McGloin4Review

Wed, 8/25 3:34PM   1:20:07

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, threshold, behavior, offending, crime, vignettes, decision, theory, paper, group, collective, piece, accomplices, criminology, thinking, idea, talk, opt, offend, read

SPEAKERS

Jean McGloin, Jenn Tostlebe, Jose Sanchez

Jenn Tostlebe 00:14

Hi everyone. Welcome to the first episode of the fall 2021 lineup of The Criminology Academy podcast, where we are criminally academic. My name is Jenn Tostlebe.

Jose Sanchez 00:25

And I'm Jose Sanchez.

Jenn Tostlebe 00:27

And today we are excited to have Professor Jean McGloin on the podcast, where we will be talking with her about collective crime and how the group or a group influences the decision to engage in criminal activity/criminal behavior.

Jose Sanchez 00:41

Jean McGloin is currently a Professor in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Maryland and Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Education in the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences. She received her Ph.D. in Criminal Justice from Rutgers University in 2004, where her dissertation focused on street gangs in Newark, New Jersey. Dr. McGloin's research interests include peer influence, co-

offending, and collective behavior. Thank you so much for joining us today, Jean. We really appreciate you being here with us.

Jean McGloin 01:11

My pleasure, but you failed to introduce the most exciting person on this podcast today.

Jose Sanchez 01:17

Yeah, so, I'm watching my kid right now. So just an FYI for everybody, if you hear some groaning, complaining, or just general, non intelligible, chatting, it's The Crim Academy baby.

Jean McGloin 01:33

And what's nice is that when he's on the edges, his face gets blurred. So it's like you're one of those celebrities who doesn't want your kid showing up in Okay magazine or People.

Jose Sanchez 01:44

He's a special guest for today.

Jenn Tostlebe 01:48

Alright, so a brief overview of what we're going to be talking about today. First, we're just going to start with some general questions about collective behavior and offending in a group. And then from there, we're going to actually go into kind of a trio of papers that have stemmed off of each other about the development of a theory of collective criminal behavior. So Jose, I will let you get started.

Jose Sanchez 02:17

Okay, so as per usual, we're gonna start off with a pretty general question. And so Jean when we use the term, collective behavior, what exactly are we referring to?

Jean McGloin 02:31

So this is interesting, this is your leadoff question, because it's a very simple question. But the answer is a little bit complicated. And it would be something that we could get into

more deeply if we well, you guys are, you know, in programs that include sociology, I am in no way a sociologist, right. So I think it's helpful for us just to have a brief sense of what it means and then specifically what it means with regard to criminology. Right? So it's interesting, because there's been some definitional debates around this issue, there's been discussions around the borders of what constitutes collective behavior and what doesn't, I mean, Blumer bemoaned this back in the 1950s and scholars have continued over time, to kind of discuss what are the boundaries of this term? Now, some scholars and some researchers just sort of dive in and don't even define it like a lot of the work if you were to read contemporary work and collective behavior, collective action, they don't take the time to define what we mean by that, right? They sort of have this sense that there's an agreed upon connotation, right. But when it comes to the actual definition, it can get, I don't want to say confusing, it can just get a little bit loose around the edges. So what's interesting is that even McPhail one time argued that we seem better able to explain what collective behavior is not, which is largely like really structured and organized behavior as opposed to what it is. There's an interesting piece by Gary Marx in 1980, where he discusses some of this stuff and I think that piece holds up still. In the most blunt sense, we can think about collective behavior as group action, right? Just the synonyms, but collective behavior has some assumptions around it. So if we go back to Blumer, his sort of classic definition of collective behavior, really focused on the idea of spontaneous action that emerges out of social interaction among non institutional groups, right, so I'm using some jargon there. But a quote of his is its character characteristic behavior is not an expression of pre established prescription, but is produced out of a forging process of interaction.

Jean McGloin 04:28

So it helps sometimes if we think about examples. So collective behavior would include things like riots or consumer demand for a new product or financial decisions and market behavior or residential migratory changes or public opinion, right? If we're thinking about it in a crime context, we can go down a rabbit hole if we want to, I'd prefer not to do that here. Right. We can think about it more simply as group crime, right. So shared criminal behavior, co offending. If we wanted to, we could delve into how the framing, the negotiation, and the ideological processes that are attached to offending can be seen as collective behavior. So, think about Becker's piece on becoming a marijuana user. Think about Matza's discussion of drift, think about social interactionism more broadly or, you know, Sutherland's deeper considerations of differential association. Those sorts of like setting the stage behaviors are also can be seen as collected behavior. If you're interested in that, I would urge you to read some of Ross Matsueda's work, he's done a really good job developing this argument specifically his 2006 piece. But for our purposes here today, I think we want to think about collective behavior as group crime that emerges sort of out

of non formal groups. Right. I think that's, that's a way that we can think about it. So long answer to a very simple question.

Jose Sanchez 05:47

Yeah, no, I think that's a great answer. And interesting, because I think, when a lot of people think of collective behavior, and this was true for me, as well, before, you know, I'd really decided that I want to be a criminologist. We think of things that we see in like the media, so like, my example would be like, Ocean's 11, right, like the George Clooney movie, like this team of specialized individuals coming together and coming up with like this highly elaborate plan, working together. But it's, it doesn't necessarily mean that it has to be that organized, right?

Jean McGloin 06:22

No, and a lot of times, I think the presumption is that it isn't like, it's it's this emergent thing that just happens naturally out of social interactions. So, you know, another sometimes people include social movements, broader social movements as a form of collective behavior, you know, early on discussions of collective behavior, this idea of sort of crowd behavior. The notion was that you lost your sense of rationality, you lost your sense of individuality, you sort of handed over your behavior to some crowd mentality. As research has gone on, it's suggested like, that's not what happens, right. But it's just curious, because it's a term that multiple disciplines use, and multiple scholars and researchers use, but it's similar to street gangs, right, that they always mean the same thing. Right?

Jenn Tostlebe 07:04

Yeah, I feel like that's been a reoccurring theme across our podcast episodes, where there's this super simple thing that's really not as simple as it seems, or vice versa. But yeah, interesting. So when we're thinking about crime, there's definitely like two silos. So either you're committing crime by yourself, or you're committing crime in a group. So how common is like group crime compared to individual crime?

Jean McGloin 07:34

Okay, so I'm just going to comment briefly on that silo analogy because I like it because in an incident, it's either a group crime or sort of a group incident or a solo incident. But we have to be careful not to put offenders in those silos. So people make references for group crime or solo crime, but a lot of people engage in both. But in terms of incidents, if we

think about sort of one or the other, in terms of its how common it is, I want to mention a few people who sort of argued that it's so common, it's an essence of criminological fact. So, you know, Warr's, I think, seminal book on companions and crime. He leveraged that phrase, and he said that if criminologists truly seek full knowledge of companions and crime, you cannot simply study the mechanisms of deviant peer influence, you have to also understand the structure and processes of cooffending. More than a century ago, and I've used this quote, in several papers, Breckinridge and Abbott said, and I'm quoting here, there is scarcely a type of delinquent boy who is not associated with others in his wrongdoing. And Joan McCord and colleagues, they argue that co offending is an inherent part of delinquency, right? It's not incidental. It is, it is something that is meaningful, and it's something that is sort of standard.

J

Jean McGloin 08:40

Now the actual estimates of you know, co offending compared to solo offending, those vary both across and within studies - that was observed, I think really nicely by Andresen and Felson. But just to give you some sense, so Shaw and McKay, in their you know, essential work for the discipline, they found that about 80% of juveniles seen in Cook County Juvenile Court were suspected of offending with accomplices. Al Reiss, who I think really, I think, pushed co offending literature like he's the change point when it comes to talking about group crime when it comes to talking about co offending. For decades, we didn't really pay much explicit attention to it. And then in a pair of pieces in 1986 and 1988. And then with another piece in 1991, with David Farrington, he basically demanded that the discipline pay attention to it. And in his 86 piece, he basically demonstrated the group nature of crime becomes even more apparent when you consider the individual rather than the incident as the unit of analysis. So for example, an incident level analysis that in 1984, approximately half of the robbery victimizations in the US were committed by two or more people at the individual level, however, nearly three quarters of people who who had engaged in robbery offended with at least one other person, right.

J

Jean McGloin 09:54

So to connect it back to this earlier discussion of what is collective behavior. I also want to highlight something that Reiss and Farrington said in 1991, they said that most of the people who offend with others are not members of larger, highly structured groups. Instead, it's delinquent offenses are generally committed by two or three individuals who are only loosely associated with one another. Right? So it's very frequent. It's very common. It does vary across crime types, it does vary across age. We, you know, several studies suggests that we're much more likely to see it during the juvenile years, I do want to highlight that there are some researchers who disagree with this, namely Stolzenberg

and D'Alessio. They had a piece in 2008, where they basically took a counter perspective and said, we actually think it's been overstated. There were some responses to that, some people don't agree, but I think it's important to acknowledge that, you know, the vast majority highlight how frequent and prevalent it is to see co offending, but there are some scholars who are like, I think maybe we've overstated it.

Jose Sanchez 10:48

So given its frequency, or, you know, we believe it to be so frequent. What about this type of collective behavior or collective crime - what makes it unique. Like what is what is different about this style of crime versus a solo type of offense?

Jean McGloin 11:04

One of the ways that we can think about it as being maybe a little bit different, are the sorts of things that go into the calculation of risks and costs and benefits, generally speaking, right. So McCarthy and colleagues had this interesting piece in 1998, we're going to talk about in a little bit when we talk about what are some theories of cooffending, right? But they highlighted that actually, co offending can be pretty risky, if you think about it from certain perspectives. So for instance, when you have accomplices, it can all fall to crap, right? Like, you know, if you're robbing someone with other people, that person can escalate the offense, and all of a sudden, it becomes more dangerous and violent than you intended, that person can bail on you halfway through, and now all of a sudden, there's there's an issue, that person can steal the money that you get, and now you're left with nothing after having committed the crime, that person can narc on you, you know, if they get caught, and you don't. So it has these additional risks, right. And there's some research to suggest that we have something called a group hazard hypothesis, which is, when you have more people engaged in an act, it's more likely to come to the attention of police, right? So people have talked about those risks, because for some people who do work in rational choice, they think it's interesting that people decide to take on accomplices because it's not something that inherently lightens the load, necessarily, right.

Jean McGloin 12:19

But there are also some perspectives that there may be benefits to co offending. So some examples would be the perceived responsibility goes down probably goes down, because it's not just you who's engaging in the act, maybe your perceived sense of how wrong it is, or your perceived sense that other people are gonna be disappointed in you goes down, because it's not just you, you're part of a group, right, you can sort of spread out blame, or

you can have diffusion of responsibility or anonymity. There may be benefits that come along with it too, it can be more exciting, you can have a greater rush, because you're doing something with other people. You can have social rewards, a feeling like you have this inclusion you feel like you belong.

Jean McGloin 12:56

It can also be sometimes that maybe there's a risk of not cooffending because now all of a sudden, you're you're not doing what everyone else is doing, right, maybe you're gonna get excluded, or people are gonna look at you in a different way and not have the same level of respect for you.

Jean McGloin 13:09

Interestingly, even though we talked about the group hazard hypothesis, there's some suggestions that maybe the perceived sanction risk goes down. Because you know, if I'm shoplifting by myself in a store, I might get caught. But if I'm one of, you know, several people who sort of grab and run, the odds that me individually will get caught perceptually might go down, right? So, you know, this is one of those areas where people are using theory to inform why co offending may be different. They're using sort of logic, they're using what we've gathered from qualitative information when we talk to offenders about what they consider when they actually go about offending. So Wright and Decker's work, other work on process tracing that's really important and insightful. But in terms of empirical commentary, on the uniqueness of the decision of cooffending, that is definitely a growing area, not one that we can point to and say, well, that's been settled.

Jenn Tostlebe 14:03

And this makes me think of so in Boulder, what was it last year, I don't know if they actually called it a riot. But there was like a large gathering of people who were together. And they weren't supposed to be because of all of the COVID-19 regulations. And it was like, like all of those things together where the risk went up, because there was this huge gathering, so the police came in riot gear and everything. But yet, not a lot of people got caught because it was such a massive group, even with social media and everything like that.

Jean McGloin 14:35

It's interesting, because it's like, you know, all of these things can be true at the same time,

right? But no, I heard about that. Because that happened when Kyle and I were working on a paper and I was like, well find a quote find a quote if one of them is saying something like that so we can. We ended up going with different quote that Zach found from a Stanley Cup a riot. But no, it's interesting, you know that you sort of you can see these bear out. So you understand like, why people can logically think about this constellation of risks and costs and benefits. But, you know, we really do need more empirical work to kind of bear that out.

Jenn Tostlebe 15:08

Yeah. Okay, so, you mentioned that we were going to talk about some of the theories. So obviously, you and your colleagues have developed, you know, a series of papers that talk about the theory. But before we get into that, can you just talk about or tell our listeners, what were some of the primary theories--before your papers came out--that were explaining, you know, why people engage in collective criminal behavior?

Jean McGloin 15:37

Okay, so we can think about this in two categories. Right. And this is probably somewhat dependent on the fact that, you know, if Riess is sort of the starting point, if he's the turning point where you start to pay attention to coffending, we're talking late to mid 80s. That means that we've had decades before that of criminological theorizing, where it was not explicitly on co offending, it wasn't explicitly on group offending. Now, there are parts of that, that are sort of interwoven in some, I would argue, seminal pieces in the discipline. So if you read Short and Strodtbeck, if you read Clifford Shaw's narratives, you know, if you read Matza's pieces, you see themes of CO offending, you see themes of group behavior, it's just there. Right. And some people did rely on sort of traditional criminological theories to think about, you know, can we use them to explain co offending or group crime? So, you know, if we were to take the selection perspective, right, the idea that, well, group crime doesn't really mean anything, it's just that offenders end up sort of, you know, coming together in time and space, and therefore, you know, or it's just a selection perspective, it could be Gottfredson and Hirschi's perspective, you know, there are some other arguments to that approach. But, you know, we could use those theories to kind of explain cooffending. We could also appeal to some theories on routine activity. So, you know, Felson wrote some pieces 2003, 2006, where he kind of portrayed interestingly enough, he talked about, he gave a spotlight to cooffending, and he thought it was important to pay attention to and he's written some really interesting work in this area. But the way that he portrayed it, and I agree with Van Mastrigt here, who talked about this in a 2017 chapter in the Offender Decision Making Handbook, I think, by Oxford, that he really portrays cooffending as incidental to routine activities, right? So you

discover potential co offenders in time and space and convergence spaces, that also sets the stage for engaging in crime. I don't think I'm the only one but I'm probably one of a handful - I believe that Osgood's routine activities theory is a theory of cooffending. Right? If you really think about how that process should unfold, it should result in group based behavior, right? The idea is that you derive the motivation for offending while you're in the group in certain situations.

J

Jean McGloin 17:49

And so we can sort of pick up a category of existing criminological theories and figure out like, what can we apply? What do we have to stretch? What do we kind of have to do to make it fit? Right? But the other category is theories that were explicitly developed to explain co offending right. And that there's really two of those, right. The first one is one by McCarthy and colleagues, and that came out in 1998. And then we have Frank Weerman. He's I should probably say, Veerman, not with the W. And his came out in 2003 and his was a social exchange theory. So with McCarthy, which he wrote with Hagan and Cohen, his argument or their argument was that individuals become more risk seeking and willing to tolerate the inherent uncertainties of group crime when they experience adversity, right. So not surprisingly, they sort of take a rational choice perspective. And in the paper, they lay out, we have all these uncertainties, we have all these risks that can be associated with cooffending. So why the hell would offenders take on accomplices like, what explains their willingness to co offend, to cooperate, to take on offenders? Because oftentimes, it's in relationships, where there's not an inherent amount of trust, right? So why would they take that risk? Why would they take that step? And what McCarthy and colleagues argued, is that when people are under adverse conditions, and I mean, they talked about serious adversity with their sample, they're talking about hunger, they're talking about lack of safe shelter, you know, pretty pretty serious cases where someone is in need typically have some kind of financial gain. They argue that people are more likely to accept the possibility that accomplices are inept or untrustworthy, because the potential gains are so attractive compared to their current situation, right? So it's like, they're backed into a corner and so fine, I'll take on accomplices, I'll take on this uncertainty because if this broadens my opportunities, if this gives me more chances to get out of the crappy circumstance that I'm in, I'm going to do it right. So it's a very instrumental decision, right?

J

Jean McGloin 19:42

Weerman's is not that different. His is a social exchange theory. That's that also assumes group crime is instrumental, but he viewed it as sort of this exchange of both material and immaterial goods. So material goods would be things like we exchange money, we

exchange goods, and immaterial goods would be things like we get social approval or we get a respect - that there's some kind of interaction and exchange between accomplices. And not shockingly, because it's an instrumental perspective, when that exchange provides more rewards or gains than costs, then they're going to engage in group crime, right. Now. So in other words, both of those perspectives assume that offenders choices whether or not to take on accomplices, whether or not to co offend depends on their current needs and the anticipated benefits that co offenders can provide. Right? So it's very much within kind of this rational choice, this instrumental perspective.

Jean McGloin 20:34

Now, one thing and this might serve as a segue into, you know, what we're going to talk about next is that, notice what both of those cooffending theories assume. And I don't know that they were explicit about this, but I think it's inherent and implicit. They're assuming that people have decided they're going to offend, and then they decide to they take on accomplices. Right. So it's this kind of two tier decision. It's like, the presumption is they are already offenders, right? And then the question is, why will they then co offend? Why will they offend with other people, so they're going to offend, but why offend in this particular way? Some of the stuff that I got into doesn't make, it's a different sort of decision process. It doesn't make that assumption

Jose Sanchez 21:13

Okay well with that great segue, laying the foundation. Let's get into our next topic, which is some papers that Jean co authored, and we are taking on three of them today, which is kind of new for us. So

Jean McGloin 21:29

Sorry about that. At least they're all related.

Jose Sanchez 21:30

Yeah. Yeah, that's not a problem whatsoever. They were an interesting read. So the first paper was authored by y our guest Jean McGloin and Zachary Rowan: "A threshold model of collective crime" and was published in Criminology in 2015. The second paper was authored by authored by Jean and Kyle Thomas: "Incentives for collective deviance: Group size and changes in perceived risk, cost, and reward" and was published in Criminology in 2016. And the final paper is a forthcoming article authored by Jean, Kyle Thomas, Zachary Rowan, and Jessica Deitzer. Did I say that right?

Jean McGloin 22:00
Deitzer. I hope so. Watch, she's probably watching this and going no, it's Deitzer. She's excellent. She's a postdoc at Max Planck.

Jose Sanchez 22:25
Yeah. In Germany, correct.

Jean McGloin 22:28
Correct. In Freiburg.

Jose Sanchez 22:29
Yeah. So the papers titled "Can the group disincentivize offending? Considering opt-out thresholds and decision reversals" and is set to be published in the November issue of Criminology, although it is already available on the online version.

Jose Sanchez 22:47
And so our first question is, what was the inspiration behind this trio article? And sort of what was the gap that you identified and felt that needed to be filled?

Jean McGloin 23:00
Okay, so I should note from the outset, I didn't say like, Oh, I want to publish three pieces, right? If I did, that would be really slow to get those three out, right? It was like, you know, you had the idea for the first one. And then the second one just kind of naturally came out of that. And then you know, you think about it and give a little bit of time, when you realize, Oh, the third one sort of might might sort of bookend it a little bit, right. But the initial sort of interest in this is something I alluded to earlier, which is that the two aforementioned theories, I want to be clear, they moved the dial, right, like McCarthy and colleagues and Weerman, they deserve, I think, like, true kudos for paying attention to co offending, for getting people to really think about it, for putting it into the spotlight, like we're indebted to them. And I think their theories are excellent, I think they hold a lot of water, you know, I'm not of the opinion that one theory is going to win the game, right, you know, multiple theories can can be true. But it struck me that those theories, because I view them as having implicit assumptions that, you know, offenders make the offending decision, and then they decide whether or not to take on accomplices, that they were

potentially and I would say, I would say, unintentionally ignoring one of the most compelling features of group crime, and this was articulated by Warr in Companions in Crime, but he's not the only one to talk about it, surely. He argued, and I'm quoting here, people will commit acts when they are with others that they would never have committed if they had been alone. Right. So ideally, a theory about the decision to engage in group crime should be able to explain why individuals who normally may not be motivated to commit crime might choose to cooffend, right like, why would they take part in it? And so the spectrum of people who you have to be able to catch in the theory should be bigger, right? It's not an offender theory. It's a theory about offending decisions, right. And so, you don't just have to capture why would people who would offend decide to co offend, You have to capture Well, why would people who normally would not offend, decide to co offend? Right? And so that just kind of got in me that I felt like this is interesting. We need we need to explain it. And the reason I was kind of on that kick is because I had been doing some work on co offending for the years beforehand, I've been lucky enough to come across some good datasets. Lucky enough to have wonderful, you know, co authors, including, you know, Chris Sullivan, Alex Piquero, Wendy Stickle, you know, Holly Nguyen, you know, very, very lucky to sort of do some work in that domain, but was frustrating for me is, you know, I've always trended towards the, as George Kelly would say, the esoteric right. I like theory, I like trying to understand the why. I like solving puzzles. And that question just kind of got to me, because I didn't think that we had adequately thought about it. And we hadn't adequately answered it. I think Osgood gets there a little bit, you know, with his unstructured and unsupervised socializing, you know, he explicitly says, we, we sort of, we don't believe in this categorical distinction, you know, people will offend, people will have various temptations. And so, you know, I think that he was getting there. And I think I really liked that. And I wanted to see an expansion of that a little bit.

J

Jean McGloin 26:10

And I was doing, you know, I was just reading in different areas, and I was familiar with Granovetter's work, but I was familiar with the Weak Ties work, right. And I think one day I had just given myself, my suspicion is that I was going through a phase where I was burned out. And so I just gave myself some room to read. I am in no way equating myself, but I loved this story. I don't know if you guys have heard the story of Lin-Manuel Miranda, where he was burned out from doing In the Heights, and he went on vacation, and he brought Hamilton, the book, with him to read. And because he finally had a break is when he had the idea, right. And so sometimes you just need to give yourself the space to just read and have ideas, you know, I, I recognize there are a lot of people whose goals, you know, are to, to publish a certain book or to publish in a certain journal, or to get a certain grant, those are laudable goals, they're important. But for me, I like to just have ideas, I like to, you know, sort of, I think part of being an academic is that you can nerd out and

just, you know, be esoteric, and you can think about solving puzzles. And so I wanted to have an idea. And I was reading Granovetter's stuff, and I came across this threshold piece, and reading that piece reminded me of my frustration that I didn't think we had a theory that could really capture that part of group crime. And I thought maybe, maybe this'll do it, you know. And to give, to give Osgood even more credit, you know, Osgood has talked about one of the benefits of criminology being interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary. So we basically get to steal from our friends, you know, we steal from our friends all the time methodologically, in our analytical models, we also steal from them when it comes, you know, from theory, like, think about Ron Aker's stuff, you know, like, sort of going through the orchard of psychology and plucking some from Skinner and plucking some from Bandura, who just recently passed away. And, you know, the idea is that we have the benefit of being able to build theories, because, you know, for many other disciplines, crime is just one other behavior. For us, it's our primary outcome. And so, you know, I read that piece by Granovetter and I thought, I wonder if this is gonna, this could do it, like this could actually be applicable. This could be interesting, right? So I just started talking about it. You know, at that time, Zach and Kyle were grad students. And, you know, talk about being lucky to have Zack, Kyle, and Holly, you know, at the same time, across the hallway for me to have the opportunity to just brainstorm and talk and discuss ideas. And I just started to become more and more convinced that this theory would be something that the discipline could benefit from. That, you know, shining spotlight and thinking critically, about whether or not thresholds or interdependent decision making could be incorporated into criminological discussions would actually provide added value, would actually move the ball downfield theoretically. So I had the idea that there was a gap. And then I started to have some thoughts about how to fill it merely because I just gave myself time and space to read and be a scholar. And we don't get a lot of that in our in our job. So I advocate for taking those breaks because that's where the ideas may come from.

Jenn Tostlebe 29:13

Yeah, and I love the idea of the stealing from your friends. I actually use that in one of my, in my theory comp. And went with it, because yeah, I think it's really cool. And criminology definitely is interdisciplinary. So, and I liked that you threw that into, I think the first paper you actually like talked about that concept.

Jean McGloin 29:32

Well, we like to I mean, it's true, because you got ah, I mean, you can't act like oh, look what I came up with all on my own. I've definitely had that moment. I think we've all had it. We're like, Oh my god, I have this great idea. And then you go to like Google Scholar

and you read something. Dammit! Someone else has had this idea, right? Like, you know, novelty is fine. But sometimes it's more about well, let's take a step back and think about contribution here. Like how can we actually expand thinking, how can we actually sort of really think about changing the dialogue. And sometimes novelty doesn't do it. But sometimes recognizing like, hey, we've had this thing that's kind of been around and we haven't really gone deeply into it. So let's see if there's actually, I mean, to me I approached the first paper as like proof of concept, right? Let's see this does anything. Let's actually see if this makes sense. Let's put it out there and see if people think that this might actually have utility.

Jenn Tostlebe 30:22

Yeah. Alright, so with that being said, let's start to dive into these papers. So again, we're gonna start with the first one. So the 2015 paper that was co authored with Zach Rowan. And so just to give kind of a brief introduction, this study introduced and provided kind of this preliminary test, as Jean, you've mentioned a few times now, of this model of collective behavior, this threshold model that came from an idea from Granovetter. And this was a theoretical framework for understanding the decision to engage in group crime. So again, developed from this idea from Mark Granovetter's Threshold Models of Collective Behavior, which just generally is the idea that a person's decision to engage in collective behavior depends on the actions and the decisions of the people surrounding them. Granovetter use rioting as like his primary example. So it has kind of this perfect fit in with criminology in a way. And it could even be about things like voting, which I think is something that you've mentioned in this paper, Jean. And so based off of this idea, you and Zach extended the threshold model to group crime to help account for people who would not engage in crime under normal situations, but would in a group setting. So can you just provide a little bit more detail on the threshold model specifically thinking about like, what a threshold specifically is? And then how you used Granovetter's idea to translate it into group crime?

Jean McGloin 31:56

Sure. And I felt not so bad about stealing from our friends when it came to Granovetter. Because Granovetter himself stole from his friends, because his theory is based on Shellings work, right? Thinking about residential migration. And basically, you know, how does the race of people moving in and out affect people's decisions of whether or not to stay in a neighborhood or move? So it's this sort of like, just kind of like piggybacking on each other, right, you know, we're standing on the shoulders of giants, right? So, as you mentioned, Jenn, the core presumption of the threshold model, like it's its starting point,

the foundation upon which it stands, is the idea that behavior is socially interdependent, right. So when you're talking about decisions of whether or not to engage in a behavior or join an act, and he talked in terms of binary acts like either you join, or you don't, right, that it's not an independent decision. And the bulk of decision making theories assume an independent actor, right. And his argument was no, no, decisions, at least partly depend on the behavior of others. So what he was saying is that people have a threshold at which the behavior, they come to perceive the behavior as having utility, the point at which the benefits outweigh the costs, and at that point, the person will join in the act or act, right?

Jean McGloin 33:10

Threshold values range from zero to one, there are going to be some people who don't need other people to act like just out of the gate, they see the behavior as having utility, right? So they would engage in it whether other people did or not, then you're going to have a range, you know, that goes up to one, which is like, you know, like, once 10% of people join in, then I will, or 20%, or 30%, or 40%, whatever it is, the argument is that there's a distribution of these threshold values across the population, and that you'll see all of them observed, although, you know, what it looks like in the constellation of a situation depends on who's there, who's not, and you know, sort of what that distribution looks like, in that particular time and space. You can also have threshold values of one, which is, I'll do it once everyone else does it. Right. So they're like the ultimate like, you know, let everyone here do it and then finally, I'll do it. Now Granovetter did acknowledge that there are some people in certain circumstances who even once everyone does it, they won't do it. Right. So like, we can think about those people as being like 1.1's, right. So, you know, because what Granovetter said, is that, from his point of view, it wasn't like they were enduring, I will never do it no matter what, under any circumstance, because if you change the situation, if you change the behavior, they might engage in that, right. So like, you know, a certain behavior in a certain context, my threshold might be 0.2, and another one, it might be, oh, I'm not doing it, even if everyone else does it, right. And what he thought typically would predict or be related to those threshold values was both individual level factors and situational level factors. So his argument was that you would probably see differences in thresholds across people, but you would also see them within people from situation to situation to situation. So from a crime perspective, you know, my threshold for theft might be one thing, my threshold for fighting might be something else, my threshold for property damage might be something else. And those are very broad categories. You know, as you guys probably know, some Kyle's work recently has really started to look at this idea of like specific attitudes that we really need to think about, what do we think about a situation contextually dependent in a particular situation? So I'm using that broadly, like even within theft, my threshold under one condition might be different from another condition might be different from another condition. So but what is

universal, even across those variations is that notice my decision of whether or not to behave is dependent on the behavior of other people. Right. And so and the idea is that even if I'm criminally prone or not criminally prone, generally speaking, I can be picked up by this theory, right? Like, I'm somewhere on that threshold spectrum.

J

Jean McGloin 35:41

Now, I don't know that Zach and I really extended it, I think we more applied it and tried to make the case that it fit, right. Like, I didn't have the sense that we had to stretch it or tweak it or, you know, move it around a whole lot. I just think we had to make the case that like it fit what we knew about co offending, it made intuitive sense and made theoretical sense. There was reason to suspect based on literature that this might have validity and might hold water. But let's lay it out methodically. And then let's think about some ways to test this and see if there's any just baseline support at all for this premise.

J

Jose Sanchez 36:16

So this paper also discusses a variety of study types that examine this threshold model, including a vignette or like this hypothetical scenario, process tracing, and also simulation studies. And a commonality across all three of the publications is the type of study used to examine your research questions, including investigating a threshold model, which you and Zach decided to examine using a hypothetical vignette. So to us, this is pretty cool. Using vignettes for research is interesting, it's an interesting technique, and one that we actually included in our Gang Reduction Initiative of Denver study, that I'm a research assistant on so we did include a vignette. We know we we consulted with Kyle on it to make sure...

J

Jean McGloin 37:12

We're giving Kyle way too much credit in this podcast, we need to back off a little bit.

J

Jose Sanchez 37:17

So, can you explain to us a little more what is a hypothetical vignette study? And why was this the method that you chose to use for your article?

J

Jean McGloin 37:29

Sure. So we're just going to talk really basically right, so you'll see if anyone's interested in this, you just want to go into arguably the rational choice literature. Right? So Ray

Paternoster used hypothetical vignettes a lot. And like any methodology, it has its champions, it has its detractors, the best way to view it is to be in really neither camp and recognize that it has its benefits and limits. And it fits certain research questions, and it doesn't fit other research questions. Right. So basically, if you're using hypothetical vignettes, you're presenting subjects with some kind of scenario. And typically, you query them on how they would behave in that scenario, or other assessments of the situation. You know, you try to give enough contextual information so that it feels realistic, that they can imagine themselves in it. There's literature out there that talks about how do you anchor things to make it realistic? How do you make sure that it resonates with them? And there's recommendations and there's literature that speaks about sort of better ways to craft vignettes and those that are maybe not the best done? You know, I think one of the benefits that people talk about when it comes to using vignettes is that it allows you to measure criminal decisions at the same time, like you're getting the specific perceptions of costs and benefits at the time of the decision with the actual context, as opposed to having some questions or concerns about well, how far apart are they? How can we trust that like, these are the perceptions or these are your anticipated sense of costs and benefits at the time you're making the decision? So it gives us the chance to do that sort of in, in closer time proximity to each other. Another big benefit of using vignettes is that you can experimentally manipulate the situational context, right? So you can actually have experimental studies that use vignettes by you know, randomly changing certain situational elements and obviously keeping track of you know, who's getting, what kind of scenarios and are you making sure that everyone, you have all the possible scenarios were presented?

J

Jean McGloin 39:21

Now, that being said, I think one of the distractions that people often talk about and understandably so when it comes to vignettes, you're not observing actual behavior, right? You're capturing intentions to offend. And so there's questions about the extent to which those intentions reflect reality. Like, if I say I would offend well, would I really, would I really offend in that circumstance? Or does it correlate to what would be my actual behavior? So you have to be really conscious of whether or not you're measuring some proxy of what you actually want to capture. Now, I argue and I put this in the papers that I'm not as concerned about that problem in the context of these papers because thresholds are intentions, right, thresholds are intentions to act, they are decisions that are made. So arguably, we should be measuring intentions. And so this gives us a chance to do that.

J

Jean McGloin 40:11

In fact, you know, if you look at some work by Granovetter, if you look at even Shelling himself, they've acknowledged that one of the most straightforward ways to gather information about thresholds at which behavioral intention shift is to simply present respondents to the scenario that describe an opportunity and query them about their tipping points. So, you know, I took guidance from the fact that, you know, the people who crafted these initial models, thought that simply asking people about their tipping points was the way to go.

J

Jean McGloin 40:41

And the reason they said that is because they argue that observing behavior itself, is may not actually be the best way to capture these tipping points because you can't always infer thresholds from patterns of behavior, or patterns of people not behaving. So for instance, imagine a person who doesn't participate in collective behavior, right. And they could have a threshold value higher than any portion of the people who acted. So imagine you're observing a crowd of 100 people, and 60 people act and 40 people don't. You don't know those 40 people, what their threshold is, you just know that it's somewhere above 0.6, right? So you're doing some sort of crude censoring of trying to figure out where they fall in that particular threshold. Now, let's take the people who did act, well, what if when they made their decision, between them making the decision and when they actually acted, several other people join to, so maybe you're assuming their threshold is, you know, 0.4 or 0.5, but it was actually 0.35, but by the time they acted like 10 other people had joined at the same time. So there's some issues around messiness of inferring. Now, arguably, you should be measuring both right? Like, that would be an ideal situation, you're capturing both intentions, and then you're observing the behavior. You know, if you can figure out how to do that effectively, like, great, you know, I mean, we can come up with ideas, but to actually do it in real time practically gets really challenging. And so for the purposes of these papers, knowing that the core focus is on the intention, the core focus is where does the utility change? Right? Like, where does that threshold that tipping point occur? We just wanted to ask people, and sometimes I think we get a little skeptical of something that straightforward, like, we'll just ask, but, you know, I sort of looked to Shelling and to Granovetter, that they advocated for that approach. You know.

J

Jean McGloin 42:32

As I mentioned, you know, in the paper, and you discussed here, Jose, like some other examples could be process tracing, you know, where you basically you have offenders who are going through offending decisions, articulate out loud what they're thinking and what they're what they're considering. That gets challenging in situations of spontaneous action, like, think about our discussion of collective behavior, if it's emergent phenomenon

at a social interaction, are you just going to like, what happened upon a riot or happened upon a group criminal incident. It could happen, you know, or you could try to get into those circumstances that are more organized, but it has its challenges. I do think there's a lot of promise with agent based simulation modeling. But a lot of times you need theoretical knowledge to figure out how do I feed those models? How do I structure those models? And I felt like we're still on the nascent stages of understanding the fundamentals of decision making when it comes to co offending. So we're going to need agent based modeling. But I feel like right now, like it needs to be complemented by just some direct information from individuals.

Jenn Tostlebe 43:32

I love vignettes. They're really interesting. And I think you have what, eight, eight different types of scenarios and this paper, which just seems like, quite a few.

Jean McGloin 43:41

Sure, I should have read the paper more closely.

Jenn Tostlebe 43:43

No, I'm pretty sure it's a I think I just read it yesterday. So pretty sure.

Jean McGloin 43:49

So not this paper, but the next paper. So remind me of that - of how many scenarios we had bring that up when we get to the paper with Kyle.

Jenn Tostlebe 43:57

Okay. All right. So the analysis for this paper, the focus was really on whether like these individual level and situational factors could actually shape respondents self reported thresholds. So just a little bit more specifically, do friends, in group versus out group, crime type, impulsivity, normative beliefs -- I think that was all of them -- do those different things impact thresholds? Or the number of people someone would need to have already engaging in the act before they would? Can you give us a rundown of like the core findings from this article?

Jean McGloin 44:34

I'll go brief. To me, I think, you know, I often think the most important findings out of studies is found in the descriptive information. And I would argue that that's the case here. So one of the things that we found with our subjects is that 40% of our subjects that they would only they would offend only if others did first. So they were somewhere between that point one and 1.0 spectrum, you know, if that threshold, we had people who had zeros, you know, very few who said I would engage them property damage, I would steal even if no one else did. We had, you know, the majority, you know, like high 50% said I wouldn't do it at all, right, which is not shocking. We used a college sample, right. But I found that really interesting that if we had asked these subjects this question in a way that only asked about committing the offense alone, right, if we had taken in a social point, perspective of crime, if we had not considered the idea of offending with other people, we would have missed those 40%. You know, that 40% of people who said, you know, well, I would only do it, if other people did it first. Right. That's the portion that Warr talks about. Right? And so, you know, we were catching those people.

Jean McGloin 45:39

And then when we looked at, and I don't want to say this as a test, but it's not it's it's more of an example and some very preliminary information. But we found some evidence that at least in this sample, there was a relationship between impulsivity and normative beliefs. So we'd argue that that sort of you're between persons differences, right, with thresholds. And then we also saw some differences within persons based on, you know, sort of situational changes in terms of whether or not the crowd that was with you included your friends, and then the crime type as well. So it suggested that both person level and situational level differences were related to these threshold values, which was consistent. I mean, again, Granovetter wasn't talking in terms of criminological theory, he didn't talk about impulsivity. He didn't talk about, you know, other, he did talk about friends, because that's broad. Right. But his argument was that this model holds you should see variations across these two units.

Jenn Tostlebe 46:29

So preliminary support?

Jean McGloin 46:32

Sure. I tend to be I tend to be cautious, but it certainly, it suggested that we shouldn't boot the theory, right, it held promise, it's suggested it's worth the conversation. And, you know,

it's suggested that there might be something here worth pursuing.

Jenn Tostlebe 46:46

Right.

Jose Sanchez 46:47

So at the end of this article, you and Zach provided three main recommendations for future research on the theoretical refinement and elaboration of collective crime. And we're going to touch on two of them that we thought were very relevant that can kind of start moving us into the other two papers. So the first one is based on previous research, it was proposed that there may also be an opt out threshold, right? So we've been talking about opting in, engaging in criminal behavior. But there may also be a threshold where, say, maybe too many people get involved, and I no longer want to be involved in the behavior. And then second, is, you argue that it is important to be able to understand precisely what makes threshold a tipping point for decision making, especially thinking about the degree to which the behavior of others shifts someone's perception of risk, costs, and rewards. And so with those two sort of recommendations or points that you guys made, I think we can start moving into your second paper with Kyle.

Jenn Tostlebe 48:00

Okay, so the second paper, again, is this 2016 paper authored with Kyle Thomas, on incentives for collective deviance, which taps into again, one of the future recommendations that you talked about in the first paper, on perceptions of risks, costs and rewards. So in this one, there were two different hypothetical vignette experiments, one that was set at a football game, and the other one was set at a concert. Two different locations based off of the universities involved. In using these both Jean and Kyle investigate the extent to which individuals' anticipated experiences of rewards and formal social costs and sanction risks are associated with deviance change as a consequence of differences in the number of people involved in the act beforehand. So again, you talk about this numerous times in this paper, it's focusing on like these dynamic changes and perspectives versus static changes or static perceptions. So form main hypotheses in this paper that focus again, on these different perceptions of rewards, informal costs, and perceived risks of formal sanctions, people would experience depending on whether or not they participated in group crime. So based off of this, how are perceptions of rewards and formal costs and risks of formal sanctions expected to change based off of group size?

J

Jean McGloin 49:31

Okay, so I'm going to get into that. But I have to give you a little bit of sort of a side story here. So when Kyle and I first did this study, we did multiple vignettes within persons. So we did a survey where people answered multiple vignettes, the idea being that we would capture within individual change across vignettes, right like within individual changing perceptions across vignettes. We were very proud of ourselves. We sent that out for review. And we're gonna invoke Wayne Osgood here again, and he sent back to us and he said, You know, I love the idea, the problem here is it this is vulnerable to the demand effect. And he was 100%. Right? Like, maybe people were changing their, you know, their answers because they sort of started to get at what we were like they understood what we were getting at, like, even though we randomize the order of the group size, you know, it wouldn't be hard for them to guess that we're looking maybe for different answers across group size. And so you don't know if the differences you observe are real, or due to what they think, like you're looking at, and so they change their answers accordingly. And so this, in my view, was a really great example of the benefits of peer review. Right? You know, it was tempting to just be like, oh, whatever, we'll just send the paper somewhere else. But, you know, I didn't want to write a paper that I knew that - and neither did Kyle - that we knew, you know, if people cite it, they might be citing to say, I don't know if we can trust these findings, right. I mean, that can always be the case, any paper, you know, people may have, you know, be skeptical, they may have issues with it, they may not agree with the inferences, like that's fine, right? But we just had a serious conversation. And we're like, if we're going to do this, we need to do it in a way that isn't vulnerable to that. And so we redid all the data collection, and we did sort of random assignment of the group size across people as opposed to within, and we ended up talking to Wayne and he was like, Okay, we'll give it a second look, because you'd like fundamentally changed how you did it. And it was one of those situations where I, you know, I'm proud that we did that it was the right decision to make. And I don't know who the reviewers were, I know who Wayne is, obviously, but like, they did us a solid, you know, they were right. And the science got better because of that feedback. And so, you know, when I think about this paper, I also think about that, I'm grateful for that.

J

Jean McGloin 51:39

Anyway, so in terms of how the perceived consequences might change according to group size, we were looking, as you mentioned, sort of three categories, right. The first is the usual suspect, which is sanction risk. And we talked about the group hazard hypothesis. But if you read the original Granovetter, when he talks about rioting, I don't know if you guys caught this, he actually talks a little bit about perceived sanction risk about how, you know, riots could be more attractive as more people get involved, because the likelihood of you individually getting caught is probably lower. Right? He talked about it objective,

really, I don't know how true it is objectively, but we certainly can understand it from a perceptual perspective, right. And so our argument was, there's reason to suspect that as the group gets bigger, people may start to think that they're, they are less likely individually to get arrested or to be sanctioned or to be detained by the police. Right.

J Jean McGloin 52:31

We also tried to get into informal costs. So the idea of, you know, we alluded to this earlier, as more people get involved in the act, it's frankly just easier to diffuse responsibility, you can say, Well, it wasn't me, it was the group, you know, it's, it's one thing to get into a fight and hurt someone or to, to steal stuff, or to damage people's property when you're one of two people. But if you're one to 50 or 75, it becomes easier and less cognitively difficult to like, give yourself the out, right. Think about Sykes and Matza, like this is completely in their lane, right? You can also think about as more people get involved, maybe people in your life would be less disappointed in you, because like you got caught up in the crowd, it wasn't like you did it on your own, you know, there's sort of less moral wrongness attached to it to a certain extent.

J Jean McGloin 53:13

And then you also have the social rewards, you know, it could be more exciting, you know, to, to be involved in a group of 50 people doing something could just be more exciting than doing it by yourself or doing it with five other people. And then, you know, also the idea of a sense of belonging, inclusion, right? Imagine you're, you know, walking through a parking lot, and people are getting involved in like, you know, kind of riotous behavior after, you know, a football game or a basketball game, it could feel like you're, you know, you're part of this, right. And as social creatures, a lot of us like that.

J Jean McGloin 53:46

And so the argument was that the costs and the rewards and the sanctions, perceived sanctions, would shift in such a way that as more people got involved in a criminal act, it would essentially incentivize crime, right? Because our argument was, okay, if you see more people joined as threshold values increase, maybe the reason you see that is because the utility - perceived utility - is changing, because the underlying costs and risks and benefits, they're changing, right? And so what we wanted to do here was try to tap into this idea of, Okay, if we see thresholds, well, maybe the mechanisms underneath are that the choice structuring properties are changing, their dynamic, you know, and they're, they're at least partly tied to how many people are involved in the act, right? They're not just stable and static, as you said, they're malleable, and they change according to this

factor. Right. And we found some, you know, suggestions that that was the case.

Jenn Tostlebe 54:40

So, before we get into the findings, you wanted us to remind you about the number of vignettes about this paper, right?

Jean McGloin 54:48

It was that. It was you know, actually that you had to review it. Yeah, we had several vignettes per person. And then we were like, I was, I was, you know, a little bit of a dummy there, wasn't my smartest move, but then it was basically one vignette per person.

Jose Sanchez 55:01

Okay. With that being said, can you hit us with the main findings associated with this paper on perceptions, the risk costs and rewards?

Jean McGloin 55:09

Sure. So when we ask people to imagine offending with larger groups of people, so just to be clear, the conditions that people got were either like, you know, they to describe the situation, as Jenn said, It's either like a property damage or theft situation. And it's like, okay, imagine that you did this, and no one else joined you. So that's like your zero condition. Imagine that five people started doing this and you join them. And then it went on from five people to 25, 50, and 75. So we had five conditions. Right. So it's another hypothetical vignette. And we have that, what's being manipulated here is the size of the group that's engaged, you know, at the time that you join. And what we found is that, you know, under these hypothetical conditions, people tend to anticipate a lower sanction risk, they anticipate feeling less responsible, they anticipate more excitement, and they anticipate more social inclusion, and then that's associated engaging with the act as more people become involved. So we sort of, we thought that this provides some preliminary evidence, again, to suggest that, you know, group size involved in a criminal act may actually incentivize the act, which again, we saw as being consistent with the threshold model, right? The idea that it is interdependent, and one of the reasons why it's interdependent is because as more people get involved, the perceptions of risk, cost, and reward changes in such a way as to invite action.

Jose Sanchez 56:28

All right, let's move into your most recent article, the 2021 article, "Can the group disincentivize offending?," which also taps into one of those future directions that you had outlined in your 2015 threshold model paper, and that's whether there is an opt out threshold? Specifically, it uses hypothetical vignettes, with they sample students from three different universities to identify opt out thresholds for fighting and theft. Can you describe the idea of the opt out threshold and how an increasing group size might contribute to both the decision to join in group crime, as well as sort of have the opposite effect and have someone decide to stop engaging in crime?

Jean McGloin 57:18

Yeah, so before I do that, I have to give Zach Rowan credit here, because from the initial sort of conversations, he was always like, I think this opt out idea is interesting. And I was always like, yeah, that's fine. We'll talk about it later. Right. You know, at some point, it just became, yeah, you know, you're right. Like, let's actually, you know, think about this. To me, this paper is an interesting turn in the conversation, because it introduces the idea that the group doesn't just incentivize criminal action, but it can also disincentivize that and the reason why I think it's an interesting turn is because if you do work in the peer influence domain, if you do work sort of in groups and crime domain, it's sort of that there's always this inherent assumption that the group facilitates, right, that it's, it's sort of criminogenic. And the idea that, you know, a criminally engaged group might actually disincentivize action, might cause people to stop offending, is curious to me, because it doesn't line up really, with the peer influence literature, it really doesn't line up with people who talk about, you know, what are the reasons why people may stop offending, right. So I think sometimes when when you have a prediction, that is not in line with the way that we typically discuss things, I just find that curious, and so it kind of caught my attention. So Granovetter's piece in 78, was really focused on the opt in threshold, right? Like, at what point do I decide to join in the behavior. He wrote two pieces, so it was Granovetter and Song 1986, 1988. And they really explicitly and I want to be like there was there were a few quotes, sort of a few places where Granovetter hinted at the idea of an opt out. But it's in these pieces that they really get laid out explicitly and directly. So they incorporated the idea of decision reversals, by acknowledging that the behavior of others can also lead to what we call a reverse bandwagon effect. Right?

Jean McGloin 59:05

So the opt in threshold can be thought of as a bandwagon effect, right? Like more people join in, you're joining the bandwagon, right? a reverse bandwagon really comes from Leibenstein's work in I think, 1950. And he talked about it as a snob effect, right. So this is a

negative relationship between individuals consumer demand and the overall market demand. So think about it, like a bandwagon effect would be, you know, there's a new Apple Watch, and everyone's super excited about it. And as more people you know, buy it, then more people buy it, right. So it's this bandwagon effect, it becomes popular and more and more people, you know, buy the product, but you can have a reverse bandwagon effect where some people are like, as it gets more popular, they're like, I don't want to be part of that, like, you know, I'm unique, I'm sort of, you know, different. And so they're less likely to buy the product because it's popular, right? So you have the bandwagon effect and you have the reverse bandwagon effect. And typically they're talked about as if they're between person differences. Some people respond this way some people respond this way.

J

Jean McGloin 1:00:03

What Granovetter and Song talked about is the idea that the same person can have both, right? So there is an opt in and opt out threshold where it's like, they join in and then there could be a point at which you know, now there's too many people, so now I'm going to leave, I'm going to stop. So basically, what they said is individuals act because their initial thresholds are met. But if a group exceeds some still higher portion, then they might change their mind. Right. So what that meant to me, first of all, I was just curious, like, does that happen in criminological context? Because if it does, that would be pretty unique. And that would, that would change the conversation, we'd have to start accommodating things that maybe, you know, aren't always discussed. And to me, I saw a little bit of parallel with--I had done a paper a while ago, and part of that paper argued that deviant friends are not always criminogenic. Because if they're less deviant than you, they could actually reduce your delinquency. So we shouldn't always think that deviant friends are terrible, right? It's not ideal, but we shouldn't view them as universally risky, because if they're less deviant than you, it's not a problem or not, well, it could be a problem. But like, arguably, you might actually decline to sort of balance it out. Right? And I saw some parallels here that I thought were interesting.

J

Jean McGloin 1:01:20

But to sort of think about the decision reversal also suggested to me that the overall relationship between groups and crime could be much more complicated, right? So I think the inference in the piece that Kyle and I did is this sense that like this incentivizing like, you know, character is linear. Like, as more and more people join the group, it gets more and more likely that you're going to join too, right. And other models out there that talk about like cascade effects or herding effects, they kind of take the same logic, and if you follow it through, it's like, well, just does it just not stop? Like, does it just continue

indefinitely? You know, and at some point, it has to stop like, at a minimum, you probably have diminishing returns. But what if you have more than diminishing returns? What if you actually have a reversal? And so it was this, this could be really curious. But also we may not, we might be misunderstanding the relationship, the relationship may not be linear, the relationship may be curvilinear. Right? It may be that if we don't think about it carefully, we may be overestimating how many people are likely to be involved in an act, you know, when it may be less. And to be fair, another thing that got me thinking about this was, when that piece with Kyle came out, I got an email from Dan Nagin, who said, you know, Hey Jean, enjoyed reading the piece, you know, good job. But I have a question. Why don't we see like, huge numbers of really large criminal events, like he was, it wasn't like, you know, here, you have to deal with this challenge. It was like, I'm just, you know, this is just something that we should think about, you know, why? Why don't we see like, more huge riots, or why don't things sort of develop and, you know, part of that could be that you have to have structural opportunity for that. And a lot of times in situations that could devolve into riots, you have a lot of guardians, and a lot of opportunities sort of are, you know, shut down. But another reason may be that there's opt out thresholds that like people sort of regulate themselves, and the equilibrium of how many people are ultimately involved in the act doesn't, you know, exponentially increase, because it's dynamic. You're having people coming in, but you're having people going out.

Jenn Tostlebe 1:03:27

You may have mentioned this already, but do you think that most of this opt out threshold has to do with like the risk involved versus rewards or other things? Or? I don't know, I'm just trying to think about why that would exist.

Jean McGloin 1:03:43

I mean, I've talked about this a lot with colleagues. And, you know, I want to be clear, whenever I say now is purely speculative. I don't have data on it. But, you know, there are certain things that I think start to like, it could be that certain things that incentivize you, like you just plateau, right? At a certain point, like, you're not going to feel any less responsible, like whether it's 50 people or 75 people or 100, people, you're not going to see like major jumps. And I'm even less responsible now than I was 25 people ago, right? I think what maybe at work is what you're responsible for, might be changing. So if we think about a fight, right, like, if 10 people are involved in a fight versus five people involved in a fight, arguably, I'm less responsible, because it was 10 versus five, but God, that person's probably going to be a lot, you know, the degree to which they're injured, or the degree to which they are harmed could be much higher. And so like, feeling like you're less responsible, is fine. But what if what you're less responsible for is a much more serious act,

right? You know, or it could be that, you know, it just becomes, you start to worry about, you know, you may feel like you're included in something, but now you may feel like if there's a crowd, you're being judged, because you're engaging like there's a difference between you know, being involved in an act and people thinking that you're piling on to somebody. Right.

Jean McGloin 1:05:03

So I think I mean, my strong gut is that yes, I think that the rewards and the and the risks and the costs that they're changing, right, but it's unclear to me, I don't know that like, I don't know, necessarily that they all reverse. I think what could happen is that some plateau, and then some become salient, you know, at some point that weren't beforehand. So I think it gets more complicated. And the question becomes, how do they aggregate in such a way that then my utility changes from thinking it has utility to now it has disutility, so I reverse my decision? So I don't think it's any one thing that changes, Jenn, I think it's like, some of them may flatten out, some of them may still go up, some new things may come in and be problematic, and then sort of the some of those start to shift my decision and the balance of what I think is the appropriate act.

Jenn Tostlebe 1:05:52

Yeah. Interesting. There's a fourth paper for you. You're not done yet.

Jean McGloin 1:05:58

I see. So that one will be Sanchez and Tostlebe and McGloin.

Jose Sanchez 1:06:03

Yep. Okay. So what were your findings when they came to opting out of theft and fighting? And are there similarities across the crime type? Are there any differences?

Jean McGloin 1:06:17

Right, so I'm gonna say the same thing here that I said before, I think the most interesting and instructive findings are the descriptive ones, right. And this is this is almost exclusively a descriptive paper, right, like, and that's what it was meant to be right? Because the core question is, do these exist, right, similar to the paper with Zach, but I think even more fundamental, because it was just like this would be curious if we actually observe this.

J

Jean McGloin 1:06:37

The overall finding is that we found evidence of opt out thresholds for both the hypothetical vignette around theft and for the hypothetical vignette around fighting, but there were some differences. So first of all, when it came to the fighting scenario, about 63%, thereabouts, of the subjects said, I'm not going to fight like even if all for this, the maximum number was 10 people. So like, even if all 10 people fought this person, and by the way, we set this scenario in such a way where like, it was justified, basically, to fight this person. They were like, No, I'm not fighting this person. About 18% said they would fight even if no one else did, right. So they had a threshold of zero. And then about 19% said they would fight only if some other number of people did so first. Right? So collectively, we have about 38-37% of the sample that says, I have an opt in threshold that goes from zero to one, right. So now the reason I highlight the opt in threshold first is because you can't have an opt out threshold unless you first have an opt in threshold, right? Like, you can't, you can't reverse your decision if you didn't start to act in the first place. Right? So among those people who said, Yeah, I'd fight, you know, and that fighting could be by myself, or when you know, five other people do it or when seven other people do it, but it's it's somewhere in that spectrum.

J

Jean McGloin 1:07:53

Of those people who opted in, what we find is that--I want to get this number, right--I think 68% of them said that they would opt out if more people joined, right? So they basically said, yah I'll join in, and then we followed up and we said, okay, I want you to imagine like if they said, I would join the fight of three people started, and I would join it, then we come back and say, Okay, I want you to imagine that three people did it, and you join them. Right? If more people continue to join the fight, would you change your mind? Or would you keep fighting? And 68% of people said, No, I'd change my mind if more people did it, and they told us at what point they would change their mind. So you know, they said they would stop at a certain point, I think it was like on average, like 0.4 or something. So basically, once like four to five people joined in, they were like, I'm out. Right? So the majority of people who said they would fight also said they would stop if more people joined, right.

J

Jean McGloin 1:08:50

Which kind of makes sense, given what we just talked about in terms of this notion of like, maybe it could be perceived as piling on. Maybe you start to get worried because you're like, God, this guy's getting the shit beat out of him. Right. And like, I don't want to It's one thing for a few of us to fight him. But now there's four or five people fighting him. And that's a whole different situation. Right? I mean, this is speculation, but like, it's sort of it

has face validity to it right?

Jean McGloin 1:09:13

When it came to the theft scenario, we had a situation where more people said they would steal so about probably think like 48% of the subjects I think said I'll steal like they're on the threshold spectrum, they have an opt in, so more people are opting in. But what's curious here is when it comes to the theft, fewer people said they would opt out. So only about 28% of the people who said they would steal said they would change their mind. And their threshold for stopping was higher.

Jean McGloin 1:09:45

So to me, the takeaway is, look, we see opt outs for both, but sort of where they happen and the prevalence of those opt outs appears to be different across situations. Super preliminary like this is two specific scenarios, like, you know, they have a lot of characteristics that are not just about crime type. So we got to be careful there. Like, you know, there's a host of contextual variables that are part of these scenarios. So it's very preliminary. But to me, what's interesting is that in both of them, we're seeing evidence of people saying, Yeah, I changed my mind. And I would opt out because more people join. Right. So walking away from that, I feel like we have preliminary evidence that there are these opt out thresholds.

Jean McGloin 1:10:31

And what's also interesting is it underscores the idea that if you're going to consider the relationship between group size or groups and intentions to, you know, offend or perceived utility of an offense, you got to think about the people who are going to be leaving, not just the people who are going to be joining. So for instance, if all we did is consider opt in thresholds when it came to the fighting scenario, it would look like once you got to a threshold of like point nine, almost 36% of the sample would be like, yep, I'm in, right. So if you only had that information, you'd be like, wow, over a third of the sample would be fighting, but the time nine people were involved. But that's misleading. Because if you start to account for the people who would leave, we start to account for the people who are like, once, like, I'll join at one person, but I'm getting the hell out of here at five, then what you see is that when you get to point nine, the portion of people who would still be involved in the fight is about 12%, not 36%, because you're taking the difference between the opt in and opt out thresholds. So I think it's a more, it's more complex, but I also think it's more realistic sense of like, what is that relationship between groups size or groups engaging in crime and individual's own intentions to offend or stop offending?

Right? It also gives you some insights. And like, you know, what, what Dan asked me, right, so, you know, why does equilibrium not always become some massive number? Well, in part because you could have people leaving just as people are joining.

Jenn Tostlebe 1:11:55

And, yes, it is preliminary. But it also, I think, makes sense, like the differences between the crime times because fighting, a violent offense, which fewer people are typically going to engage in more of a person related offense versus just theft. And so it almost would be easier to leave, because fewer people are typically involved in it anyway. So it's like, yes, it's more complicated, but it also makes sense to me.

Jean McGloin 1:12:26

I mean, clearly, we need different methodologies to comment on this. But even within this methodology, we need like, in an ideal world, you have a massive sample. And you can do like 10, 15, 20 different kinds of scenarios, like different sorts of fights, you know, different kinds of, you know, other property crimes, you know, just sort of different behaviors that you feel like you have a better handle on where the crime differences happening.

Jose Sanchez 1:12:51

Could you discuss some of the implications of developing the idea of collective behavior that may be relevant to the academic community, but also, the general public and the political sphere?

Jean McGloin 1:13:06

Right. So you're, you're talking about the idea of like, developing this idea of collective behavior further, right? I think of criminology went down this road. Frankly, I think we'd be catching up. I don't think we'd be leading the way. I think there's other disciplines that have been working in this domain for decades. And I think it's curious to me that it's not a prominent sort of area of discussion in criminology. You know, I want to be clear that Ross Matsueda, in my view, has kind of been banging the drum for some time and doing it effectively, which is not surprising, I think, you know, people who do work kind of in more sociological areas are simply probably more abreast of this, but he also understands the utility that we could gain for the discipline from this. One thing that I think is compelling. And he mentions this is that we often talk about how do we bridge the micro macro divide? That shouldn't be like, Coleman's boat stuff, right? It shouldn't really be a divide.

And, you know, thinking about collective behavior is one vehicle to to sort of start that conversation. And I think that would just be good for the discipline, period. Right.

J

Jean McGloin 1:14:07

I think it matters for criminology to have this discussion, because we have a long way to go in understanding co offending, frankly, but also, more broadly, that piece by Hoban and Thomas in Criminology and Public Policy, they recently argued, and they're not alone in arguing this, that decisions happen in social context, right? So we can't have discussions about offending decisions devoid of this idea of interdependency. Like I just think it's irresponsible at this point. We know the importance of social context, and we need to make sure that we're integrating it explicitly into our conversation. So even if a crime is committed alone, that doesn't mean that collective behavior wasn't at work, right? Maybe it was a solo event because that person had a threshold of zero and the other people who were around simply didn't have their thresholds met. Right. And so, you know, this is not an explanation. This is is not a topic that is only relevant when we talk about stereotypical crowd behavior or stereotypical group behavior. It is potentially relevant when we simply talk about offending decisions. And, you know, that being said, like, I think the peer influence literature has a ton to learn from the rational choice literature. But I also think like, these are natural bedfellows, right, sort of, you know, talking about the role of peers, talking about group process, and talking about decision making. I know some people would disagree, I think they would talk about sort of, you know, some fundamental assumption differences. My training before I went to graduate school was in psychology and behavioral psychology. So from that background, these things marry perfectly to me, right. And I know that I'm rare in that perspective, but there's so much growth to be had integrating social context and decision making and like, some people are doing great work in this area, like Kyle's doing really good work. Greg Pogarsky is doing really good work. Tim Barnum, you know, Shana Hermans, like they're all they're just doing good work. And I really hope that this, this continues.

J

Jean McGloin 1:16:02

Now, obviously, I said before, I tend to be esoteric, so not shocking, I started with the theoretical implications, right. But I also think there's some practical implications. I mean, we've seen, I'm not going to get into specifics, we all we've seen a lot of examples of crowd behavior that can be troubling, right? This might help us understand how to manage it, how to predict it. I also think the role of social media and facilitating emergent behavior, like, you know, these interactions and thinking about thresholds for different kinds of behavior. And, you know, how does it happen in this virtual space? I think, is also it's probably not my bag. But I think it's, it's hugely important for people who want to go

down that road. I think there's a lot of implications for thinking about how can this comment on things that are happening on the ground and allow us to better understand and manage that kind of behavior?

Jenn Tostlebe 1:16:50

I actually hadn't even thought necessarily about social media and how that might influence decisions? Because now it's not just the people that you're with that are seeing you do this, it could be everyone. What's being recorded goes on YouTube, or whatever. So yeah, I feel like that. I don't know how you study that. But that would. And I think that's just something...

Jean McGloin 1:17:14

We look to other disciplines. You know, they talk a lot about, you know, if you think about literature and consumer behavior and voting behavior, like it doesn't require that everyone's together in the same space, right? It sort of happens in a more amorphous way. And so you could certainly take guidance from, you know, people who have already walked down that path and continue to steal from our friends. Right.

Jenn Tostlebe 1:17:32

Yeah. Right. Back to the idea.

Jean McGloin 1:17:34

There we go.

Jenn Tostlebe 1:17:36

All right. Well, that's all of our main questions for you. Do you have anything else that you'd like to add?

Jean McGloin 1:17:42

No, I just like to say that I think it's great that you guys are doing this. It's nice to see, Jenn again, who was a member of the JRCD workshop and did a great job. And so it's just I appreciate that you guys. I mean, this is no small amount of work that you guys are taking

on and it's a service a discipline. So thank you and I apologize for, I'm sure it'll be the most boring podcast but so be it.

Jenn Tostlebe 1:18:03

I think it's really interesting.

Jean McGloin 1:18:04

Low standards

Jenn Tostlebe 1:18:08

Alright, well, thank you again, so much for coming on and sharing with us and speaking with us. Is there anything that you would like to plug, anything coming out soon related to this? I know that last paper we just talked about just came out what a week or so ago. So that is new.

Jean McGloin 1:18:27

I have to say one of the sort of copy editors, managing editors, Matthew at the University of Albany was excellent, and tolerated my questions and my I needed him to help me with an Excel matter. So big, big ups to him. But no, I mean, one of the things you said you're going to ask me is, you know, where can people find you? I am not on social media. So you can find me in College Park, Maryland. Or you can find me if if ASC goes off, which is planned to but you know, these days, everything's uncertain, you can find me there. The only thing I want to plug is something that's, you know, what my colleagues are on, some of my colleagues are on Twitter and Social Media. So I know Zach is on, Jess is on. So go look at their stuff and look at their work. And all I would say is, you know, I think JRCD has Twitter. So pay attention to JRCD. Look at some articles coming out there. But other than that, you will have enough on your plate already trying to manage what's going to be what's an elegant way I can see this an interesting semester.

Jenn Tostlebe 1:19:24

Very true. All right. Well, thank you again.

Jean McGloin 1:19:28

My pleasure.

Jenn Tostlebe 1:19:29

The Criminology Academy is available wherever you listen to podcasts. Make sure to follow us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram @thecrimacademy. If you're on Apple podcasts, please rate, review, and subscribe. Alternatively, let us know what you think of the episode by leaving us a comment on our website, thecriminologyacademy.com. And lastly, share The Crim Academy episodes with your friends and family!