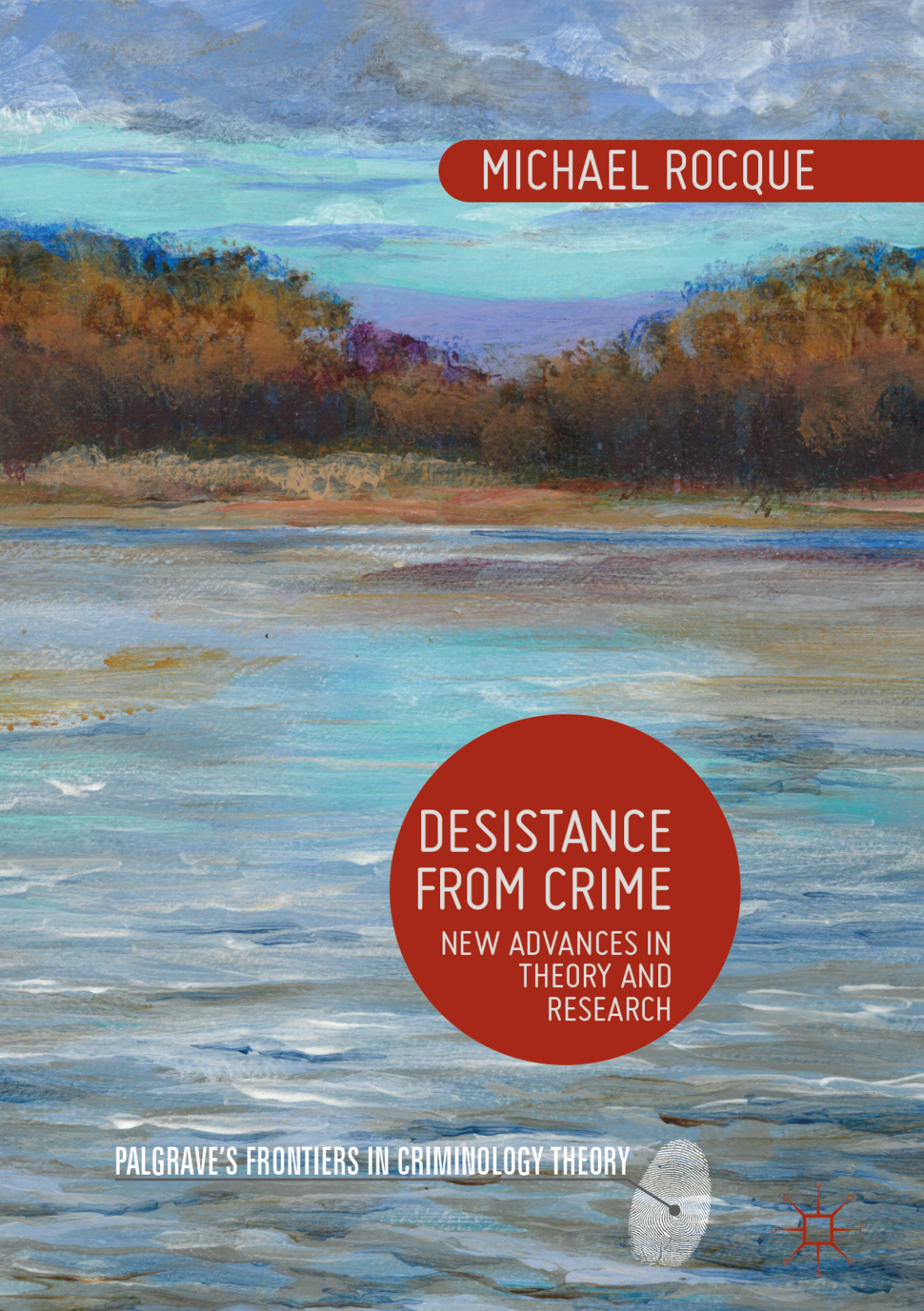
MICHAEL ROCQUE
DESISTANCE FROM CRIME
NEW ADVANCES IN THEORY AND RESEARCH
PALGRAVE'S FRONTIERS IN CRIMINOLOGY THEORY

# Palgrave's Frontiers in Criminology Theory

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Michael Rocque

# Desistance from Crime

## New Advances in Theory and Research

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*For Teddy, whose smile always makes my day*

# Foreword

"The whole art of teaching is only the art of awakening the natural curiosity of young minds for the purpose of satisfying it afterwards."

Anatole France

As a college professor for over 30 years now I have had the great fortune of having many, many wonderful students, and countless enriching intellectual exchanges with those students in our class, my office, the hallway, and over coffee or lunch. Some of these students were, as young people tend to be, brash, noisy, and arrogant; students who truly took to heart Disraeli's comment that "almost everything that is great has been done by youth." Others, like the author Mike Rocque, were more contemplative, naturally accustomed to thinking before speaking, but who when they did speak were carefully listened to. Mike was one of those students that all college professors have at one time or another who have a quiet intensity about them, a stillness that suggested both great thought and great humility toward those thoughts. He was also a student whose immense talent was brought about by hard work, one who believed that a good paper was not simply written, but revised and rewritten many times. As a student and as a young professor, Mike was the paragon of hard work, self-discipline, and responsibility toward one's work. Not surprisingly, like all those who think that their success, if it comes at all, is going to depend on work rather than natural brilliance, Mike lacked self-confidence. It is ironic that most of the really intelligent

people I know, and maybe there is some generality to this, are those who are also the most humble and self-effacing. Nevertheless, I sensed during our seminar meetings on criminological theory when he was in graduate school, as well as our co-authorships soon after he completed his dissertation, that Mike had a bright and productive future ahead of him. I would never have guessed, however, that his success would come so quickly, or so with such a bang.

Mike has written a very important book about a very important area in criminology—desistance. While most criminological scholars of my generation were mainly interested in why people first get involved in crime, what now has the sobriquet of "onset," for the past 20 or so years a major effort has been devoted within the field to the processes through which people quit or desist from criminal activity. This interest in desistance has generated a great deal of new theoretical work among those who want to explain desistance, new methodological/statistical work among those who want to empirically measure and describe desistance, and countless empirical studies (and more that appear every year) among those who want to subject those new theories to test with the new analytical tools. In addition to journal articles and books about desistance, there has also emerged new subfields in criminology devoted to desistance (developmental and life-course criminology) and new journals entirely devoted to those new subfields (the *Journal of Developmental and Life-Course Criminology*). As with many newly emerged scientific fields, there is no easy way to describe the literal explosion of scholarship by criminologists in this new field of desistance. If one wanted to study what the new area was about, and why it has generated so much excitement and so much scholarship, how would one go about doing it? The task appears daunting but the solution is simple—read this book by Mike Rocque because it nicely summarizes and explains all that we currently know about desistance from crime.

Although his book is about a relatively recent topic in criminology, Mike shows a rare reverence and respect for the history of the field beginning in the second chapter with a description of the offending 'careers' of two young males drawn from the work of Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay, two of the earliest American criminologists. Within the first ten pages of the second chapter the reader is given a hint to both

previous and current thoughts about why some juvenile offenders persist in their crimes through adulthood while others desist. Throughout the book Mike continues to link current interest in desistance with the work of past scholars who were concerned with the same issues, but did not label what they were interested in as desistance from crime. In fact, the entire second chapter of this book illustrates in detail the ways in which current conceptualization and theorizing about criminal desistance is linked to previous work—work dating back to at least the mid-nineteenth century. This is a rather useful exercise in showing that while there is great interest and wonder about desistance today, it is simply the most recent manifestation of a continuing issue that has captured the curiosity of criminologists for a long time. Such concern and respect for history is rare in criminology. The Mike who wrote this book is the same Mike I had in my graduate seminar who would remind us that while we might think we're real smart and smarter than anyone before us, it's best to be a little more humble about how original and path breaking we are in our work. While there certainly have been recent advances in theorizing about desistance and especially in statistical models that help us uncover desistance, we fish in a long and very deep stream that has come from a very distant place. This humility exists even though while only a young assistant professor not too long out of graduate school himself, Mike has his own unique multifaceted theory of desistance which he describes in Chapter 6. He does not, unlike most writers, tell us why his theory is better than the others, rather he carefully and painstakingly gives us his story and allows us to judge. It's hard not to be convinced.

True to his nature and given the large literature about desistance that already exists (and the question I had before reading the book myself), Mike asks the question out loud that anyone confronted with a book of this nature inevitably would ask: "Why do we need a book on desistance"? He answers that question through seven extraordinarily well-crafted chapters that summarize what is known about theory, methodology, the empirical research on desistance, and in the concluding chapter what this all means or might mean for policy. I cannot exaggerate how well this book is written, it is engaging and dare I characterize it as decidedly 'non-academic,' and thereby intend it as the highest compliment. Mike practiced early on the lesson that I tried to impart to all my students over

the years, a lesson that I learned only much later in my career from author and conservationist Wallace Stegner that "hard writing makes easy reading." Hopefully too we can learn more than just what desistance is from Mike Rocque. By witnessing how he treats past and current work with admiration and appreciation we can learn how to be still and quiet and let his story unfold without jumping to conclusions, hysterics, or vapors of professional jealousy. Although Mike disagrees with some past work on desistance, and rightfully takes a personal as well as a professional interest in his own theory, his review of this previous work is always conducted respectfully. The word that comes to mind, and the sentiment is very rarely seen in academic writing, is charity: Mike treats past and present efforts to understand desistance with charity. He does not agree with everything that has been written about how desistance comes about and how it may be promoted, but he has no ill-humored quarrel with them either. Just perhaps the readers of this fine book can be silent and remember Nabokov's advice that "all silence is the recognition of a mystery." There is a mystery that unfolds in this book, the mystery of desistance from crime; to best enjoy it, read it with silence and with the same stillness with which it was written.

Ray Paternoster

# Preface

My interest in desistance from crime stems from my time as a graduate student at the University of Maryland from 2005 to 2007. It is hard to imagine a place more flush with giants in criminology, actively working on theory and research that would come to shape the direction of the field for years to come. I was lucky enough to take a theory course with John Laub, who is perhaps the most recognized name in desistance research, contributing as he did both an updated and restored version of Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck's dataset from *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* as well as a fresh age-graded theory of crime over the life-course. I can still remember as if it were yesterday my friends and I staying late after class to interrogate him about how he found the data, what he thought about it, and how he came to devise his theory with his friend Rob Sampson.

While at Maryland I also had the honor of engaging in a class called the History of Criminological Thought, taught by Ray Paternoster. Ray, perhaps the best teacher, writer, and mentor one could hope to know, was deep in the process of adding his own perspective to life-course theory, in particular his identity theory of desistance, written with Shawn Bushway. This class sparked an interest in theory that developed into a flame which still burns today. Ray was also kind enough to share drafts of his identity paper with me before publication, taking my comments seriously and respectfully. I came to see that there are many

plausible and probable factors that are likely to be responsible for the near ubiquitous decline in crime with age that characterizes both the macro and the micro.

I continued my exploration of desistance during my time at Northeastern University, where my dissertation examined whether thinking about the various theories of desistance as identifying pieces of a larger puzzle might be profitable. In researching that work, I came to realize that while desistance research has grown exponentially in recent years, there does not appear to be a book-length treatment of that work. Most reviews of desistance literature can be found in articles and book chapters. The books that are in print on desistance are typically self-contained studies or original contributions rather than syntheses or overall assessments of the literature. It seemed it was time for a 'what do we know' volume on this increasingly important body of work.

Thus the goal of this book is to offer an accessible, comprehensive overview of what we know about desistance from crime. For my money, the best reviews of desistance research can be found in Laub and Sampson (2001) Understanding desistance from crime in the review journal *Crime and Justice*, and Lila Kazemian's work (2007; 2015). Yet the first is over 15 years old, and Kazemian's reviews, excellent though they are, are constrained by page limits (being either journal articles or book chapters). In this book, I wanted to go a bit deeper, starting with the story of desistance from the beginning, before any researcher used that term to describe the process of slowing down and eventually ceasing criminal behavior. And so I start with Adolphe Quetelet, whose work on the age-crime curve is well known as a starting point. I document the ebbs and flows throughout criminology's history in terms of its focus on age and crime, taking us up to the present, in which desistance is finally a subfield in its own right. Even before the term 'desistance' became common in criminological parlance, researchers knew of the phenomenon. They just didn't have a standardized way to describe it. A variety of terms were used, including 'spontaneous remission,' 'maturation,' and 'delinquency devolution.' It wasn't until a common name was applied that research began to accumulate and we really came to start to understand the process of desistance. Thus, while scholars knew of desistance,

they did not know much about why or how it occurred until recently. That more recent work represents the heart of this book.

Because this is a book-length treatment, I wanted to provide some insight into theories or perspectives that are sometimes seen as on the periphery of the literature or not often included in overviews of desistance from crime. As an example, there is a growing body of work on the importance of changing contexts or environments for desistance, with David Kirk (who was also at Maryland as a professor when I was a student there) leading the way. Kirk has ingeniously used data from New Orleans during and after Hurricane Katrina as a natural experiment to document the effect of not being able to return to one's old haunts upon leaving prison on later behavior. In this book I also cover neurocognitive research on age-related brain development in early (or emerging) adulthood, a relatively recent area of research that is not often found in desistance reviews. Brain maturation research has had a significant impact on policy, via US Supreme Court cases (see Chapter 7).

Desistance remains one of the more interesting aspects of a field that is full of interesting topics. After all, what could be more fascinating than trying to figure out why people commit heinous acts of violence? The story that opens Chapter 2 recounts the tale of John Wesley Elkins, who in the dead of the night murdered his family over 120 years ago. He was 11. What could have been the reason? Or what sorts of policies can make society safer? What should we do with cases like little John? Is he a born criminal or do people change (we now know most do, at least behaviorally)? These are things that appeal to most everybody (as any criminologist familiar with the dinner table conversations at Thanksgiving can attest). But there's something counterintuitive to the idea that hardened criminals, those engaged in antisocial behavior over their entire lives, eventually make good. There's a strain of thought in society that rears its head every once in a while arguing the exact opposite—that the more heinous an act a person committed, the greater the proof that he (usually it's a man) is unnaturally evil, won't/can't change, and needs to be incapacitated in some way, shape, or form. For example, in the spring of 2016, a family member of a homicide victim told the court, "This man is pure evil.

I requested the death penalty. I want to see this man dead."[1] This statement is not an isolated one; research indicates also that people who endorse the view that some people are 'pure evil' are more likely to support the death penalty (Webster and Saucier 2015). And so the idea that desistance may be the norm for not only the less serious but also chronic (or even 'pure evil') criminals is especially intriguing.

It is my hope that this book then, appeals to a broad base, from those causally interested in criminal behavior and criminal careers, to those teaching and studying the topic. I've begun each chapter with that broad based appeal in mind, telling a story that relates to the subject matter at hand. None of these stories are fictional, however. The purpose of the stories is to demonstrate the relevance of desistance to both everyday life and the history of the field. Readers purely interested in the meat and potatoes, though, can feel free to skip the stories should they prove to be too long and will not be too much the worse for wear.

Even with a book-length treatment of a topic, it is not possible to include everything (nor is it reasonable to do so) in the literature on desistance. As I write these words, theoretical and empirical studies are being published adding to the knowledge base on desistance. That is the exciting thing about this subfield—it is growing and morphing. Theories are developing and being tested and work is being done to bridge the divide between scholarship and policy every day. It will be interesting to see what comes of these developments. For now, I hope this book provides a foundation on which some of that work can be built.

As with any project of substance, this book was a product of the efforts of many generous souls. Ray Paternoster has been a tireless mentor and colleague since I left the University of Maryland. He served on both my master's thesis and dissertation committees and has published with me several times. I always value his advice and comments and was very pleased when he agreed to write the Foreword to this volume. His influence can be seen throughout this book, in the way I think about theory and the way I write (I am quite sure 'taking someone to the

[1] http://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2016/05/18/pure-evil-killer-sentenced-to-life-plus-100-years/

woodshed' as I describe scholars doing the work of David Matza in Chapter 5 is a phrase I first heard from him in his theory class). Steven Barkan is to be credited with being my first mentor and the person who first piqued my interest in criminology as a scientific field of study. I entered the University of Maine, where he teaches sociology, interested in crime and detective work, but unaware of criminology as a discipline. Within the first few sessions of my first course with Professor Barkan, I was hooked. He has remained a good friend and colleague. Speaking of friends and colleagues, this book would have been a much different product were it not for the assistance of Professor Chad Posick of Georgia Southern University. I first met Chad during orientation for the PhD program at Northeastern University. We became fast friends and colleagues, working on several studies together while students. Chad read every draft chapter of my dissertation on desistance and every draft chapter of this book. I owe him several cocktails and my thanks.

Thanks also to Chet Britt, of Iowa State University. I now, heart-breakingly, must add 'late of' Iowa State University. Chet tragically passed away shortly after providing feedback on this manuscript, in the summer of 2016. Chet was on my dissertation committee at Northeastern University and helped sharpen my arguments and writing throughout the dissertation. He also graciously read a draft of this book and provided, as usual, sharp-eyed critiques which helped shape the final product. It is safe to say this book would not have happened without him. The world, both criminological and otherwise, got a little less kind with the loss of Chet. Brandon Welsh, professor at Northeastern University, who I also met during my time there and have continued to work with, read a draft of this book and provided many valuable comments and insights, including a much needed change to the title.

I'm lucky enough to have met and work with some of the luminaries in criminology. Two of these, Alex Piquero and Matt DeLisi, gave me the opportunity to submit a proposal for the series on criminological theory they are editing. I'm grateful for the opportunity and look forward with interest to reading the other contributions to the series.

At Bates College, I'm surrounded by great colleagues. I presented Chapter 3 of this book at the Sociology Research Lunch series and received excellent feedback from my fellow sociologists: Francesco

Duina, Emily Kane, and Heidi Taylor. The students at Bates are also top notch. I'm grateful for the help of Brynn Wendel and the editorial assistance of Emma Bilodeau. Emma read each chapter and provided terrific, and sometimes funny, sometimes mean (but always on target), feedback. Students in my Crime over the Life-Course seminar read drafts of the chapters. Thanks to those students: Josh Geisler, Molly Pritz, Mallory Cohen, Kate Rosenthal, Nate Levin, Savannah Stockly, Hannah Yibrah, and Ali Rabideau. If not for the kind assistance of all these folks, this book would have been a much lesser product.

Litchfield, Maine — Michael Rocque
June 25, 2016

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# 1

# Introduction

The inner city breeds many delinquent and criminal careers. We have long known that crime rates are higher in urban areas, regardless of who lives there (Shaw and McKay 1969). Thanks to research that follows the same individuals over time, we also know quite a bit about how individuals in inner cities become involved in crime and delinquency as well as their various criminal trajectories, pathways, and turning points through their criminal careers. What we know about how those 'careers' fizzle out and eventually end—knowledge which has advanced appreciably in recent years—is the subject of this book. When criminologists talk about criminal careers, they are referring simply to the length of time in which a person is criminally active, the trajectories or pathways they take over their life-course. To illustrate diverging pathways through time, let's consider two inner-city youth, Jack and Edward.

## Jack

Jack came from a disadvantaged family, which contributed to a difficult childhood. His father, an immigrant with little education, married three times—the second of which was Jack's mother, who died of an illness



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when he was only four. Jack's father drank heavily and was verbally and physically abusive to his third wife, all of which was visible to the children. As a result of this domestic violence, Jack's father had several run-ins with the law, and he eventually ended up on probation. Jack's stepmother, in turn, was abusive toward him and some of the other children, encouraging them to engage in antisocial acts to support the household. It appears that she had a cold and distant relationship with her step children, not supporting their enrichment, and certainly not providing the type of watchful guardianship that is necessary to instill prosocial norms. For years now, scholars have identified this type of environment as the kind that leads to low self-control among children.

It is perhaps, then, no surprise that Jack developed behavioral problems at a very young age, rejecting authority and running away from home often. He showed a considerable degree of impulsivity, giving in to temptation and immediate gratification at the first chance. He also, around the age of six, began his life of crime, wandering the streets with his stepbrother and friends, engaging in minor acts of theft. By the time he was eight years old, Jack had experienced his first arrest. He would be arrested three more times at this age for delinquencies ranging from truancy to shoplifting. He now had a record and a history with the court system—something that would work against him in later years.

As is typically the case with the developmental sequence of offending in childhood through adolescence, Jack's behavior only worsened. Things became more serious when he turned 15. At this point, to finance his taste for gambling and sex, he began to mug strangers on the street, often beating the men unconscious after enticing them with the offer of sexual acts. It appears from his later recollections that he may have been raped by men in the city, and he began to use sex as a way to catch victims off guard. One day, his prostitution ruse was discovered, as one of his victims recognized him during a robbery, alerting the police. For this act, he was sentenced to a year in a reformatory, one of many institutionalizations as a result of his budding criminal career.

Within the year, Jack was back in the saddle, the seduction of crime drawing him into the fast life that also included mugging. After beating a victim unconscious, breaking several bones along the way, with an accomplice, he was again recognized and pointed out to the police,

and again sentenced to a one-year stint in prison. This one held not juveniles, but adults. There, he nearly died of illness.

Upon his release, Jack was put into an offender rehabilitation program, which emphasized positive social environments, meaningful employment, and cognitive-behavioral therapy. Things seemed to turn around. He obtained a job that appealed to his personality, married, and had children. Suddenly, he had a stake in conformity, or a reason to stay on the straight and narrow lest he lose what he had worked for.[1] By age 22, it seemed he had turned a corner, passing a turning point in his life trajectory. He barely recognized the chronic delinquent he had been. He remained crime-free for five years, during which time his treatment ended. His appeared to be a classic story of desistance, or the process in which offending behavior decreases and eventually stops, even among those heavily involved in crime.

Jack would only be defined as a desister, however, if we stopped following him in this early 20s. However, when we look at how the rest of his life turned out, we see desistance did not come as easily as was hoped. He ended up incarcerated both in prisons and mental hospitals periodically, had trouble giving up gambling, took part in robbery and fights, and appears to have been violently abusive to women (his marriage to his first wife failed). He also continued to have difficulty keeping jobs. He remained impulsive and quick to become hostile.

## Edward

Edward's story is similar but also unique in origins to Jack's. He was born to an immigrant family in the same inner city as Jack. The neighborhood was characterized by disorder, poverty, and a lack of community control. A lack of parental supervision, much like Jack experienced, was the norm. In addition, Edward's father was an alcoholic, and corporal punishment,

[1] Jackson Toby in the late 1950s had developed the term 'stake in conformity' to describe the process by which commitments constrain people from deviating from prosocial norms (Toby 1957).

bordering on abuse, was utilized by both parents. Alcoholism led to job instability for Edward's father, and with that, numerous relocations when rent could no longer be paid. Despite this, Edward had higher than average intelligence and no clinical psychological or emotional problems according to a psychiatric evaluation.

As a small child, much like Jack, Edward began to associate with delinquents and engage in increasingly serious crimes. He was left alone and unsupervised for much of the day, and as a result, skipped school continuously. During this time—around age seven—he began stealing from cars and local homes when the occupants were away. He and his friends were particularly adept at metal theft, taking the valuable metal from homeowner's appliances and selling it to junk yards.

Skipping school is what first landed Edward in the net of the authorities, time and again. This act eventually resulted in the first of his five arrests before age 12. After several referrals to the juvenile justice system for truancy and begging, he was arrested at age 14 for burglary twice, three more times at age 15, twice at age 17, and once at age 18 all for burglary or illegal entering. This last arrest landed him in a state reformatory, or detention hall for young offenders. Upon his release at age 21, he was arrested again five months later and sent back to the reformatory.

A particularly adventurous crime he committed at age 17 is illustrative of his primary means of stealing property. One day while scouting for ways to make an easy buck, Edward came upon a dentist office that showed no signs of occupancy. After attempting to enter the office using the front and back doors, he decided the safest mode of entry would be the cellar door which was out of most visible sight lines. Once inside, he rifled through the office, which also served as a domicile, and found some money. Before he could leave, someone came home, discovered the intruder, and began to chase him. After a confrontation that threatened to turn bloody, Edward ran again but was caught by some men who saw the chase. Edward tried to offer the men some money to release him, but they refused. The police then placed him under arrest.

His last arrest and confinement occurred at age 24, when he was charged with carrying concealed weapons and sentenced to be incarcerated for a one-year term. All told, he spent roughly 14 years incarcerated through his youth.

To this point, the story seems remarkably similar to Jack's, if somewhat less violent. Both were drawn to the antisocial, rather than prosocial, worlds of the inner city. Both engaged in acts of crime and delinquency, with increasing seriousness, which put them in contact with the juvenile justice system time and again through their teen years. Arrests did not deter Edward's behavior, nor did stints in juvenile detention halls or reformatories. Yet, after his release from the juvenile reformatory at age 22, he claims to have not participated in any more criminal behavior. The arrest and sentence he received at age 24 were, according to Edward, the result of a misunderstanding in which he was trying to return a friend's handgun. Whether this explanation is truthful or not is questionable, given his admittance that he was going to try to get away from the police by "holding them up" with the gun. Nonetheless, at last follow-up, which occurred at age 33, he had not engaged in any form of crime and had not had any contact with the justice system, a period of seven years. It appears that Edward may have indeed "made good" (Maruna 2001). In fact, he stated, "I've come to my senses. I knew crime doesn't pay but it just took a long time before waking up to the fact. I'm going to succeed somehow."

Careful readers familiar with the field of criminology will recognize at least one of these stories, if not both. They come from a collection of 'life-histories' and 'boys own stories' compiled by Clifford Shaw, a social worker and Chicago-school criminologist. The first is by far the most well-known, published under the title *The Jack-Roller* (an early twentieth-century slang term for mugging drunk men by assaulting them, or 'rolling' them) (Shaw 1930). *The Jack-Roller* is a life history written by Stanley (I've called him Jack here), detailing the author's life from birth until age 22, when Shaw ended his treatment with the delinquent.

The second story chronicling the life of Edward is similarly from Shaw's life-histories, this time from his book, *Brothers in Crime*, which was published in 1938 (Shaw et al. 1938/1966). Edward was one of five brothers who shared their stories in that book, and appeared to be the sibling who had most convincingly left a life of crime for good (for example, one of the brothers, Michael, completed his life-history while incarcerated).

These life-history autobiographies have become criminological classics, for they offer insight into the world view of chronic delinquents,

over an extended period of time, providing researchers with a treasure trove of data. Published over 70 years ago, the life-histories continue to be analyzed and interpreted, as an entire issue of *Theoretical Criminology*, edited by noted life-course criminologist Shadd Maruna in 2007, attests (Maruna and Mattravers 2007).

Yet it is their value for understanding desistance from crime that is of concern here. As we will see in this book, the term 'desistance' is not one with a straightforward, universally agreed upon definition. Even less agreement is found among scholars in terms of the reasons why desistance occurs. In general, desistance can be viewed as the process(es) by which criminal and antisocial behavior declines in frequency and seriousness over the life-course, typically after adolescence. Using that definition, it becomes clear that Jack (or Stanley's) and Edward's stories have much relevance to desistance. The topic of desistance, including the ways in which it is defined and studied, the theories developed to understand why it (seemingly always) occurs, and the ways in which it may be facilitated, are the topic of this volume.

What are the relevant factors involved in the study of desistance that these stories shed light on? First, there is the issue of when desistance can be expected to occur in the life-course. As we will see, there is a growing body of research that suggests it is 'normative'—meaning that it happens for most people around the same time—for desistance to transpire after adolescence (Farrington 1986; Laub and Sampson 2001; Massoglia and Uggen 2010; Moffitt 1993). Yet, desistance certainly does not happen at the same time for everyone, with some offenders persisting late into life (Laub and Sampson 2003; Mulvey et al. 2004). On the surface, it seems as if Jack took longer to desist (if indeed he ever did) than Edward. However, this conclusion was not the one Clifford Shaw reached at the end of *The Jack-Roller*. Having access to only a portion of Jack's life-history through his early 20s, Shaw was convinced Jack had reformed. He wrote, "More than five years have elapsed since [Jack] was released from the House of Correction. During this period there has not been a recurrence of any delinquent behavior. Furthermore, he has developed interests and a philosophy of life which are in keeping with the standards of conventional society" (Shaw 1930, p. 183). If the story (and our data) had ended here, we might begin to look for clues as to why Jack desisted, and what made it possible.

But the story does not end there, because a curious graduate student named Jon Snodgrass began to look for, and found, Jack 40 years later. Thus, the second lesson these stories impart for desistance research is that length of follow-up and definition of desistance matter. In what would become a classic in its own right, Snodgrass' follow-up of the Jack-Roller to age 70 revealed that Shaw had been wrong in his assessment of Jack's desistance (a term Shaw did not use and no scholar would use with regularity for another 70 years). Snodgrass (1978) in fact found that Jack had actually been arrested for robbery just one year after Shaw's book was published. "In light of this outcome, Shaw's conclusion was very short-lived," wrote Snodgrass (Snodgrass 1978, p. xxxiii). Snodgrass, in asking Jack to describe his life since *The Jack-Roller* was written, found substantial evidence that Jack had not changed. He experienced job instability, engaged in fights, and was abusive to both his wives (threatening to kill his first and hitting his second). The assault on the second wife occurred when he was well into his 60s (Snodgrass 1978). Thus, the story of the Jack-Roller also imparts important lessons about how to define desistance and how long of a follow-up is necessary to know if desistance truly occurred. A criminal record is not necessary for an individual to be a serious offender.

Third, the two stories tell us something about what may explain desistance, or its inverse: persistence in criminal behavior through the life-course. Jack was, by his own account, impulsive and lacked persistence. Ernest Burgess, upon examining Jack's case, found the following personality traits to be characteristic of him (Shaw 1930, pp. 190–191):

1. Early rise and persistence of a sense of injustice
2. Self-pity
3. Hypercritical of others
4. Always right; never takes blame but readily blames others
5. Readily makes friends and easily breaks with them
6. Excessive interest in attention
7. Lacks insight into his own motives and those of others
8. Suspicious toward others without sufficient cause
9. Ideas of persecution
10. Substitutes rationalization for insight

11. Builds up rational system of explanation
12. Absorbed in his own ideas and plans and relatively immune to suggestions from others
13. Resentment of correction and resistance to direction
14. Tendency to escape from unpleasant situations by the method of protest
15. Tendency to moralize
16. Speed of decision and strength of reaction.

This laundry list of traits is somewhat similar to what Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) have called low self-control, which they argue can explain all crime and deviance between individuals. Compare this to Edward's prognosis, by a psychiatric professional: "The psychiatric reports which were made in the reformatory as well as the findings of more recent examinations indicate that Edward is quite realistically oriented to his entire situation. There is no evidence of emotional disturbance or of psychopathology" (Shaw et al. 1938). He was also thought to have above-average intelligence.

Could the relatively normal development of Edward in childhood account for his earlier desistance relative to Jack's? Do personality traits make a difference in the length of criminal careers? All of these remain key questions in the study of desistance from crime, which is the focus of this volume.

## Why Do We Need a Book on Desistance?

Since the field of criminology began to focus on desistance from crime as a separate area of study under the criminal career paradigm (Blumstein et al. 1986; DeLisi 2005) in the 1980s, numerous scholarly contributions have been made to the understanding of why people quit crime. Yet early criminal career work was not particularly nuanced or sophisticated, viewing the end of the criminal career (denoted 'termination') as simply the end point at which offending ceased. It was not until the early twenty-first century that scholars began to take seriously what desistance actually means, what it looks like, and

how the process entails more than a termination of offending behavior (see Bushway et al. 2001; Laub and Sampson 2001).

Some have argued that criminology has an 'embarrassment of riches' with respect to theory. Instead of killing off those that do not enjoy a particularly high degree of empirical or even logical support, the field just continues to pile on theories, which often are just slightly altered versions of those that already exist (Bernard 1990). For example, social disorganization (Shaw and McKay 1969) can be viewed as a separate theory of why crime is concentrated in certain areas, thus representing yet another theory practitioners and policy-makers must examine to determine how to reduce crime. A more profitable approach might be to consider social disorganization theory as part of a broader control theory perspective on crime and deviance (Britt and Rocque 2015; Kornhauser 1978).

Yet the ability to view social disorganization as a variant of control theory or of Sampson and Laub (1993) age-graded theory as a variant of Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory becomes easier when theoretical perspectives are gathered together for comparison and analysis in the same volume. Books on theories of crime have been a mainstay in criminology for decades, offering students of crime the opportunity to examine varying perspectives on why crime occurs in a side-by-side manner. Often, these criminology theory textbooks include a section on the plethora of criminology theory that exists, and go on to describe efforts to integrate theories in order to reduce the number and create more comprehensive, powerful explanations (see Akers and Sellers 2013; Cote 2002; Tibbetts 2015).

In some sense, it may be argued that research on the onset and development of crime and criminality, which has been the primary focus of criminology, has bearing on desistance. After all, if we know why people get into crime in the first place, be it antisocial peers, poor parenting, or failure in school, shouldn't we be able to apply that information to understanding why people eventually stop? In other words, are the causes of desistance the inverse of the causes of delinquency? Unfortunately the world is not that simple—what Uggen and Piliavin (1998) have called "asymmetrical causation" appears to be the norm (Laub and Sampson 2001). That is, the causes of crime are *not* the

causes of desistance. The process of desistance appears to include some of the same factors involved in the onset of delinquency (e.g., delinquent peers), but also other, distinct processes (e.g., biological maturation, social responsibility). Thus, a focus on desistance and reintegration is essential rather than drawing inferences from research on other dimensions of the criminal career.

To date, numerous monographs and edited volumes have been published on what has come to be known as life-course or developmental criminology and criminal careers (DeLisi 2005; Farrington 2005; Gibson and Krohn 2013; Thornberry 2004). Yet no single book exists that attempts to compile what we know about desistance from crime, with a focus on theoretical explanations. Coverage of desistance can be found in single book chapters within larger volumes (Kazemian 2015; Kazemian and Maruna 2009), or overviews within texts that attempt to introduce and/or test a new perspective (Farrall and Calverly 2006; Healy 2010; Laub and Sampson 2003; Maruna 2001). This makes sense to some extent because desistance has only recently begun to receive the attention that other dimensions of the criminal career have had in the literature (Kazemian 2015). For that reason, theories of desistance are not as mature as theories of the emergence and seriousness of offending, and even recidivism (which is often thought to be the opposite of desistance).

The time has come, however, for a volume that specifically focuses on desistance, with an up-to-date account of theory and research on the subject. This book seeks to provide such a treatment, enabling a more lengthy analysis of the many issues that persist in the literature, including how to define and model desistance, what theories have been developed to explain desistance, and, knowing what we know, how desistance theory can inform efforts to reduce crime.

## Plan of the Book

Chapter 2 of this book begins with an historical overview of desistance from crime literature. As we will see, the term 'desistance' is a relatively recent development in the study of crime over the life-course. Various

terms, including 'maturation' and 'maturational reform' (Glueck and Glueck 1937/1966; Matza 1964) were used by scholars to account for the fact that most offenders somehow stopped misbehaving—at least at previous levels and seriousness. When was the phenomenon we now know as desistance first discovered and written about? What were some theoretical accounts given to explain this phenomenon?

The chapter begins with a discussion of research from the nineteenth century on age and crime. Understanding what the field knew about desistance prior to it becoming its own separate focal point is instructive for knowing how and why current theories were developed including how well these current perspectives fare empirically. The works of Adolphe Quetelet and G. Stanley Hall are reviewed here. In addition, this chapter traces the work of the Harvard criminologists Sheldon and his wife Eleanor Glueck, who conducted some of the very first longitudinal studies on delinquency in the United States, contributing four separate projects following juvenile offenders into adulthood (see Chapter 2 of this book; Sampson and Laub 1993). While the Gluecks did not have a fully conceptualized theory, they planted the seeds for our understanding of desistance that remains useful today.

The third chapter covers one of the reasons desistance remains so tricky to study. As Maruna (2001) pointed out, desistance is a strange topic of research because rather than being the presence of something that can be counted, poked, and prodded by scientists, it is marked by the *absence* of something—offending. How does one study that which doesn't exist? How do we know when desistance has occurred, that is, how do we define desistance? What are the possible consequences of differing definitions of desistance for our understanding of why people eventually stop? This chapter will seek to clarify terms and definitions.

Chapter 3 will also discuss methods for examining desistance beyond definitional issues. These include modeling choices and also the use of quantitative vs. qualitative data (or both). Certain theories of desistance have been based largely on qualitative, narrative accounts of individuals who claim to be moving away from crime while others are based on multivariate quantitative models. In recent years, scholars have been turning away from this dichotomy and using a more mixed method approach (Maruna 2010). Note that this chapter—and this book as a

whole—is not intended to 'take sides' with certain approaches, theories, or methods. The purpose is to provide a detailed overview. However, it will be argued in this chapter that qualitative and quantitative data are both legitimate sources upon which to study desistance, but it should be recognized that they have different capabilities in terms of what kinds of questions upon which they can be brought to bear.

Chapters 4 and 5 represent the heart of the book. Chapter 4 will cover research that has been conducted in recent years (e.g., since the 1980s) on desistance and termination from crime. The correlates of desistance are broad and come from data that were collected both cross-sectionally and longitudinally. In order to fully understand the process of desistance, prospective longitudinal research, which follows the same individuals over time at repeated intervals (see Farrington et al. 1986), is especially useful. For that reason, major longitudinal studies that have been conducted in the United States and abroad which provide insight into desistance from crime will be reviewed. Many of these datasets are now publicly available for researchers interested in examining desistance. Links to the datasets will be provided.

The fourth chapter will also discuss the logical inverse of desistance—persistence. Those who are variously labeled chronic criminals or career criminals will be discussed in this chapter. Why do some people continue to offend beyond the normative desistance period? Are they, like Jack, plagued by poor upbringings, abuse, and multiple personality deficits? This section will be relatively brief, but will seek to cover what we know about persisting offenders in criminology.

The fifth chapter will provide a discussion and analysis of the primary theories of desistance that have been offered by criminologists. The theories will be organized according to their focus, rather than by theorist, to allow distinctions and unique insights to be more easily gleaned. The categories within which the theories will be placed are as follows: (1) Biological or pure age theories, (2) Rational choice or decision-making theories, (3) Cognitive or brain maturation theories, (4) Psychological theories, including theories of personality traits, (5) Cognitive transformation or identity theories, and (6) Social process theories of desistance.

For the most part, these theories have been developed and presented in a mutually exclusive and competing framework. In fact, as we will see,

some scholars have attempted to adjudicate between certain perspectives (Laub and Sampson 2003; Giordano et al. 2002; LeBel et al. 2008). Nonetheless, certain theories have implications for other perspectives. These potential relationships will be discussed in Chapter 5. In addition, the empirical base of each theory will be reviewed to provide context of how much support each perspective has garnered to date.

Chapter 6 follows the model of criminology theory textbooks and takes a step toward building an integrated theory of desistance. While it is certainly true that we do not have as many desistance theories as we do of theories of crime *writ large*, the list is continuing to grow (as the previous chapter will demonstrate) and the different perspectives may not be as opposed to each other as appears at first glance. Building on my own maturation perspective, Chapter 6 shows how an integrative and multifaceted theory of desistance can be developed using existing theoretical and empirical work on crime over the life-course. This chapter draws largely on an article that outlines the perspective, published in the journal *Criminology and Criminal Justice* (Rocque 2015).

Finally, the last chapter takes what we have learned about desistance from crime and applies it to crime reduction efforts. How can theories of desistance inform offender rehabilitation for those currently involved in crime? What lessons have we learned about the process of desistance that may be useful to help prevent crime in the first place? Can we "force the plant" as the Gluecks (Glueck and Glueck 1937/1966, p. 205) put it, by encouraging desistance to occur earlier than it might otherwise?

This concluding chapter also reviews some of the existing crime prevention and offender rehabilitation strategies that draw on desistance work, both directly and indirectly. It will be argued that the more we know about desistance in general for more than one type of offender or population, the better able we will be as a society to reduce the harmful crimes that occur every day.

Desistance from crime continues to capture the interest of criminological scholars as more and more is learned about the process. The criminal career debates of the 1980s reinvigorated what was a field in crisis (Bernard et al. 2010; Osgood 2005). Prior to the criminal career work, theories in criminology had not progressed much and seemed to be treading water—Frank P. Williams argued in 1984 (p. 92) that the

field suffered from a "lack of 'the criminological imagination'" (see also Sullivan and Piquero 2016). The criminal career paradigm and debate it sparked stimulated renewed vigor and a sharpness of clarity in ideas heretofore not seen for some years in the field. As an outgrowth of this, desistance work is some of the most interesting and exciting that is currently being done in the study of crime, deviance, and justice.

Desistance from crime is also a fascinating topic within criminology because it is one of the few hopeful and positive facets of the field. Criminologists typically study 'bad' events and outcomes. Why do people begin to steal? Do child molesters ever change? Why are males so much more prone to violence than females? Is there a 'gene' for crime? All of these are interesting but rather gloomy things to study. Further, the same focus on the negative plagues practitioners. As Brown and Jenkins (1988, pp. vii–viii) put it:

> When juvenile justice works, very few people realize it, hear about it, or know how or why it worked. The "successes" of the juvenile justice system are seldom heard from, followed-up, or questioned . . . When juvenile justice does not work, however, it seems everybody knows. How are juvenile justice professionals affected by a constant bombardment of negativism? The answers to these questions are visibly etched in the faces of judges, probation officers, youth workers, and others who strive each day to help delinquent children and their families through difficult times.

As they point out, not only does studying 'successes'of the system, or desisters, put a more positive spin on criminological work, but it also is a logical focus of a field that, after all, hopes to find out ways to reduce crime. "If the purpose of juvenile justice [and here I may add, criminology] is to help promote socially approved behavioral change, does it not make sense to study those who have successfully accomplished this transition?" (Brown and Jenkins, p. viii). The answer to this rhetorical question is a resounding yes, thus making desistance from crime a more appealing area of inquiry.

In some ways, as we shall see shortly, desistance has always been a concern of criminology and criminal justice practitioners—it is just that that the terms differed. What program evaluators and theorists were

really hoping for, when examining rates of recidivism, was a *reduction* in recidivism. In other words, these folks were always looking for desistance from crime. It's hard to know what to look for, and how to look for something as complex as desistance, which made early efforts to understand the decline in crime with age difficult. For example, program evaluations focused on recidivism are sensitive to length of follow-up (as our Jack and Edward stories remind us), which means "the absence of recidivism does not necessarily indicate termination" from crime (Farrington et al. 1986, p. 46). The next chapter recounts these early efforts, examining research and theory on what we now know as desistance from crime from the late nineteenth to the twentieth century.

# 2

# Desistance in Perspective: Historical Work and the Identification of a Field of Study

## A Murder and a Debate about Crime over the Life-Course

During the summer of 1889, in the farm country of Iowa, a truly gruesome crime took place as the people of Elk Township slept. At around 2 am, John "Wesley" Elkins, 11 years old, took the life of his parents in their own bedroom. The brutality of the crimes shocked citizens. An attorney in Iowa described the events for the *Cedar Rapids Sunday Republican* in 1898:

> On the morning named about the break of day, (quoting from his confession), he quietly arose from his bed, passed into kitchen, then into his parent's bed room, placed his father's rifle, (this was always kept in Wesley's room), close to his father's head as he lay at the front of the bed asleep and fired, killing him instantly. He then hastened back to his room to reload rifle, but after placing powder and ball in gun (in this condition it was found), he could find no suitable patch for ball and by this time the mother had risen and Wesley, hearing her, returned to her room and found her standing in her night clothes bent over her husband, evidently to ascertain what if anything had befallen him, and with her back to the door, Wesley



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> struck her on the back of the head near the base of the brain, a fearful blow, with a club that he had obtained the evening before at the corn crib, and this staggered her so that she turned partly around facing the door; then he rained blow after blow with this club, felling her across the bed, then getting onto the bed where he could reach her head he beat it into a jelly, scattering blood and brains all over the walls and ceilings of this room.

At first, Wesley claimed he had been sleeping in a barn and was awoken by the sound of an intruder's gun shot. It didn't take long for this story to unravel; investigators were curious about the lack of affect Wesley displayed after such a horrifying discovery. He didn't seem upset or in shock. He was described as "perfectly cool and self-possessed with no tremor in his voice" (Bryan 2010, p. 268). Still no one could believe a little boy, not even 100 pounds, capable of such brutality. Then, while temporarily living with the sheriff, he confessed to the crimes. His description of what he had done after shooting his father was terrifying: "I struck her [his mother] several times more until I was sure she was dead, and then father kind of groaned so I struck him once or twice to be sure that he was dead." Why did he kill his parents? His reasoning was a headscratcher. He no longer wanted to live at home, had attempted to run away, but his father would not permit it (Bryan 2010; Price 1916; Segrave 2009).

Wesley's crime took place in a time in which criminology, as a discipline, was just coming into fruition. The standard textbook discussion of the development of criminological thought suggests that ideas about who commits crimes and why proceeded in a series of stages, from pre-scientific to scientific. In the first stage, we learn that attributions of abnormal behavior were often thought to be the result of demonic possession or sin. In the second stage, the classical school, accounts of crime turned to notions of reason, logic, and free will. The classical school emerged during the enlightenment period when people were thought to be—rather than the devil—in control over their own fates and behavior. In the third stage, the stage in which Wesley lived, positivistic criminology emerged. Positive criminology sought to find the 'causes' of criminal behavior—during Wesley's time, biological factors were most often blamed. This was the time in which crimes of any magnitude were described as the result of genetic processes or other biological defects. This was when the idea of the

'born criminal' was prominent. In other words, the causes of crime were thought to be things which could not be repaired or would not likely change over time (Bryan 2010; Rafter 2008; Rafter et al. 2016).

It should therefore be no surprise what happened to young Wesley, not even a teenager when he committed the heinous acts for which he confessed. Both the prosecution and the defense attorney agreed; this was a boy who suffered from "an utter absence of moral consciousness" (Segrave 2009, p. 154)—what today we would call a psychopath. A psychopath does not recover, according to popular notions, then and now. "After talking to the boy, the prosecutor concluded that he 'would be a dangerous element in society at any stage of life,' and the lawyer appointed to defend Elkins did not disagree" (Bryan 2010, p. 269). Some even suggested that a study of his head indicated a tendency toward violence. Without much delay, he was given a life sentence in an adult prison. Not even a year had passed between the murders and the day he was admitted to the Anamosa State Penitentiary (see Fig. 2.1 for a photograph of Elkins).

The struggle for what would happen to Wesley continued after his imprisonment. As the law professor Patricia L. Bryan writes, ideas about crime, responsibility, and age were changing during the turn of the twentieth century. In 1899, influenced by the new concept of adolescence, the first juvenile court was established in Cook County, Illinois, marking the formal beginning of the juvenile justice system. The first academic work describing

**Fig. 2.1** Photograph of John Wesley Elkins. According to the Anamosa State Penitentiary Museum, this photo captures Elkins just after the murders. Photo obtained from Anamosa State Penitentiary Museum, Anamosa, http://www.asphistory.com/HTM/john.htm.

the unique period of life that separates childhood from adulthood was published in 1904 by G. Stanley Hall. The turn of the century marked increasing debates about whether criminals were 'born,' inheriting their criminality genetically or through some other factor, or a product of their environment (Bryan 2010; Segrave 2009).

Wesley's fight for freedom exemplified this debate in a unique way, considering the heinousness of the crime, and the age of the offender. He was, by all accounts, a model prisoner. He wrote eloquent letters that seemed, at least to some, too well written to come from an atavist.[1] Others still considered him a "fiend . . . born with murder in his heart" (*Cedar Rapids Republican*, December 1, 1895, quoted in Bryan 2010). Wesley's first request for a pardon was denied in 1896. He would continue to fight, and the public would continue to change their minds about his case. Finally, in 1902, his fourth pardon request was granted. He left prison a free man, in his mid-20s. Reports from the early 1900s were that he had obtained an education, a job, and got married, thereby "fully justifying his pardon" (Price 1916, p. 257).

During Wesley's time, whether a child capable of such brutality was likely to change or was forever condemned to be a threat to public safety was not clear (Bryan 2010). Today, the idea that an 11-year old could be held legally responsible for a crime on the same level as an adult is not widely supported. With the benefit of decades of developmental and life-course research, we now know much about how the brain matures, how social factors influence us, and how these changes can lead to behavioral reform or desistance. Childhood behavior—or experiences—in other words, is not destiny. With this knowledge in hand, the US Supreme Court recently ruled in two cases that juveniles cannot be sentenced to death (*Roper v. Simmons (03–633) 543 U.S. 551 (2005)*), or life imprisonment without the possibility of parole (*Graham v. Florida (560) (2010)*) for non-homicide acts committed as children. These rulings were informed by research that sheds light on why the young may engage in risky, antisocial behavior as opposed to adults (see Steinberg 2008). That is, developmental

[1] Cesare Lombroso, whom some consider as the founder of modern criminology, argued that certain criminals were born that way, having not proceeded as far as 'normals' along the evolutionary path. He called these born criminals 'atavists' (Gibson and Rafter 2006).

sciences, and the study of desistance from crime have shown the folly of believing that people are locked into a set behavioral trajectory early in life.

The next few chapters will review contemporary research and theory on desistance from crime, discussing what we know about why people stop offending—information that has proven instrumental for policy and rehabilitation efforts. But while desistance as a sole focus of research did not emerge until relatively recently, criminologists, and those studying crime, were well aware of the 'maturation' phenomenon. They knew that age was a primary factor in understanding crime, but seldom went beyond that level of explanation. Nonetheless, what early criminologists found and theorized about what is now known as desistance is relevant to what we know today—the framework of our research rests on what came before. Not only that, as the Elkins story reminds us, as ideas and theories about crime over the life-course changed, so has how we have treated offenders. Desistance from crime, even if scholars did not use that phrase, had profound implications for the criminal justice system.

Did scientists from the late nineteenth and early to mid- twentieth centuries know about desistance? If so, what did they call it? What did they claim was responsible for the sudden decline in offending? That is the subject of the present chapter. We'll begin with the work of one of the popular 'founders' of criminology, Adolphe Quetelet.[2] Research on desistance from crime began with full force in the 1980s; the work from that point to the present represents the focus of later chapters.

## An Overview of Early Research on Age and Crime

### Adolphe Quetelet and the Influence of Age

Thanks to Sawyer F. Sylvester's excellent 1984 translation of Adolphe Quetelet's short volume *Research on the Propensity for Crime at Different*

[2] Some argue that Cesare Beccaria is the 'father' of criminology, but as Rafter (2011) points out, that makes little sense if we are to regard criminology as a science, which utilizes data to learn about the causes of crime.

*Ages*, we know that as early as 1831, scientists who had access to the data were aware of the 'age effect' in which criminal behavior increases through adolescence, peaks anywhere from age 18 to 24, then declines. Quetelet was trained in mathematics, and employed as a professor at the Brussels Athenaeum. As Sylvester recounts, Quetelet believed that the methods of the physical sciences could be applied to the social world with much profit. Relying on French court records, Quetelet provided one of, if not, the first analyses of criminal statistics in the social sciences.

Quetelet had many aims in *Research on the Propensity for Crime at Different Ages*. One of these was to describe, in statistical terms, the 'average man.' What are the odds that this man will engage in crime? How moral is this man? He then went on to examine how intelligence, weather, and geography affected this morality or propensity for crime. For the purposes of desistance from crime, the most relevant chapter is the eighth, where Quetelet considers how age affects propensity for crime. In this chapter, he reviewed several things, including whether desistance looks different for males and females (he concludes, the age effect is mostly similar), and how age affects the choice of crimes one commits. For example, he suggested that rape and assault occur in adolescence, followed by theft and homicide, and finally forgery in old age.

In Chapter 8, Quetelet makes the case that age is consequential as a cause of crime, writing his famous line, "Among all the causes which have an influence for developing or halting the propensity of crime, the most vigorous is, without contradiction, age" (Quetelet 1831/1984, p. 54). This statement is intriguing for several reasons. First, Quetelet is here using data to claim that crime varies with age, rather than making an abstract philosophical statement. This may be the first such empirical observation of what criminologists today call the 'age-crime curve.' The data he relies on to make this claim are from the 1826 and 1827 *Comptes Généraux de L'Administration de la Justice*, collected by the French government. These statistics showed that for both property and violent crimes, the number of crimes increased from less than 16 years of age to about 25–30 years, at which point crimes began to decrease in frequency. Table 2.1. reproduces these statistics, along with a variable he called 'degrees of the propensity for

**Table 2.1** Crimes against person and property by age in France, 1826–27

| | Crimes against | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Person's age | Persons | Property | Crimes against property out of 100 crimes | Population according to ages | Degrees of the propensity for crime |
| Less than 16 years | 80 | 440 | 85 | 3,304 | 161 |
| 16–21 years | 904 | 3,723 | 80 | 887 | 5,217 |
| 21–25 years | 1,278 | 3,329 | 72 | 673 | 6,846 |
| 25–30 | 1,575 | 3,802 | 70 | 791 | 6,671 |
| 30–35 | 1,153 | 2,883 | 71 | 732 | 5,514 |
| 35–40 | 650 | 2,076 | 76 | 672 | 4,057 |
| 40–45 | 575 | 1,724 | 75 | 612 | 3,757 |
| 45–50 | 445 | 1,275 | 74 | 549 | 3,133 |
| 50–55 | 288 | 811 | 74 | 482 | 2,280 |
| 55–60 | 168 | 500 | 75 | 410 | 1,629 |
| 60–65 | 157 | 385 | 71 | 330 | 1,642 |
| 65–70 | 91 | 184 | 70 | 247 | 1,113 |
| 70–80 | 64 | 137 | 68 | 255 | 788 |
| 80 and up | 5 | 14 | 74 | 55 | 345 |

*Source*: Quetelet 1831/1984

crime' which is the standardized rate of crimes. Thus, not only was Quetelet able to show that the raw number of crimes increases with age and then decreases in the 20s, but that the *rate* of crimes, standardized by population, also follows this pattern.

Second, Quetelet was arguing that age itself is a factor in crime. Future researchers, as we will see, took this claim to the extreme, suggesting that the decline in crime with age is simply an effect of age, and cannot be explained (Hirschi and Gottfredson 1983; Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Wilson and Herrnstein 1985). To Quetelet, something about age influences behavior, but that something needs to be explained.

Third, notice the language Quetelet used. He recognizes that crimes do vary with age, but he does not suggest that age affects behavior in such a simplistic manner. Instead, he claims that age affects *criminality*, a distinction also made by Gottfredson and Hirschi in the latter part of the twentieth century (Hirschi and Gottfredson 1986). They define crimes

as "short-term, circumscribed events" while criminality comprises the "stable differences across individuals in the propensity to commit criminal (or equivalent) acts" (p. 58). Quetelet's definition of propensity is very similar to Hirschi and Gottfredson's concept of criminality. He defines it as "the greater or lesser probability of committing a crime" (Quetelet 1831/1984, p. 16). Thus, an idea that Hirschi and Gottfredson, two of the leading criminologists of the twentieth century, proposed for what they called 'maturational reform' (desistance) was presaged by Quetelet more than 150 years prior. The key difference, however, is that while Quetelet thought that age affected criminality and thus crime, Hirschi and Gottfredson argued age affected crime but not criminality.

Interestingly, Quetelet did not simply conclude that age is a biological phenomenon that has unexplainable effects on crime and criminality. Sutton (1994, p. 228) reminds us of the problem of using age as an all-encompassing explanation without delving further: "to say that age influences everything is to say nothing." Pioneers of life-course criminology, John Laub and Robert Sampson, argued in 1992 that research is necessary to "'unpack' the meaning of age" (p. 81). What did Quetelet think the 'meaning' of age was? First, he argued that with age, physical stamina decreases. This is similar to a 'burnout' argument that later criminologists posited for desistance (Farrall and Calverly 2006; Hoffman and Beck 1984; Shover 1983).

Second, he argued that 'passions' decline with age. While he did not expound on this notion, it appears to be related to emotions, which have recently been incorporated into the study of desistance (Farrall et al. 2011; Giordano et al. 2007; Schroeder and Frana 2009). Note he may have been also speaking of what we know today as 'hormones,' which tend to change rapidly during adolescence (Collins 2004). For example, he argues that during adolescence, "the fire of passions and the disorders which accompany it, and which pushes man to rape and indecent assaults" emerges (Quetelet 1831/1984, p. 60).

Finally, and most importantly, what Quetelet called 'reason' develops with age and this works to counteract the propensity which has built up over adolescence. There can be no doubt what he meant by reason—it is similar to cognitive processes that are today being studied with respect to their effect on behavior during adolescence and emerging adulthood (Steinberg 2005, 2008). It is interesting to note that Quetelet

hypothesized that reason 'weakens' the influence of physical strength and passions in addition to arguing that those two factors decline with age. Thus, Quetelet anticipated many of the same theories and empirical findings currently utilized to explain desistance from crime. For example, one of the most prominent theories of desistance in the psychological literature involves what is called 'psychosocial maturity,' which is a combination of decreasing impulsivity, ability to plan ahead and take care of oneself, and concern for the needs of others (see Monahan et al. 2009). This theory includes many of the factors of which Quetelet wrote.

## G. Stanley Hall's Adolescence: Birth of a New Field of Study

In 1904, G. Stanley Hall published his two-volume magnum opus, his first book, called *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education.* With this work, the scholarly field of adolescence was born (Arnett 2006; Steinberg and Lerner 2004, p. 44). As Steinberg and Lerner (2004) recount, Hall's purpose was not simply to describe changes in the body and mind during the formative years, but to advance a theory of development—one of the first life-course theories presented in the scholarly literature. Hall suggested that human development over the life mirrored human species evolutionary development, in which humans "went from being beast-like to being civilized" (Steinberg and Lerner 2004, p. 44).

Though not often recognized by criminologists, Hall includes a nearly-100-page chapter on antisocial and criminal behavior in the first volume of *Adolescence* (Chapter V). In this chapter, he reviewed the many studies that had, by the beginning of the twentieth century, faithfully documented the age-crime curve in official statistics (e.g., police, court). Hall used data from a number of nations, including the United States, Germany, Italy, India, and Russia to illustrate the distribution of crime with age, thus showing that by 1904, what Quetelet had introduced had become a statistical 'fact.' His focus is, not surprisingly, on the increase in crime during adolescence rather than the decrease, but he did provide a discussion of behavioral

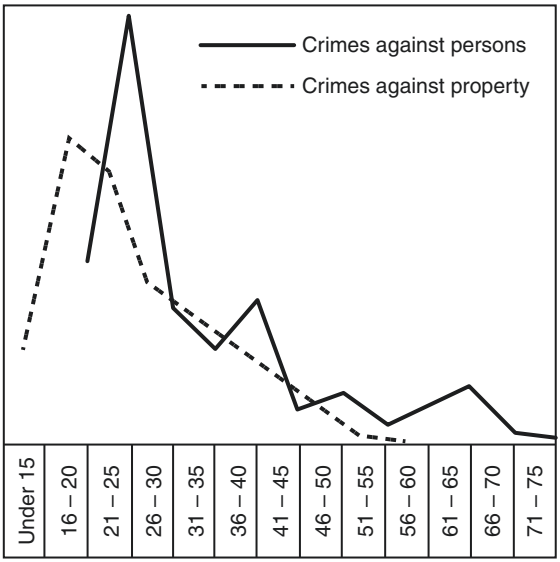


**Fig. 2.2** Age-crime curves for crimes against persons and crimes against property From G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence,* Vol 1. 1904, p. 331. Hall states that the figure is actually reproduced from Marro's La Puberta, 1898, p. 224. As is readily seen, the age-crime curves look very similar to those constructed in the 20th century and today.

reform. Hall also, like Quetelet, reproduced an age-crime curve figure "that looks very similar to the pattern today (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990), with a steep increase in the teens, peaking at age 18, followed by an equally steep decline" (Arnett 2006, p. 188). This graph is shown below in Fig. 2.2.

Interestingly, Fig. 2.2, which is constructed from Marro's (1898) *La Puberta¸* shows two curves, one for property crimes and one for personal or violent crimes. While Hall did not describe in detail (or at all, really) the data used to construct the curves, the graph is meant to illustrate that "crimes against persons reach their maximum later" than property offenses (Hall 1904, p. 330). This is interesting in its similarity to the graphs shown in Farrington's 1986 paper on age and crime, using data nearly a century older (see Farrington 1986, p. 193; note, an inspection of Table 2.1 shows Quetelet had also found this variation in peak age by crime type).

To what did Hall attribute the age-crime curve, and thus the desistance phenomenon? It appears his ideas were a bit more variegated than Quetelet. On page 325, he states that the "morality" of different ages can be understood by drawing on the fields of "ethics, sociology, genetic psychology, and . . . education and religion as well as . . . the success of a form of civilization." In keeping with his evolutionary-based theory, he states that "[c]riminals are much like overgrown children—egoistic, foppish, impulsive, gluttonous, blind to the rights of others, and our passions tend to bring us to childish stages" (p. 338) and often marked by "low intelligence" (pp. 339–340). This description meshes nicely with Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) theory of self-control, in which they characterize those with low self-control as "impulsive, insensitive, physical (as opposed to mental), risk-taking, short-sighted, and nonverbal" (p. 90).

For Hall, adolescence itself was the primary cause of the increase in antisocial behavior during this period. "The dawn of puberty," he writes, "although perhaps marked by a certain moral hebetude [dullness], is soon followed by a stormy period of great agitation, when the very worst and best impulses in the human soul struggle against each other for its possession" (Hall 1904, pp. 406–407). During this time, the adolescent "craves strong feelings and new sensations . . . monotony, routine, and detail are intolerable" (Hall 1904, p. 368). Thus he recognized that sensation-seeking, which recent research has shown increases during adolescence and then declines (Arnett 2006; Steinberg et al. 2008), plays a role in the age-crime curve. To hasten reform, he argued that children should be taught to read classic stories, which will facilitate growth of certain 'faculties' that can tame the impulses of adolescence. In other words, cognitive growth was seen by Hall, in anticipation of later work, as a factor in desistance. It is interesting to note that for Hall, adolescence was a longer period of life than is currently now recognized; for him, adolescence marked the ages 14–24 (Arnett 2006).

Hall was not a criminologist, and his overview of age and crime was at times disjointed and not well organized. He presented numerous views and theories of the time (up to the early 1900s) and it is unclear which he subscribed to, if any. However he did have strong feelings about corporal punishment ("[t]here is much to be said in favor of corporal

punishment for young offenders. . . . Dermal pain is far from being the pitiful evil that sentimental and neurasthenic adults regard it, and to flog wisely should not become a lost art" (Hall 1904, p. 402)) and the futility of education to prevent crime. Criminologists in the early twentieth century, however, did offer thoughts on the age-crime curve, and it is to these writings that we now turn.

## Criminological Views of the Age-Effect in the Early Twentieth Century

The early twentieth century was witness to a bourgeoning criminological textbook industry, many of which are available to the public due to the passing of copyright.[3] One of the first criminologists—or criminal anthropologists—was Cesare Lombroso, whose theories of born criminals continue to be misinterpreted today. Mary C. Gibson and Nicole Rafter argue that "age is central to Lombroso's criminal anthropology" (Gibson and Rafter 2006, p. 19). Much like Hall, Lombroso felt that the stages of the life span mirrored human evolution, such that childhood represented "primitive man" (Gibson and Rafter 2006, p. 19). Gibson and Rafter go on to state that maturity allows individuals to grow out of primitive criminality (of course, excepting those who are born criminals).

In his *Crime: Its Causes and Remedies*, translated by Henry P. Horton, published in 1911 'under the auspices' of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology, Lombroso included a chapter on the effect of age on crime (Chapter XIII). This chapter mirrored the arguments he makes in *Criminal Man*. Lombroso begins by noting that criminals are "most numerous at the ages between 20 and 30" (Lombroso 1911, p. 175). He goes on to compare the rate of 'normals,' 'insane,' and criminals at different ages, to show variations between the groups. Lombroso then states that the "maximum of criminality is found at ages ranging from 15 to 25 years" (p. 175) on the basis of examination of statistics from various studies—similar to Hall's analysis. After

[3] Interested readers can search archive.org for pdfs of these now out-of-print texts.

suggesting that "criminality, much more than insanity, is an inherited characteristic" (p. 177), Lombroso then discusses evidence of atavism in criminals, suggesting that natural reform is not the norm—this despite his own evidence that crime declines after age 25. Lombroso finally describes different crimes characteristic of different ages, but his table on page 180 simply shows that for each type of crime (theft, rape, assault, poisoning, etc.) each decline with age, though some (e.g., poisoning) peak later than others. Why does crime decline with age? Unfortunately he does not provide much insight in this chapter. It should be noted that in his discussion of "remedies," Lombroso does suggest that much youthful offending is likely of the "occasional criminal" form, and thus extreme, "violent correctional measure[s] ought to be regarded as harmful" (p. 411). This is similar to what Gibson and Rafter argue was his stance in *Criminal Man.*

Charles Goring's (1913) classic *The English Convict* is another criminological text that addresses age and crime. Goring seemingly picked up where Quetelet left off, offering a detailed analysis into "age as an etiological factor in crime" (Part II, Chapter 2). In this chapter, since Goring was concerned with how age affects the onset of crime, he first examined variations in first convictions by age. Here, he noted the age-crime curve for the first time, with its characteristic increase, peak and subsequent decline. He stated, 'We see from the curve that the average age of criminals at their first conviction is about 22 years; the standard deviation is approximately nine years. Before the age of 13, and after the age of 50, first convictions are relatively very rare; and, roughly assessed, we may take it that the time between the ages of 14 and 32 represents the probable period of life for criminal enlistment' (p. 202). What is unique in Goring's analysis was his use of inferential statistics to determine whether the age effect is 'statistically significant' (p. 201). He was one of the first to use such techniques in criminology.

In anticipation of later accounts of desistance, which we will cover in the next few chapters, Goring found that crime does not seem to decline monotonously with age. In fact, he found three peaks, one at 22, one at 42, and finally a last peak at age 64. This finding suggests that desistance may not be a smooth process, but one characterized by 'zig-zag' intermittency between crime and conformity (Piquero 2011). In seeking to

explain these age effects, Goring was somewhat elusive, suggesting that his documented differences in first-time convictions by age do not mean that the propensity to offend varies by age. Instead, anticipating Gottfredson and Hirschi's notion that self-control combined with opportunity explains variations in criminal behavior, he argued that (Goring 1913):

> We would not assume that the natural causes behind the age-distribution of criminals refer to special environmental influences associated with age, or to any special modification by age of criminal predisposition; we would assume, rather, that the sources of individuals' selection for conviction by age must be sought for in the particular conjunction of opportunity to commit crime with the intensity of criminal predisposition—a conjunction which obviously is highly correlated with age (p. 212).

Goring did not elaborate on what opportunity means and why it is most evident during the crime prone years. However, his explanation sows the seeds for future theories of desistance that suggest a decrease in unstructured free time contributes to a decline in crime (Sampson and Laub 1993).

Maurice Parmelee, who had previously provided an introductory chapter in Lombroso's *Crime: Its Causes and Remedies*, himself authored a criminology textbook, published in 1918. This book, entitled *Criminology* is one of the first comprehensive surveys of the field. In his chapter on juvenile crime, he notes again the distribution of 'criminality' by age. Parmelee concluded that criminality reaches its maximum at the ages of 21–24. He did not offer a detailed analysis of why crime declines with age, but did speculate: "[T]he young have not as much knowledge and experience as adults to aid them in avoiding detection"; "the young have not been subjected as much as the adults to a biological selective process which will weed out many of the aments, dements, and insane, and to a social selective process which will incarcerate many of the more dangerous" (Parmalee 1918, p. 215). In other words, unlike Quetelet or Lombroso, Parmelee did not think that age induces changes that lead to a decrease in crime, but rather to selection processes which 'weed out' the criminals at young ages.

Edwin Sutherland, famous for his differential association theory of crime, and of being primarily responsible for placing the study of crime within the discipline of sociology (Laub and Sampson 1991), was also aware of the age effect. In his 1934 *Principles of Criminology*, he included a chapter on 'physical and physiological factors in criminality' where he discussed age. Much like other texts, he wrote of the increase in crime with age, the notion of "maximum criminality" in young adulthood (Sutherland 1934, p. 87), and the rapid decrease thereafter. Sutherland described variations in peak age for different crimes and trends in age of criminals over time, and introduced the idea of the professional criminal (who continues his offending later in life) (Fig. 2.3 shows a photograph of Sutherland).

Interestingly, Sutherland, rather than offering bald statistics and a few hypotheses, spent several pages seeking to explain why crime varies with age. There are four principle theories that he covers. First, age influences physical strength. Crime increases during adolescence and youth

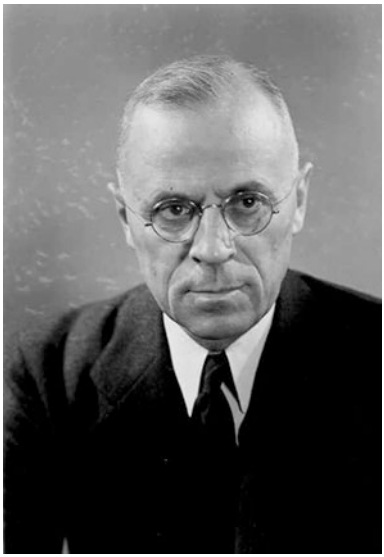

**Fig. 2.3** Photograph of Edwin Sutherland, author of the classic text *Principles of Criminology*. In that text, Sutherland developed his famous theory of Differential Association. But he also discussed the age and crime relationship. Photo courtesy of the American Sociological Association.

adulthood when physical strength and maturity is at its peak. He says, "Children and middle-aged persons refrain from robbery and burglary for the same reason they do not play professional baseball" (p. 90). The idea of age having an effect on physical factors was also noted by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1986), who argued that baseball players also have a similar age-crime curve in terms of performance.

Second, Sutherland introduced the argument that crime increases through adolescence because of "recklessness" which is "characteristic of young adults" (p. 90). He went beyond the statements of Hall to suggest that cognitive capacities are not developed as much as physical strength during this time and this leads to impulsive behavior. In other words, once cognitive maturity is reached, impulses are restrained, and crime declines.

Third, he addressed the argument that variation in crime with age is due to genetics. He drew on Goring's work, which suggested that some criminals, whose criminality was innate, begin earlier, while others who are not so inclined to crime start later. Sutherland dismissed this theory, rightfully pointing out that it cannot account for the decrease in crime after early adulthood. Here Sutherland stated that even those who started early—the seemingly born criminal—"do not persist in crime" (p. 91).

Finally, Sutherland drew on social learning as a way to explain the age-crime curve. Some children start offending early because they live in areas with high rates of delinquents—others do not start until later, when they finally leave their parents' homes and are on their own. Why then do those who learn criminal ways from others eventually stop? Here he provided a rational choice explanation: "[E]xperience with penalties for crimes leads to abandonment of criminal careers in early middle age" (p. 91). This idea anticipated the work of later criminologists who argued that eventually offenders see that crime is not worth the risk, and so they change their ways (Cusson and Pinsonneault 1986; Shover 1996). By the 9th edition of the text (then called *Criminology* and co-authored with Donald R. Cressey) in 1974, Sutherland had not expanded on these ideas. The section on age concludes: "It must be agreed, however, that the sociological theories of crime causation have not been sufficiently demonstrated as to any of these [age and crime] facts" (Sutherland and Cressey 1974, p. 126).

## The Gluecks: Maturation and Behavioral Reform

The work of Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck of Harvard University is key to understanding desistance research. Indeed, some have argued that "in-depth, social scientific study of desistance from crime began with the Gluecks" (Farrall and Maruna 2004, p. 358). In the early to mid-twentieth century, the Gluecks conducted four separate studies of crime and delinquency of enormous import to criminology (for a fascinating history, see Laub and Sampson 1991). Their first study, of 510 men released from the Massachusetts Reformatory, was reported in *500 Criminal Careers* (Glueck and Glueck 1930). The Gluecks followed this sample after additional five years had passed in *Later Criminal Careers* (1937/1966), and after a final five years in *Criminal Careers in Retrospect* (1943/1976) (Fig. 2.4 shows a photograph of the Gluecks).

The second study, *One Thousand Juvenile Delinquents* (1934), centered on boys who were brought to the Boston Juvenile Court. These boys were followed up after 10 years in *Juvenile Delinquents Grown up* (1940). This study differs from the first in that the subjects were initially children (average age 13.5) rather than young adults. In *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* they compared 500 juvenile delinquents to 500 control youth who were not in trouble with the law. This group was followed up twice, at ages 25 and 31 (*Delinquents and Nondelinquents in Perspective*, 1968). Finally, in the fourth study, the Gluecks examined female offenders, in *Five Hundred Delinquent Women* (1934/1965). This study, like *500 Criminal Careers*, followed offenders after their release from the Massachusetts Reformatory.

As one of the first teams to conduct longitudinal studies of crime in the United States (Farrington et al. 1986), the Gluecks' work was in prime position to speak to the relationship between age and crime. Does criminal behavior decline when looking at the same individuals over time rather than a cross-section of arrests or convicts? While the Gluecks found stability in offending (Laub and Sampson 1991), even for the female sample,[4] they were able to show that behavior tended to improve

[4] While on parole, 55% of the women whose behavioral records were complete engaged in delinquency (Glueck and Glueck 1934/1965).

**Fig. 2.4** Photograph of Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck. The Glucks were a husband and wife research team who brought some of the first, and most comprehensive, longitudinal studies of crime to criminology. Photo credit: FayFoto/Boston. http://www.fayfoto.com/

over time. This was true even for disadvantaged youth who were heavily involved in juvenile delinquency.

Because of the wealth of information the Gluecks collected on their samples (Laub and Sampson 1991; Sampson and Laub 1993), they were able to offer more insight than scholars previously had on just how and why crime declines with age. In the first follow-up of the 510 young offenders described in *500 Criminal Careers*, the Gluecks found that 43% of the men experienced a revocation of parole for violations or criminal behavior. The post-parole period was even worse, with 80% of the men whose behavior they had access to committing new crimes within the five years after parole ended. Yet in their next follow-up, five

years later, a different story emerged. The men were by this time on average 35 years of age. Despite a lack of convincing evidence that the men had better lives, their criminal conduct lessened. For example, they found that compared to only 21.5% of the sample who were not delinquent in the first five-year follow-up, over 30% were not delinquent in the next five years (Glueck and Glueck 1937/1966). By the last follow-up, over 41% of the offenders were classified as non-delinquent, and only 32% were persistent criminals (Glueck and Glueck 1943/1976).

With respect to their second longitudinal study of 1,000 juvenile delinquents, the Gluecks found a similar story. For example, in the five years after the sample had been brought to court, 20% were not arrested. However, those who were arrested were arrested more times than previously. At the second follow-up (Glueck and Glueck 1940) when the sample was around age 24, the percentage of men who had not been arrested rose to 34%, with 27% classified as non-delinquents. By the third follow-up period when the sample was around 29 years old, the non-delinquents increased to 30% and the seriousness of offending decreased.

Finally, the Gluecks found that decreases in criminality marked the *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* study as well. The first follow-up of the sample showed that 20% of the delinquents reformed, while during the second follow-up (to age 31), this percentage increased more than two-fold to 50%. Similar to the other studies, they found that of those who continued their criminal ways, the seriousness of their offending decreased. For the non-delinquent control group, the Gluecks found that most "boys continued, as adults, on the straight and narrow path of law-abidingness" (Glueck and Glueck 1968, p. 151).[5]

The Gluecks thus showed conclusively, through these innovative longitudinal studies, that behavior, even of serious offenders, improves over time. They did not, however, use the term 'desistance'. Instead, they referred to this phenomenon as 'maturation,' something that was related to, but not determined by, age. Unfortunately, they did not fully (or clearly) specify what maturation meant, and their theory did not stick.

[5] The Gluecks found some degree of reform for their female sample but did not follow-up these women as long as they did the other three samples.

We will return in a later chapter to the concept of maturation as it relates to crime and desistance, but suffice it to say here that the Gluecks were not the only scholars who felt that the process of growing up was relevant to behavioral reform. For example, Roper (1950) argued that crime was "essentially the solution of personal problems at a childish level of conduct" and that people will, "with proper training, grow out of" this type of behavior (p. 18). This immaturity will naturally diminish but sometimes will persist into adulthood if the individual had a "faulty home training," according to Roper (p. 27). Sellin (1958) and Winick (1962) were among other researchers to use the term 'maturation' to refer to growing out of deviance.

Interestingly, while the Gluecks were contemporaries of Sutherland, and similarly wrote about the decline in crime with age, they were not in agreement with much else. Laub and Sampson (1991) uncovered letters written between the Gluecks and Sutherland which demonstrated an increasing hostility which they attribute to Sutherland's goal of ensuring criminology became a sociological discipline. One point of contention was that the Gluecks were not wedded to any group of explanatory factors and often took a multifactor approach to explaining crime. Sutherland, of course, was in the process of developing his differential association theory which he thought was the ultimate way to explain crime. When Laub and Sampson published their article (1991), they were able to lament that "contemporary researchers rarely, if ever, read their [the Gluecks] original studies" (p. 1403). Thankfully, in large part due to the efforts of Sampson and Laub (see Chapter 4), that is no longer the case.

## Studies of Behavioral Reform in the Mid to Late Twentieth Century

Several important longitudinal studies were conducted in the mid to late twentieth century, each contributing to our understanding of desistance. Two of these include Marvin Wolfgang's study of a Philadelphia birth cohort, and of Lee Robins' follow-up of psychiatric patients in St. Louis.

Wolfgang et al. (1972/1987) traced all boys born in 1945 who lived in Philadelphia between their 10th and 18th birthday. The first study, *Delinquency in a Birth Cohort*, found that crime was concentrated among a small group of chronic offenders. For example, they found that 627 repeat recidivists (five or more offenses) were responsible for 52% of all crimes. While overall, they found increasing criminality up to age 16, their cohort did include a group of about 46% of all delinquents who only committed one offense.

As part of a follow-up study, a random sample of 10% of the boys had been taken, which allowed the research team to examine crime up to age 30 (Wolfgang et al. 1987). This study found that there was strong continuity in offending over time: 45% of the chronic offenders as juveniles remained chronic offenders as adults. Moreover, 82% of the non-offenders as juveniles were classified as such as adults. Important for the purposes of the study of desistance, however, was that crime—for the entire cohort and for the delinquents—tended to peak in adolescence and then decline thereafter. The 'modal' age of delinquent behavior was found to be 16. They also found that the desistance pattern was similar for whites and nonwhites.

Wolfgang et al. (1987) then teased apart the age-crime curve further, offering a more nuanced view of how crime varies over time. This analysis was very much in line with the criminal career work being conducted in the 1980s. First, they examined whether the frequency of offending declined over time. Wolfgang et al. found that from age 10 to age 30, the average number of offenses only ranged from 1.2 to 1.8. This suggests that prevalence (the number of offenders), rather than incidence (number of offenses), declines over time (see Farrington 1986). Second, Wolfgang and colleagues analyzed whether seriousness of offending changed from youth to adulthood. In general, crimes during early adulthood were more serious than juvenile delinquency, and seriousness tended to increase throughout the study.

Chapter 12 in Wolfgang et al. (1987) was authored by Alicia Rand and specifically examined desistance. Note that Rand actually used the term 'desistance,' which none of the previous work discussed in this chapter had done. Rand points out that while the study did find remarkable continuity in offending, desistance was not uncommon.

Drawing on the Glueck's perspective, she argued that 'life events' such as graduating, getting married, and having children may speed up maturation.

Examining a subset of delinquents from the Philadelphia birth cohort, Rand found that marriage had a small effect on desistance such that individuals were less likely to continue crime after marriage; this finding was stronger for whites than nonwhites. Yet, seriousness of offending did not seem to be affected by marriage for whites. Fatherhood and cohabitation had even less of an effect on desistance. With respect to education, those who completed high school were less criminal than those who did not. Strangely, the seriousness of offending was higher for those who graduated, however. College involvement seemed to have very little effect on desistance. Finally, vocational training in the military was associated with increased desistance. Rand's perspective is similar to some of the more recent theories of desistance we will cover in subsequent chapters, which take advantage of more comprehensive data and advanced methods.

Another cohort study conducted in Racine, Wisconsin, by Lyle Shannon found similar results with respect to desistance. Shannon examined three cohorts, including over 6,000 individuals, the earliest of which was born in 1942 and followed to age 32. Data collection began in 1974. Like the Philadelphia study, Shannon discovered that after adolescence, seriousness of offending decreases and mostly stops for the majority. Interestingly, this study showed that nearly every male "had engaged in youthful misbehavior" but nearly 95% had no "felony-level police contact" in adulthood (Shannon 1982, p. 7). Social factors such as marriage and employment seemed to have some, but not a clear, effect on reform. Shannon provided little explanation of the sudden desistance of most of his sample, other than to suggest that juvenile delinquency is normative and that adults may be more "careful" than adolescents (1982, p. 16), and that "most misbehavior ceased as a consequence of the process of socialization into adult roles" (1982, p. 17).

Robins' (1966, 1978) follow-up of 524 child psychiatry patients in St. Louis to adulthood was also an important study able to shed light on deceleration of crime over time. Her 1966 book *Deviant Children Grown Up* was intended to illustrate the progress of patients who had

received therapy for psychiatric problems. However, the design, in which severely antisocial children, followed to adulthood, were compared to 100 "normal" adults, offered much insight on later outcomes of the most at-risk youth. The study was born when a psychiatric clinic closed and the physical files containing records of children were scheduled to be burned. The research team intervened and was given the records which were at that point 10 years old. According to Robins (1966, p. 13), "[t]he clinic records appeared to be a treasure trove of research materials representing a first step in the study of the natural history of the development of adult antisocial behavior." This discovery and subsequent analysis of long-forgotten files would become a theme in later desistance research (Sampson and Laub 1993; Snodgrass 1982).

These children were followed-up when they were around 43 years of age. Robins (1966) reported that, much like earlier studies, there was tremendous continuity in offending. For example, 75% of the juvenile males referred to the clinic for antisocial purposes were arrested as adults, and half of those arrested were arrested three or more times. Nonetheless, "spontaneous improvement" was found for some of the subjects (p. 222). Psychiatrists found that of the children diagnosed with sociopathic personality, 39% had shown improvement at follow-up, and 12% had shown remission (e.g., no antisocial behavior). The "age at improvement" was around 35, but some reformed later in life: "there was no age beyond which improvement seemed impossible" (p. 226).

In her 1978 review of the clinic study as well as two others, Robins found that the conclusions from the 1966 follow-up were confirmed in general. Here she made her now famous statement that "adult antisocial behavior virtually *requires* childhood antisocial behavior [but] most antisocial children do *not* become antisocial adults" (p. 611, emphasis in the original). When allowing the subjects themselves to explain why/how they were able to recover, 41% thought that they had just become disinterested in antisocial behavior. This they "attributed to increasing age or maturity" (Robins 1966, p. 227). Others no longer wanted to risk being incarcerated, and/or found marriage turned them around. After reviewing the data, she concluded that "the positive relations found between social participation with spouse, siblings, friends, and neighbors and improvement makes it appear at least hopeful that supporting the

pressures toward conformity in the sociopath's social environment and trying to prevent his becoming isolated from family, friends, and neighbors may be helping in limiting his antisocial activities" (1966, p. 236). She suggested that interventions aimed at improving the offender's relationships are to be preferred over waiting for old age-related "burn out," "which frequently comes so late in life, if it comes at all, that enormous damage has been done" (1966, p. 236).

## Early Theoretical Accounts of the Age-Crime Curve and Desistance

Up until the late twentieth century, few researchers appear to have taken seriously the need to account for what we now call desistance in theoretical terms. This is despite what has been demonstrated in this chapter—that since the early 1800s, scholars have shown that crime declines with age. This does not mean, however, that no theoretical attempts to account for this phenomenon emerged from this work. Indeed, we have already discussed Quetelet's ideas about increasing rationality and the Gluecks' maturation perspective. Other theoretical criminologists offered ideas about the age-crime curve. While some of these ideas cannot be considered full-blown theories, it is instructive to examine some of these here.

While for the most part, theories born in the early to mid-twentieth century focused on explaining juvenile crime, this does not mean these theorists ignored age. One of the most direct attempts to develop a theory that would not fall apart when confronted with the age-crime curve was offered by David Matza in his *Delinquency and Drift* (1964/1999). In that book, Matza suggested that the theories of crime that existed failed when applied to the post-adolescent years. As he argued, "Most theories of delinquency take no account of maturational reform" (1964/1999, p. 22). Theories to that point were based on the notion of constraint, the idea that delinquents were different qualitatively than non-delinquents. They were strained, or biologically different, and this drove them to committing crimes. Yet, suddenly when they reached adulthood, they stopped. Why? These theories, Matza claimed, created "an embarrassment

of riches" (1964/1999, p. 22). Rather than being different or committed to the idea of delinquency, Matza offered that delinquents drift in and out of conformity with the law. They chose, rather than being driven to, criminal acts. And they can just as easily choose to stop or drift out of it. But that choice is not necessarily born of free will as we commonly think of it. He says, "The image of the delinquent I wish to convey is one of drift; an actor neither compelled nor committed to deeds nor freely choosing them; neither different in any simple or fundamental sense from the law abiding, nor the same" (1964/1999, p. 28). With this 'image' in mind then, it is easier to understand how delinquents escape a life of crime than the image offered by other theories of the time.

Travis Hirschi, known for his two variants of control theory (see the excellent comparison by Claire Taylor (2001)), first came to prominence in criminology with his social bond theory (1969). According to Hirschi, juveniles who are more bonded to their parents, to their teachers, who were involved in more prosocial pursuits, and who believed more in the legitimacy of the law, were less likely to be delinquent. Relying on survey data of adolescents, Hirschi found much support for his theory. While Hirschi's book was called *Causes of Delinquency* and the vast amount of attention following its publication focused on juvenile offending, he did suggest that his theory was better able to account for maturational reform than those pointing to some internal characteristic of the offender (see the discussion in Paternoster and Bachman 2010). How can a theory of social bonds explain desistance? Hirschi argued that it was not 'internalization' of attachments, but the 'attachment itself' that inhibited delinquency. Thus, "[a]ttachment may easily be seen as *variable* over persons and over time for the same person" (Hirschi 1969/2009, p. 88, emphasis in the original).

Paternoster and Bachman (2010) flesh out the implications of these somewhat obscure passages. They argue that "Hirschi's control theory accounted for variations in desistance over time by variations in the strength of the social bond over the life-course. Some offenders desist, and some desist faster when their bonds become strengthened" (p. 125; see also Britt and Rocque 2015). Less than 10 years later, Meisenhelder (1977) interviewed 20 property offenders and found support for Hirschi's contentions. The respondents stated that they were 'going

straight' because of a fear of further incarceration stints, and a desire to leave the lifestyle. However, what allowed the men to be able to make it, were "the actor's acquisition of a meaningful bond to the conventional social order" (Meisenhelder 1977, p. 325). In particular, the security a job offered and support of family proved instrumental. As we will see, this use of social bond theory to account for desistance has become one of the more popular and widely supported perspectives on the decline in crime over the life-course.

In one of the first attempts to understand desistance using a quantitative self-report approach, Rowe and Tittle (1977) found that among four age categories, 15–24, 25–44, 45–64, and 65–93, intentions to commit crime decreased monotonically from young to old age. Examining four separate theoretical perspectives (social integration, morality, fear of punishment, and utility of crime), they found that social integration (relationships with neighbors, marital status, etc.) explained the age-assault relationship but only for those with delinquent peers, and morality explained the age-gambling relationship for those with delinquent peers. Interactions between the theoretical constructs improved explanation but not appreciably. Rowe and Tittle (1977) concluded "that a really satisfying account of the age/crime relationship has eluded us" (p. 234).

Finally, some researchers focused on the notion that crime/delinquency seems to be a juvenile pursuit. Perhaps understanding what it is about adolescence that is conducive to crime may help shed light on why, when they reach adult status, most abandon it. In one account, delinquency was said to be 'reinforced' for juveniles but when adulthood is reached, other behaviors are valued (Trasler 1979). According to Trasler (1979, p. 315), juvenile misbehavior is "a response to a particular set of circumstances and reinforcers—opportunities, frustrations, periods of boredom, social and material rewards—which the individual will not encounter in other circumstances or at other periods of his life." Greenberg (1977) suggested that the unique period of adolescence in modern society leaves youth grasping for status but they are unable to obtain it because of restrictions on what juveniles are able to do (e.g., they must go to school, cannot have full-time employment). To Greenberg (1977, p. 197), "Adolescent theft then occurs as a response to the disjunction between the desire to participate in social

activities with peers and the absence of legitimate sources of funds needed to finance this participation." Upon graduation, full-time employment can be had, and juvenile crime is no longer necessary.

## When Did the Term 'Desistance' Emerge?

Today most criminologists are familiar with the term 'desistance.' They understand that it refers to the process in which crime declines with age over the life-course. It has become, in its own right, a field of study within criminology. The way scholars define and measure desistance is the topic of the next chapter. Here, an examination of when that term was first used is presented.

In general usage, desistance is associated with the phrase 'cease and desist' which, as McNeill and Maruna (2007) explain, means both to stop doing something, and to continue to not do that thing. There appears to be no consensus on when the term 'desistance' came to represent the catch-all phrase for the decline in crime over time in criminology. Farrall and Maruna (2004) suggest that the term first made its way into criminology in the 1970s and 1980s (citing Cusson and Pinsonneault 1986; Mulvey and LaRosa 1986; and Rand 1987). Trasler (1979), used the term 'desistance' and specifically attributed "spontaneous desistance" to Wolfgang, calling it a "convenient term" (Trasler 1979, p. 315). Indeed, an examination of Wolfgang et al.'s (1972/1987) *Delinquency in a Birth Cohort*, described earlier, finds numerous usages of the term, with the first appearing on page 44, and is offered as the converse of persistence. On page 160, desistance is defined as an individual who "committed no further delinquencies through age 17." Thus, what these researchers referred to as desistance may actually have been better represented by 'cessation.'

However, there appear to be earlier instances of the use of the term 'desistance' in criminal justice research. For the most part, it seems as if the term 'desistance' was used in the context of whether or not an individual desisted from his or her criminal attempt and therefore was legally culpable. For example, Ryu (1957, pp. 1198–1199) writes, "Thus in Germany it was held that where a man desists from consummating an

attempted larceny because he was disappointed by the smallness of the value of the property in issue, his desistance nevertheless constitutes a voluntary withdrawal." The earliest instance of this term I have found appeared in a 1905 law review, in which Clarke (1905, p. 198) writes of "desistance from applying the lighted match to the haystack." Much of the use of the term 'desistance' in the twentieth century seems to be in the legal, criminal attempt context.

Some scholars did use the term 'desistance' to refer to the cessation of offending over time. One of Wolfgang's coauthors, Thorsten Sellin, in fact, used the term this way in a 1942 publication on youthful offenders. This may be the first scholarly use of the term 'desistance' in the manner in which it is now meant. In a section entitled "People Become More Law-Abiding as They Grow Older," Sellin writes, "The fact, of course, remains that most offenders sooner or later desist from crime. Even a large proportion-how large no one knows-of serious criminals probably do not commit more than one such violation. If we consider the rapidly declining crime rates of age groups above 30, it is obvious that this decline means that people become more law-abiding as they grow older" (1942, p. 15).

In one study, published by Michael Hakeem attempting to test the Gluecks' predictive methods, the author discusses successful outcomes "from the viewpoint of desistance from, or continuation of, criminal behavior" (1945, p. 88). That is the only use of the term in the paper. Later, Edith Miller Tufts, writing in the *Journal of Negro Education* on delinquency prevention, argues that services available to youth who have been released from incarceration are not sufficient for delinquents "to help them desist from further delinquent activities" (Tufts 1959, p. 334). By the 1970s, with work by Trasler, Wolfgang and colleagues, and Greenberg, the use of the term 'desistance' became more commonplace.

## Summary and Conclusion

While it is certainly true that desistance from crime did not become a serious area of study until the late twentieth century, as this chapter has demonstrated, the decline in crime with age has been documented since the early 1800s. Not only that, but theoretical explanations for why this

may be the case were offered along with empirical assessments. In the 1940s, the Gluecks began to study desistance (or maturation) with more rigor and developed a more detailed perspective for why crime declines with age than had previously been published.

This does not mean that criminology did not address desistance. Several important longitudinal studies in the mid-twentieth century carefully documented what desistance looked like and tried to examine the factors related to behavioral reform. Theorists, also, were not silent on the issue. Matza's theory of delinquency and drift was, in part, developed primarily to be able to account for maturational reform, which the theories of his day, he argued, could not do. Hirschi's social bond theory was also able, in his estimation, to help explain variation in crime over the life-course.

What seems clear is that the term 'desistance,' as criminology now considers it, is a recent addition to the literature. A Google search for 'desistance from crime' turns up nearly 14,000 hits.[6] For the most part, in the past, desistance was used in the legal literature to refer to an aborted attempt at criminal activity. While it is unclear who first coined the term 'desistance' to refer to the life-course decline in crime, some have credited Wolfgang (Trasler 1979). Yet a review of the literature reveals several earlier usages, including Sellin's in 1942. This may very well be the first time a scholar described the cessation of crime in early adulthood as desistance.

Nonetheless, the term was not entirely used as it is today, as the next chapter makes clear. For example, all the usages of desistance through the 1970s (and beyond), do not include the nuance and definitional variation that exists today. In general, desistance or to 'desist' meant to stop offending. Thus, it was used in the sense of termination rather than a process of slowing down or engaging in less serious acts over time.

The next chapter will describe the modern use of the term 'desistance' in criminology, including definitional and measurement issues. The measurement of desistance has changed over time and that has had

[6] Search conducted on July 18, 2015.

consequences for the conclusions that have been drawn in research. Methods of analysis of desistance will also be covered, focusing on more recent studies. These, too, have changed over time. Most recently, as we will see, desistance has come to be viewed as a process that is not marked by any one event or, rather, non-event, but by changes over time that eventually lead to the ending of a criminal career. This means that there may be 'stages'" of desistance, each with unique predictors. As criminologists become more adept at studying the process of desistance, the techniques they use become more advanced, and more information is gained that can be used to prevent crime and relapse.

# 3

# Desistance under the Microscope: The Definition and Measurement of Desistance in Modern Criminology

## Definition and Measurement: Central Aspects of Life and Social Science

Definition is a key part of life. The way we define things can have massive implications for how people are viewed, treated, and live their lives. For example, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, as the new United States was being developed, bitter disputes over representation in the House of Representatives ensued. If representation—e.g., how many representatives each state was allowed—was to be determined by population, who should 'count' in that population?

Even before the American Civil War, the colonies that would become the United States were clearly divided geographically, with the North, focused on industry, having different goals, needs, and wants than the agricultural and slave-holding South. Both sides, therefore, wished to gain an advantage in terms of representation in the US government. This would allow their interests to be taken seriously in the new nation. But here a snag developed. What about the thousands of enslaved African Americans in the Southern states? To count them



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would be to admit to their humanity, but to fail to count them in the population would be to disadvantage those states.

Finkelman (2013) described how one man at the time saw the situation:

> James Wilson of Pennsylvania, who eventually supported the clause, understood the inconsistencies of the Southern demands. He "did not well see on what principle the admission of blacks in the proportion of three fifths could be explained." He asked, if slaves were citizens, "why are they not admitted on an equality with White Citizens?" But if slaves were "admitted as property," it was reasonable to ask, "Then why is not other property admitted into the computation?"

Eventually the North and South came up with the so-called three fifths compromise of 1787, in which slaves would be considered—or defined—as three-fifths of a person when calculating representation in the Congress (Finkelman 2013; Ohline 1971). This form of definition had profound implications for how an entire group of people would be seen and come to see themselves.

As Nobles (2011) notes, this compromise was more about identity and identification, than following the Constitution. "Yet the question remains," Nobles states, "why did the census count race? After all, representation depended on civil status, regardless of whether one was free or slave, taxed or nontaxed. The answer is that racial categories were included because race was, from the beginning, a salient social marker that qualified individuals and groups for membership in the *human* family and US political community" (Nobles 2011, p. 33, emphasis added). In other words, the three-fifths compromise was about defining groups of people as human or less than human, and not about what the law required.

Ann Fausto-Sterling (1993), in her controversial essay on "The Five Sexes," began with another fascinating story of individual definition that influenced an election. In the midst of a close election in the town of Salisbury, Connecticut, a controversy arose. Some felt that a man named Levi Suydam should not be allowed to vote in the election—they claimed he was not entirely a male, and thus should be disqualified as only men at that time—in 1843—could vote. The dispute was put to the test: two physicians

took a look at Suydam and discovered "a penis, an underdeveloped scrotum, and one small testicle" (Reis 2009, p. 34). He was allowed to vote.

This vote was not without consequence. "With Suydam safely in their column the Whigs won the election by a majority of one" (Fausto-Sterling 1993, p. 20). Later, reports emerged that Suydam, in addition to having male genitalia, had what appeared to be a vagina and menstruated. Not only this, but he was attracted to men and—gasp—had an "aversion to physical labor" (Reis 2009, p. 35). This discovery threw the definition of a man in doubt, and could therefore swing an entire election.[1]

Definitions of maturity also have changed across history, with implications for the criminal justice system. Until the late nineteenth century, individuals who had left childhood were not considered different than full-grown adults. Based largely on William Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England, the legal system in the United States considered people as legally responsible after infancy (American Bar Association 2007; Butts and Mitchell 2000). However in the latter part of the nineteenth century, a new developmental period of life began to be recognized, which we now know of as 'adolescence.' As Demos and Demos (1969, p. 632) argued, "The concept of adolescence, as generally understood and applied, did not exist before the last two decades of the nineteenth century." The scientific study of adolescence began, formally, in 1904 with G. Stanley Hall's seminal text, *Adolescence.*

What this meant was that the definition of life stages had changed—no longer was an 11-year old to be considered as legally responsible as a 30-year old. In 1899, the definition, in terms of the justice system, of adulthood formally became 18 with the creation of the first juvenile court in Cook County, Illinois. By the mid-twentieth century, there would be such a juvenile court—and thus formal definition of adults as those over 18, in every state (Butts and Mitchell 2000). Those under that age, by and large, would not be considered as criminals if found guilty of offenses, but as delinquents. They would not be convicted, but adjudicated. Their records would be sealed to the public and, therefore in theory, not impede their ability to obtain an education or job in the future.

[1] Unfortunately, it is unclear what happened to the election upon this discovery.

In these three cases, we see how important the concepts of definition and measurement are. Entire systems can hinge on such decisions, and the ways in which people are viewed and treated depend on definitional criteria. In the world of science, measurement (and definition), which began with administrative efforts, became more sophisticated with mathematics, and matured into a discipline with the work of scientists such as Edward L. Thorndike, who has been called the 'patriarch of educational measurement' (Wright 1997). The twentieth century saw increasing improvements to the science of measurement in fields such as psychology, sociology, and education.

This chapter focuses on definitions and measurement with respect to desistance from crime. Whereas the previous chapter described historical work on behavioral reform (before the term 'desistance' was widely used), this chapter examines more recent work, starting in the late twentieth century. It was in the 1980s that desistance, as part of the criminal career dimensions (e.g., onset, frequency, duration, termination), became a focal point for researchers (Weaver 2016). In addition, this chapter describes methods of analysis used to analyze desistance from crime. As recent work has shown (Lussier et al. 2015), the choice of definition and method of analysis has important implications for the understanding of desistance from crime, and therefore for the policy prescriptions that stem from such work.

The problems inherent in studying desistance have been articulated elsewhere (Kazemian 2007; Laub and Sampson 2001; Maruna 2001). As Maruna (2001) argues, desistance is a tricky variable to capture because it represents the absence, rather than the presence, of an event or behavior that can be observed. Whereas an event can be counted, an absence means that the behavior or event has *not* occurred over a set period of time. But how long is long enough? Laub and Sampson (2001) further complicate matters by questioning whether a person who has only committed one crime and then 'gone straight' can truly be considered a desister. Is desistance something that can only be considered as having occurred if *no* more deviant/antisocial acts ensue? Kazemian (2007) helpfully drew up a list of varying operational definitions (measurement strategies) of desistance used in the literature (see Table 3.1). To this list, I've added a few more recent examples.

In a footnote, Laub and Sampson (2001, p. 8) humorously recounted that a journal editor told them that 'desistance' "was not a word" and so could

**Table 3.1** Definitions of desistance in the criminological literature

| *Citation* | *Measure/Definition of Desistance* |
|---|---|
| Farrington and Hawkins (1991) | Conviction at age 21 but not between ages 21 and 32 |
| Loeber et al. (1991) | Non-offending throughout a period of less than a year |
| Shover and Thompson (1992) | No arrests in the 36 months following release from prison |
| Sampson and Laub (1993) | Juvenile delinquents who were not arrested as adults |
| Farrington and Wikström (1994) | Age at the last officially recorded offense up to age 25 |
| Mischkowitz (1994) | Last conviction having occurred before age 31 and lack of conviction or incarceration for at least 10 years |
| Pezzin (1995) | Individuals who reported having committed offenses in the past but who did not report any criminal income in 1979 |
| Uggen and Kruttschnitt (1998) | Behavioral desistance: Absence of self-reported illegal earnings during a 3-year follow-up period |
| Warr (1998) | Individuals who did not report having committed any offenses in the past year |
| Kruttschnitt et al. (2000) | Absence of new officially recorded offenses or probation violation throughout a 2-year period |
| Haggard et al. (2001) | During the follow-up period, no reconviction in the previous 10 years (at least) |
| Maruna (2001) | Individuals who identified themselves as long-term habitual offenders, who claimed that they would not be committing offenses in the future, and who reported at least 1 year of crime-free behavior |
| Maruna et al. (2002) | Absence of reconviction after release from prison during a 10-year window |
| Laub and Sampson (2003) | Absence of arrest (follow-up to age 70) |
| Stouthamer-Loeber et al. (2004) | Persistent serious delinquents in adolescence and who did not commit serious delinquency during early adulthood (ages 20–25) |
| Farrall and Calverly (2006) | Gradual slowing down of offending, self-identified and measured through official records |
| LeBel et al. (2008) | Whether the offender was reconvicted or reimprisoned within a 10 year follow-up |
| Aaltonen (2016) | Three definitions: return to prison, reconviction, or new fine in 3-year follow-up |

*Source*: Kazemian 2007, with additions

not use it in their paper. If you bring this up at your next family Thanksgiving dinner, I'm sure your aunts and uncles will agree with this editor—'desistance' is a somewhat idiosyncratic word. Unfortunately 'desistance' remains cloudy, even in the scholarly literature. Because of the lack of clear, consistent definitions and measurement strategies, many ambiguities persist in the literature and several issues must be examined when seeking to make sense of this literature. This chapter provides an overview of the definition and measurement of desistance as well as these issues. First, since researchers came to take desistance seriously from aggregate crime/arrest curves, a discussion of what those data imply seems important.

## The Age-Crime Curve and Desistance: What Does It Tell Us?

In the last chapter, historical work on the decrease in crime/offending over the life span (particularly after adolescence) was documented. Since the time of Adolphe Quetelet in the early nineteenth century, aggregate crime statistics showed a peak in active offenders around age 20 and a decline thereafter. While longitudinal studies in the twentieth century seemed to confirm that the decrease in crime was not an artifact of aggregate data, it remains somewhat unclear whether individual crime trajectories mirror the aggregate age-crime pattern. Most recent research in fact indicates that it does not, at least not for all offenders.

The issue here revolves around what the criminal career scholars in the 1980s denoted as incidence and prevalence (Blumstein et al. 1986). Incidence refers to the number of crimes an *individual* offender commits, while prevalence refers to the number of *offenders* who are active at any given time. Criminal career researchers have also referred to incidence as frequency or lambda, denoted by the Greek term λ. To see why this distinction matters for understanding the age-crime curve, refer to Moffitt's (1993) figure, (Fig. 3.1) below. As she illustrates so cleverly, the aggregate age-crime curve may represent not one process for all offenders but actually mask two (or more) groups. In her theoretical scheme, she argues that the aggregate age-crime curve, which shows a peak in offending and a relatively smooth decrease thereafter, would be found even if there

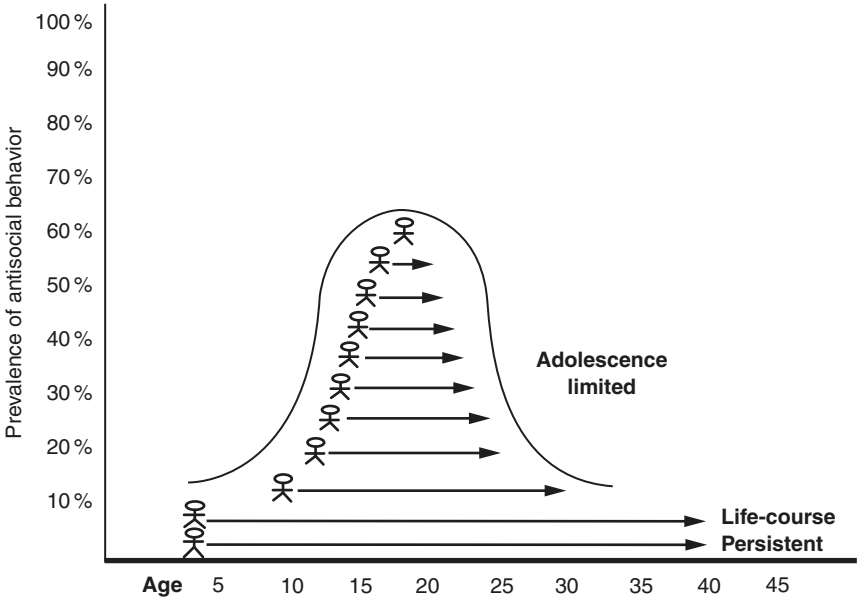


**Fig. 3.1** Moffitt's theoretical taxonomy

*Source*: Moffitt, 1993, p. 677. Permission courtesy of the American Psychological Association

exists a group of persisting offenders. The smooth deceleration of offending, therefore, may not represent the overall process for all offenders but rather the fact that some stop offending immediately after adolescence (what she calls 'adolescence-limited' offenders) and some continue on thereafter (what she calls 'life-course persistent' offenders).

In David Farrington's 1986 article on age and crime, he made this distinction as well. According to Farrington, "Age-crime curves for individuals do not resemble the aggregate curve since incidence does not change consistently between the onset and the termination of criminal careers" (Farrington 1986, p. 189). As he explained, the age-crime curve mostly reflects a decrease in prevalence—that is, the proportion of folks who are actively committing crimes—rather than incidence. Farrington also describes the aggregate age-crime curve as 'unimodal,' meaning there is only one peak for all involved. The aggregate curve not only masks

differences between individuals and aggregate snapshot figures, but also fails to uncover 'period' from 'cohort' from 'age' effects.

Briefly, period effects refer to things that occur (e.g., the depression) that affect people of all ages; cohort effects refer to things that uniquely impact a group of people with something in common (e.g., those born during the civil rights movement), and age effects are changes that occur over time associated with aging (e.g., physical decline, maturity) (see Yang and Land 2008). All of these things potentially contribute to aggregate distributions of crime and can only be disentangled with particular research designs such as multi-cohort, longitudinal studies (Blumstein et al. 1988).

This discussion illustrates the *first lesson* of desistance research in terms of definitions: the importance of research design. Can we learn about what the causes of desistance are, and what desistance looks like from aggregate, cross-sectional research? If one assumes that the aggregate crime curve does not represent individual pathways well, and that period, age, and cohort effects exist, the answer is no. Some scholars, however, argue that the age-crime curve is so persistent and so similar across time and place, that longitudinal research is simply unnecessary. The main proponents of this perspective are Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) who argued in their well-known "*Age and the Explanation of Crime*" article (Hirschi and Gottfredson 1983) that the age-crime curve is invariant and social factors (available to researchers) cannot explain it—it just is what it is. This perspective will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

It should be noted that despite decades of longitudinal research, whether the aggregate age-crime curve reflects prevalence or incidence remains unclear. Farrington (1986, p. 219) asserted that "[t]he limited amount of present knowledge, then, suggests that the peak in the crime rate in the teenage years reflects a peak in prevalence and that incidence does not vary consistently with age." To that point, much research had accumulated showing that while prevalence did decline, for those who remained active, there appeared to be a rather consistent level of offending (Blumstein and Cohen 1979; Wolfgang et al. 1972/1987). While some research continues to support this idea (Loeber et al. 2012a), other research has shown that frequency seems to decline over time, even for those actively involved in crime (Laub and Sampson 2003).

The implications of this distinction cannot be understated from a desistance perspective. The notion that the well-known age-crime curve reflects only a change in prevalence rather than a gradual decline in crime for most offenders suggests that desistance may be spontaneous, something that happens all at once rather than as a more plodding process. After all, if frequency of offending remains constant during one's active career, then termination of offending would not seem to be the culmination of a process in which offenders slow down and eventually desist. On the other hand, if frequency, or lambda, also decreases over time, then desistance would be best represented as a gradual process.

One final note regarding the age-crime curve and what it reflects. In a fascinating overview of age and crime, Chester Britt (Forthcoming) makes the case that the age-crime curve and the age distribution of crime are distinct. The age-crime curve is the "graphical representation of a crime rate or count by age" (p. 2) whereas the age distribution of crime is "fundamentally a histogram of crimes committed by age and so only includes those individuals with at least 1 crime during the measurement period" (p. 3). The age-crime curve is meaningful for understanding why crime varies by age whereas the age distribution of crime helps us see why particular ages are more crime-prone than others and is more useful for examinations of the shape of the distribution of age and crime. As Britt (Forthcoming) points out, however, most researchers use the phrase 'age-crime curve' to mean both things, which is likely a function of Hirschi and Gottfredson's (1983) conflation of the two concepts.

## A Collection of Definitions of Desistance

Before turning to how criminologists have empirically analyzed desistance from crime, a brief, non-comprehensive assessment of how they have defined desistance is offered here. As King (2014) points out, much of the desistance literature has conceptualized the term as referring to the ending of a criminal career (see also Maruna 2001; Weaver 2016). Thus, desistance has been viewed as an end state or an event (see Table. 3.1). This is not to suggest that the definition and meaning

of desistance is a settled issue in criminology. Laub and Sampson (2001), who offered what remains to-date the premier overview of desistance from crime, wrote that the definition of desistance remains unclear. However, they argued that how desistance is defined must be driven by the questions researchers are trying to answer. To them, "[d]eveloping a definition of desistance for the sake of having a definition is not worth the effort" (p. 8).

Yet it seems important, since desistance has now arguably become a primary focus of research, to develop a general understanding of what it is and how it has been articulated. This is especially true for work that seeks to make sense of desistance research and what to conclude from the findings of these studies. Having a definition that is widely accepted may be a profitable move for scholars to make, so that the literature may be more easily synthesized.

As it stands, it is not particularly helpful that due to the differences in measurement and definition of studies, "it is difficult to draw empirical generalizations from the growing literature on desistance from crime" (Uggen and Massoglia 2003, pp. 316–317; see also; Kazemian 2007). Furthermore, it appears that many researchers take the concept/definition of desistance for granted, never fleshing out their view of desistance. For example, as detailed in the previous chapter, the first criminological work to use the term 'desistance' never offered a formal definition but seemed to take it for granted that it referred to the ending of a criminal career (see also Laub and Sampson 2001). In part this is understandable since there is not a standard definition of desistance and researchers continue to struggle to determine whether crime-free periods are indicators of desistance or "predictable lulls" (Maruna et al. 2004b, p. 272).

In this section, I discuss descriptive definitions of desistance (e.g., conceptualizations), rather than measurement definitions (or what might be called operational definitions). In other words, what do researchers view desistance as representing? This definition then drives how they measure the phenomenon (as a crime-free period of two months, two years, and so on). This is akin to moving from conceptualization to operational definition (here referred to as measurement).

Definitions or conceptualizations of desistance have evolved over time. As King (2014) tells us, early work saw desistance as the end state in which offenders had stopped committing crimes. Feld and Straus (1989), writing about domestic violence, stated that "[d]esistance refers to the cessation of criminal behavior" (p. 145). Shover, in his *Great Pretenders* (1996), defined desistance as "the voluntary termination of serious criminal participation" (p. 121). Baskin and Sommers (1998) considered the women in their study to have desisted when they had "successfully exited the social world of violence, crime, and drugs" (p. 127). More recent researchers have viewed desistance as the changes and developments that precede termination of offending. For example, Laub and Sampson (2001) defined desistance as "the causal process that supports the termination of offending" (p. 11). Mulvey and colleagues (2004, p. 219) argued that "[d]esistance is a decline over time in some behavior of interest." Loeber and LeBlanc (1990, p. 382) suggested that desistance involves several things at once, not solely a decreasing of offending rates. To them, desistance is defined by "a slowing down in the frequency of offending (deceleration), a reduction in its variety (specialization), and a reduction in its seriousness (de-escalation)."

The **second lesson** of desistance research is that the way one defines desistance will guide how they study it and what they find. As Laub and Sampson (2001) argue, the definition of desistance must be connected to one's research question. It seems logical to state that if one defines desistance as the end of a criminal career, the way they seek to measure that will differ from a researcher who wishes to examine the process of decline in criminal behavior. Similarly, with respect to operational definitions, the way desistance is measured will (a) be constricted by the availability of data and (b) influence any conclusions drawn from the data.

## Expanding the Definition and Measurement of Desistance

Another key for determining and defining desistance is whether one is relying on official (e.g., arrest) records, or self-reports. Uggen and Kruttschnitt (1998) recognized this distinction, referring to the

former as official desistance and the latter as behavioral desistance. If studies rely on arrest or conviction records to make assertions about when desistance occurs and why it happens, but offending behavior continues beyond the last arrest/conviction, the conclusions based on that research could be misleading. Researchers have understood that these two definitions of desistance are not necessarily equivalent, referring to the measurement of an individual's last arrest as the end of a criminal career when the offender is still active as 'false desistance' (Bushway et al. 2001; Kazemian 2007). Blumstein et al. (1982) argued that

> [t]he most direct approach to estimating the length of criminal careers would be to follow individual offenders longitudinally, and note the time elapsed from start to end of a career. Such a longitudinal approach, however, is not very well suited to criminal-career research. To begin with, there is considerable ambiguity in identifying the exact start and end of a criminal career. Since the crimes of an offender are rarely observed directly, they cannot be used to mark the start and end of a criminal career. Using the time between the first and last arrest as a proxy is likely to understate career length because it ignores undetected criminal activity before and after these arrests (p. 12).

As Lila Kazemian (2007) has noted, however, this problem of 'false' desistance arising from failure to capture the last offense is not only germane to studies relying on official records. Longitudinal studies which do not follow the individual until death (e.g., virtually *all* longitudinal studies that include criminal behavior) are also at risk. If a study ends when the individuals turn 25, say, then all the criminal behavior they commit after that age will go unrecorded and desistance may be falsely attributed to particular subjects. We saw this issue arise with the study of the Jack-Roller who had appeared to have desisted in his early 20s. When John Snodgrass found the Jack-Roller years later, it was discovered that he in fact had not desisted then. More recently, Farrington and colleagues (2014) showed empirically that self-reported desistance and 'official' desistance do not coincide and so research relying on one or the other strategy is likely to come

to divergent conclusions. Specifically, these researchers found that desistance occurred earlier when relying on self-reports; when looking at convictions, though, desistance occurred at older ages (with the exceptions of work theft and fraud). This may be considered the *third lesson* of desistance research: whether one uses self-reports or official records matters.

## Steps toward Desistance: Stages of Behavioral Reform

In terms of defining desistance, at least two stages have been identified in the literature. Laub and Sampson (2001) make a distinction between cessation or termination, and desistance, which is what they view as the cause of termination. In this scheme then, desistance is seen as the independent variable predicting/explaining termination. One of the more interesting approaches views desistance as comprising two types: primary and secondary. Maruna and Farrall (2004; see also Maruna et al. 2004) use this distinction, drawn from Edwin Lemert's classic definition of deviance which sees primary deviance as initial exploratory antisocial behavior and secondary deviance as antisocial behavior that comes as a result of being labeled as a delinquent (Lemert 1951). To Maruna and Farrall, primary desistance represents the initial process of behavioral change, in which offenders try on the hat of conformity. Because of the nature of making such a consequential shift, the desistance process is often characterized by fits and starts and so primary desistance is often temporary. The real action is with secondary desistance, which is based on a new prosocial identity. In Maruna and colleagues' (2004b) words:

> Primary desistance would take the term desistance at its most basic and literal level to refer to any lull or crime-free gap in the course of a criminal career. Because every deviant experiences a countless number of such pauses in the course of a criminal career, primary desistance would not be a matter of much theoretical interest. The focus of desistance research, instead, would be on secondary desistance: the movement from the behavior of non-offending to the assumption of the role or identity of a "changed person." In secondary desistance,

> crime not only stops, but "existing roles become disrupted" and a "reorganization based upon a new role or roles will occur" (p. 274; citations omitted).

Some researchers have referred to this as early and late desistance. Deidre Healy, in her study of desistance among Irish offenders, focused on what she called early stages of desistance (Healy 2010). She argued this is an important phase to examine in order to understand how longer-term desistance may be facilitated. While Maruna et al. (2004a) have made the point that because primary desistance may be coincidental and not represent a move toward actual cessation of crime, secondary desistance should be the focus of research, others have argued (along with Healy) that primary desistance may tell us about the foreground or scaffolding upon which secondary desistance may be built stably (see Healy and O'Donnell 2008; King 2014).

In Sommers et al.'s (1994) work examining female criminals, three stages of desistance were identified. First, the offender has an experience or internal change of heart that convinces them it's time to stop. These experiences can include 'hitting rock bottom' or a change in how one views the pains of prison. Second, the offender makes it known that they are done with 'the life.' Sommers and colleagues refer to this as the discontinuance stage. Finally, the maintenance stage emerges in which the ex-offender seeks to build protections against relapse. These practices include getting involved in treatment, associating with prosocial peers rather than deviant ones, and engaging in prosocial activities.

What this two or three-pronged approach to understanding desistance implies is that ceasing offending is not likely to be a sudden event (though some researchers have claimed desistance does result abruptly, perhaps after a traumatic event—see Cusson and Pinsonneault 1986; Shover 1996). In other words, desistance is something that happens over time, as a process. It is therefore that process that should be studied, rather than the eventual end point of offending.

The understanding of desistance as a process or something that unfolds gradually allows researchers to better understand why it happens. Laub and Sampson (2001) refer to Vaughn's (1986) theory

of 'decoupling' to illustrate why a focus on the end point (e.g., termination) of a criminal career misses the boat. Vaughn (1986) wrote about the process of ending romantic relationships, which she argued occurs "through a series of fairly predictable stages" (Collins 1986), much like desistance. Simply examining when a couple broke-up or examining differences between those who have uncoupled and those still in relationships would certainly not be as informative as understanding what had changed in the weeks, months, and years prior to the break-up. The same, argue Laub and Sampson, applies to desistance. Thus, another—*the fourth*—*lesson* of desistance research: if desistance is a process, binary dependent variables may not capture the phenomenon well.

## Analytical/Measurement Issues: Desistance as a Process

Viewing desistance as a process clarifies some definitional aspects but leads to confusion in others. In terms of clarity, there is the ever-present issue of how long a follow-up period is necessary to determine whether desistance has actually occurred. In the program evaluation or recidivism world, this is less of a problem, because one-, two-, and three-year follow-ups are the norm. This is because of the finding that two thirds of offenders will be rearrested within three years (Petersilia 2003). Thus there is little need in the re-entry/program evaluation literature to extend projects beyond that three-year mark.

With desistance, we have a different situation. As Farrington (1992) reminded us, we can never really know if a person has desisted after two or three years. In fact, as he states, "[s]trictly speaking, it is not until people die that we can be 100 per cent certain that they have desisted from offending" (p. 523). Viewing desistance as a process means that while a longer length of time is desirable, analyses can focus on decreases or changes in crime, rather than a binary (yes/no) termination of crime outcome.

The researchers who have contributed the most to our *empirical* understanding of desistance from crime as a process are several scholars

who were summer fellows at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. The group studied violent crime over the life-course and began working on desistance from crime together. Many of the scholars were, at the time, early in their careers and have become leaders in criminology. They include: Shawn Bushway of the State University of New York at Albany; Alex Piquero of the University of Dallas, Texas; Lisa Broidy of the University of New Mexico; Elizabeth Cauffman of the University of California Irvine; and Paul Mazerolle of Griffith University.

In 2001, they published the culmination of that work, *An Empirical Framework for Studying Desistance as a Process,* where they argued that while the field was moving toward defining desistance as a process, analytically, not much progress had been made. They suggested that Fagan (1989) was the first researcher to explicitly view desistance as a process that is distinct from termination. Yet since that time, most criminological work still measured desistance as a binary outcome. However, if the period between last offense and the present time is what is of interest for researchers, and a dichotomous (offended or not) outcome is not useful, what then becomes the dependent variable?

Bushway and colleagues argued that changes in 'offending rate' or what criminal career scholars called 'frequency,' should be the focus. In a sense, this was a desistance research 'game-changer.' Now examining *changes* in offending frequency (or seriousness) would be considered desistance research. And this desistance research is able to be much more informative than previous research on the predictors of whether someone was crime free for five years or not. For example, researchers can model the desistance process over time. Is it monotonic? Zig-zag? Are there lulls, fits, and starts? The best way to capture changes in the rate of offending (which Bushway and colleagues suggested is a proxy for criminality) is, according to the group, a Poisson-based statistical model, which can describe counts of crime over time. They then offered their empirically informed definition of desistance as "the process of reduction in the rate of offending . . . from a nonzero level to a stable rate empirically indistinguishable from zero" (Bushway et al. 2001, p. 500).

Bushway's group was the first to recommend a semi-parametric group-based approach to the analysis of desistance. Introduced by

Nagin and Land (1993), what is more typically referred to as the 'trajectory method' models crime over time according to age parameters and assigns individuals to groups based on the shape of the trajectory. The authors recreated trajectory analyses from what they describe as the first quantitative paper to use group-based models to examine desistance (Laub et al. 1998). This figure is shown below (Fig. 3.2). As can be seen, four groups of offenders were found (with each decreasing crime after the late 20s, but at different rates and arrival time at desistance).

Since Bushway and colleague's (2001) first steps toward analyzing desistance as a process, many varying approaches have been taken. For example, examining the relationship of adult social bonds to desistance, Savolainen (2009) used negative binomial models (another count style regression technique) over six years. Ray Paternoster and Shawn Bushway, who have recently developed a unique identity-based

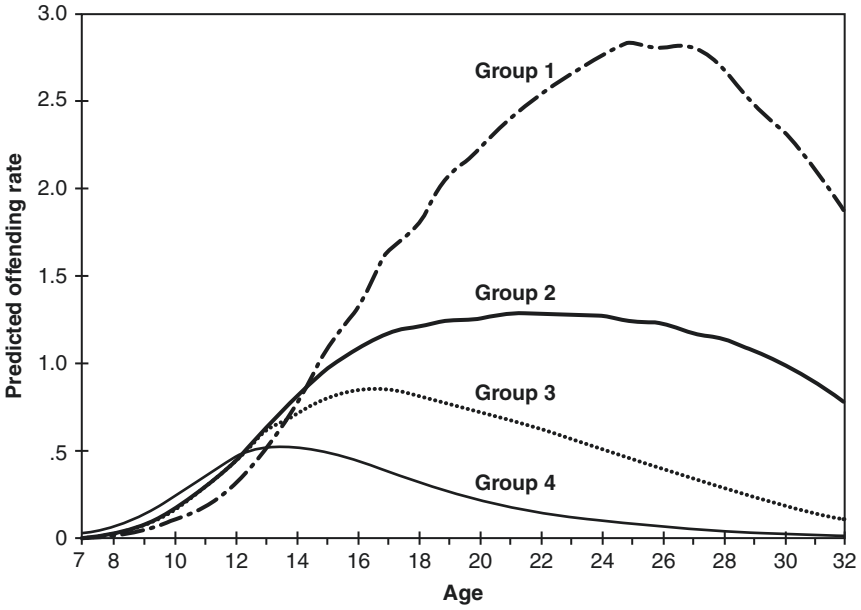


**Fig. 3.2** Trajectories of crime over time for various groups

*Source*: Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998. Figure reprinted with permission from the American Sociological Association and John H. Laub

theory of desistance (described in the next chapter), offered an interesting way to analyze desistance quantitatively. These theorists argued that desistance could be modeled using a time-series approach, where identity changes are captured as what is known as a structural break. They explain (Paternoster and Bushway 2009):

> Testing for an identity theory using time series methods would need to begin by examining whether the data can be described as a time series with a structural break perhaps using the Quandt-Andrews test statistics for structural breaks. The Quandt-Andrews test would allow us to test for a structural break, and identify the most likely break point. The Quandt-Andrews test is based on a Chow test, which estimates a regression model on two subsamples and then uses an F-test to determine if the coefficients are different in the two models. The Quandt-Andrews test expands Chow by eliminating the need to know the correct break point. The approach involves conducting the test in all possible subsets, in effect searching for the "best possible" break point (p. 1146).

At this point, one would be able to determine whether identities *did* change, thus influencing crime trends. They use the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development to show how this could be done, but few criminologists seem to have followed suit as of yet.

Finally, others have used multilevel approaches to examine desistance as a process. Bersani et al. (2009) used Generalized Hierarchical Linear Modeling with a Bernoulli estimation (which is used for dichotomous variables). In other words, they modeled changes in whether or not the offender was active (incidence) over time. Rocque, Posick, and Paternoster (2016a), in their study of the relationship between identity change and desistance, used empirical growth curves (a form of multilevel model), which allowed an assessment of changes in crime over time (see also Laub and Sampson 2003; Hussong et al. 2004). Decreases in criminal behavior were taken as evidence of desistance. Rather than representing desistance, this method may just be representing decreases in crime; however, it is likely decreases in crime over time capture some part of the *process* of desistance. This approach follows the pathbreaking work of Horney et al. (1995) who demonstrated how to examine

offending over time as a function of time-varying (e.g., jobs, marriage) and time-constant (e.g., offending history) variables. In other words, these models allow one to determine whether *changes* in particular states are associated with changes in offending.

## Quantitative vs. Qualitative Research and Desistance

To this point, the discussion about the definition, measurement, and analysis of desistance from crime has focused on quantitative assessments. That is, particularly with respect to studying desistance, the literature reviewed here has taken a *numerical* approach. Should desistance be considered a binary variable? What about a model to examine changes in offending frequencies over time? These questions must necessarily be answered using numbers or quantitative data. Yet an equally important amount of research has been conducted using narrative accounts or in-depth interviews with offenders—this approach is referred to as qualitative. According to King (2014) the literature includes at least three major methodologies used to examine desistance, the first two of which (using official records or surveys) are quantitative. The last method is qualitative and used to discover offenders' views on how they are able to break away from crime and provide "detailed insight into the processes and challenges associated with desistance" (King 2014, p. 73).

Of course many projects do not rely solely on quantitative or qualitative designs. For example in the Glueck's early longitudinal research, they utilized both official records and interviews with offenders. Sampson and Laub (1993), who drew on the Gluecks' (Glueck and Glueck 1950) *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* study, made use of both of these kinds of data. Later, Laub and Sampson (2003) also used official records as well as interviews with a subset of the original delinquents when they had reached their 70s. Farrall and Calverly (2006) similarly used a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to examine desistance in their probation sample. This type of mixed methods approach has the distinct benefit of allowing the researcher to compare how different approaches influence findings as well as to ask different kinds of

questions. Quantitative approaches are best suited for 'why' sorts of questions (why did Gerry desist? What predicted that desistance?), whereas qualitative approaches are best suited to 'how' types of questions (how did Gerry desist, what did it look like?). As Shadd Maruna points out (2010), both quantitative and qualitative methods have strengths and weaknesses, which are often complementary (e.g., qualitative approaches allow a thick and rich, nuanced description of a phenomenon whereas quantitative approaches are often quicker and—at least on the surface—more objective). Ideally, research projects would have both types of data, but often, they lean toward one or the other.

So how has more qualitative-oriented research differed in the area of desistance? First, with respect to definitions of desistance, unless one is relying on survey or official data to determine the last offense, the researcher must ask the offender if he or she is desisting or has desisted. Again, Maruna's work is instructive here. In his *Making Good*, he identified 30 desisters and 20 persisters. However, unlike quantitative approaches, where desisters are identified using statistical models or trajectories, Maruna relied on the offenders' own accounts of their plans for the future. Those who claimed they would, in all likelihood, continue to commit offenses were considered active offenders. Maruna, however, went 'both ways' in his definition or measurement of desistance. Not only were desisters defined as having no plans to further engage in crime, they had to have been crime free for a year. He obtained this information from interviews with his sample members.

Other qualitative desistance research has measured or defined desistance in a similar manner. Giordano et al. (2002) in their influential study showed how qualitative methods may uncover different information than quantitative models, with respect to desistance. After a series of regressions were conducted showing little effect of social bonds (family attachment, job stability) on self-reported or official criminal behavior, they then turned to in-depth narrative accounts. Those who considered themselves to be doing better relative to an earlier (1982) interview and who wanted to change were classified as desisters. In the narrative component of this study, however, definitions and classifications were less emphasized than for the quantitative part. In later work (Giordano

et al. 2007, 2008), they developed quantitative classifications of desisters, persisters, and unstables. Desisters were those who had not committed crimes at the two adult follow-ups.

Healy (2010) took a similar approach, considering those without a new offense in the last month on the primary desistance path and those without an offense in the last year on the secondary desistance path. These classifications were then used in her qualitative interviews and also in her quantitative analyses of those persisting in and desisting from offending.

In their informative overview of qualitative research on desistance, Veysey et al. (2013), argued that many of these studies arrive at similar conclusions. Their analysis included 29 separate studies (some of which have been discussed in this chapter). While most research on desistance has utilized longitudinal quantitative methods, Veysey and colleagues argue that qualitative studies are better suited to understand the mechanisms by which correlates of desistance lead to behavioral reform. In this sense, then, qualitative research is needed to understand the *process* of desistance, not just when it occurred.

Importantly, Vesey and colleagues provide a table with a description of each of the 29 qualitative studies of desistance they examined. In that table is a definition of desistance used by the researchers (often the definition was really a measurement or operational definition in the studies). Several studies utilized quantitative measurements of desistance (e.g., crime-free in the last 10 months), but many used definitions that are more subjective. For example, five studies used some variation of self-definition of being 'successful' or evidencing a desire to quit crime. Gadd and Farrall (2004) considered offenders to be desisting if they "showed some signs of being in the process of desisting from crime" (p. 132). Five of these studies did not define desistance. Apparently these studies agreed with Laub and Sampson (2001, p. 4) that with desistance, "you know it when you see it."

Thus the measurement of desistance for primarily qualitative research is somewhat of a mixed bag. In certain studies, a quantitative approach is used to define or measure desistance. In others, the offenders are asked themselves if they are desisting. Thus, qualitative research has been able to contribute to our understanding of desistance

in unique ways, by examining the lived experience of those in the process of changing their lives. However, this strategy also provides its own drawbacks. For example, Laub and Sampson (2003) argue that it is possible, maybe even probable for some, to leave a life of crime without even knowing it. This argument is drawn from Becker's (1960) notion of side-bets, in which one commits to a line of action without much intentionality. A man who isn't thinking about the future, or whether he wants to continue engaging in crime, may meet a woman, begin spending more time with her, eventually marry her and suddenly realize he's no longer in 'the life.' He has cut himself off from previous bad influences, including criminal peers, and perhaps gotten himself a job. But he was not aware of it nor was it a consequence of any intentionality on his part. Laub and Sampson (2003) refer to this as 'desistance by default.' It would be difficult to study desistance allowing subjects to self-classify if some or many are not aware it is happening.

Another drawback of using subjective assessments of one's position in his or her criminal career for measurement or definitions is that the researcher could be misled. In other words, not only may the subject not be aware that he or she is desisting, they may just get it wrong, or be relying on wishful thinking. Yet Maruna (2001), rather than worrying he was being 'duped' argued that researchers using official statistics are just as likely to be misled as those relying on self-reports. A mixed-method approach therefore, seems ideal.

The *fifth and final lesson* of desistance research, with regards to definition and measurement issues, is that qualitative research is able to define desistance differently than quantitative research. Thus the information gleaned from both approaches is likely to shed light on different aspects of desistance. As an example, quantitative research may identify a start and end point of a criminal career using arrest records. It then may find that marriage is highly correlated with desistance. It cannot go much further than that. Qualitative research may identify subjects who feel they are making a change in their lives. This type of research design, catching people 'in the act' of desistance, may then uncover what it is about marriage that is helping to instill that change.

## Consequences of a Lack of Measurement/ Analytic Agreement

As a result of the many varying definitions, choices of measurement, and analytical procedures to empirically examine desistance, a vast array of conclusions have been arrived at and little consensus exists. That is not to say that certain findings are not considered well supported; it is only to say that with different methods come different sets of 'facts.' These include the timing of desistance and the explanatory factors most able to advance our understanding of the process. This conclusion is what all the 'lessons' of desistance research touched on in this chapter have been building to.

Few researchers have compared different measurement or definitional approaches to desistance. Bushway and colleagues (2003) examined whether what they called static definitions (here akin to defining desistance as an event or binary variable) produced different findings from dynamic (process-oriented) approaches. To measure desistance using a binary or static approach, Bushway and colleagues counted those who offended prior to age 18 but not after (up to age 23) as desisters. To measure desistance using a process-based approach, they utilized group-based trajectory methods. The results showed that "the two methods identify different proportions of the sample as desistors, [and] they also identify different people as desistors" (p. 146). For example, the binary/static approach identified 27.6% of the sample as desistors. The trajectory approach found that about 8.4% of the sample followed the classic 'bell-shaped' desistance curve. However, many of the groups they plotted decreased criminal behavior over time, even the 'high-level chronic offenders,' who did demonstrate a slight uptick in offending after age 20.

Bushway, along with colleagues Robert Brame and Ray Paternoster (Brame, Bushway, & Paternoster 2003), examined the prevalence of desistance using different methods. Using the binary/static method, they found that 61.2% of the 1958 Philadelphia Birth Cohort sample had desisted (defined as having offended prior to age 18 but not after). They then model desistance using Poisson processes, two geometric

distribution processes, and a split population method. The technical details are not necessary here but in brief: the difference between the Poisson, and the geometric and split population techniques is that the latter does not assume everyone continues to offend. Brame and colleagues (2003) found that a split population Poisson model was the most appropriate for the data, and using that model, the estimate of the prevalence of desistance was 36.6%—much lower than for the static approach.

In a recent analysis, Lussier and colleagues (2015) empirically demonstrated the consequences of different (quantitative) operational definitions of desistance. They compared and contrasted four measurement and analytical approaches to desistance. The first, similar to Bushway and colleagues (2003), was a binary measure of remaining crime-free into adulthood. The second utilized group-based models, discussed above, to examine desistance trajectories. The third approach modeled desistance as a process to determine whether offending increased, decreased, or stayed the same. Finally, they examined desistance using a survival model to analyze desistance in probabilistic terms (survival models provide survival probabilities at different stages of life). After discovering some differences across the four measurement strategies, they argued that each was able to capture some part of the process of desistance and should be combined for a more comprehensive way to examine desistance in the future.

Thus, the conceptualization and definition of desistance matters as does the way desistance is measured (operationally defined) in research. This is why a clear definition of desistance is important for the field of criminology. How can we make any sense of the desistance phenomenon if there remains a lack of clarity around how to define and measure it? As this section has shown, a synthesis of studies on desistance may be combining definitions that treat desistance in very different ways. At the very least, researchers need to be aware of the differences between qualitative and quantitative desistance work, as well as the differences within quantitative studies to make any coherent claims about when and why desistance occurs.

The best approach to defining desistance is arguably one that does not rely on pre-specified time limits (e.g., crime free after 10 years), or dichotomizes what seems to be a process. Thus the definitions that

view desistance as a decline in crime over time are the most appropriate (see Bushway et al. 2001). Approaches that combine qualitative and quantitative analyses also seem best able to capture the process—what it feels like to desist and whether one is in fact in the process of slowing down their offending. Growth curve models or semi-parametric growth models may be preferred for quantitative analyses with a continuous measure of criminal behavior recorded at multiple time points.

## Conclusion: Definitions and Measurement Matter

Desistance remains an elusive concept to study. People who are actively trying to reform are aware of the changes they are making. Similarly, those close to people in recovery from substance abuse or chronic criminal behavior are often able to see changes taking place. Yet, as this chapter has illustrated, "knowing it when you see it," while perhaps true, does little to help the researcher who wants to study desistance. A plethora of issues has emerged in the study of desistance, beginning with the difficulty of studying something that is marked by an absence of behavior, rather than the presence of it (Maruna 2001). This leads to the issue of how long one must be crime-free to be considered a desister (or is it, as Bushway and colleagues write, "desistor?").[2]

The chapter began with a discussion of the aggregate age-crime curve, which was used in early research to identify that crime seems to decline with age. Unfortunately, the aggregate age-crime curve possibly masks individual variation, which remains a point of contention in the literature. Are there several trends within the age-crime curve? Or does it represent a 'generally' uniform process that most offenders follow? The answer to this question has profound implications for what desistance looks like and what it likely stems from.

[2] Laub and Sampson (2001) also point out that there is no uniform spelling of 'desistance.' I use their spelling, but others have used the 'desistence' variety.

Next, the chapter took a brief look at some of the more popular definitions (e.g., descriptions) of desistance in the literature. As was shown, the definition or conceptualization of desistance changed over time. While some early work (and even some current work) failed to properly and formally define desistance, the definition in research seemed to change from a binary, termination-like definition to a process-oriented one.

The way desistance is defined, of course, matters with respect to how it is measured. Again, the operational definition of desistance has evolved over time, from mostly binary variables (e.g., offending in one period and a lack of offending in the next), to trajectory or growth curve approaches. These more process-oriented analytic strategies allow a more nuanced understanding of how change over time in things like relationships, identities, or jobs relate to changes (decreases) in crime over time. Since Bushway and colleagues' 2001 paper on empirically measuring desistance as a process, researchers have taken a more serious look at how best to examine desistance from a quantitative perspective.

However, not all desistance research is quantitative. A large body of research has contributed to our understanding of desistance as a process using in-depth narrative approaches. These studies have examined the more subjective factors involved in desistance, including how it happens. The measurement of desistance generally relies on the ex-offenders' understanding of where they are in their criminal career and what they plan to do in the future (e.g., persist or desist).

Both qualitative and quantitative measurement strategies are vulnerable to error. From a quantitative perspective, whether researchers rely on official or self-reports is likely to matter in terms of drawing conclusions about desistance. The notion of 'false desistance' was developed to capture the notion that people may still offend after their official criminal records end; they just may not get caught. Thus, relying on one's last arrest as a marker of desistance could wind up being misleading. Interestingly, the idea that people may still offend after their last official arrest or conviction would indicate that relying on official data would underestimate the age of desistance. Farrington and colleagues (2014), however, showed the opposite was true. Similarly though, qualitative research, which utilizes self-reports, is open to the possibility that offenders either (a) are not aware that

they are in the process of major life change (e.g., 'desistance by default') or (b) are not entirely accurate in their projections of future behavior.

In the end, understanding the definition, measurement, and analysis of desistance matters for drawing conclusions about the whys and hows of desistance. This chapter drew five main lessons of desistance research in terms of measurement/definitions, which should be kept in mind when considering the literature *writ large*. The *first lesson* is that research design matters, and longitudinal research is more appropriate to examine desistance. While some have argued that the age-crime curve is the same for all individuals, across history and place, empirical research has revealed considerable heterogeneity with respect to individual criminal career paths. The **second lesson** is that definitions of desistance matter, and they drive how one examines it. If a researcher considers desistance to be the end point of a criminal career, s/he is more likely to define it in a static or binary fashion than those who view desistance as a process.

The *third lesson* is that research based on self-reports (whether in qualitative or quantitative research) is likely to show differences with respect to desistance than official records. Official desistance may occur at a different time than behavioral desistance (Uggen and Kruttschnitt 1998). The *fourth lesson* is that binary or static measures of desistance are unlikely to capture the process of desistance or be particularly informative. If one considers desistance to mean the changes that take place leading up to termination, then examining termination itself is unlikely to shed much light on desistance. Finally, the *fifth lesson* is that qualitative approaches are able to capture different aspects of desistance than quantitative approaches. Ideally, a mixed methods approach would be used to offer a comprehensive assessment of desistance from crime.

In the next chapter, we depart from measurement and definitions and examine some major longitudinal research studies and their findings as they relate to desistance. This chapter and the next represent the heart of the book, by discussing research and theories of desistance. As an important resource, the chapter on longitudinal studies provides information and hyperlinks to those studies where for some of them, researchers can find and download the data to conduct their own analyses.

The next chapter will survey the literature on desistance, beginning with the criminal career studies in the early 1980s when desistance as a focus of research really took off. Much like the current chapter, the findings will be divided by whether the studies were largely quantitative or qualitative (or, both!).

# 4

# What Do We Know? Longitudinal Studies and Correlates of Desistance

Longitudinal studies of human behavior are difficult endeavors for researchers to carry out. They require, at a minimum, repeated observations of the same set of individuals over time. Such studies can be retrospective, asking participants to remember past events, or prospective, identifying individuals and following up on them in the future. The prospective study is the most difficult version of the longitudinal study, which requires re-locating the subjects months or even years after initially examining them. What if they were kids in the first waves of the study and have grown up, moved out, moved on? What if they are in prison?

With all this time, energy, and resources required to execute a high quality longitudinal design, disasters affecting the study are the last thing the researcher needs. Yet this is exactly what happened to the investigators of the study that arguably set in motion the entire criminal career paradigm, from which desistance research emerged. As recounted in Chapter 2, Marvin Wolfgang, Robert Figlio, and Thorsten Sellin collected data on every boy born in 1945 in Philadelphia, which became the study known as *Delinquency in a birth cohort.* This study included data on 9,945 boys who lived in the city at least from the ages 10 to 18. John



M. Rocque, *Desistance from Crime*, Palgrave's Frontiers in Criminology Theory, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-57234-9_4

H. Laub, in his 2003 American Society of Criminology Presidential Address, argued that this study was a major turning point in the field (Laub 2004).

Imagine for a minute the time and energy—the months and years—that went into gathering these data. Wolfgang and colleagues, in their first book on the study (1972) describe the sources they utilized (including Selective Service data and education board data) to gather the list of boys who would be eligible for the study. The Catholic and other private schools in the city did not "maintain a central filing system" which necessitated visits to "more than 200 schools" to obtain the data (Wolfgang et al. 1972/1987, p. 34). At that time, all the data would be in paper format, which required assistants to go through the lists to find the boys, trace 'incomplete' records, and cross-check against other data records. This was done just to get the sample of boys to study.

Next, they went about gathering the data for analyses. Such data included school records, IQ scores, and police contacts. The police contact data gave them information on the date of the offense, the type of offense, and victim data. After compiling a record for each boy who had committed delinquent acts, the researchers were able to build a juvenile criminal career for each subject, examining whether he committed further delinquencies, and if so whether they increased or decreased in seriousness.

The major findings of the study were reported in Chapter 2 of this volume. The researchers, however, having went to all the trouble of collecting and analyzing the data on the birth cohort, wanted to extend the study. They recognized that the initial study only followed the individuals to age 18 and so adult crimes were excluded. In addition, they only had access to official records (Wolfgang et al. 1987). A follow-up study of these boys into adulthood, supplemented by interviews—a mixed-method approach—would be enormously valuable to criminology.

Unfortunately, on January 8th, 1968, the data records of all 9,945 subjects in the study were lost in a "huge fire" (Wolfgang et al. 1987, p. xiii). In an interview recorded on February 27, 1979, Wolfgang described the situation.

> This might be the propitious time to mention that after we had collected all of the data on the first birth cohort born in 1945 the Criminology Center was located in what was known as the Normandy Hotel at 36th and Chestnut. The Normandy Hotel was at time in 1968, when we were housed on the first floor of that building while we were waiting construction of the McNeil building, where we are now housed. It was an 8-story building and on Jan. 8, 1968 a fire broke out in one of the rooms. Eventually it was a nine-alarm fire and the whole building was totally destroyed. I remember vividly shaving in the morning and having the radio on and hearing that there was a three-alarm fire at the old Normandy Hotel. I immediately ran out of my house with my face half-shaved and saw my building going up in flames. We lost practically all of our research materials. I was able to run into the building and save one box. But fortunately many of the data that we had on the birth cohort study were already on computer tape at the computer center so that the study was saved but a lot of the records were destroyed that we had accumulated and many variables that we would have included in the study we could not because they were not yet put on tape. That was a disaster for us.[1]

All that hard work, and just like that, the data were gone. Up in flames. It's a daunting, terrifying thought for the longitudinal researcher. Lucky for the investigators, a student named Albert Cardarelli had taken a random 10% sample of the original cohort for his own study. This dataset was the only way to identify the members of the original study (Kempf-Leonard 2010). This random sample allowed a follow-up of the kind they anticipated, with official, self-report, and victimization data on 567 of the original subjects.

Today, with electronic data storage capacities, cloud services (such as dropbox), and nightly server back-ups, a fire is less likely to wreak the same kind of havoc. Yet the lesson of the Wolfgang study is not lost on

[1] Interview was included as part of Temple University's Oral Histories Repository. An edited version can be found here: https://libdigital.temple.edu/pdfa1/Oral%20Histories/AOHWMPJZ2015030022Q01.pdf

researchers; I was involved in a study at the University of Maryland in which the Principal Investigator required assistants to make regular transfers of electronic data for storage from one building to another in case of just such a disaster. Fortunately for criminology, Wolfgang and colleagues were able to save most of their data analyses and *Delinquency in a Birth Cohort* as well as the follow-up study were able to forever impact the field.

This chapter is a testament to longitudinal research and researchers which have contributed to our knowledge of desistance. The chapter reviews some of the major longitudinal research studies that have informed desistance from crime since the early 1980s focusing on thirteen unique studies. Earlier studies were detailed in Chapter 2. Where possible, links are provided to those studies, where more information can be found and data may be available for download (if the study is public). The discussion of the longitudinal studies is not meant to be comprehensive, but rather to illustrate what well-known datasets contain, how the data were collected, and what work has emerged based on them.

Other descriptions of longitudinal studies are available that readers are encouraged to consult. These include Farrington (1979) as well as Farrington et al.'s (1986) overview of 11 American studies that were prospective, included at least two waves, covered at least five years, had 'hundreds' of subjects, and collected data on crime. In addition, Akiva Liberman's (2008) opening chapter in his excellent anthology on longitudinal criminal studies, reviews the state of affairs since Farrington and colleagues' book. Liberman's book includes chapters covering more than 60 longitudinal studies and roughly 200 studies drawn from them. The Appendix to his volume describes 64 studies, 20 of which were international in scope. Finally, Farrall and colleagues (2014) review and discuss nine desistance studies in detail.

The second part of the chapter then discusses major findings that have emerged from these studies regarding desistance from crime. Findings are described in thematic sections to illustrate for the reader the primary areas that have been demonstrated to be related to desistance. This chapter leads naturally into the next which discusses theories of desistance which were built, in large part, on the studies and findings reviewed in this chapter.

# Major Longitudinal Studies Examining Desistance

## The Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development[2]

The order in which studies are described is, for the most part, chronological. The starting point for this discussion is Farrington's work with the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development (CSDD). While this study was initiated prior to 1980, the boys in the study were about 30 by that time and so desistance was able to be examined more thoroughly than previous analyses. The CSDD was initiated by Donald West; the current director, David P. Farrington, became a co-investigator in 1969. Farrington took over the project in 1981 and continues to be the director to this day (Piquero et al. 2007).

The CSDD is a study of 411 individuals born in South London in 1953. The study sought to examine the development of offending over life, and thus enrolled boys who were eight and nine years old. The names of the boys were gathered from lists of six schools they attended. Besides being a 40-year study of the same individuals, the CSDD is well-known because of the wealth of data collected (from the boys, from their parents, from teachers, etc.). The CSDD also includes official conviction data to complement the self-report data. The profile of the sample is white, mostly working class, all males, living in an inner-city.

The data were collected at various time points throughout the boys' lives. Interviews were conducted at ages 8, 10, 14, 16, 18, 21, 25, 32, and 48. An incredible 94% of the sample that were alive were interviewed at age 48. As the daily context of the sample changed, the interview focus changed as well (e.g., from school attendance to employment). As of 2012, there were five major books written on the CSDD and over 200 publications (Farrington et al. 2013).

In terms of desistance research, the CSDD has contributed many interesting findings, some of which will be reviewed in the next section. As mentioned in the last chapter, a recent analysis of the CSDD has

[2] http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/RCMD/studies/8488

compared desistance up to age 48 for both self-reports and convictions (Farrington et al. 2014). There appeared to be very few boys who were not eligible, even under the most stringent of definitions, to be classified as a desister. Over 98% of the sample had committed some form of offense under study covering eight crimes, ranging from theft, to fraud, to vandalism. For self-reports, the average age at desistance was just over 19. For convictions, this average was just over 23. This study showed that criminal careers typically begin around age 10 for self-reports to 19 for convictions and ends around 32 for self-reports and 25 for convictions.

Data from the first 20 years of the CSDD are available for download (along with supporting materials) from the *Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research* (*ICPSR*).

## Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health & Development Study[3]

While the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health & Development Study, much like the CSDD, was initiated prior to the 1980s, the sample was not yet 18 until 1990 and so research on desistance utilizing the study did not emerge until relatively recently. The Dunedin study, which is ongoing, began at the birth of the sample (1972–1973), and included an entire birth cohort. Three years later, more data were collected, and on a regular bi-annual basis up to age 15. Then the sample was followed-up every three or four years up to age 38. The initial sample included 1,037 New Zealanders, 52% of which were boys, and 7.5% Maori. There were also 24 twins in the initial sample. To date there have been 12 waves of data collection since the sample was born. In 2012, at the 12th wave, 961 of the original sample was assessed (93% retention; 95% of those eligible—e.g., had not died). The current project directors are Avshalom Caspi and Terrie Moffitt. Paul Silva, who is still involved in the study, was a director in earlier phases of the project.

[3] http://dunedinstudy.otago.ac.nz/

Like the Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), which is reviewed later, the Dunedin study includes a vast array of data on physical and mental health, behavior, attitudes, and social indicators. According to Poulton et al. (2015), more than 1,200 articles and reports have been published on the Dunedin study. Antisocial behavior, from a variety of sources, has been collected since the sample was aged 5. One of the major findings of the study is that self-control is the strongest correlate of life outcomes, including crime (Moffitt et al. 2011). Importantly, the study has influenced policy, including the use of thermostats in "hot water cylinders in New Zealand to reduce the risk of scalds and burns among children" (Poulton et al. 2015, p. 10).

Focusing on the period of life spanning 18–26, Hussong and colleagues (2004) created a variety score of 8 antisocial items at three waves. The mean of the variety score decreased over time from 1.95 to 1.57 to 1.50, out of eight possible delinquent behaviors (breaking and entering, vandalism, assault, arson, fraud, robbery, theft, and weapon carrying). This decrease was not exceptionally large, but the last wave measured behavior during the mid-20s, when many individuals are still in the process of desistance. One of the project directors, Terrie Moffitt, has developed a theory of life-course offending which specifies that most adolescents desist upon entry into adulthood whereas a few persist (more on this theory in the next chapter). As a test of this theory, Moffitt et al. (2002) examined outcomes for males classified as life-course-persistent (10%) or adolescent-limited (26%) (based on previous analyses). There was no difference in the mean variety scores for delinquent behavior at age 26, but the adolescent-limited group did commit fewer overall crimes than the persistent group. Regarding criminal convictions, Piquero et al. (2005) compared adolescents (age 13–17) to adults (18–26) and males vs. females. They found that convictions increased from adolescence where 8.4% of the sample had a conviction, while in adulthood, this figure was 14.6%. However, it is difficult to draw conclusions from this, as the vast majority of the sample at both time periods had zero convictions. Finally, Odgers and colleagues (2008) studied aggressive behaviors in the Dunedin sample from ages 7 to 32. For acts such as fighting, destroying property, and playing truant from school or work, the percentage of both males and females engaging in

the behavior peaked in adolescence and then declined thereafter. Fighting was highest at age 7 (59.1%), remained high through age 18 (52.2%) but then fell to 37.5% at age 21, and 11% at age 32. For some acts, such as lying, there did not appear to be such a trend.

The Dunedin data are not public and cannot be downloaded by external researchers.

## The Montreal Two Sample Longitudinal Study

The Montreal Two Samples Study (MTSLS) was initiated by Marc Le Blanc and is currently led by Julien Morizot. The two samples came from (a) a representative sample of 1,611 12–16 year olds living in Montreal in 1974 and (b) 470 boys who were in the justice system. The delinquent boys had been in the juvenile justice system during 1974–1975 and were 13–18 years old at the initiation of the study. A sample of 458 of the 1,611 was drawn at random in 1976 and then surveyed. There have been five waves of data collection, with the last when the men ranged in age from 37 to 43. Thus the data cover adolescence through mid-life. Like the other studies in this chapter, the MTSLS has collected a diverse array of data on the subjects' lives, including personality, peers, attitudes, and behavior (Morizot and Le Blanc 2003). The study is active and plans are in place for a sixth round of assessments in which the sample will have entered their 50s (Morizot, personal communication, September 16, 2015).

Tzoumakis and colleagues (2012) examined trajectories of offending from adolescence to adulthood (e.g., age 30s) for both samples. In terms of frequency or variety of offending, the picture hadn't changed all that much from age 17 to 30. For example, the mean frequency of offending (out of 12 offenses) was 1.56 at age 15, 2.95 at age 17, and 2.91 at age 30. Similarly, the variety score changed from 2.56 at age 15 to 1.20 at age 17 and was 1.22 at age 30. With respect to trajectories, they found four distinct groups, only one of which was an "increaser," while two were "decreasers," in line with desistance. Defining desistance as a "progressive decline in offending versatility," Morizot and Le Blanc (2007, p. 50), focused on the adjudicated sample. Using latent trajectory

modeling, the researchers found that overall, crime frequency and versatility declined over the life of the sample. For example, the sample committed an average of 2.5 offenses at age 15 and that decreased to 0.41 at age 41. Finally, Kazemian et al. (2009) found that on average, the adjudicated men "terminated" their offending careers around age 30.

The MTSLS are not available to the public.

## National Youth Survey[4]

Like the CSDD, the National Youth Survey (NYS) was initiated prior to the 1980s (it began in 1976), but it was not until then that information on desistance could be gathered from most of the sample. By 1979, only 25.3% were over age 18, however. By the seventh wave of data collection, in 1987, all the respondents were at least 21, with an average age of about 23. The NYS was led by Delbert Elliot. Data were collected on a nationally representative sample of 1,725 US youth aged 11–17, starting in 1976. Most of the sample are white (79%) and male (53%). In 2003, data were collected when the sample was aged 38–44, and included the participants' parents, partners, and children (Brown et al. 2015).

The NYS has collected data on various types of offending (both self and official reports) as well as information on parents and care-takers. As the sample grew in age, questions shifted to asking about partners and employment. In 2000 the NYS was re-named the National Youth Survey-Family Study to reflect the inclusion of the children of the original participants. In addition, DNA information is now being collected (Finley 2011; Regoli et al. 2014).

Currently there have been 12 waves of data collected on the sample. Data from the children of the sample can be found in waves 11 and 12. The first 11 waves contain data on the sample and their parents (Elliott, personal communication, 2015). Unfortunately only the first seven waves of data are archived for public download, which can be found at the ICPSR website.

[4] http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/series/88

In terms of desistance, Elliot (1994), in a presidential address to the American Society of Criminology, discussed results from the first eight waves of the NYS (up to ages 27–33). He found that for serious violence, offending peaked in the late teens (age 17). The rates declined thereafter. "For females, the rates after age 20 are less than those at age 12; for males after age 24 they are one-half those at the peak ages and less than those at age 12" (Elliott 1994, p. 5). Overall, he found that only 18% and 22% of females and males who committed serious violence before age 18 persisted into their 20s. Conversely, this means that nearly 80% desisted (using the binary definition). Other research has examined desistance from marijuana smoking with the NYS. Maume et al. (2005) defined desistance as having smoked at wave 5 but not wave 6. Of those who smoked in wave 5 (and were unmarried, an important part of their analysis), 28.4% had desisted in wave 6. Warr (1998) used a similar definition of desistance, counting individuals as having desisted if in wave 6 they reported having engaged in no crimes. Finally, Forrest (2007) examined desistance in the NYS without restricting analyses to marijuana (he looked at drug sales, felony assault, felony theft, minor assault, minor theft, prostitution, and robbery). He found, across cohorts, evidence of declining criminal behavior. For the 1963 and 1964 cohorts, while "more than half of respondents born in those years reported committed offenses in 1979 when they were aged 16 and 15 respectively, by 1986, aged 22 and 23, less than a third of them were reporting criminal involvement" (Forrest 2007, p. 48).

## National Longitudinal Survey of Youth[5]

The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) includes two primary studies, one conducted in 1979, and one conducted in 1997, both by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). The 1979 study included those born in the late 1950s and early 1960s, aged 14–22 during the first wave. Two primary groups of individuals represent the entire sample. First, those born during the time period from 1957 to 1964 in the United States were

[5] http://www.bls.gov/nls/

sampled in order to "be representative of non-institutionalized civilian youths"; second, those born from 1957 to 1961 and in the armed forces in 1978 were sampled (Bouffard and Laub 2004, p. 136). The sample of 12,686 men and women has been interviewed 25 times since 1979, now on an every other year basis. They were interviewed yearly until 1994. The purpose of the NLSY79 was to examine job and occupation trends (the initial questionnaire called it the "National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Force Behavior"), but the surveys included a multitude of other information, including drug use and criminal behavior. The first wave sample was split evenly by sex, was 59% white, 25% black, and 16% Hispanic.

Since 1988, the children of the original sample have also been surveyed regarding their crime and delinquency. Because of the many waves of data and the inclusion of incarceration, researchers are able to examine more fine-grained changes in criminal behavior, controlling for "exposure" time or time on the street (under the assumption that those incarcerated cannot offend. The data are available via the BLS through an 'investigator' program, which allows researchers to extract or download only the parts of the study (e.g., variables) in which they are interested.[6]

The NLSY97 includes 15 waves of data, following a sample of 8,984 individuals who were around 12–17 when first interviewed. The sample is split relatively evenly by sex and is about 52% white, 26% black, and 21% Hispanic. The latest round contains over 80% of the original sample. Data are gathered on many topics, including romantic relationships, employment, attitudes, health, and crime/substance use. The same investigator tool allows researchers to download data from the NLSY97 as the NLSY79.

Researchers have examined desistance from crime in both of the NSLY studies. Bouffard and Laub (2004) examined desistance with the NLSY79, defining it as a lack of police contact after age 18. They found that of those in the military, 31.2% of the sample had a police contact after age 18 compared to 64.4% of those not in the military. Forrest and Hay (2011) used the Child and Young Adult Supplement of the NLSY79, which includes children of women in the initial sample.

[6] The investigator tool can be found here: https://www.nlsinfo.org/investigator/pages/login.jsp and can be used for each of the variants of the NLSY.

They examined desistance from marijuana use, much in line with Warr (1998) and Maume et al. (2005). Katz (2000), focusing on females, used the 1st and 7th wave of the NLSY79. Desistance measurement was not extensively discussed, but an examination of the changes from wave 1 to wave 7 in acts such as 'attacking others' (wave 1) and 'hitting others' (wave 7) showed a decrease in prevalence from 40% to 15% for people of color and 28% to 3% for whites.

Examining the NLSY97, Murphy and colleagues (2012) calculated offending trajectories, finding that 25.2% of males and 21.6% of females could be classified as "decreasers" whose "delinquency rates leveled off near zero" by the late teens and early 20s (Murphy et al. 2012, p. 53). All groups, with the exception of the 'low' group, showed a decrease in crime over time however. Most recently, Liu (2015) compared age-crime curves for males and females using the 1st through 13th waves of the NLSY97, up to age 30. She found that self-reported crime peaks around ages 14–15, and by age 24 (the highest age she examined for self-reported crime), the variety score (a variable that counts each *different* crime committed) was under 0.3 for each sex. In terms of arrests, which were examined up to age 30, the peak age was later for males (age 20). By age 30, frequency of arrest was under 0.1 for both males and females.

## Add Health[7]

The Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health, commonly referred to as 'Add Health,' began in 1994, and included a representative sample of kids in grades 7–12 in the United States. According to the project website, the Add Health is the "most comprehensive longitudinal survey of adolescents ever undertaken." It remains a very popular study for researchers from a variety of disciplines, and boasts over 2,000 journal articles published using its data. There are currently four waves of data in the Add Health, the first included more than 90,000 students, split evenly by sex. Over half of the sample was white, about 19% black, 7% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 5% American Indian. Next, the researchers

[7] http://www.cpc.unc.edu/projects/addhealth

surveyed a selection of 20,745 kids from the original sample to interview in their homes. These are the individuals who were followed-up in previous waves. Parents were also interviewed during this wave. Wave 2 took place in 1996, and included 14,738 individuals, interviewed in school and in home. Wave 3 took place in 2001–2002, when the sample was 18–26 years old ($N$ = 15,170). In 2008, a fourth wave was gathered, when the sample was 24–32 ($N$ = 15,701) (Harris 2013).

The Add Health data include a treasure trove of information on social, attitudinal, behavioral, and biological factors. One of the key components of the study is its inclusion of genetic data, which has allowed biosocial researchers to explore gene x environment interactions over time. The most sensitive data are available through a restricted-access contract, but there are also public use data available on each of the four waves.[8] With respect to desistance, several studies have been conducted with the Add Health data. Craig and Foster (2013) showed descriptive statistics for a delinquency scale at wave 1 and wave 3. Though the wave 3 scale was based on less items than at wave 1 (14 compared to 15), the overall score decreased considerably, from 4.22 to 0.97 over time. Examining domestic violence, Whitaker et al. (2010) sought to determine whether individuals persisted or desisted from one relationship to the next. They found that while 29.7% persisted from relationship 1 to relationship 2, over 70% desisted. After removing those who had never engaged in any form of delinquency, Barnes and Beaver (2012) found that 70% of the Add Health sample could be defined as desisters. They defined desistance as having engaged in delinquency at waves 1 and 2 but not at wave 3.

## Ohio Life-Course Study

The Ohio Life-Course Study (OLS) began in 1982 and is led by Peggy Giordano, a leader in life-course and desistance research and theory. The data came from a sample of 16-year-old girls who were incarcerated in

[8] An application for restricted data can be found here: http://www.cpc.unc.edu/projects/addhealth/data/restricteduse/RestrictedUseContractApplication.pdf. Public use data can be downloaded here: http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/RCMD/studies/21600.

a facility in Ohio. They also recruited the same number (127) of boys who were incarcerated in Ohio. A large portion of the sample is African American (38% of the girls). Two follow-ups have taken place, including one when the participants were around age 29 (year 1995) and a second when the sample was 37 (year 2003). In the last round, the research team interviewed children of the original sample.

The OLS has informed much desistance research, and because of its qualitative nature, has allowed a mixed methods approach to the study of behavioral reform. In one of the most influential papers on desistance to-date, Giordano and colleagues (2002) described a quantitative and qualitative study of desistance. At that time, they only examined the first two waves of data. Although raters classified the sample as persisting, desisting, or 'making progress,' such information for the full sample was not shown. However, examining their data in Table 2 (p. 1014), calculations show that roughly 23% of the sample appeared to be desisting by the second wave (late 20s). Examining the full three waves of data, Schroeder et al. (2007) defined desisters as those without frequent or serious crime or were not incarcerated at waves 2 and 3. They found that 44.7% of the sample were desisters and only 25.7% were persisters.

The OLS data are not publicly available at this time.

## PYS/DYS/RYDS[9]

Three similar studies were initiated in the 1980s across the United States. These are known as the Pittsburgh Youth Study (PYS), the Denver Youth Study (DYS), and the Rochester Youth Development Study (RYDS). The studies were the result of the creation of the Program of Research on the Causes and Correlates of Delinquency in 1986, part of the US Department of Justice's office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.[10] The PYS is led by Rolf Loeber and included a random sample of boys in first, fourth, and seventh grades in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The study oversampled boys with conduct problems, information collected from the boys

[9] https://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/jjbul9712-2/jjb1297d.html

[10] OJJDP describes the programs here: http://www.ojjdp.gov/programs/ProgSummary.asp?pi=19

and their parents. The initial sample included 1,517 boys who were age 7–13 (grades 1, 4, and 7) when the study began in 1987–1988. The racial breakdown of the sample ranges from 57.7% in the youngest cohort (grade 1 in 1988) to 55.9% in the middle cohort. The percentage of white subjects ranges from 40.56% in the youngest cohort to 42.72% in the middle cohort. There have been 14 and 16 assessments of the youngest and oldest groups in the study—for the first five years, assessments were taken every six months and now are conducted on an annual basis. The latest assessment was done in 2010, when the oldest cohort was 35 years old.[11]

The Denver Youth Study was led by David Huizinga. It consists of 1,527 youth in high risk neighborhoods, aged 7, 9, 11, 13, and 15 when the study was initiated in 1987. The study is split evenly by gender (53% boys), and has considerable racial/ethnic heterogeneity (33% black, 45% Hispanic, and 10% white). Yearly assessments were done from 1988 to 1992, then in 1995–1999 until the subjects were aged 27. Two of the groups were interviewed again in 2003 (Thornberry et al. 2005). Information was obtained from youth and their parents. Attrition was around 20%. See https://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/203555/jj2.html.

The Rochester Youth Development Study is led by Terence Thornberry and has the smallest sample of the three studies at 1,000 youth. The RYDS includes a disproportionate amount of boys (73%) in order to obtain more high risk youth. The sample was also disproportionately black (68%) and Hispanic (17%). The subjects were derived from Rochester youth in 7th and 8th grades in 1988. Like the PYS, the sample was assessed every six months until 1992, at which point annual assessments took place. Interviews also took place when the sample was aged 29 and 31, specifically to focus on continuity and desistance. These represent the 13th and 14th waves of data collection.[12]

As described in the previous chapter, Shawn Bushway and colleagues (2003), in examining the consequences of different operational definitions of desistance, used the RYDS. To capture desistance, the researchers utilized the data up to wave 12 (age 23). Recall that their

[11] See http://www.lifehistorystudies.pitt.edu/pittsburgh-youth-study.

[12] See http://www.albany.edu/hindelang/ryds.php for more information.

static or binary definition (e.g., classifying those who offended prior to age 18 but not after) found that 27.6% of the sample were desisters, while the trajectory method found that 8.6% of the sample were 'bell-shaped' desisters. With respect to the PYS, the most comprehensive work to-date was published by Rolf Loeber and colleagues (2008) in *Violence and Serious Theft: Development and Prediction from Childhood to Adulthood*. In that text, the authors examined desistance in the short-term (over two 'age blocks') and long-term (more than two age blocks). They found that for serious offending, over half (54%) of the sample desisted from middle to late childhood (age blocks 7–9 to 10–12). Boys who first offended in middle childhood desisted at a lower rate (29%). The largest percentage was for those who desisted from late childhood to early adolescence (68%) (Stouthamer-Loeber et al. 2008). Loeber et al. (2012b) sought to explain the age-crime curve in the PYS, from 12 to 28. Consistent with previous work, they found that the probability of being arrested increased, then sharply declined, and eventually stabilized. Using the DYS, Kreager et al. (2010) sought to explore desistance trajectories for women. Their 20-item measure of delinquency showed peaks at ages 15–16 and declines thereafter up to age 26. Alcohol use, though, generally rose steadily throughout the study frame.

At the time of this writing, none of the three datasets are available to the public for download.

## Pathways to Desistance[13]

The Pathways to Desistance study was developed (as its title implies) for the express purpose of examining desistance from crime, within a sample of serious offenders. The study, led by Edward P. Mulvey and Carol A. Schubert, consists of individuals in the criminal justice system, aged 14–17 when enrolled. A total of 1,354 youth are included, from two sites (Maricopa, County, AZ and Philadelphia County, PA). The study began between 2000 and 2003 and ended

[13] http://www.pathwaysstudy.pitt.edu/

after seven years of data collection (April 2010). Thus, the sample was at the prime ages for behavioral reform and desistance, and met the recommendation of life-course researchers to examine serious offenders (Laub and Sampson 2001). The majority of the sample is male (84%), 41% are black, and 34% are Hispanic. At enrollment, half of the sample were incarcerated (Steinberg et al. 2015). According to the Pathways website (link above), over 20,000 interviews have been conducted. Assessments were twice a year for three years then once a year a year after that (Mulvey et al. 2014).

The assessments cover a broad range of information, including,

> (a) background characteristics (e.g., demographics, academic achievement, psychiatric diagnoses, offense history, neurological functioning, psychopathy, personality), (b) indicators of individual functioning (e.g., work and school status and performance, substance abuse, mental disorder, antisocial behavior), (c) psychosocial development and attitudes (e.g., impulse control, susceptibility to peer influence, perceptions of opportunity, perceptions of procedural justice, moral disengagement), (d) family context (e.g., household composition, quality of family relationships), (e) personal relationships (e.g., quality of romantic relationships and friendships, peer delinquency, contacts with caring adults), and (f) community context (e.g., neighborhood conditions, personal capital, social ties, and community involvement).[14]

Mulvey and colleagues (2010) examined trajectories of offending for the sample. The first study focused on males for the first three years of the study. The researchers were able to identify five groups, one of which persisted in crime (less than 10%) and another they called desisters (14.6% of the sample). However, all of the groups (including the persisters) decreased their criminal behavior over the 36 month period. The second study expanded the analyses to seven years. This study again found that nearly all (90%) of the sample decreased in criminal behavior, with 42% being classified into late or early desistance groups.

[14] see http://www.pathwaysstudy.pitt.edu/baselineinterview.html

The study has completed data collection and the researchers are in the midst of reporting various findings that emerged from it. A final report was written in 2014 and all of the data can be downloaded here: http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/NAHDAP/series/260.

## Sheffield Pathways out of Crime Study[15]

The Sheffield Pathways out of Crime Study (SPooCS) is led by Sir Anthony Bottoms and Joanna Shapland and takes place in the United Kingdom. It is a study of high frequent offenders and is specifically intended to better understand desistance. The study was initiated in 2003 and is described in several of Bottoms' publications (e.g., Bottoms et al. 2004). The sample included in the study was 679 20-year-old males and 94 females in the Sheffield, England area (Bottoms and Shapland 2011a). This sample had at least two convictions and were on probation at the time of recruitment. Because of logistical issues, the researchers were only able to recruit 113 of the males in the study at the first interview (Bottoms and Shapland 2011a). The study is now called simply the Sheffield Desistance Study (SDS), which, unfortunately is a less fun acronym than SPooCS. The study emerged from the work of the Social Contexts of Pathways in Crime (SCOPIC) research group (King 2013). This group was led by Per Olaf Wikström.

The SDS intentionally uses both a quantitative and qualitative orientation. Bottoms and Shapland (2011a) explain that this is so that the study will inform human agency explanations of desistance. The sample was interviewed a total of four times (ending in 2007), with 86% of the sample interviewed at time 3 or 4. The sample is mostly white (79%) and had an average of eight convictions in their past. Thus it is a serious offending sample (Bottoms and Shapland 2011a).

[15] http://www.scopic.ac.uk/StudiesSPooCS.html

With respect to desistance, the SDS is in a good position to assess behavioral reform since, as the researchers note, the initial sample was recruited at the typical peak age of offending. The level of desistance, as might be expected for a serious offending group, was low. Specifically, approximately 80% of the sample re-offended during the period from the baseline interview to the last interview (four-year window). In terms of the level of offending (as opposed to prevalence), crime did seem to decrease. As Bottoms and Shapland (2011b) report, the number of crimes committed on average fell from 8.2 to 2.6 over the course of the study.

The SDS data are not publicly available at this time.

## Tracking Progress on Probation Study

The Tracking Progress on Probation Study (TPPS) has been ongoing since 1997, led by Stephen Farrall. The TPPS study recruited 199 probationers as they attempted to desist from crime. The study has undergone five 'sweeps' or interviews and there are plans for a sixth underway (Farrall, personal communication, December 21, 2015). The TPPS attempted to recruit probationers between the ages of 17–35, who had sentences of 6–24 months and started probation from October 1997 to March 1998. The sample is mostly men (87%) and mostly young (age 17–23, 44%). The modal offense for which the probationers were sentenced was theft (32%) (Farrall and Calverly 2006). The TPPS employs qualitative interviews in order to fully probe the experience of probationers.

The most comprehensive reports on the TPPS were published as *Understanding Desistance from Crime* by Stephen Farrall and Adam Calverly (2006), and *Criminal Careers in Transition* by Farrall and colleagues (2014). Both are masterful works that describe findings from the fourth and fifth sweeps of the study, and examine such topics as emotions and desistance, citizenship and desistance, and the influence of agency vs. structure. The methodology chosen is what Farrall calls "Qualitative Longitudinal Research" (QLR). The 2006 study was able to locate and interview 51 of the original 199 probationers. Measuring

desistance as a "gradual process" (Farrall and Calverly 2006, p. 18), they found that 71% of the offenders desisted or showed "signs" of desisting (p. 31). This compares to Farrall's (2002) earlier work which found that 46% of the offenders had desisted or showed signs of it. The major take-away from their 2006 work is that both individual (emotions, agency) and external (social relationships, social structures) matter with respect to desistance.

The 2014 report was similar to the 2006 study, in that agency, structure, and citizenship were examined. In the fifth sweep, 105 of the sample was found and interviewed which is about 50% of the original sample. Interestingly, 73% of the sample was found but some either could not or did not want to participate. At this point, they found that 52% of males and 77% of females were desisters (which included all sample members, not just those interviewed in the fifth sweep). "Interestingly," the researchers point out, "almost 40% of the sample was still offending some 13–15 years after recruitment into the study" (Farrall et al. 2014, pp. 96–97).

The TPPS data are not available at this time.

In sum there are numerous longitudinal studies that have recently been able to inform knowledge about desistance from crime. See Table 4.1 for a summary. The studies discussed here do not include perhaps the most influential, the Gluecks' *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* study, which was detailed in the last chapter. That study was initially published in 1950 and so at first blush would not seem relevant for a chapter on recent longitudinal datasets. Yet arguably the most well-known research on desistance has been conducted by John Laub and Robert Sampson, utilizing that dataset. As Laub (2009) recounts, "Our journey began in 1986, when I stumbled across the dusty archives of a classic but largely forgotten study of delinquency housed in the basement of the Harvard Law School." Over the next few years, they restored and computerized the data and then launched a follow-up of the men into their 70s (Laub and Sampson 2003).

The studies described above illustrate the depth and variety of projects that have been completed and are ongoing in criminological research. They

**Table 4.1** Major desistance studies

| Name | Investigators | Date initiated | Sample |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development | Donald West, David P. Farrington | 1961 | 411 boys aged 8/9 at initiation, 48 at last follow-up |
| Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study | Patricia Buckfield, Paul Silva, Avshalom Caspi, Terrie Moffitt | 1972–1973 | 1,037 boys (535) and girls (503), aged 0 at initiation, 38 at last follow-up |
| Montreal Two Sample Longitudinal Study | Marc Le Blanc, Julien Morizot | 1974 | 1,611 12–16 year olds in the community and 470 incarcerated boys |
| National Youth Survey | Delbert Elliot | 1976 | 1,725 youth aged 11–17 at initiation, 38–44 at last follow-up |
| National Longitudinal Survey of Youth | Bureau of Labor Statistics | 1979; 1997 | 12,686 males and females aged 14–22 at initiation, 47–56 at last follow-up for the 1979 cohort; 8,984 males and females aged 12–17 at initiation and 28–34 at last follow-up |
| Add Health | Kathleen Mullan Harris | 1994 | 20,745 males and females, grades 7–12 at initiation, aged 24–32 at last follow-up |
| Ohio Life-Course Study | Peggy Giordano | 1982 | 127 males and 127 females incarcerated in Ohio aged 16 at initiation, and aged 37 at last follow-up |
| Pittsburgh Youth Study | Rolf Loeber | 1987–1988 | 1,517 boys aged 7–13 at initiation, 35 at last follow-up |
| Denver Youth Study | David Huizinga | 1987 | 1,527 males and females aged 7–15 at initiation, aged 27 at last full follow-up |

(*continued*)

**Table 4.1** (continued)

| Name | Investigators | Date initiated | Sample |
|---|---|---|---|
| Rochester Youth Development Study | Terence Thornberry | 1988 | 1,000 males and females in grades 7–8 at initiation, aged 29–31 at last follow-up |
| Pathways to Desistance | Edward Mulvey, Carol Shubert | 2000–2003 | 1,354 males and females aged 14–17 at initiation, 21–24 at last follow-up |
| Sheffield Pathways out of Crime Study | Anthony Bottoms, Joanna Shapland | 2003 | 113 males aged 20 at initiation, 24 at last follow-up |
| Tracking Progress on Probation Study | Stephen Farrall | 1997 | 199 male and female probationers, aged 17–35 at initiation, 32–50 at last follow-up |

have been conducted across the world covering several decades. Many of the studies have made their data available so researchers who are not directly connected to the projects can add their analyses to the growing desistance knowledge base. The next section of this chapter offers a brief overview of what we have learned from these and other studies.

## What Have We Learned?

What are the major correlates of desistance? What are the processes that research has identified as important in facilitating behavioral reform? In this section factors related to desistance are discussed in thematic categories for ease of presentation. To begin, however, an overview of the timing of desistance, as discovered in recent longitudinal studies, is important (for a similar, but more brief discussion, see Rocque et al. forthcoming-a).

## When Does Desistance Happen?

Does crime peak at the same age for everyone? The historical research discussed in Chapter 2 showed a variety of age-crime curves, indicating that crime 'peaks' at different ages for different crimes. This research mostly used official and aggregate data. Quetelet's data showed that the peak (age at which desistance occurs) between ages 25 and 30. Farrington's (1986) data showed peaks much earlier, between ages 12 and 16 for crime rates covering the years 1938, 1961, and 1983 from Great Britain's official data.

More recent research on the timing of desistance has seemingly found a middle ground between Quetelet and Farrington. For example, in one of the few pieces to focus on timing of desistance, Massoglia and Uggen (2010) argued that desistance should represent a part of the maturation process; that is, becoming an adult. They emphasized Arnett's (2000) concept of "emerging adulthood" which considers the period from age 20 to 25 to be the beginning of adulthood. Those who transition to adulthood but continue to engage in 'adolescent appropriate' behavior, are considered late to the adult party. Thus, from this perspective (see also Moffitt 1993), desistance from crime should occur between ages 18 and 25.

Perhaps the most important conclusion that recent desistance research has revealed is that pin pointing a particular age or range of ages when the peak of offending occurs is a futile game. In other words, not only does desistance happen at different ages for males vs. females (Uggen and Kruttschnitt 1998), or whites versus nonwhites (Elliott 1994), but also within groups there is heterogeneity. Trajectory and other group-based analyses have demonstrated that individual offenders may follow several pathways into and out of crime, some desisting sooner, some later. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Laub and Sampson's (2003) seminal work identified six distinct groups of offending trajectories, one of which evidenced a peak in offending after age 35. They also, like researchers before them (see Steffensmeier et al. 1989), found different age-crime curves and thus ages at desistance, for various types of crime (e.g., property,

drug, violent). This of course doesn't mean that desistance happens at random or at any age, but that there are variations to be mindful of.

## What Causes—Or Is Related To—Desistance?

There is now a wide-ranging and continuously growing body of research that details the correlates of desistance (see Rocque et al. forthcoming-a). Many of these factors have found their way into theoretical accounts of desistance which will be discussed in the next chapter. In general, the literature can be divided into external, social factors and internal, agentic ones. In general, they have been discussed and examined separately in the literature. The following is a brief overview of these correlates, providing the 1,000 foot view of factors that have been found to be related, empirically, to desistance from crime.

### Internal Factors

Many studies of desistance appear to assume that (much like criminological and sociological research *writ large*) internal, human agency influences can be separated from social structural influences. Yet, as Giddens' Structuration Theory (Farrall and Bowling 1999) suggests, these two factors are interrelated. In other words, humans are neither "super dupes" (people entirely guided by social, external forces), nor are they "super agents" (people who are not influenced by structures) (Farrall and Bowling 1999). Nonetheless, few studies or theoretical treatments of desistance are purposefully integrative in focus.

Some of the earliest work on behavioral reform (e.g., Quetelet) argued that crime declines with age because of an increase in cognitive capacity or reason. Empirical work on giving up crime also emphasized these cognitive changes. Shover (1985; Shover and Thompson 1992) found that as offenders age, or get older, their reasoning changes such that criminal behavior no longer seems as attractive. This could be viewed as an increase in rationality (Shover 1996). Shover's work in this regard has utilized both qualitative approaches (interviews with 'aging offenders')

and quantitative approaches (OLS regression in Shover and Thompson 1992). Using data from a Rand study, Shover and Thompson (1992) found that expectations about how profitable future criminal behavior would be was a significant predictor of desistance (operationalized as having no arrests three years after the initial interview).

Other research has supported the idea that rationality has a role in decisions to desist (and, incidentally, that desistance *is* a choice). Cusson and Pinsonneault (1986) found, in their study of 17 offenders who had "given up crime," that over time, the calculus involved in committing crime changes. It no longer seems worth it, the chances of getting away with it seem to diminish. Sometimes, this change is in response to a 'shock' such as being incarcerated that serves as a wake-up call, leading to more rational conduct. Paternoster (1989), Fagan (1989), and Leibrich (1996) also found support for this correlate of desistance. Fagan (1989) focused on the role of the formal justice system in deterring offending, but Paternoster's (1989) data indicated that the informal costs of offending may be as important (if not more so) in the desistance process.

Perhaps the most researched internal cause of desistance involves changes in offenders' sense of self or identity. Studies have argued that the reason that people stop offending—or decide to—is because they come to see themselves in a different light. As Hill (1971) found, no longer do some men want to be "hell-raisers," but instead, they come to desire being "family men." In large part, the research that has focused on identity or the "self" has been qualitative, in which the notion that offenders stop committing crimes because they see it as inconsistent with "who they are" emerges from interviews.

These studies seek to examine the experiences of individuals who are actively or have already completed the process of getting out of the life of crime. Vaughn (2007) reviewed several of these studies, including Maruna (2001). Maruna (2001) interviewed 30 offenders who were making an attempt to give up crime, finding that as compared to active offenders, they viewed themselves as fundamentally good and that criminal behavior is not consistent with who they are. In a chapter on "Shame, blame, and the core self," Maruna describes how the desisters views of themselves differed from offenders. He found that often, desisters used excuses or "neutralizations" and this may be an indicator

that they did not see themselves as criminal "to the core." "The deviant who says, 'Nobody made me do it; I did it for the money!' or 'I just enjoy it' may be the least likely to reform. Offenders who use neutralizations, however, seem less comfortable with their behaviors and more in line with conventional morality" (Maruna 2001, p. 144).

Other research has supported the notion that identity is an important factor for understanding desistance. For example, Sommers et al. (1994) examined the factors that were related to female offenders' ability to stop offending. They found that the creation of a new, prosocial identity and the integration of that identity into their lives enabled the women to desist. Interestingly, "the success of identity transformations hinges on the women's abilities to establish and maintain commitments and involvements in conventional aspects of life" (Sommers et al. 1994, p. 157). More recent findings have also focused on identity change in the desistance process (Bachman et al. 2015; Rocque et al. 2016a). Rocque and colleagues' study attempted to measure identity quantitatively using a set of items asking subjects how they viewed themselves. This measure was correlated with a reduction in deviant behavior over time.

## External Factors

Social, or external factors, have also been studied in relation to desistance from crime. The general premise of these findings is that something changes in the offender's life (change in living arrangements, obtaining a job, etc.) that influences behavior. Early work focused on relationships in the social bond tradition. The Glueck and Glueck (1937/1966) may have been among the first to point this out, finding that marriages were related to cessation of offending for some of the men they studied. Farrington and West (1995), using the CSDD data, showed that offenders who got married reduced their criminal behavior.

The most prominent work demonstrating the 'marriage-effect' has been conducted by John Laub and Robert Sampson, utilizing the Glueck's *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* data. Their two books, *Crime in the Making* (1993) and *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives* (2003) shed the spotlight on marriage as a 'turning point' in lives

characterized by delinquency and crime. In empirical assessments outside of these books, they have continued to show how marriage is negatively related to crime over time (Bersani et al. 2009; Laub et al. 1998; Sampson et al. 2006).

A large literature has now grown up showing the negative relationship between marriage and crime, suggesting that marriage is a causal factor in the process of desistance. A recent review found 31 studies examining marriage and crime, with a total of 85 findings. Of these 85 findings, 67% of them showed a statistically significant negative effect. However, the causality of the marriage effect remains in question. The most recent review which included 58 studies between 1990 and 2014 similarly showed an overall negative effect of marriage but questioned the meaning of these findings (Skardhamar et al. 2015). Skardhamar et al. (2015) paid particular attention to methods used to identify causality with respect to marriage. They noted "that there is no direct evidence of a counterfactual causal effect of marriage on crime" (p. 437). The researchers also noted that the effect of marriage may depend on timing and antisocial orientation of the spouse.

Another external, social factor that research has found to be associated with desistance is employment. Again, Sampson and Laub's work is influential here, as their studies have often found that meaningful employment is negatively related to crime (Sampson and Laub 1990, 1993). Other researchers have similarly found a negative association between work and crime (Crutchfield and Pitchford 1997; Uggen 1999). Yet much like the literature on marriage, the research on work and crime is nuanced. In one of the most well-known studies of how work may relate to desistance, Uggen (2000) found that having a job was negatively associated with crime, but only for those over the age of 27. Other research has failed to find that work matters much (Hayford and Furstenberg 2008; Horney et al. 1995). In their review of adult status markers and crime, Siennick and Osgood (2008) argue that the effect of work is often contingent on offender characteristics (such as race or age).

Other external factors have been examined, but the evidence is not nearly as strong as for marriage and employment. In Siennick and Osgood (2008) review, parenthood and living arrangements are

discussed, neither of which have strong or research support, due in part to less studies on these topics. Religious orientation is also a possible external source of desistance. Here again, the results are mixed (Chu 2007; Giordano et al. 2008). With respect to parenting, some research has specifically examined motherhood, revealing a "complex relationship" (Bachman et al. (2016). In their research examining 118 women from a larger study, Bachman and colleagues found that most were not able to break free of drug use. Motherhood was not an impediment to such use—being a mother was associated with stopping substance use for three women. But motherhood was deemed important for those who were able to desist, as a social bond to help them stay on track. One mother even related how her daughter kept watch over her, so she wouldn't relapse.

## Substance Use

For the most part, this review has covered factors that promote desistance from crime. However, certain behaviors or outcomes are related to persistence from crime. Substance use and abuse, both alcohol and illegal drugs, tend to delay desistance from crime. Here we are referring to persistence in illegal acts other than substance use (there is an entire literature on persistence and desistance in substance use). Laub and Sampson (2003) found that alcohol use was related to persistence in offending for the Glueck men. They argued that this was in part due to the negative influence of alcohol use on prosocial adult bonds (marriage, employment).

Schroeder et al. (2007), using a more contemporary sample, demonstrated that drug use (and drug culture) negatively influences desistance (persistence) over and above alcohol use. In their findings, drug use was related to antisocial peers and spousal deviance, which led to persistent criminal behavior. In a study of serious criminals, Mulvey (2011) found that substance abuse treatment had a negative effect on criminal behavior. In sum, it appears that substance use "ensnares" people in a life of crime, making it difficult to gain traction with desistance (Hussong et al. 2004; Laub and Sampson

2003). Sommers et al. (1994, p. 137) describe it this way: "For the majority of the women, the problem of maintaining an addiction took precedence over other interests and participation in other social worlds."

## Demographic Factors

In general, demographic characteristics, such as race, gender, and social class, have not been the focus of desistance research—at least relative to research on social and cognitive processes. However, some work has sought to determine whether there are differences in the timing of desistance across social groups. For example, Uggen and Kruttschnitt (1998) found that women desisted more frequently than men in their sample. In terms of correlates, Uggen and Kruttschnitt (1998, p. 356) state, "[W]e have relatively little evidence that the factors influencing desistance from deviant behavior operate differently for females and males" (see also Sommers et al. 1994). However, Massoglia and Uggen's (2007) analyses of different forms of desistance (see Chapter 3) found that females were more likely to desist than males in terms of 'subjective' and official desistance, but less likely in terms of reference (comparing oneself to one's peers) desistance. In other words, "[M]ales are not universally more likely than females to desist. Rather, the relationship between gender and desistance appears to depend on definitions of desistance" (pp. 97–98).

The most recent work on gender and desistance can be found in a comprehensive review by Elanie Rodermand and colleagues (2016). In their assessment of 44 unique studies, only some allowed a comparison of males vs. females with respect to desistance. For the most part, factors that research has identified as important for males also matter for females (similar to what Sommers et al. 1994 found). However, there are some differences—marriage, employment, and deviant friends, for example, seem to have larger effects for males than females. Conversely, having strong relationships and children appears to be more important for female desistance. Overall, however, the policy implications from their review are not entirely different from what research suggests for males.

They state: "[I]t is critical to provide recently convicted females with a wide range of assistance related to housing, financial support, relationships, employment and drug use" (Rodermand et al. 2016, p. 22). These are similar policies that would derive from analyses of male desistance.

With respect to race, a similar mixed bag emerged in Massoglia and Uggen's (2007) work. Whites were more likely to desist using the self-reported desistance definition, but less likely using the reference group definition. Though few studies have examined whether the correlates of desistance vary by race/ethnicity, Chu and Sung (2009) found that religion was an important factor in blacks' desistance but was not for whites. Piquero et al. (2002) examined race differences in the effect of local life circumstances (e.g., jobs, marriages) on crime, finding that for the most part, these factors had similar effects for both whites and blacks. In a study assessing whether social bonds matter across race, Doherty and Ensminger (2013) found that marriage inhibited crime for black males but was less of a factor for black females.

Finally, while much of the research on desistance has been conducted in the United States, this is increasingly no longer the case. Maruna's (2001) landmark study of desisting and persisting offenders was conducted in Liverpool, UK. International work has also generally confirmed the correlates of the cessation of crime. For example, Savolainen (2009) found that employment and marriage were negatively related to offending for offenders from Finland. However, Graham and Bowling (1995) discovered that social bonds like marriage were *only* influential for females rather than males in the process of desistance. One of the most recent innovative works on desistance has come from Europe, by scholars such as Stephen Farrall, Anthony Bottoms, and Paul Nieuwbeerta. This European work has advanced our understanding of desistance, including how the criminal justice system may impact the desistance process. Studies by Farrall (2002), Rex (1999), Herzog-Evans (2011), King (2014), and Healy (2010) have focused on probation as a stimulant to desistance. These studies find in general that probation can facilitate desistance but at the same time, certain forms of probation may not have much of an effect.

A controversy of sorts exists with respect to whether the correlates of crime are the same as the correlates of desistance. In other words, researchers have wondered, do the factors that predict crime similarly

predict (in the inverse) desistance? In some cases, the same factors do seem to be implicated in the development and decline of crime. For example, social bonds predict whether someone engages in delinquency as a youth (Hirschi 1969) and also whether someone desists (Sampson and Laub 1993). One of the better discussions of this phenomenon is found in Chris Uggen and Irvin Piliavin's (1998) essay. They argued that "[t]he failure of programs as wide-ranging as family therapy, remedial education, reference group alteration, and psychological counseling suggests that either the presumed cause is misidentified or that symmetrical causation does not apply" (p. 1410). Symmetrical causation, or the idea that the same factors cause crime that cause desistance, appear to apply to some factors but not others. For example, the internal, identity-based factors may be unique to adulthood and growing up. While some youth may indeed have negative self-identities it is not clear that feeling that one is a 'bad person' is uniquely causal of youth delinquency (but see Rocque et al. 2016a). In addition, factors like substance use may be more of a consequence than a cause of delinquency.

In the 1980s, Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi argued that the same information about crime can be obtained from cross-sectional research as has been obtained from longitudinal research (see Gottfredson and Hirschi 1987). This is based in part on the symmetrical causation argument. However, it appears that longitudinal research has identified how causal factors change over time and the differential ways in which people desist in order to make it a worthwhile endeavor. The debate, however, is not settled and will likely continue into the future.

## Methodological Approaches

As Rocque et al. forthcoming-a discuss, the study of desistance has varied by the research method employed. Researchers who are examining what causes (or to be more accurate, correlates with) desistance typically use quantitative techniques. In general, this means that a database with variables indicating life events along with their respective dates is built and an examination of whether those events happen before or after desistance is conducted. In Laub

and Sampson's (2003) seminal work, the researchers meticulously constructed data gleaned from the Glueck's original paper files. Then they used statistical models to determine whether changes in marriage over time was associated with changes in offending (for an excellent overview of this statistical model, see Horney et al. 1995). Typically, quantitative research has been used when examining the correlates of desistance.

To the extent that desistance is a process, however, this type of method is somewhat problematic. How can desistance be modeled statistically? There are several solutions that quantitative researchers have used to date, none of which are ideal. Early work, as has been discussed in this book, simply used a binary definition of whether one desisted or persisted by using an arbitrary period of time and coding desisters as those who did not offend over that period (e.g., Warr 1998). Logistic regression models then can be used to examine the predictors of whether one desisted or not.

More recent work has utilized more sophisticated methods that have attempted to capture the 'process-like' nature of desistance. These approaches are able to capture the changes in criminal behavior, and other life-course events, over time as well as the relationship between these factors. In other words, these methods do not just treat desistance as a binary event that either happened or did not happen but one that may be a continuous process. Daniel Nagin's (2005) group-based trajectory approach allows researchers to form empirical groups based on behavior over time and model the way criminal behavior unfolds for those groups. This approach has been used to some effect by desistance scholars such as Laub and colleagues (1998). For an overview of trajectories of crime over the life-course, see Piquero (2008). Trajectory-based analyses also allow researchers to examine whether life events or predictors of desistance are correlated with group assignment. Other work has used multi-level models (much like Laub and Sampson in their 2003 book) to examine changes in offending over time. This approach is also commonly called 'growth-curve modeling' and can be used to separate 'between-individual' from 'within-individual' effects. What this means is that factors (marriage, employment) that change over time for the same people and factors that do not change over time can be examined in relation to crime. The growth modeling approach also comes closest to exemplify the method

that Bushway and colleagues (2001) advocated. Examples of desistance scholarship using this approach include Laub and Sampson (2003), Hussong et al. (2004), Bersani et al. (2009), and Rocque et al. (2016a).

Yet what about the notion that desistance requires motivation, thought, and intentionality? What about the subjective 'feel' of desistance? These things are much harder to capture using algebraic equations. In Laub and Sampson's (2003) follow-up of the Glueck men to age 70, they found that a theme of human agency emerged from their interviews. While these researchers continue to hang their hat on external forces as the primary cause of desistance, and even suggest that criminals can 'desist by default' (i.e., without meaning to), there was evidence that some of the men made a conscious decision to stop offending. As they state, "[W]hat is most striking in the narratives we collected is the role of human agency in the process of desistance from crime and deviance. The Glueck men are seen to be active players in their destiny, especially when their actions project a new sense of a redeemed self" (p. 55). Agency emerged from the interviews with the men and thus was something that likely would not have been detected but for qualitative analyses.

Qualitative analyses are useful to understand desistance from a subjective, personal view. How does desistance "feel?" In some sense, then, the process of desistance, at least as defined by Laub and Sampson (2001), as the period in which motivation is built up to stop committing crimes, is best examined in a qualitative manner. It should be clear, however, that quantitative and qualitative methods are able to capture different parts of the desistance journey and therefore should be seen as complementary rather than competing.

## Chronic Offending

As we have seen, desistance appears to be the norm for most offenders. In addition, some things are likely to encourage or facilitate earlier desistance. Yet research has shown that there are certain individuals who buck the trend, who are more chronically criminal than others. These folks both commit more crimes and have longer criminal careers.

As we learned in Chapter 2, Wolfgang and colleagues estimated that these represented about 5% of the population. Moffitt (1993) labeled chronic offenders life-course persistent, which captures the notion that these individuals are more likely to be poorly behaved both early in life and after early adulthood. To Moffitt, early neuropsychological deficits along with environmental 'snares' (getting arrested, not finishing school) contributes to the persistence of offending past the stage of normative desistance.

Perhaps the most consistent correlate of offending is past behavior (Nagin and Paternoster 1991). It is well known that those who begin antisocial behavior earlier tend to have longer criminal careers (Piquero et al. 2003, 2004). Piquero and colleagues also found that family welfare, poor cognitive abilities, and length of incarceration were linked to a longer criminal career. Nagin and Farrington (1992) argued that there is no causal link between age of onset and persistence; this relationship is explained by time stable individual differences. Finally, as mentioned above, substance use appears to be related to persistence in offending.

## Conclusion: What Do We Know?

While longitudinal research on crime and delinquency has been ongoing for nearly 100 years in criminology, it was not until relatively recently that they became somewhat prevalent. This means that for much of the field's history, criminology has been "adolescent-limited" (Cullen 2011), relying as it has, on surveys of school-aged children. The increase in longitudinal studies including measures of antisocial behavior has allowed criminologists to examine crime over the life-course. There was not an American Society of Criminology division focusing on the life-course until 2012, which speaks to the relatively recency of the focus on life-course and desistance in criminology.

Yet it is not the case that we know little about desistance. As this chapter has recounted, there are numerous studies that are actively

collecting data from which we have learned the causes and correlates of desistance. The first part of the chapter reviewed 11 of these studies, providing links to data or study websites where available. These 11 studies are a testament to the high quality work that is currently being conducted to learn the causes and correlates of desistance (as well as a vast array of other crime-related topics). As was discussed, these studies range from those conducted in the United States, to those conducted in New Zealand, Canada, and the United Kingdom. The studies range in length of follow-up but all have in common multiple assessments of the same sample, and data collected into adulthood. Other studies, such as the Glueck follow-up by Sampson and Laub, and an ongoing follow-up of the Cambridge-Somerville Youth participants by Brandon Welsh and Gregory Zimmerman (Welsh and Zimmerman 2015) of Northeastern University, offer examples of researchers taking advantage of earlier efforts to extend follow-ups over the entire life-course.

The second part of the chapter reviewed what we know about desistance. In terms of the timing, when desistance occurs is often a function of research method and measurement. However, much 'normative' desistance appears to occur in early adulthood. Some correlates of desistance include 'external' and 'internal' factors such as marriage, employment, and identity. Whether one examines the causes of desistance or the process depends, at least in part, on the research method used. Quantitative methods are more conducive to discovering the correlates of desistance while qualitative approaches have been used to explore how people choose to exit the world of crime, what it feels like, and the obstacles they face on their journey toward 'making good.'

But why do certain factors seem to be related to desistance and not others? Why do some people desist earlier than others? Just why is it that marriage is associated with a change in life-course trajectories? After all the research that has focused on desistance, finding correlates and uncovering narratives associated with behavioral change, researchers have yet to figure out why (or if) marriage causally impacts crime. The next chapter will focus on theories and perspectives developed in criminology to explain desistance from crime, drawing on the research

presented in this chapter. As will be seen, there has been a plethora of explanations proffered to better understand what desistance is and why it happens. Consequently, the chapter following the discussion of these theories will offer a comprehensive, integrated theory of maturation drawing on the major perspectives.

# 5

# Putting It All Together: Theories of Desistance from Crime

In the 1980s, some argued, criminology was at a standstill. It had no new ideas. Old ideas were recycled, tested, published, and subsequently forgotten. Worse, the scathing appraisal that James Q. Wilson (1975 (revised in 1985)) laid on the field—that a focus on root causes of crime such as poverty and discrimination was doomed to failure and criminology as a whole had nothing to offer society—seemed prescient (Cullen 2010). In his critique of the major sociological theories of crime that existed during the 1960s, Wilson noted, "All were serious, intelligent efforts at constructing social theories, and while no theory was proved empirically, all were consistent with at least some important observations about crime. *But none could supply a plausible basis for the advocacy of public policy*" (Wilson 1985, p. 45, emphasis in the original).

The problem, to Wilson, was that the sociological theories made for good reading by the fireplace, and stimulated much academic discourse, but had few practical applications. If attitudes cause crime, what



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are we to do about that as a government? These 'root causes' are not something easily changeable in a democratic society. Again, in Wilson's (1985) words:

> The criminologist, concerned with causal explanations and part of a discipline—sociology—that assumes that social processes determine behavior, has operated largely within an intellectual framework that makes it difficult or impossible to develop reasonable policy alternatives, and has cast doubt, by assumption more than by argument or evidence, on the efficacy of those policy tools, necessarily dealing with objective rather than subjective conditions, which society might use to alter crime rates (p. 50).

Additionally, during this time, criminologists were having a crisis of confidence in terms of what to do about crime once it had occurred. Should we try to 'fix' the offender? Up to the 1970s, in criminology there was a firm belief that something was wrong with offenders and that it was the job of correctional practitioners to rehabilitate them. Then, in 1974 a report by Robert Martinson argued that there was little evidence that rehabilitation works to reduce future crime. In examining 231 studies of rehabilitation programs, he claimed, "With few and isolated exceptions, the rehabilitative efforts that have been reported so far have had no appreciable effect on recidivism" (p. 25). This led to the 'nothing works' paradigm, in which—consistent with Wilson's arguments—efforts to reduce crime that were rooted in sociology were doomed to failure. It should be noted that Martinson's paper was really less an attack on social scientific rehabilitation efforts and more on the poor state of affairs regarding research methods at the time. As Martinson (1974) stated toward the end of the article:

> We tried to exclude from our survey those studies which were so poorly done that they simply could not be interpreted. But despite our efforts, a pattern has run through much of this discussion–of studies which "found" effects without making any truly rigorous attempt to exclude competing hypotheses, of extraneous factors permitted to intrude upon the measurements, of recidivism measures which are not all measuring the same thing, of "follow-up" periods which vary enormously and rarely extend beyond the period of legal supervision, of experiments never replicated, of "system effects" not taken into account, of categories drawn up without any theory

> to guide the enterprise. It is just possible that some of our treatment programs are working to some extent, but that our research is so bad that it is incapable of telling (pp. 48–49).

Nonetheless, the damage had been done. Belief in rehabilitation went from being nearly ubiquitous among scholars and practitioners, to nonexistent during the 1970s (Cullen 2013). It wasn't just that we hadn't found the golden key or improved our studies enough—it was that rehabilitation can't work. Follow-ups to Martinson's work agreed that "Martinson was right" (Annis 1981, p. 321). Rehabilitation was futile. So what to do? "Wicked people exist," claimed James Q. Wilson. "Nothing avails except to set them apart from innocent people" (1985, p. 260).

So, the 1980s dawned on a field with a crisis on its hands. Its theoretical and empirical models seemed little more than fodder for academic journals, with no actual import. Perhaps worse yet, criminology's "answers about the origins of crime were stale" (Cullen 2010, p. 20). As recounted in the introduction to this book, the late 1970s lacked "criminological imagination" (Williams 1984). There was a lack of intellectual curiosity, a lack of fresh ideas, and increasing dismay about the future of the field. Williams was especially concerned with the preoccupation of criminologists with improving the minutia of statistical models and research methods at the expense of useful theoretical perspectives on criminal behavior.

All of that changed with what has been termed "the great debate" (Bernard et al. 2010). In the late 1970s, researchers began to explore a new paradigm, called the criminal career (and career criminals). In 1986, the National Academy of Sciences published a landmark report (known as the Criminal Career report), that described the perspective in detail, including a call for longitudinal studies and analyses of different 'dimensions' of the criminal career. Each of these dimensions, onset, duration, frequency, prevalence, desistance, were equally worthy of investigation by criminologists. In particular, the criminal career researchers argued that criminal careers varied across individuals and this variation should be explained by researchers.

This premise would have been interesting on its own, had it emerged in a different time. But alongside this focus on criminal careers arose a

unique theoretical perspective that directly challenged the tenets of the criminal career paradigm. Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi, two well-known criminologists, published a paper in 1983 arguing that the relationship between age and crime was the same everywhere and at all times (small degrees of differences between age-crime curves do not change the overall story, they said). Gottfredson and Hirschi directly opposed the criminal career work being conducted by Alfred Blumstein, Jacqueline Cohen, David Farrington, and Joan Petersilia. Their points of contention were many, but "boiled down to a debate between" the idea that criminal propensity was the primary cause of crime throughout life, and the idea that there are various causes to various types of crimes and various dimensions of the criminal career (Bernard et al. 2010, p. 308; Sampson and Laub 2016).

Key for the purposes of this chapter, however, the criminal career debate touched off a period of methodological and, importantly, theoretical creativity in the 1980s and into the 1990s (Rocque et al. 2015), and what was not directly addressed in the debate led others to take up the slack (Sampson and Laub 2016). It inspired a revival of the "criminological imagination" (Williams 1984). Gottfredson and Hirschi, after publishing several critical essays, fully described their perspective in their 1990 *A General Theory of Crime* (see Rocque et al. 2016b). This theory, also known as self-control theory, is among the most tested and supported theories of crime today. From 1986 to 2010, both Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi were among the top 11 most cited scholars in the field's flagship journal *Criminology* (Cohn et al. 2014).

The criminal career debate, in essence, kicked off developmental and life-course criminology. Does age matter? How? What happens in early, mid, and late adulthood with respect to crime? While the criminal career camp was not seemingly interested in theory, theories of desistance, the subject of this chapter, did emerge from this period. Prior to the criminal career debate, and the theoretical explosion that emerged from it, there was no such term as 'life-course criminology' or 'developmental criminology.' Today, there are dozens of books bearing those titles (and one academic journal, the *Journal of Developmental and Life-Course Criminology*), and divisions within criminological societies focused on

issues of crime over time. Key theory textbooks in the field would be incomplete without a chapter devoted to developmental/life-course (DLC) criminology.

This chapter draws on such DLC work, focusing on theories of desistance which early on were part of larger developmental frameworks but increasingly are being constructed as stand-alone theories. If one types in 'theories of desistance' to a Google scholar search bar, 13,000 results immediately populate.[1] Just what do these theories argue? Which has the most empirical support? Which seems to be the most logically consistent? The focus of this chapter will be on recent (1980s to present) perspectives on desistance. In that sense, we'll pick up where Chapter 2 left off, at the end of the 1970s. As we'll see, there are many views on why and how desistance occurs. To call each of them full-blown theories may be a stretch, but they are getting increasingly sophisticated, include a wide-array of disciplines, and have begun to be tested with increased vigor.

The chapter is organized thematically according to the primary focus of each particular theory. Note that such organization does not necessarily represent the last word on where and with whom such theories 'belong.' Scholarly tug of wars still persist, for example, on whether Matza's drift theory belongs to social learning or social control perspectives. Nonetheless one must select a thematic manner in which to make sense of theories of desistance, as they must for theories of crime in general. Rather than discuss the perspectives in chronological order, I have chosen to group them in six distinct (but overlapping) categories. These categories are organized by level of individual-centeredness—more individual-oriented theories are discussed first, concluding with more social theories. In the language of Dale Dannefer, we will move from ontogenetic to sociogenic theories (Dannefer 1984).

First, the chapter will cover pure age or biological theories of desistance. In this section, theories that give the explanatory weight of behavioral reform to biology or just the aging process are discussed here. I place this section first because it contains the most controversial

[1] Search conducted 12/28/15.

in terms of scholarly disagreement (and least supported) theories and serve in some sense as a counterpoint to all theories that have been developed since. Second, cognitive or brain maturation perspectives are considered. These theories draw on the recent work on changes in brain function and structure over the life-course that map pretty neatly onto the age-crime curve graphs we've considered throughout. In this section another biological theory is considered, relating to genetic causes of desistance. Third, the chapter moves on to rational choice perspectives on desistance. Much like the larger rational choice body of literature in sociology and criminology, rational choice theories see desistance as occurring as a result of a determined, purposeful, 'reasoned' decision on the part of the offender. Fourth, personality and psychosocial maturation identity theories of desistance are examined. These perspectives focus on temperament, personality traits and impulse control as key factors in the desistance process. Fifth are cognitive transformation, narrative, and identity theories. These internally focused theories see desistance (much like rational choice theories) as the result of processes that occur within the individual. Something changes in how the offender views him/herself or the world, and a change in behavior results. Finally, social process theories of desistance are examined—the most in-depth section of the chapter. It is the most in-depth section because the most work, both theoretical and empirical, has been done on how social factors correlate with or cause desistance. These social factors range, as discussed in the last chapter, from religion to marriage. Other social factors include civic participation and citizenship, a topic that has been examined with more rigor outside of the United States.

Certain theoretical views pertain to desistance but have not been given a large amount of attention in the scholarly literature. For example, Agnew's (1992) General Strain Theory is among the most popular theories of crime and could conceivably be related to desistance, but largely has not been applied to life-course crime. These extensions will not be discussed in detail in this chapter.

One final note before we get into the heart of the chapter. Not all of the perspectives presented and discussed here are full blown theories. Some of the perspectives are taken from works that do not purport to offer theories of desistance. Nonetheless, where scholars and other commentators have

attempted to explain the 'age effect' or why crime declines over time and with age, they are useful to include in a survey of theories of desistance.

## Theories of Desistance from Crime

What is a theory? In brief, it is an explanation of some sort of phenomenon. More formal definitions exist, of course. One of my favorites is 'a set of interrelated propositions' which basically just means statements about the world that are linked together. For example, in Sutherland's differential association theory, the theorist includes nine specific propositions that together explain how people become deviant and why some remain so longer than others. Akers and Sellers (2013) provide a nice set of factors upon which to evaluate theories including whether they make sense (logical consistency), whether they explain a lot or a little of the phenomenon of interest (scope), whether they are simple or overly complex (parsimony), whether they are empirically supported (valid), and whether they are able to inform public policy. In terms of desistance, theories seek to explain why crime declines with age, typically in early adulthood. But recognizing that desistance does not occur at the same time for everyone or at the same pace, theories must account for differential desistance as well. In this chapter, the focus is on empirical validity as well as logical consistency.

### Pure Age or Biological Theories of Desistance

Does desistance just happen? In other words, if we do nothing, will even the worst—the wicked if you will—among us eventually grow out of offending? Perhaps breaking into homes in the dead of night requires a degree of athletic ability and energy, energy that dissipates as people get older. Is desistance, then, just something that we should expect to happen—if at different times—for everyone? This seems to be a reasonable conclusion if one examines the data. For example, as was shown in Chapter 3, even for Laub and Sampson's (2003) highly criminal sample, nearly everyone eventually desisted.

So is age the only variable we need in order to understand desistance? Although it may be easy to misinterpret earlier work by Sheldon and Eleanor

Glueck as suggesting that age is a direct cause of crime (e.g., their statement that "aging is the only factor which emerges as significant in the reformative process" (Glueck and Glueck 1937/1966, p. 105), these scholars did not view age as solely causing desistance. For example, The Gluecks followed this line, on the next page, with the assertion that they did not know *what* aging meant but that it likely involved 'biological or psychological or social' factors. In some sense, the early writings of the Gluecks can be interpreted to equate aging with maturation and they often used the two words interchangeably. My argument, however, is that they did *not* suggest that aging was the cause of desistance but rather the "maturation that accompanies it" (1937/1966, p. 106).

The view that age is all that matters was endorsed by Hirschi and Gottfredson (1983) in their seminal age and crime paper. There, they made the convincing case that age and crime are similarly related across time and place—that is, it declines after adulthood. This age-crime curve, they said, was "one of the brute facts of criminology" (p. 552). After plotting age-crime curves for several time periods and across nations, they derived five 'theses' about the relationship between age and crime, which are central to their perspective. They are

> the age distribution of crime is invariant across social and cultural conditions; (2) theories of crime that do not explicitly attend to age have no logical or empirical obligation to do so and should not be judged by their apparent ability or inability to account for the age effect; (3) the age distribution of crime cannot be accounted for by any variable or combination of variables currently available to criminology; (4) explanations focusing explicitly on the age effect must be compatible with an apparently direct effect of age on crime; (5) the conceptual apparatus that has grown up around the age effect is largely redundant or misleading; (6) identification of the causes of crime at any age may suffice to identify them at other ages as well; if so, cohort or other longitudinal designs are not necessary for the proper study of crime causation (p. 554).

In their characteristically clever language, Hirschi and Gottfredson (1983) make claims that viewed one way, may be highly controversial—viewed another, not that noteworthy. For example, their third thesis, that the age

effect "cannot be accounted for by any variable or combination of variables currently available to criminologists" could mean (a) that the age effect cannot be explained or (b) that more research with refined measurement is needed. Later in the essay, the authors state "We would not argue that no mechanism can be found to account for the effects of age; we argue only that no such mechanism is to be found in current criminological research or theory" (p. 573).

A reading of their later work, though, seems to support interpretation 'a.' In a 1986 book chapter where they begin to lay out their theory more fully specified in *A General Theory of Crime* four years later, they discuss age again. Here they take a firmer stand on just what age means in relation to crime. First, they take David Matza (1964) to the woodshed for arguing that biological theories cannot account for the age effect. Read differently, this implies they believe biology *can* account for why crime declines with age. In response, they state

> Change in behavior with age would normally lead one to suspect that age might be in some way responsible for the change in behavior. But age suggests biology, and in criminology biology connotes fixation, immutability, or even destiny, and Matza is thus able to say that an *obviously biological correlate* of crime poses a direct threat to the ability of the biological perspective to explain criminality (Hirschi and Gottfredson 1986, pp. 55–56, emphasis added).

More illuminating still is the passage—one of the more remarkable in the criminological literature—that comes several paragraphs later:

> An alternative interpretation of maturational reform or spontaneous desistance is that crime declines with age. This explanation suggests that maturational reform is just that, change in behavior that comes with maturation; it suggests that spontaneous desistance is just that, change in behavior that *cannot* be explained, change that occurs whatever else happens later (1986, p. 57, citations omitted, italics added).

The authors then go on to systematically dismantle the case for the ability of social factors (job, marriage, children) to account for desistance.

The theory then is that crime declines with age, not because of social or institutional factors that vary across individuals, thereby accounting for differences in rates of desistance. It is rather due to the "inexorable aging of the organism" (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990, p. 141). Thus, desistance, according to this view, is a natural phenomenon, that will happen of its own accord. The well-known correlates of crime in adulthood, including jobs and marriage, are not causal from this perspective, but rather the result of selection. Hirschi and Gottfreson (1995) doubled down on their theory five years later in an exchange with proponents of the life-course view on crime, John Laub and Robert Sampson. They disagree with the "life-course perspective (which) says aging is not a unitary or biological process, we say that with respect to crime, it is useful to see aging in precisely this way" (p. 135).

Gottfredson and Hirschi are not the only proponents of the pure age perspective on desistance. Gove (1985) also argues that "Age is by far the most powerful predictor of those forms of deviant behavior that involve substantial risk and/or physically demanding behavior" (p. 115). He, like Hirschi and Gottfredson, suggests that no sociological theories can explain this effect. However, he does invoke psychological processes (in addition to biological changes) to account for this relationship. Bio-physiological factors play a role in Gove's theory. These include declining physical strength with age, energy, and psychological drives.

In their meaty treatise on all things crime, Wilson and Herrnstein (1985) also seek to explain why crime declines with age (i.e., desistance). Like Gottfredson and Hirschi, they note that age has presented a stumbling block for theorists in criminology. They spend about 20 pages covering the effect of age on crime, demonstrating the by now familiar age-crime curve across crime types. In the conclusion to this chapter, they theorize about "what the age effect means" (Wilson and Herrnstein 1985, p. 143). "Why does age affect crime?" they ask. The answer is to be found within the biological process of aging. "Youth is the adventurous time of life; old age, the settled time" (Wilson and Herrnstein 1985, p. 144). There are possibilities, they suggest such as that youth may be more inclined to crime because they are not economically established. Perhaps the passions of youth are what lead them to

crime. But they dismiss these, along with possible explanations of "employment, peers, or family circumstances" (p. 145).

Instead, Wilson and Herrnstein (1985) argue, "Age, like gender, resists explanation because it is so robust a variable" (p. 145). Yet they go on to describe a possible explanation, leaning on social reinforcement theory (that crime is rewarding in youth and less so in adulthood). For some who continue to offend in adulthood, and for whom the typical constraints have not applied, "the diminishing capacities of later life make crime too dangerous or unlikely to succeed, especially where there are younger and stronger competitors, or victims who will not be cowed" (p. 147). Thus, for Wilson and Herrnstein, while age has a strong effect, there is at least an attempt at understanding why. In that sense, age may only in *some* cases, have a direct effect.

Roughly 15 years after Hirschi and Gottfredson and Wilson and Herrnstein argued that the age effect *was* the theory, Satoshi Kanazawa and Mary C. Still (2000) attempted to put a bit more theoretical grist to the age mill. They placed the age-crime curve within the context of evolutionary psychology. That is, factors that influenced how humans developed in the environment of evolutionary adaptedness programmed us to behave in certain ways. For example, puberty increases the competition among males for reproductive success. Yet the costs of competition increase over time as well. These costs—from an evolutionary standpoint—include being killed and thus not being able to protect ones progeny (and genes) to ensure survival. The peak of the age-crime curve, according to these authors, is the confluence of increasing benefits and costs of reproductive competition. It is a bit unclear, however, once children have grown up past the point of needing physical protection, why men's violence does not increase again.

The position of Gottfredson and Hirschi and Wilson and Herrnstein was supported by empirical research at the time. Hoffman and Beck (1984), examining released federal prisoners in the 1970s, found that age was a strong predictor of recidivism, over and above criminal history. They argued that this provided evidence of a 'burnout' effect on criminal behavior. Shover (1985), in his study of older criminals, found that some stopped because of a growing sense of 'tiredness.' One ex-offender, in explaining why he desisted, said "Being tired, you know. Just

collapsing, that's all. I'd say age made me weak, made me tired, you know. That's all" (Shover 1985, p. 90). Even more recent work has seemingly suggested that biological or physiological effects of aging may matter a great deal. In their fascinating analyses of 16 convicted offenders, Sparkes and Day (2016) found that "tiredness" and "slowing down" were implicated in convincing offenders it was time to stop.

Unfortunately, using age as an explanation of crime begs the question rather than answering it. As covered in Chapter 2, Sutton (1994, p. 228) states, "[T]o say that age influences everything is to say nothing." In other words, it is not age itself that matters but changes that accompany aging. This is especially true when attempting to develop a theoretical account of behavioral reform (see Burke 2014; Maruna 1997). As Burke (2014) outlines, Dannefer (1984) and Sampson and Laub (1992) criticize this "ontogenetic" perspective. So while the age theory is parsimonious and wide in scope, it does not fare well on the logical consistency score (it doesn't really explain what is going on) or with respect to relevance for policy. What sorts of interventions follow from the notion that age is all that matters?

In perhaps their first full statement on life-course criminology, Sampson and Laub (1992) point out why age as a general explanation is not likely to bear fruit. The basis for their critique of the pure-age theories is "a seeming paradox—while studies reviewed earlier do show that antisocial behavior in children is one of the best predictors of antisocial behavior in adults, 'most antisocial children do not become antisocial as adults' (Gove 1985, p. 123)" (Sampson and Laub 1992, p. 71). In other words, persistent criminality is real, but somewhat rare, and so age itself cannot be the only factor explaining crime over the life-course. They then suggest that age is not a uniform phenomenon—it consists of several parts. Drawing on Rutter (1989), Sampson and Laub argue that not only does aging reflect physiological or biological changes, it also includes brain-related changes, "duration of experiences, and types of experiences" (Sampson and Laub 1992, p. 81). To Sampson and Laub (1992) and Rutter (1989), age had been mistakenly used as a proxy for biological changes. It means much more than that; only by understanding what aging really means can we get closer to understanding why criminal desistance occurs.

## Cognitive or Brain Maturation and Desistance from Crime

> The last decade has been one of enormous and sustained interest in patterns of brain development during adolescence and young adulthood. Enabled by the growing accessibility and declining cost of structural and functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and other imaging techniques, such as Diffusion Tensor Imaging (DTI), an expanding network of scientists have begun to map out the course of changes in brain structure between childhood and adulthood, describe age differences in brain activity during this period of development, and, to a more modest degree, link findings on the changing morphology and functioning of the brain to age differences in behavior—Steinberg 2008, p. 81

One of the components of aging that Rutter (1989) understood as vital to the aging process was cognitive maturity. By this he meant changes in cognitive abilities that accompany aging—for example, children have more 'limited' abilities than adults. Since Rutter published this work, there has been a veritable explosion in research on 'brain maturation.' Reading and understanding the neurological literature, however, is not easy. It requires something akin to learning a new language. Not only are the areas of the brain important to understand, but the component parts that make up the wiring of the brain are essential to know. Synapses, neurotransmitters, myelin, etc. are part of this new, wonderful language.

Before discussing 'theories' of brain maturation and desistance, it is useful to discuss just what this rather recent work has been uncovering. I say that the work is recent, because it is, but also because the work has represented something of a turning point in thinking about the brain. As Steinberg (2014, p. 22) states, "Until recently, neuroscientists believed that developmental plasticity [the shaping and building of the brain] is mainly a characteristic of early life. . . . We now know that adolescence is a similarly remarkable period of brain reorganization and plasticity." Just what is it that is undergoing a renovation in adolescence and into early adulthood? One change is an increase in white matter coinciding with a decrease in gray matter (Paus 2005). White matter is thought to play a role in informational processing, representing the connections between

parts of the brain, as well as sensations and the brain. James Balm (2014), writing for BioMed, calls white matter "the subway of the brain," for that reason. What helps speed up information processing, the ability for neurons to carry information, is called 'myelin' or fatty material that covers the neurons. It's the myelin that makes up the 'white' in the white matter. "Myelin insulates brain circuits, keeping the impulses flowing along their intended pathways rather than leaking out" (Steinberg 2014, p. 32). Thus, what is happening in adolescence with respect to white matter is that the brain is building a more efficient processing system.

Why does gray matter decrease then? One reason may be that connections that are no longer needed or used are simply removed. This process is called 'synaptic pruning' and, as Steinberg (2014) illustrates, is akin to trimming the branches of a tree so that the healthy, vibrant branches are able to flourish. Interestingly, gray matter tends to increase right before puberty, before decreasing thereafter as shown by Jay Giedd and colleagues in a pathbreaking study in 1999. In that study, one of the first to use Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) technology (which allows us to literally see inside the working brain) in a longitudinal manner, showed that from ages 4 to 21, gray matter increased and then decreased over time. They also showed that white matter increased monotonically. These changes are taking place where it matters most, in the frontal region of the brain, the house of decision-making (Spear 2007, 2013).

The psychologist Lawrence Steinberg has advanced a theory about how two 'systems' in the brain mature at different rates in adolescence, setting individuals up for trouble. In this dual systems theory, Steinberg (2008) argues that the parts of the brain that control reward seeking and impulsivity are not well matched (see also Steinberg et al. 2008). That is, early in adolescence, changes in the brain result in greater risk taking preferences. This increase in risk taking is likely due to changes in the dopaminergic system of the brain (Steinberg 2008). Dopamine is a neurotransmitter related to emotion and motor abilities (note, the Amygdala is also important for emotional control–Salgado-Pineda et al. 2005). Only later does increased regulation/reduced inhibition catch up. Thus, for a time, adolescents' brains are characterized by a high

preference for risk taking but a lack of inhibition. Steinberg (2010) found that risk taking preferences increased through adolescence then declined, whereas impulsivity scores were reduced from age 10 to 30.

Thus, as Restak (2001, p. 76, quoted in; Walsh 2009) says, "the immaturity of the adolescent's behavior is perfectly mirrored by the immaturity of the adolescent's brain." As the brain matures—gets more efficient, more controlled—behavior changes. It seems clear that the adolescent increase in antisocial behavior is linked to brain-related changes. But is the onset of desistance in emerging adulthood a result of brain maturation? Loeber et al. (2015) argue that researchers aren't yet sure. It seems likely, given the increase in restraint and forethought in this period that brain maturation is part of the process.

One of the more advanced theories of desistance using biological mechanisms was advanced by Collins (2004), who suggested that neurological factors, including structural and functional brain changes as well as hormonal and neurotransmitter-related variables, can help explain why antisocial behavior increases in adolescence and then declines. As can be seen, various factors influence each other to combine in producing desistance. Importantly, however, he does not dismiss the importance of socialization and social learning, which are also required for desistance to take place. Collins does not, however, explain how socialization matters in his schema, and it is unclear why it should, given the neurological changes relating to improved behavioral control. In fact, he advances the theory that individuals who persist in crime may not have strong adult social bonds in part because of the neurological deficits which predispose them to chronic criminality.

Finally, while not directly related to cognitive or brain maturation, there is a nascent body of research that argues genetic factors are implicated in the desistance process. Therefore, this research may also belong in the pure age category, but is still in need of a theoretical fleshing out. As an example, the biosocial criminologist Kevin Beaver and colleagues (2008) examined the relationship between marriage and desistance in conjunction with genetic polymorphisms. They found that marriage did predict desistance but genes (in particular DRD4, DRD2, and MAOA) also had independent effects on desistance (defined in a binary fashion as those who had offended at time 1 but not at time 3

using the Add-Health dataset). In addition, certain polymorphisms interacted with marriage such that those with the alleles understudy who got married were more likely to desist.

"Why would genes related to neurotransmitters be associated with desistance from offending behaviors?" Beaver et al. (2008) ask. "Most importantly . . . levels of neurotransmitters ebb and flow over the life course and these fluctuations in biochemical levels parallel closely the age-crime curve" (p. 749). Thus the authors draw on Collins' (2004) to explain this effect. Another intriguing possibility exists as well. Simons and Lei (2013) argue that genes may interact with the environment in a "differential susceptibility" manner, in which people with specific alleles are more susceptible to environmental influences than others. They argue that certain life events (such as marriage) may help certain people desist compared to others due to particular gene variants. However, as Kazemian (2015) argues genetic research on desistance "is a relatively new area of inquiry in desistance research, and more studies are needed" (p. 306).

Cognitive maturation theories are a bit more nuanced than pure age theories in that there are mechanisms (e.g., risk taking) that are implicated in the explanations. There are also implications for policy and practice that stem from cognitive maturation, programs that may help improve cognitive skills, for example. However, thus far this body of work remains mostly empirical, without full-fledged theories explaining why these changes happen or do not happen and they do not mesh well with the variations in desistance curves found in much research.

## Making the Right Choice: Rational Choice and Desistance from Crime

While there can be little argument that physiological changes are relevant for desistance from crime, in the remainder of this chapter we seek to take Sampson and Laub's (1992, p. 81) advice and "unpack the meaning of age." What is it about aging, cognitively or socially, that leads to changes in behavior? Certain theories of desistance—in fact, some of the earliest in the post-1980 literature—focus on decision-making. In other words, these theories suggest that with age and experience, the cost-benefit analysis that

underlies our actions is altered. The benefits of crime are downweighted and the costs are viewed as increased. All this leads to a reduction in antisocial behavior and engagement in the life-style that often accompanies it.

Rational choice perspectives in criminology emerged out of what is known as the neoclassical school, so named because of the resemblance to the classical school of criminology. Often deemed the first 'school of thought' in the field, and without fail the first set of theories discussed in criminology texts, the classical school argued that rather than the result of sin or demonic possession, criminal behavior could be boiled down to simple choices people make. The name most associated with the classical school is Cesare Beccaria, whose *On Crimes and Punishments* written in 1764 ushered in a new way of thinking about criminality and justice. The classical school assumed that individuals are rational thinkers. For example, "That force, which continually impels us to our own private interest, like gravity, acts incessantly, unless it meets with an obstacle to oppose it" (Beccaria 1764/1992, pp. 26–27).

The classical school was replaced by the positivist perspective, which deemed the collection and analysis of data superior to the more philosophical style of understanding human behavior that had gone on before. Positivism in criminology reigned supreme (and in some ways, still does) until the 1980s in which classical ways of thinking reemerged from the theoretical dustbin. This 'neoclassical' school included theories such as rational choice theory (Clarke and Cornish 1985) and routine activities theory (Cohen and Felson 1979). These theories, like Beccaria, assume that humans are rational actors, responding to costs and benefits associated with potential lines of action. It is a short theoretical distance to travel from assuming humans engage in criminal behavior because of the greater rewards relative to costs of such behavior, to assuming that criminals choose to desist when the costs outweigh the benefits.

It was in Cornish and Clarke (1986) *The Reasoning Criminal* that Maurice Cusson and Pierre Pinsonneault developed a strictly rational choice theory of desistance. They take as their purpose to explain "What makes a person decide to stop committing crimes" (p. 73). To begin to do so, they rely on interviews with 17 Canadian robbers who had stopped offending in their 20s. The data they analyzed allowed them to put together a theoretical sketch for why people make a choice to stop

criminal behavior. What clarified this cost/benefit analysis? First, a 'shock' had to occur. This shock could be a near death experience related to their crimes, a punitive sentence, a loss of a relationship. This leads the offender to begin to reassess his or her behavioral lifestyle, including whether criminal behavior is 'worth it.' From there a decision is made to stop, and desistance is reached.

Cusson and Pinsonneault (1986) also allow for what they call "delayed deterrence" which is the changing in calculation of costs and benefits that come with aging. For example, with age (or experience), offenders may realize that what they get out of robbery is really not that much. And also they may start to lose a sense of invincibility—seeing that their chances of being caught are higher than they previously thought. The four elements of delayed deterrence are "(a) higher estimate of the cumulative probability of punishment; (b) increasing difficulty of 'doing time,' (c) an awareness of the weight of previous convictions on the severity of the sentences, and (d) a spreading of fear" (p. 76). Figure 5.1 displays their theory graphically.

The idea of a changing criminal calculus leading to desistance was also utilized theoretically by Neal Shover (1983) in his work drawing on interviews with ex-offenders. In his first study on 'later stages' of criminal careers, Shover examined why 36 property criminals eventually decided to quit the business. The sample he used had engaged in quite a bit of crime, spending an average of 11 years behind bars and ranging in age from 51 to 72. Four of the subjects had not stopped offending, but most had. To understand why, Shover (1983) uses "*aging* as the major explanatory variable . . . however, only for the sake of brevity and convenience. The biological process of aging is not the focus of attention; rather it is the socially constructed and negotiated changes in perspectives which accompany aging" (p. 210, emphasis in original). What are these changes in perspective? First, Shover finds that over time, the idea of a profitable criminal career wanes. They begin to see "their youthful criminal identity as self-defeating, foolish, or even dangerous" (p. 211).

Second, with age, people begin to see that they have limited time on Earth. The idea of spending a two-year stint behind bars at age 20 may seem innocuous. For a 50-year-old grandfather, that prospect becomes frightening. Third, the things the men want out of life change over time—no longer

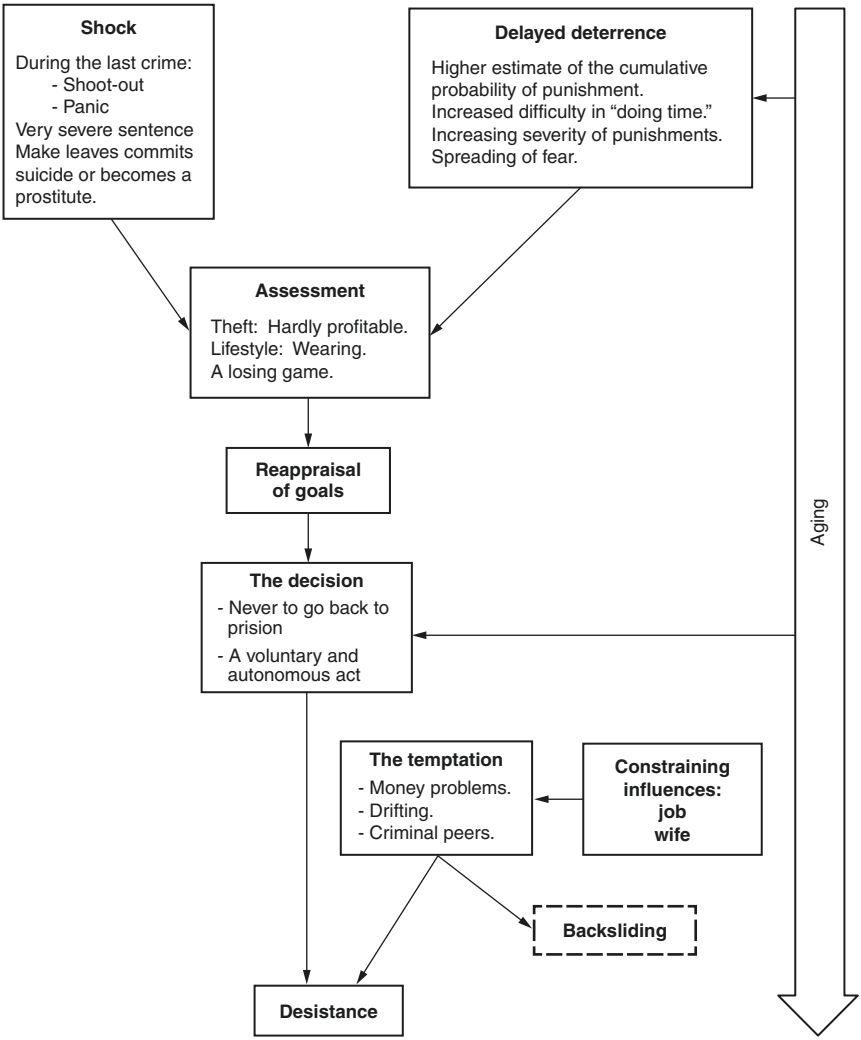


**Fig. 5.1** Cusson & Pinsonneault's rational choice theory of desistance

*Source*: Cusson & Pinsonneault (1986, p. 74). Figure reprinted with permission from Springer Publishing

is getting wealthy a top priority. Instead, having a good life takes precedence. Finally, the subjects suggested that they were too 'tired' to engage in

physical criminal activity. All of these factors lead to a rational decision to quit. As Shover states, as people get older, "the perceived odds narrowed; the perceived risks became greater; and the offenders decided to avoid the high-visibility crimes they had engaged in when younger" (p. 215). These changes in criminal calculus were in part brought on by experiences encountered while engaging in crimes, and in part by normal cognitive or psychological changes that happen over time even for non-criminals.

Shover expanded these ideas through two books. In the first, *Aging Criminals*, Shover (1985) provides one of the first in-depth treatments of older criminal careers and why even chronic offenders eventually stop. There he argues that in essence, experience provides offenders more information with which to make their cost benefit calculations, and thus they become more accurate at assessing risks and possible rewards of offending. In this book, Shover fleshes out his theory, arguing that the process of change is social, not individual. That is, it is not biological changes alone that lead to a different view on crime and criminal behavior. He says, "As men fail at crime and begin seriously to take stock of their lives and accomplishments, the collective norms and standards of thieves and hustlers gradually lose their grip on them. They recall the warnings of older inmates, perhaps offered years before, not to be fooled by the assumed ease of committing crime successfully" (Shover 1985, p. 103). In other words, peer pressure loses its power. The reference group for the men changes. The process is less personal and more social.

In later work, he (Shover and Thompson 1992) more fully specified how the criminal calculus changes over time. Specifically, with age, offenders decrease their perception of the likely success of criminal enterprises, increase their perception of the chances they get caught, and consequently reduce offending. In a quantitative analysis using the Rand Inmate Survey of 1,469 male prisoners, Shover and Thompson (1992) found that together, only criminal expectations (possible consequences of criminal behavior) and confinement avoidance (the success one has had avoiding criminal punishment) were statistically significant predictors of desistance (not being arrested 36 months after release).

Finally, in, 1996 Shover published *Great Pretenders: Pursuits and Careers of Persistent Thieves.* This work largely supports his earlier arguments about crime occurring as a result of conscious choice and

desistance emerging in a similar fashion. However, he adds several theoretical layers here, including the concept of 'life as party.' Here he means the high flying, careless, impulsive behavior coupled with a concern with having fun that characterizes many chronic criminals. In the later chapters of the book, Shover spells out the reasons for desistance, which again includes changes in interpersonal situations and reassessment of the value of criminal behavior.

A recent rational choice perspective on desistance was offered by Sam; King (2013). In what he calls "transformative agency," King argues that by deciding to change, offenders have the ability to desist from crime. Yet, following others (e.g., Farrall and Bowling 1999), he recognizes that rational choice may not be enough. Social structures and opportunities are key. The interplay between the structure and personal decision-making suggests that rather than simply a decision to stop, what is required are "strategies that will assist them [ex-offenders] in developing their personal and social context in ways that will enable them to move away from crime and (re)integrate into mainstream society" (King 2013, p. 318). A key element of King's theory is that the decision to stop does not just include the "here and now" but a focus on the future and what the individual intends to be doing (or not doing). Then, the individual can take steps to ensure they are successful in reaching those goals.

Empirical support has been equivocal for rational choice theories of desistance. It can hardly be disputed that some sort of decision underlies all human endeavors, including desistance. However, whether that decision is conscious and takes priority over other factors is in question. Paternoster (1989) found that "Like the decision to begin offending, the decision to desist was virtually unrelated to considerations of legal threats. . . . There is no evidence . . . of a 'delayed deterrence' effect, at least as it pertains to formal sanction threats" (p. 30). Uggen and Kruttschnitt (1998) similarly found other factors were more important in explaining desistance than risks of offending. Laub and Sampson (2003), in their reanalysis and follow-up of the Glueck data, found some evidence of rational choice, but argued that overall, many offenders desist "by default," that is, without conscious effort. However, some research—typically qualitative—has found that offenders do make a decision to stop offending (see Byrne and Trew 2008; Sommers et al.

1994). More recent work has utilized the term 'human agency' as a code for purposeful decision-making, but the theory is the same. This work has suggested, similar to rational choice theories, that decisions are part of the desistance process (Farrall and Bowling 1999; Farrall and Calverly 2006; Healy 2010; King 2014). As will be discussed below, however, conceptual and definitional issues remain with this notion of human agency.

A larger question is why decision-making changes with age. Cusson and Pinsonneault (1986) answered this question in part by suggesting some sort of rock-bottom must be reached or a shock to the system which then leads to changes in how one views crime. But what about those who desist 'naturally,' that is, without being caught and punished? And why do some offenders persist while others come to the conclusion that crime no longer pays? Perhaps more fundamentally, how can we influence these changes in rational thinking from a policy perspective? These questions remain relatively open with respect to rational choice theories of desistance.

## On Cognitive Development and Desistance: Psychological and Psychosocial Theories

While theories of desistance that focus changing mindsets or decision-making are arguably related to psychological mechanisms, several explanations have drawn more specifically on factors such as personality traits and cognition. The theme of interrelatedness of various perspectives or theories of desistance will repeatedly arise in this chapter. That is, while theories have been presented as stand-alone, or even competing, links between them are often obvious but overlooked. This notion will be the subject of the next chapter.

### Personality Traits: Fixed or Changing?

Certain theories of desistance suggest that behavioral change comes about due to changes in cognitive or psychological factors. A relatively recent example is the work of Daniel Blonigen, who has argued that personality traits change over time in such a way that mirrors the age-

crime curve (Blonigen 2010). As he points out, in criminology especially, personality traits are often viewed as fixed, changing trivially throughout life. In their classic text *Theoretical Criminology*, Vold et al. (1998) define personality as the "complex set of emotional and behavioral attributes that tend to remain relatively constant as the individual moves from situation to situation" (p. 88). Later, they suggest that criminological research examining individuals with personality defects "suggests that these people have some personality characteristic that is associated with crime that they carry with them through time and space" (p. 106).

Criminology may be forgiven for having an antiquated view of personality. As recently as 1987, a *New York Times* article (Goleman 1987) reported the findings of "The largest and longest studies to carefully analyze personality throughout life." That article quoted expert Paul T. Costa Jr. who stated, "I see no evidence for specific changes in personality due to age." Fast forward 20 or so years and the evidence had changed—remarkably so. Blonigen (2010) utilizes the work of Caspi et al. (2005), who argued that personality traits are both stable and unstable over time. In other words, those high in anxiety might remain high relative to others, but their population (mean or average) levels will change as they age. This is exactly what Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), incidentally enough, argued in their self-control theory. That is, self-control levels remain relatively fixed, but absolutely can change—and perhaps that's the key to desistance.

For Blonigen (2010), it is important to distinguish between rank-order stability (relative stability, the "if you have more self-control than Catherine at age 10, you likely will have higher self-control than her at age 25 as well" thesis), mean-level change, and individual-level change. As he states, "[R]ank order stability does not reflect stability in an absolute sense. Rather, it indicates the degree to which individuals maintain their ordinal position within a population over time, and is thus distinct from mean-level change" (2010, p. 93). Mean-level change indicates how the population as a whole changes over time. Importantly, "To the extent that the majority of individuals in a population change in the same direction, mean-level change reflects normative alterations in the average amount of a trait in a population over time and may reflect

maturational or historical processes common to that population" (p. 93). Finally, individual-level changes refer to idiosyncratic variation among individuals belonging to the same group. These changes may buck the overall trend and thus account for relative extreme patterns of behavior.

Key for the purposes of desistance research, is that certain influential personality traits change over time. Blonigen (2008) focuses on the "Big Five" of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to experience) correlate with antisocial behavior—and these traits often show mean-level changes consistent with what would be expected from the normative desistance literature. For example, reviews covering ages 18–30 show that neuroticism scores decrease, and agreeableness and conscientiousness scores tend to increase. Thus, mean-level changes can account for normative desistance. Of course, as we've seen throughout this book, not everyone desists at the same time—this may be better understood, Blonigen suggests, by appealing to individual-level changes. He is quick to point out, however, that personality trait changes are likely implicated in a host of factors, all of which cause desistance (i.e., personality trait change alone is not, to him, *the* cause of desistance). Similar arguments have recently been made by Morizot (2015).

So far research seems supportive of the idea that personality traits (using individual level analyses) can and do change over time. Importantly, these changes are related (causally?) to desistance (see Blonigen et al. 2008; Steinberg et al. 2015; see also the review in Morizot 2015). It is interesting that researchers are hesitant to make the case that increases in such things as agreeableness and conscientiousness might be causally connected to increases in prosocial behavior. It seems logical that those who are easy to get along with and who think about others would be less likely to victimize those in their environments. Yet the same sort of critiques discussed in the cognitive maturation section apply here. Why do personality traits change differently for different people? What policies are implicated in these types of theories? However, more fully fleshed out models of psychological changes and desistance have been developed, which we turn to next.

## Psychosocial Maturation

The concept of psychosocial maturation has a long history in psychology and related fields. As best I can tell, the first usage of that term was by Ellen Greenberger and colleagues in the 1970s and 1980s (Greenberger et al. 1975; Greenberger and Sørensen 1974; Greenberger 1982; Greenberger and Steinberg 1986). Greenberger and Sørensen (1974) were the first to introduce psychosocial maturity. They developed the concept as a way to study 'social' as opposed to cognitive growth over time. The concept included three dimensions. The first referred to responsibility or independence ("the capacity to function adequately on one's own;" p. 339). When one has attained the stage in life where parents, teachers, caretakers are no longer needed for the basics, the first degree of psychosocial maturity has been reached. Second, individuals must be able to get along with others ("the capacity to interact adequately with others;" p. 340). We are social animals and we rely on others for survival. Interaction and working together are integral parts of becoming an adult. Finally, the third dimension of psychosocial maturation captured the ability to bring people closer together ("capacity to contribute to social cohesion;" p. 340). Greenberger et al. (1975) showed how to empirically measure this concept that they said was meant to capture "growth as persons and as social beings" in students (p. 127).

It wasn't until 20 years later that psychosocial maturity was applied to criminal and antisocial behavior. Steinberg and Cauffman (1996) reinterpreted the concept to include three components: (1) responsibility, (2) temperance, (3) perspective. Responsibility refers to being able to take care of oneself, and is related to Greenberger and colleagues' definition of psychosocial maturation. Steinberg and Cauffman (1996), however, expand the umbrella of responsibility to include things like having a good idea of who one is (identity). Temperance is akin to self-constraint or impulse control—similar to Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) concept of self-control. Finally, perspective represents the tendency to think about others and the consequences of one's actions. In other words, the ability to think beyond one's personal bubble.

The links between the theory of psychosocial maturation and desistance from crime are clear. As we have seen, antisocial behavior tends to peak in late adolescence. This is the period in which risk taking and impulse control are not well matched cognitively. As individuals age, they begin to gain responsibility—they are less reliant on others or illegitimate avenues for their needs, their self-control increases, and they are also more likely to consider how their actions affect others (not just those in the immediate path of their destruction). Thus, perhaps people desist from crime—and why much of crime is adolescent limited—is due to normative psychosocial maturation. Those who do not desist in their early 20s have delayed maturation. Or so the theory goes.

Empirical work on this new concept/definition of psychosocial maturation took off in the later part of the first decade of the twenty-first century. First, Cauffman and Steinberg (2000) showed that measuring psychosocial maturation is possible and that scores on this domain increased over time and tracked well with so-called socially responsible decision-making. Since that paper, several others have explored psychosocial maturity and crime over time, suggesting that this kind of maturity is indeed important for desistance. Monahan et al. (2009) examined the Pathways to Desistance Study, which includes a psychosocial maturity measure, in relation to desistance from crime. In that study, they found that there are several trajectories of antisocial behavior, including one 'desisting' group. Higher levels of psychosocial maturation were related to desistance but not in a universal way. Gains in temperance were associated with desistance, but the results were mixed for responsibility and consideration (see also Steinberg et al. 2015). Recent research has examined whether incarceration (Dmitrieva et al. 2012) or substance use (Chassin et al. 2010) impedes psychosocial maturation (the answer is yes to both).

The importance of psychosocial maturation as a key part of the desistance process (or even a cause) has yet to be fully realized in criminology. Much of the work on psychosocial maturation has been conducted in psychological outlets rather than mainstream criminology journals. There is no doubt that its inclusion in a key longitudinal dataset (Pathways to Desistance, see Chapter 4) will help usher psychosocial maturity into criminological prominence. It has yet to be determined whether the theory will fare well in comparison to other theories

of desistance, however. Interestingly, links to other theories (e.g., cognitive maturation and rational choice theories) are also clear. Perhaps psychosocial maturation is part of a larger, umbrella phenomenon that helps explain why decision-making improves with age.

## It's Just Not Who I Am Anymore: Identity Theories of Desistance

In some shape or form, theories of identity have been prevalent in sociology and related disciplines for decades. The notion that the 'self' is an important part of who we are and how we behave can be traced to the symbolic interactionist work of George H. Mead, Herbert Blumer, and Charles Horton Cooley. How can the self or identity shape our behaviors? Oyserman et al. (2012, p. 69) put it this way "Want a burger and fries or softly steamed fish and fungi? How about offering a bribe to win that contract? Feel like bungee jumping? People believe that they do not need to seriously weigh the pros and cons of these choices before deciding, that their identities provide a meaning-making anchor. They know who they are, and who they are directs their choices." In other words, rather than a thoughtful, reasoned decision guiding all choices and behaviors, certain lines of action are not even considered because they are not consonant with who we think we are. Other choices are quickly accepted—'of course I want a burger, only yuppies eat sushi!'

A similar story is likely to be implicated with respect to criminal behavior. That is, people may engage or not engage in crime not because of a conscious or detailed cost-benefit analysis but because such lines of action are or are not in line with whom they think or want to be. Identity theories of desistance are among the more recent theories but have quickly gained empirical support. One of the first theories of identity was offered by Peggy Giordano and colleagues (Giordano et al. 2002). Their theory of 'cognitive transformation' outlines a four step approach that offenders go through in the process of desistance. It is called 'cognitive transformation' because the approach entails beginning to view oneself as a different person (e.g., no longer a troublemaker) and then coming to think about crime differently (e.g., see it in a different light).

## The Theory of Cognitive Transformation

Giordano et al.'s (2002) theory was offered in direct contrast to a theory we'll discuss later on—Sampson and Laub (1993) theory of informal social controls. In brief, that theory views external forces as the most important factors in causing previously serious criminals to stop offending. Giordano's team drew on a sample of offenders who were (a) more recently involved in crime (Sampson and Laub utilized the Glueck data, composed of boys born in the 1920s and 1930s) and (b) more diverse in terms of gender and race. The question was, would social control measures (e.g., marriage, employment) have the same effect on nonwhites and women? The answer, in short, was no. Something else needed to be drawn upon to understand persistence and desistance from crime for these folks.

By talking to the individuals who were recruited as juveniles for the Ohio Life-Course Study (OLS) which was initiated in 1982 and seeking to understand what seemed to be changing or not in their lives, Giordano and colleagues found that attitudes coupled with prosocial relationships seemed to be a primary factor. Attitudes about what behavior is appropriate or acceptable, attitudes toward other people, and attitudes about themselves were key. This is the up-front work that has to be done before external forces such as social bonds can have any influence, they argue. The four steps of cognitive transformation referenced earlier are as follows. First, the individual—who is assumed to have been a serious if not chronic offender, one who has lived a significant portion of their life in a criminal culture, a criminal way of life—must be accepting of a new outlook and way of life. In this view, offenders who don't want to change, who don't want to give up crime or their party lifestyle are not going to be influenced much by the conforming tendencies of getting a great job. So a crack in the veneer is a necessary first step.

Second, some structural assistance must become available to the individual. Thus wanting to change is not seen as enough for desistance to happen. Giordano et al. (2002) call this second step "exposure to hooks for change." By hooks, they refer to relationships and structural

roles that can help someone get on the path to the straight and narrow. These could be a relationship, a job, or having a child. Social control theories view the presence of these relationships as often all that is needed for desistance—from the cognitive transformation perspective, the first step is necessary for the second step to take on a greater meaning in the individual's life.

The third step is the beginning of a change in how one views him or herself. Prior to this step, the individual's 'self' has been primarily anti-social, they see themselves as a 'bad person.' Now a new self becomes possible. Finally, the fourth step is that, consistent with all that has gone on before with respect to cognitive transformations, criminal behavior comes to be seen by the individual as undesirable. It is no longer consistent with who they are as a person and the world that they inhabit. Giordano et al. (2002, p. 1002) call this the "capstone" transformation, the one that completes the process. Note that for desistance to occur, all the steps should be completed. While not specifically stated by the authors, it is conceivable that should only certain of the steps be completed, the individual will only reach primary, rather than secondary desistance (see Maruna et al. 2004a). The theory is displayed graphically in Fig. 5.2.

In the same article that Giordano introduced the theory of cognitive transformation, they also presented interview data to support it. They found evidence of all parts of the transformation process in the desisting sample. Later work by Giordano and her team expanded the theory to include such things as the role of emotions in desistance (Giordano et al. 2007). For example, they argue that new role-taking experiences (from which selves are derived) may do three things: (1) decrease negative emotions that give rise to crime, (2) decrease positive emotions that encourage crime, and (3) foster a new ability to handle emotions. Again, their data (using the OLS study) showed support for this 'neo-Meadian' (referencing George H. Mead) perspective. Finally, in a 2008 study, Giordano and colleagues sought to further explore the role of religion as a hook for change. In their quantitative analyses, they found no support for the idea that religion or spirituality is a cause of desistance. However, their interviews hinted at ways in which religion may provide meaning in the subjects' lives and promote behavioral reform.

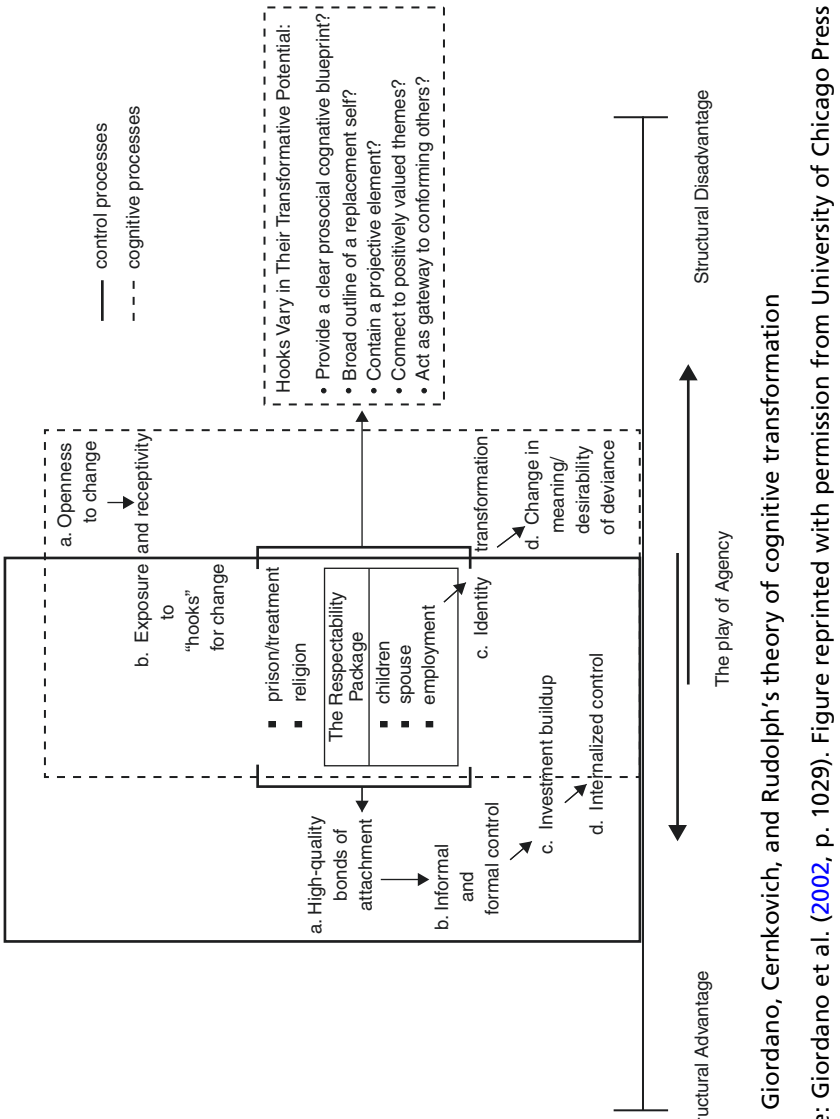


**Fig. 5.2** Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph's theory of cognitive transformation

*Source*: Giordano et al. (2002, p. 1029). Figure reprinted with permission from University of Chicago Press

Giordano and colleague's theory directly links cognitive transformations to the social world. Decision-making in the form of human agency is apparent from the very beginning iterations of the theory. However, recently, Ray Paternoster (2016) has argued that their notion of agency is not clear and, more importantly, in the later versions of the theory, agency is more social than cognitive. He says, "In fact, in the revised 2007 theory of emotional transformations and desistance they (Giordano et al. 2007, p. 1607) seemed utterly hostile to the notion that desistance originates in the minds of offenders" (Paternoster 2016, p. 24). In other words, the theory of cognitive transformation is more social than psychological and decision-making is forced to the background of the desistance process.

## Maruna's Theory of Narrative Rescripting

There may be no other researcher who has contributed more to understanding the cognitive processes of desistance than Shadd Maruna. From the beginning of his career, he has been interested in talking to offenders in various stages of their criminal careers, some with plans to continue, others actively trying to 'go straight.' In recent years he has been interested in examining the role of reintegration and stigma and how desistance research can inform corrections work. With respect to his primary theoretical contributions, Maruna shows how 'narrative identity' or how one tells their own story comes to influence their lives. He says, "The way each of us views our own history is interesting not only because of what it reveals about our personality and our background; *this subjective autobiography actually shapes our future choices and behavior*" (Maruna 1999, p. 5, emphasis in the original). Drawing on the work of McAdams (1994) and Giddens (1991), Maruna argues that identity is important in understanding past, present, and future behavior, and that to understand one's identity, researchers must look at their narratives or self-stories.

His best known work is the masterful *Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild their Lives* (2001). Here he presents his theory via an analysis of the Liverpool Desistance Study (LDS) data. This work was one of the first (along with Laub and Sampson's review piece published

the same year) to offer an overview of desistance research and organize it into several categories. In this work, Maruna also first provided his insightful analysis of the definition of desistance (to which Chapter 3 is indebted) illustrating why it is such "an unusual dependent variable" (Maruna 2001, p. 17). Here he more fully fleshed out the idea of the narrative identity as a structure for behavior.

While Maruna's theory and findings are certainly complex, one of the major insights he provides is that there must be some sort of bridge between a disadvantaged background, steeped in criminal behavior, and a new, prosocial 'me.' It is too far of a leap between the two to simply wake up one day and have a new identity. What Maruna (2001) discovered was that ex-offenders—desisters—re-imagine their past in a way that allows them to see it as consistent with their new, crime-free future. This 'redemption' provides motivation to push through the difficult work of desistance. The "redemption script begins by establishing the goodness and conventionality of the narrator—a victim of society who gets involved with crime and drugs to achieve some sort of power over otherwise bleak circumstances . . . Yet with the help of some outside force, someone who 'believed in' the ex-offender, the narrator is able to accomplish what he or she was 'always meant to do'" (Maruna 2001, p. 87).

Another key finding and element of Maruna's explanation of desistance is that persistent offenders see themselves as lacking agency, as being controlled by outside forces while desisters frequently spoke about taking control of their lives in order to enact change. Note the similarities to Giordano and colleagues' theory, which places the emphasis on identity but sees social relationships as the key that unlocks the power of the self to change behavior. Generativity or the desire to do something for others, to repay debts as it were, is a final aspect of 'making good.' Research has supported the role of the narrative in the desistance process (see, e.g., Gadd and Farrall 2004; Vaughan 2007). In addition, a recent paper by Alisa Stevens (2012) found that part of the reason therapeutic communities are effective is that it helps offenders reframe their identities in ways that are consistent with a prosocial self. This is consistent with the process Maruna discovered in the LDS. External sources of identity are seen as important, as Maruna et al. (2004b) argue that labeling by others can either assist or impede reintegration.

## Paternoster and Bushway: The Feared Self

The most explicit identity/self-based theory of desistance is also one of the more recent. In 2009, Ray Paternoster and Shawn Bushway, two criminologists well known for their empirical and quantitative work, took up the theorizing torch. What resulted was a theory placed directly in contrast to prevailing explanations of desistance. For example, they say that while their theory is related to Maruna's and Giordano's in highlighting identity, it is less socially oriented than Giordano's and does not view prosocial identities as having to be construed as fundamentally consistent with past selves, as in Maruna's theory. For Paternoster and Bushway, identities change but not because of relationships or external bonds. It is an individualistic, cognitive process.

Like Maruna and Giordano, however, Paternoster and Bushway (2009) offer a theory that sees desistance as the end result of a series of steps. Drawing on social psychological literature on the self, they view individuals as holding multiple perspectives of themselves at once. The version of the self that characterizes who someone is at the present is the 'working self.' Individuals also think about what they want to be in the future, and this is called the 'possible self.' The possible self is a goal of sorts, something to strive for. As they state, the possible self "provides directed motivation for one's behavior" (p. 1114). Finally, there is a 'feared self,' something one does *not* wish to become or continue to be. This also provides motivation for behavior.

While the theory of the feared self focuses on identity, Paternoster and Bushway's imagined sequence of events is not entirely distinct from the rational choice theories reviewed earlier. In other words, even though identity change comes from within, there may be specific events that encourage change. This isn't a natural, maturation-related change to Paternoster and Bushway. The replacement self is a (rational?) decision, one that is arrived at after a consideration of "the costs and disadvantages of their lives in crime" (p. 1119). After a series of life failures, offenders experience a "crystallization of discontent" (p. 1124) with their lifestyles, prompting a need for change. This idea is similar to Cusson and Pinsoneault's notion of a shock leading to a reassessment of behavior.

The difference is that instead of one major event leading to change, there is an accumulation of poor outcomes that crystallize into a negative assessment of the present, a feared future of more of the same, and a possible, future self that is free of the current troubles. Importantly, like Giordano and colleagues, the focus of the theory is on identity change but with that comes a change in desires and the type of people one affiliates with (e.g., 'hooks for change').

Until recently, few quantitative empirical tests had been conducted showing identity change is related to desistance. To be sure, qualitative research had suggested that ex-offenders tend to think about themselves and criminal behavior differently (see Giordano et al. 2002; King 2013; Opsal 2012; Sommers et al. 1994; Vaughan 2007). However, it was unclear whether this was a retrospective re-imagining or wishful thinking. In the last few years, however, quantitative research has supported the idea that identities do change over time and that such change is related to behavioral reform (see Bachman et al. 2016; Na et al. 2015; Rocque et al. 2016a). Paternoster and Bushway (2009) recommended a specific type of analysis to assess their theory (time-series analysis) but to date, it does not appear researchers have taken the suggestion. Nonetheless, identity, the self, and narratives appear to be an important part of the desistance process. As people get older, they see themselves as, and wish to be, better people. It appears that given a certain level of social supports, identity change can lead to behavioral change, and thus, desistance. Note also the considerable overlap between identity/cognitive transformation theories of desistance and rational choice perspectives. Both view desistance as the result of a change in preferences and of a decision to stop offending.

## Turning Points, Social Inclusion, and Desistance: Social Process Theories

Social process theories of desistance emerged prior to personality or psychological perspectives. The linchpin theory in this category is Sampson and Laub's age-graded theory of informal social controls, which was first developed in the early 1990s. Social process theories are fundamentally different than what we have discussed previously.

As Paternoster and Bachman (2001) argue, theories tell us what we should pay attention to in the world. Social process theories, rather than directing the spotlight on physiological changes or cognitive transformations, tell us to look at social relationships and social roles people occupy. We'll begin with learning theories.

## Social Learning Theory and Desistance

In what are known as social learning theories of crime, the major cause of delinquency is peers. Peers may act as role models, change attitudes, or provide opportunities for crime. We learn from peers (friends, family, etc.) how to behave, what goals to pursue, and values to hold dear, and so on. Peers occupy greater roles in our lives as we exit childhood and enter adolescence. The transition to adulthood leads to a decrease in the influence of peers as we create our own families. Mark Warr (1993) found that peer influence is strongest in adolescence and then declines over time. To him, this could offer a reasonable explanation of the age-crime curve, and thus, desistance. In fact, his models showed that peer influence (measured by having and hanging out with delinquent peers) explains the association between age and crime. In a later paper, Warr (1998) showed that marriage is related to desistance because, in part, it breaks up deviant peer groups.

The name most associated with social learning theories in criminology is Ronald Akers. He has created a general theory, which is multilevel, called Social Structure and Social Learning (SSSL) theory. Akers has made a career of extending and reformulating Edwin Sutherland's Differential Association Theory. His first piece, with Ernest Burgess in 1966, cast Differential Association Theory in a modern learning perspective, drawing on the idea of conditioning. Akers sees social learning of behavior as comprising four elements: (1) differential association (who one interacts with); (2) definitions (of behavior/law); (3) imitation; and (4) differential reinforcement (rewards or avoidance of punishments for behavior). SSSL has mostly been concerned with explaining delinquency but it does deal with desistance as well. For example, the theory would argue that people have fewer associations with delinquent peers as they

age, their definitions or attitudes toward crime change, there are fewer criminal models to imitate, and offending behavior is less likely to be rewarded or reinforced with age. This last argument is consistent with rational choice or identity theories. As we've seen, numerous theories expect that the benefits of crime are (a) likely to be perceived as lower and (b) likely to be reduced in older age. In his (2011) Social Learning and Social Structure tome, Akers mostly refers to desistance in terms of 'cessation' from delinquency. Here he argues, "[S]ocial learning theory addresses the entire use (of drugs) process of abstinence, frequency of use, abuse, cessation, and relapse" (p. 191).

Social learning theory is one of the more empirically supported theories of crime and delinquency. Meta-analyses (e.g., Pratt et al. 2010) and reviews (Akers and Jensen 2006) have demonstrated that the components of Akers' theory predict deviance. Some work has shown that social learning variables can predict cessation from such things as drug and alcohol use and adolescent cigarette smoking (Krohn et al. 1985; Lanza-Kaduce et al. 1984; Maume et al. 2005). It also appears to be the case that changes in peer groups do occur during the transition to adulthood and these changes influence behavior (Giordano et al. 2003). Importantly, research has shown that the influence of marriage on desistance depends upon the criminality of the spouse (Andersen et al. 2015; Skardhamar et al. 2014[3]; Van Schellen et al. 2012). This suggests (to some) that the association between marriage and desistance (discussed further below) may be in part due to a peer effect. Other work has indicated social learning is more useful for understanding initiation into delinquency rather than desistance (Esbensen and Elliott 1994; Winfree et al. 1993). It remains the case that in the desistance literature, social learning theory is relatively neglected, occupying either a small section in reviews or, in other cases, not even warranting a mention (see, e.g., Farrall and Calverly 2006; Farrall et al. 2014; Kazemian and Maruna 2009; Laub and Sampson 2001; Maruna 2001).

[3] Interestingly, Skardhamar et al. found that the decrease in criminal behavior was greater for those who married a criminal. They speculate that this may be because these individuals have a higher rate of crime pre-marriage.

## Changing Contexts, Changing Behavior?

Some theories of desistance have focused on the way individuals spend their time and how that changes over time. One of the stronger correlates of juvenile delinquency is unstructured and unsupervised time spent with peers (Anderson 2013). The basic premise is that adolescents, because of perhaps a natural inclination to mischief, the influence of peers, or perhaps changes in risk taking preferences, require more supervision than small children or adults. It may also be the case that unstructured time—from certain theoretical perspectives—is by itself, regardless of age, a main ingredient in the recipe for deviance. The colloquial saying, "idle hands are the devil's playthings" illustrates this well. When people have nothing constructive to do with their time, the lure of antisocial behavior may become too much.

There is some evidence that changes in unstructured time is associated with a decrease in antisocial behavior. Osgood and colleagues (1996) examined data from the Monitoring the Future study to determine whether unstructured socializing such as "riding around in a car for fun," "getting together with friends informally," and "spending evenings out for fun and recreation" (p. 642). Not only did the results show that these activities decreased after adolescence, they were strongly related to criminal behavior.

Changing routine activities may not only provide structure for offenders, thus representing a form of social control, they may also 'knife off' individuals from bad influences (Maruna and Roy 2007). Maruna and Roy (2007), in their analysis of the 'knifing off' metaphor in criminology, argue that knifing off of past roles and opportunities can cause desistance. But it is a touchy process: "Ideally, like with a good surgeon, knifing off would involve the precise removal of those bits of one's past life choices that were contaminated and leave all of the other, good bits in" (Maruna and Roy 2007, p. 114). David Kirk (2012) found evidence that former offenders who moved away from their previous neighborhoods in New Orleans (because those neighborhoods were no longer

habitable) recidivated at lower rates than those who stayed. However, evaluations of programs, such as Moving to Opportunity, which sought to experimentally investigate how changing environments changes behavior, have not had the same results. Moving to Opportunity, for example, showed that for boys whose families received housing vouchers for low poverty areas, risky behavior was increased relative to a control group who did not receive any vouchers (Orr et al. 2003). While some advantageous findings for girls emerged, the overall picture seems to be that the program did not improve behavior. Much more research is necessary to fully understand the mechanisms at play in the changing contexts of theories of desistance. Is it opportunity for crime that is diminished when one leaves one's old stomping grounds?

## Civic (Re)integration and Desistance

As Maruna (2001) argued, desisting individuals often want to "give back" in order to make up for what they have done. He discussed this tendency in the context of "generativity." There is an increased desire to "take responsibility for the next generation" (p. 118). Part of generativity involves becoming an upstanding citizen and a good member of society. How this is accomplished, though, must be meaningful. As Maruna relates, "Requiring offenders to pick up garbage along the highway probably will not create many environmentalists. Yet, giving convicted offenders the option to volunteer at homeless shelters, build houses with Habitat for Humanity, or counsel juvenile offenders (as alternatives to sitting in a cell) just might help 'turn on' a few individuals to something besides criminal consumption" (pp. 128–129).

In other words, there may be something about civic participation, volunteering, taking part in socially constructive activities which help offenders feel that they are finally part of society—mainstream society. After all, traditional street crimes generally contradict the values and beliefs held firm in mainstream society—life, property, safety/security. Generativity or civic reintegration may therefore represent affirmation of the exiting of a criminal career both to the offender and to the wider society.

The work of criminologist Christopher Uggen has been most supportive of this perspective. Uggen and colleagues have examined the effects on recidivism of a wide variety of civic factors, such as voting. Uggen and Manza (2005) suggest that civic integration is an important element of "social participation [that] may affect desistance patterns" (p. 66). To them, felon disenfranchisement laws (the removal of voting rights for those convicted of a felony, even after release) are likely to have a damaging effect on ex-offenders' abilities to reintegrate into society.

Uggen and Manza (2004) argued that "The reintegrative effects of voting may have broader implications. The right to vote is one of the defining elements of citizenship in a democratic polity and participation in democratic rituals such as elections affirms membership in the larger community for individuals and groups" (p. 195). In other words, there is a connection between civic membership and prosocial identity, relating this social theory of desistance with the more psychological ones discussed above. Uggen and Manza (2004) found evidence that those who voted were less likely to be arrested or incarcerated, but offenders themselves are more skeptical.

Uggen et al. (2004) link voting and civic reintegration to adult status, suggesting that those who feel more adult are less likely to recidivate. They extend their arguments beyond voting to include neighboring and homeownership, and volunteering. It seems logical that volunteering, participating in community organizations, as well as voting, would be part of the constellation of markers of a good citizen, a role inconsistent with criminal behavior. As one of Uggen et al.'s (2004) interviewees related,

> I think that just getting back in the community and being a contributing member is difficult enough . . . And saying, "Yeah, we don't value your vote either because you're a convicted felon from how many years back," okay? . . . But I, hopefully, have learned, have paid for that and would like to someday feel like a, quote, "normal citizen," a contributing member of society, and you know that's hard when every election you're constantly being reminded, "Oh yeah, that's right, I'm ashamed." . . . It's just like a little salt in the wound. You've already got that wound and it's trying to heal and it's trying to heal, and you're trying to be a good taxpayer and be a homeowner . . . Just one little vote, right? But that means a lot to me (p. 274).

Another stated, "People don't want to recognize that we can still be citizens and still be patriotic even though we made a mistake" (Uggen et al. 2004, p. 275). Other offenders express the desire to do something good for their community (e.g., being a coach, speaking publicly, etc.). Binnall (2007), himself an ex-felon, concurs with this assessment, stating "that removing civic freedoms can lead to re-offending by first contributing to the stigma of being an ex-felon and then by reducing an ex-felon's moral desire to remain lawful" (p. 668). Thus, it appears that citizenship, civic participation, and volunteering are important aspects to the desistance process that help individuals feel fully prosocial.

In their analyses of the Tracking Progress on Probation Study, Farrall and Calverly (2006) also found support for the idea that citizenship factors play a role in desistance. They first outline their theoretical expectations regarding this relationship. Farrall and Calverly argue that citizenship values are correlated with greater feelings of legitimacy toward the state; those who respect the state are more likely to follow its edicts. This is a pure social control perspective, relying on the idea of the social contract to understand why people obey. Yet they also invoke socialization (e.g., social learning) to explain why those indoctrinated in citizenship values are less likely to commit crimes. Farrall and Calverly's (2006) "criminologically informed notion of citizenship" includes several characteristics:

1. Citizens are honest in their dealings with one another.
2. Citizens are honest in their dealings with the state.
3. Citizens uphold the law.
4. Citizens are tolerant of others' right to be different.
5. Citizens have a concern with the wider interests of "the community."
6. Citizens are engaged in an "ongoing dialogue" with the state (in which it is presumed one takes account of the other's opinions) (p. 135).

In other words, Farrall and Calverly's (2006) work has more to do with the "attitudes towards notions of citizenship" and not civic roles and

duties (p. 138). After creating a citizenship scale, they found that those classed as desisters had a statistically significantly higher score than persisters.

In their follow-up work, Farrall et al. (2014) also examined how citizenship relates to desistance. They extended their earlier work by also investigating whether and how citizenship attitudes changed over time. They also, following Uggen's work, measure civic activities (voting, volunteering). For example, they found significant differences between desisters and persisters in being registered to vote, but not volunteering. Farrall et al. also introduce what they call a "continuum of citizenship" which ranges from disengaged, to "stay at home," to active/engaged. They found that while 36% of desisters were active, only 10% of persisters were.

Some have argued for civic participation to become a more central component of the criminal justice system's efforts at helping offenders readjust to society. Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004) suggest that increasing civic participation and engagement through the criminal justice system could be developed through restorative justice strategies. Bazemore and Karp (2004) go one step further by explicitly outlining a reentry program they call "Civic Justice Corps," a specifically restorative justice oriented program for parolees that would allow ex-offenders to work in the community to (1) increase trust of others—for example, 'earned redemption'; (2) help change identities from anti to pro social; and (3) increase community social control of ex-offenders.

Recently, Fox (2016) has used the theory of civic reintegration to contextualize a reentry program called Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA). CoSA is unique because it involves not just the ex-offender and/or criminal justice system agents, but also "ordinary community members" (p. 70). Their acceptance and willingness to help is thought to facilitate reintegration, and thus, desistance. Fox (2016) explains that the program was intended for sex offenders, a group for whom social acceptance may be especially vital. Fox (2016) explains why CoSA's civic reintegration focus relates to desistance: "from a human rights perspective, communities can play a greater role in signaling the end of punishment through their own civic commitment to offender

reintegration" (p. 70). Fox's (2016) interviews revealed that CoSA had numerous effects on participants, including rebuilding the trust of participants toward others, creating a system of obligation in which participants were keen not to "let them [volunteers] down" (p. 79), and helps forge new identities.

The civic reintegration theory of desistance is intriguing but appears to be part of a larger process of generativity (Maruna 2001). It is not clear what theoretical processes are at work in linking civic integration and desistance but many are possible, such as increased legitimacy toward the state and the law, social bonds, and changes in social context. The policy implications of such a theory, however, are perhaps more clear than for other theories of desistance.

## Modernity and Maturity: Growing Out of It

In 1977, David Greenberg published a theoretical paper arguing that one reason the age-crime curve exists in its current form is that adolescence is a time of uncertainty in modern societies. It is a time in which individuals are considered to be children, yet have reached a stage where they desire greater independence and autonomy. Drawing on strain theory as well as control theory, Greenberg posits that adolescents experience a peak in offending because they are denied the valued goals of independence and autonomy. Greenberg (1977) wrote:

> This process has left teenagers less and less capable of financing an increasingly costly social life whose importance is enhanced as the age segregation of society grows. Adolescent theft then occurs as a response to the disjunction between the desire to participate in social activities with peers and the absence of legitimate sources of funds needed to finance this participation (p. 197).

What explains the subsequent decline in crime (or desistance)? "When students drop out or graduate from high school, they enter a world that, while sometimes inhospitable, does not restrict their autonomy and

assault their dignity in the same way the school does. The need to engage in crime to establish a sense of an autonomous self, and to preserve moral character through risk-taking is thus reduced" (pp. 205–206). Thus, the structural position of juveniles is criminogenic from Greenberg's point of view.

Others have taken up this line of thinking as regards desistance. Agnew (2003), similarly argues that industrialization lead to a peak in offending in adolescence. He goes beyond Greenberg to argue that adolescence is a time that is particularly prone to crime because it is characterized by a lack of supervision, more expectations, increasing importance of peers, and the strain of not being able to attain adult goals. Once these factors decrease, so does crime. Moffitt (1993) also offered a theory based on the idea that modern society deprives biologically adult individuals from obtaining adult satisfactions. In what she termed a "maturity gap," Moffitt argues that the majority of youth turn to crime and deviance because they are not granted adult freedom and autonomy, see certain youth doing as they please and getting social rewards from such behavior, and mimic those youths. Once adulthood is reached, the need to rebel dissipates.

One issue with modernity and youth strain theories is that they fail to explain why the age-crime curve tends to be found across cultures and historically (Hirschi and Gottfredson 1983). If modernity is a unique cause of adolescent crime, should the adolescent peak in offending be a recent phenomenon? As we've seen in this book, that is simply not the case.

## Social Bonds and Informal Social Controls

Those familiar, even slightly, with desistance research will note that the one theory that represents the penultimate desistance perspective has heretofore, been given scant attention. Arguably the most well-known (and tested) theory of desistance (really of the entire life-course) is Sampson and Laub's Age Graded Theory of Informal Social Controls. It is to that theory that we now turn.

The fortuitous way in which Sampson and Laub came across the data upon which they based their theory has been recounted numerous times by now (see Sampson and Laub 2016). While working at Northeastern University in 1986, John Laub "discovered 55 boxes of information on 500 delinquent boys who had been sent to reform school in the 1930s" (Laub 2011[4]). This was the famous *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* study by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, discussed in Chapter 2. Laub and his collaborator, Robert Sampson, painstakingly reconstructed and computerized the paper files, validating the Glueck findings and extending some of the analyses (including correcting some of their statistical mistakes). The first major publication that emerged from this part historical, part criminological project was *Crime in the making: Pathways and Turning Points through Life* (Sampson and Laub 1993). In that text, they introduce their age-graded theory.

In some sense, the age-graded theory is 'Hirschi, 1969 grown up.' Hirschi's (1969) social control theory argued that juveniles are less likely to engage in delinquency if they are attached, committed, and involved in prosocial institutions, as well as if they believe in the validity of the law. These 'bonds' to social institutions (family, school) are thought to constrain those who would otherwise be inclined to engage in self-serving deviance. Sampson and Laub applied this logic to the entire life-course. In their scheme, bonds to society explain childhood delinquency, continuity through adolescence, and eventual desistance. The focus of their analyses in adulthood is on marriage and employment, though they do examine how military influences trajectories (see Sampson and Laub 1996). The theory is a nuanced one though—it is not simply getting hitched or finding a job that matters; whether the marriages are affectionate, marked by strong attachment, and whether the job is meaningful and stable are key factors.

Sampson and Laub describe their main findings in this way:

> Consistent with an emphasis on adult developmental change and informal social control, however, we found that job stability and marital

[4] http://www.nij.gov/about/director/pages/stockholm-prize-interview.aspx

> attachment in adulthood were significantly related to changes in adult crime—the stronger the adult ties to work and family, the less crime and deviance among both the delinquent and control groups. We even found that strong marital attachment inhibits crime and deviance regardless of that spouse's own deviant behavior, and that job instability fosters crime regardless of heavy drinking (Sampson and Laub 2011, p. 169).

In the pure form of the age-graded theory, it is bonds to society that matter, making it a 'symmetrical theory' (Sohoni et al. 2014). That is, strong bonds can alter the life-course of a prosocial individual, just as weak bonds can set off the prosocial fellow on a track of deviance. The individual him/herself, their biology, personality, is not important.

In 2003, Laub and Sampson published *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to Age 70.* As the title implies, the researchers decided they wanted to see what the original Glueck men had been up to since they were last contacted in the 1960s. Relying on a number of strategies, 141 of the men were located. In addition, crime and death information was collected for as many of the men as possible. The researchers even made use of the Cold Case Squad in Boston to help find the men. Of these, 52 agreed to be interviewed. Thus, for the follow-up study, Laub and Sampson (2003) included 52 interviews and official crime data on 480 of the original 500 delinquents.

Rather than a simple confirmation—with more years of data—of their age-graded theory, Laub and Sampson's (2003) findings (again, both qualitative and quantitative) led them to elaborate their perspective. One key element that was not included in the initial version of the theory but became a prominent theme in the interviews was the notion of human agency or choice. In other words, rather than viewing individuals as nearly entirely constrained by social structure, people's choices and decisions play a role in whether they persist in crime or not. However, in a later article, Sampson and Laub (2005) make the case that they do not see human agency—at least their conceptualization of it—as rational choice reimagined. They say, "In our view, the rational choice approach views agency as a static entity representing the stable part of the person as well as within-individual variation over time that is largely driven by age" (Sampson and Laub 2005, p. 38). They feel that

rational choice ignores the environment, whereas "we argue that human agency cannot be divorced from the situation or context" (p. 38).

While Laub and Sampson add layers of complexity to their theory, arguing that marriage (even a good one) does not automatically lead to desistance, they still take a fundamentally social view. Though reflexivity is present in their theory, the authors in the end seem to give the weight of theoretical muster to bonds. This is found in their concept of 'desistance by default,' in which people were found to desist without even knowing it or intending to, presumably because they happened into beneficial social circumstances.

In defense of the life-course perspective, Laub and Sampson's revised work hits hard the developmental view of mechanical unfolding of predetermined trajectories. In particular, they take aim at Terrie Moffitt's theory of life-course persistent vs. adolescent limited offenders. They argue that distinct taxonomies of offenders or individuals cannot be predicted with any degree of accuracy early in life and so they wind up being purely ad hoc labels that do not illuminate anything about offending over time.

Arguably, Sampson and Laub's theory of Age-Graded Informal Social Controls remains the most popular of all desistance explanations. Studies have found that social bonds are correlated with desistance with diverse samples (see Bersani et al. 2009; Horney et al. 1995; Uggen 2000; for a review, see Siennick and Osgood 2008). However, criticisms do exist. Paternoster's (2016) essay on the use of human agency in criminological theory argued that Laub and Sampson (2003) incorporate agency in a way that is not aligned with the rest of their theory. For example, as Paternoster (2016) points out, Laub and Sampson (2003) argue that often, getting a good job or finding a spouse is a random process. In addition, the notion of "desistance by default" (Laub and Sampson 2003, pp. 278–279) assumes desisters did not act with intention. "Characterizing what occurred to them [desisters] as a happening over which they had no conscious control or an act in which they did something but did not intend to do it is not an important distinction," writes Paternoster. "What is important to recognize is that they were not involved in intentional action and cannot, therefore, be said to be acting as human agents" (p. 22).

In addition, empirical, as opposed to theoretical, critiques have been levied by scholars against Sampson and Laub's theory. As noted above, Giordano et al. (2002) found within their racially diverse sample, marriage or employment did not predict offending. In addition, while Sampson and Laub have continued to show that marriage matters for the Glueck sample (see Sampson et al. 2006), recent work has questioned whether marriage is indeed causally related to crime (Lyngstad and Skardhamar 2013; Skardhamar et al. 2015). Similarly, some work has argued that employment is not related to desistance from crime (Skardhamer and Savolainen, 2014). The crux of these recent arguments critiquing the age-graded theory of informal social controls is that it is not the occupation of particular social roles (husband, worker) that changes behavior, but rather that behavior (or something internal to the person) changes which then leads to occupation of the social role. In other words, "[E]mployment is best viewed as a consequence rather than as a cause of criminal desistance" (Skardhamar and Savolainen 2014, p. 263). There is little doubt future research will continue to grapple with these issues.

## Other Theoretical Accounts of Desistance

Some popular theories of crime and delinquency could be adapted to the life-course and thus help us understand desistance but have not contributed to this literature in large part. One example is Agnew's General Strain Theory (1992), which argues that crime and delinquency is a function of (among other things), stressors in life which lead to negative emotions, and, if not coped with effectively, criminal behavior. As Agnew (1997, p. 101) states, "Strain theory does not play a significant role in recent developmental theories of crime." Yet it could easily be applied to this literature. To explain desistance, Agnew suggests that the presence of noxious stimuli decreases after adolescence as social and legal independence increases, the interpretation of events as negative is higher in adolescence due to a lack of brain maturation, and finally that adolescents do not have the tools that adults do to cope with stress in non-delinquent ways.

Another theory that could be applied to desistance but has infrequently been used to explain behavioral reform, is labeling theory. Labeling theory is one of the oldest criminological perspectives, typically used to explain juvenile delinquency beyond normative youth transgressions. The classic distinction between primary and secondary deviance (Lemert 1951) captures the theory well. Primary deviation is the typical juvenile antisocial behavior that many kids get up to—running away, fighting, small scale theft. Some kids either do not get caught and some have their delinquency treated leniently. For others, who are punished and treated as criminals, they may come to see their options limited and begin to see themselves as a criminal—they are labeled (and thus, secondary deviance ensues). Sampson and Laub (1997) demonstrated how labeling theory could explain stability of crime over the life-course, with those labeled being 'knifed-off' from prosocial opportunities so that their disadvantage builds up over time. Yet labeling theory, as Maruna and colleagues (2004b) have shown, can also shed light on desistance. If the label is what matters, then it should work both ways—antisocial labels would lead to antisocial behavior and prosocial labels would lead to prosocial behavior. This is the essence of some of the identity theories reviewed above, although for certain identity theories, the stimulus for identity change comes from within rather than from without. It is certainly the case that we have plenty of degradation ceremonies for those accused and found guilty of crimes (Garfinkel 1956), the effect of which is to embed the criminal label and a criminal identity. Perhaps a more concerted effort at a redemption ceremony (Maruna 2011) would help offenders shed the criminal label and desist. The power of the ritual, Maruna (2011) suggests, has been underappreciated in Western society when it comes to reintegration of ex-offenders. Addressing public labels is an important issue, especially in an era of increasing 'stickiness' of criminal records (Uggen and Blahnik 2016).

## Either or? What about Structure and Agency?

Sampson and Laub's latest work has emphasized that context matters. Yet it remains the case that most researchers interpret the theory to emphasize social bonds. Some desistance theorists, particularly

**Table 5.1** Major theories of desistance by category

| Category | Theory | Authors |
|---|---|---|
| Pure Age or Biological | Inexorable Aging Theory | Hirschi and Gottfredson 1983 |
| | Bio-Psychological Theory | Gove 1985 |
| | Social Reinforcement Theory | Wilson and Herrnstein 1985 |
| | Evolutionary Theory | Kanazawa and Still 2000 |
| Cognitive/ Brain Maturation | Dual Systems Theory | Steinberg 2008 |
| | Neurophysiological Theory | Collins 2004 |
| | Genetic Neurotransmitter Theory | Beaver et al. 2008 |
| Rational Choice | The Decision to Give Up CrimeTheory | Cusson and Pinsonneault 1986 |
| | Changing Criminal Calculus Theory | Shover 1983; Shover and Thompson 1992; Shover 1996 |
| | Transformative Agency Theory | King 2013 |
| Psychological/ Psychosocial | Changing Personality Traits Theory | Blonigen 2010 |
| | Psychosocial Maturation Theory | Greenberger and Sørensen 1974; Cauffman and Steinberg 2000 |
| Identity | Cognitive Transformation Theory | Giordano et al. 2002 |
| | Narrative Rescripting Theory | Maruna 2001 |
| | Feared Self Theory | Paternoster and Bushway 2009 |
| Social Process | Social Learning Theory | Akers 2011; Warr 1998 |
| | Changing Contexts Theory | Kirk 2012 |
| | Civic Reintegration Theory | Bazemore and Karp 2004; Farrall and Calverly 2006; Fox 2016; Uggen and Manza 2005 |
| | Modernity, Adolescence and Maturity Theory | Agnew 2003; Greenberg 1977; Moffitt 1993 |
| | Age-Graded Theory of Informal Social Controls | Laub and Sampson 2003; Sampson and Laub 1993 |
| Other Theories | General Strain Theory | Agnew 1992 |
| | Labeling Theory | Lemert 1951; Maruna et al. 2004a; Sampson and Laub 1997; Uggen and Blahnik 2016 |

Farrall and Bowling (1999) have taken pains to integrate both levels of explanation. Farrall and Bottoms argue that human beings are neither 'super dupes' (the interpretation that may arise from purely social bond-like theories) nor 'super agents' (individuals who have complete agency). People do make decisions and those decisions are not entirely free but constrained by structure. Anthony Bottoms and colleagues have also worked toward developing an integrated theory that takes seriously the role of context and of individual decision-making. Bottoms et al. (2004) envision five aspects as being crucial to understand desistance: (1) programmed potential, (2) structure, (3) culture/habitus, (4) situational context, and (5) agency. However, they criticize much existing work as not really defining agency well or meaningfully. Programmed potential refers to risk of offending (typically measured via risk assessment tools). Structure indicates larger macro level "social arrangements" of society (Bottoms et al. 2004, p. 372). Culture/habitus represents the cultural worldviews and ways of thinking/acting arising from social groups. Situational contexts refer to the places in which people live and act. Finally, agency is reflected in choice, but the authors call for more 'precision' in how it is used by researchers.

Thus researchers are moving beyond either/or explanations of desistance and arguing that desistance cannot be boiled down to the environmental factors one finds themselves in, nor to deliberate choice independent of situational context. These interactive, integrative theories seemingly hold more promise than the ones which focus on one level of analysis while paying lip-service to others. Table 5.1 offers a quick glance at each of the theories discussed above.

## Summing Up and Looking Ahead

As this chapter has sought to demonstrate, theories of desistance from crime have grown, developed, and proliferated in recent years. No longer can researchers say with a straight face that "desistance has been the subject of little empirical research and relatively neglected by theory" (Farrall and Bowling 1999, p. 253). In less than 20 years, researchers have

developed theories to account for desistance by focusing on the brain, individual identities, and social relationships.

This chapter has sought to offer an organizational scheme within which to understand these theories. Six distinct but often overlapping categories were created to make sense of these explanations. First, pure age or biological theories of desistance were discussed. These include the work of Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) and Wilson and Herrnstein (1985). More recent biological work includes the second category, brain development or maturation theories. Third, rational choice theories were examined. These theories were popular in the 1980s but appear to be making a comeback, particularly under the term 'human agency.' Fourth, psychological or psychosocial theories were presented. Fifth identity or narrative theories were discussed, including rescripting and 'feared self' explanations. Sixth and finally were social theories. In this last category, social learning, civic reintegration, and social control theories were discussed. The chapter concluded with a brief discussion of integrated or interactional theories that see structure and agency as important.

What seems to be missing to date is a truly integrative explanation of desistance. As has been demonstrated, various theorists have pointed out important factors that are related to 'making good.' All have a degree of face validity to them—that is, all seem plausible. It is unlikely, as the interactive theories point out, that desistance can be fully accounted for by purely environmental, or life events, or by appealing to cognitive changes alone. All of these factors seem to represent pieces of a larger puzzle that, if pieced together, may help us arrive at a better, more holistic understanding of just why it is that people reform and why some take longer than others. Not only would such a scheme increase our ability to explain desistance (e.g., social bonds may be important for some whereas for others identity is what matters; including both in one scheme would therefore account for both groups) but also help understand the processes through which the changes implicated in the above theories emerge. An integrative, comprehensive theoretical understanding of desistance through a maturation lens is thus the subject of the next chapter.

# 6

# Integrated and Equal Is Better: How Desistance Theories Represent the Process of Maturation

## Introduction: Wither To Integrate?

In 1979, criminologist Travis Hirschi published a characteristically clever paper titled "Separate but Unequal is Better" on what he saw as a trend toward integrating theories. He particularly took aim at Elliot et al. (1979), whose attempt to combine control, social learning, and strain theories raised his ire. Why? Because, to him, they are irreconcilable in the assumptions they make about humans. Also, according to Paternoster and Bachman (2001), theories make clear what we should pay attention to, and consequently, what we should *not* pay attention to. Thus, control theorists' "minds are closed to the idea that, for example, 'access to and involvement in delinquent learning and performance structures is a necessary . . . variable in the etiology of delinquent behavior'" (Hirschi 1979, p. 35) and are not, therefore, open to the idea of needing such variables in their theories.

Hirschi's preferred method is theoretical competition (see Bernard and Snipes 1996). Theories should be kept separate, put to the test of empirical falsification, and to the victor go the spoils. In theory, this is a grand idea, one that has much merit. Yet as Bernard (1990) pointed out,



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Hirschi's era of theory testing and competition resulted in some great articles, but very little in the way of falsification. In fact, Bernard went so far as to say, "At the broadest level, I could argue that no theoretical approach to crime has ever been falsified in the history of criminology" (p. 327). In the first place, it is difficult to publish null findings. Secondly, even when theories do not receive full support, their progenitors and supporters rarely give them up.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, theoretical integration vs. competition was all the rage in criminology. Neither side made concessions, but the acceptability of integrated theories seemed to get a boost with the rise of developmental and life-course criminology. In some sense, researchers have recognized that in order to understand and explain offending over the entire life span, more than one perspective is necessary. Moffitt's (1993) taxonomic theory is but one example. In 2005, criminologist David P. Farrington published a book on integrated developmental and life-course theories. In that book, he claimed that "DLC (developmental life-course) theories are more wide-ranging than previous theories because they integrate knowledge about individual, family, peer, school, neighborhood, community, and situational influences on crime, and also integrate key elements of earlier theories" (Farrington 2005/2011, p. 4). Farrington is a notable advocate of integrated perspectives, having offered a life-course theory that integrates individual and environmental factors (Farrington 2003).

Despite this, desistance theories remain generally narrow. As discussed in the last part of Chapter 5, some theorists are moving to integrate agency and structure, but these attempts remain somewhat nascent. Perhaps this is to be expected since desistance theories are relatively new, and as noted previously, often a part of a larger theory of the life-course. Yet, I would argue that it is not a stretch to see each of the perspectives delineated in the last chapter as part of a larger process—that of growing up or maturation.

In this chapter, I present my own theoretical attempt to understand desistance from crime.[1] In doing so, I answer a call from the Gluecks

[1] Parts of this chapter were published in 2015 as "The lost concept: The (re)emerging link between maturation and desistance from crime" in *Criminology and Criminal Justice, 15*(3), 340–360. See also Rocque et al. Forthcomingb; Rocque & Welsh, 2015.

nearly 80 years ago. In their description of maturational reform, they argued that future researchers from a variety of disciplines should "dissect maturation into its components" (Glueck and Glueck 1940, p. 270). In other words, maturation, which they thought explained desistance from crime, is not a unitary phenomenon, but one that is composed of multiple dimensions. In answering this call, I identify what I see as the components of maturation, by drawing on the theories presented in Chapter 5.

Arriving at an integrated theory is not, I argue, an exercise in futility because the perspectives utilized are not fundamentally incompatible. As was pointed out, in the last chapter, there is overlap between many theoretical accounts of desistance. My perspective takes advantage of this and draws them out more forcefully. Further, unlike what Hirschi was critiquing in his *Separate but Equal* (1979) piece regarding the futility of integration, my view is that the competing perspectives do not make irreconcilable assumptions about human nature as do social learning, strain, and control theory. For example, rational choice theory assumes that people are reasoning creatures, weighing (sometimes unconsciously) costs and benefits of particular lines of action. At a certain point, offenders decide the costs of crime are no longer worth it. Neurological maturation theories would seem to mesh well with rational choice perspectives, offering a possible reason that decision-making improves over time. Even the two most competing paradigms, identity/cognitive transformation and social control theories, are not necessarily irreconcilable. In some sense the theories compete in terms of which element (identity or social bonds) is given more weight in causing desistance. In addition, while a theory that centers on the notion that age is the only variable that reliably predicts desistance would seem hostile to integration, it is undeniable that age *does* matter for behavioral reform. People do get older; they do slow down. In that, Hirschi, Gottfredson, Wilson, and Herrnstein are right. But slowing down can take place alongside an increase in social bonds. Thus, even the stubbornest desistance theories do not seem diametrically opposed. A consequence of an exercise that demonstrates the mutual relevance of ostensibly competing theories is also a more nuanced and complex definition of maturation, a concept that remains vague and unclear in lay usage.

In what follows, I take a step back into history to describe the Gluecks' theory of maturation. Because the Gluecks did not care for theory as much as empiricism (Laub and Sampson 1991), their views were not carefully specified. As such, they left themselves open to hostile attack and the maturation theory was relegated to forgotten status. I then show how several theories described in the last chapter fit comfortably within their perspective, offering a multifaceted and interdisciplinary view of maturation. In rescuing this 'lost concept' in criminology, I seek to show how theories of desistance may not be as mutually exclusive as previously presented and may, if they are combined in a thoughtful manner, help us arrive at a more complete understanding of desistance from crime.

## Desistance and Maturation: The Glueck Legacy

In work that spanned over 40 years, Harvard criminologists Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck advanced the notion that the decrease in crime with age was a result of maturation (see Glueck and Glueck 1937, 1940, 1945, 1970; Glueck 1964[2]). As discussed in Chapter 2, in each of the Gluecks' longitudinal studies, they noted a decline in delinquency over time. Yet this decline was not, they found, due primarily to a monotonous effect of age. The Gluecks' main argument was that after a certain period of time, criminal behavior slows down naturally and that it is not due primarily to environmental influences (Glueck and Glueck 1974; Laub and Sampson 2001). The idea was that as the individual matured, he or she began to make more responsible decisions and understood that "crime does not lead to satisfaction" (Glueck and Glueck 1974, p. 170). The Gluecks did not view maturation as an event that happens according to a predefined process, in which, for example, at a particular age, individuals become 'adults.' Rather, people can (and do) mature at

[2] For a fascinating history of the Gluecks' work, see Sampson and Laub 1993. Laub and Sampson 1991 detail the relationship between the Gluecks and their contemporary, Edwin Sutherland.

different ages and stages of the life-course and some fail to mature—in the full sense of the word—at all.

The first mention of maturation as a cause of behavioral reform appeared in their 1937 follow-up of *500 Criminal Careers*. Much like previous researchers of their day, they begin their analysis by suggesting that "aging is the only factor which emerges as significant in the reformative process" (Glueck and Glueck 1937/1966, p. 105). Interestingly, at this point in time, they used the terms 'aging' and 'maturation' synonymously. They go on to describe aging's 'accompaniments,' which include improved environmental surroundings, family life, use of leisure time, and emotional stability. Their analyses led them to believe that for most, maturation is achieved by age 36. For those who have not matured by that age, the prospects were dim indeed.

Jack (not to be confused with Jack from earlier in this book) is used to illustrate maturation for the Gluecks and his story helps to illuminate what the Gluecks meant by the concept (Glueck and Glueck 1937/1966). Jack began his delinquency early in life, having dropped school for work in the 5th grade. His story is familiar—incarcerated, released, arrested, and reincarcerated numerous times. He got married at age 24 while incarcerated in a reformatory to a woman he had impregnated. Despite being arrested twice for gambling, upon his release at age 24, he generally stayed out of trouble, employed and cared for his growing family. At age 36 (the last we hear from him), "He is the father of five children and devoted to them and his wife. The family now lives in a suburban neighborhood where the influences are not unwholesome" (p. 157). From this story we can see that Jack is making better choices but also that he is involved in prosocial relationships (marriage and employment). Another case, that of Charles, further supports the idea that "normal maturation leads to and is further facilitated by congenial employment and a wholesome marriage" (p. 158). Still, what maturation actually meant was not entirely clear, as marriage and jobs did not always seem to be related to maturation.

By the follow-up of *1,000 Juvenile Delinquents* (Glueck and Glueck 1940), the maturation perspective was much more developed. In this work, the Gluecks included an entire chapter on maturation, describing it as separate from aging. They state, "[N]ot arrival of any particular age,

but rather the *achievement of adequate maturation regardless of chronological age at which it occurs, is the significant factor in the behavioral changes of criminals*" (Glueck and Glueck 1940, p. 94, emphasis in the original). Here we see the first point of departure from scholars who argued that aside from some mental changes that occur with age, age itself seemed to be the primary cause of behavioral reform. The Gluecks came to the conclusion that age and maturation were distinct after finding that their two longitudinal studies (*1,000 Juvenile Delinquents* and *500 Criminal Careers*) showed differing behavioral profiles at the same ages. They noticed that those who were reformed were "*the same distance away from their onset of delinquent behavior*" (Glueck and Glueck 1940, p. 97, emphasis in the original). Thus, it wasn't age but length of criminal career that mattered, a topic that life-course researchers would focus on 50 years later.

In their 1940 work, they hinted at what the 'biological' phenomenon of maturation may be composed of: "greater powers of reflection, inhibition, postponement of immediate desires . . . the power to learn from experiences . . . " (Glueck and Glueck 1940, p. 103). Yet they recognized that "[m]aturity is a complex concept. It embraces the development of a certain stage of physical, mental, and emotional capacity and stability, and a certain degree of integration of the personality." This change facilitates "social adaptation" (Glueck and Glueck 1940, p. 267). Clearly, appropriate social roles were considered part of the maturation process for the Gluecks.[3] At the same time, they argue that "hereditary and early social equipment tends to release the forces in the human organism which make for an effective degree of integration of the human personality; and that, because of it, a natural process of maturation with aging can proceed at a normal rate" (Glueck and Glueck 1940, p. 133). In other words, maturation involves not only genetic processes, but personality and social factors. They suggested that future scholars should further define maturation by uncovering the 'components' of maturation. This task would involve experts in medicine, psychiatry, psychology, physiology, and "related

[3] Note that the Gluecks recognized that some persistent offenders never reach 'maturity.' They stop offending eventually because of physical 'burn out.'

disciplines" and would ultimately result in the formation of a "maturation quotient" (MQ) instrument (Glueck and Glueck 1940, p. 270).

The next series of work published by the Gluecks did little to advance the maturation theory, however. In *Criminal Careers in Retrospect* (1943/1976), their third follow-up of *500 Criminal Careers*, the Gluecks mostly repeated remarks from previous work. In *Delinquents and Nondelinquents in Perspective* (1968), the follow-up of *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency*, they repeated the "complex concept" description of maturity, but now discussed "a capacity for self-control and foresight" and an ability to "postpone immediate desires for later, less hazardous, and more rewarding ones" (p. 177). And so the maturity process would seem to have taken a decidedly cognitive or neurological turn. Yet, in the next paragraph, they note, "It must of course be recognized that external circumstances which occur with the passage of time contribute to the maturation process" (p. 177). The work was still not done by the time of their last publication, *Of Delinquency and Crime* (1974), before the release of which, Eleanor died. They continued to argue it was a "complex concept" and that the "*striking maturation* phenomenon" should be a primary research concern for future scientists (Glueck and Glueck 1974, p. 174, emphasis in original). Yet their descriptions of maturation were mere repetitions of previous work.

The Gluecks came under attack for this maturation theory (if it can be called that), particularly by Barbara Wootton (1959). In one of the most vitriolic critiques to be found in the academic literature, she argued that the notion of maturation added nothing to our understanding of behavioral reform and, worse, was tautological. For example, Wootton (1959) stated:

> If, however, the maturation theory does not imply a roughly constant process of maturation which is irrespective of the offender's chronological age, what meaning can it be said to have at all? The discovery that ageing "turned out to have played a significant role in the process of improvement with the passage of the years" (Glueck and Glueck 1945, p. 78) then becomes merely a rather pompous way of saying that with the passage of the years the subjects both grew older and behaved better. This, however, we knew already: indeed, the fact that people tend to reform as they grow older is just what we are out to explain. (p. 163)

To Wootton, the Gluecks had done nothing more than offer a "high falutin' way of saying what has all along been obvious—viz: that a minority of young criminals become recidivists, while the majority do not" (p. 164). Wootton had several valid points but she was too quick to dismiss the theory of maturation. She was right that the Gluecks hadn't done much to advance the theory, but they were very adamant that others should pick up the torch. Unfortunately, few did, as Maruna (2001) lamented 60 years after they introduced the concept that researchers have not heeded their call to "dissect maturation into its components" (Glueck and Glueck 1940, p. 270). With respect to Wootton herself, despite dedicating an entire chapter to age and crime, she offered nothing more than criticisms of others' attempts at explanation, and it is difficult to see how the literature was advanced by her attacks.

While certain of Wootton's criticisms were well-founded, the Gluecks' theory is more viable than she and other critics argued. For example, the notion of 'maturation' is not necessarily tautological (they did attempt to define maturation independently of criminal behavior). In addition, their notion of maturation seemingly foresaw several developments in criminology, cognitive psychology, and neurological sciences that have recently helped to advance our understanding of behavioral change in adulthood. After Sutherland's (1937) attack on the Gluecks' idea that aging was the only factor important in behavioral reform, they identified changes that take place alongside aging in later works.

Because of this seeming misunderstanding of the ability of maturation to explain desistance, the theory remains merely an historical footnote. It is true that the theory was in need of clarification. One reason that the Gluecks' work may remain buried today is that rather than being spelled out in an article or book-length project, the seeds of the theory, such as it was, are found scattered in their numerous books which generally focused on offending. It does not, looking backward, appear that these researchers intended to develop a fully specified theory, but instead may have been offering their insights on the process of what we now call desistance. They left much to be done by future researchers in this regard. Indeed, the Gluecks argued that more work needed to be done

to better conceptualize the meaning and measurement of maturation. As mentioned, they specifically suggested that future researchers take up where they left off and "dissect maturation more deeply into its components," possibly creating an "M.Q." (maturation quotient) (Glueck and Glueck 1940, p. 270; Glueck and Glueck 1943). This work, to the Gluecks, would require efforts of researchers in multiple, related disciplines (such as psychiatry, medicine, physiology, and psychology). Thus, while the MQ was to be used to determine whether an individual had reached age-appropriate stages of maturation, it also suggested that maturation is multifaceted and in need of further clarification.

To date, few, if any, researchers have heeded this call. As Shover argues (1985, p. 77; see also Maruna 2001), research on maturation and crime has "not progressed appreciably beyond [the Gluecks] work." For the most part, recent scholarship only mentions maturation in reference to previous perspectives, or in a limited sense (see, e.g., Graham and Bowling 1995; Laub and Sampson 2001; Maruna 2001; Kazemian and Maruna 2009); researchers have not attempted to fully flesh out the concept in a theoretically and empirically meaningful manner to explain desistance. That is the aim of the current chapter. Interestingly, recent work on human development and desistance is integrated and interdisciplinary, which tends to support the Gluecks argument that any full understanding of the process would require multiple disciplines.

## Current Understandings of Maturation

Since the Gluecks' time, research in all fields they thought were related to maturation has progressed. What is the current definition of maturation? What do most people think of when they describe someone who has 'matured?' As discussed in the last chapter, research has increasingly begun to focus on what is called 'brain maturation' related to changes in structure and function during the later adolescent and early adulthood years. Physiologically, the term 'maturation' is often used to describe puberty and the biological process of becoming a functioning adult

(for example, Smith et al. 2013). Psychologists have taken steps to describe what maturation or maturity represents as well. Tim Elmore (2012a) argues that the "marks of maturity" are:

1. ability to keep long-term commitments;
2. not being shaken by compliments or criticism;
3. possessing a spirit of humility;
4. making decisions based on character rather than emotions;
5. prioritizing others before themselves, and
6. Seeking wisdom before acting.

These 'marks' are drawn from his book *Artificial Maturity* (2012b). Interestingly Elmore (2012b), like the Gluecks before him, argues that "authentic maturity" means "growing up not merely in one facet of their lives, but physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially, and spiritually" (p. 1). Thus, for him, maturation is complex and multifaceted.

As mentioned in the last chapter, the psychological concept of 'psychosocial maturation' is also a relatively new way to view maturity. Recall, it is composed of three facets: (1) temperance or self-control; (2) responsibility or autonomy; and (3) perspective or the ability to think about others and consequences. To date, data have shown that psychosocial maturation is related to decreased risk-taking behavior (see Chap. 5).

What about the social world? Do more mature people get along better with others? Do they have more meaningful relationships? Do they try to be good citizens? Interestingly a concept of 'social maturity' has been around since the 1930s. Edgar A. Doll (1936) developed what he called the "Vineland Social Maturity Scale" based on 117 items. However, this scale was created for young children and meant as a "measurement of social competence which would enable us to satisfy the first criterion of differential diagnosis among mentally deficient subjects" (Doll 1936, p. 288). Social maturity is also studied, in more recent work, among autistic populations. For example, the Vineland Social Maturity Scale remains utilized in such research (Ganaie et al. 2013). A newer social maturity scale was developed by Nalini Rao (2002). The scale does not appear to have been studied extensively in the US or Western world, however. Thus, a contemporary, post-adolescence measure of social maturity appears to be generally lacking in the literature.

In the 1980s, maturation was used to explain desistance sparingly. Waln Brown (1981) wrote about maturation and "delinquency devolution" a few years after the Gluecks' last publication. After reviewing the Gluecks theory, Brown argued that we still do not know what comprises maturation and we need further study if we are to help prevent delinquency. Gove (1985) presented a psychological maturation theory to better understand the age-crime curve. He argued that sociological theories are inadequate as they would predict a continuous increase in criminal behavior. His theory includes changes in self-concept, changes in sensitivity to social norms, changes in how one interacts with others, an increase in desire to contribute to the community, and a greater preoccupation with religion. Thus, from this perspective, we can glean several strains of recent desistance theory work, including identity, psychosocial maturation, and civic reintegration. Interestingly, Gove (1985) also included physiological factors such as hormones and decreasing strength in his perspective. It does not appear that Gove intended to develop a comprehensive theory of maturation and he does not appear to have pursued this explanation further. Also, it is important to note, he did not have access to recent work on neurological maturation, and he did not place much emphasis on actual social roles and relationships as important in changing behavior.[4]

In recent years, some researchers have looked to maturation to understand desistance and improve criminal justice policy specifically. A report by Prior and colleagues (2011) sought specifically to unite literatures "separated by disciplinary boundaries, involving different theoretical models and analytical concepts, and distinctive methodological approaches" (p. 3) in order to understand how maturity is related to desistance. This is similar to what the Gluecks had in mind when they argued that specialists from different disciplines should be relied upon to better define maturation. Quoting Steinberg and Cauffman (1996, p. 251), they state that maturation remains

[4] While Gove's work does not appear to have stimulated integrated theories of desistance or maturation, for my money it remains one of the most comprehensive and multifaceted explanations of desistance presented in the literature. It certainly seems to mesh well with the Gluecks' theory (which he did not cite) and with the perspective offered in this chapter.

a cloudy term, a "remarkably elusive and ill-defined construct among legal scholars and social scientists" (Prior et al. 2011, p. 3). Prior and colleagues recognize, from their review of the literature, that maturation (as it relates to behavior) is composed of "physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development" (p. 4). The work of Prior et al. (2011) is important in showing how maturity is an important concept for both offending and desistance, but their purpose was neither to create a working definition nor to fill the gap left by the Gluecks.

Finally, certain researchers have considered desistance to be a part of the maturation or developmental process. Massoglia and Uggen (2010) argue that desistance from crime is a part of becoming an adult. In modern society, risky and selfish behavior is inconsistent with the role of adulthood, which is characterized by independence and delayed gratification. According to Massoglia and Uggen (2010), viewing behavioral reform as a component of the normative process of growing up, or maturation, makes sense because (a) most adolescents engage in antisocial behavior, (b) most of those engaging in antisocial behavior age out of it after adolescence, and (c) desistance is just one part of attaining adult status, along with other markers (marriage, employment).

In sum, there is increasing support for the notion that maturation is related to desistance (or vice versa). Yet a comprehensive definition, or delineation of the 'domains of maturation,' continues to elude us. In part this is because, I would argue, maturation does not happen only in one sphere of growth. Maturation occurs physiologically, as noted by pubertal changes; cognitively, as noted by structural and functional brain-related growth; and psychologically, as indicated via research on psychosocial maturation. Maturation is also demarcated—at least when most people think of the term—by social integration and age-appropriate social roles.

## Current Explanations of Desistance and the Components of Maturation

In the previous chapter, the theoretical literature on desistance from crime was detailed. The explanations of desistance reviewed were placed into six categories: (1) pure age theories of desistance; (2) cognitive and

neurological theories of desistance; (3) rational choice theories of desistance; (4) personality or psychosocial theories of desistance; (5) cognitive transformation and identity theories of desistance; and (6) social process theories of desistance. Pure age theories are those which do not consider other factors than getting older as important in understanding behavioral reform. Cognitive, or better yet, neurological theories draw from the recent work on 'brain maturation,' which has discovered that the brain is continuing to form and grow during and beyond adolescence and that these changes are relevant for behavioral improvements into early adulthood. The rational choice theories see the decision to stop offending as just that—a decision. Often though, something happens to provoke a reassessment of one's lifestyle (say, an incarceration stint), according to the theory. Personality or psychosocial theories relate to changes in personality traits or cognitive skills such as self-control. Cognitive transformation theories have less to do with actual decisions (though of course these are parts of the story) and more to do with a change in how one views oneself and crime. In these accounts, one's self or identity drives behavior; when identity becomes more prosocial, so too does behavior. Finally, social process theories include environmental or relational factors relevant for behavior. Social learning, civic reintegration, and social control theories fall under this category.

How do these categories and theories relate to one another? How might they be integrated into a more comprehensive, unified understanding of maturation and desistance? Supporters of pure age-based theories are perhaps the least amenable to integration with other perspectives (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Hirschi and Gottfredson 1983). However, in their 1983 paper, Hirschi and Gottfredson argued that the relationship between age and the "tendency to commit crime" (rather than crime itself) was invariant (see their footnote 9).[5] In addition, even though Gottfredson and Hirschi state that crime may decline independently of criminality (1990), their theory also suggests that

[5] For the most part, researchers have interpreted Hirschi and Gottfredson's position to be that the relationship between age and *crime* is invariant, which in my view has different implications than what they actually argued.

criminality declines with age and these changes impact behavior; they simply thought that criminological research had not uncovered these processes at the time. Yet, internal processes of change associated with criminality are exactly what rational choice, cognitive transformation, and psychosocial theories center on. In this sense, part of the changes in "the tendency to commit crime" that come with age may be related to increasing rationality, decreasing impulsivity, and changes in identity. Thus, the rational choice, cognitive transformation, and psychosocial theories may be viewed as describing the "black box" age and aging (see Elder 1999), and are not incompatible with pure age-based accounts. With respect to recent neurocognitive work, part of the reason that people become less impulsive and less 'biased' in their decision-making over time could be due to the brain maturation that appears to be occurring into the twenties. For example, Paternoster and Pogarsky (2009) suggested that the tendency for change in cost/benefit calculations with age may be due to changes in brain maturation. They argue that "A maturing of the brain areas responsible for executive functioning may lead to an improvement over the lifespan in [rational decision-making] by decreasing the discount rate—the rate at which people discount the future" (2009, p. 105; see also Geier and Luna 2009).

The links between psychosocial maturity and rational choice theories are perhaps the clearest. It is possible to view increasing rational choice as simply decreasing impulsivity. Thus, psychosocial maturation may imply increasing rationality. Interestingly, part of Shover's (1996) conceptualization of increasing rationality includes the ability to consider future consequences. Future orientation, of course, is a major facet of psychosocial maturation (Cauffman and Steinberg 2000).

Civic engagement and social bond theories are distinct but similar to each other in that they are both social process explanations of crime and desistance. That is, they both view external factors and behaviors as important in facilitating cessation of crime. These theories are less concerned with internal processes and thus may be seen by sociologists as more policy-relevant. Nonetheless, they differ in exactly how social processes are said to change behavior. As noted, social relationship theories are often couched within a social control perspective, in which social ties are seen as restraining natural, deviant behavior (Sampson and Laub 1993). Civic

engagement perspectives, especially the work of Uggen and Massoglia, are derived from a more symbolic interactionist framework in which social processes such as voting and participation in volunteer work help shape the offenders' feeling that he or she is part of society. This work helps to transform the offender's identity, which marks a clear link between this work and cognitive transformation/identity theories of desistance.

Social relationships and cognitive transformation/identity theories represent perhaps the most popular perspectives on desistance currently in the criminological literature. Accordingly, researchers have attempted to sort out how these theories are related or if they are incompatible. The best evidence now suggests that both cognitive and social process factors are implicated in desistance (LeBel et al. 2008; Mulvey and LaRosa 1986). Even if identity change occurs before social relationships are attained or strengthened, then those relationships are still a vital part of desistance, as research has shown that merely wanting to desist may not be enough to actually do so, without social support (see Shapland and Bottoms 2011). An unexplored, but potentially important linkage between theories may also involve psychosocial or neurological maturation and adult social roles. It could be that changes in cognitive processes influence individual preferences for and ability to fulfill these roles.

In sum, while the theories reviewed in the current chapter as well as Chapter 5 have generally been presented in the literature as competing, it is reasonable to view them all as identifying factors of a larger, developmental process—one that may help better understand desistance from crime. Indeed, the links between these perspectives are numerous; only a few were highlighted here. It is true that certain factors may have a larger impact on behavior than others, but it seems that each theory or framework in isolation is incomplete and can be profitably enhanced by considering its link with other perspectives. In this sense, a maturation perspective may be integrative, incorporating parts from extant theoretical explanations into a larger, more powerful whole. Unfortunately, integrated theories of desistance are not common in the criminological literature (Farrall et al. 2011). The theoretical framework advocated in this chapter is that each of the theories identifies processes that play a role in desistance. It is possible that these theories may be used to develop 'domains' of maturation, domains that the Gluecks argued

should be developed many years ago. The next section takes a step in that direction, describing five different domains of maturation, all derived from the literature reviewed above and in the previous chapter.

## An Updated View of the Components of Maturation

In this section, maturation is defined by "dissecting [it] into its components" (Glueck and Glueck 1940, p. 270) and developing maturation domains. The foundation for each of the 'domains' of maturation identified below is drawn from the desistance and developmental literature discussed above. All of these literatures are fundamentally about changes that take place during the process of becoming a fully integrated adult. Maturation is likely comprised of many internal and external developments, including what Massoglia and Uggen (2010) refer to as the attainment of "adult status markers." Along with a description of the domains, possible empirical measures are offered to guide future research efforts. While not represented here as a domain, clearly pure age is a factor and should be taken into consideration in any explanation that seeks to describe maturation as well as desistance.

**I. Cognitive/Neurological Maturation**: Direct measures of cognitive or neurological maturation include: (a) increasing neurological development; (b) decrease in frontal cortex gray matter (GM) density; (c) increase in cortical myelination; and (d) increase in white matter (WM) density. Indirect measures include: (a) neuropsychological measures of executive functioning; (b) memory; (c) vocabulary proficiency; and (d) abstract reasoning.

*Explanation*: Recent advances in neurological and cognitive sciences have indicated that the brain continues to grow and develop during adolescence and into adulthood. These changes have been associated with more rational thought and socially acceptable behavior. Evidence is accumulating that neurological maturation may play a role in desistance from crime. According to Blonigen (2010), the three main neurotransmitters that have been implicated in crime and deviant behavior, norepinephrine, dopamine, and serotonin appear to undergo changes in adulthood. Blonigen calls this phenomenon "neurobiological maturation" (2010, p. 96).

Certain research has found that executive function and working memory increase through adolescence (Iselin et al. 2009; Luna et al. 2004). This line of work is related to psychosocial maturity because improved cognitive or executive functioning is linked to a reduction in impulsive and sensation-seeking behavior (Casey et al. 2008; Steinberg 2008).

**II. Psychosocial/Personality Maturation**: Indicators that may represent psychosocial and personality maturation include: (a) attitudes toward adult roles; (b) expectations of future adult roles; (c) impulsivity; (d) present orientation; (e) responsibility; (f) inhibitions; (g) sensation-seeking; (h) rationality or rational decision-making; (i) agreeableness; (j) conscientiousness; and (k) neuroticism.

*Explanation*: The domain of psychosocial maturation derives from work in the mid-1970s meant to explain changes in personality and social roles that accompany the transition from adolescence to adulthood (Greenberger and Sørensen 1974; Greenberger et al. 1975). The more recent operationalization of psychosocial maturity (Cauffman and Steinberg 2000) includes components of Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) notion of "self-control." Inhibitions, consideration of others, impulsivity, and present orientation are all characteristics these authors use to describe "typical offenders."

Some personality traits that change over time (such as agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to change) are likely to lead to more prosocial behavior. Blonigen (2010) argues that changing social roles may affect personality traits. Thus, this work suggests another possible interaction (perhaps reciprocal) between psychosocial/psychological maturation and social maturation. Interestingly, Caspi and colleagues (2005) have suggested that changes in personality traits affect other domains of the life-course. While they focus on how personality differences lead to differences in social relationships, achievement, and health, the implication is that changes in personality traits (increases in agreeableness and conscientiousness, for example) may facilitate the development of long-term, meaningful relationships (e.g., marriage) and stable employment, which can contribute to desistance.

In addition, note that this domain includes rational decision-making. This incorporates rational-choice theories discussed in Chapter 5

(e.g., Cusson and Pinsonneault 1986; Shover and Thompson 1992). It seems to make intuitive sense to include this factor within psychological or psychosocial maturation, as it seems to represent an improvement in restraint and a decline in impulsivity, all parts of psychosocial maturation.

**III. Identity/Cognitive Transformation**: Markers of identity maturation from the literature reviewed above include: (a) prosocial attitudes toward deviance or crime; (b) prosocial views of the self; and (c) openness to change.

*Explanation*: Research has long indicated that crystallization of identity (e.g., discovering 'one's true self') is part of the maturation process and transition to adulthood (Arnett 2000; Hogan and Astone 1986). In addition, research shows that individuals often undergo numerous changes in outlooks toward social behavior, such as deviance (Giordano et al. 2002).

Theories of cognitive or identity transformation suggest that Sampson and Laub's (1993) social control theory of desistance is not sufficient—that is, marriage and stable employment alone are not enough to change individuals' behavior. Interestingly, certain of the orientational changes associated with cognitive transformation (e.g., changes in attitudes toward crime) are labeled 'maturation' by Farrall and Calverly (2006, p. 179). Giordano and colleagues (2002) viewed their theory as complementary to Sampson and Laub's (1993). Thus, cognitive transformations are likely to have a stronger impact on crime when 'hooks' for change (marriage, jobs, religion) are available.

Identity and cognitive transformations are also linked to personality traits and psychosocial maturation. For example, Giordano et al.'s (2002) concept of openness to change is similar to the "Big Five" trait of openness to new experiences. In addition, researchers examining personality trait (as opposed to more flexible 'states') changes over time have suggested that changes in identity may lead to changes in personality (Caspi et al. 2005).

**IV. Citizenship or Civic Maturation**: Measures of civic integration may include: (a) voting or taking part in government/political activities;

(b) attitudes toward the state or government; (c) community service or activity in community organizations; (d) payment of taxes; (e) volunteer work; (f) tolerance of diversity; and (g) 'concern with wider interests of the community.'

*Explanation*: The notion of citizenship or civic responsibility is becoming more prevalent in desistance research. Civic responsibility implies that the individual feels a degree of legitimacy toward the state which should lead to greater acceptance of rules/regulations and laws. The idea is that when individuals reach adult status, they begin to recognize duties (conforming behavior, paying taxes) that are associated with citizenship (Farrall and Calverly 2006; Gove 1985). In a sense, citizenship is a relationship with the state much like a social relationship. It involves sacrifices and obligations and also specialized benefits; that is, it involves a degree of 'give and take' that requires the person to think of more than just themselves. Certain work on the transition to adulthood also argues that civic engagement and 'extra-curricular activities' are a part of that process (Finlay et al. 2010; Kort-Butler and Martin 2015).

This concept of civic responsibility may be thought of as part of the process whereby the individual comes to view social inclusion as increasingly important. This is related to the notion of 'generativity' in which individuals develop a desire to give back (McAdams et al. 1998). In a sense, being accepted and identified as a good citizen is the opposite of being identified as a deviant. This type of role reversal may be important in the desistance process (Massoglia and Uggen 2010), linking this domain to identity theories of desistance.

**V. Social Role Maturation**: Key indicators of the social domain of maturity include the following: (a) the presence and quality of adult relationships such as marriage and children; (b) markers of independence (not living with parents, being self-sufficient); (c) finishing school (high school or college degree); and (d) satisfaction with and consistency of employment.

*Explanation*: The basis for this domain of maturation derives from the social relationship and social role theories reviewed in the last chapter. Massoglia and Uggen (2010) argue that marriage, employment, *and*

desistance are parts of traditional adult status markers, or what Giordano colleagues (2002) refer to as a "respectability package." Thus, marriage and employment may not be causally related to behavioral change but part of the same process of becoming an adult. Adult status brings with it normative expectations and different role-oriented behaviors than those usually associated with juveniles and these factors are parts of maturation (see Adams 2004; Yamaguchi and Kandel 1985). For example, Adams (2004, p. 338) states, "As a partnership, marriage works against egocentric perspectives by creating pressures for less selfish outlooks in ways that range from demands for simple courtesies to

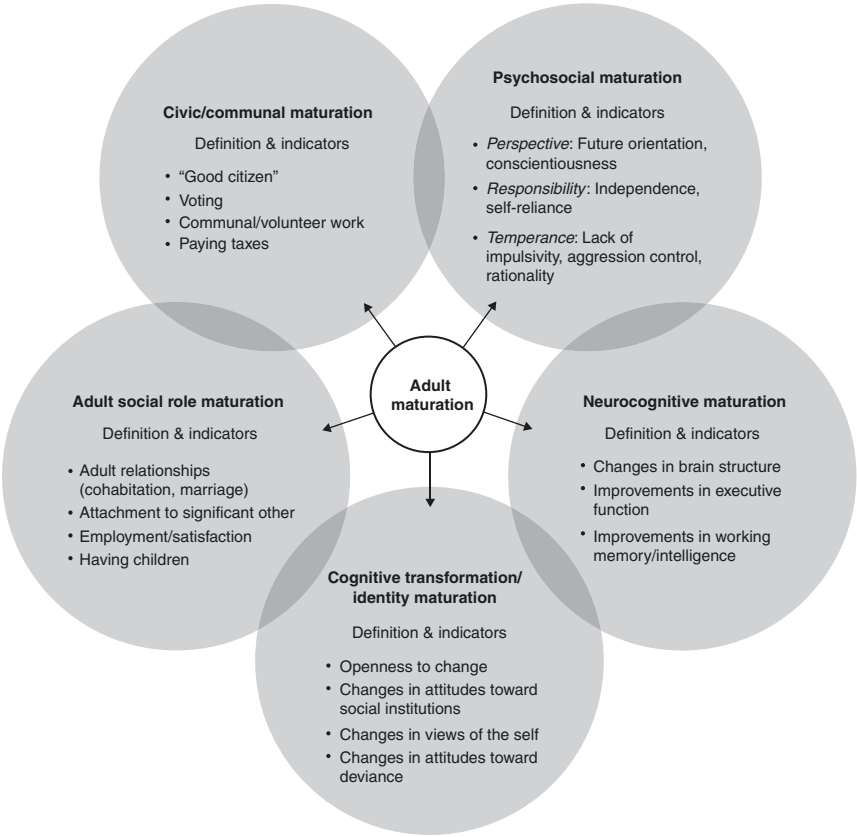


**Fig. 6.1** A theory of maturation domains

expectations of more altruistic behaviors." In this sense, that marriage/employment may reduce crime because of a reduction in time spent with peers (Warr 1998) is to be expected from the maturation perspective because these institutions force a different lifestyle than was previously acceptable. The maturation domain schema is presented in Fig. 6.1.

Figure 6.1 presents both the five domains detailed above as well as possible measures that may be useful to represent the domains in future empirical analyses. The relationships between the domains are drawn such that each is related to the other. There is no a priori reason to believe that certain domains are uncorrelated, nor is there any reason to believe that particular domains generally develop before others.

## Attainment of Maturation Domains

Understanding what accounts for different rates of maturation is an empirical question, but several factors are likely important. First the theoretical schema detailed in this chapter is largely normative. That is, while not necessarily occurring at the same time for everyone, as individuals age, they are expected to develop greater capacity for forethought, seek out adult relationships, and engage in civic activities. Part of this process is biological—the neurological maturation that occurs normatively—and part of this process is socially prescribed. Healthy development during childhood and adolescence is also likely to be an important factor in promoting normative maturation. Having warm, supportive parents, protection from harm or abuse, as well as from exposure to violence, and positive peer relationships are all keys to healthy development, whether biological, social, or psychological (see Dmitrieva et al. 2012; Rocque et al. 2012).

From a biological standpoint, changes in brain maturation are likely linked to the other maturation domains outlined above. For example, while future orientation and self-control are considered part of psychosocial maturation, those factors are likely influenced by neurocognitive changes. For example, Paternoster and Pogarsky (2009) suggested that the tendency for change in cost/benefit calculations with age may be due to changes in brain maturation.

Several factors are likely important determinants of healthy or unhealthy (re: normative) development. Causes of such traits as impulsivity or neurocognitive deficits continue to emerge in the developmental literature. Research has pointed to abuse/neglect as well as nutritional deficiencies as possible causes of developmental delays (Diamond et al. 1997; Navalta et al. 2006). Importantly, early problem behavior may also be a factor in 'knifing off' normative development. Moffitt (1993) suggested that delinquency in adolescence can "ensnare" individuals in a life of persistent crime, in part by isolating them from the sources of healthy development. Recent research from across the globe has supported this idea, finding that those who are persistent criminals tend to have less 'successful' lives (Farrington et al. 2009; Pulkkinen et al. 2009) as indexed by what are here argued to be markers of maturation (adult relationships, adult roles, etc.). This highlights the idea that maturation domains are likely interactive. That is, levels of one domain may be conditioned by or contingent on other domains. For example, it is likely that levels of identity maturation are influenced by the attainment of adult social roles (see Shanahan et al. 2005). In addition, identity change may be one reason why individuals come to wish to be 'good citizens' and 'give back' from a civic maturation perspective.

The framework outlined in this chapter suggests that it is normative for individuals to eventually come to see themselves as conformists and delinquency/crime as undesirable. Research has found a select group of persistent offenders, who continue to commit criminal acts long past the point of normative maturation. Why might these offenders persist? As suggested above, several factors may be important in delaying maturation (or even preventing its full attainment). Research has found that criminal justice system contact may delay maturation. Dmitrieva and colleagues (2012) showed that incarceration in a secure facility had negative effects on psychosocial maturation. This study found that certain types of prisons reduced temperance, which means that they increased impulsivity. One of the reasons posited by the authors is that prison impedes normal opportunities to socialize and places one in the company of deviant peers. In addition, the work of Moffitt (1993) is informative here. According to her theory, certain individuals possess neuropsychological deficits which lead them to persist in offending long

past the time others have stopped. This argument mirrors that of the Gluecks who suggested that some individuals may not mature normatively due to biological impairments such as "innate abnormalities" (Glueck and Glueck 1940, p. 269) or being "feebleminded" (Glueck and Glueck 1937/1966, p. 105).

It is important to point out, however, that incarceration may not have solely negative effects on maturation. The study referenced above (Dmitrieva et al. 2012) found that the effect of incarceration varied according to whether the facility focused on rehabilitation. Prisons that offer treatment programs may actually help instill some forms of maturation. For example, cognitive behavioral treatment (one of the more popular families of evidence-based treatment) has recently been argued to 'work' because it affects neurological functioning (Vaske et al. 2011). Other effective prison programs, such as those that focus on employment and social skills building, may increase social role maturation.

In terms of the ordering of the domains (e.g., which comes first), recent empirical research is relevant. A debate in the literature is currently being hashed out according to whether, for example, more subjective factors (such as identity) change prior to social role factors (such as marriage). On the one side of the debate are Laub and Sampson (2003), who argue that marriage and other social relationships can affect offending without identity first having been modified. On the other side of the debate are those such as Paternoster and Bushway (2009) who feel that something must change in the offender before they are ready for a meaningful social relationship. The domains as specified above do not depend on any such ordering. It is quite possible that the attainment of one influences the attainment of others. In today's Western society, with first-time marriage being delayed into the mid- to late 20s, it is likely that identity or psychosocial maturation may 'come first.' This does not, in terms of the perspective, mean that it has to, however. In previous generations, marriage or social maturation likely arrived before other domains. It is just as likely, from the perspective advocated here, that this development would influence the attainment of identity or psychosocial maturation as much as the inverse. Finally, the attainment of one or two domains of maturation may simply not be enough to achieve desistance. As Shapland and Bottoms (2011) point out, even offenders

who have 'conformist values' may continue to offend because of structural barriers they face. Offenders who have matured psychosocially or in terms of identity may not be able to gain employment or meaningful relationships because of impediments they face with a criminal background. Thus, to fully understand desistance, the entire picture of maturation must be considered.

## How Does an Integrated Maturation Theory Advance Desistance Research?

Is the maturation/domain theory sketched here simply an amalgamation of well-supported theories? In some ways, that critique is an accurate reflection of the theory but not necessarily a damaging one. As Bernard pointed out nearly 20 years ago (Bernard 1990), there are far too many theories in criminology. The same is becoming true of desistance research in some sense. In part this is because there remains much to be learned about desistance. But in another sense, as argued here, it may be because theories are identifying legitimate *parts* of the process of desistance. Combining them would therefore not only create a more comprehensive picture of desistance but also reduce the need for separate theories.

More than this, however, the perspective described in this chapter helps us understand what maturation is in today's world. What does it mean to say that someone has really matured since the last time you saw them? Maturation is not simply a physiological process, though that is part of it. We are biological as much as social beings and maturation is a process that reflects these factors. It is also the case that simply combining theories doesn't tell the whole story. There is a developmental process that unfolds over time which is captured by the maturation domains detailed here. As people age, from childhood to adolescence, from adolescence to adulthood, their social roles change. They are put into different contexts and those contexts matter for their behavioral choices and opportunities. How they react to those contexts is also partly a function of physiological development such as brain and cognitive maturation. Are they 'open' to new social roles? Can they handle them

responsibly? Whether someone has a job is important on its own but also, as the last chapter pointed out, whether that job is meaningful matters. So who decides whether a job is meaningful? The person in the job. Thus, the person has to be able to reflect on the job, understand its importance and act toward it in such a way that the job is valued. It seems clear that some sort of reflective decision-making is involved in this process.

Social roles also provide meaningful information for one's identity. Identities are likely tied up with cognitive changes and brain maturation, but they do not exist solely in a vacuum. Why does someone decide they are a 'good person' or that being a good person is valuable? Occupying a meaningful social role is a good place to start understanding why identities change. Yet it is also the case that identity change may make someone more appealing to employers and partners. There is no linear, step-by-step approach to maturation in which domain A leads to domain B and so on from the perspective advocated here.

An additional point to be made is that, as may be seen from the above discussion, the domains of maturation may emerge at the same time or at different time points. The effect of the maturation domains may be additive or interactive as well. In other words, having high levels of all five domains may lead to desistance in a more powerful way than having high levels in only three of the five levels. On the other hand, the effect of one domain may depend on the level of another domain. This is essentially what Giordano and colleagues (2002) argue with respect to social bonds. If one is not 'open' to 'hooks for change,' the bonds are rendered meaningless. This could explain why for some groups, social bonds do not seem to matter as much with respect to desistance. Further, in Moffitt's (1993) account of "maturity gaps," having attained maturation in one domain (say a biological one) but not another (say a social role domain) could lead to strain and thus criminal behavior.

Future research and expansions of the maturation perspective are clearly needed to better understand these complexities. Research will also help narrow down or identify the number of domains that best characterize maturation in modern society. It could be, for example, that neurological maturation and psychosocial maturation are not entirely separable but best considered part of the same domain. Nonetheless it should be clear that the maturation perspective does not simply

represent a lumping together of theories but rather (a) an up-to-date conceptualization of maturation and (b) comprehensive picture of the processes involved in desistance. A small amount of research bears on this perspective, to which we now turn.

## Empirical Analyses of the Maturation Domains

Measuring and analyzing maturation, as detailed in this paper, would require a dataset with a tremendous amount of information over the life-course. The dataset would need to include at least some of the indicators from each domain, measured multiple times over time. The first type of analysis that would need to be conducted to test the perspective would focus on whether the domains change over time. Do people, in fact, mature? In other words, the domains would have to increase for the perspective to be consistent with the literature on crime over the life-course. Some work from which the domains are drawn has done this with certain aspects or indicators, such as marriage and impulsivity (see Laub and Sampson 2001; Monahan et al. 2009).

A recent paper (Rocque et al. 2015b) demonstrated how the maturation domains may be measured and preliminarily how they may be related to crime over time. Using the Rutgers Health and Human Development Project data, Rocque and colleagues were able to measure most of the domains, with the exception of cognitive maturation as described above. Neuropsychological tests were used in the place of direct brain maturation measures, but these were only available at three of the five waves. Limited civic reintegration measures were also available. The Rutgers Health and Human Development Project was initiated in the late 1970s and included three cohorts of subjects. Rocque and colleagues used the youngest cohort, which was aged 12 at the first wave. Follow-ups occurred at age 15, 18, 25, and 30/31. Thus, the study encompasses childhood through full adulthood.

As recommended above, the first step was to examine whether the maturation domains did indeed change over time. For the most part, the authors found that the domains increased, with psychosocial maturation plateauing around age 25. Civic maturation actually declined until age 18

and then increased. Analyses showed that identity/cognitive and psychosocial maturation measures had the most consistent relationship with crime, with social role maturation also showing a statistical relationship with crime (interestingly, only a measure of average social role maturation, differentiating those who were more mature than others, was statistically related to crime; changes in social role maturation over time were not). Cognitive and civic maturation measures, limited as they were, did not reach statistical significance in multivariate models but were related to crime at the bivariate level. This preliminary study showed the promise of the integrated perspective—as a 'total maturation' measure, combining all five domains was statistically significantly related to crime over time, but also demonstrated the need for further refinement.

Another recent study used the maturation perspective to examine desistance from crime, but in a qualitative manner. Sparkes and Day (2016) use the theory to ground their investigation of desistance with a sample of six ex-offenders, two persistent or 'stuck' offenders, and eight individuals attempting to desist. They find that aging itself is an important component of desistance, forcing individuals to rethink the way they behave. They argue the integrationist flavor of the maturation perspective is useful but may be improved by including other bodies of literature, such as phenomenology.

## Summary and Conclusions

The study of desistance from crime has emerged as a key focus in criminology in recent years. Because of the relative recency of the study of desistance, the theories offered to date are limited, often concentrating on one component of development over the life-course. These explanations are also generally presented as mutually exclusive and competing, which has thus far impeded a more complete understanding of a complex and nuanced phenomenon. The theoretical framework advocated here as an explanation of desistance is multifaceted and integrative. It suggests that we can best understand why and how desistance occurs through the lens of a complex, integrated notion of maturation rather than by examining isolated processes. Desistance from crime is likely to be related

to changes in social relationships, changes in attitudes and identity, changes in views of the self, and biological processes. All of these factors form what I see as maturation in terms of behavioral change. They all may represent changes that occur during the transition to adulthood. Importantly, there has been a trend toward recognizing that desistance may require integrated theorizing, where factors on several levels of analysis are viewed as important (Farrall et al. 2011).

One of the benefits of increasing availability of high-quality longitudinal datasets is that old ideas may be revisited and revitalized (Sohoni et al. 2014). The notion of maturation as a cause or even correlate of desistance was once a key theory in criminology (Glueck and Glueck 1940, 1968) but the theory lost favor and has yet to be taken seriously in the study of desistance. This chapter argues that this oversight is a mistake and that there may be something to the 'lost concept' of maturation which can contribute to an increased understanding of desistance. Indeed, others are beginning to view the Gluecks' theory similarly. In a recent interview, Anthony Bottoms stated:

> The concept of *maturation* as an explanation for desistance was used by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (1974, chapter 13) in an earlier era of criminology. They were clear that maturation did not just mean aging, but their attempts to explain exactly what it did mean were not completely successful. In fact, the principal evidence for maturation appeared to be the reduction of offending, and—as many people have pointed out—that is unhelpful because it is tautological. So maturation as an explanation for desistance lost credibility within criminology. But Joanna Shapland and I think that this concept needs to be reconsidered . . . for example, deciding what sort of employment to try to enter, perhaps forming a long-term partnership, and so on.[6]

In this view, becoming an adult is not a simple transition, comprised of one or two salient events. Instead, it entails multiple, complex processes, both internal and external. Focusing on one or two of these processes (as

[6] Interview is available here: http://crimelink.nl/analyse/groot-interview-met-anthony-bottoms-over-desistance

I argue most desistance theories have done) is not likely to capture the entire experience of becoming an adult—that is, maturation.

Maturation as a cause of desistance was an early criminological idea. Unfortunately, despite the calls to continue this line of work (see Glueck and Glueck 1940), few criminologists have taken up the work of identifying what maturation is comprised of, and how this concept is related to crime over the life-course. Drawing on the life-course and developmental literatures, this chapter identified and detailed five specific components or domains of maturation. Some of the domains posited above have yet to be empirically validated and examined in relation to delinquent/criminal behavior.

It should be pointed out that this is a Western, postindustrial view of maturation, especially with respect to the social role and identity domains. Biological maturation indices may cut across cultures, but the timing and even content of what may be described as 'maturation' may vary across cultures. As Bottoms et al. (2004) point out, the meaning and effect of various factors (such as employment) may be in part determined by cultural or social context. They argue that desistance cannot be understood in a vacuum, and they are correct. Because the literature on desistance from crime is largely centered on Western cultures, the corresponding maturation perspective was developed with that context in mind. Future research should seek to identify whether the components of maturation are distinct in other cultures.

Further, as is the case in any integrative theoretical perspective, there are certain strains between component theories. For example, it may be argued that identity-oriented theories view the effect of marriage in entirely different causal terms than social control perspectives. While this may be true, the maturation argument made here is only that marriage matters in the desistance process, and it may have both control and subjective, identity-related effects. The theoretical perspective advanced in this chapter suggests that both processes are valid and not mutually exclusive. Whether both processes are present in the desistance process is an empirical question.

In sum, the perspective offered in this chapter attempts to advance our knowledge and understanding of desistance in several ways. First, as is the case with criminological theory in general, there are increasingly

numerous theoretical explanations of desistance from crime. It is important, in order to advance the field, to make sense of these explanations, including their (possible) relationship to one another. The notion of maturation in terms of multiple domains allows us to see how these seemingly divergent explanations of desistance may be related and indeed may be part of the same general framework. In addition, it may be argued that criminology has yet to have offered a comprehensive explanation of desistance, but rather has identified variables or factors that relate to a decline in crime over time. Viewing these factors as each holding a piece of the developmental process pie may help the field arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of behavioral reform.

But what next? Clearly more theorizing is needed to better understand desistance from crime. Is a maturation perspective necessary? Do some theories hold better for males rather than females? Different cultures? These questions need to be examined in more detail in future work.

Perhaps more fundamentally, however, the time has come to begin to utilize desistance theory and research for social policy. What should we do about it? How can desistance research inform policy? Can we "force the plant, as it were, so that benign maturation will occur earlier than it seems to at present" as the Gluecks put it in 1937 (p. 205)? As mentioned in the introduction of this book, much research has focused on reducing recidivism, which is conceptually related, but also distinct from desistance. What does desistance theory and research have to say about the criminal justice system? Can we use it to reduce crime? Implications for policy and practice are the subject of the next and concluding chapter.

# 7

# Putting Desistance Research to Work: Policy and Desistance Theory

## Desistance Research and Crime Policy

Much of the longitudinal turn in criminology in the last 20–30 years can be placed under the umbrella of developmental or life-course criminology. While some see these as two terms for the same area of study (see Farrington 2003), others view developmental and life-course criminology as fundamentally different, the former focusing on continuity of behavior over time and the latter on the importance of events and relationships for behavior. For example, Sampson and Laub (2005) assert that developmental criminology often implies an unfolding of predetermined outcomes, while life-course criminology gives proper weight to environmental influences. To them, "A key difference between the present life-course perspective and most developmental criminology can be clarified by asking what would happen in an imagined world of perfect measurement. Even if *all* risk factors (including social controls!) were measured without error, our framework posits the continuous influence of human agency and randomizing events, leading again to heterogeneity in outcomes, emergent processes, and a lack of causal prediction" (p. 41).



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Fox Butterfield's (1995) study of Willie Bosket, who was considered one of the most dangerous juvenile criminals of his time, came at a point in history when criminological research had not yet taken its life-course turn—when the idea that there are 'superpredators' who are born criminal and will not be positively influenced by the environment reigned supreme (Dilulio 1995). This understanding of the life-course of crime is also very similar to Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) conceptualization of the low self-control offender, who, if he hasn't been taught to restrain himself by age 8 or so, is doomed to a life of deviance. Butterfield, though, did not buy these arguments. Later on, he says, "But modern research suggests there are positive alternative treatments. Early intervention is the key. Many factors go into producing personality: temperament, the genetic component you are born with; the neighborhood in which you grow up; and perhaps most important, the style of your parents" (Butterfield 1995, p. 327). Life-course criminology has continued to show the relevance of interventions in changing individual trajectories and in inducing turning points.

Perhaps it is best to bring this book full circle and discuss the opening cases of Jack and Edward. Both were seen by specialists in juvenile delinquency and mental health and both underwent treatment to help bring about desistance from their antisocial ways. What did that treatment look like? For Jack (the Jack-Roller), after an assessment of what led to his behavioral problems, the first step was to "place Stanley (the pseudonym Shaw gave Jack) in an entirely new social situation, and to initiate a plan of treatment adapted, as far as possible, to his particular attitudes and personality" (Shaw 1930, pp. 165–166). Thus, they placed him in the home of a foster mother and also sought to obtain work for him. Jack's plan also included encouraging new friendships so as to cut him off from his previous gang.

In Ernest W. Burgess' assessment of the case, the most effective aspect of Shaw's treatment was that he used "not sympathy, but . . . empathy" in dealing with Jack (p. 194). "Empathy," he says, "means entering into the experience of another person by the human and democratic method of sharing experiences" (pp. 194–195). Thus, the "very act of pouring out one's experiences not only has a cathartic effect, particularly where tensions and inhibitions are released, but also gives the subject

perspective upon his life" (p. 195). The writing of the life history, then, was part of the treatment plan.

With respect to Edward, his treatment involved similar aspects to Jack's. While under parole and probation, case workers sought to help out Edward's family with "financial aid . . . from relief agencies, providing for clinical examinations and medical service, investigating complaints, and making arrangements for foster-home placements" (Shaw et al. 1938/1966, pp. 340–341). Various forms of treatment were offered when the boys were incarcerated as well, but Shaw does not believe they were effective; rather, he argues that incarceration led to more criminogenic personal relationships for the boys. Additionally, like Jack, Edward and his brothers were given employment opportunities to help them stay on the straight and narrow.

As noted in the introduction to this book, it is unclear whether the treatment had any effect; Jack seemed to fall back into antisocial behavior after Shaw lost track of him; there is not long-term follow-up available for Edward. Treatment programs at the time, focused specifically on crime prevention, have not had the most positive of outcomes. Perhaps the best-known example is the Cambridge-Somerville Youth Program, devised by Dr. Richard Cabot, a former professor at Harvard. Cabot's program was based on the notion that individual mentorship could correct even the worst of family backgrounds. The program was evaluated in a study that took place in the 1930s, matching participants into a group that would receive the program and a group which would not. Treatment consisted of being paired with a counselor who would work with the family and the boy (McCord 1992). Joan McCord (1992) described the experiences of the treatment group:

> When the program ended in 1945, boys in the treatment group had been visited, on average, two times a month for 5 ½ years. Over half the boys had been tutored in academic subjects; over 100 received medical or psychiatric attention; almost half had been sent to summer camps; and most of the boys had participated with their counselors in such activities as swimming, visits to local athletic competitions, and woodwork in the project's shop. Boys in the treatment program were encouraged to join the Y.M.C.A. and other community youth programs. The boys and their

> parents called upon the social workers for help with a variety of problems including illness and unemployment. (p. 200)

Clearly then, this was a well-thought-out program, addressing multiple areas of the youths' lives, relying on state of the art science (including the research of the Gluecks (Zane et al. 2016)). Unfortunately, it turned out that the program had iatrogenic effects—that is, it made the treatment group worse off than the control group, for which no treatment was provided (Welsh and Rocque 2014).

After the 'nothing works' era, discussed in Chapter 5, criminologists stepped up to the plate to demonstrate that programs and approaches can 'work.' By 'work,' they often meant that the programs resulted in reduced recidivism. Thus, recidivism, or reoffending after involvement in the justice system or a program, became the focus of much research. One of the most popular of these recidivism approaches is the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model, developed by Canadian psychologists James Bonta and Don Andrews. The RNR approach sees as imperative the measuring of risk and need of offenders, as well as matching treatment options to those risks and needs.

The RNR approach is influential—its risk assessment tools, the Level of Service instruments, remain some of the most popular in North America (Lowenkamp et al. 2009)—but they is not based on desistance research. This matters because while clearly risk factors are important for understanding why people commit crimes, the ways in which people proceed (sometimes naturally) toward a state of non-offending could improve correctional approaches. In some ways, the approach utilizes developmental psychology in order to assess risk, including deviant peers, criminal history, and substance use as risk factors. Their tools include both static (unchanging) and dynamic (changing) risk factors (see Lowenkamp et al. 2009). Yet much like Sampson and Laub's (2005) assessment of developmental criminology, it does not give much weight to the environment or context. Can explicit desistance-focused assessment improve the state of correctional policy? What would desistance research and theory say about current programs and approaches to reduce crime? This concluding chapter takes a look at some of these questions, describing approaches that mesh well with desistance

research, and also spells out the types of programs that are implicated by particular theories. The chapter also discusses how current effective practices are informed by desistance research and theory. Finally, the chapter concludes with an overview of the book as a whole and a look to the future of desistance from crime in scholarship and practice.

## Desistance and Policy

In an interesting discussion, Shapland et al. (2016) argue that rehabilitation and desistance are sometimes seen as referencing the same thing but are actually distinct. Rehabilitation, they say, is related to the effects of a criminal justice policy—that is, whether a program or intervention can reduce offending. Desistance is a bit more encompassing, generally referring to an offender's own journey to a crime-free life. In addition, they suggest that desistance research is still not well integrated into actual practice.

This does not mean that desistance cannot or has not influenced policy. As Paternoster and Bachman (2001) argue, no criminal justice policy is atheoretical. Every approach is based on some understanding of criminal behavior. For example, "three strikes and you're out" laws not only scratch the retributive itch, but also assume a reasoning offender who, realizing he only has one more shot, will rationally decide not to commit that third crime. Visitation policies in prisons are both aimed at providing inmates an incentive to behave as well as toward maintaining social bonds with the outside world. Yet it remains the case that criminological work is often divorced from actual practice. Most criminal justice agents and policymakers do not have the time to keep up with the latest developments and published studies in criminology journals. "To practitioners and policy-makers," write Shadd Maruna and colleagues (2004, p. 10), "even the word 'desistance' may seem like the latest addition to academia's apparently never-ending quest to make well-known social behaviors more complicated and scientific than they really are." In this, the field, which often laments the lack of utilization of research as compared to medicine, has a barrier to face

(Maruna and Barber 2011). In the medical field, for example, the practitioners are *also* often times the researchers. In criminology, we have researchers and we have practitioners and never the twain shall meet. Thus, it is unclear how much if at all desistance research has influenced criminal justice policy or practice (Maruna and Immarigeon 2004).

Desistance research, as hover (2004) argues, has much to offer criminal justice policy. Rather than focusing on "manipulating threat," and reducing risk, desistance research can increase "the analytic focus to the entire array of forces that cause men and women to turn away from serious criminal participation" (p. ix). Desistance research can, for example, help illuminate how a policy ostensibly concerned with issues of human rights may also help reduce future offending. In the spring of 2016, Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe issued an executive order to re-enfranchise ex-felons. McAuliffe referenced the origins of Virginia's felon voting ban, tying it to racist intentions to deny African-Americans the vote post-civil war. Yet he also seemingly recognized the importance of enfranchisement for reintegration, stating, "I want you back in society. I want you feeling good about yourself. I want you voting, getting a job, paying taxes" (Stolberg and Eckholm 2016). In other words, to be a good citizen. Civic reintegration theories of desistance can help to shed light on why this order is more than a civil rights matter, perhaps persuading opponents who view the move as too lenient.

What are the policies and programs that would be recommended from desistance research? In a recent discussion, Kurlychek et al. (2016) outline the police implications of five bodies of desistance theories: (1) pure age (or what they call maturational), (2) natural, (3) social bonds, (4) motivational, and (5) rock bottom. Pure age or maturational theories assume that desistance will happen with age and so the criminal justice system need not do anything to encourage it. Relatedly, natural desistance theories assume people will grow out of crime but argue that criminal justice intervention may result in a labeling process, thereby impeding desistance. Social bond theories assume that relationships (e.g., marriage, employment) are needed to deflect criminal trajectories. Thus, employment programs would be seen as important from this perspective. Not discussed here but

relevant programs that encourage social ties, such as visitation policies during incarceration, would be recommended by these theories.

Kurlychek et al. (2016) move on to discuss motivated theories of desistance, which include Maruna's (2001) and Giordano and colleagues' (2002) theories of the self. These theories argue that internal change must happen in order for external events or relationships to have any effect on behavior. Thus, from these perspectives, simple employment programs will not work unless the offender is ready to make a change (see also Uggen 2000). Finally, rock bottom theories, such as Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) theory of the feared self, argue that one has to reach a point at which they realize crime is no longer worth it. Kurlychek and colleagues (2016) suggest that criminal sanctions may actually provide that experience for offenders, thus incarceration or severe punishments could, from this perspective, encourage desistance.

What are some other policy implications from desistance theories? According to Maruna and LeBel (2010), desistance research focuses on offenders' strengths and their individual lives while rehabilitation and correctional policy is hung up on fixing deficits. They propose correctional policies be put in place to affirm a new, noncriminal status for the offender once his/her sentence has been served. This perspective meshes well with Christopher Uggen's work on labels applied to ex-felons as barriers to reform (Uggen and Blahnik 2016). From Uggen's view, structural barriers such as laws preventing felons from voting or holding office impede civic reintegration. From Maruna and LeBel's (2010) view, these impediments also restrict the reshaping of a new identity. Thus, both identity and civic reintegration theory would argue that criminal justice policy should remove sanctions once the offender's sentence is up, but for different reasons.

Maruna (2011) takes the labeling perspective to its logical conclusion in his essay calling for reentry to be a "rite of passage." Relying on Garfinkel's (1956) notion of status degradation ceremony, Maruna shows how the process of becoming a formal criminal within the system is a ritual, one that breaks down old identities and creates a new one (offender). Yet there is no equivalent ritual on the back end of the system, when offenders are returning to society. They leave prison

with the offender label still largely intact. Maruna suggests that rituals could be used to break down the offender status and to rebuild new identities. Part of this ritual would inevitably entail a full restoration of rights necessary to become an engaged citizen.

In a handy policy brief, desistance scholars Beth Weaver and Fergus McNeill (2011) outlined how the criminal justice system, taking lessons from desistance research, can promote behavioral reform. They include 'eight principles' that practitioners can draw upon to assist offenders. First, they suggest that practitioners must be patient—desistance isn't something that happens all at once or after a few sessions of therapy. Second, they encourage practitioners to use the strong arm of the law as infrequent as possible. Instead, use informal means of control. Third, and related, only incarcerate as a means of last resort. Fourth, relationships are important and they should be a key part of practice. Fifth, understand that desistance is a process that is unique for everyone. Sixth, pay attention to the social environment in addition to the problems related to the offender. Seventh, be careful about the terms used in interactions with offenders. Try to create positive hope rather than frustration. Finally, eighth, emphasize the ways in which offenders can 'make good.' These eight principles of desistance focused practice are reminiscent of the RNR model's eight principles of effective intervention, which have been utilized by practitioners for several years (see also McNeill 2016, for a review of policy reports written by desistance researchers).

The RNR approach has taken some heat in recent years from desistance researchers who view it as too risk oriented and failing to take individuality and context into account (McNeill 2016; Ward et al. 2012). In response, the 'Good Lives Model' (GLM) was proposed, which sought to bring back into focus offenders' strengths and core needs rather than focusing on deficits. The GLM was developed by Tony Ward (2002) and colleagues. Ward and Stewart (2003) argued that the RNR approach is useful but should give more attention to "human needs" rather than solely criminogenic needs. In fact, they think the term 'criminogenic needs' is confusing since it really concerns risk factors. Needs, to them, "are concerned with the attainment of objective goods that sustain or enhance an individual's life, their absence will

harm a person in some way or else increase the chances of harm occurring in the future" (p. 128). Ward and Marshall (2004) proposed the idea of the GLM by indicating what they see as primary human needs or goods. There are nine goods, including life, knowledge, excellence in play, excellence in agency, inner peace, relatedness, spirituality, happiness, and creativity.

While the proponents of the GLM do not specifically rely on desistance research, their approach is related to certain of the more recent arguments about how desistance work can inform practice. It is consistent with Maruna and LeBel's (2010) notion that practice should focus on offender strengths. Fergus McNeill (2016) and Stephen Farrall (2002) have also argued that practice should be forward thinking and relational. In this way, GLM helps practitioners recognize that they should not only be helping *prevent* but also be helping *create* outcomes. Offenders who are attempting to reintegrate into society often need assistance in reaching their goals and the idea is that if they reach them, antisocial behavior will decrease.

The GLM is deliberately relational (it is one of the primary goods), but desistance research would support an even more direct approach to building and enhancing personal relationships. To the extent that strong relationships found in meaningful employment and marriage help promote desistance, policies that help maintain or create those relationships would be useful. Employment training and reentry programs already focus on getting ex-offenders employment upon release but for logistical reasons, whether the jobs available are those that can offer meaningful occupations or pathways to a meaningful life is questionable. In addition, while prison programs cannot, at least at the current time, assign offenders spouses, strategies could be put in place to encourage the maintenance of families, including incentives for offenders returning home to spouses, and family counseling. It is important to recognize, however, that the marriage→desistance link is under heavy scrutiny (see Chapter 5), with some claiming marriage does not have causal effects on crime (Skardhamar et al. 2015). Lyngstad and Skardhamar (2010) conclude that "there is no clear policy implication from the research on family formation and desistance" (p. 237).

Finally, John Laub (2016) has written about how the life-course perspective can be brought to bear on policy. Reflecting on his experience as both a researcher and former head of the National Institute of Justice, he argues that policy must be attentive to lessons learned from life-course research, including the negative impact of punitive criminal justice policies, the idea of turning points, and the concept of 'nudging,' or gently pushing offenders to make better decisions (see also Sampson and Laub 2016). He says, "I think there is an enormous opportunity to apply the 'nudge' idea to change offender behavior. But equally compelling is how the 'nudge' idea can also be applied to change the behavior of criminal justice officials. As states look to reduce both the rate and length of incarceration, attention needs to be directed to probation and parole supervision and services" (pp. 632–633). From this perspective, rather than seeking 180° reversals in behavior and identities, small incremental changes may be key.

## Current Approaches Aligned with Desistance Research

Several programs and policies that are currently utilized by the criminal justice system are consistent with findings on desistance, though perhaps not always intentionally so. In the juvenile justice system, to the extent that arrest or incarceration impedes growth (Dmitrieva et al. 2012), the practice of diversion may allow natural desistance to occur. Juvenile diversion is the process of allowing juveniles who have been arrested for offenses that are generally nonserious in nature to bypass the traditional method of being adjudicated in a court and sanctioned. However, rigorous research on diversion programs finds that in and of themselves, they do not reduce crime among diverted populations. Diversion to family therapy programs seems to be the most beneficial (Schwalbe et al. 2012). Thus, the desistance theories that suggest non-intervention entirely, that youth will 'naturally grow out of it,' may be misguided.

Programs for juveniles who have found themselves caught up in the justice system often revolve around maintaining or strengthening ties.

The University of Colorado-based 'Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development' has rated several juvenile prevention programs. Those that reach the designation of a 'model program' are programs that have been evaluated by at least two high-quality experimental evaluations (or one experimental and one quasi-experimental) and have maintained the effect for at least a year. Model programs include what Greenwood and Welsh (2012) have called "brand name" programs, such as Functional Family Therapy (FFT) and Multisystemic Therapy (MST). FFT relates to the social relationship/social bond theories of desistance by focusing on familial relationships and interaction styles. It helps parents better understand how to address misbehavior. MST focuses on parenting but also seeks to help improve peer and school relationships. Both of these programs have been shown to reduce juvenile offending (induce adolescent desistance?) when utilized within the justice system. It is likely no coincidence that they target the factors desistance research has identified as key for behavioral reform.

Another key family of programs shown to reduce problem behavior in youth takes place outside the justice system. Parenting programs seek to help at-risk families understand appropriate ways to nurture their children and to respond to misbehavior. David Olds' Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) program is one of the most well-known. Originally developed in the 1970s, the NFP uses trained nurses to make home visits for at-risk mothers (in poverty, single, etc.), to provide assistance and advice on parenting practices and nutrition. The program began when the mothers were pregnant and terminated when the children were around two years of age. The first trial, which took place at Elmira, New York, has followed the children of the mothers for nearly 20 years. Results have been largely positive, with early returns showing that children in the program (experimental) group were less likely to be mistreated. In 2010, Eckenrode and colleagues reported on outcomes of the children. While the NFP did not seem to have much lasting influence on boys, for girls in the experimental group, there were fewer antisocial behaviors and less involvement in the justice system at age 19.

Sentencing policies have also been influenced by desistance-related research. As described in Chapter 5, work on changes in brain function and structure has indicated that the brain continues to mature

throughout adolescence. The US Supreme Court has taken these findings into consideration in several landmark decisions in recent years. For example, in Roper v. Simmons (2005), the Court decided that juveniles could not be subject to capital punishment. In 2010, the Court outlawed life without parole for crimes committed by juveniles (Graham v. Florida). In these cases, research on brain development formed part of the basis for the decisions (Steinberg 2013). In these and other cases, it appears the Court has recognized that the brain is continuing to mature throughout adolescence and into early adulthood. This continuing development affects both culpability and the potential for change over the life-course.

Policies and programs for adults in the justice system also have relevance for desistance research. Some sanctions, rather than sending offenders away to be incarcerated, take place in the community. These may be seen as an effective way to sanction offenders because it does not remove them from their jobs and their families. Early desistance research indicated that probation had little effect on desistance (Farrall and Calverly 2006), but more recent research suggests that it can. One of the more influential studies on this topic is Stephen Farrall's Tracking Progress on Probation study, which, in its early stages, showed that probation is not likely to support desistance. However, most recently (Farrall 2016; Farrall et al. 2014), the study began to uncover that the probation officers may have helped offenders turn away from crime. Farrall argues "that the advice, which they had been given by probation staff, had lain 'dormant' for many years" (2016, p. 189).

One practice within probation that some view as potentially promising is the use of motivational interviewing (MI). MI seeks to understand the offender's viewpoint and helps him or her come to the conclusion that it is time to change. Rollnick and Miller (1995) define MI as "a directive, client centered counselling style for eliciting behavior change by helping clients explore and resolve ambivalence" (cited in Rollnick and Allison 2004, p. 104). MI has potential as a technique used by probation officers to bring practice toward a more forward-thinking orientation (McNeill 2016).

Programming in correctional atmospheres is also consistent with much we've learned from desistance research. One that has, in recent

years, held the attention of researchers is visitation policies. Due at least in part to the work of Sampson and Laub, who showed the importance of social ties, scholars began to examine whether those who received visits (as a proxy for maintenance of social ties) had better outcomes upon release. By and large, this research has supported Sampson and Laub's view (see Bales and Mears 2008; Cochran 2012; Duwe and Clark 2013; Mears et al. 2012). In fact, some research has shown that visitation has an impact on behavior while the offender is inside, reducing misconduct (Cochran 2012), with one study showing that misconduct decreases prior to but then increased after visits (Siennick et al. 2013).

The effect of employment programs is a bit less clear. Programs for released offenders (e.g., taking place after incarceration) have not shown a consistent impact on crime (Visher et al. 2005). A meta-analysis of education and employment programs for those still in the system (incarcerated or on probation) found small effects but warned that the studies included generally were methodologically weak (Wilson et al. 2000). Yet again, as Sampson and Laub (1993) make clear, it is not employment by itself that matters, but meaningful employment that builds capital. Recognizing that "most existing work used a simplistic employment measure (i.e., employed vs. unemployed)" Ramakers and colleagues (2016, p. 1) focused on variations in type of employment. These researchers found that higher status and stable jobs had a larger effect on recidivism. In addition, in a well-known study, Christopher Uggen (2000) teased apart data on what seemed to be a failed work program for offenders. He identified an interesting finding that the program seemed to 'work' for offenders over the age of 26. This suggests that some degree of maturation is required for work to build capital and encourage desistance.

Educational programs are another possible approach to building social bonds/social capital and enhancing offenders' ability to pound their stake in conformity upon release. In a study of correctional education programs in three states, Steurer and Smith (2003) found that those participating in such programs reoffended at lower rates than those who did not in two of the states. A recent meta-analysis of education programs by the Rand Corporation (Davis et al. 2013) found that such programs are associated with a 43% reduction in the odds of

reoffending. Given the shift in Western economies toward skills-based work rather than non-skilled labor, education may be the best way to provide offenders new opportunities upon release.

One of the more consistently effective types of programs offered in prisons works by targeting attitudes and thoughts. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a family of programs that seeks to help individuals recognize problematic thoughts and triggers in the hope of changing behaviors that often accompany those thoughts (Martin 2014). Examples of oft-studied programs in corrections include Reasoning and Rehabilitation and Aggression Replacement Therapy. A Campbell Collaboration systematic review found that despite diversity in types of programs, they all are effective in reducing recidivism (Lipsey et al. 2007). In their analysis of 58 studies, Lipsey and colleagues found that CBT was associated with an odds ratio of 1.53, which means those offenders receiving the program had a 53% greater odds of making it (not recidivate) than those in control groups.

Lipsey and colleagues (2007; Lipsey and Landenberger 2007) argue that one reason CBT may work is that it targets criminogenic attitudes which are learned from others. Attitudes, of course, are a key component in Akers' social learning theory; thus, the intervention addresses factors identified in social learning theories of desistance. Yet CBT is relevant to other bodies of desistance research, namely neurological and brain maturation. In a fascinating piece, Jamie Vaske and colleagues (2011) demonstrated that one reason that CBT may be effective is because it helps "shape neuropsychological processes" (p. 91). They focus on three ways in which CBT improves behavior, through social skills, coping skills, and problem-solving skills and then demonstrate that each of these skills is linked to particular areas of the brain, particularly the pre-frontal cortex. As Rocque and Welsh (2015) pointed out, "These brain areas are also implicated in impulsivity, perspective taking, and other components of psychosocial maturation, indicating that any treatment targeting that maturation domain will likely have an influence on neurological functioning" (p. 510). Thus, CBT may impact desistance from a variety of perspectives.

Substance abuse programming is also relevant to desistance research. As mentioned in Chapter 4, some work has indicated that drug and

alcohol use serves as an impediment to the desistance process. As some work has indicated, substance use is often implicated in criminal events. Use of alcohol and drugs is also linked to later antisocial behavior and life-course difficulties. Wesley Jennings and colleagues (2015), using data from the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development (see Chapter 4), found that binge and problem drinking in youth was significantly associated with later crime and adjustment problems in adulthood. This finding of alcohol tripping up an offender on the path to conformity was found in the earliest longitudinal studies, including that of the Gluecks.

With respect to whether substance use treatment works for offenders, perhaps the best evidence comes from the Campbell Collaboration review conducted by OJ Mitchell, Doris MacKenzie, and David Wilson (2012). Their review of rigorous randomized studies found that drug treatment is associated with lowering recidivism by 15–17%. Therapeutic communities seemed to have the most consistent (though somewhat small) effect. Therapeutic communities (TCs), according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), involve residential, group-based therapies for a variety of ailments. TCs "have a *recovery* orientation, focusing on the whole person and overall lifestyle changes, not simply abstinence from drug use" (NIDA 2015[1]). Interestingly, TCs are related to desistance theories in that some may seek to change individual's identities. Drawing on identity and narrative theories of desistance, Stevens (2012) argues that "offender rehabilitation in therapeutic communities involves a process of purposive and agentic reconstruction of identity and narrative reframing, so that a 'new' and 'better' person emerges whose attitudes and behaviors cohere with long-term desistance from crime" (p. 527).

A unique approach to examining whether programs 'work' or not with respect to desistance was offered by Shawn Bushway and Robert Apel (2012) in a seminal issue of the journal *Criminology & Public Policy*. In their assessment, employment programs can 'signal' those

[1] https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/therapeutic-communities/what-therapeutic-communitys-approach

who are making the change toward desistance. As mentioned previously in this book, quantitative methods often examine associations between events and behavior; in that sense, they have a difficult time identifying those offenders who are still 'active' but trying to desist. Bushway and Apel (2012) argue that employment programs, while short on evidence in terms of reducing recidivism, may still be important for signaling purposes. How? The key is in motivation. Often, in employment programs, there are those who make it through—the 'graduates'—and those who drop out along the way. Those who make it through are providing useful information. A signal that they are ready to change. As they state, "Although we cannot know for certain, it seems to us that this difference is consequential enough to inform hiring decisions by potential employers, with respect to the level of crime risk and work productivity. To the extent this assumption is true, program completion may serve as a strong signal for employers seeking to identify good employees" (p. 23).

Recently, scholars have begun to call for a larger role of genetics and biological information in crime prevention and correctional programming. The idea here, from a biological or biosocial standpoint, is that not all individuals respond equally to interventions. In addition, biosocial work has indicated that certain individuals have suffered developmental issues that can be addressed by nurturing or enriching programs. Of particular relevance is Gajos et al. (2016) arguments surrounding what is known as the differential-susceptibility hypothesis. They note that particular gene variants, instead of signaling who is more likely to engage in certain types of behaviors, may instead indicate which individuals are more susceptible to environmental influences. Gajos and colleagues contrast this model to the diathesis-stress approach, which views certain gene variants as combining with risky environments to increase the odds of antisocial behavior. These scholars suggest that genetic information can be used to help us understand why particular social interventions do or do not work, and how. This information can be used to augment existing data on such programs to better understand how we can prevent antisocial behavior or facilitate desistance. Others have similarly argued that biosocial information (e.g., brain

development) can help us understand how and why crime prevention works (Rocque et al. 2012).

As the foregoing discussion makes clear, there are programs or practices in place that incorporate nearly all perspectives and research on desistance from crime. Pure age and biological approaches are relevant for diversion programs as well as new ideas about genetically informed crime prevention. Neurological/brain maturation research helps explain why cognitive behavioral programming may be so effective. This work (much of it noncriminological; see Gajos et al. 2016) has also influenced important US Supreme Court cases involving the treatment and sanctioning of juvenile offenders. Certain programs may influence how one views crime and their conception of their identity as well. These include cognitive behavior programs and therapeutic communities.

With respect to social process theories of desistance, several programs and approaches are relevant. Juvenile evidence-based programs such as MST address negative peer influence. Approaches to reintegration, that allow ex-offenders a smoother transition back to the community, that allow them to participate fully as citizens, align with civic reintegration theories. Finally, programs that allow offenders to either enhance or maintain their bonds to prosocial institutions (family, employment, education) are relevant to social control theories of desistance.

Unfortunately, if we view desistance as a multifaceted process involving more than one domain (such a perspective was outlined in the previous chapter), programming in one or two areas may not suffice. A wide array of approaches and programs may be needed. Further, however, offenders may have needs in some but not other areas. The Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R), one of the most popular assessment tools associated with the RNR approach discussed earlier, was devised by Canadian psychologists to provide information on offender risk level and criminogenic needs. The idea is that both are vital to guide how offenders are treated in the justice system.

Following the social learning perspective, the RNR approach argues that low- and high-risk offenders should not be mixed together. Why? Because high-risk offenders need the most rigorous treatment while low-risk offenders really do not need much in the way of intervention in the first place. In addition, the research on crime prevention programs

suggests that 'deviancy training' may occur if deviant individuals are in contact with those who are less so (Welsh and Rocque 2014). The LSI-R also provides information on ten domains of need, including (1) criminal history, (2) employment/education, (3) financial, (4) accommodation, (5) leisure/recreation, (6) peers, (7) substances, (8) family, (9) emotional/personal, and (10) attitudes (Andrews and Bonta 1998). This would be an ideal method to determine in which domains (of criminogenic need, or maturation) an offender could use some work. Unfortunately, there is scant research examining whether the LSI-R (or any of its variants, including newer versions) adequately identifies needs. One recent study found that the LSI-R did not seem to work better for those scoring high in needs in particular domains and receiving treatment in those domains (Duwe and Rocque 2016). In addition, that nearly all researches on the LS tools show that they strongly predict recidivism (Olver et al. 2014) is in itself evidence that the tools are not being used to help offenders while in the system.

It is likely that those engaging in criminal and antisocial behavior as well as those attempting to begin the process of desistance differ in levels of maturation. Thus, a one-size-fits-all approach to corrections or crime prevention is not likely to be adequate. Assessment tools are necessary to examine where an individual is on their behavioral journey. Are they still engaged in persistent offending? Beginning their descent into desistance? With respect to treatment, assessment tools are needed to determine the areas or domains of maturation in which offenders could use some assistance. Such a tool might focus on the domains identified in the previous chapter: neurological/cognitive, psychosocial/personality, civic/communal, adult social role, and identity/cognitive transformation. While such a task may seem somewhat daunting, luckily researchers have a vast amount of research on which to base their work; the research reviewed in Chapter 4 provides something of a foundation.

The maturation perspective outlined in the previous chapter helps to guide policy in a number of ways. First, as opposed to theories that argue desistance stems from largely one or two factors (identity change, social relationships), the maturation notion points out the need to look in multiple spheres of an individual's life. Offenders may have a prosocial identity but still be at risk for recidivism if they do not have a

meaningful job or are excluded from being a participating member of society upon their return to the community. Second, the maturation perspective recognizes that different approaches may be more useful at different stages of the life-course. Certain theories of desistance are somewhat limited in this regard, with their focus on, say, the importance of adult social roles. How does such a theory help us promote desistance for juveniles? Adolescence and early adulthood, of course, are prime periods for a focus on cognitive or brain maturation. Recognizing that such maturation is still ongoing, some research has discussed the importance of treating early adults (those aged 18–24) more like juveniles in the justice system, with Young Adult Offender Programs offering more age-appropriate treatment than would be available in the adult system (Farrington et al. 2012; Rocque et al. Forthcomingb). Finally, the maturation perspective shines the light on the notion that domains are not isolated but may be interconnected and interactive in their effects on behavior. The RNR approach addresses multiple domains of risk but does not speak to how those domains may influence one another. The maturation approach would encourage practitioners to not examine domains in isolation but recognize how each is connected to the other.

Perhaps it is important to conclude with an important lesson for criminal justice policy that can be discerned from desistance research. The lesson extends to the way we think about criminals and noncriminals, as well as human behavior in society. Recall in the first chapter the discussion of John Wesley Elkins and the implications his case had for perceptions of behavioral change over the life-course. Are people 'born criminal,' a product of unchanging biological deficits, or do the factors that combine to produce criminality sufficiently change so that locking up a child for heinous acts for the rest of his life no longer makes sense?

As the Elkins case demonstrated in the late nineteenth century, change can happen, even for those who commit terrible, inhuman acts in childhood. And yet, perceptions change. The history of correctional treatment, swinging on a pendulum from crime control to rehabilitation, has been recounted numerous times (Dowd 1984; Howell et al. 2013). At certain points in history, the public's belief in rehabilitation has been strong; at other times (including after Martinson's famous report), the notion that people do not or cannot change has been firm.

This latter belief is epitomized by the story of Willie Bosket. In response to his horrendous childhood acts of murder, New York passed what now may be viewed as draconian juvenile offender laws, allowing children as young as 13 to be tried as adults and locked up for the rest of their lives (Woods 1980). In fact, Willie Bosket, the 'baby faced murderer,' remains behind bars, nearly 40 years after his teenage crimes—as of 2008 he had spent about 20 years in solitary confinement due to his violence on the inside (Eligon 2008). As we've seen in this chapter, the pendulum has seemingly swung the other direction, with the US Supreme Court striking down such laws, largely on the basis of research relevant to desistance from crime.

One thing is clear, however, and that is desistance from crime, even for the most serious and entrenched offenders, appears to be the norm (Laub and Sampson 2003). Thus, ideas about the likelihood of recidivism should take this reality into account. One of the most striking aspects of the LSI-R as a tool to assess the odds of reoffending is that age, perhaps the most powerful predictor of crime (aside from previous offending), is not part of its equation. The criminal career debate, discussed in Chapter 5, was partly about whether life-course research can inform sentencing. In that debate, one of the main issues was whether 'chronic criminals' could be identified and targeted. Another issue life-course and desistance research helps clarify is that in terms of public safety, life sentences, or extremely long sentences (particularly for those who are past adolescence), are likely to be ineffective.

This reality is especially important in light of current trends in sentencing and correctional policy. Many of the 'tough on crime' policies are still in place, such as truth in sentencing, elimination of parole, 'three-strikes' policies, and mandatory minimums. In addition, the use of life without the possibility of parole has increased of late (Nellis 2010). As Nellis (2010, p. 28) states, "The incentive to incapacitate rather than rehabilitate is also driven by a lack of confidence in offenders' ability or willingness to turn their lives around." While there seems to be more willingness to trust in rehabilitation (for example, Thielo et al. 2015), these policies speak to the vestiges of belief in the incorrigible offender. As Uggen and Blahnik (2016) put it,

> There has been a tremendous revolution in life course criminology, as careful longitudinal research has shown us how criminal behavior changes from month to month and year to year. We now have clear evidence that pretty much "all offenders eventually desist" (Laub and Sampson 2003, p. 582), yet our laws, policy, and public discourse have all lagged behind this revolution in scientific knowledge. Public discourse continues to proceed as if there were two kinds of people in the world—the good and the bad—and if we would simply lock up the bad guys forever, the rest of us will be safe. (p. 222)

Desistance research findings also have implications for theory, as any perspective seeking to explain crime must grapple with the normative decline in offending that comes with age. Theories based on largely unchanging factors, such as heritability or intelligence, seem less useful for understanding crime throughout the life-course than between individual differences in offending. This is also the case for static social/psychological theories (see Paternoster et al. 1997). Of course, this observation is not new; David Matza highlighted the inability of popular criminological theories to explain maturational reform in the mid-1960s (Matza 1964) and Gove reiterated the critique in 1985. Yet it remains relevant today. Theories that fail to take into account the normative desistance phenomenon may influence policymakers or practitioners in ways that lead to ineffective and inefficient practices. Intelligence matters for a host of behavioral outcomes—this is not in serious dispute. But if intelligence is viewed as largely unchanging, as fixed or static, then it is difficult to see how it can be used to guide effective policy. Instead, viewed this way, it becomes yet another static factor that can be used to justify draconian practices that incapacitate individuals long after they likely would continue their offending career. A desistance-focused policy perspective would incorporate knowledge detailed in this book about the age-crime curve, factors related to desistance, and the rarity of offending in later stages of the life-course (Maruna and LeBel 2010).

In sum, while crime prevention and offender rehabilitation research as well as practice share the same neighborhood as much desistance work, they are not yet roommates. Information on desistance can be used to inform new approaches as well as to evaluate existing practices—why

they do or do not work. Importantly, desistance research can supplement current knowledge about 'what works' in corrections to improve effectiveness.

## Wrapping Up: Where Have We Come From and Where Are We Going?

Desistance research in criminology is a relatively new phenomenon, depending on how you look at it. The term 'desistance,' in terms of describing a decline in crime or the process that supports eventual cessation of offending, has only been used with frequency in the scientific literature in the last 20 to 25 years. Yet as we have seen throughout this book, arguably the first scientific work on crime, using quantitative, positivistic methods, was at least in part about desistance (Quetelet 1831/1984). Historical work highlighted the age-crime curve, but was more likely to focus, as did Hall (1904), on the increase in antisocial behavior that seemed to (and still does) accompany adolescence.

While the increase in crime during adolescence and early adulthood as well as subsequent decline has been known for decades, it is true that longitudinal studies that included criminal behavior were not common until relatively recently. What this means is that most of what we knew about the age-crime curve came from aggregate data, that is, prevalence of, say, arrests on the y-axis plotted against age on the x-axis. Thus, it was unclear if the pattern was reflecting a change in incidence (number of crimes per person) or prevalence (number of active offenders) with increasing age. In some ways, this debate continues with some finding that even for serious, chronic offenders, the frequency of offending declines with age (Laub and Sampson 2003) and others arguing that the age-crime curve graphs mask different offending trajectory groups (Moffitt 1993, 2006).

Because an actual focus on desistance remains relatively new in criminology, certain logistical issues remain, including the definition of desistance and the best way to study it. Is desistance an end state? Does it always conclude with a zero rate incidence of offending? How many

offenses are enough to classify someone as a potential desister once they stop? Is it desistance if there was no intention of quitting crime? A standardized conceptualization and operational definition of desistance is necessary for researchers to work from so that conclusions drawn are meaningful. While some dispute that a definition of desistance is important, it would be difficult to argue that cancer research wouldn't be hampered if some purported studies were examining cancer and others were examining heart disease. Recommendations for prevention and treatment would be hopelessly confounded. In some ways, such is the case with respect to current desistance scholarship.

As reviewed in Chapter 4, longitudinal datasets in the United States and abroad have proliferated in the last 20–30 years, stimulating a veritable explosion in knowledge about desistance. The timing of desistance of course varies by method and definition but seems to be normative in the early to mid-twenties. Because of this finding, Massoglia and Uggen (2010) to argue that desistance is a normal part of becoming an adult. While it appears that desistance *is* normative in that most do eventually slow down and stop committing crimes, it is not the case that everyone follows the same trajectory. Quantitative research has identified a host of factors that are associated with earlier desistance, such as relationships, changes in social situations, changes in peer networks, and identity transformations. Qualitative research has uncovered what it feels like to begin the process of desistance, and how ex-offenders seek to square their former behavior with that of the 'good person' that they now see themselves as. Both quantitative and qualitative researches have provided vital information about the whys, whos, and hows of desistance and mixed methods appear to be the most useful type of research in this area.

Chapters 5 and 6 reviewed theoretical perspectives on desistance, identifying six distinct but overlapping themes. First, pure age or biological perspectives were detailed. These include work by scholars who argue that desistance just happens or that aging of the biological organism is the primary cause. Second, cognitive or neurological theories were covered. These theories (or, more accurately, this body of work) view brain maturation as key for understanding behavioral reform after adolescence. We know now that the brain remains plastic throughout adolescence and changes that take place allow for more behavioral

control and identification of risks. Third rational choice perspectives were discussed. These perspectives argue that offenders eventually stop committing crime because they come to recognize that crime is not worth it and that they can no longer afford to give up substantial periods of time behind bars. Some of these theories suggest that a 'shock' must occur or rock bottom must be reached before the decision is made to give up crime. Fourth, personality and psychosocial maturation theories were reviewed. These theories see psychological factors as most important in causing desistance. These factors include such things as impulsivity, agreeableness, future discounting, and responsibility. Fifth, identity and cognitive transformation perspectives on desistance were discussed. These theories argue that people who make true, lasting behavioral change come to view crime and themselves differently over time. Their conception of who they are becomes incompatible with the idea of breaking the law. Behavioral change eventually follows identity change. Finally, social process theories of desistance were reviewed—these theories focus on changes in the environment, such as a change in social context, changes in peer relationships, and changes in involvement in social institutions (work, marriage, etc.).

Each of these perspectives offers important insights into the process of desistance. Yet viewed competitively and in silos, an argument could be made that they are incomplete. More to the point, perhaps they all identify *parts* of the process that, when viewed together, represent a complete picture. Chapter 6 made the case that these desistance perspectives can be seen as comprising the domains of maturation that Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck asked researchers to identify 80 years ago. Five domains of maturation were described, including adult social role, civic reintegration, psychosocial/psychological, cognitive transformation/identity, and neurological maturation. Preliminary work suggests that this may be a profitable way of integrating desistance theories.

Finally, this chapter has sought to flesh out the implications of desistance research and theory. It is all well and good to sit in an armchair and speculate about the reasons offenders eventually 'make good.' But what does that work do for society? Does it help make people safer? Contribute to good lives? How theory translates into practice is a key evaluative factor. In this chapter, the implications of desistance

research and theories were reviewed as well as the ways in which current practice and policies relate to such research. All policy is inherently related to some theory about human behavior and the way we treat offenders is no different. While much policy has its roots in desistance research, such research has only scratched the surface of the criminal justice system. A more purposeful desistance orientation would likely improve effectiveness of practices, contributing to a safer society.

What does the future of desistance research hold? Of course, one can only guess at the direction of future research and make certain recommendations. Nevertheless, one trend that does not seem to be going anywhere is the use of longitudinal datasets. While Chapter 4 demonstrated that there is no longer a shortage of recent and ongoing longitudinal studies from which desistance researchers can mine, there are many remaining questions and populations still in need of examination. Many of the longitudinal studies in criminology have a shortage of diversity with respect to (a) age of subjects, (b) sex of subjects, and (c) race of subjects. In addition, while David Farrington and colleague's (1986) call for longitudinal experiments is over 30 years old, few have been undertaken. Biological information is also sorely needed in longitudinal work; to date, most research on life-course criminology and genetics has had to rely on the Add-Health study. More datasets like this one are needed.

Research on desistance from crime at older and younger ages is also necessary. A recent report on desistance of juveniles by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (2016) found that in some areas, probation practice matches what the literature suggests, while in others it does not. One area the researchers noted that was especially in need of being addressed was that the practitioners often did not know much about desistance research. In addition, they found that there is not enough work demonstrating how desistance research can be put to use. However, it is also the case that desistance research has focused on postadolescence rather than early adolescence or childhood. Similarly, offending and desistance at older ages should become a focus of research. Of course, in both areas, there is some existing research that can be informative (see e.g., Barry 2010; Shover 1985) but more is necessary.

As theoretical perspectives evolve and advance, it will become useful to continue to explore integrated approaches such as that which was

described in Chapter 6. If agency, identity, and social control perspectives are not incompatible, how exactly do they fit together? Does identity or cognitive transformation necessarily have to precede social relationships in order for the latter to be an effective source of change? What role does brain maturation play in both identity change and openness to new social relationships? Are all types of maturation necessary for desistance to occur? Do maturation domains interact with one another such that, for example, social relationships are not as influential if an individual has a strong prosocial identity (or vice versa)? Clearly, viewing the categories of desistance theories as part of a shared process opens up a vista of new questions to be explored.

Other areas in need of further investigation include the historical contextuality of desistance theories or perspectives. One of the pillars of the life-course approach is that history matters. As Elder (1994, p. 5) notes, "Especially in rapidly changing societies, differences in birth year expose individuals to different historical worlds, with their constraints and options. Individual life courses may well reflect these different times." In large measure, perhaps because desistance research is so relatively new, history and context have not played a large role in theorizing. Yet history and context matters. One of the primary critiques of Sampson and Laub's theory of informal social controls is that it was based on data from boys born in the early twentieth century, coming of age in the 1950s. Does marriage and employment have the same impact today, some wonder?

One notable exception to what Laub (2004) calls criminology's "presentism" is a 2009 special issue of the journal *Theoretical Criminology*, in which two articles explored the historical context of desistance. In one of the papers, Farrall et al. (2009) argued that nearly all desistance research focuses on the present or near present. When examining data covering the period 1880–1940 in Crewe, UK, they discovered marriage and employment did not seem to affect criminal behavior as it did for the Glueck men, and for some contemporary samples. In fact, gaining employment at 'the Works,' the main employer during the time in Crewe, led to an increase in criminal behavior. An understanding of history illuminates this strange finding: as Farrall and colleagues note, drinking was part of the culture at the Works. They argue, "Set against

this, in order to temper the 'work cures all ills' tenor of the above, we additionally propose the following: that employment, especially within 'heavily' industrialised, male dominated, working-class cultures of the Victorian era such as the railway Works, increased the chances for offending via wages which were spent on recreational activities, namely alcohol, leading to drunkenness and disorderly behavior" (p. 93).

More research on whether the predictors of desistance, the process of desistance, or the theories that have been promulgated to explain those predictors and that process are historically contingent is needed. Ideally, researchers could compare datasets from two distinct historical time frames and determine whether differences emerge. In this way, desistance research could begin to take seriously the themes of the life-course paradigms that Elder described. The three other pillars, or themes, include the idea that timing of events matters with respect to their impact on the life-course, the notion that lives are interdependent or linked, and human agency (Elder 1994). All of these have been incorporated into desistance research and theory. Taking history seriously is the last step.

Finally, it seems reasonable to argue that desistance research will become more fully incorporated into policy and practice in the future. Indeed, this already is becoming more of a reality, as governmental reports are surfacing attempting to bridge the divide between academese and practical knowledge (McNeill 2016). Ensuring that important desistance research does not remain isolated from the more practice-oriented risk assessment and 'what works' perspectives currently dominating the correctional scene will likely lead to a more effective system. While as this chapter has demonstrated, it is certainly the case that there is overlap between some desistance research and theory and correctional approaches, there are also unique insights desistance research could bring to bear.

Unique insights of desistance research include the significance of emotions (Giordano et al. 2007) in the desistance process, the notion of agency and choice, and the importance of self-concept or identity. While kernels of these ideas can be found in some correctional or justice approaches, to date they have not been a core part of programming or philosophy. Correctional practices that sought to actively engage with offenders' desire

to give back to the community and to become prosocial individuals might lead to the emergence of approaches that help ex-offenders become who they want to, and who they feel they have been all along. In addition, incorporating the concept of choice into offender rehabilitation would benefit the control/risk reduction emphasis that seemingly predominates. One of the key insights of desistance research—even that focused nearly exclusively on the effect of external forces—is that humans make decisions and can choose to change. Helping ex-offenders with this process, rather than or maybe in addition to controlling their behaviors, seems an important but overlooked part of rehabilitation.

The future of desistance research is bright indeed. Hardly a month goes by without a new contribution being published that shines the light on another aspect of the process of desistance. This research will continue to help us understand how and why people move away from crime as well as how we can facilitate that process. There is so much new research on desistance that in a real sense, this book, entirely dedicated to describing that research, could only scratch the surface. It is an exciting time for researchers examining the life-course of crime, as new datasets become available and new techniques for analyzing those data emerge. The goal of this book was to provide an updated and thorough account of desistance research and theory. To the extent that readers feel more informed about this burgeoning field after reading this work, that goal will have been achieved.

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