

# Reflected Appraisals, Parental Labeling, and Delinquency: Specifying a Symbolic Interactionist Theory<sup>1</sup>

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This article draws on behavioral principles of George Herbert Mead and other symbolic interactionists to specify a theory of the self to explain delinquent behavior. The theoretical framework builds on Mead's analysis of the social act, symbolic interactionists' specification of the self as a reflection of appraisals made by significant others, and labeling theorists' notions of dramatization of evil, deviance amplification, and secondary deviance. This integrated framework is tested with a causal model of the causes and consequences of reflected appraisals and delinquent behavior. The analysis provides general support for the theory. Reflected appraisals of self are substantially affected by parental appraisals and prior delinquency; future delinquency is substantially affected by reflected appraisals of self as a rule violator; and reflected appraisals mediate much of the effects on delinquency of parental appraisals, prior delinquency, and structural variables.

An important question in the study of social control involves the mechanisms by which informal groups control the behavior of members. Much research on informal controls and delinquent behavior has examined rela-

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tionships between parental socialization, self-concepts, and delinquency. As Wells and Rankin (1983) put it, self-concepts should be an important mediating factor in delinquency, intervening between parental socialization and delinquent behavior. Accordingly, researchers have produced a voluminous literature that investigates the relationship between self-concepts and delinquency. The results of that research have been disappointing. When conceptualized as global self-esteem or self-rejection, self-concepts appear to have modest or inconsistent effects on delinquent behavior. These results suggest the need for considering alternative conceptualizations of the self and its role in the process of social control.

In this article I will draw on the writings of George Herbert Mead (1934) and the school of symbolic interactionism to conceptualize the self as being rooted in social interaction, comprising multiple dimensions, and providing a crucial link between self-control and social control. I will draw on theories of labeling and reference groups to specify the broader determinants of the self and argue that delinquency is in part determined by one's appraisals of self from the standpoint of others.

#### THEORY AND RESEARCH ON DELINQUENCY AND SELF-CONCEPTS

Most research and theory about the self and delinquency has focused on global self-esteem. In perhaps the best theoretical statement on self-esteem, Rosenberg (1979) argues that the formation of global self-esteem entails three mechanisms: reflected appraisals, social comparison, and self-attribution (see also Rosenberg and Simmons 1972). Through the process of reflected appraisals, individuals form self-conceptions on the basis of their perceptions of others' attitudes toward them. Through the process of social comparisons, people make judgments about themselves, in part by comparing themselves with others (Festinger 1954). And through the process of self-attribution, individuals draw conclusions about their dispositions, motives, and self-esteem on the basis of their observations of their own overt behavior (Bem 1972). These mechanisms imply that a strong motive for delinquent behavior, as well as for other forms of behavior, is the acquisition and maintenance of high self-esteem. Adolescents may turn to delinquency to enhance their self-esteem (Kaplan 1975) or to overcome feelings of self-rejection (Kaplan 1980). Thus, positive self-esteem may insulate one from delinquency (Reckless, Dinitz, and Murray 1956).

Recent empirical research on self-esteem and delinquency, which capitalizes on longitudinal data; has produced equivocal results. Several sets

of analyses of the Youth in Transition data set (Bachman, O'Malley, and Johnston 1978) reveal conflicting results: some have found support for the self-enhancement principle (self-esteem affects delinquency; see Rosenberg and Rosenberg 1978; Rosenberg, Schooler, and Schoenbach 1989), while others have not (Bynner, O'Malley, and Bachman 1981); and some have found support for the reflected appraisals principle (delinquency affects self-esteem; see Wells and Rankin 1983; McCarthy and Hoge 1984), while others have not (Rosenberg and Rosenberg 1978). Furthermore, in a series of analyses, Kaplan and his colleagues have found consistent support for the self-enhancement principle. They found that, net of three variables (prior deviance, deviant peers, and disposition to deviance), prior self-rejection exerts a small but significant effect on future deviance (e.g., Kaplan, Johnson, and Bailey 1987).

Given that global self-esteem appears to have modest effects on delinquency, it may be fruitful to examine other conceptualizations of the self and self-control (Wells and Rankin 1983, p. 20). A promising framework for analyzing delinquency and the self is symbolic interactionism, a perspective that includes an explicit theory of the self and social control. From an interactionist perspective, global self-esteem is only one element of a multifaceted self and may not be the most important determinant of delinquent behavior (Wells 1978). A more important determinant may be the specific content or meaning of the self that is relevant to delinquent behavior (Schwartz and Stryker 1970), such as evaluations of the self as a delinquent versus evaluations as a conformist. Furthermore, the critical locus of social control may be the process of role-taking and forming the self as an object with a specific set of meanings. Thus, a useful approach would examine the self (as delinquent or conformist) as a reflection of the appraisals of others—not as a principle governing the formation of global self-esteem, as specified by Rosenberg (1979)—but rather as one component of a symbolic interactionist principle of social control.

An early attempt to examine deviance from an interactionist perspective was conducted by Schwartz and Stryker (1970), who hypothesized that boys labeled as “bad” by teachers should be more likely than boys labeled “good” (1) to have poor and uncertain self-concepts; (2) to exclude members of conventional institutions (teachers) as significant others; and (3) to have more difficulty with masculine identities. Their results provided mixed support for these hypotheses. While only partially successful, this study remains the only major empirical study of an interactionist approach to deviance (Stryker and Craft 1982). I will attempt to build on this research here by developing an explicit interactionist theory of the self and delinquency and subjecting the theory to empirical test.

SELF-CONTROL AS SOCIAL CONTROL: A CONCEPTION OF SELF  
BASED ON MEAD

The perspective of symbolic interactionism presupposes that social order is the product of an ongoing process of social interaction and communication. Of central importance is the process by which shared meanings, behavioral expectations, and reflected appraisals are built up in interaction and applied to behavior. These shared meanings attach to positions in society and thus link individual conduct to the organization of groups and to social structure. Social structure—the patterned regularities in society—is an ongoing process, built up by social interactions; moreover, social structure in turn constrains the form and direction of these interactions by structuring communication patterns, interests, and opportunities (Stryker 1980). The specific mechanism linking interaction and social structure is role-taking.<sup>2</sup>

Role-Taking and Delinquency

To analyze interaction, symbolic interactionists define the unit of analysis as the transaction, which consists of an interaction between two or more individuals. Within transactions, the important mechanism by which interactants influence each other is role-taking, which consists of projecting oneself into the role of other persons and appraising, from their standpoint, the situation, oneself in the situation, and possible lines of action. With regard to delinquency, individuals confronted with delinquent behavior as a possible line of action take each other's roles through verbal and nonverbal communication, fitting their lines of action together into joint delinquent behavior (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969).

The transaction is built up through this dynamic process of reciprocal role-taking: one person initiates action—say, an unlawful act—a second takes the role of the other and responds, then the first person reacts to the response, and so on, until the jointly developed goal is reached, a new

<sup>2</sup> This perspective emphasizes the study of patterns of behavior and meanings that remain relatively stable across a delimited set of situations. Somewhat stable meanings can be examined with quantitative survey data. This view is consistent with the methodological thrust of "structural symbolic interactionism," which stresses the structure of role relationships that generate stable meanings and behaviors (Stryker 1980; McCall and Simmons 1978). It is less consistent with the methodological recommendations of Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism, which stresses the negotiated, interpreted, and constructed nature of meaning, and eschews "variable analysis" for the study of human experiences that give rise to meanings. Note, however, that it is consistent with Blumer's (1969, p. 139) conclusion that "in the area of interpretative life, variable analysis can be an effective means of unearthing stabilized patterns of interpretation which are not likely to be detected through the direct study of the experience of people."

goal is substituted, or the transaction simply fades. Through reciprocal role-taking, or a conversation of gestures, consensus over situational goals and the appropriate means for attaining those goals is constructed, individual lines of action are coordinated, and there is concerted action toward achieving the goal (Blumer 1969). Thus, the initiated delinquent act of one youth might elicit a negative response from another youth, causing the group to search for another, more suitable alternative. Whether or not a goal is achieved using unlawful means is determined by each individual's contribution to the direction of the transaction; those contributions, in turn, are determined by the individual's prior life experience or biography (Hewitt 1988).

Early in the socialization process, individuals engage in a serial process of taking the role of specific significant others who are present in the interaction. Later in the socialization process, individuals learn to take the role of the entire group or "generalized other," which includes the norms, rules, and expectations governing various positions and roles of a group, community, or society. Here, individuals learn to relate the activities and expectations of their roles to the activities and expectations of other roles within an organized system (Mead 1934, pp. 152–64). This form of taking the role of an organized and abstract group appears in more institutionalized settings and constitutes the most effective form of social control, since the organized institutions and norms enter individual behavior.

Role-taking also provides a framework for an interactionist theory of cognition. Cognitive processes arise in problematic situations, in which a line of action (impulse) is temporarily blocked by physical objects in the situation, by verbal responses of others, or by subjective reactions such as repugnance, shame, and fear (Shibutani 1961). The blocked impulse is transformed into a self-image (the self as an object or the "me"), consisting of alternative lines of action, anticipated reactions of others, and, most significantly, a view of self from the standpoint of others. The line of action is then reacted to by another impulse (the "I"), which either reacts positively and follows the line of action into overt behavior or reacts negatively, blocking the impulse to act and eliciting another self-image. This cognitive process continues until the problem is solved or the transaction ends. Thus, cognition is identical, in form and content, to role-taking between interactants, except that it occurs in the mind in an imaginative rehearsal between the "I" and the "me" (Mead 1934).

Moreover, similar situations will call out similar "me's"—the self formed as an object from the standpoint of others. Therefore, a stable self arises because the self-images ("me's") called up in a situation, to which the "I" will react, will resemble previous "I's" and "me's" from similar past situations. This stable set of self-images is multidimensional,

containing an organized set of stable meanings about oneself from the standpoint of others. Mead (1934, p. 142) termed this self "multiple personality" to emphasize that it is a reflection of the organized social process; McCall and Simmons (1978) and Stryker (1980) conceptualized it as "role-identities" to emphasize that it corresponds to the many social roles one plays; and Kinch (1963) conceived it as "reflected appraisals" to emphasize that it is a reflection of appraisals made by significant others. With regard to delinquency, the important element of the self formed as an object is the specific meaning or content of the self with respect to delinquency. Those who see themselves (from the standpoint of others) as persons who engage in delinquent behavior in certain situations are more likely to engage in delinquency. Thus, if the self as a delinquent is an important dimension of the self for individuals, such that it endures across situations, it should predict individuals' delinquent behavior.

Most behavior, particularly in highly institutionalized and routinized transactions, occurs in nonproblematic situations and results from nonreflective habitual behavior, based on the way in which previous problematic situations were resolved. When a problematic situation is repeatedly encountered, it becomes less problematic, as one learns to resolve it proficiently. Eventually, the situation becomes nonproblematic and the behavior habitual. This implies that over time, delinquent behavior will become increasingly stable, so long as one encounters similar situations. Of course, behavior will not be completely stable because situations are in part selected through cognitive processes, and the response of the "I" is not completely determined by the "me."<sup>3</sup>

The process by which role-taking can lead to delinquent behavior is illustrated by four classic studies of delinquency. Briar and Piliavin (1965) found that boys freed from commitments to conventional lines of action are often incited into delinquency by "situationally induced motives," which are verbal motives presented by other boys. Free from considering the reactions of conventional others, these boys can take the role of each other, present delinquent motives, and jointly adopt a delinquent line of

<sup>3</sup> The use of the social transaction as the unit of analysis is a convenient abstraction from the ongoing social process used for analytical purposes. Mead (1938) specified the social act as beginning with the stage of impulse and ending with consummation, with perception and manipulation intervening. Note, however, that the consummation stage of one transaction may be the impulse stage for another. This implies that individuals place themselves in certain situations through habit or through cognitive processes arising from a previous problematic situation. Unlike radical behaviorism, symbolic interactionism does not subscribe to what Wrong (1961) termed "the oversocialized conception of man" (Stryker 1980). Individuals are not viewed as completely determined beings, passively conforming to expectations or reinforcement contingencies but instead are seen as active beings in part constrained by social organization (through the "me") and in part creating that organization (through the "I").

action. Short and Strodtbeck (1965) noted that one's decision to join a gang fight often revolves around the risk of losing status within the gang. Gang members would take the role of the group, consider the group's negative reactions, and join in on the action for fear of losing status. Cohen (1955) argued that adolescent groups engage in a tentative probing conversation of gestures—a process best characterized as one of trial and error—and collectively innovate a new status hierarchy, a delinquent subculture. Finally, Gibbons (1971) claimed that as a result of group interactions, novel shades of norms and values emerge to influence the direction of joint behavior (Short 1974). Such processes, consistent with Smelser's (1963) "value added" and Turner's (1964) "emergent norm" approaches to collective behavior, show how a group controls the behavior of its members within a situation.

This discussion of role-taking implies four major features for a theory of the self and delinquent behavior. First, the self consists of an individual's perception of how others view him or her, and thus, is rooted in symbolic interaction. Second, the self as an object arises partly endogenously within situations, and partly exogenously from prior situational selves being carried over from previous experience. This results because self-images ("me's") called up in a situation will resemble previous "me's," while the "I" will respond in novel ways arising from the immediate situation.<sup>4</sup> Thus, we can speak of a set of patterned selves that is somewhat stable over time but varies across individuals. Third, the self as an object is a *process* determined by the self at a previous point in time and by prior behavior (resolutions of problematic situations). Fourth, delinquent behavior will result in part from the formation of habits and in part from stable perceptions of oneself from the standpoint of others. Through the latter process, delinquency is controlled by one's reference groups.

### Role-Taking, Reference Groups, and Delinquency

Role-taking usually entails taking the role of members of one's reference group, which is a group that serves as a source of one's values, perspec-

<sup>4</sup> The "me" called up to solve a problematic situation will resemble previous "me's" because of stability in one's generalized others. That is, an individual will take the role of the generalized other, forming a "me," and consider alternative lines of action from the standpoint of that generalized other, which represents the organized structure of the group (Mead 1934, p. 199–201). Since one's generalized others remain somewhat stable across situations, there will be continuity in "me's" across situations. Furthermore, since one's generalized others are predicated on one's role commitments, the structure of the self that conditions cognition is organized by commitments (see Stryker 1980; McCall and Simmons 1978).

tives, and self-comparisons. Reference groups consist of individual significant others, such as parents, friends, and teachers, but also organized groups (generalized others) such as classmates, gangs, and families. In mass societies, members have multiple reference groups; which significant other or reference group is invoked *within a given situation* depends on many factors, the most important of which is the relevance of the group to the perceived problematic situation at hand. Moreover, those persons we care about, from whom we gain personal status, and who have helped form our self-image in the past, are most likely to be selected, since we want to maintain a favorable self-image in their eyes.

More broadly, an adolescent's multiple reference groups are determined by a complex set of individual variables, such as propinquity (Festinger 1954) and his or her perception that the group will provide a positive self-image (Hyman and Singer 1968). These individual determinants are structured by communication channels, which in turn are patterned by the larger social structure (Hewitt 1988, p. 125). I would expect that communication channels will be influenced by structural variables such as social class, family structure, residential area, and neighborhood structure, as well as individual characteristics such as age, race, sex, and cognitive ability. Thus, social structure should affect delinquency by structuring communication channels and reference groups, which in turn influence self-control—engaging in self-conscious reflective behavior. Therefore, self-control is social control because social structure enters behavior through role-taking, and because the self is constructed in a social process (Blumer 1969). We might term this “differential social control,” since the direction of control—whether toward delinquency or toward conformity—differs by the problematic situation, the reference group, and the prior views of self by the individual (Glaser 1979).

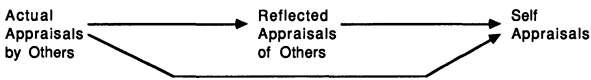
### Reflected Appraisals of Self and Delinquent Behavior

The foregoing discussion implies a specific conception of the self as a mechanism of social control. While the self as an object arises in problematic situations, we can also conceive of a self, in the form of consistent “me’s,” that is relatively stable across situations. Such a self, specified by Cooley (1922) as a “looking-glass self,” and by Mead (1934) as the “self as an object,” is a process consisting of three components: how others actually see one (others’ actual appraisals); how one perceives the way others see one (reflected appraisals); and how one sees oneself (self-appraisals). Thus, one’s self is in part a “reflected appraisal” of how significant others appraise one (Kinch 1963; Felson 1985).

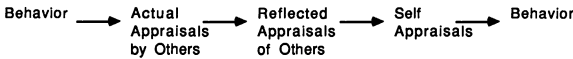
Most empirical research on this conception of the self has followed



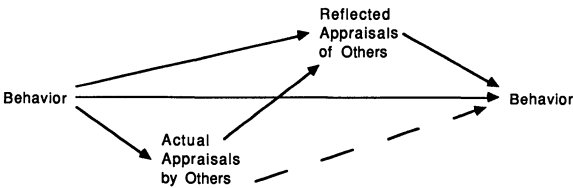
Miyamoto and Dornbush (1956) and examined the relationships among actual appraisals of significant others, reflected appraisals of significant others, and self-appraisals (Shrauger and Schoeneman 1979). This is diagrammed in the top third of figure 1. Felson (1985) argues that, according to symbolic interactionist theory, reflected appraisals of self are causes of self-appraisals and consequences of actual appraisals by others. Empirical research has found that actual appraisals have consistent but modest effects on reflected appraisals of self (Shrauger and Schoeneman 1979; Felson 1985, 1989). On the basis of these results, Felson (1980, 1989) suggests that (1) actual appraisals have only modest effects on reflected appraisals because of barriers to communication (peers do not always communicate their appraisals directly to their friends); (2) the effect is greater for appraisals that are socially defined in interaction (greater for attractiveness than for athletic performances); and (3) the relationship could be spurious owing to prior performance of the appraised behavior.



Felson's Model of Reflected Appraisals and Self Appraisals



Kinch's Model of Reflected Appraisals and Behavior



A Revised Model of Reflected Appraisals and Behavior

FIG. 1.—Alternative models of reflected appraisals

An interactionist conception of self as social control, however, does not imply a one-to-one correspondence between reflected appraisals and actual appraisals (Hewitt 1988, p. 129). Clearly, reflected appraisals are the result of *selective perception* of actual appraisals, which depends on the particular problematic situations that give rise to the reflected appraisals. Thus, reflected appraisals should be only partially a function of actual appraisals.

Research has also found that reflected appraisals have small effects on self-appraisals; however, these effects are larger than those of actual appraisals on self-appraisals (Shrauger and Schoeneman 1979; Felson 1985; Rosenberg and Simmons 1972). The inconsistent effect predicting self-appraisals may be due to social desirability effects or demand characteristics within the interview setting, which may be larger when evaluating oneself than when reporting how others evaluate one (Schrauger and Schoeneman 1979). Moreover, the theoretical framework outlined above suggests that the significant dimension of the self is reflected appraisals and not self-appraisals. If social control is exerted through role-taking, and the self that influences behavior is the object taken from the standpoint of others, it may be fruitful to examine the efficacy of reflected appraisals in explaining behavior.

There has been little research examining the relationship between the reflected appraisal process and actual behavior. Long ago, Kinch (1963) derived a theoretical model of reflected appraisals and behavior from symbolic interactionism, which posits a long causal chain (see the middle section of fig. 1). According to the model, initial behavior determines others' actual appraisals of a person, which in turn, lead to the person's reflected appraisals of self; reflected appraisals then determine self-appraisals, which in turn, lead to behavior. The model implies that, in the causal sequence explaining behavior, each antecedent variable in the model is entirely mediated by each subsequent variable. In light of the theoretical discussion above, I can derive a more plausible model of reflected appraisals and behavior.

The revised model, diagrammed in the bottom section of figure 1, follows Kinch by specifying that actual appraisals by others affect behavior only by affecting one's reflected appraisals of self. The alternative hypothesis, which contradicts symbolic interactionism, posits that actual appraisals influence behavior directly, regardless of reflected appraisals (indicated by a broken line in the bottom section of fig. 1). This could result if significant others are particularly proficient at appraising one and, therefore, predicting one's behavior or if other elements of the self besides reflected appraisals mediate actual appraisals. Moreover, the model diverges from Kinch's model in three ways. First, it deletes self-appraisals from the model, stipulating reflected appraisals of self as the

key variable for explaining behavior.<sup>5</sup> Second, it allows behavior to have a direct effect on subsequent behavior. This is consistent with our theoretical framework, which posits that institutionalized behavior, corresponding to Mead's (1934) nonreflective behavior and Dewey's (1922) habitual behavior, occurs in nonproblematic situations and is determined not by role-taking but by prior behavior. Third, it allows behavior to have a direct effect on reflected appraisals, since those appraisals are formed in part from previous behavioral solutions to problematic situations. Symbolic interactionism would predict that reflected appraisals are determined more by actual appraisals of others than by past behavior.

This last model can explain the relationships between parental appraisals, reflected appraisals, and delinquent behavior. It allows me to test three restrictions specified by Kinch (1963): (1) prior delinquency has no direct effect on later delinquency; (2) prior behavior has no direct effect on reflected appraisals; and (3) actual appraisals have no direct effect on future delinquency.<sup>6</sup> To link these social psychological mechanisms to broader determinants of delinquency, I turn to labeling theory.

#### THE PARENTAL CONTEXT OF CONTROL: LABELING AND REFLECTED APPRAISALS

Most etiological statements of labeling theory, particularly Tannenbaum's (1938) concept of the dramatization of evil, Lemert's (1951) concept of secondary deviance, and Mead's ([1918] 1964) concept of the hostile attitude of punitive justice, are rooted in the perspective of symbolic interactionism.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, we can draw on labeling theory to specify the broader social determinants of the reflected appraisal process (see Elliott, Ageton, and Canter 1979; Farrell and Swigert 1988).

Focusing primarily on the negative consequences of labeling an indi-

<sup>5</sup> In their examination of labeling theory and the I.Q.-delinquency debate, Menard and Morse (1984) found that perceived social labels (reflected appraisals) had large effects on delinquency.

<sup>6</sup> Note, however, that the revised model is unable to test Kinch's hypothesis that self-appraisals mediate the effects that reflected appraisals have on behavior. Such a test would require direct measures of self-appraisals.

<sup>7</sup> Here, I am referring specifically to the writings of Lemert (1951, 1972) and Tannenbaum (1938), which stress the causal consequences of "dramatization of evil" and "secondary deviance." What falls under the rubric of labeling theory typically includes the "societal reactions" perspective, which is not directly relevant to the present analysis. In some versions of societal reactions theory, advocates call for examining the process by which official processing leads to some persons being designated criminals, delinquents, or mentally ill (Kitsuse and Cicourel 1963). In other more extreme versions, proponents define deviance not as behavior but as a label conferred by a social audience (Becker 1963).

vidual as “deviant” or “delinquent,” labeling theory argues that initial acts of delinquency are relatively harmless instances of primary deviance. From the standpoint of the child, such acts are defined as “play” or “mischief”; however, from the standpoint of the larger community, they are viewed as “evil” or as a “law violation.” The community’s response, which initially includes reactions of parents, teachers, and peers, and later encompasses reactions of the juvenile justice system, is to label the child as “bad” or “evil.” The label, in turn, influences the self-image of the child, who comes to view him or herself as bad or delinquent, which in turn increases the likelihood of future deviance. Eventually, this spiraling labeling process can leave the youth in the hands of juvenile justice officials—cut off from conventional society, stigmatized by parents and teachers, and left with a delinquent self-image. Thus, a self-fulfilling prophecy is set up: through this process of deviance amplification, or secondary deviance, an otherwise conforming child may eventually respond to the initial labeling of harmless acts by confirming the delinquent label (Tannenbaum 1938). Mead (1964) argued that the hostile response of the criminal justice system, under the justification of deterrence or retribution, could operate to exacerbate rather than ameliorate the crime problem, perhaps creating a stable criminal class (Hagan and Palloni 1990).

A hallmark of labeling theory is the proposition that deviant labels are not randomly distributed across the social structure, but are instead more likely to apply to the powerless, the disadvantaged, and the poor. Because of existing stereotypes—which portray criminals as members of lower classes, minorities, urban dwellers, and young adults—individuals who belong to such groups are more likely than others to be labeled delinquent (Simmons 1965; Farrell and Swigert 1978, 1988). Because these stereotypes are widespread in society, they are likely to be used not only by members of the juvenile justice system, but also by parents, teachers, and peers. While actual deviant behavior increases the likelihood of being labeled a deviant, delinquency is not a necessary condition for being labeled. The “falsely accused” are persons who refrain from deviance but get labeled anyway (Becker 1963). Moreover, the powerless, having fewer cultural and material resources at their disposal, may be more likely to accept deviant labels. Again, the result is a self-fulfilling prophecy: members of disadvantaged groups are labeled delinquent, which alters their self-conceptions and causes them to deviate, thus fulfilling the prophecy of their initial label. Finally, labels are not restricted to deviance. One can be labeled a conformist or a success at conventional activity, which should increase the likelihood of conventional behavior, while decreasing the likelihood of deviance.

Empirical research on labeling theory has produced equivocal results.

While some research has found official labeling to have trivial effects on self-image (Gibbs 1974), especially when prior self-reported delinquency is controlled (Hepburn 1977), other research has found official labels to have effects for some youth (whites and nonserious delinquents) but not others (Ageton and Elliott 1974). In summarizing this research, Jensen (1980) concluded that official labeling may have a greater impact on delinquent self-images and attitudes among those less heavily involved in delinquency. Research on the effect of official labeling on subsequent delinquent behavior has found positive effects on delinquency (Meade 1974), but when prior levels of self-reported delinquency are controlled, the results have been inconsistent (Thomas and Bishop 1984; Ray and Downs 1986). Recently, Hagan and Palloni (1990) found evidence that official labeling of parents and sons interacts to produce greater self-reported delinquency. They conclude that labeling leads to an intergenerational reproduction of a criminal class, which supports the ideas of Mead, Tannenbaum, and Lemert. While this research literature has led some researchers to dismiss labeling theory (Hirschi 1980), others have concluded that attention should focus more on the consequences of informal rather than official labels (Paternoster and Iovanni 1989). Menard and Morse (1984) found support for the latter proposition: perceived informal social labels had substantial effects on delinquency and helped mediate the effect of IQ on delinquency.<sup>8</sup>

Labeling theory can help specify the relationships between background characteristics, the informal labeling process, and delinquency. First, youths who have engaged in delinquent behavior should be more likely to be labeled delinquent by their parents. Second, insofar as parents act on conventional stereotypes of deviance, their appraisals of their children as either deviant or conforming may be influenced by structural conditions that reflect disadvantages. Urban, minority, lower-class, older adolescent youths may be more likely to be labeled by their parents as deviant and less likely labeled as conforming, in part because they engage in more objective deviance. Indeed, parents could act on stereotypes to such an extent that those parents of disadvantaged children are more likely to label their children deviant, regardless of their children's behavior. This

<sup>8</sup> Some indirect evidence on deviance amplification comes from research on delinquent careers, which finds little specialization or escalation in seriousness of offenses (e.g., Wolfgang, Figlio, and Sellin 1972; Kempf 1987). However, labeling theory does not necessarily imply specialization of offenses: stigmatizing the delinquent will make it difficult to remain conventional, which increases the likelihood of committing a variety of offenses. Deviance amplification does imply some escalation in seriousness of offenses from trivial acts to minor deviance to more serious offenses. Recent research finds some evidence of escalating seriousness through the early adult years (Wolfgang, Thornberry, and Figlio 1987).

would constitute strong evidence for a labeling perspective since the parents share the disadvantages of their children but nevertheless still act on conventional stereotypes. Third, parental appraisals of youths as deviant or conforming will influence their further delinquency, primarily by influencing youths' reflected appraisals of self as deviant or conforming.<sup>9</sup>

#### DATA AND METHODS

The analyses that follow will examine the propositions above that are derived from both a symbolic interactionist theory of the self and a labeling theory of delinquent behavior. Such an examination requires a research design with at least three features. To examine the labeling hypothesis that parental appraisals vary by social-structural variables, a random sample of a heterogeneous population is required. To examine the joint relationships between parental appraisals, reflected appraisals, and delinquency, survey data measuring *perceptual* or subjective social psychological concepts is needed. To examine simultaneously the reciprocal effects of delinquency on parental and reflected appraisals, a longitudinal design is necessary.

Data that meet these requisites were collected by Delbert S. Elliott and his colleagues as part of the National Youth Survey (NYS), a longitudinal study of delinquency and drug use (Elliott, Huizinga, and Ageton 1985; Elliott, Huizinga, and Menard 1989). Employing a multistage cluster sampling frame, the NYS obtained a national probability sample of households in the United States in 1976. After several stages of sampling geographic units, 7,998 households were randomly selected, and all 2,360 eligible youths living in the households were included. Seventy-three percent of those youths (1,725) agreed to participate, signed consent forms, and along with one of their parents, completed first-wave interviews in 1977. As a result, the participating youths are reasonably representative of 11–17-year-olds in the United States. My analyses focus on the first three waves of data for male respondents.<sup>10</sup> Attrition over these waves

<sup>9</sup> The present analysis is concerned with informal labels made by an adolescent's parents and whether those appraisals affect delinquency by affecting the adolescent's reflected appraisals. I am unable to examine the proposition of labeling theory that concerns the effects of formal labels made by officials of the juvenile justice system.

<sup>10</sup> This analysis follows much delinquency research and focuses on the 918 males in the sample. If males and females are pooled, the overall pattern of results is unchanged; thus, our results are not biased because of censoring. Nevertheless, some preliminary analyses suggest that separating males and females reveals some interesting interaction effects. A complete analysis and interpretation of such interactions is beyond the scope of the present article.

was remarkably low: 4% in 1978 and 6% in 1979. Elliott, Knowles, and Canter (1981) examined nonparticipation and attrition and concluded that neither compromised the representativeness of the sample.

The NYS used personal interviews to collect self-reports of delinquent behavior, parents' reported appraisals of their child, and youths' reflected appraisals of themselves from the standpoint of parents, friends, and teachers. The content of the appraisals cluster around four substantive dimensions: (1) sociable, measured by "well-liked" and "gets along well with others"; (2) likely to succeed, measured by a single indicator; (3) distressed, measured by "often upset" and "has a lot of personal problems"; and (4) rule violator, measured by "gets into trouble" and "breaks rules."<sup>11</sup> The delinquency inventory was designed to represent the entire range of delinquent acts for which juveniles could be arrested, and includes all but one part 1 offenses of the Uniform Crime Report (UCR), over half of part 2 offenses, and a range of UCR "other offenses." Following Elliott et al. (1985), I use the categorical response sets, which have less skewed distributions. The analyses will focus on a 24-item scale of general delinquency, since our interactionist theory does not specify a priori reasons for examining specific offenses, and, empirically, recent research finds little evidence that delinquents specialize in offenses. To check the robustness of the results, however, I will also examine three subscales of delinquency: drug use, minor delinquency, and UCR index offenses (see App. A). Finally, the NYS also includes measures of background characteristics relevant to labeling hypotheses: age, race, urban residence, broken home, and family income. Descriptions of the measures appear in Appendix B.

To analyze these data, I first specify measurement models of the reflected appraisals process, and second, incorporate this model into a structural model of the causes and consequences of reflected appraisals. The measurement models allow me to test specific hypotheses about the structure underlying the indicators of reflected appraisals and to estimate and control for the biasing effects of response error. Both measurement and substantive models are estimated simultaneously using Jöreskog and Sorbom's (1988a) LISREL 7 program. Under the assumption of large samples and multivariate normality, this program provides maximum-likelihood estimates, asymptotic standard errors, and a likelihood-ratio test statistic for covariance structure models.

<sup>11</sup> The indicators of distressed and rule violator are selected from a larger set of measures. I originally estimated a measurement model that included, as measures of distress, "are messed up" and "need help" and as measures of rule violator, "are a bad kid" and "do things that are against the law." For parsimony, I retained those indicators that had the best measurement properties.

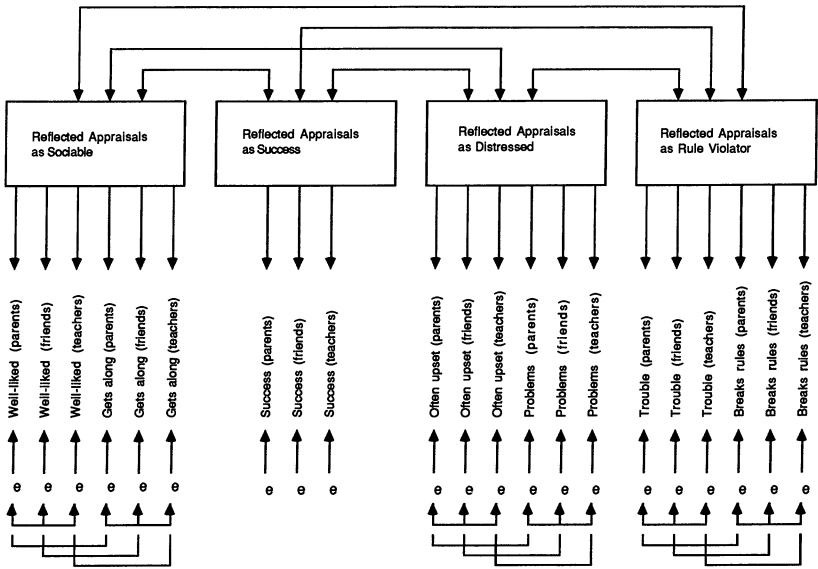


FIG. 2.—A measurement model of reflected appraisals of self

ANALYSIS OF THE MEASUREMENT MODEL

I specify measurement models of youth-reflected appraisals of self as well as parent appraisals of their children. Figure 2 presents a measurement model of reflected appraisals of self made by youths. This model considers each observed indicator as a linear combination of a latent unobserved factor plus a random measurement error. Substantively, the model, based on the theoretical framework above as well as on some preliminary exploratory analyses, implies that youth-reflected appraisals from parents, teachers, and peers coalesce into a single self representing convergence or consensus in reflected appraisals, rather than splitting into conflicting, compartmentalized selves. I did attempt to fit a model that separated reflected appraisals into parent, teacher, and peer factors, but this model was clearly inconsistent with the data. Nevertheless, I did find significant correlations among indicators of a given construct that referred to the same significant other, such as a parent. Adding these 29 error correlations improved the fit from  $L^2 = 1248.43$ ;  $df = 463$  to  $L^2 = 777.02$ ;  $df = 434$ , which is an acceptable fit (Jøreskog and Sorbom's 1988a goodness-of-fit index is .951 and adjusted goodness-of-fit index is .824).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Specifically, I added measurement error correlations in three steps. First, I added 18 correlations among identical measures that differed only in who the significant other was (e.g., get in trouble from the standpoint of teachers, parents, and peers). The improvement of fit was  $L^2 = 281.20$ ;  $df = 18$ . Second, I added nine correlations



Table 1 presents maximum-likelihood estimates of parameters of the measurement model. The indicators of youth-reflected appraisals of self as sociable, as a success, as distressed, and as a rule violator are given in the bottom section of the table. These measures show fairly high validity coefficients, ranging from .47 to .78, particularly given that they are measuring subjective phenomena. In general, with the exception of “personal problems,” the parental reflected appraisals are slightly less reliable than those of peers and teachers. While “well-liked” and “gets along well” are equally reliable measures of “sociable,” and “gets in trouble” and “breaks rules” are equally reliable measures of “rule violator,” “personal problems” is a better measure of “distressed” than is “being upset.” Intercorrelations among latent variables range between  $-.26$  and  $.52$ , indicating that, as expected, the variables are strongly intercorrelated. Nevertheless, the latent variables are sufficiently distinct to show discriminant validity.

Figure 3 presents a measurement model of parental appraisals of their child. Paralleling the model of youth-reflected appraisals, this model also specifies four latent appraisal factors: parental appraisals of their child as sociable, as a success, as a rule violator, and as distressed. The validity coefficients suggest that the measures are fairly reliable indicators of their theoretical constructs (see table 1). While the measures of rule violator appear equally reliable, “gets along with others” is a more reliable indicator of sociable, while “personal problems” is a more reliable indicator of distress. As with the youth-reflected appraisals, the latent variables underlying parental appraisals are substantially intercorrelated in expected ways, ranging from  $-.40$  to  $.66$ .

These results suggest that, for both youth-reflected appraisals and parental appraisals of youths, the indicators are adequate measures of the theoretical constructs, but contain sufficient measurement error—both random and systematic—to require correcting for attenuation due to unreliability.

## ANALYSIS OF THE SUBSTANTIVE MODEL

### Specifying the Model and Hypotheses

The substantive model, depicted in figure 4, specifies causal relationships among the four following latent constructs: (1) a set of exogenous back-

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among measures of a given construct that referred to a similar significant other (e.g., rule breaker from the standpoint of teachers and gets into trouble from the standpoint of teachers). The difference in chi-squares was  $L^2 = 156.08$ ;  $df = 9$ . Finally, I added two additional correlations between getting along with others from the standpoint of teachers, and two other teacher indicators (personal problems and success). The improvement of fit was  $L^2 = 34.14$ ;  $df = 2$ .

TABLE 1  
PARAMETER ESTIMATES OF THE MEASUREMENT MODELS: MALES

Variables	Observed Variance	Error Variance	Metric Slope	Validity Coefficient
Parental appraisals:				
SOCIABLE1:				
Well-liked .....	.408	.232	.747	.657
Gets along .....	.467	.151	1.000 <sup>a</sup>	.822
SUCCESS1:				
Success .....	.373	.000 <sup>a</sup>	1.000 <sup>a</sup>	1.000 <sup>a</sup>
DISTRESSED1:				
Often upset .....	1.048	.667	1.000 <sup>a</sup>	.603
Problems .....	.823	.171	1.307	.890
RULE VIOLATOR1:				
Trouble .....	.744	.333	1.000 <sup>a</sup>	.743
Breaks rules .....	.989	.496	1.097	.707
Youth-reflected appraisals:				
SOCIABLE2:				
Well-liked (parents) .....	.354	.276	.946	.470
Well-liked (friends) .....	.281	.173	1.112	.619
Well-liked (teachers) .....	.334	.209	1.200	.613
Gets along (parents) .....	.333	.202	1.227	.628
Gets along (friends) .....	.286	.199	1.000 <sup>a</sup>	.552
Gets along (teachers) .....	.299	.216	.957	.516
SUCCESS2:				
Success (parents) .....	.537	.256	.910	.724
Success (friends) .....	.565	.224	1.000 <sup>a</sup>	.776
Success (teachers) .....	.514	.228	.917	.746
DISTRESSED2:				
Often upset (parents) .....	.982	.666	1.171	.567
Often upset (friends) .....	.741	.508	1.000 <sup>a</sup>	.557
Often upset (teachers) .....	.676	.406	1.087	.635
Problems (parents) .....	.727	.283	1.389	.782
Problems (friends) .....	.631	.305	1.190	.719
Problems (teachers) .....	.542	.210	1.199	.781
RULE VIOLATOR2:				
Trouble (parents) .....	.812	.400	.955	.714
Trouble (friends) .....	.788	.334	1.000 <sup>a</sup>	.759
Trouble (teachers) .....	.733	.343	.925	.728
Breaks rules (parents) .....	.811	.377	.978	.732
Breaks rules (friends) .....	.782	.345	.981	.748
Breaks rules (teachers) .....	.706	.294	.951	.763

NOTE.—*N* = 851.

<sup>a</sup> fixed coefficient

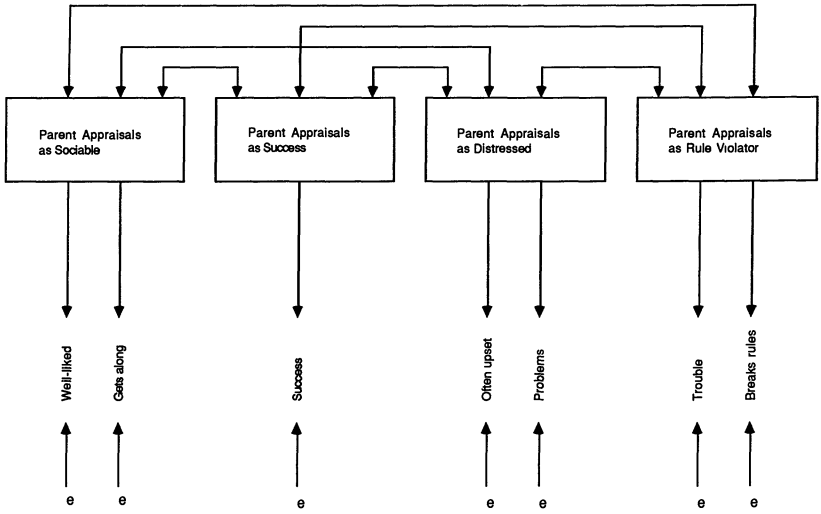


FIG. 3.—A measurement model of parental appraisals of youths

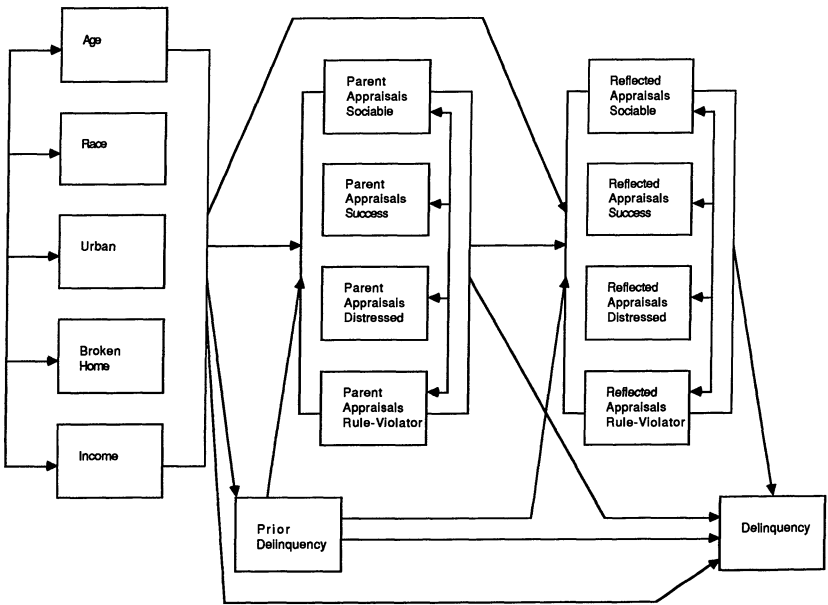


FIG. 4.—A substantive model of parental appraisals, reflected appraisals, and delinquency.

ground variables measured at time 1; (2) a set of endogenous parental appraisals of youths as sociable, as a success, as distressed, and as a rule violator, measured at time 1; (3) a set of endogenous youth-reflected appraisals of self as sociable, as a success, as distressed, and as a rule violator, measured at time 2; and (4) an outcome variable of delinquency, measured at time 3.<sup>13</sup> The causal ordering of the variables follows my theoretical specification: parental appraisals influence reflected appraisals, which in turn influence delinquent behavior. The time ordering of the variables coincides with this causal ordering to reduce ambiguity in making causal inferences. Analyses that vary the precise timing of the variables do not change the substantive findings appreciably (see App. B).

Within this model, we can identify specific hypotheses derived from labeling and symbolic interactionist theories. Consistent with labeling theory, background characteristics reflecting disadvantages should increase the likelihood of negative parental labeling and perhaps decrease the likelihood of positive labeling. Thus, parental labeling of a youth as a rule violator and as distressed may be greater for youths who have committed prior delinquent acts, who are black, and who come from urban, low-income areas and broken homes. As noted above, if disadvantages increase the likelihood of parental labeling, net of prior delinquency, the stereotyping process specified by labeling theorists would receive strong support. Alternatively, it may be that stereotypes are used only by secondary others, such as teachers or juvenile justice officials, and that parents and other significant others use their intimate knowledge of the child in forming appraisals. Finally, parental labeling of the child, particularly as a rule violator, should have substantial total effects on future delinquency. As deviance amplification predicts, youths will commit more crimes if their parents label them as rule violators or as distressed; conversely, they may commit fewer crimes if their parents label them as sociable or as likely to succeed.

Symbolic interactionist theory implies three hypotheses concerning direct effects. First, parental appraisals should have a direct effect on their reflected counterparts, net of prior performance (delinquency). This tests the hypothesis that one's reflected appraisals of self from the standpoint of significant others is, in part, a reflection of the actual appraisals made by those significant others. Second, previous delinquent behavior should exert a direct effect on reflected appraisals of self. Prior delinquency

<sup>13</sup> Relationships among the four parental appraisals are specified as unanalyzed correlations, as are the four youth-reflected appraisals (see fig. 2). These disturbance correlations range from  $-.36$  to  $.58$  for parental appraisals, and from  $-.15$  to  $.40$  for youth-reflected appraisals.

should increase reflected appraisals as a rule violator and as distressed, and perhaps decrease reflected appraisals as sociable and likely to succeed. This hypothesis is consistent with (1) an interactionist perspective that specifies self-images ("me's") as determined in part by prior behavioral resolutions to problematic situations and (2) Bem's (1972) theory of self-perception formation, which posits that individuals form conceptions of self by observing their own behavior. Third, future delinquent behavior should be directly affected by one's reflected appraisals of self. Delinquency should be substantially affected by reflected appraisals of one as a rule violator and perhaps also by reflected appraisals as distressed, sociable, and likely to succeed.

The model also allows us to test several hypotheses that imply parameters constrained to be zero. First is Kinch's (1963) hypothesis that the effect of prior behavior on reflected appraisals is entirely mediated by parental appraisals. Second is Kinch's hypothesis that the effect of prior delinquency on future delinquency is entirely mediated by the intervening reflected appraisals process. In contrast, an interactionist theory would predict that, through habit or nonreflective behavior, prior delinquency will maintain a direct effect on future delinquency. Third is the hypothesis, consistent with Kinch and symbolic interactionism in general, that parental appraisals influence delinquency only indirectly through their effects on reflected appraisals. The alternative hypothesis is that parental appraisals are sufficiently accurate to predict delinquency, even holding prior delinquency and reflected appraisals constant. Fourth is the hypothesis, consistent with labeling and interactionist theories, that the effect of background variables on delinquency works primarily indirectly through the labeling and reflected appraisals process.

### Estimation of the Model

Table 2 presents unstandardized parameter estimates of the substantive model; standardized counterparts appear in table 3. The hypotheses derived from labeling theory involve effects of background characteristics and prior delinquent behavior on parental appraisals of youth (tables 2 and 3, rows 2–5). As hypothesized, older youths, urban dwellers, and youths from broken homes, all commit more delinquent acts on average. Consistent with labeling theory, prior delinquent behavior substantially increases parental appraisals of a youth as a rule violator and distressed, while also slightly reducing their appraisals of a youth as sociable or likely to succeed (see rows 2–5 in col. 6). Also consistent with labeling theory, the background variables exert some effect on parental appraisals, particularly rule violator ( $R^2 = .13$ ). Parents of youths who are younger, nonwhite, and from urban areas are more likely to label their

TABLE 2  
UNSTANDARDIZED PARAMETER ESTIMATES OF THE SUBSTANTIVE MODEL: MALES

DEPENDENT VARIABLES	PREDETERMINED VARIABLES														R <sup>2</sup>
	Parental Appraisals							Youth-reflectd Appraisals							
	AGE (1)	RACE (2)	URBAN (3)	BROKEN HOME (4)	INCOME (5)	DELIN- QUENCY (6)	SOCIALE1 (7)	SUCCESS1 (8)	DISTRESS1 (9)	RULE VIOLATOR1 (10)	SOCIALE2 (11)	SUCCESS2 (12)	DISTRESS2 (13)	RULE VIOLATOR2 (14)	
1. DELINQUENCY1 ..	.022 (.004)	.048 (.025)	.080 (.020)	.069 (.020)	-.004 (.004)										066
Parental appraisals:															
2. SOCIALE1 ...	.022 (.012)	-.018 (.067)	.016 (.054)	-.114 (.054)	.009 (.011)	-.268 (.092)									032
3. SUCCESS1 .....	.008 (.011)	-.040 (.063)	.001 (.051)	-.067 (.050)	.011 (.010)	-.270 (.086)									.019
4. DISTRESS1 .....	.001 (.012)	-.020 (.069)	-.001 (.056)	.160 (.056)	-.017 (.011)	.513 (.100)									.077
5. RULE VIOLATOR1 ..	-.056 (.013)	-.207 (.077)	-.090 (.062)	.031 (.061)	-.004 (.012)	.708 (.107)									126
Youth-reflectd appraisals															
6. SOCIALE2 .....	-.000 (.007)	-.036 (.037)	.027 (.030)	-.005 (.030)	.003 (.006)	-.004 (.053)	.097 (.039)	.018 (.026)	.005 (.036)	-.037 (.041)					068
7. SUCCESS2 .....	-.017 (.012)	.166 (.067)	.059 (.054)	.049 (.053)	.032 (.011)	-.053 (.096)	-.053 (.069)	.074 (.048)	.034 (.066)	-.180 (.075)					101
8. DISTRESS2 .....	.001 (.010)	-.138 (.054)	.038 (.043)	.016 (.043)	-.024 (.009)	.183 (.077)	-.072 (.055)	-.042 (.038)	-.117 (.053)	-.065 (.059)					.164
9. RULE VIOLATOR2 ..	.032 (.013)	.128 (.071)	-.056 (.056)	.016 (.056)	-.019 (.011)	.907 (.104)	-.100 (.073)	.029 (.050)	-.120 (.070)	.379 (.083)					.285
Delinquent behavior															
10. DELINQUENCY3 ..	.018 (.004)	.040 (.025)	.029 (.020)	.007 (.020)	-.006 (.004)	.451 (.038)	.053 (.026)	-.019 (.017)	-.010 (.025)	.084 (.029)	.166 (.046)	.006 (.019)	-.056 (.026)	.157 (.021)	464

NOTE.—SEs are in parentheses, N = 851.

TABLE 3  
STANDARDIZED PARAMETER ESTIMATES OF THE SUBSTANTIVE MODEL: MALES

DEPENDENT VARIABLES	PREDETERMINED VARIABLES													
	Parental Appraisals							Youth-reflectd Appraisals						
	AGE (1)	RACE (2)	URBAN (3)	BROKEN HOME (4)	INCOME (5)	PROR DELIN- QUENCY (6)	SOCIABLE1 (7)	SUCCESS1 (8)	DISTRESS1 (9)	RULE VIOLATOR1 (10)	SOCIABLE2 (11)	SUCCESS2 (12)	DISTRESS2 (13)	RULE VIOLATOR2 (14)
1. DELINQUENCY1 ..	170	071	139	127	- 035									
Parental appraisals														
2 SOCIABLE1 . . .	.076	-.012	012	093	037	- 119								
3 SUCCESS1 ..	.025	-.024	001	-.050	042	-.110								
4 DISTRESS1 . . .	003	-.012	-.001	.118	-.061	207								
5 RULE VIOLATOR1	-.168	-.120	061	.022	-.013	.275								
Youth-reflectd appraisals.														
6. SOCIABLE2 . . .	-.002	-.045	040	-.008	024	-.003	185	037	010	-.080				
7 SUCCESS2 . . . . .	-.056	105	044	038	125	-.008	051	.077	-.036	-.197				
8. DISTRESS2 . . . . .	003	-.106	-.034	-.015	-.112	095	-.085	-.054	151	086				
9 RULE VIOLATOR2 . .	092	.070	-.036	011	-.065	335	-.083	026	-.110	360				
Delinquent behavior:														
10 DELINQUENCY3 . . .	119	051	042	.011	-.044	.382	101	-.039	-.021	184	.167	011	-.092	361

NOTE.—N = 851.

children as rule violators. This is primarily because such youths have committed delinquent acts in the past.

But the only evidence that the disadvantaged may be falsely accused by parents is a countervailing effect of race. Blacks are less likely to be labeled rule violators because they commit fewer delinquent acts; however, net of delinquency, they are more likely to be negatively labeled. Parents in nonintact families are less likely to label their children sociable and more likely to label them distressed (tables 2 and 3, col. 4). This second effect works partly indirectly through prior delinquent behavior. In general, then, these results provide limited support for the labeling hypothesis that, net of their delinquent behavior, youths from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be labeled negatively.

Turning to the reflected-appraisals equations, we find support for the interactionist proposition that reflected appraisals of self are partly a reflection of the objective appraisals made by others. With one exception, parental appraisals of a youth have significant effects on youths' corresponding reflected appraisals of self. This effect is particularly strong for the rule-violator appraisals, perhaps because of the salience of youths' deviant behaviors to parents, who are likely to be concerned about such behavior. The one exception is the coefficient relating parental and reflected appraisals of who is likely to succeed, which does not quite reach significance.<sup>14</sup> The small size of this effect is perhaps due to the nebulous nature of the category, "likely to be a success," especially for adolescents, whose success has yet to be determined.<sup>15</sup>

We also find support for the symbolic interactionist hypothesis that prior behavior influences reflected appraisals indirectly by influencing significant others' appraisals. Prior delinquency has a large total effect (standardized coefficient of .42) on reflected appraisals as rule violator, and a moderate total effect (.17) on distressed. About 25% of the effect of prior delinquency on reflected appraisals as rule violator is mediated by

<sup>14</sup> The nonsignificance of this coefficient could be due to random measurement error in the measure of parental appraisals of a youth as "likely to succeed." Such error, fixed in this model to have a zero variance, could exert a downward bias on this coefficient. A sensitivity analysis on the measurement error variance reveals that increasing the measurement error variance increases the estimated structural coefficient, but also increases its standard error, so that it remains nonsignificant. We would need a larger sample, or perhaps additional indicators, to rule out chance in this estimate. Because the substantive results were not altered when the measurement error variance was fixed to be small, I chose to leave the variance fixed at zero.

<sup>15</sup> The bivariate correlations between parental appraisals and youth-reflected appraisals are of course larger, since they do not condition on the background variables, or the effects of parental appraisals of one characteristic on reflected appraisals of another. The bivariate correlations are .244 for sociable, .183 for success, .316 for distress, and .388 for rule violator.



parental appraisals as a rule violator. Nevertheless, contrary to Kinch's mediation hypothesis, even holding parental appraisals constant, prior delinquency significantly influences reflected appraisals as rule violator (standardized coefficient of .34) and as distressed (.09). This finding supports an interactionist theory, as well as Bem's (1972) self-perception theory.

Overall, the model explains nearly half of the variance in delinquent behavior (tables 2 and 3, row 10). Of the youth-reflected appraisal variables, rule violator has by far the largest effect (a standardized coefficient of .36). Thus, persons who perceive that others view them as one who violates rules, or gets in trouble, engage in more delinquent acts. This supports the major hypothesis of an interactionist theory of delinquency: behavior is strongly influenced by reflected appraisals. Of the remaining reflected appraisal variables, sociable has a substantial positive effect on delinquency, and distressed a small negative effect. Net of the other variables in the model, youths who see themselves (from the standpoint of others) as sociable commit more delinquent acts, while those who see themselves as distressed commit slightly fewer delinquent acts.

Consistent with a deviance amplification hypothesis, parental appraisals of a youth as a rule violator have a substantial total effect on delinquency (a standardized coefficient of .29). Moreover, nearly one-half of this effect is mediated by youth-reflected appraisals as a rule violator. This supports an important hypothesis of symbolic interactionism: parental appraisals influence youth-reflected appraisals, which in turn influence delinquency. Nevertheless, even controlling for youth-reflected appraisals, parental appraisals of youth as a rule violator exert a substantial effect on delinquency. It appears that parents' appraisals of youths are, to some extent, more accurate than youths' perceptions of those appraisals. This finding fails to support a symbolic interactionist perspective. Parental appraisals of youths as sociable also exert a significant total effect on delinquency; however, only a small portion is mediated by youth-reflected appraisals. This effect is positive, meaning that, net of the other explanatory variables, more likeable and sociable youths commit more delinquent acts. There is a small but significant indirect effect of parental appraisals as distressed on delinquency through reflected appraisals as distressed.

Prior delinquency (measured at time 1) has a very large total effect on delinquency at time 3 (standardized effect of .55), about 30% of which is mediated by parental and reflected appraisals as a rule violator. This implies that males between the ages of 13 and 19 are fairly stable in delinquent behavior: those who engage in delinquency are likely to have engaged in delinquency two years earlier. This finding also implies that, as predicted by an interactionist theory of the self, part of the stability

in delinquency is due to reflected appraisals as a rule violator and part is due to habit (nonreflective behavior). Alternatively, the direct effect could reflect unmeasured mechanisms not included in the model. Finally, with one exception, the intervening mechanisms specified by the labeling and symbolic interaction process account for most of the effects on delinquency of the background variables. The one exception is age—about one-half of the total effect of age on delinquency is direct.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In sum, these analyses yield six principal findings, which provide general support for a symbolic interactionist conceptualization of reflected appraisals and delinquency. First, youths' reflected appraisals of themselves from the standpoint of parents, teachers, and friends coalesce into a consensual self, rather than remaining compartmentalized as distinct selves. This holds for reflected appraisals as rule violators, distressed, sociable, and likely to succeed. Second, consistent with labeling theory, parental labels of youths as rule violators are more likely among delinquents, nonwhites, and urban dwellers. Most of these effects operate indirectly through prior delinquency; thus, we find only modest evidence of disadvantaged youths being falsely accused. This, however, is not surprising, since the labels investigated are those of parents, who share the disadvantages of the youth. A stronger test of this proposition would examine formal labels of secondary others, such as the juvenile justice system.

Third, with the exception of likely to succeed, youths' reflected appraisals of themselves are strongly influenced by their parents' independent appraisals of them. This result is particularly strong for the rule violator variable, the reflected appraisal most relevant to labeling and delinquency. This finding, at least with regard to rule violator, suggests that youths accurately perceive their parents' appraisals of them and that the reflected-appraisal constructs are capturing meaningful elements of self-concept. Moreover, this supports the proposition of symbolic interactionism that reflected appraisals of the self arise through role-taking in transactions and, therefore, are in part a reflection of others' actual appraisals.

Fourth, previous delinquent behavior influences reflected appraisals of self. Consistent with predictions from labeling theory, this effect works partly indirectly through parental appraisals. Prior delinquency, however, also affects reflected appraisals directly. This implies that reflected appraisals are not a mirror reflection of others' appraisals, as implied by a literal interpretation of Cooley's (1922) looking-glass self, but rather are the result of selective perception of others' appraisals and of previous

behavior. Fifth, as predicted by symbolic interactionism, reflected appraisals as a rule violator exert a large effect on delinquent behavior and mediate much of the effect of parental appraisals as a rule violator on delinquency. Contrary to interactionism, however, parental appraisals as a rule violator still exert a direct effect on delinquency. Sixth, age, race, and urban residence exert significant total effects on delinquency, most of which work indirectly through prior delinquency, and partially through the rule-violator reflected appraisal.

These findings suggest that an interactionist conception of the self as reflected appraisals provides an important cause and consequence of delinquent behavior. The results, however, find Kinch's (1963) theoretical model of reflected appraisals and behavior to be overly restrictive. In particular, prior delinquent behavior influences reflected appraisals even when parental appraisals are held constant; prior delinquent behavior affects delinquency even holding both parental and reflected appraisals constant; and parental appraisals as a rule violator influence delinquency even holding reflected appraisals as a rule violator constant. One could argue that these results contradict only a literal interpretation of Kinch's models, and, if viewed loosely, the results are generally consistent with his arguments. One could also argue that the model estimated here does not include all possibly relevant appraisals by others and reflected appraisals, and if it did, these results might support Kinch's model. Moreover, the present model could not consider Kinch's hypothesis that the effects of reflected appraisals on delinquency are not direct, but are instead mediated by self-appraisals.

Viewed more broadly, these results indicate that the concept of role-taking, as specified by symbolic interactionism, is important for delinquency. Unlike most previous research on the self and delinquency, which examines global self-esteem, I have examined specific meanings of the self pertaining to violating rules. I found that one aspect of the self—reflected appraisals as a rule violator—has strong effects on delinquency. Furthermore, an interactionist perspective would imply that other specific meanings of the self may also influence delinquent behavior. These include specific attitudes and motives concerning delinquent and conforming alternatives, the specific reactions to and attitudes about delinquency held by significant others, and the presentation of situational motives for delinquency by significant others.

Such mechanisms could account for the finding that parental appraisals of a youth as a rule violator affect delinquency, net of the youth's reflected appraisals. While the finding could mean that parents are particularly accurate in predicting the behavior of their children, as noted above, it could also mean that parental appraisals work indirectly through an aspect of the self besides reflected appraisals, such as self-esteem or anti-

pated reactions. Alternatively, the result may be consistent with a structural explanation. Parents may form their appraisals based in part on the role occupied by the child (as well as the role occupied by the parent). They may consequently alter their treatment of the youth—which affects delinquent behavior—but never communicate their appraisal to the child. For example, youths occupying the role of troublemaker may be viewed as such by parents, which causes parents to be alienated from their child, ultimately leading to increased delinquency. Or a parent with a criminal history may be more likely to view the child as a delinquent, which reduces the affection given the child and thereby increases the likelihood of delinquency. In either case, parental appraisals of the youth may lead to delinquency without their being consciously perceived by the youth. Such mechanisms, if found to exist, would underscore the importance of a structural version of symbolic interaction (Stryker 1980).

Symbolic interactionism can also provide a framework for integrating the literatures on reflected appraisals, global self-esteem, and delinquent behavior. From this perspective, delinquent behavior is determined primarily by specific meanings concerning delinquency, including reflected appraisals, role identities, specific motives concerning delinquency, reactions of significant others to delinquency, and presentation of situational motives by significant others. Accordingly, low global self-esteem and high self-rejection are products of previous social transactions and can motivate the individual to act in ways that increase his or her self-regard (Hewitt 1970; Kaplan 1980). The extent to which this is accomplished by delinquent behavior depends on the outcome of reflective behavior in problematic situations, which in turn is shaped in part by one's stable self-image concerning delinquency. This implies that effects of global self-esteem on delinquency will be dwarfed by effects of specific meanings of the self concerning delinquency and may be conditioned by such specific meanings. Future research is needed to estimate relative weights of such processes and to determine whether conditional effects are involved. Such research would link traditional studies of self-esteem to our findings supporting a symbolic interactionist theory of delinquency.

## APPENDIX A

### Examination of the Robustness of the Findings

While the findings above provide general support for an interactionist theory of delinquency, they could be artifacts of certain methodological assumptions made in the analysis. Therefore, I performed additional analyses to examine the robustness of the findings to four competing specifications and interpretations. First, in the models reported above,

prior delinquency is lagged two years from the outcome variable of delinquent behavior. This was done to make the causal ordering among prior delinquency, parental appraisals, reflected appraisals, and future delinquency coincide with their temporal ordering of measurement. I did not include delinquency at time 2, which would be causally ambiguous with respect to parental and youth-reflected appraisals. If time-2 delinquency is included, then the effects of reflected appraisals on time-3 delinquency are somewhat attenuated; nevertheless, the effect of rule violator is still substantial in size and statistically significant. However, if parental and reflected appraisals, as well as prior delinquency, are measured at time 1, and future delinquency measured at time 2, then only time-1 delinquency and parental label as a rule violator significantly influence time-2 delinquency. This appears to be due to the high stability in delinquency between time 1 and time 2.

Second, the results could fail to apply to measures of delinquency other than the 24-item index used. Therefore, I estimated the model substituting three conceptually relevant indexes of delinquency: drug offenses, minor delinquency, and index offenses. Overall, with some minor exceptions, these models yield the same substantive story.

Third, a potential threat to the validity of causal inferences concerns the relationship between reflected appraisals as a rule violator and delinquency. Even though I have controlled for prior levels of delinquency, it still could be that rule violator is serving as a proxy for minor forms of prior deviance, rather than a reflected appraisal. In other words, the effect of rule violator on delinquency could be spurious owing to the omission of prior minor deviant behavior. Fortunately, some additional minor deviant acts were measured at time 1 (but not time 2), including vandalized property of family, school, and other; threw objects at people; lied about age to gain entrance; sold marijuana; cheated on school tests; illegally hitchhiked; stole from family; bought liquor for a minor; avoided paying for things; was publicly drunk; stole at school; and skipped classes. I first added these 10 items to the index of prior delinquency, which yielded a 34-item index, reestimated the model, and obtained identical results. I then estimated a model that included both measures of prior delinquency (the 24-item index plus the 10-item scale) and again obtained identical results. Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that reflected appraisals as a rule violator is not serving as a proxy for prior minor delinquency—at least not as measured here.

Finally, it could be that the results are methodological artifacts of two assumptions: the dependent variables are measured on unbounded interval scales and the observed variables are distributed multinormally. Although Monte Carlo evidence suggests the LISREL estimator is robust to these assumptions, I nevertheless estimated a model that uses the

log of delinquency, which reduces skewness and kurtosis, and obtained identical results. I then used Muthen's (1984) general framework to estimate a model that assumed that delinquency is a continuous variable, but all other measures are ordinal. Specifically, I used Jøreskog and Sorbom's (1988*a*, 1988*b*) approach, which uses PRELIS to estimate polychoric and polyserial correlations and their asymptotic covariances, then uses weighted least squares to obtain asymptotic distribution-free estimates of parameters and standard errors. Given the sample size, however, I could only estimate the important core components of the model: the relationships between background variables, parent appraisals as a rule violator, reflected appraisals as a rule violator, and delinquency. This analysis gives similar overall results, although effects are somewhat attenuated: reflected appraisals still have significant effects on delinquency, but parental appraisals do not.

## APPENDIX B

### Descriptions of Measures

#### *Background Characteristics and Delinquent Behavior*

AGE	Years of age of the youth respondent.
RACE	Race of the youth respondent (0 = black; 1 = non-black).
URBAN	Urbanicity (0 = rural or suburban; 1 = urban).
INCOME	Family Income (10-point scale in \$4,000 increments: 1 = \$6,000 or less; 10 = more than \$38,000).
BROKEN HOME	Broken home (0 = intact; 1 = at least one parent absent).
DELINQUENCY1	Index of 24 delinquent acts committed in the past year, including the following: auto theft, \$5 theft, \$5-\$50 theft, \$50 theft, buying stolen goods, runaway, concealed weapon, aggravated assault, prostitution, sexual intercourse, gang fights, sold marijuana, hit parents, hit teacher, hit students, disorderly conduct, sold drugs, joyriding, sexual assault, strong-armed students, strong-armed teachers, strong-armed others, breaking and entering, panhandled.
DELINQUENCY3	Index of 24 delinquent acts committed between years 2 and 3.

*Parental Appraisals*

For the following measures, the parent was asked, "Please listen carefully and tell me how much you agree or disagree with each of the words or phrases as a description of your son or daughter."

**SOCIABLE1**

Well liked

"My son or daughter is well liked."

Gets along

"My son or daughter gets along well with others."

**DISTRESSED1**

Often upset

"My son or daughter is often upset."

Problems

"My son or daughter has a lot of personal problems."

**SUCCESS1**

Success

"My son or daughter is likely to succeed."

**RULE VIOLATOR1**

Trouble

"My son or daughter gets into trouble."

Breaks rules

"My son or daughter breaks rules."

*Youth-Reflected Appraisals*

For the following measures, the youth was asked, "I'd like to know how your parents, friends, and teachers would describe you. I'll read a list of words or phrases and for each, will ask you to tell me how much you think your parents would agree with that description of you. I'll repeat the list twice more, to learn how your friends and your teachers would describe you."

**SOCIABLE2**

Well liked

"Parents agree I am well liked."

"Friends agree I am well liked."

"Teachers agree I am well liked."

Gets along

"Parents agree I get along well with others."

"Friends agree I get along well with others."

"Teachers agree I get along well with others."

**DISTRESSED2**

Often upset

"Parents agree I am often upset."

"Friends agree I am often upset."

"Teachers agree I am often upset."

Problems

"Parents agree I have a lot of personal problems."

"Friends agree I have a lot of personal problems."

"Teachers agree I have a lot of personal problems."

SUCCESS2

Success

"Parents agree I am likely to succeed."

"Friends agree I am likely to succeed."

"Teachers agree I am likely to succeed."

RULE VIOLATOR2

Trouble

"Parents agree I get into trouble."

"Friends agree I get into trouble."

"Teachers agree I get into trouble."

Breaks rules

"Parents agree I break rules."

"Friends agree I break rules."

"Teachers agree I break rules."

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