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“Linked Lives, Faith, and Behavior:
Intergenerational Religious Influence on
Adolescent Delinquency” by Mark Regnerus
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Linked Lives, Faith, and Behavior: Intergenerational Religious Influence on Adolescent Delinquency

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Research on religion and delinquency has generally concluded that only minor forms of delinquency are affected by religious commitments. However, parents have not often been the focus of religion and delinquency research. This study explores the influence of parental religious identity and behavior on the serious delinquency of adolescent children. This analysis tested an intergenerational model of religious influence on delinquent behavior. Results suggest parental religious devotion protects girls considerably better than boys. In fact, it may amplify delinquency among boys, at least when controlling for other important influences such as autonomy and family satisfaction. Parents' conservative Protestant affiliation displays consistent negative direct effects on delinquency, but little indirect influence. This study reinforces the importance of considering linked lives in the development of youth, as well as the need to assess both direct and indirect religious influences.

INTRODUCTION

The religious beliefs and practices of American teenagers are generally thought to help steer them away from trouble. Yet much research suggests that religion is effective in preventing only minor forms of deviance such as drinking or smoking (Benda and Corwyn 1997). In the wake of perceived intensified school violence in America, however, talk of religiously and morally based solutions to serious delinquency has gained popularity among parents, politicians, and school boards. However, the influence of religion in general has been understudied in the nationwide struggle to foster resilience in at-risk adolescents.

The family is a more common research focus for delinquency. It is well documented that children who grow up in homes characterized by a lack of warmth, understanding, and affective bonds are strong candidates for antisocial behavior throughout their youth and sometimes into adulthood (Rankin and Kern 1994). Additionally, specific risk behaviors of parents are often transmitted to their children during adolescence (Wickrama et al. 1999). Conversely, family satisfaction, affection, parental supervision, rules, and spending time together with parents often characterize the family life of nondelinquents (Warr 1993). Most theories of delinquency therefore rely heavily on parenting and family life in their explanations of delinquency. Might parental religious beliefs and practices contribute to the development of such positive family qualities as these, and also to the avoidance of delinquent behavior among their children?

This analysis poses and tests a two-wave latent variable path model of intergenerational religious influence on delinquency. The specific research questions I look to answer are: (1) Do parental religious traits and behaviors influence both the baseline (Time 1) measure of adolescent delinquency as well as change (Time 2 controlling for Time 1) in delinquency, or just one or neither of these? (2) Do parental religious concerns shape a child's delinquency directly, or indirectly through family satisfaction and/or an adolescent's autonomy, or both? (3) Does an adolescent's own religiosity—clearly shaped by that of his or her parents—alter behavior independently of the parents' influence? (4) Considering age and gender as pronounced predictors of delinquency,

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does the suggested model I outline work as well for boys as for girls, and for different age groups?

INTERGENERATIONAL INFLUENCES ON RELIGION AND DELINQUENCY

Parent religious traits are seldom linked to adolescent delinquency. They are, however, related to such attributes as positive parent-child relations (Pearce and Axinn 1998; Wilcox 1998) and obedience, especially among theologically conservative Protestants (Ellison and Sherkat 1993). Overall, research on religion's place in explaining delinquency is characterized by inconsistent results. Baier and Wright (2001) describe the religion/delinquency evidence as "... varied, contested, and inconclusive."

In some settings the religious beliefs and behaviors of adolescents appear to restrain youth from getting into trouble, yet in other places they seem to hold no sway (Stark and Bainbridge 1996). As noted above, one popular conclusion suggests that religious traits or behaviors restrain participation only in minor forms of delinquency such as alcohol use or smoking. More serious forms of delinquency are thought to be subject to universal condemnation and thus religious effects would display no unique addition (Middleton and Putney 1962). Still other research suggests that peer and family influences reduce religious effects to insignificance (Bahr, Hawks, and Wang 1993; Benda and Corwyn 1997). Benda and Corwyn (1997:81) conclude that "any relationship between religion and delinquency is complex."

Stark's research takes a distinctly sociological turn and suggests that religiosity is related to conformity only in distinctly *religious* contexts—among groups of people or in communities where the mean level of religiosity is high. Stark, Kent, and Doyle (1982) found no substantial religiosity effect in Seattle but a strong one in Provo. Tittle and Welch (1983), however, found that religiosity's inhibitory effects varied directly with the degree of normative ambiguity in a context. "Secularized" social settings, they argued, lack the tools to produce conformity (Tittle and Welch 1983:672). By extension, religion ought to most clearly affect minor delinquency—behaviors that exhibit moral ambiguity (e.g., alcohol use rather than murder). Recent research also suggests possible influences of conservative religious affiliations or communities, as well. Curry's (1996) research on conservative Protestant adults suggests that such parents take a more intense interest in the behavioral socialization of their children, regardless of age. Both private and public behavior matters a great deal to such conservatives, Curry argues, and is often imbued with transcendent, eternal significance. Additionally, a study of individual, school, and county attributes revealed that self-identified "born-again Christian" youth who resided in counties whose religious affiliates were disproportionately conservative Protestant displayed lower levels of delinquent behavior than other youths, including "born-again" adolescents living in less densely conservative Protestant counties (Regnerus 2000).

Such research on conservative Protestantism may reflect in part Ellison and Sherkat's (1993) finding that such parents disproportionately valued obedience in their children. This appears to be a priority that does not change much over the course of adolescence. Delinquent behavior may be of greater concern to conservative Protestants, and the avoidance thereof more closely connected to parenting practices than it is for other groups (Bartkowski and Ellison 1995).

Although Benda and Corwyn (1997) posit a "complex" relationship between religion and delinquency, that complexity may be mostly of social scientists' own making. To be sure, it is complex to successfully survey adolescents on two subjective—and perhaps sensitive—topics. But the complexity is more significantly the result of three unreasonable expectations that many studies apply to the relationship, albeit sometimes out of data necessity. They are: (1) creating statistical competition between religious and secular social controls when in fact they are typically interrelated; (2) overlooking the possibility of change during such a fluid phase of the life course; and (3) neglecting the intergenerational socialization of religious and moral behavior, thereby missing key direct and indirect effects of religion on delinquency. When correcting for these,

religion is very likely related not only to minor forms of deviance, but also to more serious law breaking. A brief comment on each of these points is merited here.

First, religious and secular social controls are often positively correlated to each other in a reciprocal causal fashion. Instead of attempting to model accordingly (or at least acknowledging the situation), researchers often include in their models along with religious variables such influences as family activities, friendship restrictions, formal legal deterrents, household rules, and quality of relationship with parents. Although well intentioned, this approach creates a statistical competition with religious social control measures such as church attendance for the purpose of establishing the direct statistical importance of the variable for preventing delinquency. Second, accounting for change is critical during adolescence. It is a life stage that involves considerable change and a number of potential “turning points,” such as the onset of puberty or menarche, transition from junior to senior high school, family relocations, legal driving age, high school graduation, and the commencement of higher education. Religious conversion, delinquency, and declining church attendance are all typical, if not all compatible, phenomena marking adolescence (Johnstone 1997).

Third, the earliest source of moral socialization in youth—their parents—is frequently neglected, often due to data constraints. This is an important loss, since parent and child religiosity is closely linked not only during adolescence but well into adulthood (Myers 1996). Parent religiosity and religious identity serve as important early resources upon which children draw in forming their own religious identity and practices, as well as shaping their behaviors. And as previous studies suggest, conservative Protestant parenting may disproportionately value children’s conforming behavior (Bartkowski and Ellison 1995; Ellison and Sherkat 1993).

A different approach to assessing religion and delinquency lies in understanding the linked lives of parents and children. This approach focuses on life-course influences and transitions that either accentuate or redirect behavioral tendencies (Elder 1998). A central influence on stable behavior is intergenerational family ties and the social attachments and commitments they foster. Just as the transmission of abusive and unstable family relations is an example of lives lived interdependently, so also pro-social behavior is learned from parents, peers, and other socializing agents in children’s lives (Elder, Caspi, and Downey 1986).

Parents, then, are a logical place to start connecting religion with delinquency prevention. They provide children with their initial level of internalized moral patterns, from which to draw upon both as children and later as adolescents and adults. In fostering religious practices and beliefs in their children, parents typically encourage (directly or indirectly) character formation, self-discipline, a definition of identity and self-image rooted in the sacred, and a “duty-based” moral orientation toward others. Although an “interdependent lives” approach would suggest that the religiously-inspired role relationships children learn come also from community ties to church leaders, youth ministers, and friends, this analysis is restricted to the parent/child relationship.

All this is not to suggest a consistently reliable transmission of values and behaviors. As studies of resilience note, many adolescents whose parents have provided poor socialization do not offend, while the converse is likewise often true. Positive and negative influences on behavior vary across the life course (Elder 1998). Understanding the *timing* and *context* for parental religious influence on their adolescent children’s delinquent behavior, then, is a central goal of this analysis. When, if at all, do parental religious characteristics affect the behavior of their teenage children? Is the influence stable for both boys and girls?

One very recent study of adolescents revealed aggravating effects of parent/child religious dissimilarity on the delinquency of youth (Pearce and Haynie 2001). Among parent/child pairs where different religious affiliations were given, the child’s frequency of delinquency was 11 percent higher than those pairs where affiliation was identical. A similar finding emerged when children disagreed with their parents about the importance of religion. These results suggest that children who demur will be 21–22 percent more delinquent than children who agree with their parents that religion is very important. Additionally, as parents’ religiosity rose, child delinquency fell.

FIGURE 1
AN INTERGENERATIONAL MODEL OF RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE

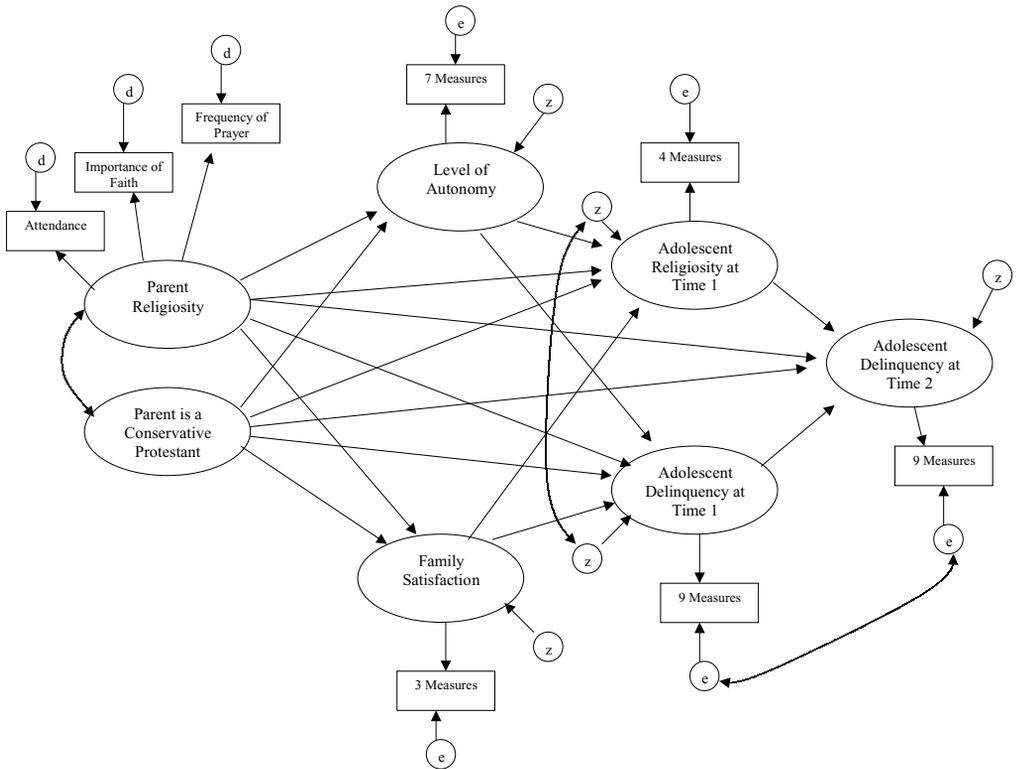


Figure 1 presents an intergenerational model of religion and delinquency that emphasizes the linked lives of parents, family attributes and patterns, and children. Parental religiosity and the parents’ conservative Protestant affiliation are thought to affect several outcomes at Wave I: their child’s religiosity, the level of autonomy accorded the child, and the child’s perception of family satisfaction. Each of these is considered influential in both the onset and development of religiosity and delinquency. Additionally, the two parental religion measures are allowed to influence the delinquency of their adolescent child at both waves, in order to provide both an estimate of the baseline influence as well as possible change in that influence.

The path model does not explicitly include such influences as age and gender because this analysis seeks to understand the variations in its influence across age and gender. To accomplish this, I employ multigroup analysis to test the model among age and gender groups, two characteristics that are strongly related to both delinquency and religiosity (Moffitt 1993). The path model is designed to test for direct and indirect relationships between parent religion and delinquency over the two waves while correcting for measurement error within the latent variables. The key reason I bypass a simple difference model in favor of a lagged effects model is that I am interested in how parent religiosity and affiliation predict both baseline delinquency levels in children as well as change in those levels. Second, the evidence for a “state dependence” or “behavioral continuity” effect in delinquency—the likelihood that past delinquency lowers resistance to future delinquency—is theoretically and empirically strong (Nagin and Paternoster 1991). In other words, delinquency lends itself to lagged effects. Third, accounting for prior delinquency helps control for “unobserved heterogeneity,” or other individual characteristics that have not been included in the model but that likely influence delinquency. This approach is common in previous

research (Matsueda and Anderson 1998). The result is a dynamic picture of how religion affects delinquency over time.

DATA AND METHODS

Data Source

The data for this analysis come from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, a longitudinal nationally representative study of adolescents in grades 7–12. “Add Health,” as it is commonly referred to, is a school-based study of health-related behaviors designed to explore the causes of these behaviors, with an emphasis on social context. The Add Health study was funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD) and 17 other federal agencies. Fieldwork was conducted by the National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago. Data were gathered from adolescents themselves, from their parents, siblings, friends, romantic partners, fellow students, and from school administrators. Further details regarding the sample and methods of study can be found in Bearman, Jones, and Udry (1997). Respondents were interviewed in their homes twice, with an approximate one-year interval between interviews. I use both waves of data in this analysis. The first wave of in-home interviews was conducted between April and December 1995. The second wave took place between April and August 1996. Prior to list-wise deletion of missing values, the working sample size is 11,890 students, with an identical number of parents. Given its multiple waves and large sample size, Add Health is arguably the best current data source for examining religious effects on adolescent delinquency, especially for scholars concerned with change in behavior over time, and explanatory rather than associational relationships.

Measures

As indicators of the latent religiosity construct among parents (answered typically by an adolescent’s mother) at the first wave, I use three measures. Respondents were asked to report their: (1) frequency of attendance at religious services, (2) frequency of personal prayer, and (3) the importance of religion in their lives. Both adolescent and parental respondents that self-identified as having no religious affiliation in a previous question were skipped for all subsequent religiosity questions. I have recoded these to the lowest levels of religiosity in order to retain them in the sample. This is preferable to dropping the cases, and is a conservative solution. Although clearly contributing to the problem of measurement error in the constructs, I correct for much of this by estimating measurement errors in the model. The religiosity measure for the adolescent child includes these same three plus a fourth measure: attendance at church youth activities such as Bible studies or choir. Having a parent self-report of religiosity minimizes the method variance bias resulting from relying on adolescents for an assessment of their parents’ religiosity.

Nine indicators comprise the latent construct of serious delinquency for both waves. They are each count outcomes measured by self-report, with a range of 0–3. Respondents were asked to mark the number of times during the past 12 months (or in Wave II, since the month of the last interview) the respondent participated in that form of delinquency. The nine measures are: paint graffiti on another’s property, deliberately damage another’s property, go into a house or building to steal something, shoplift, steal something worth less than \$50, steal something worth more than \$50, use or threaten to use a weapon against someone, take part in a group fight, and sell marijuana or other drugs.

Perceived family satisfaction and autonomy comprise the final two latent constructs. Family satisfaction is measured by three variables: how much the respondent felt that their family understood them, how much fun they had with their family, and how much they felt their family paid attention to them. Each measure is a parallel five-point Likert scale. The level of autonomy

is constructed as a latent variable from seven dichotomous measures of freedoms the respondent perceives to enjoy. The questions were asked in the form: "Do your parents let you make your own decisions about . . ." and allowable answers were "yes" or "no." The seven topics are: the time you (the respondent) must be home on weekend nights, the people you hang around with, what you wear, what you eat, how much television you watch, which television programs you watch, and when you go to bed on weeknights.

Parental conservative Protestantism is the only explicitly observed variable in the model. It is a dichotomous measure of whether the parent interviewed self-identified as belonging to a Baptist, Assemblies of God, Pentecostal, Adventist, or Holiness denomination. This is a proxy measure of conservative Protestantism, since conservative Protestants are found outside these broad affiliations. Gender and three age categories (ages 11–14, 15–16, 17+) comprise subgroups of the data for which I test the invariance of several path coefficients in the model.

Method of Estimation

Latent variable structural equation models were used to examine the theoretical model presented in Figure 1. Weighted least squares estimates of the model coefficients were obtained using tetrachoric and polychoric correlation matrices as input into LISREL 8. I used WLS estimators due to the categorical nature of the indicators for independent and dependent variables.

Since a clustered sampling design was used in Add Health, minor cluster effects due to heterogeneity among classmates may remain. Differences among boys and girls, and young, middle, and older adolescents were assessed using multigroup analysis. My purpose in employing multigroup analysis is restricted to comparing the fit of individual parameters of *religious* variables on Wave I and II delinquency. In other words, for each pair of groups (i.e., boys and girls) I compare the equality of five separate parameters, one at a time: parental religiosity and conservative Protestant affiliation on Wave I delinquency, the same two variables on Wave II delinquency, and adolescent religiosity on Wave II delinquency. I use a chi-square difference test (one degree of freedom) to assess parameter equality.

I assess the goodness of fit of the models tested here by several means. First, the parameter estimates themselves offer an important test of the model. Second, I use the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) statistic, which determines relative fit per degree of freedom used. An RMSEA of 0.05 is suggested to be an upper boundary of adequate fit for a model. Third, I display a model's adjusted goodness of fit (AGFI). The AGFI measures the relative amount of the variances and covariances in the S sample matrix that are predicted by $\hat{\Sigma}$, the estimated population matrix, adjusted for the degrees of freedom of a model relative to the number of variables in it. Values nearing 1.0 are considered to have good fit.

RESULTS

Table 1 displays mean scores for the outcome variables in Figure 1, split by several religious categories. Distinct (though modest) differences characterize most outcomes by the parent and adolescent religious measures. Parent and adolescent religious service attendance and importance of faith display significant differences on each outcome measure. Each is related to significantly higher family satisfaction, lower autonomy, and lower delinquency at both waves. Gender differences appear among most outcomes as well, in similarly protective directions. Age differences are not as substantial as gender differences, although they are present. Although church attendance does significantly decline across age groups (result not shown), the overall religiosity score does not so differ.

To test the structural model in Figure 1, the measurement and path models were jointly estimated as a single system. The measurement model parameter estimates and fit scores are available upon request. Overall, the results suggest that the measurement portion of the model

TABLE 1
MEAN LEVELS OF OUTCOMES BY PARENT AND CHILD RELIGIOUS CHARACTERISTICS

	Delinquency at Wave I	Delinquency at Wave II	Family Satisfaction	Level of Autonomy	Religiosity at Wave I
<i>Parent Characteristics</i>					
Attends religious services weekly	1.56	1.26*	11.55*	4.11	13.85*
Attends religious services less than weekly	1.77	1.52*	11.24*	4.23	9.74*
Conservative Protestant affiliation	1.51*	1.20*	11.39	4.05*	12.27*
Another religious affiliation (or none)	1.78*	1.53*	11.33	4.25*	10.77*
Religion is “very important”	1.57*	1.31*	11.48*	4.11	12.74*
Religion is not “very important”	1.90*	1.60*	11.16*	4.31	8.92*
<i>Adolescent Characteristics</i>					
Attends religious services weekly	1.38*	1.14*	11.72*	4.03*	NA
Attends religious services less than weekly	1.90*	1.60*	11.12*	4.29*	NA
Religion is “very important”	1.21*	1.10*	11.88*	4.01*	NA
Religion is not “very important”	2.04*	1.65*	10.98*	4.31*	NA
Adolescent child is female	1.27*	1.10*	11.21*	4.18	11.62*
Adolescent child is male	2.12*	1.75*	11.48*	4.20	10.86*
Age 12	1.42	1.48	12.31+	3.55*	11.65
Age 15	1.94	1.48	11.09+	4.25*	11.30
Age 18	1.59	1.14	11.14+	4.90*	10.36

*Mean is significantly different (at 0.05 level) from comparison category appearing above/below it.

+Means differ significantly among the different age groups, though not all differ significantly from each other.

presented in Figure 1 fits the data quite well for both parents and adolescents. All the factor loadings were quite significant. The measures are thus sufficiently reliable as indicators of parent and adolescent religiosity and delinquency. It should be noted as well that there was a significant level of measurement error for each of the measures of the five latent constructs.

Table 2 displays WLS parameter estimates of the structural model, both for the overall sample and the five subgroups. I focus on the overall fit of the model, some interesting overall findings, and emergent patterns among the subgroups. I discuss the results found in Table 3 along with those in Table 2 together, split into three sections: the overall sample, the gender subgroups, and the age subgroups, since discussing the path analysis should not be separated from discussing their indirect and total effects on the outcomes.

Overall Sample

Beginning with the total sample—in the first column of Table 2—the fit of the model appears quite good. The paths appear to be acceptable ones for this analysis. Family satisfaction comprises the strongest preventive path. Increasing autonomy, on the other hand, is mildly related to greater baseline delinquency.

Although the direct path from parental religiosity to delinquency at the first (baseline) wave appears to be insignificant, conservative Protestantism’s path is strongly negative, suggesting a direct protective effect. Indirect influences (from Table 3) tell a quite different story. Since parental religiosity is positively linked to family satisfaction and negatively linked to autonomy, its indirect

TABLE 2
STANDARDIZED WLS PARAMETER ESTIMATES OF THE STRUCTURAL MODEL OF
INTERGENERATIONAL RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE

Structural Path	Total Sample	Males	Females	Below Age 15	Ages 15–16	Ages 17+
Parent religiosity→autonomy	−0.12***	−0.13***	−0.11***	−0.02	−0.16***	−0.18***
Parent religiosity→family satisfaction	0.16***	0.14***	0.22***	0.15***	0.18***	0.21***
Parent religiosity→adolescent religiosity	0.73***	0.74***	0.73***	0.76***	0.73***	0.66***
Parent religiosity→delinquency at Time 1	0.01	<u>0.04**</u>	<u>−0.05**</u>	<u>0.10***</u>	−0.05***	0.02
Parent religiosity→delinquency at Time 2	0.05*	0.02	0.07*	<u>0.07*</u>	0.05*	0.20***
Conservative Protestant→autonomy	−0.04*	−0.02	−0.06*	−0.14***	−0.04*	−0.10***
Conservative Protestant→family satisfaction	−0.04*	−0.02	−0.07***	0.01	−0.06**	0.06**
Conservative Protestant→adolescent religiosity	0.02*	0.02	0.05***	0.00	0.02	0.08***
Conservative Protestant→delinquency at Time 1	−0.09***	−0.08***	−0.11***	<u>−0.09***</u>	−0.05**	−0.19***
Conservative Protestant→delinquency at Time 2	−0.04**	<u>−0.05***</u>	<u>0.01</u>	−0.04*	−0.04**	−0.05**
Adolescent Religiosity→delinquency at Time 2	−0.05*	−0.01	−0.08**	<u>−0.09***</u>	−0.02	−0.17***
Autonomy→adolescent religiosity	−0.07***	−0.03*	−0.11***	−0.05***	−0.11***	0.04**
Autonomy→delinquency at Time 1	0.03*	0.03*	0.07***	0.13***	0.02	0.07***
Family satisfaction→adolescent religiosity	0.12***	0.13***	0.10***	0.12***	0.08***	0.13***
Family satisfaction→delinquency at Time 1	−0.36***	−0.39***	−0.39***	−0.47***	−0.31***	−0.40***
Delinquency at Time 1→delinquency at Time 2	0.74***	0.68***	0.86***	0.77***	0.79***	0.78***
<i>N</i>	11,046	5,384	5,662	3,629	4,751	2,666
RMSEA	0.031	0.036	0.035	0.044	0.040	0.056
Adjusted goodness of fit	0.99	0.98	0.98	0.98	0.98	0.97

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

For religion-on-delinquency coefficients:

Italics = significant difference between 1st and 2nd age groups.

Underline = significant difference between 1st and 3rd age groups, or between males and females.

Bold = significant difference between 2nd and 3rd age groups.

TABLE 3
STANDARDIZED ESTIMATES OF THE TOTAL AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF PARENTAL
RELIGIOUS CHARACTERISTICS ON ADOLESCENT'S DELINQUENCY

Sample and Effects	Predictor Variable		Sample and Effects	Predictor Variable	
	Parent Religiosity	Parent Conservative Protestant		Parent Religiosity	Parent Conservative Protestant
<i>Overall Sample</i>			<i>Younger Adolescence Sample</i>		
Total effects on Wave I delinquency	-0.06***	-0.08***	Total effects on Wave I delinquency	0.03	-0.12***
Indirect effects on Wave I delinquency	-0.06***	0.01*	Indirect effects on Wave I delinquency	-0.07***	-0.02
Total effects on Wave II delinquency	-0.03**	-0.09***	Total effects on Wave II delinquency	0.02	-0.13***
Indirect effects on Wave II delinquency	-0.08***	-0.06***	Indirect effects on Wave II delinquency	-0.05	-0.09***
<i>Male Sample</i>			<i>Middle Adolescence Sample</i>		
Total effects on Wave I delinquency	-0.02	-0.08***	Total effects on Wave I delinquency	-0.11***	-0.04*
Indirect effects on Wave I delinquency	-0.06***	0.01	Indirect effects on Wave I delinquency	-0.06***	0.02**
Total effects on Wave II delinquency	0.00	-0.11***	Total effects on Wave II delinquency	-0.06***	-0.07***
Indirect effects on Wave II delinquency	-0.02	-0.05***	Indirect effects on Wave II delinquency	-0.10***	-0.03*
<i>Female Sample</i>			<i>Older Adolescence Sample</i>		
Total effects on Wave I delinquency	-0.14***	-0.08***	Total effects on Wave I delinquency	-0.07***	-0.22***
Indirect effects on Wave I delinquency	-0.09***	0.03**	Indirect effects on Wave I delinquency	-0.10***	-0.03**
Total effects on Wave II delinquency	-0.11***	-0.07***	Total effects on Wave II delinquency	0.02	-0.24***
Indirect effects on Wave II delinquency	-0.18***	-0.07***	Indirect effects on Wave II delinquency	-0.17***	-0.18***

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

and total effects are strongly negative. The protective influence of conservative Protestant parents, however, is entirely direct. In fact, given its negative link with perceived family satisfaction, its indirect influence on Wave I delinquency is slightly positive.

In addition to Wave I influence, parental religiosity and conservative Protestantism are each surprisingly linked to change in delinquency, or Wave II delinquency when controlling for Wave I delinquency. The former is linked to minor growth in delinquency while the latter is linked to a decline. Both, however, remain strongly negative in their indirect and total influence on change in delinquency. Adolescent religiosity, largely a product of parental religiosity, also displays a significant negative influence on Wave II delinquency, even when controlling for previous delinquent behavior and the ongoing influence of the two sources of parent religious influence. Overall, then, the path model for the total sample suggests a minor direct influence and significantly larger indirect influence for parental religiosity and conservative Protestant identity.

Male and Female Subgroups

As noted above, I conducted multigroup analysis for the path model on males and females, as well as three age subgroups. Two of the five tested paths are significantly different for males than for females. The first of these is the influence of parent religiosity on delinquency at Wave I. Here, interestingly enough, the effect for each is significant but in different directions. Among adolescent boys, increases in parent religiosity are associated with increases in delinquency. Among females, the story is just the opposite, which may explain the null effect in the total sample. Lest one prematurely conclude that devout parental religion leads to adolescent male rebellion, the influence of a conservative Protestant parent is protective for *both* boys and girls. However, it remains protective at Wave II for boys only.

In sum, religiosity (both parent and adolescent) appears to be an ineffective protector for boys, but a very effective one for girls. This conclusion is reinforced in Table 3, where the total effects of parent religiosity on Waves I and II delinquency for boys is nearly null and insignificant, while for girls it is a strong -0.14 and -0.11 , respectively. A protective effect of religiosity for boys is present, though entirely indirect (on Wave I) through both autonomy and family satisfaction.

Age Subgroups

Adolescence spans approximately eight years and delinquency is typically thought to rise quickly from its onset in early adolescence and peak during mid-adolescence before a slow decline into young adulthood. Given this, testing the model across three age groups seemed more appropriate than across two. Indeed, four of the five tested direct paths between religion and delinquency display significant differences among age categories. Only the effect of conservative Protestant parent on Wave II delinquency was statistically equivalent across all age groups. As with the gender comparison described above, the path between parental religiosity and first wave delinquency displayed opposite directions among different groups. For the youngest sample, high parent religiosity predicted greater delinquency. For the middle adolescents, the opposite was true. And for older adolescents, there appears to be no direct relationship at all between the two.

A look at Table 3 mediates these contrasts to some degree. A significantly negative indirect relationship with Wave I delinquency among younger adolescents mitigates the positive direct relationship between parent religiosity and delinquency. In fact, all age groups display this negative indirect relationship. Such a peculiar direct-effects finding is not repeated among conservative Protestant parents. Their influence on Wave I delinquency is persistently negative. Nevertheless, it is significantly more protective among the oldest adolescents. Again, as with the overall and gender samples, the total effect of conservative Protestantism on delinquency at the first wave is tempered by the relative lack of indirect influence (except among older youth), a pattern that stands in stark contrast to that of parental religiosity.

A similar increasing influence pattern of direct effects emerges between parental religiosity and Wave II (or change in) delinquency when controlling for previous delinquent behavior. The positive path that was evident in the overall sample is also evident in the age-graded analysis for all but the youngest adolescents. But older adolescents (with more devoutly religious parents) appear significantly more likely than even middle adolescents to increase their participation in delinquency, suggesting modest support for a possible deviance amplification effect found in at least one previous study (Peek, Curry, and Chalfant 1985).

Finally, and equally curious, is the relationship between an adolescent's own religiosity and delinquency at Wave II when controlling for parent religiosity and previous delinquency. The strongest protective effect is found during later adolescence. And while a negative path is likewise visible among younger adolescents, the relationship is null during middle adolescence.

In sum, both gender and age differences among the paths suggest that the structural model fits age and gender groups quite differently, though seldom along any evident systematic bases. One very visible pattern, established in the overall and gender-differentiated samples, continues through the age-graded sample. Conservative Protestants' weak or insignificant relationship with autonomy and family satisfaction fails to bolster what is otherwise a strong direct effect on initial delinquency. Parent religiosity appears to follow the *reverse* path: a weak or unstable direct effect on delinquency, but a strong indirect one through its influence on autonomy and family satisfaction.

Finally, in order to briefly assess whether the findings here may be contingent upon racial or ethnic distinctions, as well as the parent's (mother's) education and the respondent's age and its squared term, I conducted ancillary analyses of the model undertaken using observed variables (including summed indices) in OLS regression. Adding racial and ethnic categories served to clarify and intensify, not mask, the relationships between religion and delinquency. Controlling for gender, however, curbed the significant path between adolescent's religiosity and delinquency. The parental religious influences remained constant. Additionally, I tested whether it mattered that *both* parents were conservative Protestant when contrasted with only one parent. The short answer is "yes." For several pathways, including autonomy and both waves of delinquency, no relationship existed unless both parents were conservative Protestant. However, in the structural model analysis discussed above I employ whether the *respondent* parent is a conservative Protestant—and in fully 80 percent of such cases the spouse was also a conservative Protestant. In sum, though, spousal religious congruence here does matter.

DISCUSSION

Sociologists and criminologists who study religious influence have generally concluded that little relationship exists between adolescent religiosity and more serious forms of delinquency such as theft, fighting, and violence. In doing so, they may be overlooking the important developmental link between parent and child. Indeed, there is a complexity to the relationship of religion with delinquency, but it is not one of finding any relationship at all. It is, rather, about understanding what appears to be a varying relationship—by age, gender, and form of religious influence (Baier and Wright 2001). This study confirms such a portrayal.

To review, then, these are the research questions I have sought to answer: Do parental religious traits and behaviors influence adolescent delinquency? Does adolescent religiosity matter, even though I account for parent's religiosity? Are these direct or indirect effects? And do these relationships vary by age and gender?

First, results from tests of the structural path model displayed in Figure 1 revealed that religious traits of *both* parent and child curb more serious forms of delinquency than just drinking and smoking. Parental religiosity, nevertheless, varied considerably in its influence. Conservative Protestant affiliation appears consistently (but only directly) protective. Despite the small one-year period between waves, influences on change in delinquency still appear. Other studies (e.g., Elder and Conger 2000) also found a relationship between religiosity and change in delinquent behavior.

Table 2 displays numerous significant indirect effects of both parental religiosity and conservative Protestant affiliation, several of which stand *in contrast* to their direct effects. This was evident for conservative Protestant parents, whose indirect effects on Wave I delinquency for girls and middle adolescents were negative. Parent religiosity, on the other hand, was consistently protective in an indirect manner, but directly aggravating, for boys and younger adolescents.

Striking differences were revealed when the sample was split by gender and age categories. This is, perhaps, the most significant contribution this analysis makes—that during the adolescent years the religion of one's parents may not provide a uniformly protective influence on their children. For girls, it is largely protective against baseline (Wave I) delinquency, but only indirectly so for change (Wave II controlling for Wave I) in delinquency. For boys, the potential protection that parents' religiosity might afford appears to backfire. It is directly linked with greater delinquency initially, and is unrelated to change in same. Nevertheless, there remains a protective religious influence on boys through the conservative Protestant affiliation of their parent(s), as well as the indirect influences of parental religiosity. Nevertheless, the conservative Protestant effects were largely mitigated if only one parent self-identified as such.

In their meta-analysis of the effect of religion on crime, Baier and Wright (2001) documented that large data sets, secular samples, and nonviolent measures of delinquency all contributed to finding larger effects of religion on crime. My analysis of Add Health data displays none of those traits—except that my dependent variable includes some nonviolent though serious acts of delinquency—yet still shows evident religious effects. To further put the uniqueness of these findings in perspective, Cochran, Wood, and Arneklev (1994) found that religious effects disappeared after controlling for family and peer influences on all but drug and alcohol use. Similarly, Benda and Corwyn (1997) found in their study of 1,093 public school adolescents that general social control measures displaced most religious effects on *status* offenses—the type of outcome most often associated with stronger religious effects in Baier and Wright's (2001) meta-analysis. Bahr, Hawks, and Wang (1993), examining 322 adolescents in a western state, applied a complex modeling approach to assessing religion's influence, yet found that after accounting for peer drug use, parental cohesion and adolescent religiosity showed no relationship with either cocaine or marijuana use or general substance abuse. Parental monitoring, however, remained important. Their follow-up study (Bahr et al. 1998), however, showed that more religious respondents displayed less marijuana and amphetamine/depressant use in a random sample of Utah youth.

Parents and children do live linked lives, and given that parents provide a considerable share of their children's internalized values or "moral stock," shared religious practices are a logical place to begin a religion/delinquency analysis. Yet while religious practices may be shared, the strength and resolve with which parent and adolescent hold their religious beliefs can clearly differ, as can behavior. Moreover, family and religious influences are best understood not as competing claims on youth behavior, but as complementary ones. Since Pearce and Haynie (2001) also document strong parent/child religious effects on delinquency, the developmental and intergenerational argument outlined and tested here seems increasingly appropriate for the study of religious effects on deviance and crime.

Although affirming the appropriateness of a longitudinal path model, the results nevertheless raise several interpretative questions that I want to briefly note here. Why does parental religiosity display such widely varying influence on delinquency—both between the sexes and by age groups? And why is parental conservative Protestantism more consistently protective than religiosity? It is well beyond the scope of this article to fully explore answers to these questions, but I think it appropriate to touch upon possible explanations for the varied and contingent relationships documented here.

Teenage boys, it would appear, are more likely than girls to join in rather than shun delinquency when their parents are devoutly religious. Cernkovich and Giordano (1987) report a similarly puzzling positive relationship between close family communication and delinquency among white males. In fact, several studies conclude that parental methods of social control on delinquency vary in effect by age and gender and can have unintentionally deleterious results (Rankin and Wells

1990; Seydlitz 1993). One plausible interpretation might follow Peek, Curry, and Chalfant's (1985) argument that some teenagers experience a "deviance amplification" of sorts. Their study finds that diminishing religiosity on the part of the adolescent is associated with a greater-than-expected rise in deviant behavior as these youth "make up for lost time." Extending such an argument here, persistent intensive religiosity in parents, while initially serving to foster the same in their children, may, *among some*, provoke a rejection of the parents' values at some point during adolescence.

Inferences from moral development (e.g., Gilligan 1982) may also prove helpful. Like physical maturation, girls' moral maturation (in the West) appears more rapid than boys'. Specifying morality in religious terms, it is likely that girls are quicker to universalize religiously-inspired behavioral norms than boys. "Duty-based" and "other-oriented" norms are slower to form in the latter, developing more rapidly in early adulthood alongside significant life-course transitions such as marriage and child rearing. In other words, boys are more likely to compartmentalize religious beliefs and behaviors than are girls, and for longer duration. By extension, as boys mature morally more slowly than girls, messages prompting the integration of faith with external behavior offered by devout parents may meet resistance.

Although the gender contrasts in religious influence seem to adhere to developmental assumptions about the gendered nature of delinquency, the age differences—with respect to religious influence—do not easily lend themselves to such parallels. Indeed, parental influence as a whole on antisocial behavior is thought to have receded by middle—and certainly by later—adolescence (Catalano and Hawkins 1996). However, other studies (including Munsch and Blyth 1993), in keeping with the results displayed here, do not concur. It is noteworthy in the results presented here that parent religiosity is increasingly related to restricted freedom across the cohorts. Younger adolescents have fewer freedoms regardless of the religious devotion of the parents, but among older teens those with very religious parents clearly differ from their peers. This may be in part what underlies the increase in delinquency that is visible with respect to parental religiosity, in keeping with the "deviance amplification" thesis. Since adolescent religiosity is negatively related to change in delinquency—except for a null effect among middle adolescents—it may be that children of devout parents who fail to internalize their parents' practices as their own may be at greatest risk for increases in delinquency.

Directions for Future Research

Although this analysis has benefited from an intergenerational approach that accounts for both direct and indirect effects, it is not without its limits. Chief among them is the unidirectional flow of influence as modeled in Figure 1. Delinquency does shape religiosity (Benda 1997) and very likely reduces family satisfaction. Future research would test the reciprocal effects of delinquency on both family and religious influences. I have tested the appropriateness of the model among gender and age categories; however, there are additional groupings that may prove helpful to have tested. Breaking down gender and age into gender/age groups may assist in understanding some of the current findings. Additional groups that may have profited from analysis include different family structures (intact, step, single parent), socioeconomic classes, and religious identities or affiliations (e.g., theological conservatives, Catholic, mainline Protestant, Pentecostal). In a compelling study of the influence of religiosity on black and white youths' drug use, Amey, Albrecht, and Miller (1996) found that religiosity was much more likely to predict abstention in whites than in blacks. Thus, the intergenerational model I present here may also vary among racial and ethnic groups.

Additionally, there are obviously other important pathways (e.g., peer relationships, school attachment, etc.) that a more comprehensive analysis of religion and delinquency ought to investigate. Assessing the most efficacious aspects of religiosity on delinquency would also augment this research. Both in Amey, Albrecht, and Miller (1996) and in Foshee and Hollinger (1996), the aspect of parental or youth religiosity that was most influential in curbing drug and alcohol use was actual religious service attendance, rather than more private forms of religiosity or their particular religious affiliation. Finally, given that parental religious congruence affected how

conservative Protestantism shaped adolescent delinquency, more attention should be paid to both this form and other forms of parent and child religious dissimilarity (see Pearce and Haynie 2001 for an example of such a study).

CONCLUSION

The results of this analysis suggest that the religious traits and behaviors of parents wield notable influence on their children's delinquent behavior. However, parents have not often been the focus of religion and delinquency research. Coupled with research designs that failed to explore direct and indirect relationships, a number of previous studies may have masked a link between religion and serious forms of adolescent delinquency. This analysis tested an intergenerational model of religious influence on delinquent behavior. Parental religious devotion appears to protect girls better than boys. In fact, it may in some circumstances amplify delinquency among boys, at least when controlling for other important influences such as autonomy and family satisfaction. Although previous studies have often shown parental religiosity to generally socialize children toward pro-social ends, obedience and behavioral rules appear to be more highly valued among conservative Protestant parents (Ellison and Sherkat 1993). In keeping with the latter, this analysis concludes that parents who profess a conservative Protestant affiliation are more apt to directly prevent and reduce delinquency among their adolescent children.

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