CRIME AND COERCION: A TEST OF CORE THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS

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In his recent Crime and Coercion*, Colvin contends that individuals exposed to coercive environments develop social-psychological deficits that enhance their probability of engaging in criminal behavior. Using a sample of 2,472 students from six middle schools, the authors test core propositions of Colvin's differential coercion theory. Thus, they assess whether delinquent involvement is related to four coercive environments: parental coercion, peer coercion, a coercive school environment, and a coercive neighborhood environment. The authors also assess whether the influence of these coercive environments on delinquency is mediated by four social-psychological deficits: coercive ideation, anger, school social bonds, and parental social bonds. The analysis revealed fairly consistent support for the core propositions of differential coercion theory. Thus, they found that students exposed to coercive environments develop social-psychological deficits and therefore engage in relatively serious delinquent behavior.*

Keywords: *coercion; coercive ideation; crime*

The theme that coercion is a cause of crime has emerged in the criminological literature over the past two decades (Agnew 1992; Athens 1994; Colvin 2000; Colvin and Pauly 1983; Hagan and McCarthy 1997; Patterson 1982; Regoli and Hewitt 1994; Tittle 1995). *Coercion* can be defined as a force that compels or intimidates an individual to act because of the fear or anxiety it creates (Colvin 2000; Etzioni 1970). This force can emerge from impersonal sources, such as violent conflict among gangs that create a coercive neighborhood environment, or from interpersonal sources in which an

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individual coerces another for purposes of compliance, such as parents harshly punishing their children.

Set forth in *Crime and Coercion*, Colvin's (2000) "differential coercion theory" represents the latest and perhaps most significant attempt to connect coercive forces to the production of crime and delinquency. Although only recently published, this perspective has earned considerable attention and promises to shape thinking about crime into the foreseeable future.[1] Despite this growing recognition, the empirical validity of Colvin's perspective remains to be determined. In this regard, the purpose of our research is to present the first systematic assessment of the core propositions of "differential coercion theory."

CRIME AND COERCION

Few theoretical ideas in criminology emerge as fresh inventions—so startlingly new that they represent a fundamental paradigm shift and induce a "scientific revolution" (see, more generally, Kuhn 1962). As Merton (1973) notes, as theoretical models are "discovered," it is virtually certain that many of the key insights have been adumbrated—that is, anticipated in one form or another (and even, on rare occasions, independently discovered).[2] In this context, *Crime and Coercion* (Colvin 2000) is not gaining scholarly notice because it is the first theoretical explication of the criminogenic effects of coercion. Rather, *Crime and Coercion* is being recognized because it incorporates the insights from previous works (including Colvin's own writings), systematically identifies the multifaceted features of coercion, and explicates how they lead to criminal involvement.

Accordingly, we first review how the connection between crime and coercion has become, in Colvin's (2000:9) words, an "emergent" idea in criminology. Second, we review the theoretical foundation of Colvin's work highlighting the distinctive premises of differential coercion theory. Third, we present our research strategy for testing the perspective's core propositions.

Theoretical Emergence

The theme that coercive forces and relations are causes of crime has been a feature of several criminological theories. First, Patterson (1982, 1990, 1995) describes aversive family interchanges and coercive disciplining patterns as prime sources of juvenile delinquency. Parents' frequent use of harsh and punitive discipline initiates a pattern of coercive exchanges that affect all family interactions. These coercive interchanges include physical attacks, which are often the outcome of escalating nonphysical coercive interchanges

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that include negative commands, critical remarks, teasing, humiliation, whining, yelling, and threats. Through these aversive family interchanges, coercion becomes a primary learned response to adverse situations that arise in both family and nonfamily settings (Snyder and Patterson, 1987). Children from these coercive family backgrounds are more likely to become delinquent (Larzelare and Patterson 1990; Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber 1986; McCord 1991; Patterson 1995; Simons, Wu, Conger, and Lorenz 1994; Smith and Thornberry 1995; Straus 1994; Straus et al. 1991; Widom 1989).

Second, Colvin and Pauly's (1983) integrated structural-Marxist theory focuses on the criminogenic influences of coercion that emerge in multiple settings. A central idea in this theory is that coercive controls produce an alienated bond between the controller and the controlled. The idea that weak social bonds produce delinquency derives from social control theory (Hirschi 1969). Colvin and Pauly (1983) theorize that weak social bonds have their origins in coercive relations of control. This insight is an extension of Etzioni's (1970) compliance theory in which coercive control produces an alienated involvement (or alienated social bond) on the part of subordinates in control relations. Other types of control produce stronger social bonds: normative controls produce strong, morally based bonds; remunerative controls produce intermediately intense bonds based on calculations of self-interest. In Colvin and Pauly's (1983) theory, coercive control is most conducive to the production of delinquency because it produces a weak, alienated social bond that is reproduced across social settings as the individual encounters coercion in these settings.

Third, Agnew's (1985, 1992) general strain theory is also connected to the theme of coercion. Agnew's reconceptualized strain theory highlights extreme negative stimuli as primary sources of strain. Important sources of strain, Agnew argues, are negative stimuli that produce anger. Agnew's (1985:154-55) descriptions of negative stimuli involve several instances that can be characterized as coercive: adolescents being "placed in aversive situations from which they cannot legally escape" and "parental rejection, unfair or inconsistent discipline, parental conflict, adverse or negative school experiences, and unsatisfactory relations with peers." Coercive interpersonal relations are among the most aversive and negative forces individuals encounter. These are most likely to produce a strong sense of anger and, in turn, criminal involvement, especially when the individual perceives the coercive treatment as unjust or arbitrary. Instead of producing conformity, therefore, coercive treatment creates greater defiance of authority and is criminogenic (Sherman 1993). Furthermore, impersonal coercive forces, such as a threatening neighborhood environment, can also produce strain in which the person feels pushed by negative stimuli that produce a sense of fear, desperation, and

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anger (Agnew 1999; Agnew et al. 1996; Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Hagan and McCarthy 1997).

Other recent criminological theories also highlight the theme of coercion. Athens (1994) describes coercive interpersonal relations as primary forces in the creation of dangerous violent criminals. Regoli and Hewitt (1994) argue that coercive acts by adults in their quest for order play a major role in creating an oppressive environment for juveniles that produces delinquency. Tittle (1995) contends that repression (a concept similar to coercion) creates "control deficits" that, depending on the strength and consistency of the repression, produce predatory, defiant, or submissive forms of deviance. Hagan and McCarthy (1997) focus on coercive forces in both the background and foreground in their explanation of delinquency among homeless street youth. And most recently, Colvin (2000) emphasizes this theme in his differential coercion theory.

Differential Coercion Theory

Colvin's (2000) work attempts to extend the existing understanding of the coercion-crime relationship. He makes the initial insight that coercion has multiple sources—including families, schools, peer relations, and neighborhoods among other settings—and then specifies how these coercive experiences foster criminal involvement. He uses the term *differential* because individuals vary in the "degree" to which they are exposed to coercion (2000:5). A central premise of his perspective is that criminal involvement will be positively related to the degree of coercion individuals experience.

Colvin (2000) posits two dimensions of differential coercion: the degree of the coercive force (from no coercion to very strong coercion) and the consistency with which it is applied or experienced. He argues that under most ordinary circumstances (in families, schools, peer groups, and neighborhoods, for example), coercion is most likely to be experienced on an inconsistent basis.[3] Therefore, the extent, or degree, of the coercion is the most salient element of coercion in producing delinquency.

For Colvin, coercion produces a set of social-psychological deficits that are conducive to greater involvement in delinquency. Thus, to the degree that individuals experience coercion, they are more likely to have higher levels of anger, lower self-control, weaker social bonds, and a high degree of, what Colvin (2000) labels, "coercive ideation." This latter concept refers to a world view in which the individual perceives that the social environment is filled with coercive forces that can only be overcome through coercion. This set of "social-psychological deficits" (high anger, low self-control, weak social bonds, and coercive ideation) mediates the relationship between coercion and delinquency.

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Colvin (2000) also differentiates interpersonal from impersonal forms of coercion. The first occurs within direct interpersonal relations of control in various settings, such as the family. The second is connected to pressures from impersonal forces that create an indirect experience of coercion. Interpersonal coercion involves the use or threat of force and intimidation aimed at creating compliance in an interpersonal relation. These micro-level coercive processes of control can involve the actual or threatened use of physical force and/or the actual or threatened removal of social supports. Impersonal coercion is experienced as pressure arising from larger circumstances beyond individual control. These macro-level sources of coercion can include economic and social pressures created by structural unemployment, poverty, or violent competition among groups. An example of impersonal coercion that Colvin (2000:124) discusses is the violent environment within neighborhoods created by gang rivalries. Such neighborhoods, perceived as dangerous and violent by the juveniles who live in them, are a strong, impersonal force that creates an environment of threat (Decker and Van Winkle 1996), which enhances "coercive ideation" and other social-psychological deficits that Colvin (2000) argues are conducive to delinquency. In addition, the school setting can be perceived as coercive if school administrators fail to curtail a threatening school environment created by bullying and other forms of aggression at school.

In summary, for Colvin (2000), the accumulated coercion that juveniles experience in their families, schools, peer relations, and neighborhoods creates social-psychological deficits that make involvement in delinquent activities more likely. We should note that *Crime and Coercion* pays special attention to the origins of chronic offending. However, similar to other contemporary perspectives (e.g., self-control, social learning, and strain theories), the logic of differential coercion theory is that the effects of coercion are general and thus are implicated in most, if not virtually all, forms of crime (e.g., white-collar illegality, see Colvin 2000:130-33). Relevant to our concerns is the reasonable prediction from *Crime and Coercion* that the more coercion individuals encounter, the more likely they are to engage in relatively serious forms of juvenile delinquency.

RESEARCH STRATEGY

The goal of this project is to provide the first empirical test of Colvin's (2000) theory of differential coercion and crime. On the broadest level, we assess a core premise of this perspective that the greater the extent of coercion experienced by juveniles, the greater their involvement in delinquency.

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Our test is further enhanced, however, in three ways. First, a key contribution of Colvin's (2000) theory is that coercion is not limited to a single context, as some perspectives implicitly contend (e.g., the family), but rather can occur in multiple social contexts. In this regard, the data set used in our analysis allows us to examine four sources of coercion: parental, peer, school, and neighborhood. Second, another salient feature of Colvin's model is that it specifies the "social-psychological deficits" that coercion fosters, which, in turn, increase the risk of delinquent involvement. The data set allows us to measure four of these deficits: coercive ideation, anger, parental social bonds, and school social bonds. Assessing coercive ideation is especially relevant because it is central to Colvin's theory and is largely unstudied in previous empirical research. Third, we are able to test the theory with a data set that both contains a large sample (more than 2,000 respondents) and is socially diverse.

Colvin's (2000) theory is rich in detail and complex in its many facets. As a result, a complete test of his perspective would require longitudinal data that could assess the intergenerational effects of coercion, measure a wide range of interpersonal and impersonal forms of coercion, and trace the development of life-course trajectories into chronic criminality. Our study, however, is limited to the use of a cross-sectional design that examines youths at one point in the life-course. Furthermore, Colvin's paradigm suggests that coercion becomes particularly criminogenic when it is applied in an erratic fashion. In fact, the theory offers a four-fold typology that cross-tabulates the factors of the degree of coercion and the extent to which it is erratic or consistent. This part of the theory requires more precision (e.g., how intermittent would coercion have to be to be categorized as "erratic"?), and it likely would require survey questions specifically designed to test when coercion in multiple contexts is erratic or consistent. In any event, our study is restricted to the extent or harshness of coercion and its relationship with delinquent involvement.

Despite these limitations, we would reiterate that the data set used in the analysis allows us to assess core propositions of Colvin's differential coercion theory. Based on his perspective, we test three propositions: (1) coercion increases delinquent involvement, (2) different types of coercion are positively related to delinquent involvement, and (3) coercion influences delinquency through the social-psychological deficits—coercive ideation, anger, alienated social bonds—predicted by the theory. If these propositions are consistent with the empirical data, they will provide confidence that the larger paradigm outlined by Colvin (2000) has merit and, in the least, warrants contingent support and further investigation. Alternatively, falsification of these propositions will decrease the theory's credibility and place the onus

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on its advocates to produce data showing that a more complex analysis will reveal relationships masked by our more limited study (see, more generally, Braithwaite 1968).

Finally, the strategy of focusing on core propositions in early tests of theories has been used fruitfully in recent years in tests of new perspectives, such as Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) "general theory" (Grasmick et al. 1993), Agnew's "general strain theory" (Paternoster and Mazerolle 1994), and Tittle's "control balance theory" (Piquero and Hickman 1999). These studies are important in establishing an empirical baseline or foundation on which subsequent studies can build and elaborate. Given the nature of criminological data sets, most tests of theories are partial, and assessing the utility of a theory can require a decade or more of research (see, e.g., Kempf 1993; Pratt and Cullen 2000). The key to initial tests is that they (1) clearly specify what they are and are not testing, (2) assess central rather than peripheral propositions, and (3) employ data that are sufficiently solid and theoretically relevant to render meaningful results. In the current project, our goal is to meet these criteria in providing an initial test of Colvin's differential coercion theory.

METHOD

Sample

The data we employ in this study were collected for a project designed to gather baseline data on school bullying and school violence. The sample was drawn from the six public middle schools that serve a metropolitan area with a diverse population of nearly 100,000 inhabitants in Virginia. The six middle schools served a total enrollment of 3,038 students in grades six, seven, and eight. Approximately, 46.5 percent of the middle schools student population was non-White, 52 percent received a free or reduced-cost breakfast or lunch at school, and 50 percent were male. The percentage of students receiving some services in special education based on an individualized education plan (IEP) was 19.6 percent and the dropout rate for the middle schools in 1999 to 2000 was 1.9 percent.

All middle school students in attendance on the day of the survey were eligible for the study.[4] In all, 2,472 students completed the survey (a response rate of 81 percent). School administrators sent an "opt-out" letter to all the parents/guardians of the students before the administration of the survey. The parents of 42 students declined to allow their children to participate in the survey. Teachers administered an anonymous survey in classrooms during the fall of 2000.

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The respondents who completed the survey closely matched the total population of students. The percentage of students who reported they were non-White was 40 percent in comparison to the student population of 46.5 percent; the percentage of male study participants was 48.9 percent in comparison to the student population of 50 percent; and the percentage of students who reported that they received a free or reduced-cost breakfast or lunch was 49.8 percent in comparison to the student population, for grades 7 to 12, of 52 percent.

Questionnaires were carefully screened for complete and accurate information (patterned responses). Thirty-one questionnaires were deleted in which the students gave the same response to every question on one or more pages (excluding the pages focused on bullying and having been bullied). Also, four questionnaires were dropped in which the student reported an unlikely height (more than six-foot five-inches) or weight (more than 300 pounds). School principals confirmed that no students in the school were this large.

Using LISREL 8.50 for Windows and the EM algorithm (Schafer, 1997), we substituted values for missing cases. The EM algorithm generated values based on a data set that included the variables used in the present analysis. All analyses were run with and without missing cases; the results did not differ substantively. After imputing values for the missing cases, the sample included 2,437 middle school students. We did not detect any excessive collinearity. None of the correlations exceeded .75 and no VIF value exceeded 2.0 (Fisher and Mason 1981). We used ordinary least squares as the estimation procedure.

Measures

Table 1 shows the coding of the variables included in this analysis. Variable names are in the first column, the coding categories are in the second, and descriptive statistics are in the last columns. The appendix includes the items used to construct the measures of coercion and the social-psychological deficits.

Dependent variable. A self-report instrument adapted from the National Youth Survey was used to measure delinquent involvement (Elliott, Huizinga, and Ageton 1985; Elliott, Huizinga, and Menard 1989). To ensure a clear reference period for offending, students were asked to indicate how often "since school started in August" that they had engaged in nine relatively serious delinquent acts. The survey was administered in the last week in October (in 2000). To respond to the self-report items, the youths used a scale

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TABLE 1: Coding of Variables

Variable Name	*Coding/Range*	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*
Gender	0 = female	.48	.49
	1 = male		
Received federally funded meal	0 = no free meal	.49	.50
	1 = free meal	.40	.49
Race	0 = other		
	1 = African American		
Student grade level	0 = sixth grade		
	1 = seventh grade		
	2 = eighth grade	.95	.81
Parental coercion	–1.46 – 3.74 Higher standardized scores indicating more coercive home environments	.00	.96
Peer coercion	–.68 – 6.11 Higher standardized scores indicating more peer coercion	.04	1.04
School coercion	–8.0 – 0 Higher scores indicating more coercive schools	–3.79	2.43
Neighborhood coercion	2.0 – 8.0 Higher scores indicating more coercive neighborhoods	4.04	1.54
Coercive ideation	–1.52 – 2.71 Higher standardized scores indicating more coercive ideation	.03	.93
Anger	–2.08 – 2.15 Higher standardized scores indicating more anger	.04	.93
Parental social bonds	–4.65 – 1.30 Higher standardized scores indicating stronger attachment to parents	–.05	1.02
School social bonds	Higher standardized scores indicating stronger attachment to school	–.00	.93
Delinquent involvement	–.30 – 3.52 Higher logged scores indicating more delinquent involvement	.36	.68

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ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (4 or more times). The items used included purposely damaging property belonging to a school, purposely setting fire to a building/car or other property, carrying a hidden weapon, attacking someone with the idea of seriously hurting or killing them, and getting involved in gang fights. They also included hitting or threatening to hit a teacher or other adult at school, selling illegal drugs, hitting or threatening to hit a parent, and using force or threatening to use force to get money or things from other people. The students' scores were summed across these nine items to create the Delinquent Involvement scale. Its alpha coefficient was .90.

Of the 2,437 middle school students, 34 percent reported that they had committed at least one delinquent act. The log transformation of the scale scores was used in the analysis given that it was positively skewed.

Measures of coercion. Although designed for other purposes, the data set provided an opportunity to assess propositions central to Colvin's (2000) differential coercion theory. Most noteworthy, the data set contained measures of four types of coercion. *Parents' coercive behavior* was assessed using a scale developed by Simons et al. (1994). This scale measured the degree to which the students' parents/guardians used authoritarian child-rearing techniques. The items ranged from how often the child and parents/guardians disagreed to how often the parents/guardians used physical force (e.g., hitting, shaking, shoving, etc.) The responses ranged from 0 (never) to 4 (always). The scores were summed across the four items and were standardized. The alpha coefficient for the Parental Coercion scale was .73, which is similar to the alpha reported by Simons et al. (1994).

Peer coercion was assessed using a nine-item scale developed by Olweus (1994), which measured the degree to which students were bullied at school. The responses ranged from 0 (it has not happened) to 4 (several times a week). The scores were summed across the nine items and were standardized. The alpha coefficient for the Peer Coercion scale was .86.

Neighborhood coercion was measured using two items. These two items assessed the degree to which the respondents considered their neighborhood to be safe and free from violence. The responses ranged from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 4 (*strongly disagree*). The scores were summed across the two items and its alpha coefficient was .56.

School coercion was measured using two items. These two items assessed whether students thought school officials had done enough to create a safe school environment; that is, a school free from unwarranted aggression. The responses ranged from 0 (*almost never*) to 4 (*almost always*). The scores were summed across the two items. The alpha coefficient for School Coercion was .73.

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Social-psychological deficits. Given the richness of the data set, we were able to include four social-psychological deficits hypothesized by Colvin (2000) to be related to coercion. We created a scale using five items (e.g., “If a kid threatens you, it is okay to hit them”) to measure Colvin’s (2000) central concept of *coercive ideation*. The responses ranged from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 4 (*strongly disagree*). The scores were reverse coded, summed across the five items, and were standardized. The alpha coefficient for Coercive Ideation was .79.

Anger was measured using four items (e.g., “I lose my temper pretty easily”). Grasmick et al. (1993) used these four items to assess the level of anger, which was one aspect of their multidimensional self-control scale.[5] The responses ranged from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 4 (*strongly disagree*). The scores were reverse coded, summed across the five items, and were standardized. The alpha coefficient for Anger was .76.

Parental social bonds were measured through a scale developed by Simons et al. (1994). This scale assessed how effectively parents or guardians monitored the behavior of their children. The responses ranged from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*always*). Responses were summed across five items (e.g., “My parents/guardians care how I do in school”) and the scores were standardized. The alpha coefficient for the Parental Social Bonds scale was .73, which is similar to the alpha reported by Simons et al. (1994).

School social bonds were measured using four items (e.g., “How do you like school?”). The responses depended on the specific item. For example, the responses for the item quoted above ranged from 0 (*I dislike school very much*) to 4 (*I like school very much*) whereas for the item (“How much schooling do you want to get eventually?”) the responses ranged from 0 (*some high school*) to 5 (*college graduation and attend a graduate school*). Responses were summed across the five items and the scores were standardized. The alpha coefficient for the School Social Bonds scale was .68

Control variables. The control variables included gender and, as a rough index of socioeconomic status, the data set identifies students who reported receiving a free or reduced-cost meal at school. An income chart adjusted by household size determines whether a student qualifies for a free or reduced-cost meal. For example, a student living in a household of four whose annual income does not exceed $22,945, can qualify for a free meal and can qualify for a reduced cost meal if the annual income does not exceed $32,653. In addition, children can qualify for a free meal if they are a foster-child, live in a household receiving food stamps, or if they get Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Of the 2,437 students, 49 percent reported receiving a free or reduced-cost breakfast or lunch at school. For race, we included a dichotomous variable to identify African American students, the only

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minority group large enough for statistical analysis (40 percent of the 2,437 students) and we included student grade level (grades six, seven, and eight).

RESULTS

Colvin (2000) argues that people are more likely to engage in criminal behavior if they are exposed to coercion. We assess four sources of coercion, parental, peer, school, and neighborhood. The results presented in model 1 of table 2 provide support for Colvin's (2000) thesis. The respondents who engaged in relatively serious forms of juvenile delinquency experienced coercive environments. The beta weights indicate that exposure to parental coercion places the students at greatest risk for offending. The results also show that experiencing a coercive school environment and living in an unsafe neighborhood place students at risk for delinquent involvement. Notably, we did not find any evidence that peer coercion is an independent source of juvenile delinquency. The results further show that males, African Americans, those receiving a free meal, and students in higher-grade levels have a significantly greater likelihood of engaging in juvenile delinquency.

Colvin (2000) additionally argues that coercive environments do not directly cause criminal behavior. Rather, he contends that sources of coercion indirectly affect criminal behavior through a variety of social-psychological deficits. We assess whether four social-psychological deficits, as specified by Colvin, mediate the relationship between sources of coercion and juvenile delinquency: coercive ideation, anger, parental social bonds, and school social bonds.

Model II of table 2 presents the full regression equation, including the sources of coercion and the four social-psychological deficits specified above. These results show that students who have developed a coercive ideation are more likely to have offended. In addition, students with strong parental social bonds and with strong school bonds are less likely to have engaged in delinquent behavior. Notably, angrier students are not significantly more likely to have offended. The relationship did border on statistical significance ($p = .06$), but the size of the effect ($B = .042$) was not substantively large.

The results from model II partially support Colvin's (2000) contention that social-psychological deficits should mediate the effect of coercive environments on juvenile offending. The full regression equation reveals that parental coercion, school coercion, and neighborhood coercion directly affect juvenile offending after controlling for the four social-psychological deficits. However, the results also indicate that the social-psychological deficits mediate a meaningful proportion of the effects of coercive environments

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TABLE 2: The Impact of Coercion and Social-Psychological Deficits on Delinquent Involvement

	Model I		*Model II*	
Independent Variable	*Beta*	B	*Beta*	B
Gender (1 = male)	.132***	.180	.052**	.071
Race (1 = Black)	.041*	.058	.030	.043
Received federally funded meal	.042*	.057	–.005	–.007
Grade level	.055**	.046	.016	.014
Parental coercion	.207***	.146	.121***	.085
Peer coercion	.009	.006	.020	.013
School coercion	.153***	.043	.069***	.019
Neighborhood coercion	.171***	.076	.078***	.034
Coercive ideation	—	—	.176***	.128
Anger	—	—	.042	.031
Parental social bonds	—	—	–.215***	–.142
School social bonds	—	—	–.215***	–.142

*$p < .05$. **$p \leq .01$. ***$p < .001$.
$N = 2{,}437$; R^2 for model 1 = .176***; R^2 for model 2 = .269***

on juvenile delinquency. The results show that 42 percent of the effect of parental coercion on juvenile delinquency is mediated by the social-psychological deficits. Similarly, 55 percent of the effect of school coercion and 55 percent of the effect of neighborhood coercion are mediated by the social-psychological deficits. The social-psychological deficits also mediated the effects of race, socioeconomic status, and grade level on juvenile delinquency. After including the social-psychological deficits in the regression equation, African American students, those receiving a free meal, and students in higher-grade levels are not more likely to offend. However, even after including the social-psychological deficits, gender still significantly affected the delinquency scale. Males are more likely to offend.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this investigation was to present an initial test of Colvin's (2000) differential coercion theory of crime. Taken as a whole, the data offered fairly consistent support for Colvin's core theoretical propositions. Several findings warrant further attention.

First, the data largely supported the general proposition that different types of coercion would be positively related to delinquent involvement. Consistent with previous research (Patterson 1990, 1995; Simons et al. 1994; Snyder and Patterson 1987), parental coercion—verbal abuse, threats, physical punishment—was clearly related to delinquency. Although the

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relationships were less strong, impersonal measures of coercion—school and neighborhood—were also significantly related to delinquency. These contextual measures represent the types of threatening environments that according to Colvin (2000), create impersonal, indirect forms of coercion.

We should note that the finding on parental coercion, in particular, might be called into question because of the possibility of "child effects": the thesis that parental coercion was a response to, not a cause of, youths' misconduct. We cannot rule out this possibility, given the cross-sectional design of the study and the fact that existing research indicates that child effects occur (Lytton 1990; see also, Harris 1998). Future research on Colvin's (2000) theory will have to investigate this issue. Even so, three considerations lend confidence to the causal ordering identified by Colvin (2000) and the results reported here. First, the general psychological literature finds that parenting effects occur even when individual traits and behaviors are controlled (Maccoby 2000). Second, longitudinal studies show that parenting—including coercive practices like harsh and erratic discipline—exerts independent effects on delinquency (see, e.g., Farrington and Loeber 1999; Sampson and Laub 1994). As such, even if the effects of coercive parenting were diminished in a longitudinal design, the coercive treatment of children almost certainly would remain an important predictor of delinquency. Third, as predicted by Colvin's theory, the pattern of results for parenting is consistent with the results for impersonal forms of coercion that would be less susceptible to child effects. Thus, whereas the parenting questions ask about direct coercion toward the respondent personally—reactions that arguably could be elicited by a youth's misconduct—the measures of impersonal coercion ask each respondent to assess the general degree of coercion in the broader contexts of the neighborhood and school. Although it is conceivable that child effects could influence these evaluations, this possibility does not seem compelling given that youths are being asked to assess the extent of coercion in the broader environment.

Second, one type of coercion was unrelated to delinquency: peer coercion or "bullying." Although peer coercion was unrelated to the relatively serious kinds of delinquency included in the data set, existing studies reveal that it may have other negative consequences. Children who are victimized by school bullies develop social-psychological deficits, including depression and low self-esteem, which can persist into adulthood (Bjorkqvist, Ekman, and Lagerspetz 1982; Haynie et al. 2001; Olweus 1994). In addition, research indicates that there is a distinct subset of victims, aggressive or provocative victims (Olweus 2001; Schwartz, Proctor, and Chien 2001; Unnever 2003). Aggressive victims are students who have been bullied but who also bully others. Aggressive victims demonstrate higher levels of verbal aggression and become physically aggressive when provoked (Haynie et al. 2001;

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Pellegrini, Bartini, and Brooks 2000). Further research is needed to assess the impact of peer coercion, to demarcate why it may cause some children to become bully-victims, and to understand the processes by which it may affect delinquency.

Third, a distinctive feature of Colvin's perspective is the attention given to "coercive ideation"—an orientation in which the "world is imagined to be a continuous pattern of coercion that can only be overcome through coercion" (2000:6). It is noteworthy that our measure of coercive ideation was a positive and significant predictor of delinquent involvement. This finding suggests that beyond exploring how general antisocial values are related to crime (Andrews and Bonta 1998), the specific content of attitudes or "ideation" deserves attention.

Fourth, as predicted by Colvin's (2000) theory, the hypothesized "social-psychological deficits" mediated a meaningful portion of the effects of coercion. One exception was anger—a factor also linked to delinquency by Agnew's (1992) general strain theory. As may be recalled, the measure of anger bordered on statistical significance, but its substantive effects were limited.[6] It is noteworthy that our measure of anger is highly correlated with coercive ideation (.60). The degree to which these variables are correlated indicates that the youths in the sample who developed a coercive ideation are also angrier than most of their peers. In fact, when we delete coercive ideation from the full regression model, the relationship of anger to delinquency increases in strength and becomes clearly statistically significant. Together these findings suggest that coercion may foster in individuals not only anger but also the belief that coercion is an acceptable means to achieve a desired end.

As may be apparent, these results are of potential relevance for general strain theory. Previous research has provided qualified support for general strain theory's proposition that anger mediates the impact of strain on criminal conduct (see, e.g., Aseltine, Gore, and Gordon 2000; Mazerolle et al. 2000; Mazerolle and Piquero 1997). As noted, however, our results suggest that the effects of anger are larger when coercive ideation is omitted from the model. (There is no interaction effect between Anger × Coercive Ideation in our data.) Because anger in previous tests of general strain theory has been most clearly related to acts of aggression, we also replicated our results using only violent offenses as the dependent variable. Again, the results paralleled those of the data using all offenses as the outcome measure: the effects of anger were diminished markedly when coercive ideation was entered into the equation. Taken together, these findings are suggestive that analyses that do not include coercive ideation may overestimate the effects of anger. That is, it may well be that individuals with higher levels of coercive ideation may be angrier but that it is the ideation, not the anger, that plays the larger role in

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precipitating criminal involvement. Of course, it is risky to push this point too far and to dismiss anger as a factor independently related to crime based on our one study. Research using different samples, different measures of anger, and different methodologies may not replicate this finding. Still, the results reported here on coercive ideation and anger raise a salient possibility that merits further investigation.

We also should note more generally that advocates of general strain theory might well claim that Colvin's (2000) coercion theory could be subsumed under the umbrella of this perspective. In this view, the types of factors identified by Colvin as "coercive" could be conceptualized as "strains." Four observations on this point can be made.

First, as Agnew (1993, 2001) points out, it is commonplace for scholars to use the same variables to measure concepts taken from divergent perspectives. This occurs because there are no clearly defined rules for deciphering why a particular variable is a strain, coercion, or—for that matter—a social bond or some other theoretical construct. For example, Agnew (1992) makes a plausible case that a range of experiences are "strains," but he provides little compelling evidence that these myriad of social conditions actually elicit feelings of strain. In this context, Colvin might rightly claim as much "ownership" of items in a survey as does Agnew. That is, what "counts" as coercion or strain is really determined by whether the items in question are consistent with how core concepts are defined. In testing coercion theory (or any theory), then, the key issue is whether the items have face validity as measures of the core theoretical concept—in this case coercion; we believe that is the case in the current study.

Second, although Colvin (2000:16-20) sees the theoretical similarities, he likely would reject any attempt to portray his ideas on coercion as falling exclusively within the strain tradition. Indeed, as noted in the introduction to this article, Colvin (2000) proposes that a diverse set of theories—including but hardly limited to strain theory—form the foundation for his perspective. He readily confesses that his theory builds on other writings; what is innovative is his effort to systematize these various contributions that have touched on—sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly—the theme that coercion can be criminogenic. Accordingly, he offers an "integrated" perspective that combines elements of strain, control, learning, and critical theories.

Third, if one were to insist on subsuming coercion theory within the general strain paradigm, then Colvin's types of coercion could be seen as falling under Agnew's (1992:58) category of "strain as the presentation of noxious stimuli." As Agnew (2001:319) understands, however, a weakness in general strain theory is that scholars "have little guidance when it comes to selecting among the many hundreds of types of strain and have trouble explaining why only some of them are related to crime." The threat to general strain theory is

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thus an embarrassment of riches: Because a seeming unending number of experiences can be called a strain, researchers will find—perhaps by chance alone—that some measures of "strain" are related to criminal participation. In this context, from the vantage of strain theory, Colvin's work would be an invaluable and systematic theoretical attempt to explain why a particular set of negative stimuli—those experienced as coercive—lead to criminal involvement. The subsequent challenge facing general strain theory would then be to develop other subtheories to explicate when conditions defined as strain by Agnew are criminogenic.

Fourth, coercion theory and general strain theory differ in one other salient way: Colvin (2000) argues that the effects of coercive conditions produce and are mediated by factors—which Colvin calls "social-psychological deficits"—such as coercive ideation, anger, and social bonds. In contrast, similar to the stress research in the field of mental illness, general strain theory asserts that these (and a range of other) factors "constrain" or "buffer" strain (Agnew 1992). For this reason, tests of this portion of general strain theory assess the effects of the intervening variables through interaction terms (Agnew and White 1992). The evidence supportive of the constraint or buffering depiction of intervening variables, however, is inconsistent at best (see, e.g., Paternoster and Mazerolle 1994). Colvin's (2000) view that social-psychological deficits mediate the effects of coercion (or strain) thus may prove more accurate.

Let us hasten to note, however, that the social-psychological deficit variables in the study mediated some, but not all, of the effects of the coercion measures on delinquent involvement. That is, the types of coercion retained direct effects on delinquency. A challenge for Colvin—and future researchers—is to account for these direct effects. One likely possibility is that studies that included a wider range of social-psychological deficits would account for more of the unexplained direct effects. Although our study contained a diverse set of measures of these deficits, we were not able to measure all factors identified by Colvin (2000) as potentially mediating exposure to coercion. Even so, if such research were unable to explain why coercion directly influences criminal conduct, Colvin's theory would be in need of further specification.

Two further limitations to our study also point to potentially fruitful avenues for future research. First, our research shows that differential coercion theory can explain involvement in delinquency among a sample of middle school youths. As such, it is a perspective that should be considered as contributing to our understanding of general delinquency. Colvin's (2000) main concern, however, was in explaining the origin of "chronic criminality" over the life course. A next step in the research, therefore, would be to explore whether differential coercion theory can account not only for general

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delinquent involvement but also for the ensnaring of youths in criminality across the life course.

Second, as noted, differential coercion theory also argues that four qualitatively distinct categories of coercion—created by cross-tabulating the harshness and consistency of coercion—will produce specific sets of outcomes. Although focusing on central theoretical propositions, the current study could not test these specific causal linkages. In fact, it is unlikely that any existing data set contains measures of whether varying modes of coercion are applied in a consistent or erratic fashion (with the possible exception of parental coercion). Furthermore, most data sets do not contain measures of the different types of criminal behavior (e.g., white-collar crime, predatory crime, sporadic "righteous" assaults) that Colvin argues are related to his four types of coercion. This aspect of differential coercion theory would require primary data collection in which the theory was operationalized in its full complexity.

In summary, the current study offers support for the conclusion that Colvin's (2000) differential coercion theory has explanatory value. The analysis shows that various domains of coercion are related to delinquency and that the effects of coercion are mediated, at least in part, by social-psychological deficits specified by Colvin. Core propositions derived from differential coercion theory thus receive reasonably consistent support. Accordingly, beyond the persuasiveness of Colvin's (2000) arguments presented in *Crime and Coercion*, there is, in the least, initial evidence to suggest that this perspective warrants further investigation.

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APPENDIX
Measures of Theoretical Variables

Variable	*Alpha*	*Measures*
I. Measures of Coercion		
Parental coercion	.73	1. How often have your parents/guardians disagreed with you?
		2. How often have your parents/guardians argued heatedly or shouted at you?
		3. How often have your parents/guardians ended up threatening you?
		4. How often have the arguments between you and your parents/guardians ended up being physical (e.g., hitting, shaking, shoving, etc.)?
Peer coercion	.86	1. I was called mean names, was made fun of, or teased in a hurtful way.
		2. Other students left me out of things on purpose, excluded me from their group of friends, or completely ignored me.
		3. I was hit, kicked, pushed, shoved around, or locked indoors.
		4. Other kids told lies or spread false rumors about me and tried to make others dislike me.
		5. I had money or things taken away from me or damaged.
		6. I was threatened or forced to do things I did not want to do.
		7. I was bullied with mean names or comments about my race or color.
		8. I was bullied with mean names, comments, or gestures with a sexual meaning.
		9. I was bullied in another way.
Neighborhood coercion	.56	1. I live in a safe neighborhood.
		2. Kids are always getting into fights in my neighborhood.
School coercion	.73	1. How often do the teachers or other adults at school try to put a stop to it when a student is being bullied at school?
		2. Overall, how much do you think your teachers have done to counteract bullying since school started in August?

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II. Measures of social-psychological deficits		
Coercive ideation	.79	1. If a kid threatens you, it is okay to hit them.
		2. It feels good when I hit someone.
		3. If you fight a lot, everyone will look up to you.
		4. Sometimes you have only two choices—get punched or punch the other kid.
		5. If you are afraid to fight, you will not have any friends.
Anger	.76	1. I lose my temper pretty easily.
		2. Often, when I am angry at people I feel more like hurting them than talking to them about why I am angry.
		3. When I am angry, other people better stay away from me.
		4. When I have a serious disagreement with someone, its usually hard for me to talk calmly about it without getting upset.
Parental social bonds	.73	1. How often does your parent/guardian know who you are with when you are away from home?
		2. In the course of a day, how often do/does your parent or parents (guardians) know where you are?
		3. My parents (guardians) care how late I stay out.
		4. My parents (guardians) care how I do in school.
		5. My parents (guardians) help me with my homework.
School social bonds	.68	1. Which one of the following best describes the grades you are getting at school?
		2. How much schooling do you want to get eventually?
		3. How much schooling do you expect to get eventually?
		4. How do you like school?

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NOTES

1. For example, *Crime and Coercion* (Colvin 2000) has won two books awards from professional organizations, was featured in an "author meets critics session" at the 2001 meeting of the American Society of Criminology, and is being discussed in contemporary books on criminological theory (Lilly, Cullen, and Ball 2002).

2. However, as Merton (1973:350) also illuminates, adumbration—or even a clearer form of theoretical anticipation—is not equivalent to the delineation of a perspective that is conceptually coherent and clearly specifies causal linkages and core propositions. He warns about the "vice of . . . 'adumbrationism'—the denigration of new ideas by pretending to find them in the old . . . It does not follow that all newly emerging knowledge is nothing but rediscovery."

3. Colvin (2000:43) recognizes the possibility that the degree and consistency of coercion can independently vary from high to low, thus creating a two-by-two cross-tabulation and "four control types." In reality, however, he suggests that coercion is usually applied inconsistently. This coterminous relationship occurs, says Colvin (2000:49), because "Extraordinary measures are usually required to consistently monitor behavior in order to deliver coercion on a consistent basis for rule violations." He (Colvin 2000:85) argues that only under unusual circumstances of control, such as those found in super-maximum security prisons, can coercion be delivered on a consistent basis. Thus, in most potentially criminogenic environments—such as families, schools, peer groups, and neighborhoods—coercion will be experienced on an inconsistent basis. For our test of differential coercion theory, the salient implication is that the key dimension of coercion is the degree to which individuals experience coercion. Of course, as we note later, a complete investigation of the perspective would include measures of the inconsistency of coercion and would explore, in a finely calibrated way, the specific effects of the interaction between levels of the degree and inconsistency of coercion. (This type of test would likely require a data set specifically designed to probe this aspect of the theory.) At this point, however, the logic of Colvin's perspective suggests that criminal involvement will be directly and positively related to the degree of coercion an individual experiences.

4. An alternative school, whose enrollment includes 50 seventh and eighth graders, 10 of whom are in a separate self-contained program at another site, was excluded from participation in the survey.

5. In Colvin's (2000:40-8) discussion of social-psychological deficits, it is apparent that these deficits (including anger) are considered to be a relatively stable set of traits, which emerge from differential exposure to coercion. The measure of trait anger, as drawn from the Grasmick et al. (1993) scale, seems most appropriate, then, for measuring anger as a social-psychological deficit, which is a negative affect within the individual, not a situational response to a direct provocation. Of course, as Colvin (2000) discusses in his book's fifth chapter (on the "foreground of crime"), such negative affects (including anger and other social-psychological deficits) create greater potential for a situational "state" of anger (and thus for a criminal event) being provoked by a coercive circumstance. The data set used in our secondary analysis does not include variables that might measure the "state," as opposed to the "trait," of anger. However, when discussing anger as a social-psychological deficit, clearly trait anger, as derived from the Grasmick et al. (1993) scale, is most relevant as the measure of anger.

6. The beta weight for coercive ideation is larger than the beta weight for anger whether the two variables are both included in the main effect regression equation as presented in model II of Table 2 (.176 and .042) or if they are entered into the regression equation without the other present (.182 and .111, respectively).

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