

## **A Symbolic Interactionist Theory of Role-Transitions, Role-Commitments, and Delinquency**

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Recent criminological research has emphasized the importance of viewing crime and delinquency within the framework of the life-course or life-span development (Hagan and Palloni 1988; Elliott, Huizinga, and Menard 1989; Loeber and Le Blanc 1990; Sampson and Laub 1992, 1993; Farrington 1992). A life-course perspective opens new puzzles and questions for the study of deviance, such as the role of pathways, trajectories, and life-course transitions in deviance, hypotheses about duration-dependent processes, questions about ontogenetic versus socio-genic causal mechanisms, and issues in modeling longitudinal data. The empirical research on these topics suggest that trajectories, pathways, and transitions are important, and that a general theory of crime should incorporate a life-course view (Sampson and Laub 1992, 1993; Farrington 1992; Hagan and Wheaton 1993). This chapter explores the potential contribution of symbolic interactionism to a life-course theory of crime. We argue that such a view provides a theory of the meaning of life-course transitions and a situational theory of the mechanisms by which such transitions translate into criminal acts. It also provides a slant on

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the ontogenetic-sociogenic debate, and can help specify duration-dependent hypotheses about crime. The remainder of this chapter is divided into three parts: First, we briefly review the importance of a life-course perspective in crime and delinquency, highlighting important issues, theoretical questions, and tentative empirical findings. Next, we sketch a symbolic interactionist approach to crime in the life course. Third, we apply the theory to three stages of the life course: early child development, adolescence, and adulthood.

### Life Course, Development, and Crime

Life-course perspectives generally view life events in the context of life stages, transitions, turning points, and pathways, which are embedded in social institutions (Elder 1985). According to Elder (1985), pathways or trajectories refer to long-term trends or patterns of events, such as occupational careers or family trajectories. In contrast, transitions refer to short-term changes that can redirect a trajectory, such as getting married, becoming divorced, or entering the labor force. For example, Sampson and Laub (1993) argue that it is not life transitions per se that affect criminality, but rather the extent of informal social control associated with such transitions that lead to changes in crime. That is, life events effect change in crime by influencing the strength of social ties, which reflect investments in institutional relationships or social capital (Laub and Sampson 1993).

A parallel approach has been applied to crime under the term "developmental criminology" (Loeber and Le Blanc 1990). Again, the proposal is to view crime in developmental terms, refining concepts of age-of-onset, age-of-termination, and cumulative frequency with dynamic concepts: activation refers to early development after onset, including acceleration, diversification, and stabilization; aggravation refers to developmental sequences and escalation of criminality; and desistance refers to deceleration, specialization, and ceiling effects. It follows that the parameters of change in crime, and by implication the parameters of criminal career models, are all summary statistics of the concept of an individual hazard rate, the instantaneous probability or propensity to engage in illegal behavior (Hagan and Palloni 1988). A useful definition of development in crime is a duration-dependent hazard rate of criminality, where duration dependence means the rate of change is dependent on

time, i.e., is nonconstant or nonstationary (e.g., Featherman and Lerner 1985). From this view, not all change in crime is developmental; rather, change in crime is developmental when the hazard rate is changing with time, such as the waiting time in the prior state of the same event, or the waiting time in the state of some other event. For example, if the likelihood of crime declines as individuals age, or increases the longer one is a member of a delinquent gang, then crime is developmental. Conversely, if the likelihood of crime is the same regardless of age, length of time in a delinquent gang, or any other duration-dependent mechanism, then crime is not developmental. We begin with the premise that crime is developmental. Moreover, development can be age-graded, history-graded, or event-graded.

### *Sampson and Laub's Theory of Informal Social Control*

Applied to crime and delinquency, the life-course approach has fallen center stage amidst controversy in criminology (Hagan and Palloni 1988). In perhaps the most promising program of research on deviance within the life course, Sampson and Laub (1990, 1992, 1993; Laub and Sampson 1993) specify a theory of informal social control. Their theoretical view combines low self-control theory and social control theory: criminal behavior is due in large part to a stable trait of childhood antisocial propensity, which causes adult deviance and adult problems with conventional institutions like education, family, military, and employment. But net of antisocial propensity, they argue that adult ties to conventional institutions and individuals reduce adult criminality. For Sampson and Laub, it is not education, marriage, or employment per se that is important, but rather the level of commitment and attachment to those conventional roles. Here they draw parallels between adult social bonds and Coleman's (1990) concept of social capital. Their empirical results find that early childhood antisocial behavior is linked to adult deviant behavior as well as adult social bonding—marital attachment, job stability, and occupational commitment. Moreover, net of child antisocial behavior, marital attachment and job stability (but not occupational commitment) affect adult crime and the time to desistance from crime (Sampson and Laub 1993).

In both their theoretical discussions and their empirical tests, Sampson and Laub consider three important issues: the roles of ontogenesis and sociogenesis (Dannefer 1984); the existence of heterogeneity and state

dependence (Nagin and Paternoster 1991); and the need to specify and test duration-dependent mechanisms (Featherman and Lerner 1985). Specifically, they recognize the role of ontogenesis (individual development), but clearly specify a sociogenic theory of development and crime that focuses on social processes (see also Loeber and Le Blanc 1990; Elliott et al. 1989). They thus avoid the “fallacy of ontogenetic reductionism,” in which socially organized developmental phenomena are reduced to individual ontogenetic causes (Dannefer 1984). Moreover, Sampson and Laub acknowledge that continuity in crime can be explained by individual differences that remain stable over time (population heterogeneity), or by changes directly brought on by an earlier criminal event (state dependence). Finally, they specify and test duration-dependent hypotheses about the time to crime given their theoretical model (1993: 171–78).

Sampson and Laub’s work has set an important theoretical and research agenda for examination of crime in the life course. Nevertheless, we believe that a symbolic interactionist perspective can augment their theoretical argument in two important ways. First, by relaxing the assumptions made by control theories that the motivation for crime is constant across persons, that subcultures are impotent, and that only conventional culture matters, a symbolic interactionist theory can provide a more complete and nuanced theory of the content of culture—one that specifies a theory of the meaning of social roles, and links the life course to criminal and deviant subcultures. Second, by providing a situational theory of action, interactionism can stipulate how the dynamics of the immediate situation are linked to social roles, meanings, and behaviors, and how individual propensities (personality) are socially constituted in interactions. Third, the theory of meaning within interactions specifies a dialectical relationship between the life course and interaction: social interaction is conditioned by the life course, which at the same time, is socially constituted in interactions.

### A Symbolic Interactionist Framework

Symbolic interactionism is a useful framework for developing a life-course theory of crime for several reasons. First, unlike structural functionalism, which underlies anomie and social control theories of crime, symbolic interactionism does not take a static view of society, social

organization, and social order. Instead, interactionism builds on the philosophical position of American Pragmatism, beginning with a process model of society: society consists of an ongoing process of interactions, which fit together and constitute social organization and social order. Such a model is compatible with a life-course perspective that begins with a dynamic view of individual, group, and societal biographies. Second, symbolic interactionism takes a clear and consistent position on the ontogenetic-sociogenic debate. We follow George Herbert Mead’s (1934) view of “biosocial man,” in which the impulses, instincts, and genotypes of human biological organisms are translated into behavior through a social process consisting of interaction with others. Third, life-course perspectives emphasize the importance not only of role-transitions, but also of the meanings of such transitions to individuals (Elder 1985). Symbolic interactionism provides an explicit theory of meaning and a way of linking roles to meanings, identities, and subcultures (Stryker 1980). Finally, symbolic interactionism can stipulate specific mechanisms of population heterogeneity and state dependence within a unified framework. Thus, we can apply these mechanisms to crime without having to resort to ad hoc mixing of contradictory theories, like social control and labeling. To specify the mechanisms explicitly requires a brief review of a symbolic interactionist view of crime. We build upon statements made by Matsueda (1992) and Heimer and Matsueda (1994) in applying the principles to life-course issues.

### *Culture and Subcultures*

Symbolic interactionism rejects the assumptions of sociology’s structural functionalists, and criminology’s social control theorists, that society consists of a single moral order and that subcultures are irrelevant to the motivation of crime and delinquency (Kornhauser 1978; Hirschi 1969). Instead, interactionists assume that pluralist societies consist of a diversity of perspectives organized along lines of communication. These perspectives at times crystalize into distinct social worlds, in which groups organize around a common set of concerns and viewpoints. These subcultures can give rise to new ways of solving problems or adapting to the environment. At the same time, they can give rise to a parochialism that generates deviant behavior from the standpoint of other groups.

A dominant culture in pluralist societies consists of the intersection of various perspectives, and is socially constituted in interaction. In general, a dominant culture consists of norms, beliefs, and behavior patterns that facilitate success in conventional realms and proscribe deviant and criminal behavior. In a market economy, various forms of capital investment increase the likelihood of individual market success, including investments in human capital, such as schooling and job training (Becker 1964), social capital, which inheres in social relations such as obligations and expectations, information channels, and norms (Coleman 1990), and cultural capital, defined as competence in elite status cultures, including elite attitudes, behaviors, and habits (Bourdieu 1977). These forms of capital are resources that can be translated into material rewards through conventional institutions. Moreover, capital investments should reduce the likelihood of criminality by increasing conventional role commitments, identities, and reference groups, and by reducing incentives for crime.

Furthermore, within criminal subcultures, one can speak of rudimentary criminal counterparts to conventional culture.<sup>1</sup> That is, success in a criminal subculture may be increased by investing in criminal counterparts to human, social, and cultural capital. Thus, members of these subcultures might gain greater monetary returns, prestige, and status through investing in criminal skills, training, obligations, information channels, norms, attitudes, and habits. Because such structures and norms foster behavior proscribed by the larger social system—which mobilizes resources to combat the behavior—they will remain comparatively rudimentary, weak, and ineffectual relative to conventional structures. Nevertheless, in contrast to disorganization and control theorists, we do not view these structures and cultures as entirely impotent (Matsueda 1988). For individuals unable to attain success in conventional ways, criminal structures may be important determinants of crime (e.g., Cloward and Ohlin 1960). We use the term “criminal capital” to refer to forms of human, social, and cultural capital that foster returns to criminal behavior. Both conventional and criminal capital investments vary across the life course and are critical variables in explaining the timing and sequence of behaviors and roles. We argue that investments in various forms of capital and the resulting decisions based on those investments are in part conditioned by taking the role of significant others in problematic situations.

### *Social Process and Transactions: Role-Taking*

Symbolic interactionism assumes that society is an ongoing process of social transactions, consisting of interactions between two or more individuals. Transactions are built up by participants' adjustments to each other and their situations. When adjustments are smooth and routine, they occur without self-consciousness. When they are temporarily blocked, the situation becomes problematic and the individuals engage in role-taking, solving 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). When an act or impulse is blocked by a physical or social barrier, an emotion is released, and the impulse is transformed into an image, including a plan of action and the anticipated reactions of others to the action. This image is then reacted to by another impulse, which either follows the plan into overt behavior, combines the plan with another, or blocks the plan, causing the situation to remain problematic. Mead (1934) referred to the image as the “me,” the reacting impulse as the “I,” so that cognition is an internal dialogue or conversation between two phases of the self, the “I” and the “me.” This process continues until the problem is solved or the transaction ends. Once the problem is solved, the “me” is incorporated into the self in memory, and can be called up in future problematic situations. When problematic situations are solved repeatedly in similar ways, they become less problematic, and behavior becomes more habitual, nonreflective, and scripted (Matsueda 1992; Heimer and Matsueda 1994). Specifically, consistent with some psychological research, situations that are encountered repeatedly become routine and do not trigger deep cognitive processing; behavior, therefore, appears relatively “mindless” and unfolds in a scripted fashion (Shiffrin and Schneider 1977; Langer 1989). Thus, successive solutions to problematic situations—solutions that are rewarded, to use the terms of social learning theories, leads to continuity in behavior—whether legal or illegal—across similar situations. For example, within turf gangs, violence may be automatic and nonreflective, whereas within a church choir, violence would rarely result and only after considerable reflection.

The self, then, is the critical locus of social control, and consists of a dialectical relationship between the “I” and the “me.” The “me” consists of the portion of the self rooted in one's organized groups; the “I” con-

sists of impulses, some of which are socially conditioned. Moreover, the "I" contains a variable element of novelty or emergence, so that the response of the "I" can never be predicted perfectly by the "me."

From this standpoint, criminal acts refer to specific directions of ongoing behaviors. The probability of such behaviors occurring is a function of the situation into which interactants self-select, and the contributions of each interactant to the direction of that behavior. Those contributions in turn are a function of the individual biographical histories of each interactant relevant to criminality. This includes stable views of the self (as a criminal or conformist) from the standpoint of others, attitudes and motives about crime, and anticipated reactions of others toward crime (Heimer and Matsueda 1994).

#### *Role-Commitment and Differential Social Control*

Because the self consists of a dialectic between the "I" and the "me," behavior is patterned, but not completely determined. Stability in the self results from stability in the organization of attitudes in the "me," or the generalized other, which leads to continuity in behavior within individuals. This organization of the self results from participation in organized groups, which implies that those individuals who participate in similar organized groups will display similarities in behavior relevant to the particular group. For example, youths who participate in delinquent peer groups are likely to take the role of delinquents when considering whether to engage in delinquent behavior. If role-taking involving this generalized other repeatedly solves problematic situations, the delinquent group is likely to constitute an important element of a youth's "me" and the youth is likely to become increasingly committed to the group, which becomes an important generalized other. Thus, self-control is social control because social organization enters behavior through the process of taking the role of the other (Matsueda 1992).

With respect to unlawful behavior it is important to emphasize that social control varies in strength *and* meaning. In a pluralistic society, members participate in multiple groups, which vary not only in the degree to which they control the behavior of a given member, but also in the meaning or content of control—either encouraging or dissuading criminal behavior through the process of role-taking. Therefore, social control of criminal versus conventional behavior is a process of differential

social control—either toward conventional or criminal habits and solutions to problematic situations (Matsueda 1992; see also Elliott et al. 1989). Differential social control includes stable views of the self (as a criminal or conformist) from the standpoint of others, attitudes and motives about crime, and anticipated reactions of others to crime (Heimer and Matsueda 1994).

Identity theorists have specified testable generalizations to capture this process by which participation in groups leads to certain forms of behavior (McCall and Simmons 1978; Stryker 1980). Identity theory proposes that commitment to a specific role in an organized group increases the likelihood that the group will serve as a generalized other in problematic situations. The symbolic interactionist concept of role-commitment entails notions of "side-bets" (Becker 1960) or the cost of giving up meaningful relationships with others (Stryker 1968), and contains both a cognitive base (commitment) and a socioemotional base (attachment) (Burke and Reitzes 1991). The greater the rational or emotional cost of jeopardizing a role, the greater the commitment to the role. Role commitments, then, are an important element of social capital: they constitute the structure of social networks and imply obligations, expectations, information, and norms.

Commitment to roles is linked to the self through identities, an important feature of the stable self. Here, the self is viewed as a system of hierarchically organized role-identities. The most important, salient, or prominent identities are those that correspond to roles that have received greater investments by the individual (Stryker 1968, 1980; McCall and Simmons 1978). These identities are built up fundamentally through ongoing processes of interaction: through participation in organized groups leading to recurrent role-taking involving those groups, commitments to group roles are built up, and corresponding identities established. The identity becomes more salient or prominent, increasing the likelihood that it will be the basis of future behavior, in part because the corresponding behaviors have become habitualized, and in part because the identity becomes relevant to an increasingly broader range of situations. Thus, over time, as behavior becomes routinized, the "I" recedes in importance and a wider range of problems are resolved from the standpoint of a specific role-identity or generalized other. Turner (1978) used the term, "role-person merger," to refer to this situation in which the person becomes so identified with a specific role that he or she seeks to enact the

role even when it may be inappropriate. Under these circumstances, behavior is routinized, the "I" is relatively dormant, and change is unlikely. This view of stability and change in the self helps explain life-course transitions. But also relevant to that explanation are biological differences.

#### *A Biosocial View of Human Behavior*

Most symbolic interactionists, following Blumer (1969) and others, have ignored the role that genetic, biological, and constitutional factors play in behavior, and instead have assumed that social processes are sufficient to account for behavior. We take a different view, beginning with Mead's view of humans as biosocial organisms (see also Shibutani 1961).<sup>2</sup> In this view, genetics alone do not determine criminality—i.e., there is no crime gene—but inheritance does play an important role in the process leading to crime, operating indirectly through social interaction. This view is generally consistent with twin and adoption studies of crime. Twin studies show that correlations between delinquency of identical twins (e.g., .70) are consistently higher than those of fraternal twins (e.g., .50), suggesting that both genetics and shared environments play an important role in accounting for behavior (e.g., Rowe 1983). Adoption studies show that the criminality of adoptees resembles the criminality of biological parents slightly more than that of adoptive parents (e.g., Mednick, Gabrielli, and Hutchings 1984). Although these studies have been criticized on methodological grounds (e.g., Walters and White 1989; Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990), it is hard to deny that inheritance plays some role (Walters and White 1989; Plomin 1986).

But what are the specific mechanisms by which genes influence criminal behavior? Scarr and McCartney (1983) argue that the way in which genetic traits influence behavioral outcomes is by affecting the environment. They identify three mechanisms by which genotypes *select* environments: (1) passively, in which parents select environments of their children (because parents' genotypes are correlated with children's genotypes, the result is a correlation between child's genotypes and environment); (2) evocatively, in which the physical and social environment responds to a child's genotypes; and (3) actively, in which a child's genotype directly selects the environment. Moreover, these are age-dependent effects: passive selection is emphasized in infancy, when parents deter-

mine a child's environment; and active selection is increasingly emphasized in adolescence and adulthood.

This conception of the interplay between genetics and environments can be consistent with an interactionist framework. From an interactionist standpoint, human beings are biosocial organisms that adjust to changing environments; the ability to engage in self-reflective behavior—in which the attitudes of organized groups enter behavior—is the highest evolutionary form of adjustment because it gives humans the capacity to change the environment to which they must adjust. Thus, human beings are born with genotypes, constitutions, and temperaments, but these do not directly determine behavior. Instead, they restrict the range of behaviors possible, and affect the likelihood that certain environments are selected. The most important element of the environment is role-taking, in which adjustments to the environment are self-conscious. In the case of infants and young children, parents help determine environments in part unintentionally, due to their structural limitations (e.g., resources), and in part intentionally, as they exercise their discrimination, tastes, and values. The physical and social environment selected will affect a child's behavior by circumscribing the child's social transactions. But the environment's response to the child's constitution and evolving social self is more critical. Here the self emerges through reciprocal role-taking in social transactions. From an interactionist standpoint, the evocative and active mechanisms of selecting environments are not discrete. Rather, they emerge jointly out of interaction: the self is built up from appraisals of oneself by others, and the self in turn actively selects future lines of action to adapt to present problematic situations.

An example of how a genetic characteristic affects criminality is given in Caspi, Elder, and Bem's (1987) work on child temper tantrums. This work shows how early child temper tantrums can lead to later problems in life (e.g., downward occupational mobility, erratic work lives, and divorce) through one of two mechanisms: cumulative continuity, in which the maladaptive behavior selects individuals into negative environments (e.g., dropping out of school) that perpetuate the maladaptation; and interactional continuity, in which reciprocal interaction with the environment leads to sustained maladaptive behaviors. From an interactionist standpoint, these two mechanisms derive from a continuous social process, in which reciprocal role-taking produces a self that selects future environments. Thus, early child tantrums can lead to criminality through a la-

being process: temperamental outbursts lead to problems in conventional settings, like preschool and kindergarten, causing adults to discipline and label the child as a troublemaker or problem-child, which alters the child's views of self, increasing the likelihood of sustained troublesome behavior. This, in turn, can increasingly channel a child into situations conducive to deviance, foreclose conventional opportunities, and leave the child with a deviant identity.

### Symbolic Interaction, Life Course, and Delinquency

#### *Symbolic Interaction and the Life Course*

We can use a symbolic interactionist framework to examine delinquency within the life course. The most important phases of the life course include infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Within these phases are age-graded or development-graded social roles including the roles of dependent child, student, adolescent peer, employee, criminal, spouse, parent, military employee, etc. When viewed within a person and across time, these roles trace out life-course trajectories for individuals.

From an interactionist standpoint, there exists a dialectical relationship between the life course—consisting of age-graded and developmentally graded organized social roles—and social interactions (Wells and Stryker 1986). On the one hand, the life course, like other aspects of social organization, is constituted in social interaction; on the other hand, social interactions are in part conditioned by the life course. But how exactly is behavior conditioned by the life course, and how exactly is the life course constituted in interaction? We can posit two mechanisms: (1) an endogenous process in which actors consider aspects of the life course in carrying out meaningful, self-conscious behavior; and (2) an exogenous social structuring that may or may not condition the consciousness of actors.

Drawing on our earlier discussion of role-taking within problematic situations and Mead's theory of temporality, we can specify an endogenous process by which the life course is constituted. One can think of features of the life course as abstract objects whose meaning is constituted in social interactions. Although we can speak of a life course as an objective phenomenon existing independent of consciousness, it is an indefinite object; what is important in behavior is the specific meaning of

features of the life course as constituted in interactions. Thus, an individual's biographical history—including the content of identities, definitions of situations, and role-expectations—is limited by his or her specific life-course roles, transitions, and trajectories. In the process of engaging in meaningful action, individuals take the role of the other, call up elements from the past to solve problematic situations in the present in light of future consequences. When individuals consider aspects of their biographical past or consider the future consequences of action that have implications for future role-transitions and trajectories, they are taking into self-conscious consideration features of the life course. For example, a high school dropout may consider whether he wants to pursue drug dealing as a major source of income, or instead delay gratification, take a low-paying conventional job, and attend an evening trade school. The decision may involve considering the attitudes of peers toward drug dealing, the risks and future potential involved, as well as imagining the probability of garnering a high paying job after completing trade school, and the meaning of such a job. The life course as a whole consists in part of the aggregation of interactions such as these that involve self-conscious attention to some of its constituent features.

But the life course also is constituted partly exogenously in interactions, without self-consciousness. When the features of a nonproblematic situation—including role relationships of interactants, the objective opportunities to engage in behavior, such as crime, and the resources available to interactants—are age-graded or developmental, they directly constitute the life course in social interaction. Finally, the life course also constrains social interaction, and thus behavior. Here age-graded or development-graded roles affect behavior by delimiting opportunities, and affecting the generalized other and identities by affecting communication networks, peer associations, and subcultural affiliation.

#### *Role Transitions and Crime*

The life course can be viewed as a series of transitions, representing choice points, or branches in a time-ordered tree diagram. Each choice made at one point opens up opportunities and choices at a future time point, as well as closing off other opportunities (Atchley 1975; Wells and Stryker 1986). For example, dropping out of high school reduces the likelihood of obtaining a job that requires a college degree, while in-

creasing the likelihood of pursuing criminal careers, such as dealing drugs. For our purposes, an important distinction is between conventional and criminal roles. Conventional roles entail predominantly law-abiding behavior; when crime is called for, it is exceptional and transient. Criminal roles entail predominantly law-abiding behavior as well; but it also includes criminal behavior as a major defining feature. For example, most of the day-to-day behavior of persons occupying the roles of pimp or drug dealer is law-abiding behavior, but nevertheless the roles are defined by sustained criminal role expectations of organizing prostitution and selling drugs, respectively. Most acts of crime are probably transient rather than role behavior.

A symbolic interactionist perspective can help explain why some individuals undergo life-course transitions at particular times, while others do not, and how such transitions may affect the probability of illegal behavior. According to interactionism, role transitions and continuity are each an outcome of social interaction. That is, within social transactions, individuals self-select into social roles—including age-graded roles—and are selected by social groups into social roles. Most importantly, self-selection and other selection into roles occurs simultaneously in social interaction.

At an abstract level of explanation, we can specify the major determinants of role-continuity versus role-transition, given a decision point between two or more age-graded social roles. This entails factors that push one out of a social role and factors that pull one into another role. These determinants include the context of the decision, particularly its location in social structure; and the factors that affect the direction of role-taking, including impulses, habits, commitments, reference groups, attitudes, and anticipated reactions. The immediate context of the decision conditions the outcome by framing possible objective alternatives. Here, structural position, defined by access to resources and power in society, becomes important. The greater the resources and power, the greater the range of alternative roles, and the greater the likelihood of selecting a role that maximizes tangible rewards and minimizes aversive outcomes. An individual located in an advantaged social class with greater human capital (education, experience, and skills) and social capital (network connections, obligations and authority, norms and sanctions, and information) will have access to a wider range of social roles, such as high-paying desirable jobs, than a lower-class person lacking capital. By

determining the objective possibilities, social structure will exert a direct effect on the likelihood of individual role-transitions. This holds for criminal as well as conventional roles. For criminal roles, criminal capital—network connections, information, and obligations associated with criminal subcultures—are particularly important (Letkemann 1973; Steffensmeier 1986).

In addition to these direct effects, structural location may affect role-transitions indirectly. Here symbolic interactionism can help specify selection mechanisms. From an interactionist standpoint, social structure conditions alternatives, but selection into a role is dependent on perceptions of alternatives and their meanings, which are formed through role-taking in interactions. People are likely to remain in roles if they do not perceive the opportunity to change, even if opportunity exists objectively. Here the situation does not become problematic, and people will continue engaging in habitual behavior associated with existing roles. However, once alternative roles are under consideration, the situation becomes problematic and persons engage in role-taking. The outcome of this role-taking process will be affected by the relative meanings of the present and prospective roles. These meanings, in turn, are determined by perceived appraisals by others, salience of the role-identities, and strength of habits and attitudes corresponding to the roles. It follows that role-continuity is more likely for individuals who have experienced a restricted range of roles, a restricted set of generalized others, and a restricted range of information about new roles.

Selection into roles is often a joint transaction carried out between two or more individuals. For example, employment is typically a joint decision between employer and employee (Sørensen and Kalleberg 1981), college entrance is a joint decision between student applicants and college admission committees, and entrance into professional crime rings is often a joint process of inquiry and recruitment (Sutherland 1937; Letkemann 1973). Similarly, selection out of roles can also be a joint decision: for example, the decision to divorce or separate at a particular time is often determined jointly by spouses, or the decision to leave a criminal organization may be a joint decision among members. In each case, the transaction entails role-taking, as interactants take the role of the other in a process of developing a joint definition of the situation, and work toward a given outcome. The outcome will be governed by the emergent dynamics of the interaction, in which interactants consider the

perspectives of the other in light of the immediate circumstances, drawing upon past experiences to fit behavior together and attain a future objective.

Individuals lacking qualities or skills that social roles require will be unlikely to be selected into such roles. Through the interactional process of being denied entrance into various roles, the individual is likely to adjust by externalizing failure, devaluing the role, or internalizing failure, and blaming himself. They may have no alternatives to less-desirable positions, and may also develop a preference for such positions. The clearest example of this is given by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), who argue that persons who are impulsive, unskilled, unable to plan or delay gratification, and preoccupied with risk-taking are unlikely to succeed at conventional activities, such as school, jobs, and family life, and at the same time unable to control their criminality. But for Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), the effects of life-course transitions are spuriously related to criminal behavior: each is entirely determined by a stable individual personality trait they term "low self control." We argue that selection into life-course events such as high school dropout, unemployment, and divorce may result from an interactional process that reflects in part prior individual characteristics—including mutable elements of the self—but that those events and their attendant roles directly effect criminality by changing opportunities, resources, reference groups, and therefore, elements of the self that in part selected the events in the first place (Thornberry 1987). Thus, there may be a long-term tendency toward cumulative continuity, in which individual characteristics select for roles and events which reinforce those characteristics (Caspi, et al. 1987).

Social roles may have disparate effects on criminal behavior depending on the specific role and the type of criminal offense examined. Here a simple typology of social roles is useful: (1) social roles that are overwhelmingly conventional (e.g., schoolteacher); (2) social roles that typically include specific forms of criminal behavior (e.g., college fraternity member); and (3) criminal roles in which some form of sustained crime is a defining characteristic (e.g., gang member). Net of individual characteristics, conventional social roles can affect crime in several ways. The most important mechanism is through their effects on reference groups, generalized others, and perspectives. Reference groups are often attached to social roles in that the group supports the behavior and expectations of the role. Thus, repeated positive interaction with a refer-

ence group corresponding to a role will increase one's commitment to the role. For example, employment in a firm brings the employee into contact with other employees who serve as a reference group. Role commitment, in turn, will on average reduce the likelihood of behaviors that may be inconsistent with the role or even jeopardize the role, such as crime (e.g., Sampson and Laub 1992). But the effect of commitment on crime may be contingent on the meaning of the role in relation to crime. For example, developing a committed marriage to a criminal spouse may increase the likelihood of criminal behavior. Having a child may have very different meanings for an impoverished inner-city family than an affluent family. These different meanings may be consequential for crime. For the impoverished family, having a child may increase pressure for welfare fraud or theft, whereas for the affluent family, having a child may increase commitment to the family unit. Some conventional social roles may carry expectations or tolerances for certain forms of criminal behavior, such as employee theft, embezzlement, or violations of affirmative action laws. Here, developing a commitment to the role may reduce the likelihood of crime in general, while increasing the likelihood of a specific role-related criminal act.

In contrast, criminal roles operate very differently. Because sustained criminal behavior is a defining characteristic of the role, increased commitments will increase those role-specific offenses, net of the individual characteristics that selected for the role. Role-commitments are built up through interacting with other members of the criminal group and successfully committing criminal acts (Elliott, Huizinga, and Ageton 1985; Elliott, et al. 1989). Again, the meaning of the role is critical, which explains why some roles select for certain crimes, like insider-trading or embezzlement, and not others, like gang violence. Criminal roles may affect one's general attitudes toward deviant behavior, and thus generalize to other forms of crime as well. The meaning of the role entails how one sees oneself from the standpoint of significant others, attitudes toward the role, and role-expectations, and operates through the process of role-taking. Continuity in and commitment to criminal roles are also affected by interactions with conventional society, which may reinforce the role through negative labeling. For example, convicted criminals have difficulties returning to conventional society because of the stigma of their status (e.g., Irwin 1970). Negative labeling may make it difficult to find employment, increasing the likelihood of resuming a criminal role.

That is, net of individual characteristics that handicap them on the labor market, the negative reactions to their prior criminal roles may contribute to cumulative continuity.

#### *Role Trajectories and Duration-Dependent Mechanisms*

For a theory of crime to take a developmental or life-course approach, it must specify not only the effects of roles and transitions on crime, but also specify duration-dependent causal mechanisms (Featherman and Lerner 1985). One way of framing this discussion is to follow Daniel Nagin's (Nagin and Paternoster 1991; Nagin and Farrington 1992) lead and apply Heckman's (1981) distinction between state dependence versus population heterogeneity to crime (see also Sampson and Laub 1993). Heckman (1981) argued that continuity in events, like spells of unemployment or poverty, can be explained by individual differences that remain stable over time (population heterogeneity) or by changes directly brought about by the earlier event, like changes in preferences, constraints, or prices (state dependence). Nagin and his colleagues apply this to crime, noting that persistent criminality can be due to individual characteristics that select for crime (heterogeneity), like low self-control, biological characteristics, or relatively stable structural characteristics like social class, as well as mechanisms that result from the *event* of committing a crime, such as secondary deviance, specific deterrence, and social learning.<sup>3</sup> They find support for state dependence and rule out inertia or mere habit (Nagin and Paternoster 1991), but elsewhere find more support for heterogeneity over state dependence (Nagin and Paternoster 1992).<sup>4</sup>

State dependence can be further decomposed into two components identified by Caspi et al. (1987): cumulative continuity, in which maladaptive behavior increasingly channels an individual into environments that sustain the behavior; and interactional continuity, in which maladaptive behavior is responded to by others (in reciprocal social interaction) in ways that maintain the behavior (see also Sampson and Laub 1993). The former refers to a sorting process into structural positions, while the latter refers to sorting into interactional sequences. We argued above that a symbolic interactionist perspective implies that both selection into social roles (due to individual heterogeneity) and the social role itself (state dependence) should affect subsequent role transitions and behavioral outcomes, like crime and deviance. Moreover, the mechanism by which

individuals select into roles and positions is the self, which itself is in part socially constituted in interactions. This is consistent with Moffitt's (1993) view that life-course persistent delinquents may begin with neuropsychological deficits and temperament problems, which selects them into structural positions conducive to labeling and antisocial behavior, and results in interactions in which they fail to learn prosocial alternatives. She suggests that adolescence-limited delinquents tend to imitate the delinquent acts of life-course persistent peers in an effort to establish autonomy and maturity. Our view is also consistent with Sampson and Laub's (1993) findings that adult social roles affect adult criminality net of childhood delinquency, temperament, and low self control, and contrasts with the position of Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) who argue that stability in crime should be the result of heterogeneity in the form of the trait of low self-control.

Within this framework, we can specify duration-dependent hypotheses. One source of hypotheses stems from variation in the process of selection into social roles. Selection can vary in the degree to which it is systematic versus random. Thus, selection is often very systematic as previously discussed, a process of interaction involving self-selection and other-selection. But at other times, selection into roles can be the result of stochastic processes, in which other-selection is minimal and self-selection is either minimal or dominated by the "I," the impulsive component of the self. We can hypothesize that the stronger the systematic component of the selection process, the greater the correspondence between the individual's characteristics (including temperament, constitution, impulses) and social self (including one's generalized other), and the social role. The result is that subsequent commitment to the role will be stronger, increasing role-continuity over time. Conversely, the stronger the stochastic component of selection, the greater the discontinuity between individual characteristics and the social role. The result is that the individual is less likely to fit in with reference groups associated with the new role, less likely to come to identify with the role, and therefore, more likely to seek a role change. Duration in the role will be short. This process would be even more extreme in the unlikely case in which systematic selection produces mismatches between individual and role.

Similarly, when the selection into social roles is primarily self-selection rather than other-selection, there should be a greater fit between the self and the role, and a greater motivation to develop a commitment to

the role. This should increase the duration of the role. Of course, the mere fact of self-selection does not guarantee a fit between an individual and a role; this hypothesis holds only net of other qualifications, skills, and attributes for the role. Conversely, when selection is primarily other-selection, the individual may not fit as well (because others do not have access to full information on the biographical history of the individual) and may be less-motivated to stay in the role. For example, a youth who selects into a delinquent gang because he has strongly aspired to gain the status of a gang member is more likely to stay in the gang than someone who was uninterested in the gang, but was selected out of propinquity. The first youth is more likely to fit in with the gang, adopt its perspective, and fulfill its role-expectations.

Net of the individual characteristics (heterogeneity) that selected an individual into the role, a variety of events occur that affect commitment to the role and, thus, duration (state dependence). The most important is a change in reference groups. This in turn leads to changes in the self as viewed from the standpoint of others, increasing the likelihood of role-behavior and commitment to the role. Thus, a transition into a subcultural delinquent role may increase negative labeling by conventional institutions, increase status and identities based on subcultural norms and behavior, and perhaps increase objective opportunities to perform the new role-behavior. Finally, the consequences of role-specific behaviors will affect role continuity and commitment: positive psychic and material returns from a criminal role will increase identification with the role, while negative returns will decrease identification.

It follows that, all else constant, the longer the waiting time in a conventional or criminal role, the greater the likelihood of commitment and the lesser the likelihood of change. In other words, if we define an individual hazard rate of role-continuity as a latent variable representing the propensity to remain in the role per unit of time, the hazard averaged across individuals should increase with duration in the role. This is because there will be greater time for interactions based on the role, performance of role-behavior, and communications with a role-specific reference group. The result is that the self will increasingly become tied to the role. But for those individuals who are mismatched to the role, interactions and role-performance will be negative, resulting in the opposite effect. Mismatched individuals will have short role-durations, as they seek to exit the role. Moreover, the longer they remain in the role (are unsuccessful

ful in exiting), the greater the negative interactions and the greater the likelihood of a role-transition. Thus, the effect of role-duration on the hazard or a role-transition is conditional on being mismatched to the role. Furthermore, even for those well-matched, at some point increase in commitment will be offset by countervailing processes, such as reaching a saturation point of interest, reaching a point of diminishing returns, or reaching a point in which the physiological effects of aging begin to hamper adequate role-performance and therefore, attainment of rewards. The result is that, on average, hazards for role-continuity will begin to decline increasingly over time, causing the aggregate of hazards to trace out a curve that resembles the age-crime curve: a sharp increase early in the role, followed by a slow decline over time. Of course, a role-transition can involve exiting a role and entering a new role(s), or adding a new role(s) to one's constellation of role-relationships. Regardless of whether one exits the original role when entering a new role(s), such transitions involve a process of competing risks among possible roles. Thus, individual role-trajectories are summary statements of individual hazard rates of competing risks among social roles, which from our standpoint, are socially constituted in interactions. And, as Hagan and Palloni (1988) show, the age-crime curve is an aggregate of individual trajectories of criminality versus other social roles. We can examine these trajectories by examining their constituents: age-graded or development-graded role transitions through the life course. These transitions typically occur during major life stages: childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

### Child Development and Antisocial Behavior

#### *Interaction, Identity Formation, and Deviant Behavior in Early Childhood*

Social control rests on the ability to take the role of the other, which requires the acquisition of language, or significant symbols that call out the functionally identical response in self and others (Miller 1973). After young children have developed language skills, an important development with respect to antisocial behavior is the learning of the significant symbol, the directive, "No," which distinguishes appropriate and inappropriate behavior from the standpoint of others. In addition, the social self begins to emerge through rudimentary role-taking, in which children

begin to label and differentiate themselves from others (Hewitt 1987). As children experience a wider range of situations, particularly those outside the family setting (e.g., preschool or play with other children), their ability to take the perspectives of others improves (Denzin 1972). Role-taking now takes the form of play-acting, in which children perform discrete roles serially, such as playing mother, doctor, nurse (Mead 1934). At this stage, the child is not cognizant of the larger social group in which the role is embedded and takes the role of the other without considering relationships to larger social groups, such as the family or hospital staff. Social control, then, at the age of three or four, consists of a serial process of considering the reactions of concrete significant others, like mother, father, best friend, teacher, and so on. The identities that emerge at this stage are restricted largely to gender identity, body image, and personal characteristics (Keller, Ford, and Meacham 1978). Such embryonic identities are unstable, changing easily with situational context. Nevertheless, they can set up patterns of self-reflection that extend throughout the life course (Demo 1992). Indeed, the identities that begin to form during the preschool years can be consequential for future roles and identities. It follows that young children who become accustomed to seeing themselves as "bad kids" or "troublemakers" through the eyes of others are likely to perceive negative appraisals from others as they age, which can increase the chances for forming a delinquent identity in later years.

By the time children are five or six years old, their cognitive capabilities have matured to the point where they can view situations from the perspectives of a variety of others, including teachers, peers, and parents, and anticipate the reactions of others to certain lines of action (Entwistle, et al. 1987). Their developing cognitive capabilities also allow for the emergence of a stable set of attitudes toward the self by this time, which we can think of as the "core" self-concept (Demo 1992). Research shows that children who have developed a core self-image as a "bad kid" through taking the roles of their parents, teachers, and peers are more likely than children who view themselves as "good kids" to intentionally break rules at home and school because misbehavior is consistent with their identities (Matsueda 1992). Misbehavior, of course, perpetuates others' appraisals and reflected appraisals as a "bad kid," increasing the chances of future deviance (Matsueda 1992). Conversely, children who have come to see themselves as "good kids" through the

eyes of others will be relatively unlikely to violate rules and norms, prompting further appraisals by others and reflected appraisals as a good kid and making future rule violation less likely. This labeling process occurring early in life can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies.

From our perspective, labeling of children does not occur in a vacuum but reflects objective characteristics of children, like abilities, temperaments, and constitutions. For example, intelligent, sociable preschoolers tend to have more positive interactions with caretakers than other children, which can produce positive labels and self-images (MacKinnon and King 1988). The relationship between objective characteristics and interactional environments reflects a three-pronged selection process (e.g., Scarr and McCartney 1983). First, when children are very young, parents likely play a large role in creating the association between characteristics and interactional environments—parents presumably share with their children genotypes related to intelligence and sociability and therefore select environments for their children that to some extent are "matched" to such characteristics. Second, intelligent, sociable children may themselves evoke positive responses from others because of the value given to these characteristics in our culture. By contrast, less intelligent, reticent children may evoke fewer positive responses and more negative responses. Third, bright, sociable children may themselves seek out positive interactions with others. The outcome is that intelligent and sociable children are more likely to find themselves in social environments that reward these attributes and accordingly begin to develop corresponding identities. By contrast, less intelligent, less socially skilled, and temperamental children may receive negative sanctions rather than rewards for these attributes, and thus, develop negative identities.

We can imagine that parents will channel temperamental children into interactions that reinforce such tendencies, and that temperamental children will evoke negative responses from others and will themselves initiate or select into interactions in which others perceive them to be "difficult children" or "troublemakers." Indeed, research finds that temperamental, aggressive children who are not socially responsive tend to evoke coercive and erratic responses from parents, which increases antisocial behavior (Keller and Bell 1979; Patterson 1982; Lytton 1990; Patterson, Reid, and Dishion 1992). We argue that such responses to children increase negative labeling, which can set in motion a self-fulfilling prophecy leading to behavioral trajectories that "move against the world,"

including later delinquency (see Caspi, et al. 1987; Moffitt 1993). A similar process may account for the greater likelihood of future delinquency among children with attention-deficit disorders (Moffitt 1990; White, et al. 1990). In short, characteristics that lead to selection into particular environments during early childhood can have implications for labeling and reflected appraisals. When reflected appraisals from a variety of sources converge on a common self-image, they become a core part of self and thus, have significant consequences for future trajectories of deviance versus conformity.

Another clear example of the selection process is the influence of sex on interactional environments. Parents view and treat infants differently on the basis of sex from the time they are born, thereby creating different social environments for males and females and initiating the formation of gender identity (see Cahill 1980). After gender identity emerges, children become active agents in gender role construction by seeking out situations in which they test and learn to express gender identity. Also, the biological fact of being male or female evokes quite different reactions and expectations from the others with whom children interact, such as families, teachers, and peers (see Goffman 1977; Cahill 1980). As in the case of ability and temperament, this three-pronged selection process leads to the formation of gender identity. Because our culture defines female antisocial behavior more negatively than male antisocial behavior, strong gender identity should reduce the chances of future delinquency among females but not males (Schur 1983; Heimer, 1996).

Such selection processes are conditioned by social structure. Parents with greater access to financial resources can mitigate the negative consequences for their temperamental children. And, differences in parenting styles across social class are likely consequential when parents select environments for their children based on children's attributes, like intelligence, sociability, or attention-deficit disorders.

Consequently, abilities, temperaments, constitutions, and social structure influence selection into interactional environments, which influence children's reflected appraisals, definitions of deviance, and anticipated reactions for deviance. For example, selection into an environment in which parental supervision is lax can attenuate the learning of moral principles from parents and increase the learning of antisocial motives from peers. Research provides partial support for this argument: (1) Difficult children, with histories of temper tantrums, are supervised less

closely than other children and are more likely to break rules and laws (Sampson and Laub 1993: 91); and (2) selection processes result in less supervision for boys than girls and hence, higher rates of male than female delinquency (Jensen and Eve 1976; Hagan, Simpson, and Gillis 1987). The weaker supervision of boys and temperamental children increases delinquency by reducing the learning of conventional morals and enhancing the learning of delinquent definitions from peers. Also, the stronger the emotional connection between parent and child, the more likely the child is to consider the parent's reactions to delinquency—which presumably would be negative, averaged across persons—when they negotiate definitions of situations through role-taking (Heimer and Matsueda 1994; see also Hewitt, 1989:118).

Overall, we can specify a developmental hypothesis based on the discussion in this section. In early childhood, the negotiation of antisocial definitions of situations are influenced largely by impulses of the "I" and concrete others who are present in the immediate situation, but not abstract others who are not present. So, in a group of peers playing aggressively, children will be apt to behave similarly regardless of potential reactions by parents. By middle childhood (ages of nine to eleven), children's cognitive capabilities have developed sufficiently to allow them to grasp the notion of multiple explanations for behavior (Demo 1992). Here the child can recognize multiple and perhaps competing definitions of rule and norm-violating behaviors. Thus, children negotiate definitions of situations by simultaneously considering the perspectives of a variety of others, such as parents, teachers, and peers, who may be physically absent.

#### *Generalized Others, Social Networks, Peer Groups, and Delinquency*

By middle childhood, then, youths are capable of taking the perspectives of generalized others or reference groups. During the game stage of the development of self, a child is able to take the role of an abstract organized group, locate him or herself within the group, and consider the attitudes, rules, and expectations relating the child to other group roles. Mead's (1934) favorite example of the game is a baseball game, in which a pitcher must hold the attitudes of all incumbents of positions, including the batter, the catcher, the managers, and the other fielders. He is able to take the role of the abstract group, including the rules, norms, and expect-

tations to organize the various roles. Involvement in antisocial peer groups has parallel consequences. Thus, the member of an antisocial peer group will be more likely to engage in group delinquency because the generalized other is organized around deviant behavior. As the child participates in increasingly diverse and broad groups, its generalized other broadens and diversifies. Continuity in generalized others (the "me") results in stability in self. But, the self also changes over time with changes in group participation and novel solutions (the "I") to problematic situations.

Children's generalized others likely reflect the perspectives of both families and peers, which at times conflict (Hewitt 1989:118; Heimer and Matsueda 1994). By middle childhood, however, the influence of peer groups is intensified and the influence of parents wanes (Thornberry, et al. 1991; Demo 1992). Peer interactions become crucial contexts for children's interpretations of their worlds, resulting in peer cultures that are essential for the development of the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in the adult world. In short, peers become at least as important as adults in the socialization process (Corsaro 1992:162).

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, peer groups are essential to antisocial behavior during childhood and adolescence because they shape identities and communicate cultural definitions of deviance. Once again, selection is important. Although parents influence selection into peer groups through supervision (Matsueda and Heimer 1987), selection by the peer groups and self-selection become more important by middle and late childhood. Thus, highly aggressive boys are rejected by conventional peer groups (Dishion 1990) and are likely to associate with other antisocial children (Dishion, et al. 1991; Vuchinich, Bank, and Patterson 1992). They are less likely to consider the perspectives of conventional peer groups and are more likely to take the role of the antisocial peer group in problematic situations. Consequently, these youths will continue to react to difficult situations aggressively and their antisocial and aggressive behavior will appear stable over time. When selection into deviant peer groups is systematic rather than random, stability in antisocial behavior may be due in large part to preexisting individual differences, or heterogeneity.

At other times, selection can be stochastic. For example, youths may be "falsely accused" of being troublemakers in school or fortuitously sorted into an antisocial peer group. If such stochastic processes lead youths to enact deviant or antisocial roles, the mere fact of role-occu-

pancy *itself* can create stability in antisocial behavior through processes producing state dependence. By virtue of their group status, these youths may be further labeled as troublemakers, come to identify with the delinquent group, and learn delinquent attitudes and values.

Similarly, when youths select into peer groups that are organized against law violation, taking the role of these groups produces attitudes and identities that conflict with antisocial behavior. Again, such selection may be based on strong matching between the characteristics of youths and conventional groups and at other times may be approximately random. Strong selection into these groups would occur when youths have learned to conform to the expectations of authority figures, when youths' scholastic performance is encouraged and they develop commitments to academics, or when other characteristics of youths are strongly compatible with those of peer groups organized against delinquency. Interestingly, gender plays a strong role here. Boys' peer groups are integrated by the excitement derived from rule-violation, while girls' groups are integrated by sharing intimacies and secrets with each other (Thorne and Luria 1986). Boys gain status in their peer groups through the display of "toughness" and "coolness," while girls gain status through their physical appearances, social skills, and academic success (Adler, Kless, and Adler 1992). Consequently, girls are more likely than boys to select into groups that are organized against antisocial behavior.

Finally, the more systematic the role selection, the greater the match between the individual and the group, and therefore, the greater the future role-commitments and role-continuity. And, the longer the duration in a role, the greater the future continuity—until a major triggering event occurs. This is because the identities formed in interaction with groups become stable over time, persons are motivated to maintain stable self-images, and consequently, seek further interaction with these groups. It is also because other reference groups, such as parents and teachers, label youths, reducing the chances of transitions out of peer group roles. And, role transitions also become more difficult the longer one enacts a role because behavior becomes scripted, automatic, and nonreflective (Heimer and Matsueda 1994). This suggests that youths who have developed strong conventional or deviant role-identities will be likely to continue such trajectories during adolescence unless some major events occur to alter such trajectories. Other youths may be more susceptible to transitions across deviant and conventional groups.

### Adolescence, Delinquency, and Youth Crime

Pubertal change is often viewed as an important trigger in the transition from childhood to adolescence. Indeed, adolescence is commonly seen as a period in which biological changes dramatically outpace social development, thus requiring great social adjustment. In addition, the transition from childhood to adolescence also involves a transition from elementary school to middle school and high school environments. These major biological and social changes create stress and contribute to the "difficulties" of adolescence (Simmons and Blyth 1987). One of the major adjustments that occurs during this period is the development of a stable identity (Erikson 1968) that allows the youth to align previous conceptions of self with current social, physical, and physiological changes. This requirement causes adolescents to be unusually egocentric and preoccupied with the evaluations and thoughts of their significant others and reference groups (Elkind 1967).

Understanding adolescence, then, requires a perspective that acknowledges the importance of biological as well as social development. A symbolic interactionist perspective can recognize both. From this viewpoint, biological tendencies, such as those accompanying puberty, set the context in which social interactions unfold. Indeed, physical and hormonal changes can create impulses, needs, or desires, which trigger role-taking; yet, the potency of such impulses is determined by the *meaning* that they are given when youths take themselves as objects from the perspectives of others (see Simmons and Blyth 1987). Thus, biological factors shape behavior principally through reflective thought, in which they are defined and examined by the individual.

This means that the dramatic physical and physiological changes that occur during this period create impulses or needs that are symbolized in identity crises, preoccupation with appraisals by others, and psychological stress, which in turn prompt delinquency when role-taking suggests that impulses and needs may be satisfied by delinquency. Physiological changes will have the largest impact on identity crises, reflected appraisals of self, and stress when they are "off-time." For instance, children that mature earlier or later than their peers must negotiate identities in light of off-time hormonal changes, growth spurts, voice changes, and the development of acne. Given that most youths emancipate from parents during this time (Montemayor 1983), the peer group becomes an

especially important generalized other for giving meaning to physical changes (or lack of change). In some cases, the meaning given to maturational processes increases the chances of delinquency. Youths who experience early growth spurts may feel more comfortable interacting with older peers, who are of similar physical size, and may be more willing to engage in delinquency if this translates into acceptance by the group. For example, Caspi et al. (1993) find that early onset of pubertal changes (menarche) increases adolescent female delinquency in coed schools but not all-girl schools. They hypothesize that girls experiencing early menarche in coed schools associate with older delinquent boys, who influence them into delinquency. This mechanism does not occur in all-girl schools, since girls lack opportunities to associate with older boys. We would argue that the association and learning process entails role-taking with a reference group of older boys. In general, the important arenas for role-taking during adolescence are the school and peer group (e.g., Demo 1992).

#### *Student Roles and the Social Organization of the School*

Since the advent of mandatory education and child labor laws, the role of student and the social institution of the school have become central to the lives of adolescents, and thus, constitute a primary arena in which identities are formed (Coleman 1961; Greenberg 1977; Platt 1977). The social organization of the school, as a haven of development and learning, has a positive impact on the identities of most youths. For instance, the school provides youths with opportunities to develop academic skills within the classroom and social skills within extracurricular activities, such as organized sports, band, special interest, and leadership groups. When youths have experienced repeated successes in these arenas earlier in childhood, they will have developed identities premised on commitments to student roles, which they seek to maintain during adolescence. Consequently, the trajectories of conventional students, initiated in previous years, can continue into adolescence when youths continue to work for good grades and become further involved in extracurricular activities (Schafer and Polk 1967; Wiatrowski, Hansell, Massey, and Wilson 1982). These youths are relatively unlikely to adopt delinquent lines of action when they consider the perspectives of their teachers, other committed students, and the school (Heimer and Matsueda 1994).

By contrast, when youths have failed in the classroom or in extracurricular activities, they are less likely to view themselves positively from the perspectives of teachers and schools. Indeed, poor performance in the classroom and the absence of positive experiences with extracurricular activities can have devastating consequences for self-esteem, given the importance of the school and student roles during adolescence. This can be exacerbated when poor performance leads to failure to be promoted to the next grade and the youth is off-time in terms of age-graded transitions in comparison to peers. Under these circumstances, we can expect weak commitment to student roles, lack of motivation to perform well academically, and generally, alienation from school. Teachers are likely to view these youths in a negative light, which youths perceive through role-taking. This, in turn, heightens alienation and increases the chances of selection into groups of other alienated students (Menard and Morse 1984) in an attempt to repair a damaged identity (Kaplan 1980). In groups of similarly alienated peers, then, youths encourage one another to "reject the rejecters" (Sykes and Matza 1957), and innovate attitudes and behaviors that are counter to those supported by the school. When confronted with problematic situations, these youths are more likely than committed students to jointly negotiate delinquent lines of action.

The outcome of this labeling process can be seen in studies of academic tracking in schools. Students assigned to college tracks perform better and have a greater chance of high school graduation, even when factors that account for initial selection into track (e.g., ability) are controlled (Gamoran and Mare 1989). Net of social class and ability, students assigned to low and average ability tracks are viewed more negatively by teachers and classmates, have lower aspirations, have more negative self-images, are more alienated, and are more likely to drop out than their high track counterparts (e.g., Oakes 1985; Schafer and Olexa 1971). From an interactionist perspective, students in lower tracks are more likely than those in higher tracks to form reflected appraisals as poor students, which can be expected to hinder the development of strong commitments to academic roles and schooling. These youths, then, are more likely drop out of school and more likely to select into peer groups that encourage law violation. The general practice of ranking students may cause identity problems for students ranked on the bottom. In some ways, schools, like total institutions, seek to break down the identities youth bring to school, and reconstitute them in ways consistent with the

ideology of achievement and the social control requirements of the school (Goffman 1961). Ironically, the degradation ceremonies in schools often exacerbate the problems of control, causing threats to identity and encouraging rebellion to restore self-images (Greenberg 1977).

Other aspects of the social organization of schooling contribute to alienation from conventional school roles. The first of these stems from our cultural definitions of adolescence, which emphasize conflicting values like moral maturity versus social irresponsibility, social concern versus egocentrism, and laudable ideals versus childish misbehavior (Kett 1977). While we expect *children* to be obedient, we expect *adolescents* to begin exercising their own judgement at some times, but yet not at others. Such contradictions are embodied in the social organization of the school. For example, through policies such as hall passes, bathroom monitoring, and dress codes, the school strips youths of autonomy and denies them the opportunity to demonstrate moral and social responsibility (Greenberg 1977). This presents a dilemma for youths when they take the perspective of the school in general, and specific teachers in particular: they are aware that the school simultaneously expects maturity and immaturity from them. Concretely, this means that when youths encounter novel situations, the likely social consequences for any given line of action will be unclear—sometimes responsibility and independence may be rewarded, and at other times, it may be negatively sanctioned. When the consequences for behavior are unclear, the likelihood of deviant behavior increases.

Social class can condition the interactionist process linking the school, role-taking, and delinquency. For instance, based on his study of working class British students, Willis (1977) argues that working-class cultural capital—norms, values, skills, speech patterns, demeanor, and practices—is devalued in schools, which instead reward and value middle-class cultural capital. Indeed, some argue that the typical language patterns used in schools are compatible with middle class but not working-class socialization, thereby communicating to youths a devaluing of working-class cultural capital from the outset (Meehan 1992). Through taking the role of teachers and the school itself, working-class youngsters become aware that their cultural capital is not valued highly and that success in the school setting would be difficult. Youths then act upon this knowledge by selecting into oppositional peer groups, which reproduce and revel in working-class culture and reject the academic

achievement orientation of the school (Cohen 1955; Willis 1977). Eventually, the peer group becomes a much more important generalized other than teachers and schools, and these youths engage in activities that produce skills associated with working class rather than middle-class jobs. Finally, the emergent normative codes of oppositional peer groups may promote rejection of other middle-class values, such as the value given to private property, which increases the chances of delinquency among working class youths (Cohen 1955).

#### *Peer Roles and the Social Organization of Peer Groups*

Within adolescent peer groups, attention is largely focused on acceptance, status, and group solidarity (Corsaro and Eder 1990). Gossip and evaluation of group members becomes a primary activity, reinforcing membership and definitions of appropriate behavior from the perspective of the group (Eder and Enke 1991). Indeed, daily interactions with peer groups allow youths to constitute norms about appearance, friendship, sexuality, and achievement, which youths subsequently consider through role-taking when they negotiate identities and lines of action. In this way, peer groups are an important source of social control during adolescence.

In addition to reinforcing group solidarity and controlling members' behaviors, a common theme in adolescent peer groups is resistance and rebellion against adult rules (Wulff 1988). Reactance against adult authority may be due to the inherent contradictions in adolescence, such as pressures to conform and exert independence. Because it affords youths with autonomy and personal control, such reactance may be a "universal feature of peer culture" during adolescence (Corsaro and Eder 1990). Thus, when youths consider the perspectives of peer groups, they are quite likely to rebel against rules. And, because delinquency represents an extreme form of resistance to authority, peer group processes may explain part of the peak in crime during adolescence (Warr 1993). These arguments are consistent with the empirical finding that association with delinquent peers is a robust and powerful predictor of law violation during adolescence (e.g., Warr and Stafford 1991; Elliott and Menard in press; Matsueda and Heimer 1987).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, delinquent peers can increase the likelihood of delinquency via role-taking by fostering identities as troublemakers and transmitting definitions favorable to delinquency (Heimer and Matsueda 1994).

But what determines selection into delinquent peer groups? A critical factor is prior behavior. Indeed, deviant youths actively seek out similar peers (Billy and Udry 1985) and, therefore, actively shape their own future role-taking and delinquent behavior (Heimer and Matsueda 1994). Other social psychological factors contribute to the selection of peer groups: youths who are strongly committed to student roles, whose families disapprove of law violation, and whose parents offer warm and supportive emotional environments will be less likely to select into delinquent groups (Elliott, et al. 1985, 1989; Thornberry, et al. 1991).

Structural features of community organization also affect selection into delinquent peer groups. For instance, the opportunity structures of communities—such as the opportunities for getting a good education and landing a job that pays well—are consequential for the emergence of delinquent groups and gangs (Vigil 1985; Hagedorn 1985; Sullivan 1989; Hagan 1991). Specifically, when opportunities for economic success through legitimate avenues are not available, youths may adapt by forming deviant subcultures (Cohen 1955; Cloward and Ohlin 1960). Youths who live in communities where legitimate opportunities are blocked and delinquent gangs are common are more likely to interact with and take the perspectives of persons who favor law violation as a way to satisfy needs. Thus, a structural feature of communities—the availability of educational and occupational opportunities—is consequential for the formation of delinquent groups, which in turn, influence role-taking and delinquency.

Cultural features of communities also may be consequential for delinquent group formation and role-taking. In structurally disadvantaged communities where adults do not sanction delinquency, crime can come to be defined as an acceptable mechanism for generating income or acceptable "work" (Sullivan 1989). In some structurally disadvantaged communities, characteristics such as toughness, smartness, and machismo become valued cultural capital, which can be translated into status in subcultures and lead to delinquency (see Miller 1958; Vigil 1985). Entrance into gangs can then involve a matching process, focused on norms of toughness, risk-taking, courage, honor, and negative attitudes toward law enforcement (Horowitz 1983). Once a tradition of delinquent groups is established in a community, the likelihood that other youths will come into contact with such groups, and consider their perspective through role-taking, is increased. And, there may be significant pressures to affiliate with gangs in communities where long-standing traditions exist.

For example, many youths are recruited into gangs by older siblings or other relatives and move through the gang in a series of age-graded cliques. Indeed, gang membership often is viewed as indicating commitment to the larger community, neighborhood, and even ethnic group (Vigil 1985).

### Adulthood, Adult Roles, and Crime

Adulthood marks a series of significant changes for individuals, as they take on more responsibility, develop commitments to adult social roles, and accommodate to the effects of physiological aging. At the same time, however, the transition to adulthood is marked by continuity with adolescence. Patterns of behavior in adolescence trace a trajectory that influences the transition to adulthood by affecting access to resources, selection into adult roles, and consequently the likelihood of adult crime. The most important adult roles, family and work, are important for criminality in two ways: as causal forces that affect criminal behavior net of individual characteristics, and as noncausal states that are spuriously correlated with criminality due to causal characteristics of individuals selecting both crime and adult roles.

#### *Family Roles: Marriage and Parenthood*

Conventional wisdom suggests that getting married and becoming a parent will have a negative effect on criminality. Some research supports this proposition that marriage reduces crime and antisocial behavior (Gibbens 1984; Rand 1987), although the effect may be age-graded, applying more to delayed than early marriages (West 1982; Farrington 1986). Sampson and Laub (1993) argue that the key to adult criminality is the degree of bonding to conventional institutions, which operate to control individual behavior. They find that criminality is affected not by marriage per se, but instead by attachment to spouse, measured by attitudes toward marital responsibility, attitudes about the conjugal relationship, and the absence of divorce, separation, and desertion. Similarly, Quinton et al. (1993) find that having a supportive spouse reduces adult criminality for both males and females (see also Pickles and Rutter 1991).

From our perspective, the important dimension of adult family roles is the meaning of the role to spouses, particularly as it is relevant to criminality. For most individuals, the greater the commitment to spousal and

parent roles—including a greater respect for the institution of marriage, a greater affection for and attachment to family members, and a stronger investment in familial activities—the lower the likelihood of criminality, since crime entails the risk of jeopardizing the functioning of the family. When confronted with opportunities for crime, the family is likely to enter role-taking as a generalized other. Committed family members are likely to take the role not only of family members, but the role of the family as a conventional institution intertwined with other institutions, and are thereby unlikely to jeopardize the family through crime. In contrast, individuals who lack commitments to family roles are less likely to share the family as a generalized other, and thus, less likely to be controlled by the family. For example, some members of the urban underclass have little belief in the sanctity of the family and little commitment to the roles of parent and spouse, and thus are vulnerable to criminalistic influences. Commitment to parenthood is perhaps the most important family influence on crime. Because crime is so counternormative and carries serious sanctions, nearly all committed parents desire that their children refrain from most crimes, particularly serious crimes. Such desires will affect their attitudes and behaviors, as they seek to be positive influences and role models, which in turn will reduce the likelihood of their own criminality.

Although commitment to family roles—a conventional set of roles—will on average reduce the likelihood of criminality, there are instances in which commitment to family roles *increases* the likelihood of crime. For example, in the relatively uncommon case in which spouses together commit crimes such as robbery, greater commitment to the spousal unit may increase the likelihood of a commitment to crime. Indeed, it is conceivable that a spouse who holds criminalistic attitudes may influence a straight spousal partner into crime. We hypothesize that such an effect, if it exists, would operate through role-taking: the straight partner would learn criminal attitudes from their spouse by taking the role of the other and considering him or herself from their standpoint. Thus, husbands holding criminalistic attitudes may influence the criminality of their wives. Sampson and Laub (1993), however, found that the opposite does not occur: deviant wives do not significantly affect the deviance of their husbands, when marital attachment is controlled. Given the gender differences in power and types of deviance, this finding is perhaps not surprising.

Any examination of the effects of family roles on parents' criminality must consider the possibility that preexisting individual characteristics or prior experiences select for both family roles and criminality, which could render the association spurious. A number of empirical studies have examined the development of family roles, which typically occurs in early adulthood through an assortative mating process in which persons are matched to cohabitation or marriage partners. These studies show that people tend to select partners based on homogamy or similarity of experience, including similarities in educational attainments, occupational status, religious preference, and deviance (e.g., Kandel 1990), with recent trends suggesting that education is replacing religion (Kalmijn 1991; Mare 1991). Thus, high school educational experiences are consequential not only for occupational attainments but also for selection of marriage partners. For example, youths who drop out of school, engage in deviance and delinquency, land unskilled low-paying jobs are likely to marry partners with similar experiences. In the previous section, we argued that youngsters who have difficulty in schools, are negatively labeled by teachers, and become alienated from schools are more likely to affiliate with similarly disenfranchised peers (including delinquent peers). Consequently, they are more likely to have self-images premised on membership in marginal and deviant youth groups, and more likely to move into unskilled, low-paying jobs and select mates with similar problems. This homogamy in mate selection may reflect propinquity, restricted structural opportunities to find other mates, or the desire to validate identities that emerged during adolescence. Either way, continued interaction with a similarly disenfranchised spouse will constrain family resources, reinforce deviant identities, and lead to a greater likelihood of deviance, marital instability, and divorce. By contrast, when homogamy is based on success in school and the labor market, spouses will likely have greater resources at their disposal, and stronger identities stressing family and work roles. This should foster marital stability and conformity.

These arguments receive some support from longitudinal research on the life trajectories of temperamental children. Specifically, research finds that men with histories of temperamental behavior during childhood are less likely to succeed in educational and occupational realms, and more likely to experience unhappy marriages. Women with histories of temperamental behavior during childhood are more likely to marry unsuc-

cessful husbands and experience unhappy marriages (Caspi et al. 1987; Elder, Caspi, and Downey 1986). Such husbands may also be at risk for more crime. Quinton et al. (1993) find homophily in deviance across the life course: those who exhibit conduct problems in childhood tend to select deviant nonsupportive partners. Moreover, they find that homophily in deviance is explained not by direct selection, but rather a series of events. Childhood conduct disorders select for deviant peers and lack of planning—and early out-of-wedlock pregnancy in girls—all of which increase the likelihood of selecting a deviant partner or spouse.

But what about the case of heterophily? Theoretically, we would expect that under certain conditions, spouses may influence each other's criminality. A criminal could be pushed into conformity by a law-abiding spouse if the spouse is highly influential, determined, and endowed with sufficient material resources, and if the criminal is receptive to change. We would argue that a process of change would entail changing the content of the criminal's role-taking and identity by changing his or her reference groups and generalized others. A similar process would account for the perhaps rarer case in which a noncriminal takes up crime after being influenced by a criminalistic spouse. Some research supports the notion of spousal influence. Quinton et al. (1993) find that although there is great continuity in deviance—child conduct disorders are highly correlated with adult maladaptation—a supportive nondeviant spouse can create significant discontinuities in deviance (see also Pickles and Rutter 1991). They find this effect for both males and females. However, Sampson and Laub (1993) fail to find evidence that deviant wives bring about deviance in conforming husbands.

The timing of transitions into or out of family roles may be critical to one's life chances and criminality. For example, teenage pregnancy can result in material needs that are beyond reach, or curtail one's educational attainment. The difficulty of such off-time transitions varies dramatically by context. When accompanied by substantial investments in social capital—such as a supportive spouse, a supportive kinship network, an adequate income, and advanced education and career opportunities—teenage pregnancy may pose few additional problems, and thus, be unrelated to criminality. In contrast, in the absence of social capital—no spouse or kinship, few marketable skills, and an inadequate income—and in the presence of other risk factors—such as a delinquent history, explosive temper, or history of drug use—teenage pregnancy can lead to

continuous problematic situations. Such problems may increase the likelihood of crime.

From an interactionist perspective, the stigma of these off-time, early transitions to parenthood can solidify deviant or marginalized identities developed during earlier life stages and, thus, increase alienation from other conventional roles, such as legitimate work roles, and encourage entry into less legitimate roles, such as welfare and even criminal roles. This implies that the high rates of school drop out, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, welfare dependency and crime among the urban underclass (Wilson 1987) may involve trajectories of commitments to deviant identities and roles that begin early in the life course, continue through adulthood, and are ultimately rooted in structural conditions.

#### *Work Roles: Labor Force Attachment*

This discussion suggests that family roles operate in conjunction with occupational and work roles to affect the likelihood of crime. From an interactionist perspective, it is the *meaning* of work that is most relevant to role-taking, identity, and deviance. When work means more than simply having a job, when it is tied to a career and a long-term commitment, when it leads to reference groups that disdain crime, and when it brings prestige and status and thus self-esteem and a positive identity, it can be an important restraint from crime. Conversely, when work is merely a temporary dead-end source of spending money, bringing little prestige and esteem, and not affecting one's reference groups, it may have little or no restraining effect on crime. Further complicating matters, work sometimes means an opportunity to commit crimes, such as employee theft or embezzlement.

A number of studies find an empirical relationship between adult employment and desistance from crime: those parolees who succeed in the labor market are less likely to recidivate (e.g., Cook 1975). Sampson and Laub (1993) find that, net of childhood antisocial behavior, job stability (employment status, stability of recent employment, and work habits) affects adult desistance from crime, not jobs per se. Uggen (1992) finds that, net of background factors and employment variables, job quality reduces criminal recidivism among adult offenders. From our perspective, job quality, employment status, recent job stability, and work habits on the job are important dimensions of the meaning of work to individu-

als. This meaning is tied to structural opportunities, the objective characteristics of jobs, reference groups, and individuals's histories of role-taking. Thus, based on reference groups and prior role-taking, a dead-end blue-collar job may mean frustration and failure to one person, and success and a reasonable livelihood to another. Although recent survey research controls for several variables that may affect both crime and employment, estimates of the work-crime relationship could still be biased due to selectivity. Individuals who select into good jobs may have a lower criminal propensity than those who select into poor jobs or no jobs at all. That is, it may be that work is related to crime not because of the experience of having a job, but rather because of the systematic ways individuals are sorted into various jobs.

This sorting or selection mechanism is often viewed as a matching process, in which prospective employees are matched to prospective jobs by employers (Sørensen and Kalleberg 1981). Clearly, the attributes and backgrounds of individuals are critical for this sorting process. Those individuals who have greater endowments, greater investments in human capital (such as years of schooling, educational credentials, and job skills), and greater social capital (such as the obligations, expectations, information channels, and norms derived from network ties), will have greater employment prospects than individuals lacking those attributes. Such investments and attributes develop early in the life course through family socialization, peer influences, and school experiences. Thus, youth who are committed to trajectories of conventional roles—educational and law-abiding peer roles—will be likely to invest in conventional human and social capital, and thereby increase their employment prospects. Youth who are committed to deviant roles—drug use and delinquent roles—are more likely to invest in criminal capital, such as developing peer networks of delinquency, crime, and drug acquisition and use. They will be less attractive to employers because they lack the positive traits signalled by conventional capital, and possess negative traits signalled by criminal capital. Research on the labeling process finds that the stigma of a criminal record makes it difficult for ex-offenders to find employment (for a discussion see Sampson and Laub's chapter in this volume).

On the other side of the equation, employers' preferences are driven by their perceptions of worker skills and abilities, but also by structural characteristics that affect demand for specific forms of labor. For example, primary sector firms are likely to have internal labor markets,

which causes employees to compete over vacancies rather than wages, insulates them somewhat from neoclassical market competition, and increases their returns to human capital as more extensive on-the-job training accentuates returns (Dickens and Lang 1985). In contrast, workers in secondary sector jobs are more vulnerable to market competition, earn lower wages, are less rewarded for human capital investments, and are more likely to end up stuck in dead-end jobs. In short, the quality of and remuneration from jobs is determined not only by individual human and social capital investments, but also structural conditions, such as access to primary sector positions. Such determinants suggest a systematic selection process into jobs, which could bias estimates of the work-crime relationship in nonexperimental data.

Some research has controlled for selectivity directly using randomized controlled experiments (see Uggen et al. 1992). The National Supported Work Demonstration Project randomly assigned subjects to a control group versus an experimental group that received jobs. Subjects were drawn from three unemployed groups at risk for crime: ex-offenders who had been incarcerated, ex-addicts who had been treated in a drug treatment facility, and youth who dropped out of school, half of whom had been arrested. A three-year follow-up revealed that, overall, the treatment was effective for ex-addicts, but not youth dropouts or ex-offenders. Moreover, there was a treatment by age-interaction effect: among ex-addicts and ex-offenders older than 35 years of age, experimentals were less likely than controls to have been arrested in the three-year follow-up period (Piliavin and Gartner 1984). The negative finding concerning younger offenders is consistent with follow-up evaluations of the Jobstart Demonstration Project (Cave and Doolittle 1991). The null overall findings may be due to the meaning of the jobs assigned to experimentals. The jobs were low-paying, uninteresting, and offered little mobility—in short, typical secondary-sector jobs—and thus, work may have been viewed as a temporary, inadequate source of economic support, while crime was viewed as a more exciting, better-paying alternative for younger offenders (Piliavin and Gartner 1984: 200). The positive experimental finding for older subjects suggests that the timing of life-course transitions may be critical to their effects on crime. Moreover, it illustrates the interaction between biological and social determinants of crime. Older offenders are physiologically slower, weaker, and less-dexterous, and perhaps are more likely to become burned out from crime than their younger counterparts. For these reasons, they are on the declining side of

the age-crime curve—on average they are more likely to desist from crime. This average decrease means that they will have less support for crime as they have fewer criminals in their reference groups. At an advanced age, jobs may provide a particularly attractive alternative to crime, thereby increasing the rate of desistance.

But having a job does not always exert a negative effect on crime. Indeed, depending on the meaning of work, the organization of work can be intimately intertwined with crime. For example, some studies estimate that over seventy-five percent of employees in legitimate jobs are involved in some form of employee theft (Henry 1981; Comer 1985). At times, stealing from a business is justified or tolerated as a “perk” to employees or as a cost simply passed on to customers (Ditton 1977). In another example, Arnold and Hagan (1992) argue that lawyer misconduct results from three structural factors: pressures to deviate due to inexperience combined with job expectations; a stratification system in which lawyers are solo practitioners at the bottom; and macroeconomic recessions. Moreover, they find that careers of misconduct unfold through interaction and labeling between offender and prosecution. Similarly, studies of embezzlers find that embezzlement often results from a financial problem and verbalizations that justify the behavior while allowing the embezzler to maintain a favorable self-image (e.g., Cressey 1973). Studies of corporate crime typically find illicit acts of corporations result from structural incentives to violate the law, organizational structures of the firm that diffuse responsibility, and a corporate culture of crime in which corporate actors justify illicit activity (e.g., Sutherland 1949; Clinard and Yeager 1980; Coleman 1987). Finally, the intertwined nature of criminal and legitimate roles, which varies by meaning, is illustrated by the case of housewives. This role excludes women from the paid labor force and thereby reduces opportunities for crimes such as employee theft, corporate crimes, and some street crimes (Simon 1976). At the same time, it increases opportunities for other crimes, such as welfare fraud, which they may view as a way of accommodating to the role of child caretaker (Steffensmeier and Cobb 1981).

#### *Joblessness and Criminal Capital*

Commitment to criminal roles in adolescence and early adulthood restricts future opportunities for legitimate employment and increases the chances for unemployment, largely by restricting networks that offer

access to legitimate jobs (Hagan 1993). Such a process can escalate over time: early involvement in crime can restrict success in the labor market and foster continued crime, which further restricts labor market options (Sullivan 1989). From an interactionist perspective, when crime is a primary source of income for long periods of time, reference groups increasingly become less conventional and more criminal, and thus role-transitions to legitimate work become more difficult and less likely. This may correspond to "life-course persistent" offenders described by Moffitt (1993). These individuals, such as professional thieves and "rounders," become increasingly committed to criminal roles and identities over time and are unlikely to change direction in trajectories (Sutherland 1937; Letkemann 1973).

When labor market success is impeded by deficits in human, social, or cultural capital, role-taking may lead to identities, goals, and morality favoring property and street crimes as viable solutions to financial problems. For example, when individuals are isolated from legitimate job opportunities, as in some urban ghettos, crimes like drug dealing may be defined as an acceptable way to earn a living (Anderson 1990). Indeed, norms can emerge that justify criminal enterprises even when legitimate work opportunities exist. In secondary labor markets, for instance, individuals often participate in legitimate work while "moonlighting" in criminal enterprises (Holzman 1983; Sullivan 1989). When individuals are committed to roles in both legitimate and criminal groups, role-taking and identities will reflect these dual commitments. Indeed, these commitments can be quite compatible. For example, young men who work in legitimate auto garages by day and also work stripping stolen cars in chop-shops by night (Sullivan 1989), are likely to form identities centered on the common features of the activities—automotive work—and deemphasize the legal-illegal dimension. Here the illegal role may be viewed as an extension of the legal counterpart.

In communities where such criminal traditions exist, we can speak of social and cultural capital that fosters success and mobility in illegal enterprises (Cloward and Chlin 1960). Thus, success in illegal markets, either in terms of monetary returns or prestige of illegal "occupations," (Matsueda et al. 1992), is determined by one's embeddedness in the criminal world. Those criminals with greater ties to criminal networks are more likely to acquire skills and experiences that facilitate returns from illegal activity and reduce the risk of sanction (Sullivan 1989; Letkemann 1973; Åkerström

1985; Reuter 1983). Through interactions with other members of a criminal world, they are likely to acquire criminal capital—the criminal argot, insider's information, and attitudes—that may increase their subcultural status (Åkerström 1985). Perhaps the extreme case of such processes surrounds organized crime families, which may contain specific cultural schemas and extensive network structures (Cressey 1969; Reuter 1983). Moreover, such embeddedness may in turn hamper the individual's success in conventional labor markets (Hagan 1991, 1993).

Prison experiences make transitions to conventional roles even more difficult. Again, length of time in the role is important: the longer periods of incarceration, the higher the probability of future crime and the lower the likelihood of transitions to legitimate work roles (Sampson and Laub 1993). While some reentering criminals may prefer to avoid legitimate roles, others will have little choice due to their criminal label. Here, net of prior propensities, negative labeling and stigmatization of official criminals, combined with reduced conventional social capital, will hamper efforts to obtain stable employment and resume stable family roles (Irwin 1970). The process of stigmatization and labeling operates through a role-taking process, in which societal members attribute stereotypical characteristics to criminals, such as having poor character, being likely to recidivate, and being dangerous. The result may be a return to those criminal subcultures that led to incarceration in the first place.

### Conclusion

This chapter has argued that symbolic interactionism can provide a fruitful way of examining crime and delinquency throughout the life course. The interactionist perspective developed here has several important features. First, it assumes a biosocial view of human behavior such that behavior occurs at the intersection between biological and environmental processes. Second, it specifies specific ways in which ontogenetic mechanisms are constituted in interactions with others. Third, it emphasizes the importance of criminal and deviant counterparts to conventional culture and organization, including criminal capital. Fourth, it implies several duration-dependent mechanisms linking social roles and criminal behavior through the major life-course transitions from childhood to adolescence and finally, to adulthood.

## Notes

1. We use the terms, "deviant subcultures" or "criminal subcultures" to refer to subcultures in which some forms of deviance or crime are widespread, tolerated, or even encouraged. Thus, we would argue that certain crimes are tolerated or the laws proscribing them are neutralized in infracultures and encouraged in contracultures (see Matsueda et al. 1992).
2. Mead's pragmatism begins with the theory of evolution, which for him, stipulated a life process in which individual organisms are adjusting to a changing environment to sustain a species. Genetic mutations are emergent (novel) adjustments (solutions) to problems posed by the environment. Reflective thinking by human beings represents the highest level of evolution, because it allows the organism to control its behavior and environment self-consciously. The novel element of reflective behavior, originating in the response of the "I" is an efficient emergent adjustment to a problem posed by a changing environment.
3. State dependence refers to being in a state, which has a duration. Criminal acts typically have very little duration. Nevertheless, one can use the concept of state dependence by treating criminal acts as discrete indicators of an unobservable state of readiness or propensity to commit crimes.
4. The contradictory results may be due to differences in datasets or more specifically the variables included in the models, and outcome variables used. Nagin and Paternoster (1991) use two waves of the National Youth Survey, which uses self-reported delinquency on adolescents and include a vector of 16 exogenous variables (e.g., peer effects, family background, violence and drugs) known to have strong effects on delinquency. It could be that these 16 variables capture most of the between-person within-time variation in delinquency, leaving the heterogeneity component trivial in size. Nagin and Farrington (1992) use 11 waves of Farrington's London Cohort Data, which uses conviction as an outcome and four substantive variables (IQ, parental child rearing, parental criminal record, and daring) in addition to age. The large unobserved heterogeneity component could be the result of the four variables capturing only modest between-person, within-time variation in crime, and the fact that no covariates are included to capture the effects of processing by the criminal justice system on convictions.
5. Control theorists argue that the correlation between delinquent peers and delinquency is spurious, a reflection of the selection into peer groups, rather than a causal relationship (e.g., Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990). Following Robins (1966), Sampson and Laub (1993) interpret their extraordinarily large correlations between delinquency and delinquent peers ("virtually coterminous") to be spurious due to selection into peer groups. The argument is based on comparing the large correlations of delinquency between peers and modest correlations of delinquency between siblings. If the peer correlations are due to causation and not selection, then sibling correlations should also be high, since there is no possibility of self-selection. We believe, however, that the premise could be faulty: it is likely that siblings simply do not have as strong an influence on youth compared to peers. A more plausible interpretation, consistent with findings of Elliott and Menard (in press), is that the correlation partly reflects causation and partly reflects selection.

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