

The Routledge Handbook of Deviant Behavior

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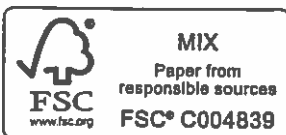
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Entering deviance

Stacey Nofziger

Introduction

The question of how individuals become deviant has been the focus of many criminological theories and empirical studies. Theories may focus on either the socially constructed nature of deviance or the processes involved in the entrance into deviance. Some perspectives argue that once started on a deviant path, the individual will be persistent in their criminal and deviant behaviors. Others argue this is a more fluid relationship, which accounts for transitions in and out of deviance throughout the life course. Regardless of the specific processes and mechanisms that are hypothesized to predict deviance, two empirical realities are acknowledged as central in the understanding of deviant behavior. First, the earlier one begins engaging in deviant behaviors, the more likely one is to have relatively stable, long-term patterns of criminal and deviant activity. Second, the family plays a vital role in becoming deviant.

This chapter examines the importance of early onset and stability of deviant behavior and focuses on experiences within the family that affect early childhood entrance into deviance.

Onset and stability of deviance

The majority of research on crime and deviance has focused on the reasons why individuals engage in antisocial behaviors. Nearly every theory proposes different explanations, ranging from larger structural and cultural causes to individual differences and various social processes. While there is continued debate about the mechanisms and processes involved, most theories attempt to explain the initial cause or entrance into deviant behaviors. In contrast, some recent theory has focused more on processes that influence not only the entrance of individuals into deviance but their persistence and exit or desistance from these behaviors. For example, life-course theories argue that different trajectories of behavior are interwoven and influenced by specific, relatively abrupt or gradual, transitions that lead to increased deviance or a movement away from deviance (Sampson and Laub 1993, 1997; Thornberry 1997; Elder 1985, 1994; Laub and Sampson 2003). These perspectives emphasize changes that occur during the life course of the individual that influence their deviant career (Inciardi 1975; Luckenbill and Best 1981). While these new perspectives expand our understanding of changes in deviant behavior and bring attention to a relatively neglected area of study, they also still acknowledge the importance of the first step of entering deviance.

One important issue related to entrance is the age at which individuals begin such behaviors. The assumption is that an earlier age of onset will increase the likelihood that individuals engage in serious and chronic antisocial behaviors. Research on whether the age of onset matters typically compares those who have their first incident of either official or self-reported deviance in childhood or young adolescence to those who do not begin such behaviors until they are older. For example, a review of research found that those who began criminal acts in childhood "continued committing crime at a higher rate all through adolescence and early adulthood" compared to those who started at later points in life (Loeber 1982: 1438). In general, those who enter deviance during childhood are more likely to engage in antisocial behaviors at later stages in life (Farrington 1992; Hirschi and Gottfredson 1995). In addition to simply increasing the likelihood of later offending, studies find that younger onset is associated with more serious offending, a greater variety of offending behaviors, higher frequency of offending, and engaging in deviance over a longer period of time (Loeber 1982; Blumstein *et al.* 1986; Tolan 1987; Farrington and Hawkins 1991; Tolan and Thomas 1995). The implication of these studies is that understanding, and potentially correcting, the processes that lead to entrance into deviance at young ages will have a substantial impact on long-term behavior.

The age of entrance into deviance is vital to understand due to the high level of stability in deviant behavior. The concept of stability has been defined in a number of ways, and many of these interpretations are dependent on whether the focus is on "within" or "between" individual stability. For within individual stability, the essential argument is that individuals involved in deviant behaviors early in life are likely to be engaged in similar behaviors later in life. For example, most studies of adults who are defined as criminal find that these individuals participated in deviant behaviors as juveniles and that involvement in such behavior early in life predicts later antisocial behaviors (Olweus 1979; Loeber 1982; Moffitt 1993; Laub and Sampson 2003). While studies find that juveniles who are deviant as children do not always persist in deviance as adults (Gove 1985; Sampson and Laub 1997; Laub and Sampson 2003), the dominant trend in research supports within-person stability in that "the antisocial child tends to become the antisocial teenager and the antisocial adult" (Farrington 1992: 258).

In addition to stability *within* individuals, there is a great deal of relative stability in deviant behavior *between* individuals. This form of stability focuses on how much "people differ in the likelihood that they will commit crimes" (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990: 108). While the absolute levels, or the manifestations, of deviance may shift, the relative involvement between individuals remains consistent over time. In other words, individuals who are highly deviant as children will be more deviant as adults compared to individuals who were less deviant as children. For example, in a review of longitudinal studies, Olweus (1979: 870) found that individual differences in aggression emerge very early, as young as three years old, and are maintained to a "considerable degree" through adolescence and adulthood. Thus, differences in relative levels of participation in deviant behaviors emerge early and persist over time (Robbins 1966; Loeber 1982; Farrington 1992; Sampson and Laub 1993). These findings again point to the importance of understanding early entrance into deviance as it may be possible to differentiate between individuals who are at high and low risk for chronic deviance early in life.

One important example of these stability findings is provided by Sampson and Laub through their work with the data originally collected by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck. In *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* (1950), the Gluecks compared 500 boys who had been officially classified as delinquent by the State of Massachusetts with 500 "non-delinquent" comparable boys. This control group may have engaged in various forms of deviant behavior, but they were not involved in "official, or serious, persistent delinquency" (Sampson and Laub 1993: 26) according to police records or key reporters, such as their parents or teachers. While these data do not

represent a random sample of the population, and are limited in important ways (such as not including females in the sample), the richness of these data, and the fact that subsequent follow-up studies have followed these individuals through youth, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, and the beginnings of old age, makes these some of the most useful data for understanding patterns of stability in deviant behavior.

While Laub and Sampson emphasized the need to examine social bonds and experiences through the life course that can change participation in deviance, they found substantial stability. Boys who were identified as deviant children were much more heavily involved in crime, as well as other deviant and analogous behaviors, throughout their lives (Sampson and Laub 1997; Laub and Sampson 2003). Therefore, they concluded that there was a great deal of consistency in behaviors from childhood through adulthood. Such findings suggest that "individual traits and childhood experiences" (Laub and Sampson 2003: 6) are both important in understanding deviant behaviors.

Findings regarding age of onset and stability in deviance indicate that a useful focus of research would be to identify a characteristic or trait that develops in childhood and maintains a relatively stable influence on behavior over time. In *Becoming Deviant*, Matza (1969) argued that individuals develop an affinity, or predisposition, toward crime. He argued that people "develop predispositions to certain phenomena, say delinquency, as a result of their *circumstances*" (Matza 1969: 90–91). One circumstance that may produce an affinity toward deviance is the type or quality of childrearing practices. Specifically, the lack of self-control, which results from circumstances that produce inadequate parenting, can be regarded as a specific form of affinity toward deviance. The remainder of this chapter examines the role of the parents in developing self-control in children.

Parenting and self-control

Research on self-control has firmly established that this trait predicts a wide range of deviant and analogous behaviors (see Pratt and Cullen 2000 and Gottfredson 2008 for reviews). Defined as the extent to which individuals are likely to give in to temptations of the moment (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990: 87), self-control has been found to develop early in life and to remain fairly stable across time (Arneklev, Cochran, and Gainey 1998; Tuner and Piquero 2002; Hay and Forest 2006; Beaver and Wright 2007). In addition, self-control has been used to predict behaviors in childhood and adolescence as well as adulthood, in general and criminal samples, across different racial groups and for both sexes (Pratt and Cullen 2000). Due to the consistency in these findings about the importance of self-control, it is argued that it is crucial to develop this characteristic in order to prevent entrance into deviance.

The processes necessary to develop self-control are said to be best carried out in early childhood and within the home. However, this is not always successful. The assumption in most research is that the home is a place of safety and security and parents engage in socialization processes that encourage law-abiding, non-deviant activities in children. Parents are presumed to serve the role of providing "conventional, anti-criminal definitions, conforming role models, and the reinforcement of conformity" (Akers and Jensen 2008: 50). Unfortunately, that is not always the case. Parents who are themselves engaged in a variety of deviant behaviors often produce high levels of deviance in their children (West and Farrington 1977; Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber 1986; Farrington 1992). For example, Glueck and Glueck (1950; 1962) and Sampson and Laub (1993) found that delinquent boys were more likely to have parents who had problems with criminal behavior and alcoholism than their non-delinquent counterparts.

Parents do not need to have criminal records or to be involved in serious forms of deviance to increase their children's entrance to deviance. Simple tolerance for deviant behavior is adequate. In a meta-analysis on the ways that families are important in the prediction of juvenile delinquency (Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber 1986), it was found that both parental criminality and lenient attitudes toward deviance increased deviance in children. In fact, nearly every study (eight out of nine) that included a measure of parents' tolerance for deviance found this led to increased deviance in children. These findings indicate that deviant parents increase the likelihood that children enter into deviant activities. What is needed is to understand the mechanisms that link parental and child deviance. One argument is that deviant parents do not engage in behaviors that will produce adequate self-control in their children.

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990: 101) proposed that self-control develops when parents monitor the child, recognize when deviance occurs, and correct these behaviors. Parents who fail in these steps increase the risk that their children will enter into deviant behavior. An underlying necessary condition for these behaviors is that the parents are invested in their children as evidenced through feelings of concern and affection (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990: 98). The importance of both affection and various parenting styles and processes are well established in existing research. Studies of different forms of parenting find that "authoritative" parents, who provide warmth and affection as well as clear rules and restrictions, are most likely to develop children who follow the rules of society and are non-deviant (Baumrind 1978; 1991). In addition, poor supervision and erratic or harsh discipline are consistently found to differentiate between deviant and non-deviant juveniles (Glueck and Glueck 1962; Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber 1986; Gibbs, Giever and Martin 1998; Unnever, Cullen and Pratt 2003; Akers and Jensen 2008). The need for affection is also clear. Poor relationships between parents and children lead to problems with hostility on the part of children (Glueck and Glueck 1962: 128), and generally increase antisocial behaviors in juveniles (Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber 1986).

While there is a great deal of work that establishes the importance of parenting practices, most of these studies were conducted prior to the development of self-control theory and thus do not specifically test whether these practices influence the self-control of the child. However, there is a growing body of literature that specifically examines the three parenting practices advocated by the theory that tests whether these steps are associated with self-control in children. A recent review by Cullen *et al.* (2008) examines thirteen different studies conducted since 1994 that test specific pieces of the necessary steps for developing self-control. Of these studies, the majority focus on the role of supervision and various forms of punishment (Cullen *et al.* 2008: 70–71). Across all these studies, higher self-control was related to adequate and consistent supervision or monitoring, as well as various measures of parenting which included appropriate discipline, parental warmth and affection for children. One thing that may result in poor parenting performance is whether the parents are deviant, and thus low in self-control, themselves.

Many studies find that adults who are deviant engage in practices that do not fulfill the requirements of developing their children's self-control. For example, parents who have a history of criminal involvement use punishment inconsistently, and when they do discipline their children, their methods rely on actions that are "easy, short-term, and insensitive—that is, yelling and screaming, slapping and hitting" (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990: 101). Further, deviant parents do not perceive their child's activities to be problematic or simply ignore acts of deviance (Patterson and Dishion 1985; Laub and Sampson 1988). Therefore, parents who are deviant themselves are more likely to engage in practices that will lead to the development of low self-control in their children and thus to an early entrance into deviance.

Deviant parents may not adequately instill self-control in their children because of their own poorly developed self-control. Characteristics of low self-control include impulsivity, having a

short temper, and being self-centered (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990: 90). Since successful parenting requires a great deal of effort, time, patience, and self-sacrifice, adults with poor self-control are unlikely to engage in parenting practices that are adequate to teach their children self-control and thus prevent them from entering into deviance. In fact, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990: 100) argue that the self-control of the parent will be the primary predictor in the self-control of their children. Parental self-control is expected to affect whether they engage in the types of parenting that will produce self-control in their children. In spite of this growing attention to building an understanding of how parenting leads to self-control, most studies do not directly measure the self-control of the parent. One recent exception (Nofziger 2008) found that mothers with low self-control were more likely to engage in such parenting practices as ignoring the child when they misbehave (thus, not acknowledging or correcting such behavior) and failing to monitor certain activities. These parenting practices ultimately led to lower self-control, and subsequent deviant behavior, in their children.

The large, and continually growing, body of literature on self-control theory supports the importance of the relationship between parenting processes, the development of self-control, and ultimately deviant behavior. While there are many other factors that may influence individual entrance into deviance, this research clearly establishes the importance of these family processes. Thus, entrance into deviance cannot be fully understood without a consideration of the role of parenting and self-control.

Conclusion

The step of entering deviance is arguably the most important process to understand due to the findings that, once started on a deviant path, there is a great deal of stability in such behavior. Therefore, preventing entrance is the key to avoiding a lifetime of antisocial behaviors. This chapter argues that the processes related to the family, and in particular parental practices that produce self-control in children, are vital in producing or preventing deviance. Specifically, parents who have poor self-control and are themselves deviant inadequately socialize their children. They fail to form close attachments with their children, provide inadequate supervision, discipline inconsistently or inappropriately, and ultimately fail to instill adequate self-control in their children.

Of course, such "family factors never operate in a vacuum but take place against a backdrop of other influence such as those exercised by children's peers, their school, and society in general" (Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber 1986: 128). Therefore, while the processes involved in the family are important to consider, it must be remembered that entering into deviance is a highly complex process with multiple causes. While early processes may be those that have the longest and therefore most important impact, it is conceivable that later developing realities may also influence other pathways into deviance.

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