

## **Increase in Self-rejection as an Antecedent of Deviant Responses**

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*The hypothesis that increase in negative self-attitudes is an antecedent condition of deviant responses was tested. Subjects were seventh-grade students who responded to a questionnaire three times at annual intervals (N = 3148). Self-attitudes were measured by a seven-item self-derogation scale. Change in self-derogation was determined by expressing the posttest score as a deviation from the posttest-on-pretest regression line. For each of 22 deviant acts it was hypothesized and observed that, among students denying performance of the act prior to T<sub>2</sub>-T<sub>3</sub>, students affirming performance during T<sub>2</sub>-T<sub>3</sub>, relative to students continuing denial of performance, will have manifested significantly greater antecedent increases in self-derogation during T<sub>1</sub>-T<sub>2</sub>. The comparisons were significant in 19 of the 22 instances. The findings provide strong support for the position that the genesis of negative self-attitudes is a common influence mediating between adverse membership group experiences and the adoption of any of a wide variety of deviant responses.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The following is a consideration of the general proposition that the adoption of each of a range of essentially uncorrelated deviant responses is associated with antecedent increase in negative self-attitudes.

This proposition is implicit in the statement of a general theory of deviant behavior based on the premise that the need to experience positive self-attitudes

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and to avoid negative self-attitudes is universally a characteristic outcome of the socialization process (Kaplan, 1972, 1975). According to this statement, negative self-attitudes are the consequence of a long history of membership group experiences that were characterized by (1) self-perceptions of possessing negatively valued (and failing to possess positively valued) attributes and of performing negatively valued (and failing to perform positively valued) behaviors, (2) self-perceptions as the object of negative attitudes expressed by highly valued others, and (3) the inability to effectively employ protective mechanisms in the face of self-devaluing experiences. The person comes to perceive a relationship between such experiences in his membership groups and the genesis of highly distressing negative self-attitudes. Through a process of association, he comes to experience the normative patterns characteristic of these membership groups as intrinsically distressful. Given the inability of normative patterns to satisfy the self-esteem motive and the continuing experience of self-rejecting attitudes, the person seeks motivationally acceptable alternative responses that offer promise of reducing self-rejecting attitudes. Deviant responses represent the only motivationally acceptable alternative to the now intrinsically disvalued normative patterns that might function to reduce the high levels of distressful self-rejecting attitudes through fostering avoidance of prior self-devaluing experiences, attacks the basis of one's self-rejecting attitudes, and the opportunity for self-enhancement through substitute experiences. A more detailed statement of this position along with a discussion of relevant empirical studies is presented elsewhere (Kaplan, 1975).

Congruent with the expectation that deviant responses are preceded by increases in self-rejecting attitudes are the results of a number of investigations that implicate negative self-attitudes in the performance of one or a few modes of deviance, including a range of delinquent and criminal patterns (Wood, 1961; Schwartz and Stryker, 1970; Scarpitti, 1965; Hall, 1966), drug abuse (Kaplan and Meyerowitz, 1970; Brehm and Back, 1968), alcoholism (Berg, 1971; Carroll and Fuller, 1969), interpersonal violence (Leon, 1969; Wood, 1961), and suicidal behavior (Miller, 1968; Wilson *et al.*, 1971; Braaten and Darling, 1962), as well as other responses suggestive of socially defined deviant behavior such as cheating at a card game and keeping found money (Aronson and Mettee, 1968; Graf, 1971). However, these studies cannot be accepted as a demonstration of the hypothesis since each was characterized by one or more of the following limitations: the failure to employ a measure of change in self-attitudes, the employment of a research design that precluded establishing a temporal relationship between the adoption of deviant responses and antecedent increase in negative self-attitudes, and the investigation of only one or a few rather than a broad range of deviant responses. The present study, in contrast, permits consideration of the hypothesis that an increase in self-rejecting attitudes is a common antecedent to the adoption of each of a number of generally uncorrelated modes of deviant response.

## HYPOTHESIS

For each of 22 deviant acts, the following general hypothesis was tested: among students who reported not performing the deviant act during the specified period prior to the first test administration ( $T_1$ ) or between  $T_1$  and the second test administration ( $T_2$ ), students who report performing the deviant act between  $T_2$  and the third test administration ( $T_3$ ), relative to those who reported not performing the act during the same period, will have manifested a significantly greater increase in a "base-free" measure of negative self-attitudes between  $T_1$  and  $T_2$ .

## METHOD

The data were collected in the course of a longitudinal survey study of a (pre)adolescent population that was designed to test a series of hypotheses comprising the general theory of deviant behavior referred to above.

### Sampling and Data Collection

A 209-item structured self-administered questionnaire was presented to the seventh-grade students in 18 (randomly selected) of the 36 junior high schools in the Houston Independent School District. The questionnaire was administered for the first time in the spring of 1971 and twice thereafter at annual intervals.

Of the 9459 seventh-grade students in the selected schools, 3148 responded to all three questionnaires. These students, constituting 33.3% of all eligible students in the selected schools and 41.3% of those students responding to the first questionnaire, provided the data for the present analysis.

An examination of subject characteristics associated with sample attrition revealed that those who discontinued participation in the study were appreciably and significantly more likely to have reported prior performance of deviant acts. However, these subjects would have been excluded from the analysis in any event since the study investigated factors associated with the adoption of deviant responses among subjects who had not previously adopted such responses.

The relevant operational definitions in the present analysis relate to self-attitude change and the adoption of deviant responses.

### *Self-attitude Change*

Self-attitudes, conceptualized as the affective component of self-responses — i.e., as the person's emotional responses to his perceptions and evalua-

tions of his own traits and behaviors — are measured by scores on a self-derogation scale whose seven constituent items were derived in an earlier study (Kaplan and Pokorny, 1969) from a factor analysis of responses to ten items. The latter items were employed by Rosenberg (1965) in a Guttman scale to measure self-esteem. The factorial refinement was undertaken on an assumption that subsequently proved to be warranted (Kaplan and Pokorny, 1969) that the scale contained both affective and nonaffective components. A similar factor structure was observed independently by Kohn and Schooler (1969). The factor analysis permitted derivation of what was taken to be a measure of affective response (self-derogation in its negative polar extreme). This measure showed strong relationships as predicted with measures of depressive affect and psychophysiological indicators of anxiety and otherwise showed good predictive validity in a study of correlates of self-derogation among a representative sample of adults in Houston, Texas (Kaplan, 1970a,b, 1971a,b; Kaplan and Pokorny, 1970a,b, 1972).

The items comprising the scale were as follows. The parenthetical entries indicate self-derogating responses. The numbers refer to the questionnaire items.

- 109 I wish I could have more respect for myself (true)
- 113 On the whole, I am satisfied with myself (false)
- 118 I feel I do not have much to be proud of (true)
- 142 I'm inclined to think I'm a failure (true)
- 152 I take positive attitude toward myself (false)
- 180 At times I think I'm no good at all (true)
- 184 I certainly feel useless at times (true)

The self-derogation score was computed by assigning a weight of "2" to self-derogating responses to items 109, 180, 184 and a weight of "1" to self-derogating responses to the remaining items. The weights were added (a maximum of 10), the sum was divided by the number of units for which units were available (maximum of 10), and the result was multiplied by 100. The scores varied between 0 and 100. The differential weighting of the items was suggested by the earlier factor analysis (Kaplan and Pokorny, 1969).

Change in self-derogation from the first to the second testing was measured by a residual change score. A gain is said to be residualized "by expressing the posttest score as a deviation from the posttest-on-pretest regression line" (Cronbach and Furby, 1970, p. 68). The raw residual change in self-derogation between the first and second testing (Rch SD 1-2) scores is defined as  $Rch\ SD\ 1-2 = Y - \bar{Y} - \beta y \cdot x (X - \bar{X})$ , where  $Y$  is the time 2 score,  $\bar{Y}$  is the mean time 2 score,  $\bar{X}$  is the time 1 score,  $X$  is the mean time 1 score, and  $\beta y \cdot x$  is the regression coefficient,  $r_{yx}$  ( $\sigma y / \sigma x$ ). The effect of residualizing is to remove "from the posttest score, and hence from the gain, the portion that could have been predicted linearly from pretest status . . . . The residualized score is primar-

ily a way of singling out individuals who changed more or less than expected" (Cronbach and Furby, 1970, p. 74).

The decision to employ a "base-free" measure of self-attitude change was prompted by two sets of observations. First, modes of response to self-attitude change are apparently a function of characteristic level of self-attitudes (Frankel, 1969; McGuire, 1968, pp. 1158-1160; Silverman, 1964; Dittes, 1959a,b; Stotland *et al.*, 1957). Second, congruent with expectations based on the postulate of the self-esteem motive (Kaplan, 1972, 1975), the amount and direction of self-attitude change are reported to be a function of initial level of self-acceptance (Brownfain, 1952; Engel, 1959; Rosenberg, 1965, pp. 152-154; Clifford and Clifford, 1967; French, 1968, p. 149). Therefore, in order to investigate the "independent" relationship between adoption of deviant responses and antecedent change in self-attitudes it was necessary to "factor out" the predictive utility of initial level of self-attitudes.

#### *Adoption of Deviant Responses*

Deviant behaviors are conceptualized as instances in which a person so behaves as to violate normative expectations (previously accepted by the person as well as other group members as applicable to him) due to a loss of motivation to conform to, or the acquisition of motivation to deviate from, the normative expectations of one or more specified membership groups. Thus conceived, for a behavior to be considered deviant the actor must previously have regarded the behavior as inappropriate for him by personal and group standards and must therefore have avoided performing such behavior. Performance of the behavior out of a loss of motivation to conform to, or out of the genesis of motivation to deviate from, the persisting group standards constitutes the deviant response.

Operationally, deviant behavior is indicated by self-reports of the 22 acts listed in Table I. At the first test administration, the students were asked to indicate whether or not they performed the deviant behavior in question during a specified period prior to the test. For reasons not relevant to the present analysis, the specified period in question was "within 1 month" for all of the items except the following, where the time period is as indicated parenthetically: 26 (during the last 9-week period), 28 (within the last week), and 29 (during the last exam period). At the second and third testings, the time reference was "within the last year" except for item 28, which retained the same ("within the last week") time reference.

The validation of the items as illustrative of the concept of deviant behavior defined above was established by predicting and observing temporal relationships between antecedent conditions and subsequent performance of the presumably deviant acts such that for each act, among subjects who reported not performing the act during the specified period prior to the first testing, students

**Table I.** Mean Residual Change in Self-derogation  $T_1$ - $T_2$  by Report of Deviant Act  $T_2$ - $T_3$  Among Subjects Denying Performance of the Deviant Act Prior to the Period  $T_2$ - $T_3$

Deviant response	Students denying performance of deviant act prior to $T_2$ - $T_3$	
	Students reporting deviant act $T_2$ - $T_3$	Students denying deviant act $T_2$ - $T_3$
3 <sup>a</sup> Took things worth between \$2 and \$50	3.1 <sup>b</sup> * 27.9 209	-1.6 <sup>c</sup> 24.2 2368
7 Took things worth less than \$2	2.4 ** 25.3 257	-2.7 23.7 1783
10 Thought about or threatened to take your own life	3.9 *** 27.3 206	-4.2 22.6 2020
14 Became angry and broke things	2.1 *** 25.3 256	-3.8 23.0 1525
17 Carried a razor, switchblade, or gun as a weapon	2.3 27.6 181	-1.1 24.5 2355
24 Sold narcotic drugs (dope, heroin)	5.4 *** 26.3 170	-1.1 24.6 2583
26 Received a failing grade in one or more school subjects	2.8 ** 25.3 243	-1.8 24.2 1575
28 Used wine, beer, or liquor more than two times	4.4 *** 25.8 383	-2.0 24.2 1733
29 Cheated on exams	-0.7 * 24.2 464	-3.2 23.0 1143
31 Attempted suicide	5.5 *** 28.7 139	-2.4 23.6 2426
33 Started a fist fight	0.5 26.6 180	-0.8 24.4 2106
38 Took narcotic drugs	5.9 *** 27.0 294	-1.9 24.0 2263

Table I. Continued

Deviant response	Students denying performance of deviant act prior to T <sub>2</sub> -T <sub>3</sub>	
	Students reporting deviant act T <sub>2</sub> -T <sub>3</sub>	Students denying deviant act T <sub>2</sub> -T <sub>3</sub>
44 Skipped school without an excuse	3.3 *** 25.3 385	-2.4 24.2 1983
50 Took part in gang fights	-0.1 25.2 138	-0.9 24.5 2471
57 Used force to get money or valuables	4.6 * 27.1 124	-1.0 24.5 2562
61 Broke into and entered a home, store, or building	3.7 * 27.1 103	-1.1 24.5 2633
64 Damaged or destroyed public or private property on purpose	4.2 ** 27.4 154	-1.1 24.2 2411
69 Stole things from someone else's desk or locker	3.0 ** 26.4 212	-2.0 23.9 2198
72 Used a car without the owner's permission	5.6 *** 25.2 178	-1.0 24.8 2524
75 Beat up someone who did nothing to you	7.3 *** 25.6 155	-1.5 24.3 2418
78 Took things worth \$50 or more	4.6 * 26.7 115	-0.8 24.7 2676
82 Smoked marijuana	2.5 ** 26.5 406	-1.7 24.0 2044

<sup>a</sup>Numbers refer to questionnaire items.

<sup>b</sup>The series of three entries in each column indicates the mean of the residual change score, the standard deviation, and the *N*. The asterisks indicate significance level: \* =  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* =  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < 0.001$  for difference between adjacent means by *t* test (one-tailed), assuming unequal variances (Welch, 1947).

<sup>c</sup>Positive signs indicate relative increases in self-derogation from T<sub>1</sub> to T<sub>2</sub>. Negative signs indicate relative decreases in self-derogation from T<sub>1</sub> to T<sub>2</sub>.

were considerably less likely to subsequently report performing the act if they previously expressed relatively little dissatisfaction with and motivation to leave their family and school membership groups, did not anticipate greater gratification from contranormative patterns, and did not perceive the "deviant" patterns as standard responses in their immediate environment.

The validation of the self-report data was considered by employing school personnel (vice-principal or school counselor) reports as an external criterion. The analysis revealed significant relationships between school personnel reports and student self-reports for all but one of the acts (cheating on exams). Self-report data were thus accepted as a rough indicator of deviant behaviors in the sense that the probability is far greater that a student who reports the act will have in fact committed the act (by the criteria of school personnel reports) than that a student who denies the act will have done so, or, conversely, in the sense that the probability is far greater that externally validated cases of deviant performers will so identify themselves than will performers whose deviant behavior is unknown. However, the analysis also indicated that a good deal of under-reporting occurred, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the particular act. Thus the self-reports could not be used to offer reliable estimates of the absolute number of deviant actors in the population under study.

The adoption of deviant responses was said to have occurred if subjects who reported not performing the act either prior to the first testing or during the period between the first and second testings did report (at the time of the third testing) performing the act during the period between the second and third test administrations. It was assumed that nonperformance of the act prior to the last period indicated subjective definition of the act as deviant and that subsequent adoption indicated a departure from prior conformity. It is recognized, of course, that nonperformance of an act might occur even in the face of subjective endorsement of an act, as in instances where an individual positively sanctions behaviors as appropriate ones to be performed at some future time, i.e., by way of anticipatory socialization. However, it is argued that (particularly in view of the validation of the item content summarized above) the probability is greater that the student has not accepted the act as a normatively endorsed membership group response and that the behavior constitutes a departure from prior conformity if he indicates prior nonperformance of the act in question than if he indicates prior performance.

### Analysis

To test the general hypothesis that the adoption of deviant response is preceded by an increase in self-derogation, the following procedure was followed in the separate consideration of the 22 deviant responses. All students who indicated by their responses at the first and/or second questionnaire administra-



tion that they had performed the deviant act during the periods covered by the questions were excluded from further analysis. Only students who indicated that they had not performed the act in question up to (but not including) the year period covered by the third questionnaire were retained in the analysis of the relationship between adoption of the deviant act and antecedent increase in self-derogation.

The students who were thus retained in the analysis were distributed among two groupings: (1) those who reported at the time of the third questionnaire administration that they had performed the deviant act during the preceding year and (2) those who reported not performing the act during the same time period. The two groupings were then compared with regard to the mean Rch SD 1-2 scores. It was hypothesized that for each deviant act the former group would manifest significantly greater Rch SD 1-2 scores, thus indicating that those who "initially" adopt a deviant response relative to those who continue not to do so have experienced significantly greater than expected *antecedent* (to the period of the deviant response) increase in self-derogation.

Significance of difference between mean Rch SD 1-2 scores was treated by a *t* test assuming unequal variances in the two groupings (Welch, 1947).

Separate consideration of the 22 deviant acts was justified by the observation of the characteristically low intercorrelations among the deviant patterns. Of the 231 intercorrelations, 202 were below 0.20. Only two of the correlations ( $r$  3,7;  $r$  10,31) were of a sufficient magnitude ( $> 0.316$ ) that more than 10% of the variance in one item was accounted for by the paired item. Such virtual independence was anticipated in view of the manifest dissimilarities among the items along a number of dimensions. Indeed, the items were selected in the expectation that they would be highly independent, thus facilitating the investigation of factors that were common to the genesis of a range of deviant patterns rather than those that accounted for one or a few modes of deviance.

## RESULTS

The results are summarized in Table I. In each of the 22 comparisons, differences were in the hypothesized direction. Among students denying performance of the act *prior* to  $T_2$ - $T_3$ , students who reported performing the act during  $T_2$ - $T_3$  relative to those who denied performing the behavior during the same period had manifested higher Rch SD 1-2 scores during the antecedent period  $T_1$ - $T_2$ . The differences were statistically significant in 19 of the 22 comparisons ( $p < 0.001$  in nine instances,  $p < 0.01$  in five instances, and  $p < 0.05$  in five instances). In another instance (variable 17), the difference approximated the 0.05 level ( $p < 0.054$ ).

## CONCLUSION

The data appear to provide strong support for the hypothesized relationship between adoption of deviant responses and antecedent increases in self-rejecting attitudes. Individuals who (presumably) initially adopted a deviant response during a given time period relative to those who continued to refrain from performing the deviant act over the same period manifested significantly greater than expected increases (or lower than expected decreases) in self-rejecting attitudes during the preceding period. In short, the results support the position that an antecedent condition of deviant responses is the experience of increased negative self-attitudes.

These results, by virtue of the change measure employed, cannot be accounted for in terms of the relationship between initial level of self-attitudes and amount or direction of change in self-attitudes. Nor can they be reinterpreted in terms of reversal of the hypothesized causal sequence by virtue of the mutually exclusive time periods employed in the analysis. However, it might be suggested that the relationship could be explained in terms of increased willingness to report deviant acts rather than in terms of adoption of the acts. That is, increased self-rejection could be associated with decreasing defensiveness and therefore an increased willingness to report acts that had previously been denied. Although not completely obviating this argument, three observations suggest its tenuous nature. First, significant relationships were observed between self-reports and an external validating criterion (school personnel reports). This observation cannot be accounted for by the students' reporting acts that they knew had been observed since far more acts were reported than were known to school personnel. Second, only persons who previously denied the acts in question were included in the analyses. These included an appreciable portion of high self-derogation subjects who denied prior performance of the act. Such an occurrence would not have been observed if the relationship between high self-derogation and willingness to admit to a deviant act were a very strong one. Third, and perhaps most significant in this connection, although these findings were not hypothesized and therefore are not reported here since they did not permit establishment of a temporal relationship, with few exceptions greater increases in self-derogation from  $T_1$  to  $T_2$  were consistently observed for persons who admitted performing the deviant act at all three points in time relative to those who denied the performance at all three points in time. Since for the former grouping the admission of the act was constant referring to periods both prior and subsequent to the observed changes in self-derogation ( $T_1$ - $T_2$ ), the increase in self-derogation by itself cannot account for subsequent willingness to admit to (as opposed to valid self-reports of) deviant acts. As noted above, the consistency of the relationship over the range of deviant acts cannot be accounted for in terms of the interdependence of the deviant acts. On the other hand, this

relationship between deviant response and antecedent increase in self-derogation consistently observed for a variety of highly independent deviant acts does provide support for the general theory of deviant behavior, a central tenet of which is the assertion that the genesis of negative self-attitudes is a common influence mediating between adverse social experiences and the adoption of any of a broad range of deviant responses.

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