

Genetics, Families, and Children

Crime and the Life Course
SOC 401D

Genetics and Social Behavior

- **Traditionally, Sociologists Shied away from Genetics and Biology:**
 - Partly due to WWII, the Holocaust, Nazi experiments, and fears of eugenics—the use of policy (extermination, birth control, limits on birthing) to manipulate genetic composition of a population.
 - Viewed as reductionist: reducing social phenomena to individual processes.
 - Social Darwinism: survival of the fittest.
- **Today, Many Sociologists are embracing Genetics**
 - Advances in genomics (analyzing DNA): mapping the human genome.
 - Reject genetic determinism: Question is how do genes interact with the environment to produce behavior?
 - Evolutionary psychology & economics has made advances.
 - Much more sophisticated than social Darwinism.

Heredity and Environment

- **Nature vs. Nurture**
 - Decompose variation in phenotypic outcomes to heredity vs. environment
 - Twin studies: Identical vs. fraternal
 - Adoption studies: Identical twins reared apart

- **Genes Interact with Environments**
 - Effect of a gene expression depends on environments
 - Today: Environments can affect genes, feedback turning a gene's expression on or off.
- **More interesting question: How do genes select environments?**

Genes Select Environments (Scarr and McCartney 1983)

- Why are genotypes correlated with behavior?
- Genes Select Environments in Three Ways:
 - Passively, through parents
 - A child shares 50% of his genes with each parent
 - Parents select environments for their children
 - SES, neighborhood, school, acquaintances
 - Parents genes are correlated with children's, so children's genes are correlated with environments
 - Actively, the child selects environments
 - Use agency to select into situations & social contexts
 - Examples:
 - Colicky child selects angry parents and special day care.
 - High IQ selects for high track in school.
 - ADDHA selects for special education classes

Genes Select Environments (Scarr and McCartney 1983)

- **Evocatively, in which the physical and social environment responds to a child's genotype**
 - Examples:
 - Parents respond to a colicky child
 - Racist adults respond to a child born with a dark skin color
 - Teachers assume a child with a learning disability is not bright
 - Note that this is a labeling process based on phenotypical expressions of genes
 - Let's add a fourth mechanism:
- **Interactively, in which interactions between a genotype and a social context produce an emergent environment**
 - Consistent with pragmatism and symbolic interactionism
 - Often environments are selected through a complex social interaction between a child and others.

Empirical Research

- Caspi et al. (2002): MAOA interacted with child maltreatment in affecting violence
 - Dunedin, New Zealand cohort.
 - The MAOA gene codes for monoamine oxidase, which eliminates excess neurotransmitters, such as norepinephrine, serotonin and dopamine, which are known to affect mood
 - Many studies have failed to replicate
- Guo et al. (2008): MAOA plus DAT1 and DAT2 genes affected delinquency
 - Add Health Survey of 2000 respondents from a national sample of schools
 - Gene-environment interactions
 - Repeating a grade, family meals, intact families, school attachment, delinquent friends all interacted with one or more genes.
 - In each case, the stronger the social controls, the weaker the genetic effect.

Parenting and Delinquency

- Social Control Theories: attachment and supervision reduces delinquency.
- Baumrind: Three styles of parenting (ideal types)
 - Authoritative Parenting
 - Set clear standards & limits, monitor child, allow the child to develop autonomy
 - Punish violations but explain the rationale so it is reasonable & fair
 - Use violations as an occasion to forgive and to teach the child
 - Teach child to regulate feelings and solve problems
 - Authoritarian Parenting
 - Strict and rigid: stress is on conformity and compliance to parental rules
 - Child is expected to follow parents' rules and expectations without question
 - Sometimes accompanied with physical or corporal punishment, which is correlated with antisocial behavior
 - Tends to produce blind obedience and lack of forethought

Parenting and Delinquency

- **Permissive Parenting (indulgent)**
 - Parent is involved with child but places few controls or demands
 - Parent is nurturing, affectionate, accepting, and responsive to the child
 - Popular among parents of the 1970s and 1980s
 - Tends to produce “spoiled children” with little impulse control
 - Associated with drinking and drug use
- **Neglectful Parenting (Maccoby and Martin)**
 - Parent is uninvolved in the child’s life (neither demanding nor responsive)
 - Parents are not warm or nurturing and fail to set limits on the child
 - Parents prioritize their own careers and problems above the child.
 - May produce precocious children, acting adult prematurely
- **Empirical research on delinquency**
 - Physical punishment is correlated with delinquency (especially violence)
 - Authoritarian parenting is negatively correlated with delinquency

Class and Conformity

- **Class and Conformity (Melvin Kohn)**
 - Authoritarian parenting is related to social class
 - Working class: blue collar jobs stressing blind obedience to rules
 - Little intellectual flexibility on the job
 - Tend to socialize children using authoritarian parenting
 - Result: children are prepared for blue collar jobs
 - Upper classes: white collar jobs stress intellectual flexibility
- **Heimer: Class, Parenting, and Violence**
 - Class is related to authoritarian vs. authoritative parenting
 - Authoritative parenting leads to definitions unfavorable to violence, which predicts less violence

Parenting as an Interaction

- **Child Developmental Psychologists: Children Have Agency**
 - Conceive of parenting as a two-way interaction between parents and children
 - Children act in ways that elicit parental responses (parenting styles)
 - Parental response shapes the child's action
 - Need to consider both parent and child contributions to socialization.
 - E.g., Stattin & Kerr: Parental monitoring is partly parent behavior and also child willingness to disclose
- **Delinquency results from interactions between parents and children**

