

Blumstein, Alfred, and Jacqueline Cohen. 1987. "Characterizing Criminal Careers." *Science* 237: 985-991.

Blumstein and Cohen explain the importance of the recent attention to the study of criminal careers for policy decision making. The criminal career paradigm is superior to cross-sectional community studies of the correlates of crime for two primary reasons. These include the examination of a longitudinal pattern of criminal activity and distinguishing between causal factors that 1) contribute to participation in crime, and 2) affect the frequency of offending or the termination of a criminal career.

The empirical focus is on serious crime. The rate of crime can be understood, they argue, by the fraction of people participating and their crime frequency. The authors use the FBI "index" offenses data for the 55 largest US cities with populations over 250,000 to examine participation. They find racial disparities in participation in index offenses, but not in the chance for rearrest. Importantly for policy, they conclude that racial discrimination by the criminal justice system is empirically incorrect. Research should thus focus on separating out the determinants of participation and criminal careers. To examine crime frequency the authors use FBI arrest histories of cohorts of arrestees whose first arrests occurred between 18 and 20 during the 1970s in Washington, D.C. and Detroit. The individual crime frequencies for five offense types (robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, auto theft) were "generally similar" across the samples with the exception of auto theft. Although in aggregate arrest rates, age, race, and gender are likely to determine who is arrested, arrest frequencies for active offenders are strikingly similar regardless of these differences. This means that blacks and males and teens are more likely to participate in crime, but also that for those who remain criminally active continued participation is constant across groups. For those who have criminal "careers" unlike the majority of offenders whose participation in crime declines rapidly by the early 20s, termination does not seem to occur until after age 40.

The authors conclude by considering the criminal career and different crime control strategies (prevention, incapacitation, rehabilitation, general deterrence). Each of these are areas in need of further research.

Moffitt, Terrie E. 1993. "Adolescence-Limited and Life-Course-Persistent Antisocial Behavior: A Developmental Taxonomy." *Psychological Review* 100 (4): 674-701.

The author distinguishes between temporary and persistent antisocial behavior and offers theories of criminal behavior based on these distinctions. The life-course-persistent offender engages in antisocial behavior throughout the life course, while the adolescence-limited offender desists from crime. Moffitt continues by developing theories of antisocial behavior for these two theoretical groups of offenders.

The life-course-persistent offenders are most likely to exhibit antisocial behavior early in childhood and into midlife as well with antisocial behavior manifesting itself in different ways at different ages and under different circumstances. The roots of crime are located in neuropsychological differences which are maximized by environmental context (they interact to account for continuity). Cumulative and contemporary continuity make it difficult for the individuals with antisocial behavior early in life to move into the other group of people which will eventually desist from crime. A small number of males (5%) can be characterized by this offender type.

Adolescence-limited offenders are those who exhibited no "notable" history of antisocial behavior in childhood and will likely not offend beyond adolescence. Antisocial behavior is not continuous across time and space. These offenders engage in crime when it is perceived as advantageous or profitable, thus deterrents will most likely be effective for this group of boys. Adolescence-limited offenders are thought to engage in crime to be seen as adults, to be mimicking their life-course-persistent counterparts because crime during adolescence is normal. Reinforcement of antisocial behavior will lead to continued delinquent behavior. These offenders desist for the same reasons that they initially engage in crime: motivational and learning mechanisms.

Finally, Moffitt draws links between her developmental taxonomy and other theories of crime. She offers strategies for research regarding differential correlates of antisocial behavior, offense types, abstaining from delinquency, and the stability of antisocial behavior.

Laub, John H., and Robert J. Sampson. 2003. *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to Age 70*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Chapters 1-5.

Chapter 1: Diverging Pathways of Troubled Boys

On the first page of reading, Laub and Sampson make it evident that a goal in this book is to dispel the myth that childhood circumstances do not wholly account for adult outcomes. Their central aim of the book "...is to examine criminal and deviant offending as a general process, with the goal of using both quantitative and qualitative data to explicate the pathways to persistent offending and desistance over the full life course" (p. 5). They use data collected by the Gleuck's in their *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* study in which they matched 500 delinquent and non-delinquent boys and collected data at three points in time. This data is supplemented with data collected (death record, criminal history, life history interviews) on the 500 delinquents at the end of the 20th c. The interviews were conducted with men from three trajectories: persistent offender, desister, and intermittent offenders.

Chapter 2: Persistence or Desistance?

The authors refer to previous work on persistence and desistance to demonstrate the complexity surrounding measurement and definition of these concepts. They too are clearly grappling with these issues in this piece as they lay out conceptual ground rules. Although the authors problematize the measurement and definition of persistence early in the chapter, much of the subsequent literature review addresses concerns of desistance, which appears to have been more contentious in criminological discussions. They distinguish between desistance and termination. Desistance is a process that occurs before, during, and after termination (recall the example of "uncoupling") and it is also reversible. Termination is the point at which one stops criminal activity. The authors see desistance and persistence as two sides of the same coin. Three processes explain these phenomena:

- 1) Population heterogeneity: differences in persons and the consequences of those differences for desisting from or persisting in crime
- 2) State dependence: differences in situations or contexts and the consequences for desisting from or persisting in crime
- 3) Mixed model

The critique is that these processes do not explain change (i.e. desistance) and the authors advocate a life course approach to explaining both continuity and change in offending behaviors. A life course approach emphasizes specifically variability and exogenous influences not accounted for in traditional accounts, particularly not in developmental theories.

Chapter 3: Explaining the Life Course of Crime

Criminality is dynamic, meaning that people may drift (Matza 1964) in and out of crime. For this reason, persistence and desistance are theoretically, methodologically, and analytically linked. The processes of social control, routine activities, and human agency explain both persistence and desistance although the dynamics may differ. The authors identify and discuss formal and informal social controls as well as human agency, situational influences, and local cultures and historical contexts that contribute to these processes.

- Marriage and family: accumulation of social capital; changes in everyday routines—less time with peers, new friends, relocation; direct social control—wife as guardian of activities; getting serious—becoming an adult; authors reject selection effect

- Work: reciprocity of social capital; changes in everyday routines—work structures life; direct social control by employer; identity and meaning to life
- Military service: reorganization of social roles and opportunities; structural benefits—training, education; changes routines, provides supervision and support, possibly identity change, meets basic needs; downsides—injuries, trauma
- Justice system involvement: all incarcerated as boys

Revising the age-graded theory of informal social control

- Human agency: emergent process linked to situations and larger structures; especially important in processes of desistance
- Situational context: crime and violence are normative in some settings/situations; lack of stability in routine activities for persisters; alcohol (ab)use for persisters;
- Historical context: Great Depression and WWII era; different world than today; opportunities available

Advantages of life history approach

- Captures processes of becoming involved and disengaging in crime
- Provide an understanding of complex patterns of change and continuity
- Reveals the complexity of criminal behavior
- Locates experiences in time and place
- Shows human side of offenders

Chapter 4: Finding the Men

Gleuck's Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency

- 500 male delinquents and 500 male non-delinquents aged 10-17 matched on age, ethnicity, IQ, low-income residence
- 3 waves of data collection 1940-1965 (means men were born 1924-1932) during childhood, adolescence, adulthood
- 92% retention (88% all 3 time periods)
- Central Boston

Laub and Sampson follow-up study

- Began in 1993 (men aged 61-69)
- Criminal records search: Mass. criminal history database to update criminal history after last contact with Gleucks; collected age and offense type (violent, property, alcohol/drug, other) for each arrest; criminal histories from FBI (same coding scheme as previous); using both data sources allows them to more accurately classify people in their typology of offenders
- Death records search: State and national searches—resulting information coded and included in dataset
- Life history interviews: initially based on eight trajectories of violent criminal offending (5 interviews per trajectory=40 total); people were not located evenly in categories, so revised collapsed/combined some trajectories into 5 categories (discussed chs. 6-8); use of life history calendar during interviews; open ended interview schedule; 52 respondents

Chapter 5: Long-Term Trajectories of Crime

In this chapter the authors seek to contribute to the debate concerning the age-crime curve. In the aggregate, their data seem to confirm the age-crime curve hypothesis. Although the data on

property crimes has the same general shape, data on violent crimes and those involving alcohol or drugs are not so supportive. The differences among offenses suggest the importance of having longitudinal data to better examine the age-crime curve hypothesis. Regression predicted age-crime curves graphed together indicate the differences in peak age and rates of decline for the offenses. By way of descriptive statistics (Table 5.1, p. 90), the authors demonstrate that most of the men desist from crime as they age.

Next, the authors address whether long term patterns of offending can be predicted based on childhood and adolescent characteristics. They are very inclusive regarding the risk criteria they use to predict patterns of offending. Childhood risk is a summary measure and is dichotomized according to Moffitt's approach. Predicted probability curves for each offense are shown. These curves provide support for the age-crime curve, but more importantly demonstrate that the curves are similar for both groups of boys although at different levels. Despite several attempts to find differences between the predicted probability curves of those with high and low childhood risk, they were unsuccessful. All of the men desisted from crime as they aged. They address recent critiques by dealing methodologically with incarceration and death, but the findings remain the same.

Finally, the authors examine whether there are latent offender groups by considering complete trajectories. This method allows them to assess whether the age-crime curve is the same for all of the men and all offenses. In the aggregate, six curves emerge, while five emerge for each of the specific offense types. Neither individual differences nor childhood characteristics distinguish the different groups, only delinquency does.

Questions

1. Are you convinced that the racial discrimination by the criminal justice system does not occur (Blumstein and Cohen)? On what grounds do you challenge this and what would make their argument stronger?
2. Are there other studies that test the age-crime curve hypothesis that (or have the ability to) provide as convincing of evidence as Laub and Sampson? Which aspects of their models do you challenge?
3. What do policymakers do with Laub and Sampson's findings in chapter 5?
4. How might these curves look if we began a replication of the Gleucks' study in 1990? They would be 15 today. Are the issues facing adolescents (e.g. use of guns, easy access to drugs) different enough today to question the applicability or reasonability of Laub and Sampson's findings across time?