Competence, Delinquency, and Attempts to Attain Possible Selves

Daphna Oyserman and Eli Saltz

The impact of impulsivity, possible selves, and social and communication skills on delinquent involvement in inner-city high school and incarcerated boys (aged 13–17, N = 230) was explored. Impulsivity, perceived attempts to attain possible selves, and balance in possible selves were hypothesized to directly influence delinquency. Social and communication skills were hypothesized to influence delinquency directly and indirectly through their effects on impulsivity, balance, and attempts to attain possible selves. These factors discriminated moderately well between high school and incarcerated youths. Impulsivity was an especially powerful predictor of self-reported delinquency among high school youths but not among incarcerated youths. The effect of other variables differed somewhat for different categories of delinquency (aggression, theft, hooliganism, and school truancy) and between subsamples, suggesting the importance of examining the subjective meaning of each of these behaviors for the individual in his social context.

A review of delinquency patterns among the general adolescent population indicates that delinquent behavior is a common occurrence during adolescence. Juveniles aged 15–17 years account for a disproportionately large amount of crime relative to their numbers in the general population (Elliot, Huizinga, Knowles, & Canter, 1983; National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 1988; Rutter & Giller, 1984; Tolan, 1988). Delinquent behavior is rare in early adolescence and increases in prevalence during midadolescence, peaking between ages 15 and 17 (Elliot, Huizinga, & Morse, 1988; Farrington, 1986; Gold & Petronio, 1980). Self-report data suggest that for the majority of youths, delinquent involvement ends within a year of its initiation (Elliot et al., 1988).

This pattern of timing and prevalence raises the possibility that adolescent development and delinquent behavior are linked. Furthermore, social-skills deficits in delinquent as compared with nondelinquent youths have been reported (Freedman, Rosenthal, Donahoe, Schlundt, & McFall, 1978; Hains & Herrman, 1989; Leadbeater, Hellner, Allen, & Aber, 1989). For many youths, delinquency may be an undesirable by-product of difficulties negotiating the developmental tasks of adolescence (Gold & Petronio, 1980; Oyserman & Markus, 1990b; Tolan, 1988; for a similar position see Thornberry, 1987). A consuming life task of adolescence is the construction of a self that one could become (Erikson, 1968) that is at once believable, personally satisfying, and coordinate with the responsibilities that confront adults in one's own community (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987).

It has previously been argued that many youths initially view a delinquent lifestyle as a means to create selves that they could become (Oyserman & Markus, 1990a, 1990b). These future-oriented components of the self-concept, or *possible selves*, are

Daphna Oyserman, Merrill-Palmer Institute, Wayne State University (on leave from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem); Eli Saltz, Merrill-Palmer Institute, Wayne State University.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Daphna Oyserman, 71-A East Ferry, Merrill-Palmer Institute, Detroit, Michigan 48202.

the selves we could become, would like to become, and are afraid we might become (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Delinquency may be a means to attain such possible selves as "independent," "daring," "competent," or "fun-loving and adventurous." The negative self-definitional consequences of delinquency may not be taken into account initially, especially by youths who lack balanced possible selves. *Balance* refers to the construal of both positive expectations and possibilities to be avoided in the same domain (e.g., I expect to be popular and have lots of friends and I am afraid that I'll be alone, that other kids' parents won't let them hang out with me).

Youths with balanced possible selves have both a positive self-identifying goal to strive for and are aware of the personally relevant consequences of not meeting that goal. This balance may preserve motivation to attain the positive possible self and therefore avoid the negative self, leading these youths to make more attempts to attain expected selves and avoid feared ones. Balance may also decrease the range of strategies deemed acceptable in attempting to attain positive possible selves. Strategies that may both increase the possibility of attaining a positive self and reduce the possibility of avoiding the negative self with which it is balanced will be discarded. Only strategies that simultaneously increase the possibility of attaining the positive self and avoiding the negative self will be attempted (Oyserman & Markus, 1990b). Lack of balance in possible selves may mean that youths are more likely to act without taking into account possible negative consequences for the self. This oversight is likely to result in surprise and bewilderment when attempts to attain a positive possible self result in unforeseen negative consequences for the self. Thus, a youth may think that breaking into school after hours and marking his initials on the walls will help him attain his "cool dude" possible self without taking into account that this behavior is illegal and that by writing his initials on the walls he is providing officials with clues as to who to prosecute.

When faced with negative consequences of delinquent activities, many youths may discontinue their involvement. Perhaps they view delinquent activities as the only means of attaining a positive sense of self because their attempts to do so normatively in the past have failed (Kaplan, 1975; Oyserman & Mar-

kus, 1990a, 1990b). These youths may be less competent in their interactions with others in their conventional environment and less successful in negotiating positive identities in the give-and-take of everyday events, either because they are generally less articulate or because they do not have a sense of the likely consequences of their strategies. For these youths, negative self-definitional consequences of delinquency are likely to compete with its positive self-definitional potential. The relationship between delinquency and the self-definitional task of adolescence may be cyclical in nature, both influencing and being influenced by possible selves and strategies for their attainment.

In this article, we explore one part of this relationship—the extent that youths who differ in their levels of social competence and verbal articulateness, balance in possible selves, and impulsiveness also differ in their levels of delinquent involvement. We use path analytic techniques to explore the extent to which competence, content of future-oriented self-concept, and attempts to achieve these future selves are related to delinquent involvement in a sample of urban male adolescents. We hypothesize that articulate, competent youths will be more likely to have balanced possible selves and to make efforts to attain expected and avoid feared selves and will be less likely to be involved in delinquent activities.

Negotiating the Transition to Adulthood

Common to current approaches to adolescence is the premise that the central developmental task of this period is the creation of a sense of self that will provide a bridge into the adult world (Csikszentmihalyi & Larsen, 1984; Erikson, 1968). This bridge allows the adolescent to leave the dependent roles of childhood and take on the independent roles of adulthood. The adolescent's task is to synthesize childhood identifications; to make sense of achievements, characteristics, traits, and attributes; and to attune motives, values, skills, and abilities to the possibilities perceived as available in the social environment (Erikson, 1968). As such, the self developed in adolescence reaches from the current situation into the past and the future and unifies perceptions of what currently is with those of what once was and what one day might be. On completion of this process, the young adult is to attain a sense of self as separate from and independent of the family of origin, competent and capable of carrying out adult roles.

It has been posited that as the future-oriented component of the self-concept, possible selves are essential for putting the self into action (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Adolescents are motivated to behave in ways congruent with the selves they expect to become and to refrain from behaving in ways congruent with selves they are afraid they might become. Those selves that seem plausible and probable for oneself give meaning to current behavior, positive or negative, and influence the direction of current activities (e.g., Carson, Madison, & Santrock, 1987; Csikszentmihalyi & Larsen, 1984). Thus, in a recent study, high school girls who expected to work full-time as adults felt that it was important to establish themselves in their future careers as soon as possible and chose a science-dominant curriculum of study more often than their equally able classmates who either did not expect to work or expected work to be secondary to future selves as mothers and homemakers (Curry, Trew, Turner, & Hunter, 1992).

What is the source of one's sense of future possibilities? Social

roles, life events, and the specific contexts within which these unfold are all source material (e.g., Cantor & Zirkel, 1990; Markus & Wurf, 1987). In addition, social norms and mores and the possibilities encapsulated in the roles played by others in one's social environment are likely to delineate ways the self could be defined: What others like me are now, I could become (Conger & Peterson, 1984; Curry et al., 1992; Oyserman & Markus, 1990a, 1990b; Rosenberg, 1979). One's sense of self develops and is maintained within a particular social context and is always grounded in this social reality (Wiley & Alexander, 1987; Rosenberg, 1979). During adolescence, the family, peer group, and the world of work and school are the normative contexts in which one seeks a sense of self (see, e.g., Thornberry, 1987). Cutting across contexts, ethnicity and social class form part of the scaffolding on which a meaningful sense of self is constructed (Hare, 1988).

Given the social nature of the self, it is likely that only those selves that others validate as possible will become part of one's identity. In this regard, the plausibility of particular possible selves or desired identities may be thought of as the outcome of a series of interpersonal interactions in which these selves are negotiated (e.g., Cantor & Zirkel, 1990; Thornberry, 1987). Thus, a "smart, do well in school" possible self cannot be sustained by a particular grade in school; rather, it is the result of a series of interactions with teachers, classmates, and parents over time in which information about the individual's past, current, and likely future academic achievement is symbolized by grades, among other things. Because future identity requires some current social validation, adolescents must learn to skillfully negotiate with the important others in their social environment. It is through the eyes of their parents, peers, and teachers that adolescents strive to build a plausible independent adult self. These others, partners in the identity negotiation process, provide feedback about the self's successes and failures, strengths and weaknesses—past, current, and likely in the future.

However, these others do not simply react to the selves the teen attempts to portray in the interaction. They also bring their own normative expectations about the ways a teen should behave and the kinds of selves that ought to be negotiated. Thus, the expectations and feedback of negotiation partners have an important effect on the sense of self being developed (Erikson, 1968; Markus, Cross, & Wurf, 1990; Wiley & Alexander, 1987). It has been argued that success in this negotiation process depends critically on one's ability to translate desired identities into the possibilities afforded by the social environment (e.g., Cantor, Mischel, & Schwartz, 1982). This ability has been termed *social intelligence* or *social competence* (e.g., Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987; Little, 1989). Social competence involves the ability "to negotiate socially responsible and feasible ways to do both what one wants and what is needed in a current situation" (Cantor & Zirkel, 1990, p. 158).

Socially competent teens may thus be better able to figure out which of their desired identities to negotiate with whom and under what conditions. For example, a socially competent teen may realize that negotiation of an "independent" possible self with his or her parents is more likely to be successful after volunteering for and completing household chores than after being caught trying to sneak into the house two hours past the weekday curfew. Socially competent teens may also be more likely to enlist the support of significant others in the attain-

ment of cherished possible selves. When having trouble with schoolwork, for example, a socially competent teen will be able to assess the likelihood of getting appropriate help from teachers and classmates and will know when and how to obtain this help. Getting help will allow the teen to continue to view school success as a possible self. Less socially competent teens may also wish to maintain a "school success" possible self but will likely be less able to attune themselves to when and how to attain help and support to do so. In spite of their efforts, attainment of this self may become less and less subjectively plausible over time and eventually change from being an expected to merely a hoped for self, valued but subjectively unlikely to be attained.

As they enter adolescence, socially incompetent youths are likely to find that interactions with their parents, teachers, and normative or conventional peers are frustrating and unrewarding. In their interactions with these others, they are likely to be unable to negotiate the kinds of positive possible selves that make becoming an independent, competent adult seem likely. Instead, the identities that ensue from these interchanges may be so unappealing that these youths may seek out alternative social contexts in which to define themselves. Although remaining in school means continued contact with conventional peers and teachers, seeking out delinquent activities may provide an alternative self-definitional route with positive possibilities of its own (see Kaplan, 1975, 1980; Oyserman & Markus, 1990a, 1990b). Thus, positive possible selves such as "daring," "adventurous," "independent," and "tough" can be constructed in a delinquent social environment (Farrington, 1987) and can counteract the unappealing selves that result from interactions with parents, teachers, and conventional peers. Stealing, fighting, and skipping school may be viewed as ways of showing one's daring and independence and as ways to gain friends or avoid being viewed as weak, dependent, or fearful (e.g., Kaplan, 1975).

Socially competent youth are likely to experience more success in negotiating positive possible selves and in enlisting the support of others in attaining these selves within a conventional environment. They are more likely to perceive that involvement in nonconventional activities may have a negative effect on their ability to negotiate the adult self they would like to become. These youths may be therefore more likely to avoid delinquent activities. Their competence in negotiating will make formation and maintenance of a plausible and positive sense of themselves as independent, competent adults-to-be possible. Because they have been successful in the past, socially competent youths may be more likely to try to attain positive and avoid negative possible selves within their conventional social context.

Conversely, having experienced little success in their attempts to attain possible selves in the past, socially incompetent youths may be less likely to try to attain possible selves within the conventional environment and may therefore be both more impulsive and more vulnerable to the momentary pressures or opportunities available in their social environment. Social competence may thus directly increase socially appropriate behavior such as attending school and refraining from delinquent activity. It may also indirectly increase these behaviors by making the construction of balanced possible selves and efforts to attain these selves more likely and by making impulsive behavior less likely.

We hypothesize first that possible selves will be implicated in involvement in delinquent activities, with youths who are not involved in delinquency more likely to have balanced possible selves and more likely to attempt to attain these possible selves than youths who are involved in delinquency. Second, we hypothesize that youths who are not involved in delinquent activities will be less socially competent, with social competence being both directly and indirectly linked with involvement through its effects on balance in possible selves, attempts to attain possible selves, and impulsive behavior. Third, we hypothesize that youths who report impulsive behavior will be more highly involved in delinquency. Finally, lack of basic communication skills is hypothesized to be linked with delinquent behavior both directly and through its effects on social competence and possible selves. Low value attached to achievement–individuation and interconnection are proposed to mediate the relationships described above by decreasing commitment to others and future goals. The hypotheses are illustrated in Figure 1. We explore the fit of this model to the data using path analyses.

Method

Sample

We selected a total of 230 youths, aged 13 to 17, from two subsamples distinguished by their degree of officially known delinquency: Detroit inner-city public school students and Wayne County Detention Center inmates. Youths are held in the detention center if they have been arrested for a felony offense and are believed to pose a risk of committing further offenses before their trial date. They are held until their trials or until the court is convinced that they no longer pose a risk before trial. Detention is thus generally short, normally not longer than a few months. The public school youths attended one of the schools most frequently listed as the school last attended by detention center youths. By selecting this school as a comparison for the detention center, we limited the effect of socioeconomic status and race on processing for delinquent activities. Because the youths in this study came from the same county and often from the same area in the city, they would all have been processed through the same judicial frameworks. Thus, any biases inherent in the juvenile justice system would be uniform across the sample. Because of overcrowding in detention facilities, most youths are returned to the community after trial rather than being incarcerated in a closed facility.

We interviewed subjects individually either at their school or at the detention center between August and October 1989. The youths studied were male, had an average age of 15.3 (15.4 for the school sample and 15.2 for the detention center sample), and were African American. The two subsamples did not differ significantly by age. The officially nondelinquent subsample was a random sample of 97 boys in grades 8–12 at an inner-city high school in Detroit, Michigan. Because the prevalence of delinquency among boys is much higher than among girls (see Farrington, 1987; Gold, 1987), only boys were in either sample. Approximately 30% of the students who were to have been interviewed were absent or unaccounted for at the time that interviews took place.

The officially delinquent sample was composed of all those boys present at the county detention center who were between the ages of 13 and 17, not currently receiving psychiatric treatment or diagnosed as learning disabled, and who we were able to interview during the two weeks made available to the project. A total of 133 youths were interviewed: 72 were arrested for property crimes, 48 for crimes against persons (so-called violent crimes), and 13 lacked records on arresting offense.
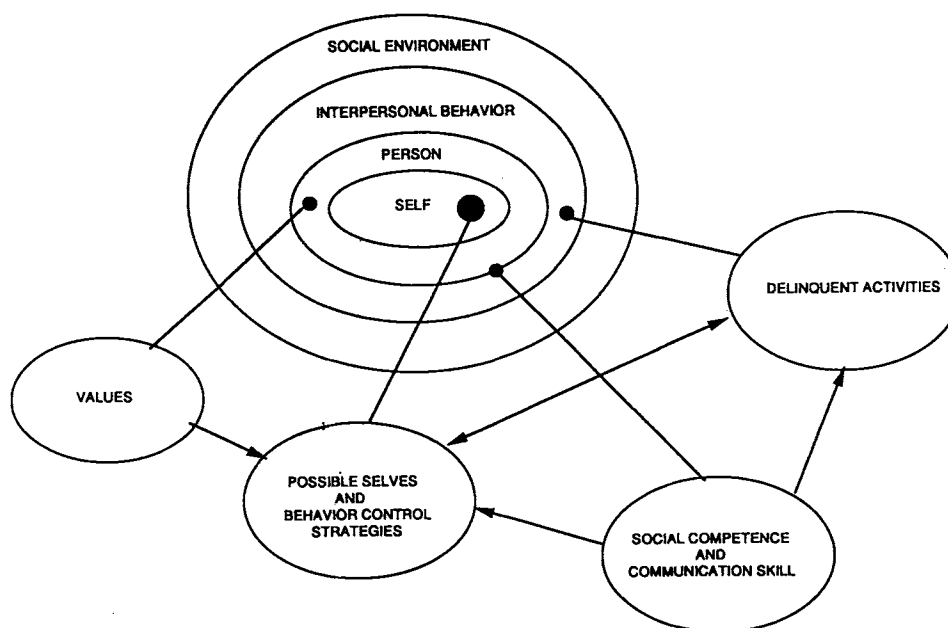
Figure 1. General model.

Interview Procedure

With the high school sample, we sent letters to parents explaining the interview and its purpose and stating that a random sample of youths would be asked if they would be willing to be interviewed. Parents were asked to return the form if they did not wish their child to be interviewed. In the detention center sample, youths were court wards and approval was sought from the court representative. In both settings, the voluntary nature of the interview was explained to each youth before the interview. Only three high school and two detention center youths refused to participate. To maintain respondent confidentiality and anonymity, each youth was interviewed individually in approximately 20-min interviews. Respondents' names were not attached to any of the interview materials.

Interviewers

Psychology majors who had previously been taught basic interviewing and empathy skills were trained in use of the questionnaire. All of the interviewers were Black women between 20 and 25 years of age.

Questionnaire

The interview consisted of four content domains: (a) the self and self-relevant expectations, (b) social skills, (c) communication skills, and (d) self-reported delinquency. In the first section, respondents were asked to what extent six possible domains (getting along with my parents, being happy with myself, finishing school, getting a job, having friends who like me, and being independent) were currently important to the way they thought of themselves. The respondents then were asked to generate three self-relevant expectancies for the next year ("Next year I expect to be. . .") and three self-relevant outcomes to be avoided for the next year ("Next year I want to avoid being. . .").

The six domains of self were chosen to map onto the content domains described in the literature on separation and individuation in adolescence. Exploratory factor analysis with a varimax rotation suggested that two somewhat overlapping factors, the importance of self-definitions as individuated and achieving and the importance of self-definitions as connected with others, explained more than 50% of the

variance in responses (see Table 1). These two factors, labeled *individuated achievement* and *interconnectedness* were retained for further analyses by summing responses to the items in each factor (i.e., finishing school, getting a job, being independent, and being happy with myself were summed to form the first factor). Because the item "being happy with myself" loaded onto both factors, it was included in both of the variables created.

Following previous categorization systems and in line with the domains relevant to adolescence (e.g., Gillies, 1989; Greene, 1986; Oyserman & Markus, 1990a), the following five categories of fears and expectations were coded: achievement (school or job), interpersonal domains (e.g., have friends, get along with my brothers), crime (e.g., get in trouble with the police, steal, sell drugs, get hurt or killed), personal traits or characteristics (e.g., be happy, try to always do my best), and material goods (e.g., have the right clothes). As is common in open-ended measures of self-concept, respondents' expectations were neutral to positive in valence (Markus & Wurf, 1987).

Table 1
Factor Loading of Important Domains of Self Items

Item	% variance explained	Cronbach's α	Loading
Factor 1: Individuated achievement	34.5	.56	
Getting a job			.68
Finishing school			.67
Being independent			.62
Being happy with myself			.54
Factor 2: Interconnectedness	18.1	.41	
Being happy with myself			.49
Having friends who like me			.82
Getting along with my parents			.67

Note. Response scale: 1 = *not important,* 2 = *not very important,* 3 = *a little important,* 4 = *somewhat important,* 5 = *extremely important.* N = 230.

When an expectation and a fear described two aspects of the same content domain—such as doing homework, getting by in school, and getting into trouble and sent to a school of attention (a school of last resort for students who were expelled from their home school)—were mentioned in the same domain, these were coded as a balanced response in this domain. Coders attained a reliability level of Cartwright's α = .80 before coding the data (for additional discussion of reliability of possible selves coding, see Oyserman & Markus, 1990a; Van Hoysten, 1989). After each expected self generated, youths were asked if they had done anything in the past year to attain this self. After each feared self, they were asked if they had done anything in the past year to avoid becoming this self. Each time the respondent replied that he had not tried to attain an expected self or avoid a feared self, he received a point. A mean of the six responses formed a "tried to attain possible self" variable ranging from 0 (*tried to achieve all expected and avoid all feared selves*) to 1 (*did not try to achieve any expected or avoid any feared selves*).

In the second section, youths were asked to generate responses to 11 problem situations involving parents, teachers, employers, and peers at home, in school, at work, or during free-time activities. The problem situations were from the 44-item Adolescent Problem Inventory (API; Freedman et al., 1978). The API was developed empirically and validated in a series of comparison studies using White male Madison, Wisconsin, public school students and Wisconsin training school inmates, aged 14 to 18.[1] The API distinguishes between incarcerated and competent high school students, between incarcerated youths who continue to get into trouble while incarcerated and those who do not, and between incarcerated youths and high school youths. The current sample differs from the API development samples as it consists of inner-city, African American youths. However, the API has been used in a number of other studies with racially mixed and more urban respondents (J. D. Hawkins, Jenson, Catalano, & Wells, 1991; Leadbeater et al., 1989).

Responses were coded following the coding manual developed by Freedman et al. (1978) and available from the author. Scores on each of the scenarios could range from 8 (*a very competent response*) to 0 (*a very incompetent response*) on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Freedman's manual contains scores for each response, with maximum points being given for responses that are likely both to resolve the current problem and not to result in future negative consequences for the youth. A score of 0 is awarded for those responses that do not resolve the current problem and are likely to create new problems. For example, in one scenario, subjects were told

> Your mother has been hassling you for months about getting home by midnight, and sometimes that's a problem because none of your friends have to be home before 1 a.m. and you feel like an idiot, always leaving places early. One night you walk in at 1:30 a.m. and your mother is sitting in the living room in her slippers and robe looking mad. She says "Where the hell have you been? Do you have any idea what time it is?" What do you do or say now?

Responses such as "Mom, I realize I'm an hour late, but nobody else has to be in till 1:00, and I could not get a ride before now" are coded as 8, whereas responses such as "I don't give a f—— what time it is" coded as 0. Coders were trained until they reached 95% interrater reliability for the scenario codes before coding began.

An exploratory factor analysis (varimax rotation) of the responses suggested that these scenarios were tapping three main factors: (a) competence with peers and in interactions with parents about peers (e.g., You are playing basketball in the schoolyard and some guy you don't know very well is standing on the sidelines. He starts taunting you, calling you names and making fun of the way you play. He says "Hey, look at the tub of lard. He looks like a ball of pizza dough!" What do you say or do now?); (b) impulsive behavior (e.g., You're browsing in a discount department store with a friend. You're in the sporting goods section. You look around and notice that the glass case where they keep hand guns is open, and the guns are just lying there, where you can reach in and grab them out. There's nobody in sight, no customers and no employees. Your friend says "Quick man, let's get some." What do you say or do now?); and (c) competence with teachers/employers (e.g., You've been hassling a young substitute teacher all week, and all week she's been sending you up to the principal's office. It's sort of fun, because it's so easy to make her lose her cool. You're up at the principal's office again, and he meets you at the door, and says, "This is the third time this week you've been sent up here! I'm sending you from school! What do you have to say about that?" What do you do or say now?). Table 2 shows the loadings of each of the scenarios on each of the three factors. As can be seen, the three factors together accounted for about 45% of the variance. Competence scores in each of the three domains were computed by taking a sum of the item scores in each domain.

The third section of the interview focused on aspects of communication skill. Communication skill is often linked with social competence (e.g., D'Zurilla, 1986; Hughes, 1988; see Brion-Meisels & Selman, 1984, for a developmental model of interpersonal negotiation strategies). Children with communication skills may be better able to express themselves and therefore have more satisfying social interchanges (e.g., Pozner & Saltz, 1974). At a basic level, communication skill refers to the ability to verbalize one's thoughts in a way that makes it possible for a listener to receive the message one intends to send. At a higher level, it may refer to the ability to provide the listener with an accurate and detailed message describing events, thoughts, feelings, and aspirations.

In the current study, respondents were asked to describe what was going on in 3 four-picture sequences. Their responses were coded for the number of details correctly noted, the extent to which affect and motivation were mentioned, and the overall clarity of their communication. Coding was based on the methodology used by Bernstein and colleagues (Bernstein, 1971a, 1971b; Hasan, 1971; P. R. Hawkins, 1971; Robinson & Creed, 1971) as described below.

Each respondent saw each four-picture sequence. Each sequence portrayed a complete story without captions. The first story contained the following four scenes: Three boys are playing ball near an apartment building. One of the boys kicks the ball through the window of an apartment, breaking the window. A man standing in the street admonishes the boys, who run away. In the final scene, a woman watches the boys flee. The second story portrayed a man who gets up late, rushes through breakfast, hurries through the streets, and falls asleep on the job. The third story depicted a boy who tries to catch a boat as it begins to drift away. Three dogs chasing a cat appear on the scene as the boy stretches further and further to reach the boat, as do the dogs. In the end, the cat is adrift in the boat, two dogs are in the water, and the boy and the third dog watch from the dock. Respondents were asked to look at each picture sequence and then to recount

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[1] In the first study (n = 60), incarcerated youths were compared with two groups of high school students, "good citizens" (mature, responsible, involved in extracurricular activities, law-abiding, and able to get along well with peers and adults) and "leaders" ("good citizens" who were also recognized student leaders), as described by a guidance counselor's report. Students scored higher in IQ, grade-point average, and API than delinquents but were also higher in socioeconomic status. Leaders were also higher than good citizens in all measures but IQ, in which significant differences did not emerge. Across the three subgroups, API reliability was Cronbach alpha = .97. The second study (n = 30) focused on currently incarcerated delinquents who varied in their disruptiveness levels. More disruptive youths had lower API scores. In the third study (n = 40), the effect of using open or multiple choice response formats and of the specific probe (the best response one can think of vs. what one would probably do in the problem situation) was explored in a sample of high school and incarcerated youths. Across conditions, students scored higher than incarcerated youths on the API. Students again had higher IQ scores than incarcerated youths.

Table 2

Factor Loading of Impulsive Behavior and Social Competence Items

Item	% variance explained	Cronbach's α	Loading
Factor 1: Impulsive behavior	24.6	.59	
You and your friend find that the gun case at the store is unlocked			.71
You and your friend pass an attractive car and notice that the keys are in the ignition			.66
Your friend suggests that you sneak out to meet with friends even though you are grounded			.59
Your friend asks you to deliver drugs for him			.58
Factor 2: Competence with peers and interactions with parents about peers	10.8	.50	
After going out with friends, your mother catches you coming home late			.65
At school someone makes suggestive remarks about your mother			.62
You are teased while playing ball			.53
Your mother wants to stop you from being with a friend she thinks is a "bad influence"			.52
Factor 3: Competence with teachers/employers	9.8	.39	
Your gym teacher is picking on you			.83
The principal says he wants to expel you from school			.50
You are in a job interview and the interviewer says they won't hire people who have been on parole			.46

Note. Items take the form of short paragraphs and have been abbreviated (see Freedman, Rosenthal, Donahue, Schlundt, & McFall, 1978, for the full text).

what was going on as if it were an event that they had witnessed and were describing to a friend who had not.

The first story contained 16 basic pieces of information, the second contained 14, and the third contained 21. *Detail* was scored by summing the number of details correctly mentioned (possible range 0–51). *Affect and motivation* were scored by summing the number of times the youth ascribed affect or motives to the figures in the stories (e.g., the boys ran away because they were frightened, the man hurried so he would not be late for work); each mention of affect and any motive ascribed to the characters in the stories was counted.

Clarity of communication was scored as the mean of two variables, the number of speech segments with implied subjects and the number of pronouns as a function of the number of nouns used. Taken together, use of few nouns relative to pronouns and lack of noun markers in speech segments result in unclear, unspecified, and therefore ambiguous communication. Respondents who spoke in this manner did not make clear who was the subject of the story, which actions were taken by the subject, and which actions were taken by other characters in the story. Reliability of each construct was scored across the three stories. Cronbach's α = .37 for affect and motivation, and .70 for both the clarity and the detail measures.

The final section of the interview measured delinquent activities in the past 12 months using nine items from the Youth in Transition questionnaire (Bachman, Johnson, & O'Malley, 1982). The reliability and validity of such self-report measures have been documented in previous research (Elliot et al., 1983; Quay, 1987). In line with critiques of self-report scales (see Cernkovich, Giordano, & Pugh, 1985), the items referred to actionable offenses (e.g., car theft, fire setting) rather than offenses that would not normally result in official responses from the police-judicial system (e.g., smoking, sexual activities, skipping school). All officially delinquent youths and all but 21 of the public school youths reported committing at least one of these delinquent activities in the past year. For example, in the total sample, 9% reported stealing something worth more than $50, 8% reported hitting a teacher or employer, 39% reporting shoplifting, and 26% reported hurting someone badly enough to require medical attention.

Exploratory principal components factor analysis (varimax rotation) showed that three factors together accounted for 54.7% of the variance in the self-reported delinquency items. The factors were labeled *aggressive activities, theft,* and *hooliganism.* Table 3 shows the specific items in the scale and their loadings on each of the three factors. Mean delinquent involvement scores in each of the three domains were computed.

A final question asked youths to report the extent that they currently skipped school (or skipped school prior to incarceration). Responses were on a 5-point scale (*never attend, skips school almost every day, skips school at least once a week, skips school every few weeks,* and *skips school less than every few weeks*) weighted toward detecting high truancy rates.

Results

Differences Between Subsamples

We used multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) to explore differences between officially delinquent and nondelinquent youths in their possible selves, the life domains they viewed as important, their social competence and communication skills, and their levels of delinquent involvement.

Officially delinquent and nondelinquent youths differed significantly across these domains, $F(15, 193) = 7.32, p < .001$. As can be seen in Table 4, officially nondelinquent youths were more likely to have balanced possible selves, to believe that they were attempting to attain expected selves and avoid feared selves, and to view individuated and achievement-oriented selves as important. They were more competent in their responses to problem situations involving parents, peers, and other adults, and were less impulsive. They were less likely to report being involved in aggressive delinquency or theft and

Table 3

Factor Loading of Self-Report Delinquency Items

Item: How many times in the past 12 months have you...	% variance explained	Cronbach's α	Loading
Factor 1: Aggressive activities	28.7	.58	
Hurt someone badly enough to need a doctor			.79
Hit a teacher or someone you work for			.75
Been in a serious fight with kids at school			.63
Factor 2: Theft	14.9	.58	
Stolen a car			.78
Stolen something worth more than $50 from someone (not shoplifting)			.66
Shoplifted, taken things from a store without paying			.60
Factor 3: Hooliganism	12.1	.49	
Trespassed, gone into a closed building without permission			.74
Damaged property at school or place of work on purpose (not by setting a fire)			.66
Set a fire to a building or someone else's property			.60

Note. Response scale: 0 = *never*, 1 = *once*, 2 = *twice*, 3 = *three or four times*, 5 = *five or more times*. n = 209.

were less likely to be truant from school. Youths in detention were neither less detailed nor less clear in their communications and were more likely to refer to affect and motivation than were the high school youths. Thus, subjects differed significantly in almost all of the variables under consideration with incarcerated youths faring worse than those in high school across all but the communication variables. With regard to the latter variables, youths in detention did not differ from those in high school in terms of the basic clarity of their communication or the level of detail communicated. Because youths in deten-

Table 4

Mean Responses of High School and Detention Center Youths to Independent and Dependent Variables

Variable	High school ($n = 85$)	Detention center ($n = 124$)	$F(1, 207)$
Independent			
Balance in possible selves[a]	0.69	0.49	3.71**
Tried to attain possible selves[b]	0.14	0.38	14.96****
Importance of individuated selves[c]	19.28	18.63	6.29**
Importance of interconnected selves[d]	13.12	12.90	0.64
Impulsive behavior	10.62	8.75	24.38****
Competence in interactions with peers	8.21	6.81	15.10****
Competence in interactions with adults	6.95	6.32	9.16***
Describes affect in communication[e]	0.09	0.41	15.16****
Describes motives in communication[e]	0.19	0.56	12.91****
Uses accurate detail in communication[f]	23.95	23.44	0.36
Clarity of communication[g]	7.61	7.34	1.26
Dependent			
Aggressive delinquency[h]	0.27	0.66	19.10****
Theft[h]	0.11	0.32	9.74****
Hooliganism[h]	0.26	0.39	2.98*
Truancy	4.42	3.52	32.77****

[a] Range = 0 (*no balance*) to 3 (*all expectations and fears balanced*). [b] Range = 1 (*did not attempt*) to 0 (*attempted to attain all possible selves*). [c] Range = 5 (*not important*) to 20 (*very important*). [d] Range = 5 (*not important*) to 15 (*very important*). [e] Describes affect and motivation were counts of the number of mentions of each of the three story sequences and had no upper limit. [f] Range = 0 (*did not mention any of the predetermined basic components of the three stories*) to 51 (*mentioned each of the predetermined components of the three stories*). [g] Mean use of implied subjects in speech fragments and relative use of pronouns to nouns in the total story description. [h] Range = 0 (*never*) to 5 (*more than 5 times*). [i] Range = 1 (*never go to school*) to 5 (*skip school less than once every few weeks*).
* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. **** $p < .001$.

tion were also more likely to describe affect and motivation, they did not appear to be verbally deficient as compared with the high school youths.

We used discriminant function analysis to explore the extent to which clarity of communication; social competence with parents, peers, and other adults; trying to attain possible selves; importance of individuated and interconnected selves; impulsive behavior; and balance in possible selves distinguished between the officially delinquent and officially nondelinquent subsamples. The discriminant function classification showed a moderate overall success rate of 68.5%, with 74.4% of high school students and 64.6% of youths in detention being correctly classified. Factors were entered in the discriminant function following the Wilks's lambda minimization selection rule (Norusis, 1988) in the following order: impulsive behavior, trying to attain possible selves, competence in peer-related situations, clarity of communication, importance of individuation, and balance in possible selves. Social competence with adults and the importance of interconnected selves did not enter into the function.

Path Analyses

We explored the fit of the hypothesized model to extent of involvement in aggressive delinquency, theft, hooliganism, and school truancy using the LISREL VII package (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1988). The two subsamples differed significantly on the predictor variables, so analyses of each subgroup were conducted separately. Factor analyses suggested three types of self-reported delinquent behavior, with truancy a fourth behavioral outcome index, such that four paths were analyzed for each subsample. Limitations of sample size meant that all possible paths between the three background variables (clarity of communication, valuing achievement–individuation, and valuing interconnection), two social competence variables (competence in situations involving peers and competence in situations involving teachers and employers), three self-related variables

(balance in possible selves, attempts to achieve possible selves, and impulsive behavior), and each of the outcome variables could not be tested simultaneously. Therefore, we examined correlation matrices to choose those paths between each of the predictor variables that were consistent with the model and were significant (see Table 5). All paths between predictor variables and the delinquency–truancy measures were retained. The results of the path analyses for high school youth are presented first (see Figures 2–5), followed by those for the youth in detention (see Figures 6–9). For ease of comparison, the same path was tested for each of the outcome variables in each subsample.

High School Subsample

Self-reported theft. The specific model tested is shown in Figure 2. The data do not differ significantly from the model, $\chi^2(22, N = 86) = 17.08$, $p = .76$, goodness of fit index = .96, adjusted goodness of fit = .92, $r^2 = .18$, suggesting moderate fit. The total effect of the predictor variables on theft is displayed in Table 6. As can be seen, impulsive behavior ($\beta = -.57$) has the largest total effect on this cluster of behaviors, followed by balance in possible selves ($\beta = -.23$) and competence in peer-related situations ($\beta = -.21$).

Self-reported aggression. The specific model tested is shown in Figure 3. The data do not differ significantly from the model, $\chi^2(22, N = 86) = 23.01$, $p = .46$, goodness of fit index = .95, adjusted goodness of fit = .89, $r^2 = .22$, suggesting moderate fit. The total effect of the predictor variables on aggression is displayed in Table 6. As can be seen, competence with adults ($\beta = -.47$) has the largest total effect on this cluster of behaviors, followed by clarity of communication style ($\beta = -.21$) and social competence in peer related situations ($\beta = -.19$). Thus, the relative importance of the predictors differs between theft and aggressive delinquency.

Self-reported hooliganism. The specific model tested is shown in Figure 4. The data do not differ significantly from the

Table 5

Intercorrelations Among Predictor and Outcome Variables for High School (Lower Matrix) and Detention Center (Upper Matrix) Youths

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Peers	—	20***	33****	15**	10	−08	07	20***	−13*	−29****	−21***	06
2. Adults	31***	—	24***	10	12*	09	16**	11*	−17**	−21***	−25***	00
3. Impulse	35****	23	—	01	−22***	−01	14*	08	−21***	−26***	−19***	02
4. Balance	−02	−10	−01	—	06	−03	−02	14*	−04	−05	−13*	10
5. Try	−09	−10	−08	−07	—	01	−03	06	05	−01	15**	16**
6. Comm	−18**	−14*	03	09	34****	—	−13*	−13*	−09	02	07	−01
7. Indiv	15*	−04	06	03	−19**	−27***	—	44****	04	−11	−24***	−21***
8. Val inter	12	16*	04	21**	−06	−23**	38****	—	−01	−12*	−26***	−07
9. Theft	−20**	−18**	−57****	23**	14*	13	−10	−09	—	22***	29****	−10
10. Aggress	−26***	−47****	−25**	00	−02	−15*	−09	−21**	30***	—	19***	−04
11. Vandal	−22**	−25**	−44****	08	−14*	03	03	−10	55****	50****	—	−08
12. Truancy	14*	05	36****	−03	−22**	−14*	09	−09	−42****	10	−18**	—

Note. Decimal points are omitted. 1 = Competence in interactions with peers; 2 = Competence in interactions with adults; 3 = Impulsive behavior; 4 = Balance in possible selves; 5 = Tried to obtain possible selves; 6 = Clarity of communication; 7 = Importance of individuated selves; 8 = Importance of interconnected selves; 9 = Self-report theft; 10 = Self-report aggression; 11 = Self-report vandalism; 12 = Self-report truancy.
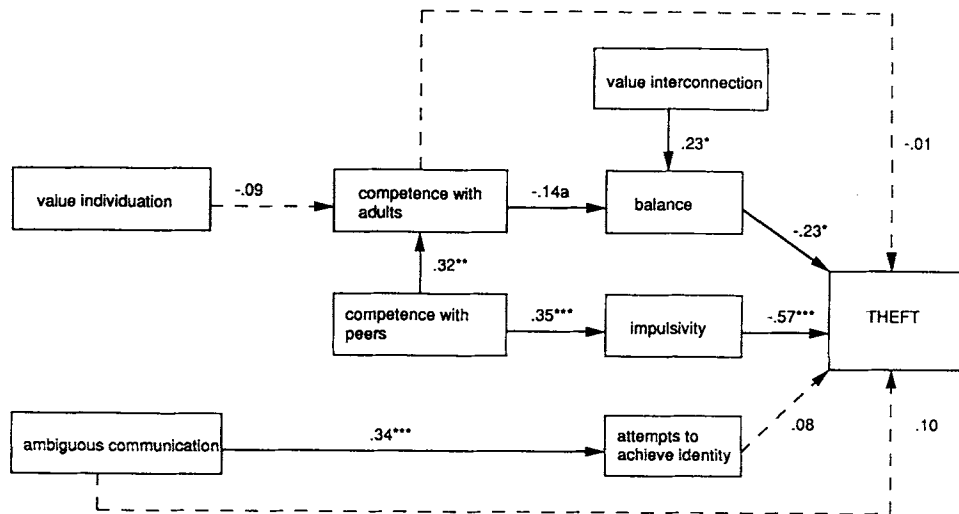* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. **** $p < .001$.

Figure 2. High school students' self-reported theft. (Dashed line indicates nonsignificant path. $^a p < .10$; $^* p < .05$; $^{**} p < .01$; $^{***} p < .001$.)

model, $\chi^2(22, N = 86) = 16.87$, $p = .77$, goodness of fit index = .96, adjusted goodness of fit = .92, $r^2 = .18$, suggesting moderate fit. The total effect of the predictor variables on hooliganism is displayed in Table 6. As with theft, impulsive behavior ($\beta = -.43$) has the largest total effect on this cluster of behaviors, followed by not trying to attain possible selves ($\beta = -.20$) and competence in peer related situations ($\beta = -.19$). Thus, whereas aggression was significantly predicted only by the social competence and communication variables, some of the self-related variables are predictive of theft and hooliganism.

Self-reported truancy. The specific model tested is shown in Figure 5. The data do not differ significantly from the model, $\chi^2(22, N = 86) = 17.86$, $p = .71$, goodness of fit index = .96, adjusted goodness of fit = .91, $r^2 = .18$, suggesting moderate fit. The total effect of the predictor variables on truancy is displayed in Table 6. Again, impulsive behavior ($\beta = -.36$) has the largest total effect. Of the other predictors, not trying to attain possible selves ($\beta = -.16$) and clarity of communication style ($\beta = -.15$) approach significance ($p < .10$).

Discussion. The posited model appears to provide a moderate fit to the data. Among the posited determinants, impulsive behavior and competence in peer-focused situations were most consistently significant indicators of extent of deviant involve-

ment. Impulsive behavior significantly affected each of the outcome variables except aggression. Perhaps youths growing up in the inner-city area sampled learn aggressive responses to various situations, such as being "dissed" (i.e., not being given appropriate courtesy and respect), and so aggression is not an impulsive response but the chosen response. Less aggressive youth may be the more socially competent ones who can avoid these situations. Thus, competence in peer-focused situations had significant effects on theft, aggression, and hooliganism, with only truancy being better predicted by impulsive choices than any of the social competence variables.

Although basic communication skill, competence with adults, and competence in peer-focused situations were conceptually related, their effects were differentiated. Peer-focused competence was significantly related to competence with adults and to communication skill (see Table 5), yet peer-focused competence was more critical in predicting degree of delinquent involvement among this sample of inner-city high school students. Perhaps this is because much of these youths' lives take place among peers.

Furthermore, although impulsive behavior, attempts to achieve possible selves, and balance in possible selves were conceptually related constructs among high school students, these

Table 6
Total Effects of Predictor Variables on Delinquency and Truancy Among High School Subsample

Variable	Theft	Aggression	Hooliganism	Truancy
Impulsive behavior	−57***	−13	−43***	36***
Balance	−23**	−02	−05	04
Peer-related competence	−21**	−19**	−19**	11
Clarity of communication	12	21**	01	−15*
Tried to attain possible selves	03	04	20**	−16*
Value interconnection	−05	−01	−01	01
Competence with adults	−04	−47***	−14*	04
Value achievement individuation	−00	−04	−01	00

Note. Decimal points are omitted. Total effects are total direct and indirect effects shown as beta weights.
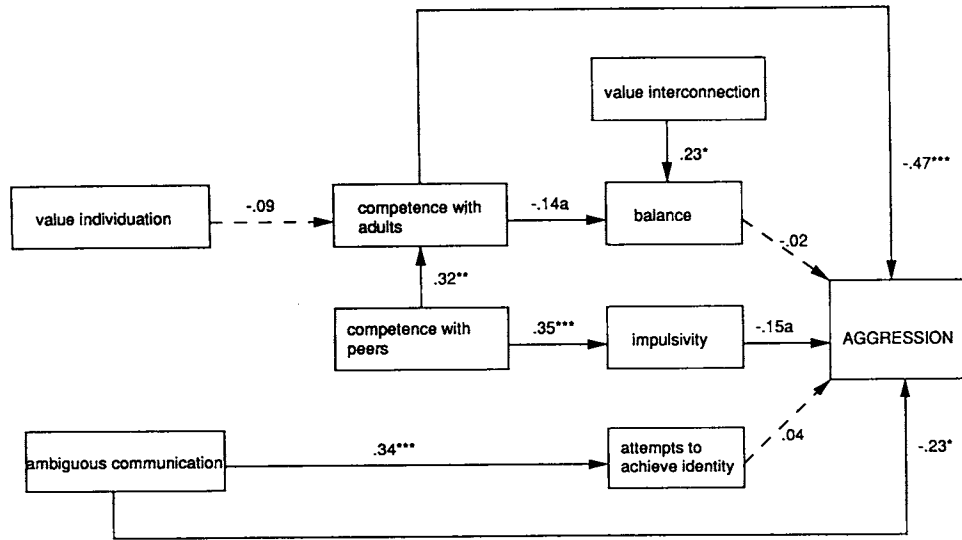* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure 3. High school students' self-reported aggression. (Dashed line indicates nonsignificant path. $^a p$ < .10; $^*p$ < .05; $^{**}p$ < .01; $^{***}p$ < .001.)

variables were independent of one another (see Table 5) and were not each related to all of the deviant behaviors. Thus, balance in possible selves was related to theft, not trying to attain possible selves was related to hooliganism, and impulsive behavior was related to theft, hooliganism, and truancy. Limitations in measurement techniques may have played a part in the limited role of the self-related measures. These findings also suggest that impulsive behavior, one's attunement to opportunities in the immediate social environment, warrants further study. It is also interesting to note that balance in possible selves related to level of theft. Theft may be particularly attractive to these youths as it results in attainment of concrete goods that they may otherwise have to do without. Perhaps youths with balanced possible selves were better able to see the potential cost of theft in terms of loss of a positive possible self and

therefore better able to avoid involvement in this delinquent activity.

Detention Center Subsample

The next set of path analyses focused on the subsample of youths in the detention center. As before, separate paths were analyzed for each predicted delinquent behavior cluster and for truancy. Again, limitations of sample size meant that all possible paths between the background, social competence variables, self, and outcome variables could not be tested simultaneously. Therefore, we examined correlation matrices to choose those paths between each of the predictor variables that were consistent with the model and were significant (see Table 5). All
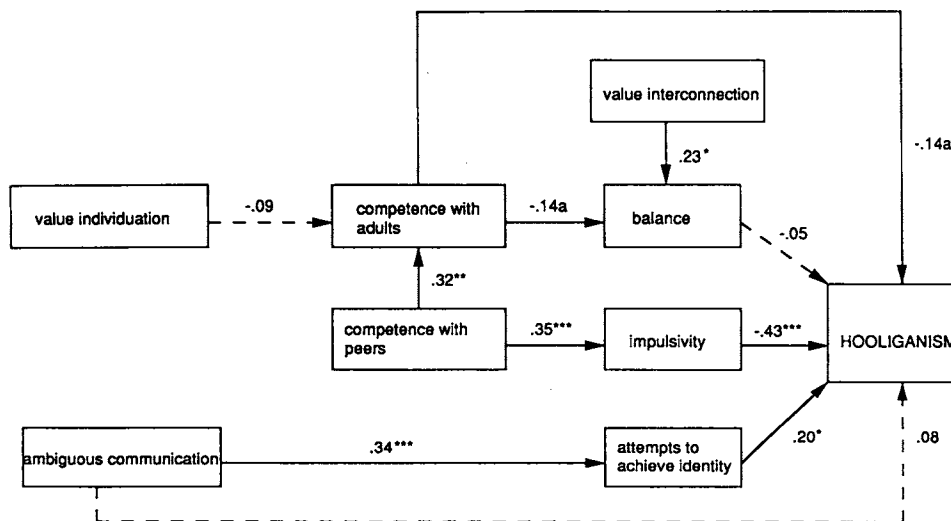

Figure 4. High school students' self-reported hooliganism. (Dashed line indicates nonsignificant path. $^a p$ < .10; $^*p$ < .05; $^{**}p$ < .01; $^{***}p$ < .001.)
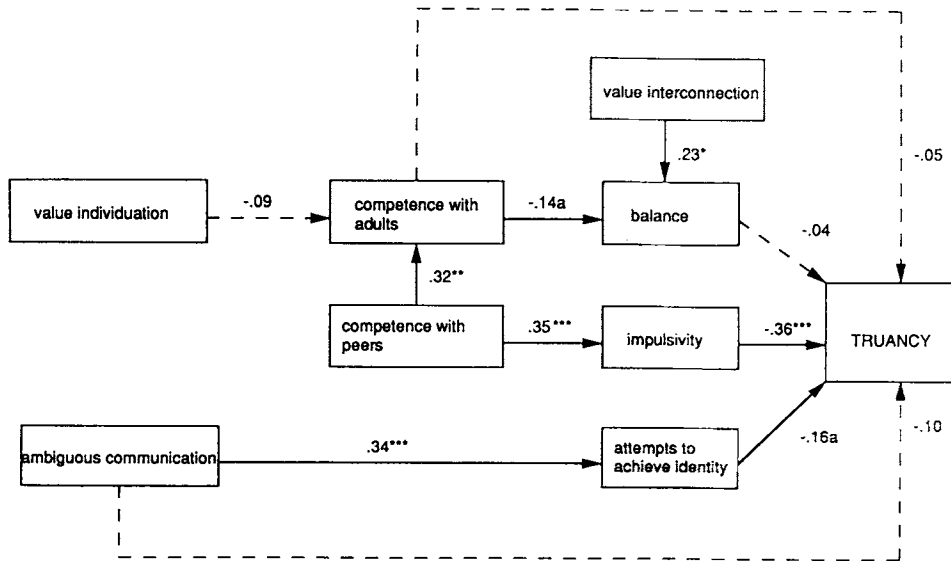
Figure 5. High school students' self-reported truancy. (Dashed line indicates nonsignificant path. $^a p <$ .10; $^* p < .05$; $^{**} p < .01$; $^{***} p < .001$.)

paths between predictor variables and the delinquency–truancy measures were retained. The results of the path analyses are presented below. For ease of comparison, the same model was tested for each of the outcome variables. The model differs slightly from that tested for the high school subsample.

Self-reported theft. The specific model tested is shown in Figure 6. The data do not differ significantly from the model, $\chi^2(20, N = 126) = 17.66$, $p = .61$, goodness of fit index = .97, adjusted goodness of fit = .93, $r^2 = .09$, suggesting moderate fit. The total effect of the predictor variables on theft is displayed in Table 7. As can be seen, impulsive behavior ($\beta = -.16$) is a significant predictor of this cluster of behaviors. Of the other predictors, only competence in peer-focused situations ($\beta = -.14$) and competence with adults ($\beta = -.11$) approach significance ($p < .10$).

Self-reported aggression. The specific model tested is shown in Figure 7. The data do not differ significantly from the model, $\chi^2(20, N = 126) = 18.03$, $p = .59$, goodness of fit index =

.97, adjusted goodness of fit = .93, $r^2 = .08$, suggesting moderate fit. The total effect of the predictor variables on aggression is displayed in Table 7. As can be seen, competence in peer-focused situations ($\beta = -.29$) and impulsive behavior ($\beta = -.16$) were significant predictors of this cluster of behaviors. Of the other predictors, only competence with adults ($\beta = -.13$) approached significance ($p < .10$). Thus, the same three predictors were the most salient in predicting both theft and aggression among youths in detention centers.

Self-reported hooliganism. The specific model tested is shown in Figure 8. The data do not differ significantly from the model, $\chi^2(20, N = 126) = 25.33$, $p = .49$, goodness of fit index = .96, adjusted goodness of fit = .90, $r^2 = .08$, suggesting moderate fit. The total effect of the predictor variables on hooliganism is displayed in Table 7. As can be seen, competence in peer-related situations ($\beta = -.23$) and competence with adults ($\beta = -.19$) were significant predictors of this cluster of behaviors. Of the other predictors, not trying to attain possible selves ($\beta =$
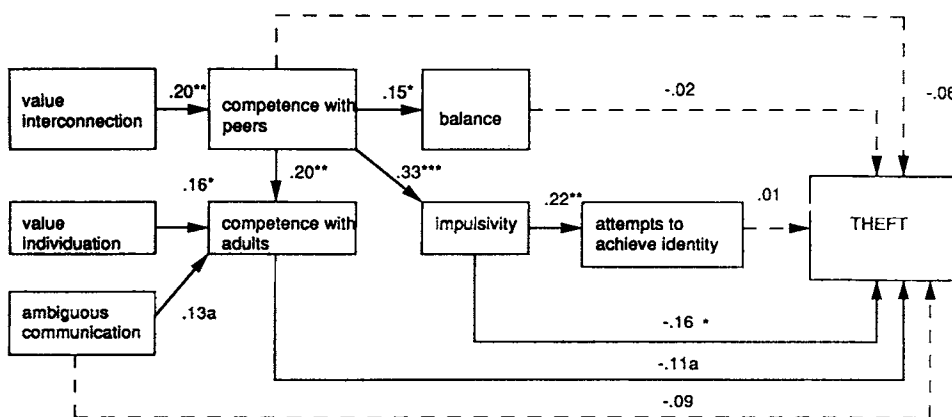

Figure 6. Detention-center youths' self-reported theft. (Dashed line indicates nonsignificant path. $^a p <$ .10; $^* p < .05$; $^{**} p < .01$; $^{***} p < .001$.)

Table 7

Total Effects of Predictor Variables on Delinquency and Truancy Among Detention Center Youth

Variable	Theft	Aggression	Hooliganism	Truancy
Impulsive behavior	-16^{**}	-16^{**}	-10	02
Peer-related competence	-14^{*}	-29^{****}	-23^{***}	03
Competence with adults	-11^{*}	-13^{*}	-19^{**}	00
Clarity of communication	10	00	04	00
Value interconnection	-03	-06	-05	01
Balance	-02	-01	-08	-10
Value achievement individuation	-02	-02	-03	00
Tried to attain possible selves	00	04	12^{*}	-18^{**}

Note. Decimal points are omitted. Total effects are total direct and indirect effects shown as beta weights.

$^{*}p < .10.$ $^{**}p < .05.$ $^{***}p < .01.$ $^{****}p < .001.$

—.12) was the only one to approach significance ($p < .10$). Impulsivity was not related to hooliganism although it was a central predictor of theft and aggression in this subsample.

Self-reported truancy. The specific model tested is shown in Figure 9. The data do not differ significantly from the model, $\chi^2(20, N = 126) = 23.74$, $p = .25$, goodness of fit index = .96, adjusted goodness of fit = .91, $r^2 = .08$, suggesting moderate fit. The total effect of the predictor variables on truancy is displayed in Table 7. Not trying to attain possible selves ($\beta = -.18$) was the only significant predictor of truancy.

Discussion. As was the case in the high school subsample, the self-concept variables (balance in possible selves, attempting to attain possible selves, and impulsive behavior), although conceptually related, differed in their impact on the outcome measures. The same was the case for the social competence and communication variables. Paralleling the findings for high school youths, impulsive behavior and competence in peer-focused situations were the strongest predictors of delinquent involvement. Specifically, impulsive behavior was significantly related to theft and aggression. Those youths who were more vulnerable to delinquency-eliciting cues in their immediate social environment were also more likely to report involvement in aggressive delinquency and theft. Competence in peer-focused situations was significantly related to aggression and hooliganism. Those youths who were unable to resolve difficult situations involving their peers were more likely to report fighting

with peers and hitting adults and more likely to trespass on or vandalize property.

In general, we were able to explain a very moderate amount of the variance in the self-reported delinquency and truancy among youths in detention and were somewhat more successful in the high school subsample. Perhaps this is due to limitations in the measurement techniques used or to the cross-sectional nature of the design, or perhaps the factors associated with continuing delinquent behavior differ from those associated with initial involvement.

General Discussion

The main premise of this study is that youths are more likely to be involved in delinquent activities if they are experiencing difficulties negotiating the separation–individuation task of adolescence. We have suggested that lack of social competence will increase the risk of involvement in deviant behaviors during the transition to adulthood both directly and by reducing ability to negotiate and maintain a positive sense of the self one will become as an adult. Youths may engage in a particular deviant behavior as a means of attaining that identity, either because it smooths entry into a particular social group (e.g., Castro, Sharp, Barrington, Walton, & Rawson, 1991) or because it is self-symbolizing in other ways (Gollwitzer & Wicklund, 1985).
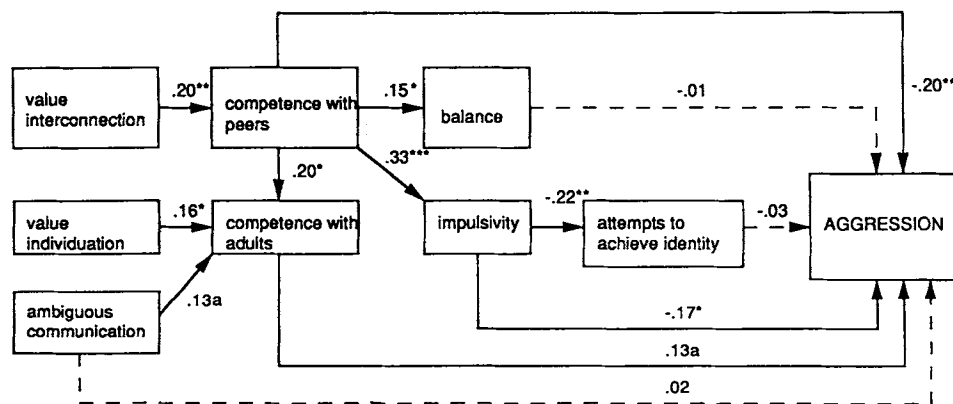

Figure 7. Detention-center youths' self-reported aggression. (Dashed line indicates nonsignificant path. $^{a}p < .10$; $^{*}p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$.)

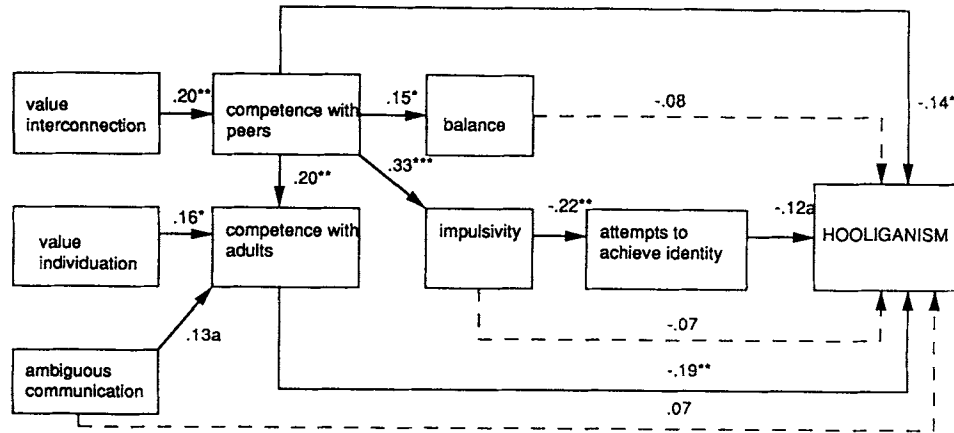*Figure 8.* Detention-center youths' self-reported hooliganism. (Dashed line indicates nonsignificant path. $^ap < .10$; $^*p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$.)

Findings from this cross-sectional study suggest that youths who are not socially competent, especially in matters relating to peers, and who are impulsive (likely to act on opportunities arising in their immediate situation) are likely to be involved in a variety of delinquent activities. Officially delinquent and officially nondelinquent youths could be discriminated with moderate success on the basis of their social competence, impulsiveness, balance, and attempts to achieve possible selves. The cross-sectional nature of the data clearly limit the findings, yet the data set is unique in its exploration of inner-city African American youths both in high school and in detention and therefore we believe that it warrants attention.

Officially delinquent youths were less likely to have balanced possible selves, were less competent in their social interactions, and were more likely to choose a deviant response to the immediate opportunities provided in the social environment than were officially nondelinquent youths. Yet the officially delinquent youths were no more likely to lack basic communication skill or to omit basic information in their communication, and they were more likely to describe affect and motivation when communicating. Clearly, these youths were not, on average, less verbally proficient, and they may even have been more profi-

cient. Perhaps this proficiency reflects these youths' greater experience in using communication to reduce the negative response of others to deviant behaviors (e.g., Matza, 1969). Given these differences in the samples, we conducted separate analyses of deviant behavior in each subsample to provide a more conservative test of the general model.

Although some authors (e.g., Jessor, 1991) suggest that deviant behaviors of many forms (e.g., drug use, delinquency, school truancy, and early sexual activities) can all be predicted by the same factors, others (e.g., Osgood, Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, 1988) present contradictory findings. Examination of our data suggests that self-related factors and social competence are differentially salient when describing different deviant behavior clusters. Thus, aggressive delinquency was predicted by level of social competence (competence in peer-focused situations and with adults, and basic communication skill) in both high school and detention center youths. Truancy, on the other hand, was not predicted only by social competence but also by the functioning of the self as an instigator and controller of action. Finally, theft and hooliganism were predicted by a mix of self-related factors and social competence.

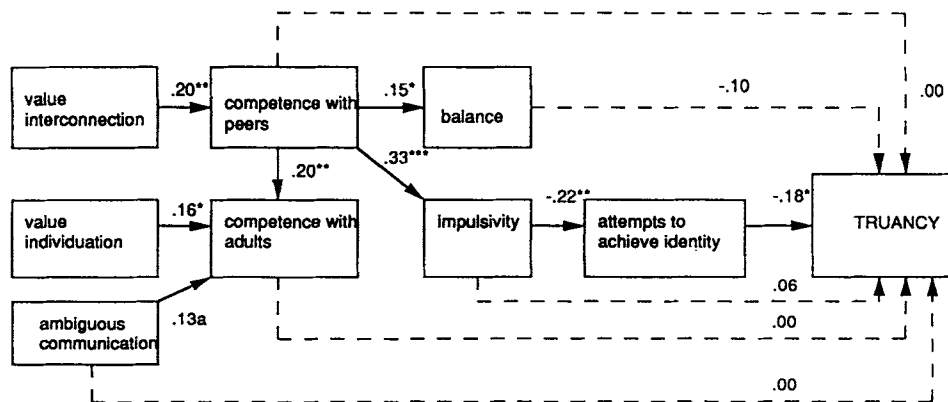Perhaps the independence of aggression from self-related

Figure 9. Detention-center youths' self-reported truancy. (Dashed line indicates nonsignificant path. $^ap < .10$; $^*p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$.)

factors is related to the high level of aggression found in inner-city neighborhoods (Hare, 1988). Youths may differ in their ability to avoid situations in which an aggressive response is viewed as normative. For example, when insulted or taunted, some youths may be able to joke, banter, or distract the actor or the audience to the event, obviating a need for physical retaliation. Youths who lack this skill may respond aggressively because to do otherwise would leave them vulnerable to further attack. Thus, rather than being related to the self, the response is related to social competence and social reality, and perhaps to beliefs about the normativeness of violence as a way of coping (e.g., Slaby & Guerra, 1988).

The connection between self and truancy is important because truancy, school failure, and dropping out are viewed as early risk factors for delinquent involvement and have been shown to be correlated with extent of delinquency (e.g., Farrington, 1986, 1987; Gold, 1987). Youths who are out of school may have more opportunities for delinquent involvement. Skipping school may be the result of impulsive choices and lack of faith in one's ability to achieve such possible selves as doing well in school. Indeed, on average, all youths generated at least one positive expected self related to school ($M = 1.4$ detention, 2.0 high school). These expectations, such as passing the 10th grade, were not necessarily balanced by a feared outcome, such as flunking out. Youths in the detention center who believed that they had not tried to attain expected selves were more likely to report truancy prior to detention.

Both social competence in peer-focused situations and self-related factors (particularly impulsive behavior and not trying to attain possible selves) predicted hooliganism and theft. Balance in possible selves was a predictor variable only in the case of theft. A picture emerges from these results of youths who cannot extricate themselves from problematic situations involving their peers and who go along with whatever opportunities arise rather than actively seeking opportunities for attaining self-relevant goals. For many youths, theft and vandalism are not lone activities but social events that take place in the company of others (Elliot et al., 1983; Elliot et al., 1988), so the youth's competence in interacting with these others is critical.

In the current study, balance in possible selves was not a central predictor in the path analyses. The reduced role played by balance may be the result of limitations in the measurement technique used. Balance was measured on the basis of three expected and three feared selves because pilot testing suggested that these youths had trouble when asked to describe more than this number of possible selves. Perhaps, rather than attempting to measure the amount of balance, measuring the strategies used to attain possible selves and an in-depth analyses of the reasons that youths do not attempt to attain possible selves may provide more insight into the process by which adolescents become involved in delinquent activities.

Finally, with regard to the other self-related factors, we found a different relationship between impulsivity and attempting to attain possible selves in the two subsamples. Among the officially delinquent youth, impulsive behavior was related to not trying to attain possible selves. The two variables were independent among high school youths. Perhaps high school students have a richer social environment that provides more opportunities to attain expected and avoid feared possible selves, even for those who are less able to control their own behavior and are likely to be vulnerable to delinquency-eliciting cues in the so-cial environment. Further work is needed to map out the paths into and out of delinquent involvement for youths who vary in their levels of involvement and official delinquency status. This work should be sensitive to possible cultural and ethnic differences in the processes involved that result from differences in the youths' social-environmental milieu and the structural differences in the opportunities facing them (Hare, 1988). Increased understanding of the process by which life tasks are mapped onto self-knowledge of abilities, strengths, and weaknesses, translated into possible selves, and acted upon in ways that reduce or enhance chances of delinquent involvement is a large order. It may be that for these African American youths, general theories of adolescent development are insufficient and increased attention should be put on the ways in which knowledge of racism and structural limitation of opportunities affects the self that one comes to define and the behavioral strategies that one learns to use.

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