CRIMINOLOGY

MARRIAGE, IN-LAWS, AND CRIME: THE CASE OF DELINQUENT BROTHERS-IN-LAW*

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With marriage comes in-laws, and if the in-laws include delinquent males, their delinquency could affect the prosocial effects of the given marriage. In this article, I focus on the effect of having a convicted brother-in-law as a general indicator of this broader phenomenon of family-formation processes impairing the positive impact of marriage on crime desistance. I use registry data on all men from birth cohorts 1965–1975 in Denmark (N = 69,066) to show that when a man marries, his new family ties to delinquent brother(s)-in-law do indeed hinder his criminal desistance. The results that take into account the characteristics of husbands, wives, their shared family-formation process, and the criminality of male family members suggest that 1) family dynamics tend to keep criminality within family networks and 2) influences from one's broader social network through marriage are important for the protective effects of marriage. Analyses of previous conviction, co-offending between a man and his brother-in-law, as well as analyses of in-laws who reside in close proximity confirm the two mentioned main findings. In all, the findings reported in this article add to our understanding of the processes by which families are tied, and how these family-formation processes influence men's behavior.

Of all the pathways that could lead to criminal desistance, marriage has repeatedly been emphasized as one of the most important (e.g., Craig, Diamond, and Piquero, 2014). Scholars of criminology debate whether this important correlation between marriage and desistance from crime is indeed causal (e.g., Laub and Sampson, 2003; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Warr, 1998), whether it is confounded by selection issues (e.g., Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990), or whether desistance primarily begins before marriage because of

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cognitive transformations that prepare men for marriage and for a less delinquent life (e.g., Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph, 2002). Researchers using empirical studies consistently find lower crime rates among married men (e.g., King, Massoglia, and MacMillan, 2007; Sampson, Laub, and Wimer, 2006). In fact, the outcomes of this research have shown that marriage is an especially important pathway for desistance from crime when the bonds between husband and wife are strong and the wife does not engage in delinquent behavior (e.g., Andersen, Andersen, and Skov, 2015; Laub, Nagin, and Sampson, 1998).

Yet, factors from outside the internal dynamics of a marriage may also influence behavior. From Elder's (1994, 1998) notion of "linked lives," we know that social control and social ties constrain individual behavior through networks of social relationships, not only through dyadic relationships such as a marriage. Social support and regulation occur (in part) through these networks. Spouses' lives are thus embedded in social relationships that extent beyond the married couple wherefore, for example, friends and kin could also influence the behavior of the male spouse.

The results of research have shown that the relationship to in-laws is important for the marital ties between the spouses (Fingerman et al., 2012) because it is often characterized by ambivalence (Turner, Young, and Black, 2006; Willson, Shuey, and Elder, 2003). The married couples' relationship success may depend on the relationship to the in-laws (Bryant, Conger, and Meehan, 2001; Högnäs and Carlson, 2010). And as all of us who are married know, with marriage comes in-laws, and if these in-laws include delinquent males, their delinquency could affect the prosocial effects of marriage.

In-laws thus constitute a significant group of people because of the link between the in-laws and the spouse marrying into that family. Spouses are expected to form familial bonds with in-laws (Bryant, Conger, and Meehan, 2001; Fingerman, Sechrist, and Birditt, 2013). Moreover, spouses not only have to establish their own family—with all the emotions, obligations, and routines that come with it—but they also have to bridge the gap to their nonblood kin, which might cause stress and hostility between the spouses because they feel torn between loyalty to their new family and loyalty to their own kin (Bryant, Conger, and Meehan, 2001). Marriage unites husband and wife, yet despite this unification, neither of them is likely to dismiss a family member, like for instance a brother, whether or not he brings positive or negative influences. Influences from brothers are then close to inevitable and could affect the inner dynamics of marriage, which in turn could hinder or strengthen the protective effects of marriage.

In this article, I focus on the effect of having a convicted brother-in-law as a general indicator of how family factors external to the dynamics of marriage influence the protective effect of marriage. I focus on brothers-in-law as one example of a nonblood family tie through marriage that plays a role in men's criminal behavior. I rely on Danish registry data to achieve a sample that holds a wide array of information on criminal justice outcomes and on family relations that are required to analyze how men's criminal desistance correlates with that of their in-laws. These data, which have precise measures of family relations, marriages, and criminal convictions, not only provide criminal justice outcomes on all men from the entire birth cohorts 1965–1975 in Denmark, but the data also allow me to pair spouses and link information on the spouses' siblings and other family members (including their criminal justice outcomes), something that would not be possible with most other existing data sources.

The crime rate of men differs dramatically, as I show in this article, over their entire life course depending on the type of marriage they have. Here, type of marriage is defined by the delinquency of their in-laws. This indicates strong mechanisms that pair certain types of men with certain types of families, and because family dynamics are essentially endogenous, criminality tends to concentrate in family networks. Yet, after controlling for observed differences in the men, their wives, their shared family-formation process, and the criminality of their families, I show that although criminality of husbands and wives prior to marriage matters the most for the risk of postmarriage crimes, a man's criminal desistance varies by whether he has a previously convicted or a nonconvicted brother-in-law. This indicates that for the men in my sample, marriage, which is considered to be a pathway to criminal desistance, is affected by family factors external to the internal dynamics of marriage. The results by previous conviction, by co-offending, and by in-laws who reside in close proximity confirm this overall finding.

Criminologists tend to view marriage as a union formed between two spouses, and its protective effects have primarily, although not exclusively, been theorized within this context. Yet, when the criminal history of a brother-in-law is associated with men's desistance, as this article shows it is, it points to the importance of acknowledging how marriage simultaneously unites two families. The results from this article suggest that the characteristics of the new family members, that is, the in-laws, are important for how likely a marriage is to exert its well-known positive influence and lead the male spouses down the pathway of criminal desistance.

MARRIAGE, IN-LAWS, AND CRIME

Accounts of the connection between marriage and desistance from crime tend to theorize this connection as the product of a dyadic relationship between two spouses: a social unit made up of two persons who affect each other. In brief, lower criminality among married men could imply that men who are less likely to offend are also more likely to marry: a pure selection mechanism (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). Nevertheless, lower criminality among married men could also imply that 1) marriage creates a system of mutual obligation and interdependence between the spouses (*theory of age-graded informal social control*; Sampson and Laub, 1993); 2) marriage affects desistance by changing the routine activities of the spouses, particularly the amount of time spent with peers (*peer association theory*; Warr, 1998); or 3) marriage leads to behavioral change because men who marry are already open to cognitive change before the marriage itself (*theory of cognitive transformation*; Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph, 2002). Cognitive openness means that men anticipate and accept the coming of change in identity and behavior that follows from replacing unmarried life with the life of "the married man." Moreover, cognitive openness is primarily triggered by emotions, especially from love for another person (Giordano, Schroeder, and Cernkovich, 2007).

As mentioned, marriage links more people than the two spouses, who make up the dyadic couple. According to Elder (1994, 1998), social relationships are linked, meaning that the networks that each spouse is tied to affect the type of behavioral constraints that any given marriage is likely to exert on the spouses. According to this theory, a life course has a multilevel structure, meaning that a person's life course is the dynamic product of 1) his or her pathway through social institutions, 2) the different organizations he or she is or has been associated with, 3) the social trajectory he or she experienced,

and 4) his or her individual development (Elder, 1994). Events that pair people, such as marriage, should thus be understood as shared life-course events that interweave individual trajectories, constituting a dynamic merger of two packages of individual and social biographies.

Elder's concept of "linked lives" is especially important for this study (Elder, 1994, 1998). This term refers to the fact that lives are typically embedded in social relationships, such as friends and kin. Influences (i.e., socialization) from these lives to which a person is linked matter for individual behavior. Marriage, then, affects individual behavior because it directly and indirectly links the spouses to wider social networks. Marriage directly links these wider social networks by connecting a husband and his wife's family and friends. Moreover, marriage indirectly links the wider social networks because it merges spouses, who each come with socialized attributes (i.e., the values each spouse brings into the marriage that are affected by his or her own life course, for example). Thus, because of influences between the spouses as well as between the spouses and the networks each spouse brings to the marriage, married people are likely to converge in a mixture of different values and behaviors.

Kreager and Haynie (2011) provided empirical support for a similar claim. The findings from their study show that when adolescents find a romantic partner, their drinking behavior not only converges to that of the partner but also to that of the partner's friends. The result is not driven by assortative mating in drinking behavior, nor is it driven by other selection issues, which implies the existence of network pressure on individual behavior. Yet, whereas the results in Kreager and Haynie (2011) indicate that assuming a correlation between a male spouse's desistance of crime and the criminal history of his brother-in-law is valid, this is not the case in Kreager, Haynie, and Hopfer's (2013) similar study of smoking behavior, which thus indicates that some types of behavior are not affected by such network pressures.

DELINQUENT IN-LAWS AND THE DESISTANCE PROCESS

The question of interest here is whether getting linked to delinquent in-laws (in particular to delinquent brothers-in-law) matters for men's criminal desistance. If the wider social (and especially kinship) networks, which men are exposed to through marriage, matter for their behavior, as is implied by Elder (1994, 1998), this observation could hold true for criminal behavior too. Confirming or rejecting that this is the case represents an important empirical extension of theories of marriage and crime.

In their original formulation of the age-graded theory of informal social control, Sampson and Laub (1993) also viewed marriage as a union formed between two spouses (except from a few passages where, for example, a man gets beaten up by in-laws because of domestic violence; Sampson and Laub, 1993: 227–8). In their later revision of the theory, however, they expanded their view of marriage as a social institution to include the total system of interdependencies and influences that come with marriage (Laub and Sampson, 2003). For example:

> George told us that his wife cared for him and that this was the first time in his life that another person had felt this way toward him. Moreover, his in-laws "surrounded" him and adopted him into their family. This acceptance contrasts sharply with his own family, where he had little contact with his siblings and parents. (Laub and Sampson, 2003: 137)

George, a former delinquent man, clearly experiences the benefits of marriage. He feels loved for the first time in his life, and through marriage, he experiences social bonds that he would not have experienced were it not for his marriage. This is likely to affect his behavior, as implied by the original theory. His marriage also offers—or bestows on him—more than a wife; with marriage, George gets an entire family, a network of interdependencies, and support that he did not have prior to being married.

The point is that with marriage come in-laws. In marriage we almost inevitably form social ties to nonblood family members whom we were less likely to form ties to in the absence of marriage. By being our loved one's direct family, in-laws tend to become important to us and to the inner dynamics of marriage (Fingerman et al., 2012; Turner, Young, and Black, 2006; Willson, Shuey, and Elder, 2003). Paraphrasing insights reported in the family literature, in-laws may provide a series of social support functions and one might feel both solidarity with and ambivalence about them because of the familial tie (Fingerman, Sechrist, and Birditt, 2013). In fact, the results of research have shown that a married couple's relationship success depends on their relationship to the in-laws, even for marriages that have lasted for many years (Bryant, Conger, and Meehan, 2001; Högnäs and Carlson, 2010). This, again, points to just how important the ties to in-laws are.

When the importance of in-laws is taken into account, it seems reasonable to assume that specific characteristics of these new family ties could matter for men's desistance from crime. Thus, as a general example of this broader social phenomenon, I propose the hypothesis that the desistance process of newly married men is impaired by delinquent brothers-in-law. In returning to the example of George, then, what would have happened if one of the brothers-in-law, who surrounded him, exerted an antisocial influence?

HOW DELINQUENT BROTHERS-IN-LAW UNDO THE CRIME-FIGHTING BENEFITS OF MARRIAGE

A wide array of differences between men who are tied to convicted and nonconvicted brothers-in-law is most likely to exist. People select into marriage and into types of marriages based on the characteristics of themselves and of their spouses, which is also known as assortative mating (Rhule-Louie and McMahon, 2007). Equally likely, people select into marriages that link families with a criminal history and thus come with delinquent in-laws. This selection, or assortative mating, need not be deliberate (phenotypical preference, choosing a partner from preferred characteristics such as attitudes). It could simply express the fact that crime is more prevalent among socially disadvantaged families, who are more likely to get tied by marriage (social homogamy). If so, men who are more likely to offend are also more likely to marry into families that come with delinquent in-laws, and the connection between delinquent in-laws and men's offenses would simply express this confounding.

Brothers-in-law might also directly affect men's behavior, which could happen via several mechanisms. For example, law-abiding brothers-in-law are likely to disapprove of delinquency and could thus add to the informal social control that comes with marriage. They are also more likely to serve as prosocial peers (to the extent that a man spends time with his brothers-in-law), and they are more likely to function as prosocial role models, around which a man might build his identity as husband. Thus, the theoretical mechanisms that link marriage to desistance from crime (which were briefly mentioned earlier) could be strengthened or weakened by the characteristics of in-laws.

Even though I am unable to distinguish empirically between the various theoretical mechanisms that link brothers-in-law (and in particular delinquent brothers-in-law) to men's postmarriage behavior, having a previously convicted brother-in-law might impair the desistance benefits of marriage along three empirical mechanisms. First, delinquent brothers-in-law could serve as co-offenders. Second, they could decelerate the desistance process among previously convicted men. Third, they could draw previously nonconvicted men into crimes. Empirical evidence on which of these mechanisms prevails in my data will add to the theoretical understanding of how factors external to the internal dynamics of marriage could influence the desistance-promoting effects of marriage.

CO-OFFENDING

Crimes often occur as a result of peer pressure (e.g., Hochstetler, Copes, and DeLisi, 2002). Just as a law-abiding brother-in-law could provide additional pressure on a man to desist from crimes, so could a convicted brother-in-law provide pressure to engage in such behavior. Indeed, the brother-in-law could act as a delinquent peer himself. If so, co-offending rates should be higher among men and their delinquent brothers-in-law than they are among men and their nonconvicted brothers-in-law.

If co-offending is the main driver of how delinquent brothers-in-law impair the desistance benefits of marriage, higher co-offending rates among the in-laws before marriage would, however, suggest problems of simultaneity. Such a finding could indicate that social ties between delinquent men may provide access to marriage—e.g., a sister of the delinquent friend. If so, marriage would be an outcome of criminality rather than a cause for desistance. The finding could also indicate that marriage into families with a history of delinquency is simply a correlate of premarriage behavior, and that the cognitive transformation that precedes marriage is to some extent impaired among men who marry women that come with delinquent brothers. Most people do not marry the first day they meet, and co-offending before marriage might thus simply express the timing of events.

DECELERATED DESISTANCE

Desistance from crime implies not acting in specific ways, and when criminologists talk about desistance processes, they typically refer to the gradual decrease in criminality from one level to a new and lower level (Laub and Sampson, 2001). This also means that, empirically, processes of desistance are most readily measured among previously convicted men because these men have already revealed their level of criminality in actual offenses (Hirschi and Gottfredson, 1986). According to theories, marriage influences this process and accelerates the desistance process, meaning that when previously convicted men marry, their criminality will drop compared with that of their nonmarried peers. Because this is especially true for marriages where the bonds between husband and wife are strong and the wife does not engage in delinquent behavior, it could be equally false for other types of marriages. One way in which delinquent brothers-in-law could impair the desistance process is by decelerating it. Again, because processes of desistance require some measurable level of criminality to desist from, decelerated desistance should be empirically most visible among previously convicted men.

IGNITED CRIMINALITY

It is possible that delinquent brothers-in-law impair the benefits of marriage by serving as gateways to criminality for men who have not exhibited such behavior prior to their

marriage. Delinquent brothers-in-law could signal that in the new family, to which the newlywed is tied, delinquency is not a reason for exclusion. This implies that the wife is more accepting or understanding of criminal activity. Delinquent brothers-in-law could also introduce the man to delinquent peers. In such cases, marriage works against the mechanism proposed by *peer association theory*, and it introduces to the man delinquent peers with whom to socialize. As crimes often arise as the result of peer pressure, this would promote the expectation that delinquent brothers-in-law lead to higher crime rates. Thus, for men who are not previously convicted, one might expect higher crime rates after the wedding if their marriage ties them to delinquent brothers-in-law.

Other explanations of the possible link between delinquent in-laws and desistance from crime also exist. For example, what appears to be a link between men's behavior and the criminality of their in-laws might simply express that when men become tied to in-laws who have already attracted the attention of the police, their risk of being apprehended for even minor offenses increases. If so, delinquent in-laws mechanically increase detection risks, not individual behavior.

RESEARCH QUESTION

In both the theoretical and the empirical literature on desistance-promoting benefits of marriage, researchers tend to interpret the connection between marriage and desistance as causal. This implies that, on average, men do indeed change their behavior when they marry. Validating this claim, however, requires a research design in which the selection into marriage is taken into account by providing variation in marriage, which is uncorrelated with individual characteristics, observed as well as unobserved. Nevertheless, because no scholar has yet provided such a research design, this theoretical and empirical claim is fundamentally unsubstantiated (Skardhamar et al., 2015).

Turning to the question of whether delinquent brothers-in-law could offset the desistance-promoting benefits of marriage poses a similar fundamental challenge. By focusing only on men who marry, and thus avoiding the comparison of married and unmarried men, the challenge of accounting for selection into marriage is avoided. Yet, the selection of men into different types of marriage, as defined according to delinquency of brothers-in-law, easily presents the same challenge (for similar considerations regarding the selection of men into marriages with convicted spouses, see Andersen, Andersen, and Skov, 2015). Here, the lack of variation that is exogenous to individual characteristics, in which wives come with different types of brothers, makes it fundamentally challenging to measure the direct causal effect of convicted brothers-in-law on men's desistance. The direct and deliberate selection of men into marriages with delinquent brothers-in-law might be less important than the processes by which spouses select each other (assortative mating). One might argue that spouses choose each other, not each other's brothers-in-law. Yet, because spousal characteristics, especially unobserved ones, are likely to correlate with family characteristics, one cannot simply compare men with convicted brothers-in-law and men with nonconvicted brothers-in-law.

My research questions therefore focus explicitly on conditional correlations, and I only suggestively and cautiously interpret these correlations as causal. Does men's criminality differ depending on whether they are tied to a convicted or a nonconvicted brother-in-law? If so, what happens to this difference once other features of those men and their families (including criminality in the family) are taken into account? As part of the latter

question, I set out to analyze whether the correlation between delinquent brothers-in-law and men's criminality mainly occurs among previously convicted men (decelerated desistance), among previously nonconvicted men (criminality ignition), as co-offending between the men and their brothers-in-law (co-offending), and whether the correlation is stronger between men and brothers-in-law who live in close proximity compared with those who live far apart.

The answer to the first research question will establish whether processes by which men marry into families with delinquent brothers-in-law also cause these men to have higher crime rates than men who have nonconvicted brothers-in-law. Any difference between these men's criminality could come from the mentioned selection issues, but it could also come from a causal effect of delinquent brothers-in-law on men's behavior. The second research question relates to the differences in outcomes driven by the observed characteristics of those men and the families they marry into (e.g., the concentration of criminality within families). The answer to the second research question will thus tell whether men who have convicted brothers-in-law have higher postmarriage delinquency than do men who have nonconvicted brothers-in-law, net of covariates that are observed in the data.

DATA AND METHOD

I exploit detailed Danish registry data to analyze whether and how a married man's criminal desistance varies with the criminality of his brothers-in-law. Danish registry data are recorded by governmental agencies and are collected and organized by Statistics Denmark. The data are accurate, they suffer from little or no attrition, and the level of detail in Danish registry data exceeds that of most other data sources (Lyngstad and Skardhamar, 2011).

Danish registry data consist of a broad range of communications with the welfare system, such as demographic events and criminal justice contacts. The data, which are recorded at the individual level, are linkable across registers and across years by a personal identification number. They provide a full population panel that allows researchers to pair family members. These data also allow me to measure people's criminal convictions. Moreover, they allow me to distinguish between men who get previously convicted brothers-in-law and men who do not—and add to that data a wide array of background characteristics as well as information on whether the newly tied brothers-in-law co-offend.

Thus, Danish registry data are ideal for the purposes of this article as it would be impossible to analyze how delinquent brothers-in-law impair the desistance benefits of marriage using most other data sources. Nevertheless, a few caveats of using these data do call for discussion. Although Denmark has one of the lowest incarceration rates among developed democracies (e.g., Walmsley, 2013), this low incarceration rate does not imply that the Danish society is less burdened with crimes than other developed democracies are. In fact, Denmark has consistently had one of the highest rates of burglary crimes in the world throughout the last decade (UNODC Statistics, 2016). The low incarceration rate thus simply reflects the wide range of noncustodial alternatives to imprisonment in Denmark (such as probation, treatment programs, community service, and electronic monitoring) and that sentences in Denmark are comparatively short (Wildeman and Andersen, 2015).

Also of importance, marriage rates in Denmark have undergone substantial changes over the past 50 years; today, marriage is typically preceded by a lengthy period of

cohabitation. In fact, Denmark and the other Nordic countries have been the forerunners of what demographers term the "Second Demographic Transition" (Sobotka, 2008), by which the timing of family-formation events has changed substantially. The Second Demographic Transition is also occurring in other developed democracies, and because of these changes, the results from Danish birth cohorts 1965–1975 might indicate possible results from more recent birth cohorts in other countries.

SAMPLE

From registry data, I select all men from birth cohorts 1965–1975 who experienced their first marriage before 2011 ($N = 194,246$). Because the age of criminal responsibility in Denmark is 15 years and the criminal justice registers are available from 1980, the 1965 birth cohort is the first cohort with complete histories of criminal justice contact. Because the 1975 birth cohort will be 35 years old in 2010, many of them will have married before 2011 (the mean age of first marriage for Danish men was, for example, 34.2 years in 2010; Statistics Denmark, 2016). I have not included men from later birth cohorts because the available registers would not allow me to track them up to 3 years after their (first) marriage.

I then follow these men in the criminal justice registers up to 3 years after their first marriage. I further restrict the sample to include only men who were alive and had not emigrated at least until 3 years after the wedding and who have no missing information in any of the many registers I merge to achieve control variables. This brings the sample size to $N = 190,453$.

Out of these men, 69,066 married a woman who had at least one brother, who was less than 5 years older or younger than themselves. The reason for only counting brothers-in-law who fall within this ±5-year age bracket of the man is the expectation that the further apart in age a man and his brother-in-law are, the less likely are they to affect each other's behavior, including their delinquent behavior.

MEASURES

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

The dependent variable is a binary marker that measures criminal conviction within the first 3 years after the wedding. For the analyses of co-offending between a man and his brother-in-law, the dependent variable measures whether the man and at least one of his brothers-in-law were convicted of the same crime (had the same case file), again within the first 3 years after marriage. The follow-up period starts on the wedding day and continues 3 years from that date, ensuring that all men are tracked for the same amount of days. Conviction refers to being found guilty of violating the penal code.

CONVICTED BROTHER-IN-LAW

A binary variable marks whether a man is tied to at least one convicted brother-in-law or whether all his brothers-in-law are nonconvicted. Conviction implies found guilty of violating the penal code. Importantly, and as mentioned, a brother-in-law is only counted as relevant if he is less than 5 years younger or older than the man. Most men in the sample have nonconvicted brothers-in-law, and only 3,131, corresponding to 4.5 percent, have at least one convicted brother-in-law.

HUSBAND'S COVARIATES

I add a range of control variables on the husband, all measured before his marriage. I add his birth year and his age when he marries for the first time. I count how many brothers and sisters he has, and I indicate whether he has any children (not necessarily with his future wife) prior to the marriage. I also indicate whether he has an ethnic minority background. From the education register, I add years of education obtained before the marriage. Last, from labor market registers, I obtain information on whether the man was employed the year leading up to his marriage, his earnings during that year (measured in US$10,000 in 2014 prices), and how many public benefits he received during the same year (again, measured in US$10,000 in 2014 prices).

I add four variables, which measure the man's criminal justice contact prior to marriage. I indicate whether he was ever convicted of a crime (i.e., a violation of the penal code), whether he was ever incarcerated for a longer duration that would imply arrest, whether he was convicted within the last 3 years prior to marriage, and whether he was arrested within the last 3 years prior to marriage.

WIFE'S COVARIATES

In regard to the wife, I add the same package of covariates as on the husband, except for fewer variables for criminal justice contact, because criminal justice contact is rare among women in Denmark. The one essential criminal justice contact variable that I do include for the wife is a binary marker of whether she was convicted before marriage. In the elaborate analyses, I further define recent spousal criminality as a binary marker of whether the wife was convicted within the last 3 years before marriage.

FAMILY-FORMATION COVARIATES

As mentioned, the Second Demographic Transition has already occurred in Denmark. This makes it pivotal to take other family-formation events than marriage into account when analyzing the association between marriage and crime. I therefore add six variables on family formation prior to marriage. Three variables measure whether the couple was cohabiting for each of the 3 years prior to marriage, whereas the other three variables measure whether the spouses had children together during those years.

FAMILY CRIMINALITY

Because of ample reasons for suspecting that family dynamics cause crime-prone people to select into families with a history of delinquency, I add information on convictions among the male members (other than the man's brothers-in-law) of the two spouses' families. These binary variables measure whether the husband has brothers who are previously convicted, whether the husband's father was ever convicted, and whether the wife's father was ever convicted. Again, the criminality of female family members (other than the wife) is not taken into account simply because criminal justice contact among females in Denmark is rare. Moreover, because family criminality is essentially a marker of crime-prone families, I also run analyses where I measure family criminality as recent family criminality, defined as whether the male family members were convicted within the last 3 years before the marriage of the men in my sample.

PROXIMITY OF THE BROTHER-IN-LAW

If a delinquent brother-in-law is to influence a man's behavior directly, social interaction between the two is necessary. Thus, after I analyze whether men's criminal behavior is associated with that of their brothers-in-law after marriage, I analyze whether this association is indeed stronger among men and brothers-in-law who are more likely to interact socially. The Danish registers do not hold information on social interactions, but they do hold information on residence. I therefore add from the housing registry information whether the man (or more precisely the married couple) lives in the same municipality as at least one of his brothers-in-law (for families where all brothers-in-law are nonconvicted) or in the same municipality as one of his previously convicted brothers-in-law (for families in which there is at least one convicted brother-in-law).

ANALYTIC STRATEGY

To answer whether men's criminality differs conditionally on whether they are tied to a convicted or a nonconvicted brother-in-law, and to absorb from this association the variation that is caused by the characteristics of those men, their spouses, and their families, I apply seven analytical steps. First, I illustrate differences in criminality over the life course between men who marry into different types of families, as defined from the delinquency of the family members. I also compare the criminality curve to the same curve for men who never marry.

Second, I show that men's crime rates do indeed decrease from before marriage to after, and that this is true even conditional on the criminality of their brothers-in-law.

Third, I show that men's crime rates differ drastically by whether male family members, other than the brother-in-law, have previously been convicted. I also show that even within these families, desistance is associated with convicted brothers-in-law.

Fourth, I provide descriptive statistics on the men, their wives, and families by comparing their means and standard deviations across all the control variables. I also compare them with men who marry but are not tied to any brother-in-law simply because their wife had no brothers.

Fifth, I turn to a regression framework and estimate models that predict conviction within the first 3 years after marriage. I include a dummy variable for having a brother-in-law who was convicted within the past 3 years, that is, the key variable in the analyses. The first model tests the difference between the men controlling for nothing more than birth year. This model reports the raw difference between the men without taking into account any information on who they are (except from their birth cohort), and the results thus compare with those presented graphically in the second analytic step. The second model adds background information on the man, his wife, their shared family-formation process, and the criminality of their male family members (in the online supporting information,[1] the results are expanded to include one model per set of background characteristics). The last model mirrors the second model but redefines family member and wife criminality to recent convictions, that is, convictions that occurred during the last 3 years prior to marriage.

Sixth, I analyze the outlined empirical mechanisms that could link in-law criminality to men's behavior. Here I first analyze whether results are driven by decelerated desistance among previously convicted men or by criminality ignition among previously nonconvicted men. To do so, I run separate models by previous conviction. Then I analyze whether similar results (as those found in the fifth analytic step) are found for co-offending between men and their brothers-in-law, and whether co-offending between the man and his brother-in-law mainly occurs before or after their family tie has been secured through marriage.

Seventh, after I analyze whether men's criminal behavior after marriage is associated with that of their brothers-in-law, I analyze whether this association is stronger among men and brothers-in-law who are more likely to engage in social interactions. I do this by running the empirical models (identical to those in the fifth analytic step) on the subsample of men who reside in close proximity to their brother-in-law, as defined by their municipality of residence.

My outcome variable, that is, whether a man is convicted within the first 3 years after marriage, is binary. This would typically encourage the use of a nonlinear probability model, such as the logistic regression model or the probit regression model. Nevertheless, advances in the methodology of nonlinear models advise against applying a nonlinear function to an empirical setup such as mine, where I am interested in comparing estimated coefficients across regression models (e.g., Karlson, Holm, and Breen, 2012). To secure comparability between regression coefficients across models and across samples, I therefore use linear probability models estimated by using the standard ordinary least-squares estimator. The estimated coefficients should thus be interpreted as the difference in the crime rate of men who have convicted brothers-in-law and of men who have nonconvicted brothers-in-law, net of the included covariates. In the online supporting information, I report, for reference, results from logistic regression models too, and throughout the Results section in this article, I mention the key results from these models.

In the Results section, I only present the parameter estimates of main interest. I show coefficients for the delinquency of the brother-in-law, the husband, the wife, and the male family members other than the brother-in-law, so these important influences can be compared. The full set of parameter estimates is available in the online supporting information.

RESULTS

STEP 1: IN-LAWS AND MEN'S CRIMINALITY OVER THEIR LIFE COURSE

Figure 1 shows the age–crime curves of men conditional on one defining characteristic of their first marriage: in-law delinquency. There are remarkable differences between the life courses of these men. Especially stark is the difference between men who marry previously convicted women with high crime rates (also shown in previous research; e.g., Andersen, Andersen, and Skov, 2015) and men who marry into families with no convictions, who have low crime rates. In between these extremes are the age–crime curves of men who, in ascending order, have no brothers-in-law, have a convicted father-in-law, and have convicted brothers-in-law. Men who have convicted brothers-in-law have almost as high crime rates as do men with convicted spouses, whereas men who marry women without brothers (in the relevant age bracket) have almost as low crime rates as do men who marry into families with no convictions.

Figure 1. Percentage Convicted by Age and Marriage Type, Danish Men From Birth Cohorts 1965–1975 [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
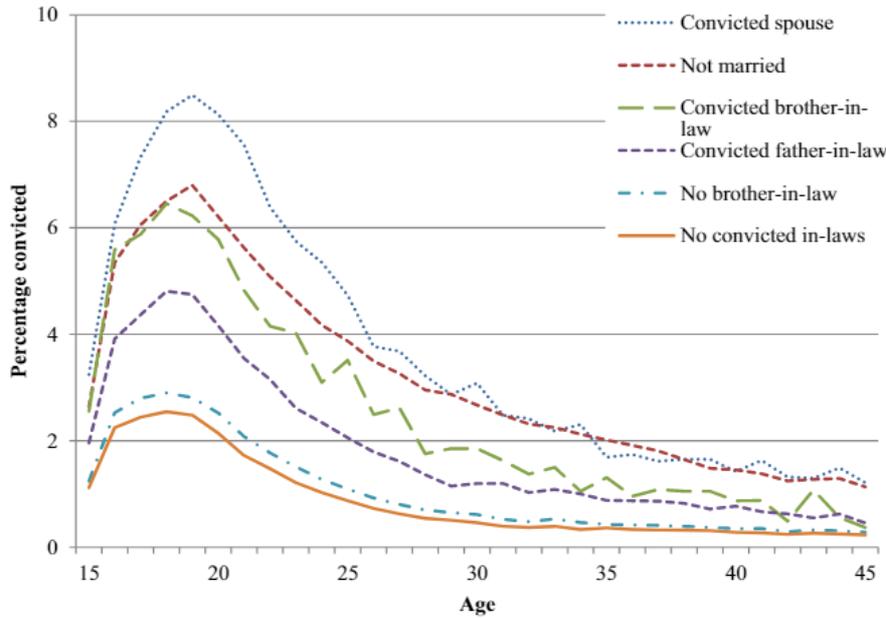
NOTES: N = 317,169. Results from third-degree local polynomial smoothing using the Epanechnikov kernel with bandwidth 2. The categories are not mutually exclusive.
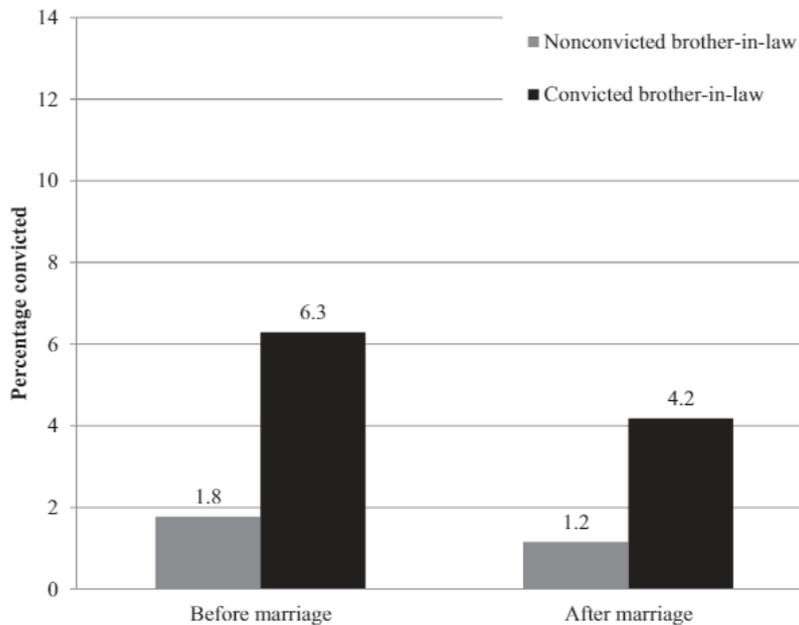*SOURCE:* Author's calculations on data from Statistics Denmark.

STEP 2: CRIME RATES BEFORE AND AFTER MARRIAGE

Figure 2 compares the crime rates before and after marriage for men who have convicted and nonconvicted brothers-in-law. It is obvious that even when leaving the distribution of crime over the life course and zooming in on these men's crime rates just before and after marriage, there are important differences between the two groups of men. During the years after marriage, 4.2 percent of the men with convicted brothers-in-law are convicted themselves, whereas the same is only true for 1.2 percent of the men with nonconvicted brothers-in-law. This is a difference of a factor of 3.5, which could imply that convicted brothers-in-law reduce the protective effects of marriage.

But the same factor (3.5) exists during the years before marriage. A total of 6.3 percent of the men who have convicted brothers-in-law are themselves convicted, whereas the same is true only for 1.8 percent of the men who have nonconvicted brothers-in-law.

In absolute terms, men who have convicted brothers-in-law experience a more pronounced desistance effect of marriage than do men who have nonconvicted brothers-in-law. Across the marriage year, the men who have convicted brothers-in-law decrease their crime rate by 2.1 percentage points, a number that even exceeds the full crime rate among the men who have nonconvicted brothers-in-law before they marry. The men

Figure 2. Percentage Convicted Three Years Before and After Marriage, by Convicted Brothers-in-Law, Danish Men From Birth Cohorts 1965–1975

NOTE: N = 69,066.
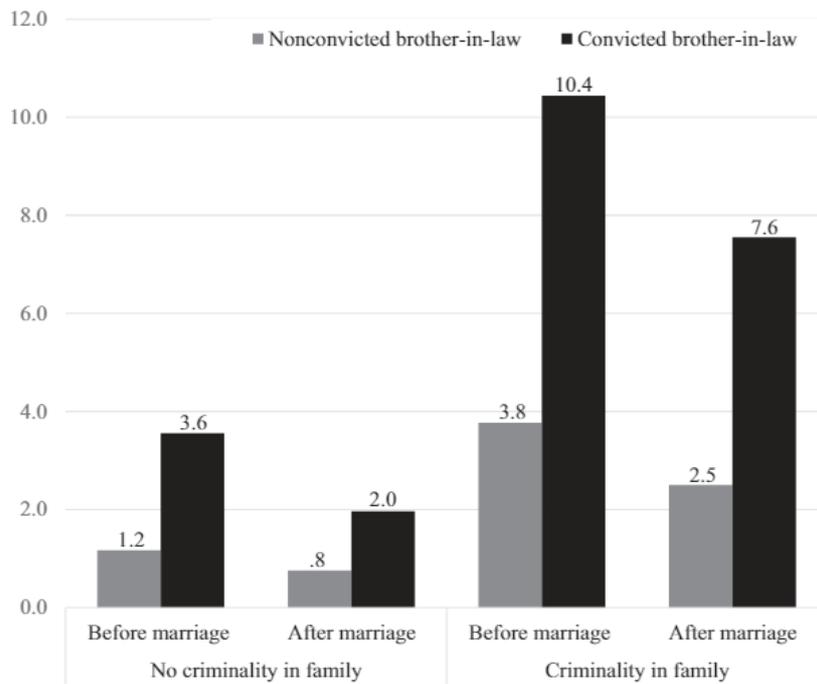SOURCE: Author's calculations on data from Statistics Denmark.

who have nonconvicted brothers-in-law only decrease their crime rate by .6 percentage points.

The counterintuitive result that men who are tied to convicted brothers-in-law benefit more from marriage stems, however, most likely from the huge difference in the two groups' crime rates. The constant relative difference (by a factor of 3.5, as mentioned) between these men's crime rates before and after marriage implies that both groups of men experience the same relative change in criminality from before to after their marriages. When we consider their criminality before marriage, both groups are thus equally likely to benefit from marriage, or just as possible, the decline in criminality from before to after marriage could be driven by the gradually declining crime rates that come with age, not from marriage.

STEP 3: SELECTION INTO FAMILIES WITH A CRIMINAL HISTORY

Figure 3 shows the crime rates before and after marriage for the men who have convicted and nonconvicted brothers-in-law, conditional on whether any of the male family members (other than the brother-in-law or the husband himself) are previously convicted. The crime rates of the men who marry into families with a criminal history are much higher than are the crime rates of men who marry into families without previous convictions. Both prior to and after marriage, these men's crime rates are around three

Figure 3. Percentage Convicted Three Years Before and After Marriage, by Convicted Brothers-in-Law and by Family Criminality, Danish Men From Birth Cohorts 1965–1975

NOTE: N = 69,066 (n = 16,491 with criminality in family and n = 52,575 without criminality in family).
SOURCE: Author's calculations on data from Statistics Denmark.

times higher than they are among the men who marry into families without previous convictions.

When we look at the figure by criminality of brothers-in-law, the crime rates of men who have convicted brothers-in-law are, again, higher than among men who have non-convicted brothers-in-law. This goes both for men who marry into families with a criminal history and for those without. Once again, these differences could imply that convicted brothers-in-law hinder men's desistance process just as they could merely reflect the composition of the groups.

STEP 4: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

When both the premarriage and postmarriage crime rates of men who have convicted and nonconvicted brothers-in-law differ as substantially as shown, other and important differences between them are likely to exist. Table 1 emphasizes this point by comparing the means and standard deviations of all control variables across the men who have nonconvicted brothers-in-law, convicted brothers-in-law, and the men who marry but do not have any brothers-in-law. The latter group is much larger than the first two groups because I only count as relevant brothers-in-law who fall within a ±5-year age bracket of the man.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics, Danish Men From Birth Cohorts 1965–1975

Brother-in-Law's Criminality	Not Convicted		Convicted		No Brother-in-Law	
Variable	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Husband						
Ever convicted	.144	.352	.267	.442	.152	.359
Ever incarcerated	.026	.160[a]	.059	.236	.028	.164[a]
Convicted within past 3 years	.018	.132[b]	.063	.243	.018	.132[b]
Arrested within past 3 years	.003	.055[c]	.013	.114	.003	.057[c]
No. of brothers	.688	.795	.720	.827	.666	0.776
No. of sisters	.712	.892	.754	1.099	.701	0.939
Age at marriage	30.324	4.549	28.458	4.646	30.559	4.562
Ethnic minority background	.004	.062[d]	.008	.089	.004	.065[d]
Years of education	13.013	2.199	12.047	2.198	13.053	2.188
Has children	.619	.486	.636	.481	.608	.488
Employed	.939	.239[e]	.881	.324	.937	.243[e]
Earnings	5.155	2.817	4.440	2.468	5.200	2.836
Public benefit dependence	.265	.614[f]	.435	.788	.267	0.630[f]
Wife						
Wife convicted	.039	.194	.107	.309	.042	.200
No. of brothers	1.137	.384	1.309	.570	N/A	N/A
No. of sisters	.487	.744	.620	.881	.925	.807
Age at marriage	29.175	4.853	27.512	4.952	29.237	4.932
Ethnic minority background	.004	.066[g]	.010	.101	.004	.066[g]
Years of education	12.940	2.138	11.663	2.094	13.016	2.114
Has children	.646	.478	.695	.461	.634	.482
Employed	.844	.362[h]	.752	.432	.846	.361[h]
Earnings	3.382	2.161	2.662	1.969	3.420	2.177
Public benefit	.983	1.119	1.366	1.389	.953	1.102
Shared						
Cohabiting year before marriage	.878	.327	.804	.397	.884	.320
Cohabiting 2 years before marriage	.763	.426[i]	.666	.472	.764	.425[i]
Cohabiting 3 years before marriage	.639	.480[j]	.549	.498	.640	.480[j]
Shared children year before marriage	.588	.781[k,l]	.571[k]	.786	.555	.759[l]
Shared children 2 years before marriage	.426	.702[m,n]	.412	.710[m]	.398	.677[n]
Shared children 3 years before marriage	.308	.621[o,p]	.304	.629[o]	.284	.594[p]
Family Criminality						
Husband's brother convicted	.097	.296	.149	.356	.101	.301
Husband's father convicted	.065	.246	.079	.270	.067	.251
Wife's father convicted	.070	.254	.183	.386	.074	.262
N	65,935		3,131		121,387	

[a–p]Means that share superscript (within table rows) do not differ at the 5 percent level.
NOTES: Brother-in-law's criminality is measured as conviction within the past 3 years before the marriage.
ABBREVIATIONS: M = mean; N/A = not applicable; No. = number; SD = standard deviation.
SOURCE: Author's calculations on data from Statistics Denmark.

Table 1 shows huge differences between the men depending on the criminality of their brother-in-law. Most means differ statistically at the 5 percent level, but this result is likely to be mechanically driven by the huge number of observations. More importantly, all rows of the table show that the men who have convicted brothers-in-law are more disadvantaged than are those who have nonconvicted brothers-in-law and the men who do not have any brothers-in-law. The shares that are previously convicted, previously incarcerated, and recently arrested are, for example, much higher among the men who have convicted brothers-in-law. These men come from larger families (they have more brothers

and sisters) and marry at a younger age than do those who do not have convicted brothers-in-law. Moreover, they have fewer years of education and a poorer labor market position.

When we look at the wives they choose, a similar picture emerges. Their wives are more likely to be previously convicted, and they are younger when they marry. Their wives also have fewer years of education and a worse labor market position than do the wives of men who have nonconvicted brothers-in-law and of men who do not have brothers-in-law.

Family-formation events, other than marriage, show an interesting pattern. First, the men who have convicted brothers-in-law are just as likely as the other men to have children with their future wife in one of the 3 years before marriage. Yet, both spouses are more likely to have children prior to the marriage than the other men and their spouses. This indicates that higher shares of men who have convicted brothers-in-law, and higher shares of their future wives, have children with a person other than their future husband or wife, a result that has also been found in other recent research (e.g., Lyngstad and Skardhamar, 2016). Second, although the men who have convicted brothers-in-law and their spouses are just as likely as the other men and their spouses to have shared children in one of the 3 years before marriage, their cohabitation rates are lower. In the year before their marriage, for example, only 80 percent of the men who have convicted brothers-in-law appear on the same address as their future wife. The same number is close to 90 percent for the other men. All in all, descriptive statistics regarding family-formation events, other than marriage, indicate that men who get tied to convicted brothers-in-law and their spouses have less stable relationships before their marriage.

Last, the criminality of male family members (other than the brothers-in-law) also indicates a certain selection into families. Of the men who have convicted brothers-in-law, a higher proportion have brothers who are previously convicted, a higher proportion have fathers who are previously convicted, and a higher proportion finds a wife whose father is previously convicted (close to 20 percent, which is more than double the proportion among the men who have nonconvicted or no brother-in-law). Thus, criminality indeed concentrates within family networks.

STEP 5: DO DELINQUENT BROTHERS-IN-LAW MATTER?

Table 2 moves beyond bivariate associations and presents results from the main regression models. The full table of estimates from the linear probability model is available in table S1 in the online supporting information, and the full table of estimates from the corresponding logistic regression model is available in table S7. The first model in table 2 shows a positive and statistically significant association between having a convicted brother-in-law and postmarriage criminality. The estimate implies that the men who have convicted brothers-in-law have three percentage points higher crime rates than do the men who have nonconvicted brothers-in-law. This is consistent with the already mentioned findings from figure 2 (this difference corresponds to an odds ratio of 3.5; cf. model 1 in table S7 in the online supporting information, which again is consistent with the factor that was mentioned earlier).

The association between having a convicted brother-in-law and postmarriage criminality diminishes as information on the husband, his wife, their shared family-formation events other than marriage, and the criminality of other male family members is added to the model. Estimates in the model that includes all information (model 2 in table 2) imply that the men who have convicted brothers-in-law have 1.1 percentage point (odds

Table 2. Results From Linear Probability Models Estimating Men's Risk of Conviction Within 3 Years After Marriage, Danish Men From Birth Cohorts 1965–1975

Model Variable/Model Description	(1) No Controls	(2) All Family Criminality	(3) Recent Family Criminality
Brother-in-law convicted within past 3 years	.030***	.011**	.011**
	(.004)	(.003)	(.003)
Ever convicted		.017***	.018***
		(.002)	(.002)
Ever incarcerated		.039***	.039***
		(.006)	(.006)
Convicted within past 3 years		.096***	.092***
		(.010)	(.010)
Arrested within past 3 years		.086***	.081**
		(.026)	(.026)
Wife convicted		.016***	.097***
		(.004)	(.017)
Husband's brother convicted		.007***	.020***
		(.002)	(.005)
Husband's father convicted		.012***	.026**
		(.003)	(.010)
Wife's father convicted		.005*	.006
		(.002)	(.007)
Cohort dummies	YES	YES	YES
Husband covariates		YES	YES
Wife covariates		YES	YES
Shared covariates		YES	YES
Family criminality		YES	YES
R^2	.004	.071	.074
N	69,066	69,066	69,066

NOTES: Standard errors in parentheses. A total of 895 men (1.3 percent) in the sample were convicted within the first 3 years after marriage. Full table of parameter estimates is available in table S1 in the online supporting information.
ABBREVIATION: R^2 = square of correlation between predicted and observed values.
SOURCE: Author's calculations on data from Statistics Denmark.
**$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed).

ratio [OR] = 1.2) higher postmarriage crime rates than do the men who have nonconvicted brothers-in-law. This difference is statistically significant and is controlled for the wide array of information mentioned in the Data section, including the men's criminality during the 3 years before their marriage. Indeed, the difference is substantial considering the generally low postmarriage crime rates. Thus, even when taking into account a wide array of observed differences between the men who have different brothers-in-law, the criminality of the brother-in-law still seems to hinder criminal desistance.

It is important to note, however, that the estimate associated with having a convicted brother-in-law is small compared with the estimates associated with other family members (and although the estimate from the linear probability model is statistically significant at the 1 percent level, it is only significant at the 10 percent level in the corresponding logistic regression model, presented in the online supporting information). In fact, the influence from the broader family network, which is tied together after the marriage, is much lower than that of the men's own previous criminality (9.6 [OR = 1.9] and 8.6 [OR = 1.6] percentage points higher crime rates among men who were convicted and

arrested, respectively, within the past 3 years) and the criminality of their wives (almost 2 percentage points [OR = 1.4] higher crime rates among men whose wife was previously convicted). This finding implies that although influences from the wider social network after one's marriage are important for the desistance process, the main driver of men's postmarriage crime rates is their own criminality and the criminality of their wives.

The last column of table 2 shows results measuring the criminality of male family members and the wife within the last 3 years leading up to the marriage. The results show that even when controlling for marriages that unite families who were recently active on the criminal market, the difference between men who have convicted and nonconvicted brothers-in-law persists (the point estimate in the corresponding logistic regression model, model 3 in table S7 in the online supporting information, is also statistically significant at the 5 percent level). This is again despite large and statistically significant impacts of variables related to male family member delinquency, suggesting that convicted brothers-in-law impair desistance over and above what is associated with family delinquency. In fact, the estimated difference in these men's crime rates is identical to the previous model, although the impact of the male family members' and the wife's criminality is much larger than that in the previous model. The estimated coefficient related to the wife's criminality increases, for example, sixfold (OR = 2.2). Moreover, the coefficient associated with the criminality of the husband's own brother increases almost threefold (OR = 1.6). Both of these results indicate that the proximal criminality of a man's loved ones, for example, his wife or his brothers, is important for understanding his behavior.

STEP 6: PREVIOUS CONVICTION AND CO-OFFENDING

Table 3 shows results by previous conviction. The crime rates of men who have convicted brothers-in-law are consistently higher than are the crime rates of men who have nonconvicted brothers-in-law even when results are broken down by previous conviction. For previously convicted men, the estimated difference is numerically the highest, but these estimates are statistically insignificant (most likely because of the lower number of observations in this subsample). For previously nonconvicted men, who constitute the majority in the sample, the postmarriage crime rates differ statistically significantly by the criminality of their brother-in-law. The estimated difference is numerically smaller than among previously convicted men. The estimates imply that even in this model, which takes all background characteristics of the husband, the wife, their shared family formation, and the criminality of their male family members into account, previously nonconvicted men who have convicted brothers-in-law have around .5 percentage points (OR = 1.5) higher postmarriage conviction rates than do men who have nonconvicted brothers-in-law. This is despite large and statistically significant impacts of other covariates, such as family criminality and recent family criminality, which correlate strongly with postmarriage criminality (results shown in tables S2 and S3 in the online supporting information). Again, the results uniformly suggest that even though the selection of delinquent men into families with a criminal history is strong, nondelinquent men who get convicted brothers-in-law through marriage have higher postmarriage criminality.

The results thus indicate that even though postmarriage conviction is comparatively rare among previously nonconvicted men, getting tied to a convicted brother-in-law holds the potential to ignite criminality among previously nonconvicted men. For the previously

Table 3. Results From Linear Probability Models Estimating Men's Risk of Conviction Within 3 Years After Marriage, by Previous Conviction, Danish Men From Birth Cohorts 1965–1975

Model Variable/Model Description	(1) No Controls	(2) All Family Criminality	(3) Recent Family Criminality
Previously Convicted Men			
Brother-in-law convicted within past 3 years	.064***	.013	.014
	(.011)	(.011)	(.011)
R^2	.007	.102	.107
N	10,362	10,362	10,362
Previously Nonconvicted Men			
Brother-in-law convicted within past 3 years	.010***	.006*	.006*
	(.003)	(.003)	(.003)
R^2	.001	.010	.010
N	58,704	58,704	58,704
Cohort dummies	YES	YES	YES
Husband covariates		YES	YES
Wife covariates		YES	YES
Shared covariates		YES	YES
Family criminality		YES	YES

NOTES: Standard errors in parentheses. A total of 561 previously convicted men (5.4 percent) and 334 previously nonconvicted men (.6 percent) in the samples were convicted within the first 3 years after marriage. Full tables of parameter estimates are available in tables S2 and S3 in the online supporting information.
ABBREVIATION: R^2 = square of correlation between predicted and observed values.
SOURCE: Author's calculations on data from Statistics Denmark.
*$p < .05$; ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed).

convicted men, the results are statistically weaker (i.e., point estimates are statistically insignificant). Yet, the numerically larger and consistently positive point estimates for previously convicted men indicate that getting tied to a convicted brother-in-law may decelerate desistance among the previously convicted men.

CO-OFFENDING

Table 4 shows the results for co-offending both before and after marriage. A first observation from this table is the low frequency of co-offending between men and their brothers-in-law. Only .5 and .2 percent of the men co-offend with their brother-in-law before and after marriage, respectively.

Across all models, men who have convicted brothers-in-law have higher rates of co-offending than do men who have nonconvicted brothers-in-law. Again, this result indicates that getting tied to a convicted brother-in-law could decrease the desistance-promoting benefits of marriage because the new family tie between a man and his brother-in-law after the marriage could lead them to increased levels of co-offending.

Yet, interestingly, rates of co-offending increase (in absolute terms) among men and their previously convicted brothers-in-law already during the years leading up to marriage. In the years leading up to marriage, the convicted future brothers-in-law seem to affect the behavior of future grooms, which at first glance seems surprising because at this point there is, by definition, not yet a desistance-promoting effect of marriage. But the result resonates well with the theoretical idea that the desistance-promoting benefits of marriage are indeed precursors of entering marriage, a cognitive transformation that

Table 4. Results From Linear Probability Models Estimating Men's Risk of Conviction for Co-Offending With Their Brother-in-Law Within 3 Years Before and After Marriage, Danish Men From Birth Cohorts 1965–1975

Model Variable/Model Description	(1) No Controls	(2) All Family Criminality	(3) Recent Family Criminality
Before Marriage			
Brother-in-law convicted within past 3 years	.019***	.009***	.009***
	(.003)	(.002)	(.002)
R^2	.003	.072	.076
After Marriage			
Brother-in-law convicted within past 3 years	.013***	.008***	.008***
	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)
R^2	.003	.032	.032
Cohort dummies	YES	YES	YES
Husband covariates		YES	YES
Wife covariates		YES	YES
Shared covariates		YES	YES
Family criminality		YES	YES
N	69,066	69,066	69,066

NOTES: Standard errors in parentheses. A total of 362 (.5 percent) and 160 (.2 percent) of men in the sample were convicted for co-offenses with their brother-in-law within the first 3 years before and after marriage, respectively. Full tables of parameter estimates are available in tables S4 and S5 in the online supporting information.
ABBREVIATION: R^2 = square of correlation between predicted and observed values.
SOURCE: Author's calculations on data from Statistics Denmark.
***$p < .001$ (two-tailed).

prepares men for a life with marriage and less crime. Does finding a future wife, who has a convicted brother, hinder or impair this cognitive transformation, resulting in less desistance even before the marriage is formalized?

STEP 7: PROXIMITY OF THE BROTHER-IN-LAW

Table 5 shows the results from the last analytic step, which restricts the sample to include only men who reside in close proximity to their brothers-in-law. When interpreting municipality of residence as a proxy for interaction propensity results confirm the expectation that if the propensity for interacting with a convicted brother-in-law is high, it impairs the men's desistance. The estimates in table 5 are consistently higher than the main estimates, which did not take proximity of the brother-in-law into account (although the parameter estimate associated with having a convicted brother-in-law is only statistically significant at the 10 percent level in the full model; model 2 in table 5). The differences are, however, small, and the estimates differ only on the third decimal point, indicating that the proximity of the brother-in-law is perhaps not very important.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical accounts of the connection between marriage and desistance from crime acknowledge, although not to any large degree, that family factors from outside the internal

Table 5. Results From Linear Probability Models Estimating Men's Risk of Conviction Within 3 Years After Marriage, Danish Men From Birth Cohorts 1965–1975 Who Reside in the Same Municipality as Their Brother-in-Law

Model Variable/Model Description	(1) No Controls	(2) All Family Criminality	(3) Recent Family Criminality
Brother-in-law convicted within past 3 years	.037***	.012	.013*
	(.007)	(.006)	(.006)
Cohort dummies	YES	YES	YES
Husband covariates		YES	YES
Wife covariates		YES	YES
Shared covariates		YES	YES
Family criminality		YES	YES
R^2	.005	.079	.089
N	21,923	21,923	21,923

NOTES: Standard errors in parentheses. A total of 351 men (1.6 percent) in the sample were convicted within the first 3 years after marriage. Full table of parameter estimates is available in table S6 in the online supporting information.
ABBREVIATION: R^2 = square of correlation between predicted and observed values.
SOURCE: Author's calculations on data from Statistics Denmark.
*$p < .05$; ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed).

dynamics of marriage, such as in-laws, could be important for the marital ties between the spouses. Nevertheless, the findings from empirical research on the connection predominantly view marriage as a dyad, that is, a union formed between the two spouses alone. When men's postmarriage criminality varies by the criminal history of a brother-in-law, as this article has shown it does, it has implications for both theory and empirical research. Indeed, the results in this article confirm the observations made by Elder (1994, 1998), that social relationships are linked, meaning that the networks of each spouse matter for the type of behavioral constraints any given marriage is likely to exert on the spouses.

The results indicate that the criminality of the spouses themselves is important for how likely a marriage is to promote desistance. This finding is consistent with those from existing research, which emphasizes the importance of the characteristics of spouses (and the strength of their relationship) for desistance, and it seems safe to conclude that the marriage dyad itself is most important for the desistance-promoting benefit of marriage. In this article, however, I focused on having a convicted brother-in-law to exemplify the breadth of family influences beyond the marriage dyad that could matter for desistance, and the results suggest increased focus on explicitly theorizing how in-laws—or friends and kin of the spouses—affect the desistance process. Empirical research would also benefit from taking into account that marriage simultaneously unites two families, which could lead to important heterogeneity in how the desistance-promoting benefits of marriage work.

In brief, the results from this article suggest that the characteristics of new family members (other than the spouse) may be important for how likely a marriage is to exert its well-known positive influence and lead the spouses down the pathway of criminal desistance. When the criminality of men differs depending on whether they have convicted or nonconvicted brothers-in-law, it might be explained by certain social processes. Men with specific characteristics that also correlate with criminality may be

more likely to marry into families with a criminal history. In this sense, convicted in-laws may simply be symptoms of the fact that family dynamics is a social variable, driven by social homogamy (Rhule-Louie and McMahon, 2007). Yet, the results in this article control the association between the criminality of the men and their brothers-in-law for other features of those men, their wives, their shared family-formation process, and the delinquency of other male family members who are tied together because of the marriage (such as both spouses' fathers). Separate results by previous conviction, by co-offending, and by family members who reside in close proximity confirm the main findings. Many variables associated with the selection of people into marriage and into families are thus taken into account; yet, the association between the criminality of men and their brothers-in-law persists (and, indeed, even remains unaltered when recent family criminality is taken into account).

In lack of variation in brothers-in-law that is plausibly exogenous to the characteristics (observed as well as unobserved) of men, their wives, and their families, the persistent association between the criminality of men and their brothers-in-law could still be caused by family dynamics that tie together specific types of families. Indeed, Wildeman and Wakefield (2014) showed that incarceration is much more concentrated in family net-works than the results of most quantitative research suggest, for example. This limitation permeates most, if not all, research on the causal connection between marriage and crime. Questions of causality are always intriguing and the center of both theoretical and empir-ical debate. Yet, the simple fact that family dynamics and processes of family formation concentrate criminality within family networks is an important addition to our knowledge on this area of research.

The results reported in this article do not formally distinguish whether one of the four presented theories (i.e., the selection paradigm, the theory of age-graded informal so-cial control, peer association theory, and the theory of cognitive transformation) of the connection between marriage and desistance from crime is more correct than the others. Instead, my empirical results offer knowledge on how the delinquency of brothers-in-law is associated with that of different subsets of the men in my sample. The results show that the postmarriage criminality of men with convicted brothers-in-law is higher both among previously convicted and previously nonconvicted men. This implies that getting tied to delinquent brothers-in-law could both decelerate the desistance process among previously convicted men and ignite criminality among previously nonconvicted men (al-though only by around .5 percentage points and from a very low proportion convicted).

The results regarding co-offending are weaker simply because rates of co-offending in the sample are low. Even so, the rates of co-offending between men and their brother-in-law are significantly higher if the brother-in-law is previously convicted. Importantly, however, there are signs that the surplus in co-offending existed prior to the marriage too. This finding raises the point of simultaneity, which could have two interesting im-plications. One is that delinquent friends may come with sisters (potential wives) and not the other way around. If so, future research should aim to disentangle the timing of family-formation events and include the relationship to in-laws. The other is that the process promoting desistance among married men may begin before marriage, as the the-ory of cognitive transformation would suggest, and being tied to a convicted brother-in-law weakens the cognitive transformation of delinquent and unmarried men into "family men." Again, because the results for co-offending are generally weak, this finding and the implications are just bait for future research to chase.

Last, empirical results taking into account the geographical dispersion of family members confirm the main findings: The association between crime desistance and having a convicted brother-in-law is slightly stronger when looking only at married couples who live in the same municipality as the brother-in-law. Yet, the fact that this association is only slightly (and probably not statistically significantly) different from the general association between crime desistance and having a convicted brother-in-law may express that with modern communication technologies, such as online communication, geographical proximity is perhaps no longer that important for family relations (Fingerman, Sechrist, and Birditt, 2013). It might also reflect that the results are from a small country, Denmark, where even the most remote areas are accessible within a few hours.

When the distance gradient does not play the most important role for the connection between the criminality of the men and their brothers-in-law, it alludes to a broader limitation of the current study: The results are from Denmark, a small Scandinavian country that differs from most other developed democracies in many ways, which raises concern about generalizability.

Most importantly, over the recent decades, marriage in the United States has become highly individualized, and marriage now emphasizes personal choice and self-development over virtues of perseverance (Cherlin, 2004). Moreover, patterns of marriage, divorce, and cohabitation have changed significantly (Cherlin, 2010). These observations raise two important questions. First, is it reasonable to expect in-laws to matter for desistance in the context of individualized marriages? Deliberately choosing marriage (or deliberately choosing not to divorce) that comes with delinquent in-laws would, in this context, express that these men expect to achieve something, such as self-development, from these marriages. This process would again imply that specific types of men self-select into marriages that come with delinquent in-laws, and their reduced desistance would likely be caused by such selection rather than by a direct effect of having a convicted brother-in-law.

Second, the question is whether results from Denmark are applicable to the context of the United States where family formation and the institution of marriage have undergone such changes. The transferability of results across national contexts is always troublesome, but Denmark and the rest of the Nordic countries have, as mentioned, gone through much the same development as the United States has, at least in terms of the timing of family-formation events (the Second Demographic Transition). Some of the challenge of transferability might therefore be overcome. Although the practical importance of marriage has declined in the United States and family structures have become more complex, the symbolic significance of marriage is still high, and contemporary marriage still holds a unique position as a marker of family ties (Cherlin, 2004, 2010). In short, although marriage is changing, it is still important.

Point estimates are thus unlikely to transfer well across the Atlantic Ocean. The general implication that marriage unites more people than the spouses and that delinquent in-laws may affect the benefits of marriage will, however, most likely transfer well. Despite the limitations of the current research, the study behind this article used unique registry data on several family members to show that delinquent brothers-in-law can indeed impair the desistance-promoting benefits of marriage. By implication, criminologists in particular, as well as social scientists in general, should aim to disentangle how all people tied together by marriage respond to the dynamics of family formation, as well as how it affects the desistance-promoting benefits of marriage.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's web site:

Table S1. Results From Linear Probability Models Estimating Men's Risk of Conviction Within 3 Years After Marriage, Danish Men From Birth Cohorts 1965–1975

Table S2. Results From Linear Probability Models Estimating Men's Risk of Conviction Within 3 Years After Marriage, Previously Convicted Danish Men From Birth Cohorts 1965–1975

Table S3. Results From Linear Probability Models Estimating Men's Risk of Conviction Within 3 Years After Marriage, Previously Nonconvicted Danish Men From Birth Cohorts 1965–1975

Table S4. Results From Linear Probability Models Estimating Men's Risk of Conviction for Co-Offending With Their Brother-in-Law Within 3 Years Prior to Marriage, Danish Men From Birth Cohorts 1965–1975

Table S5. Results From Linear Probability Models Estimating Men's Risk of Conviction for Co-Offending With Their Brother-in-Law Within 3 Years After Marriage, Danish Men From Birth Cohorts 1965–1975

Table S6. Results From Linear Probability Models Estimating Men's Risk of Conviction Within 3 Years After Marriage, Danish Men From Birth Cohorts 1965–1975 Who Reside in the Same Municipality as Their Brother-in-Law

Table S7. Results (Odds Ratio) From Logistic Regression Models Estimating Men's Risk of Conviction Within 3 Years After Marriage, Danish Men From Birth Cohorts 1965–1975

Table S8. Results (Odds Ratio) From Logistic Regression Models Estimating Men's Risk of Conviction Within 3 Years After Marriage, by Previous Conviction, Danish Men From Birth Cohorts 1965–1975

Table S9. Results (Odds Ratio) From Logistic Regression Models Estimating Men's Risk of Conviction for Co-Offending With Their Brother-in-Law Within 3 Years Before and After Marriage, Danish Men From Birth Cohorts 1965–1975

Table S10. Results (Odds Ratio) From Logistic Regression Models Estimating Men's Risk of Conviction Within 3 Years After Marriage, Danish Men From Birth Cohorts 1965–1975 Who Reside in the Same Municipality as Their Brother-in-Law