

Criminological theories have been developed to explain why crime is committed. Theorists also attempt to explain why offending rates differ between males and females, why delinquency desists with age, and what social institutions play an important role in juvenile crime and conformity. While several theorists claim to be able to answer these questions, few, if any are fully capable of thoroughly answering them all. This research paper will review three different theories (General Strain, Self Control, and Life Course) to determine whether they explain gender, age, and racial differences in delinquency. More specifically, the purpose of this paper is to analyze these three theories to determine how well each one can answer the following questions: (1) Why do males commit more crime than females? (2) Why does delinquency vary by age (i.e., why does delinquency increase from pre-teen years to the age of 20 before the offending rates begin to decrease); and (3) Why does delinquency vary by race?

Statistics on Juvenile Delinquency

Initially, it is important to look at the statistics showing the type and number of offenses committed by juveniles of different genders, ages, and races. Arrests and self-reports are two types of resources that can be used to describe differences in offending rates. Arrest data are official statistics gathered by police departments. Self-reported data are gathered through surveys and account for all offenses whether or not an arrest actually occurred. Individuals completing the survey answer questions anonymously regarding their involvement in delinquent activities.

Few differences exist between arrest data and self-reported data for gender and age characteristics. Both indicate that males are more delinquent than females and delinquency peaks between the ages of 16-20 before rates begin to steadily decrease. On

the other hand, arrest statistics and self-reports show dramatically different results regarding the characteristics of race. Arrest statistics indicate that African Americans and to a lesser extent Hispanics have extremely higher offense rates than Caucasians (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005). According to self-reported statistics, few differences appear in offending rates between African Americans, Hispanics, and Caucasians (Binder, Geis, and Bruce, 1997). Therefore, it is necessary to use both sources when presenting crime statistics.

Gender

Arrest Data. Males are significantly more delinquent than females. Status offenses account for 27.5% of female delinquency while it accounts for only 10.5% of male delinquency. Females are more likely than males to be arrested and referred to court for status offenses such as prostitution or running away from home. Previous literature reviewed by Chesney-Lind and Shelden (1998) indicates that 72% of status offenders are reported by relatives. Parents are more likely to set different standards of obedience and morality for their male and female children. Parental adherence and enforcement of the sexual double standard leads to family conflict with female adolescents. Juvenile court intervention often results when parents are unable to control the continued noncompliance or fighting in the home (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1998).

Males and females are arrested for a variety of different reasons. Females are typically arrested for truancy from home, larceny-theft, liquor law violations, disorderly conduct, curfew violations, simple assaults, and status offenses. Males are more likely to be arrested for serious property, drug, and violent offenses. The male-to-female arrest ratio is 3:1 for serious property crimes. According to Chesney-Lind and Shelden (1998),

the studies conducted by Tracy, Wolfgang, and Figlio (1985) reveal that males are more involved in crime than females and have criminal careers that last longer. Females are one-and-a-half times more likely to be “one time offenders”.

Three out of four violent crimes are committed by male juveniles. The average annual rate of homicide offending for males is 14 times higher than that for females (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005). Approximately 75% of violent female offenders commit simple assault. Male offenders are more likely than female offenders (28% to 15%) to use a weapon during a violent offense (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999).

Self-Reported Data. Females commit fewer delinquent offenses than males. According to the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (Bureau of Statistics, 1997), males were five times more likely than females to carry a handgun. The male-to-female ratio was 16:3. Males belonged to gangs three times as often as females. They purposely destroyed property, stole items valued over \$50, and sold drugs more often than females. Males also committed assault and were arrested twice as often as females (Shelden, 2006).

A review of previous literature by Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis (1981) indicated that males are more likely to commit serious crime such as sell stolen property, break into a building or home, threaten assault, carry a weapon, and use a weapon in the commission of a crime (Binder et al., 1997). They are also more likely to fire a BB gun at someone or personal property, refuse to provide information to the police, and physically assault another person. Males and females report similar alcohol and drug use. However, males are more likely than females to sell drugs and drive while under the influence (Binder et al., 1997).

Summary. Both arrest and self-reported data indicated that males commit more delinquent acts than females. Self-reported data indicate that both females and males are more delinquent than arrest information specifies. Both sources indicate that males and females commit different types of crime. However, males commit more serious and violent crimes than females.

Age

Arrest Data. Age is inversely related to criminality. As offenders mature, their offending rates decline. The average age of criminal onset for all crime is 11.9 years. The average age of desistance from crime is 37.5 years. Criminal activity peaks between the ages of 16 and 20 and then declines. The average criminal career for delinquents lasts 25.6 years. The violent criminal career averages 9 years (Sampson and Laub, 1993). Statistics show that older teens commit homicide at a rate higher than all other age groups (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005).

The Uniform Crime Report (1993) indicated that 29% of all people arrested for Index crimes were minors between the ages of 10 and 17. The 1990 census found that 11% of people in the United States fell within the age range. This percentage of the population was highly disproportionate with the number of youth in the United States (Binder et al., 1997).

Self-Reported Data. Delinquent activity peaks between the ages of 16-20 and then begins to decrease. According to the Denver longitudinal self-report study (Browning and Huizinga, 1999), 53% of the youth studied in 1987 were arrested within the next five years. The study consisted of youth between the ages of 11 and 15. According to the Pittsburgh longitudinal self-report study (Browning and Loeber, 1999), the onset of

serious offending occurred by age 15. Several references addressing self-reported data provided similar information regarding the age of juvenile delinquents.

Summary. Both arrest rates and self-reported surveys indicate that crime and delinquency vary by age. The onset of criminal activity starts in the preteen years. Criminal activity peaks between the ages of 16-20 and then declines. The information collected from the self-reported surveys and arrest rates is quite similar. The importance of using both methods of data collection appears to be less relevant for the age characteristic.

Race

Arrest Data. Racial differences are reflected in delinquency arrest statistics. According to Bartollas and Miller (2005), Caucasians constitute roughly 78% of the general population while African Americans constitute only 13%. However, even the statistics indicate that Caucasians comprise of 71% of all arrests whereas African Americans comprise of 26%. Caucasians account for 55% of violent offenses while African Americans account for 43%. Such an arrest pattern clearly indicates that African Americans are arrested in disproportionately high numbers.

Reviewing homicide rates, the disproportionate racial pattern appears to continue. In 1999, the homicide offending rate for African American juveniles was seven times greater than that for Caucasian juveniles (14 versus 2 per 100,000) (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999). Overall, African Americans were five times as likely as Caucasians to be a victim of a homicide (5 per 100,000 versus 1 per 100,000). Data also show that African Americans also commit more personal crimes than Caucasians. Offenders of other races account for only 1 in 7 juvenile offenders (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005).

Self-Reported Data. Few racial differences exist in delinquency when reviewing self-reported data. A review of literature by Hindelang et al. (1981) found that Caucasians carried a handgun more often than minorities. African Americans belonged to gangs almost twice as often as Caucasians. Caucasians purposely destroyed property and sold drugs more than African Americans. African Americans stole items valuing over \$50 and committed assaults more frequently than Caucasians (Shelden, 2006).

African Americans are more likely than Caucasians to commit serious crime. African Americans are more likely than Caucasians to sell stolen property, threaten assault, carry a weapon, and use a weapon in the commission of a crime. These data indicated that crime and delinquency are distributed throughout social class. Furthermore, African Americans and Caucasians have similar levels of criminal activity. These data indicated that racial differences are most prominent in serious and persistent criminal offenses.

In addition, Hindelang et al. (1981) found that African Americans and Caucasians commit a similar level of delinquent acts. African Americans were more likely than Caucasians to fire a BB gun at someone or personal property, refuse to provide information to the police, and physically assault another person. Although Caucasians were more likely to steal items with a value less than \$2, destroy property in a school or church, and drive away from the scene of an accident (Binder et al., 1997).

Summary. Results concerning criminal offending by race are inconsistent. Data collected from self-reported surveys differ significantly from arrest statistics. Arrest statistics show a large difference in criminal offenses committed by African Americans and Caucasians while self-reported statistics do not reveal the same information. The

importance of using both data collection methods is stressed due to the extent of proposed racial differences in criminal activity.

There appears to be some differences in criminal offending among races, but a question to the extent of the differences remains. “Consistent with virtually all previous research, the overall impression is that blacks are only slightly more delinquent than whites...overall, the black-to-white ratio in the Seattle (Hindelang et al., 1981) data does not exceed the ratio of 1.1:1” (Binder et al., 1997, p. 15). There are two proposed explanations for the disproportionate number of minority youth who are arrested. Some believe that official differences in delinquency are the result of the race-based decision making found in the juvenile justice system. Other researchers believe that the official data have validity. The data indicate that the disproportionate amount of minority delinquency is the result of their socioeconomic position and the racism they face (Siegel et al., 2006).

Theories of Delinquency

The following three general theories (General Strain, Self Control, and Life Course) of delinquency may address all crime. As such, these three theories should also be able to explain gender, age, and racial differences in rates of juvenile delinquency.

General Strain Theory was developed by Agnew (1992). He claims that crime is the result of the “strain” individuals face throughout life. Elevated levels of strain result in a higher possibility that an individual will utilize crime to reduce strain. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) developed Self Control Theory to explain delinquency resulting from an individual’s lack of self control. A lack of self control leads to the inability to develop

healthy coping skills in an attempt to acquire what an individual desires. Sampson and Laub (1993) developed Life Course Theory to rationalize desistance from criminal behavior over a person's life course. Desistance results from the occurrence of major events, such as marriage, employment, or military assignment. The question still remains: How well does each of these three general theories adequately explain gender, age, and race differences in delinquency?

General Strain Theory

General Strain Theory is a set of ideas formulated to explain the occurrence of crime as a result of the strain that an individual faces in life. Agnew focuses on the effects of strain and how strain leads an individual towards delinquency and crime. In 1992, Agnew proposed General Strain Theory in an attempt to broaden the scope of classic Strain Theory, "focusing on all situations where individuals are not treated as they want to be treated" (Agnew and Passas, 1997, p. 10).

"Strain or pressure is placed upon certain persons in the society to engage in nonconformist rather than conformist conduct" (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1998, p. 83). Some individuals fail to recognize legitimate methods to achieve their goals. These goals usually revolve around money, status, and obtaining material goods. General Strain Theory indicates that strain is present in day-to-day life. An individual's coping skills, personality, emotions, and surroundings determine how well an individual will handle the strain. Individuals with positive skills and support will often use legitimate methods to handle strain.

Coping Skills. Each individual's coping skills will determine whether or not strain will lead to a delinquent act (Cochran et al., 2005). Some effective coping skills include

employment, exercise, writing, and talking about emotions and frustrations. Individuals make choices based on their desire and capability to reach goals, available coping skills, and access to social supports. Strong social relationships cause individuals to reassess their feelings of anger and frustration and to consider consequences of delinquent behavior. If these relationships or coping skills are unavailable, delinquent behavior is often the result (Konty, 2005).

Personality Traits. Agnew (1992) suggests that personality traits within an individual can cause a reaction to strain. When these traits are provoked by strain, the individual displays emotions such as anger and frustration, which in turn lead to delinquency. These negative emotions can be controlled by an individual, but one often struggles to control his reactions. He suggests several factors, including temperament, intelligence, interpersonal skills, association with criminal peers, conventional social support, as well as self worth, to determine whether an individual has the ability to cope with strain in a delinquent or conforming manner (Agnew, 1992).

Emotions. Negative feelings such as defeat, despair, fear, and anger may be caused by outside sources. Agnew (1992) mainly focused on the feeling of anger and the idea that individuals blame their negative conditions and interactions on others. Anger can lower inhibitions, create a desire for revenge, and cause a person to act impulsively. Anger and frustration enable an individual to justify delinquent behavior. Furthermore, anger reduces the perception of costs of crime and energizes the individual to act (Agnew, 1995). The more strain to which an individual is exposed leads to a higher probability that one will resort to delinquent behavior as a coping mechanism. Simply,

an increase in strain will lead to an expansion in anger ultimately leading to an increase in crime.

Delinquent Peers. The presence of delinquent peers strongly influences an individual's decision to turn to crime when faced with strain. As an individual is pushed toward a deviant route, one learns new techniques for committing crime. The motives, attitudes, and rationalizations used by delinquent peers influence others. These adolescents often adopt the deviant thinking and attitude displayed by their cohorts. The more strain an individual faces, the further one is pushed into the world of crime. Consequently, the individual will use non-conventional means to achieve desired goals.

Adolescent Escalation of Crime. Agnew and Broidy (1997) argue that escalation in both the seriousness and quantity of criminal acts can be explained by three mechanisms. First, adolescence is a time of transition for youths to enlarge their social world and take on greater responsibility. There is a potential for more situations in which young people are treated unfairly or exposed to stressful situations. Second, adolescents are more likely than children or adults to view their environment as adverse. Self-directed and introspective perceptions can magnify stresses. Third, adolescents are more likely to react negatively to adversity because they lack effective coping skills. They react to stressful situations with anger, frustration, depression, anxiety, or nervousness (Hoffman and Cerbone, 1999).

Three Types of Strain. The three major types of strain include: (1) failure to achieve positively valued goals; (2) the loss of positive stimuli; and (3) the presence of negative stimuli. Each type of strain increases the possibility of an individual committing a delinquent act (Agnew, 1992).

Failure to Achieve Positively Valued Goals. Failure produces extreme stress for some individuals. Members of society strive to achieve three goals. The first goal is money. Money is the cause of strain when it is not available to the individual through legitimate means (Agnew et al., 1996). The second goal is status and respect. Men particularly value this goal. Although this type of status differs culturally, individuals may resort to crime to achieve this status. Agnew emphasizes that traits associated with masculinity are often displayed through delinquent behavior. The final goal valued in society is autonomy. Strain caused by lack of autonomy greatly affects juveniles because these individuals often struggle to gain power. The need for power may result in delinquent behavior as the individual tries to assert and achieve autonomy (Agnew et al., 1996).

Culturally accepted goals and values that are not available to everyone causes increased amounts of strain (Agnew, 1992). Most individuals strive for their own transportation, home, family, possessions, and employment. Strain also results when the actual rewards gained by an individual are less than expected. For example, an individual earns a high school diploma with the expectation of obtaining a higher paying job. Instead, after receiving a diploma, he is unable to find a better job because the higher paying job he desires requires a college diploma. An individual feels that the hard work he did to complete high school did not result in the rewards he expected (Agnew, 1992).

Loss of Positively Valued Stimuli. According to Agnew (1992), a second type of strain is the loss of positively valued stimuli. This loss can result from a death or broken relationship with a friend or partner, or the loss of a valued object. Delinquency may result as an individual attempts to prevent the loss of the valued relationship or object. In

an attempt to retrieve what was lost, or seek revenge on those who removed the valued relationship or object, an individual may turn to delinquent behavior.

Presentation of Negative Stimuli. The last type of strain is the presentation of negative stimuli. Presenting negative stimuli to an adolescent provides increased opportunities for delinquent behavior. “Child abuse, neglect, adverse relations with parents and teachers, negative school experiences, adverse relations with peers, neighborhood problems, and homelessness” (Agnew, 1992, p. 58-59) are examples of negative stimuli presented to a juvenile. Previous literature reviewed by Hoffman and Miller (1999) found that negative life events such as parental unemployment, family deaths, and illness increase delinquent behavior in adolescents and adults. As each additional negative stimulus is presented, the chance of delinquent activity increases.

Gender and General Strain Theory. The question still remaining relates to whether Agnew’s General Strain Theory can explain gender differences in delinquency. Some theorists such as Katz (2000) feel that General Strain Theory does not adequately address the question of gender differences. Females often have similar aspirations but lack the same opportunities due to forms of discrimination. Thus, females should face more strain and thus, commit more crime. However, as indicated earlier, females commit fewer crimes than males (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1998).

On the one hand, it can be argued that women are less likely to have effective coping mechanisms, increasing their possibility of deviance. On the other hand, women are also less likely to commit crimes because society stresses that females should conform to societal norms. Women may be more likely to cope by using non-criminal

and/or self-destructive coping strategies such as substance abuse, eating disorders, and self-mutilation (Agnew and Broidy, 1997).

Additionally, Agnew and Broidy (1997) found that males and females experience different types of strain. Female strain leads to family violence, running away from home, and self-directed forms of deviant behavior, such as substance abuse, self-mutilation, and eating disorders. Females are less likely to commit aggressive crimes while males are more likely to commit serious property and violent crime. Differences in coping skills, social support, opportunities, social control, and a higher disposition to engage in crime result in greater male delinquency.

Agnew and Broidy (1997) found that males and females have distinct goals and perceptions of fairness. Males are more concerned with material success and extrinsic achievements, while females are more concerned with the establishment and maintenance of relationships. Females report more relationship stressors, low prestige in work and family roles, gender-based discrimination, excessive demands of family members, and restrictions on their behavior. Society holds females to a higher moral standard. According to such standards, their behavior must be appropriate. Females spend more time in private, feel responsible for children and others, are burdened with the demands of others, and are under more pressure not to behave in an aggressive manner. On the other hand, males experience greater financial strain, more problems with peers, and characterize their relationships with peers by competition, conflict, and jealousy (Agnew and Broidy, 1997).

Females internalize their feelings because they fear anger will lead them to harm others and jeopardize relationships. They view their anger as inappropriate and a failure

of self-control (Agnew and Broidy, 1997). Females are socialized to be aware of the concerns of others and to develop and strengthen personal relationships (Hoffman and Cerbone, 1999). Males are less concerned about hurting others or disrupting relationships (Agnew and Broidy, 1997). Males are also socialized to be more aggressive and to withdraw from personal relationships (Hoffman and Cerbone, 1999). Anger is viewed as a masculine trait. Groups of males are more likely to take risks and challenge authority. Support networks for females are less likely than male support networks to offer models or support for deviant behavior (Agnew and Broidy, 1997).

Furthermore, Agnew and Broidy (1997) explored different emotional responses to crime demonstrated by males and females. Females are more likely to respond with depression and anger. Their anger is accompanied by fear, guilt, and shame. They are more likely to blame themselves and worry about the affects of their anger than males. Lastly, depression and guilt may lead to self-destructive behaviors. On the other hand, males are more likely to respond with anger followed by moral outrage, which in turn, leads to property and violent crime. Finally, males are quick to blame others and are less concerned about hurting other people (Agnew and Broidy, 1997).

Moreover, females use escape and avoidance methods to relieve the strain. They have stronger relational ties than males, which may cause them to commit fewer delinquent and criminal behaviors. Males socialize in large, hierarchical peer groups while females form close social bonds in small groups (Agnew and Broidy, 1997).

Thus, according to Agnew and Broidy (1997), General Strain Theory is capable of explaining gender differences once different types of strains are identified. It is necessary to recognize how males and females react to strain. If one looks solely at the amount of

strain felt by an individual, it would follow that females should commit more crime because they face more strain. Nevertheless, factors, such as socially accepted methods for females to express anger and frustration, different types of strains faced, and different emotional responses, result in less female delinquency.

Age and General Strain Theory. General Strain Theory can also address age differences in offending patterns. Delinquency increases from the pre-teen years to between 16-20 before rates begin to decrease. Adolescents face strain at a young age as the result of a lack of opportunities and independence. They are often unable to have the ability of reaching goals in legitimate ways, such as obtaining material goods due to lack of financial opportunities. They become angry about the inability to obtain possessions and the perceived lack of fairness which often leads to the onset of juvenile delinquency.

Older adolescents and adults have more opportunities to earn money, respect, and material goods through legitimate methods, such as employment and higher education. However, strain usually increases as one grows older and becomes more independent. Individuals become responsible for caring and providing for themselves and their families as they age. With increased responsibility, individuals face an increased need for specific goods and must find ways to get these possessions. If they do not have access to legitimate means such as employment, or their employment fails to subsidize the lifestyle they need or desire, individuals often turn to illegitimate methods to obtain these goods.

Individuals at the peak of delinquency often are in the process of becoming autonomous. A large number of these individuals lack effective coping skills leading to a higher likelihood of delinquent activities. However, individuals who turn to delinquent

activities in order to cope with the strain at this age often will find legitimate ways to meet their future desires, thus decreasing their criminal activity over time.

Race and General Strain Theory. Agnew (1999) also claims that General Strain Theory can explain racial differences in delinquency. Cochran et al. (2005) claim that community differences, including economic and racial inequalities, influence levels of strain leading to higher crime rates. “Community characteristics will have a significant direct effect on individual crime after the individual-level variables are controlled. Communities also have an indirect effect on strain by influencing individual traits and the individual’s immediate social environment” (Cochran et al., 2005, p. 117).

Agnew (1999) developed General Strain Theory to explain racial differences in crime rates among differing communities. According to Cochran et al. (2005), Agnew’s argument is that structural community characteristics such as high inequality and economic deprivation lead directly and indirectly to high crime rates. The variation of those who commit crimes depends on the stressful experiences of the individuals in the community. They state that the “crime/delinquency rates indirectly depend on the levels of aggregate strain, aggregate negative affect/anger, and other stressful community conditions” (Cochran et al., 2005, p. 119). Highly disadvantaged communities create strain and anger by blocking the members of the community from achieving positive goals, creating a loss of positive stimuli, exposing individuals to negative stimuli, and increasing overall deprivation. These communities are more likely to attract and retain strained and angry individuals, thus maintaining the continued disadvantage of the community.

Thus, General Strain Theory is able to explain racial differences regarding offending patterns. Highly disadvantaged communities face strain at higher levels due to having fewer opportunities to gain goals through socially accepted methods. Highly underprivileged neighborhoods usually contain a larger number of minorities. These individuals are surrounded by other individuals who turn to criminal activity at a higher rate than individuals in privileged communities. Moreover, there are fewer employment and educational opportunities in these areas. Individuals often fail to see conventional methods as ways to achieve their goals. The strains these individuals face are often the result of perceived or actual unjust acts. These perceptions may lead to anger, which in turn lowers one's inhibitions and results in criminal behaviors.

Self Control Theory

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) developed Self Control Theory in an attempt to address the inabilities of Social Control Theory and other classical theories of crime to explain differences in delinquency. Like Agnew (1992), they attempted to fill in the gaps and make the theory more applicable to all criminal activities. Self Control Theory stresses that the lack of self control leads to delinquency. Self control is the ability to restrain oneself from acting impulsively. It requires thought, time, and composure. Individuals lacking self-control use criminal acts to provide an immediate gratification of desires. Individuals with self control do not need immediate gratification.

Self control is instilled by parental guidance, acknowledgment, and discipline. If parents lack the knowledge or interest in teaching their children, these children grow up without learning the importance of self control. Parents teach children lessons and values whether they intend to or not. Children model their parents, including behavior, values,

and lifestyles. As children age, they may learn self control from social institutions such as schools.

Criminal Actions. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990, p. 15) define crime as “acts of force or fraud undertaken in pursuit of self-interest.” Crime requires very little in the way of effort, planning, preparation or skill, is largely petty, usually not completed, and provides little lasting or substantial benefit. Crime data indicate that victims of personal crime tend to be male, young, minority, and of low economic status. Victims and offenders tend to share most social and personal characteristics (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990).

The concept of self-control is consistent with the idea that criminal acts require no special capabilities, motivation, or needs. A lack of self control increases the possibility of deviant, criminal, or dangerous acts (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). The main factors potentially leading to a high likelihood of criminal activity include a desire for material goods, status, excitement, and sexual satisfaction (Farrington, 2003).

Low self control does not necessarily mean that an individual will commit a crime. However, an individual who commits a crime typically lacks self control. Individuals with low self control have more difficulty accepting the long term consequences of their behavior. These individuals view pleasure resulting from criminal activity as direct, obvious, and immediate, while the pains risked by committing the act are not as obvious or direct.

Elements of Self Control. There are several elements of self control (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). (1) Criminal acts provide the immediate gratification of wants or desires. People with low self control have the tendency to respond to their

immediate environment, focusing on the “here and now.” Individuals with high self control display the ability to delay gratification. (2) Criminal acts provide an easy gratification of desires. They provide money, sex, and revenge without delay. People lacking self control also tend to lack the diligence or persistence to gain goals legitimately. (3) Criminal acts can be exciting and risky. They involve danger, speed, agility, and deception. Individuals lacking self control tend to be adventuresome and physical although their counterparts tend to be cautious and verbal. (4) Crimes provide few long term benefits. They interfere with long term commitments, such as marriages, employment, and family. Criminals are unprepared and uninterested in long-term pursuits. (5) Criminal acts require little planning or skill. People lacking self control do not need to possess manual or academic skills to commit most crimes thereby, providing easy access to obtaining material items. (6) Crime often results in pain or discomfort for the victim. People who lack self control tend to be self-centered or indifferent to the needs of others.

Individuals who lack self control will also search for other avenues to find immediate gratification. Thus, a search to obtain immediate gratification results in drinking, smoking, using drugs, gambling, having illicit sex, and having children out of wedlock (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). People who lack self control tend to be impulsive, physical, indifferent, adventuresome, and short-sighted. These characteristics are conducive to engaging in criminal or other self serving acts.

Development of Self Control. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argue that low self control is evidenced in early childhood through personality characteristics. For example, the inability to postpone gratification, a low tolerance for frustration, and a

tendency to commit high-risk behaviors indicate low self control. Low self control appears to be caused by the absence of parental nurturance, discipline, and training. In other words, the main cause of low self control appears to be insufficient child-rearing. Supervision, discipline, and affection towards a child tend to be missing in the home of delinquents. Delinquent children tend to have parents that display poor behavior such as drinking, poor supervision, and criminal records (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990).

Furthermore, Gottfredson and Hirschi, (1990, p. 97) identified three necessary conditions for adequate child-rearing. A parent must “(1) monitor the child’s behavior; (2) recognize deviant behavior when it occurs; and (3) punish such behavior.” Parents must demonstrate an investment in their children. Through this process, children learn that actions have consequences, and they must think about the consequences prior to acting. Teaching a child that certain behaviors are not acceptable and will not be tolerated can result in a child being (a) more capable of delaying gratification, (b) more sensitive towards others, (c) more willing to accept restraints on his or her activity, (d) more independent, and (e) less likely to use force to attain his or her desires.

Parents must recognize deviant acts committed by their children in order to punish their behavior. Problematically, not all parents are skilled at recognizing acts of low self control. Some parents allow the child to do as s/he pleases, such as not completing homework, excessive television viewing and computer use, not attending school daily, smoking, and using physical force. Not only does a parent need to recognize this deviant behavior, but the parent must also punish it in order to prevent further deviance. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) suggest that “disapproval by people one cares about is the most powerful of sanctions.”

Because the path toward or away from crime starts early in life, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) assert that the level of self control depends on the quality of early parenting. The self control model states that parental concern for the welfare of the child is a necessary condition for successful child-rearing. Parents of delinquents are more likely to be characterized as indifferent toward their children compared to the mothers of nondelinquents. Evidence also shows that step-parents are often unlikely to have feelings of affection towards their step-children, adding to the likelihood that children will be raised by people who do not care for them (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990).

Parental supervision is presumed to prevent criminal and analogous acts. It also trains the children to avoid these acts on their own. It should be noted that criminal offenses differ in the degree in which they can be prevented through parental supervision. Children at younger ages are monitored more closely than adolescents. The goal of parental supervision is to teach children values that they will uphold when not directly supervised by a parent (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990).

Individuals that fail to socialize their children adequately often do so as a result of their own inadequate socialization. Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) summary of the literature suggests that the supervision of delinquents in families in which parents have criminal records is often too lenient and insufficient. Punishments tend to be easy, short-term, and insensitive. These parents tend to use yelling, slapping, hitting, and making threats that are not upheld.

Role of Schools. Schools may teach self control when families fail. The school has several advantages as a socializing institution. They can effectively monitor behavior. Unlike some parents, teachers do not struggle with identifying deviant

behavior. The school has a clear interest in maintaining order and discipline resulting in methods to obtain control of disruptive behavior. Lastly, the school has the authority and means to punish the deviant behavior, but struggle when the families do not provide support and cooperation. Despite the lack of parental support, schools may still teach students self control through their use of supervision and punishment. The daily social interaction and socialization provided by schools promote self control (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990).

However, Self Control Theory indicates that school is not a primary source of socialization. Children who lack self control often fail to meet the school's demand of control, discipline, and accountability. Poor academic performance and dropping out of school are the outcomes of low self control. Thus, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) still claim that these outcomes are the result of ineffective parental socialization.

Adolescent Development. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) view the development of independence and self control is part of the developmental tasks for an adolescent. As adolescents grow and mature, parental supervision becomes more lax. This is an opportunity for adolescents to develop opinions and attitudes independent from their parents (Landsheer and Hart, 1999). If children fail to develop self control, the lax supervision by parents provides an additional opportunity for adolescents to display low self control. These adolescents will have more opportunity to commit delinquent and criminal acts. Adolescents who accept and follow conventional norms are less likely to engage in delinquent behavior (Landsheer and Hart, 1999).

Delinquent Peers. Self Control Theory indicates that delinquent peers are attracted to other people who are impulsive, pleasure-seeking, and lack normal restraints.

Juvenile risk taking is not caused by delinquent peers, but is the result of ineffective familial relationships. Youth observe and learn in group interactions that some delinquent behaviors are encouraged and rewarded by peer groups (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). Individuals who lack self control tend to dislike situations that require supervision and discipline such as school and work. These youth tend to gravitate to a same-sex peer group yet they do not make good friends. These peers are untrustworthy, self-interested, adventuresome, reckless, and take more risks than nondelinquent peers.

Stability of Self Control. Self control is identified as a constant factor that explains the continuity of deviant behavior or conformity into adolescence and adulthood. The correlations between childhood misbehavior and criminal actions during a life course provide evidence that self control is lacking in these individuals. The pattern of stability is determined by separating individuals by the level of offenses. Thus, it is not claimed that an individual will continue to commit the same amount of crime throughout a lifetime. Rather, it is viewed that individuals with high offense rates as adolescents continue to commit at rates higher than individuals starting with lower offense rates. Even though as individuals age they tend to commit fewer crimes (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990).

Explanation of Criminal Careers. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argue that it is unnecessary to determine why people start, persist, and/or desist offending because all criminal careers reflect the underlying issue of self-control. Thus, they claim that predictors of onset, continuation, frequency, seriousness, and desistance are explained by levels of self control. Self Control Theory also stresses how the age-crime curve reflects the biological processes of maturation.

Gender and Self Control Theory. Self Control theorists have the ability to explain gender differences in delinquency. Males and females are not only supervised differently, but they are taught to behave in different ways. Females tend to be more cautious, less impulsive, and take fewer risks than males. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) assert that gender differences in delinquent activity are a result of differences in self control. Females are believed to be less delinquent because they have greater self control and fewer opportunities to commit crime (Mason and Windle, 2002). Risky behavior of males may be overlooked or even rewarded, while these same violations committed by females are more likely to result in sanctions that have long-term negative social consequences. For example, low familial support and poor academic performance result from committing risky behavior (Mason and Windle, 2002).

Many individuals view female misbehavior as more socially unacceptable. As a result, they must be monitored more carefully. Strict monitoring often extends beyond childhood. Parents are normally more concerned with the effective socialization of females because they are more dependent on social approval. As the result of strict supervision and punishment, they develop stronger self control leading to less delinquency (Tittle et al., 2003). Thus, parents who supervise their sons and daughters differently may socialize them differently (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990).

Age and Self Control Theory. Self Control Theory is unable to explain age differences among offending patterns. Recall that the trend for delinquency is to increase through adolescence until late adolescence or early adulthood, when it begins to steadily decrease. Self control theorists do not claim to be able to explain the age/crime relationship due to their stance that self control does not vary over the life course.

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) state that “crime varies inherently, naturally, and in invariant ways by age, so that no theory is obligated to account for that relationship.” As previously explained, the stability in offending patterns is determined by separating individuals by the level of offenses. Individuals will not necessarily continue to commit a constant number of offenses rather, individuals with high offense rates as adolescents will continue to commit crime at rates higher than individuals starting with lower offense rates.

Despite the claim that self control remains stable, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) acknowledge that biological controls play an increasingly larger part as individuals age and the tendency for criminal behavior declines. Thus, self control can increase slightly as individuals grow and mature. Tittle et al. (2003) claim that people are basically rational and as they suffer the consequences of low self control, individuals will develop greater self control over time to avoid future negative consequences. Inherently, this will lead to a reduction in crime as individuals age.

Race and Self Control Theory. Gottfredson and Hirschi claim that Self Control Theory has the ability to explain racial differences in delinquency. The relationship between race and crime is the result of differences in the level of self control among the social groups (Makhaie et al., 1999). Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) agree that differences among racial and ethnic groups are the result of different levels of supervision by family. “However, as with gender, differences in self control probably far outweigh the differences in supervision in accounting for racial or ethnic variations” (Makhaie et al., 1999, p. 153).

Minorities often have lower educational levels and come from families that also lack higher levels of education. However, if education, income, and socioeconomic levels were controlled, racial differences should decrease. As a result, these families are more likely to demonstrate ineffective parental supervision and guidance. According to Self Control Theory, parental supervision and discipline play an important role in the process of learning self control. Parents model parenting skills learned during their childhood. The lack of learning effective child-rearing skills leads to low self control in the next generation. Thus, failure to learn self control leads to an increased likelihood of delinquency.

Life Course Theory

Sampson and Laub (1993) developed Life Course Theory in an attempt to explain criminal behavior starting at the onset of childhood and persisting or desisting into adulthood. According to data collected throughout the United States, rates of violent and property crime rose rapidly between the preteen years and peak between the ages of 16-20. “Although criminal behavior does peak in the late teenage years, evidence reviewed indicates an early onset of delinquency as well as continuity of criminal behavior over the life course” (Sampson and Laub, 1993, p. 64).

Developmental and life course criminology focuses on how offending and antisocial behavior develops. Life Course Theory also identifies the risk factors at different ages, and what effect life events have on an individual’s life course. Low income, school failure, impulsiveness, criminal parents, delinquent peers, inadequate schools, bad neighborhoods, erratic parental child-rearing, poor parental supervision, anxiety, anger, boredom, criminal opportunity, and disrupted family units are key risk

factors for the onset of juvenile delinquency (Farrington, 2003). Stable employment, marriage, child-rearing, moving out of an urban area, decreasing physical capabilities, drinking less, fear of punishment, and spending less time with male peers leads to desistance of criminal activity (Farrington, 2003).

Process of Life Course Theory. Life Course Theory defines “pathways” through life and age differentiation as the decision process and course of events that influence life stages (Sampson and Laub, 1993). A “trajectory” is a pathway or line of development over one’s life course and consists of long-term patterns of behavior marked by transitions. Simply, a trajectory is the path of a person’s life. Employment, parenthood, marriage, school, military, and criminal behavior are examples of trajectories.

“Transitions” are marked by life events, such as a first marriage or first job (Sampson and Laub, 1993). They are specific events that may alter a trajectory or life path. “Turning points” are changes in the life course caused by both trajectories and transitions. It is important to note that a transition or turning point may have different effects on individuals. A first job for one person may lead to the start of a conventional life course, but may just be a short-term solution for an individual who continues to commit criminal actions.

Interpreting Gluecks’ Research. Sampson and Laub (1993) analyzed the empirical data from Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck’s (1950) *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* study and their follow-up surveys in 1956, 1962, 1968, and 1970 in an attempt to determine whether major life events played a role in future criminal activity and desistance of delinquency. The original Glueck study found that family life for adolescents was an important factor in distinguishing between delinquents and nondelinquents. Their

research stressed that discipline, attachment, and supervision were powerful predictors of persistent, serious delinquency. Families with lax discipline combined with inconsistent and threatening punishment, poor supervision, and weak attachment to parents were linked to the highest probability of delinquency.

After reviewing the Gluecks' conclusions, Sampson and Laub (1993, p. 125) developed three hypotheses: "(1) early antisocial behavior is linked to adult deviant behavior across a variety of settings; (2) early delinquency is linked to adult social bonding; and (3) outcomes are independent of sociological and psychological variables, such as ethnicity, IQ, and social class."

Sampson and Laub (2003) concluded that crime declines with age sooner or later for all offenders. They determined through their longitudinal study of the Gluecks' research that the peak age of offending for violent crimes was in the twenties and the rate of decline is erratic over time. Relating to overall crime, 44% of the males were arrested between the ages of 40 and 49, 23% were arrested between the ages of 50 and 59, and 12% were arrested between the ages of 60 and 69. The mean age of criminal onset for all crime is 11.9. The mean age of desistance is 37.5. The average criminal career for delinquents spans 25.6 years. Violent criminal careers average 9 years (Sampson and Laub, 1993).

Stability of Criminal Behavior. As with Self Control Theory, Life Course Theory supports the notion that antisocial behavior is relatively stable across the life course. Sampson and Laub (1993, p. 248) found that "the qualitative analysis supported the central idea of our theoretical model that there are both stability and change in behavior over the life course, and that these changes are systematically linked to the institutions of

work and family relations in adulthood.” One of the best predictors of antisocial behavior in adults is antisocial behavior in childhood. They also found that although a decrease in crime is normal for most adolescents, individuals who originally commit a higher number of crimes continue to commit crimes at a higher rate than individuals who initially committed fewer crimes.

Social Control. Sampson and Laub (1993) emphasize the importance of social ties and bonds across the entire life course. They feel that previous studies have failed to examine the influences of informal social control from childhood through adulthood. They define 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” (Sampson and Laub, 1993, p. 18). Informal social controls link members of society to each other and other social institutions. Pathways to crime and conformity are mediated by social bonds to institutions of social control. Their model emphasizes the transition into adulthood and the new role demands from employment, higher education, marriage, and military service. Moreover, Sampson and Laub (1993) stress that “social capital” or investment in society resulting from strong social relations prevents a majority of individuals from committing criminal offenses. As a result, individuals with social bonds have more to lose than those who have not developed strong social relations.

In order to understand Life Course Theory, three concepts must be explained: (1) causes of adolescent delinquency, (2) consequences of adolescent delinquency and adult antisocial behavior, and (3) the explanation of adult crime in relation to social bonds (Sampson and Laub, 1993). Adolescent delinquency is the result of informal social controls influenced by family and school, such as the lack of consistent discipline,

monitoring, and attachment. Sampson and Laub (1993) believe that failure to provide these social controls leads to delinquency. The second concept links antisocial adolescent behavior to adult deviance. The negative consequences of childhood misbehavior have a broader range for an adult. For example, educational failure, financial dependence, marital conflict, and employment instability are possible consequences of adult antisocial behavior. The third concept focuses on the strengthening of social controls which leads to fewer criminal acts.

Social Bonds. Life Course Theory emphasizes the strength and quality of social ties. Sampson and Laub (1993) agree with Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) that marriage does not automatically increase social control. Additionally, strong attachment between the spouses is essential. Similarly, employment alone does not increase social control. Rather, employment builds social investment in society resulting in bonding young adults with social institutions. The development of socializing with coworkers disrupts the previous bond with delinquent peers and reduces the opportunity and desire to commit criminal acts (Wright and Cullen, 2004). Getting a job, earning a high school diploma, entering the military, and getting married have the potential to become pivotal periods of transition in an individual's life. These transitions replace old histories, beliefs, and values with new conventional relationships and institutions. However, interdependence with social institutions is likely to decrease crime only if the transitions present a set of obligations, social connections, and expectations (Wright and Cullen, 2004).

“Social bonds in the transition from young adulthood (ages 17-25) and changes in social bonds at ages 25-32 predict variations in crime at ages 25-32 unexplained by prior criminal propensities - whether juvenile or adult” (Sampson and Laub, 1993, p. 200).

Social bonds established and maintained during this time are the best predictor of criminal desistance. The absence of delinquency provides individuals with opportunities for conventional attachments to take hold in adulthood.

Reasons for Delinquency. Sampson and Laub (1993) argue that crime and delinquency are the result of a breakdown of informal social control. They contend that deviant behavior tends to stabilize throughout an individual's life because delinquents often are raised to be adults with low attachment and commitment to work and romantic relationships. Simply, their child-rearing prevents the building and strengthening of ties to school, parents, and nondelinquent peers. Therefore, antisocial childhood behavior increases the chances of delinquency because it disrupts social controls. However, these children are at no greater risk for delinquency than their nondelinquent counterparts in situations where social controls do not corrode.

According to DeWit et al. (1998), children are less likely to encounter problems if they have high attachment to family and school. Frequent relocation was positively related to delinquency due to its effect on weakening the child's attachment to school. Individuals attached to family, school, and peers become hesitant to engage in criminal or delinquent behavior due to invoking a negative response from people who are significant to them. Participation and commitment to conventional activities, such as sports, academic clubs, youth clubs, and churches, decrease the likelihood of an adolescent engaging in delinquent behavior because they are integrated into conventional social institutions with commitment to the pursuit of socially accepted goals. Along with Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), Sampson and Laub (1993) broadened the concept of control to include measures of parental disciplinary actions. These actions include

frequent monitoring and supervision of a child's activities, parental acceptance of children, and the use of punitive measure to punish and correct inappropriate behaviors (DeWit et al., 1998).

Desistance from Crime. Sampson and Laub (2003) emphasized that desistance from crime results due to the presence of positive social institutions and individuals. For example, an individual who obtains steady employment and has the support of his wife to continue legitimate methods of receiving material goods is more likely to desist from criminal activity. Desistance is a process that must be constantly renewed. It occurs when an individual is separated from an immediate environment and offered a new possibility for the future. It also results when an individual is provided a daily routine that includes structure and meaningful activity (Sampson and Laub, 2003).

Individuals who desist from crime often develop a new sense of identity, such as a family man, hard worker, or good provider (Sampson and Laub, 2005). These images enable a person to view conventional methods of financial gain and respect as more beneficial because they have developed a new sense of self and have more to lose. Other individuals desist from crime by "default," meaning that the choice to desist from crime occurs without the intentional deliberation of the individual. Nevertheless, Sampson and Laub (2005) insist that choice alone is not an effective method to prevent criminal activity. They claim that individuals also need social support to desist from criminal activity.

Persistence of Crime. Persistent offenders lack the linking structures through the life course, including nurturing relationships, social support, and informal social control. These individuals also choose to continue criminal activity, not because of impulsivity or

lack of knowledge regarding the possible consequences, but because they continue to pursue the rewards of crime or the desire for domination, defiance, excitement, adventure, or a sense of injustice (Sampson and Laub, 2005). Persistent offenders experience residential, marital, and employment instability in addition to long periods of incarceration and failure in school or the military. These individuals often maintain consistent contact with individuals in similar situations. Nonetheless, it must be noted that even persistent offenders desist from crime as they age (Sampson and Laub, 2005).

Gender and Life Course Theory. Life Course Theory has the ability to explain gender differences when it identifies how males and females view relationships and other life events. The importance that each gender places on the different relationships and the importance of having employment are necessary to demonstrate why males and females offend at different rates. For females, a conventional and intimate partner, strong job commitment, and conventional adult friends decreased the likelihood for females with a delinquent history to escalate to adult crime. Only conventional peers decreased the likelihood for a male with a delinquent history to escalate to adult crime (Simons et al., 2002).

Furthermore, Simons et al. (2002) stress that gender differences in offending are the result of the importance males and females place on values. Women tend to be more responsive to romantic partners than men. A female's emotional well-being and life satisfaction are linked to problems with a partner. Women are less likely to commit criminal acts. If they commit these acts, it often occurs when assisting a criminal partner. A male's identity and life satisfaction are more often linked to the nature of employment.

Work and economic struggles are linked to a male's sense of well-being (Simons et al., 2002).

Life Course Theory claims that females and males use different social processes. Females are often controlled indirectly through the use of emotional bonds to families while males are controlled directly by parental monitoring and supervision (Mason and Windle, 2002). Women place tremendous value on relationships and fear losing loved ones. Committing criminal acts can potentially result in women being incarcerated or ostracized by loved ones who do not agree with her criminal behavior. Females tend to focus less on material goods when they have a family. The family often becomes the focus of the female and she works to keep those individuals happy.

Life Course Theory also indicates that the peak of criminal delinquency for females is age 18. At this point, females tend to become independent from their birth families and start to establish families of their own. They find long-term intimate partners who they risk losing if they commit criminal activities. Some females have children and households to maintain. At this age, females are likely to start college or find steady employment. Both of these factors play a role in desistance of crime. Specifically, females are less likely to risk friendships, family, and intimate relationships. Therefore, females have lower offending rates than males because they fear losing these relationships as the result of engaging in criminal activity.

Age and Life Course Theory. Life Course Theory can also explain age differences in offending patterns. Obviously, Life Course Theory specifically addresses criminal activity from childhood to adulthood. Sampson and Laub (1993) state that males and older adolescents are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior. Life Course theorists

adamantly believe that individuals commit crimes at a younger age because they have lack social support, social control, and parental guidance. Not only do parents need to teach children social control, but they also must model appropriate behavior.

Inappropriate behavior needs to be identified and punished at a young age in order to teach children socially and morally acceptable behavior. As individuals age, they are surrounded by peers and school faculty who continue to instill and model acceptable behavior. Young adolescents and adults learn appropriate behavior through reward and punishment. Young adults begin to learn responsibility and accountability decreasing the number of criminal acts they commit. Young adults have more to lose than young adolescents and they have also learned what behavior is acceptable.

The Life Course theorists insist that individuals will desist or persist in criminal activity in the future based on social support. The Life Course Theory looks at the institutions that teach children that bad behavior will be punished and good behavior will be rewarded. Parents are the key players in this development. Schools often attempt to pick up where parents fail. As individuals age, coworkers, peers, intimate partners, and social groups that they surround themselves with will influence their behavior. If individuals feel they have more to lose, they are less likely to engage in criminal activity.

Race and Life Course Theory. Life Course Theory is capable of explaining racial differences among offending patterns. Looking at arrest rates, there appears to be a large difference in offending patterns between races, although this is not supported by the results of self-reported surveys. With self-reported surveys, there appears to be little, if any, difference between racial offending patterns. Life Course theorists attempt to explain the difference of offending patterns by race. Minorities may have higher offense

rates due to the lack of access to the major life events that lead to desistance: marriage, higher education, employment, military involvement, and child-rearing. For a number of reasons, minorities often face more barriers than Caucasians in obtaining higher education and employment. Home environments model higher education as less important and less accessible to minorities. They lack the role models showing that higher education can lead to a more successful life than criminal activity and the transportation to get to college campuses or vocational training schools. In addition, minorities lack the financial assistance to further their education.

Due to racial discrimination and financial struggles, minorities have a narrower job market. They may not be able to travel outside their neighborhood due to lack of transportation. Agencies may not hire a minority due to bias or lower education. Moreover, their educational achievements may not be viewed as highly as individuals who attend more well known or accredited schools. These arguments may present valid reasons why minorities may commit more criminal offenses.

Conclusions

Juvenile delinquency will continue to be a hot topic for researchers because crime among juveniles is still relatively high. Juveniles also continue to engage in serious criminal acts. Based on the original three questions proposed, General Strain Theory probably does the best job in explaining gender, age, and racial differences in delinquency. Agnew (1992) stresses that individuals face strain on a daily basis and that some individuals choose to commit criminal actions as a way to cope with strain. Agnew's theory was able to identify effective coping skills as the factor that determines

whether an individual will use conventional or nonconventional methods to handle strain. His theory provided a concrete argument to explain gender, age, and racial differences in delinquency.

Despite the fact that females face more strain than males, males commit more crime as the result of using different coping mechanisms. Males externalize their emotions while females internalize them. Males are less concerned about societal pressure and expectations while females are taught by society that criminal behavior is not acceptable and they value societal opinion. Males are less concerned with hurting or destroying relationships while females are socialized to highly value relationships.

General Strain Theory explains the age component based on increased strain from childhood to adulthood as a factor for committing crime. Children rely on parents to provide for them so they face less strain and responsibility. As adolescents, their desire for material goods grow. If their parents are not able or willing to provide these materialistic items, young adults look for ways to obtain them. Strain and responsibility increase as individuals become adolescents. As individuals reach adulthood, they have increased opportunities to gain material goods and status through higher education and employment. Adults also form bonds to spouses, family members, coworkers, and peers that they risk losing through engaging in criminal activity. These opportunities are generally lacking prior to early adulthood leading to decreases in crime as individuals age.

Racial differences in delinquency can be explained by the additional strain placed on minorities. Minorities face more discrimination and have fewer opportunities to gain goals through socially accepted means. Individuals in these highly disadvantaged

communities also face fewer employment and educational opportunities. Minorities are often surrounded by more delinquent peers who increase their criminal opportunities. In addition, fewer positive role models among the community also stress the belief that financial gains can not be obtained through legitimate methods. These extra strains often lead to delinquency.

Summary

In this paper, I explained whether each of the three theories is capable of answering the following questions: (1) Why do males commit more crime than females? (2) Why does delinquency vary by age? Specifically, why does delinquency increase from pre-teen years to the age of 20 before the offending rates begin to decrease; and (3) Why does delinquency vary by race? Each of the theories was able to address these questions – at least to some extent.

General Strain Theory

General Strain Theory was able to explain gender, age, and racial differences in delinquency. This theory indicates that males commit more crime than females despite the fact that females are exposed to more strain, such as abuse and gender discrimination. Females internalize feelings of anger, guilt, shame, and fear. They use self-destructive coping skills such as substance use, eating disorders, and self-mutilation to handle strain. Males externalize feelings of anger and display their feelings in physical and aggressive means; for instance, destroying property, fighting, and engaging in criminal behavior. General Strain Theory also indicates that males associate with more deviant peers leading to greater opportunities for crime. Moreover, females are also held to higher moral standards in society and are demeaned for committing criminal activity.

General Strain Theory indicates why crime and delinquency varies by age. Younger individuals face less strain and responsibility because parents tend to provide for their needs and wants. Adolescents are often unable to obtain their needs through legitimate means because they do not have access to jobs or the education required to obtain certain jobs. Parents provide less for adolescents during this transition period. They are expected to earn more for themselves. Older adolescents and young adults have greater access to jobs and higher education; however, they are responsible for all of their needs and wants. They often need to financially support families and pay for households, transportation, clothing, food, and any additional needs.

General Strain Theory also indicates why minorities have higher crime rates. Minorities face high inequality and economic deprivation. They often come from disadvantaged communities which attract and retain strained, angry individuals. Also, minorities have fewer opportunities to attain goals through socially accepted methods. Minorities frequently have fewer employment and educational opportunities. They associate with more deviant peers and face more perceived or actual unjust acts. These issues result in higher crime rates among minority groups.

Self Control Theory

Self Control Theory was capable of explaining gender and racial differences in delinquency, but was unable to explain age differences. Self Control Theorists explain that males commit more crime than females for several different reasons. Parents supervise females more than males, leading to a higher level of self control. Due to the lack of excessive supervision, males develop less self control and act more impulsively. Females tend to be more cautious, less impulsive, and take fewer risks. Further, they are

held to higher societal standards and criminal behavior by females is less acceptable. Males are often accepted and rewarded despite criminal activity. Self Control Theory also indicates that males associate with more deviant peers leading to greater opportunities for crime. Finally, females have a stronger sense of guilt and disapproval preventing them from committing actions that lead to these feelings.

Self Control Theory failed to explain differences in juvenile delinquency by age. However, Self Control theorists feel that there is no need to explain age because crime declines “naturally” as individuals age. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) claim that humans are basically rational. Thus, as they suffer the consequences of low self control, individuals will develop greater self control over time to avoid future negative consequences. As a result, age does not need to be addressed because criminal activity will naturally decline over time.

Self Control Theory indicates why minorities have higher crime rates. Minorities receive different levels of supervision and generally have less education, which often results in ineffective parenting skills. As a result, families pass along ineffective parental supervision and guidance to their children, causing the pattern to continue from generation to generation. In conclusion, failure to learn self control as a child increases the likelihood of delinquency.

Life Course Theory

Life Course Theory was also able to explain gender, age, and racial differences in delinquency. Life Course theorists explain that males commit more crime than females because their emotional well-being and values are different. A female’s emotional well-being and life satisfaction are relationship based while a male’s identity and life

satisfaction is linked to the nature of employment. Females value relationships more than males and fear losing loved ones. At the peak age of criminal activities, females are in the process of changing their focus from their immediate family and friends to starting independent lives. They engage in long-term intimate relationships, possibly get married, have children, gain steady employment, or pursue higher education. Each of these life events are likely to lead to desistance in crime. Because females value relationships, they will do less to disrupt or destroy them.

Life Course theorists explain why crime and delinquency vary by age. As previously indicated, criminal activity peaks between the ages of 16 and 20. Life events such as marriage, higher education, employment, military, and child-rearing lead to desistance. Both males and females realize they have more to lose; thus, they are less likely to engage in criminal activities which may interfere and cause them to lose these important opportunities and people. Parents are key “players” in Life Course Theory. Schools attempt to pick up where parents fail to teach values to their children. As individuals age, peers, coworkers, intimate partners, and social groups influence their behavior.

Life Course Theory indicates why minorities have higher crime rates. According to arrest rates, there are large differences in offending patterns between races. Self-reported surveys indicate there are few differences in offending patterns between races. It is proposed that minorities have higher offense rates due to the lack of access to the major life events that Sampson and Laub (1993) stress lead to desistance: marriage, higher education, employment, military involvement, and child-rearing. Minorities often face more barriers than Caucasians to obtain higher education and employment for

various reasons. Home environments model higher education as less important and less accessible to minorities. They lack the role models showing that higher education can lead to a more successful life than criminal activity and the transportation to get to college campuses or vocational training schools. In addition, minorities lack the financial assistance to further their education. Lastly, minorities also have a narrower job market due to racial discrimination and lack of transportation.

In conclusion, General Strain theory, Self Control theory, and Life Course theory present credible arguments that help explain racial, age, and gender differences in delinquency statistics. Despite the inability to fully explain each characteristic, theorists are able to find evidence that supports their claim that such differences in delinquency can be addressed. Each theory uses different viewpoints to explain the gender, age, and racial differences in delinquency, but all theories manage to sufficiently cover them.

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