

Lecture 12A: Feminist Approaches to Criminology



Feminist Theories

- Knowledge assumed to be determined by experiences conditioned by one's *gender*, race, class, ethnicity, etc.
- Because criminology dominated by males, the field is flawed by “masculinist” perspectives.

Feminist Theory of Criminal Justice

- Focus on gender inequalities, especially societal institutions such as patriarchies where the rights and privileges of males are superior.
- Feminists stress that male-female differences in power are at least as important as power differentials by race, class, and age.

Empirical Validity of Feminist Theory and Criminal Justice

- Prediction: Females, in having less **power**, receive harsher treatment from the system.
- Evidence: Most evidence suggests equal treatment by gender, or males experiencing harsher treatment.
- Explanation: “Chivalry” or “Paternalism” serving to maintain submissive roles by women.

Paternalism and Status Offenses

- Higher proportion of girls than boys brought to juvenile court and incarcerated for status offences such as running away and truancy.
- Girls treated more harshly for these minor offenses because system “sexualizes” their offenses as a threat to sex-role expectations.

Gender and Court Rulings

- Evidence suggests that judges consider family ties and obligations to children in sentencing for BOTH men and women.
- Women do receive more lenient sentences, but more women have family ties and obligations to children. When family ties are controlled for, there are no gender differences in sentences.

Summary of Evidence

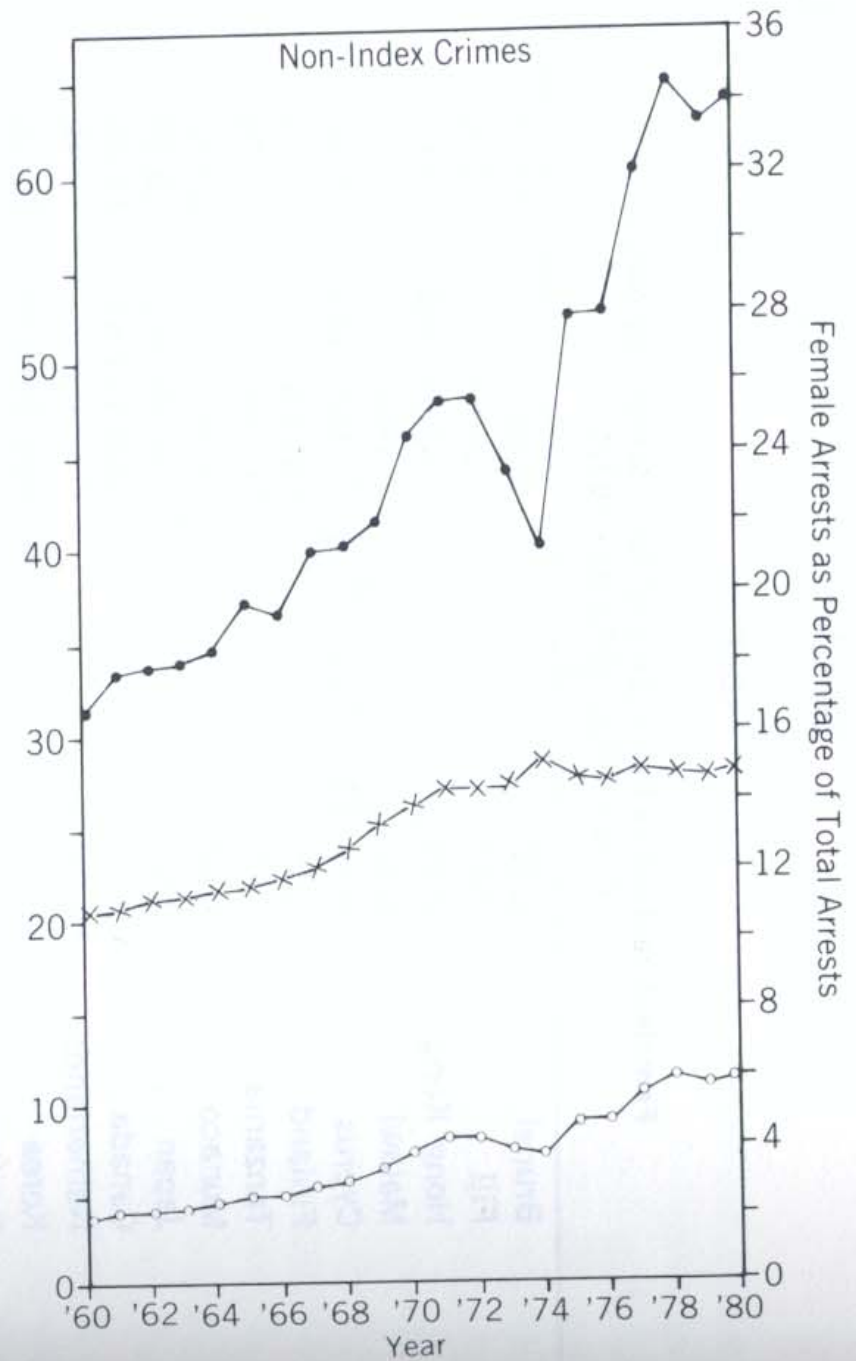
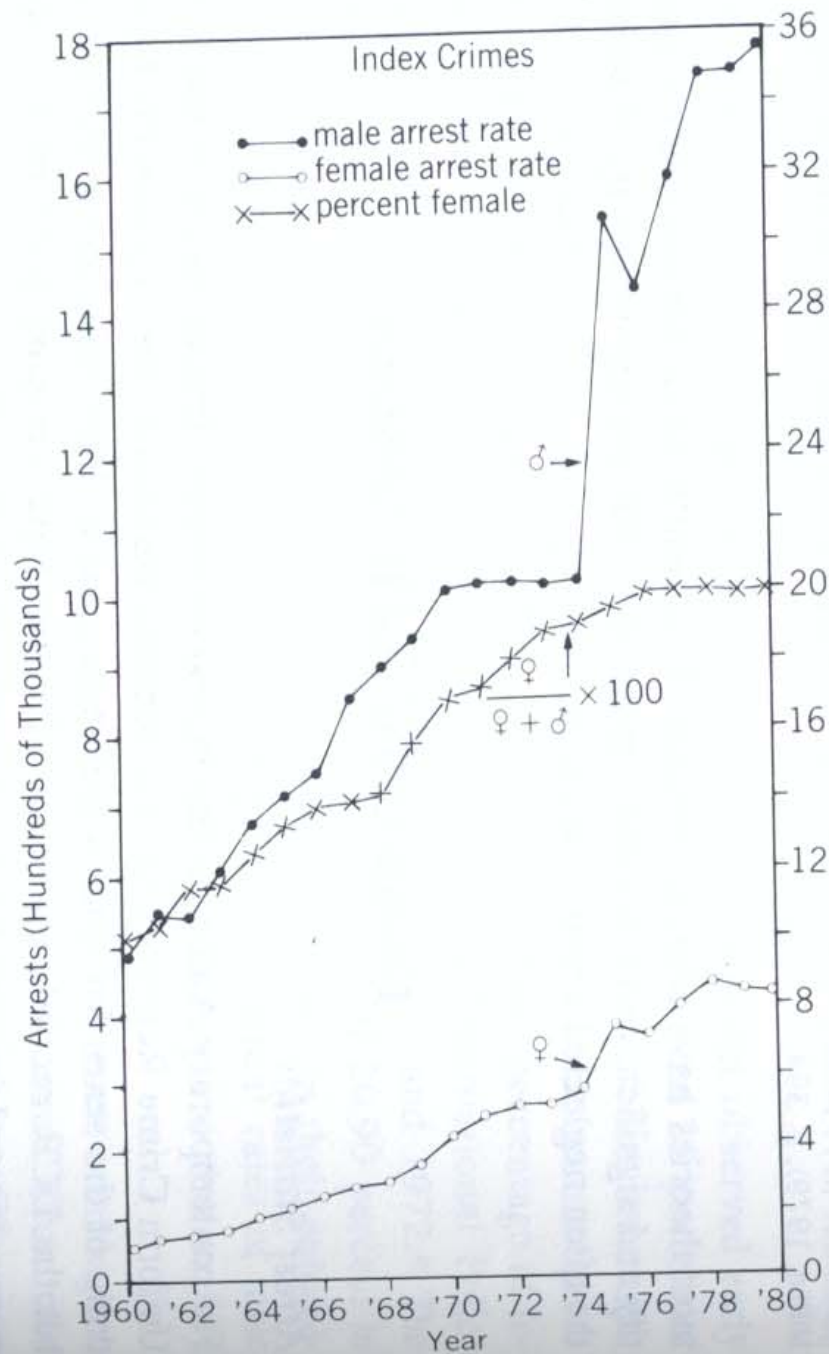
- When factors such as offense circumstances, offenders' blameworthiness, and family responsibilities are considered, gender has a very small effect on court decisions.
- In sum, effect of extra-legal variables such as gender do exist, but are closer to the pure justice end of the continuum than pure discrimination.

Feminist Theories of Crime

- Feminists criticize other theories of crime as developed to explain only male crime.
- What explains why males much more likely involved in crime? Many feminists say this question unanswered by traditional theory.

Women's Liberation and Female Crime

- **Hypothesis:** As gender inequalities are reduced through “liberation” movements, male and female crime rates will converge.
- **Problems:** Female crime has been recently rising, but 1.) the initial rise may have pre-dated women's liberation movement 2.) occurred mainly in areas where movement has been least successful and 3.) the gap has decreased, but not by much.



Power-control Theory of Gender and Delinquency

- Families socialize their male and female children differently because of capitalistic economic system and patriarchal institutions.
- Males taught to be risk-takers and females to be risk adverse.
- Such socialization thought to be more extreme in families that are more patriarchal.

Empirical Validity of Feminist Theories of Criminal Behavior

- Akers summarizes that there is little support for feminist theory—the same variables related to male offending are generally related to female offending.
- Can gender variables such as patriarchal institutions explain the gender gap in rape, or interpersonal violence?

Policy Implications of Feminist Theory

- Patriarchal institutions must be removed from society.
- Advocates favor prevention and treatment rather than punitive strategies for women because they are more amenable to such rehabilitative strategies.

Lecture 12B: Integrated Criminological Theories



1.) Evaluate Individual Theories

- Evaluate the theory by using empirical data to address if the predictions are confirmed or disconfirmed.
- Evaluating evidence on single theory seldom leads to complete theory rejection as some truth can usually be found in most theories.

2.) Theoretical Competition

- Principle of parsimony: evaluate each theory in comparison to others to identify which theory explains the most variation for the subject at hand.
- Akers favors this approach. He finds most support for social learning theories of crime, and least for labeling, strain theories, and biological theories. Rational choice theories?

3.) Integrate Theories

- Identify commonalties of two or more theories to produce synthesis that is superior to any one theory individually.
- Theoretical revisions often incorporate concepts from other theories.

Additional Method: Question Based Approach to Studying Human Behavior

- Focus less on integrating pre-existing theories, and more on clarifying what questions about human behavior you are interested in resolving.
- Avoid disciplinary boundaries, and forcing oneself to reconcile differences between pre-existing theories.

Parsimony and Scope

- General theories of crime may be useful (i.e., self-control theories). But do we need some theories that are narrower in scope?
- Thus, is it possible that some types of crime are better understood with specific theories?
(Dispute-related homicide, politically motivated violence and terror, professional thieves).

How important are different forces?

Macro Level Variables (i.e. criminal justice institutions)
Class > Race > Gender

Micro Level Variables (i.e., individual behavior)

Rational
Choice

Social Learning and
Social Bonding

Strain, cultural
values,

Akers: Conceptual Absorption

- Akers argues concepts from one theory could be used incorporate concepts from another theory.
- Example: Social bonding and social learning theories.
 - 1.) “Belief” vs. favorable or unfavorable “definitions”
 - 2.) “Commitment” vs. differential reinforcement
 - 3.) “Attachment” vs. intensity of modal reinforcement.

Contradiction: Social learning predicts that sometimes attachment increases deviance.

Proposition Integration

- Elliot's integrative model (strain, bonding, learning)
- Favors assumptions of learning theory (in contrast to control theory) because he believes it is unlikely that socialization **ONLY** results in conventional behaviors.
- Empirical finding that association with delinquent youth **increases** crime leads Akers to criticize model.

Figure 10.2 Elliott's integrated theory.

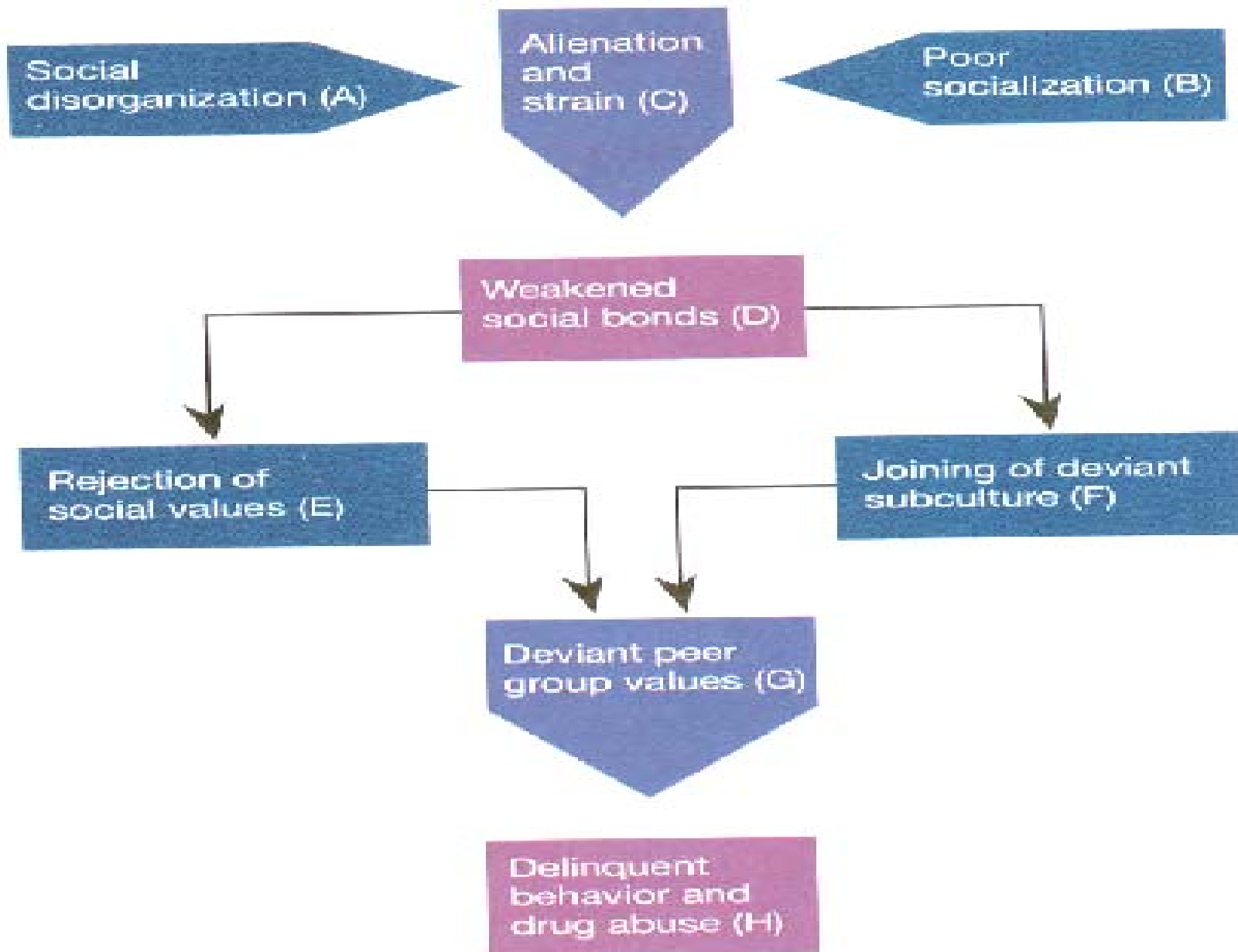
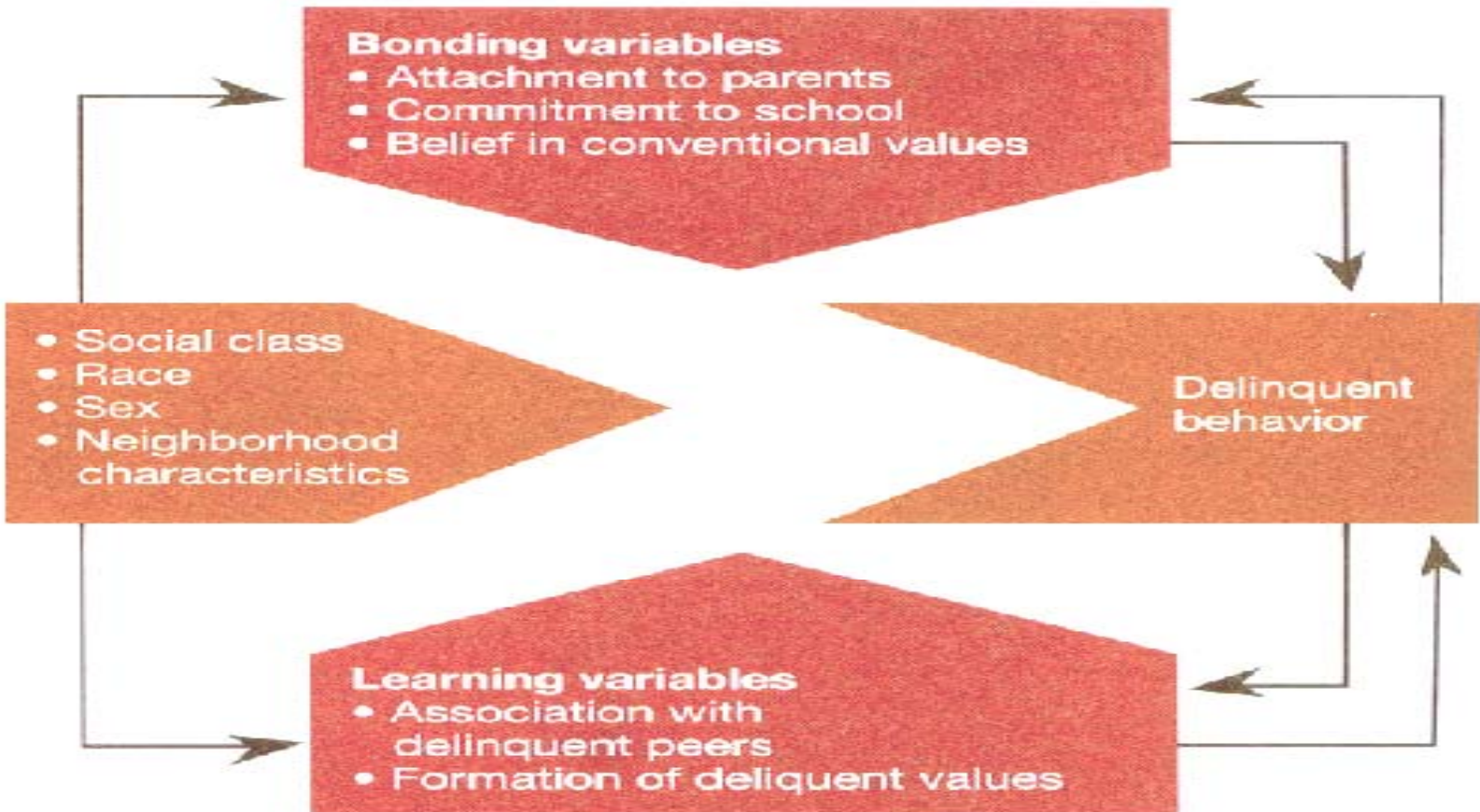


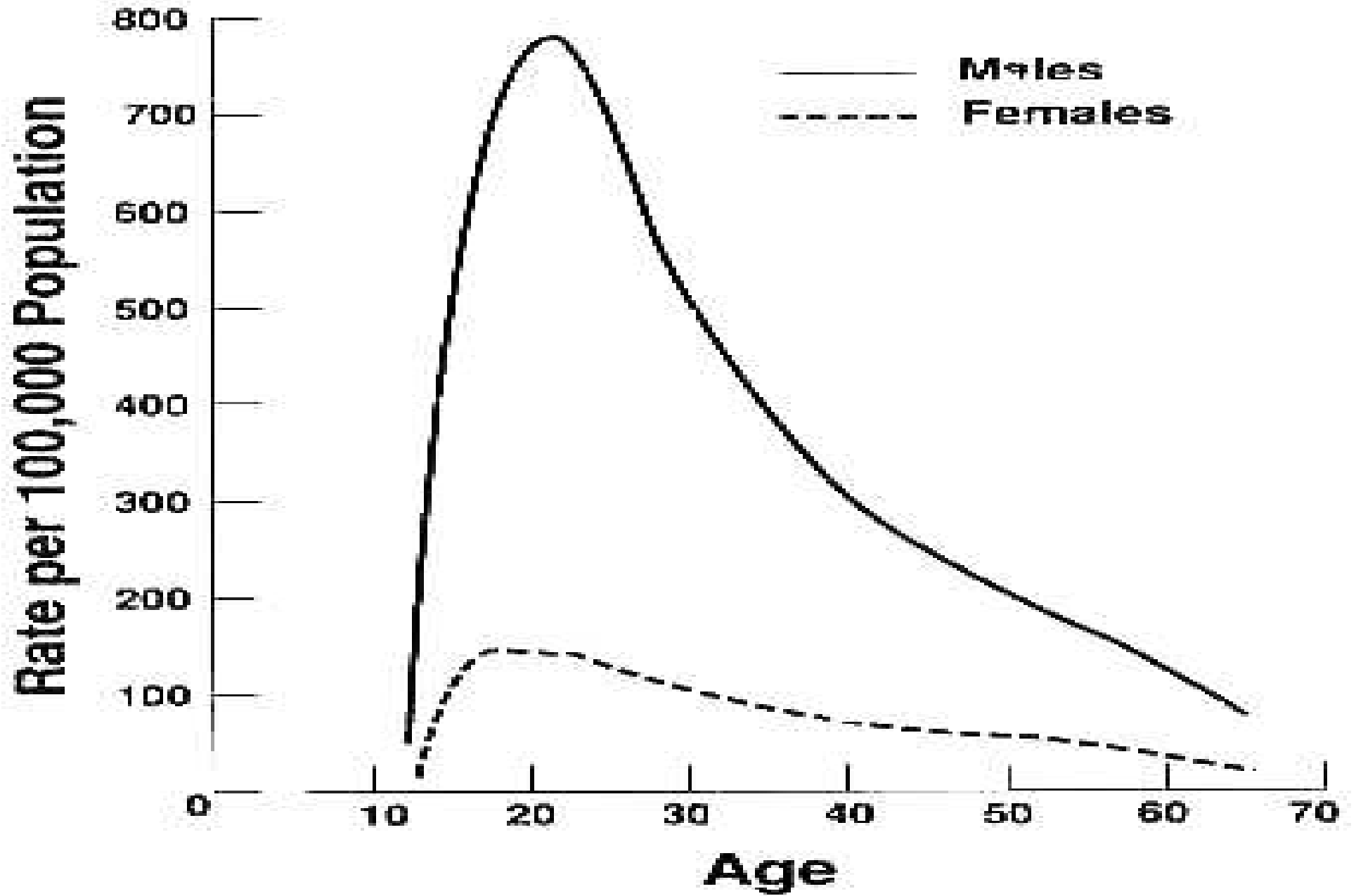
Figure 10.6 Overview of the interactional theory of delinquency.

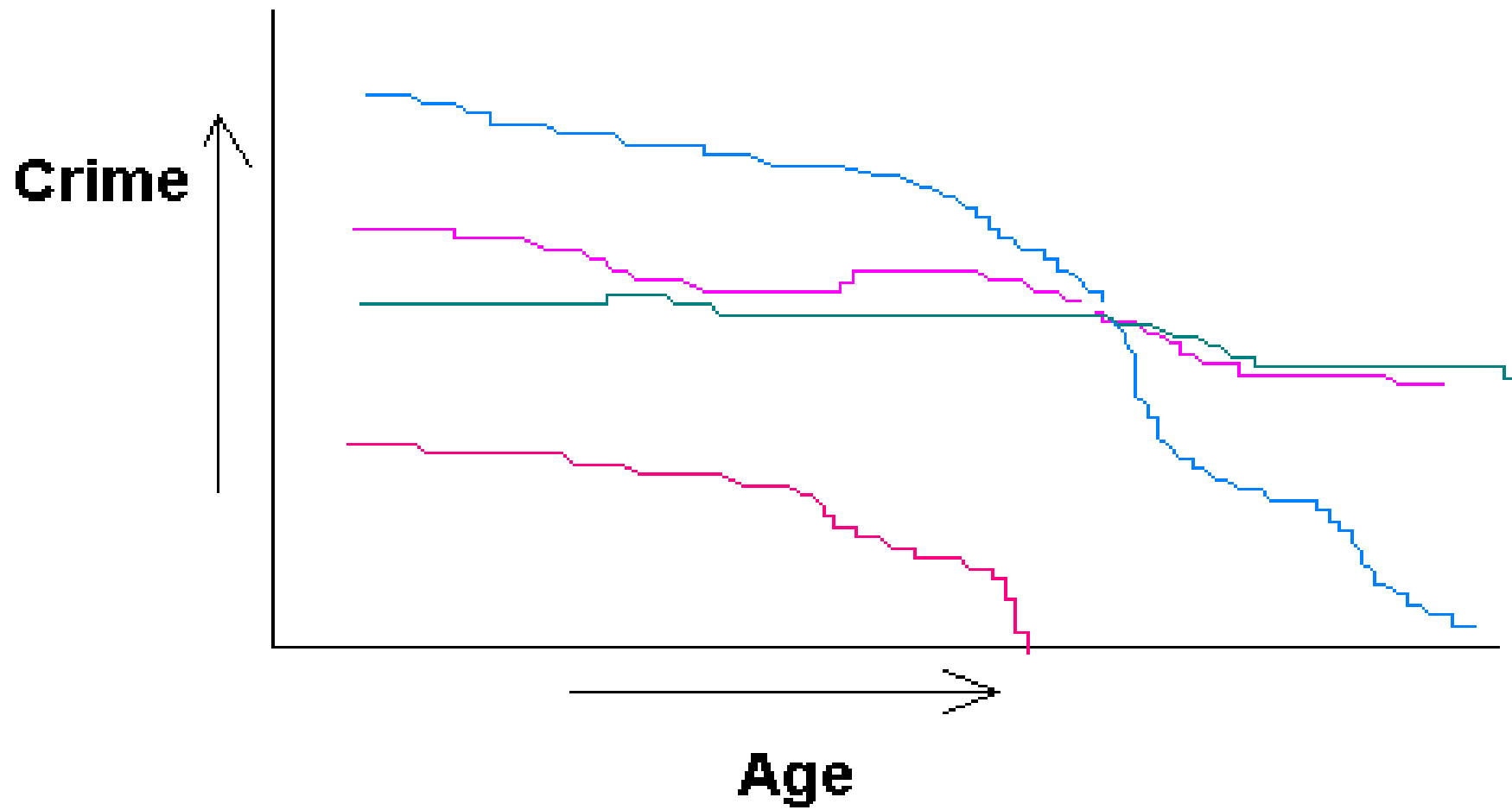


• Thornberry's Interactional Theory: Causal forces among social structure, social learning, and social bonding variables interact rather than operate in linear manner.

Developmental and Life-Course Theories

- Goal is to understand stability and change in criminal and deviant behavior through time at different life stages.
- Often integrate a number of theories and concepts to explain life history and crime.

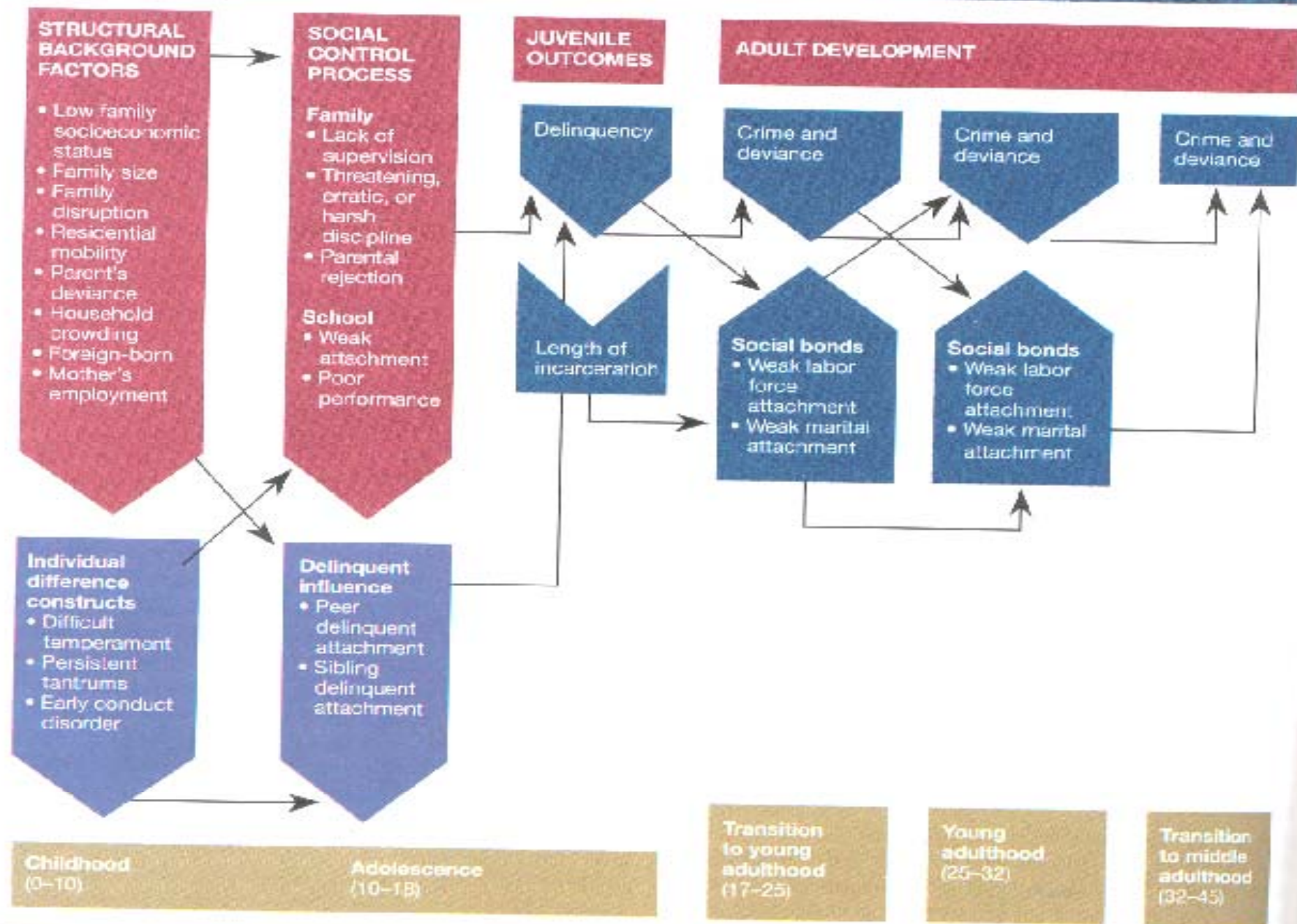




Sampson and Laub

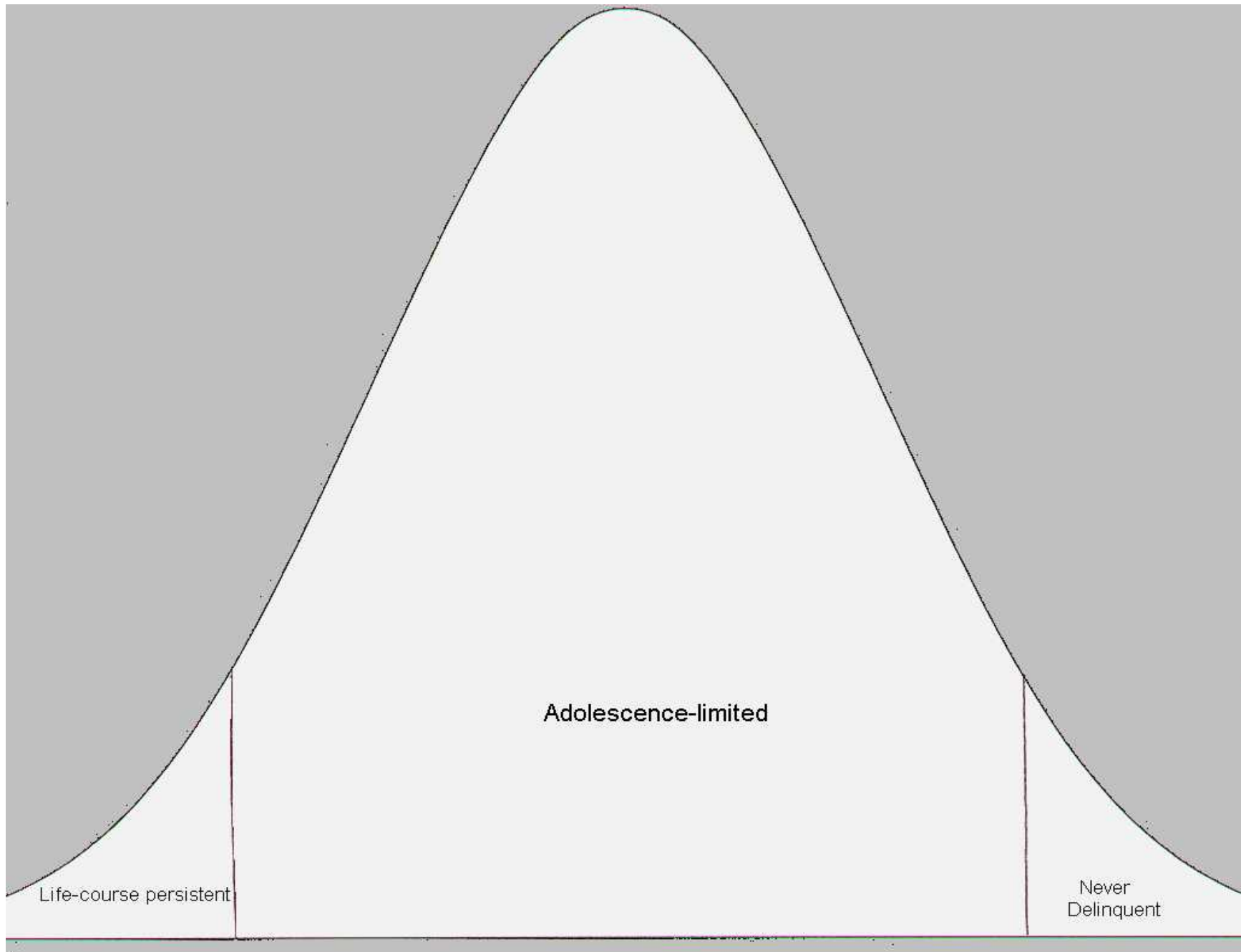
- **Consider both social learning, control theory, and labeling theory.**
- Crime/deviance is stable from young ages to adulthood, but often reaches abrupt “turning points” and gradual changes that are associated with bonds that occur with marriage and stable employment.

Figure 10.7 Sampson and Laub's ago-graded theory.

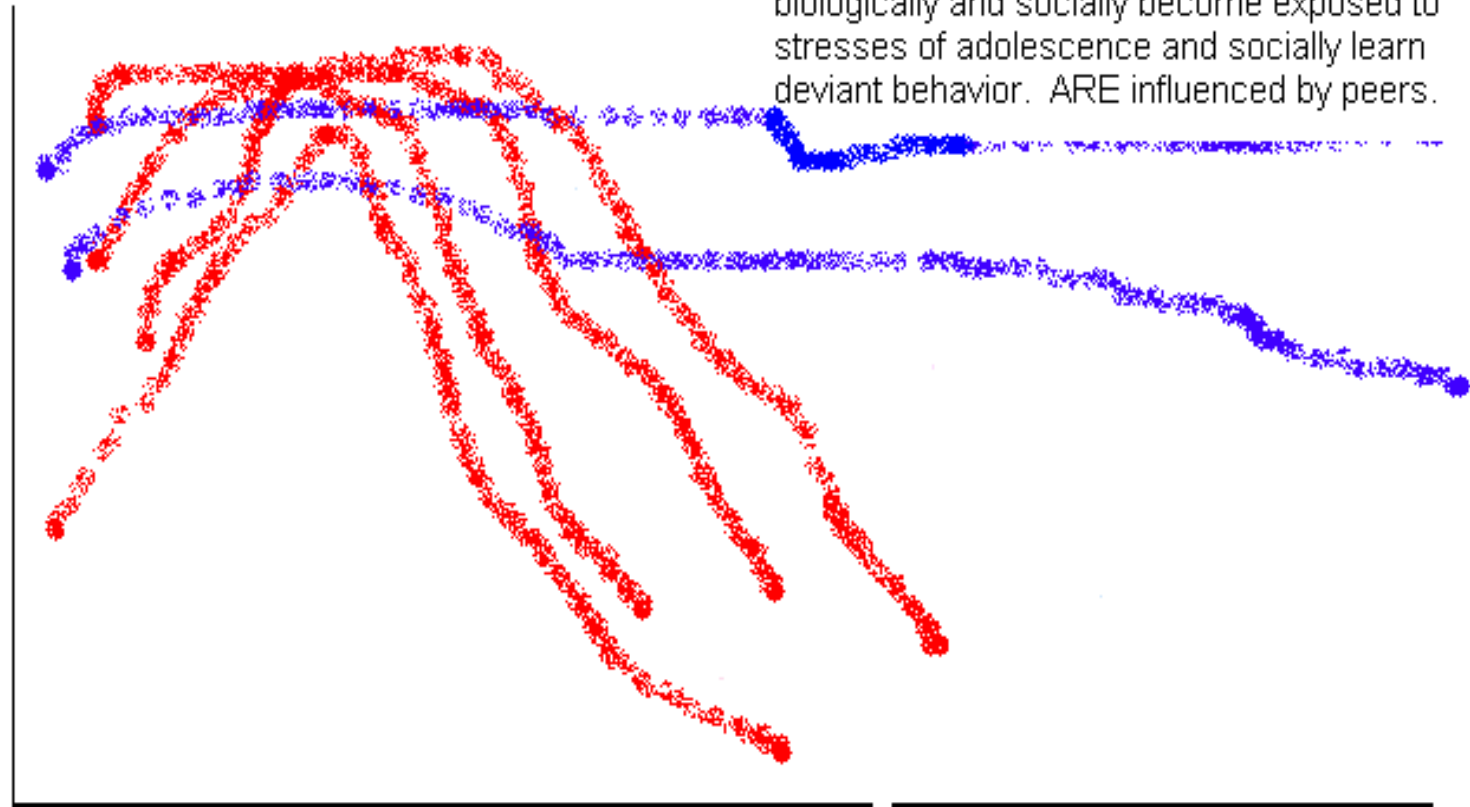


Moffitt's Theory to Explain Both Continuity and Change

- Evidence suggests a good deal of stability in criminal behavior. However, there is also a great deal of change over the life course. Both observations are accurate.
- Moffitt suggest that there are two types of offenders (*life-course persistent* and *adolescence-limited*).



Crime

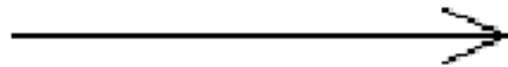


Life course persistent. Biology and early socialization makes individuals impulsive and prone to deviance. NOT influenced by PEERS



Adolescence-limited. "Normal" children biologically and socially become exposed to stresses of adolescence and socially learn deviant behavior. ARE influenced by peers.

Age



Case Study

- “What the Bagel Man Saw”
- What can be learn from bagel thieves?

“What the Bagel Man Saw”



What the Bagel Man Saw

- Story from the New York Times
- A man had a well paid job, but was unfulfilled in Wash. D.C. researcher role. "I'd go to the office Christmas party, and people would introduce me to their wives or husbands as the guy who brings in the bagels," he says. "*Oh! You're the guy who brings in the bagels!*" Nobody ever said, "This is the guy in charge of the public research group."
- He became the bagel guy.

The Bagel Business

- Driving around the office parks that encircle Washington, he solicited customers with a simple pitch: early in the morning, he would deliver some bagels and a cash basket to a company's snack room; he would return before lunch to pick up the money and the leftovers. It was an **honor-system** commerce scheme, and it worked. Within a few years, he was delivering 700 dozen bagels a week to 140 companies and earning as much as he had ever made as a research analyst.

Did everyone pay for their bagel?

- When he first went into business, he expected 95 percent payment, based on the experience at his own office.
- He considers companies "honest" if the payment is 90 percent or more. "Averages between 80 percent and 90 percent are annoying but tolerable," he says. "Below 80 percent, we really have to grit our teeth to continue."

Trends

- In recent years, he has seen two remarkable trends in overall payment rates. The first was a long, slow decline that began in 1992.
- Entering the summer of 2001, the overall payment rate had slipped to about 87 percent. Immediately after Sept. 11, the rate spiked a full 2 percent and hasn't slipped much since. (If a 2 percent gain in payment doesn't sound like much, think of it this way: the nonpayment rate fell from 13 percent to 11 percent, which amounts to a 15 percent decline in theft.)

Do people steal it all?

- When he started out, he left behind an open basket for the cash, but too often the money vanished. Then he tried a coffee can with a slot in its plastic lid, which also proved too tempting. The wooden box has worked well. Each year he drops off about 7,000 boxes and loses, on average, **just one to theft**. This is an intriguing statistic: the same people who routinely steal more than 10 percent of his bagels almost never stoop to stealing his money box -- a tribute to the nuanced social calculus of theft.

Rationalizations?

- From Paul F.'s perspective, an office worker who eats a bagel without paying is committing a crime; the office worker apparently doesn't think so. This distinction probably has less to do with the admittedly small amount of money involved than with the context of the "crime." (The same office worker who fails to pay for his bagel might also help himself to a long slurp of soda while he's filling a glass in a self-serve restaurant, but it is extremely unlikely that he will leave the restaurant without paying.)

Group Factors

- Predictors of a company's honesty: morale and size. Paul F. has noted a strong correlation between high payment rates and an office where people seem to like their boss and their work. He also gleans a higher payment rate from smaller offices. (This one is firmly supported by the data.) An office with a few dozen employees generally outpays by 3 percent to 5 percent an office with a few hundred employees.

Weather and Holidays

- Unseasonably pleasant weather inspires people to pay a significantly higher rate. Unseasonably cold weather, meanwhile, makes people cheat prolifically; so does heavy rain and wind.
- The week of Christmas produces a 2 percent drop in payment rates -- again, a 15 percent increase in theft, an effect on the same order, in reverse, as 9/11. Thanksgiving is nearly as bad; the week of Valentine's Day is also lousy, as is the week straddling April 15. There are a few good holidays: July 4, Labor Day and Columbus Day.

Unemployment

- The bagel data also show a correlation between payment rate and the local rate of unemployment. Intuition might have argued that these two factors would be negatively correlated -- that is, when unemployment is low (and the economy is good), people would tend to be freer with their cash. "But I found that as the unemployment rate goes down, dishonesty goes up," Paul F. says. "My guess is that a low rate of unemployment means that companies are having to hire a **lower class of employee.**" The data also show that the payment rate does not change when he raises bagel prices, though volume may temporarily fall.

- "One time when I was cleaning up leftovers," he recalls, "a man came and took a doughnut while I was standing there, and started to walk away without putting any money in the box. I never challenge people about paying, but in that place, despite notes and appeals to management, the payment rate had been abysmal, and I was fed up. I said to the guy, 'Are you going to pay for that?' And he said, 'Oh, I left my wallet in my car,' and started to put the doughnut back. Now I knew, and he knew that I knew, that he hadn't left his wallet in the car, but he was too cheap to pay 50 cents for a doughnut and too brazen to say, 'Oh, I'm sorry, I just wasn't thinking,' which is what anyone with half a conscience would say."