



Jacobs Center Research Seminar Series

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BFF in the Making: Examine Peer Selection and Influence Process in the Context of Cheating Behaviour

Peer effects remain a central topic in criminological research. While prior experimental research has demonstrated that exposure to deviant peers increases the likelihood of delinquent behaviours, less is known how selection and influence intersects and the beyond-the-situation consequences of delinquent peer associations. In two online experiments (N1 = 292; N2 = 299) using a novel experimental paradigm that combines experimental manipulation of peer influence and multiple decisions regarding peer selection, participants played an investment game that allows cheating to take place, alongside a peer who was either honest or dishonest. Results showed that participants were more likely to cheat when paired with a dishonest peer, and this effect

was amplified when the peer actively encouraged cheating. Moreover, individuals selectively aligned themselves with peers whose behaviour mirrored their own dispositions—patterns that persisted even in the absence of material incentives. Notably, even brief exposure to dishonest peers had lingering effects on behaviour. Greater exposure to delinquent peers led to more cheating in subsequent individual settings. Together, these findings highlight the connection between peer influence and peer selection and underscore the importance of jointly considering individual dispositions, social influence, and social contexts in the study of delinquent behaviour.

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