

# CRIMINOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE THOUGHT OF GEORGE HERBERT MEAD

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## ABSTRACT

*The ideas of George Herbert Mead have received renewed interest in philosophy and the social sciences on both sides of the Atlantic. This chapter reviews recent developments and interpretations of Mead's thought and discusses their implications for criminological theory. Four theoretical issues are addressed. First, how is the concept of identity conceived and related to social outcomes? Second, how is human agency theorized within a unified theoretical framework. Third, what role do societal reactions play in shaping social action, such as law violation? Fourth, how are features of the life course socially constituted, and what are the theoretical mechanisms by which life course events shape future behavioral outcomes? The discussion is illustrated with classical and contemporary empirical studies. The chapter closes by discussing the role of qualitative and quantitative methods for advancing criminological research from a Meadian standpoint.*

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Sociological Theory and Criminological Research: Views from Europe and the United States  
Sociology of Crime, Law and Deviance, Volume 7, 77-108

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ISSN: 1521-6136/doi:10.1016/S1521-6136(06)07005-9

Sociology and philosophy have witnessed a resurgence of interest in pragmatist philosophy and social thought. Through the seminal work of Hans Joas (1985, 1993, 1996), this interest in an essentially American philosophical tradition has recently spread to Europe. In sociology, the writings of John Dewey, Charles Peirce, and George Herbert Mead have received renewed attention as theorists grapple with problems of human agency, creativity of action, complex social relations, rational choice, and social values. In criminology, George Herbert Mead's writings about social processes from the standpoint of a social pragmatist have had an influence on many of the classical theories of crime. They may have had an indirect influence, through the writings of W. I. Thomas, on the general approach of Sutherland's differential association theory, and clearly were the inspiration for Cohen's (1955) social psychological mechanism by which delinquent subcultures are innovated. Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionist interpretation of Mead's ideas, which stress the ways in which negotiated meanings are built up through collective action, directly underlay the labeling approach to deviance of Tannenbaum, Lemert, and Becker. The Iowa School of symbolic interaction, most notably Kuhn (1964), influenced the structural version of symbolic interactionism of Stryker (1980) and McCall and Simmons (1978) and indirectly influenced Schwartz and Stryker's (1970) and Matsueda and Heimer's (1997) theories of deviance and crime. This paper draws on recent reinterpretations and extensions of Mead's social pragmatism to address key theoretical questions facing criminologists, including human agency and creativity, identity and the self, differential association and social learning, rational choice and deterrence, and temporality and the life course.

### KEY ISSUES IN THE SOCIOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CRIME

Theorizing about criminal behavior has historically been dominated by sociological theory, perhaps because crime is generally recognized to be a social construction, constituted by socially organized actors in specific connections of historical periods, societies, and groups within society. Sociological theories of crime have enjoyed a rich and varied history, including classical theories of social disorganization and cultural transmission (Shaw & McKay, 1969), anomie (Merton, 1938), differential association (Sutherland, 1947), labeling (Tannenbaum, 1938; Becker, 1963), subculture (Cohen, 1955; Loward & Ohlin, 1960; Short & Strodtbeck, 1965), and social control

(Matza, 1964; Hirschi, 1969; Kornhauser, 1978). More recently, such theories have been extended to social learning (Akers, 1998), control in the life course (Sampson & Laub, 1993), and control-balance (Tittle, 1995). These criminological theories have drawn liberally from the broader sociological theories of their time, and addressed key debates taking place among sociological theorists. For example, Merton drew heavily from Durkheim to explain class differentials in deviance rates, Shaw and McKay drew from Park and Burgess's human ecology perspective and applied it to delinquency rates in urban areas, Sutherland drew from W. I. Thomas, Louis Wirth, and other early interactionists in specifying that crime is learned in interaction and rooted in culture conflict, and Tannenbaum, and later Becker, drew from Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism to specify that deviance is a socially constructed label, which has consequences for the labeled person.

Recent literature in sociological theory has been grappling with four theoretical questions important for theorizing about crime. First, how is the concept of identity conceived and related to social outcomes? Second, how is human agency theorized and why is it important? Third, what role do societal reactions play in shaping social actions such as law violation? Fourth, how are features of the life course socially constituted and what are the theoretical mechanisms by which life course events shape later criminality? The answers to those questions go far in distinguishing among major perspectives. For example, Giddens' (1984) structuration approach posits a duality between structure and culture in which agency plays a prominent role; Coleman's (1990) social capital theory emphasizes a rational actor individual, but ties rationality to social structure through the concept of social capital; and post-modern perspectives reject the assumption of objective reality and emphasize multiple, fractured identities in modernity and the importance of deconstructing social phenomena.

This paper addresses these questions from the standpoint of a theory of crime based on Mead's social pragmatism. It builds on some of my earlier writings, with Karen Heimer, on a symbolic interactionist theory of crime, and focuses on the question of crime causation, rather than on the societal reaction to crime – except to note that the writings on labeling from the standpoint of symbolic interactionism are compatible with the perspective developed here, and that labeling and crime causation are a part of the same process. This paper argues that we can draw on Mead's theory of temporality, which helps unify his theories of the self, social control, and cognition to shed new light on questions of agency and creativity, identity and the self, structure and culture, process and life course, and rationality and decision making.

## MEAD'S THEORY OF SOCIAL CONTROL

At the heart of Mead's social psychology and his theory of social control lies the concept of taking the role of the other. I will describe this concept in detail, apply it to the social control of crime, and use it to illustrate other features of Mead's perspective, including his theory of temporality, cognition, agency, and rationality. Mead begins with three assumptions. First is a methodological holism, in which "the whole (society) is prior to the part (the individual), not the part to the whole; and the part is explained in terms of the whole, not the whole in terms of the part or parts" (Mead, 1934, p. 7). Second is a social process model within which society, selves, and cognition, arise, and which can be studied by using the abstract concept of a social act, a cooperative act between two or more individuals. Third, is an organic or functionalist social psychology, in which social acts are viewed as a "dynamic whole" (rather than as aggregations of stimulus-response sets), and the component elements are analyzed in terms of their functions (Mead, 1934, p. 7).

### *Mead's Temporally Ordered Phases of the Act*

As a preliminary, note that Mead begins his analysis of the act by dividing it into four functional and temporally ordered phases: impulse, perception, manipulation, and consummation. Impulses, which are ultimately rooted in physiology, but are also subject to social conditioning, initiate the act, seeking stimuli (physical objects) for their expression. The consummation stage sees the impulse expressed or frustrated, and objects infused with meaning – meanings are socially constituted in a process that spans the entire act. Between impulse and consummation are the mediating stages of perception and manipulation. Perhaps the key phase is manipulation, in which objects are observed with vision and, more importantly, manipulated with the hand. Objects provide resistance to the hand or body – they "push back" – and in this sense manipulation is social. As Miller (1973, p. 121) states concisely, "The inside of the object is involved in manipulation, and we cannot handle or manipulate an object unless it offers resistance and thereby cooperates with us." Physical objects are socially constituted in manipulation – we apprehend its hardness, brittleness or sharpness – and we do so instrumentally for the purpose of reaching consummation. For example, a burglar manipulates a doorknob in the dark as a phase in stealing valuables from a home.

Perception allows us to approach objects at a distance in terms of hypothetical manipulation and consummation. Perception is an active process of searching for objects that would lead to consummation of an impulse, anticipating their physical characteristics – how they would feel if we touched them. For this reason Mead termed perception a "collapsed act," which includes all stages of the act (impulse, manipulation, and consummation) (Mead, 1938, p. 128). Whether or not the anticipations are correct are determined in the manipulation phase. Moreover, in the stage of manipulation, perception and contact are nearly simultaneous, or as Cook (1993, p. 172) puts it, the "temporal passage that normally intervenes between seeing (distance perception) and bodily contact is at a minimum; such passage can therefore be ignored by the acting organism." Here, in the present, human beings can delay consummation of the act, consider the anticipated resistance of objects at a distance, constitute objects through reflection, and thereby consider alternative lines of action in the present. At this point, there is an "enduring fabric as a basis for alternative courses of action, a world of things that have identical dates, namely, the date of the manipulatory area" (Mead, 1938). Thus, human beings' ability to delay consummation of an act enables them to engage in cognitive processes, in which alternative solutions to problematic situations are considered in the present in the manipulatory phase. Here we see Mead's theory of temporality in the stages of the act.

### *Taking the Role of the Other*

The key concept in Mead's social psychological writings is role-taking, which occurs in social acts.<sup>1</sup> Within an ongoing social process, social acts are built up by participants adjusting their responses to each other within an ongoing social process. When adjustments are smooth and routine, situations are non-problematic, and behavior non-reflective. When, however, an ongoing response or impulse is temporarily blocked, the situation becomes problematic, and individuals engage in role-taking, seeking solutions to the problematic situation by taking the role of others, viewing themselves as objects from the standpoint of others, and considering alternative lines of action from the standpoint of others (Mead, 1934).

Specifically, when an impulse is blocked by a physical or social barrier, an emotion – such as anger, fear, sadness, or happiness – is released, and the impulse is transformed into an image, which includes a plan of action and the anticipated reactions of others to the plan. The impulse is reacted to by

another impulse, which follows the plan to overt behavior, combines the plan with another, or blocks the plan, causing the situation to remain problematic – in which case, the individual again takes the role of the other, forms a self as an object, and considers new alternatives from the standpoint of others. This process – the serial process of cognition – continues until the problem is solved or the social act fades. Mead (1934) termed the image the “me” and the impulse the “I,” and specified them as two phases of the self – the self as an object drawn from the past, and the acting self responding in the present. By “solution,” Mead meant not that the problem is resolved in an optimal way, but rather that it is solved for the practical purposes at hand, which means the blocked or conflicting impulses are freed and the social act is allowed to resume. Moreover, when similar problematic situations are repeatedly solved in functionally equivalent ways, they become less problematic, and behavior becomes habitual or non-reflective. In highly institutionalized settings, with strong norms, most behaviors are non-reflective, actors are not self-conscious, and stimuli lead directly to responses; at times, however, even normative behavior is interrupted by anticipated or unconventional exigencies, and behaviors become reflective, actors take themselves as objects, and stimuli are mediated or interpreted by cognitive processes.

Mead’s (1934) theory of cognition consists of this dialectical inner-dialogue of the “I” and the “me,” which, in form and substance, resembles the “conversation of gestures” occurring between two individuals, except that it occurs between the phases of the self in the mind. Role-taking is possible by the use of language – or “significant symbols” to use Mead’s term – which calls out functionally identical responses in oneself as well as in others (Miller, 1973). The universal character of language allows us to imitate, hold onto, and manipulate or reconstruct alternate responses, anticipating how others might respond, before carrying them out in overt behavior. Here we glimpse Mead’s theory of temporality: role-taking occurs in the present, in adjusting to a problematic situation in the present, and applies past experiences to anticipated future outcomes (Mead, 1932). From an indefinite past, a specific depiction of the past (the “me”) is called up to solve a problem in the present in the context of a future goal with anticipated consequences. The response of the “I” occurs in the present, but only insofar as it has been called out by the “me” (a past) in terms of a specific anticipated future. Moreover, the “I” – or more specifically, the dialectical unfolding of the “I” and the “me” – contains an element of novelty or emergence, which stems from being in multiple perspectives simultaneously. Mead used the term “sociality” to refer to the ability to be

in multiple spatio-temporal perspectives, simultaneously – a prerequisite for role-taking.

Because the reaction of the “I” to the “me,” always entails some element of emergence and novelty, the response of the “I” can never be perfectly predicted or known in advance. We constantly surprise ourselves. Indeed, the “I” is knowable only in the future as another “me” – a depiction of the past – within another problematic situation. In Mead’s (1964, p. 141) terms, “The self-conscious, actual self in social intercourse is the objective ‘me’ or ‘me’s’ with the process of response continually going on and implying a fictitious ‘I’ always out of sight of himself.” Moreover, the “I” can suggest new alternatives (“me’s”) and vice-versa. This parallels Dewey’s (1958) theory of “ends in view,” in which ends are always in the present and are reciprocally related to means (Joas, 1994). Once a problematic situation is solved, and conflicting impulses are resolved through role-taking, a reconstruction of the situation has occurred, and a new self emerges from the old self: “Solution is reached by the construction of a new world harmonizing the conflicting interests into which enters the new self” (Mead, 1964, p. 149).

For Mead, emergence and reconstruction are key elements of human experience, and arise through role-taking. The past and future are hypothetical representations in experience and can be reconstructed in the present to resolve a problem. As one present passes into another, novelty emerges, which allows us to experience continuity. For Mead (1964, p. 350), “pure continuity could not be experienced,” but “as present passes into present, there is always some break in continuity,” and “the break reveals the continuity, and continuity is the background for the novelty.” Only by experiencing novelty in the context of continuity does one experience passage. Moreover, once novelty emerges, we create continuity by reconstructing the past so as to “transform the unexpected emergent into something that should have been expected” all along (Cook, 1993, p. 149). Novelty and emergence bring about social reconstruction in the perceptual field of objects, allowing for new meanings to arise, and providing for new, reconstructed, changed selves.

In sum, Mead’s concept of role-taking has three key functions for the social act: anticipatory, reflexive, and appropriative functions (Cook, 1993; see also Lauer & Boardman, 1971). The anticipatory function allows individuals to anticipate how others will react to their responses before responding overtly. The reflexive function allows individuals to become self-conscious, to see themselves, and to grasp the meaning of their behavior. The appropriative function allows individuals to incorporate responses, attitudes, and values of others into one’s own line of conduct, adjusting to others into coordinated behavior.

### *The Social Structure of the Self*

The self, then, arises in social interaction as an object, and thus, is socially constituted (given meaning) as an object in the same way other physical objects are constituted. For Mead (1964, p. 141), the organized society is prior to the individual, and the self has a definite social structure, which derives from the larger society in which the individual participates: "Inner consciousness is socially organized by the importation of the social organization of the outer world." That structure is revealed in Mead's well-known analogy of "play" and "the game," which describes the developmental process of acquiring a mature self. Early in life, children learn to play roles by taking the role of concrete others independently: they play policeman and arrest themselves; they play parent and scold themselves (Mead, 1934, p. 150). During this period, the child becomes aware of his or her body, learns to identify with the body (that is, draw a connection between the self and the body), and differentiate the body from the rest of the world. Later, having developed a sense of the body, and a rudimentary or compartmentalized self, children diversify the self by learning the game, in which they take the role of the entire group or "generalized other," including the norms, rules, and expectations governing various positions and roles of the group, community, or society. They learn to relate the rules, expectations, and obligations of their own roles to those of others within the organized system. This process of taking the role of the generalized other is the most effective form of social control because organized groups and institutionalized norms enter individual behavior (Heimer & Matsueda, 1994).

Moreover, if we begin with the organized group or institution, with its differentiated roles, expectations, values, and norms, and then explain individual selves, minds, and social activities, we see that the structure of individual selves reflect the larger social structure of the groups in which individuals participate. A key question is which attitudes or organized roles will be invoked to solve a particular problematic situation? The answer is simple: the one that is most relevant, and offers, from the standpoint of the unfolding self, the best chance of freeing the impulse and solving the problem. If it fails, another "me" is called out. The relationship between the structure of the group and action is not a simple deterministic function, however, for three reasons. First, individuals participate in a plethora of distinct and overlapping groups, and their participation varies from superficial association to deep commitments.<sup>2</sup> Second, the specific groups, or generalized others, that will be invoked in a problematic situation depend on the exigencies of that specific situation. That is, the specific formulation of

the past arising in the "me" depends on the problem at hand. Third, the specific response of the "I" to the "me" is not deterministic, but rather involves a dialectic, in which there is an element of novelty, creativity, and emergence. It may be useful to contrast, on the one hand, a *stable self*, derived from previous stable participation in certain organized groups, with, on the other hand, a *situational self*, arising in the present (as the dialectic between the "I" and the "me") through role-taking to solve problematic situations. In other words, we can contrast stable identities with situational identities (Alexander & Rudd, 1984).

### IDENTITIES AND CRIME

Clearly, for Mead, the locus of social control lies in the genesis of the self as an object from the standpoint of the generalized other. In other words, social control lies in the ways identities are formed from the standpoint of reference groups, and invoked to solve problematic situations. Thus, we can describe the self from two vantage points. First is a situational or acting self, operating self-consciously in the present, emerging between old and new selves by adjusting to conflicting impulses, and knowable only in the future as a past acting self, now incorporated in the stable self. This is the realm of human agency, emergence, and novelty. Second is the stable self, which gives behavior continuity. We can conceive of such a self by summing across a person's biographical history, including past social selves, social acts, and most importantly, past solutions to problematic situations. This self has a structure, which lies in the past, and corresponds to the structure of the generalized other – that aspect of society in which the individual has participated. The stable self is the realm of structure, constraint, and habit. The relationship between the two components of the self illustrates Mead's theory of temporality: the stable self lies in the past, but is called up in the present as a certain depiction of that stable self as the "me," which is responded to by the "I" to solve a present problem in light of anticipated future consequences. The situational self then becomes incorporated in the stable self, ready to be called up to solve future problems.

Because the self is multidimensional and as complex as the temporal and spatial organization of groups within which the individual participates, any study of the self must restrict focus on a single domain or dimension. Criminological research has examined the implications of both stable and situational selves for criminal and moral action. Research on stable selves or identities has used quantitative methods to unearth patterned views of the

self. For example, early work by Schwartz and Stryker (1970) hypothesized that, compared to boys labeled "good boys" by teachers, those labeled "bad boys" would have poor and uncertain self-concepts, have difficulty with masculine identities, and have few conventional significant others such as teachers. Research by Kaplan and his colleagues has examined how self-derogating attitudes – self rejection – affect delinquent behavior directly, and indirectly through delinquent peers (Kaplan, Johnson, & Bailey, 1987). In my own work on youth crime, I have tried to specify a conception of the self as a reflected appraisal of how others appraise one in interaction (Matsueda, 1992). Applied to delinquency, I find that parents' actual appraisals of youth as a rule violator leads to youth reflected appraisals as a rule violator from the standpoint of parents, teachers, and peers, which in turn, is associated with future delinquent acts (see also Triplett & Jarjoura, 1994). Bartusch and Matsueda (1996) showed how this process explains delinquency for both males and females, but has stronger effects for females, presumably because adolescent girls are more concerned with the opinions of others. Finally, Heimer and Matsueda (1994) have shown that reflected appraisals as a rule violator is one aspect of role-taking producing delinquency, along with delinquent peers, anticipated reactions of significant others to delinquency, and delinquent attitudes. They term the process as one of "differential social control" (see also Heimer, 1996).

Criminological research on situational selves has used qualitative methods to reconstruct situations in which – using the terms adopted here – individuals have engaged in role-taking to solve problematic situations in illicit ways. I will mention a few classical examples from criminology. Cressey (1953) developed a theory of the criminal violation of financial trust – defined as taking a position of financial trust in good faith, but then violating that faith – based on interviews with convicted embezzlers, who reconstructed the circumstances of their offenses. Cressey argued that a three-stage sequence led to violations of trust: (1) the offender realized he had a serious financial problem that could not be shared with others; (2) he perceived that he could solve the problem by violating financial trust; and (3) he was able to use vocabularies of motive to adjust his conception of self as an upstanding moral person with a conception of self as one who absconded with entrusted money. Those rationalizations or definitions of the situation, included "I was just borrowing the money and planned to pay it back," "I was entrusted with the money, and can do with it what I please," and "It's not really a crime."<sup>3</sup> Some offenders found themselves "in too deep," and unable to repay their debt and turned themselves in, thereby maintaining a self-image as an honest person. Others repented when caught,

and again maintained their moral self-image. In a minority of cases, upon being caught, the offender changed their self-image from an upstanding member of the community to that of a criminal.

Becker's (1963, p. 42) study of marijuana smoking showed how "deviant motives actually develop in the course of experience with the deviant activity," or in other words, how means and ends evolve reciprocally within a social act. Thus, novice smokers take the role of experienced users to learn to smoke marijuana, including how to inhale and hold the smoke in the lungs, how to recognize the effects of being high, and how to define the effects as pleasurable. In this way, an inherently ambiguous physiological experience – dizzy, nauseous, euphoric, or comical – is transformed and redefined into a social object defined as being "high," and more importantly, being pleasurable. Such definitions are built up through role-taking in groups, as other experienced members help demonstrate how to smoke properly, how to recognize the feeling of being high (including having the "munchies"), and how to interpret the high feeling as pleasurable and even euphoric. Thus, "marihuana acquires meaning for the user as an object which can be used for pleasure" and with repeated experiences of this sort, "there grows a stable set of categories for experiencing the drug's effects" (Becker, 1963, p. 56). Moreover, because marijuana is illegal, whether one progresses from a beginning user to occasional user and then to a regular user depends on how one adapts to social control attempts to limit supply of the drug, detect drug users, and define the behavior as immoral. Through role-taking, regular users have developed contacts with drug dealers, have learned verbalizations that neutralize definitions of the behavior as immoral, and have dealt with the possibility of being caught by segregating acquaintances into users versus nonusers, by withdrawing into groups who condone marijuana, or by realizing that detection would not be so bad. Through these processes, regular users adopt a stable conception of self as a marijuana smoker from the standpoint of their generalized other.

Luckenbill (1977) found that homicides are often situated transactions that escalate from a minor dispute to violence because actors seek to maintain a favorable self-image, stand strong rather than backing down, and thereby jointly construct a violent definition of the situation. Analyzing reconstructed descriptions of homicide transactions, Luckenbill developed a sequential process model of homicide. One actor issues a challenge or insult, the second actor perceives it as such and accordingly as a threat to his self-image. Rather than backing down and losing face, the second responds by standing his ground and insulting, threatening, or challenging in kind. In turn, the first actor perceives a threat to self and responds in kind, followed

by the second actor responding to this response, and so on, in a spiraling escalation of violence. Often bystanders encourage, agitate, or cheer on the combatants. Luckenbill concludes that such transactions are often a character contest unfolding in stages, as each interactant seeks to show strong character and avoid losing face by standing strong and not backing down, until the interaction spirals into a murderous definition of the situation (see also Felson, 1978).

Katz (1988, p. 5) examines the "the range of sensual dynamics" operating within the immediate situation of a criminal event, finding that criminals are often seduced into crime by the prospect of excitement and kicks, or what he terms "sneaky thrills." Sneak thieves are often preoccupied with "getting over" and the "excitement and thrill" from succeeding in their thefts. When caught or arrested, they typically express shock, subsequently treat their theft as "real crime," and typically end their deviant careers to avoid commitment to a deviant identity. Professional shoplifters, in contrast, see themselves as members of a criminal subculture and as "real thieves," and therefore see arrest as just another "cost of doing business" (Katz, 1988, p. 66). Katz also writes about violence committed by street youth. Such youth work at developing a reputation as a "badass," demonstrating a "superiority of their being" by dominating and forcing their will on others. They start a fight or "force a humiliating show of deference" by accidentally bumping another male, challenging them with eye contact and the opening line, "Whateuhlookinat?" (Katz, 1988, p. 110).

Anderson (1999) goes beyond this analysis of inner city violence by identifying a "code of the street" operating on the streets of Philadelphia, which he argues is rooted in the local circumstances of ghetto poverty as described by Wilson's (1987) underclass thesis. Cut off from gaining success in mainstream institutions, alienated African-American youth come to distrust the legal system for resolving their disputes, and turn to violence and an emphasis on "manhood" to resolve disputes and gain status. Status and a sense of self is derived from developing a reputation based on showing toughness, nerve, and physical prowess and adhering to the code of the street: never backing down from a fight, always coming to the defense of one's crew, and exacting revenge or "payback" when one or one's loved one is disrespected. Moreover, Anderson's work shows how, within the backdrop of a broader socioeconomic urban context, organized groups structure individual selves, and therefore, solutions to problematic situations. His ideal types of "decent families" and "street families" illustrates the ways in which conflicting groups give rise to conflicting impulses that are solved through taking the role of the other.

These studies of the acting or situational self suggest that behavior is not strictly determined by outside forces, but rather include a volitional component, or human agency. Moreover, within Mead's perspective is an implicit theory of agency, which can link structure to action, stable selves to situational selves, habit to emergence, and stability to change.

## HUMAN AGENCY IN CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORY

Although the question of human agency can be traced to moral philosophers of the Enlightenment, including forefathers of criminology, Bentham and Beccaria, sociological interest in human agency has stimulated Wrong's (1961, p. 183) critique of sociological theorists' "oversocialized conception of man," in which "man 'internalizes social norms' and seeks a favorable self-image by conforming to the 'expectations' of others." Wrong argued for a dialectical conception, which has been developed in theories of Giddens (1984), Bourdieu (1977), Sewell (1992), and others. In criminology, Kornhauser (1978) applied Wrong's critique to "cultural deviance theory," her term for her caricature of differential association and subcultural theories, arguing that such theories are deterministic and eschew notions of human agency (see Matsueda, 1988, 1997). More recently, Sampson and Laub (1993) and Laub and Sampson (2003) have raised the question of agency in their theory of informal social ties across the life course. Elsewhere, in the context of specifying a theory of crime, Karen Heimer and I have argued that Mead's perspective includes a theory of agency, which resolves the deterministic critique of structuralism (Matsueda & Heimer, 1996). Here, I briefly summarize the work of Emirbayer and Mische (1998), who draw on Mead's theory of temporality to specify a complete theory of agency.

There are at least four theoretical reasons to be concerned about human agency for a theory of crime. First, a conception of human agency allows us to break free of a completely deterministic model and oversocialized conception of behavior. Second, agency provides a mechanism for change in individual criminal behavior – a crucial concept for translating theory into policy and for accounting for criminal trajectories across the life course. Third, it provides a mechanism by which individual actors can effect change in macro-level outcomes, such as institutions, cultures, and subcultures, which in turn act back on crime. Finally, a theoretical conception of agency is compatible with theorizing about legal concepts, such as moral responsibility and legal culpability. Unfortunately, much of the discussion of human agency is not rooted in observable behavior, but rather degenerates



into a metaphysical discussion of concepts of "will," (e.g., Matza, 1964) which is demonstrated empirically in case studies in which actors claim they were acting on their will. Other conceptions of agency simply treat it as a residual category, in which all that cannot be explained by variables of a social theory is attributed to "agency." A more satisfying solution would be to develop a conception of human agency from within the general theoretical framework explaining criminality.

In their remarkably complex and free-ranging treatise on human agency, Emirbayer and Mische (1998, p. 970) draw on Mead's theory of temporality to specify a conception of agency as "the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations." To emphasize the temporal orientation of agency, they identify three elements of role-taking that constitute sequential phases of agency. The "iterational element" refers to the process of calling up the past through the structure of the "me" – "actors selectively recognize, locate, and implement such schemas" – which gives continuity to behavior and identities (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 975). The "projective element" refers to the cognitive process of considering alternate lines of action and creatively combining or reconfiguring them in light of "actors' hopes, fears, and desires for the future." The "practical-evaluative element" refers to recognizing a situation as problematic, characterizing the problem in terms of a specific past, and deliberating among alternatives to arrive at a decision to be executed in overt behavior to attain a future objective. Although they do not use the term, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) are referring to Mead's concept of role-taking, and identifying human agency in the process of taking the role of the generalized other, being in multiple temporal and spatial perspectives in the present (by considering alternative lines of action from the standpoint of others), and adopting a practical solution to the problem using a specific depiction of the past. Stated simply, human agency emerges in problematic situations via the dialectical conversation between the "I" and the "me."

Closely aligned with the concept of agency in Mead's thought are notions of creativity, spontaneity, and novelty. This arises in the impulsive, spontaneous response of the "I" to the structured, normative, group-based image of the "me," which explains why "we surprise ourselves by our own actions" (Mead, 1934, p. 174). Thus, there is an element of creativity in every act of role-taking, solving a problem using reflective intelligence: "The resulting action is always a little different from anything he could anticipate" (Mead,

1934, p. 177). The degree of creativity, of course, varies in degree from slight differences to wholesale transformations. This notion is so crucial to Mead's thought that Joas (1996) has used it to develop a theory of the "creativity of action."

Embedded in Mead's perspective, then, is a theoretical mechanism for innovation, which can be used to address a critical problem in criminology: where does crime come from? That is, where do the ideas, justifications, and motives for new crimes originate? Such an explanation, which is beyond the scope of this chapter, would begin with a situation of social disorganization, in which conventional organization is undermined by conflicting attitudes giving rise to rule violation. For example, male minority youth in disadvantaged inner city neighborhoods face social disorganization, frustration, and alienation, as family, education, and labor market institutions fail to meet their needs and inculcate conventional commitments. Such a situation calls for social reorganization, in which new rules for behavior provides expression of the new attitudes (Thomas & Znaniecki, [1918] 1958). Here a key element is played by indigenous leaders, who use their prestige, efficiency, and ability to motivate through fear and hope to build cooperation and new schemes of behavior, corresponding to new norms and institutions, which increases social cohesion (Thomas & Znaniecki, [1918] 1958). Those new schemes of behavior, such as codes of honor or the code of the street, provide ways of attaining respect and honor on the streets, often through illegal behavior. In fact, however, such honor codes have a long history in the U.S. (e.g., Ayers, 1984), and therefore, the problem is one of transforming existing rules and status systems to fit a particular problematic situation facing inner city, disadvantaged, minority youth. The important point is that indigenous leaders, who correspond to "organizational entrepreneurs" in the neo-institutional organizations literature (e.g., Powell & DiMaggio, 1991), use their agency to solve a problematic situation in creative ways, suggesting new schemes of behavior for obtaining status. Through role-taking, they jointly innovate new schemes of behavior and systems of status, and succeed in persuading a critical mass of similarly disadvantaged youth to participate in such a system (e.g., Cohen, 1955). Once the system is in place, other disadvantaged youth can gain status in the eyes of other participants in the system by adhering to the code – never backing down from a fight, watching one's back, responding with violence when one's girlfriend is disrespected, and exacting revenge when violence strikes a member of a crew (e.g., Anderson, 1999). That is, by exercising their human agency, and taking the role of the generalized other (including the rules and sanctions of the status system), members can use the tenets of the system strategically for their own personal gain.



More generally, this conception of human agency is important for theorizing about criminal acts because it (1) derives agency from the underlying mechanisms of the theory, rather than simply adding on a residual term or a metaphysical concept of will in an ad hoc way to an otherwise deterministic theory; (2) moves beyond the tired free-will-determinism debate by positing a dialectic between individual and society; (3) supplies a theoretical mechanism by which individual and group change can occur; and (4) provides a temporal framework compatible with a life span approach, from which the specific mechanisms explaining turning points flow naturally. Mead's theory of agency and social control can be applied to Sutherland's (1947) classical theory of differential association and free the theory of its statement of determinism, address some criticisms of the theory raised by Sutherland himself, and provide a stronger link between differential association and differential social organization (see Matsueda, 2006). Moreover, it can provide the theoretical mechanism by which labeling can amplify crime or lead to desistance through the life course.

### LABELING, DEVIANCE AMPLIFICATION, AND DESISTANCE

The perspective on deviance most closely associated with symbolic interaction is labeling theory, which traditionally has ignored the etiology of crime and deviance, and focused on the process of labeling deviance. Indeed, some versions of labeling theory have defined crime and deviance not as objective behaviors, but rather as a mere label conferred by a social audience (e.g., Becker, 1963). Here, I will reject this definition and assume that, while crime is socially constituted in interaction, there are objective behaviors that violate laws for which a strong consensus can usually be found among members of society. Nevertheless, labeling theory provides a framework, consistent with Mead, for specifying the consequences of societal reactions to crime.<sup>4</sup> The concept of labeling can be traced to Tannenbaum's (1938) discussion of the "dramatization of evil," which arises from conflict between the community and its youth over the definition of the situation. From the perspective of youth, acts of breaking windows, climbing over roofs, and stealing from street vendors are forms of play, adventure, and fun. From the standpoint of the community, these acts are forms of evil, nuisance, and delinquency, which call for control (Tannenbaum, 1938, p. 17). Repeated conflict between youth and community sets in motion a process of escalating

conflict, in which adults label the youth as increasingly "bad" and "evil" and the youth respond with more resistance to the adults. Their resistance elicits increased negative labeling, as adults seek to control the increasingly serious behavior of youth.

The community, then, gradually shifts from defining the youthful acts as evil to defining the youth themselves as evil persons. Soon the youth's speech, companions, and hangouts come to be regarded with suspicion, the youth recognizes that he or she is being defined as evil, and the youth comes to see herself as a delinquent. Thus, at times, the "person becomes the thing he is described as being" (Tannenbaum, 1938, p. 20). The youth responds to negative labeling in different ways, sometimes resisting aggressively, sometimes conforming, and sometimes fleeing. Such youth are particularly vulnerable to the influence of older more experienced delinquents. Moreover, society's attempts at control, through deterrence and rehabilitation at times exacerbate the problem. Arrest and incarceration can intensify the hardening process, opening up their worlds to formal institutions of control, and exposing them to increasingly hardened criminals.

Lemert (1951) used the term, "secondary deviance," to describe deviant acts which are explicit responses to societal reactions to deviance. Secondary deviance occurs when society's response to initial or "primary" deviance, including stigmatization, punishment, and segregation, causes fundamentally changes in a person's social roles, self-identity, and personality, resulting in additional deviance. Whereas the primary deviant's life and identity are organized around conventional activities, "the secondary deviant's life and identity are organized around the facts of deviance" (Lemert, 1967, p. 41). Becker (1963) expanded labeling to include the process by which moral entrepreneurs marshal support from various interest groups to outlaw a behavior in the first place, and the process by which rule enforcers – police, prison guards, and security – enforce those laws, typically by attending more to bureaucratic imperatives of enforcement than the substantive content of the laws. Moreover, law creation and enforcement, for Becker, typically work against the interests of the powerless in society, who are more likely to be labeled as deviant or criminal.

Labeling theory points to a theoretical mechanism by which negative reactions to crime can increase future criminality, and by inference, positive reactions can reduce future crime (for a review of empirical evidence, see Paternoster & Iovanni, 1989). Braithwaite's (1989) theory of reintegrative shaming seeks to identify the conditions under which labeling will lead to stigmatization and secondary deviance. For Braithwaite, severe punishment, such as incarceration, stigmatizes the offender as an outcast, cuts the

individual off from conventional society, and forces the person into affiliation with subcultural groups – if she has the opportunities and tastes for such affiliations. In contrast, when community disapproval – particularly public shaming – is followed by reacceptance into the community of law abiding citizens, the offender is likely to desist from crime. This reintegrative shaming effects desistance by embedding social disapproval in the broader context of social acceptance, minimizing stigmatization and subcultural affiliation, and building a person's conscience through shaming and repentance. Reintegrative shaming is more effective in communitarian societies with high social capital – mutual obligations, trust, and loyalties embedded in interdependencies – because the shamed individual is more intertwined in the lives of others. Finally, shaming begins in early child socialization within the family, as parents punish children while expressing love, rather than rejecting the child.

These ideas were presaged by Mead (1918) in an essay on the psychology of punitive justice. Mead argued that punishment allows members of society to express impulses of outrage and hostility at the criminal – impulses that are normally restrained by social norms. This expression creates a strong emotional identification with conventional society and a feeling of anger at the criminal. Despite this human tendency, Mead felt that such expression of hostility, eventuating in the effective segregation of criminals from society, would be less effective than integrating the criminal. For Mead, the solution was to expand the scope of the generalized others for both the criminal and conventional elements. That is, through role-taking and deliberation, the criminal would come to appreciate the perspective of the conventional society, while at the same time, conventional members would come to understand the perspective and situation of the criminal. By incorporating each others' perspectives into their own, each would move toward a more universal understanding of the problem, and be capable of forging a creative solution that took all roles into account. This is consistent with W. I. Thomas's concept of reorganization and with Shaw's Chicago Area Project, which attempted to translate social disorganization-cultural transmission theory into practice.

Clearly, law creation, rule enforcement, primary deviance, labeling, and secondary deviance are all intertwined within the organization of society. Labeling theory and reintegrative shaming point to specific problems of prisoner reentry into society – stigmatization from conventional society increases problems of obtaining jobs, refraining from street life and affiliating with criminals, and maintaining or developing strong ties to family and conventional others (e.g., Petersilia, 2003). For example, using a quasi-experimental

audit study, in which pairs of job applicants matched on job credentials applied for real entry-level jobs, Pager (2003) found that felons and blacks were less likely to get callbacks for interviews than similar non-felon and white applicants. Moreover, race and felon status interacted: black applicants with a criminal record were least likely to get a callback. Pager concluded that the “mark of a criminal record” results in stigmatization and negative labeling, presenting a barrier for criminals to reenter society. Thus, the process of negative labeling can transform the experience of incarceration from a way of paying one's debt to society (or deterring the criminal from future crimes) to a way of increasing the likelihood of future crime – reducing the rate of desistance. The effect of incarceration, a life course role-transition, then, depends on the meaning of the role, which is constituted through social interaction.

## CRIME IN THE LIFE COURSE

Elsewhere, Karen Heimer and I have discussed the relevance of symbolic interactionism for a life course theory of crime (Matsueda & Heimer, 1997). There we made three principal points: (1) Mead's theory of temporality and role-taking explains how the life course is constituted, and provides a basis for theorizing about state dependence (change) versus heterogeneity (stability); (2) Mead's biosocial conception of human beings provides a framework for addressing how genes interact with environments; (3) role-taking provides a theory of the meaning of role-transitions, an explanation of role-selection, and a mechanism by which role transitions alter trajectories of behavior. Here we expand on that discussion by discussing the role of human agency, and of Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph's (2002) concept of “hooks for change.”

### *Temporality, the Life Course, and Life History Narratives*

Mead's theory of temporality provides a theoretical framework for conceptualizing aging, the passage of time, and the life course, and is compatible with Dannefer's critique of an ontogenetic development model rooted in biology in favor of a sociogenic model rooted in symbolic interaction. Rather than treating the life course as a series of ontogenetically determined age-graded life stages, and analyzing departures from age as abnormal, one can treat the life course as sociogenetically determined by

symbolic knowledge and intentionality mediating development,” as a malleable human organism interacts with a structurally diverse social environment (Dannefer, 1984).

Moreover, Mead’s theory of temporality applies to the constitution of the life course itself. Objective features of a life course are indefinite and exist independently of consciousness; what is important is the specific meaning of features of the life course, which are constituted in interaction. Thus, when individuals consider a problematic situation in the present, and call up aspects of their biographical history – which includes organized roles, role-transitions, and trajectories – in light of a future trajectory, they are constituting features of the life course by taking those features into self-conscious consideration. In this way, the temporal dimensions of the life course emerge in the present, in the same way that spatial or relational dimensions emerge in constituting space or relationships in interaction.

This conception of temporality applies to the use of life history narratives to reconstruct an individual’s biographical history. Such narratives are attempts to reconstruct a conception of the past in terms of a present problem (e.g., the researcher’s attempt to link criminal acts to stages of the life course) in light of future consequences (e.g., accurately depicting the life history of the subject for use in contributing to scientific knowledge). Clearly, the way in which the researcher frames the terms of the narrative, queries the subject, and probes certain topics is essential to the success of the enterprise, which is a joint social act between researcher and subject. The trick, presumably, is to determine if the subject can mirror his or her reconstruction of the life course within the researcher’s various (perhaps competing) theoretical conceptualization of the unfolding of the life course.

### *Human Agency and the Life Course*

Because life course theories of crime seek to explain changes (as well as stability) in criminality over the life span, a concept of human agency is crucial. This point was made originally in life course criminology by Sampson and Laub (1993). Laub and Sampson (2003), in their excellent extension of their analysis of the Glueck data to age 70, return to the concept of agency and cite Emirbeyer and Mische’s (1998) theory of agency – which is explicitly based on Mead’s writings. They do not, however, develop a theory of human agency themselves. Consequently, their empirical illustrations of agency, while illuminating, are not framed theoretically, and thus, are just as consistent with a conception of agency reduced to a residual term or a

metaphysical concept such as “will,” as they are to a more theoretically nuanced conception of agency. What is needed is a theory of agency, consistent with the theory of crime and desistance, that provides the mechanism by which “a subjective reconstruction of the self is especially likely at times of transition” (Laub & Sampson, 2003). Mead’s theory of temporality and role-taking can specify such a mechanism.<sup>5</sup> Most behavior is habitual, guided unreflectively by habits built up in the past; here agency is fairly dormant or indirect, lying in the past as legacies of prior acting selves, which serve to guide present habitual behavior. In problematic situations, however, agency comes to the forefront as the unfolding dialectic phases of the self constitute the past in terms of the future. Agency is particularly apparent when the problematic situation involves major life course changes or transitions. Here the individual engages in role-taking, activating relevant aspects of his or her biographical history to constitute a life course transition to realize a future goal, such as earning more money, gaining status, or avoiding arrest.

Applying a conception of human agency based on Mead to crime in the life course also would free Laub and Sampson’s (2003) theory of informal control from the questionable tenets of control theories. Influenced by Kornhauser’s (1978) writings on social disorganization, and Hirschi’s (1969) writings on social control (see also Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), Sampson and Laub (1993) have maintained the control argument that crime is not learned, subcultures are not important in the genesis of crime, and delinquent peers do not cause delinquency. A Meadian perspective provides a mechanism by which organized groups influence behavior, a mechanism that applies equally to all groups, regardless of the *form* of their organization or the *content* of their influence. Thus, organized delinquent groups, such as delinquent gangs, may increase the likelihood of crime by providing criminal role-expectations, values, and norms, as well as objective opportunities, which are *in part selected* through peer processes. These role-expectations, values, and norms at times crystallize into subcultures, which call for delinquent or criminal behavior in certain situations. The subcultures rarely float autonomously, cut off from conventional culture, but are interwoven into the very fabric of conventional society – albeit as pockets, rather than smooth continuous threads.<sup>6</sup>

### *The Aging Body, Cognitive Transformation, and Desistance*

Criminal acts, like other forms of action, entails physiological action by the body, whether that action entails overt physical effort or the cognitive

planning that precedes the act. The body plays an important role here, at times being used instrumentally (and illegally) to solve a problematic situation, as when a male street youth uses his physical prowess to gain status by physically dominating a rival, when a burglar uses manual dexterity to enter buildings undetected, and when an insider trader uses his or her computer keyboard to buy and sell stocks illicitly based on insider information. Therefore, the functioning of the body plays a part in social action and crime over the life course.

At the risk of oversimplification, we can state this hypothesis in three stages of individual physiological development. During childhood, the body has yet to mature, complex thought is still being learned, and habits have yet to stabilize. Forms of impulsive acts are more likely than acts requiring complex information processing. Acts requiring strength or sexual prowess are limited. In adolescence and young adulthood, a transition to sexual maturation, including hormonal changes stimulates risky impulsive behaviors and inhibits cautious, careful acts. At the same time, physical maturation allows greater flexibility in behavior, including acts requiring strength, such as violence, planning, and skill. The transition to old age witnesses physiological breakdowns in the body and once again inhibits complex cognitive and physical behaviors, in particular, risky behaviors such as crime. Consequently, most behaviors, including crime, fertility, athletic prowess, and career productivity tend to follow a familiar age curve: a sharp increase from childhood to adolescence, followed by a slow decline throughout the adult years (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1983). But just as important as the physiological capacity of the body is the way in which individuals constitute an image of the body in interaction (Joas, 1985). That image does not correspond perfectly to the physiological capacity of the body, which is not definite, but rather arises through role-taking. For example, one's image of one's body arises in problematic situations, when the body as an object is constituted from the standpoint of others' evaluations. Similarly, one's image of the physical capacity of the body is constituted in interaction through role-taking, as when an athlete is able to exceed conventional expectations from his or her body, and when an aging criminal realizes that he or she is too old to participate in gang fights, pull off stick-up robberies, or continue with burglaries (Shover, 1985). Such events involve an evaluation of the self from the standpoint of others.

The concept of role-taking provides a theoretical mechanism to explain how role-transitions may lead to changes in delinquent trajectories, such as speeding or slowing desistance from crime. The process of making a transition into a new life course role, such as a student, employee, or gang

member, entails taking the role of the generalized other within which the new role is embedded, leaving behind an old self, and initiating the embracement of a new self, corresponding to the new role. Drawing on Mead's theories of agency and the self, Giordano et al. (2002) use the term "cognitive transformations" to emphasize instances of role-taking in which creativity moves an individual to a different trajectory, and "hooks for change" to emphasize the actors' role in latching on to an opportunity and to stress that hooks or key phrases often appear in life history narratives. They specify four types of cognitive transformations: (1) a shift to openness to change; (2) exposure to a hook for change; (3) ability to envision an appealing "replacement self" that can supplement the old identity; and (4) transformation in views of the deviant behavior or lifestyle (as no longer appealing or viable). Using quantitative analyses of survey data and qualitative analyses of narratives of a subsample of desisters, they find evidence of cognitive transformations leading to desistance for both men and women. Such findings are important because they get at the *theoretical mechanisms* by which role-transitions speed or slow the desistance process. Thus, for example, they explain how stable employment and marital attachments increase desistance from crime. That is, it is not merely the utility derived from work and marriage, but rather also a process of changing identities derived from organized groups.

## METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES AND DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

In presenting the criminological implications of recent reinterpretations and extensions of Mead's thought, this discussion has remained at a very abstract theoretical, and at times even meta-theoretical, level. Many of Mead's ideas provide promising answers to challenging problems facing contemporary sociological theory. That promise, however, requires research and theorizing at a more concrete level, showing exactly what structural aspects of concrete organizations and groups are relevant to criminality and how they arise as selves through role-taking to influence the direction of ongoing social interaction. Some of the examples I have cited, such as Anderson's work on code of the streets and Giordano et al.'s (2002) work on cognitive transformations, are doing precisely that, and there are many more. Such directions for research requires both inductive qualitative research identifying the ways in which social organization is constituted in social interaction through role-taking, and deductive quantitative research measuring

e patterned and structured outcomes of role-taking (e.g., norms, identities, and habits) and relating them to causes and consequences of criminal acts.

### *Levels of Explanation and Methods of Research*

Mead did not develop a methodological strategy for studying social phenomena from his perspective. We can, however, sketch some recommendations. My argument, that research is needed at both macro- and micro-levels, and using both qualitative and quantitative methods, may appear prosaic and faddish, but I will at least try to be specific in my prosaic and faddish recommendations. As noted above, Mead clearly argued for starting analyses with the organization of the society or group, and then to identify social interaction, role-taking, and joint action with reference to that organization. Methodologically, this implies that one cannot hope to understand social action without first understanding the structure of the larger groups within which that action takes place. One cannot hope to understand the actions of a numbers banker without understanding the structure of the organized crime family – as well as the structure of demand of potential customers – in which the actions are embedded. One cannot hope to understand the actions of a gang member without understanding the organization of the gang and the gang's role in within the structure of the community. One cannot hope to understand the obstruction of justice behavior of government officials without understanding the political organization of the office in relation to the situation.

To identify the ways in which individuals negotiate or interpret meanings, just to each other's conduct, and thereby coordinate their conduct into joint action, one must directly observe or reconstruct the interaction process. This is the methodological emphasis of Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism, which argues for using naturalistic inquiry, sensitizing concepts, and exploration of social phenomena to refine concepts and construct explanations, rather than being imprisoned by rigid theoretical concepts and mindless testing of hypotheses derived from such concepts. In criminology, a number of classical studies have borne fruit, including the classical studies of Becker's (1963) *Outsiders*, Matza's (1964) *Delinquency and Drift*, Luckenbill's (1977) *Homicide as a Situated Transaction*, and Katz's (1988) *Seductions of Crime*. In terms of our above discussion, such studies focus on the social process, emphasizing the emergent properties of social interaction, which are reducible to the biographical histories of the individual participants. From

the standpoint of the individual, emergence arises via the "I's" response to the "me." Such direct observation and inductive reasoning is particularly powerful when examining a phenomenon about which we lack strong theories – e.g., the process of becoming a marijuana smoker, the group processes and structures operating within gangs, the dynamics of homicide transactions, and the immediate, momentary, emotional experience of enacting a crime.

But in contrast to Blumer's (1956) followers, who take literally the polemical arguments of his essay, "Sociological Analysis and the Variable," and reject the use of statistical analysis of variables to study social phenomena, I argue that such analyses – or at least the careful use of the results of such analyses – is essential to the study of role-taking and crime. Because individuals are embedded in organized groups and social institutions, they develop consistent reference groups or generalized others. Although complex, overlapping, and ever changing, such embeddedness accounts for stability in reference groups and therefore, the self, which in turn, explains continuity in behavior. Individuals, then, are distributed in social groups in ways structured in part by social networks, which cannot be revealed in case studies or studies of interaction sequences. One must use variables measuring the features of certain organized groups, such as commitments to lawful activities or views of self as a "badass," relevant to the social action investigated. This is consistent with Blumer's (1969, p. 139) largely ignored conclusion that "in the area of interpretative life, variable analysis can be an effective means of unearthing stabilized patterns of interpretation, which are not likely to be detected through the direct study of the experience of people."<sup>7</sup> Of course, studies that combine quantitative and qualitative approaches have the *potential* of maximizing benefits of each (for example, see Pearce, 2002). Examples in criminology include Short and Strodtbeck (1965), Giordano et al. (2002), and Laub and Sampson (2003). Although such mixed-method approaches are in some ways ideal, it is not necessary that every study employs a mix of methods, so long as they are informed by all relevant research findings regardless of method.

These arguments, I believe, are generally consistent with Mead's appraisal of Cooley's writings – one of the few places where his methodological views are revealed. There, Mead (1930, p. 706) praises Cooley for treating selves and others on the same "plane of reality of experience," and demonstrating that society is "an outgrowth of the association and co-operation of the primary group in face-to-face organization." Mead also admonishes Cooley for treating selves and others as "ideas in people's minds" (rather than arising from concrete social interaction), which renders the question of

human agency sociologically meaningless. Moreover, Mead (1930, p. 705) argues that while Cooley did recognize the "importance of statistical methods" and "community surveys," he nevertheless is uninterested in "the application of the scientific method to the study of society," the economic history of society, or the development of society from earlier forms, and instead adopts a "psychological" method of introspection to get at selves which exist as a psychological phase. In contrast, Mead (1930, p. 705) advocates treating selves as belonging to objective experience, and a "society of selves in advance of inner experiences," which allows for sociological analyses such as "those of W. I. Thomas, Park and Burgess, and Faris."

This argument suggests that the symbolic interactionist traditions of the Chicago school, led by Blumer and his followers, and the Iowa school, led by Kuhn and his followers, both conduct research consistent with Mead. The Chicago school emphasizes the use of naturalistic inquiry, direct observation, and in-depth interviews to examine the situational self, negotiated meanings, and cooperative action. The Iowa school uses surveys and quantitative methods to examine patterned selves, stable meanings, and institutionalized behavior. Other research, such as by Cottrell (1971), a student of Mead, uses experimental methods (analyzed using statistical methods) to test the mechanism of role-taking. My point is that research using all three methods – naturalistic inquiry, quantitative analyses of survey data, and experiments, are essential for testing, extending, and applying Mead's ideas to criminal behavior.

#### *Directions for Future Research*

The general theme of this chapter has been that patterned selves, which remain relatively stable, arise because stable generalized others are rooted in social organization. Thus, we can speak of views of self from the standpoint of others as a "badass," "sneak thief" (or an upstanding "athlete"), which entails role-relationships to other badasses, sneak thieves (upstanding athletes), potential victims of violence or theft, and the larger conventional society. Such views of self also encompass norms and vocabularies of motive that govern and motivate role behavior. At the same time, however, situational or acting selves arise in problematic situations, giving rise to human agency, creativity, and practical intersubjectivity – all of which is conditioned by a specific depiction of the past. The situational self entails taking the role of the other, and thus, is rooted in organized groups, and accounts for change in the self.

Future research on social forms of crime at particular conjunctions of historical period and special context should examine four questions relevant to a perspective based on Mead. First, what are the crucial organized groups relevant to the criminal behavior under study? As noted above, the most important group is the concrete group present within the interaction, but beyond this, other groups, such as families, peers, fellow workers, and neighbors are often relevant generalized others guiding habitual behavior and offering solutions to problematic situations. For example, Becker (1963) identifies the marijuana using group as the primary generalized other for becoming a marijuana user, but also identifies conventional groups as important for moving from occasional to regular user. Cressey (1953) identifies the inability of embezzlers to share their financial problem with conventional groups as a key step in the criminal violation of financial trust. Anderson (1999) finds that for street youth, failure in conventional society, isolation from decent families, and affiliation with street culture led to espousing the code of the street.

Second, how are complex role-relationships, role-expectations, norms, and values organized within groups such that they control the behavior of its members? Anderson (1999) finds that the role of the "badass" is inversely related to conventional roles, and governed by the code of the street, which at times calls for violent behavior, and at other times calls for artful and nuanced acts of avoiding violence while still maintaining respect. How do group roles, norms, and values operate with respect to other crimes, and how do they relate to the self?

Third, how can we develop quantitative measures of the self, role-relationships, norms, and values to get at the stable self and stable patterns of interaction? Survey data have helped measure broad conceptions of the self as reflected appraisals, vocabularies of motive, and criminal values (e.g., Heimer & Matsueda, 1994; Heimer, 1996, 1997). But we need to be more specific in our operationalizations, link them more directly to the organization of groups, and specify the interactions among the various aspects of the self.

Fourth, what is the relationship between a conception of decision making based on role-taking and one based on rational choice? And as a corollary, what is the role of deterrence from the standpoint of Mead? Clearly, role-taking, as a mechanism for solving problematic situations, has an instrumental character. But the model entails that the alternatives within the choice set, as well as the criterion for adoption, are built up in interaction, rather than imposed externally. Therefore, a utility maximization model likely distorts the general process of making decisions about crime,



out that under certain circumstances – institutional contexts – actors will act rationally.

From this standpoint, much criminological research from traditional perspectives will reveal incomplete portraits of processes producing crime. Research on conventional social bonds from a social control standpoint will ignore the role of criminal organization, and the rich micro-organization of situations leading to crime. Research on labeling and secondary deviance will ignore the processes by which identities lead to primary deviance. Research on learning definitions of crime from the standpoint of differential association theory will ignore the role of the self, situational interaction, and agency. Research from individual strain theories will ignore the ways in which strains or stressors are constituted in interaction and are reciprocally related to coping mechanisms. Research on rational choice and deterrence, will assume that ends and means can be identified before the fact, and miss out on the ways in which preferences are formed in interaction in groups, cognition operates in situations, and means and ends (preferences) interact within situations.

## NOTES

1. Elsewhere, Karen Heimer and I have described Mead's concept of role-taking and social control and applied it to delinquency; here I draw liberally from that discussion (see Matsueda & Heimer, 1997, pp. 169–170).

2. Structural symbolic interactionists use the term "identity salience" to hypothesize that certain aspects of the self (from the standpoint of generalized others) will be called up to solve a certain class of problematic situations (e.g., McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stryker, 1980).

3. Sykes and Matza (1957) later systematized such verbalizations, drawing on Merton and Weinman's psychoanalytic typology of rationalizations, and termed them techniques of neutralization."

4. This section draws from Matsueda (2000), in which I discuss the historical roots and current status of labeling theory.

5. Laub and Sampson (2003) note that their perspective is compatible with symbolic interactionist theories of desistance of Matsueda and Heimer (1997) and Jiordano et al. (2002). Here we seek to make this point more explicit.

6. This contrasts sharply with Kornhauser's (1978) depiction of "cultural deviance theories" – a caricature of subcultural theories – in which she argues that subcultures are not only autonomous, but perfectly socialize its members to autonomous subcultural values (see Matsueda, 1988).

7. For a provocative but, in the end, unsatisfying discussion of these methodological issues, see Hammersley (1989). Also see McPhail and Rexroat (1979) for a more extreme claim of divergence between the methodology of Mead and Lumer.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

A portion of this chapter was presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Society of Criminology, Toronto, Canada, November 16–19. The research upon which this paper was based was supported in part by grants from the National Science Foundation (SES-0004323) and the National Institute on Drug Abuse (R01DA18148). The author was an Honorary Fellow at the University of Wisconsin, which provided office space, computing, and administrative support. The funding agencies bear no responsibility for the analyses and interpretations drawn here. James F. Short, Jr. provided comments on an earlier draft.

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