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*Crime & Delinquency* 2011 57: 709 originally published online 20 July 2009

DOI: 10.1177/0011128709340224

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# Institutional Misconduct, Delinquent Background, and Rearrest Frequency Among Serious and Violent Delinquent Offenders

Crime & Delinquency


57(5) 709-731

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DOI: 10.1177/0011128709340224

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## Abstract

This study examines the relationship of institutional misconduct to postrelease rearrest, controlling for a battery of preincarceration variables typically found to influence recidivism among institutionalized delinquent offenders. Based on data from 1,804 serious and violent male delinquents released from a large southern juvenile correctional system, this research found limited support for institutional misconduct as a determinant of recidivism. Of all measures of misconduct, only the rate of total misconduct infractions was related to postrelease rearrest, and this effect was generally small and found only in the rearrest frequency model, not the dichotomous rearrest model. Implications for research and practice are explored.

## Keywords

institutional misconduct; blended sentencing; serious and violent delinquents; recidivism; institutionalization

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There is growing recognition that institutional misconduct may be an important determinant of recidivism following release from institutionalization (Langan, Camp, & Saylor, 2004; Maruna & Toch, 2005). It is unfortunate that misconduct behavior while institutionalized has generally been disconnected from an understanding of postrelease recidivism outcomes (DeLisi, 2003), and little empirical research exists on this subject for adult (Huebner, Varano, & Bynum, 2007; Langan et al., 2004) or juvenile offenders (Lattimore, MacDonald, Piquero, Linster, & Visser, 2004; Trulson, Marquart, Mullings, & Caeti, 2005). Measures of offender behavior preincarceration, such as prior arrests and delinquent adjudications, have been staples in recidivism research involving juvenile offenders (Lattimore, Visser, & Linster, 1995)—in particular the body of recent recidivism research on institutionalized and released juvenile offenders (Benda, Corwyn, & Toombs, 2001a, 2001b; Cottle, Lee, & Heilbrun, 2001; Lattimore et al., 2004; Piquero, Brame, Mazerolle, & Haapanen, 2002; Ryan, Davis, & Yang, 2001; Trulson et al., 2005). The lack of research on the relationship of institutional misconduct to recidivism is thus surprising considering that misconduct behavior is a key indicator of continuity in delinquent and other antisocial behaviors. Moreover, factors found determinative of misconduct among institutionalized delinquent offenders (e.g., Kuanliang, Sorensen, & Cunningham, 2008; MacDonald, 1999; Trulson, 2007) are some of the same factors that have traditionally provided insight into postrelease recidivism (Cottle et al., 2001; Lattimore et al., 1995; Trulson et al., 2005).

Although research remains limited, further inquiry into the relationship of misconduct to postrelease recidivism for juvenile offenders is important on a number of fronts. First, studies have confirmed that time institutionalized is for many juvenile offenders time to continue offending on the “inside” (MacDonald, 1999; Poole & Regoli, 1983; Trulson, 2007) and, for some, at a relatively frequent and serious pace (Kuanliang et al., 2008; Trulson, 2007). If such offenders demonstrate continuity in delinquent and other antisocial behaviors while institutionalized, despite the suppressive environment characteristic of institutionalization, there is little reason to believe that these offenders will cease offending in the immediate period following their release from institutionalization. In short, offending continuity “inside” may emerge as an important precursor of continued offending on the “outside.”

Second, indicators of institutional misconduct are often the most proximate recorded behaviors demonstrated by delinquent offenders at their point of release from institutionalization. Delinquent history measures and other preincarceration variables routinely correlated with recidivism, for example, are often years divorced from a delinquent’s behavior while institutionalized, and even further separated from an offender’s release from incarceration. If

current behavior is most closely associated with the proximate past, the more recent behavioral measures of misconduct may then serve to advance our understanding of the determinants of postrelease recidivism. Indeed, a growing body of literature has found that local life circumstances are an important part of explaining current behavior (Piquero, Brame, et al., 2002; Piquero, MacDonald, & Parker, 2002; Sampson & Laub, 2003), and institutional misconduct measures shore up some of the time gap in knowledge on the behavior of institutionalized offenders.

Third and finally, the relationship between misconduct and recidivism has important practical implications for those responsible for releasing juvenile offenders, especially for the release of the most serious, violent, and chronic of all state committed juvenile offenders. Youthful offenders who reach state incarceration are the most problematic offenders in the juvenile justice system. As a whole, they are offenders who are still on the escalation side of the aggregate age-crime curve (Sampson & Laub, 2003) are the most extreme of all left-hand side offenders (Piquero, Brame, et al., 2002), and, when released from state juvenile incarceration, represent some of the most risky offenders relative to recidivism. Greater insight into the potential of misconduct as a risk factor for recidivism postrelease, independent of the effects of traditionally used delinquent history indicators, would improve on knowledge in this area.

## Prior Research

To the best of our knowledge, only two research studies have empirically examined the relationship of misconduct to recidivism among institutionalized juvenile offenders. In the first, Trulson and colleagues (2005) examined the recidivism outcomes of a sample of 2,436 state incarcerated delinquents released from Texas's state juvenile facilities. Logistic regression analyses revealed that state delinquents categorized as "institutional dangers" while incarcerated had significantly higher odds of rearrest during a 5-year period postrelease. The odds of rearrest for institutional dangers increased by 40% for any offense and by 47% for a felony offense postrelease, independent of the effects of a number of delinquent and social history variables. In fact, institutional misconduct emerged as the strongest predictor of recidivism postrelease.

In a second study, Lattimore and colleagues (2004) examined the postrelease rearrest rate of more than 3,000 California Youth Authority (CYA) wards during the first 3 years after their release from institutionalization. Lattimore and colleagues found that those youth who engaged in gang related activity while confined had an increased expected arrest rate of 9% and youth involved in CYA violence had an increased expected arrest rate of 14%, net the effects of a number of variables. Moreover, the rate of total misconduct

infractions was also related to the expected arrest rate. Negative binomial and generalized negative binomial estimates revealed that a one unit increase in the ward's infraction rate increased the expected arrest rate by 7%. Further analyses examining the predicted probability of rearrest relative to other variables found that those who engaged in misconduct while institutionalized had a higher predicted probability of arrest as their number of arrests increased. Thus, not only were various forms of misconduct associated with an increased expected arrest rate net the effects of other controls, but wards with misconduct problems also demonstrated a higher probability of rearrest as the number of rearrests increased.

Despite the paucity of research, these important studies provide some insight into the contribution of institutional misconduct in understanding postrelease recidivism. Both studies used large samples of state committed delinquent offenders, and measures of institutional misconduct were some of the strongest predictors of recidivism postrelease. The findings of the Trulson et al. and Lattimore et al. studies are also consistent with one recent research effort focused on a sample of young adult prisoners (e.g., ages 17-24). Huebner et al. (2007) found that the frequency of institutional misbehavior was one of the strongest predictors of timing to reconviction, controlling for other important variables. Prisoners rated as high on misconduct frequency while institutionalized (e.g., 12 and more infractions) were reconvicted more than a year earlier than those with low misconduct frequency and nearly 3 years sooner than those with zero recorded incidents of misconduct while confined. The small amount of research on the relationship of misconduct to recidivism has demonstrated that continuity in offending while institutionalized may have important effects on postrelease recidivism. This research seeks to add to that knowledge base by exploring the relationship of various indicators of institutional misconduct to postrelease recidivism.

## **This Study**

This study adds to the body of existing research on the relationship of institutional misconduct to recidivism by examining the postrelease rearrest outcomes of a cohort of 1,804 serious and violent male delinquents released from a large state juvenile correctional agency. This study extends previous research by examining several measures of total, aggressive, and generally antisocial forms of institutional misconduct. This article also extends previous research by focusing on a large cohort of serious and violent institutionalized juvenile offenders. Uncovering the factors related to rearrest among serious and violent institutionalized delinquents, with a focus on

institutional misconduct, may provide important practical information related to the release decisions of such serious juvenile offenders and potential areas of intervention and prevention (Lattimore et al., 2004).

## Method

### *Sample*

The sample for this research includes 1,804 serious and violent male delinquent offenders released from a large southern Youth Correctional System (YCS, a pseudonym, is used because confidentiality was a condition of data retrieval) between 1987 and 2004. As opposed to a generalized or mixed sample of state committed delinquents, all 1,804 offenders in this study were sentenced to state juvenile incarceration as serious and violent offenders under a unique blended sentencing statute. Adopted in 1987, the blended sentencing statute in the state under study provides authority to juvenile court judges to sentence delinquents adjudicated of certain serious and/or violent crimes up to a 40-year determinate sentence, starting in the YCS and potentially ending in an adult penitentiary (e.g., the blending of juvenile and adult sanctions).<sup>1</sup>

Upon adjudication under this statute, the delinquent is first placed in the YCS until his or her 18th birthday. A hearing is then held to determine one of four options: (a) release and placement on juvenile parole until a maximum age of 21, (b) recommitment to confinement in the YCS until a maximum age of 21, (c) release and discharge from YCS jurisdiction without parole supervision, or (d) transfer to adult prison to continue the determinate sentence up to a 40-year maximum. This study examines the rearrest outcomes of those offenders who were granted release from the juvenile correctional system through options a through c, short of serving the remainder of their determinate sentence in adult prisons. The 1,804 offenders represent 71% of all male offenders sentenced under the blended sentencing statute since 1987 and released by 2004.

### *Data*

The YCS provided electronic data detailing the personal characteristics, delinquent histories, and institutional misconduct for the sample of offenders in this study. These measures were originally compiled through a combination of official record checks, offender self-reports, observations, and/or on-site

diagnostic procedures conducted by YCS staff at intake and during the juvenile's confinement.

The YCS also provided the recidivism data for the sample in this research. Statewide arrest data are collected and centrally maintained by the state's Department of Law Enforcement (DLE, a pseudonym). The YCS, in conjunction with the DLE, maintains rearrest information on all state committed offenders incarcerated and released from state juvenile confinement. Arrest count data are tracked even as delinquent offenders transition to adulthood.

## Measures

*Dependent variable.* The dependent variable is a measure of the total number of rearrests for new offending following release from juvenile institutionalization. It is unfortunate that our data do not allow consideration of whether the releases served periods of incarceration after their release from YCS—incarceration time that may have truncated their “free” time after release to accumulate arrests (see Lattimore et al., 2004, for a similar measure of rearrest frequency and also adjustment for incarceration time postrelease; Piquero, Brame, et al., 2002; Sampson & Laub, 2003). Although this is a limitation of the data (see, generally, Piquero et al., 2001), this limitation is not uncommon in recidivism analyses in general or among institutionalized delinquents (e.g., Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998; Piquero, Brame, et al., 2002).

In terms of postrelease rearrest, Table 1 shows that 64% ( $n = 1,157$ ) of the study sample was rearrested at least once postrelease, and 46% ( $n = 831$ ) were rearrested for at least one felony.<sup>2</sup> As a whole, the study sample incurred an average of 4.55 rearrests postrelease ( $SD = 6.35$ ). As the standard deviation indicates, there was moderate variation in rearrest activity among the sample. Relative to the seriousness of rearrests, we ranked the most serious rearrest incurred based on penal code categories in the state under study. Based on this ranking, the study sample averaged a score of 6.51 ( $SD = 2.14$ ), which in the state under study is generally indicative of a lower level felony offense.

*Independent variables.* The primary independent variables of interest in this study are measures of institutional misconduct frequency. We use six measures of institutional misconduct. To account for different periods of time incarcerated for each offender and the influence of time served on raw misconduct counts, we converted each misconduct measure into a rate per year confined. The first measure of misconduct is total misconduct and is an omnibus measure of the frequency of participation in any form of misconduct recorded during a youth's institutionalization. The sample engaged in an average of 67 misconduct incidents each during their confinement and this

**Table 1.** Sample Characteristics (*n* = 1,804)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Dependent variable</b>		
Frequency of postrelease arrests	4.55	6.35
<b>Frequency and seriousness of postrelease arrests</b>		
Rearrested at least once postrelease (1 = yes)	0.64	—
Rearrested for at least one felony (1 = yes)	0.46	—
Rank seriousness of most serious rearrest <sup>a</sup>	6.51	2.14
<b>Independent variables</b>		
<b>Institutional misconduct</b>		
Total misconduct (rate per year confined)	66.63 (17.32)	112.44 (26.22)
Staff assaults (rate per year confined)	0.46 (0.12)	1.47 (0.37)
Youth assaults (rate per year confined)	3.04 (0.82)	5.03 (1.21)
Danger to others (rate per year confined)	5.36 (1.38)	9.46 (2.20)
Possession of a weapon (rate per year confined)	0.10 (0.03)	0.42 (0.11)
Gang related activity (rate per year confined)	0.28 (0.07)	1.07 (0.28)
<b>Youth and delinquency background</b>		
African American (1 = yes)	0.32	—
White (1 = yes)	0.26	—
Hispanic (1 = yes)	0.40	—
Other (1 = yes)	0.02	—
Substance abuser (1 = yes)	0.43	—
Age at YCS commitment	15.35	1.15
Age at YCS release	18.89	1.28
Days served in YCS	1305.10	439.37
Previous felony adjudications	1.26	0.57
Total previous adjudications	1.56	0.90
Out-of-home placements	0.43	1.10
Gang affiliated (1 = yes)	0.35	—
Gang related commitment offense (1 = yes)	0.16	—
<b>Commitment offense</b>		
Homicide related (1 = yes)	0.26	—
Sexual related (1 = yes)	0.39	—
Serious property/person (1 = yes)	0.19	—
Other (1 = yes)	0.16	—
<b>Postrelease supervision</b>		
Released from YCS on parole supervision (1 = yes)	0.42	—
Exposure time	2095.87	1223.26

Note: YCS = Youth Correctional System.

a. Most serious rank based on following rankings: Unclassified Misdemeanor = 1; Misdemeanor C = 2; Misdemeanor B = 3; Misdemeanor A = 4; Unclassified Felony = 5; State Jail Felony = 6; Felony 3 = 7; Felony 2 = 8; Felony 1 = 9; Capital Felony = 10.

equaled a total misconduct rate of 17.32 incidents per offender, per year confined.

We also use three forms of generally serious misconduct: assaultive behavior against staff members, assaultive behavior against other offenders, and being considered a danger to others as determined by institutional staff. Table 1 shows that sample members engaged in staff assaults much less frequently than both youth assaults and dangerous activity. The sample averaged 3.04 youth assaults during their confinement (0.82 incidents per year confined) and 5.36 instances of being a danger to others (1.38 incidents per year confined) versus 0.46 assaults on staff during their confinement (0.12 rate per year). Finally, we use two misconduct measures that are generally indicative of continued antisocial behavior: possession of a weapon and participation in gang related activity while confined. Overall, the study sample demonstrated low levels of weapons possession misconduct ( $M = 0.10$ ,  $SD = 0.42$ , rate per year = 0.03) or gang related activity ( $M = 0.28$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ , rate per year = 0.07). Although we do not have any way to account for differences in the detection of misconduct incidents by staff members, or discretion of staff in recording detected misconduct, the individual misconduct measures are those where discretion among staff is perhaps less likely compared with other behaviors (e.g., failure to follow general program rules).

We also use several youth and delinquency background variables based on their empirical relevance to misconduct and/or recidivism among institutionalized delinquent offenders. A youth characteristic variable indicating race is included with codes for African American ( $M = .32$  or 32% of the sample), Hispanic ( $M = .40$ ), White ( $M = .26$ ), and Other ( $M = .02$ ). This variable was dummy-coded for use in the multivariate model with African American as the reference category. Continuous delinquent history variables include the age at YCS commitment ( $M = 15.35$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ), age at YCS release ( $M = 18.89$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ), days served in YCS ( $M = 1,305$ ,  $SD = 439$ ), number of previous felony adjudications ( $M = 1.26$ ,  $SD = 0.57$ ), total previous delinquent adjudications ( $M = 1.56$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ), and out-of-home placements prior to the current commitment ( $M = 0.43$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ). Additional categorical delinquent history variables indicate whether or not the youth was categorized as a substance abuser at state commitment, gang related, or committed for an offense that was gang related. Forty-three percent of the sample were categorized as substance abusers at their state commitment. Slightly more than one third of the sample were considered gang related at their state commitment, and roughly 16% of the sample were committed for an offense that was also considered gang related. A variable indicating whether or not the offender was released from the YCS on juvenile parole supervision

was used to control for the potential effects that parole supervision may have on postrelease rearrest. Of the entire sample, 42% were released to parole supervision versus released without any supervision requirements.

We also include measures indicating the specific commitment offense for each offender. Although all offenders in the study sample are considered serious and violent, the specific type of commitment offense may have some bearing on postrelease arrest frequency. The separate commitment offenses were collapsed and dummy-coded into homicide related offenses (capital murder, attempted capital murder, murder, attempted murder, criminally negligent homicide, and voluntary manslaughter;  $M = .26$ , or 26% were homicide related offenders), sexual related offenses (aggravated sexual assault, attempted aggravated sexual assault, attempted sexual assault, and sexual assault;  $M = .39$ ), serious property/person offenses (aggravated robbery and attempted aggravated robbery;  $M = .19$ ), and other offenses (felony injury to a child or elderly individual, felony indecency with a child, deadly conduct, aggravated kidnapping, aggravated assault, arson, conspiracy to commit murder, and solicitation to commit murder;  $M = .16$ ). Based on these figures, the sample was clearly involved in serious and violent offenses, which led to their commitment to state juvenile institutionalization.

Finally, to account for different offender follow-up periods postrelease, despite the absence of information on potential periods of incarceration, we control for exposure time in the analysis. As Table 1 shows, the sample averaged nearly 2,100 days of exposure time, or roughly 6 years, based on the point of YCS release to data retrieval from YCS. However, the standard deviation suggests much variation in exposure time for individual releases. To account for exposure time differences and the effect that different exposure times can have on rearrest frequency, we estimate a negative binomial model that uses a rate of arrests postrelease rather than the frequency of rearrests. It does so by using the log of the number of days of exposure time and converting the dependent variable (rearrest frequency) to a rate of arrests per period of postrelease exposure for each individual offender. This has the effect of standardizing different follow-up times relative to rearrest frequency and, hence, opportunity for accumulating rearrests (Long & Freese, 2006).<sup>3</sup>

## Model Estimation

To examine the relationship of misconduct to the rearrest rate postrelease, we estimated a multivariate negative binomial regression model in Stata version 10.0. Because rearrest counts are constrained to zero and demonstrate heteroskedastic errors, the assumptions of a linear regression model are violated

and using this statistical model would lead to biased estimates. Negative binomial models, as opposed to other count models such as Poisson regression, also provide superior estimates on the type of data used in this study. For example, rearrest data tend to also be positively skewed and overdispersed on the dependent variable, meaning that the conditional variance exceeds the conditional mean and this leads to biased standard error estimates and, ultimately, misleading indications of statistical significance (Lattimore et al., 2004; Long & Freese, 2006).<sup>4</sup> The negative binomial model is also preferred to the standard Poisson model because it does not retain the strict assumption that events such as future arrests are independent of preceding arrests (e.g., Lattimore et al., 2004). Because of these conditions, negative binomial regression is preferred over linear regression or a standard Poisson regression model.

## Findings

Table 2 presents the results of the negative binomial regression model for the postrelease rearrest rate. It presents the regression coefficient ( $b$ ), the factor change in the expected rearrest rate [ $Exp(b)$ ], and the percentage change in the expected rearrest rate for a one unit increase of the independent variable [%  $Exp(b)$ ]. Discussion of the findings focuses on the percentage change in the expected rearrest rate holding other variables constant. It is interpreted as a one unit increase of the independent variable leading to a +/- \_\_\_% change in the expected rearrest rate.

The findings in Table 2 demonstrate that with the exception of the omnibus measure of misconduct (total misconduct), no other individual measures of misconduct were predictive of the expected rearrest rate (all were, however, in the expected direction based on previous research). Moreover, although total misconduct demonstrated a positive and statistically significant effect on postrelease arrests, the coefficient is extremely small and appears to offer little utility in explaining variation in the rearrest rate for this sample. For example, the model indicates that a one unit increase in the total misconduct rate is equivalent to a .30% increase in the expected rearrest rate, net the effects of other variables in the model. Thus, for this sample, involvement in various forms of institutional misconduct did not emerge as a strong barometer of the postrelease rearrest rate controlling for other factors.

With regard to race, the findings indicate that being White [% change in  $Exp(b)$ , -41%], Hispanic (-35%), or Other (-69%) was associated with a substantial decrease in the expected rearrest rate relative to being an African American offender. Being a youth categorized as a substance abuser by the

**Table 2.** Negative Binomial Regression Model of Postrelease Arrests (n = 1,779)

	<i>b</i>	<i>Exp(b)</i>	% <i>Exp(b)</i>
<b>Independent variables</b>			
<b>Institutional misconduct</b>			
Total misconduct (rate per year confined)	0.01	1.00	0.30*
Staff assaults (rate per year confined)	0.02	1.02	1.70
Youth assaults (rate per year confined)	0.01	1.01	1.10
Danger to others (rate per year confined)	0.02	1.02	2.40
Possession of a weapon (rate per year confined)	0.12	1.13	13.00
Gang related activity (rate per year confined)	0.08	1.09	9.30
<b>Youth and delinquency background</b>			
African American (I = yes) (reference category)	—	—	—
White (I = yes)	-0.53	0.58	-41.00***
Hispanic (I = yes)	-0.43	0.64	-35.40***
Other (I = yes)	-1.18	0.30	-69.30***
Substance abuser (I = yes)	0.15	1.16	17.00***
Age at YCS commitment	-0.02	0.97	-2.80
Age at YCS release	0.02	1.02	2.50
Days served in YCS (log)	0.08	1.09	9.00
Previous felony adjudications	0.11	1.12	12.60**
Total previous adjudications	0.09	1.10	10.30***
Out-of-home placements	-0.01	0.98	-1.90
Gang affiliated (I = yes)	0.20	1.22	22.50***
Gang related commitment offense (I = yes)	-0.02	0.97	-2.20
<b>Commitment offense</b>			
Homicide related (I = yes) (reference category)	—	—	—
Sexual related (I = yes)	0.10	1.11	11.10
Serious property/person (I = yes)	0.16	1.17	18.00*
Other (I = yes)	0.12	1.13	13.30
<b>Postrelease supervision</b>			
Released from YCS on parole supervision (I = yes)	0.08	1.08	8.70
Log likelihood	-4274.57		
$\chi^2$	254.04***		
LR $\chi^2$	4902.22***		

Note: 25 cases were dropped due to missing information on one or more misconduct variables. YCS = Youth Correctional System.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001.

YCS at state commitment increased the expected arrest rate by 17%. Both the number of previous felony and delinquent adjudications (not counting the most recent adjudication that led to state commitment) were significant and positively related to the expected rearrest rate. A one unit increase in

previous felony adjudications increased the expected rearrest rate by 13% and by 10% relative to the number of total previous adjudications.

Youth categorized as gang affiliated at state commitment demonstrated an increased expected rearrest rate. Being gang affiliated increased the expected rearrest rate by roughly 23%, net the effects of other variables in the model. Relative to commitment offense, being a serious property/person offender increased the expected rearrest rate by 18% compared with homicide related commitments. Although not significant, it is important to note that all other categories of offenders had an increased expected rearrest rate relative to homicide related commitments, indicating that lower expected arrest rate was associated with a delinquent commitment for homicidal behavior.

In addition to the negative binomial model focused on rearrest rate across the entire release period, we also estimated two separate logistic regression models focused on those offenders with at least one rearrest and those offenders who incurred at least one felony rearrest following their release (see Table 3). In the absence of a measure of postrelease incarceration time, a dichotomous logistic regression model allowed for a potentially less biased model in the event that released offenders did experience periods of postrelease incarceration, thus truncating their real exposure time to accumulate rearrests. To account for exposure time differences postrelease, we limited the follow-up period to those offenders who had at least 3 years of follow-up.<sup>5</sup>

Table 3 presents the results of the logistic regression analysis. The first model examines those offenders who accumulated at least one rearrest within the 3-year fixed follow-up, and the second model examines those who accumulated at least one felony rearrest in the 3-year fixed follow-up. Focused specifically on misconduct indicators as a predictor of rearrest, the results are generally consistent with previous analyses. Results of the logistic regression estimation provide little evidence that indicators of misconduct are a barometer of postrelease rearrest. In fact, in neither logistic regression model were any of the misconduct measures significantly associated with the dichotomous rearrest measures. Some differences did emerge, however, between the negative binomial estimation and the logistic regression models. For example, being a substance abuser was not related to rearrest for any offense, although substance abuse was associated with felony rearrest. The total number of previous adjudications was significant and positively related to any rearrest but not to felony rearrest. Previous felony adjudications failed to attain statistical significance in either logistic regression model, although it was a significant factor in the negative binomial model predicting the rearrest

**Table 3.** Logistic Regression Model of Any Rearrest and Any Felony Rearrest in 3 Years

	Any Rearrest (n = 1,433)			Felony Rearrest Only (n = 1,420)		
	B	SE(B)	Exp(B)	B	SE(B)	Exp(B)
Independent variables						
Institutional misconduct						
Total misconduct (rate per year confined)	0.01	0.01	1.01	0.00	0.01	1.00
Staff assaults (rate per year confined)	0.28	0.28	1.32	0.26	0.25	1.30
Youth assaults (rate per year confined)	-0.02	0.08	0.98	0.01	0.07	1.01
Danger to others (rate per year confined)	0.13	0.07	1.14	0.12	0.06	1.12
Possession of a weapon (rate per year confined)	0.12	0.64	1.13	0.55	0.65	1.74
Gang related activity (rate per year confined)	0.74	0.62	2.10	-0.40	0.45	0.67
Youth and delinquency background						
African American (1 = yes) (reference category)	—	—	—	—	—	—
White (1 = yes)	-0.83	0.16	0.44***	-0.92	0.16	0.40***
Hispanic (1 = yes)	-0.72	0.14	0.49***	-0.98	0.14	0.38***
Other (1 = yes)	-1.95	0.48	0.14***	-2.03	0.51	0.13***
Substance abuser (1 = yes)	0.14	0.12	1.15	0.39	0.12	1.47**
Age at YCS commitment	-0.06	0.11	0.94	-0.12	0.11	0.89
Age at YCS release	0.06	0.12	1.06	0.07	0.12	1.07
Days served in YCS (log)	-0.32	0.37	0.71	-0.51	0.37	0.60
Previous felony adjudications	0.08	0.12	1.08	0.12	0.11	1.13
Total previous adjudications	0.22	0.10	1.25***	0.15	0.08	1.16
Out-of-home placements	0.07	0.06	1.07	-0.02	0.06	0.98
Gang affiliated (1 = yes)	0.22	0.14	1.25	0.22	0.14	1.25
Gang related commitment offense (1 = yes)	0.03	0.17	1.03	0.01	0.17	1.01
Commitment offense						
Homicide related (1 = yes) (reference category)						
Sexual related (1 = yes)	-0.40	0.16	0.68*	-0.48	0.16	0.62**
Serious property/person (1 = yes)	0.00	0.18	1.00	-0.53	0.18	0.59**
Other (1 = yes)	-0.34	0.18	0.71	-0.53	0.18	0.59**

(continued)

**Table 3. (continued)**

	Any Rearrest ( <i>n</i> = 1,433)			Felony Rearrest Only ( <i>n</i> = 1,420)		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE(B)</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE(B)</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
Postrelease supervision						
Released from YCS on parole supervision ( <i>I</i> = yes)	0.18	0.13	1.20	0.26	0.13	1.30*
$\chi^2/df$			150.27/22			171.44/22
<i>p</i>			< .001			< .001
Nagelkerke <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>			0.13			0.15
Cox & Snell <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>			0.10			0.11

Note: YCS = Youth Correctional System.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001.

rate. It is important that gang membership failed to emerge as a significant predictor in either dichotomous model, although it was associated with an increased expected rearrest rate in the negative binomial model. Finally, parole supervision failed to be related to rearrest frequency, but those released on parole supervision had greater odds of rearrest for a felony offense postrelease.

In an overall view, the results of the logistic regression models provided additional evidence in this study that a variety of indicators of misconduct offered little explanation of postrelease reoffending for this specific group of serious and violent male delinquents. Moreover, estimation of a logistic regression model led to slightly different conclusions on the importance of certain variables, such as gang membership, commitment offense type, and other delinquent history variables such as previous felony adjudications relative to the count model. The inconsistent effect of these variables across models may be related to the different outcomes examined—the rate of rearrests over an entire follow-up versus a dichotomous outcome over a fixed 3-year window.

## Discussion and Conclusions

This study focused on the influence of institutional misconduct as a barometer of postrelease rearrest among a group of serious and violent male institutionalized delinquent offenders. The small amount of extant research on this topic has generally supported the notion of institutional misconduct as a risk factor for future recidivism, and this study sought to add to that literature base with a large group of serious and violent male delinquent offenders

while using a variety of misconduct indicators. The findings of this study can be summarized as follows: Measures of total, assaultive, and generally anti-social misconduct provided little insight into the rearrest outcomes of serious and violent delinquent offenders postrelease. Although the measure of total misconduct was significant, its effect on the expected rearrest rate was extremely small and this finding was limited to the negative binomial model. Being a gang member, a substance abuser, and having incurred a lengthier and more serious adjudication record prior to commitment—all delinquent history preincarceration measures—were related to significant increases in the expected rearrest rate, net the effects of other variables. However, gang membership was not significant in the dichotomous model, being a substance abuser was significant only in the felony arrest model, and total previous adjudications was significant only in the any rearrest model.

On one hand, the results of this study provide very limited support for the relationship of institutional misconduct to recidivism as found in the small body of extant research (although all misconduct coefficients were positive in relation to the postrelease rearrest rate, and this finding was generally true in the dichotomous models). For example, Lattimore and colleagues (2004) found that gang involvement, violent activity, and the total infraction rate while confined were some of the strongest predictors of the expected rearrest rate among a cohort of youth released from California juvenile facilities, independent of the effects of several social, familial, and delinquent history variables. Trulson and colleagues (2005) revealed that being an “institutional danger” significantly increased the odds of rearrest, net the effects of numerous delinquent and social history variables. Although the rate of total misconduct incidents as measured in this study was related to an increase in the expected rearrest rate (see also Huebner et al., 2007, finding a significant effect for an omnibus measure of total misconduct on reconviction timing), the effect was small. The bottom line is that the findings of this study generally support previous research on the effect of misconduct on recidivism, just not to the same extent, and such support appears to depend somewhat on whether the outcome examined is a rearrest rate versus variation in being rearrested.

On the other hand, the findings of this study are more consistent with the body of research on the recidivism outcomes of state committed delinquents, in general, that delinquent history variables are some of the strongest determinants of recidivism (Cottle et al., 2001). For example, gang affiliation emerged as the strongest predictor of the expected rearrest rate, and this finding is consistent with a number of recent studies (Benda et al., 2001a, 2001b; Trulson et al., 2005; Wiebush, Wagner, McNulty, Wang, & Le, 2005). Prior

adjudications was also related to the expected rearrest rate and rearrest, consistent with previous research (Cottle et al., 2001; Lattimore et al., 2004; Ryan et al., 2001; Trulson et al., 2005; Wiebush et al., 2005), as was the measure for substance abuse (Benda et al., 2001a, 2001b; Cottle et al., 2001).

Although we found limited support for institutional misconduct relative to the expected rearrest rate, it is important to note some differences with this study compared to the body of previous research. First, this study examined an exclusive cohort of serious and violent state commitments. The sample in this study appears to represent a more serious and violent group of delinquents than used in previous research. This is not to criticize previous research but, rather, to recognize that institutional misconduct indicators, as measured in this study, may be more relevant among more generalized or mixed samples of institutionalized delinquent offenders than strictly serious and violent state commitments. Indeed, the sample of focus in this study was composed of a group of male offenders sentenced under a blended sentencing statute strictly reserved for the most serious and violent offenders in the state under study. In short, our results may not generalize to less serious samples of institutionalized juvenile offenders. These findings imply that it is premature to close the door on the relationship of misconduct to recidivism, especially for serious and violent state commitments. This study is then a prompt for further research examining different offender samples and, in particular, the most serious of all state committed delinquents. Second and related, this research used several measures of misconduct. With the exception of one additive measure of total misconduct, all were individual measures of misconduct, and the diversity of misconduct measures in this study appears to be lacking in the juvenile literature (e.g., Steiner & Wooldredge, 2008). An avenue for further research would be to examine multiple types of misconduct and their relevance to both general institutionalized offender samples and more serious and violent institutionalized offender samples.

Beyond the above considerations, there are limitations to this study that if improved may have provided further insight into the effect of misconduct on postrelease recidivism. The limitations herein also provide avenues for further research. First, we were not able to account for the seriousness of postrelease rearrests in the negative binomial model and were forced to treat all rearrest activity equally. Although basic descriptive statistics showed that less than one half of the entire release cohort were subsequently rearrested for a felony level offense, and the rank seriousness of the most serious postrelease rearrest was, on average, a low-level felony in the state under study, it would have been advantageous to estimate additional rearrest frequency models disaggregated by offense seriousness. Although we were able

to estimate a logistic regression model based on the dichotomous outcomes of any rearrest and felony rearrest only, the structure of the data did not allow such disaggregation by rearrest frequency. Because institutional misconduct of various types may have a different effect relative to different outcome indicators, a promising line of further research would be to explore the contributions of misconduct on rearrest frequency for serious and nonserious forms of rearrest, and even for specific types of offenses (e.g., violent vs. nonviolent felonies) within those broader categories of seriousness. Such research initiatives could be further disaggregated by type of offender, for example, homicidal offenders versus property offenders. Moreover, we were not able to assess the final disposition of rearrests. In short, we did not have information on whether the offender was eventually convicted. Information on final disposition would have provided more validity to our outcome measure and previous suggested analyses could be conducted for rearrests and supplemented with conviction outcomes.

This research would have also benefited from information on postrelease incarceration time possibly experienced by released offenders. Periods of postrelease incarceration time reduce exposure and impose limitations on the potential frequency of rearrest postrelease and thus potential variation on the dependent variable. Although we do not know the effect that this limitation had on this analysis and did not have access to this information, previous research suggests that accounting for postrelease incarceration lends greater specificity to questions of continuity versus lulls or desistance in offending behavior postrelease (Lattimore et al., 2004; Piquero et al., 2001; Piquero, Brame, et al., 2002; Sampson & Laub, 2003). Although the absence of postrelease incarceration time is a frequent limitation in recidivism follow-ups and this study is no exception, Piquero et al. (2001) demonstrated that periods of incarceration had modest effects on criminal offending trajectories in their long-term follow-up of released institutionalized offenders. In their study, Piquero and colleagues revealed that controlling for periods of postrelease incarceration led to a 20% difference in categorizing offenders as desisting versus persisting based on their rearrest trajectories (Piquero et al., 2001). Inasmuch as this study was interested in rearrest frequency among serious and violent juvenile offenders, it is logical to assume that at least some of these risky offenders experienced periods of incarceration postrelease and those periods of incarceration time would have affected their ability to accumulate arrests and affected their postrelease rearrest rate.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, we believe it would be useful to explore the timing of misconduct relative to release from institutionalization. Although the data did not allow an examination of misconduct timing, we believe that the relevance of

misconduct in explaining postrelease recidivism may be related to the timing of misconduct, not just its frequency and/or seriousness. For example, misconduct during the early years of incarceration may be less relevant than misconduct closer to release from incarceration. Indeed, the offenders of focus in this study served roughly 3.5 years incarcerated on average, and misconduct in the initial months and years of incarceration may be less relevant to postrelease behavior (and other outcomes such as adult prison transfer vs. release under blended sentencing statutes) than misconduct during the middle or later years of institutionalization. This presents another future research implication and, if such a study were conducted, would shed further light on the relationship of institutional misconduct to postrelease recidivism.

Despite the limitations above, we believe that this study adds to the small literature on the relationship of misconduct to postrelease recidivism for institutionalized delinquent offenders and provides a foundation for further and more specific research on this topic. We also believe that this study is relevant despite its limitations because it focuses on a cohort of perhaps the most serious and violent individuals to be released from juvenile correctional facilities under a blended sentencing statute. It is interesting that descriptive information on the frequency and seriousness of postrelease rearrests revealed that the serious and violent offenders in this study appeared less serious and frequent overall in their postrelease behavior than state delinquent samples in previous research (e.g., Ezell & Cohen, 2005; Parker, Morton, Lingefelt, & Johnson, 2005; Trulson et al., 2005).

On a more practical level, research on the relationship of misconduct to recidivism can provide important information to practitioners charged with the release of state delinquents from juvenile incarceration. Notwithstanding other important benefits to examining the misconduct–recidivism relationship, this study suggests that misconduct may still provide some insight into the recidivism of youth as they transition from juvenile incarceration to freedom and from late adolescence into young adulthood. As mentioned, offenders transitioning from juvenile incarceration are, as a whole and as supported by postrelease recidivism research, still largely on the escalation side of the aggregate age–crime curve and represent some of the most risky juvenile offenders relative to reoffending. Involvement in institutional misconduct may signal a risk for continuity in offending postrelease and, at the least, the need for heightened attention to such offenders. As such, further attention should be placed on misconduct as part of the repertoire of information in terms of deciding who should get released and, perhaps more important, when they should be released. Almost all state juvenile commitments will

eventually be released directly from juvenile incarceration (as opposed to adult prison transfer, for example), and with that fact in mind, institutional misconduct may serve as an additional early warning whereby further intervention efforts could be explored before release and transition back to society. Specific to the sample in this study, the results also suggest that such decisions should also give further credence to delinquent history variables, for example, gang membership and the length and seriousness of previous offending, including substance abuse history. These variables also appear relevant as an early warning sign for those offenders who may need different or lengthier services prior to their release from institutionalization to improve their chances for success postrelease.

In conclusion, this study provided additional insight into the relationship of institutional misconduct to the postrelease rearrest of an extremely serious and violent cohort of institutionalized juvenile offenders sentenced under a blended sentencing statute. Among all institutionalized offenders, this is the population of perhaps most concern relative to policy discussions concerning their release and behavior as they transition back into society. This is especially relevant in the state under study and others that have increasingly adopted blended sentencing statutes to give serious and violent juvenile offenders one more last chance to change before adult imprisonment as juveniles and young adults. As these types of offenders will increasingly be given one last chance to change under blended sentencing schemes, information on potential risk factors for recidivism upon their release should remain important on the juvenile justice research agenda—this focus should include further evaluating the effect of institutional misconduct as a barometer of postrelease outcomes.

### **Authors' Note**

The authors would like to thank the editor, Dr. Paul E. Tracy, and three anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions to improve this article. The authors also thank the managing editor, Meredith McKinney, for her responsiveness and expediency during the review process.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

### **Funding**

The authors received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

## Notes

1. These current eligible offenses for blended sentencing include (number and percentage of offenders in sample committed for type of crime): murder ( $n = 170$ , 9.4%), attempted murder ( $n = 174$ , 9.6%), capital murder ( $n = 24$ , 1.3%), attempted capital murder ( $n = 73$ , 4.0%), voluntary manslaughter ( $n = 22$ , 1.2%), intoxication manslaughter ( $n = 0$ , 0.0%), criminally negligent homicide ( $n = 1$ , 0.1%), aggravated kidnapping ( $n = 29$ , 1.6%), attempted aggravated kidnapping ( $n = 0$ , 0.0%), aggravated sexual assault ( $n = 630$ , 34.9%), attempted aggravated sexual assault ( $n = 10$ , 0.6%), sexual assault ( $n = 61$ , 3.4%), attempted sexual assault ( $n = 4$ , 0.2%), aggravated assault ( $n = 167$ , 9.3%), aggravated robbery ( $n = 346$ , 19.2%), attempted aggravated robbery ( $n = 5$ , 0.3%), felony injury to a child or elderly or disabled person ( $n = 15$ , 0.8%), felony deadly conduct ( $n = 31$ , 1.7%), aggravated or first degree controlled substance felony ( $n = 0$ , 0.0%), criminal solicitation/conspiracy of a capital or first degree felony ( $n = 2$ , 0.2%), second degree felony indecency with a child ( $n = 37$ , 2.1%), criminal solicitation of a minor ( $n = 0$ , 0.0%), first degree felony arson ( $n = 3$ , 0.0%), and habitual felony conduct ( $n = 0$ , 0.0%).
2. Of the recidivists, 831 or 72% were rearrested for at least one felony postrelease.
3. Two variables, age at Youth Correctional System (YCS) commitment (Variance Inflation Factor [VIF] of 4.72) and age at YCS release (VIF of 5.80), demonstrated elevated VIF but were included in the models due to the relevance in the literature. Two additional variables, the total infraction rate (VIF of 3.094) and rate of danger to others (VIF of 3.341), also were included in the models. We estimated all models separately and alternately with one age variable, separate models with each misconduct indicator above, and a combined variable of total infraction rate and rate of danger to others. No substantive change was indicated in any of the models and so both sets of variables were retained. Correlations among other variables were inspected and correlations did not indicate multicollinearity. We also examined tolerance and VIF collinearity statistics for each variable. Absent the variables above, VIF values ranged from 1.078 to 2.085, generally under the threshold indicating multicollinearity. Although there is no generally agreed-on threshold signaling multicollinearity, the Statistical Engineering Division of the National Institute for Standards and Technology (at <http://www.itl.nist.gov/div898/software/dataplot/refman2/auxillar/vif.htm>) indicates that VIF greater than 10 may indicate potential multicollinearity problems (see also Neter, Wasserman, & Kunter, 1990).
4. A diagnostic dispersion parameter (likelihood ratio test) confirmed that the negative binomial model was appropriate when compared with the Poisson model, another strategy for modeling count data but one in which the presence of overdispersion can lead to biased estimates. The test revealed significant overdispersion ( $G^2 = 4902.22$ ,  $p < .000$ ) and thus the negative binomial model is the preferred model for these data.

5. We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting these additional analyses to provide more reliability to the results due to the inability to adjust for potential incarceration time postrelease. Fixing the follow-up period resulted in a total loss of 346 offenders from the full sample ( $n = 1,804$ ) who did not have at least 3 years follow-up. This resulted in a total  $n$  size of 1,458 offenders. A nominal number of cases beyond these were lost in the logistic regression models because of missing data on certain variables, in specific, 25 cases in the any rearrest model and 38 cases in the felony rearrest model.
6. Although not shown in tabular form, 97% of all recidivists ( $n = 1,157$ ) incurred 2 or more rearrests, 74% incurred 3 or more rearrests, and 63% incurred 4 or more rearrests. Only 6.5% of all recidivists (or 76 offenders) were rearrested only 1 time in the postrelease follow-up period. This very basic descriptive evidence suggests that the great majority of offenders did have at least some exposure time to accumulate multiple rearrests even in the event of incarceration periods. Further evidence on the rank seriousness of the most serious rearrest for the cohort suggests rearrest offenses that would have been unlikely to result in lengthy periods of incarceration in county jail or state prison, if at all, despite being felonies. In addition, and on the advice of an anonymous reviewer, we explored whether those with low counts of rearrests were more or less likely to have the most serious offenses. The perspective is that if those with low counts of rearrests also had the most serious offenses, this would provide some evidence of their potential incarceration. Based on the frequency of rearrests by the most serious rearrest, it is interesting that we found that those with the most serious rearrests (e.g., felonies) tended to experience higher rearrest frequencies than those with misdemeanor rearrests, overall. In short, our analysis did not show that those who had the most serious rearrests were those with the lowest rearrest frequencies. For example, of those offenders with at least 10 rearrests ( $n = 33$ ), only 4 were misdemeanants, whereas 29 were felony offenders, 20 of which incurred the most serious felonies in the state, 8 had Felony 2 offenses at their most serious rearrest, 11 had Felony 1 offenses, and there was 1 Capital Felony rearrest. We thank the reviewer for this unique perspective. Although our inability to account for postrelease incapacitation time is a limitation of this study, of main interest is the continuity of offending for such serious delinquent offenders in relation to their institutional misconduct even with the unknown potential for incarceration time periods postrelease.

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