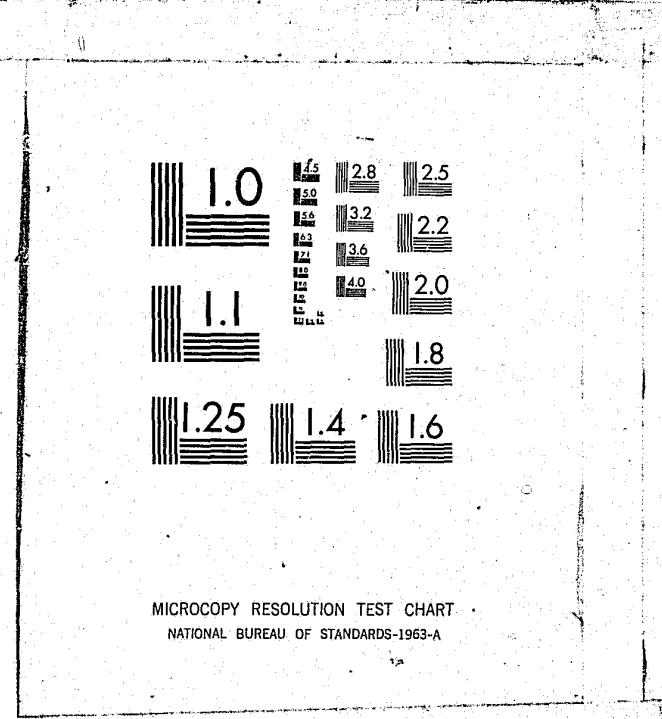


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RELIGION AND DELINQUENCY:
THE ECOLOGY OF A 'LOST' RELATIONSHIP

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By:

Rodney Stark
Professor, Sociology

Lori Kent and Daniel P. Doyle
Research Assistants

National Center for the Assessment of Delinquent
Behavior and Its Prevention

October, 1979

Joseph G. Weis, Director
Richard Janvier, Assistant Director

Center for Law and Justice
University of Washington
JD-45

Seattle, Washington 98195
(206) 543-1485

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RELIGION AND DELINQUENCY:
THE ECOLOGY OF A "LOST" RELATIONSHIP

Confusion has developed in the literature over whether or not religious commitment decreases delinquent behavior. In this paper we show that the effects of individual religiousness on delinquency depend upon the overall religiousness of the social environment. In communities where religiousness is the norm, variations in individual religiousness do have a substantial effect on delinquency. However, in highly secularized communities religion is unable to restrain the behavior even of its firm adherents. Hence, initial studies reporting no effect are explained because they were based on highly secular West Coast communities. Using a national sample of 16 year old boys, from 87 high schools, we show that very substantial negative relations exist between religious commitment and delinquency in the majority of schools--those characterized by majorities who are religious. But, the relationships drop to zero when examined in highly secularized schools. The theoretical implications of these marked ecological effects are assessed.

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RELIGION AND DELINQUENCY: THE ECOLOGY OF A 'LOST' RELATIONSHIP

The publication of "Hellfire and Delinquency" (Hirschi and Stark, 1969) confounded social scientific as well as common sense views of delinquency. In that paper it was reported that religious commitment was not related to delinquent behavior, whether measured by self-reports or by official records. Young people who believed that hell awaits sinners were not less likely than those lacking such a belief to be delinquent. Young people who attended church and Sunday school regularly also were no less prone to commit offenses than were those without church connections. Nor did the religious behavior of parents have any impact on their children's delinquency.

These findings challenged long-held views about the nature of the moral order. At least since Durkheim, social scientists have been convinced that a primary function of religion is to instill moral convictions and to sanction the normative system. Yet the data showed no evidence that immersion in religious organizations or belief in hellfire restrained behavior.

The Hirschi and Stark paper quickly became the accepted word on the subject, frequently cited and widely reprinted. Although, as Hirschi and Stark acknowledge, several older studies had found some evidence for a slight religious effect on delinquency, these findings seemed suspect in the light of the better sample, the better measures of religiousness,

and the more adequate analysis of the Hirschi and Stark paper. Soon, the knowledge that religion fails to guide teenagers along the straight and narrow was enshrined in undergraduate textbooks.

Yet the findings remained perplexing to those social scientists more concerned with the sociology of religion than with the correlates of delinquency. How was it possible that religion has no impact on behavior so intimately a part of fundamental conceptions of sin? These concerns prompted several replication studies. The first of these, however, led to only the most trivial amendment of the original Hirschi and Stark findings. In a study of teenagers from several cities of the Pacific Northwest, Burkett and White (1974) found that religious commitment did reduce the probability that teenagers would use drugs or alcohol. But they found no religious impact on other kinds of delinquency. And so the mystery of missing religious effects persisted.

Recently, however, two attempted replications yielded very different results (Higgins and Albrecht, 1977; Albrecht, Chadwick, and Alcorn, 1977). The first of these was based on a sample of teenagers in Atlanta, Georgia. The data revealed strong negative correlations between church attendance and delinquency. The second was based on a sample of Mormon young people living in six wards (congregations) of the Mormon Church. Two wards were in rural towns in Southern Idaho where the population is almost wholly Mormon. Two were from a medium-

sized community in Utah, again largely Mormon, and two were from suburbs of Los Angeles, both heavily but not so exclusively Mormon. This study also found a substantial negative correlation between religious beliefs and practices and delinquency.

Moreover, a search of the literature reveals a fifth paper on the topic, published in late 1970 by Rhodes and Reiss. Based on data the authors had collected more than a decade earlier in Nashville, Tennessee, the paper made no mention of the Hirschi and Stark findings, and it, in turn, was cited in only one of the three attempts to replicate "Hellfire and Delinquency." Shortcomings in the conceptualization of "the religious factor" used by Rhodes and Reiss seem to have diverted their attention and caused them to conclude they had found little of interest.¹ Indeed, they ended their paper with this sentence:

Nonetheless, given problems of measurement where there are low rates of deviance for populations, the crudeness of many sociological measures, and the likely possibility that religious effects, if there be such, are small, we would discourage the rather simple analyses that have characterized most of the research on religion and delinquency reported in the literature (p. 98, italics added).

However, even a cursory examination of the data they presented indicates a very substantial negative effect of church attendance on delinquency.

As things stand, the empirical findings are contradictory and confusing--two against, three for. Does religion sanction the normative system or doesn't it?

In the conclusion of their paper based on Atlanta, Higgins and Albrecht suggested that a possible reason their findings differed so from those of Hirschi and Stark might be because "religion is more of a concern in the South than it is in California...." (1977:957).

In this paper we argue that this is in fact the key that will unlock the mystery of the contradictory empirical findings. We argue that religious effects on delinquency vary according to ecological conditions, namely the religious climate of the community studied.

The initial Hirschi and Stark finding that religion does not constrain delinquent behavior is a mystery only if we restrict our view to a wholly individualistic, psychological model of how religion exerts influence on behavior. So long as we restrict ourselves to thinking that religious beliefs concerning the punishment of sin function entirely as elements within the individual psychic economy, causing guilt and fear in the face of temptations to deviate from the norms, we may or may not find confirmatory evidence. However, if we take a more social view of human affairs it becomes plausible to argue that religion only serves to bind people to the moral order if religious influences permeate the culture and the social interactions of the individuals in question. More specifically, in social groups wherein a religious sanctioning system is the mode and receives everyday expression, the propensity to deviate from the norms will be influenced substantially by the degree of one's commitment to the religious sanctioning system. However, where the religious sanctioning system is not pervasive, the effects of individual religious

commitment will be muffled and curtailed. In such a setting religion will not find everyday expression, but will tend to be a highly compartmentalized part of the lives even of its adherents. In such a setting religious concerns will be manifest only during Sunday school or church, but ordinarily will not enter into discussions on the school ground or at other times and places where young people congregate and interact. Conversely, when religion does permeate the culture of a group, questions about the "rightness," in religious terms, of some action will tend to come up.

This view of how religion sanctions the normative system is, in fact, more in keeping with traditional theory than is a purely psychological model. When one reads Durkheim's (1915) discussions of how religion supports the moral order, for example, one finds the clear assumption that religion is a living, salient feature of the group: religion is not said to make the individual afraid to sin, but to bind its adherents into a "moral community."

It is important to recognize that this aspect of religion on which sociological theories rest is a variable. Societies and groups vary in the extent to which they are bound by religion into a moral community. In highly secularized, 20th century, industrial societies, many people may not inhabit a moral community. Indeed, examination of Richmond, California, where the original hellfire and delinquency data were collected, suggests it does not much resemble a moral community permeated by a religious sanctioning system that binds residents to the moral order. And, since Burkett and White's (1974) data also

come from the West Coast, they also were drawn from a highly secularized social climate. Later in this paper we report that the West Coast is much more secularized than is the rest of the nation.

On the other hand, Atlanta, Georgia, where the initial findings of a strong negative relationship between religiousness and delinquency were found, may well be more akin to the moral community as Durkheim conceived of it. By the same token, small Mormon communities would seem to exemplify the moral climate wherein religiousness ought to constrain deviant behavior. Indeed, it is part of the Mormon genius that they can create and maintain highly integrated moral communities in the midst of even the largest cities.

As for Nashville, Tennessee, it is not only the "country music capital of the world," but it sometimes is also called the "Protestant Vatican" because of the number of national denominational headquarters, church publishing houses, and other religious organizations located there. Moreover, the kind of religion that predominates in Nashville is the "old time religion" they sing about at the Grand Ole Opry. Nashville too may constitute a moral community.

The fact that the five published studies seem to vary not only in their findings, but in the religious climate of the communities in which they were conducted, strongly points to an ecological solution to the question of whether religion constrains delinquency.

In this paper we seek to demonstrate that this is in fact the answer. First, we examine data from two additional communities which appear to differ greatly in the degree to which they constitute moral communities: Provo, Utah, and Seattle, Washington. We then examine data based on a national sample. If we are correct that the impact of individual religiousness on delinquency is contingent on the moral climate surrounding the individual, then we ought to be able to make the relationship vary by introducing an ecological measure of religiousness. If this occurs, then the mystery surrounding the contradictory literature is solved. Finally, we discuss reasons why religious commitment has for decades been "lost" from delinquency research.

PROVO: A MORAL COMMUNITY

We began our study by searching the archives for data sets on delinquency that contained measures of religious commitment. We also wanted these studies to be based on communities that represent extremes in terms of their religious climates. Both requirements were met by the well-known Provo study (Empey and Erickson, 1972).

The data are based on a sample of boys from Provo, Utah, the home of Brigham Young University. Provo is a town of about 50,000 people, the overwhelming majority of whom are Mormons. Provo is a highly religious community in contrast with Richmond, California. While Hirschi and Stark (1969) found that 37 percent of the white boys in Richmond attended

church weekly, 55 percent of the boys in Provo attended at least weekly and 29 percent of them went to church at least three times a week.

If we are correct that a relationship between religiousness and delinquency is contingent on the moral climate of the community, then such a relationship ought to show up strongly in these data.

Table 1 confirms our prediction. There is a very strong negative correlation (gamma $-.46$) between church attendance and a measure of official delinquency--based on the number of times a boy had been arrested. Similarly, there is a very strong negative correlation (gamma $-.45$) between church attendance and a self-report measure of delinquency.

Seventy-four percent of these boys were Mormons. The others were scattered among many religious groups: Catholics, Jews, and many Protestant denominations. None of these non-Mormon groups contained enough cases for separate analysis. However, there is no reason to suppose that denominational differences are important. When Table 1 was recomputed for Mormon boys only, the gammas were unchanged.

As social science research goes these are very large correlations. Indeed, they are as large or larger than those typically reported for those variables that are the center of attention in current assessments of delinquency, such as race, sex, IQ, and school performance (cf. Hirschi, 1969; Hirschi and Hindelang, 1977; and Harris, 1977). Yet, despite the fact that one might rate Provo as the closest thing to an ideal moral community of all those studied so far, the

correlations in Table 1 are not of unusual magnitude.

Instead, they are virtually identical to the Atlanta results: Higgins and Albrecht (1977) reported a gamma of $-.48$ between church attendance and an index of self-reported delinquency.

This suggests several things. First of all, the majority of American communities may constitute moral communities--it may be rare to find communities so secularized that individual religious commitment has no influence on delinquency. Secondly, moral climate may well not be a continuous variable. Instead, a threshold effect may exist here. That is, given a sufficient proportion of religious persons in the environment, the impact of religiousness on individual delinquency may be fully realized, and thus further increases in the degree to which a moral community exists may not increase the effect. We return to these matters later in this paper.

But, before we leave Provo behind it is worth pausing to consider what the state of the literature might be today had Hirschi and Stark been at Brigham Young rather than at Berkeley, and thus based their initial paper on data from Provo rather than from Richmond. Presumably, correlations of this magnitude would have been taken seriously, and religion would not have continued to languish as a "lost cause" of delinquency.² There has always been anxiety expressed over delinquency studies due to the fact that almost uniformly each has been based on a single community: Would the results generalize to other

communities? Agreement among studies has tended to allay those fears. But, here we see them justified. When it comes to the relationship between religion and delinquency it does appear to matter considerably where the data are collected.

SEATTLE: A SECULAR COMMUNITY?

In further pursuit of an ecological solution to the contradictory findings about religious effects on delinquency, we searched for a plausible instance of a highly secularized community wherein the initial Hirschi and Stark findings might replicate.

At this point in our investigation we were able to construct reliable church-membership rates for SMSAs and for all 50 states (Stark, in press). These data, which we use in another study to explore the impact of moral communities on the crime rate (Stark et al., forthcoming), reveal that in fact it is highly secular, not moral communities that are unusual in the United States. In most American cities more than half of the population are official church members--that is, their names appear on the membership roles of a specific organization. However, the most prominent feature of American church-membership is an "Unchurched Belt" stretching from the Mexican border through Anchorage, Alaska. Here, running along the shores of the Pacific are an unbroken string of communities with the lowest church-membership rates in the nation--only about a third of Pacific Coast residents are official church members.

Keeping in mind that the initial two studies finding that religion does not influence delinquency were based on Pacific Coast communities, it seemed plausible that only in this region do such results apply. We therefore sought a Pacific Coast study to further test our ecological explanations.

Fortunately, our colleagues Joseph Weis, Michael Hindelang, and Travis Hirschi have just completed a vast experiment to assess the validity of various self-report delinquency indices. In so doing they administered questionnaires to a sample of Seattle teenagers (Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis, 1980). Since Seattle has one of the lowest church-membership rates in the nation, these data were ideal for our purposes.

In order to make the most precise possible comparison with the original Hirschi and Stark findings we constructed two measures of delinquency using exactly the same items (Hirschi, 1969). And, to facilitate comparison with the other studies, we limited the analysis to males only.

The results are shown in Table 2. Church attendance is only very weakly related to either delinquency measure, the first based on the recency of delinquent acts (-.08), the second on the incidence of delinquent acts (-.13). When the item "How religious do you consider yourself?" is used to measure religiousness, identical, but very small, gammas result (-.14).

We note that these correlations are slightly stronger than those reported for Richmond, California by Hirschi and Stark. Yet, they are so weak as to be of virtually no substantive interest. Were these the strongest correlations to be found

between religion and delinquency there would be no reason to challenge Hirschi and Stark's original conclusions. Students of the causes of delinquency would have no reason to show interest in the role of religion.

But, in point of fact, these findings merely confirm our suspicions that the effects of religion depend upon the moral climate of communities. In the "Unchurched Belt" along the West Coast, individual religious commitment appears not to sustain conformity to the legal norms. But all of the studies we have seen from elsewhere in the nation, where church-membership remains the norm, show strong evidence in support of the centrality of religion for conformity.

The score now stands at three studies finding no religious effects, and four that do. All three no-findings studies were conducted in the highly secularized Far West region. These patterns offer very strong support to an ecological interpretation.

A NATIONWIDE SAMPLE³

In order to demonstrate conclusively that variations in the effect of religiousness on delinquency are ecological in origin, what is needed is a larger number of communities, particularly, as it turns out, a larger number of highly secularized communities. Thus, we were very excited when we discovered during our archival search that a large, well-executed national data set was available (Bachman, 1970).

The study design was longitudinal and four waves of data were collected from an initial sample of 10th grade boys, beginning in 1966 and following them through 1970. Our analysis is based on the 1966 wave. A multi-stage sampling technique resulted in the selection of 87 of the nation's high schools. Approximately 25 boys were selected from each school. Each boy was interviewed and also filled out a number of questionnaires and tests. One important defect marred the design. Very few blacks turned up in the sample other than those enrolled in the few predominantly black schools that fell into the sample. In a methodological warning attached to the codebook, the principal investigator warns against use of data on blacks in this study (Bachman, 1970). In keeping with this advice, we omitted all blacks from our analysis. While we regret this loss, the fact that a cluster design was utilized turned out to be of immense value for our research needs, as will be seen.

Turning to these data, the first vital question is the breadth of the relationship between religiousness and delinquency. Is this relationship to be found only in a few of the most intensely religious communities in the United States, or is it a relatively widespread effect? Put another way, are most American communities sufficiently religious so that an effect on delinquency occurs?

Table 3 offers a clear and quite resounding answer: There is a very substantial relationship between various measures of religiousness and self-report measures of delinquency.

The first measure of religiousness is a Religious Values Index constructed by four questionnaire items, contained in a lengthy battery headed by the question: "Is this a good thing for people to do?" The four statements concerning religion were:

1. "Being devout in one's religious faith."
2. "Always attending religious services regularly and faithfully."
3. "Always living one's religion in his daily life."
4. "Encouraging others to attend services and lead religious lives."

Response categories were the same for all items: six categories ranging from "very good," "good" to "bad" and "very bad." These items were scored to create a four-point index.

Table 3 shows that this index is strongly negatively correlated with three self-report measures of delinquency. The first is the frequency of trouble with the police. The second measure added up answers to 9 questions that asked how often the boy had committed particular acts such as taking things from stores and hitting his parents. This too is strongly related to the religious values index. The third measure of delinquency is based on the number out of 26 delinquent behaviors the respondent admitted committing at least once.

The second measure of religiousness consists of responses to a single question: "How important is religion in your life?"-- four response categories ranged from "very important" to "not

important." This measure is negatively related to delinquency even more strongly than is the Religious Values Index.

Since, as we point out below, this is a more direct measure of a boy's own religiousness, it ought to produce the strongest correlations with delinquency, and it does.

Finally, a measure of the frequency of the boy's church attendance, ranging from "about once a week or more" to "never" also is related negatively to delinquency. However, this aspect of religiousness is not as good a predictor of delinquency as are the other two measures. This is entirely consistent with past research on the nature of religious commitment (Stark and Glock, 1968). Many people attend church frequently who are not particularly religious in any other way--they do not believe in the theology of their church, they do not pray (except as part of the ritual of church services), nor do they think of themselves as concerned about religion. By the same token many persons who are very devout in other ways are infrequent church attenders, and some such persons never attend at all. Thus, if one is interested in measuring inner religiousness, church attendance is not as good a measure as are direct inquiries about what a person believes and feels. Moreover, in the case of teenage boys this measurement error is likely to be magnified because, compared with most adults, they have less control over whether or not they go to church. It is this less accurate measurement provided by church attendance that shows up in the weaker correlations between church attendance and delinquency shown in Table 3.

Since these are national data they suggest that, as we already suspected, it is not the case that moral communities are rare in the United States and that only in "Bible Belt" or Mormon communities is religion a substantial factor in constraining delinquent behavior. For the nation as a whole, religion serves to undergird the moral order just as Durkheim supposed, and as the many juvenile judges who have ordered delinquents to attend church and Sunday school took for granted.

Furthermore, the correlations were not changed when re-examined within a four-fold regionalization of the country. As we point out below, this measure violates important boundaries of the "religious geography" of the United States. Nonetheless, these regional results do not support the possibility that the nation-wide correlations are a misleading average produced by strong relationships in some parts of the nation balanced by weak or zero relations in other large sectors. On the other hand, the correlations in Table 3 are not as strong as those reported for Atlanta and Provo. This suggests that important ecological variations do exist and that careful analysis of these national data ought to uncover them.

MEASURING MORAL CLIMATES

Having found that substantial correlations exist between religiousness and delinquency in the nation as a whole, the next question is the degree to which variations in the correlations are the result of ecological influences. We have proposed that religion acts do inhibit individual norm

violations to the degree that the individual is embedded in a moral community. Where the surrounding community is permeated by religious beliefs and concerns, variations in individual religiousness will influence delinquency. But where the surrounding community is highly secular, the effects of individual religiousness will be muffled and will not influence delinquency.

To operationalize this hypothesis we needed a basis for separating the boys in this sample according to the religious climate of their social environments. Initially we hoped to construct a regional variable sufficiently sensitive to "religious geography" so that we could at least produce marked fluctuations in the strength of the correlations between religiousness and delinquency. These intentions initially were frustrated. Information concerning the location of each of the 87 schools had been collapsed into four huge regions. We were denied access to the specific state in which a sample school was located. However, what at first appeared hindrance was in fact beneficial. Trying to find alternative means to characterize moral climates caused us to better recognize what was needed.

A state is not a moral community. At least no state is the kind of moral community that people experience. As the term takes on significance as a social fact, moral communities describe the religious aspects of our immediate social setting, the one we experience in our daily social interactions. To

attempt to classify a boy as inhabiting a moral community or not on the basis of the state in which he lives gets much too far away from the boy. What is needed is some way to estimate the degree to which the immediate social environment of these boys resembles a moral community.

For this purpose the school is much preferable to either state or city as the unit of analysis. Therefore, we examined the distribution of the religious items among the boys from each of the 87 high schools. Our goal was to aggregate the individual data to classify the school environment.

When we re-examined the Religious Values Index we became convinced that the items in it were relatively ideal for our purposes. Recall that it did not ask boys about their own beliefs and behavior. Instead, it asked them how good or bad a thing it was for "people" to be religious in these ways. Clearly, this index will pick up a lot of the boy's own religiousness. However, it is entirely credible that a boy who personally is not very religious will think it a good thing for others to be religious. Indeed, to the extent that religious commitment is typical of those in the boy's environment, the more likely he ought to be to see such behavior as good even if it is not his personal pattern. It was this social aspect of the Religious Values Index that prompted us to use it as the basis for assessing the degree to which schools represented moral communities. Moreover, we were thereby able to hold in reserve for subsequent analysis

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the item that dealt directly with the boy's own religiousness:

"How important is religion in your life?"

When we examined the distribution of responses to the Religious Values Index within each of the 87 schools, the first thing we discovered was that in the overwhelming majority high levels of religiousness existed--indeed for the sample as a whole 53 percent of the boys scored in the top two points of the index. This is additional confirmation of our conclusion that in the United States it is highly secularized, rather than highly religious, moral climates that are exceptional. In consequence, our attention shifted from the task of isolating a subset of moral communities to that of isolating a subset of highly secularized communities.

At what point can it be said that a boy is surrounded by a secularized moral climate? When the majority of his peers are relatively irreligious. We therefore set our cutting point at 60 percent--a school was classified as a "secular community" if 60 percent or more of the sample of its students scored below the mean on the Religious Values Index (and if no more than 20 percent scored at the top of the index). This cutting point identifies those schools in which a substantial majority of students do not think it is particularly desirable for people to be devout and to manifest their faith in everyday life. It is precisely in such a setting that we have argued that religion tends to become compartmentalized and its effects on daily behavior attenuated.

Initially we also attempted to select a subset of schools with the most intensely religious moral climates. A number of cutting points were assessed. But we never found means to isolate a set of ideal moral communities smaller than the entire set not identified as secular communities. This might be due to problems of measurement. But we are inclined to think it reflects the threshold effect mentioned earlier in the paper. That is, once there are a substantial number of religious persons in a social network the effects of individual religiousness on delinquency are fully realized. Above this level, variations in the proportion of religious persons in the social network have no additional impact.

THE IMPACT OF MORAL CLIMATES

Since we used distributions on the Religious Values Index to separate the secular from the moral communities, problems of ~~mutual~~ autocorrelation limit use of that index as an independent variable at the individual level in the remainder of our analysis. However, the ecological impact of the index as a measure of moral climate can be examined. That is, if the moral climate of communities has impact on delinquency then there ought to be higher levels of delinquency in the secular communities than in the moral communities. Table 4 shows that this is noticeably the case. On each of the measures of delinquency shown, the level is lower in the moral communities.

We are now ready to examine the major hypothesis of this study: that the correlations between religiousness and delinquency will vary according to the moral climate of the communities in which they are examined. Table 5 confirms this hypothesis. On each of the three measures of delinquency, the correlation is substantially lower in the secular communities than in the moral communities.

It is quite true that even in this subset of the most secularized communities the correlations do not go to zero. In part this may be due to the fact that, because individual schools had to be classified on the basis of relatively small Ns, there was sufficient measurement error to limit the extent to which the correlations declined. But in large part it seems due to the fact that communities so highly secularized that the effects of individual religion on delinquency are fully stifled are quite rare in the United States. Indeed, there are substantial proportions of relatively religious boys even in these schools selected for being the most secularized. For example, in their responses to the item used as the independent variable in Table 5, only a minority (45%) of the boys in the secular communities said that religion was of little or no importance in their life. Forty percent said it was "pretty important" and 15 percent said it was "very important." While this is a markedly lower proportion of "religious" boys compared with the remainder of the sample (70 percent of whom thought religion was very or pretty

important in their lives), it also does not reflect a community dominated by religious apathy or agnosticism. Thus, the comparisons in Table 5 are between very moral communities, as we define them, and only relatively more secularized communities. Viewed in this light we think the effects shown in Table 5 are very substantial.

When we examined the 16 schools classified as secular communities some striking geographical facts came to light. Not a single one was in the South--in these data the South is a huge region beginning at the southern border of Pennsylvania and stretching west as far as Texas. In the total sample of 87 schools, 26 were in this region. In contrast, while only 15 (or 17%) of the schools in the sample were in the western region, 6 of the 16 most secular schools (40%) were in that region. The western region defined in the codebook is also very large and includes the Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico tier, and all points west. However, it is obvious that huge and populous California dominates any sample representative of this area.

It seemed likely that the majority of these secular western schools were located on the West Coast since the inland western states are known to be characterized by relatively high levels of religiousness (Stark, in press). The significance of this is that the three studies finding no impact of religion on delinquency also were based on West Coast data. We have already mentioned data that show the coast to be deviantly low in terms

of church membership. And this is further evidenced in the data at hand. Recall that Hirschi and Stark found that only 37 percent of the white boys in Richmond, California attended church weekly. In contrast, 59 percent of the boys in this national sample claimed weekly church attendance--indeed 45 percent of those in schools we have classified as secular communities attended church that often.

CALIFORNIA REVISITED

These considerations led us to want to isolate the West Coast schools, particularly the California schools, to see if we could more closely replicate the previous findings of no relationship. Fortunately, faced with this need, we were able to find foolproof means to discover the state within which each school is located.⁴

Three of the schools classified as secular communities turned out to be located in California. Upon examination they gave evidence of being noticeably more secularized than the other schools in the group. For example, while 47 percent of the boys in the other thirteen secular communities attended church weekly, only 37 percent of the boys in these three California schools attended weekly. If that last figure seems familiar it is because it is exactly the same low proportion of weekly church attenders found in Richmond, California by Hirschi and Stark (1969). This strongly suggested that we were on the track of the elusive non-relationship between religiousness and delinquency.

In Table 6 the relationship between religiousness and delinquency is shown on the basis of the three California secular communities only. And, in fact, the data fully replicate the original Hirschi and Stark (1969) findings, shown at the bottom of the table. While each of the three gammas displays the expected negative signs, each is so small that no claim of a relationship can be sustained. That is, when we limit the data to the more secularized California communities we find the same non-relationships that caused the original report that religiousness had no effect on delinquency. Thus, we have traced the original non-finding back to its ecological source and reconfirmed it.

Now it is important to recognize that California is a very diverse state. Some of the California schools displayed quite high levels of religious commitment, and within them strong relations between religiousness and delinquency existed. We have no way of knowing the specific cities within which our three most secular California schools are located. However, the presence of a significant number of Jewish boys in these schools strongly suggests that each school is within sight of salt water, and within the "Unchurched Belt."

We are fully aware that our findings for California are based on a relatively small number of cases. However, we think they are reliable because of their internal consistency, their close comparability with the earlier California-based results,

and because they fit so well with the logic of the overall pattern of findings reported in this paper.

Einstein once remarked that "God does not play dice with the world." By this he meant that we ought not gladly accept random models of phenomena--that we ought instead to search for an underlying logic by which the seemingly happenstance becomes explicable and predictable.

It would have been all too easy to invoke the dice-rolling assumptions of statistical significance to suggest that contradictory research findings about the relationship between religion and delinquency reflected the luck of random fluctuations in the samples. In some ways it was only the luck of the draw that Hirschi and Stark (1969) and Burkett and White (1974) happened to examine data on exceptionally secularized communities and thus sustain the misconception that the moral sanctions of faith cannot "compete with the pleasures and pains of everyday life" (Hirschi and Stark, 1969:213). But there seems to be nothing random about variations in the degree to which religion does function to sustain the moral order. Individual religiousness alone seems unable to constrain delinquent behavior. Only within a significantly religious social climate--a moral community--does the individual faith generate this power. But the fact remains that the majority of communities in the nation possess such a moral climate, and therefore most studies of delinquency can be expected to find significant religious effects. The relationship that was "lost" on the West Coast is alive and thriving east of the Sierra Nevada.

CONCLUSION

Looking back on our tour through the data archives, it appears we have solved one mystery, but perhaps found another. The mystery of the contradictory findings appears solved by variations in the moral climates within which the different studies were conducted. Religion does seem to constrain delinquency, but only where the religious convictions of the individual are reinforced by their social environment. Where religious conviction is primarily a private matter, it loses its capacity to sanction the normative system.

But perhaps there is a second mystery: Why has such a strong relationship been "lost" for so long? Granted that happenstance played a part--the first two studies to pay close attention to this question in many years happened to take place in extremely secularized communities. This may have deflected some investigators away from the topic. However, Hirschi and Stark were not the first to possess good data on the question. Indeed, all of the data we have re-examined, except for those from Seattle, were collected and available well before the Hirschi and Stark paper appeared. Regardless of dozens of failures to find a relationship between social class and delinquency, researchers have doggedly continued that unsuccessful search (Tittle, Villemez, and Smith 1978). They were not deterred by one short paper. Indeed, it is clear from the literature that a great deal of data dredging has gone on for years--researchers have relentlessly reported any variable found to correlate significantly with delinquency in any data

set. Yet, through all this, correlations as large as those we have found lay undiscovered for more than a decade in existing data sets.

Why?

It cannot be that religion was ignored because it is a variable unsuited for intervention programs. When did a delinquency intervention program ever work anyway (Weis, 1977)? Moreover, race and sex must have less potential for intervention programs than does religion, and they have been studied at length. Who among us knows how to upgrade school performance or create attachment to parents? Yet these occupy stage center in current delinquency analysis. And the lack of action implications has not dampened interest in social class; indeed 30 years of non-findings have not even done so.

We suggest that the answer to this mystery can be found in the self-conscious secularism of social scientists (Leuba, 1934; Glock and Stark, 1965; Stark, 1963; Allport, 1950). During the 19th century "golden age" of social science, the founders were very interested in religion. But by the start of this century interest waned. The overwhelming majority of social scientists were irreligious or even anti-religious. This led them to believe that religion was a disappearing and unimportant factor in human affairs. Thus, Gordon Allport wrote in 1950 that "the subject of religion seems to have gone into hiding," and "the persistence of religion in the modern world appears an embarrassment to the scholars of today" (1950:x).

It has been only during the past two decades that social scientific interest in religion has been rekindled, largely due to encountering stubborn religious effects on many aspects of social behavior such as fertility, voting, prejudice, and divorce. It now appears certain that delinquency must be added to the list. Yet, the fact remains that rediscovery of religion is occurring relatively late in delinquency research. We wonder whether this is due to the fact that religion might have intervention program potential. It is one thing to say that religion influences voting. No approval of this influence is implied. But what about saying religiousness helps prevent delinquency? This is a "good" effect. To say it is to imply a positive judgement of religion. Moreover, when it is widely known that religiousness does restrain delinquency, some people are bound to suggest that religious training ought to be encouraged because of these social benefits. Given the private attitudes toward religion predominant among social scientists, most probably would not want to lend encouragement to such proposals.

If this is not why religious effects on delinquency have been ignored, we have no other solution to offer. But whatever the reasons, what is important now is that this subject be ignored no longer, and that religion be conceived of in a social rather than only an individualistic way.

For our data show that it is not merely the religiousness of individuals, but of their social environments, that matters. Apparently, it did not matter in Richmond, and in other

places on the West Coast, that some parents had instilled religious faith in their children. At least it did not matter when it came to keeping them out of juvenile hall. Indeed, the influence of moral climates suggests that religious parents are right to worry not only about their own children's religious instruction, but about the moral tone of the community in which they are growing up. And this, of course, leads the discussion back to a fundamental theoretical anchorage. For once again we see substantial reason to agree with Sutherland (1924), who constructed his theory of differential association more than 50 years ago on the premise that it does matter what company we keep.

It should not be supposed from our criticisms of delinquency researchers for ignoring religious effects, that we are thumping the drum for faith. We intend to be no more "pro-religion" in this paper than the senior author intended to be "anti-religion" when he collaborated on the paper that began this whole affair by finding no relationship between hellfire and delinquency a decade ago. Yet, what difference would it make if each of us held Holy Orders? The business of social scientists is to test hypotheses as best they can, making methods and data as public as possible. Practiced in that fashion, the facts eventually will out, regardless of what the researchers might prefer the facts to be. And the facts seem to be these: In a reasonably religious environment, individual religious commitment does tend to keep kids honest, congenial, and out of jail.

FOOTNOTES

1. The trouble lies with their conceptualization of religiousness. Rhodes and Reiss were greatly influenced by their colleague Gerhard Lenski's The Religious Factor (1961). They therefore followed his lead and gave most of their attention to a search for differences in delinquency rates across major denominational lines (Jews, Catholics, and liberal and conservative Protestant groups). But by the time their article appeared in 1970 it was understood by sociologists of religion that the "religious factor," thus conceived, has little to do with religiousness per se, but is a less than satisfactory proxy measure of ethnicity (Glock and Stark, 1965; Stark and Glock, 1968; Greeley, 1974). Furthermore, since all of these religious bodies foster moral teachings incompatible with delinquent behavior, variations in delinquency by denomination ought not reflect theological differences, but primarily variations in the proportions of highly committed members each group manages to maintain. That is, Episcopalians differ from Baptists not so much in what the respective churches want from their members, but in the degree to which they successfully engender high levels of commitment. Which is to say that denomination is also a proxy measure of variations in individual religious commitment (Stark and Glock, 1968). There is no point using proxy variables when direct variables are available.
2. In the history of delinquent research, misguided criteria of causation have resulted in many powerful empirical findings being dismissed. See Hirschi and Selvin, 1966.
3. These data were made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
4. The data for state of birth had not been collapsed into regions. Americans may be highly mobile, but they are not so mobile that schools will have a modal state of birth other than the state within which they are located.

TABLE 1

RELIGION AND DELINQUENCY IN PROVO, UTAH

	<u>Church Attendance</u>
Official Delinquency	-.46 (gamma)
Self-Report Delinquency	-.45 (gamma)

(N=273)

TABLE 2

RELIGION AND DELINQUENCY IN SEATTLE

<u>Self-Report Delinquency</u>	<u>Church Attendance</u>	<u>Personal Importance of Religion</u>
Recency Index	-.08 (gamma)	-.14 (gamma)
Standard Index	-.13 (gamma)	-.14 (gamma)

(N=1213)

TABLE 3

CORRELATIONS (GAMMA) BETWEEN RELIGIOUSNESS AND DELINQUENCY (NATIONAL SAMPLE OF WHITE BOYS)

	<u>Religious Values Index</u>	<u>Personal Importance of Religion</u>	<u>Church Attendance</u>
1. Frequency of Trouble with Police	-.28	-.28	-.27
2. Frequency of Delinquency	-.20	-.29	-.19
3. Amount of Delinquency	-.24	-.29	-.21

(N=1799)

TABLE 4

LEVELS OF DELINQUENCY IN MORAL AND SECULAR COMMUNITIES

	<u>Moral Communities (N=1518)</u>	<u>Secular Communities (N=281)</u>
1. Percent who ever have had trouble with the police	30%	46%
2. Percent with a high frequency of delinquent acts	24%	31%
3. Percent with a high total of delinquent acts	24%	33%

TABLE 5

CORRELATIONS (GAMMA) BETWEEN RELIGIOUSNESS AND DELINQUENCY IN MORAL AND SECULAR COMMUNITIES

	<i>All sites</i>	Moral Communities (N=1518)	Secular Communities (N=281)
1. Frequency of Trouble With the Police	<i>.28</i>	-.29	-.16
2. Frequency of Delinquency	<i>.20</i>	-.31	-.15
3. Amount of Delinquency	<i>.24</i>	-.30	-.19

TABLE 6

RELIGIOUSNESS AND DELINQUENCY IN CALIFORNIA (GAMMAS)

California Secular Communities
(N=42)

Importance of Religion

Frequency of trouble with police	-.03
Frequency of delinquency	-.09
Amount of delinquency	-.05

Richmond, California
White Boys only
(Hirschi and Stark, 1969)

Belief Index

Church Attendance

Self-report Delinquency	-.03	.02
Official Delinquency	.02	.06

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