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The Power of the Word: Religion, Family, Friends, and Delinquent Behavior of LDS Youth

Youth who experience spirituality rather than just participate in public religious observances are likely to avoid delinquency—even when they live in a hostile environment or have delinquent friends.

Brent L. Top and Bruce A. Chadwick

Most religious people, including Latter-day Saints, generally assume that the infusion of religious values into young people—through personal experience, church involvement, and religious training—will deter behaviors that society characterizes as delinquent. Theologians and social scientists have taught that the more religious a person is, the less likely she or he will be to participate in delinquent behavior.¹

These traditional assumptions about the power of religion to deter delinquency came under serious challenge in the 1960s by researchers who failed to confirm them. For example, Travis Hirschi and Rodney Stark found that church attenders were “no more likely than non-attenders to accept ethical principles.” Importantly, they concluded that church attendance was “unrelated to the commission of delinquent acts.”²

Numerous studies in the 1980s further tested the link between religion and delinquency but produced mixed results. Some found that religion was indeed associated with lower rates of delinquency, while others concluded that the relationship was minimal.³ Other researchers discovered that religion seems to deter some types of delinquency more than others. Steven R. Burkett and Mervin White found that religion was more likely to discourage “victimless crimes” such as alcohol and drug abuse and “sexual offenses that involve consent” than offenses against others or against property.⁴

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Stark and his associates argue that the reason for the inconclusive findings is that religion affects deviance only within a religious climate. The *religious ecology* hypothesis maintains that delinquency is not so much deterred by religion, beliefs, or attendance as it is by the prevailing moral climate of the community. Thus the impact of religiosity on delinquency is reduced from a spiritual phenomenon to a social one. Stark and others contend that religion's significant negative relationship to delinquency of LDS youth reported by researchers was due to the cohesive LDS communities (Southern California, Southeastern Idaho, and Central Utah) from which the samples were drawn.⁵ Expanding this notion, other researchers sought to minimize the role of religion by advocating the hypothesis that it influences adolescent behavior only if the youth comes from a religious home and has religious friends. They argue that any effects of religion on behavior are largely moderated through parents and peers. These and many other studies have relegated religiosity to only a minor role with little importance in understanding delinquency.⁶

The teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, however, emphasize that religion has a power of its own—independent of prevailing social values and norms—to positively affect human behavior. The Book of Mormon prophet Alma believed in the transforming power of religion in the lives of his people: “And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them” (Alma 31:5).

In more recent times, Church leaders also teach that religion, when understood and accepted by its members, “changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior.”⁷ The belief that religion does indeed promote righteous living, and in turn deters deviant activity, underlies the Church's efforts in perfecting the Saints. Church efforts to strengthen families and young people against societal ills are usually conducted in the context of increased religiosity and gospel living. The link between religiosity and moral behavior is explicit. Elder James E. Faust has taught:

Generally, those children who make the decision and have the resolve to abstain from drugs, alcohol, and illicit sex are those who have adopted and internalized the strong values of their homes as lived by their parents. In times of difficult decisions they are most likely to follow the [religious] teachings of their parents rather than the example of their peers or the sophistries of the media which glamorize alcohol consumption, illicit sex, infidelity, dishonesty, and other vices. . . .

What seems to help cement parental teachings and values in place in children's lives is a firm belief in Deity. When this belief becomes part of their very souls, they have inner strength.⁸

As seen in this statement, religiosity as viewed by Latter-day Saints includes a personal internalization of the religious experience in addition to outward religious behaviors such as church attendance.

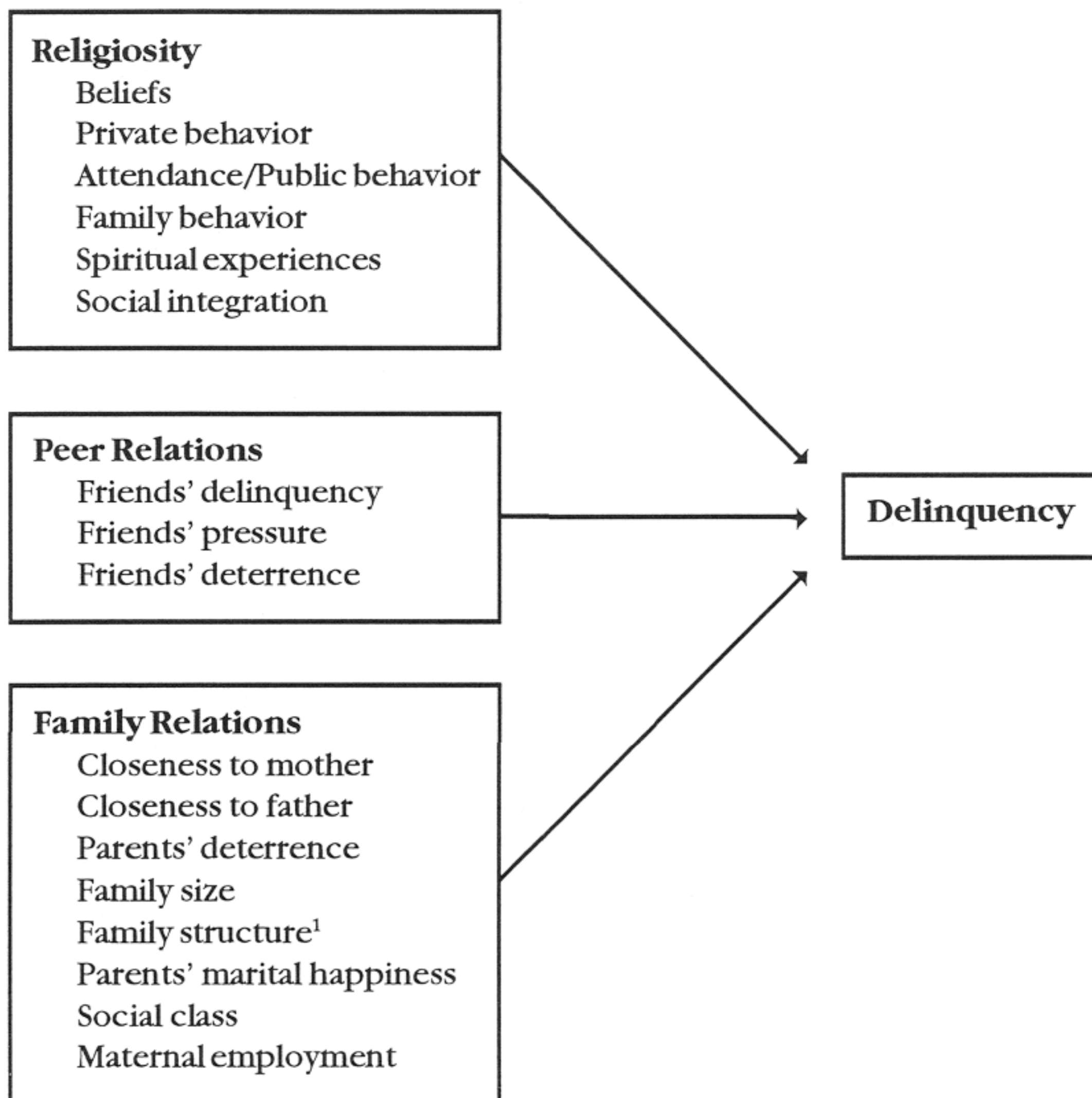
In this study, we sought to empirically test what most Latter-day Saints take for granted. We combined our understanding of the power of religion, as articulated by both ancient and modern prophets, with our tools of social-scientific research to achieve two objectives.

The first objective was to test the religious ecology hypothesis that a supportive religious environment is a necessary condition in order for religiosity to be related to lower occurrences of delinquency among LDS youth. To reach this objective, we collected information from LDS adolescents living along the east coast of the United States, a non-LDS environment where LDS high-school students comprise 1 percent or less of the high-school population.

The second objective was to test the strength of religiosity's relationship to delinquency in comparison to the influence of friends and selected family characteristics. To accomplish this objective, we tested the model presented in figure 1.

Most previous studies testing the relationship between religion and delinquency have used single measures of religiosity such as claimed affiliation or attendance at church meetings. Recent research confirms that religiosity is comprised of several different dimensions.⁹ To provide a more adequate test of the relationship between religion and deviant behavior, we included in this study several measures of religiosity: religious beliefs, private religious behaviors, public religious behaviors, family religious practices, personal spiritual experiences, and feelings of integration into a branch or ward.

Figure 1
Religiosity, Family Characteristics, and Peer Relations
Predicting Delinquency



¹Family structure was coded as a dummy variable; 1 = two parent family and 0 = all others.

Methodology

Data Collection. In the spring of 1990, we conducted a mailed survey of 2,143 Latter-day Saint teenagers between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. The teenagers resided in Delaware, New York, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Washington, D.C., Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. These young people were enrolled in LDS Seminary—either daily early morning classes or a weekly home study class. Sampling from seminary enrollment provided a broad cross section of LDS youth. The sampling frame included nearly all ninth-through twelfth-grade LDS youth in the area. In this geographical area, 90–95 percent of the LDS teenagers were enrolled in seminary classes. Also enrolled in the seminary classes were some LDS youth who rarely attended church.

A packet was sent to the youths' parents with a letter explaining the study and asking permission for their teenager to participate. Parents were informed of the objectives of the study and that the questionnaire asked about sensitive issues, including drug use and premarital sexual activity. If parents did not want their teenager to participate in the study, they were instructed to return their mailing label with the assurance that they would receive no further follow-up mailings. We did not receive a single refusal. The letter stressed to the parents that in order to collect meaningful data, they needed to allow their children to respond to the questionnaire in complete privacy. A business reply envelope was enclosed so the youth could confidentially return the completed questionnaire.

A postcard reminder was mailed approximately three weeks later. One month after this reminder, a new packet—including a letter, questionnaire, and reply envelope—was sent to those who had not returned their questionnaire. A month later, a final request was sent to those who had not yet completed the survey. These procedures resulted in 1,398 completed questionnaires—a response rate of 70 percent. This is a rather high response rate for a mail survey, particularly one involving such sensitive issues.

Measurement of Variables. Delinquent behavior was measured by forty-four items that asked whether the respondent had ever engaged in specific activities and if so, how often he or she had ever done each. Sixteen questions focused on drug and alcohol use and

premarital sexual activity. These constituted the victimless offense scale. An eleven-item scale gauged property offenses such as shoplifting, theft, and vandalism. Measurement of victim offenses, such as attacks on parents, school officials, and other teens, was done with a sixteen-item scale.

As mentioned earlier, we included five dimensions of religiosity in the questionnaire. Religious beliefs were measured by twelve questions that examined traditional Christian beliefs as well as unique LDS doctrines. Five items assessed private religious behavior by asking about the frequency of personal prayer, private scripture reading, and fasting. Attendance at various church meetings assessed public religious behavior. Three items which asked about the frequency of family prayer, scripture study, home evening, and other family religious activities determined the level of family religious behavior. Three additional items that asked how well the respondents felt they fit into their ward or branch and were accepted by fellow church members determined feelings of religious integration.

Four dimensions of peer influence were also examined. First, friends' delinquency was determined by the respondents' perceptions of the proportion of their friends' involvement in the forty-four negative behaviors listed on the delinquency scale. Friends' pressure was measured by the frequency that friends "have tried to get" the respondent to participate in those behaviors. Friends' disapproval focused on the respondents' perceptions of how their friends feel about seven delinquent behaviors: lying or cheating, fighting, stealing, vandalism, premarital sex, drug use, and/or use of alcoholic beverages. Finally, friends' deterrence was assessed by whether friends' influence was a significant reason why the respondent refrained from the seven delinquent behaviors.

Family structure, number of siblings, maternal employment, and perceived happiness of parents' marriage were measured by a single question each. Closeness to father and closeness to mother were gauged by four-item scales probing the parent-child relationship. A scale for parental disapproval of delinquency asked the young respondents how they thought their parents would feel if the respondents engaged in the seven delinquent behaviors mentioned above. The parental deterrence scale contained questions asking the respondents if they regularly engaged in any of those

seven behaviors and *if not*, whether parental disapproval was a significant reason.

The gender of the respondents was used as a control variable. All of the items were submitted to factor analysis, which indicated that the items combined to produce strong unidimensional scales.¹⁰ Before testing the model presented in figure 1, we examined the correlations between the various independent variables to identify any multicollinearity problems. As a result, peer and parental disapproval were removed from the model because of high correlations with peer and parental deterrence.

Findings

Characteristics of Sample. Girls comprised 54 percent of the sample and boys 46 percent. This difference was largely accounted for by the girls' somewhat higher response rate (75 versus 62 percent). The young people in the sample were fairly evenly distributed between ninth and twelfth grades. The sample was predominately white, as Asians, African Americans, and Hispanics totaled only 5 percent. The sample is clearly upper-middle class as 36 percent of the teenagers' fathers had college degrees and another 29 percent held advanced degrees. Of the mothers, 33 percent were college graduates and 8 percent had postgraduate degrees. The fathers worked primarily in "white-collar occupations"; 56 percent held managerial positions, 14 percent were in clerical occupations, and 5 percent were professionals. Only 13 percent of the fathers had "blue-collar" occupations.

Frequency of Delinquent Behaviors. The percentages of the LDS young women and men who had ever engaged in each of the various delinquent behaviors and the average number of times they had done so are presented in table 1. Among offenses against others, one labeled "pick on other kids, make fun of them, or call them names" was the most frequently cited misbehavior, followed by creating disturbances at school. Boys were more likely to be involved in offenses against others than were girls. An encouraging finding, however, in this day of increased adolescent violence and crimes against others, is that LDS youth overwhelmingly avoided such conduct.

Table 1
Frequency of Delinquent Activities Ever Done

Items	Males N = 636		Females N = 754	
	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency
Offenses against Others				
Cursed or swore at parent	19%	10	21%	9
Pushed, shoved, or hit parent	10	6	14	5
Openly defied church teacher/leader	20	10	18	6
Openly defied schoolteacher/official	36	11	26	8
Created a disturbance by being loud, unruly, or disorderly at school or in some other public place	48	14	43	12
Been suspended or expelled from school	20	4	6	3
Forced or pressured someone to engage in sexual activities with you	5	6	5	4
Threw things (rocks, bottles, eggs, garbage, etc.) at cars, people, or buildings	41	9	18	6
Called someone on the telephone to threaten or bother them	21	7	23	8
Purposely picked on other kids, made fun of them, or called them names	52	21	43	15
Picked a fight with other kids	25	8	12	7
Physically beat up other kids	25	7	8	6
Took money or other things from someone by using force or threats	2	6	2	5
Hurt someone badly enough that they had to go to a doctor	8	5	3	3
Threatened or attacked someone with a knife, gun, or other weapon	6	6	2	4
Been in a gang fight	8	6	2	7
Offenses against Property				
Took something from a store without paying for it	33%	9	20%	6
Stole something from someone else's locker, desk, purse, etc.	12	8	11	3
Stole anything more than \$50	6	5	2	1
Stole anything worth between \$5 and \$50	18	7	10	6
Stole anything less than \$5	37	9	22	5
Took a car or other motor vehicle without the owner's permission	8	5	6	4
Broke into a building, car, house, etc.	15	4	4	2
Went onto someone's property without permission	53	11	34	7
Purposely ruined or damaged someone else's property or possessions	26	9	12	5
Purposely damaged or destroyed things at school, store, etc.	17	11	9	7
Victimless Offenses				
Smoked cigarettes	24%	2	24%	2
Used "smokeless" or chewing tobacco	12	1	3	1
Drank alcoholic beverages (beer, wine, liquor)	24	2	27	1
Used marijuana ("grass," "pot")	7	2	5	2
Used cocaine ("crack," "coke")	2	1	1	1
Used other drugs (heroin, LSD, amphetamines, etc.)	3	2	3	1
Been drunk or high on drugs	12	2	13	1
Run away from home	12	3	13	2
Skipped school without a legitimate excuse	44	9	41	8
Cheated on a test	70	13	73	10
Read sexually explicit or pornographic books or magazines	46	8	20	6
Watched sexually explicit or pornographic movies, videos, or television programs	42	8	27	5
Been involved in heavy petting	29	9	32	11
Had sexual intercourse	7	11	12	11

Trespassing was the most commonly cited offense against property, followed by petty theft and shoplifting. Again, more boys than girls had engaged in the various property offenses.

Cheating on tests at school was the most often cited victimless offense, with over 70 percent of both girls and boys reporting that they had been dishonest in their school work. Over 40 percent of respondents had also "sluffed school." More young men than young women had read or watched pornographic materials. Surprisingly, however, more young women had been involved in heavy petting and sexual intercourse than the boys. Senior girls were the most sexually experienced group as 22 percent reported they had voluntarily participated in intercourse. This finding was unexpected since nearly all previous research has reported that boys are more sexually active than girls.

It may at first seem alarming that approximately 30 percent of the young people in the sample had been involved in heavy petting and that approximately 10 percent had engaged in sexual intercourse. These findings, however, reflect a significantly lower involvement in premarital sexual activities than is reported in recent national studies of young people in general. There was little evidence of alcohol and/or drug use among LDS youth. Although the study found that approximately one-fourth of the young people had drunk alcoholic beverages, the infrequency of this behavior indicates it was an experiment rather than an on-going practice.

Religiosity of Sample. There was a remarkably high level of religiosity among the sample. Over 80 percent of the boys and nearly 90 percent of the girls believe strongly in the reality of God and the divinity of Jesus Christ. With regards to uniquely LDS religious beliefs, three-fourths of the youth reported that they felt strongly that the Book of Mormon was the word of God and that the President of the LDS Church is indeed a prophet. Over 60 percent of the young men reported they planned to serve full-time missions for the Church and approximately 75 percent of the entire group reported they planned to marry in the temple and be active in the Church. Only a few of these young people reported that religion was not important to them, and less than 10 percent reported that the Church was "too restrictive" or that some teachings of the Church were hard for them to accept.

Despite these high levels of religious belief, the levels of personal religious experience were somewhat moderated. This finding seems logical due to the relative youth of the sample. Only slightly more than a third of the boys and 43 percent of the girls reported that they had “really tried to live the standards of the church” during the past year. Similarly, only 36 percent of the boys and 41 percent of the girls felt that they had “strong” testimonies of the Gospel, while half stated that they had indeed felt the Holy Ghost in their lives. Although the levels of religious experience are lower than those of professed beliefs, these teenagers were undoubtedly more religious in both beliefs and personal experience than their non-LDS peers. The high religiosity of these young people in a “hostile” religious environment is an important element in testing the religious ecology theory.

Perceived Frequency of Peer Delinquency. Respondents were asked how many of their friends had engaged in the 44 delinquent behaviors. They reported whether “all,” “most,” “some,” or “none” of their friends had participated in these activities. Table 2 presents only the percent of LDS youth who thought “all” or “most” of their friends had engaged in the delinquent activities. The sample of young people perceived that their friends were much more involved in delinquent behavior than the LDS youth were themselves. However, the survey obtained only the respondents’ perception of their friends’ behavior. Nevertheless, even though this perception may not reflect the actual conduct of the peer group, it is important to the religious ecology theory. According to this theory, if young people think their friends are involved in delinquent behavior, they will feel pressure to engage in similar behavior in order to be like their friends.

The Religious Ecology Hypothesis. In a 1976 study of religiosity and delinquency among LDS youth living in a highly religious ecology, respondents were asked about the frequency of ten delinquent activities: cigarette smoking, beer drinking, hard liquor drinking, marijuana smoking, use of LSD or other similar drugs, petting, premarital sexual intercourse, stealing, shoplifting, and fighting.¹¹ These responses were combined into a measure of total delinquency, the first seven for *victimless* delinquency and the

Table 2
Friends' Delinquent Behavior

Items	Factor Weights	
	Boys	Girls
How many of your friends:		
drink alcoholic beverages (beer, wine, liquor)	.883	.813
get drunk or high on drugs	.807	.827
have sexual intercourse	.800	.794
are involved in heavy petting	.799	.824
skip school without a legitimate excuse	.690	.697
smoke	.666	.706
cheat on a test	.657	.537

last three for *victim* delinquency. Religious behavior was measured by the frequency of attendance at Sacrament and other meetings and the frequency of personal prayer. Religious beliefs were gauged by belief in the existence of God, Jesus Christ, and the Devil and by the acceptance of the Bible as the word of God.

The current study of youth in a low religious ecology asked the same information with minor variances in wording and in response categories. The bivariate correlations between the several measures of religiosity and delinquency for both the highly religious ecology (1976 study) and the low-religious ecology (1991 study) are presented in table 3. Correlations obtained in the two different environments are very similar. Eight of the twelve correlations in the highly religious environment achieved statistical significance, whereas all twelve did so in the low-religious environment, where LDS youth are the minority and where their peers are not only less religious, but also more delinquent. Correlations between religion and delinquency among youth living in a "hostile" low-religious ecology are as strong, if not stronger, than those among the young people living in a more predominantly LDS environment. These findings refute the hypothesis that the only way religion deters delinquency is through a religious environment.

Previous research has suggested that religion has a stronger relationship to victimless activities such as underaged drinking, drug

Table 3
Correlations between Measures of Religiosity and Self-Reported Delinquency in High and Low Religious Ecologies

Religiosity	Type of Delinquency and Ecology					
	Total		Victim		Victimless	
	High E ¹	Low E ²	High E	Low E	High E	Low E
Boys						
Attitudes	-.26**	-.25**	-.08	-.25**	-.28**	-.21**
Behavior	-.34**	-.31**	-.08	-.26**	-.38*	-.28**
Girls						
Attitudes	-.14	-.24**	-.16*	-.19**	-.11	-.23**
Behaviors	-.43**	-.38**	-.26**	-.24**	-.42**	-.38**

* Significant at .001 level.

** Significant at .01 level.

¹High-LDS religious ecology: Southern California, Central Utah, and Southern Idaho.

²Low-LDS religious ecology: Delaware, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Washington, D.C., and West Virginia.

___* Differences between the two correlations are significant at .05 level.

use, and premarital sex than to other types of delinquent activities.¹² Although this relationship was true for boys in the 1976 study, the overall differences in the correlations between religion and the two types of delinquency are so small as to be negligible.

The lack of support for the religious ecology hypothesis is consistent with a recent study of adult Catholics' criminal behavior.¹³ Apparently, LDS youth who have internalized religious values and beliefs engage in delinquent activities less often than those LDS youth who have not. These findings indicate that if we are to fully understand the relationship of religion to delinquency, we must not merely examine social or environmental dimensions, but must also consider personal religious experience as an important deterrent to delinquency.

The Peer, Family, and Religion Model of Delinquency. To test the hypothesis that religion in competition with peer and family factors would make a significant, unique contribution to predicting delinquency, we tested the model presented in figure 1. Our intent

was not to develop a comprehensive model of delinquency, but rather to assess the relative strength of the peer, family, and religious factors in predicting it.

One way we tested the model was by utilizing a statistical procedure known as step-wise multiple regression analysis, which allows the independent variables to compete with each other in order to enter the regression equation. The independent variable containing the highest correlation with delinquency when the factors already in the equation are controlled is added to the equation in each step. This step-wise approach provides us with information about the relative strength of each of the factors. The results of the step-wise multiple regression analysis are presented in table 4.

As illustrated, the first two factors to emerge as significant in predicting boys' overall delinquent behavior were the pressure their friends put on them to participate in such activities and their perceptions of their friends' level of delinquency. The greater the pressure from friends and the more delinquent those friends are, the greater the respondents' delinquency. Such findings validate other studies that have demonstrated the power of peer pressure.

The relative strength of religious variables in predicting delinquency is also impressive. Private religious behavior and feelings of religious integration made significant contributions to predicting overall delinquent behavior of boys. The more frequent the private religious behavior, such as scripture reading, personal prayers, and fasting, the lower the level of delinquency. Similarly, the more these boys felt accepted and integrated into their ward, classes, and quorum, the less likely they were to participate in delinquent behaviors. For delinquency in general, two other factors appeared as significant predictors: friends' deterrence of delinquency and the socioeconomic status of the family.

These six factors accounted for 24 percent of the variance in total delinquency reported by the boys in the sample. Similar findings appeared for offenses against others, property offenses, and victimless offenses.

Peer influence, religion, and family characteristics also emerged as the significant predictors of delinquency among the girls. Friends' pressure and friends' delinquency were the most significant factors, followed by personal spiritual experience, friends' deterrence, and

Table 4
Multiple Regression of Peer, Family, and Religiosity
Predicting Delinquent Activity

Sex	Beta			
	All Offenses	Against Others	Property Offenses	Victimless Offenses
Boys				
Friends' pressure	.386*	.402*	.357*	.290*
Friends' delinquency	.331*	.364*	.089***	.264*
Friends' deterrence	-.104**	-.074***	—	-.090***
Private religious behaviors	-.171*	-.216*	-.259*	-.098**
Church attendance	—	—	—	-.111**
Religious beliefs	—	—	.118**	—
Religious integration	-.106**	-.099**	-.096***	—
Quality of parents' marriage	—	-.071***	—	—
Family size	—	—	-.091**	—
Socioeconomic status	-.87***	—	—	—
	(R ² =.240)	(R ² =.284)	(R ² =.225)	(R ² =.134)
Girls				
Friends' pressure	.483*	.489*	.320*	.332*
Friends' delinquency	.342*	.408*	.208*	.304*
Friends' deterrence	-.157*	-.118*	—	—
Private religious behaviors	-.097**	-.106**	-.157*	-.140*
Spiritual experiences	-.125*	-.140*	—	—
Church attendance	—	—	—	-.153*
Closeness to mother	—	—	.113**	-.071**
Quality of parents' marriage	-.073***	-.075***	—	-.068**
Parents' deterrence	-.078***	—	-.072***	-.194*
Family structure	—	-.081**	—	-.074***
	(R ² =.316)	(R ² =.382)	(R ² =.181)	(R ² =.272)

* Significant at .001 level.

** Significant at .01 level.

*** Significant at .05 level.

private religious behavior. Two family variables also entered the regression equation: perceived happiness of parents' marriage and parental disapproval of delinquency. The happier the parents' marriage was, the lower the level of delinquency. Family factors are slightly more important to predicting delinquent behavior for girls than for boys. The levels of explained variance for all the measures of delinquency were higher for the girls than the boys. Religious factors made very meaningful contributions to predicting girls' delinquency.

Among the various dimensions of religiosity, private religious behavior has the strongest negative relationship to delinquency among LDS youth. It was a significant predictor for all types of delinquency among both girls and boys. Private religious behavior is a strong indicator of the importance of religion in the lives of these young people, as well as an indicator of the internalization of religious beliefs. However, religious beliefs were also a significant factor in predicting offenses against property by boys. In addition, boys who feel accepted in their ward engage in fewer delinquent activities. The results of the multiple regression analyses clearly demonstrate that, contrary to the views of Stark and other social scientists, religious factors are significantly related to delinquency of LDS youth living in a low-religious ecology.¹⁴ While peer factors are somewhat more important, the significance of religion cannot be ignored.

Conclusions and Implications

The Latter-day Saint young people in this study appear to have internalized a set of religious beliefs, values, and practices that are related to less frequent participation in delinquent activities. The relationship of religiosity to delinquency for LDS adolescents is not largely a cultural or social phenomenon. The link was just as apparent (if not more so) in the low-LDS religious climate of the eastern states as it was for the highly LDS religious environment of southern California, southeastern Idaho, and central Utah.

Contrary to considerable previous research, peer influences did not overpower religiosity in explaining delinquent behavior of LDS youth. In fact, religion made a significant contribution to predicting delinquency when competing with peer and family influences for both boys and girls.

Some of the factors that Church members traditionally view as being important to the prevention of delinquency did not emerge as significant in this study. Public religious behaviors such as attendance at various Church meetings and family religious behaviors such as family prayer, home evening, and scripture study were not significantly related to lower delinquency rates among LDS youth. These activities, as important as they are in and of themselves, apparently do not counteract the peer pressures facing LDS youth today.

Parents should recognize that it is important not only to hold home evening, family prayers, and scripture study, but also to seek ways to help their children to internalize religious values by spiritual experiences. When parents hold these family religious activities only to be holding them, the behaviors are not associated with lower delinquency. But if these activities are utilized to help adolescents internalize religious values and to feel religious experiences, they are significantly less likely to be involved in delinquent activities.

In a similar vein, it appears that local Church leaders, advisors, and teachers can best insulate LDS youth from immorality, drug/alcohol abuse, and other acts of delinquency if there is greater emphasis on activities that promote genuine spiritual experiences—experiences that will help the youth see gospel principles more in practice and less in theory. “You are not merely to teach lessons, or expound doctrines, or set up tools, and prescribe programs,” counseled President Spencer W. Kimball. “Your success is not only in setting up ideals but in motivating students to put these ideals into their lives.”¹⁵ Just expecting youth to attend Church meetings and activities “to keep them out of trouble” is not a significant delinquency deterrent. However, those activities that promote internalization of Christian principles and religious integration have a positive effect.

Recognizing the power of peer influences, we should seek to guide the youth to those friends who share similar values. We should also recognize, however, that when LDS youth live in a “hostile” religious environment and associate with delinquent peers, religiosity and loving parents can do much to influence them to keep the commandments.

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NOTES

¹ Kingsley Davis, *Human Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 73-74, 371, 519-520, 531, for example; see also Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: Free Press, 1915); John E. Coogen, "Religion: A Preventive of Delinquency," *Federal Probation* 18 (December 1954): 29; and John Milton Yinger, *Religion, Society, and the Individual: An Introduction to the Sociology of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1957).

² Travis Hirschi and Rodney Stark, "Hellfire and Delinquency," *Social Problems* 17 (Fall 1969): 202.

³ Charles R. Tittle and Michael R. Welch, "Religiosity and Deviance: Toward a Contingency Theory of Constraining Effect," *Social Forces* 61 (March 1983): 653, 675-76; and Lee Ellis, "Religiosity and Criminality: Evidence and Explanations of Complex Relationships," *Sociological Perspectives* 28 (October 1985): 501-20.

⁴ Steven R. Burkett and Mervin White, "Hellfire and Delinquency: Another Look," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 13 (December 1974): 455-62.

⁵ Rodney Stark, Lori Kent, and Daniel P. Doyle, "Religion and Delinquency: The Ecology of a 'Lost' Relationship," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 19 (January 1982): 4-24; and Stan L. Albrecht, Bruce A. Chadwick, and David S. Alcorn, "Religiosity and Deviance: Application of an Attitude-Behavior Contingent Consistency Model," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 16 (September 1977): 263-74.

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⁷ Boyd K. Packer, "Little Children," *Ensign* 16 (November 1986): 17.

⁸ James E. Faust, "The Greatest Challenge in the World—Good Parenting," *Ensign* 20 (November 1990): 34.

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¹⁰ The items, factor weights, eigen values, and Chronback Alpha coefficients can be found in the more technical paper reporting the results of this research,

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¹¹ Albrecht, Chadwick, and Alcorn, "Religiosity and Deviance," 266.

¹² Burkett and White, "Hellfire and Delinquency," 455-62.

¹³ Michael R. Welch, Charles R. Tittle, and Thomas Petee, "Religion and Deviance among Adult Catholics: A Test of the 'Moral Communities' Hypothesis," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30 (June 1991): 159-72.

¹⁴ Stark, Kent, and Doyle, "Religion and Delinquency," 21-23.

¹⁵ Spencer W. Kimball, "Circles of Exaltation," in *The Charge to Religious Educators*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 20.