
ROLE-TAKING, ROLE COMMITMENT, AND DELINQUENCY: A THEORY OF DIFFERENTIAL SOCIAL CONTROL*

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This paper builds on a symbolic interactionist theory of delinquency that identifies the locus of social control in the process of taking the role of the other. According to structural symbolic interactionism, role-taking is linked to the broader social organization through the concepts of generalized others, role commitments, and reference groups. We specify mechanisms affecting delinquency derived from the classical theories of labeling and differential association as special cases of this symbolic interactionist perspective. In contrast, social disorganization and social control theories contradict the assumptions of interactionism and provide a competing set of hypotheses. We translate these hypotheses into a covariance structure model of individual delinquency, and estimate it using panel data from a national sample of males. Our results support the symbolic interactionist perspective: Delinquency is affected by the elements of role-taking—associating with delinquent peers, having delinquent reflected appraisals, and holding delinquent attitudes. Moreover, contrary to social disorganization and social control theories, variables representing social disorganization, attachment, and commitment affect delinquency only indirectly through the differential social control process of role-taking.

A central sociological problem concerns the process by which deviant or criminal behavior is controlled by the larger society. Although most would agree that social interaction is an important locus of control of crime and delinquency, criminological theory has not stressed the interactional *mechanisms* of social control. Instead, recent developments in criminological theory and research have focused on developing macrotheories of Marxist class categories and delinquency (Colvin and Pauley 1983; Hagan 1989), microtheories of stable in-

dividual traits (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990), or life-course theories of life events and delinquent behavior (Sampson and Laub 1990; Hagan and Palloni 1988). Another theoretical trend integrates traditional theories, such as anomie, disorganization, social control, labeling, differential association, and social learning theories, to increase explanatory power or link levels of explanation (Elliott, Ageton, and Canter 1979; Elliott, Huizinga, and Ageton 1985; Pearson and Weiner 1985; Thornberry 1987). This latter trend has been criticized for failing to reconcile the contradictory assumptions underlying the constituent theories, for integrating disparate variables into a causal model rather than integrating propositions into a general theory, and for simply renaming theoretical concepts rather than reconceptualizing them in a larger theoretical framework (Hirschi

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1979; Short 1979; Liska, Krohn, and Messner 1989).

We take a different avenue and specify a theory of delinquency based on a unified framework of symbolic interactionism. We build on the work of Matsueda (1992), who specified a theory of delinquency based on a symbolic interactionist view of the self as a reflection of the appraisals of others. We extend that work by (1) identifying a broader range of individual-level mechanisms of social control, (2) specifying group and organizational processes for controlling delinquency, (3) conceptualizing classical criminological theories as special cases of a general interactionist framework, and (4) testing the interactionist model empirically against specific hypotheses drawn from competing theories.

DIFFERENTIAL SOCIAL CONTROL: A SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONIST THEORY OF DELINQUENCY

Reflected Appraisals and Delinquency

Matsueda (1992) employs symbolic interactionism to show how the social control of delinquency lies in an interactionist conception of the self. He bases his explanation on Mead's (1934) thesis that the self arises in problematic situations when an individual takes the role of significant others and views oneself from the standpoint of those others. The self, then, consists of a set of reflected appraisals (or perceptions of the appraisals or evaluations) of the self by others (Kinch 1963; Felson 1985). Matsueda argues that delinquency is in large part a function of the meanings of self that are relevant to deviant behavior and that these meanings arise in part through labeling. That is, one's reflected appraisals of self as a delinquent are affected by the actual appraisals (or labels) made by significant others, like parents, teachers, and peers. Matsueda's empirical results support most of these propositions: Delinquency is significantly affected by reflected appraisals of the self as a "rule violator," which are in turn determined by parental labels of youths as rule violators. Yet, contrary to labeling theory, he also finds that disadvantaged youths are only slightly more likely to be labeled deviant than advantaged youths. And contrary to symbolic interactionism, he finds that the effect of parental appraisals on delin-

quent behavior is not mediated by reflected appraisals—a finding that is difficult to explain and raises questions about symbolic interactionism.

Matsueda's (1992) initial attempt to specify an interactionist theory of delinquency focuses on the effects of the self as reflected appraisals. It ignores, however, other features of an interactionist conception of social control relevant to delinquency and fails to draw on recent research in structural symbolic interactionism that links interactions to social organization. We examine these issues below, beginning with a review of Mead's (1934) analysis of the social transaction.¹

The Individual Level: Role-Taking, Social Control, and Delinquency

Mead (1934) views role-taking as the key to social control. Interactants take the role of others, view themselves as objects from the standpoint of others, and thus fit their actions into a social transaction. In essence, reciprocal role-taking between interactants makes joint activity possible. This implies a process of social cognition arising in problematic situations, which Matsueda (1992) uses to build his explanation of self and delinquency. Reflective thought, or self-consciousness, is critical for explaining delinquency, since delinquency is particularly likely when youths consider behavior that is generally eschewed by a variety of social groups (Mead [1927] 1982). When an action or impulse to act is interrupted, causing a discontinuity in interaction, the blocked impulse causes one to view the self (the "me") as an object from the standpoint of others. The individual views him or herself from the standpoint of significant others, considers alternative solutions to the discontinuity, and appraises potential justifications and reactions of significant others to those alternatives. The proposed alternative is then evaluated by another impulse

¹ Our view emphasizes the study of patterned meanings and behaviors that remain somewhat stable across situations. Such patterns can be examined with quantitative survey data. This is consistent with the methodological perspective of "structural symbolic interactionism" (e.g., Stryker 1980; McCall and Simmons 1978) and inconsistent with the methodological recommendations of Blumer's (1969) version of symbolic interactionism (see Matsueda 1992).

(the "I"), which reacts either positively, following the alternative into overt action, or negatively, blocking the impulse and eliciting another "me." This serial cognitive process continues until the problem is solved or the interaction ends. Once the interaction ends, the "me" is incorporated into the individual's memory and becomes part of the self to be called up in future interactions.

This process illustrates the essential features of Mead's theory of temporality: Role-taking occurs in the present and applies past experiences to anticipated future events (Mead 1929). From an indefinite past, a specific depiction of the past (the "me") is called up to solve a problem in the present in the context of a future goal with anticipated consequences. Cognition thus allows humans to break out of the present, gives our present continuity with the past and future, and allows us to adjust to emergent events or discontinuities in the present by aligning them with the past and the future (Maines, Sugrue, and Katovich 1983). This implies continuity in human behavior, such as delinquency, through time.

Role-taking implies five major processes that can affect the likelihood of delinquent or deviant behavior. First, as specified by Matsueda (1992), the specific *meaning of the self as reflected appraisals* (as a rule-violator) should affect delinquency. Thus, delinquency is in large part a function of stable meanings of the self relevant to deviant behavior, which arise partly through processes of role-taking and labeling (see Matsueda 1992 for further elaboration).

Second, *holding attitudes toward delinquent solutions* to problematic situations will affect the likelihood of delinquent behavior. Attitudes are predispositions or plans to act (Mead 1938) that serve as "pivots for the redirection of social acts" through role-taking in problematic situations (Dewey 1922). For Mead, the important attitudes are significant symbols whose meanings are shared in the sense that they call out "functionally identical" responses in the self and in others (Miller 1982). As such, the attitudes of one's communities and social groups constitute the generalized other and become incorporated into the "me" (Mead 1934). This does not mean, however, that the attitudes of the larger community always prevail. When the attitudes of a given community or social group fail to resolve a

problematic situation and create a discontinuity in interaction, an individual will sometimes form an attitude that is at odds with those of the larger group (Mead 1934; Miller 1973). In this situation, however, the individual must fit the new attitude together with the old attitude so that the new one is acceptable from the perspective of the generalized other. In the case of delinquency, we might expect individuals to attempt to make delinquent behavior acceptable to law-abiding social groups by justifying, disclaiming, or neutralizing the behavior (Sykes and Matza 1957; Hewitt and Stokes 1975). Or, individuals may change perspectives and take the role (perspective) of a different generalized other, like a law-violating youth group, that would be more likely to favor delinquency. When attitudes favoring delinquency are incorporated over time into the "me," they become stable and can be called up in the future. Consequently, the stronger and more stable the attitudes, motives, and justifications favoring delinquency, the greater the likelihood that delinquent resolutions to problematic situations will occur.

A third process affecting delinquency involves *anticipating the reactions of significant others to delinquent behavior*. Specifically, through role-taking individuals also become aware of the likely reactions of others to certain behaviors; thus they can consider the consequences of such reactions for self-image, extrinsic rewards, and group membership (McCall and Simmons 1978). This is at the heart of reflective thought for Mead, since the ability to anticipate the responses of others is imperative for viewing oneself as an object and for incorporating the future into a present problem in light of the past (Mead 1934). Reflective thinking regarding a delinquent action requires considering the potential consequences for that action, particularly the responses of significant and generalized others. The more negative the anticipated reactions to a delinquent behavior, the lower the likelihood of delinquent lines of action.

Role-taking also implies that *associating with delinquent peers* would influence the likelihood of delinquency, both indirectly and directly. Indirectly, delinquent peers permit the emergence of a pro-delinquent generalized other or reference group (Shibutani 1955; Glaser 1956), providing delinquent concep-

tions of self, pro-delinquent attitudes, justifications, and motives, and potential positive reactions to delinquent behavior. Directly, delinquent peers increase the likelihood of delinquency through group processes, like engaging in a conversation of gestures, presenting situationally-induced motives, and presenting opportunities for delinquency (Short and Strodtbeck 1965; Briar and Piliavin 1965).

Finally, Mead's perspective implies that delinquent behavior can occur in the absence of reflective thought, via *habitual or scripted responses established through previous experiences*. Indeed, reflective thought establishes habits that correspond to specific situations—habits that allow individuals to respond to future encounters in those situations without cognition. In general, role-taking is more likely in the case of a socially-disapproved behavior (Mead [1927] 1982). But even delinquent behavior can become habitual: When problematic situations are repeatedly solved using delinquent behavior, the situations cease to be problematic and delinquency becomes automatic, scripted, and habitual. This is consistent with psychological research that finds behavior to be automatic rather than reflective in routine situations (Shiffrin and Schneider 1977; Langer 1989). Prior experience with delinquency, thus, is an important predictor of future delinquency, especially when delinquent situations have become routinized or institutionalized, as in delinquent gangs.

These five features of role-taking, then, are important individual-level mechanisms by which delinquent behavior is produced. While analytically distinct, they should overlap considerably in reality. This raises the empirical question of whether these features of role-taking affect delinquency at all, and if so, whether they affect delinquency uniquely or jointly. This individual-level process leading to delinquency might be termed "differential social control," since self control incorporates reference groups and is thus social control (Mead 1924–1925) and can lead either to delinquency or conformity depending on the direction of control (Matsueda 1992). Thus, the likelihood of delinquency should be increased by delinquent views of self from the standpoint of others, attitudes favorable to delinquency, perceptions that others would approve of delinquency, friendships with delinquent peers, and histories of delinquent habits.

*The Social System Level:
Differential Organizational Control*

Role-taking is conditioned by the broader social organization in which it is embedded. Social organization is a configuration of roles or perspectives that constrains the form, content, and participants of interaction (Shibutani 1986). Interactants who occupy similar positions in the social structure are likely to share perspectives and communication networks, and therefore, display similarities in role-taking and behavior. Through taking the role of the generalized other, the organization of the group enters the cognition and behavior of individuals as they locate their positions within the group and adjust their conduct according to group expectations, norms, and appraisals linked to those positions (Mead 1934). But specific overt behaviors will contain an element of novelty due to the response of the "I," which implies that behavior contains emergent elements that vary across situations, that roles are reconstituted within social transactions, and that behavior is never a perfect reflection of role-expectations. Turner (1962) used the term "role-making" to emphasize the constitutive character of role-taking. Thus, a dialectical relationship exists in which organized roles regulate situated action and at the same time are reconstituted by emergent properties of that action.

This abstract organization of roles, attitudes, and commitments in a social system—or generalized other—allows interactants to conceptualize their role within an abstract group, including the expectations and attitudes linking various positions in the group. The generalized other can vary in scope and depth, ranging from small informal groups to entire communities or even societies (Mead 1934). Although overt behavior is only loosely related to organized roles, we can specify a more precise relationship by focusing on a specific form of behavior—in this case delinquent behavior (Schwartz and Stryker 1970; Cressey 1954). With respect to adolescent deviance, entire communities or societies are perhaps less critical than families, schools, and peer groups. Identity theory is useful in specifying the conditions under which particular generalized others will be invoked. Identity theorists posit that commitments to roles and role identities help link social structure to the individual process of role-taking (McCall and Simmons 1978;

Stryker 1980). The proposition is that commitment to a specific role in an organized group increases the likelihood of that group serving as a generalized other in problematic situations. Because individuals are members of multiple reference groups, a stable organization of role commitments leads to a stable and organized set of generalized others.

Organized groups vary both in the *efficacy* and the *content* of group regulation (or to use terms of identity theory, role identities vary in salience or prominence as well as in meaning). Some groups are more effective in controlling the behavior of their members, and some members are more susceptible to control by a given group. The efficacy of group regulation is determined by the strength of commitment to group roles and the degree to which the group serves as a generalized other in problematic situations. Moreover, the form or content of behavior subject to group control varies within and between groups: Some groups consist primarily of roles stressing law-abiding expectations, norms, and social status criteria, whereas other groups include roles stressing delinquent norms and expectations. The likelihood of delinquency will depend on the relative efficacy of the two kinds of groups. To emphasize these differentials in the efficacy and content of group regulations we use the term "differential organizational control"—the process by which delinquent behavior is controlled by organized groups.² Using this perspective we can specify mechanisms by which families, peers, and schools control adolescent violation of the law.

A primary locus of control resides in families—in particular, in parent-child relationships. Most parents do not explicitly promote delinquency in their children; thus, parental control operates on average to dissuade delinquent behavior. Parents control their children's behavior when a child takes the role of the parents, forms an image of self as an object from

the viewpoint of parents, and considers the parents' reactions to delinquent behavior. Two sources of variation in parental control operate here. Parents vary in the degree to which they disapprove of specific delinquent acts, and parents vary in the probability that they will actually serve as a generalized other to their child in delinquent situations. The latter is a function of whether parents and children share open lines of communication, intense interpersonal attachments, and strong commitments to the family unit.

The peer group is a second critical context of control of adolescent behavior. Peer groups control the delinquent behavior of members directly, by providing concrete situationally-induced motives and pressures in delinquent situations, and indirectly, by serving as important abstract generalized others. When considering unlawful behavior, peer group members take the role of the group, anticipating the group's reactions, attitudes, and evaluations of the delinquent behavior. Youths belonging to conventional peer groups are, on average, likely to see themselves and their peers as "good kids," believe their peers would not sanction delinquency, and adopt attitudes against delinquent behavior. Conversely, members of delinquent peer groups are likely to see themselves and their friends as "troublemakers," believe their peers would reward delinquency, and adopt rationalizations for delinquent behavior. Whether a peer group serves as a generalized other for an individual in delinquent situations depends on the relevance of the group to the situation, the strength of interpersonal attachments, and the nature and strength of the individual's role commitments to the group. Peer influence, of course, is tied to other groups and institutions. Parents influence their children's peer groups by choosing a residential location (that delimits the range of available peers), as well as through direct supervision of their children's activities with peers.

Within schools, peer influences are in part conditioned by the conventional social organization and interactional patterns of the school. School organization opposing delinquent behavior includes rules governing students' behavior and mechanisms for inculcating commitments to scholastic achievement and extracurricular activities (Polk and Schafer 1972; Wiatrowski, Hansell, Massey, and Wilson 1982). This entails socializing students to high

² This concept extends Shaw and McKay's (1969) conceptualization of social disorganization to include variation not only in the ability of conventional institutions and communities to achieve values collectively, but the ability of unconventional and delinquent groups to regulate behavior as well. It also extends Sutherland's (1947) concept of differential social organization, stressing the mechanisms that groups use to regulate behavior beyond differentials in learning delinquent definitions and techniques (see Matsueda 1988).

aspirations, rewarding high-achievers, motivating students to learn, and dissuading students from negativistic subcultures—all of which increase the likelihood that students' generalized others will include law-abiding classmates, teachers, and conventional rules and role expectations. In contrast, those students who are not motivated to learn in school, who perform poorly, and who become alienated from school are less likely to be controlled by the school organization and more likely to affiliate with delinquent and alienated students (Menard and Morse 1984). The reference groups and subcultures for these students are likely to exclude students who are committed to the school's values, and more likely to include delinquents and troublemakers, resulting in weak studious identities and strong delinquent identities. Of course, conventional and deviant role commitments and social controls will overlap considerably, and behavior is ultimately determined by differentials in the efficacy of these competing controls.

Each of these social systems is situated within a broader social context that includes neighborhood and community organizations. Community organization relevant to delinquency consists primarily of the interrelationships among families, peer groups, and schools. Thus, delinquency in communities or neighborhoods is primarily a function of organizational control exerted by each of these subsystems. Moreover, other characteristics of communities, including those factors falling under the rubric of social disorganization (high rates of delinquency, geographic mobility, nonintact families, low socioeconomic status, and physically deteriorating neighborhoods) should influence delinquency indirectly by affecting the differential organizational control exerted by families, peers, and schools. The same holds for broader political and economic processes that may in part determine the characteristics of communities (Sampson 1987). This implies that community organization should exert minimal contextual effects, net of group and individual processes.

The important point here is that organized groups affect delinquent behavior through differential organizational control. Groups consist of organized sets of roles, including mutual expectations, obligations, and norms; individuals develop commitments to group roles by interacting within the group; and these role com-

mitments serve to condition subsequent interactions by affecting the perspectives adopted through role-taking and role-making. Such commitments can foster delinquency, as in the case of commitments to roles in delinquent gangs, or discourage delinquency, as in the case of commitments to roles in law-abiding peer groups. This implies that for individual-level models, any examination of the effects of role-taking on delinquency should also examine links to group organizations, such as commitments to conventional and delinquent roles. An interactionist hypothesis is that such commitments to roles should affect delinquency indirectly through the process of taking the role of the generalized other. Net of the mechanisms of organizational control and individual role-taking, contextual variables should exert minimal effects on delinquency.

Classical Theories as Special Cases of Differential Social Control Theory

Several classical theories of crime are indirectly rooted in principles of symbolic interactionism; consequently, their causal mechanisms can be viewed as special cases of a more general interactionist model. This provides a way to test an interactionist model of individual delinquency against competing theories, including social disorganization, social control, differential association, and labeling theories.

Social disorganization theory stresses the efficacy of community self-regulation through conventional institutions like families and schools. Communities with strong families and schools are able to discourage youth from delinquent behavior through close supervision, socialization to conventional values, and commitments to conventional activities (Sampson and Groves 1989). Shaw and McKay (1969) include the concept of cultural transmission to describe how unsupervised and disaffiliated youth become positively motivated to delinquency through delinquent values, traditions, and peers. Following Kornhauser (1978:70–72), however, criminologists have extracted from Shaw and McKay (1969) a “pure disorganization model” that assumes delinquent organization, groups, and subcultures to be either nonexistent or ineffectual (Bursik 1988; Sampson and Groves 1989). Social disorganization, then, describes a special case of differential organizational control in which community rates

of delinquency are determined entirely by conventional organizational controls. This suggests an empirical test of social disorganization theory against differential social control theory: The former implies that *delinquent* organizational control (e.g., delinquent peer groups) exerts no effect on delinquent behavior; the latter implies that interactions with delinquent peers can *motivate* delinquent behavior.

Social control theory, an individual-level counterpart to the "pure" community-level disorganization model, offers a social psychological model of the process by which institutional and community controls affect individual delinquent acts (Kornhauser 1978). Based on the assumptions that (1) society is characterized by consensus, (2) the motivation to deviate is identical across persons, and (3) deviant subcultures and groups are impotent to control behavior, control theories posit that it is commitments, attachments, and affiliations with conventional institutions that dissuade individuals from pursuing delinquent behavior (Hirschi 1969). We can extract the control model from our model of differential social control. Control theories form a special case of the differential social control model when: (1) groups are organized only against delinquency; (2) no systems of attitudes, motives, and rationalizations exist that favor delinquency; (3) delinquent groups are impotent to foster delinquency; and (4) because of societal consensus, significant others always disapprove of delinquency. This argument suggests an empirical test against differential social control: Control theories hold only in homogeneous societies where deviant subcultures are impotent and delinquency is entirely determined by variation in conventional controls; a theory of differential social control holds in both homogeneous and heterogeneous societies. Furthermore, control theories imply that delinquent groups never foster delinquency, while differential social control predicts that, at least in heterogeneous societies, delinquent groups exert a substantial effect on delinquent behavior through the process of role-taking.

Unlike disorganization and control theories, *differential association theory* is based on the same assumptions that underlie a symbolic interactionist perspective. This theory assumes that delinquency results from the competing influences of groups organized in favor of delinquency versus groups organized against delinquency. It differs from a symbolic interac-

tionist view in specifying the mechanisms by which groups influence delinquent behavior. For differential association, the principal individual-level mechanism is the differential learning of definitions favorable and unfavorable to delinquency, as well as the learning of delinquent techniques and skills (Sutherland, Cressey, and Luckenbill 1992)—this learning mediates the effects of group characteristics like race, family structure, and group attachments (e.g., Matsueda 1982; Matsueda and Heimer 1987). In contrast, differential social control theory builds on revisions of differential association that incorporate role-taking (Cressey 1954), identification (Glaser 1956), and anticipated reactions (Akers 1985). From an interactionist standpoint, definitions of delinquency are important pivots for redirecting social acts in either delinquent or nondelinquent directions, but are not the sole mechanisms of informal social control. Of equal importance are other aspects of role-taking, such as views of the self from the standpoint of significant others, anticipated reactions of significant others to delinquency, and situationally-induced group processes. These comparisons suggest an empirical test of differential social control against a "pure" differential association theory, in which the individual-level mechanism of control is the learning of definitions of delinquency.

Labeling theories of deviance are based on principles of symbolic interactionism, as is evident in Mead's ([1918] 1964) early discussion of the hostile attitude of punitive justice, Tannenbaum's (1938) notion of the dramatization of evil, and Lemert's (1951) concept of secondary deviance. Labeling theories form a diverse group that is difficult to characterize. Nevertheless, most labeling theorists make one or more of the following arguments that contradicts a perspective of differential social control. (1) They assume a "societal reactions" definition of delinquency as a status conferred by a social audience, rather than as consisting of an objective set of behaviors. (2) They assume that primary deviance is either randomly distributed, uninteresting, or beyond causal explanation, and focus only on secondary and career deviance. (3) They seek to articulate sensitizing concepts to guide studies of the social construction and interpretation of deviant labels and the consequences of labeling. (4) They emphasize the negative consequences of formal

labeling by official agencies, while slighting the importance of informal labeling by significant others (see Becker 1963; Kitsuse 1962; Gibbs 1966; Rains 1975; Schur 1971; Gove 1980). In contrast, we follow Mead's ([1914] 1982) idea of objective relativism and define delinquency in terms of objective behaviors; we seek to explain all forms of delinquency—including primary and secondary forms—within an integrated causal theory; and we focus on the interactional mechanisms within informal groups that lead to identity formation. Our focus is more consistent with recent attempts to go beyond labeling theory to address etiological questions in the areas of crime (Hagan and Palloni 1990), mental illness (Link, Cullen, Frank, and Wozniak 1987; Link, Cullen, Struening, Shrout, and Dohrenwend 1989), and emotions (Thoits 1985).

Nevertheless, labeling theories provide two testable propositions that are special cases of an interactionist perspective. First, labeling theorists argue that deviant labels—especially official labels—are not distributed uniformly across the social structure, but rather are more likely to be applied to disadvantaged members of society (Quinney 1970; Schur 1980; Gove 1980). Thus, impoverished, minority youths from nonintact homes would be more likely to be labeled deviant, not because they exhibit higher rates of primary deviance, but rather because of stereotypical conceptions of deviants by others (Simmons 1965; Farrell and Swigert 1978). Second, labeling theorists argue that negative labels have adverse consequences, such as increasing the likelihood of future deviance (Tannenbaum 1938; Lemert 1951; Gove 1980). Thus, when disadvantaged youths' harmless acts of primary deviance are labeled as bad by the community, these youths are stigmatized, segregated from conventional society, and perhaps left with a deviant self-image (Becker 1963). Such youths are thus more likely to engage in secondary deviance, which increases the likelihood of official labeling and further amplifies deviant behavior in a spiraling process whereby the initial prophesy of the negative label is fulfilled.³ These two proposi-

³ Empirical research on the effects of the discriminating application of official labels, net of self-reported delinquency, has been equivocal (e.g., Huizinga and Elliott 1987), as has research to determine if official labeling increases the likelihood

tions do not directly derive from a differential social control perspective. Nevertheless, from our perspective, if discriminatory labeling and the resulting deviance amplification *do* result in a self-fulfilling prophesy, the individual-level mechanisms explaining the prophesy will be identical to those mechanisms generating primary deviance—namely differential social control in which the meaning of role-taking directs behavior in a delinquent direction.

DATA, MODELS, AND HYPOTHESES

Sample and Data: The National Youth Survey

To test a symbolic interactionist theory of delinquency and our argument that key propositions of classical theories can be viewed as special cases of this theory, we use individual-level data from the National Youth Survey (Elliott, Huizinga, and Ageton 1985; Elliott, Huizinga, and Menard 1989). The survey employed a multistage cluster sampling frame to obtain a national probability sample of households in the United States in 1976. After several stages of randomly sampling geographic units, the final stage sampled 7,998 households and selected all eligible 11- to 17-year-old youths in each household. Of a total of 2,360 eligible youths, 1,725 (73 percent) agreed to participate in the survey. They were interviewed in their homes, first in 1977 and then at one-year intervals through 1981. In addition, one parent per household was interviewed in 1977. After studying patterns of nonparticipation, Elliott, Knowles, and Canter (1981) concluded that nonresponse bias was minimal and, thus, the sample was reasonably representative of all youths ages 11 to 17 in the United States in 1976. Our analysis focuses on the first three waves of data for the 918 male respondents.⁴ The retention of respondents from the 1977 wave was excellent: 96 percent were re-

of future deviance, holding constant self-reported delinquency (Thomas and Bishop 1984; Ray and Downs 1986). Some studies suggest that informal labels may have stronger effects on delinquency than official labels (Menard and Morse 1984).

⁴ Our analyses are based on pairwise present covariance matrices. Examination of missing value patterns suggest that missing values are approximately random. As a sample size, we use the median sample size ($N = 863$) of all pairwise covariances.

tained in 1978 and 94 percent in 1979. In addition, a comparison of "stayers" and "leavers" revealed that attrition did not influence the distributions of age, sex, ethnicity, social class, residence, or reported delinquency in any way (Elliott, Knowles, and Canter 1981).

Concepts and Measures

Figure 1 depicts a structural equation model of differential social control and delinquency. The model consists of six blocks of variables: (1) background variables measuring location in the social structure; (2) a measure of prior delinquency; (3) variables measuring commitments to conventional roles, parental disapproval of delinquency, and appraisals by parents (objective labels); (4) role-taking measured by delinquent peer associations; (5) other variables representing the role-taking process; and (6) an outcome variable of subsequent delinquent behavior. (Descriptions of measures of theoretical constructs appear in Appendix A.) The causal ordering of these variables is based on our theoretical specification and corresponds to the temporal ordering of our variables.⁵ The model specifies a sequence of variables in which role-taking, the proximate determinant of delinquency, mediates the effects on delinquency of role commitments and social structural position. Thus, persons develop commitments to conventional roles in part based on

⁵ We specify prior delinquency (measured at wave 1 in 1977) as endogenous with respect to the background variables so we can examine the extent to which prior delinquency mediates the effects of background variables on role commitments, role-taking, and future delinquency. Similarly, we specify association with delinquent peers (which refers to delinquent peers prior to wave 2) as exogenous with respect to role-taking (measured at wave 2 in 1978) so we can examine the extent to which role-taking mediates the effects of delinquent peers on delinquent behavior. We examined the robustness of our findings to variations in the timing of our measures and obtained similar results. Specifically, we estimated models that (1) added delinquency at wave 2 as an endogenous predictor; (2) specified delinquency at wave 3 as an outcome of role-taking, role commitments, and prior delinquency all measured at wave 2; and (3) specified delinquency at wave 2 as an outcome of role-taking, role commitments, and prior delinquency all measured at wave 1. Each of these models yielded a similar substantive story.

their objective location in the class, residential, or ethnic structure. Commitments to roles signify continuity in the efficacy and content of generalized others, which affects delinquency through role-taking.⁶

The exogenous background variables—race, nonintact family, urban, family income, residential stability, and neighborhood crime (measured by parental reports of vandalism and burglary)—reflect structural position and social disorganization (Bursik 1988). We also included age and number of siblings in the home because both variables have been found to predict delinquency.

Commitment to conventional roles comprises the latent constructs of attachment to family, attachment to peers, commitment to school, expectations of employment, and expectations of a college education. These constructs are drawn from each realm of adolescent life—family, peer, school, and the impending future. Our conceptualization of commitment follows from symbolic interactionist notions of "side bets" (Becker 1960), or the cost of giving up meaningful relationships with others (Stryker 1968). As do Burke and Reitzes (1991), we distinguish a cognitive base (commitment to roles) from a socioemotional base (attachment to role relationships). We use three variables to measure the cognitive basis of role commitment: expectations of future employment, anticipation of a college education, and commitment to school roles (the latter measured by youths' reports of the importance of getting good grades, doing well in hard subjects, and the importance of school in general).⁷ Two constructs measure the socioemotional basis of commitment: attachment to family

⁶ Symbolic interactionism implies a degree of reflexivity among these concepts, since they are merely abstractions from an ongoing social process. Thus, any reciprocal effects, theoretically, should be comparatively small, and the sequence of variables should be a reasonable approximation of the social processes that produce delinquency.

⁷ "Expectation of a good job in the future" and "expectation of a college education" are each measured by a single questionnaire item. In our measurement model, we fix the measurement errors associated with these observable variables to be non-zero, such that the reliability of each is equal to .81. Sensitivity analyses showed that varying the reliabilities between .64 and 1.00 did not appreciably affect substantive parameter estimates.

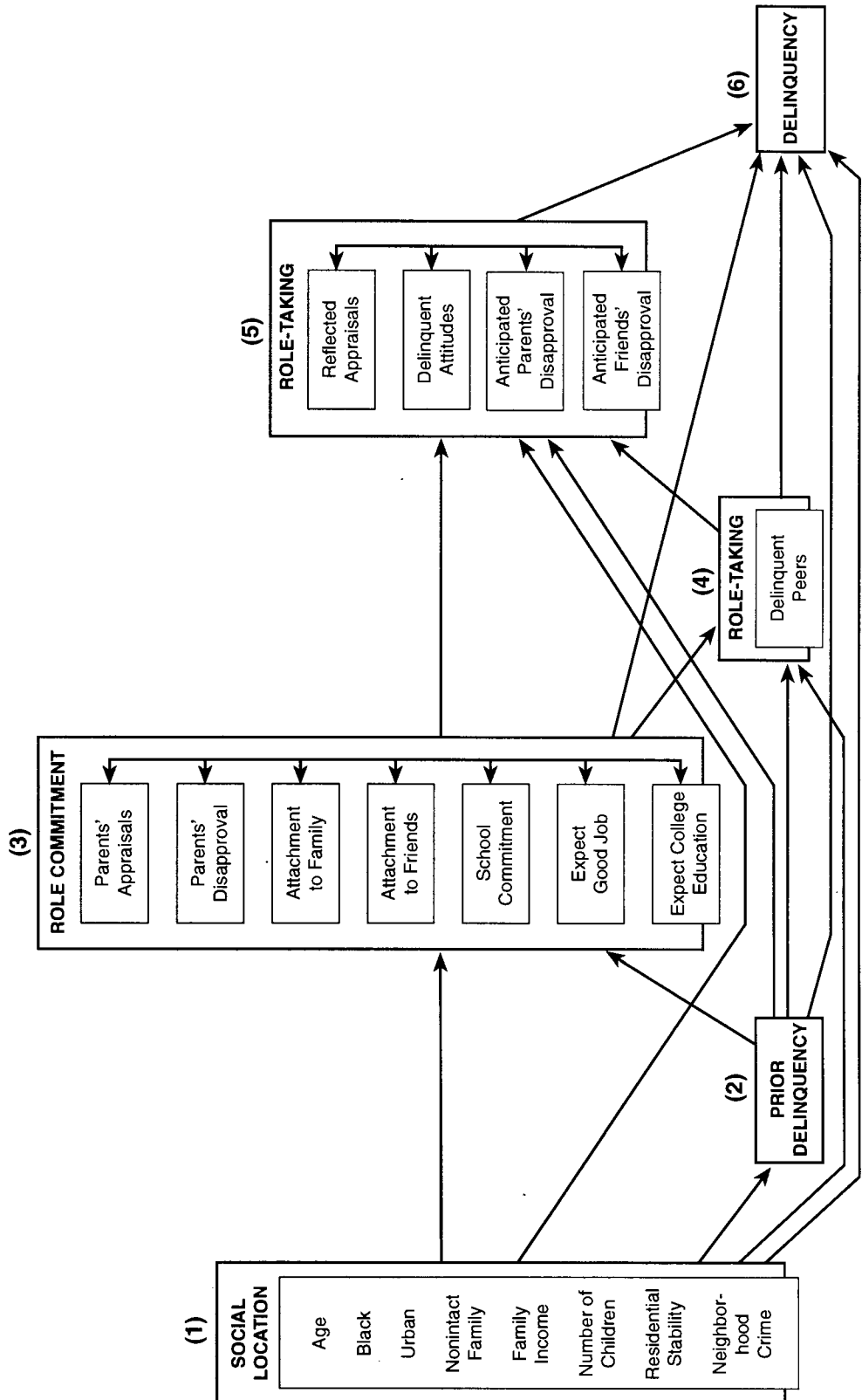


Figure 1. A Model of Differential Social Control and Delinquency

(measured by importance of family intimacy and importance of comfort from and activities with parents) and attachment to friends (measured by importance of time with friends and being included in their activities). These items are similar to measures of attachment and commitment used by Hirschi (1969), who tested the hypothesis of control theory that attachment and commitment should both exert direct effects on delinquency.

To measure the symbolic interactionist concept of taking the role of the other, we use four latent constructs: reflected appraisals as a rule-violator, anticipated reactions of significant others to delinquent behavior, delinquent attitudes, and association with delinquent peers. Following Matsueda (1992), we specify reflected appraisals as a rule-violator to measure the views of the self from the standpoint of significant others. The survey asked respondents whether their parents or friends viewed them as trouble-makers or rule-violators. We use a similar set of items to measure the construct of parental appraisals, which we specify as an antecedent of reflected appraisals. This measure allows us to test the symbolic interactionist and labeling hypothesis that reflected appraisals derive from actual appraisals made by significant others. Similarly, we model the transmission of parental attitudes via role-taking by including a latent construct representing parents' disapproval of delinquency (vandalism, theft, and burglary) and a corresponding construct capturing youths' perceptions of their parents' disapproval. We also include a parallel construct—the anticipated disapproval of delinquency by friends. Youths' attitudes toward delinquency is measured by the youth's own reports of the extent to which vandalism, theft, and burglary are wrong. Finally, we specify that association with delinquent peers—measured by respondent reports of the number of friends who have engaged in vandalism, theft, and burglary in the last year—is an antecedent of reflected appraisals, anticipated disapproval, and attitudes about delinquency.⁸ This enables

us to examine whether associating with delinquent peers affects delinquency indirectly through its effects on other elements of role-taking.

Our outcome variable, delinquency at wave 3, 1979, is measured by a 28-item index of self-reported illegal acts, including property, violent, public order, and drug offenses (Elliott and Ageton 1980). The self-report inventory includes all but one of the Uniform Crime Reports' "part 1 offenses," over half of the "part 2 offenses," and a variety of the "other offenses." We use a similar variable measured at wave 1 to control for prior delinquency. We follow Elliott et al. (1985) and Matsueda (1992) and use the less-skewed categorical responses of rates of offending.

Hypotheses

Our symbolic interactionist model allows us to test several key hypotheses that distinguish it from alternative theoretical perspectives. We emphasize that such hypotheses do not exhaust the differences among perspectives—such as disparate assumptions about social order and human nature, the definition of delinquency, and appropriate level of explanation. Nevertheless, they provide a test of a few key competing hypotheses that may shed light on the relative efficacy of different perspectives. Table 1 presents hypotheses derived from five perspectives concerning our outcome variable of delinquency (our hypotheses predicting intervening variables are not depicted in the table).

Our first set of hypotheses follows from the major propositions of symbolic interactionism and constitutes the heart of our differential social control theory (Table 1, column 1). Specifically, delinquency is determined directly by role-taking, which is measured by reflected appraisals of the self as a rule-violator, delinquent attitudes, anticipated disapproval of delinquency from parents and peers, and delinquent peers. By specifying delinquent peers as causally prior to the cognitive outcomes of role-taking, we examine the extent to which delinquent peers affect delinquent behavior indirectly by serving as a generalized other in role-taking, or directly through group processes, like fitting lines of action together, engaging in a conver-

⁸ We initially estimated measurement models that specified five indicators each for delinquent peers, anticipated disapproval, and delinquent attitudes. For each of the constructs, these indicators pertained to vandalism, theft of greater than \$50, burglary, theft of less than \$50, and car theft—all were reasonably reliable and valid. For parsimony and to make our models manageable we included three

items that appeared to capture different domains of content, such as seriousness of offense.

Table 1. Hypothesized Effects and Direction of Effects of Selected Variables on Delinquency Derived From Five Alternative Theories

Determinants of Delinquency	Theoretical Perspective				
	(1) Differential Social Control	(2) Social Disorganization	(3) Control Theories	(4) Differential Association	(5) Labeling Theory
(1) Structural variables	Indirect (+)	Direct (+ +), Indirect (+ +)	Indirect (+)	Indirect (+)	Indirect (+)
(2) Prior delinquency	Direct (+ +), Indirect (+ +)	—	Direct (+ +), Indirect (+ +)	Indirect (+)	Indirect (+ +)
(3) Institutional ties	Indirect (-)	Direct (- -)	Direct (- -)	Indirect (-)	—
(4) Parental appraisals	Indirect (+ +)	No effect	No effect	—	Indirect (+ +)
(5) Parental disapproval	Indirect (- -)	Direct (- -)	Indirect (- -)	Indirect (- -)	—
(6) Delinquent peers	Direct (+ +), Indirect (+ +)	No effect	No effect	Indirect (+ +)	Indirect (+ +)
(7) Reflected appraisals as rule-violator	Direct (+ +)	No effect	No effect	—	Direct (+ +)
(8) Delinquent attitudes	Direct (+ +)	No effect	Direct (+ +)	—	Direct (+ +)
(9) Expected disapproval	Direct (-)	—	Direct (- -)	—	—

Note: Empty cells indicate that a theory makes no prediction; + = small positive effect; ++ = large positive effect; - = small negative effect; -- = small negative effect.

sation of gestures, and presenting situationally-induced motives (Short and Strodbeck 1965; Briar and Piliavin 1965). According to differential social control theory, prior delinquency affects subsequent delinquency both directly, through the formation of habitual and scripted behavior in nonproblematic situations, and indirectly, by affecting role-taking in problematic situations.

Our discussion of a symbolic interactionist theory of delinquency specifies that structural variables, role commitments and institutional ties, role-taking, and delinquency approximate a causal chain which implies several restrictions on the effects of structural variables and role commitments on delinquency (Table 1, column 1, rows 1 through 5). Specifically, role-taking is the proximate determinant of delinquency, mediating the effects on delinquency of role commitments, objective labeling, and social-structural position. For example, a disadvantaged background can impede school commitment and attenuate expectations of successful future careers, which in

turn can affect youths' associations with delinquent peers, reflected appraisals, and definitions of the law. These youths, then, are more likely to solve problematic situations by breaking the law. Similarly, residential characteristics captured by structural variables—such as living in urban, high-crime neighborhoods—can increase the chances that youths will associate with peers who are delinquent, see themselves as rule-violators, learn delinquent attitudes, and thus engage in delinquent behavior.

In contrast, social disorganization and control theories specify an alternative set of hypotheses that hold when the symbolic interactionist explanation is restricted by the assumptions that there is consensus regarding the law and that motivation for delinquency is the same for all individuals. Disorganization theories posit that delinquency is a direct result of structural conditions that reflect disorganization (urban environment, race, nonintact family structure, low income, high neighborhood crime rates, and residential mobility) and weak

institutional ties (weak attachments to others and commitments to conventional institutions) (Table 1, column 2). Moreover, a pure disorganization model—divorced from the concept of cultural transmission—stipulates that pro-delinquent organizational controls, like having delinquent peers and reflected appraisals as rule-violators, should have no effects on delinquency (Kornhauser 1978). While disorganization theories are agnostic about social psychological mechanisms, control theories stipulate an individual-level process by which weak bonds to society lead to delinquency (Hirschi 1969). Weak commitments to conventional action should free persons to deviate because they have little to lose. Similarly, strong attachments to parents and peers should reduce delinquency by inducing youths to consider parents' and peers' disapproval of delinquent behavior (see Table 1, column 3). Hirschi (1969) sees delinquent attitudes as moral beliefs, an element of the bond to society, and argues that strong beliefs reduce delinquency directly (column 3, line 8). Finally, like disorganization models, control theories stipulate that systematic sources of delinquent motivation, such as having delinquent peers and reflected appraisals of self as delinquent, will have no effects on future delinquency (Hirschi 1969). These restrictions provide a test of the special cases of control and disorganization theories against a broader symbolic interactionist perspective.

Our third set of hypotheses derives from defining differential association theory as a special case of our interactionist theory of differential social control. Differential association specifies that delinquency is determined by attitudes toward delinquency learned through interaction in primary social groups (Sutherland 1947). Thus, from a pure differential association theory viewpoint, it is delinquent attitudes alone that affect delinquency and mediate the effects of structural locations, role commitments, and previous delinquent behavior (Matsueda 1988). Moreover, the theory specifies that association with delinquent peers should affect delinquency principally through the differential association process of learning and reinforcing attitudes about delinquency. In contrast, a symbolic interactionist perspective specifies other aspects of the role-taking process—like forming reflected appraisals and anticipating reactions to delinquency—as important determinants of delinquency, and it allows

for direct as well as indirect effects on delinquency of prior delinquency (habit) and delinquent peers (situationally-induced group motives).⁹

Our fourth set of hypotheses concerns labeling theories. Standard labeling theories typically define delinquency as a status conferred by society, rather than as an objective quality of the act, and focus on secondary deviance rather than primary deviance; nevertheless, we can conceptualize the proposition of deviance amplification as a special case of a differential social control process. Two hypotheses follow from this. First, labeling theorists specify that labeling is inherently discriminatory: Youths from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be labeled by their parents and others as bad kids, troublemakers, and rule-violators. Parents may be more likely to label disadvantaged youth as delinquent, in part because such youths frequently engage in deviance. But parents may also act on stereotypical images of deviance to the extent that they falsely accuse even their own children (see Link et al. 1987). Second, discriminatory labeling implies a self-fulfilling prophesy in which the stigmatizing effects of labeling lead to secondary deviance (Table 1, column 5, row 1). Labeling theories do not all specify that delinquency is affected by conventional role commitments or institutional ties; however, in this view such effects are plausible intervening mechanisms. The labeling process may lead to secondary deviance or deviance amplification by attenuating conventional role commitments and institutional ties, and strengthening a person's deviant self-concepts (Schur 1971; Link et al. 1989). Together, these propositions predict a causal chain in which disadvantaged structural locations in-

⁹ Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) speculate that estimates of the effects of delinquent peers on delinquent behavior could be biased upward if reports of respondents' delinquency and delinquency of their peers are measured at the same time. The correlations between the two contemporaneous measures could be inflated by respondents imputing their own delinquency to peers or by being with their peers during delinquent activity. Our analysis avoids this problem by (1) measuring delinquent peers one year *before* the delinquency outcome, which is consistent with our hypothesized causal order; and (2) examining the effects of delinquent peers on future delinquency while controlling for prior levels of self-reported delinquent behavior.

crease prior delinquency and negative parental labels, which in turn increase negative self-concepts and the likelihood of affiliation with delinquent peers, and ultimately, delinquent behavior. Symbolic interactionist theories conceptualize self-concepts as reflected appraisals as a delinquent or rule-violator (Table 1, column 5, row 7) (Matsueda 1992). Moreover, a differential social control perspective also specifies other intervening dimensions of role-taking, such as expected disapproval and delinquent attitudes, and specifies that role-taking will mediate the effects of role commitments.

RESULTS

We estimated substantive and measurement models simultaneously using the maximum-likelihood estimator of Jöreskog and Sörbom's (1988a) LISREL 7 program. The program provides asymptotic standard errors of direct and indirect effects and a likelihood ratio test of the overall fit and of specific hypotheses for nested models. The model fits the data reasonably well, given the large sample size ($L^2 = 1049.67$, *d.f.* = 618, *GFI* = .947).¹⁰ The estimates from the measurement model are given in Appendix B. These estimates show that, overall, our observed indicators are reasonable measures of unobserved theoretical constructs. At the same time, however, these measures contain enough response error to require correction for attenuation due to unreliability.¹¹

¹⁰ The maximum likelihood and likelihood ratio methods assume interval scales and normal distributions. We examined the robustness of these assumptions using an asymptotic distribution-free weighted least-squares estimator (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1988b) on models for non-normal and ordinal variables. Because, given our sample size, this strategy is limited to small models, we estimated several models containing core subsets of our theoretical constructs. While the magnitude of the effects diminished somewhat, the overall pattern of results remained unchanged. We report the maximum-likelihood results because they appear robust against departures from assumptions and because they allow us to estimate a model that contains all relevant variables and, thus, pose less risk of omitted-variable bias.

¹¹ The model presented includes 22 measurement error correlations that we expected to be nonzero on substantive grounds. We specified 18 correlations between indicators of delinquent peers, attitudes, and expected disapproval from parents and

Table 2 presents unstandardized maximum-likelihood parameter estimates for our substantive model.¹² We focus on those estimates that bear directly on our four hypotheses. Most significantly, we find support for the key interactionist hypothesis that role-taking influences delinquent behavior: Reflected appraisals, delinquent peers, and delinquent attitudes all exert significant effects on delinquent behavior (Table 2, column 14, rows 17 through 19).

Reflected appraisals as a rule-violator has the largest effect on delinquent behavior (standardized effect of .23) after prior delinquency (Table 2, column 14, row 18). Youths who see themselves from the standpoint of parents and peers as rule-violators are more likely to engage in delinquency. Reflected appraisals, in turn, are determined in part by parents' actual appraisals. These findings are consistent with the results of Matsueda (1992). Moreover, our model accounts for his anomalous finding, which challenged symbolic interactionism, that parental appraisals exerted a significant effect on delinquency even net of reflected appraisals. By examining the role of delinquent peers, we find that the effects of parental appraisals on delinquency are entirely mediated by reflected appraisals and association with delinquent peers. Parental appraisals of youths as rule-violators exerts a total unstandardized effect on reflected appraisals of .25, which can be decomposed into a direct effect of .16 and an indirect effect, through association with delinquent peers, of .09; all effects are significant. This provides support for symbolic interactionism (and labeling theory): Youths who are appraised negatively by parents are likely to commit subsequent delinquent acts, in part because of their perceptions of the appraisal and in part because they are more likely to come into contact with peers who are delinquent.

Consistent with a symbolic interactionist theory and the special case of differential asso-

peers that referred to the identical offense: either vandalism, theft, or burglary. We also included four error correlations among indicators of reflected appraisals that share referents (parent-friend or troublemaker rule-violator). A test of nested models shows that the model with 22 error correlations fits the data significantly better than a model with no correlations ($L^2 = 213.72$; *d.f.* = 22; $p < .001$).

¹² Standardized parameter estimates, omitted due to space limitations, are available from the authors upon request.

Table 2. Unstandardized Parameter Estimates: U.S. Males, Ages 11 to 17, 1976

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables													
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
<i>Structural Location</i>														
(1) Age	.029** (.005)	-.047** (.011)	-.039** (.013)	-.052** (.013)	-.010 (.007)	-.087** (.014)	.002 (.009)	-.045** (.012)	.029** (.011)	-.013 (.012)	.014* (.007)	-.005 (.009)	-.014 (.010)	.020** (.005)
(2) Black	-.069* (.028)	.014 (.061)	-.056 (.076)	.205** (.072)	-.256** (.040)	.244** (.078)	.003 (.053)	.263** (.071)	.015 (.059)	-.004 (.068)	.023 (.037)	-.218** (.051)	-.033 (.053)	-.025 (.027)
(3) Urban	.104** (.023)	.074 (.050)	.050 (.063)	.069 (.059)	.078** (.032)	.043 (.063)	.052 (.043)	.129* (.057)	.032 (.045)	-.009 (.052)	.036 (.029)	.048 (.038)	.015 (.041)	.020 (.021)
(4) Nonintact family	.061** (.023)	-.037 (.049)	-.050 (.062)	.017 (.058)	.009 (.032)	.076 (.063)	.042 (.043)	.044 (.057)	.008 (.045)	.015 (.052)	-.042 (.029)	.009 (.038)	.038 (.041)	.003 (.021)
(5) Family income	-.002 (.005)	-.001 (.010)	.034** (.012)	-.004 (.012)	.014* (.006)	.005 (.012)	.008 (.009)	.075** (.011)	.008 (.009)	-.009 (.011)	-.001 (.006)	.012 (.008)	.006 (.009)	.000 (.004)
(6) Number of children	.011 (.006)	-.003 (.014)	-.044* (.017)	.004 (.016)	.005 (.009)	.039* (.017)	-.002 (.012)	-.008 (.016)	.014 (.013)	.003 (.015)	-.011 (.008)	.006 (.011)	-.009 (.012)	-.004 (.006)
(7) Residential Stability	-.011 (.009)	-.009 (.020)	-.030 (.025)	-.019 (.023)	.015 (.013)	.049 (.025)	.002 (.017)	-.021 (.023)	-.025 (.019)	-.013 (.021)	.007 (.012)	.042* (.016)	.020 (.017)	-.017* (.008)
(8) Neighborhood Crime	.009 (.025)	-.037 (.053)	-.124 (.068)	.058 (.063)	-.051 (.035)	.080 (.068)	-.029 (.047)	.036 (.062)	.077 (.050)	-.061 (.057)	-.027 (.031)	-.002 (.042)	.039 (.044)	.022 (.022)
<i>Prior Delinquency, 1977</i>														
(9) Delinquency	—	-.566** (.082)	.115 (.092)	.660** (.093)	.058 (.048)	-.722** (.097)	-.156* (.064)	-.377** (.085)	.714** (.086)	.432** (.101)	.182** (.056)	.076 (.074)	-.160* (.079)	.436** (.040)
<i>Role Commitment, 1977</i>														
(10) Attachment to family	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-.003 (.093)	-.121 (.107)	-.161** (.061)	.141 (.080)	.132 (.084)	.036 (.043)
(11) Attachment to friends	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-.077 (.047)	.086 (.054)	.038 (.030)	.025 (.039)	.007 (.042)	-.009 (.021)

(Table 2 continued on next page)

(Table 2 continued)

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables													
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
	Prior Delinquency, 1977	Attachment to Family, 1977	Attachment to Friends, 1977	Parents' Appraisals, 1977	Parents' Disapproval, 1977	School Commitment, 1977	Expect a Good Job, 1977	Expect to Go to College, 1977	Delinquent Friends, 1978	Reflected Appraisals, 1978	Delinquent Attitude, 1978	Expect Parents' Disapproval, 1978	Expect Friends' Disapproval, 1978	Delinquency, 1979
<i>Role Commitment, 1977 (Continued)</i>														
(12) Parents' appraisals	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.232** (.046)	.155** (.053)	-.003 (.029)	-.069 (.039)	-.023 (.041)	.034 (.021)
(13) Parents' disapproval	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.000 (.051)	-.020 (.059)	-.023 (.032)	.022 (.043)	.025 (.046)	.016 (.023)
(14) Commitment to school role	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.006 (.066)	-.109 (.076)	-.013 (.042)	-.028 (.056)	.040 (.059)	.010 (.030)
(15) Expect a good job	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-.029 (.049)	.056 (.056)	.034 (.031)	-.002 (.041)	-.036 (.044)	-.004 (.022)
(16) Expect college education	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-.112** (.044)	-.139** (.051)	-.007 (.028)	.048 (.037)	.023 (.039)	-.017 (.020)
<i>Role-Taking, 1978</i>														
(17) Delinquent friends	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.366** (.064)	.291** (.039)	-.116** (.045)	-.489** (.054)	.115** (.030)
(18) Reflected appraisals	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.117** (.025)
(19) Delinquent attitudes	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.115** (.041)
(20) Expect parents' disapproval	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.055* (.023)
(21) Expect friends' disapproval	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.043 (.030)
R ²	.079	.184	.066	.147	.078	.237	.130	.370	.437	.421	.145	.430	.520	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed t -tests)Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors; $N = 863$; $L^2 = 1049.67$, $d.f. = 618$; $GFI = .947$.

ciation theory, delinquent attitudes exert a significant effect on delinquent behavior (Table 2, column 14, row 19). As differential association predicts, delinquent attitudes are, in turn, most strongly affected (standardized effect of .44) by associations with delinquent peers (Table 2, column 11, row 17) and significantly affected by level of attachment to family (column 11, row 10) and prior delinquency (column 11, row 9). But contrary to differential association, delinquent peer associations and prior delinquent behavior also exert direct positive effects on delinquency, net of delinquent attitudes. From an interactionist standpoint, the direct effect on delinquency of delinquent peers is due to group interactions, consisting of situationally-induced motives, emergent group norms, and concrete conversations of gestures; the stability of delinquency over time represents the habitual or scripted nature of behavior when problematic situations are repeatedly solved in similar ways.

Contrary to a symbolic interactionist hypothesis, neither expected disapproval of delinquency by parents nor by friends affects delinquency as predicted. In fact, each of the coefficients is small and in the wrong direction (Table 2, column 14, rows 20 and 21). This finding is consistent with previous research (Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce, and Radosevich 1979). Closer inspection reveals that expected disapproval from friends has a large bivariate correlation with delinquency in the predicted direction (-.43), but the correlation appears spurious in the face of other elements of role-taking. We can reject the joint null hypothesis that expected friends' disapproval, reflected appraisals, delinquent peers, prior delinquency, and delinquent attitudes are zero in the population, but we cannot accept the hypothesis that expected friends' disapproval operates uniquely. It may be that, while the elements of the role-taking process are analytically distinct, they are too closely intertwined to be distinguished empirically with these data.¹³ Further-

¹³ Statistically, this issue is one of multicollinearity: Are our predictor variables too highly correlated to produce stable estimates of separate population parameters? Our variable of expected disapproval from friends is correlated about .6 (in absolute value) with delinquent peers, delinquent attitudes, and reflected appraisals. To assess this more precisely, we followed the recommendations of Matsueda and Bielby (1986) and performed a

more, expected parental disapproval is unrelated to parents' actual disapproval of their children's delinquency. Perhaps barriers to communication impede youths from accurately perceiving their parents' attitudes about delinquency (Felson 1980).

We find some support for the hypothesized sequence of events derived from labeling theory. The background variables of age, race, urban residence, and nonintact family affect parents' appraisals of their children as rule-violators indirectly through youths' prior delinquency (see Table 2, column 1, rows 1 through 4 and column 4, row 9). The positive indirect effect of age is offset by a negative direct effect, so that holding prior delinquency constant, parents are more likely to label younger than older boys as rule-violators (column 4).¹⁴ Likewise, the negative indirect effect of race is offset by a positive direct effect: controlling for prior delinquency, black youth are more likely to be labeled rule-violators by their parents. This is the only evidence of disadvantaged youth being falsely accused by their parents: holding constant prior delinquency, neither income, urban, nor family structure affects parental labeling.

A chain of events operating through labeling supports the hypothesis of deviance amplification or secondary deviance. Youth who are older, nonblack, urban residents, and from nonintact homes commit more initial delinquent acts than others, which increases the chances that their parents will see them as rule-violators. In turn, labeling by parents increases

power analysis on these coefficients. This revealed reasonable power to detect meaningful departures from the null hypothesis (power of .98 to detect a standardized coefficient of -.17; power of .77 to detect a standardized coefficient of -.12).

¹⁴ A reviewer pointed out that the direct effect of age on parental labeling could reflect differences in society's appraisals of the *meaning* of delinquency throughout a youth's lifespan. That is, if delinquency is viewed as more serious among younger youth, then holding constant prior delinquency, age would exert a negative direct effect on parental appraisals. Such a hypothesis implies that age would have no effect on labeling while holding constant an age-standardized measure of prior delinquency. We estimated such a model, but found that the direct negative effect of age persisted. Apparently, the effect of age on parental appraisals reflects more than age-graded differences in the meaning of delinquency.

the likelihood that these youths will affiliate with delinquent peers and see themselves as rule-violators from the standpoint of others, which ultimately increases the likelihood of future delinquent behavior. The only evidence consistent with a self-fulfilling prophecy concerns race: Blacks are more likely to be falsely accused by parents, leading to increased views of self as a rule-violator and increased association with delinquent peers, both of which increase the likelihood of future delinquency.

A chain of events operating through college expectations is consistent with structural symbolic interactionism, which stresses the concept of role commitment. Specifically, youths who are younger and from higher-income families are more likely to expect to attend college (Table 2, column 8, rows 1 and 5).¹⁵ We also find that black youths have higher expectations of attending college than their nonblack counterparts (column 8, row 2), which coincides with findings of other national surveys conducted in 1977 (Hauser and Anderson 1991). While family income affects college expectations primarily directly, age and race affect expectations both directly and indirectly, through their effects on prior delinquency. Expecting a college education, in turn, reduces the likelihood of affiliation with delinquent peers and reflected appraisals as a rule-violator (row 16) and thereby indirectly reduces the probability of future offending. As predicted by symbolic interactionism, then, structural position in society affects commitment to educational roles, which in turn affects role-taking, and ultimately, future delinquency. Moreover, this finding squarely contradicts pure disorganization and control theories, which posit direct effects of commitment to conventional activities, net of the motivating effects of role-taking.

Also contrary to control theories is the finding that attachment to family reduces delinquency only indirectly by inhibiting the learning of delinquent attitudes (Table 2, row 10). This is generally consistent with symbolic interactionism and is consistent with differential association theory specifically. Indeed, none of the attachment or commitment variables exert

¹⁵ While urban residence directly increases expectations of college (.13, unstandardized), this effect is counterbalanced by a significant negative indirect effect through prior delinquency (-.04), yielding a nonsignificant total effect of urban residence on educational expectations (.09).

substantial direct effects on future delinquent behavior (column 14). Thus, in contrast to the predictions of control and disorganization theories, delinquency is not a *direct* outcome of commitment to conventional institutions. Instead, such role commitments are mediated by reflected appraisals, delinquent peers, and delinquent attitudes, as predicted by differential social control theory. Thus, control appears to be a process of differential social control—varying both by the content and the efficacy of role-taking—rather than of mere conventional social control.

Finally, our model of differential social control accounts nicely for the total effects of structural variables on delinquency. Of the variables with significant total effects on delinquency (age, race, urban, nonintact homes, and residential stability), all except age and residential stability have effects that are mediated by the subsequent variables in the model. Thus, race, urban residence, and living in a nonintact home affect delinquency indirectly by significantly influencing the process of forming role commitments and of taking the role of the other. The exceptions are age, which operates both indirectly and directly, and residential stability, which has a small direct effect of -.05 (standardized).

CONCLUSIONS

In sum, these results yield five principal findings that provide some support for a differential social control perspective on delinquency. First, delinquency results largely from the variables that measure role-taking: appraising oneself as a rule-violator from the standpoint of others, associating with delinquent peers, holding attitudes that favor delinquency, and having committed delinquent behavior previously. Second, consistent with symbolic interactionism, commitments to conventional roles, structural locations, and residential characteristics affect delinquency indirectly through role-taking. Third, consistent with differential association, delinquency stems in part from association with delinquent peers and learning attitudes about the legal code. Fourth, our results provide some support for the labeling hypothesis of secondary deviance, but only the effects of race support the hypothesis that false accusations among the disadvantaged result in a self-fulfilling prophecy. Fifth, consistent with

social disorganization and control theories, strong ties to conventional institutions exert significant total effects on delinquency, but contrary to control theories, these effects are mediated by role-taking. Together, these findings suggest that a broad-based theory of symbolic interaction provides a more complete explanation of delinquency than do the classical theories investigated here, in terms of both specifying important omitted constructs and addressing the conventional and deviant content of social organization.

Our results do not support pure social control theories. But what, if anything, do they imply for the more recent version of control theory, low self-control theory (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990)? According to low self-control theory, unlawful behavior can be decomposed into two components: criminal propensity and criminal events. Criminal propensity results from low self-control, a stable individual trait that predisposes one to deviate and is a product of poor parental child rearing. Persons who have low self-control are impulsive risk-takers and thrill-seekers who are unable to consider long-term consequences of action, are insensitive to the suffering of others, and are incapable of elaborate planning. Criminal events consist of the event-like characteristics of crime that are orthogonal to propensity, and include age, physical ability, and the situational effects of opportunity and decision-making. The relative contribution of these components varies by offense: Minor delinquent acts that require little ability, opportunity, or choice are explained by low self-control, while complex crimes (like armed robbery) that require physical ability, elaborate opportunities, and conscious decision-making are explained by criminal events.

From a symbolic interactionist standpoint, low self-control is less an individual trait than a learned predisposition toward habitual behavior, which can be either deviant or conventional. If a person has repeatedly solved a problematic situation in a similar way, that person will be unlikely to perceive similar future situations as problematic, to experience blocked impulses, and thus to engage in reflective thought. Moreover, symbolic interactionism implies that individual propensity and specific situations change over time, interacting with one another to produce behavior. For example, resolutions of a problematic situation at one time may cause one to select into a delinquent situation at a later

time, which may become problematic and elicit further role-taking. The self that arises in this role-taking process is also influenced by previous resolutions to problematic situations. Perhaps the most important point, however, is that self-control is a process of *differential* social control that eventuates in delinquent or conventional behavior depending on the content (delinquent or conventional) and efficacy of reference groups and role commitments.¹⁶

In the present work, we selected the individual as the unit of analysis because our aim was not only to provide empirical support for our differential social control theory, but also to specify the relationship between our theoretical perspective and classical theories of crime, many of which are either specified at the individual-level or have an individual-level analogue. A next step in our work will be to assess the usefulness of the differential social control framework for explaining delinquency at other levels of analysis. For instance, we can envision a study with the family as the unit of analysis that would examine within- and between-family variation in patterns of crime and delinquency. Such a study could illuminate the factors that shape the family as a generalized other, and the implications of this for familial controls including rules, expectations, and familial sanctions for delinquency. We can also envision a study of peer groups that examines variation in delinquency within and between peer groups. Here one could examine the perceived goals, interests, and needs of the group, and most importantly, the sets of norms, expectations, and role models regarding delinquent behavior that constitute the group as a generalized other. Or, one could focus on within- and between-neighborhood variation in delinquency and examine how negotiated social orders can produce delinquency, even in tightly-knit communities as in the case of "defended

¹⁶ Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argue that the best indicator of low self-control is minor deviant behavior. Thus, in our statistical models, low self-control is controlled for by including prior delinquency, which helps rule out the possibility that the remaining coefficients of our models are biased because of unobserved heterogeneity or omitted variable bias. In addition, we estimated models that controlled for prior delinquency plus an additional 10-item scale of other minor deviant acts and found similar results. Thus, our findings are unlikely to be spurious due to low self-control.

territories" (Suttles 1968; Heitgerd and Bursik 1987).¹⁷

In conclusion, symbolic interactionism offers an avenue for addressing the issue of the "missing situation" in criminological research (Birkbeck and LaFree 1993). That is, criminologists have failed to develop a comprehensive theory of situations and crime. As others have noted recently (Birkbeck and LaFree 1993), situational explanations have received the most attention within the opportunity perspective (e.g., Cohen and Felson 1979), yet this view does not address the role of the motivations of offenders. A differential social control perspective not only focuses specifically on the

motivations for delinquency that arise through role-taking in problematic situations, but also situates these motivations in the context of actors' structural locations, commitments to social roles, and institutional arrangements.

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¹⁷ Note that we have restricted our analysis to males. Other work indicates that a symbolic interactionist theory of delinquency also helps to explain the gender gap in delinquency (Heimer forthcoming) and that the effects of reflected appraisals may vary across gender (Matsueda and Jeglum-Bartusch 1991).

Appendix A: Description of Variables

Variable	Description
<i>From the Parent Interview, 1977</i>	
Urban	Dummy variable coded 1 if family lives in urban area, defined as central city of SMSA or urban area with population 100,000; 0 otherwise.
Nonintact Family	Dummy variable coded 1 if father does not live with the youth; 0 otherwise.
Family Income	Total for the previous year, coded as: 1 = < \$6000; 2 = \$6001–10,000; 3 = \$10,001–14,000; 4 = \$14,001–18,000; 5 = \$18,001–22,000; 6 = \$22,001–26,000; 7 = \$26,001–30,000; 8 = \$30,001–34,000; 9 = \$34,001–38,000; 10 = \$38,001 and more.
Number of Children	Number of youth under 18 living in the household.
Residential Stability	Length of time residing in present neighborhood, coded as: 1 = less than one year; 2 = 1 or 2 years; 3 = 3 or 4 years; 4 = more than 4 years.
Neighborhood Crime	Rating of how big a problem (1) vandalism and (2) burglaries and thefts are in the neighborhood, coded as: 1 = not a problem; 2 = somewhat of a problem; 3 = big problem.
Parents' Appraisals	Agreement with the following statements, coded as 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree: "My son or daughter gets into trouble." "My son or daughter breaks rules."
Parents' Disapproval of Delinquency	Responses to the following questions, coded as 1 = not at all wrong; 2 = a little bit wrong; 3 = wrong; 4 = very wrong: "How wrong is it for a young person, like your son or daughter, to purposely damage or destroy property that did not belong to him or her?" "How wrong is it for a young person, like your son or daughter, to steal something worth more than \$50?" "How wrong is it for a young person, like your son or daughter, to break into a vehicle or building to steal something?"

(Continued on next page)

(Appendix A continued)

Variable	Description
<i>From the Youth Interviews, 1977 to 1979</i>	
Black (1977)	Dummy variable coded 1 if black, 0 if nonblack.
Age (1977)	This variable is the age of youth, 11 to 17.
Attachment to Family (1977)	Responses to the following questions, coded as 1 = not at all important; 3 = somewhat important; 5 = very important: "How important is it to you to have a family that does lots of things together?" "How important is it to you to have parents who comfort you when you are unhappy about something?" "How important is it to you to have parents who you can talk to about almost everything?"
Attachment to Friends (1977)	Response to the following, coded as 1 = not at all important; 2 = not too important; 3 = somewhat important; 4 = pretty important; 5 = very important: "How important is it to you to have a group of friends and be included in their activities." And, responses to the following, coded as 1 = not at all important, 3 = somewhat important, 5 = very important. "How important is it to you to be asked to take part in things your friends do, such as going to parties and games?" "How important is it to you to have friends ask to spend time and do things with you?"
Commitment to School Role (1977)	The following, coded as 1 = not at all important; 2 = not too important; 3 = somewhat important; 4 = pretty important; 5 = very important: "How important has your school work been to you?" And, responses to the following coded as 1 = not at all important; 3 = somewhat important; 5 = very important: "How important is it to you to do well in hard subjects?" "How important is it to you to have a high grade point average?"
Expect Good Job (1977)	The following, coded as 1 = poor; 2 = fair; 3 = good: "What do you think your chances are for getting the kind of job you would like after finishing school?"
Expect College Education (1977)	The following, coded as 1 = poor; 2 = fair; 3 = good: "What do you think your chances are for completing a college degree?"
Delinquent Friends (1978)	Responses to the following, coded as 1 = none of them; 2 = a few of them; 3 = several of them; 4 = most of them; 5 = all of them. "During the last year, how many of your close friends have purposely damaged or destroyed property that did not belong to them?" "During the last year, how many of your close friends have stolen something worth more than \$50?" "During the last year, how many of your close friends have broken into a building or vehicle to steal something?"
Reflected Appraisals as a Rule-Violator (1978)	Responses to the following, coded as 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree: "How much would your friends agree that you get into trouble?" "How much would your friends agree that you break rules?" "How much would your parents agree that you get into trouble?" "How much would your parents agree that you break rules?"

(Continued on next page)

(Appendix A continued)

Variable	Description																																		
Delinquent Attitudes (1978)	<p>Coded as 1 = not at all wrong; 2 = a little bit wrong; 3 = somewhat wrong; 4 = very wrong:</p> <p>“How wrong is it for someone your age to purposely damage or destroy property that does not belong to him or her?”</p> <p>“How wrong is it for someone your age to steal something worth more than \$50?”</p> <p>“How wrong is it for someone your age to break into a building or vehicle to steal something?”</p>																																		
Expected Disapproval From Parents (1978)	<p>Responses to the following, coded as 1 = strongly approve; 2 = approve; 3 = neither approve nor disapprove; 4 = disapprove; 5 = strongly disapprove.</p> <p>“How would your parents react if you purposely damaged or destroyed property that does not belong to you?”</p> <p>“How would your parents react if you stole something worth more than \$50?”</p> <p>“How would your parents react if you broke into a building or vehicle to steal something?”</p>																																		
Expected Disapproval From Friends (1978)	<p>Responses to the following, coded as 1 = strongly approve; 2 = approve; 3 = neither approve nor disapprove; 4 = disapprove; 5 = strongly disapprove.</p> <p>“How would your friends react if you purposely damaged or destroyed property that does not belong to you?”</p> <p>“How would your friends react if you stole something worth more than \$50?”</p> <p>“How would your friends react if you broke into a building or vehicle to steal something?”</p>																																		
Delinquency (1977 and 1979)	<p>These variables are computed as means of rates of self-reported involvement in delinquency. Each individual item is coded 1 = never; 2 = once or twice a year; 3 = once or twice every 2 to 3 months; 4 = once a month; 5 = once every 2 to 3 weeks; 6 = once a week; 7 = 2 to 3 times a week; 8 = once a day; 9 = 2 to 3 times a day. The offenses included are as follows:</p> <table border="0"> <tbody> <tr> <td>(1) Damaged family property</td> <td>(18) Sexually assaulted someone</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(2) Damaged school property</td> <td>(19) Used force on students</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(3) Damaged other property</td> <td>(20) Used force on teacher</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(4) Stolen motor vehicle</td> <td>(21) Used force on other</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(5) Stolen something worth more than \$5</td> <td>(22) Run away.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(6) Bought stolen goods</td> <td>(23) Stolen things worth between \$5 and \$50</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(7) Carried a hidden weapon</td> <td>(24) Sexual intercourse</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(8) Stolen something worth less than \$5</td> <td>(25) Broken into a building to steal or look around</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(9) Attacked someone</td> <td>(26) Disorderly conduct</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(10) Been paid for sexual relations</td> <td>(27) Used marijuana or hashish</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(11) Been in gang fights</td> <td>(28) Joy riding</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(12) Sold marijuana</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>(13) Hit teacher</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>(14) Hit parent</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>(15) Hit other students</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>(16) Sold hard drugs</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>(17) Begged</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	(1) Damaged family property	(18) Sexually assaulted someone	(2) Damaged school property	(19) Used force on students	(3) Damaged other property	(20) Used force on teacher	(4) Stolen motor vehicle	(21) Used force on other	(5) Stolen something worth more than \$5	(22) Run away.	(6) Bought stolen goods	(23) Stolen things worth between \$5 and \$50	(7) Carried a hidden weapon	(24) Sexual intercourse	(8) Stolen something worth less than \$5	(25) Broken into a building to steal or look around	(9) Attacked someone	(26) Disorderly conduct	(10) Been paid for sexual relations	(27) Used marijuana or hashish	(11) Been in gang fights	(28) Joy riding	(12) Sold marijuana		(13) Hit teacher		(14) Hit parent		(15) Hit other students		(16) Sold hard drugs		(17) Begged	
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Appendix B. Parameter Estimates of the Measurement Model

Latent Construct	Observed Variable	Metric Slope	Validity Coefficient	Observed Variance	Error Variance
<i>Structural Location</i>					
Age	Youth's age	1.00 ^f	1.00 ^f	3.76	.00 ^f
Black	Black racial status	1.00 ^f	1.00 ^f	.14	.00 ^f
Urban	Urban residence	1.00 ^f	1.00 ^f	.19	.00 ^f
Nonintact family	Nonintact family	1.00 ^f	1.00 ^f	.21	.00 ^f
Family income	Family income	1.00 ^f	1.00 ^f	5.22	.00 ^f
Number of children	Number of children in family	1.00 ^f	1.00 ^f	2.27	.00 ^f
Residential stability	Residential stability	1.00 ^f	1.00 ^f	1.09	.00 ^f
Neighborhood crime	Vandalism	1.00 ^f	.65	.37	.21
	Burglary	1.47	.97	.36	.02
<i>Prior Delinquency, 1977</i>	Delinquency scale 1977	1.00 ^f	1.00 ^f	.08	.00 ^f
<i>Role Commitment, 1977</i>					
Attachment to family	Family is important	1.00 ^f	.51	.84	.62
	Comfort from parents important	1.50	.61	1.33	.84
	Talk with parents important	1.18	.55	.98	.68
Attachment to friends	Friends are important	1.00 ^f	.56	1.12	.76
	Time with friends important	1.29	.66	1.35	.77
	Included by friends important	1.31	.59	1.72	1.12
Parents' appraisal	Troublemaker	1.00 ^f	.70	.74	.38
	Rule-violator	1.25	.75	.99	.43
Parents' disapproval	Vandalism	1.00 ^f	.85	.20	.06
	Theft of greater than \$50	.68	.69	.14	.07
	Burglary	1.04	.97	.17	.01
Commitment school role	School is important	1.00 ^f	.69	.90	.47
	Important to do well in school	.87	.51	1.25	.92
	GPA is important	1.07	.63	1.24	.75
Expect a good job	Expect to get good job	1.00 ^f	.90 ^f	.26	.05 ^f
Expect college education	Expect to get a college degree	1.00 ^f	.90 ^f	.51	.10 ^f
<i>Role-Taking, 1978</i>					
Delinquent friends	Friends' vandalism	1.00 ^f	.60	.79	.51
	Friends' theft greater than \$50	.77	.76	.29	.12
	Friends' burglary	.91	.76	.41	.18
Reflected appraisals	Troublemaker from friend	1.00 ^f	.71	.79	.39
	Rule-violator from friend	1.00	.70	.81	.41
	Troublemaker from parent	1.07	.77	.78	.32
	Rule-violator from parent	1.04	.73	.81	.37
Delinquent attitudes	Vandalism is wrong	1.00 ^f	.60	.36	.23
	Theft greater than \$50 is wrong	1.19	.78	.29	.11
	Burglary is wrong	1.36	.86	.33	.09
Expect Parents' Disapproval	Vandalism	1.00 ^f	.77	.32	.13
	Theft greater than \$50	.85	.72	.27	.13
	Burglary	1.04	.88	.26	.06
Expect Friends' Disapproval	Vandalism	1.00 ^f	.77	.47	.19
	Theft greater than \$50	1.18	.77	.64	.27
	Burglary	1.14	.87	.47	.12
<i>Delinquency, 1979</i>	Delinquency scale 1979	1.00 ^f	1.00 ^f	.11	.00 ^f

Note: ^f = fixed coefficient; N = 863.

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