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## Book Review

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## BOOK REVIEW

### EXPLAINING CRIME OVER THE LIFE COURSE . . . AND ALL POINTS IN BETWEEN

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JOHN H. LAUB & ROBERT J. SAMPSON, *SHARED BEGINNINGS, DIVERGENT LIVES: DELINQUENT BOYS TO AGE 70* (Harvard University Press 2003). 338 pp.

#### INTRODUCTION

Understanding the longitudinal patterning of criminal activity has occupied a central spoke in the wheel of criminological investigation. Specifically, understanding the onset, continuance, and desistance associated with crime over the life course has been studied in one fashion or another, qualitatively or quantitatively, since the mid- to late-19th century.<sup>1</sup> Classic birth cohorts studied in the middle to latter part of the 20th century,<sup>2</sup> and reviews of the literature surrounding the relationship between age and crime,<sup>3</sup> continue to demonstrate the theoretical and policy import of tracking crime over the life course. Much contemporary research attempts

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., CLIFFORD SHAW, *THE JACK ROLLER: A DELINQUENT BOY'S OWN STORY* (Univ. of Chic. Press 1966) (1930); O. Köbner, *Die Methode einer wissenschaftlichen Rückfallsstatistik als Grundlage einer Reform der Kriminalstatistik*, 13 ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR DIE GESAMTE STRAFRECHTSWISSENSCHAFT 1 (1893).

<sup>2</sup> See PAUL E. TRACY & KIMBERLY KEMPFF-LEONARD, *CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY IN CRIMINAL CAREERS* (1996); PAUL E. TRACY ET AL., *DELINQUENCY IN TWO BIRTH COHORTS* (1990); MARVIN E. WOLFGANG ET AL., *DELINQUENCY IN A BIRTH COHORT* (1972).

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., *CRIMINAL CAREERS AND "CAREER CRIMINALS"* (Alfred Blumstein et al. eds., 1986); David P. Farrington, *Age and Crime*, 7 CRIME & JUST. 189 (1986); Travis Hirschi & Michael R. Gottfredson, *Age and the Explanation of Crime*, 89 AM. J. SOC. 552 (1983).

to document how involvement in crime evolves as people age, as they transition from adolescence into adulthood, and whether orderly patterns of continuity and change in the frequency, seriousness, and diversity of offending activities are evident.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, in order to track the changes in criminal activity as individuals age, longitudinal data, which contain repeated observations of crime within persons over time, are necessary and are routinely received with a great deal of interest by the criminological community, especially since they bring the promise of increased knowledge about criminals and their crimes.<sup>5</sup> Longitudinal data are necessary for making proper inferences about individual trajectories of stability and change,<sup>6</sup> as well as how life events alter trajectories of criminal activity over the life course.<sup>7</sup> In fact, if researchers are to more accurately chart the causes and correlates of criminal activity, they need an adequate description of these phenomena.<sup>8</sup>

Criminologists have brought much evidence to bear on the longitudinal patterning of criminal activity. In fact, evidence on the relationship between age and crime has emerged from numerous longitudinal studies throughout the world, involving birth cohort, general population, and offender-based samples. Prominent longitudinal studies in Montreal, Rochester, Pittsburgh, Denver, Philadelphia, Seattle, Racine, London, Dunedin, and Stockholm have generated a great deal of information about the natural history of offending.<sup>9</sup>

Recently, Professors Thornberry and Krohn have "taken stock" of the key findings emerging from many of the world's foremost contemporary longitudinal studies.<sup>10</sup> Although there are some unique and important differences across the studies, six generalized findings about the causes, course, and consequences of delinquency and criminal activity stand out.<sup>11</sup> First, charting the developmental progression of delinquency indicates that

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<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Alex R. Piquero et al., *The Criminal Career Paradigm*, 30 CRIME & JUST. 359 (2003).

<sup>5</sup> See Joan McCord, *Longitudinal Analysis: An Introduction to the Special Issue*, 16 J. QUANTITATIVE CRIMINOLOGY 113 (2000).

<sup>6</sup> See ROBERT J. SAMPSON & JOHN H. LAUB, CRIME IN THE MAKING: PATHWAYS AND TURNING POINTS THROUGH LIFE 251 (1993).

<sup>7</sup> See John H. Laub et al., *Trajectories of Change in Criminal Offending: Good Marriages and the Desistance Process*, 63 AM. SOC. REV. 225 (1998); Daniel S. Nagin et al., *Life Course Turning Points: The Effect of Grade Retention on Physical Aggression*, 15 DEV. & PSYCHOPATHOLOGY 343 (2003).

<sup>8</sup> See TERENCE P. THORNBERRY & MARVIN D. KROHN, TAKING STOCK OF DELINQUENCY: AN OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS FROM CONTEMPORARY LONGITUDINAL STUDIES 244 (2003).

<sup>9</sup> See Piquero, *supra* note 4.

<sup>10</sup> See THORNBERRY & KROHN, *supra* note 8.

<sup>11</sup> See *id.* at 316-25.

individuals exhibiting an early onset of offending tend to commit many crimes, engage in relatively serious acts, and have lengthy criminal careers. Second, different groups of offenders emerge from this research, each differing in the shape and volume of criminal activity with age. Third, evidence indicates that effective parenting early in life yields more positive outcomes among offspring, that there is an intergenerational transmission of crime, and that gang-affiliated delinquent peers increase the criminal activity of youths. Fourth, the life course transitions of marriage and grade retention can alter crime trajectories, in the case of marriage by decreasing them, and in the case of grade retention by increasing them. Fifth, these studies have shown that antisocial and criminal activity impact other aspects of individual's lives, such as parental behavior, educational attainment, childbearing, mate selection, and so forth. Sixth, longitudinal studies have shown that while there is a significant degree of continuity in misbehavior, there is also a fair degree of change, suggesting that a middle-ground position that combines elements of continuity *and* change are needed for a more complete understanding of crime over the life course.<sup>12</sup> Several unexpected results have also emerged from these studies. For example, trajectory-based research identifies a group of offenders ("late-onset chronics") who are not anticipated by previous theory.<sup>13</sup> These individuals begin offending during mid to late adolescence and continue offending at high and/or stable rates in early adulthood.

Although these efforts have been important and well received, most studies have only followed their subjects through their 20s, and only a few have followed their subjects past the 30s.<sup>14</sup> This right-hand censoring problem—i.e., that individuals are only followed until a particular age and are thus missing information on criminal activity occurring after that period—complicates researchers' abilities to truly identify individuals who have desisted because they may be incapacitated or are on holiday.<sup>15</sup> Fortunately, a recently published and award-winning book begins to fill this void.

In *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to Age 70*, Professors John Laub and Robert Sampson, arguably among the most

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<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Raymond Paternoster et al., *Generality, Continuity, and Change in Offending*, 13 J. QUANTITATIVE CRIMINOLOGY 231 (1997).

<sup>13</sup> See Amy V. D'Unger et al., *How Many Latent Classes of Delinquent/Criminal Careers? Results from Mixed Poisson Regression Analyses*, 103 AM. J. SOC. 1593, 1615 (1998).

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., THORNBERRY & KROHN, *supra* note 8, at 323.

<sup>15</sup> See Shawn D. Bushway et al., *An Empirical Framework for Studying Desistance as a Process*, 39 CRIMINOLOGY 491 (2001); John H. Laub & Robert J. Sampson, *Understanding Desistance from Crime*, 28 CRIME & JUST. 1 (2001).

influential life-course criminologists working today, have undertaken a large effort to carefully document the criminal activity of 500 delinquent boys through age seventy.<sup>16</sup> The central thesis of their book is that in order to explain longitudinal patterns of crime, data are needed on childhood, adolescence, and adulthood experiences. The authors use a wide range of data to understand the patterning and causes of persistence in—and desistance from—criminal activity, ultimately reminding readers that the full life course matters, especially post-childhood, adolescence, and adult experiences.

Their study also combines both quantitative and qualitative data to understand not only the patterning of crime, but also the reasons for persistence, desistance, and zig-zag points in between. Their effort provides one of the most comprehensive portraits of criminal careers available, using what is the longest longitudinal study of crime in the world. Combining national death and criminal history records up to age seventy, along with life-history interviews with fifty-two delinquents, they have altered the future of criminal careers research with an agenda-setting effort.

Given this, it goes without saying that this book is a must-read for all those interested in the longitudinal patterning of criminal activity, as well as for any criminologist who wants a model by which to understand how qualitative and quantitative research can truly be integrated in order to dissect the web of continuity and change in criminal activity. Section I of this review summarizes the book chapter by chapter. Section II considers some of the book's specific strengths and weaknesses and outlines a modest set of future research directions. Section III places the book within the context of extant developmental criminology and criminal careers research.

### I. SHARED BEGINNINGS, DIVERGENT LIVES

Why do some offenders persist, others desist, and still others zig-zag in between these end-points? This question is central to both theory and policy. In Chapter One, Laub and Sampson begin with the divergent outcomes of Arthur and Michael. Their stories capture much of what criminologists try to explain: why two sets of individuals, starting at the same point, end up with two drastically different outcomes. In this chapter, Laub and Sampson reject several "popular notions" about continuity and change in criminal activity.<sup>17</sup> For example, they

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<sup>16</sup> JOHN H. LAUB & ROBERT J. SAMPSON, *SHARED BEGINNINGS, DIVERGENT LIVES: DELINQUENT BOYS TO AGE 70* (2003).

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 4.

reject the idea that childhood experiences such as early involvement in antisocial behavior, growing up in poverty, and woeful school performance are sturdy markers for predicting long-term patterns of offending . . . that individual "traits" such as poor verbal skills, low self-control, and difficult temperament can explain long-term patterns of juvenile delinquents . . . [and] that offenders can be neatly grouped into distinct categories, each displaying a unique trajectory and etiology of offending.<sup>18</sup>

They review their earlier book, *Crime in the Making*, and identify the three major challenges that have been levied against them by the community of scholars: the notion that there are distinct groups of offenders, each of whom follow a pre-determined pathway; whether particular dynamic methodological tools yield important insights into the longitudinal patterning of crime and "their ability to identify meaningful patterns of change in crime"; and that they did not fully explore a person-based analysis.<sup>19</sup>

Following this, they outline the book's analytic focus and organization. Laub and Sampson indicate that searches for all 500 men in the original Glueck delinquent sample were conducted up to age seventy, and that they tracked, located, and conducted life-history interviews with fifty-two men from the original delinquent group as they approached age seventy. These men, who had not been contacted in over thirty-five years, were "selected on the basis of their trajectories of juvenile and adult offending . . . as derived from official criminal records."<sup>20</sup> The qualitative interviews are absolutely essential for understanding and unpacking the "mechanisms that connect salient life events [including crime] across the life course, especially regarding personal choice and situational context."<sup>21</sup> Also, the authors anticipate, and tackle head on, a concern raised by other researchers regarding the Glueck data: that they are old, and of a select group of individuals who were born during the Great Depression era.

Chapter Two asks a simple but challenging question: persistence or desistance? Here, Laub and Sampson identify and then critique the explanations that have been proffered to account for desistance, including maturation, development, rational choice, and social learning. They then present their own integrated approach, which is based on the principles of life-course inquiry and combines elements from psychology, sociology, and criminology. The authors provide a nice overview of the long-term studies of criminal careers, noting that "[f]ew longitudinal studies contain data on

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<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Id.* at 7-8.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.* at 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Id.* at 10.

criminal behavior during childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and middle to older age for the same people.”<sup>22</sup>

The authors also outline of a set of conceptual ground rules. Much like an umpire reminds Red Sox pitchers not to hit Yankees batters before a big game, Laub and Sampson distinguish between the concepts of termination and desistance: “Termination is the point at which one stops criminal activity, whereas desistance is the causal process that supports the termination of offending.”<sup>23</sup> Also, an important point regarding the term “propensity” is made explicit in this chapter. Although the authors have been silent on this issue for quite some time, they end up contending that “an individual’s propensity to crime can change over time because of a variety of factors (for example, aging, changes in informal social control, the increasing deterrent effect of sanctions).”<sup>24</sup>

Laub and Sampson also make the case that the “life-course perspective is the most promising approach for advancing the state of knowledge regarding continuity (persistence) *and* change (desistance) in crime and other problem behaviors.”<sup>25</sup> Adhering to the belief that “[s]ome changes in the life course result from chance or random events [and] others stem from macro-level shocks largely beyond the pale of individual choice,”<sup>26</sup> Laub and Sampson’s main disagreement with developmental approaches concerns a theoretical commitment to the idea of social malleability across the life course and a focus on the constancy of change.<sup>27</sup> More specifically, they “reject the idea of determinism and lawful predictability from childhood factors” and claim that “the full life course matters, especially post-childhood, adolescence, and adult experiences.”<sup>28</sup> For them, the idea of “turning points” plays a central role, “especially when linked to the interaction of human agency, life-course events, situations, and historical context.”<sup>29</sup>

In Chapter Three, the authors begin with a theory of persistent offending and desistance from crime: “[P]ersistence in crime is explained by a lack of social controls, few structured routine activities, and purposeful human agency [while] desistance from crime is explained by a confluence of social controls, structured routine activities, and purposeful human

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<sup>22</sup> *Id.* at 14.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.* at 21.

<sup>24</sup> *Id.* at 23.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.* at 26.

<sup>26</sup> *Id.* at 34.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> *Id.* at 34-35.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.* at 35.

agency.”<sup>30</sup> Importantly, for Laub and Sampson, and unlike their more developmental counterparts, “the fundamental causes of offending are . . . the same for all persons, although for some there may be a single pathway to crime or desistance, whereas for others there are multiple pathways.”<sup>31</sup> Although this framework is consistent with Laub and Sampson’s earlier work, their latest thinking identifies other important sources of change such as human agency (or choice), situational influences, and local culture and historical contexts. In short, involvement in institutions of informal social control “reorders short-term situational inducements to crime and, over time, redirects long-term commitments to conformity.”<sup>32</sup> A perfect example is the role of work, especially meaningful work, which often leads to “a meaningful change in routine activities. . . . The simple fact is that people who work are kept busy and are less likely to get into trouble.”<sup>33</sup>

In the fourth chapter, Laub and Sampson outline how they went about finding the men. The narratives came from a subset of men who were part of the original Glueck delinquent study, which tracked the offending careers of 500 Boston-area delinquents, with a second sample of 500 non-delinquents matched case by case on age, ethnicity, I.Q., and low-income residence. The Gluecks finished tracking their sample at age thirty-two. In 1993, Laub and Sampson began their follow-up study and started a painstaking process of not only collecting criminal and death records at the state and national levels, but also finding a subsample of the delinquents who were last contacted between 1957 and 1964.<sup>34</sup>

Specifically, they decided on sampling men for the interviews based on five categories: persistent violent or predatory offenders (N=14), nonviolent juvenile offenders who desisted in adulthood (N=15), juvenile violent offenders who desisted in adulthood (N=4), intermittent (or sporadic) offenders who also had an onset of violence in later adulthood (N=5), and intermittent offenders with an onset of violence in young adulthood and desistance in middle age, or those showing an erratic offending pattern over their entire life course (N=14).<sup>35</sup> During interviews, Laub and Sampson used a modified life-history calendar that tracked changes in marriages (and other relationships), children, housemates, family, education, employment, residences, as well as arrests and convictions. The remainder of Chapter Four details the tracking process.

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<sup>30</sup> *Id.* at 37.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> *Id.* at 41.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.* at 47.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.* at 62.

<sup>35</sup> *Id.* at 66-67.



Interestingly, Laub and Sampson sent "seasons greetings" cards to the men in order to remain in contact.<sup>36</sup> This not only worked, but also lended a "human touch" to the project.

Chapter Five contains the meat of the quantitative analysis. Laub and Sampson detail the results of what is the most comprehensive analysis of the relationship between age and crime to date (from age seven to age seventy). The authors examine this relationship using a variety of methods and deal with issues endemic to longitudinal studies. A number of key findings emerge from this chapter.

First, when they studied the long-term trajectories of crime through age seventy, they found that, overall, there was much variability in patterns of offending during adulthood of formerly serious persistent delinquents and that desistance was the norm. For example, in their plot of the aggregate age/crime relationship, they found a peak in the late teenage years, followed by the classic decline through adulthood such that, by the early 50s, the mean number of offenses approached zero.<sup>37</sup> Thus, most, if not all, delinquents desisted from crime. When the authors disaggregated by crime type, there were some interesting differences. Whereas the property-crime curve closely resembled the aggregate age-crime curve, violent offenses, though lower in frequency, appeared to peak in the early 20s and increased very slowly through the 30s, only to be followed by a much quicker decline in the 40s. The aggregate curve for alcohol/drug offenses peaked in the early 20s but remained reasonably high and stable throughout the 20s, 30s, and 40s, and then to dropped toward zero in the late 40s.<sup>38</sup> Still, what is common to the crime type curves is the drop toward zero, or desistance, by middle adulthood.

Second, Laub and Sampson also examined prospectively defined groups of offenders. Here, they "followed the logic of risk factor theory by giving emphasis to the combination of risks within the same boy."<sup>39</sup> When age/crime curves were plotted across crime types, they found that the curves of the two groups (i.e., had childhood risk, did not have childhood risk) resembled one another quite closely (there were differences in degree but not differences in kind). Similar conclusions emerged when they compared the predicted probability of offending through age seventy for chronic and non-chronic juvenile offenders, as well as whether the sample was stratified by family and childhood risk.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Id.* at 79.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.* at 86 fig.5.1.

<sup>38</sup> *Id.* at 88-89 figs.5.2a-d.

<sup>39</sup> *Id.* at 93.

<sup>40</sup> *Id.* at 99 fig.5.7.

Third, Laub and Sampson deal with issues related to mortality and incarceration, and how they can influence age/crime conclusions. Many of the delinquents served time in jails and/or prisons, while half of them died by age seventy. After investigating these issues, the authors conclude that "the age-crime curve and the similarity of offending trajectories by childhood risk groups is . . . remarkably stable."<sup>41</sup> An inspection of those analyses shows that although the shape of the curves was the same, in terms of controlling and not controlling for incarceration and mortality, the predicted number of offenses was much higher when they controlled for incarceration (as would be expected).

Fourth, Laub and Sampson utilized Professor Daniel Nagin's semiparametric group-based modeling approach to examine whether distinct groups of offenders emerged from the data. Using total arrests, the trajectory methodology identified six different groups of offenders, with one group, termed 'high-rate chronics' (3.2% of the sample), evincing a peak of offending in the mid to late 30s, and then a drop toward zero throughout the 40s and 50s. Their trajectory analysis revealed that, while the age-crime relationship was not invariant for all offenders and offense types, the data reject the typology of two offender groups—an assumption common to developmentally-based theories of crime and antisocial behavior<sup>42</sup>—and that there was "no evidence of a flat-trajectory group with age."<sup>43</sup> This is important because it has been undetected by prior research, likely due to middle-adulthood censoring.<sup>44</sup> The authors seem more interested in where the groups end up ("all offender groups decline in their offending over time")<sup>45</sup> than in the differences that emerge in terms of shape, peak, and patterning across the groups over time and by offense type.

When Laub and Sampson examined the ability of key childhood characteristics and individual characteristics to differentiate across the offender groups, they found that "once conditioned on delinquency, individual differences and childhood characteristics defined by risk rather than by crime itself do not do a good job of distinguishing different offending trajectories over the long haul."<sup>46</sup> Based on their quantitative analysis, they conclude that "life-course-persistent offenders [serious, high-

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<sup>41</sup> *Id.* at 103.

<sup>42</sup> See, e.g., Terrie E. Moffitt, *Adolescence-Limited and Life-Course-Persistent Antisocial Behavior: A Developmental Taxonomy*, 100 PSYCHOL. REV. 674 (1993); Gerald R. Patterson, *Orderly Change in a Stable World: The Antisocial Trait as a Chimera*, 61 J. CONSULTING & CLINICAL PSYCHOL. 911 (1993).

<sup>43</sup> LAUB & SAMPSON, *supra* note 16, at 105.

<sup>44</sup> *Id.*

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*

<sup>46</sup> *Id.* at 107-109 tbl.5.2.

rate chronic offenders] are difficult, if not impossible, to identify prospectively using a wide variety of childhood and adolescent risk factors.”<sup>47</sup> These results are extremely important, for they suggest that “all offenses eventually decline in the middle adult years for all groups of offenders.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, even the most high-rate of all delinquents eventually desist, and “childhood prognoses . . . do not yield distinct groupings that are valid prospectively for troubled kids.”<sup>49</sup> This is true even if the most active of all offenders are selected.<sup>50</sup>

In Chapters Six through Eight, Laub and Sampson turn to the life-history narratives. In Chapter Six, they investigate, through the detailed interviews, the sources of desistance with two groups of men. Those in the first group were arrested as juveniles for nonviolent crimes and were not arrested for any predatory crimes as adults (N=15), while the second group consisted of four men who had at least one arrest for violence as a juvenile but none for predatory crime in adulthood.<sup>51</sup> Laub and Sampson are careful to highlight different aspects of the desistance process with regard to family life, namely marriage and military service. With regard to why some offenders stop, they conclude that “offenders desist as a result of a combination of individual actions (choice) in conjunction with situational contexts and structural influences linked to important institutions that help sustain desistance.”<sup>52</sup> Principal among these are family, work, and military. Importantly, these turning points are not interpreted in the same way for all offenders. Thus, it is especially useful to understand the different meanings that some offenders apply to family, work, marriage, and criminal justice experiences. This latter life experience is particularly important because criminal justice intervention “works” for some offenders but not others and it is important to understand this variation.

Laub and Sampson indicate that “while there are multiple pathways to desistance, there do appear to be some important general processes or mechanisms of desistance at work.”<sup>53</sup> The interviewed men identified four major turning points for desistance: marriage, military, reform school, and neighborhood change. Each of these turning points “(1) knife off the past from the present; (2) provide not only supervision and monitoring but

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<sup>47</sup> *Id.* at 110.

<sup>48</sup> *Id.* at 111.

<sup>49</sup> *Id.* at 112.

<sup>50</sup> Robert J. Sampson & John H. Laub, *Life-Course Desisters? Trajectories of Crime Among Delinquent Boys Followed to Age 70*, 41 *CRIMINOLOGY* 555 (2003).

<sup>51</sup> LAUB & SAMPSON, *supra* note 16, at 115.

<sup>52</sup> *Id.* at 145.

<sup>53</sup> *Id.* at 148.

opportunities for social support and growth; (3) bring change and structure to routine activities; and (4) provide an opportunity for identity transformation.”<sup>54</sup> Personal agency is also important for desistance, as the men “were active participants in the decision to give up crime.”<sup>55</sup>

In Chapter Seven, Laub and Sampson unpack some of the factors associated with persistence in crime, which they define as “being arrested at multiple phases of the life course.”<sup>56</sup> Two types of persistent offenders were studied. The first group were arrested as juveniles, young adults, and older adults for crimes of violence, while the second group were arrested as juveniles, young adults, and older adults, including arrests for violence in at least two of the phases of the life course.<sup>57</sup> A total of fourteen men were interviewed for this chapter.

Persisters “spent considerably less time married, working, and in the military over the course of their lives.”<sup>58</sup> The fascinating account of “Boston Billy,”—who accumulated twenty-six official offenses (seven of which were violent) between the ages of seven and seventy, spent almost half his life in institutions, was never married, had a low I.Q., and spent a large proportion of his time in unstable employment—paints a picture about persistence unavailable in quantitative data. A number of the men evinced a long-standing resentment of—and defiance toward—authority, looking for injustice “in everything,”<sup>59</sup> and many more, including Billy, lacked positive turning points in their lives.<sup>60</sup> Add to that serious alcohol abuse, long-term institutional confinement in prison, and the generally chaotic lives and lifestyles led by many of the persistent offenders, and it is a wonder how the vast majority of persistent offenders did not wind up dead. For many, the pathways to desistance in young adulthood were pathways not taken.<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting conclusion emerging from this chapter is that the childhood traits of the persistent offenders interviewed were the same as the childhood traits of those who desisted from crime. Even the most “hardened offenders” eventually desist, albeit at different rates and

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<sup>54</sup> *Id.* at 148–49.

<sup>55</sup> *Id.* at 146.

<sup>56</sup> *Id.* at 150.

<sup>57</sup> *Id.*

<sup>58</sup> *Id.* at 151.

<sup>59</sup> *Id.* at 174–75.

<sup>60</sup> This is not meant to suggest that turning points did not occur for these persistent offenders; in fact some were married. For these individuals however, marriage did not aid the desistance process.

<sup>61</sup> *Id.* at 159.

ages.<sup>62</sup> For Laub and Sampson, persistent offenders are “devoid of connective structures” throughout their lives, especially those structures that provide informal social control and social support.<sup>63</sup> The persistent offenders interviewed “experienced residential, marital, and job instability, failure in school and the military, and relatively long periods of incarceration.”<sup>64</sup> And among many of these persisters, human agency was part and parcel of a life of continued crime.

In Chapter Eight, Laub and Sampson unpack the issue of intermittency, or the various stops and starts that exist throughout the criminal career.<sup>65</sup> They interviewed three types of men here (N=19). The first group experienced their first arrest for violence in later adulthood, after age thirty-five (N=5); the second group, which contains two subgroups, had at least one arrest at each segment of their life course, but experienced their first arrest for violence in young adulthood (N=14). Seven of these men were designated “late desisters” because they desisted in their late 20s to 30s, while the other seven were labeled “intermittent” or “hybrid” offenders because they had intermittent offending spells over their life course.

The onset of violence in later adulthood is illustrated by the life history of Giuseppe. His offending career began early; he never completed grammar school, and his adult life consisted of considerable job instability, multiple marriages, nonsupport, adultery, gambling, and extended periods of drunkenness.<sup>66</sup> Giuseppe’s first experience with violence came in his 30s, and one episode in particular, the killing of his roommate, illuminates his struggle with heavy drinking, which oftentimes got him into trouble.<sup>67</sup>

The life history of Patrick characterizes the intermittency issue. For Patrick, crime was not part and parcel of everyday life, but alcohol was. In fact, the most consistent pattern that emerged from the interviews with Patrick and other intermittent offenders was their serious problem with alcohol.<sup>68</sup> For many intermittent offenders, even those who were married and working, alcohol somehow triggered criminal activity. Because the intermittent offenders were not deeply committed to offending, crime was regarded as normative and “not real crime.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Id.* at 194.

<sup>63</sup> *Id.*

<sup>64</sup> *Id.*

<sup>65</sup> See Alex R. Piquero, *Somewhere Between Persistence and Desistance: The Intermittency of Criminal Careers*, in AFTER CRIME AND PUNISHMENT: PATHWAYS TO OFFENDER REINTEGRATION 102 (Shadd Maruna & Russ Immarigeon eds., 2004).

<sup>66</sup> LAUB & SAMPSON, *supra* note 16, at 204-05.

<sup>67</sup> *Id.* at 204-10.

<sup>68</sup> *Id.* at 241.

<sup>69</sup> *Id.* at 243.

The intermittent offender poses a unique challenge to group-based theories of crime over the life course, sometimes looking like a persistent offender while other times looking like a desister, and not fitting neatly into one specific offender typology.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, the intermittent offender presents an obstacle to researchers relying exclusively on official records. Many of the crimes engaged in by intermittent offenders are not reflected in official records (i.e., bar room brawls).

In Chapter Nine, Laub and Sampson return to their quantitative data and model change in crime by studying how time-varying states of marriage—rather than the strength or attachment of the marriage bond—relate to crime from ages seventeen to seventy. They administered a life-history calendar to the fifty-two interviewed men, and observed yearly changes in incarceration and marital status over the full life-course. Combining this information with analyses of the larger sample of 500 delinquents through age thirty-two, Laub and Sampson provide some of the most comprehensive analyses ever undertaken on change and crime.

With regard to the total arrest counts among the follow-up (interviewed) sample of fifty-two men, the within-individual effect of marriage served to inhibit criminal activity, and it did so even after controlling for important childhood and criminality risk factors. The marriage effect continued to hold even when Laub and Sampson examined alcohol/drug crime and predatory crime separately. Turning to an analysis of competing life events (marriage, military, and unemployment), they found that among the fifty-two follow-up men, within-individual changes in marriage and military served to inhibit total arrests between ages seventeen and thirty-two, while within-individual changes in unemployment served to increase total crime through the same period.<sup>71</sup> When Laub and Sampson expanded this analysis to include the full delinquent group sample from ages seventeen to thirty-two across alcohol/drug and predatory crime, they found that within-individual changes in marriage and military reduced crime while within-individual changes in unemployment increased crime.<sup>72</sup> These findings held even after controlling for various risk factors.

Four key findings emerge in this chapter.<sup>73</sup> First, there was much variability over time in criminal offending and major life events among the men. Second, the general pattern of age and desistance was strong. Third, there was “considerable variance in desistance rates as high-rate active

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<sup>70</sup> *Id.* at 249.

<sup>71</sup> *Id.* at 267 tbl.9.3.

<sup>72</sup> *Id.* at 268-69 tbl.9.4.

<sup>73</sup> *Id.* at 272.

delinquents age over the life course.”<sup>74</sup> Fourth, changes in the event rate of crime, controlling for age, were systematically related to adult transitions to marriage, unemployment, and military service: when in states of marriage (and also military service and employment), men were less likely to be involved in crime, and the marriage effect was observed over the entire life course. Thus, while childhood factors are related to crime, adult life events also matter.<sup>75</sup>

In the final chapter, Laub and Sampson reach three conclusions. The first deals with their critique of the position that some readers will take with regard to “who cares about Boston boys born in the 1920s.”<sup>76</sup> Here, the authors indicate that their theory is not bounded by place, historical time, gender, and race,<sup>77</sup> and they argue that all studies seeking to understand the longitudinal relationship between age and crime will surely be criticized for having data that are “too old”,<sup>78</sup>—after all, the subjects in many of today’s longitudinal studies are not to turn age seventy until the year 2045.<sup>79</sup>

The second message deals with the study’s implications for developmental criminology, which could hardly be clearer. Laub and Sampson remind readers about the large variation that exists in offenders’ careers, and that long-term patterns of offending cannot be explained solely by individual differences, childhood characteristics, or adolescent characteristics. As such, they point out the dangers of offender typologies by showing that “the process of desistance follows a remarkably similar path for all offenders, albeit at different rates.”<sup>80</sup> They suggest that criminologists shy away from the appeal of groups and instead attend to individual trajectories of crime: “Understanding general causal pathways to crime at all points in the life course is the research question that criminology might profitably begin to address.”<sup>81</sup>

The third message deals with the idea of situated choice. Personal agency seems to be particularly important in understanding persistence in—and desistance from—criminal activity over the life course. They urge readers to make the idea of situated choice a central part of the understanding of crime over the life course.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Id.*

<sup>75</sup> *Id.*

<sup>76</sup> *Id.* at 282-85.

<sup>77</sup> *Id.* at 283.

<sup>78</sup> *Id.* at 285.

<sup>79</sup> *Id.*

<sup>80</sup> *Id.* at 288.

<sup>81</sup> *Id.* at 289.

<sup>82</sup> *Id.* at 293.

## II. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

This work is groundbreaking. Aside from providing data on longitudinal patterns of crime in what is the world's longest longitudinal study, the most significant contribution of this book is its combination of qualitative and quantitative data to study persistence and desistance. Laub and Sampson's work highlights the importance of turning points, both objectively and subjectively, in either curtailing or continuing crime. It should serve as a model for students and scholars alike for how to ask questions, bring data to bear on questions, and not arrive at conclusions that go beyond the data presented.

But the picture is more complicated than "all offenders desist," or simply that turning points or life events alter criminal activity. Men who desisted from crime did so when they experienced the turning point and made an inner resolve to change their lives.<sup>83</sup> Extant criminological theory would do well to bring a little bit of choice back into its thinking, while bearing in mind that life events matter as well. The key is to understand why some life events matter for some offenders but not others, and why some offenders make some choices and not others.

The findings in this book raise challenges not only for Laub and Sampson, but also for those interested in the study of crime over the life course. Aside from the definitional issues that come along with any study of desistance, it is important to know whether the findings emerging from *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives* are replicable in different samples and across race and gender. The Glueck data, on which the analyses are based, are limited because they only contain information on the offending patterns for a group of white men. With only a few exceptions, criminologists know very little about the longitudinal pattern of crime among females<sup>84</sup> and non-whites.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *Id.* at 249.

<sup>84</sup> But see DEBORAH R. BASKIN & IRA B. SOMMERS, CASUALTIES OF COMMUNITY DISORDER: WOMEN'S CAREERS IN VIOLENT CRIME (1998); Peggy C. Giordano et al., *Gender, Crime, and Desistance: Toward a Theory of Cognitive Transformation*, 107 AM. J. SOC. 990 (2002); Alex R. Piquero et al., *Extending the Study of Continuity and Change: Gender Differences in Adolescent and Adulthood Offending*, 21 J. QUANTITATIVE CRIMINOLOGY (forthcoming 2005).

<sup>85</sup> See Delbert S. Elliott, *Serious Violent Offenders: Onset, Developmental Course, and Termination—The American Society of Criminology 1993 Presidential Address*, 32 CRIMINOLOGY 1, 19 (1994); Alex R. Piquero et al., *Race, Local Life Circumstances and Criminal Activity*, 83 SOC. SCI. Q. 654 (2002).



Second, more detailed information is needed on other variables that are related to crime over the life course, particularly with regard to peers.<sup>86</sup> Professors Reiss and Farrington, for example, have shown that the incidence of co-offending decreases with age primarily because individual offenders change and become less likely to offend with others, rather than because of selective attrition of co-offenders or persistence of those who offend primarily alone.<sup>87</sup> Still, no information has been presented on patterns of co-offending and individual offending over the full life course.

Third, more attention must be devoted to sources of non-random sample attrition, like non-response, mortality, and incarceration, and their effect on trajectories of criminal activity.<sup>88</sup> With regard to incarceration, Laub and Sampson conclude that, controlling for exposure, time does little to alter their substantive conclusion regarding the general shape of the age/crime curve (i.e., all curves decline toward zero). Actually, controlling for incarceration has the effect of not only increasing the predicted level of offending over age as would be expected, but also evincing different peak ages of offending and identifying different individuals in different trajectories.<sup>89</sup> In fact, using the Glueck data, Eggleston, Laub, and Sampson conclude that "the exclusion of incarceration time results in underestimating the rate of offending and can affect group shape, peak age, and group membership."<sup>90</sup> Still, even with controls for incarceration, the trend declines with age, so incarceration does not appear to alter Laub and Sampson's principal conclusion.

Fourth, the only adult experience that Laub and Sampson were able to examine throughout the full life course was marriage. Thus, the extent to which other key informal social control agents such as employment, children, and religion relate to persistence and desistance remains unknown. In a related vein, the qualitative interviews identified the importance of local contexts in fostering changes in criminal activity, including the specific context of neighborhood change. Evidence is mounting to suggest

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<sup>86</sup> See Mark Warr, *Life-Course Transitions and Desistance from Crime*, 36 CRIMINOLOGY 183 (1998).

<sup>87</sup> See Albert J. Reiss, Jr. & David P. Farrington, *Advancing Knowledge About Co-Offending: Results from a Prospective Longitudinal Survey of London Males*, 82 J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY 360 (1991).

<sup>88</sup> See, e.g., Alex R. Piquero et al., *Assessing the Impact of Exposure Time and Incapacitation on Longitudinal Trajectories of Criminal Offending*, 16 J. ADOLESCENT RES. 54, 69 (2001).

<sup>89</sup> Elaine P. Eggleston et al., *Methodological Sensitivities to Latent Class Analysis of Long-Term Criminal Trajectories*, 20 J. QUANTITATIVE CRIMINOLOGY 1 (2004).

<sup>90</sup> *Id.* at 21.

that neighborhoods relate to parenting,<sup>91</sup> individual self-control,<sup>92</sup> and criminal activity<sup>93</sup> in important ways. Although Laub and Sampson were unable to empirically assess the role of neighborhood change on changes in crime, this is a high priority.

Fifth, more work is needed with regard to Laub and Sampson's critique of Moffitt's developmental taxonomy, especially her prediction of life-course-persistent offending. Although Laub and Sampson are certainly not shy about their concerns associated with group-based theories of crime and Moffitt's view that some small subset of offenders offends continuously and at high rates over the life course,<sup>94</sup> one wonders whether Moffitt actually expected such individuals to be committing robbery and violence at age sixty.<sup>95</sup> Did her use of the term "life-course-persistent offending" really imply offending over the *full life course* until death? Still, Laub and Sampson pose criminologists such as Moffitt a very critical challenge that needs to be addressed.

Sixth, while Laub and Sampson may confirm much of Gottfredson and Hirschi's expectations regarding the aggregate age/crime curve, much remains to be documented and understood with regard to the relationship between age and crime. The data assembled by Laub and Sampson represent the longest longitudinal study in the world tracking patterns of crime between ages seven and seventy. Further analyses using this data would allow for a large-scale, comprehensive study of the properties of what Blumstein and his colleagues termed lambda ( $\lambda$ ), or the frequency of offenses committed by active (in that period) offenders.<sup>96</sup> While the lambda issue has been addressed elsewhere,<sup>97</sup> it has not been resolved. The Glueck data provide a unique opportunity within which not only to investigate the lambda issue across crime types, but also to do so using different

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<sup>91</sup> See FRANK F. FURSTENBERG, JR. ET AL., *MANAGING TO MAKE IT: URBAN FAMILIES AND ADOLESCENT SUCCESS* (1999).

<sup>92</sup> See Travis Pratt et al., *Parental Socialization and Community Context: A Longitudinal Analysis of the Structural Sources of Low Self-Control*, 41 J. RES. CRIME & DELINQ. 219 (2004).

<sup>93</sup> See Jens Ludwig et al., *Urban Poverty and Juvenile Crime: Evidence from a Randomized Housing-Mobility Experiment*, 116 Q. J. ECON. 655 (2001).

<sup>94</sup> See, e.g., Sampson & Laub, *supra* note 49, at 588.

<sup>95</sup> See Alex R. Piquero and Terrie E. Moffitt, *Explaining the Facts of Crime: How the Developmental Taxonomy Replies to Farrington's Invitation*, in *ADVANCES IN CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORY: INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENTAL AND LIFE COURSE THEORIES OF OFFENDING* (David P. Farrington ed., forthcoming 2005).

<sup>96</sup> CRIMINAL CAREERS, *supra* note 3.

<sup>97</sup> See, e.g., MICHAEL R. GOTTFREDSON & TRAVIS HIRSCHI, *A GENERAL THEORY OF CRIME* 240 (1990); Sampson & Laub, *supra* note 49, at 560.

measurement and operationalization strategies of just what constitutes an "active" offender.

Finally, though Laub and Sampson employ the trajectory methodology in order to understand the patterning of crime across latent classes of offenders over time, they raise concerns associated with criminologists' tendency to reify the existence of groups identified with this methodology. Although this tendency is not an inherent product of the methodology itself, criminologists should still be very careful about reifying identified groups. The larger issue of which technique to employ (trajectory models, growth curve models, etc.), and what the results emerging from these techniques suggest, is a key methodological issue central to life-course criminology. Criminologists should continue to conduct analyses with different methodological techniques in order to understand how key conclusions about crime over the life course remain similar or change across methodologies.

### III. CLOSING THOUGHTS

Every now and then, a book comes along that makes theoretical, methodological, and policy advances that redirect and re-specify the study of a phenomenon. These books, of course, are few and far between. Luckily for those interested in the longitudinal patterning of criminal activity over the life course, Laub and Sampson's *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to Age 70* does just that.

This book offers much to the field of criminology. With regard to developmental criminology, it challenges core assumptions that there are distinct and identifiable subgroups of offenders whose causes and patterns of offending differ from each other and across the life course. With regard to criminal careers research, it offers the first set of estimates regarding persistence and incidence throughout the entire life course. With regard to criminological theory, it offers a "new" theoretical middle ground position that lies somewhere between the positions of Gottfredson and Hirschi, the criminal careerists, and the developmentalists.<sup>98</sup> Laub and Sampson remind the field that "individual differences, environmental differences, social interactions, and random, chance events" are all needed to better understand offending over the life course,<sup>99</sup> and that what happens in adulthood may matter just as much or even more than what happens to us as infants and children. With regard to policy, Laub and Sampson remind readers about

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<sup>98</sup> LAUB & SAMPSON, *supra* note 16, at 112.

<sup>99</sup> *Id.* at 286.

the potential negative effects of sanctioning,<sup>100</sup> the lack of understanding about prisoner “re-entry”, and about participants’ frequent unwillingness to help themselves.<sup>101</sup> While readers may take issue with some of the statements and analyses in the book, it will do what all good research does: further debate and empirical inquiry into the phenomenon of interest. And for that reason alone, this book merits close reading and careful thought.

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<sup>100</sup> *Id.* at 291.

<sup>101</sup> *Id.* at 292.

