

Deviant Identity and Delinquent Behavior

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Background

- Identity formation is a critical dimension of adolescence, but a dearth of criminological research has focused on identity as a precursor to antisocial behavior (with important exceptions such as Matsueda, 1992)
- More recent criminological research that focuses on identity has relied on static measures of identity, lacked controls for delinquency, excluded females, or omitted relationship status and general crime
- No prior studies have examined within individual shifts in these time-varying identities and behaviors

Current Investigation

- Hyp 1: Contemporaneous deviant identity is positively associated with delinquency
- Hyp 2: Prior deviant identity is positively associated with subsequent delinquency
- Hyp 3: The effect of contemporaneous or prior identity does not vary by gender

Data and Sample

Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (N = 1,321)

- 5 waves of data (2001 – 2011) for male and female young adults
- Age ranges from 12-19 years at Wave I, and 22-29 years at Wave V

Sample

- Analyses rely on all 5 waves of data

Key Measures

- Delinquency: range 0-8 with questions on stealing, vandalism, weapon use, drug use, violence, etc. (Elliott and Ageton, 1980)
- Deviant identity: reflect appraisal as a “trouble-maker” (binary) (Matsueda, 1992)

Analyses

- Fixed-effects regression to account for unobserved individual characteristics that may effect both identity and delinquency (i.e., unobserved heterogeneity) and to examine within individual change

Table 1. Means/Proportions (Range) for Key Variable

Variable	Wave I	Wave II	Wave III	Wave IV	Wave V
Delinquency	0.20 (0-8)	.24 (0-6.1)	.27 (0-4.6)	.27 (0-5)	.18 (0-4)
Deviant Identity	0.15	0.15	0.15	0.12	0.07
Age	15.26	16.39	18.17	20.35	25.38
n (person-level)	1321				
n (person-period)	6605				

Table 2. Fixed-Effect Regression Estimates (and Standard Errors) of Delinquent Behavior (Logged) on Deviant Identity, Prior Delinquency, and Other Covariates

Predictor	Model 1	Model 2
Deviant Identity	0.98 (.13) ***	1.01 (.13) ***
Prior Deviant Identity		0.26 (.12) *
Prior Delinquency	-0.12 (.02) ***	-0.12 (.02) ***
Age (16)		
Age18	0.20 (.08) *	0.21 (.08) *
Age20	0.17 (.08) *	0.18 (.08) *
Age25	-0.25 (.09) **	-0.23 (.09) **
Relationship Status (Single)		
Cohabitation	-0.14 (.11)	-0.14 (.11)
Marriage	-0.47 (.16) **	-0.46 (.16) **
R ²	0.56	0.56

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

n (person-level)	1321
n (person-period)	5284

Results

- Contemporaneous deviant identity was positively related to delinquent behavior
- Deviant identity at an earlier age was positively related to later delinquency
- The effect of contemporaneous or prior deviant identity did not vary by gender

Limitations/Subsequent Research

- Data was drawn from a regional sample
- Additional deviant identities should be considered, such as “partier”
- Expand beyond delinquent outcomes, such as substance use or violence

Conclusions

- Deviant identities are associated with delinquent behavior from adolescence to young adulthood
- These associations appear to operate in similar ways for men and women
- The association between deviant identity and behavior persists when controlling for unobserved individual characteristics, but these estimates are more conservative than in traditional OLS estimates
- Although not the sole predictor of delinquency, identity should be considered a predictor of delinquency
- Findings illustrate the importance of including measures of identity when examining delinquent and criminal involvement as an outcome

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