

Accepted wisdom holds that crime is committed disproportionately by adolescents. According to data from the United States and other industrialized countries, rates of property crime and violent crime rise rapidly in the teenage years to a peak at about ages 16 and 18, respectively (Hirschi and Gottfredson, 1983; Farrington, 1986a; Flanagan and Maguire, 1990). The overrepresentation of youth in crime has been demonstrated using multiple sources of measurement—official arrest reports (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1990), self-reports of offending (Rowe and Tittle, 1977), and victims' reports of the ages of their offenders (Hindelang, 1981). It is thus generally accepted that, in the aggregate, age-specific crime rates peak in the late teenage years and then decline sharply across the adult life span.

The age-crime curve has had a profound impact on the organization and content of sociological studies of crime by channeling research to a focus on adolescents. As a result, sociological criminology has traditionally neglected the theoretical significance of childhood characteristics and the link between early childhood behaviors and later adult outcomes (Robins, 1966; McCord, 1979; Caspi et al., 1989; Farrington, 1989; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Loeber and LeBlanc, 1990; Sampson and Laub, 1990). Although criminal behavior does peak in the teenage years, evidence reviewed in this chapter indicates an early onset of delinquency as well as continuity of criminal behavior over the life course. By concentrating on the teenage years, sociological perspectives on crime have thus failed to address the life-span implications of childhood behavior.

At the same time, criminologists have not devoted much attention to the other end of the spectrum—desistance from crime and the transitions from criminal to noncriminal behavior in adulthood (Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986; Shover, 1985; Gartner and Piliavin, 1988). As

Rutter (1988: 3) argues, we know little about "escape from the risk process" and whether predictors of desistance are unique or simply the opposite of criminogenic factors. Thus, researchers have neglected not only the early life course, but also the relevance of social transitions in young adulthood and the factors explaining desistance from crime as people age.

Finally, in all phases of the life course, criminologists have largely ignored the link between social structural context and the mediating processes of informal social control. Most researchers have examined either macro-level/structural variables (for example, social class, ethnicity, mobility) or micro-level processes (for example, parent-child interactions, discipline) in the study of crime. We believe both sets of variables are necessary to explain crime, but from the existing research we do not know precisely how structural variables and the processes of informal social control are related.

In this book we confront these issues by bringing both childhood and adulthood back into the criminological picture of age and crime. To accomplish this goal, we synthesize and integrate the research literatures on crime and the life course and develop a theory of age-graded informal social control and criminal behavior. The basic thesis we develop is threefold in nature: (1) structural context mediated by informal family and school social controls explains delinquency in childhood and adolescence; (2) in turn, there is continuity in antisocial behavior from childhood through adulthood in a variety of life domains; and (3) informal social bonds in adulthood to family and employment explain changes in criminality over the life span despite early childhood propensities. Our theoretical model thus acknowledges the importance of early childhood behaviors and individual differences in self-control (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990) but rejects the implication that later adult factors have little relevance (Wilson and Herrnstein, 1985; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). In other words, we contend that social interaction with both juvenile and adult institutions of informal social control has important effects on crime and deviance. Thus, ours is a "sociogenic" model of crime and deviance that seeks to incorporate both stability and change over the life course.

We test our theoretical model through a detailed analysis of unique longitudinal data consisting of two samples of delinquent and nondelinquent boys followed from childhood and adolescence into their forties. Before describing our research strategy, we present a brief overview of the life-course perspective.

## THE LIFE-COURSE PERSPECTIVE

The life course has been defined as "pathways through the age differentiated life span," where age differentiation "is manifested in expectations and options that impinge on decision processes and the course of events that give shape to life stages, transitions, and turning points" (Elder, 1985: 17). Similarly, Caspi, Elder, and Herbener (1990: 15) conceive of the life course as a "sequence of culturally defined age-graded roles and social transitions that are enacted over time." Age-graded transitions are embedded in social institutions and are subject to historical change (Elder, 1975, 1992).

Two central concepts underlie the analysis of life-course dynamics. A *trajectory* is a pathway or line of development over the life span, such as work life, marriage, parenthood, self-esteem, or criminal behavior. Trajectories refer to long-term patterns of behavior and are marked by a sequence of transitions. *Transitions* are marked by life events (such as first job or first marriage) that are embedded in trajectories and evolve over shorter time spans—"changes in state that are more or less abrupt" (Elder, 1985: 31-32). Some transitions are age-graded and some are not; hence, what is often assumed to be important are the normative timing and sequencing of role transitions. For example, Hogan (1980) emphasizes the duration of time (spells) between a change in state and the ordering of events such as first job or first marriage on occupational status and earnings in adulthood. Caspi, Elder, and Herbener (1990: 25) argue that delays in social transitions (for example, being "off-time") produce conflicting obligations that enhance later difficulties (see also Rindfuss et al., 1987). As a result, life-course analyses are often characterized by a focus on the duration, timing, and ordering of major life events and their consequences for later social development. The interlocking nature of trajectories and transitions may generate *turning points* or a change in the life course (Elder, 1985: 32). Adaptation to life events is crucial because the same event or transition followed by different adaptations can lead to different trajectories (Elder, 1985: 35). The long-term view embodied by the life-course focus on trajectories implies a strong connection between childhood events and experiences in adulthood. However, the simultaneous shorter-term view also implies that transitions or turning points can modify life trajectories—they can "redirect paths." Social institutions and triggering life events that may modify trajectories include school, work,

the military, marriage, and parenthood (see Elder, 1986; Rutter et al., 1990; Sampson and Laub, 1990).

In addition to the study of patterns of change and the continuity between childhood behavior and later adulthood outcomes, the life-course framework encompasses at least three other themes: a concern with the social meanings of age throughout the life course, intergenerational transmission of social patterns, and the effects of macro-level events (such as the Great Depression or World War II) on individual life histories (Elder, 1974, 1985). As Elder (1992) notes, a major objective of the life-course perspective is to link social history and social structure to the unfolding of human lives. To address these themes individual lives are studied through time, with particular attention devoted to aging, cohort effects, historical context, and the social influence of age-graded transitions. Naturally, prospective longitudinal research designs form the heart of life-course research.

Of all the themes emphasized in life-course research, the extent of stability and change in behavior and personality attributes over time is probably the most complex. Stability versus change in behavior is also one of the most hotly debated and controversial issues in the social sciences (Brim and Kagan, 1980; Dannefer, 1984; Baltes and Nesselrode, 1984; Featherman and Lerner, 1985; Caspi and Bem, 1990). Given the pivotal role of this issue, we turn to an assessment of the research literature as it bears on stability and change in crime. As we shall see, this literature contains evidence for both continuity *and* change over the life course.

## STABILITY OF CRIME AND DEVIANCE

Unlike sociological criminology, the field of developmental psychology has long been concerned with the continuity of maladaptive behaviors (Brim and Kagan, 1980; Caspi and Bem, 1990). As a result, a large portion of the longitudinal evidence on stability comes from psychologists and others who study "antisocial behavior" generally, where the legal concept of crime may or may not be a component.<sup>1</sup> An example is the study of aggression in psychology (Olweus, 1979). In exploring this research tradition our purpose is to highlight the extent to which deviant childhood behaviors have important ramifications in later adult life, whether criminal or noncriminal in form.

Our point of departure is the widely reported claim that individual

differences in antisocial behavior are stable across the life course (Olweus, 1979; Caspi et al., 1987; Loeber, 1982; Robins, 1966; Huesmann et al., 1984; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Jessor et al., 1977, 1991). The stability of crime and antisocial behavior over time is often defined as *homotypic continuity*, which refers to the continuity of similar behaviors or phenotypic attributes over time (Caspi and Bem, 1990: 553). For example, in a widely cited study of the aggressiveness of 600 subjects, their parents, and their children over a 22-year period, Huesmann and colleagues (1984) found that early aggressiveness predicted later aggression and criminal violence. They concluded that "aggression can be viewed as a persistent trait that . . . possesses substantial cross-situational constancy" (1984: 1120). An earlier study by Robins (1966) also found a high level of stability in crime and aggression over time.

More generally, Olweus's (1979) comprehensive review of more than 16 studies on aggressive behavior revealed "substantial" stability: the correlation between early aggressive behavior and later criminality averaged .68 for the studies reviewed (1979: 854-855). Loeber (1982) completed a similar review of the extant literature in many disciplines and concluded that a "consensus" had been reached in favor of the stability hypothesis: "Children who initially display high rates of antisocial behavior are more likely to persist in this behavior than children who initially show lower rates of antisocial behavior" (1982: 1433). Recent empirical studies documenting stability in criminal and deviant behavior across time include West and Farrington (1977), Wolfgang et al. (1987), Shannon (1988), Elliott et al. (1985), and Jessor et al. (1991). Although perhaps more comprehensive, these findings are not new. Over 50 years ago the Gluecks found that virtually all of the 510 reformatory inmates in their study of criminal careers "had experience in serious antisocial conduct" (Glueck and Glueck, 1930: 142). Their data also confirmed "the early genesis of antisocial careers" (1930: 143). In addition, the Gluecks' follow-up of 1,000 males originally studied in *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* (1950) revealed remarkable continuities. As they argued in *Delinquents and Non-Delinquents in Perspective*: "While the majority of boys originally included in the nondelinquent control group continued, down the years, to remain essentially law-abiding, the greatest majority of those originally included in the delinquent group continued to commit all sorts of crimes in the 17-25 age-span" (1968: 170). Findings regarding behavioral or homotypic continuity are thus supported by a rich body of empirical research that

spans several decades (for more extensive discussion see Robins, 1966, 1978; West and Farrington, 1977; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). In fact, much as the Gluecks had reported earlier, Robins (1978) summarized results from her studies of four male cohorts by stating that "adult antisocial behavior virtually *requires* childhood antisocial behavior" (1978: 611).

In short, there is considerable evidence that antisocial behavior is relatively stable across stages of the life course. As Caspi and Moffitt (1992) conclude, robust continuities in antisocial behavior have been revealed over the past 50 years in different nations (for example, Canada, England, Finland, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United States) and with multiple methods of assessment (including official records, teacher ratings, parent reports, and peer nominations of aggressive behavior). These replications across time and space yield an impressive generalization that is rare in the social sciences.

Sociological approaches to crime have largely ignored this generalization and consequently remain vulnerable to attack for not coming to grips with the implications of behavioral stability. Not surprisingly, developmental psychologists have long seized on stability to argue for the primacy of early childhood and the irrelevance of the adult life course. But even recent social theories of crime take much the same tack, denying that adult life-course transitions can have any real effect on adult criminal behavior. In particular, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990: 238) argue that ordinary life events (for example, jobs, getting married, becoming a parent) have little effect on criminal behavior because crime rates decline with age "whether or not these events occur." They go on to argue that the life-course assumption that such events are important neglects its own evidence on the stability of personal characteristics (1990: 237; see also Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1987). And, since crime emerges early in the life course, traditional sociological variables (such as peers, the labor market, or marriage) are again allegedly impotent (Wilson and Herrnstein, 1985). The reasoning is that since crime emerges before sociological variables appear, the latter cannot be important in modifying life trajectories.

From initial appearances it thus appears that the evidence on stability leaves little room for the relevance of sociological theories of age-graded transitions in the life course. As it turns out, however, whether one views the glass of stability as half empty or half full stems at least as much from theoretical predilections as from empirical reality. More-



over, not only are there important discontinuities in crime that need to be explained, but a reconsideration of the evidence suggests that stability itself is quite compatible with a sociological perspective on the life course.

#### CHANGE AND THE ADULT LIFE COURSE

In an important paper Dannefer (1984) sharply critiques existing models of adult development, drawn primarily from the fields of biology and psychology, for their exclusive "ontogenetic" focus and their failure to recognize the "profoundly interactive nature of self-society relations" and the "variability of social environments" (1984: 100). He further argues that "the contributions of sociological research and theory provide the basis for understanding human development as socially organized and socially produced, not only by what happens in early life, but also by the effects of social structure, social interaction, and their effects on life chances throughout the life course" (1984:106). Is there evidence in the criminological literature to support Dannefer's general observations regarding change over the life course and the importance of social structure and interaction?

We begin to answer this question with a seeming paradox: although the studies reviewed earlier do show that antisocial behavior in children is one of the best predictors of antisocial behavior in adults, "most antisocial children do not become antisocial as adults" (Gove, 1985: 123). Robins (1978) found identical results in her review of four longitudinal studies, stating that most antisocial children do not become antisocial adults (1978: 611). A follow-up of the Cambridge-Somerville Youth study found that "a majority of adult criminals had no history as juvenile delinquents" (McCord, 1980: 158). Cline (1980: 665) states that although there is "more constancy than change . . . there is sufficient change in all the data to preclude simple conclusions concerning criminal career progressions." He concludes that there is far more heterogeneity in criminal behavior than previous work has suggested, and that many juvenile offenders do not become career offenders (Cline, 1980: 669-670). Loeber and LeBlanc make a similar point: "Against the backdrop of continuity, studies also show large within-individual changes in offending, a point understressed by Gottfredson and Hirschi" (1990: 390).

Caspi and Moffitt's (1992) review reaches a similar conclusion when

they discover large variations in the stability of antisocial behavior over time. Antisocial behavior appears to be highly stable and consistent only in a relatively small number of males whose behavior problems are quite extreme. Loeber's (1982) review also found that extremes in antisocial conduct were positively linked to the magnitude of stability. Moffitt (1991) builds on this information to argue that stability is a trait among those she terms "life-course persistent" delinquents. In other words, whereas change is the norm for the majority of adolescents, stability characterizes those at the extremes of the antisocial-conduct distribution. This conceptualization points out the dangers of relying on measures of central tendency that mask divergent subgroups.

Moffitt's (1991) review further suggests that social factors may work to modify childhood trajectories for the majority of youth who are not "life-course persistent." In support of this idea, recent criminological research suggests that salient life events influence behavior and modify trajectories—a key thesis of the life-course model. A follow-up of 200 delinquent boys found that marriage led to "increasing social stability" (Gibbens, 1984: 61). Knight, Osborn, and West (1977) discovered that while marriage did not reduce criminality, it reduced antisocial behavior such as drinking and drug use (see also Osborn and West, 1979; West, 1982; Rand, 1987). Osborn (1980) examined the effect of leaving London on delinquency and found that subjects who moved had a lower risk of re-offending when compared with a similar group who stayed in London (see also West, 1982). Rand (1987) found mixed results for the effect of going into the armed forces on later offending, but for some subgroups criminal behavior declined after serving in the military. And there is some evidence that episodes of unemployment lead to higher crime rates (Farrington et al., 1986).

In the context of personality characteristics, Caspi (1987) found that although the tendency toward explosive, under-controlled behavior in childhood was evident in adulthood, "invariant action patterns did not emerge across the age-graded life course" (1987: 1211). Similarly, using a prospective longitudinal design to study poverty, Long and Vaillant (1984) found both discontinuity and continuity across three generations of subjects. Their finding that the transmission of "underclass" or dependent life styles was not inevitable or even very likely refutes the hypothesis that the chances of escape from poverty are minimal. As they observe: "The transmission of disorganization and alienation that seems inevitable when a disadvantaged cohort is studied retrospectively

appears to be the exception rather than the norm in a prospective study that locates the successes as well as the failures" (Long and Vaillant, 1984: 344; see also Vaillant, 1977).

This is an important methodological point that applies to the stability of crime. Looking *back* over the careers of adult criminals exaggerates the prevalence of stability. Looking *forward* from youth reveals the successes and failures, including adolescent delinquents who go on to be normal functioning adults. This is the paradox noted earlier: adult criminality seems to be always preceded by childhood misconduct, but most conduct-disordered children do not become antisocial or criminal adults (Robins, 1978).

A recent study of adult crime supports a dual concern with stability and change using prospective longitudinal data. Rutter, Quinton, and Hill (1990) analyzed follow-up data from two groups of youth. One was a sample of youth institutionalized in group homes because of family dysfunctions (for example, parental criminality, abuse, desertion). The other was a quasi-random sample of the population of noninstitutionalized individuals of the same age living in inner-city London. Both groups were thus similar in composition but varied on childhood adversity. Consistent with the stability literature, Rutter and colleagues found that the high-risk institutionalized youth went on to experience a diversity of troublesome outcomes in adulthood, including but not limited to crime. By comparison, those in the control group were relatively well adjusted in later life.

Yet Rutter and colleagues also found that in both groups there was considerable heterogeneity in outcomes that was associated with later adult experiences. In particular, marital support in early adult life provided a protective mechanism that inhibited later deviance. Positive school experience among females was another factor that promoted desistance from crime, especially indirectly through its effect on planning and stable marriage choices. These results maintained despite controls for numerous measures of childhood deviance (1990: 152), leading Rutter and colleagues to rule out individual self-selection bias as an explanation (cf. Nagin and Paternoster, 1991). As they concluded: "The data showed substantial heterogeneity in outcomes, indicating the need to account for major discontinuities, as well as continuities in development. In that connection marital support from a nondeviant spouse stood out as a factor associated with a powerful protective effect" (1990: 152). Adult transitions in the life course can thus "modify the

effect of adversities experienced in childhood" (Rutter et al., 1990: 152). They also pointed out a key reason why change is possible: because the chain of stability "relied on multiple links, each one dependent on the presence of some particular set of features, there were many opportunities for the chain of adversity to be broken" (Rutter et al., 1990: 137).

#### RETHINKING CHANGE AND STABILITY

Taken as a whole, the foregoing review suggests that conclusions about the inevitability of antisocial continuities have been either overstated or misinterpreted. In regard to the former, long-term stability coefficients are far from perfect and leave considerable room for the emergence of discontinuities. In retrospect, criminologists should have been forewarned not to make sweeping generalizations about stability in light of the lengthy history of prediction research showing that childhood variables are quite modest prognostic devices. In a situation known as the false positive problem, prediction scales often result in the substantial overprediction of future criminality (Loeber, 1987; Farrington and Tarling, 1985). Likewise, prediction attempts often fail to identify accurately those who will become criminal even though past behavior suggests otherwise (false negatives).

In probably the best recent study on this topic, White and colleagues (1990: 521) document that, consistent with past research, "early antisocial behavior is the best predictor of later antisocial behavior." Nevertheless, their data clearly show the limitations of relying only on childhood information to understand behavior over time. As White and colleagues (1990: 521) argue, a high false positive rate precludes the use of early antisocial behavior alone as a predictor of later crime. They go on to note the general inaccuracy of specific predictions and the fact that the heterogeneous nature of delinquency in later adolescence (and, by implication, in adulthood) thwarts accurate prediction.

The prediction literature thus reinforces the need to look at both stability and change, and hence the futility of either/or conceptions of human development. That is, although there is longitudinal consistency, research has established large variations in later adolescent and adult criminal behavior that are not directly accounted for by childhood propensities. Furthermore, there is some evidence that these changes in adult criminality are structured by social transitions and adult life

events in the life course (Rutter et al., 1990), underscoring the utility of a life-course perspective.

Equally important, however, is the fact that the conception of stability traditionally used in criminology is very specific and has been frequently misinterpreted. Rank-order correlations and other measures of stability refer to the consistency of between-individual differences over time and consequently rely on an aggregate picture of relative standing. As Huesmann and colleagues (1984) note, what remains stable over time is the aggressiveness of an individual relative to the population (1984: 1131). Stability coefficients do not measure the consistency or heterogeneity of individual behaviors over time (that is, individual change). Consider Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) argument that "if there is continuity over the life course in criminal activity . . . it is unnecessary to follow people over time" (1990: 230). The continuity to which they refer is relative stability, which does not mean that individuals remain constant in their behavior over time. Thus, individual change is possible, if not likely, despite the stability of relative rank orderings.

Even if propensity for crime is stable over time, the commission of a criminal act depends on a host of social factors that vary with key life-course transitions. For example, in Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) theory, heterogeneity among individuals in low self-control is established early in life and remains stable over time (see also Nagin and Paternoster, 1991). From their viewpoint the diversity of adult crimes and antisocial behaviors in childhood are all expressions of the same underlying trait. Yet the idea of self-control cannot be divorced from the life course because its changing manifestations over time are structured by social opportunities to commit crime, differential reactions by the criminal justice system, and constraints imposed by aging (see also Shover, 1985; Gartner and Piliavin, 1985). As Gottfredson and Hirschi argue: "Crimes are short-term, circumscribed events that presuppose a peculiar set of necessary conditions (e.g., activity, opportunity, adversaries, victims, goods). Self-control, in contrast, refers to relatively stable differences across individuals in the propensity to commit criminal (or equivalent) acts. Accordingly, self-control is only one element in the causal configuration leading to a criminal act" (1990: 137). This argument clearly implies that the causes of crime may be very different from the causes of propensity (low self-control). Combined with the recognition that stability is an aggregate between-individual concept that does not preclude within-individual change, Gottfredson and

Hirschi's distinction between crime and lack of self-control (criminality) aids in resolving the seemingly contradictory data on stability, change, and prediction of criminal events over time.

Based on this conceptualization of past research, our theoretical model is premised on the fact that both stability and change are present over the life course, and that we need to explain both. As Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) note, the tendency of individuals to remain relatively stable over time on the dimension of deviance points to the early life course—especially family socialization and child rearing—as a key causal explanation of early delinquency and a stable self-control. While we agree with this conception, we are also concerned with adult behavior and how it is influenced not only by early life experiences and self-control, but also by modifying events and socialization in adulthood. Because we hypothesize that the adult life course accounts for variation in adult crime that cannot be predicted from childhood, change is a central part of our explanatory framework. Our theoretical model is laid out in detail in Chapters 4–9, but it will be useful at this point to provide a brief overview of our key strategy and ideas.

#### INFORMAL SOCIAL CONTROL AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Our theory emphasizes the importance of informal social ties and bonds to society at all ages across the life course. Hence the effects of informal social control in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood are central to our theoretical model. Virtually all previous studies of social control in criminology have focused either on adolescents or on official (that is, formal) social control mechanisms such as arrest and imprisonment (for reviews see Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Horwitz, 1990). As a result, most criminological studies have failed to examine the processes of informal social control from childhood through adulthood.

Following Elder (1975, 1985), we differentiate the life course of individuals on the basis of age and argue that the important institutions of informal and formal social control vary across the life span. For example, the dominant institutions of social control in childhood and adolescence are the family, school, peer groups, and the juvenile justice system. In the phase of young adulthood, the institutions of higher education or vocational training, work, and marriage become salient. The juvenile justice system is also replaced by the adult criminal justice system. Finally, in middle adulthood, the dominant institutions of social



control are work, marriage, parenthood, investment in the community, and the criminal justice system.

Within this framework, our organizing principle derives from the central idea of social control theory (Durkheim, [1897] 1951; Reiss, 1951a; Hirschi, 1969; Janowitz, 1975; Kornhauser, 1978): crime and deviance result when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken.<sup>2</sup> As Janowitz (1975) has cogently argued, many sociologists mistakenly think of social control solely in terms of social repression and State sanctions (for example, surveillance, enforced conformity, incarceration). By contrast, we adopt a more general conceptualization of social control as the capacity of a social group to regulate itself according to desired principles and values, and hence to make norms and rules effective (Janowitz, 1975: 82; Reiss, 1951a; Kornhauser, 1978). We further emphasize the role of *informal* social controls that emerge from the role reciprocities and structure of interpersonal bonds linking members of society to one another and to wider social institutions such as work, family, and school (see also Kornhauser, 1978: 24).

In applying these concepts to the longitudinal study of crime, we examine the extent to which social bonds inhibit crime and deviance early in the life course, and the consequences this has for later development. Moreover, we examine social ties to both institutions and other individuals in the adult life course, and identify the transitions within individual trajectories that relate to changes in informal social control. In this context we contend that pathways to crime *and* conformity are mediated by social bonds to key institutions of social control. Our theoretical model focuses on the transition to adulthood and, in turn, the new role demands from higher education, full-time employment, military service, and marriage. Hence, we explore the interrelationships among crime and informal social control at all ages, with particular attention devoted to the assessment of within-individual change.

We also examine social relations between individuals (for example, parent-child, teacher-student, and employer-employee) at each stage of the life course as a form of social investment or social capital (Coleman, 1988, 1990). Specifically, we posit that the social capital derived from strong social relations (or strong social bonds), whether as a child in a family, as an adolescent in school, or as an adult in a job, dictates the salience of these relations at the individual level. If these relations are characterized by interdependence (Braithwaite, 1989), they represent social and psychological resources that individuals can draw on as

they move through life transitions that traverse larger trajectories. Thus, we see both social capital and informal social control as linked to social structure, and we distinguish both concepts as important in understanding changes in behavior over time.

Recognizing the importance of both stability and change in the life course, we develop three sets of thematic ideas regarding age-graded social control. The first concerns the structural and intervening sources of juvenile delinquency; the second centers on the consequences of delinquency and antisocial behavior for adult life chances; and the third focuses on the explanation of adult crime and deviance in relation to adult informal social control and social capital. Although this model was developed in the ongoing context of our analysis of the Gluecks' data and represents the best fit between our conceptual framework and available measures, we believe that our theoretical notions have wider appeal and are not solely bound by these data.

#### Structure and Process in Adolescent Delinquency

In explaining the origins of delinquency, criminologists have embraced either structural factors (such as poverty, broken homes) or process variables (such as attachment to parents or teachers). We believe such a separation is a mistake. In Chapters 4 and 5, we join structural and process variables together into a single theoretical model. In brief, we argue that informal social controls derived from the family (for example, consistent use of discipline, monitoring, and attachment) and school (for instance, attachment to school) mediate the effects of both individual and structural background variables. For instance, previous research on families and delinquency often fails to account for social structural disadvantage and how it influences family life. As Rutter and Giller (1983: 185) have argued, socioeconomic disadvantage has potentially adverse effects on parents, such that parental difficulties are more likely to develop and good parenting is impeded. If this is true, we would then expect poverty and disadvantage to have their effects on delinquency transmitted through parenting.

The effects of family process are hypothesized to mediate structural context in other domains as well. As described in Chapter 4, our model and data enable us to ascertain the direct and indirect effects of other key factors such as family disruption, parental criminality, household crowding, large family size, residential mobility, and mother's employment. All of these structural background factors have traditionally been

associated with delinquency (for a review, see Rutter and Giller, 1983). It is our major contention, however, that these structural factors will strongly affect family and school social control mechanisms, thereby playing a largely indirect (but not unimportant) role in the explanation of early delinquency. As detailed in Chapters 4 and 5, the intervening processes of primary interest are family socialization (discipline, supervision, and attachment), school attachment, and the influence of delinquent siblings and friends. Overall, these two chapters provide our accounting of the causes of early delinquency and what Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) refer to as low self-control.

#### The Importance of Continuity between Childhood and Adulthood

Our second theme concerns childhood antisocial behavior (such as juvenile delinquency, conduct disorder, or violent temper tantrums) and its link to troublesome adult behaviors. As noted earlier, the theoretical importance of homotypic continuity has been largely ignored among sociological criminologists. Criminologists still focus primarily on the teenage years in their studies of offending, apparently disregarding the connections between childhood delinquency and adult crime. Reversing this tide, our main contention (as discussed in Chapter 6) is that antisocial and delinquent behavior in childhood—measured by both official and unofficial sources—is linked to later adult deviance and criminality in a variety of settings (for example, family violence, military offenses, “street crime,” and alcohol abuse). Moreover, we argue that these outcomes occur independent of traditional sociological and psychological variables such as class background, ethnicity, and IQ.

Although some criminologists have explored the connections among conduct disorder, juvenile delinquency, and adult crime, we argue that the negative consequences of childhood misbehavior extend to a much broader spectrum of adult life, including economic dependence, educational failure, employment instability, and marital discord. In Chapter 6 we thus explore the adult worlds of work, educational attainment, and marriage as well as involvement in deviant behavior generally. As Hagan and Palloni (1988) argue (see also Hagan, 1989: 260), delinquent and criminal events “are linked into life trajectories of broader significance, whether those trajectories are criminal or noncriminal in form” (1988: 90). Because most research by criminologists has focused either on the teenage years or on adult behavior limited to crime, this basic idea has not been well integrated into the criminological literature.

#### The Significance of Change in the Life Course

Our third focus, drawing on a developmental perspective and stepping-stone approach (Loeber and LeBlanc, 1990: 433–439), is concerned with changes in deviance and offending as individuals age. As discussed in Chapter 7, our thesis concerns adult behavior and how it is influenced not just by early life experiences, but also by social ties to the adult institutions of informal social control (such as family, school, and work). We argue that trajectories of both crime and conformity are significantly influenced over the life course by these adult social bonds, regardless of prior individual differences in self-control or criminal propensity.

The third major theme of our research, then, is that changes that strengthen social bonds to society in adulthood will lead to less crime and deviance. Conversely, changes in adulthood that weaken social bonds will lead to more crime and deviance. This premise allows us to explain desistance from crime as well as late onset. In addition, unlike most researchers, we emphasize the quality, strength, and interdependence of social ties more than the occurrence or timing of discrete life events (cf. Hogan, 1978; Loeber and LeBlanc, 1990: 430–432). In our view, interdependent social bonds increase social capital and investment in social relations and institutions. As discussed more fully in Chapters 7 and 8, our theoretical model rests on social ties to jobs and family as the key inhibitors to adult crime and deviance.

#### DATA ON CRIME IN THE LIFE COURSE

Our concerns in this chapter have been primarily theoretical and conceptual. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that scientific knowledge regarding crime and delinquency has also been hampered by the sheer lack of good data, especially data of a longitudinal nature. Recently the National Academy of Sciences Panel on Criminal Careers (Blumstein et al., 1986; see also Farrington, Ohlin, and Wilson, 1986) made several recommendations regarding criminological research. The NAS panel called for prospective longitudinal studies to examine (1) the developmental experiences engendering compliant behavior, (2) behavioral precursors of subsequent criminality, (3) the influence on subsequent behavior of interactions with the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems, and (4) factors associated with career termination (Blumstein et al., 1986: 200).

What sort of data base would suffice to carry out such a mandate? The panel’s answer included data on “crime and arrest sequences: on



each individual's early childhood experiences; on his parents, siblings, and peers; on school experiences and work experiences; on deviant behavior of various sorts; and on interactions with the justice system" (1986: 200). This description sounds discouraging because, according to the panel, "No single data source yet collected contains so rich a set of information on an appropriately broad sample" (Blumstein et al., 1986: 209). Furthermore, collection of new longitudinal data is costly and time-consuming (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1987).

Counteracting these concerns, we executed a research strategy that involved recoding, computerizing, and analyzing a major prospective data base that has been virtually inaccessible to the research community—the three-wave, matched-sample longitudinal study of juvenile delinquency and adult crime pioneered by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck of Harvard Law School. This data base contains virtually all the necessary characteristics delineated by the NAS panel for a rigorous study of crime and delinquency in the life course. Moreover, several important theorists and methodologists have noted the value of both the matched-sample research design employed in the *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency (UJD)* study, and the quality and scope of longitudinal information collected by the Gluecks' research team (Reiss, 1951b; Hirschi and Selvin, 1967; Wilson and Herrnstein, 1985: 175–179; Farrington, 1986a: 209). Quite simply, the Gluecks' data are some of the best that the field of criminology has to offer.

Among the numerous advantages provided by the Gluecks' data, at least three stand out. First, the data cover a long period of time—information is available from birth to age 32 and, in some instances, to age 45. To date, most criminological research has been cross-sectional in design, or, to a lesser extent, has consisted of short-term panel studies. By contrast, there are few long-term longitudinal data sets (see Farrington, 1979, and Farrington, Ohlin, and Wilson, 1986), and even fewer prospective longitudinal studies (for example, Elliott et al., 1985; Robins, 1966; McCord and McCord, 1959; West and Farrington, 1973, 1977; Thornberry et al., 1991; Loeber et al., 1991; Huizinga et al., 1991). Thus, it is perhaps unsurprising that information gleaned from prior longitudinal studies often simply reaffirms the results of cross-sectional data (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1987). When the same variables are measured over a short period for the same cohort of individuals, one is precluded from studying developmental change and how constructs manifest themselves across varying stages of the life course.

Second, the sampling design of the *UJD* study allows a full-scale

assessment of serious and persistent offending. As reviewed by the NAS panel (Blumstein et al., 1986: 198–209; see also Cernkovich et al., 1985), prior data bases often do not include sufficient samples of serious or persistent criminal offending. In fact, many studies of juvenile delinquency are characterized by an analysis of truancy, running away, and other relatively minor offenses, and by samples where State sanctions are infrequent. Although specialization is not a trademark of delinquency (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Blumstein et al., 1986), the juvenile justice system does react more harshly to violent and persistent offending. Focusing on minor deviance therefore precludes the study of how the mechanisms of official delinquency control may alter later adult development (cf. Moffitt, 1991). We elaborate on this point in Chapters 6 and 7, where we examine the long-term negative consequences of incarceration for adult outcomes.

Third, and probably most important, the Gluecks' data are rich in the number and quality of measures across a variety of dimensions of juvenile and adult development. Many longitudinal studies fail to measure the developmental course of informal social control and major life events. For example, although the birth cohort study by Wolfgang et al. (1972; see also Tracy et al., 1990) has provided key information on criminal offending and has served as a stimulus for research, explanatory characteristics were limited largely to structural and demographic variables (such as poverty and race). Many other longitudinal studies have also been limited to demographics and a restricted age range. As many researchers have argued (Farrington, Ohlin, and Wilson, 1986; Tonry et al., 1991; Blumstein et al., 1986), to distinguish effectively the causal influences on crime one must account for important background factors and the changing nature of life events—especially during the transition from late adolescence to young adulthood. Informal social controls in adulthood seem especially salient to us, and the Gluecks' data permit refined analyses of this dimension.

#### INTEGRATING CRIMINOLOGY AND THE LIFE COURSE

Building on earlier work (Laub and Sampson, 1988; Sampson and Laub, 1990), our theoretical framework represents a challenge to several assumptions and ideas found in contemporary criminological thought. We believe that the field of criminology has been dominated by narrow sociological and psychological perspectives, coupled with a strong tradition of research using cross-sectional data on adolescents. As a result,

scientific knowledge in the field has been hindered by a focus on a limited age range, a limited range of variation in crime and State sanctions, an examination of either structural *or* process variables, and by serious limitations found in previous research designs and analytic strategies. The overall consequence is that major gaps appear in the existing body of criminological literature.

In this book we confront several of these knowledge gaps and, we hope, expand and enrich the focus of criminological theory and research. We do so by merging a life-course perspective on age and informal social control with the existing criminological literature on crime and delinquency. With this strategy we believe that key issues of current debate in the field, such as the age-crime relationship and longitudinal versus cross-sectional data needs, can be resolved (see Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1986, 1988; Blumstein et al., 1988a, 1988b). Rather than pitting one view against the other in an either/or fashion, our theory of social bonding integrates what is conceptually sound and empirically correct from each perspective.

Take, for example, the issue of stability versus change. We posit that life-event transitions and adult social bonds can modify quite different childhood trajectories. Thus our conception of change is that adult factors explain systematic variations in adult behavior independent of childhood background. This does not deny the significance of childhood—in fact, Chapters 4 and 5 are devoted to the explanation of delinquency by focusing primarily on early child-rearing practices. Our theory thus incorporates the juvenile period with the adult life course to provide a more unified picture of human development. The unique advantage of a sociological perspective on the life course is that it brings the formative period of childhood back into the picture yet recognizes that individual behavior is mediated over time through interaction with age-graded social institutions.

By choosing the route of data restoration, we avoid legitimate criticisms regarding expenditures of large funds on long-term projects (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1987). We also take advantage of the unique substantive properties of the Gluecks' data, which will likely never be repeated given current research restrictions. Our strategy thus permits the linking of theoretical concerns with the rich nature of the Gluecks' longitudinal data. We now turn to a description of these data and our efforts to restore them.

## UNRAVELING JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND FOLLOW-UP STUDIES



For more than forty years, Sheldon Glueck (1896–1980) and Eleanor (Tourff) Glueck (1898–1972) carried out fundamental research on crime and delinquency at Harvard University. Their primary interests were discovering the causes of juvenile delinquency and adult crime and assessing the overall effectiveness of correctional treatment in controlling criminal careers. For their time, the Gluecks' research projects were unusually large investigations that included extensive follow-up periods. Their major studies included the Massachusetts Reformatory study (1930, 1937, 1943), the Women's Reformatory study (1934a), the Judge Baker Foundation study (1934b, 1940), and the *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency (UJD)* study (1950) plus later follow-ups (1956, 1962, 1968, and 1970). The result was that the Gluecks generated four relatively large data sets and more than 280 articles and 13 books during the course of their professional careers (for an overview see Glueck and Glueck, 1964 and 1974).

This chapter has three main objectives in presenting the empirical and intellectual context of the Gluecks' research. The first is to describe in detail the research design of the *UJD* study and subsequent data collection efforts during the period from 1940 to 1965. Second, we seek to provide an intellectual history of the Gluecks and their research program in order to establish what we call the "Glueck perspective" on crime and criminological research. Third, we address the methodological and ideological critics of the *UJD* study specifically and the Gluecks' research program in general. It is our contention that the Gluecks' research contributed crucial knowledge on the causes of crime and, more important, that their research agenda set the stage for current battles in criminology regarding the proper focus of the discipline and the role of the scientific method (Laub and Sampson, 1991). Despite their seminal contributions to the field, the substance of the Gluecks'