

PART XIII

Getting Into and Out of Crime: Life-Course Theories

Psychologists have long understood that human personality and behavioral patterns emerge through a developmental process that unfolds from birth onward. They study infants and their interaction with mothers; they have specialized courses in "child psychology" and "adolescent psychology." They take for granted that what occurs early in life may shape—sometimes profoundly—what occurs later in life.

Until relatively recently—the last two decades or so—most criminologists systematically ignored these fundamental insights of psychology (for exceptions, see scholars in Part XII). Equipped with a thoroughly sociological worldview, they had little interest in tracing how individuals *develop* over time. Instead, they were concerned with what happens when individuals are placed in a particular *social context*. This distinction is somewhat subtle, but it is important: A developmental perspective focuses on the individual and how the person's life unfolds as he or she traverses through different contexts. A traditional criminological perspective is more interested in which contexts—or features of the context—are crime-inducing. Another way of phrasing this issue is that a developmental perspective is *dynamic*, studying whether an individual's behavior remains stable or changes over time. A traditional criminological perspective often is *static*, assuming that contexts have stable and enduring effects on the people caught in them.

This characterization might be a bit of an overstatement, for there are always exceptions to the

rule. Even so, most criminological theories have paid, at best, only a vague and implicit attention to what goes on during childhood. Let us take, for example, Hirschi's (1969 [Chapter 14 in this volume]) social bond theory in which he argues that attachment to parents is a significant indirect social control. Psychologists have published volumes of studies on the concept of attachment and on what attachment between infants and parents involves (see, e.g., Bowlby, 1969). In contrast, in Hirschi's theory, there is only the vague sense that attachment to parents must have evolved sometime in childhood. But this process is not investigated or *given any theoretical weight*; that is, it is not an object of study and its implications for understanding the origins and effects of the social bond are left unexplored.

Or to take but one other example, let us consider social disorganization theory (see Part II in this volume). The theory logically suggests that the effects of social disorganization are restricted to the present moment. We would anticipate that growing up in a disorganized neighborhood—spending years in a "delinquency area," to use Shaw and McKay's term—would have some criminogenic effect above and beyond simply being in such a community at the current time. If this were the case, we might expect that theorists would investigate how the length of residing in a troubled area affects youths, or they might explore the effects of disorganization on children versus, say, adolescents. But, at least traditionally, questions of this nature escaped systematic study

by social disorganization theorists (for an exception, see Sampson, 1997).

The downplaying of childhood was probably not a conscious conclusion that the early years in life were uninvolved in crime; after all, who would really say that what goes on in childhood is unimportant? Rather, it reflected the intellectual evolution of criminology in directions that simply placed childhood “on the back burner”—just far enough out of mind that the implications of taking childhood seriously did not have to be entertained. Two factors contributed to this neglect of the early years of life and, in turn, of considering crime as a developmental process.

First, research studies reveal that participation in crime peaks during the teenage years. Crime is highest around age 17 or 18, with violent crime reaching its apex a bit later (Agnew and Brezina, 2012; Caspi and Moffitt, 1995; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016). As Caspi and Moffitt (1995: 493) note, “the majority of criminal offenders are teenagers; by the early 20s, the number of active offenders decreases by over 50 percent; by age 28, almost 85 percent of former delinquents desist from offending.” Given these empirical realities, the relevance of childhood experiences was not readily apparent. Rather, it “made sense” to ask what was special about the *juvenile* years—peer relationships, school experiences, frustration in the job market, labeling by police, threats to masculinity, and so on—that suddenly compels large numbers of American youths to break the law, with some doing so at a high rate. This search for the criminogenic conditions that are integral to the teenage years is why a large proportion of crime theories were actually put forth as theories of “delinquency.”

Second, the focus on juveniles seemed not only reasonable—given their high involvement in crime—but also *practical*. Studying crime and testing criminological theories is often a daunting task. But teenagers are an ideal population to investigate. Thus, in any community, most of them congregate daily in one place: the schools. Researchers found it convenient to arrive at a

high school and, over a day or two, distribute questionnaires for students to complete. These survey instruments would contain both questions measuring different theories and questions measuring involvement in crime (called a “self-report delinquency scale”). Relying on students had one other advantage: They were used to filling out pencil and paper “tests,” which questionnaires approximated. Not surprisingly, literally hundreds of these studies were conducted, and they largely form the basis for current assessments of whether or not given theories are empirically supported.

It is important to note that the vast majority of these surveys were *cross-sectional* in design; that is, they did not follow youngsters over time (a *longitudinal* study) but rather studied them by taking a “slice” or “cross section” of their lives at one time and place. Again, cross-sectional studies are time and cost effective. Tracing what happens in an individual’s life over several years is difficult and requires an ongoing team of researchers. Studying the goings on in someone’s life from *childhood* into later years is extremely challenging. The point is that surveying juveniles cross-sectionally was practical and within reach of many scholars. But by choosing this approach, it was not possible to consider the role of childhood and human development in crime; such questions fell outside the dominant research design employed by criminologists.

Gradually, however, findings from the limited number of longitudinal studies gained notice (see, e.g., Farrington, 1995, 2003; Farrington and Loeber, 1999; Loeber et al., 2003; Robins and Wish, 1977; Thornberry and Krohn, 2003). Most notably, spurred by the work of Sampson and Laub (1993; see also Laub and Sampson, 1991), scholars paid renewed attention to the research of Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (1950; [Chapter 35 in Part XII]). Sheldon Glueck was a professor in the law school at Harvard University; reflecting the gender bias of the times, his wife, Eleanor, was consigned to a soft-money research assistant position. Their most famous investigation

involved a longitudinal study of 500 delinquents and a matched sample of 500 nondelinquent boys. Both groups consisted of white males ages 10 to 17. The delinquent boys were selected from two juvenile reformatories in Massachusetts, whereas the nondelinquents were from Boston public schools. The study, which spanned 1949 to 1963, included follow-up of the sample at age 25 and at age 32 (Laub and Sampson, 1991; Sampson and Laub, 1993).

Although the Gluecks' research received much attention when published, it also was attacked by Edwin Sutherland for not testing any theory about crime and for downplaying sociological factors. Sociologists in general came to reject the Gluecks' work, stereotyping it as methodologically flawed and as portraying offenders as biologically deficient. In the ensuing years, their writings were infrequently read (Laub and Sampson, 1991). This neglect was unfortunate, because the Gluecks' detailed study provided insights that would come to occupy a central place within criminology in the 1990s and beyond (Laub and Sampson, 1991). For our purposes, three contributions are most significant.

First, the Gluecks showed the importance of discovering empirically how delinquents and nondelinquents differ from one another. They embraced an "eclectic" or "multifactor" approach in which conclusions about the causes of crime were not driven by any single theory but by the data. This was a prelude to today's scholars' search for "risk factors" that place youngsters in jeopardy of offending (see, e.g., Loeber and Farrington, 1998; Tanner-Smith et al., 2013). Second, they established that early antisocial conduct was tied to later criminal behavior. That is, there is a good deal of stability in waywardness from youth into early adulthood. Criminal involvement thus is developmental; what happens at one stage in life influences what happens at the next stage in life. Third, they demonstrated that antisocial youths not only are shaped by their circumstances (e.g., quality of family) but also impact their social world. Delinquent youngsters, for example,

dislike and misbehave at school, and they choose friends who are similarly delinquent. As such, they are architects of their future, making decisions that potentially impoverish their lives. The role of offenders in knifing off prosocial opportunities is an insight that would reappear in later developmental theories.

Contemporary criminologists' consciousness about these and similar findings were especially raised by the writings of a limited group of controversial but prominent scholars (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Wilson and Herrnstein, 1985). Their central observation was that relatively few youths suddenly become serious, chronic offenders during the juvenile years. Although what we call "crime" may first emerge during adolescence, a range of "conduct problems"—precursors to crime, such as bullying, lying, and stealing—arise during childhood. In short, childhood antisocial behavior is perhaps the strongest predictor of involvement in serious juvenile offending.

The theoretical implications of this insight are profound. First, it suggests that the central causes of crime likely lie in childhood and thus that theories need to take this fact into account. Second, theories that have focused exclusively on "what happens" in the teenage years and beyond are incomplete, if not fully incorrect. In short, most existing theories of crime are wrong because they attribute crime to conditions (e.g., dropping out of school, unemployment) that occur long after individuals start a trajectory into crime during childhood. Third, the link between childhood and later deviance—although not ironclad—is sufficiently strong to show that involvement in crime is a dynamic, developmental process. Accordingly, criminological theory should become largely a branch of "developmental criminology" (see, more generally, Farrington and Loeber, 2013; Le Blanc and Loeber, 1998; Loeber and Le Blanc, 1990; Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1996). Other scholars, making the same point, preferred to label this paradigm—this fresh way of thinking about and researching crime—"life-course criminology" (Benson, 2013; Sampson

and Laub, 1990, 1992, 1993, 1995; see also Farrington, 2005). Another option, now growing in popularity, is to combine this terminology. For example, in the American Society of Criminology, members interested in this area have created the "Division of Developmental and Life-Course Criminology." Often, scholars abbreviate this name by using the acronym "DLC criminology."

To date, the most sophisticated scholarship within developmental criminology has been empirical and descriptive, as researchers have used longitudinal designs to document the factors that place individuals at risk for crime at different points in the life course. Biosocial criminology has played an invaluable role in identifying factors (e.g., brain structure and function, genetics) that had been neglected by traditional criminologists (see Part XII; see also Walsh and Beaver, 2009; Wright et al., 2008). Unfortunately, developmental *theories* of crime—attempts to explain why people develop into and out of crime—have lagged behind. Still, important conceptual frameworks have been advanced (Cullen et al., 2012; Farrington, 2005). We believe that it is useful to separate these initial theories into three categories: (1) theories of continuity, (2) theories of continuity *or* change, and (3) theories of continuity *and* change.

Continuity

A developmental pattern over the life course can be marked by *continuity*—the behavior is stable and continuous—or marked by *change*—behavior on one pathway departs and heads in an alternative direction. As noted, life-course theories differ in whether they predict that the dominant pattern in the development of criminal conduct is continuity or change. As a group, these authors tend to agree that childhood is a time during which a criminal trajectory—especially for the most serious, chronic offenders—starts. They use the term "onset" to describe this initial entry into crime. They also tend to agree that some individual differences in the propensity for crime are

established. They use the term "heterogeneity" (as opposed to "homogeneity") to describe how people vary in their orientation toward criminal conduct. But despite these points of agreement, theorists begin to part company when deciding the importance of the role played in crime causation by the criminal propensities that emerge in childhood.

For example, are criminal propensities developed in childhood carried by a person throughout life? If some people enter a life course of crime in their early years, are there others who start offending later in life—such as during adolescence? If so, do these early and late starters into crime differ from one another? Furthermore, among those who show signs of criminal propensity during childhood, are there some who continue into serious delinquency and others who do not? How might we explain how youngsters—or adults—escape the life of crime that seemingly lay ahead for them? It is challenging questions such as these that developmental theories of crime seek to answer.

Individual trait perspectives (see Part XII) tend to be *continuity* theories. Typically, the reasoning is that once a trait emerges or becomes part of someone's personality, this trait is difficult to "get rid of." A person thus carries the criminogenic trait across time and, within any one time, across social contexts. Because the trait is enduring, involvement in crime also tends to be enduring. In short, the trait produces continuity in criminal behavior.

Within criminology, sociological perspectives tend to be implicitly continuity theories. We say "implicitly" because the issue of continuity is not directly addressed and thus the theory's stance on the issue must be inferred from its logic. In any event, most sociological theories imply that once people become criminal—whether due to strain, a broken social bond, or perhaps differential association—they will tend to stay criminal. They rarely address the issue of "desistance" or the process whereby people stop committing crimes.

Of course, sociological theories could be used—and in a limited number of cases have been used—to explain why people stop committing crimes (see, e.g., Agnew, 1997; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Thornberry, 1987; Warr, 1998). Indeed, these theories are more amenable to explaining change than are trait theories: If social situations change (e.g., strain is eliminated, bonds are established), then it would seem logical that crime will decrease or stop. To explain desistance, individual trait theorists would have to explain how the crime-inducing trait somehow vanished—a more difficult task than explaining a change in social conditions external to the individual.

In this context, within the existing developmental models, the most important continuity perspective is Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) *self-control theory*, which they published in their now classic *A General Theory of Crime* (see also Gottfredson, 2006; Hirschi and Gottfredson, 1995). We are reviewing their thinking here because of its relevance to life-course criminology. Gottfredson and Hirschi's theory, however, was previously studied in Part V, where "varieties of control theory" were presented (for a review of this work, see the introductions to Part V and Chapter 15). It might be advantageous for readers to revisit these earlier materials.

As may be recalled, Gottfredson and Hirschi suggest that an enduring propensity to commit crime, which they call "low self-control," emerges in childhood (by about age 8). They link the failure to develop internal controls to the failure of parents to supervise their children, to recognize behavior that is deviant, and then to punish and correct such conduct when it occurs. Individuals with low self-control "will tend to be impulsive, insensitive, physical (as opposed to mental), risk-taking, short-sighted, [and] nonverbal" (1990: 90). Further, "since there is considerable tendency for these traits to come together in the same people, and since the traits tend to persist through life, it seems reasonable to consider them as comprising a stable construct useful in

the explanation of crime" (pp. 90–91). It also is relevant that Gottfredson and Hirschi believe that, once established, low self-control is highly resistant to being altered—even if individuals experience fortuitous changes in their life circumstances (e.g., acquire a good job) or the planned interventions of the criminal justice system (e.g., rehabilitation programs).

Thus, according to Gottfredson and Hirschi, individuals with low self-control carry this bundle of traits with them wherever they go and for however long they are on this earth. In childhood, they bully, lie, and steal; as teenagers and adults, they avail themselves of the opportunity to become involved in a range of delinquencies and crimes. Low self-control—their tendency to seek immediate gratification, to take risks, to be unmindful of future consequences—infects virtually every aspect of their lives. They not only break the law but also are more likely to create public disorder, to drink and take drugs, to drive under the influence of intoxicants and get in accidents, and to become ill and die young. They are poor at forming and sustaining quality friendships and marital relationships, father or mother children out of wedlock, suffer more divorces, drop out of school more often, and have difficulty finding and keeping employment. Those with low self-control are, in short, architects of a life that is replete with crime, deviance, and social failure.

Four final observations are required. First, it should be clear why Gottfredson and Hirschi's perspective is a *continuity theory*. Individuals, it is said, can never escape their low self-control. People do not change, and if they do, it is merely because opportunities to express their low self-control have been limited. As a result, they tend to be involved in crime and/or other manifestations of social failure throughout their lives. Stability of antisocial conduct—not change from antisocial to prosocial conduct—is thus a core premise of self-control theory.

Second, Gottfredson and Hirschi's model begins as a sociological theory but ends as an

individual differences theory. Low self-control is not due to biological deficiencies or to psychological dysfunction. Rather, it is produced by differential social experience: Good parental monitoring instills self-control, whereas poor parental monitoring does not. But once implanted, these differences in self-control among individuals are virtually intractable and set for life. Self-control thus differentiates who people are—their core individual traits—and, in turn, differentiates the life course that these people will experience.

Third, self-control theory is a rejection of the fundamental premise of Hirschi's social bond theory (Evans et al., 1997; Taylor, 2001). Previously, Hirschi proposed that weak social bonds caused criminal involvement. Now, Hirschi and Gottfredson (1995) maintain that *both* weak social bonds *and* crime are caused by the underlying trait of low self-control (i.e., people lacking in self-control not only commit crimes but also fail at school, jobs, and social relationships). In methodological terms, the relationship between social bonds and crime is held to be spurious (Evans et al., 1997; Wright et al., 1999).

Fourth, Gottfredson and Hirschi do not deny that, overall, crime increases in the teenage years and declines as people grow older; in fact, they assert that this age-crime curve is "invariant" across societies. This rise and fall in crime rates would seem to contradict their theory; after all, it means that some people must be entering and leaving crime. Gottfredson and Hirschi do admit that why the age-crime curve exists is a social science mystery that has not yet been adequately solved by any criminological theory—including theirs. Regardless, they answer their critics in this way: At any given point in the life course, individuals low in self-control will have higher criminal involvement—and other manifestations of social failure—than individuals higher in self-control. Thus, although "crime everywhere declines with age . . . differences in 'crime' tendency across individuals remains relatively stable over the life course" (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990: 144).

Continuity or Change

Terrie Moffitt (1993 [Chapter 38 in this volume]) approaches the age-crime curve in a very different way (see also Caspi and Moffitt, 1995). She suggests that the jump in crime during the teenage years conceals two groups that take very different developmental pathways into crime. One group, which she calls *life-course-persistent* offenders (LCPs), start antisocial acts early and continue their waywardness into and beyond adolescence. The second group, which she calls *adolescence-limited* offenders (ALs), start and finish their criminality during the teenage years. The age-crime curve is high during adolescence because of the high offending of the LCPs and the temporary offending of the ALs. Theoretically, the task is to explain why one group, the LCPs, manifest continuity in offending, while the other group, the ALs, manifest discontinuity or change in offending. Because youngsters tend to take one pathway or the other, her theory is a theory of continuity or change.

Life-course-persistent offenders make up only a small percentage—perhaps about 5 percent—of the population. According to Moffitt (1993), "continuity is the hallmark" of this group (p. 679), with their antisocial behavior "stable from pre-school to adulthood" (p. 680). Thus, at age 4, they bite and hit others; at age 10, they skip school and steal from stores; at age 16, they sell drugs and steal vehicles; at age 20, they rape and rob; and at age 30, they engage in fraud and child abuse (p. 679). In her view, "the underlying disposition remains the same, but its expression changes form as new social opportunities arise at different points in development" (p. 679). Of course, this leads to the question: What creates this "underlying disposition" that is powerful enough to create persistent offending across the life course?

Whereas Gottfredson and Hirschi link criminal propensity to inadequate parenting, Moffitt outlines a more complicated developmental process in which individual traits interact with the social environment to entrench youngsters

in persistent antisociality. The development into life-course-persistent offending starts with “neuropsychological deficits.” Essentially, when normal brain development is disrupted—such as through exposure to drugs and poor nutrition in the prenatal period or through injury and exposure to toxins (e.g., lead) during childhood—psychological deficits are produced. These typically include “high activity level, irritability, poor self-control, and low cognitive ability” (p. 683).

These traits or individual differences are linked directly to misconduct and social failure throughout life. Again, this view is similar to Gottfredson and Hirschi’s theory of low self-control. But Moffitt argues that these deficits also lock individuals into crime by the way in which they interact with the social environment to create disadvantages that “ensnare” people in an antisocial life. In childhood, for example, people with neuropsychological deficits often evoke harsh and erratic parenting, which in turn exacerbates their antisocial orientation. They are more likely to fail at school or to become pregnant as teens—choices that restrict their ability to enter conventional social roles that might extricate them from crime. Or they may lose jobs or end up in prison, experiences that make exiting from their developmental pattern difficult. In short, individual deficits or traits produce stability in offending in two interrelated ways: first, by their constant or “contemporary” effects (i.e., always being “in” the individual); and second, by the way they foster “cumulative continuity”—a mounting array of lost opportunities, failures, and poor choices that “prune away the options for change” (p. 684).

“Adolescence-limited” offenders, as their label implies, restrict their criminality largely to the teenage years. Moffitt contends that as youths enter adolescence, their chief developmental challenge is to overcome the “maturity gap” created by the mismatch between their adult biological development and modern society’s expectation that they refrain from adult behaviors for several years (e.g., sexual activity, smoking, consuming goods). This gap between biological

and social maturity is a source of dissatisfaction and motivation for delinquency. The motivation is translated into behavior through “social mimicry”—a process whereby youngsters model the delinquency conduct of other adolescents, usually LCPs in their own age cohort or older youths. Delinquency also occurs because it is self-reinforcing in that it shows, symbolically, autonomy from adults and maturity. Thus, “every curfew broken, car stolen, joint smoked, and baby conceived is a statement of independence” (Caspi and Moffitt, 1995; 500).

Adulthood, however, brings desistance from crime. As the maturity gap closes, adult conventional roles become available (e.g., jobs, marriage), and the consequences for misconduct escalate, there is a corresponding decrease in the appeal of, and reinforcements for, delinquency. Misfortune during the teenage years—such as drug abuse, incarceration, or prematurely becoming a parent—traps a few ALs in crime well into the adult years. But unlike the LCPs, most of the ALs are able to take advantage of conventional opportunities to change and move on with their lives. Their antisocial conduct is thus characterized by discontinuity, not continuity, and is limited to their adolescent years.

Moffitt’s two-group taxonomy—ALs and LCPs—has come under scrutiny, with some scholars questioning whether such groups exist and others arguing that there may be more than just two groups (see, e.g., Blokland et al., 2005; Laub and Sampson, 2003; Sampson and Laub, 2005). Moffitt (2006) has reviewed much of this evidence (see also Bushway, 2013; Moffitt et al., 2001; Piquero and Moffitt, 2005). Although not denying the existence of other offender groups that may have distinct developmental pathways, she argues that a large proportion of offending can be explained by her theory. In particular, Moffitt (2006: 301–302) concludes that after a decade of research, “what can be stated with some certainty is that the hypothesized life-course persistent antisocial individual exists, at least during the first three decades of life.”

Continuity and Change

In 1985, while researching the archives of Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (Chapter 35), John Laub was startled to discover that the longitudinal data collected by the Gluecks were gathering dust in the sub-basement of the Harvard Law School Library. Stored in tens of boxes, this information was an untapped source of detailed information on Boston-area youngsters. Recall that the Gluecks had collected detailed information on 500 delinquent boys and a matched sample of 500 nondelinquent boys. These youths, born in the Great Depression, were between the ages of 10 and 17. The Gluecks then conducted follow-ups with them at age 25 and at age 32 (Sampson and Laub, 1993).

Along with his collaborator Robert Sampson, Laub quickly realized the rich criminological treasure that lay before him: He had rediscovered one of the greatest longitudinal data sets ever collected. But the information was in raw form and reconstructing the files for use required years of painstaking work. Later, Laub and Sampson (2003) would add new information to the original data set. They would follow up the 500 delinquents in the sample until age 70 and conduct intensive interviews with 52 of them.

Based on the original and newly collected data, the theorists published two classic books. In the first, they presented their age-graded theory of informal social control (Sampson and Laub, 1993). In the second, they presented a revised theory. This newer volume was consistent with their earlier thinking but, based on a longer view of adulthood (to age 70), introduced a more elaborate theoretical model (Laub and Sampson, 2003 [Chapter 39 in this part]). In both works, the authors emphasized the importance of a life-course perspective that explained both continuity and change in behavior.

In their first book, *Crime in the Making*, Robert Sampson and John Laub (1993) set forth an important paradigm for understanding the development of crime (see the discussion of their

work in the introduction to Part V). Notably, they subtitled their book *Pathways and Turning Points Through Life*. By “pathways,” they were alluding to the fact that people can be caught in life trajectories that form a continuous line over a substantial time period. With regard to crime, they noted that the trajectory may extend to childhood, and that there is “considerable evidence that antisocial behavior is relatively stable across stages of the life course” (p. 11). By “turning points,” they were raising the possibility that entering a criminal trajectory is not a life sentence. Research shows that many offenders experience points at which they change and turn away from crime. In short, offending is characterized by both continuity and change. For Sampson and Laub and other scholars, the theoretical task was thus to explain what creates continuity along criminal pathways and what creates change at key turning points in life.

Sampson and Laub (1993) hypothesized that a complex set of factors combine to entrench a child on an antisocial pathway (see also Sampson and Laub, 1994). They recognized that some of these conditions are the kinds of individual differences that psychologists emphasize, such as a difficult temperament and early conduct problems. Other factors, however, are rooted in the disadvantaged and unstable social context into which a child is born. These individual and social structural conditions coalesce to foster a family life that is marked by ineffective and rejecting parenting, to decrease the chances that children will succeed at and be committed to school, and to cause children to seek out and be exposed to delinquent peers and siblings. For youths with these individual traits and social experiences, delinquent behavior is the likely result. In turn, delinquency weakens social bonds, which makes future delinquency and then adult crime more likely. Incarceration also might occur, which increases criminality because it, too, diminishes the strength of ties to conventional society.

This interactive process—one in which social bonds weakened by crime in turn lead to more crime that further weakens bonds, and so on—creates the

kind of “cumulative continuity” described by Moffitt (1993). As time goes on and chances to establish social bonds—at school, at work, within the family, with a marriage—are “knifed off,” a criminal life course becomes probable. Even so, Sampson and Laub did not believe that people are consigned to be life-course-persistent offenders. Change, not just continuity, is possible.

In turning away from crime, the key agent of change is establishing conventional social bonds. Here, Sampson and Laub, once students of Travis Hirschi in graduate school, essentially apply Hirschi’s social bond theory to their life-course perspective. As a general principle, the presence or absence of social ties determines whether people offend. By implication, if offenders are able to secure social bonds, they will experience renewed social control that has the potential to change their behavior. Social bonds can arise during childhood (e.g., attachment to parents), in adolescence (e.g., ties to school), and in adulthood (e.g., marriage). Importantly, Sampson and Laub note that change is induced when offenders acquire *quality* social bonds—such as a “good” marriage or a “good” job.

Ironically, Sampson and Laub’s use of social bond theory placed them in opposition to the theoretical position that Hirschi had later taken with Michael Gottfredson. Recall that Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990 [Chapter 15]) believed that social bonds have no causal impact on crime. Any relationship between bonds and crime was seen to be spurious—a correlation that exists because low self-control produces both weak bonds and criminal involvement (see also Hirschi and Gottfredson, 1995). In contrast, although not disputing that individual differences such as self-control are important, Sampson and Laub (1993, 1995) asserted that social bonds—fresh ties to conventional society—might allow people to overcome their criminal propensities and divert them from crime. Although not plentiful, research suggests that Sampson and Laub’s version is more correct, with both low self-control *and* social bonds implicated in crime across the life

course (Evans et al., 1997; Wright et al., 1999; see also Laub et al., 2006; Pratt, 2016; Sampson and Laub, 1990, 1993; however, see Hirschi and Gottfredson, 2000).

Again, Gottfredson and Hirschi argue that the trait of low self-control creates continuity of offending across time. Moffitt proposes that some offenders—the LCPs—also show remarkable continuity in antisocial conduct from childhood onward. But she suggests that another group—the ALs—are marked by change: into offending in adolescence and then out of offending in adulthood. By contrast, Sampson and Laub contend that *the same individual* can experience both continuity and change in offending.

This focus on change is even more pronounced in Laub and Sampson’s (2003 [Chapter 39 in this part]) revised theory (see also Laub et al., 2006; Sampson and Laub, 2005). As noted, this work was based on a follow-up of the original Glueck sample until age 70. Previous longitudinal projects traced offenders into their 30s and perhaps into middle age. But Laub and Sampson pursued a true *life-course* study! Notably, from this vantage point, their analysis showed that virtually all offenders desisted from crime. For even the most persistent criminals, it appears that change is inevitable.

In their revised theory, Laub and Sampson retain the core thesis that structural turning points—marriage, employment, military service—are potential sources of informal social control that foster desistance from crime. But they broaden this perspective to argue that such structural positions involve multiple processes:

Each of these creates new situations that (1) knife off the past from the present; (2) provide not only supervision and monitoring but opportunities for social support and growth; (3) bring change and structure routine activities; and (4) provide an opportunity for identity transformation. (Laub and Sampson, 2003: 148–149)

Let us take marriage as an example. Once married, an offender’s life is potentially transformed.

The spouse provides emotional support to help with stresses and rough times. She (or "he" in other samples) also curtails her husband's comings and goings. She makes sure he goes to work and arrives home for dinner. These prosocial routine activities give him little chance to be in situations where trouble arises (e.g., in a bar getting drunk, on the street at night). His affiliations with former "bad friends" are stopped (see also Warr, 1998, 2002), especially if his wife and he move to a "better" neighborhood. When children are born, the now ex-offender might have a new "script" or "identity" as a "provider" and "good father." Crime thus becomes an increasingly distant pastime as the *process of desistance* runs its course.

At times, desistance thus happens virtually "by default." There is no conscious decision to stop being a criminal. In Laub and Sampson's (2003: 147) sample, many "men made a commitment to go straight without even realizing it. Before they knew it, they had invested so much in a marriage or a job that they did not want to risk losing their investment." But in an important—and theoretically controversial—assertion, Laub and Sampson also suggest that the decision to desist (or, for that matter, to persist in crime) also involves *human agency*.

"Human agency" is a somewhat vague concept, but its core idea is that people are not unthinking billiard balls who are bounced in and out of crime by the deterministic forces around them. Instead, we all have a subjective reality that affects our choices. To be sure, circumstances bound and shape what we do, for we can only choose from the options available to us. For many inner-city youngsters, the choice is not between going to Harvard or joining a gang but perhaps between working in a minimum-wage job or stealing and partying on the streets. Even so, in situations where a turning point is possible, offenders can act to move out of crime or to stay in crime. For example, when a good marital relationship is possible, a person can prove unfaithful, disdain his wife's wishes by getting drunk with his buddies, neglect his children, and walk

off his job in defiance of a boss he dislikes. Or he can resist these temptations and build a marriage that persists and makes crime less meaningful.

The theoretical idea of "human agency" is noteworthy for two other reasons. First, it is a way of "bringing motivation back in" to control theory. Recall that control theorists such as Hirschi (1969 [Chapter 14]) take the motivation or predisposition to offend for granted; humans by their nature are gratification seekers and must be restrained from pursuing their self-interest through crime. Laub and Sampson (2003 [Chapter 39]), however, assert that humans act in part because of what they "will" themselves to do. They can decide to act differently—or not. Human agency thus is a conduit for the motivation to change.

Importantly, unlike with many alternative theories, Laub and Sampson do not see motivation as an enduring trait or orientation. And unlike with rational choice theories, they do not see motivation as a cold calculation of costs and benefits. Rather, motivation is situational and emerges from the person-environment interaction. For example, if a male offender falls into a close relationship with a woman, he may be inspired to "go straight." If this relationship had not occurred, the motivation to desist may not have arisen. Conversely, meeting a potential partner is no guarantee that conformity will follow. The offender still has to exercise agency; he still has to develop the will to change.

Second, the idea that change in a criminal life course is contingent on situated choices and human agency challenges more neatly packaged developmental theories—most notably Moffitt's theory of ALs and LCPs. The very idea that crime is "developmental" presupposes that offenders enter into and out of crime in a *predictable sequence of steps*. Their lives are held to unfold in defined stages.

By contrast, Laub and Sampson (2003) believe that adult development is, to an important degree, *unpredictable*. Thus, it is impossible to predict from childhood factors how long "life-course-persistent

offenders" will in fact persist in their criminality in adulthood. All offenders eventually give up crime—age, or death, seems to have that effect. But at what precise point people desist is a matter of good fortune (e.g., getting a good job), situational dynamics, and human agency. Thus, while desistance is a process with definable patterns, it has an emergent, contingent quality that is not captured by the notion of universal developmental sequences. Put another way, lives do not "unfold" but rather are shaped and chosen, often in idiosyncratic ways.

Understanding Change

In developing their concept of "human agency," Laub and Sampson (2003) have revealed the importance of understanding not only why people enter crime ("onset") and stay in crime ("persistence") but also why they leave crime ("desistance"). Scholars have now begun to explore in detail the desistance process (see, e.g., Maruna, 2001; Maruna and Roy, 2007; Sullivan, 2013).

Findings from longitudinal research on the timing of social bonds and desistance complicate this issue. Sampson and Laub (1993) assume that a good marriage or job acts as a catalyst for desistance. Studies report, however, that the causal ordering may be reversed—that offenders desist from crime first and then acquire prosocial bonds such as a spouse and employment (see Skardhamar and Savolainen, 2014; Skardhamar et al., 2015). At the very least, it may be that a key element in desistance is that offenders approach such opportunities to establish social bonds with a subjective openness for change to occur. This insight suggests the importance of examining what offenders are thinking as they progress through their life course. Several scholars have explored the role of cognitions in the decision to desist from crime.

Thus, Peggy Giordano, Stephen Cernkovich, and Jennifer Rudolph (2002) offer a theory of cognitive transformation. They agree with Sampson and Laub's (1993) initial theory that acquiring

social bonds, such as a marriage or a job, facilitates desistance. But they also concur with their revised theory, discussed just above, that human agency is involved in this process. Social bonds are not simply magically developed or unwillingly imposed. Career criminals must take advantage of opportunities for desistance. A quality relationship or a decent job can be lost if an offender chooses not to return home at night or to show up for work. In essence, then, offenders must exercise human agency by choosing to change.

However, for Giordano et al., such human agency can be unpackaged into four "cognitive shifts." In their perspective, offenders encounter potential social bonds, which they call "hooks for change." These might include a budding intimate relationship or an offer of employment. But these opportunities may be forfeited unless an offender experiences a fundamental "cognitive transformation." This transformation, again, occurs through four steps.

First, the offender must possess a general openness to change. Second, the person must look favorably upon a specific hook for change and see embracing this hook (e.g., a new relationship) as being "fundamentally incompatible with continued deviation" (Giordano et al., 2002: 1001). Third, the offender must begin to fashion a new conventional identity, what Giordano and colleagues call a "replacement self" (p. 1001). Fourth, the individual must come to see continued wayward conduct negatively. Thus, a "deviant behavior or lifestyle" is no longer viewed as "positive, viable, or even personally relevant" (p. 1002). In this way, the motivation to deviate vanishes as the offender is cognitively transformed into a conventional member of society.

In short, desistance is a dynamic, interactive process that involves both opportunities or hooks for change and active efforts by offenders to interpret their world and themselves differently. The value of Giordano et al.'s framework is that it moves us beyond the broad view that offenders exercise human agency to an understanding of what such agency might entail. For them,

human agency is not simply willpower but ways of thinking—cognitive shifts—that motivate offenders to act differently.

Other scholars have offered a related but distinct explanation for desistance: offenders quit crime when they change their identity. As might be recalled from Chapter 18, Shadd Maruna (2001) argued that whether individuals persisted in a criminal career depended on their narrative identity—the story they told about who they were and what their future might hold. Offenders who embraced a “condemnation script” believed that they were “doomed to deviance” and could not escape a life in crime—and thus they did not. By contrast, offenders who manifested a “redemption script” stated that their real self was good and not criminal, were optimistic about their ability to overcome dismal economic prospects, and believed that their life could serve a higher purpose. This identity led them to abandon crime and to try to “make good” in their lives.

Another identity theory of desistance has been proposed by Ray Paternoster and Shawn Bushway (2009 [Chapter 40 in this volume]). They argue that offenders make rational choices and use human agency—“intentional self-change”—to stop offending (2009: 1106). They also observe, however, that the decision to persist or desist from crime is shaped by how offenders view their current and future identities. At some point, if being a criminal is seen as too costly, desistance is possible.

Paternoster and Bushway propose that active criminals have a “working self” or identity as a person who commits crime—that is, as a drug addict, thief, or perhaps robber. Acting consistently with this identity provides motivation to keep offending. Behavior is thus seen as an expression of who offenders think they are. Note that this assertion differs from the view that, like the rest of us, criminals are socialized into a dominant conventional morality and thus must neutralize controls in order to break the law (see Sykes and Matza, 1957 [Chapter 13]). Rather, a criminal identity is seen to provide a rationale

that makes offending uncomplicated: “I am just being me.”

Paternoster and Bushway also note, however, that individuals have not only a current working self but also a future “possible self.” This future identity can play a crucial role in desistance in two ways. Positively, offenders might look ahead and see themselves someday being a spouse, a parent, employed, and a respected neighbor. Such a prosocial self can be a pull out of crime. Negatively, offenders might look ahead and see themselves as constantly in and out of prison, strung out on drugs, victimized by the violent criminals they encounter on the streets, accumulating no wealth or property to speak of, and without a family to love them. The authors call this the “feared self,” and it can serve as a powerful push out of crime.

For Paternoster and Bushway, desistance is not a discrete event or turning point but rather a process that typically unfolds over a period of time. A likely sequence is that as offenders persist in crime, the payoffs decline and the costs become harder to bear. When dissatisfactions with being a criminal crystallize, they provide the impetus to seek change. The feared self is no longer a distant possibility but a fast-approaching future. Avoiding the feared self thus motivates the change to a more prosocial identity. As this transformation occurs, offenders’ preferences also switch from those conducive to crime (e.g., love of getting high and the excitement of being on the street) to those conducive to conformity (e.g., love of relaxing at home and the honor of making an honest living). Further, as part of their identity change, offenders choose to spend more time with people who are prosocial and supportive of their movement away from crime. This support, which may be provided by family members, coworkers, or treatment counselors, isolates them from criminal influences. Put another way, their prosocial identity—perhaps as a good worker, good parent, and good community member—organizes their life in a new direction. Tentatively—taking “baby steps” in which they gradually experiment with being conventional—they relinquish their working

self and, in their own mind, become a different person. At this point, the choice to desist reflects who they are—their identity—and emerges as the most rational course to follow.

The Future of Developmental Criminology

Developmental theories are now center stage in criminology. Even if one takes issue with the main theories that have been set forth, the fundamental point underlying these perspectives is indisputable: Crime is a dynamic process that potentially begins in childhood and occurs across the life course. Accordingly, the challenge for all theoretical criminology is to explain continuity and/or

change in criminal involvement. For many years, however, traditional theories remained largely silent on these key issues. This does not mean that traditional perspectives have no value. But it does mean that their credibility will be judged, in large part, by how well they are able to address the key life-course issues of continuity and change in offending. Sampson and Laub provide an example of how this might be accomplished when they use social bond theory to illuminate why offenders become entrenched in and escape from a criminal trajectory. In any event, for the next decade and beyond, the developmental or life-course perspective almost certainly will be the dominant theoretical and research paradigm in the field of criminology (Cullen, 2011).

References

- Agnew, Robert. 1997. "Stability and Change in Crime over the Life Course: A Strain Theory Explanation." In Terence P. Thornberry (ed.), *Developmental Theories of Crime and Delinquency: Advances in Criminological Theory*, Volume 7, pp. 101–132. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Agnew, Robert and Timothy Brezina. 2012. *Juvenile Delinquency: Causes and Control*, 4th edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Benson, Michael L. 2013. *Crime and the Life Course: An Introduction*, 2nd edition. New York: Routledge.
- Blokland, Arjan A. J., Daniel S. Nagin, and Paul Nieuwbeerta. 2005. "Life Span Offending Trajectories of a Dutch Conviction Cohort." *Criminology* 43: 919–954.
- Bowlby, John. 1969. *Attachment and Loss, Volume I: Attachment*. New York: Basic.
- Bushway, Shawn D. 2013. "Life-Course-Persistent Offenders." In Francis T. Cullen and Pamela Wilcox (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Criminological Theory*, pp. 189–204. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Caspi, Avshalom and Terrie E. Moffitt. 1995. "The Continuity of Maladaptive Behavior: From Description to Understanding in the Study of Antisocial Behavior." In Dante Cicchetti and Donald J. Cohen (eds.), *Manual of Developmental Psychology*, pp. 472–511. New York: John Wiley.
- Cullen, Francis T. 2011. "Beyond Adolescence-Limited Criminology: Choosing Our Future—The American Society of Criminology 2010 Sutherland Address." *Criminology* 49: 287–330.
- Cullen, Francis T., Michael L. Benson, and Matthew D. Makarios. 2012. "Developmental and Life-Course Theories of Offending." In Brandon C. Welsh and David P. Farrington (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Crime Prevention*, pp. 23–45. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Evans, T. David, Francis T. Cullen, Velmer S. Burton, Jr., R. Gregory Dunaway, and Michael L. Benson. 1997. "The Social Consequences of Self-Control: Testing the General Theory of Crime." *Criminology* 35: 475–500.
- Farrington, David P. 1995. "The Development of Offending and Antisocial Behavior from Childhood: Key Findings from the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 36: 929–964.
- . 2003. "Key Results from the First Forty Years of the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development." In Terence P. Thornberry and Marvin D.

PART XIV

Positive Criminology

Most theories attribute crime to what are commonly viewed as negative traits and social experiences. For example, crime is said to be caused by traits such as low self-control and negative emotionality, as well as by social experiences such as child abuse, weak bonds to family, and association with criminals. Further, it is argued that the best way to control crime is to manage these traits and experiences and to exercise greater control over the offenders with them. By contrast, positive criminology proposes that we should devote greater attention to the role that positive traits and social experiences play in the explanation and control of crime (for overviews, see Ronel, 2015; Ronel and Elisha, 2011; Ronel and Segev, 2014, 2015).

As an aside, “positive” criminology, which is a contemporary perspective, should not be confused with the positive school of criminology founded by Lombroso and others. As discussed in Part I, this earlier approach heralded the use of scientific or “positive” methods to study criminals.

Positive criminologists do not deny the importance of negative traits and experiences, but they claim that crime is not simply a function of such traits and experiences. Crime is also influenced by positive traits such as empathy, altruism, optimism, self-efficacy, prosocial identities such as parent and worker, and positive affect (the tendency to experience emotions such as happiness). Likewise, crime is influenced by positive social experiences, especially involvement in relationships characterized by acceptance, trust, security, support, and justice. It is argued that

individuals with such traits and experiences are better able to avoid those negative factors that cause crime, are better able to cope with negative experiences, and generally feel less need or desire to engage in crime. In fact, such individuals often feel an aversion to crime and an attraction to prosocial behavior.

Further, positive criminologists argue that efforts to control crime should not simply focus on reducing negative traits and experiences or controlling offenders, especially through imprisonment (Ronel and Segev, 2014, 2015). An effort should also be made to cultivate positive traits and experiences. Positive criminologists, for example, endorse the restorative justice approach, which tries to foster empathy in offenders and restore their ties to prosocial others (see Braithwaite, 2002). They also favor treatment approaches, such as the Good Lives model, that seek to build on offenders’ strengths rather than simply try to fix their deficits (see Ward and Maruna, 2007). Further, the harsh punishment and isolation of offenders should be avoided. These responses undermine positive traits and experiences; instead, they create feelings of anger and rejection, disrupt ties to prosocial others, and lead to association with other offenders. As such, they may increase crime (Cullen et al., 2011).

In brief, positive criminologists argue that we should focus on the positive as well as the negative. Positive criminology is not a distinct theory of crime, however. Rather, it is a general approach that encompasses several theories and crime control strategies (Ronel and

Elisha, 2011; Ronel and Segev, 2015). Certain of the theories that fall under the umbrella of positive criminology have already been discussed. This includes peacemaking criminology, which was discussed in the Introduction to Part VII. Peacemaking criminology contends that crime is less likely when individuals possess certain positive traits, such as compassion, and when they are involved in communities characterized by such things as acceptance and social justice.

Braithwaite's theory of reintegrative shaming (Chapter 16) is another example of positive criminology. Crime is said to be less likely in communitarian societies, where individuals are involved in interdependent relationships characterized by trust and mutual assistance. And crime is best controlled not by rejecting offenders but through reintegrative shaming—which fosters traits such as empathy and builds positive ties with prosocial others. Certain aspects of life-course criminology also fall under positive criminology. Researchers have found that offenders are more likely to desist from crime when they possess certain positive traits, including hope, self-efficacy, and a positive identity. Desistance is also more likely when offenders develop positive ties to prosocial others (see Part XIII in this text; Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; Ronel and Elisha, 2011; Ronel and Segev, 2014).

Still other work in criminology exemplifies the positive approach. Prominent here are recent attempts to explain long-term trends in crime. In an analysis of homicide trends over the last several hundred years, Roth (2012, 2013) presents data suggesting that declines in homicide are due not to increases in self-control but rather to successful nation building. Homicide is lower when citizens view the state and social system as legitimate, trust the government, and feel close to and empathetic with their fellow citizens. And Pinker's (2011) seminal book *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* attempts to explain a general decline in violence over the centuries by

arguing that a series of social changes have fostered traits such as empathy and a moral sense.

Two Theories Illustrating Positive Criminology

Certain of the theories that fall under positive criminology focus on the positive social experiences that reduce crime. Cullen's (1994) theory of social support and crime, presented in Chapter 41, is an example. Other theories focus on the positive traits that reduce crime. Agnew's (2014) theory of social concern and crime, presented in Chapter 42, is an example. But most positive theories, including those by Cullen and Agnew, recognize that positive traits and social experiences mutually influence one another. Positive traits arise in part from positive social experiences. So, for example, Agnew argues that the types of social support described by Cullen are a major source of those traits that comprise social concern. And positive traits contribute to positive social experiences. Individuals who are concerned about the welfare of others, for example, are more likely to provide support to them.

Social Support Theory

Cullen (1994) drew his theory from a broader theory of social support in the social sciences (Vaux, 1988). This perspective was particularly influential in the sociology of mental illness, where it was argued that social support buffered the impact of stress on outcomes such as depression (see Thoits, 2011). Cullen recognized that as a general theory of human behavior, social support theory might well apply to criminal conduct. One obvious overlap was with strain theories that examined how people coped with the "stress" in their lives (Cullen and Wright, 1997). But his approach was also a reaction to other perspectives, such as Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory, that seemed to ignore the good in social life. Thus, whereas Hirschi focused on the role of parents in building bonds that exerted indirect control over their children, Cullen wondered how the most fundamental

aspect of parenting—hugs, kisses, and loving one's child—could be ignored. As a result, he was attracted to the concept of social support because it seemed to fill this void in the criminological enterprise. As Vaux (1988: 1) noted at that time: "Social support has to do with everyday things—sharing tasks and feelings, exchanging information and attention—as well as dramatic but common human experiences—the joy of love, the pain of isolation, family ties, and bonds of friendship."

Cullen also was writing in the midst of the mean season in corrections in the United States. As a long-time advocate of rehabilitation (Cullen, 2013), he believed that punitive policies that stigmatized and excluded offenders, most dramatically seen in mass imprisonment, were counterproductive. He favored instead reforms that emphasized social support such as correctional treatment programs and early intervention programs (Cullen et al., 1999).

Cullen's central thesis is that the level of crime is inversely related to the level of social support. This is true in the lives of individuals and in the experiences of communities and nations. The presence of quality social support is seen to be a good thing. A growing body of empirical research now supports this thesis, showing that social support reduces crime at the micro level and macro level (for reviews, see Makarios and Sams, 2013; Pratt and Cullen, 2005). The effects are not always large, but they appear to be relatively consistent. It may be that social support is not a single powerful factor that is the most dominant source behind whether someone becomes a criminal. In all likelihood, receiving social support is one facet of our social relationships and thus affects our lives in small but diverse ways from infancy to adulthood.

One challenge is to demonstrate precisely how social support is implicated in the reduction of crime. With Robert Lilly and Richard Ball, Cullen has outlined five ways that social support might increase prosocial and decrease antisocial influences for individuals (Lilly et al., 2015: 144–145). First, social support fosters healthy social development among infants and children. This might

involve assistance for at-risk mothers during pregnancy and parents using supportive rather than harsh management strategies with their youngsters. Second, social support is a source of social bonds to parents and others. Attachment is a product of receiving love and assistance with problems, whether from parents during childhood or a spouse in adulthood. Third, the delivery of social support would model prosocial learning, acting as a conduit for positive differential association. Fourth, social support insulates against strain caused by negative life experiences, making noncriminal coping possible. Fifth, social support may help offenders deal with the stigmatizing effects of an arrest and help prisoners re-entering society after years behind bars (see, e.g., Dong and Krohn, 2017). Cullen and colleagues add that at the macro-level, supportive communities and nations focus on fulfilling human needs rather than consigning "individuals to deal with personal and social troubles on their own" (Lilly et al., 2015: 145). They are characterized by "government welfare policies, cultural values, and community integration that help to diminish the effects of the root causes of crime" (p. 145; see also Braithwaite, 1989; Currie, 1998).

Social Concern Theory

Agnew (2014) begins his theory of social concern and crime by arguing that criminologists focus on the negative traits of individuals. In particular, it is frequently assumed that individuals are by nature self-interested. They have little concern for others and are instead "focused on the satisfaction of their needs and desires." And, unless subject to proper control, they will satisfy their needs and desires through crime when it is expedient to do so. Perhaps most prominently, Hirschi's (1969; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990) control theories, for example, are based on this assumption (see Part V). Agnew argues, however, that this view of human nature is overly simplistic. Drawing on research from a variety of fields, he claims that while people are self-interested to some degree, they are also socially concerned.

Social concern refers to “a set of inclinations that sometimes lead people to give more consideration to others than to their own interests” (Agnew, 2014: 5). Individuals high in social concern care about the welfare of others, in large part because of their empathy with and sympathy for them; they desire close ties to others; they follow certain moral intuitions, such as the inclination to avoid harming innocent others; and they are inclined to conform to the behavior and views of others. These inclinations are in part “natural,” meaning they have a strong biological basis and are widely shared. And they are also influenced by the social environment. They are learned from others, are fostered by strong bonds to prosocial others, and are more common among those who have experienced *moderate* levels of strain. So Agnew contends that human nature is complex; individuals are self-interested, socially concerned, *and* malleable—being influenced by the larger social environment.

Agnew then discusses the relationship between social concern and crime. The major proposition of his theory is that those higher in social concern should be lower in crime, since crime runs counter to those inclinations that comprise social concern. Agnew also states that social concern affects crime in other ways. For example, social concern has an indirect effect on crime through its effect on strain, control, and

the social learning of crime. Those higher in concern should be lower in strain, higher in control, and less likely to associate with criminal others. Finally, Agnew argues that the effect of social concern is stronger in some circumstances than others. For example, we are more likely to show social concern to those seen as ingroup versus outgroup members.

So Agnew’s theory of social concern and crime highlights several positive traits that generally reduce the likelihood of crime. It is important to note that Agnew was not the first to identify such traits. Many of the traits that comprise social concern have been discussed by other criminologists. Agnew’s theory of social concern and crime draws heavily on their work, as well as work in related areas, to present the most systematic theory regarding positive traits and crime. As noted by Agnew in Chapter 42, data suggest that many of the traits that comprise social concern are related to crime, although many of the specific propositions in Agnew’s theory are in need of empirical testing (see also Agnew, 2011; Chouhy et al., 2016, 2017). Agnew further notes that his theory, if supported, has important implications for reducing crime. Even though the traits that comprise social concern have some biological basis, they are also influenced by the social environment and there is good reason to believe that they can be deliberately cultivated.

References

- Agnew, Robert. 2011. *Toward a Unified Criminology: Integrating Assumptions About Crime, People, and Society*. New York: New York University Press.
- . 2014. “Social Concern and Crime: Moving Beyond the Assumption of Simple Self-Interest.” *Criminology* 52: 1–32.
- Braithwaite, John. 1989. *Crime, Shame and Reintegration*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2002. *Restorative Justice and Responsive Regulation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chouhy, Cecilia, Robert Agnew, and Francis T. Cullen. 2016. “Social Concern and Crime.” *Oxford Handbooks Online* May: 1–35. doi: 10.1093/oxfordhob/9780199935383.013.135
- Chouhy, Cecilia, Spencer T. Hochstetler, and Francis T. Cullen. 2017. “Social Concern and Delinquency: An Empirical Assessment of a Novel Theory.” *Deviant Behavior* 38: 94–117.
- Cullen, Francis T. 1994. “Social Support as an Organizing Concept for Criminology: Presidential Address to the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.” *Justice Quarterly* 11: 527–559.