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Religiosity, Religious Participation, and Negative Prison Behaviors

KENT R. KERLEY
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An impressive research literature has emerged that identifies linkages between religion and a wide range of attitudes, behaviors, and life events. One of the recurrent themes in this literature is that religion may operate as a force both for reducing antisocial behaviors and for increasing prosocial behaviors. We build upon this research by examining survey data of inmates at a large southeastern prison facility to determine whether religiosity can reduce the odds of frequent inmate arguing and fighting. Overall, our results indicate that religiosity directly reduces the likelihood of arguing and indirectly reduces the likelihood of fighting. We conclude that the efficacy of religiosity and religious programs for individuals in prison rests on whether they can promote basic prosocial behaviors.

Introduction

An impressive research literature has emerged that identifies linkages between religion and a wide range of attitudes, behaviors, and life events. Research suggests that religiosity and religious participation are associated with: (1) reductions in the likelihood of criminal activity and drug use (Baier and Wright 2001; Johnson, Jang, Larson, and De Li 2001; Johnson, Larson, De Li, and Jang 2000); (2) interpersonal congeniality or "niceness" (Brennan and London 2001; Ellison 1992; Morgan 1983); (3) improved psychological and physical well-being (Ellison 1991; Ellison, Boardman, Williams, and Jackson 2001; Levin, Markides, and Ray 1996); (4) comfort for those who face difficult life situations, such as family problems, divorce, and unemployment (Ellison et al. 2001; Ellison and Levin 1998; Krause et al. 2001; Levin and Chatters 1998); (5) participation in politics and political movements (Williams and Alexander 1994); and (6) formal volunteering (Wilson and Musick 1997). One of the recurrent themes in this literature is that religion may operate as a force for reducing antisocial behaviors and for increasing prosocial behaviors. In this study, we expand this line of research to investigate whether religiosity can reduce the incidence of antisocial behavior in the special context of prison. Specifically, we use survey data derived from a random sample of inmates at a large southeastern prison facility to determine whether religiosity can reduce the likelihood that inmates will engage in frequent arguments and fights.

Religion and Negative Behaviors

Beyond simply identifying empirical linkages between religion and various types of behavior, the important question is *how* religion may reduce antisocial behavior and promote prosocial behavior. The answer lies in insights drawn from social capital (Coleman 1988; Putnam 2000) and

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social control theories (Hirschi 1969; Krohn 1986). Recent research on the relationship between religion and crime/delinquency as well as crime and interpersonal congeniality is instructive. Johnson et al. (2000, 2001) contend that religious involvement may foster strong social networks and emotional support that constrain criminal behavior. Religious individuals tend to be bonded to religious institutions that provide informal social control over their behaviors. Johnson et al. (2000:379–80) argue that individuals with higher levels of religiosity maintain "behavioral patterns [that] are expected to be guided by sanctions derived from religion." Thus, religiosity may operate as a protective factor against negative behaviors such as crime and delinquency by creating and reinforcing faith-based social networks and social bonds.

The other side of this same coin is how religion may promote prosocial attitudes and behaviors such as interpersonal congeniality, cooperativeness, and altruism. Ellison (1992) finds that religiosity may be linked with prosocial outcomes for two principal reasons. First, individuals with higher levels of religious commitment are more likely to engage in religious role taking such that they interact with others according to their perceptions of what a "divine other" would expect. Religious individuals may view life from "the vantage point of the 'God-role,' by attempting to understand how a divine other would expect them to behave toward their fellows" (Ellison 1992:413; see also Pollner 1989). Second, religious individuals may internalize religious norms concerning kindness, empathy, and civility. Scriptural stories such as the Good Samaritan and scriptural precepts such as the Golden Rule provide structure and a model for relationships with others.

Along this same line, in their recent study of faith-based poverty relief programs, Bartkowski and Regis (2003:169) find that religion can foster positive individual outcomes by creating or reinforcing "networks, norms, and trust." Of particular importance for this study are the concepts of norms and networks. Norms of civility are found in nearly all major religions, and religious practitioners are taught to have compassion, to be other-regarding, and to engage in "rightly-guided action" in their private and public lives (Bartkowski and Regis 2003; Sherkat and Ellison 1999; Williams and Alexander 1994). Scriptural precepts to "love thy neighbor," to "pray for those that persecute you," and to "turn the other cheek" are examples of these norms. Social networks, in turn, are the vehicles through which such norms are disseminated and enforced. These social networks may include friendship circles in local congregations, scripture study groups, and relationships with religious leaders who serve as role models for individuals. Thus, religion may reduce antisocial behavior and promote prosocial behavior by providing both moral frameworks (i.e., norms) and accountability structures (i.e., networks) (Bartkowski and Regis 2003; Sherkat and Ellison 1999). One context in which these ideas have not been explored fully is the prison context.

Faith-Based Prison Programs

The criminal justice system in the United States has experienced unprecedented growth over the past three decades. From 1980 to 2002, the total prison population expanded from about 330,000 inmates to just over 2,000,000 inmates (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2003). Currently, 1 of every 37 adults living in the United States has been imprisoned for some period of time. The criminal justice system is the fastest-growing area of spending in almost every state (Austin and Irwin 2001). Despite the vast investment of resources devoted to crime control, extensive use of imprisonment has produced only minor impacts on the intended goals of dramatically reducing crime and victimization rates, making people feel safer, and deterring offenders from committing additional crimes. According to a recent report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2002), nearly 68 percent of inmates in the United States who were released in 1994 were rearrested within three years. The popular notion of the "revolving door" nature of prisons appears to be an empirical reality.

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Considering the immense number of people currently imprisoned, there is a clear need for effective correctional treatment programs. Programs that have shown promise have focused on literacy, GED and college training, work and life skills training, and substance abuse treatment (Andrews et al. 1990; Cullen and Gendreau 2001; Gendreau and Little 1996; Gibbons 1999; Latessa, Cullen, and Gendreau 2002; Lipton 1996). Unfortunately, these programs often require significant economic and staffing resources. Given their limited operating budgets, most states typically spend as little as possible on correctional treatment. Moreover, in many states there is active political pressure to reduce spending for correctional treatment. Consequently, state legislators and prison administrators often find themselves searching for inexpensive programs.

One inexpensive approach to correctional treatment receiving increased attention involves the use of faith-based prison programs. To be sure, the use of faith as a tool for correctional treatment is not a new idea. Federal and state prisons have used chaplains, at least in some capacity, since the inception of the prison system (Sundt and Cullen 2002). National prison ministry organizations, such as Bill Glass's *Champions for Life* and Charles Colson's *Prison Fellowship Ministries*, have held evangelical events in U.S. prisons since the 1970s. Yet in recent years, there appears to be renewed interest in the potential for faith-based programs to address myriad social issues. Two important signs of this renewed interest are: (1) the "charitable choice" provision of the 1996 welfare bill, which allows faith-based organizations that provide social services to compete for federal grants; and (2) the newly created White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI). It is clear that faith-based programs have become a conceptual and fiscal priority for the Bush administration.

These developments at the federal level have sparked a great deal of coverage in a wide range of media outlets. Perspectives on faith-based programs often exist on opposing poles, from those who completely support the use of faith-based programs to provide all social services to those who oppose government-supported faith-based programs under nearly all circumstances. One recent development concerning faith-based prison programs is the opening of the Lawtey Correctional Institution in Florida, which is the nation's first "faith-based prison" (Farrington 2003). Another development is the release of the first evaluation of the InnerChange Freedom Initiative, a faith-based prerelease program launched by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (Johnson 2003). Supporters of faith-based prison programs suggest that the purpose of these programs is to expose inmates to faith and a belief system that will potentially help them to claim responsibility for their mistakes, to live a moral life, to avoid additional crimes, and to become more compassionate and other-centered (Clear and Sumter 2002).

The important question is whether religiosity and faith-based prison programs can be effective in improving the lives of inmates while in prison and, by extension, once they are released. Academic research on the issue is still in its infancy and, to date, only a small number of studies have been conducted (Clear and Sumter 2002; Clear et al. 1992; Johnson 1987a, 1987b, 2002; Johnson, Larson, and Pitts, 1997; O'Connor and Perreyclear 2002). Overall, this research has shown only moderate effects of faith-based programs on outcome measures such as institutional adjustment, incidence of prison infractions, and likelihood of postrelease arrest. This literature also suffers, in some cases, from important limitations such as: small and nonrepresentative samples, a reliance on anecdotal evidence, an absence of theoretical context, limited statistical analysis, and self-evaluation by prison ministry providers.

Thus, as the prison population continues to expand and states face budgetary and political hurdles to providing effective correctional treatment, many states are using faith-based prison programs in the hopes that they will make prisons safer and more manageable. Unfortunately, however, there has not been enough empirical research on this issue to reach any firm conclusions. Understanding how religion may affect the lives of the incarcerated is an important question for researchers to address. Before conducting a program evaluation of a specific faith-based prison program, an important first step in this line of inquiry is an independent and systematic study of the relationship between religiosity and negative prison behaviors. Using survey data from

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a random sample of inmates at a large southeastern prison facility, we explore how religiosity affects the incidence of two key negative behaviors in prison: arguing and fighting.

Data and Methods

Sample

Data for this study are derived from a survey of inmates at the Mississippi State Penitentiary in Parchman, Mississippi. This facility is the largest of Mississippi's three state-managed prisons and, in fact, is one of the largest prisons in the nation both in terms of acreage and inmate population. The facility houses over 5,000 men representing all security classifications. The sample was drawn in June 2002 following the authors' receipt of a current inmate list from the Mississippi Department of Corrections. At the time the sample was drawn, there were just over 5,100 inmates incarcerated at the facility. Given the purpose of the study, inmates who were in "lockdown," under the age of 18 years, or in the facility's hospital were eliminated from the sampling frame. This left an inmate population of 4,313 from which the sample was drawn. To achieve a sampling error of no greater than 5 percent, 875 inmates were randomly selected to receive the survey questionnaire.

The survey packets were delivered to all randomly selected study participants on the same date in June 2002. Each packet contained a cover letter, informed consent form, survey questionnaire, and a stamped return envelope. It was important that inmates randomly chosen for participation were delivered their survey packets on the same date and time. Inmates were able to receive the packets at their regular mail pick-up location and, for those who chose to respond, the questionnaires were returned to our office via inmates' regular mail drop-off location. In contrast to a mail survey of the general public, surveys were delivered at the same time to guard against any potential response biases (e.g., inmate rumors about special rewards or punishments for participation). This method provided the standardization necessary to be confident that the surveys were received by the correct individuals. The research team was not present during survey administration because (1) it was not permitted by prison officials, (2) it would have been virtually impossible logistically, and (3) it would have necessitated several correctional officers being nearby, and thus might have placed undue coercion on the inmates.

A total of 386 valid questionnaires were returned to the principal investigator, which constituted an overall response rate of 45 percent. Our response rate is quite good for a prison-based survey and, to our knowledge, this is the first study of religiosity and prison behavior that uses a random sample survey of inmates at a large prison facility. This is an important departure from prior studies that employ convenience samples or anecdotal reports. We should note that the original file containing the sample frame, which was provided by the institution, contained basic demographic and criminal history information about each inmate. After survey administration was complete, we tested for statistical differences between respondents and nonrespondents in terms of demographic characteristics, type of crime, and sentence length, and found no significant differences between the two groups.

In terms of content, the questionnaire contained a broad range of questions pertaining to inmates' family and religious backgrounds, criminal histories, perceptions of morality, levels of self-esteem, experiences with negative emotions, use of coping mechanisms, religiosity, involvement in faith-based prison ministry programs, and incidence of fighting and arguing with other inmates.

Dependent Variables

We use two dependent variables to measure negative prison behaviors. The first dependent variable is *arguing with other inmates*. We asked inmates to report how often, on average, they

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engaged in "arguments with other inmates that involved yelling and screaming." The response categories were never or almost never, about 3–4 times per year, about once per month, about once per week, about 3–4 times per week, and daily. This ordinal measure was transformed into a dichotomous measure to allow for the use of logistic regression. The distribution suggested that we code arguing as one or more times per month = 1 and less than once per month = 0.

The second dependent variable is *fighting with other inmates*. This variable provides an indication of more serious negative behavior among inmates. For this measure, we asked inmates how often, on average, they got into "fights with other inmates that involved punching, kicking, or stabbing." The response categories were the same as for the measure of arguing with other inmates. As with the arguing measure, we transformed fighting into a dichotomous measure where fighting one or more times per month = 1 and fighting less than once per month = 0. These two self-report measures represent two forms of negative prison behavior.[1] Our original intent was to supplement these self-report measures of fighting and arguing with institutional reports of inmate infractions. However, these data were only available in aggregate form and thus could not be matched with sample respondents.

Independent Variables

The independent variables for this study can be arranged into three categories: religiosity, criminal history, and demographic control variables. First, there are five measures designed to tap both the cognitive and behavioral dimensions of religiosity. The first three measures are designed to capture the cognitive dimension. The first measure asked inmates whether they had experienced a conversion at some point in their lives (1 = Yes, 0 = No). The second measure asked inmates whether they "believe in the existence of a higher power or spirit such as God or Allah" (1 = Yes, 0 = No). The third measure asked for level of agreement with this statement: "Right and wrong should be based on God's laws." The original response categories were Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. We collapsed the first two and latter three categories to create a dichotomous measure (Strongly Agree or Agree = 1, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree = 0).

The final two measures of religiosity are designed to capture its behavioral dimension. The fourth measure asked inmates to report how often, on average, they attend religious services in prison (Once per week or more = 1, Less than once per week = 0). Religious services could include formal meetings and scripture studies in the prison chapel or individual units, as well as informal scripture studies and prayer groups in the individual units. The final measure was attendance at a national prison ministry event called Operation Starting Line (1 = Yes, 0 = No). Operation Starting Line is a prison ministry program that is part of Charles Colson's Prison Fellowship Ministries. The organization held a one-day evangelical event at Mississippi State Penitentiary, which included Christian musicians, comedians, professional athletes, and other speakers, about six months before the survey was distributed.

Second, four measures of criminal history are included. Given the nature of our survey population, it is important to include measures of respondents' history of contact with the criminal justice system to predict the incidence of arguing and fighting. The first two measures asked inmates how many times they had been arrested and how many times they had been in prison. These measures originally had five response categories but were transformed into dichotomous variables for purposes of the logistic regression models. Number of arrests was coded as 3 or more arrests = 1 and less than 3 arrests = 0. Number of times in prison was coded as 2 or more prison stints = 1 and less than 2 prison stints = 0. The third measure of criminal history was the numeric length of respondents' current prison sentence. Finally, we included respondents' current prison security classification. The categories were maximum security, medium security, and minimum security. We combined the first two categories to create a dichotomous measure (Maximum or Medium = 1, Minimum = 0).

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Third, we include three important demographic measures that also serve as control variables. The first measure is respondents' current age. The second measure is respondents' race. This measure originally had six different categories. However, given the extremely small number of individuals who did not identify themselves as white or black, we created a simple binary indicator of race (Black = 1, White = 0). Finally, we include a measure of respondents' educational attainment. This measure originally contained six categories, but was transformed into a dichotomous measure based on its distribution. We coded educational attainment as high school or better = 1 and less than high school = 0.

Results

Descriptive statistics for the variables in our logistic regression models are presented in Table 1. For our two dependent variables, we observe that about 55 percent of inmates in our sample report getting into arguments with fellow inmates one or more times per month, while 19 percent report getting into fights with other inmates one or more times per month. In terms of demographic characteristics, inmates in our sample have an average age of just over 36 years, about two-thirds are black, and only 58.4 percent have a high school degree or higher.

The respondents appear to have had substantial contact with the criminal justice system during their lives. About two-thirds of the inmates had been arrested three or more times, about 38 percent had been in prison two or more times, and nearly 58 percent were classified as either medium or maximum security risks. The average length of the current sentence for the respondents is 27.7 years.

In terms of the cognitive dimension of religiosity, we find that 31.5 percent of inmates report a conversion experience during their lives, 93.7 percent believe in a higher power, and 77 percent believe that right and wrong should be based on God's laws. For the behavioral dimension of religiosity, nearly 39 percent of inmates attend religious services in prison once per week or more, and 69.4 percent attended the Operation Starting Line event.

To explore the bivariate relationship between religion and negative prison behaviors, we examine the frequency of arguing and fighting within the categories of our measures of religiosity (see Table 2). Our bivariate findings indicate that four of the five measures of religiosity are significantly related to participation in arguments. The largest substantive difference observed in Table 2 is the finding for belief in a higher power. For this measure of religiosity, 73.9 percent of inmates not believing in a higher power engaged in an argument one or more times per month, whereas only 53.1 percent of those believing in a higher power participated in one or more arguments per month. These findings point to a consistent bivariate relationship between our measures of religiosity and the frequency of arguments.

In contrast, our cross-tabulations for fighting suggest that religiosity is less influential in affecting the frequency of physical violence. For inmates in our sample, experiencing a religious conversion, attending a religious service one or more times per week, and attending Operation Starting Line have little substantive effect on fighting. Belief in a higher power and attitudes toward right and wrong are the two measures that significantly decrease the frequency of physical violence. Thus, our bivariate analysis of fighting suggests that religiosity has little effect on the frequency of physical altercations.

In Tables 3 and 4 we build upon our bivariate analyses by estimating multivariate logistic regression models for the likelihood of arguing and fighting one or more times per month. We report the findings from our logistic regression models as odds ratios of engaging in arguments or fights once or more per month (Hosmer and Lemeshow 1989). For illustrative purposes, we also include the beta weights from our analyses.[2]

We present odds ratios for arguing one or more times per month in Table 3. In terms of demographic factors, we observe that older inmates are less likely to participate in arguments.

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TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR VARIABLES IN LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS

	Percent or Mean
Dependent Variables	
Arguing with fellow inmates	
1 or more times per month	54.7
Less than once per month	45.3
Fighting with fellow inmates	
1 or more times per month	19.0
Less than once per month	81.0
Independent Variables	
Demographics	
Age (in years)	36.16
Race	
Black	66.9
White	33.1
Education	
High school or better	58.4
Less than high school	41.6
Criminal justice factors	
Number of arrests	
3 or more arrests	66.9
Less than 3 arrests	33.1
Number of times in prison	
2 or more times	37.9
1 time	62.1
Length of sentence (in years)	27.7
Security classification	
Medium or maximum	57.6
Minimum	42.4
Religiosity	
Religious conversion	
Yes	31.5
No	68.5
Belief in a higher power	
Yes	93.7
No	6.3
Right and wrong should be based on God's laws	
Strongly agree or agree	77.0
Neither disagree or strongly disagree	23.0
Attendance at religious services	
Once per week or more	38.5
Less than once per week	61.5
Attendance at Operation Starting Line	
Yes	69.4
No	30.6

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TABLE 2
CROSS-TABULATIONS OF DEPENDENT VARIABLES BY MEASURES OF RELIGIOSITY

	Percent Arguing Once or More per Month	Percent Fighting Once or More per Month
Religious conversion		
Yes	51.7**	18.3
No	57.6	19.2
Belief in a higher power		
Yes	53.1**	18.5**
No	73.9	26.1
Right and wrong should be based on God's laws		
Strongly agree or agree	52.9**	17.0**
Neither disagree or strongly disagree	61.4	26.1
Attendance at religious services		
Once per week or more	50.3	20.7
Less than once per week	57.6	17.8
Attendance at Operation Starting Line		
Yes	52.5**	18.9
No	60.0	19.3

**Indicates significant model chi-square and significant differences in measures of association at $p < 0.05$.

Our findings indicate that a one-year increase in age is associated with a 5.8 percent decrease in the odds of arguing. This finding suggests that older inmates may be able to minimize verbal conflicts that potentially could escalate to physical altercations, perhaps because they are more respected in the prison community or are better equipped to negotiate the difficulties of prison life. Our findings also indicate no significant race or education differences in the odds of arguing one or more times per month.

Inmates who have served two or more terms in prison are nearly three times as likely to engage in frequent arguments than those with fewer prison stints. This finding must be reconciled with the finding for age by noting that, on average, older inmates are less likely to engage in frequent argument except in cases where they have been incarcerated two more times. Additionally, inmates classified as medium or maximum security prisoners are twice as likely to be involved in one or more arguments per month than those in minimum security. These findings indicate that higher security inmates with two or more prison stints are at the greatest risk for verbal conflicts. Our findings regarding security classification are interesting because high security prisoners typically have less social contact than those in minimum security settings.

For our five measures of religiosity, we find that four of them significantly reduce the odds of frequent arguments. Concerning the cognitive dimension of religiosity, inmates believing in a higher power are 73 percent less likely to engage in one or more fights per month than inmates not believing in a higher power. Those strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement that "right and wrong should be based on God's laws" are 47.3 percent less likely to argue once or more per month. Our odds ratios for the behavioral dimension of religiosity yield similar results. Inmates attending multiple religious services per week and the special Operation Starting Line event are only about half as likely to engage in one or more arguments per month than those in the reference categories.

In Model 1 of Table 4 we regress our measure of fighting behavior on our demographic, criminal justice, and religiosity variables. Our findings regarding the effect of demographic and

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TABLE 3
LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR ARGUING ONE OR MORE TIMES PER MONTH WITH FELLOW INMATES

	B	Odds Ratio
Demographics		
Age (in years)	−0.060	0.942***
Race		
Black	−0.040	0.961
White	ref	ref
Education		
High school or better	−0.012	0.988
Less than high school	ref	ref
Criminal justice factors		
Number of arrests		
3 or more arrests	0.481	1.618
Less than 3 arrests	ref	ref
Number of times in prison		
2 or more times	1.011	2.748***
1 time	ref	ref
Length of sentence (in years)	0.002	1.002
Security classification		
Medium or maximum	0.688	1.990**
Minimum	ref	ref
Religiosity		
Religious conversion (1 = Yes, 0 = No)	−0.413	0.662
Belief in a higher powerb (1 = Yes, 0 = No)	−1.309	0.270**
Right and wrong should be based on God's laws		
Strongly agree or agree	−0.641	0.527*
Neither disagree or strongly disagree	ref	ref
Attendance at religious services		
More than once per week	−0.602	0.548**
Once per week or less	ref	ref
Attendance at Operation Starting Line (1 = Yes, 0 = No)	−0.780	0.459***
−2 log likelihood		329.108
Nagelkerke R-square		0.229

*Significant at $p < 0.10$, **significant at $p < 0.05$, ***significant at $p < 0.01$.

criminal justice characteristics on fighting parallel those for arguing in Table 3. Age is the only significant demographic characteristic, and there are no race or education differences in the odds of fighting. The odds ratio for age indicates that a one-year increase in age reduces the odds of engaging in one or more fights per month by 5.3 percent. This finding reinforces the idea that older inmates may be more respected in the prison community or may seek to avoid physical altercations. Our findings also point to an increased risk of fighting for those with multiple prison stints and inmates with higher security classifications. Inmates in either category are over twice as likely to engage in one or more fights per month than first time or minimum security inmates. We also observe in Model 1 that black inmates are about 48 percent less likely to get into frequent fights than white inmates.

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TABLE 4
LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR FIGHTING ONE OR MORE TIMES PER MONTH WITH FELLOW INMATES

	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	Odds Ratio	*B*	Odds Ratio
Demographics				
Age (in years)	−0.054	0.947***	−0.032	0.969
Race				
Black	−0.651	0.522*	−0.760	0.468**
White	ref	ref	ref	ref
Education				
High school or better	0.533	1.704	0.668	1.750
Less than high school	ref	ref	ref	ref
Criminal justice factors				
Number of arrests				
3 or more arrests	0.290	1.336	0.147	1.158
Less than 3 arrests	ref	ref	ref	ref
Number of times in prison				
2 or more times	0.773	2.166**	0.467	1.596
1 time	ref	ref	ref	ref
Length of sentence (in years)	0.004	1.004	0.005	1.005
Security classification				
Medium or maximum	0.748	2.112**	0.498	1.645
Minimum	ref	ref	ref	ref
Religiosity				
Religious conversion (1 = Yes, 0 = No)	−0.378	0.686	−0.200	0.819
Belief in a higher power (1 = Yes, 0 = No)	−0.070	0.932	0.259	1.296
Right and wrong should be based on God's laws				
Strongly agree or agree	−0.871	0.418**	−0.724	0.485*
Neither disagree or strongly disagree	ref	ref	ref	ref
Attendance at religious services				
More than once per week	−0.377	0.686	−0.227	0.797
Once per week or less	ref	ref	ref	ref
Attendance at Operation Starting Line (1 = Yes, 0 = No)	−0.225	0.799	0.098	1.104
Arguing with fellow inmates				
One or more times per month	—	—	2.855	17.372***
Less than once per month	—	—	ref	ref
−2 log likelihood		245.906		209.267
Nagelkerke R-square		0.164		0.340

*Significant at $p < 0.10$, **significant at $p < 0.05$, ***significant at $p < 0.01$.

In contrast to the models for arguing, our measures of religiosity demonstrate little preventive effect on fighting. With the exception of attitudes toward right and wrong, our measures of religiosity are not associated with frequent fighting. Inmates strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement that right and wrong should be based on God's laws are 58.2 percent less likely to fight one or more times per month. Odds ratios for the other measures of religiosity are in the expected directions, but are not statistically significant.

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After finding that our measures of religiosity did not exhibit a direct effect on fighting, we then explored the possibility that religiosity may influence fighting *indirectly* by reducing the likelihood of arguing. We reasoned that physical conflicts generally result from the escalation of verbal conflicts. Thus, it is possible that religiosity may reduce the likelihood of fighting by reducing the odds that inmates will get into arguments.

To test this assertion, we estimated the mediating effect of religiosity on fighting by including the frequency of arguing in Model 2 of Table 4 (Clogg, Petkova, and Haritou 1995; Wheaton 1985). The results suggest that arguing has a large and significant effect on fighting. Inmates engaging in one or more arguments per month are over 17 times more likely to engage in one or more fights per month. We estimate the effect of religiosity on fighting that is mediated by arguing through a comparison of beta weights and standard errors from the reduced model (Model 1) to the full model (Model 2) (Clogg, Petkova, and Haritou 1995). We examine mediating effects for religiosity variables that were significant predictors of arguing in Table 3. Our results indicate that arguing significantly mediates the effect of belief in a higher power ($B = -0.330$, SE $= 0.127$, $t = -2.596$, $p < 0.01$) and attendance at Operation Starting Line ($B = -0.323$, SE $= 0.083$, $t = -3.882$, $p < 0.01$) on fighting. Thus, inmates believing in a higher power and attending the Operation Starting Line event are less likely to engage in one or more fights per month because they participate in fewer arguments.

Discussion and Conclusions

Overall, our study lends support to the idea that religion can reduce antisocial behaviors, even in an extreme case such as prison. Scientific research on religiosity in prison and faith-based prison programs is just beginning to emerge and it will be some time before any overarching conclusions can be reached. Our study was not a program evaluation of a specific faith-based prison program, but instead explored whether religiosity led to any significant decreases in negative prison behaviors. We found that religiosity directly reduced the likelihood of arguing and indirectly reduced the likelihood of fighting. The implication for faith-based prison programs is that for them to be effective, they should promote basic prosocial behaviors by reducing the frequency of inmate arguments. Five issues deserve further discussion.

First, we discuss our findings for the models predicting the frequency of arguments with other inmates. An argument that involves yelling or screaming is a fitting example of a negative prison behavior. In our models predicting the likelihood of arguments with other inmates, we found strong support for the idea that religiosity may promote prosocial behavior. Four of our five measures of religiosity directly reduced the odds that inmates would get into arguments once or more per month. Specifically, inmates who believed in a higher power, regularly attended religious services, and attended the Operation Starting Line event were at least half as likely to get into arguments with other inmates than those in the reference groups. Belief in a higher power reduced the likelihood of inmates getting into frequent arguments by over 70 percent. Thus, even with controls for demographic factors and criminal history, we find that religiosity, in both its cognitive and behavioral dimensions, appears to be related directly to the likelihood of inmate arguments.

Second, our models used to predict fighting with other inmates deserve further discussion. It would seem important in any study of negative behaviors to account for gradations in scope and intensity. In that vein, we felt that it was important to supplement the measure of arguing by including a measure of fighting with other inmates that involved punching, kicking, or stabbing. This measure clearly represents a more serious form of negative behavior in a prison setting. In fact, this type of behavior could lead to serious injury, depending on the situation and the presence of weapons. Unlike the analysis for arguing, our models for fighting did not demonstrate a strong inhibitory effect of religiosity. In fact, agreement with the statement that "right and wrong

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should be based on God's laws" was the only factor that significantly reduced the odds of frequent fighting. The other four measures of religiosity appear to operate in the anticipated direction, but do not significantly reduce the odds of inmate fighting.

Third, we note that there is the temptation to conclude from this study that because religion directly reduced minor negative behaviors (i.e., arguments) but did not directly reduce more serious negative behaviors (i.e., fighting), we should have minimal confidence that religion can promote prosocial behavior in the context of prison. Indeed, there is a tendency in criminal justice evaluation research to evaluate programs primarily in terms of their effects on more serious forms of crime and deviance. Most crime prevention and correctional treatment programs are evaluated in terms of how they affect levels of violent offending, violent victimization, and fear of crime, while other less serious outcome measures are ignored or downplayed.

However, results from our study demonstrate how misleading it would be to focus solely on more serious forms of behavior. As noted previously, most studies of religiosity and faith-based prison programs focus on recidivism and long-term serious behavior. If we had taken this approach, we likely would have used only fighting as our outcome measure and would have concluded that religiosity had, at best, a minimal effect on behavior. However, it would seem appropriate to adopt a more nuanced view of the relationship between religiosity and negative prison behaviors. Thus, we concluded the analysis by adding our measure of arguing to the full model predicting fighting, and then tested whether there was an *indirect* relationship between religiosity and fighting that was mediated by arguing. We found this to be the case for two measures of religiosity. Inmates who reported believing in a higher power and who attended the Operation Starting Line event were less likely to engage in one or more fights per month because they participated in fewer arguments per month.

Fourth, it is important to comment on the measures of religiosity used in our study and how they affected our dependent variables. Investigators who study the effects of religiosity on a variety of outcome variables such as crime, delinquency, health, stress, and depression often find that behavioral measures are more robust than attitudinal measures (see, for example, Ellison et al. 2001; Johnson et al. 2001). In Table 3, we found that two attitudinal measures (belief in a higher power, right and wrong are based on God's laws) and two behavioral measures (attendance at religious services, attendance at Operation Starting Line) significantly reduced the odds of inmate arguing. In Table 4, three of those four variables did not significantly affect the odds of inmate fighting, and the right and wrong measure was only marginally significant. Thus, we found that attitudinal and behavioral measures of religiosity had similar effects on negative behaviors in prison. This confirms to us, and likely to most religion scholars, that both attitudinal and behavioral dimensions of religiosity should be included in future research.

Fifth, although race was simply a demographic control variable in our models, the finding that whites had significantly increased odds of regular fighting does warrant additional discussion. While much research demonstrates that blacks have significantly higher rates of violent behavior than whites in "free society," it is still a matter of debate whether this relationship holds true in prison. For example, Wright (1989) found no effect of race on prison violence, while Petersilia (1983) found that the effect of race on prison violence varied by geographic region, with whites having higher rates of prison violence in some states. More recently, Harer and Steffensmeier (1996) found that black inmates were significantly more likely to engage in prison violence than white inmates. The lack of research on this topic is surprising, and prevents us from drawing any firm conclusions from our study. Clearly, additional research that focuses specifically on this issue is needed.

Before suggesting future avenues for research, we note two potential limitations of our data set and study. First, we acknowledge that there are alternate measures of negative behavior within a prison setting. Researchers could also use measures such as fighting and arguing with correctional officers, drug use, or drug dealing. We chose arguing and fighting with other inmates as our key dependent variables for three reasons. First, arguing and fighting are significant issues

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for the social control of inmate populations, as well as for the safety of inmates and correctional personnel (Clear and Sumter 2002). Second, these two measures capture a range of prison deviance from minor incivilities to more serious fights that involve major harm. Third, arguing and fighting are commonly used as dependent variables in studies of prison adjustment and coping (Warren, Hurt, Loper, and Chauhan 2004).

Second, we note that our data set does not allow us to study the long-term effects of religiosity or the impact of a specific faith-based prison program. It is often the case in studies of faith-based prison programs that investigators gather longitudinal data to assess the effect of religiosity on inmate attitudes and behavior over time, in particular after they are released from prison (Johnson 1987a, 1987b, 2002; Johnson, Larson, and Pitts, 1997). Typically, the goal of these studies is to determine whether religiosity and faith-based programs can reduce rates of recidivism. However, our study focuses on the relationship between religiosity and negative behaviors within the prison context. Our data source is not longitudinal, but rather a cross-sectional sample of a special population. Our contention is that investigators should develop a greater understanding of how religiosity may affect attitudes and behaviors of individuals while in prison before assessing how religiosity may affect them after release. Although it would be possible for us to speculate about the long-term effects of religiosity and faith-based programs in light of findings from the present study, our data set does not allow for a direct test of these issues.

Overall, our study demonstrates that religion can reduce the incidence of negative behavior, even in an exceptionally negative context such as a prison facility. We close by suggesting two avenues for additional research. First, as noted previously, our measures of fighting and arguing are derived from self-reports because we did not have access to the correctional facility's infraction records. Future studies might be conducted at correctional facilities where self-report measures of conflict are linked to administrative data on prison infractions. Such studies would test the validity of self-reported involvement in arguments and fights. Second, given that our sample was derived from an all-male prison, it would seem important to conduct a study that examines the relationship between religiosity and negative behaviors for female inmates. This type of study would shed light onto potential differences in interpersonal behavior, which may be attributable to ascriptive characteristics such as gender.

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Notes

1. The point could be raised that arguing and fighting are highly correlated events and thus not distinctive measures. While it is the case that many arguments will lead to immediate fights, we believe that the measures are distinctive. This is demonstrated in two ways. First, as seen in Tables 3 and 4, the separate models for arguing and fighting produce noticeably different results. Second, when we ran a cross-tabulation for arguing by fighting, we found that although the two variables are significantly related, 37 percent of the sample reported getting into arguments one or more times per month without also getting into fights one or more times per month. Thus, arguing and fighting appear to be antecedent, but not necessarily coterminous, events.
2. We also ran all of our models with OLS regression, thereby treating the ordinal-level fighting and arguing measures as interval-level measures. The results were virtually identical. We contend that creating binary measures of arguing and fighting and using logistic regression was the most statistically appropriate strategy because: (1) the responses for both dependent variables were skewed under the original coding scheme; (2) the original coding was ordinal; and (3) the logistic regression models appear to maximize clarity of interpretation for arguing and fighting.

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