

Intergenerational Religious Dynamics and Adolescent Delinquency*

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Abstract

Integrating theories about religious influence, religious homogamy, and delinquency, this study examines religion's potential for both reducing and facilitating adolescent delinquency. Analyses of data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health show that the more religious mothers and their adolescent children are, the less often the children are delinquent; however, the effect of one's religiosity depends on the other. When either a mother or child is very religious and the other is not, the child's delinquency increases. Thus, religion can be cohesive when shared among family members, but when unshared, higher adolescent delinquency results. These findings shed light on how family religious dynamics shape well-being and more generally emphasize that the influence of religiosity depends on the social context in which it is experienced.

Sociological interest in the relationship between religion and crime has a long history extending back to Durkheim's ([1897] 1951) discussion of religion as an integrative force fostering social regulation and morality (also see Bainbridge 1989; Kvaraceus 1944; Lombroso 1911; Schur 1969). Studies of adolescent delinquency draw upon and extend Durkheim's interest in social integration by using social control theory, differential association theory, and/or ideas of cognitive dissonance to explain how religion discourages delinquency among adolescents (Baier & Wright 2001; Tittle & Welch 1983). Empirical evidence generally supports the idea that religiosity is a protective fac-

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tor. A recent review of the literature (Baier & Wright 2001) concludes that a consistently inverse relationship exists between religiosity and delinquency across studies, with the strength of the association varying by both the type of delinquency and the dimension of religiosity being examined (e.g., Benda & Corwyn 1997; Burkett 1980; Burkett & White 1974; Elifson, Peterson & Hadaway 1983; Stark, Kent & Doyle 1982). In particular, the religion-delinquency association is strongest when the focus is on nonvictim crimes such as delinquency and drug use and when a highly religious sample is selected (see Baier & Wright 2001 for a detailed discussion of these findings). In addition, studies conducted in more religious regions of the U.S. find stronger effects of religion (e.g., Stark 1996; Stark et al. 1982).

While these results and others suggest that religion, in certain contexts, is associated with greater social control and integration (Bainbridge 1989), religion can also, in some circumstances, serve as a source of conflict, and under these conditions, is associated with negative outcomes. For example, religious conflict between or within nations, often a result of differing religious affiliations and beliefs, can lead to violence and unrest (Basu 1995; Demerath 2001), religious conflict within congregations fosters tension and interpersonal struggles (Starke & Dyck 1996), and within families, religious dissimilarity can challenge marital and parent-child relationships (Glenn 1982; Heaton & Pratt 1990; Lehrer & Chiswick 1993; Ortega, Whitt & Williams 1998; Pearce & Axinn 1998). For these reasons, we argue that a full understanding of how religion influences adolescents' lives should go beyond examining how individual-level religious characteristics shape their behavior by also considering the religious characteristics of those around them and how they interact with one another. In other words, it is important to consider the religious nature of the contexts in which adolescents live, or the religious characteristics of those with whom they interact. For example, the research of Stark and colleagues (Stark 1996; Stark et al. 1982) demonstrate that the more religious a teen's community of residence is, the greater the influence of that youth's own religiosity on his/her behavior. We transfer these ideas to the family context and the kinds of religious processes at work intergenerationally. To do this, we draw upon prior work illustrating the influence of religious homogamy in families on other outcomes.

There is a substantial literature on marital religious homogamy demonstrating that when husbands and wives are similar with regards to religious affiliation, practice, and belief, they report greater personal well-being, more satisfaction with their marital relationships, less abuse in the relationship, and a lower likelihood of divorce (Chi & Houseknecht 1983; Glenn 1982; Heaton 1984; Heaton & Pratt 1990; Lehrer & Chiswick 1993). Ellison, Bartkowski & Anderson (1999) push theorizing about religious homogamy further by testing effects of the magnitude and direction of religious dissimilarity on domestic violence. Their findings indicate that when husbands are more theologically

conservative than their wives, they are more likely to act violently towards their wives, compared to husbands who are less conservative, or as conservative, as their wives. The general interpretation of these findings, as a whole, has been that religious differences among couples can lead to more opportunity for couples to disagree (especially when the differences are greater in magnitude and in certain directions), resulting in a greater likelihood of conflict and abuse among partners. In contrast, having the same religious affiliation, practices, or beliefs provides couples with a sense of shared experience that enhances their relationship (Ellison et al. 1999; Lehrer & Chiswick 1993).

Studying religious dynamics between parents and children, Rossi and Rossi (1990) find parents and children who report more similar values, including religious values, perceive greater affective closeness to one another. Pearce and Axinn (1998) find that when mothers and children differ in the importance they place on religion in their life, they report having lower quality relationships than those mother-child dyads who find religion similarly important or unimportant. Together, these studies suggest religion has the potential to be a shared aspect of life for family members, increasing social integration as Durkheim initially suggested. On the other hand, when family members differ in terms of religious identity, religion can be a source of conflict generating negative outcomes. This suggests that in understanding the influence a person's own religious identity has on his/her behavior, it is important to consider the religious identities of influential others, such as family members.

This study contributes to research on religious influence, determinants of adolescent delinquency, and general family well-being, by exploring how intergenerational religious dynamics influence adolescent delinquency. First, we weave a theoretical framework using theories about religious influence among adolescents, including effects of parental religious characteristics and religious dynamics within families, and delinquency. We then test a set of hypotheses drawn from this theoretical framework using a nationally representative, multiwave study of American adolescents. Most studies of religion and delinquency to date use cross-sectional data and correlate current religion measures to past delinquency measures (Baier & Wright 2001; Johnson et al. Li 2001; for an exception, see Regnerus 2003a), thus our analyses provide more accurate estimates of the effect of religiosity on subsequent delinquency.¹ Another benefit of these data for our study is the availability of information from both the adolescent and his/her mother about their own religiosity.² This allows us to explore their independent effects as well as how one is affected by the other. Our findings shed light on the role of family religious dynamics in preventing or facilitating delinquency among youth.

Theorizing the Relationship between Religion and Delinquency

ADOLESCENTS' OWN RELIGIOSITY AND DELINQUENCY

As outlined above, most research on religion and adolescent delinquency finds evidence of an inverse relationship between teens' own religiosity and their delinquency (Baier & Wright 2001). This evidence is generally considered to be in support of three well known theories of deviance. First, the differential association theory (Sutherland 1947) and a theoretical extension discussed as the social learning paradigm (Akers 1997) emphasize the influence that others have in teaching behavior that is either conducive or hindering to delinquency. From this perspective, religion and religious others (e.g., parents, clergy, peers, etc.) generally encourage law abiding behavior (Smith 2003). Second, strain theory predicts that when strain is reduced, adolescents are less likely to be delinquent (Agnew 1992) and religious involvement and salience provide social and coping skills that help them avoid and overcome common causes of strain in adolescence (Smith 2003). These two theories are not mutually exclusive, but together suggest multiple mechanisms for how religious involvement and salience may buffer adolescents from delinquent involvement.

A third theory of deviance often cited in work on religion and delinquency is social control theory. Social control theory predicts that interaction with others (peers and adults) reinforces moral norms and fosters social attachment (Coleman 1988; Grasmick, Bursik & Cochran 1991; Hirschi 1969; Liu, Ryan & Aurbach 1998; Stark & Bainbridge 1996). Religion is a social institution that facilitates social and intergenerational closure (Smith 2003); therefore, most studies have assumed that religiously involved teens will have more social closure in their lives making them less likely to be delinquent. Implicit in social control theory, however, is the idea that religious teens whose lives are embedded in religious social networks will be even more buffered from delinquent involvement. Supportive of this idea are the findings of Stark and his colleagues (Stark 1996; Stark et al. 1982) that living in a religious community increases the protective effect of religiosity on teen's delinquency. Because of the overall importance of family dynamics for adolescent well-being, we propose that the family might also be a context in which religious closure serves to reinforce an expectation of upstanding behavior and might provide a reduction in the strain common to adolescent lives.

INTERGENERATIONAL RELIGIOUS DYNAMICS AND DELINQUENCY

Until now, considerations of family religious influence in studies of deviance and other outcomes have mainly followed a model of intergenerational religious transmission assuming the influence of parental religiosity operates through children's own similar religiosity (Regnerus 2003a). While the correlation

between parental and child religiosity is significant, parents and children can disagree about religiosity (Rossi & Rossi 1990). Sociologists are increasingly recognizing that children are agents in their socialization and do not always agree with the beliefs and values their parents may wish them to inherit and youth may rebel against those beliefs and values parents are most adamant about fostering (Alanen 1990). In terms of religiosity, dissimilarity in religious practices and beliefs can introduce stress and tension within families, reduce intergenerational closure, and increase the chance that children will externalize this conflict in delinquent ways.

Given that agreement on religious matters could foster intergenerational closure while disagreement could promote tension and strain, studies should assess the relative impact of parents' and children's religious characteristics *and* conceptualize their effects as dependent on one another. For example, drawing on social control theory (Hirshi 1969), having a religious parent may reinforce the protective nature of religion if a child is religious, while a having a religious parent might lead to more conflict when a child is less religious, increasing the child's risk of subsequent delinquency. Though it is less common, if a child is very religious and his/her parent is not, there will also be opportunity for disagreement and a lack of closure that will lessen the protective power of that child's own religiosity on his/her delinquency. Finally, dyads in which both mother and child are *not* religious also have something in common, perhaps making the child in this dyad at lower risk for delinquency than if they disagreed over religion, but not lowering the risk more than those mother-child pairs who are similarly religious and, therefore, also have access to the protective power that religious participation itself provides.

In sum, we argue that it is useful to expand upon the work that has viewed marital religious heterogeneity as a source of conflict in families by examining the consequences of religious differences between parents and children on adolescent delinquency. This tells us more about religious dynamics within families and provides further insight into how religion impacts adolescent delinquency.

FAMILY WELL-BEING'S INTERMEDIARY ROLE

One way to understand the effect of family religious dynamics on delinquency is to view them as causes and/or consequences of general family well-being. For example, research has shown that children who are emotionally close to their parents are more likely to follow their parents' religious preferences and choices (Rossi & Rossi 1990; Sherkat & Wilson 1995). However, it is also likely that shared religious beliefs and practices bring family members closer together and increase the quantity and quality of their interactions (Regnerus 2003b). Either way, the association between religious solidarity and family well-being may help explain religion's connection to delinquency. Therefore, our study incorporates

some dimensions of family well-being in the analyses to determine whether certain dimensions of family well-being mediate the relationship between intergenerational religious dynamics and adolescent delinquency.

Hypotheses

Drawing upon the framework described above, we posit four hypotheses describing how mothers' and children's religious characteristics might independently and interactively affect adolescent delinquency.

Hypothesis 1: A mother's religiosity will be inversely related to her adolescent child's subsequent delinquency.

Hypothesis 2: A child's religiosity will be inversely related to his/her subsequent delinquency and will partially explain the effect of his/her mother's religiosity.

Hypothesis 3: The effect of a child's religiosity on his/her subsequent delinquency will depend on the level of his/her mother's religiosity (i.e., whether it is the same or different, in either direction).

Hypothesis 4: The total effects of family religious dynamics will be partly explained by their association with family well-being.

Data and Methods

To test our hypotheses regarding religion and adolescent delinquency, we use data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), a longitudinal study of American adolescents in grades 7 through 12. This study draws on two waves of in-home interviews conducted with adolescents in 1995 and 1996. In addition, parents were interviewed during the 1995 in-home survey administration and we use information on mothers' religiosity obtained during these interviews.

During the in-home phase, a random sample of adolescents attending schools in the original sampling frame³ were interviewed in depth about sensitive health-risk behaviors, including criminal activities, and their religious beliefs and practices. All sensitive questions, such as those eliciting delinquency and criminal involvement information, were asked using audio-casi technology in which adolescents listened to questions through earphones and entered their responses on a laptop computer. This approach reduces pressure to give socially desirable answers.

There are 12,314 adolescents who completed both wave 1 and wave 2 in-home interviews and had a parent interviewed in 1995. We further limit this sample to those adolescents for whom a biological, step, or adoptive mother

completed the parent interview, and for whom sampling weights are available, resulting in a sample of 10,444 adolescents and their mothers.⁴

Variables

To reduce problems associated with endogeneity, all measures of religious characteristics and control variables come from the data collected in 1995 (wave 1) and the dependent variable, delinquency involvement, is measured from data collected in 1996 (wave 2). To assure that the observed effects of religiosity on delinquency are not a result of previous religiosity influencing both wave 1 religiosity and wave 2 delinquency, we include the respondents' prior delinquency (measured at wave 1) as a control variable. Thus, we are essentially predicting change in delinquent behavior between waves 1 and 2 of the Add Health study and providing conservative estimates of the effect of religion on adolescent delinquency.⁵

We measure the dependent variable, delinquency involvement, with a commonly used index based on adolescents' self-reports of their participation in 14 different delinquency activities participated in during the past year.⁶ These 14 activities include: painted graffiti, damaged others' property, shoplifted, stole something worth less than \$50, stole something worth \$50 or more, burglarized, borrowed a car without the owner's permission, sold drugs, was involved in a serious physical fight, seriously injured another, used or threatened to use a weapon, participated in a group fight, pulled a knife/gun on someone, or shot/stabbed someone. Adolescents are asked to report how often in the past 12 months they have participated in these activities. Each response is coded 0 if the respondent reported not participating and 1 otherwise.⁷ With a Cronbach alpha of 0.83, the delinquency index has considerable internal consistency. Although the average delinquency level (wave 2) is 1.79, with considerable variation around this mean (std. dev. = 2.33), many adolescents report never participating (48%) in any delinquent activities. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for delinquency involvement as well as all other variables incorporated into subsequent analyses.

To assess the influence of mothers' and children's religiosity on children's delinquency, we create a two-item scale of religiosity by averaging responses to a question about frequency of religious service attendance and a question about the importance of religion. Regarding religious service attendance, mothers and children with a religious affiliation are asked: "In the past 12 months, how often did you attend religious services: once a week or more; once a month or more, but less than once a week; less than once a month; or never?" These four response choices are coded so that higher numbers equal more frequent attendance (0 = never). The importance of religion to both mothers and children is assessed by asking those with a religious affiliation: "How

TABLE 1: Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used in Analyses

	Survey Weighted Mean	Person- Weighted Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Dependent variable				
Delinquency index (wave 2, 1195)	1.79	2.33	0	14
Independent variables (all from wave 1, 1995)				
Mother's religious affiliation				
Black Protestant	.09	.28	0	1
Evangelical Protestant	.23	.42	0	1
Mainline Protestant	.26	.44	0	1
Catholic	.28	.45	0	1
Other religion	.07	.25	0	1
No religious affiliation	.07	.26	0	1
Mother's religiosity (attendance and importance averaged)	2.07	.91	0	3
Child's religiosity (attendance and importance averaged)	1.86	1.05	0	3
Child argued with mother in last week	.34	.47	0	1
Mother trusts child	4.31	.86	1	5
Family protective factors scale	4.05	.66	1	5
Delinquency index (wave 1, 1995)	1.37	2.33	0	14
Race/ethnicity				
Black	.14	.35	0	1
White	.68	.47	0	1
Other race/ethnicity	.18	.38	0	1
Age	14.93	1.61	11	21
Female	.50	.50	0	1
Parent's education (highest of the two)	6.19	2.12	0	9
Two-parent household	.77	.42	0	1
Region ^a				
South	.37	.48	0	1
Northeast	.14	.34	0	1
Midwest	.34	.47	0	1
West	.16	.37	0	1

(N = 10,444)

important is religion to you: very important, fairly important, fairly unimportant, or not important at all?" The four response choices are coded so that higher numbers represent more importance placed on religion (0 = no importance). Those who report no religious affiliation are not asked the

questions regarding attendance or importance, but are assigned a value of 0 for this variable in our models.⁸ To create an index of religiosity, we average the responses to the question on religious service attendance and importance. The resulting two-item scale has a Cronbach's Alpha of .75 for the mothers and .81 for the adolescents.⁹

Because religiosity and family religious dynamics may vary by religious affiliation, we include controls for mothers' religious affiliation in all models. Mothers are asked, "What is your religion?" Their responses are coded into dummy variables representing black Protestant, Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, Catholic, other religion, and no religious affiliation following the coding scheme described by Steensland and colleagues (2000).

Previously, we discussed the possibility that family well-being might mediate some of the effect of mothers' and childrens' religiosity, as well as the interaction of the two, on adolescent delinquency. In our models, we test for evidence of this mediation with three different measures. The first is a measure of whether or not the child reports having a "serious argument" with their mother in the last week (0 = no, 1 = yes). The second is a measure of how often a mother feels she can "really trust" her child (coded 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always). Third, we code a set of variables by averaging adolescents' answers to the following four questions: "How much do your parents care about you?," "How much do you feel that people in your family understand you?," "How much do you feel that you and your family have fun together?," and "How much do you feel that your family pays attention to you?" These 4 items have a Cronbach's alpha of .75 and we call this a scale of family protective factors.

Because both the measures of family well-being and the measures of religious characteristics are from wave 1 data, we are unable to determine the causal nature of their relationship to one another. However, regardless of which came first (religion effects or family well-being effects), we are interested in whether the association between these variables explains some of the relationship between intergenerational religious dynamics and adolescent delinquency. That is, we do not attempt to specify the causal ordering of their effects, but rather to determine whether or not intergenerational religious dynamics and family well-being have statistically independent effects on subsequent delinquency.

In all analyses we include controls for demographic variables commonly associated with delinquency including adolescents' race, age, gender, parent's educational level, family structure, and geographical region of the country. Race is represented with dichotomous variables that indicate whether the adolescent is African American, non-Hispanic white, or another race (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise in each race category). The adolescent's age is measured in years calculated from birth date information. Gender is represented with a dichotomous variable (0 = male). Parent's educational level is calculated for the parent with

TABLE 2: Negative Binomial Regression Models Estimating Effects of Mother's and Children's Religious Characteristics on Adolescent Delinquency

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Mother's religiosity (Attendance and importance averaged)	-.09** (.03)		-.06** (.04)	.06 (.04)	.06 (.04)
Child's religiosity (Attendance and importance averaged)		-.06** (.02)	-.04 (.03)	-.09* (.04)	-.09** (.04)
Mother-child religiosity interaction (Mother's religiosity × child's religiosity)				-.07*** (.02)	-.05*** (.02)
Mother's religious affiliation					
Black Protestant	.08 (.11)	-.02 (.10)	.07 (.11)	-.04 (.11)	-.01 (.11)
Evangelical Protestant	.03 (.10)	-.08 (.09)	.02 (.10)	-.09 (.10)	-.07 (.10)
Mainline Protestant	.07 (.09)	-.04 (.08)	.06 (.10)	-.06 (.10)	-.04 (.09)
Catholic	.06 (.10)	-.05 (.08)	.05 (.10)	-.05 (.10)	-.03 (.10)
Other religion	.08 (.11)	-.03 (.09)	.07 (.11)	-.04 (.11)	-.03 (.10)
Child argued with mother in last week					.16*** (.04)
Mother trusts child					.10*** (.02)
Family protective factors scale					-.14*** (.03)
Delinquency at wave 1 (1995)	.28*** (.01)	.27*** (.01)	.27*** (.01)	.27*** (.01)	.25*** (.01)
Race/ethnicity					
Black	.00 (.07)	.01 (.07)	.01 (.07)	.01 (.07)	.01 (.07)
Other race/ethnicity	.18*** (.06)	.18** (.06)	.19** (.06)	.18** (.06)	.18** (.06)
Age	-.07*** (.01)	-.08*** (.01)	-.08*** (.01)	-.08*** (.01)	-.09*** (.01)
Female	-.34*** (.04)	-.33*** (.04)	-.33*** (.04)	-.33*** (8.64)	-.37*** (.04)
Parent's education	-.02 (.01)	-.02 (.01)	-.02 (.01)	-.03 (.04)	-.02 (.01)
Two parent household	-.05 (.04)	-.05 (.04)	-.06 (.04)	-.06 (.01)	-.05 (.04)

TABLE 2: Negative Binomial Regression Models Estimating Effects of Mother's and Children's Religious Characteristics on Adolescent Delinquency (Cont'd)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Region ^a					
South	-.02 (.06)	-.02 (.06)	-.02 (.06)	-.03 (.04)	-.02 (.05)
Northeast	.12* (.07)	.12* (.07)	.11* (.07)	.11* (.07)	.13* (.07)
Midwest	.10* (.06)	.10* (.06)	.10* (.06)	.09* (.06)	.10* (.06)
Intercept	1.07	1.08	1.07	1.07	1.04
Log-likelihood	-15577.43	-15570.83	-15568.08	-15563.08	-15497.77
(N = 10,444)					

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors,

^a Reference group is mothers with no religious affiliation

^b Reference group is white

^c Reference group is West

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ (one-tailed test)

the highest level of education (if mothers provided spousal information), with codes ranging from 0 = no formal education to 9 = graduate degree.¹⁰ Family structure is measured with a dichotomous variable that assesses whether the adolescent lives in a household with two married parents (including step-parents) at the time of the first interview (1 = two-parent family, 0 otherwise).¹¹ Last, we include dummy variables identifying in which region of the country the adolescent resides (West, South, Northeast, Midwest).¹² Table 1 displays descriptive statistics for our analytical sample, incorporating survey weights, and indicates that our sample is fairly representative of the U.S. adolescent population.

Method of Analysis

To understand the links between religion and delinquency, we test our four hypotheses in the order that they are presented. Because of the unusual distribution of the delinquency index, with 0 being the most commonly reported value and a minority of adolescents reporting involvement in a large number of delinquent acts, the normality assumption of OLS cannot be approximated, even with a mathematical transformation (such as logging the

index). Negative binomial regression offers a more suitable technique because it is designed to handle continuous variables with distributions containing many zero values and large positive skews.¹³ In the negative binomial model, $u = \exp(\beta_j)$, which indicates that a one-unit increase in X_{ij} multiplies the expected delinquency index by a factor of $\exp(\beta_j)$ and conversely, a one-unit decrease divides the expected index by the same amount (Gardner, Mulvey & Shaw 1995). Therefore, coefficients in these models are easy to interpret by exponentiating the parameter estimates, subtracting one and multiplying this result by one hundred ($[\exp(\beta) - 1] \times 100$) which corresponds to the predicted percentage increase [or decrease] in the delinquency index for a unit increase in a given independent variable (see also Haynie, 2003 for a similar application of negative binomial regression estimation).

Because standard negative binomial models assume that regression coefficients are fixed between groups and error terms are not correlated, these models are inadequate for complex sampling designs in which individuals are nested within a larger macro unit (here schools) (Goldstein 1987; Lee & Bryk 1989; Raudenbush & Bryk 1986). Due to the clustering of the data and the correlated error structure resulting from the Add Health sampling design, statistical techniques that can correct for design effects and unequal probability of selections are necessary to achieve unbiased parameter estimates (Chantala & Tabor 1999). Therefore, all of our analyses incorporate survey weights that account for the stratified sample design. In addition we incorporate person-level weights allowing sample totals to serve as estimates of population totals. The software package STATA is used for all analyses. For our multivariate analyses we employ the STATA procedure, *svylogit*, a survey-based negative binomial regression procedure available in STATA version 8.

Results

THE INFLUENCE OF MOTHER'S AND CHILD'S RELIGIOSITY

Table 2 presents the results from negative binomial regressions estimating the effects of mother's and child's religiosity (both independently and interactively) on the teenage child's subsequent delinquency. In model 1 of Table 2, we find a negative and statistically significant effect of mother's religiosity, indicating that the more religious a mother is, the less delinquent her child is. Specifically, our model suggests that each unit increase in mothers' religiosity is associated with a 9% decline in her child's subsequent delinquency ($[\exp(-.09) - 1] \times 100$).

In model 2, we examine whether there is an effect of an adolescent's own religiosity on delinquency and find a statistically significant negative effect. Each increase in level of religiosity is associated with a 6% reduction in delinquency

($[\exp(-.06) - 1] \times 100$). To evaluate whether there are independent effects of mothers' and children's religiosity, we include them together in model 3. Here we find that the effect of mother's religiosity remains statistically significant, but the effect of the child's own religiosity does not. This is most likely due to the moderately high correlation between the two variables ($r = .60$), representing the intergenerational pathway of influence that we described earlier through which mothers socialize their children by teaching them about their own religious beliefs and practices that translate into the child's own practices and beliefs.

Beyond this intergenerational transmission model, we also hypothesized that when transmission does not occur and children differ from their mothers in religiosity, conflict may ensue and delinquency could become more likely. This effect would be revealed in a significant negative coefficient for the interaction term that multiplies the mother's and child's religiosity scores together.¹⁴ These results are reported in model 4 where we find a negative and statistically significant coefficient for the interaction term. Figure 1 illustrates the translation of this interaction term for the various categories of mother's and child's religiosity. Not surprisingly, the lowest risk for delinquency occurs for those adolescents who are highly religious themselves and have highly religious mothers. The highest risk for delinquency comes when a child is not religious but has a very religious mother or when the child is very religious and the mother is not. Risk of delinquency is relatively low for mother-child dyads that are similarly nonreligious. Indeed, nonreligious adolescents with similarly nonreligious mothers have lower risks of delinquency than adolescents who report being religious, but who have mothers reporting they are not religious, suggesting that the effect of mother-child religious homogeneity is at least as important as the effect of an adolescent's own religiosity on their subsequent delinquency. In sum, religious influence is very different for adolescents depending on the context in which it is experienced. When adolescents are religiously similar to their mothers, especially at the highest levels, they are less likely to be delinquent than when their religiosity is at odds with their mother's religiosity (in either direction).

FAMILY-WELL BEING'S ROLE IN EXPLAINING THESE RESULTS

Our final hypothesis suggested that religious dissimilarity may affect delinquency because it potentially increases parent-child conflict and weakens family relationships. We examine this possibility by incorporating three measures of family well-being into model 5. The results provide evidence that the more often a child reports arguing with his/her mother, the greater the risk of delinquency. In contrast, the more a mother trusts her child and the higher a family scores on the protective factors scale, the less delinquent the child is. However, incorporating these dimensions of family well-being does

Conclusion

Using a nationally representative sample of adolescents and their mothers interviewed at two points in time, our results indicate that mother's and children's religiosity are both inversely related with children's subsequent delinquency *when* they are similarly religious. When mother and child are religiously different, children are likely to be more delinquent than children who share religious practices and beliefs with their mothers. This adds to the mounting evidence revealing religion to be an influential force in adolescent's lives and advances our thinking about this influence by showing the importance of conceptualizing religious influence within a family context. Most importantly, this study recognizes that the family context can be both integrative and divisive.

To more carefully evaluate how religious dynamics between mothers and children influence adolescent delinquency, we examine the role family well-being plays in these relationships. While family well-being is associated with delinquency, we find little evidence that these factors are the primary mechanisms for the religiosity effect or the effect of mother-child religious dissimilarity. Perhaps there are other dimensions of family well-being that could further help to explain what stems from, or causes, religious similarity and/or difference within families. For example, religious similarity may be important because it brings about the type of parent-child closure described in social control and differential association theories, and perhaps this closure is necessary to provide adolescent religiosity its protective power through dimensions such as moral order, learned competencies, and social and organizational ties (Smith 2003).

While our study is novel in its approach to examining the effects of mothers' and children's religiosity on adolescent delinquency, we are unable to evaluate the influence of fathers' religiosity on adolescent behavior. Future research should continue to explore the effects of family religious context by studying whether the effects of father's and children's religiosity also depend on one another. Further, the protection provided by family religious solidarity may be strongest when mother and father (if both are active in the child's life) are similarly religious, compared to when the parents are religiously different. Sibling similarities and differences could also play a role.

Beyond the family context, other contexts of adolescents' lives are also likely to condition the effect of religiosity in their lives. Stark and colleagues (Stark 1996; Stark et al. 1982) find that community religious context conditions the effect of religiosity. Perhaps neighborhood context, school context, or peer networks (see Haynie, 2001) also shape the influence that a teen's religious beliefs and practices have in their life. For example, adolescent religiosity is likely to be more protective when adolescents have friends who share similar beliefs and values, and to induce the strain and negative stimuli that lead to

delinquency when they do not. Future research should continue to explore the multiple contexts of adolescents' lives to deepen our understanding of religion's influence on their behaviors.

Our findings suggest that the influence of an adolescent's own religiosity on his/her participation in delinquent acts depends on how religious (or not religious) his/her mother is, which furthers the study of how religion affects delinquency. More broadly, these findings contribute to studies of religious influence on a variety of outcomes across the life course by demonstrating the importance of conceptualizing religious influence within a social context. Individuals are embedded in larger social structures, and for adolescents, it is critical to incorporate the family structure to decipher the ways in which religiosity shapes delinquency. In addition, studies of family well-being might benefit from incorporating family religious dynamics in models predicting other family and child outcomes such as intergenerational support and exchange or children's self-esteem.

Notes

1. The relationship between religion and delinquency may also operate in a reverse direction. It is possible that delinquency leads to lower religiosity (Benda 1997; Jang & Smith 1997; Johnson et al. 2001). We have tried to limit some of the reciprocal effects with our modeling strategies, but it is beyond the scope of this analysis to untangle the complicated reciprocal relationship between religion and delinquency.
2. We recognize the importance of fathers' or other family members' religious characteristics in adolescents' lives as well. However, in the data we are using, only one parent was interviewed and in 90% of the cases, the parent interviewed was a mother. Therefore, we have limited the sample to adolescents whose mothers were interviewed. We theorize generally about parents' roles in the family and how parent and child religious characteristics might influence delinquency, however our hypotheses and analyses focus on the mother-child relationship.
3. The primary sampling frame for Add Health was derived from the Quality Education Database, although Add Health added a stratified sample of 80 high schools to this sampling frame. Schools were stratified by region, urbanicity, school type (public, private, parochial), ethnic mix, and size. Schools varied in size from less than 100 to more than 3,000 students. The Add Health sample includes private, religious, and public schools located in rural, suburban, and urban areas of the country (see Bearman, Jones & Udry 1997 for more data details).
4. When comparing the sample of teens who completed in-home interviews at wave 1 and wave 2 and had a parent also complete a wave 1 interview to our restricted sample (made up of those cases where the parent respondent was a biological, step, or adoptive mother and for which none of the variables we use in analyses contain missing data), we find several minor but statistically significant differences. Within our subsample, the teens' most educated parents have an average of a half year more total education and 76% of the teens live with two parents at the time of the wave 1 interview compared to

68% of the unrestricted sample teens. These differences in parental education and family structure suggest we should take caution in interpreting our results, especially in contexts where parental education is low and when teens are living in single-parent homes.

5. We repeated all of our analyses using the wave 1 independent variables to predict wave 1 delinquency. Although findings indicated a stronger religiosity-delinquency association in the cross-sectional analyses, all substantive findings were replicated. Therefore, we present the more conservative longitudinal analyses here, as they give more reliable evidence that religiosity at one point in time is influencing subsequent delinquency.

6. Short and Nye (1958) introduced the self-report method of measuring delinquency. Subsequent work has established that adolescents do report their delinquent behavior, these reports tend to be internally consistent, and the reports relate to differences in official delinquency status and to other differences predicted by research and theory (Hindelang, Hirschi & Weis 1980).

7. Other analyses were carried out separately with responses to each delinquency item coded on the original ordinal scale (0 = never participating, to, 3 = participating 5 or more times) and with separate property and violent indices. Findings from these additional analyses closely dovetail those presented here for the overall delinquency involvement.

8. All parent and child respondents of the Add Health survey who gave no religious affiliation were skipped past all other religion questions. Based on descriptive analyses of the nationally representative General Social Surveys showing very low averages of church attendance and importance of religion for those with no religious affiliation, we assigned these respondents the lowest value in each category. We also conducted similar analyses on a restricted sample where all cases that had either a parent or child response of “no religious affiliation” were deleted from the analyses. The results obtained were virtually identical to the results we present in this article using the full sample.

9. In analyses not presented here, we also tested the direct and interactive effects of mothers’ and children’s religious service attendance and importance separately and the results are parallel to those presented here for the index of religiosity. To save space and avoid repetition, in this article we are presenting the results of analyses using the index of religiosity instead of separate measures for attendance and importance.

10. We also considered including a measure representing family income as reported by the mother. However, the high proportion of missing data on this indicator of family socioeconomic status suggested that inclusion of income could potentially bias our sample selection (due to missing cases) or bias the estimate of family income (using a multiple imputation procedure).

11. We assessed the influence of more detailed measures of family structure using categories for two married biological parents, one biological and one step-parent families, single-parent families, and a residual category capturing other family structures. Results from these analyses indicated that residing in a household with two married parents offered the greatest protective effect in terms of association with a reduction in self-reported adolescent delinquency. No significant differences were found among the other family structures.

12. Because prior research suggested that the religion-delinquency association is weakest in the western region of the U.S., we tested interactions between religion and the West

dummy variable in all models. These interaction terms were consistently insignificant and therefore were dropped from final models.

13. The negative binomial model differs from Poisson regression by the addition of a residual variance parameter that captures overdispersion in the dependent variable (which occurs when the standard deviation is greater than the mean). This overdispersion parameter accounts for unexplained variation among cases reflecting differences associated with unobserved predictors (Gardner, Mulvey & Shaw 1995).

14. Following Pearce and Axinn (1998), we initially tested the effect of a dummy variable measuring whether the mother and child had similar levels of religiosity, but on the advice of an anonymous reviewer we decided to measure the difference in a way that specified which member of the dyad had higher or lower religiosity if they did not match. Following Ellison et al.'s (1999) work on spousal religious homogamy, we coded dummy variables for mother-child dyads in which the mother was much more religious, a little more religious, the same, a little less religious, and a lot less religious than her child. While these results were interesting, they prevented us from distinguishing how much of the effect of a given dummy was a result of the homogamy (or dissimilarity) versus what part of the effect came from one or both of the individuals being religious. Taking all of this into consideration, we felt the best analytical strategy would be to use interaction effects telling us what the effect of an adolescent's religiosity might be for each level of what a mother's religiosity might be. This gives us more information about all the possible combinations of levels of mothers' and children's religiosity.

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