelical	−.05	−.185	−.302	−.109	.409	.035	.478
	(.145)	(.169)	(.259)	(.227)	(.313)	(.568)	(.391)
Biblical literalism scale	−.042	.026	.09	−.014	−.132	−.201	−.078
	(.053)	(.067)	(.104)	(.089)	(.089)	(.147)	(.116)
Active religiosity scale	.100	.141*	.127	.146	.020	.202	−.082
	(.052)	(.068)	(.113)	(.089)	(.083)	(.144)	(.106)
Subjective religiosity scale	.102*	.061	.044	.077	.174*	.159	.212
	(.047)	(.057)	(.087)	(.078)	(.085)	(.122)	(.127)
Pseudo-R^2	.165	.203	.213	.202	.119	.125	.092

Note: Religious identities other than evangelical were nonsignificant and thus were not included. All models control for education, income, marital status, and age.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Table 4b: Logistic regression coefficients from models predicting political behaviors (voted for Bush), by race and gender, standard errors are in parentheses

		Whites			Blacks		
	Full Sample	All	Males	Females	All	Males	Females
Religious identity—individual indicators							
Evangelical	.635***	.576**	.765**	.448*	.002	.246	.679
	(.163)	(.177)	(.289)	(.228)	(.012)	(.923)	(.493)
God created world in six days	.442**	.397*	.008	.601*	.711	.585	.717
	(.170)	(.193)	(.317)	(.247)	(.416)	(.684)	(.451)
Attends service weekly or more	.688***	.910***	1.383***	.675**	.645	.720	−.393
	(.170)	(.191)	(.345)	(.237)	(.366)	(.825)	(.533)
Pseudo-R^2	.301	.169	.197	.172	.065	.119	.074
Substitution of composite scales							
Religious identity—composite scales							
Evangelical	.289	.163	.414	−.024	.584	−.247	.694
	−.180	−.194	−.305	−.257	−.421	−.916	−.487
Biblical literalism scale	.276***	.31***	.274*	.328***	.156	.550	.111
	−.067	−.074	−.118	−.095	−.154	−.359	−.181
Active religiosity scale	.158*	.192*	.172	.203*	.106	.141	.065
	−.066	−.075	−.128	−.094	−.139	−.254	−.169
Subjective religiosity scale	.135*	.137*	.155	.124	.003	−.017	−.076
	−.056	−.058	−.093	−.077	−.171	−.322	−.217
N	1,195	873	362	511	324	106	218
Pseudo-R^2	.339	.226	.218	.239	.060	.183	.050

Note: Religious identities other than evangelical were nonsignificant and thus were not included. All models control for education, income, marital status, and age.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

being more active than their male peers (following national trends for this group), with smaller differences evident for whites.

There are likewise significant differences in religious identity across race and gender identity categories. In terms of subjective religious identity, black women are more likely than all others to say that they have a personal relationship with God (55.5 percent), followed by black men (40.1 percent) and white women (37 percent) with white men least likely to respond in this way (27 percent). The mean scores on the composite index similarly show that black women have stronger subjective identification with their religious identity than all other groups. We see similar patterns for biblical literalism, where black women have much stronger beliefs in theological inerrancy, followed again by white women and black men (who have similar profiles). Black women are also the most religiously active, with 31.4 percent attending services once or more a week. In contrast, their male peers look more like white males (18.4 and 21.4 percent attend services at least weekly) than white females (27 percent).

Table 2 examines the extent to which religiously-based attitudes correlate with behaviors thought to be associated with such attitudes and whether this varies across race and gender identity categories. We present the results of calculating partial correlations for each of the variables that make up our composite scales with voting and voting for Bush. Variables that lacked significance across all groups were dropped from the table for clarity. Rather than present regression coefficients, we use "+" to indicate significant positive associations and "−" to indicate significant negative ones (at the $p < 0.05$ level).

Several noteworthy results appear in the Table 2. First, the link between religion, conservative social values, and voting behaviors is much weaker for blacks, especially for black women. For whites, the relationship between religion, conservative social values, and voting behaviors is much stronger, particularly when voting for Bush is the outcome in question. Also, findings for white men and women are fairly consistent with each other, while there is a much more prominent gender gap for blacks. It is also significant to notice that conservative values actually dampen, rather than elevate, black men's political participation. Finally, church attendance—the most common indicator used for religiosity—has a greater impact on the political behavior of whites than blacks, and biblical literalism has little influence (and most often a negative) correlation with voting for any group.

Birth of the Fallacy

Tables 1 and 2 establish some facts, some more well known than others. On average, whites are more highly educated and earn higher incomes than blacks. On average, blacks are less likely than whites to align themselves with the Republican Party. On average, black women are more religious than other racial-gender groups but are least likely to have their political behaviors associated with their religious identity. These aggregate patterns exist. The problem is not with the aggregate patterns but with the next step in the conventional approach—identifying the mechanisms to explain the patterns and then interpreting those mechanisms as congruent with a given identity.

Tables 3, 4a, and 4b help demonstrate this point by examining the interrelationships among intersecting identities in the multivariate context. Panel A introduces individual measures of religious identity and panel B uses composite measures to assess whether this alters the findings. Panel A shows that each of the individual dimensions of religious identity are positively associated with conservative social values for the full sample as previous research would suggest (Hertel and Hughes 1987). However, when we look more closely at the subgroups, we find more variable patterns. Believing that God created the world in six days is the only factor that operates similarly across groups. On the other hand, having a personal relationship with God is significant for all groups except black males, whereas weekly church attendance has a much weaker

significance for black females. A closer inspection of these findings reveals interesting gender patterns among blacks that are less evident among whites: the effect of attendance captured in the "all black" coefficient is largely driven by men (1.23 for men compared to 0.33 for women) while the effect of a personal relationship with God is largely driven by women (0.16 for men compared to 0.94 for women). Note that the results for white men and women are not significantly different.

Panel B examines the extent to which the scaled measures of religious identity change the results. At least three things are important to note. First, the general pattern of findings is largely, though not entirely, the same; the effect sizes are smaller in part because the coefficients are tapping changes in a scale rather than a single indicator. Second, the composite measure of active religiosity is significantly associated with black women's attitudes, where the single item indicator of attendance was not. The inclusion of questions about Sunday School attendance and participation in small group studies picked up on elements of black women's religiosity that were associated with attitudes in ways that attendance, alone, did not capture. Finally, the pseudo-R^2 values are similar between the models using composite scales and individual indicators, but the correlations between our dependent variables and the scales are weaker than for the individual measures. This is expected, as adding more factors with a similar (but not the same) relationship to the dependent variable will reduce these correlations. Tables 4a, and 4b present a similar exercise, shifting the outcome to political behaviors, looking first at whether respondents voted in the 2004 election (panel A), and then among those who voted, whether they voted for Bush (panel B). Panel A shows that, except for personal relationship with God for black males, none of the individual indicators of religious identity are significantly associated with voting, and that composite measures have little to no significant relationship with voting. A more interesting and telling comparison is between panels A and B. Whereas religion's association with voting is negligible across groups, its affiliation with voting for Bush is much stronger, but only for whites. Being an evangelical Christian and attending weekly services is positively and significantly associated with voting for Bush for white men, and the latter is also significant for white women. None of the individual indicators are related to blacks voting for Bush, in part, because such a small number fall into this category. A similar picture emerges for the composite measures of religiosity, where the relationship to voting for Bush is again much stronger for whites than for blacks.

If we stopped here, we could avoid committing the congruence fallacy, religious or other. But it is difficult to publish a paper that merely describes mixed patterns without offering interpretations for why those mixed patterns exist. The feminist literature provides a plausible explanation for why black women appear to be a distinct group, namely, that they occupy a unique social location that shapes their experiences, attitudes, and behaviors (Collins 2005). Literature on the Black Church could explain why religion's association to political action is weaker among blacks than whites (Harris 1994). The identity politics literature might point to the fact that race and gender trump religion in shaping attitudes and behaviors to explain these mixed patterns (Gay and Tate 1998). The problem is that researchers tend to push one or the other of these interpretations, depending on which of the mixed findings they are trying to explain. But when scholars of gender, race, politics, or religion respond to a set of mixed findings by focusing on just the one finding that is most consistent with their preferred interpretation, they fall prey to the congruence fallacy. Clear thinking about the mechanisms that produce congruencies and incongruencies can help us refrain from too quickly presuming a congruency that is suggested by our preferred interpretations. In the case at hand, and more generally, intersectionality helps us to identify incongruencies, and it also helps to explain why different dimensions of religion operate differently across racial-gender groups and across outcomes.

Conclusions

A cursory glance at our results might lead one to conclude that our findings are mixed, that there is no uniform relationship between religion and important facets of social life. Chaves (2010) might conclude that mixed results are exactly what we should expect if we accept the idea that religious congruence is rare. We extend this line of reasoning by identifying intersecting identities as a mechanism for explaining what might appear to be a hodge-podge of findings. The concept of intersecting identities is much easier to grasp conceptually than it is to test empirically. Qualitative research has made strides in teasing out the intersectional and fragmented nature of group identities, but we have yet to recognize this as a source of the disparate patterns that emerge frequently in our research. The religious congruence fallacy occurs when we privilege religion over other forms of identity in attempting to explain social behavior, when in reality, multiple identity categories interact with religion in daily life to produce highly variable, seemingly mixed outcomes.

The same fallacy occurs in arenas outside of religion. Aggregate patterns abound in sociological research; they do so because people are black, they are white, they are poor, they are old, they are immigrants, they are living in the South. These identities matter. They are real. But they coexist in ways that are situationally specific and highly contextual. Explanations that assume congruence miss this point. Analyses that attempt to control away the effects of other identities to establish congruence miss this point. The conventional approach to interpreting results fails to capture the fact that at different times and places, different interpretations are correct. We are not saying that aggregate patterns and trends do not exist; rather, we are saying that we must be more cautious in making causal claims to explain those patterns when the data we use are insufficient to establish such claims. We must be more cautious in matching theoretical frameworks to data, when the data and theory do not necessarily match.

We are all vulnerable to this trap. One reviewer suggested we analyze our results through the lens of wedge issues and post-1960s partisan mobilization. Another reviewer suggested we bring in applicable theories on racial identity and/or identity politics to explain the results. The problem with each of these interpretations is that they are made *post hoc* based on some presumption of congruence, or causality between a given identity (black, female, evangelical, etc.) and the outcome in question (Chaves 2010). The precise point of this article is that congruence is rare (and our explanations often implausible) because our social structure creates situations wherein multiple group identities compete for supremacy, with different ones emerging more salient in different circumstances across the life course. We could offer any number of plausible explanations for our results, depending on our substantive question, our modeling assumptions, and how we choose to deal with incongruous cases. Our point is that we must be cautious that these choices do not result in our misinterpreting the data.

In the end, our intent is not to downplay the significant role that religion plays in organizing social life. To the contrary, our results indicate that we must continue to pay close attention to religion's association with consequential outcomes, whether they are positive outcomes, negative ones, or ones that fall somewhere in between. But we must do so with closer attention to how religion interacts with other facets of identity, social location, and circumstance; we must avoid isolating religion in our analyses and privileging it *ad hoc* in an attempt to explain complex events. Congruence is rare in the real world; thus we must resist the temptation to impose it in our academic one. We must be satisfied with mixed results if mixed results are what we get. Going forward, our hope is that this study will encourage future research to pay close attention to the existence and intersection of multiple group identities in studying the association between religion and social life.

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Appendix

Questions used to construct scales
Biblical literalism scale (four items)[a]
God created world in six days
Bible contains no errors in spiritual and faith matters
Bible contains no errors in matters of history or science
Bible is fully inspired by God
Active religiosity scale (five items)
Attends religious services weekly or more[b]
Reads religious text weekly or more[b]
Attends Sunday School or education classes weekly or more[b]
Belongs to small group that studies religious text[b]
Encouraged someone to become a member of your religious faith[c]
Subjective religiosity scale (five items)[a]
Has a strong belief in God
Tries to live religious beliefs
Has personal relationship with God
God loves and cares about me
Religion is important to me
Conservative social values scale (six items)[a]
Legal marriage only between man and woman
Sexual intercourse before marriage is wrong
Couples should not live together before marriage
Having an abortion is morally wrong
Destroying embryos is morally wrong
Viewing pornography is morally wrong

[a]These variables are on a five-point Likert scale. All variables were coded 1 for "strongly agree," 0 for all other categories.
[b]The frequency items were coded 1 for once a week or more, 0 for all other categories.
[c]Coded 1 for yes, 0 for no.