



Routine activities as determinants of gender differences in delinquency

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A B S T R A C T

This study examined the extent to which gender differences in delinquency can be explained by gender differences in participation in, or response to, various routine activity patterns (RAPs) using data from the second and third waves of the National Education Longitudinal Survey of 1988. While differential participation in routine activities by gender failed to explain males' high levels of deviance relative to females, two early RAPs moderated the effect of gender on subsequent deviant behavior. Participation in religious and community activities during the sophomore year in high school decreased, while unstructured and unsupervised peer interaction increased, levels of delinquency two years later substantially more for males than for females, suggesting there are gender differences in reactivity to contextual opportunities for deviance during early high school with effects that persist over time.

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Introduction

Although the gender gap in property and violent offenses as well as in more general deviance has declined, especially among youth, adolescent males consistently exhibit higher levels of delinquency than their female counterparts (Regoli, Hewitt, & DeLisi, 2010). Working within the routine activities framework (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Hawdon, 1996), the extent to which this difference might be explained by gender differences in participation in, or response to, common sets of behavioral patterns is assessed.

Routine activities as social control

Control theory is one of the most widely tested models of juvenile delinquency (see Kempf, 1993 for a review of these studies). Key to this theoretical perspective is the assumption that internal bonds to society prevent deviance through attachment to individuals or institutions that uphold the normative order, commitment to or investment in institutions that promote conformity, belief in the validity of societal mores, and involvement in conventional activities that limit opportunities for delinquency (Hirschi, 1969).

Arguing that conventional activities can themselves provide opportunities for deviance insofar as they lack purpose and are invisible to agents of social control, Hawdon (1996, 1999) redefined Hirshi's (1969) concept of involvement as participation in routine

activities, a construct initially used to explain crime victimization (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Felson, 1994). In an extension of this literature, Hawdon (1996, 1999) examined the relationship between what he termed routine activity patterns (RAPs) and delinquency. RAPs are relatively stable clusters of related behaviors that characterize individuals' daily routines that vary in structure and purpose (instrumentality) and visibility to agents of social control.

Hawdon (1996) suggested that RAPs that are high in both instrumentality and visibility should reduce the frequency of delinquent behaviors, while RAPs centered on activities that lack these characteristics should increase delinquency by enhancing adolescents' opportunities for deviance. Thus, unlike Hirshi's (1969) control theory, this model emphasizes external, rather than internal, social controls. Consistent with Hawdon's predictions, measures of delinquency were inversely associated with participation in purposeful activities with high visibility, and positively related to involvement in unstructured and unsupervised social activities, among both high school (Hawdon, 1996) and college students (Hawdon, 1999).

A number of other studies have yielded similar findings. Participation in structured academic, extracurricular, community, and religious activities has been associated with low levels of delinquency, while unstructured and unsupervised peer interaction has been shown to increase adolescents' risks for deviance (Agnew & Petersen, 1989; Anderson & Hughes, 2009; Barnes, Welte, & Dintcheff, 2007; Bernburg & Thorlindsson, 2001; Crawford & Novak, 2002; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Flannery, Williams, & Vazsonyi, 1999; Fleming et al., 2008; Haynie & Osgood, 2005; Huebner & Betts, 2002; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000; Osgood, Wilson, O'Malley, Bachman, & Johnston, 1996; Thorlindsson & Bernburg, 2006; Vazsonyi, Pickering, Belliston, Hessing, & Junger, 2002; Wong, 2005).

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Modeling the relationship between gender, routine activities and delinquency

A few of the studies cited in the preceding section examined the relationship between gender, routine activities, and delinquency. Borrowing from the literature on gender and social control more generally (see Costello & Mereder, 2003; Jensen & Eve, 1976; White & LaGrange, 1987), these analyses can be categorized based on the extent to which they emphasized mediating or moderating relationships between key variables.

Mediating models specify the mechanisms through which independent variables influence dependent variables indirectly by identifying intermediate, or intervening, variables in a causal chain. For a mediating effect to exist an independent and dependent variable must be correlated, the third (mediating) variable must be associated with both the independent and the dependent variable, and one must be able to safely assume that the mediating variable is the result (rather than the cause) of the independent variable. When these conditions are met, mediating effects are detectable through a series of analyses in which variables are sequentially added into a statistical model (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Within the context of the literature on gender and routine activities, a mediating effect is presumed to exist when the association between gender and delinquency disappears when measures of routine activities are included in the analysis. If routine activity patterns account for the effect of gender on delinquency in this manner, this suggests that that males are more delinquent than females simply because they are more likely to participate in RAPs conducive to deviance. As such, the mediation hypothesis is what White and LaGrange (1987) termed a common causes argument.

In support of the common causes position, Osgood et al. (1996) found that gender differences in participation in various routine activities, including unstructured peer interaction, accounted for much of the effect of gender on each of five types of deviant behavior (heavy drinking, marijuana use, the use of illicit drugs, crime and dangerous driving). Other analyses have, however, failed to show any mediating influences of routine activity patterns, including peer interaction (Anderson & Hughes, 2009), sports, religious activities and school clubs (Chapple, McQuillan, & Berdahl, 2005), on the gender–delinquency relationship.

A second group of studies focusing on gender and routine activities emphasizes moderating over mediating influences. While mediating models link an independent variable to a dependent variable through one or more intervening variables, moderating models specify interaction effects (Baron & Kenny, 1986). When the effect of gender on delinquency varies across levels of participation in various activities, evidenced by significant cross-product interactions in a regression model, RAPs are said to moderate the gender–delinquency relationship. The moderation model proposes that gender differences in delinquency are due to a heightened reactivity to RAPs low in structure and visibility, or immunity to the protective effects of RAPs high in these attributes, among males relative to their female counterparts.

In support of this model, Mahoney and Stattin (2000) have shown that low-structure recreational behaviors have a stronger effect on antisocial behavior among boys than among girls. Similarly, Crawford and Novak's (2002) study indicated that unstructured/unsupervised peer interaction during the sophomore year in high school increased the risk for subsequent drinking primarily among males.

In their analysis of routine activities and delinquency in U.S. and three other countries, on the other hand, Vazsonyi et al. (2002) found few gender differences in the effects of various activity clusters (hanging out with friends, school-based and sports activities, and solitary pursuits) on measures of delinquency. Furthermore, there was no evidence that the effects of peer interaction on smoking, drug use, and general delinquency varied by gender in Barnes et al.'s (2007) study of adolescents' use of time. Although an earlier analysis by Huebner and Betts (2002) yielded a larger inverse association between purposeful

activities, such as clubs and hobbies, and a measure of general deviance among males than among females, these behaviors emerged as protective for both genders. Consistent with this, Fleming et al. (2008) found little evidence that the effects of after-school activities on delinquency varied by gender.

Thus, to date, the literature on the relationship between gender, routine activities, and delinquency has been equivocal. Although there was some evidence that frequency of peer interaction, in particular, may increase the risk for deviance more for males than for females, this effect may be specific to social encounters characterized by low structure and visibility. The current study assessed the extent to which unstructured peer interactions, as well as a variety of other RAPs varying in both structure and visibility, mediated or moderated the relationship between gender and delinquency.

Like Hawdon's (1996; 1999) earlier work, many of the studies that examined gender and routine activities described above were cross-sectional in design, making it difficult to determine the causal direction of the relationships in question. This may be especially problematic when one considers the effects of peer interaction, as delinquent youth may be inclined to pursue encounters with friends that lack both structure and visibility (Crawford and Novak, 2008). Using data from the first and second follow ups of the National Education Longitudinal Survey (NELS:88), we assessed the effects of gender and a number of routine activity patterns on delinquency during the senior year in high school controlling for prior levels of deviant behavior.

Methods

Sample

The data used in this study were from the second and third waves of the National Education Longitudinal Survey of 1988 (NELS:88). The NELS data were collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in an effort to extend two earlier longitudinal studies (the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 and High School and Beyond). Unlike the latter two studies, data were collected from students before they began high school. The first wave of the study was conducted in 1988, when respondents were in eighth grade, with follow-up surveys administered in 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000. This comprehensive database includes demographic variables, academic and social-psychological indicators collected from students and their parents, as well as information from teachers and administrators about student and school characteristics.

Members of the 1988 eighth-grade cohort were selected for participation using a probability sampling strategy involving the selection of schools and then students from the schools included within the sampling frame. Each of the follow-up surveys included this group of core respondents as well as some more recently eligible students (e.g., 1990 high school sophomores who did not attend eighth grade in the U.S. in 1988), selected for participation using similar probability sampling techniques. In each case, students of Asian and Latino descent were over-sampled so that a sufficient number of minorities were included in the sample for researchers to make comparisons across racial and ethnic groups (National Center for Education Statistics, 1994).

In this study student data from the sophomore cohort were combined with data from the second follow-up, when students were seniors in high school. The sample weights and design effects provided by NCES (National Center for Education Statistics, 1994) were used to adjust for the complex stratified design of NELS.

Measures

Delinquency

A composite index of Time-2 delinquency, measured when students' were seniors in high school, served as our dependent variable. This

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