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Self, identity, and negative youth adaptation: Introduction to the special issue

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ABSTRACT

Research on adolescent identity and negative adaptations has progressed considerably in the past few years. A significant body of work casts additional light on the role identity plays in development and how this process is related to negative developmental outcomes. The articles assembled for this Special Issue represent a broad cross-section of studies that help illuminate how identity scholars approach the topic of identity formation conceptually and how they elaborate the psychological mechanisms through which identity influences deviant adaptations. In this commentary, we provide a brief overview of identity and its relations to deviant adaptations. We then highlight the key themes in the articles including a discussion of some of the conceptual and methodological challenges faced by identity researchers.

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Self; identity; negative adaptation; positive adaptation; adolescence

“For indeed, in the social jungle of human existence there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity.” (Erikson, 1968, p. 131).

This special issue provides an examination of youth identity and negative adaptations. The reason for this focus is that a considerable literature has already addressed youth identity and positive adaptation (e.g., Berzonsky et al., 2007; Sharma & Sharma, 2010) including studies of well-being (Luyckx et al., 2007; Sandhu et al., 2012), academic proficiency (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2005), hope (Burrow et al., 2010), and other positive developmental outcomes (Phillips & Pittman, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2011). However, much less attention has been paid to identity in the context of negative adaptations. The few studies that exist have primarily emphasized internalizing problems (e.g., depression) or other forms of stress (Van Doeselaar et al., 2018). Meeus et al. (1999) provide a review of this literature and Crocetti et al. (2008) examine a modified identity status model with depression, school, generalized anxiety and Big Five personality outcomes. Still, this leaves a gap in the literature that needed to be filled.

In an effort to extend and refine this literature, the contributors to this special issue focus on the role of identity and its influence specifically on deviance and delinquency. We use the umbrella term “negative youth adaptation” because it can pertain to a broad array of topics, including deviance, delinquency, high-risk behaviors, mental health, teen

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pregnancy, and school dropout. All are major cost drivers in our society and continue to produce discussion regarding the need to better understand the processes that link identity development with negative outcomes; in essence, this is a question of finding out how youth who engage in wayward behavior fall through the cracks.

Despite our limited knowledge of the relations between identity and negative adaptations, there remains tremendous interest in learning more about these developmental processes. At the heart of this impetus are possible misconceptions about linkages between youth identity development and behavior. One possible misconception is that not knowing “who you are” (or not pursuing a course of action to find out who you are) will inevitably stand in the way of self-growth and mature psychosocial development. Erikson (1968) made this point explicit in his seminal writing, continually emphasizing that extreme forms of identity confusion were associated with neurotic behavior.

Notwithstanding his overtures, examples abound that suggest this supposition may not hold true in every situation. For example, there is evidence showing that members of groups engaging in deviant behaviors support each other, fulfill certain psychological needs, and affirm the individual’s self-concept. Dishion’s seminal studies of male “deviance talk” also lend support to the beneficial aspects of deviant associations (Dishion et al., 1995, 1996; and for a more recent discussion see; Piehler & Dishion, 2007). By observing youth in freely unrehearsed conversation and during interactive problem-solving tasks, these authors found that youth who engage in deviant behaviors prop each other up and engage in subtle encouragement of delinquent behavior as a form of camaraderie and social support. Rather than living in a world absent of social skills, such youth acquire much needed skills (e.g., reciprocity, negotiation, and cooperation) through friendships that help them to progress through identity formation, albeit creating one that deviates from social norms.

Gangs represent a unique form of social identity and as a result provide an excellent illustration of how group norms and the dynamics of collective behavior can often be misinterpreted. Contrary to most lay interpretations, gangs are not collections of youth who engage in socially deviant behaviors. Nor are they collections of individuals replete with anomie seeking to fill an identity vacuum. Rather they are well organized social and economic groups directing their energies to overcome social marginalization, poverty, and urban strife. Both Sánchez-Jankowki (Sánchez-Jankowski, 2003) and Woo et al. (2015) provide excellent interpretations of gangs from both a structural perspective (i.e., material advantage) and a social-psychological perspective (i.e., emphasizing social identity, inter-group processes, and communication theories).

Other examples of somewhat questionable identity-behavior linkages abound. Consider youth who use drugs and see themselves as deviant and who maintain very loyal ties to their peers, individuals who may also use drugs. Together, they attend music concerts, adorn themselves in distinct clothing styles (e.g., attire associated with a Goth identity), and associate with certain behavioral mores that distinguish them from their more conventional peers (e.g., they may have oddly styled hair or numerous body piercings as exemplars of what Flores, 2013 called *soft embodiment*). In this example, various facets of their identity may suggest some element of confusion (i.e., moratorium with respect to the ideological domain including educational or vocational goals), however, their friendship ties are backed by a deep sense of commitment, lending support to a powerful relationship identity. These experiences are reinforced by

conviction toward meaningful identity-based “causes” (e.g., political and personal beliefs) and coupled with strong ideals. This presents a quandary of sorts, because we do not have a clear picture of precisely how identity is linked with negative adaptations such as deviance or delinquency. If identity synthesis is equated with psychosocial maturity, then one can see that individuals who are law-abiding and feel connected to conventional institutions, are somewhat insulated and less likely to commit rules transgressions. However, this still does not clarify why youth who fail to consolidate their identity nor achieve psychosocial maturity are vulnerable to become delinquent or adopt negative behaviors. This was the task set before the contributors to this special issue, to gain some insight into identity processes and their developmental relations with negative adaptations.

Before readers explore the various contents of this issue, we briefly review several key concepts in the study of identity and negative adaptations. These include gaining clarity on the term “identity,” in particular discerning its developmental significance, and then specifying precisely how identity is associated with negative adaptations.

What is identity?

Berzonsky (1992) suggests that identity represents an organized sense of self that combines past experiences with future purpose. According to this view, identity unfolds as a “style” or orientation to the world based on patterned responses that represent a blend of experiences. It is the continuity of this style or orientation that we attach the word “identity” in an effort to give substance to a person’s organized mental construction of the self. Erikson (1968) noted that identity is where an individual “reflects” on his or her role as a person in a world with others summarizing across their values and goals (see also, La Guardia, 2009). In many respects, identity encompasses a compendium of skills, capabilities, roles, desires, motivations, and the product of relationships that unfold across the lifespan, inevitably shaping a person’s future (Berzonsky, 1990). Identity can be thought of as a system of checks and balances, where an individual internalizes a sense of the world (from infancy onward), its norms, mores, expectations, and contingencies, and then asks “who am I” when differentiating their own existence (“me”) against the backdrop of the larger context (Laing, 1969).

Identity is often depicted as a personal frame of reference that individuals use to sort through the endless flow of mental experience called life (see Hammack, 2015, for an excellent historical analysis of the identity concept). In the constructivist framework proposed by Berzonsky (2011), identity functions like an interpretational filter sifting through vast amounts of information from the “real world” and deciding what is useful and practical based on both current and future motivations. According to Berzonsky (2011), the filter can operate beneath the hood of consciousness in an implicit manner (i.e., the experiential or intuitive system), in the same way Bargh and Ferguson (2000) suggest that much of higher-order self-relevant thinking is automatic and not under willful volitional control.

Although functioning as a fluid filter, identity is not one single process, but rather a compendium of several social-cognitive processes, cumulatively accreting one moment to the next in an effort to secure the interface between an individual’s past activities and their future desires (this is the cognitive bridge that Markus & Nurius, 1986 referenced in

discussing possible selves). Identity then, becomes the continuity that links experiences across time, giving it both a temporal aspect (the here and now) and an indeterminate aspect (the unknown future). There is an ideological structure that is part of identity, which reflects the individual's position in society, their resources, and their capacities and beliefs (more on this later when we discuss ethnic identity). By necessity then, identity contains a social interactional component based on reflections of the self in context with friends, family, teachers, historical figures, and other members of the person's immediate world.

Reiterating the previous perspective, we suggest that identity is not a single thing but can consist of multiple facets, some of which are positive and some negative and some of which lead to positive outcomes and some negative. As noted earlier, youth who participate in deviant behaviors and join groups that do not follow traditional norms can experience boosts to specific identity features, even while social and cultural influences might assign negative features to such individuals. In addition, whereas membership in groups engaging in deviant behaviors can reinforce one's social identity and provide social skills benefits, it might provide little positive benefit with respect to potential career and occupational aspirations. Researchers and theorists have considered the possibility of multiple identities in a variety of domains, such as biracial or multiracial individuals (Gaither, 2018), individual, relational, public, and collective identity attributes (Cheek & Cheek, 2018), and a plethora of internal audiences and "I-positions" that correspond to the dialogical self (Hermans & Gieser, 2011). From this viewpoint, it makes sense that aspects of identity can have positive and negative adaptations within the same young person.

Theory and research suggest that adolescents develop their identity through a cumulative process of integrating their life experiences and making self-adaptations. Identity can be thought of as a "meaning making" process that combines the individual's quest for autonomy along with their tacit recognition of the need for connectedness, both essential components of self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Others have framed this essential task as one of philosophical oscillation between individualism and interdependence (Waterman, 1981). Narrative studies indicate that most youth consider their identity in the context of a story, one that links events of the past with future aspirations (McAdams & McLean, 2013). The story represents a coherent autobiographical vignette, contextualized in terms of social relationships, and crafted by the mind's eye to give structure, meaning and purpose to a person's life (McAdams, 2011). The importance of identity is reinforced by Erikson who commented that, "a firm sense of inner identity marks the end of the adolescent process and is a condition for further and truly individual maturation" (1968, p. 88). He felt that identity was an "evolving configuration," that incorporated or integrated "constitutional givens, idiosyncratic libidinal needs, favored capacities, significant identifications, effective defenses, successful sublimations, and consistent roles" (1968, p. 163). Erikson also pointed out the forces that help shape identity, including social groups, family, class, nation, and culture (this is what Erikson termed the *Umwelt* and why he felt that psychotherapeutic intervention required an historical component to analysis). This means that adolescents carry the results of a long developmental history of self-related processes with them that cumulatively fuel development of their unique identities. This developmental process, its associated self-

construal activities, the effects of significant others, and one's emerging identity all have important implications for positive and negative adaptation in adolescence and beyond.

Deviant identity

Cooley (1902) coined the term "looking-glass self" to suggest that youth obtain their self-concept through reflected appraisals, pooling self-reflections that encompass social interactions with friends, teachers, parents, and other authority figures to motivate a core sense of "self," in other words providing a social-cognitive perceptual basis for the "me" inside.¹ It is this motivational experience that youth use to share meaning making, create behavioral expectations and compare themselves to standards through social comparison (see for example, Festinger, 1954). For youth who engage in deviant behavior, their penchant for non-conformist actions revolves around reflected appraisals and verification from others, ultimately striking a balance between who they are, appear to be, and wish to be (Brownfield & Thompson, 2005; Matsueda, 1992). Individuals with a deviant identity lack an existential mooring to the world and their struggle to form a cohesive identity revolves around an inability to embrace societal standards based on competencies and capabilities. According to problem-behavior theory, deviant individuals stew in social criticism and antipathy toward the social order with the end result that they are rebellious, rule-breaking and nonconformist (Jessor et al., 1968; Jessor & Jessor, 1977). Their friendships involve other like-minded deviant individuals, creating the perfect social learning storm through a process of "homophilic peer selection" that accentuates identity-congruence in beliefs, values, and behaviors (Kandel, 1978, 1986).²

Kaplan (Kaplan, 1980, 1982; Kaplan & Johnson, 2001; Kaplan & Lin, 2000) suggested that individuals with a negative or deviant identity engage in self-derogation. These individuals cognitively ruminate, wallow in self-abnegation, and make negative attributions about themselves and toward the world. Their inability to see anything positive or under their control causes emotional distress (e.g., depression), which also interferes with their motivation to comply with normative standards of their immediate membership group. The self-derogating individual essentially rejects societal values given they have never felt comfort in or attached to groups that adhere to social controls and conventional behavior (i.e., a form of moral disengagement). Their hostile attitude toward themselves and others paves the way for them to reject societal standards and "elevate" themselves through social criticism and abandonment of societal norms (i.e., the non-conformist attitude). These attitudes originate when youth (or even as children) "fail to defend against, adapt to or cope with circumstances having self-devaluing implications" (Kaplan, 1982, p. 187).

As one of several sources of negative self-attitudes and self-devaluation, studies examining the effects of early peer rejection, for instance, have long suggested that loosening ties with conventional peers undermines the self-concept, with rejected peers (based on sociometric nominations) reporting higher levels of worry and loneliness (Asher & Wheeler, 1985; Parker & Asher, 1993). Deviant youth are often treated as "out-group" members because they threaten the normative, law-abiding integrity of the group. Further downstream, adoption of the deviant peer group with its emphasis on rule breaking, in this instance, represents a form of self-esteem enhancement (Kaplan, 1982; Vega et al., 1996, and see also; Abrams and Hogg [1988] for a social identity

perspective on deviance and self-esteem). In essence, opting for deviant adaptations and seeking membership in groups that reinforce the functional utility of deviance constitutes a means of reclaiming positive self-attitudes and restoring the self (this is considered the self-esteem motive that is central to Kaplan's work).

In attempting to tease apart the factors that contribute to a deviant identity, Erikson suggested that despair and disgust expressed by the deviant individual really reflects the individual's contempt of their own self, for failing to achieve ego synthesis. They are "ill at ease" and cannot discern between right and wrong or good and bad. Equally important, they cannot find a totality of self that is harmonious. In this state of mind, confusion reigns over synthesis leading to decompensation and neurotic behaviors. To avoid feelings of internal disequilibrium, these individuals "overidentify" with their peer crowds seeking to clarify their diffuse self in terms of others who share similar values (e.g., joining a smoking crowd or a group of youth that pursues delinquent activities). To further avoid disenfranchisement spurred by identity confusion, youth become "clannish" and adopt the values and mores of their deviant peers to the exclusion of others who may behave in a more conventional and law-abiding manner.³

The present articles

With this brief overview in mind, the articles in this special issue (see [Table 1](#)) delve into the issues of self, identity, and negative youth adaptations. At our behest, the contributing authors attempted to deal with one or more facets of the conceptual issues we raised either by dissecting identity to more manageable components or by specifying the different pathways through which identity can contribute to negative adaptations. In essence, we shared with contributing authors that we know certain relationships exist, however, we do not know why they exist, which provides the substantive grounds for this special issue.

As we noted in the previous sections of this introduction, features of both current self-perceptions and future orientation play important roles in the emergence of adolescent identity. This is one area where positive and negative adaptations can readily be seen in adolescents. In the first article, Corte et al. (2021) provide a systematic narrative review of identity couched in terms of "possible selves" and the influence of this construct on health-risk and health-promoting behaviors in adolescents. Possible selves, using the cognitive-self-structure approach of Markus and Nurius (1986), are part of identity research because they tap into the aspirations youth have for their future. In other words, what youth "hope to be" and their commitment to achieve certain goals in life dovetails with many current models of identity development that incorporate searching and commitment as essential to identity crystallization. The individual who feels they can achieve their desired "self" may forego certain health-compromising behaviors as their adoption can interfere with achieving these goals. Conversely, the individual who feels they may never achieve their goals may engage in health-risk engendering behaviors as there is little to lose from their standpoint. Corte et al. include outcomes in their review that are representative of the major health cost drivers including alcohol, tobacco, illicit drug use, dieting (weigh management) and sexual risk behaviors. It should be noted that there is a paucity of intervention-based studies that focus exclusively on improving youths' self-concept. However, this type of narrative review opens the door for designing

Table 1. Self, identity and youth negative developmental outcomes

Article Sequence	Authors	Email	Status & Focus	Submission
Introduction to Special Issue	Thomas M. Brinthaupt Lawrence M. Scheier	Tom. scheier@larsri.org	Brinthaupt@mtsu.edu	Self, Identity, and
Negative Youth Adaptation: Introduction to the Special Issue	SAI 70.21			
1	Colleen Corte, Chia-Kuei Lee, Karen F. Stein & Rebecca Raszewski	ccorte@uic.edu	Possible selves and health behavior in adolescents: A systematic review, <i>Self and Identity</i> , DOI: 10.1080/15,298,868.2020.1788137	SAI 31.19 162.19. R1
2	Browman, A. S., Svoboda, R. C., & Destin, M	browman@bc.edu	A belief in socioeconomic mobility promotes the development of academically motivating identities among low-socioeconomic status youth, <i>Self and Identity</i> , DOI: 10.1080/15,298,868.2019.1664624	SAI 32.19
3	Sinclair, H. C., Utley, J. W., Nelson, S., Ellithorpe, C. N., & Stubbs-Richardson, M.	colleen. sinclair@ssrc. msstate.edu	Identifiable impact: Consequences of identity-based aggression in high school	SAI 152.19. R2
4	Wills, T. A., Pokhrel, P., & Sussman, S. Y.	twills@crch. hawaii.edu	The intersection of social networks and individual identity in adolescent problem behaviors	SAI 50.20. R3
5	de Moor, E. L., Sijtsma, J. J., Weller, J. A., & Klimstra, T. A. (2021).	SAI 40.20.R1	demoor@gmail.com	
Longitudinal links between identity and substance use in	adolescence. <i>Self & Identity</i> , doi: 10.1080/15,298,868.2020.181615			

interventions that can capitalize on the important protective role of the “hoped for self” by teaching youth to find closer harmony between “what they actually do” and what they would like to do.

There are many ways that one’s future identity can impact positive or negative behaviors. In other words, as a young person’s identity begins to coalesce and they consider their future selves, it is important to understand how an emerging orientation toward the future might affect specific healthy or unhealthy decision making and behaviors. Browman et al. (2021) build off the notion of future identity (also using the Markus and Nurius possible selves’ context), however they place it in the context of socioeconomic mobility and future educational aspirations. Their pretext is that youth who aspire toward upward socioeconomic mobility will more than likely strive for an education-dependent future (i.e., the imagined future identity) and this relation will hold for low-SES youth as well (who may hold weak mobility beliefs). This is an important line of research because it dovetails with studies that show youth who engage in deviant behavior often do not envision a future, as studies of gang membership have shown youth willingly join gangs because “there is often no other choice” and they trust their fellow gang members who share similar social status in life (Goldman et al., 2014). From an attributional standpoint (or using communication expectations and self-fulfilling prophecy), individuals form their self-conception based on what others tell them, how they are perceived (by teachers and adult authority figures) and the opportunities that play out before them.

In many respects, finding out more about motivational factors that impel youth to want to succeed can have tremendous ramifications for designing interventions that boost educational aspirations (perhaps by teaching youth to remain steadfast about their future identity). To achieve this goal, the authors present three integrated studies (two that involve experimental manipulation) that elucidate the importance of future educational aspirations for low-income youth. The first study shows that education-dependent future identity mediates the effects of mobility beliefs on academic outcomes (GPA) using a short-longitudinal design. In the second study, the authors show that mobility beliefs can be strengthened, and this boosts education-dependent future identities compared to students in a weak-mobility belief condition (this relation held for lower SES students only). The third study involves a randomized controlled trial using a curriculum to manipulate high school students’ impression of future mobility (and financial success) and determine whether this influences their future aspirations for education and their academic motivation.⁴ There is no question that identity lies at the core of a person’s future ideal, including their passions and hopes for success in the real world. This too was noted by Erikson when he commented that a person’s identity rests on the steady conviction that “I am what I can imagine I will be” (1968, p. 122).

As we noted in the earlier literature review, peer group membership and peer pressure can play an important positive and negative role in the development of adolescent identity. Adolescence seems to be a time when peer effects are magnified compared to other developmental periods. Wills et al. (2021) delve into this facet of identity, by examining how peer group crowds (e.g., affiliations labeled as jocks vs. nerds) influence cigarette smoking behavior. The authors posit a mechanism involving self-esteem as a by-product of peer crowd affiliation through which group identification (i.e., peer homophily or the attraction to peers that share similar values and behaviors) promotes combustible cigarette and e-cigarette smoking. The peer crowd represents a social network that helps

youth to solidify their social identity and eventually with social learning as a backdrop alters behavior of the individual. This is consistent with Tajfel's (1978) view of social identity, which Wills et al. show can be captured by peer crowd affiliation.⁵ The authors then extend this premise to include ethnic identity, under the same assumption, that adopting values of the dominant familial-based ethnic group will promote self-esteem, which protects against smoking behavior.

As we noted earlier, adolescence is a time of peer pressure and self-focused attention as young people negotiate their identity possibilities. Peer groups can influence adolescents in positive or negative ways. For example, a person can be bullied and victimized (i.e., harmed in some way) because of their sexual orientation (LGBTQ+), race, or other differences that distinguish members of a group. The perception they are valued less and furthermore victimized because of something out of their control (i.e., racial differences) can cause a direct threat to one's emerging identity. Utley et al. (2021) address this dynamic by comparing the psychological and behavioral responses to social identity-based aggression compared to physical forms of aggression. They argue that social identity-based aggression (e.g., based on a person's social identity such as being black, gay, or immigrant) can exact a heavy toll on students, in part because it is both social and personal. They compare these effects to general aggressive victimization, including online contexts (i.e., cyber threats). Their results show that social identity-based victimization is a frequent occurrence among their high school sample. In addition to examining mean differences between social and physical forms of aggression, they also posit mediating mechanisms that can account for the role of psychological responses (i.e., fear, anger, and self-esteem) on behavioral responses (i.e., asocial, antisocial, self-harm behaviors). Their findings add to the literature by dissecting the way students respond to both social and physical victimization, the nature of their psychological responses, and the behaviors that result from these psychological mechanisms when confronted with attacks to their self or group identity.

One of the more pressing concerns in discussing the identity-delinquency connection is which comes first. This "chicken or the egg" conundrum arises because deviant identity can cause delinquency inasmuch as delinquency can promote a deviant identity. The issue of temporality is trenchant in many studies that seek to link self-concept and identity with deviance. De Moor et al. (2021) provide a powerful test of directionality using longitudinal data. In addition to sorting out the developmental mechanisms, they apply rigorous methodological techniques to address how identity changes over time. On the one hand they use a sophisticated person-centered approach (latent profile analysis) to derive meaningful clusters of identity styles (profiles are based on mean composites used as indicators of educational and relational identity), and then examine transitions in profile membership over three years (e.g., moving from diffusion to achievement). They also estimate the influence of substance use on both baseline identity profile membership and transition in profile membership. The second facet of their study examines whether transitions in both educational and relationship identity is related to subsequent substance use (i.e., use and nonuse of alcohol, marijuana, and energy drinks). In both cases, predicting initial membership and transitions in identity status over time and predicting drug use from identity status transitions helps to clarify the role of the chicken and the egg.

It gives us great pleasure to assemble the different articles contained in this special issue. They present novel ways of conceptualizing identity, highlight innovative approaches to studying adolescent identity, and spur additional thought regarding the

linkages between identity and negative adaptations. Some of our contributors focus on factors that affect the creation of positive or negative identity features, whereas other contributors note how a young person's existing identity features can lead to maladaptive behaviors and outcomes. It is worth noting, that a more nuanced perspective on engagement in behavior labeled delinquent and gang participation will need to consider more directly the roles of societal forces, such as systemic racism (Kanbur et al., 2020) and social media effects (Middaugh, 2019) as they influence adolescent identity development. These considerations tie back nicely with Erikson's emphasis on both culture and societal forces as they influence identity development.

We hope that these papers introduce new information that can push the event horizon with regard to how we think about identity development at different points across the lifespan.

Notes

1. According to labeling theory (Becker, 1963; Gove, 1975), if this "me" is viewed as "bad or evil" through reflected appraisals (i.e., one's social identity), the child will adopt a deviant, non-conformist attitude to comply with what their peers, parents and teachers see in terms of the child's actual behavior (i.e., living the stigma of the deviant stereotype in terms of one's self-identity and in the service of preserving or boosting one's self-esteem).
2. This is also a mainstay of identity-based motivation (Oyserman et al., 2012), which posits that youth formulate their identity dynamically based on both long-standing (chronically accessible) and situational cues, act on information that is accessible in mind and consistent with their norms, values, strategies, and behaviors, and that accessible content usually affirms the centrality of a person's identity. This suggests there is a cognitive filter of sorts even for youth who engage in deviant behavior, who interpret the world in terms of their own non-conforming behavior, and they choose to engage in behaviors (when placed in deviance-provoking settings) that confirm their readily accessible deviant identity construction. This process can be explained by the self-fulfilling prophecy and also captures what personality theorists' term "interactional continuity" (Caspi et al., 1989; Caspi & Roberts, 2001), which presupposes that over the life course individuals seek continuity of social interactions that redeem and create value for the self.
3. Ideally, this process is not reserved for youth who engage in deviant behavior, but can also be part of positive youth adaptation where youth select friends based on common core values, shared experiences (e.g., sporting activities) and homophilic peer selection (gravitating toward individuals who act and behave in accordance with one's self-picture).
4. An important concern that arises from this study is the authors' use of "disadvantaged" to describe the participating youth. The use of this term goes to the heart of labeling theory, which essentially states that if you tell youth they are disadvantaged, they will eventually come to see themselves as poor, downtrodden, socially marginalized, and disenfranchised. The high school seniors participating in the intervention trial were from low SES neighborhoods but may not see themselves as "disadvantaged." The intervention builds off the premise that instructing them that they do have a future and that they can succeed, despite the context of their upbringing, will alter their cognitions regarding their future pathways, and convince them to adopt an education-dependent future identity.
5. Hogg et al. (Hogg et al., 2011 and see also; Hogg, 2000, 2012; Hogg & Abrams, 1988 for a more careful elaboration of the theory) augment social identity theory by adding an uncertainty-identity component, suggesting that individuals are motivated to reduce uncertainty about the self (who am "I," where do I fit in, and what do I believe?). When faced with uncertainty, individuals form emotional attachments through identification with groups. This provides a basis for the individual to adopt the group's ideals, mores, and behaviors (i.e., the social-

cognitive basis for constructing prototypes representing a synthesis of desired “features” of the intact peer crowd). By necessity, the entitativity defined by a group’s coherence, shared attributes, defined boundaries, goals, and collective behaviors leads the individual to identify as an “ingroup” member more closely (i.e., seeking conformity and perhaps prestige even if the behavior is deviant). The self-categorization process also depersonalizes or distances the individual from “outgroup” members. Through group identification the individual lowers uncertainty regarding the self and increases self-esteem (the self-enhancement function can occur through downward social comparison to a less fortunate or less valued group that does not possess the desired features).

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