WHAT ADOLESCENTS DO OR SAY TO ACTIVELY INFLUENCE PEERS: COMPLIANCE-GAINING TACTICS AND ADOLESCENT DEVIANCE

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ABSTRACT

Objectives. Despite abundant evidence of deviant peer influence, it remains unclear precisely how adolescents try to exert such influence. What do adolescents do or say to actively encourage or discourage deviance among their peers? The aim of the current study is to explore the different ways in which adolescents talk each other into—or out of—such behaviors. **Methods.** We analyzed narratives about delinquency (N=37), substance use (N=131), and other deviance (N=107), which were written by adolescents (ages 14 to 18) in secondary schools. The study combines criminological perspectives on situational group processes (i.e., instigation, reinforcement, and provocation) with insights on compliance-gaining from other disciplines to inform a qualitative investigation of key influence tactics. **Results.** Our results demonstrate that adolescents use a number of tactics to encourage and discourage deviance. Many of these same tactics are used to promote prosocial behavior, though provocation-like tactics are largely used to encourage deviance. **Conclusions.** The range of reported compliance tactics extends well beyond what is captured in typical studies of peer influence, largely revolving around the broader themes of instigation and attempts to impact the anticipated risks, costs, and rewards of behavior. Ultimately, this study underscores the multi-faceted, socially interactive nature of peer influence.

KEYWORDS

Peer influence, group processes, delinquency, substance use, adolescence

Peer influence is central to the daily lives of adolescents (Rubin, Bukowski, and Laursen 2009; Warr 2002). On the one hand, this can be regarded as positive given that peers structure the social world in which adolescents develop their identity and gain valuable skills (Berndt 2002; Giordano 2003). On the other hand, peers can play a critical role in adolescents' involvement in delinquency and other maladaptive behaviors (Warr 2002). The relationship between having delinquent peers and delinquent behavior is well established over many studies spanning several decades (Gallupe, McLevey, and Brown 2019; Hoeben et al. 2016; McGloin and Thomas 2019; Sijtsema and Lindenberg 2018). Over those same decades, the "selection versus influence" debate about whether this relationship reflects deviant individuals selecting into peer groups or peers having a causal impact on deviance has endured (Glueck and Glueck 1950; Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990). It is clear that selection effects do exist (Gallupe et al. 2019; Osgood, Feinberg and Ragan 2015), but it is also clear that a peer influence effect is robust across a wide range of measurement, research design, and modeling approaches (McGloin and Thomas 2019). At this point, most scholars believe it is appropriate to view peer selection and peer influence as complementary, interactive processes that co-exist in the social lives of adolescents (Ragan 2020).

The majority of the studies on peer influence adopt a variable-based approach, leveraging data from survey methods to determine the extent to which peer deviance predicts subject deviance, net of key control variables (Pratt et al. 2010). Although this helps to establish a peer influence "effect", it generally leaves the underlying processes of influence unclear. Some researchers have attempted to capture these processes by measuring others' reactions to deviance (e.g. reinforcement contingencies) and admired models (Akers et al. 1979), differentiating between peer attitudes and peer behavior (Megens and Weerman 2012; Ragan 2014; Warr and

Stafford 1991), or distinguishing between socialization and opportunity effects (Haynie and Osgood 2005). Others have experimentally manipulated peer influence "treatments", either in laboratory settings or through vignette scenarios, offering some additional precision (Barnum and Pogarsky 2022; Gardner and Steinberg 2005; Gallupe et al. 2016; McGloin and Rowan 2015; Paternoster et al. 2013). Nevertheless, these studies still operate on researchers' assumptions of influence processes and offer little direct insight into the ways adolescents try to influence each other in real-life situations. Thus far, only a few (now foundational) studies on peer influence directly observed peer social interactions (e.g., Dishion et al. 1996; Short and Strodtbeck 1965).

Current criminological theories on the mechanisms of peer influence provide little direct insight on how adolescents are supposed to intentionally affect decision-making about deviant behavior. Consider Sutherland's (1947) classic assertion that criminal behavior is learned via communication: this focuses on what happens on the side of the recipient depending on the duration, priority, intensity, and the frequency of contact with the influencer. Yet how and when communication about deviant definitions is aimed at seeking compliance with deviant values is not explicitly discussed. Warr (2002) outlined fear of ridicule, status, and loyalty as core mechanisms of peer influence. Again, these mechanisms capture recipients' motives to comply with peers rather than information about influencers' verbal and nonverbal efforts to gain compliance. Recent literature syntheses on a broader range of peer influences argued that these are driven by adolescents' desire for compatibility with peers (Brechwald and Prinstein 2011; Laursen and Veenstra 2021); but spotlighting how and what sorts of attempts adolescents make to spark this desire would surely offer an important addition.

The current study seeks to make substantive gains in this domain by exploring the different strategies that adolescents use to persuade each other into and away from deviant behavior. First, we supplement criminological perspectives on peer influence with insights from other disciplines about ‘compliance-gaining tactics’, or strategies that individuals use to persuade others (Kellermann and Cole 1994; Marwell and Schmitt 1967). Then, we analyze narrative essays from adolescents aged 14-18 in which they describe experiences with peer influence aimed at encouraging—as well as discouraging—deviance. We also analyze attempts regarding non-deviant acts (i.e., prosocial and neutral behaviors) to determine how compliance tactics related to deviance compare to more general influence processes.

THE CRIMINOLOGICAL VIEW ON COMPLIANCE-GAINING

Many criminological peer influence studies over the past decades focused on establishing causal estimates to clarify whether the relationship between offending and deviant peers is real or spurious due to selection (McGloin and Thomas 2019). There is evidence for the notion that “birds of a feather flock together” (Glueck and Glueck 1950), but it is also well documented that peers exert influence over a range of deviant behaviors, even in the face of such selection. This influence can include long-term socialization and situational effects, as well as combinations thereof (Hoeben and Thomas 2019). Only few scholars in the field of criminology have sought to understand the tactics that adolescents use to tempt each other into deviant or delinquent behaviors. This is surprising because the relatively small body of literature that has studied youth “in action” has led to critical insights. Particularly, the study of Short and Strodtbeck (1965) offers an important example of a study that scrutinized the micro-workings of peer influence. Their field research in Chicago documented that inter-gang violence was often sparked by leaders’ concerns about their own social status as a result of group processes. Without the focus

on real-life social interactions—which can be more complex and interdependent than variable-research is able to illuminate—such insights would have been lost. Recently, Costello and colleagues adopted another interesting approach to understanding peer influence by turning to individuals' own reports of experiences (Costello and Hope 2016; Costello and Zozula 2018). They asked college students to provide written descriptions of times they were involved in and/or witnessed peer influence, either positive or negative. With these data, they could analyze more directly how young people attempt to exert peer pressure into or out of deviant behaviors. Among else, they found students most often just invited their friends to participate in particular behaviors, and that around a quarter of the accounts reported more coercive methods of compliance-gaining.

As mentioned, most theories on peer influence in criminology do not directly address the tactics that adolescents may use to persuade each other into deviant behavior. Nevertheless, the criminological literature does offer some guidance on potential tactics. We identify three general processes that relate to active compliance-gaining with deviant behavior: instigation, reinforcement, and provocation. These processes are not mutually exclusive, but may overlap and interact as adolescents make attempts to negotiate and cultivate conformity.

First, adolescents may seek compliance through *instigation*. As Hoeben and Thomas (2019:768) stated, "external instigation can make individuals aware of opportunities for crime—and even 'force' them to consider engaging in crime—regardless of whether their moral framework is favorable to crime." This instigation notion stems largely from work on co-offending. As multiple sources document (Piquero, Farrington, and Blumstein 2007; Reiss and Farrington 1991), a notable portion of delinquency is committed by groups (Warr 2002). Within such groups, "one person typically provides the idea and motivation for criminal action, and

others join” (McGloin and Nguyen 2012:464). As Reiss (1988) argued in his foundational piece on co-offending, some individuals will “start” an offense, whereas others follow. Several studies have now documented evidence of offenders reporting that other persons generated the idea for the deviant act, either a person who convinced others to follow (McGloin and Nguyen 2012; Rowan et al. 2022; Warr 1996) or someone who recruited others into criminal acts (Englefield and Ariel 2017). Recent experimental studies in criminology illustrate the power of instigation as a general peer influence tactic. For instance, Paternoster et al. (2013) designed a study in which a confederate highlighted an opportunity to cheat on a task to obtain more money, and in the experimental condition cheated in full view of participants. Similarly, Gallupe et al. (2016) designed conditions in which confederates stole gift cards in front of participants. In both studies, the confederates' actions underscored the importance of instigation. However, these studies had *researcher-designed* instigator behaviors; if and how adolescents naturally present ideas for deviance in an attempt to gain compliance remains unclear.

Second, individuals may seek compliance by trying to affect the expected outcomes of deviance, in other words, the anticipated positive or negative *reinforcements*. This concept comes from social learning theory (Akers et al. 1979; Burgess and Akers 1966), in which reinforcements are seen as processes underlying long-term socialization. However, anticipated reinforcements may also refer to short-term rewards and costs to affect immediate behavior. For example, Osgood and colleagues (1996) argued that socializing in unstructured and unsupervised settings is criminogenic for adolescents because peers offer an immediate appreciative and rewarding audience for deviant behavior. Further, there is empirical evidence showing that peers can actively shape the anticipated risks and costs associated with deviance (Matsueda, Kreager, and Huizinga 2006). In one of the conditions of the aforementioned Gallupe et al. (2016)

experiment that promoted theft, confederates stated that no one would “rat” them out, presumably indicating that the risk of getting caught was low. More recently, Barnum and Pogarsky (2022) experimentally manipulated the conditions of hypothetical vignettes in an online survey, with a key focus on peer statements about the certainty of formal sanctions and the likelihood of social costs. They found that these hypothetical communications were associated with participants’ own perceptions of sanction certainty and social costs. Nevertheless, we have little direct evidence on the tactics that adolescents in real-life use to ‘assist’ others in making decisions by influencing anticipated costs and benefits.

Finally, adolescents may try to gain compliance through *provocation*. This occurs when peers threaten each other’s status through insults, teasing, or challenges (Anderson 1999; Collins 2008; Short and Strodtbeck 1965)—in short, it is a form of interpersonal verbal aggression or taunt that can elicit a deviant or aggressive reaction (see also Crick and Dodge 1994). Status threats can directly provoke deviant acts to protect one’s social status and are particularly effective when made in the presence of an audience (Jacquin, Harrison, and Alford 2006; Thrasher 1927:293-94). The notion of provocation resonates in both general strain theory (Agnew 1992) and situational action theory (SAT; Wikström et al. 2012). Under general strain, provocations have the power to elicit angry responses, especially if perceived to be intentional and if the person highly values their identity and social standing. In SAT, provocations can elicit deviant reactions when individuals attribute antagonistic intentions to interpersonal "frictions.” Further, provocation fits into Warr’s (2002) discussion of how fear of ridicule and social exclusion can motivate delinquent behavior in an attempt to avoid these negative stimuli. Empirically, the observational studies by Short and colleagues (Hughes and Short 2005; 2014; Short and Strodtbeck 1965) illustrated the power of provocation. They observed ‘identity

attacks' (i.e., challenges, accusations, insults, degrading rejections) and 'signifying' (i.e., character contests through loud-talking, destroying somebody else with words) as acts preceding incidents of intra-gang violence. Such provocations can be objectively minor (e.g., bumping into someone, crossing a line during playful roughhousing), but nonetheless elicit reactions because they are perceived to carry the risk of diminished social reputation in the absence of a response. Next to these studies that focused on violence among at-risk groups, we know comparatively little about the types of provocations that are used in day-to-day interactions among 'mainstream' adolescents. One rare exception is a study by Mazefsky and Farrell (2005), who documented in a survey of rural middle school children that peer provocation predicted aggression. The question remains whether, and how, adolescents leverage provocations when seeking compliance.

COMPLIANCE-GAINING IN OTHER DISCIPLINES

In the fields of communication research, linguistics, and social psychology, various typologies have been developed on so-called 'compliance-gaining tactics' within, for example, conversations between romantic partners (Wade, Mogilski, and Schoenberg 2018), teachers and students (Pytlak and Houser 2014), and physicians and patients (Olynick, Iliopulos, and Li 2017). The concept of compliance-gaining refers to achieving change in individuals' immediate overt behavior, rather than in individuals' beliefs, attitudes, intentions, or motivations (Gass and Seiter 2014). The first scholars to develop a typology of compliance-gaining tactics were sociologists Marwell and Schmitt (1967), who built on French and Ravens' (1959) sources of power, Parsons' (1963) influence paradigm, Skinner's (1953) types of reinforcements and punishments, and techniques for augmenting outcomes by Thibaut and Kelley (1959). Marwell and Schmitt's (1967) study was the first to illustrate the wide range of tactics that are available to

influencers and it inspired a host of other studies that looked into different types of compliance-gaining tactics, situations in which these tactics are used, and individual characteristics of people who use them (for overviews, see Gass and Seiter 2014; Kellermann and Cole 1994). These studies resulted in a myriad of terminologies and nonexclusive conceptual definitions. In their meta-analysis, Kellermann and Cole (1994) were able to provide clarity by systemizing a list of 64 distinct compliance-gaining tactics.

Studies that have examined (explicitly or implicitly) compliance-gaining tactics in adolescent peer interactions about delinquency and substance use include the previously mentioned criminological study that gathered written accounts from a sample of college students (Costello and Hope 2016; Costello and Zozula 2018). Comparable studies on this topic outside of criminology relied on samples of college students (Checton and Greene 2011), on very small samples (Alberts, Miller-Rassulo, and Hecht 1991, $N = 33$; Alberts et al. 1992, $N = 69$), and/or focused exclusively on substance abuse (Alberts et al. 1991; 1992; Checton and Greene 2011; Hecht et al. 1997; Trost, Langan, and Kellar-Guenther 1999). With some exceptions (Checton and Greene 2011; Trost et al. 1999), these studies did not build on existing typologies of compliance-gaining tactics. This means that comprehensive studies of relevant tactics in peer conversations about delinquency and substance use are largely absent.

In the field of developmental psychology, the ground-breaking work by Dishion and colleagues (Dishion et al. 1996; Dishion, Andrews, and Crosby 1995) illustrated the subtleties of peer influence "in action" and linked these to deviant behavior. The researchers videotaped conversations among adolescent boys, then coded the content of these conversations (e.g., deviant or normative) and the social reactions to such talk. They observed that antisocial boys showed positive social reactions (e.g., laughter, expressing approval) to interpersonal discussions

of prior rule breaking and future plans for such acts, which predicted later problematic behavior captured in questionnaires. This work lead the researchers to document and build theory on how youth endorse and stimulate deviance in daily social interactions, commonly referred to as 'deviancy training'.

Insights into compliance-gaining from other fields can provide a welcome addition to the criminological literature by adding depth and nuance to the three overarching types of active peer influence that are currently distinguished in criminology (i.e., instigation, reinforcement and provocation). For example, an overall consensus in the compliance-gaining literature is that tactics are context dependent; not all tactics are appropriate or useful in every situation. Thus far, we do not know which tactics are uniquely used in conversations about deviance, let alone in peer-to-adolescent conversations about deviance. Peer-to-adolescent communication will likely be egalitarian and reciprocal, whereas in parent-to-adolescent communication, parents can use their authority by forbidding the behavior or by threatening with house-arrest or withholding allowances. Further, the work by Dishion and colleagues serves as a stark reminder that peer influence is not always unilateral, as the discipline typically models it, but instead can be reciprocal, based on social exchange (McGloin 2009). It can involve mutual reinforcement and even role reversals of the influencer and the recipient. Influence is an intricate aspect of communication such that any comment or response could be construed as influence, depending on the context and intention (Dishion et al. 1996). Especially in conversations among close friends that are expected to be symmetrical in nature (Berndt 2002; Kitts and Leal 2021), rivalry and dominance attempts are often—similar to any other type of conversation—likely to be mutual and reciprocal (Parker and Massey 2018).

THE CURRENT STUDY

In this study we built on the approach followed by Costello and Hope (2016) to collect written descriptions of youth's experiences with peer influence. However, we amend and complement their method in particular ways. First, we focus on how peers *actively* try to gain compliance. In some of Costello and Hope's descriptions of how respondents emulated admired individuals, it appears they engaged in deviance despite no clear action or encouragement from the model (i.e., passive influence): "This account is similar to many students' accounts of imitating the behavior of older kids who were perceived as 'cool', but *without any discussion of the older kids encouraging this behavior, pressuring the younger kids, or even inviting them to participate in the behavior*" (Costello and Hope 2016:24, emphasis added). Our goal here is to better understand how adolescents intentionally seek to influence each-others' decision-making around deviance.

Second, we focus exclusively on reported influence tactics and separate them from motives. Thus, we focus on the 'how' instead of on the 'why'. Some of the influence mechanisms that Costello and Hope (and other researchers) discussed concern influencers' motives to affect others' behavior (i.e., entertainment of onlookers, deviance loves company) and adolescents' reasons for going along with influence (e.g., emulation of admired models) instead of tactics that were used to exert influence. This does not reflect what peers do or say, but, rather, what adolescents think and feel in response to such input.

Third, we explicitly build on the literature about compliance-gaining tactics to organize our findings and categorize the responses from our respondents. As mentioned, most prior research has not used existing categorizations. Instead we try to get a comprehensive overview of the different ways in which adolescents try to influence peers regarding deviant behavior.

In our study, we examined narratives of a relatively large sample of adolescents (*N* = 384; 14 to 18 years old). To obtain these narratives, we asked adolescents to report how they experienced intentional peer influence either as the influencer or recipient. To analyze these accounts, we incorporated the 64 distinct tactics identified in the meta-analytic overview by Kellermann and Cole (1994), considering them in the context of a wide variety of delinquent, substance use, and other deviant behaviors. Our analysis is guided by the following research questions:

1. *What are the types of compliance-gaining tactics that adolescents report from their interactions with peers about deviant behavior?*
2. *To what extent do the reported compliance-gaining tactics fit with the criminological concepts of instigation, reinforcement, and provocation?*
3. *To what extent are the reported compliance-gaining tactics specific to situations in which deviant behavior is discussed as opposed to situations concerning prosocial or neutral behavior?*

DATA AND METHODS

Data were collected in the Spring of 2017 during civic education[1] classes at five secondary schools in the Netherlands. The schools were selected based on existing ties between the first author and the civics teachers. All students in the participating classes were asked to join the study. Participation was voluntary and required active consent from the students and passive consent from their parents. The research project was approved by the Ethics Committee for Legal and Criminological Research (CERCO) of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Respondents were invited to complete a short questionnaire on demographic characteristics and behavior, as well as an essay assignment about an experience of active peer influence. For this essay assignment, the respondents were asked to describe in as much detail as

[1] Civic education is part of the required curriculum at secondary schools in the Netherlands.

possible (in 100-250 words) a recent situation in which they tried to persuade others into certain behavior or in which they felt others were trying to persuade them.[2,3] Further, they were asked to describe the situation as if they were watching a movie-scene and to pay particular attention to the conversation. A translation of the assignment is included in Appendix A in the online supplemental materials. The original set-up included three assignments that were randomly assigned to the respondents (i.e., one on deviant behavior, one on prosocial behavior, and one on influence through social media), each respondent got one of these assignments. Although we asked about recent experiences, some respondents described situations from longer ago. Of the 102 deviant incidents for which some time period could be established, 13.7 percent occurred less than two weeks ago, 39.2 percent occurred more than two weeks but less than one year ago, and 47.1 percent occurred more than one year ago.

Of the 965 students who were invited for the study, 766 (79.4%) participated. Of these 766 respondents, 247 (32.2%) were excluded because they did not complete the essay assignment[4], 35 (4.6%) because they claimed to have never experienced peer influence, 35 (4.6%) because they described an incident that did not regard peer influence (e.g., influence from parents), 53 (6.9%) because the influence attempt was described with insufficient precision to distinguish compliance-gaining tactics (e.g., "My friends tried to persuade me"), and 12 (1.6%) because the described influence was likely passive (i.e., unintentional modeling by the influencer). Two respondents (0.3%) completed the essay assignment, but not the questionnaire. These two respondents were retained for the study. In total, responses from 384 respondents

[2] The Dutch word we used in the assignment was "overhalen", which translates to "persuade", "talk over", or "win over".
[3] Despite these instructions, 4.8 percent of the incidents were described from the perspective of a witness.
[4] Several respondents submitted placeholder texts (e.g., Lorem ipsum or a copy of the assignment) or typed that they could not think of an example. These submissions were treated as missing essays.

were included in the analyses.[5] The sample of 384 respondents was on average 15.8 years old (SD = 0.81, min = 14, max = 18), 64.3 percent female, predominantly from a native Dutch background (97.1%), and engaged in various levels of education.[6] The sample is not representative of the adolescent population in The Netherlands as it is overrepresented by females and individuals from native Dutch background, but the prevalence of delinquency and substance use in this sample is comparable to that in nationally representative samples (Van der Laan and Blom 2011; Van Laar et al. 2014).

In total, the 384 respondents described 455 incidents, of which 275 were about deviant behavior in some way. Multiple incidents were defined in essays where the author wrote about (1) multiple situations; (2) influence toward multiple behaviors to the extent these did not occur simultaneously; (3) a role reversal (e.g., author was first influencer and then recipient); or (4) changes in the focal influencers or recipients (e.g., first the whole class and then one friend). The incident descriptions often included multiple statements about how active peer influence took shape. Within the 275 incidents on deviant behavior, 653 statements were distinguished that could be meaningfully coded. Each of these statements included at least one, but often numerous tactics.[7]

Analytical Strategy

The narratives were coded and analyzed by four coders with the aid of ATLAS.ti 8 (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH 2019). The analyses were performed in Dutch and the excerpts were translated for publication by the first author. We conducted several

[5] Of all 766 participating respondents, 140 completed the questionnaire but did not provide a useful essay. We compared these 140 excluded respondents to the 382 respondents who had completed the questionnaire *and* whose essays were included in the final analyses. Excluded cases were more likely to be male and from lower-education, but there were no differences with regard to age, ethnicity, reported delinquency, or reported substance use.
[6] Of the respondents, 0.8% was engaged in special education ('praktijkschool'), 19.6% in pre-vocational education ('VMBO'), 45.2% in pre-college education ('HAVO'), and 34.5% in pre-academic education ('VWO').
[7] Thus, the data consist of statements that are nested within incidents, which are nested within essays.

rounds of coding and calibration to develop a consistent and complete codebook (see Appendix B in the online supplemental materials for an elaborate description). Initially, we looked for manifestations of instigation, reinforcement, and provocation and adopted insights from prior empirical work about active peer influence (Alberts et al. 1991; Costello and Hope 2016). But coding the narratives lead us to further insights about tactics and, thereby, to the literature on compliance-gaining tactics. The final version of the codebook is provided through an OSF online repository (https://osf.io/c6s3g/?view_only=70beca54d1494fbc938219e7956442d8).

Inter-coder reliability and inter-coder agreement scores, using Krippendorff's alpha (Krippendorff 2004), were determined at essay level rather than at incident level or statement level to avoid problems with unitization (Campbell et al. 2013). Before calculating the measures, the two final coders (first and second author) used 111 essays for training purposes. These 111 essays (28.9% of the total) were re-coded by both coders at the end of the project. Over the remainder of the coding process, inter-coder reliability was calculated after each batch of approximately 55 essays. All discrepancies were discussed to avoid coder drift and to reach negotiated agreement. In the end, the average inter-coder reliability was 0.681 across all codes and 0.624 for the tactic codes. The average inter-coder agreement was 0.964 across all codes and 0.956 for the tactic codes. Krippendorff (2004) suggests 0.67 as threshold for an acceptable level of agreement. A detailed overview of these scores is provided in the codebook. The findings presented in this paper are based on the coding after agreement.

RESULTS

The 455 incidents described by the 384 respondents included 37 examples of delinquency (e.g., vandalism, theft, violence), 131 examples of substance use (e.g., alcohol, tobacco, drugs),

and 107 examples of 'other deviance', such as skipping class and bullying.[8] We focus on the type of compliance-gaining tactics that were reported to either encourage or discourage such deviant behaviors.[9] Within this domain, we distinguished 34 different tactics based on the essays, which is slightly over half of all the tactics that were distinguished by Kellerman and Cole (1994). Table 1 addresses our first research question and provides an overview of all the tactics that were reported by the respondents, a brief explanation of each tactic, and the frequency with which the tactic was reported. The table illustrates that adolescents are versatile in how they attempt to persuade others to become involved in or refrain from deviant behavior, with some tactics being quite assertive and direct, whereas others are more subtle and indirect. Moreover, some tactics involve clear verbal communication, whereas others are more behavioral in nature.

—Table 1 about here—

—Table 2 about here—

These tactics were often used *in combination* (i.e., 75.8 percent of the incidents include multiple tactics). Also, in a substantial portion of the narratives (29.2 percent), there was indication of *persevering attempts* to gain compliance. For example, respondents would write that their friends "kept nagging" or "kept arguing" that they should engage in certain behavior, or they described that influence continued on multiple occasions while different tactics were used. The reported situations indicate that peer influence often starts taking shape *after an initial refusal*. Particularly, in 31.0 percent of the incidents, the recipient explicitly verbalized a refusal, after which the influencer(s) persisted. This is illustrated in the excerpt below.

[8] See Appendix C in the online supplemental materials for an overview of all behaviors.
[9] Appendix D in the online supplemental materials contains information on the tactics described in relation to prosocial behaviors (e.g., educational achievement) and neutral behaviors (e.g., buying things, going to social events).

> (15/F) (…) At one point they started to roll one [a joint] and she asked if I wanted to. I said no because I didn't think it was necessary. I had also never smoked until then. But because she kept nagging, like come on is fun. And don't be so pussy, it is funny. Eventually I did it. (…)

Further, 24 (6.3%) of the essays contained incidents in which respondents were subsequently influencer and recipient, or vice versa. In the example below, the author is first being influenced to skip class and then he persuades others to engage in the same behavior.

> (16/M) Our teacher wasn't there the other day so there was another teacher from another subject who would take over the class, generally we don't do anything at all in such classes. I intended to go but then I was called by someone that a big group wouldn't go, I answered that I wasn't sure if I would or wouldn't go but when he kept whining a bit I was OK with it so I didn't go either. After I hung up the phone I immediately told a few other classmates/friends and none of them went to that class either. In the end only 5 students attended the class. (…)

Most of the tactics we observed did match the concepts of instigation, reinforcement contingencies and, to a lesser extent, provocation (see our second research question). A handful of tactics did not appear to fit with these themes, these tactics are addressed in online Appendix E. Table 2 presents a numeric overview of how often each of the observed tactics were classified into the three themes. A large part of the compliance-gaining tactics were related to more than one of the themes, thus, although the tactics are mutually exclusive, the themes they reflect are not. Rather than review the observed tactics individually or according to their frequency, we discuss how they illustrate the themes of instigation, reinforcement, and provocation. Doing so provides an opportunity to glean insights and highlight the similarities and differences in tactics, as well as tie them to the three overarching criminological concepts.

Instigation

In the offender decision-making literature, activation of intent is generally attributed to the immediate needs and desires of the offender, such as money or the rush associated with substance use (Jacobs and Wright 1999). However, when adolescents instigate behavior, they

may urge others to contemplate the pros and cons of the behavior at hand, even if they would have otherwise not been aware of the opportunity, or would have immediately discarded the opportunity given their personal feelings about the behavior (Thomas and McCuddy 2019; Wikström et al. 2012). Moreover, peer instigation inherently introduces (social) costs and benefits that may be more varied and complex compared with a decision-making process that is purely instigated by internal motivations. This distinction between instigation by peers and instigation out of intrinsic desires is illustrated by the excerpts below. In the first example, a young male reports that he would not have used hard drugs if peers had not suggested it. In the second example, another young male claims that he thought it was a 'terrible idea' from the start, but reluctantly participated because of others' comments.

> (15/M) One day one of my friends said 'shall we do 4FMP [amphetamine-like drug] this weekend'. So that weekend we all slept at a friend and dissolved 4fmp in water and we swallowed it and it was a really fun evening but if my friends had not wanted to do it I would have never thought of it myself.
>
> (16/M) (…) When we arrived at the bicycle bridge they thought it would be fun to walk across the railing. I actually found it a terrible idea, but I didn't dare to say it. The other 3 already walked several meters and I was still on the footpath, but then they wanted me to walk on it as well. I was scared and didn't want to, but they called me a coward. So I climbed on the railing and started to balance, with a pounding heart. Under the bridge some cars stopped and watched. (…) When we walked back home, a police car drove by and recognized us, our parents were informed and he said it was very dangerous. We got a 'minus' on our record.

Within this broader category of instigation, we identified a number of specific tactics. We highlight five here, which collectively accounted for over half of all the reported manners in which adolescents tried to gain compliance from peers[10]. The most common tactic was when

[10] Table 2 shows that the tactics *taking the lead* (64.0%), *making available* (72.4%), *simple offer or request* (81.9%) and *challenge* (68.8%) were predominantly coded in combination with the instigation code. The tactic *assertive request* was most often coded as instigation (35.6%), but also frequently as reinforcement (16.9%).

adolescents *took the lead*.[11] We included examples of such behavioral modeling only when it was obvious from the essay that the influencer wanted others to follow because of immediate verbal prompts or because of things said in the preceding conversation. For instance, a 14-year-old male broke into a care facility for people with cognitive disabilities by following his friend "L" inside:

> (14/M) (…) he said to me: come shall we go to [name facility] (…) I said: is that a good idea To which he said: no but it is fun (…) when we arrived there we were walking around we crossed the kitchen and checked whether the door was open and that was the case they must have forgotten I did not think it was a good idea but L was already inside so I went too (…)

We observed this same pattern with substance use. For example, one young (15) female respondent notes how her friends stated their plans to 'pregame' by using substances at the start of an evening out and asked her to join in with them. Another 16-year-old female writes how at a friend's party, she lit a new cigarette for herself in front of others and then asked them whether they also wanted to smoke, which is a combination of *taking the lead* and making a *simple offer*.

Other forms of instigation, which generally accompanied influencer's behavioral modeling (i.e., taking the lead), included *assertive request or command*, *making available*, *simple offer or request*, and *challenge*. The first of these included forceful assertions that essentially sought to tell others what do to. This is borne out in phrases such as "take it" (16/F), "do it" (16/M), "try it" (14/F), "you have to do it" (17/M), or "you should not do it" (15/F). Respondents also described nonverbal forms of assertive instigation, in which somebody, for example, placed a cigarette or drink in their hands or mouth. *Making available* occurs when somebody provides items needed for engagement in the behavior (but does not command it).

[11] People can also unintentionally model behavior by simply engaging in it themselves whilst being unaware of others observing or imitating them. While coding, we distinguished between active and passive forms of 'taking the lead'. The examples of passive influence are excluded from the frequencies presented in this paper.

Often these were items related to substance use, such as importing cigarettes, alcohol, or drugs into social situations. In a few cases, this tactic was also used for acts of delinquency. In the example below, the respondent describes how a friend brought spray cans and thereby created an opportunity for vandalism.

> (17/M) I was with a group of friends of mine in [name city] and then P brought cans of spray paint. He pulled it out and started to spray some tiles then he persuaded me to spray a statue together. Apparently we were seen because after a while, when we had gone someplace else, the city guard game looking for us. Passersby had taken pictures so we couldn't get out of it, the police were called.

Simple offers or requests refer to low-key offers or open questions about whether or not the actor wants to engage. For example: "do you want to try?" (17/F), "do you want to join?" (15/F), or "shall we do this?" (14/M). These offers are formulated such that they can be seemingly easily declined, but they are sometimes combined with more explicit requests later in the conversation. Thus, even though peers may start out with seemingly non-committal proposals, they may follow-up with more explicit requests if the target does not comply.

> (16/F) (…) Then they asked if I wanted too, but I don't really have a reason to smoke I don't need it either. Then they asked again yeah don't you want to try and I again no haha I don't need it don't feel like it or something, then they tried to put the cigarette in my mouth for fun but I kept my mouth closed (…)

Challenges occur when influencers instigate deviant behavior as part of a game and/or as inherent to the rules of the game. In most narratives about such challenges, the loser had to engage in the proposed deviance, such as in drinking games or other behavior like the example below:

> (16/M) (…) there was a car that was crashed a bit further than where we slept. We had seen it a couple of times when we drove by but didn't do anything with it. When I did go with a friend to watch it. We played a game that I lost and then I had to throw something through the windshield of the car.

Reinforcement

In many of the narratives, we find evidence that peers attempt to influence others' behaviors by making explicit references to potential positive or negative consequences, which resembles the concept of reinforcement[12]. Generally, peers can actively add considerations that the decision-maker may not have thought of yet or affect the decision-maker's perceptions of certain risks, costs, and benefits (see also Hoeben and Thomas 2019). Though prior research on offender decision-making has suggested that decision-makers can update perceptions in response to others' experiences with legal punishment and punishment avoidance (Barnum and Pogarsky 2022; Pogarsky et al. 2004; Stafford and Warr 1993), as well as in response to potential social costs (Barnum and Pogarsky 2022; Thomas and Nguyen 2020), we find that peers can actively try to alter these perceptions. This can include making statements about the risk and severity of punishment ("no-one will notice"; "nothing will happen"), as well as about the payoff, intrinsic rewards, social rewards, and social costs of not going along. Further, peers not only mention such possible outcomes, but can also alter the costs and rewards directly due to their presence, their behavior, and by signaling their approval or disapproval. The reinforcement tactics we observed in the essays differ in content (emphasizing or minimizing costs or benefits) and direction (toward or away from behavior). Here, we will focus on the most-often reported categories, though Tables 1 and 2 provide more detail on the range of tactics.

Encouraging deviance – Emphasizing benefits of engaging. One of the key ways that adolescents seek to shape the perceived benefits of engaging in deviance is by *promoting the task*. When promoting the task, adolescents make statements about how pleasant or enjoyable the activity is or will be. These were often in the form of general remarks such as: "it will be fun" (16/M) or "it is funny" (15/M). Statements also regularly regarded references to the social nature

[12] As shown in Table 2, of the 34 tactics that were distinguished in total, 21 were predominantly (60 to 100%) coded in combination with the reinforcement contingency codes.

of the activity: “we do it together” (17/F). The respondents repeatedly used the Dutch word “gezellig”, which refers to a nice atmosphere and a ‘togetherness’. Non-social benefits were mentioned as well, often concerning the sensory experiences of substance use: “I told him that it is very nice and relaxing” (17/F), and “it will make you feel good” (14/M). In such cases, adolescents are trying to convince others that there will be clear and immediate psychic rewards if they participate in using illegal substances. Respondents also mentioned instrumental benefits, for example for stealing candy from a store by emphasizing that “it would get them free candy” (14/M), and for running a red traffic light by stating that “it would be faster” (16/F). In the example below, an older sister tries to persuade her younger sibling to use nitrous oxide by emphasizing the togetherness of the activity. She also tries to give her a secure feeling by promising to keep an eye on her and by mentally preparing her for the sensation.

> (17/F) Laughing gas? Sister: it is less damaging to your body than alcohol, you can check the internet. And you can stop whenever you want. Me: But I tried it before and then I thought I would hyperventilate! Sister: So now you know what it feels like. We do it too. And we keep an eye on you. Me: OK, one time then. But I still find it a little scary. What do you feel? Sister: you will simply laugh and the music will vibrate and your hands and face will tingle. Me: OK, but we do it together! Sister: Yes, together.

Encouraging deviance – Minimizing the costs of engaging. This approach can include both communications that attempt to downplay costs, as well as behavior that can actively reduce potential costs. On the second point, consider the situation described below, in which the influencer brought specific items (perfume and chewing gum) that could help to minimize the risk of detection for smoking. Assuming that the recipient did not bring such items himself, the influencer inherently changed the potential risk of detection:

> (16/F) (…) At one point I lit another one and with the package still in my hand I asked that guy if he wanted one too. He started to doubt. He said: ‘I don’t know man, I’m not allowed by my parents…I swear, if they smell that I smoked they’ll kill me.” To which I replied: ‘Ah dude, just do it. I have perfume and chewing gum with me, nobody will smell it then. It is nice if you join, and you’ll like it.’ I persuaded him to smoke one.

In most cases, however, adolescents communicated in ways *to disclaim the consequences, the task, or risk of detection*. *Disclaiming the (severity of) consequences* includes statements as to how the behavior will not have negative consequences, including minimizing any harm to health or safety. This was reported in relation to an array of behaviors, including substance use ("it won't kill you", 16/F; "you can quit whenever you want", 17/F), skipping class ("it is not such an important class anyway", 16/M), burglary ("nothing can happen", 16/M), crossing a red traffic light ("there is nothing heading this way", 16/F), and stealing ("they probably won't miss it", 14/M). This is also illustrated by the more detailed example below, which describes an incident whereby an adolescent tried to convince the subject to engage in vandalism:

> (16/M) My good friend and I were at a campsite on vacation. There was a storage facility with a lot of cardboard and broken objects. (…) My friend A looked around and saw all the broken stuff and thought this was a dump, that everything was for recycling. So he had the idea to smash 2 broken fuse boxes with wooden sticks that were there too. (…) I'm not a fan of breaking things or of what kind of vandalism whatsoever. A said: "This is a dump, as you can see because of all the broken things, and over there are 2 fuse boxes, shall we demolish them?" I didn't want to and said no, to which A said: "Come on, it is for the dump anyway, you can finally demolish something without getting into trouble. Then I thought: "Ok, he has a point, it doesn't matter, I'll try it." Then after we teared everything down we were reported by a woman who perceived our smashing as a noise disturbance, so we got into trouble and we discovered it was a storage facility. Luckily we were insured, but it was a real learning experience.

Disclaiming the task included statements indicating that the behavior at hand should not pose a problem. Examples were: "it is not as disgusting as you think" (16/M, on drinking alcohol; 15/F, on smoking), "it is easy" (14/M, on stealing candy from a store; 16/M, on jumping across a wide ditch), or "there is just a teensy bit of alcohol in it" as described in the excerpt below.

> (16/F) (…) Friend A made a mix of coke [softdrink] with a little bit of safari, because she likes this very much and friend C had never had it. She gave it to friend C. Friend C first said that she didn't want it, but friend A said that she barely drank anything and that she was far from being tipsy. Friend A also claimed that there was just a teensy bit of alcohol in it so it wouldn't do much harm. Friend C took the drink eventually.

Finally, *disclaiming the risk of detection* concerns statements as to why the recipient will not get caught. This was often reported in relation to skipping class ("the teacher won't take absences", 16/M) and substance use ("your parents won't find out", 15/F), but also in relation to delinquency. As an example, consider the case of a male adolescent who reported on how others urged him to engage in theft by speaking directly to the sanction risk:

> (14/M) (…) at one time they persuaded me to steal from [name drugstore chain]. they said things like come on it's not difficult you won't get caught you get free candy. eventually I did it and I didn't get caught but I never did it again afterwards. (…)

Encouraging deviance – Emphasizing costs of <u>not</u> engaging. The narratives make clear that adolescents also call attention to the social costs of not engaging in deviance in an attempt to persuade others to comply. A frequently reported tactic in this category is *negative affect* (with 7.8% of all statements). Using this tactic, influencers signal their immediate disapproval, which is a cost in itself and also indicates that non-compliance might be received with continuing or even worse negative affect. Respondents described experiences where peers ignored them (14/F), acted displeased (16/M), were nagging them (16/M), or became angry (15/F) if they would not go along with suggested deviant behavior. This could be communicated both implicitly and explicitly, as illustrated in the following example of a young female who reports how others tried to influence her drinking behavior:

> (14/F) (…) but I already had the sense that my friends were acting a little weird toward me when they talked about alcohol, I ignored it, but then it got more weird because suddenly they did not want to talk to me anymore. I asked what was wrong and they said they won't speak with someone who has never drank energy or something so I thought what if I drink it for just a moment. (…)

A similar and partly overlapping tactic that was quite often reported was *negative esteem*, in which influencers point out that, if the recipient does not go along, either the influencers themselves or others will think worse of them. One female respondent spoke directly to this point when reporting how others tried to persuade her to skip class:

> (16/F) (..) There were messages sent such as “you are a loser with a big L if you go to that class” and “if you go you are a sick ruiner, because everybody will suffer because of you”.

Discouraging deviance – Emphasizing costs of engaging. When considering the deviant situations described in the narratives, we found that tactics were not only applied to encourage deviant behavior; sometimes, adolescents try to talk each other *out* of such behavior. This is typically done by emphasizing the potential costs of engaging (tactics *warning*, *threat*, *benefit target*). For example, they can warn each other about a formal punishment (“the fine is 400 euro”, 16/M, on stealing a pen from a store), about being expelled (17/F, on bringing alcohol to school), about getting detention (16/F, on skipping class), about getting into trouble with the police (16/M, on vandalism), about getting into trouble more generally (17/M, on stealing a bike), and about feeling guilty afterwards (15/M, on stealing candy from a store). All of these tactics appear aimed at priming or calling attention to the potential negative outcomes associated with deviance, urging others to prioritize them when making a decision about the deviant act. Adolescents also called attention to the negative consequences for third parties (with the tactic *welfare others*), such as in the example where youth pointed at the risks for the nearby residential area:

> (15/M) New year’s eve, this year we were with a group of friends of about 8 men walking around and setting off fireworks, toward the evening around 4pm we were at a terrain with a dixie that’s such a toilet for construction workers there were 3 people of the group who wanted to put fireworks in it and then blow it up with illegal fireworks but the rest of the group disagreed including me because it was quite close to a residential area. Later that day we crossed it again when it was already dark, and again there was talk about the dixie they wanted to blow up and now they said that it was already dark and we could run away and that probably nobody would see it in the end it didn’t happen because the majority disagreed

Several narratives describe how adolescents help each other with kicking or preventing a tobacco habit, by warning about the consequences for their health: “it is dangerous and bad for your brain” (17/M).

In addition to warning about direct consequences or more distant consequences, adolescents can also discourage behavior by signaling their own immediate disapproval: “it is unwise” (16/F), “it is really asocial” (16/M), “you are crossing a line” (16/F), or, as in the examples below “it is not OK”, and “it is incredibly foolish”:

> (15/M) One day I went with friend P to store A and he wanted to steal loads of candy (that doesn’t have an alarm on it), because it was a kick to him and he really wanted sweets. I told him that it is not OK to steal stuff (…)

> (15/F) One of my best friends told me once that she had smoked. I told her that I thought it was incredibly foolish and that she shouldn’t do it more often. (…)

Thus, it would seem that adolescents are trying to both remind others about the negative risks and costs associated with behavior, while also urging them to weight these in making decisions.

Provocation

Whereas instances of instigation and reinforcement were prevalent and straightforward in the essays, this was not the case for provocation. Of the 653 statements reported in relation to deviance, 229 included instigation and 245 included reinforcement, but only 27 reflected provocation. Moreover, the dynamics of character contests and revenge actions as described in earlier qualitative studies among disadvantaged youth groups (Anderson 1999; Short and Strodtbeck 1965; Thrasher 1927) did not appear in the essays of the current study. Instead, we found relatively more mild instances of insults, ridicule, or threats about rejection or exclusion. In many cases, these tactics overlapped with instigation and reinforcement tactics; indeed, most provocation tactics emphasized the social costs of *not* engaging in behavior to encourage conformity with deviance.

Insults can be perceived as threatening the recipient's status in the eyes of the influencer and the potential audience, raising expectations that if a person does not comply and engage in deviance, they will suffer some sort of negative social consequence. The described insults were directed toward, for example, a lack of masculinity or courage ("you are a pussy/sissy/coward if you don't"), immaturity ("don't be such a crybaby", 16/F), or other undesirable characteristics ("you are really low and pathetic", 14/F; "don't be boring", 16/F). This type of provocation is in line with identity attacks and verbal aggression observed in earlier qualitative studies (Anderson 1999; Short and Strodtbeck 1965; Thrasher 1927), and can be seen in the two examples below about substance use and delinquency.

> (16/F) (…) Then friends S and K were already pouring a glass for me. At first I refused intensely. Friends S and K gave me the glass and said: don't be such a wimp and take a sip. I didn't want to come across as a wimp and took a sip. Then I felt a little guilty toward my parents.

> (15/M) Until they decided to enter an abandoned school building in [name city]. I knew this evening would not end well so I said in advance that I preferred not to enter the building. As a result they called me a sissy and pussy. Because of this I felt intimidated. And as a result I entered the building.

Even when the influencer is not successful in prompting deviance, adolescents still recognize the salience of provocation when it threatens social status:

> (17/F) (..) But in the evening it said on [name of the school's administrative platform] that only the 1st hour was cancelled and that the 2nd hour would be replaced by a different teacher. Everybody was super mad and yelled [in their WhatsApp group]: "We will all skip class", "No-one should go!" and "If you go, you screw us all". I don't like to skip class at all and I was already super happy that 1 hour was cancelled. So I said: "I think that I'll just go, it is on [name platform]". When I said that I received a lot of apps with texts like: "pussy", "you'll screw us all". This made me insecure and I started to doubt if I should simply skip the class. When I was almost at the point of deciding to skip class, there was sent an app in the group by a boy from my class. He sent: "Get over yourselves guys, we have 1 hour free that is already quite nice. I am attending and if you're smart you'll do the same." Because of this app I felt not as alone anymore and I decided to attend the 2nd hour the next day.

Are Compliance Tactics Specific to Deviance?

Scholars have suggested that the same processes underlying deviant peer influence are active with regard to non-deviant behavior (Sutherland 1947; Warr 2002). This prompted our third research question of whether the tactics we observed in relation to deviant incidents are reflective of more general tactics leveraged in all types of situations. By comparing narratives on prosocial and neutral behaviors (52 and 128 incidents, respectively) with those on deviant behaviors (275 incidents), we explored whether adolescents take a general approach in influencing their friends. Appendix D in the online supplemental materials provides an overview of the reported tactics in relation to deviant, prosocial, and neutral behavior.

Overall, we found that the majority of tactics were reported regarding deviant as well as non-deviant behavior, reflecting 'general' strategies of peer influence. For example, in the excerpt below about prosocial behavior, the influencer starts the conversation about the upcoming test, then hints about negative consequences of not studying ("I asked if she wanted to pass this grade") and claims she would have already started studying (tactic *personal expertise*).

> (15/F) I was apping with friend X on WhatsApp. A week later we had a biology test. I knew that friend X wasn't doing well in biology. So I asked if she had started studying yet. She said she hadn't started. I asked why she hadn't started and then she said that she didn't feel like it and preferred to watch movies on Netflix. Then I asked if she wanted to pass this grade. She said yes of course. I said that if I were her I would have started studying a long time ago. She said that I was actually right. Then she started to study instead of Netflixing. She eventually got a good grade.

In the example below of influence toward neutral behavior, the influencer instigates, emphasizes the benefits ("come on [it] is fun"), and minimizes potential costs ("it won't take long").

> (16/F) (..) She asked: "Hey, do you want to go to the city for shopping together?". I did not feel like it at all, it was December 5th [national holiday] and at home we would have dinner early. I was in doubt. On the one hand it seemed nice, but on the other hand the other friend would then have to cycle home by herself. When friend X saw my doubts she said: "Come on is fun, it won't take long and then you will be home in time anyway" and "pleaaaase?". Eventually I said yes.

However, some tactics are clearly favored in deviant situations. When trying to convince others to engage in deviant behavior, there are likely more moral barriers to overcome than in situations of prosocial or neutral behavior (Wikström et al. 2012). Studies have confirmed that adolescents are less susceptible to peer influence when they hold moral objections against the targeted behavior (Bernburg and Thorlindsson 2001; Gerstner and Oberwittler 2018; Thomas and McCuddy 2019). Thus, stronger peer influence may be necessary to persuade others toward behaviors that deviate from social norms. In line with this idea, we see that attempts to encourage deviance include efforts to minimize potential costs (e.g., *disclaimer risk,*: "you will not get caught"; *disclaimer severity of consequences: "*nothing can happen") that are least often reported in relation to prosocial behavior, likely because those costs will not be relevant for prosocial behavior. Further, the provocation tactic *negative esteem*, which emphasizes the social costs of *not* engaging (e.g., "don't be boring"), was reported over twice as often in deviant incidents compared to in the neutral or prosocial incidents. *Threats* about rejection or exclusion and *challenges* were nearly exclusively reported in deviant incidents. These latter tactics all involve some degree of provocation. As Warr (2002) notes, social status is of tantamount importance during adolescence and fear of ridicule or tests of loyalty are "extraordinarily potent compliance mechanisms" (p. 55). Trying to provoke action by highlighting or introducing social costs for not complying may be necessary to counteract potential hesitations on the part of the recipient when it regards deviant behavior, whereas this may not be needed in case of prosocial or neutral behavior.

DISCUSSION

Despite the central role of peers in criminological theory, relatively few scholars have leveraged qualitative approaches to shed light on the underlying processes of peer influence

(McGloin and Thomas 2019). Classic examples, which we still draw from today, include Shaw's (1931; 1966) narratives, along with Whyte's (1943) and Short and Strodtbeck's (1965) works. This foundational research (see also Dishion et al. 1995; 1996) offered critical insights into the dynamics of group influence. As Matsueda and Lanfear (2020) argue, this was largely due to a decision to inductively discover causal mechanisms by studying youth in action and focusing on situations as the units of analysis. This contrasts with how research on peer influence has advanced in the past several decades, largely embracing deductive, variable-based approaches with quantitative data. Such work has undoubtedly led to advancements in our empirical and theoretical understanding, but surely the discipline would benefit from complementary qualitative research to inform our understanding of how adolescents actively try to influence each other in the real world.

We built on literature from disciplines other than criminology and more recent attempts to gather open-ended data on peer influence (e.g., Costello and Hope 2016) to shed light on compliance-gaining tactics in deviant situations. Our analytic approach, inviting direct reports from youth, sought to identify emergent themes in how adolescents make attempts to intentionally influence their peers. The written narratives clearly demonstrate that peers take efforts to explicitly influence decision-making about immediate deviant behavior. These efforts can involve multiple tactics and even influencer-recipient role reversals, highlighting the interactive nature of social exchange. Further, we found that many tactics clustered within the overarching themes of (1) trying to instigate deviance, (2) attempting to affect perceived reinforcement contingencies associated with deviant behavior, and, to a lesser degree, (3) engaging in provocation. This offers a richer view of influence than we typically document in variable-based quantitative analyses and holds theoretical implications.

First, our study underscores Warr's (2002) statement that a key challenge for criminologists studying peer influence is to capture the breadth of potential generative processes. Our observations about the ways in which adolescents encourage and discourage deviant behavior are more extensive than what is generally documented in the criminological literature, bringing together themes from co-offending, decision-making, social learning, and subcultural research. Moreover, these tactics are not mutually exclusive or singular. Indeed, we observed that adolescents would often use several tactics in their persistent attempts to seek compliance and that there is overlap in the processes of instigation, reinforcement, and provocation: many of the reported compliance-gaining tactics were used to influence peers in more than one way. Thus, what is defined as instigation, reinforcement, or provocation in fact refers to a myriad of manners in which peers try to actively influence each other into or away from deviance.

Even though the range of tactics we observed was more expansive than what typical peer influence studies capture, this does not mean we need to appeal to theories outside criminology to understand these mechanisms. Instead, we can view our results as commenting on core theoretical tenets. For instance, Sutherland (1947) argued that individuals learn deviance through a "process of communication", but there is little discussion of how adolescents specifically use communication strategies to exert deviant influence. Our study provides specific examples that demonstrate how varied and multifaceted such communication can be. Moreover, much consideration of differential association processes is oriented around long-term socialization, in which underlying norms and values are assumed to be affected. The interactions we observed may certainly affect youths' attitudes over time and their enduring orientation towards certain (deviant) behaviors, but they are clearly rooted in the immediate situation, directed towards influencing behavior in the current context, oftentimes giving others an "excuse" to deviate from

their longer-term beliefs or concerns. In this way, our findings are reminiscent of Sykes and Matza's (1957) techniques of neutralization, both in principle and in some specific techniques. Just as they argued more than 65 years ago, we observed denials of certain social costs, and the power of appealing to higher loyalties in the form of social relationships, status, and expectations being leveraged to seek compliance. At the same time, we observe tactics that extend beyond Sykes and Matza's discussion. Perhaps most notably, we documented that adolescents not only try to tempt others by neutralizing the costs or setting up implicit or explicit social expectations that urge them to sidestep conventional norms, but that they also communicate about the psychic and social benefits of deviance, making the act itself more attractive and tempting (see also Katz, 1988).

Our results also provide commentary on Sutherland's claims that deviance is learned via the same processes as all behavior. Although we focused on attempts at deviant peer influence, it was notable that most tactics were documented both for situations involving deviance and those regarding prosocial and/or neutral behavior. This does not mean that tactics are equivalently used for all behavior; indeed, we found that in deviant situations adolescents were most likely to disclaim the risks and consequences of detection and to engage in provoking behavior. Interestingly, the provocations we observed in the narratives were not consistent with the processes of character contests and retribution that have been outlined in earlier work on subcultural theory and street culture among disadvantaged youth (Anderson 1999; Short and Strodtbeck 1965). There are several potential explanations for why our observations on 'provocation' differ from that in earlier work. Our study included secondary school students who engaged in average levels of delinquency and substance use, whereas many of the earlier works focused predominantly on disadvantaged youth. Exemplary is that our essays captured only 3

incidents of violence, whereas the previous works describe character contests and revenge actions most often in relation to violence. Further, these earlier qualitative (ethnographic) studies often make note of nonverbal forms of provocations such as the 'accidental bump', 'standing in the way', 'eye contact' (staring), and 'invasion of personal space' (Collins 2008; Katz 1988; Jackson-Jacobs 2013). Perhaps our method of written narratives was less suitable for capturing such nonverbal, more subtle, influence tactics. Relatedly, prior works generally examined intra-group provocation (e.g., identity attacks or escalated "horsing around" among friends, Hughes and Short 2005) alongside inter-group provocation (e.g., "jumping" members of a rival gang on the pretext of revenge, Hughes and Short 2005), whereas our examples only included instances of friends provoking each other into collaborative deviance, thus, of intra-group provocation. In other words, we observed provocation by potential accomplices, not by potential victims.

Next, our findings underscore the recent call for decision-making perspectives in criminology to more fully integrate peer influence (Hoeben and Thomas 2019). There has been a growing recognition that offender decision-making is embedded in social context, but our findings offer unique insight. We know from prior work that individuals update risk perceptions because of friends' experiences with punishment (Matsueda et al. 2006; Pogarsky et al. 2004; Stafford and Warr 1993), but our work points to purposive attempts by adolescents to explicitly change others' decision calculus by affecting the risks, costs, and rewards associated with a deviant act. In light of Barnum and Pogarsky's (2022) recent finding that similar communications by a hypothetical peer in a vignette do affect the perceived consequences of deviance, this speaks to a potentially powerful way adolescents influence each other. Further, whereas there are several models of socially interdependent decision-making (e.g., Granovetter 1978; von Neumann and Morgenstern 1944), these focus on how individuals navigate decisions

when considering other actors. Our study documents situations in which youth intentionally try to manipulate the decision-making of others. Moreover, our study illustrates that peers' verbalizations of pros and cons are linked with signals about their own approval or disapproval of the behavior at hand. For example, when peers display positive affect (i.e., enthusiasm) or mention benefits of engaging, they can create an atmosphere that is difficult to resist or 'spoil' through non-conformity. Peers can also encourage deviance by minimizing potential costs and, thereby, communicate that they would be disappointed if the other would not go along. In other words, when zooming in on the actual conversations that take place among adolescents preceding a deviant act, the transmission of rationalizations and immediate social reinforcement are highly intertwined. This reality is much more complex than acknowledged in most decision-making studies.

Of course, all of these implications are bounded by the attributes of this study. The essay narratives offered important insights into adolescents' experiences, but they also come with limitations regarding internal validity. Given the retrospective nature of the narratives, they are unlikely to provide a full account of the exact conversation that took place (Greene, Smith, and Lindsey 1990). Thus, low prevalence of certain tactics in the essays could indicate that these tactics are scarcely used in adolescents' communication around deviance, but it could also indicate these tactics are less likely to be remembered or recognized as influence. A comparison of the reported tactics across recall period (see online Appendix F) shows that provocation-like tactics are more prevalent in stories of incidents that occurred over a year ago. It may be that provocation is so salient that details of the experience are etched in adolescents' memory, even years later. Or perhaps more psychological distance or maturity is required before adolescents realize they experienced provocation in interactions with friends. In contrast, recent stories (i.e.,

about incidents occurring less than two weeks ago) more often included the tactics *making available*, *promoting the task*, *disclaiming risk of detection*, and *warning*. Possibly, these tactics are easily forgotten over time.

Respondents also may have been less likely to describe situations around which they felt guilt or shame. Of the described situations on encouraging prosocial behavior or discouraging deviant behavior, 69.4 percent was written from the perspective of influencer, whereas, of the incidents on encouraging deviance, only 16.5 percent was written from the perspective of influencer. These numbers suggest that social desirability or avoidance of painful memories may, despite the measures we took[13], still have affected the narratives. Further, the reported incidents are unlikely to be fully representative of all situations of peer influence that adolescents encounter in their daily lives. Thus, the selection and articulation of the stories will likely have been shaped by the current feelings and circumstances of the adolescents sharing them, as well as by wisdom of hindsight (Presser and Sandberg 2015). We observed small but interesting differences in the types of tactics that were reported across author perspectives (see online Appendix G). For example, while negative affect is reported in nearly 10 percent of the statements written by recipients, it is reported in only 3.4 percent of the statements by influencers. Challenges are reported in 8.9 percent of the statements by witnesses, but much less often by influencers (2.9 percent) and recipients of influence (1.6 percent). This underscores the need for including multiple perspectives when scrutinizing mechanisms of peer influence.

Next, the sample was not selected randomly, nor was it representative of the (Dutch) adolescent population. The sample is overrepresented by females (64.3%) and individuals of

[13] To limit bias due to social desirable answering, respondents were asked to use pseudonyms in their essays and to submit their essays through an online system that separated their submissions from any identifying information. That way, the teachers nor the researchers could track down who wrote what. This was explicitly and repeatedly communicated to the respondents in both oral and written form.

native Dutch descent (97.1%). Also, not all participating respondents provided us with useful essays, possibly because the essay assignment was too difficult or too much of a time investment. We found that males and individuals from lower-educational levels were significantly less likely to provide useful essays, possibly because they struggled with putting their experiences in writing. This limitation may be overcome in future research by asking respondents to share their stories orally and to videotape these narratives for further assessment. Finally, it is not possible to rule out bias in the *interpretation* of the events that were described by the adolescents. We tried to analyze the narratives in an objective manner as much as possible, for example by having all essays coded by two independent coders. Nevertheless, the coders may have misinterpreted some of the events and processes from their background as adult, female, white, and educated persons.

Such limitations suggest that a key avenue for future research would be to seek triangulation by appealing to other research designs. Virtual reality may provide an exciting opportunity to study the tactics of peer influence, as one could ask youth to do their best to persuade another (virtual) adolescent to engage in some deviant act (van Gelder 2023). Taking a cue from Dishion et al. (1996), researchers may also consider revisiting the method of video-recording interactions among youth in order to objectively code real-time influence tactics rather than rely on retrospective accounts. Of course any video-taped sessions are unlikely to involve actual acts of delinquency or serious deviance of any sort (similar to lab-based experiments in criminology, see McGloin and Thomas 2013). Future researchers may also want to consider a social network survey approach that allows for the combining of influencer and recipient perspectives. Researchers might ask adolescents to report on influence activities over the past week in which their in-school friends were recipients and/or influencers; by matching these

reports via friendship nominations, it would be possible to determine the extent to which youth identify the same influence incidents and, for those occasions in which they do, obtain multiple viewpoints and perspectives on the social interaction.[14] Such efforts would be further facilitated by questionnaire items that prompt specific influence activities, for which our insights could form the input (e.g., one could question adolescents about peers emphasizing intrinsic or social benefits of delinquent acts). Specific prompts may help avoid recall bias and ambiguity, because not all adolescents may recognize these behaviors as influence.

Next, future research would offer a more complete view of peer influence in the real-world by also capturing *passive* peer influence. Our interest here was on the intentional tactics adolescents use to gain compliance (whether successful or not), but adolescents can also unintentionally model behavior or affect the perceived risks, costs and benefits by their simple presence (Hoeben and Thomas 2019). Our data were less suitable to capture passive influence. Generally, retrospective accounts may not be appropriate because passive influence is arguably more subtle and adolescents may not be aware of the processes at work. Also, we asked the respondents explicitly to focus on active influence when describing situations. The intentionality of the influencer poses an additional problem. Because most of the essays (67%) were written from the perspective of the recipient, it is often unclear whether the influencers intended for others to follow. (None of the influencers wrote their influence had been unintentional.) We interpreted behavioral modeling as intentional (i.e., as active influence) if it was accompanied by verbal prompts, but a lack of *reported* verbal prompts does not automatically indicate their actual absence during the incident. This makes it difficult to establish from written narratives that the influence occurred unintentionally, i.e., passively.

[14] We thank an anonymous Reviewer for this observation.

While the current study explicitly focuses on influence *tactics* rather than on *motives* for exerting influence, thus, on the ‘how’ instead of the ‘why’, we recognize that both elements are central to the influence process. Earlier work (Costello and Zozula 2018; Ryan 2023) suggests that young adults attempt to pull peers into their deviant acts because they expect company will improve their own experience: It allows them to share in the fun, plus, they may feel bothered by peers’ non-participation (e.g., “it kills the vibe”). Additional reported motivations for exerting deviant influence were to help the other (e.g., to relax, to have fun, to have a new experience, to not feel left out), for their own amusement (e.g., seeing a friend act silly), because they needed help (e.g., the other has more experience, access to targeted items), or because they didn’t want to be the (only) one to commit the act out of a fear of getting caught (Costello and Zozula 2018; Ryan 2023). Although we did not conduct systematic analyses on this topic, we can confirm that similar motives were mentioned by our adolescent sample.

Finally, it would be insightful if future work could investigate the conditions under which compliance-gaining attempts are successful. Our data were clear that youth did not always comply with influence attempts, though we did not delve further into the contexts of such situations or respondents’ perspectives on why they were or were not successful. Are certain tactics or situations so tempting or “high stakes” they inevitably compel conformity? Does having an audience change matters (Jacquin et al. 2006)? Is there a cascade effect whereby seeing others join in changes the perceived utility (McGloin and Rowan 2015)? What is the role of the relationship between influencer and recipient (Bot et al. 2005)? Such questions highlight the conditionalities that may operate to make compliance tactics more or less compelling. Real life social interactions and exchanges can be interdependent and complex, but understanding

these thresholds and how tactics can result in differential outcomes would only offer improved understanding of the realities of peer influence.

In the end, this study sought to complement existing work on peer influence by attending to the tactics whereby adolescents try to persuade their peers toward and away from deviant behaviors. By using data from adolescents about real-life experiences with peers, we uncovered that they leverage a variety of approaches to gain conformity. Moreover, these tactics often extend beyond what peer influence research typically accounts for in its measures and models. This serves as a reminder that a more full understanding of the mechanisms underlying peer influence requires an array of methodologies and information sources. Insight often comes from letting the data speak for themselves.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online

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TABLES

Table 1

Reported compliance-gaining tactics in relation to deviance.

Tactic	Frequency	%	Description
Instigation			
Taking the lead	178	27.3	Taking the lead or setting the example
Assertive request/ command	118	18.1	Forcefully stating (demanding or commanding) what one wants
Making available	87	13.3	Providing items or creating the opportunity needed for engagement in the behavior
Simple offer/ request	83	12.7	Making low-key offers or posing open questions about whether or not a person wants to engage
Suggestion	20	3.1	Making open proposals for actions (rather than posing questions)
Challenge	16	2.5	Challenging the recipient through comments characterized by competition, such as games, dares, or bets
Reinforcement: Encouraging deviance – Emphasizing benefits of engaging			
Promote task	44	6.7	Stating how pleasant or enjoyable an activity is or will be
Benefit target	17	2.6	Explaining how the activity would benefit the recipient
Benefit self	8	1.2	Explaining how the activity would benefit the influencer
Promise	7	1.1	Making promises about benefits or rewards
Positive affect	4	0.6	Acting friendly and enthusiastic, signaling approval
Compliment	4	0.6	Praising the recipient
Positive esteem	2	0.3	Making claims about how the influencer or others will positively view the recipient after the activity
Reinforcement: Encouraging deviance – Minimizing costs of engaging			
Nature of situation	29	4.4	Referring to the appropriateness of the behavior due to the situation or existing rules or customs
Disclaimer task	26	4.0	Downplaying the effort that is needed for the activity
Disclaimer severity	23	3.5	Downplaying possible harm or negative consequences of the activity
Disclaimer risk	14	2.1	Downplaying the risk of getting caught
Personal expertise	6	0.9	Referring to the influencer's credibility, experience, or trustworthiness
Disclaimer time	2	0.3	Downplaying the time that is needed for the activity

Percentages refer to the number of statements in which the tactics were reported (N = 653 statements). The tactics were often reported in combination. The tactics are listed under the category to which they were reported most frequently, but please note that most tactics are related to more than one category.

Continuation of Table 1

Reported compliance-gaining tactics in relation to deviance.

Tactic	Frequency	%	Description
Reinforcement: Encouraging deviance – Emphasizing costs of not engaging			
Negative affect	51	7.8	Acting unfriendly and displeased, signaling disapproval
Negative esteem	35	5.4	Signaling that the influencer or others will think worse of the recipient if they do not go along
Invoke norm	10	1.5	Stating descriptive norms to remind the recipient that it concerns a joint 'normative' activity
Surveillance	3	0.5	Indicating to the recipient that the influencer is aware and observant of what they do
Reinforcement: Discouraging deviance – Emphasizing costs of engaging			
Warning	28	4.3	Alerting the recipient to possible negative consequences of not going along
Value appeal	9	1.4	Appealing to central and joint values or moral standards
Welfare others	8	1.2	Referring to the welfare of the influencer or others
No benefits	5	0.8	Emphasizing that the activity has no benefits or that the benefits do not outweigh the costs
Provocation			
Threat	11	1.7	Making explicit threats about rejection or exclusion
None of above categories			
It is up to you	8	1.2	Telling the recipient that the decision is up to them
Cooperation	8	1.2	Offering help and cooperation with activities or tasks
Why or why not?	7	1.1	Making the recipient justify (in)action by asking them why they would or would not do it
Equity	5	0.8	Pointing out that it would be fair or just to comply
Debasement	3	0.5	Acting pitiful and pleading
Compromise	2	0.3	Making a concession to get the recipient to comply

Percentages refer to the number of statements in which the tactics were reported (N = 653 statements). The tactics were often reported in combination. The tactics are listed under the category to which they were reported most frequently, but please note that most tactics are related to more than one category.

Table 2
Extent to which the compliance-gaining tactics can be classified as instigation, reinforcement, and provocation (N = *653 statements).*

Tactic	Total	Instigation[a]		Reinforcement[b]		Provocation[c]		Not categorized	
	Freq	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Instigation									
Taking the lead	178	114	64.0	24	13.5	3	1.7	37	20.8
Assertive request/ command	118	42	35.6	20	16.9	4	3.4	52	44.1
Making available	87	63	72.4	4	4.6	1	1.1	19	21.8
Simple offer/ request	83	68	81.9	4	4.8	1	1.2	10	12.0
Suggestion	20	19	95.0	1	5.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Challenge	16	11	68.8	3	18.8	5	31.3	-3	-18.8
Reinforcement: Encouraging deviance – Emphasizing benefits of engaging									
Promote task	44	7	15.9	43	97.7	0	0.0	-6	-13.6
Benefit target	17	4	23.5	16	94.1	0	0.0	-3	-17.6
Benefit self	8	4	50.0	7	87.5	0	0.0	-3	-37.5
Promise	7	0	0.0	6	85.7	0	0.0	1	14.3
Positive affect	4	1	25.0	4	100.0	0	0.0	-1	-25.0
Compliment	4	0	0.0	4	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Positive esteem	2	0	0.0	2	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Reinforcement: Encouraging deviance – Minimizing costs of engaging									
Nature of situation	29	9	31.0	13	44.8	1	3.4	6	20.7
Disclaimer task	26	0	0.0	20	76.9	1	3.8	5	19.2
Disclaimer severity	23	1	4.3	23	100.0	0	0.0	-1	-4.3
Disclaimer risk	14	0	0.0	14	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Cooperation	8	2	25.0	1	12.5	0	0.0	5	62.5
Personal expertise	6	1	16.7	4	66.7	0	0.0	1	16.7
Disclaimer time	2	0	0.0	2	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Reinforcement: Encouraging deviance – Emphasizing costs of not engaging									
Negative affect	51	4	7.8	44	86.3	16	31.4	-13	-25.5
Negative esteem	35	0	0.0	35	100.0	21	60.0	-21	-60.0
Invoke norm	10	2	20.0	6	60.0	0	0.0	2	20.0
Surveillance	3	0	0.0	2	66.7	0	0.0	1	33.3

The tactics were often reported in combination. The tactics are listed under the category to which they were reported most frequently, but please note that most tactics are related to more than one category.
[a] Based on the umbrella code 'instigation'.
[b] Based on the category codes 'emphasizing/minimizing costs/benefits' and 'costs/benefits of engaging/not engaging'.
[c] Based on the umbrella code 'provocation'.

Continuation of Table 2

Extent to which the compliance-gaining tactics can be classified as instigation, reinforcement, and provocation (N = 653 statements).

Tactic	Total	Instigation[a]		Reinforcement[b]		Provocation[c]		Not categorized	
	Freq	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Reinforcement: Discouraging deviance – Emphasizing costs of engaging									
Warning	28	2	7.1	25	89.3	0	0.0	1	3.6
Value appeal	9	2	22.2	8	88.9	0	0.0	-1	-11.1
Welfare others	8	0	0.0	8	100.0	1	12.5	-1	-12.5
No benefits	5	0	0.0	5	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Provocation									
Threat	11	0	0.0	11	100.0	5	45.5	-5	-45.5
None of above categories									
It is up to you	8	0	0.0	3	37.5	0	0.0	5	62.5
Cooperation	8	2	25.0	1	12.5	0	0.0	5	62.5
Why or why not?	7	1	14.3	2	28.6	0	0.0	4	57.1
Equity	5	1	20.0	1	20.0	0	0.0	3	60.0
Debasement	3	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	100.0
Compromise	2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	100.0

The tactics were often reported in combination. The tactics are listed under the category to which they were reported most frequently, but please note that most tactics are related to more than one category.

[a] Based on the umbrella code ‘instigation’.

[b] Based on the category codes ‘emphasizing/minimizing costs/benefits’ and ‘costs/benefits of engaging/not engaging’.

[c] Based on the umbrella code ‘provocation’.