

Sampson4REVIEW

Sun, 2/6 1:24PM 1:01:22

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

work, criminology, crime, neighborhood, theory, social, life, collective efficacy, influenced, people, victimization, important, gangs, social disorganization, data, argue, sociology, graduate school, research, book

SPEAKERS

Rob Sampson, Jenn Tostlebe, Jose Sanchez



Jenn Tostlebe 00:00

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Jenn Tostlebe 00:34

Hi, everyone, welcome back to the Criminology Academy where we are criminally academic. My name is Jenn Tostlebe



Jose Sanchez 00:41

And my name is Jose Sanchez. And today we have Professor Robert Sampson on the podcast to talk with us about his storied and decorated career as a sociologist and criminologist.



Jenn Tostlebe 00:51

Robert J. Sampson is the Henry Ford II Professor of the Social Sciences at Harvard University, the founding director of the Boston Area Research Initiative, and affiliated Research Professor at the American Bar Foundation, Professor Sampson served as the president of the American Society of Criminology and received the Stockholm prize in criminology. His research and teaching cover a variety of areas including crime, disorder, the life course, neighborhood effects, civic engagement, inequality, econometrics, and the social structure of the city. He's the author of three award winning books, and numerous articles. His last book published by the University of Chicago Press is "Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood

Effect". Great American city is based on the culmination of over a decade of research from the Project on Human Development in Chicago neighborhoods, for which Sampson served as scientific director. Thank you so much for joining us, Rob. We're excited to have you.

R

Rob Sampson 01:47

Thanks for having me.

J

Jose Sanchez 01:49

Okay, so just a brief overview of what today's episode is going to look like. So, the first part of our episode's going to be reflecting back on Rob's early career, then we'll discuss his contributions to criminology, mainly communities and the life course. And finally, we're going to wrap up with a discussion of the discipline of criminology and future possible future directions. So, with that being said, I'll go ahead and get us started. And so for our first question, so as Jenn and I were kind of going through this, and from other people that we've talked to, this appears to be a common theme that our upbringing has influenced with the work that we do, and the research that we do. And so we read that your hometown is Utica, in New York, and we'd like to know how this influenced your career.

R

Rob Sampson 02:42

Yeah. So, I think it's probably the case that it influenced my career in a couple ways. One has to do with the context of growing up there, and a particular urban atmosphere of you. And the second is geographic chance, really, in the sense that where I went to graduate school, I think, was just the fact that it was down the road from where I grew up. So, let me just say a bit about each. There's no reason that people would really know much about Utica. Pretty non distinct city, some might say, it's a decaying city. And I think that's true. It's on the Mohawk River, upstate New York. It's one of many older cities that were heavily dominated by industry. For example, textile mills, was actually born in Gloversville. Literally, is known for making gloves, factories. You go down you had west on the Mohawk river, you had towns like Amsterdam, Utica, Syracuse. Chapel, it has the highest vacancy rate of homes in the United States, at least the last I looked Rochester, which saw the population, Buffalo deindustrialization, so Utica is smaller is about 100,000 people when I grew up, it's a little dangerous I think in terms of, you know, retrospective bias. I've learned about this and my writings in the life course. That is to say, what we think now about our past, right, is influenced by everything that's happened since, that said, I was fascinated, growing up by the changes that I was witnessing. I've already mentioned the deindustrialization. Utica had over 100,000 people when I was living there and think now it's something like 60 to 62,000. So, that's a big loss. That's what I kind of put it in the context of these other cities. Because it's smaller. It's off the radar screen. It was decaying. Here's a concrete example. The high school I went to was very large, huge, I don't know, 1,000 students. They closed because of the depopulation, and it's now a nursing home. So, that kind of gives you an idea of what's happening. So, a city that saw a lot of inequality, deindustrialization, segregation, there was a big city crime, it didn't have one of the highest crime rates in the United States, it was relatively safe. On the other hand, there were gangland slayings. One day in the middle of the day, mobster was blown up coming out of a coffee shop, opened his door, there been a bomb had been set. And he was executed that about three,

three blocks from my house. So, it was an interesting context. And I think somehow, that sort of got, you know, so my intellectual curiosities going in terms of the nature of change. I liked it, though. I mean, it's oddly enough, I had a good time, shall we say, growing up, but it was something that stuck with me. The other way it was probably influential is that when it came to time to go to graduate school, at least, when I made that decision, there wasn't a lot of thought put into it. I didn't do a search across the country. I didn't apply to a lot of places. The State University of New York at Albany was about an hour and a half drive. from Utica, almost on a lark one day I drove after I spent a year traveling around the country, doing nothing much productive, visiting friends, California, ran out of money, moved back in with my parents and decided this is not good life, drove down visited Albany. I don't remember exactly how I knew about the program. But when I visited, I thought, this is a interesting, exciting atmosphere. So, I applied pretty much on a lark, and was admitted as a master student, I didn't have the undergraduate resume to be admitted as a PhD student. The only other place I considered was Cornell in a sociology of science, which just goes to show you that that was pretty random. I had no Well, it's not I didn't have an interest in criminal justice. It's just that I wasn't seeking out there was like, sociology of science, intellectual history. I like that. Criminology seemed interesting, so, I figured I'd give it a shot. It's not a model I would recommend for people, but that's the way it worked for me.



Jenn Tostlebe 07:20

Yeah, kind of funny. I feel like Jose and I kind of had similar I mean, not the same thing. But I definitely didn't necessarily plan to go into graduate school either. And I just kind of applied on a whim to a master's program, because similarly, I didn't have the grades, at least I didn't think to get directly into a Ph. D. program. So.

R

Rob Sampson 07:42

Yeah, I was sort of pretty much yeah, you're not your ideal candidate went to multiple places. And as an undergraduate, I skipped my last year of high school, did classes and community college because I was sick of high school. So yeah, I was a high risk candidate.

R

Rob Sampson 07:57

Yeah, I was at a junior college for four years, my first two years, but for you were almost non existent, really. And yeah, I think it was the spring semester of my senior year, when a professor asked what I had planned. I said, I don't know. She said, Well, we're opening up our message program here. Why don't you consider applying? I said, All right. I'll do that, I guess.

R

Rob Sampson 08:23

Yeah, it's a good thing. You know, just as an aside, I think one of the problems is that graduate schools have become almost too professionalized and they reduce the number of students they admit, and everyone comes in with funding, whereas the model back then at Albany, and when I was at the University of Chicago was to let in a lot of students, the student body, I think, cluding master students and PhD students was like, 40. And it was just sort of, you know, giving

a lot of people a chance and see what happens as opposed to selecting, it's sort of almost preordained in the sense of trying to predict who's going to be, you know, a good student. So I think it's a model that has its own problems. But on the other hand, I'm a big believer in giving people a chance. So I was grateful for that,



Jenn Tostlebe 09:09

Completely. So you mentioned that your primary interest was never necessarily criminal justice. And so we're kind of curious how you went from getting your degrees in sociology, to becoming interested in criminology and criminal justice?

R

Rob Sampson 09:26

Yeah, so as an undergraduate, I went to a couple different places, ended up at SUNY Buffalo again, in New York kid, tuition was, I don't remember 150 bucks. So, I mean, for the money it was a great education. There were a lot of great professors. at SUNY Buffalo. I took a number of classes philosophy, psychology, sociology, statistics. I actually liked them all. And I was kind of going back and forth. There were some really great psychologists there. But I remember taking several different sociology courses, they weren't criminology courses, they were more courses in social change. I forget the titles of the courses. But I became enamored with more macroscopic thinking macro social theories as a way to understand the world. To me, psychological theories were necessary, but it was really the context surrounding individuals that became more interesting to me possibly, because there are lots of social changes at that time. So, this was mid 70s, was just after Watergate into the Vietnam War. There was economic changes. So that that was probably part of it's hard to say again, retrospectively, but it wasn't that I was disinterested in crime. It's just there wasn't a thing in my classes at Buffalo, which goes back to my point that when I was deciding to go to graduate school, it was like, Well, I'm interested in sociology. Cornell had interesting people. And then Albany, again, was really pretty fortuitous. There's there's a big sort of geographic component to it a random component to it. I got hooked into my interest in crime literally there. Wasn't, again, like I had the interest in, sought it out and decided that was the best place.

J

Jose Sanchez 11:38

So, like we mentioned up top, you really know for a lot of the work in criminology, but when we're going through your book, Great American city, it seems to have always had or at least you had his interest in general well being. Was that always there? Or is this something you've developed over time throughout your career?

R

Rob Sampson 11:57

Yes, good question. I think I would say that it was more developmental with respect to my career. In other words, it evolved. My training, exposure at Albany was pretty eclectic. One thing I liked about the program is that it exposed students to really multidisciplinary setting there were a psychologist, going back to the idea of, you know, different approaches on the faculty, law faculties, sociologists, political science. It was pretty intense, really. And the faculty

were really very diverse. It wasn't like there was a unified front. There's a lot of conflict, actually, among the young professors there, went on to become famous in their own right like, Michael Gottfredson, was an assistant professor, Larry Sherman was an assistant professor. But it's there, I got exposed to Travis Hirschi, in particular, it was, became my main mentor. And I had not read in undergraduate career causes of delinquency, but that was an eye opener for me. But what really turned me on to a more community level approach was in a seminar, the Travis Hirschi taught. And one of the books he assigned in that seminar was Social Sources of Delinquency by Ruth Kornhauser. That was published in 1978. That's the year I started graduate school. So, it just come out as fresh publication University Chicago Press. And that book, for those who haven't read it, it's just a tour de force, overview, analytic assessment of social theories of crime. One of the big ideas really, in that book has to do with community level social control, and then introduced me to the Chicago School of Urban Sociology, or the Chicago school of Criminology. So that's really where I was introduced to that work. And that was a intellectual turning point for me. And then it just evolved over time, and I got deeper and deeper into it, but that's really where it started, is really part of my education in that course. I mean basically what Hirschi did it was one of those things where the syllabus was, I don't know, one or two pages, like here's the 14 books we're gonna read. I was like, okay, like, I like this.



Jenn Tostlebe 14:28

Yeah. Alright. So there are really these two big theoretical contributions, that you're most known for your work on social structures through social disorganization and collective efficacy. And then your work on life course criminology through kind of this age graded theory of informal social control. We'd like to go through both of these starting first with communities and social structure. And you just mentioned this, so I'm going to hopefully dig a little bit deeper here. But we know that during graduate school you were introduced to scholars in the Chicago School. And we're curious what influence the Chicago School had on your work in this area of social structures?



Rob Sampson 15:10

Yeah. So, when I read some of the Chicago School works, and it goes well beyond Kornhauser's book that was just really, I think the subtitle is something like analytic assessment. That's not exactly correct subtitle, but it got me into the classics. So, reading the original work, Shaw, McKay, Burgess, other works, urban ecology, which then led to an interest in neighborhood level and community level research, which turned out to really have a long history in criminology, and sociology as well. So, it just opened up a whole new line of work for me. So, it took a while to work through all that, but I got interested in a neighborhood level research was also interested in victimization research. It might not seem like an obvious connection, but at the time, Michael Hindelang, the late Michael Hindelang, he was a young, dynamic professor who had several large grants, studying victimization. In particular, the National Crime Victimization Survey, then known as the National Crime Survey, had basically just started, I think the first wave of the NCS was what 1973. So, it started to come out. And there was an entity at Albany called the Criminal Justice Research Center, which is a very bright, vibrant center whereby faculty for directing their grants and a lot of research assistants and graduate students working on grants, that's where I got to meet a lot of fellow graduate students. We wrote some papers together, monographs for the grant, I discovered that there was what was called a special supplement to the National Crime Survey that attached census data on

neighborhood characteristics to the national sample. To make a long story short, I was able to look really for the first time with that particular dataset, how the risk of victimization, and at the time, a lot of the analysis was about how things like age and race, and sex and other individual correlates were influential in predicting victimization. Essentially, what I argued in my thesis was for an emphasis on the neighborhood context of victimization, so it was really moving it to a different level of analysis and using those data in ways that would allow me to look at the neighborhood context of victimization, I don't know. I mean, several of my early publications were on that out of the dissertation. And that was influenced by the Chicago School and the other works in urban and sociological criminology. So, that was, I think the title of my PhD dissertation was "The Neighborhood Context of Criminal Victimization", pretty simple title. But it also entailed looking at how social structure in terms of inequality and heterogeneity with respect to neighborhoods was related to different types of victimization, such as interracial victimization, and other intellectual influence on my career, about the same time was Peter Blau. He was a sociologist, originally from Columbia University. But at that time, namely the late 1970s, he had an appointment, in the sociology department at Albany, I believe it was 1977, he published "Inequality and Heterogeneity". It was a almost a pure sociological work arguing for a very macro structural approach, like Kornhauser, social sources of delinquency. I thought it was just like, wow, this is great stuff. I can't stop reading it. It really wasn't about crime at all. Oh, there was a little section in there. He was a very provocative theorist, because basically what he was saying was my theory applies to every phenomenon, putting crime. So, it was a very ambitious theory, kind of like Hirschi's theory, kind of like Kornhauser. His approach, I guess, I'm attracted to those broad, big Idea theories and I took those ideas and applied them in the dissertation. I guess I worked up the nerve to send him a memo. Memory serves about this idea. He thought it was good, I guess because he served on my committee. He's a very formal professor and he used to write memos that would react to the chapters and the analysis, fantastic, deep read. So, he was on my committee. So the committee was Travis Hirschi. Hindelang had to drop off when he became ill, Peter Blau, and then Michael Gottfredson joined the committee. So it was really this combination of social structural neighborhood. But also this more macroscopic approach from Blau, that I applied to the neighborhood. There was a little bit of tension on the committee, frankly, because Hirschi was a little suspicious that Blau's work was relevant. And the defense I was worried about, because and how are these two gonna get on together? Was I going to be a victim of intellectual warfare? They sat about 10 feet apart. And I was in the middle. It was about a two hour defense, but it was great. it was great. And I felt privileged to have that kind of mentorship.



Jenn Tostlebe 21:02

Sounds like an experience. It's definitely something that you hear nowadays, like, make sure everyone on your committee gets along, for the most part, at least, like personally, maybe not necessarily workwise. But person level. Yeah.



Jose Sanchez 21:15

So, we want talk to you about your collective efficacy. And it sort of came out as a response to some of these weaknesses that you identified in social disorganization. Can you tell us what were these gaps that you identified? And how did you start developing this idea of collective efficacy?

R

Rob Sampson 21:34

Yeah, so first of all, I think social disorganization theory, it's gotten somewhat of a bad rap. It's got a great lineage, obviously, in the discipline. Although it was criticized early on, William F. Whyte in "Street Corner Society" basically said that it was really about differential social organization, which was the Sutherland argument as well with regard to criminology. So, it's early critics, but what I liked about it was the focus on the social and community level processes. I agreed with some of the criticisms, and I thought that there's too much emphasis on the DIS-organization. In other words, thinking about how communities are organized, it seems like well, it's just the flip side of the equation. That's somewhat true. But I think that's important because, as Bob Bursik argued, in his assessment of social disorganization theory, it's kind of tautological right to say, well, it's disorganized. How do we know it's disorganized? There's high crime, right? And so you kind of explain crime with crime. One of the challenges then of social disorganization theory was to step back from that tautological or circular kind of reasoning and point out the processes, the social processes. And what I thought was missing was that a lot of the literature, at least as I read it, you can argue, in the disorganization literature, was about the density of networks in the community. friendship networks, deep social ties. And so that's important. But what I was, I guess, really trying to think through more concretely was what were the other characteristics. And so, I would say that the evolution at least in my thinking from social disorganization theory to collective efficacy theory, they're very mean they're very tightly linked. So, in my writings, I give great tribute to social disorganization theory. But it's in a way kind of taking on some of the criticisms like Whyte and Sutherland and looking at how communities collectively support and provide social controls particularly informal social controls, one of my early papers actually talked about collective socialization. So, rather than disorganization, it was about what are the mechanisms of informal social control, and then also thinking through the activation of social controls that's the efficacy part, so could almost think of collective efficacy as two ideas, which was related to the operationalization into sub scales. One is the collectiveness, if you will, of the phenomenon in the sense of cohesion, social cohesion ties and trust, which is pretty consistent, I think, with social disorganization theory. The other is on efficacy and activation. And at the time, this was in the mid 90s. He was also working on the project on Human Development Chicago Neighborhoods was another fortuitous exposure, I had moved to the University Chicago in the early 90s, and became involved in that project, which involved interactions with a number of different scholars. And Tony Earl's, who was really coming out of public health and psychology introduced me to the work of Albert Bandura on self-efficacy. And we're seeing parallels to collective efficacy. In fact, Bandura talked about collective efficacy, although his was really more about the aggregation of individual self-efficacy produces kind of this collective efficacy. Whereas we were thinking more about the collective expectations and context of trust and cohesion, provided this higher order level, or theory, really, I think of collective efficacy less as an operationalization of a variable and more as a theory. And that's something that has come up a lot and some of the, I think, misunderstanding sometimes of collective efficacy theory. It's not the specific measures necessarily that we used. And what I mean by that is the paper we published on collective efficacy in crime was based on a community survey that we designed, actually Al Reiss and I designed that, Al Reiss was a sociologist/criminologist at Yale at the time. And that was very theoretically driven, because much of the research had been based on individual surveys, and then a lot of the neighborhood research is based on administrative data. So, make a long story short, we designed a survey whereby we were looking at the clustering or clustered survey of enough residents within a particular context, in this case, a neighborhood to be able to develop community level measures. And the idea behind collective efficacy was that it wasn't just about or even about an individual's efficacy, but it was the perception of the environment. In other words, individuals were being used as informants about

the context. And then we developed a sort of a methodological toolkit, which we call ecometrics or a metric for the study of ecology to reliably measure variations across neighborhoods. So, that's a key theoretical idea, but it also has a methodological component. So, that's a long way of saying that the journey to collective efficacy theory started out with a deep conversation with neighborhood level research and appreciation of social disorganization theory, but tried to move beyond it in theoretical terms, but also in methodological terms. In terms of new data, and a methodological approach, which attempted to parse out true neighborhood level variants and collect properties.

J Jose Sanchez 28:00

Yeah, super interesting how you develop this idea of collective efficacy. Okay, so as we mentioned, a little earlier. So I grew up in South Los Angeles, you know, formerly known as South Central. And that's really influenced my research, I focus my research around gangs, and how to respond to gangs. And since sort of becoming an academic not that long ago, I've become really fascinated with how researchers deal with the phenomenon of gangs, you know, you have, like your Kornhauser, and your Hirschi's, that are very structural, you address the structure that gangs of disappears, it's a case of homophily. And then you have someone like Cloward and Ohlin, or Albert Cohen, who are kind of more culturally based. And so I'm curious as to how gangs would fit within collective efficacy specifically, and control theory generally.

R Rob Sampson 28:59

That's a good question. To be honest, my thinking, in my research over the years has never really focused on gangs. Specifically, I suppose in retrospect, that's a bias that comes from Hirschi's work, as you probably know, and control theories are suspicious, shall we say? The relevance of gangs not that they don't exist, but the larger idea of peers and peer influence. I mean, I wouldn't go as far as Hirschi peers matter, I think matter. But, of course, in a control theory perspective, it's somewhat spurious. In terms of what the causal impact is, the real question is, well, why are people in gangs? And why are delinquent peers together, so you can even go back to Thrasher's classic court, speaking of the Chicago School on the gang, he was focusing on young kids, really.

J Jose Sanchez 29:52

[Something] playgroups.

R Rob Sampson 29:55

Yeah. I mean, if you think about it, it's pretty wild, right? Like young kids playgroups. Get today our image of gangs is older, very sophisticated gangs both exist. I think theoretically, the idea though of Thrasher was that communities and social structures are differentially effective in terms of the socialization of kids and the extent to which kids are supervised and monitored. That's where you see the connection to control theory. So, it's almost that every day informal social controls that matter in Thrasher's theory. So, in a sense, the collective efficacy can try to mediate that. And the vignettes that we used, or we came up with to measure collective

efficacy we're trying to think of what what are the different ways that people might mobilize or activate social controls? Well, there's different things kids hanging out, maybe causing trouble skipping school. We even thought about institutional things like fire station closing, you might think about school closing, what are the conditions under which parents or community residents, you know, would mobilize? And we think there's real variations. And I think in our, at least in my every day life, I see it a lot I saw, when I was a kid, I was socialized a lot by parents. I never, not just my parents, when I had kids, I remember one day, neighbor calling me up and said, you know, your son's driving around his bicycle with his friends shirts off with sticks, knocking over garbage cans? No. Glad the neighbor called and had a talking to with my son. So yeah, I mean, I think it's a real phenomenon that exists. And so that's what we're trying to get at. I have not studied gangs in the sense of formal organized gangs, I have great respect for that research. It's just not something that really drove my interests. I guess my take, though, is that the most important questions are really the conditions under which gangs are forming. And the more sort of exogenous or prior characteristics, even though I think there is evidence that pure systems, can have independent influences? For sure. I think that's the case. It's just for me, the more interesting question is what comes before that?

R

Rob Sampson 30:01

All right. So then let's move in and do a brief discussion on life course, criminology. And so we've read before that John Laub found this dataset that you use to develop life course theory. And we've read about your theory. So, we're just kind of curious what propelled you into doing work on life course in crime kind of coming off of social structure, I think.

R

Rob Sampson 32:55

Yeah. Well, again, I think there's a bit of just fortuitous circumstances here. Stumbled into it in a couple different ways. First of all, I knew John Laub from graduate schools. That's one key fact here. He was, I think, one or two years ahead of me in graduate school. He worked at the Criminal Justice Research Center in Albany also worked under Michael Hindelang. We wrote together in graduate school. That's one fact in the background than another is that in the mid 1980s, roughly, there was a lot happening intellectually. I mentioned earlier about the community level influences in terms of Kornhauser, Hirschi and all that. But there was another set of influences that came along, not that much later in the mid 80s. One was a famous article which most criminologists know about, by Hirschi and Gottfredson on age and crime, very different, completely different but it's not causes of delinquency. It's a really provocative argument about the invariance of age and crime. 1986 was the criminal careers report of the National Academy of Sciences. It was 1985 was crime and human nature by Wilson Bernstein. Each in their own way. It was a very influential work. So, I was reading all this, and you can take different things out of those works. But one argument that, at least to my mind, came out of it was the heavy emphasis on stability of early life characteristics as important in explaining crime over the life course, not completely. The criminal careers report, Blumstein, Cohen, and so forth, was arguing for looking at crime longitudinally, Gottfredson Hirschi, Hirschi and Gottfredson in their different publications were arguing against longitudinal research because of the stability of crime. Wilson and Hernstein were arguing about the importance of early life characteristics. So that was the intellectual milieu that was happening at the time. And John Laub and I were talking about that. And it was really a combination of that with the discovery of the Glueck's data from Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency. unravelling juvenile delinquency was

published in 1950. That was a cross sectional study. It's very relevant, very influential. in criminology, what was important there was, well, there are several things, but it had really influenced the field in terms of what was known as a multi factor approach that incredible detail of measurement on individual characteristics, family characteristics, they collect the data from parents and teachers and social workers and the police and official records. For reasons that are not completely clear the data, even though the books were famous in their time, I was shocked the other day I looked up, by the way, Unraveling Juvenile Delinquencies, despite the fact that was published so long ago is cited a lot. That's quite remarkable given the fact that, you know, a lot of citations are more recent work. It's sad. Well, that is the data just sat dormant in the archives in the basement of Harvard Law School. John Laub in the late 80s, was a visiting scholar at Harvard Law School came across those data. We were friends we had published together, we began a conversation. Eventually, it led to a paper that was published in criminology, that was sort of a test case is one way you might think about it, which is taking the Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency data, and bringing it to life, so to speak, and seeing if it could speak to contemporary criminological theory. It was published in criminology, we thought it did, as we were doing that and as we were talking through these other works, that were influential at the time, became apparent that the possibilities for those data were very rich were. We didn't realize even at the time, how much was there. But in other words, we began to think longitudinally and dynamically about the Gluecks' data, they have scholars who are familiar with their works now to follow up their sample. So they were interested in longitudinal research as well. But they really didn't theorize seems to me, it seemed to John at the time, in a dynamic way, it was really all about Well, you see, there were drunkenness, kids, and that's what it says adults and so there's stability of delinquency. And that's really kind of what you need to know. That's an oversimplification, but not a great deal. We took a different perspective. The other link here in the story, is the intellectual influence of the life course paradigm, which I think is separate from the criminal career, Hirschi Gottfredson. It's kind of buried in there. But if you think about more sociological life course, tradition. So, you can think of work such as Glenn Elder's, "Children in the Great Depression", there were other works. But in sociology, in demography, the idea of the life course cohorts, so forth, was really important. And we began to really dig into that research and bring it into, at least that was our thinking at the time was bringing the life course into criminology. And that started very soon after the publication of our paper on Unraveling Juvenile delinquency. I think it was 1990, we published a paper in the American Sociological Review on crime and deviance over the life course. And that basically set the context for our work, which then led to crime and making pathways and turning points through life, more or less basic thesis of our work that yes, there are these developmental pathways that psychologists emphasize. But there are turning points. In that case, we argued that there were turning points in young adult life force ties to social institutions that mattered, and that could redirect pathways in crime. So that led to that book, which we published in 1993. And then later on, we followed up with more data, we collected our own data. We followed up official records, we interviewed approximately 50 of the original delinquents to it. 70 That became the basis of shared beginnings, divergent lives. So there was an evolution there as well started out with fairly modest ambitions with regard to the dataset and then grew to a much more ambitious effort to not just resurrect the data and the longitudinal data. But to put forth the theory and age graded theory of informal social control over the life course,



Jenn Tostlebe 40:29

Big undertaking it's impressive, and then follow it up with your own data do is really cool.

R

Rob Sampson 40:36

Well, that was an important part of it. Because the data were very rich. On the other hand, we want it to be able to take it further in the life course to really get the long term perspective. But also to collect our own data to be able to dig deeper into some of the mechanisms that we identified ample in crime, the making, such as social ties to institutions like work, marriage, relationships, military service, so.

J

Jose Sanchez 41:11

So, life course criminology, has pretty much cemented itself in the discipline, you know it has an ASC division, there's a journal dedicated to life course and developmental criminology. So, I think it's safe to say that it's kind of here to stay. But you know, as you sort of touched on, it was not without its critics, people are still skeptical of it now. And again, one of the more vocal critics was your advisor, Travis Hirschi, along with Michael Gottfredson. And so we'd like to get some of your thoughts on the criticisms that have been levied at life course criminology and so how would you respond to them?

R

Rob Sampson 41:55

It was a little awkward with Travis as my mentor, just somewhat disagree with him, although I think that disagreements are less than people thought. One has to remember, at least in my view, that Travis Hirschi, at least in terms of his writings, one thing he always emphasized that ideas are separate from the person. "Causes of Delinquency" is fundamentally through and throughout a theory of social control, I would say informal. The argument about stability and self control came later. And in our work, John Laub and I were never really criticizing or denying the role of self control, it was more like there's another whole dimension of social control that needed to be brought in. And that went beyond the self control. So if the argument is that all you need to know, is the early life course and individual self control? I totally disagree. John disagrees. We think the data disagree, I would argue that that's what the field, what research shows? Sure. I mean, you can always have individual studies that may disagree, but I think the preponderance of evidence is clear that both matter. And so we were arguing for that. And at the end of the day, I had many conversations with Travis. I think he would not disagree. And I know Mike doesn't fundamentally with that idea. I think, some of the other criticisms that have come out, which are not unrelated to the stability, self control argument, there's one line of criticism, it says, well, some of these institutional ties turning points are spurious. So there's a causality critique, which is general like, well, it could be this, it could be that that's a critique that's really hard to answer, right? Because what's the most definitive way to do that someone argue you need experiments, or there's been a lot of methodological work that's tried to do matching and other kinds of causal type work. You know, I've done some of that. John, and I've done some of that. I don't think that ultimately, you know, it's definitive. Either way, I think I would still argue that you can find experimental evidence in favor of informal social control theory, you can find statistical evidence in favor, but that, you know, I'll totally agree that that's a critique that has to be taken seriously as it should be in any field or that is any theory. Another critique has to do with focus on or a shift away from a more social perspective and toward within individual characteristics, cognitive changes, agency, choice and so forth in the individual. There's different theorists out there. That's a line of critique which we take seriously, in fact, and share beginnings diversion lives, we devote a lot of attention to agency, we don't

deny agency, we, we think of it as structured choice. Where I believe we disagree with that line of critique is if the idea is to reduce everything to getting inside the heads of individuals that it's necessary that individuals have this cognitive transformation or choice process before, let's say, desisting. I just think that's incorrect. I view that as kind of a psychiatric criminology, to be honest, and I think psychiatric criminology has always been problematic. That is to say, you know, truly subjectivist approach, it's important to understand and study the meaning that behavior has for people. But I think that the move to essentially deny the influence of context is mistaken. And I think it's not supported by the evidence. So, we tried to take that argument seriously. But the argument we made in "Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives" that's correct.



Jenn Tostlebe 46:15

Yeah, that last critique that you touched on is something that I feel like, I've had a lot of conversations with people about, and one that's definitely very prevalent still.



Rob Sampson 46:26

Yeah, it is. But look, at the end of the day, that kind of argument, I just don't think can explain, there's not very compelling to explain massive variations. Yeah, at the individual or macro level. Yeah, I think about great changes that have happened over the last few decades mean, mass incarceration, right? Just was a huge structural influence doesn't matter what people think it affected people, the crime declined the crime increases, in sort of the urban crisis, the massive social changes that were taking place, agency cognitive changes, yes, they're important, but they're occurring, they're embedded within these contexts and which have causal influence. And so we need to unite those, rather than I think, the argument that it's sort of a more subjectivist, sort of non-contextual choice process seems to me, not a compelling argument.



Jenn Tostlebe 47:30

So we've touched on your influential work on communities and social structure, and now the life course, and Jose and I are interested in what you would consider to be your biggest accomplishment? And why out of those 2?,



Rob Sampson 47:47

That's an unfair question.



Jenn Tostlebe 47:48

I know, but



Rob Sampson 47:49

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Of course, I'm gonna say both well, but just push it a little bit. And I do think both, I would say that the project with John, the informal social control theory, age graded theory, prior to making shared beginnings, publications, that was a tremendous effort was a tremendous collaborative effort. We're proud of that. So, I continue to be influenced by that or so. I don't want to let that go. The only thing I would say is that the neighborhood stuff came first intellectually in my history. That's what you asked me about. And I, because I laid out the sequence. So, in that sense, if I think about it, the neighborhood level work. community level work, was sort of my signature introduction. When I think about it, terms of my career that I said, as an undergraduate, I really I was serious. I wasn't an intellectual, in the sense of deep dives, right into the sort of it was really in graduate school. So it's a neighbor. So in that sense, "Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect", is really important to me, as well in links back to my initial forays into criminology. But I guess what I would say is if you bring it together, if you think about the project, human development, Chicago neighborhoods, and what I'm doing now, with the follow up of the original cohorts from PHDCN, in a way, is bringing them both together in ways that I haven't before because the original, well, the book study was right? I still believe that ideas are relevant, but they data are from different era. The Chicago cohort kids, they're growing up in the cauldron of the social change of the 90s mass incarceration, the crime decline, and now these changes as well. We follow them up. In fact, just last November, the month of ASC that we just completed wave five PHDCN. survey we've collected criminal history records, so The original infant cohort, which was born in 1995, is now just over 25 years old. So we have a life course perspective on them, the older cohorts are in their 30s to 40s. So we're analyzing them. We published a paper and American Journal of Sociology, just last March, that's looking at the life course of criminalization, but embedded not just in the neighborhood, but also in the context of larger social changes what we call the birth lottery history. So, my ambition now and what I'm working on is another book that is trying to tie together the life course, crime, and criminalization, and these larger structural changes. So, I guess the kind of sociological essence of my being is coming out even more in this work. That is to say, it's not just ties to institutions, not just neighborhood, but it's those embedded in these large scale structural changes, which I think have important effects or their imprint on the individual life course. That's a classic issue. I mean, C. Wright Mills talked about sociological imagination is the intersection of biography, history, and social structure. We know that's a fundamental idea, but actually doing that is really, really hard. And, at least in my own case, I believe that been unable to do that until now with the evolutional I thinking the recent data collection PHDCM, so I'm trying to tie it all together rather than saying one.



Jenn Tostlebe 51:38

Yeah, that's a big undertaking as well. Yeah, I like how you do these very large scale projects, though, because they feel complete. And also interdisciplinary, which I'm a big fan of in my own work. So yeah.



Rob Sampson 51:52

I mean it's important to take your critic seriously. And again, just not denying individual differences. I think what's interesting is how those differences interact, really, with social structures.



Rob Sampson 52:00



Jose Sanchez 52:02

Okay, so now for a broader question, would you like to see the discipline of criminology go moving forward?



Rob Sampson 52:12

Yeah, that's a good question. Yeah, I think the field is pretty healthy, actually. It's very interdisciplinary. So I'm not one of those that say, Oh, it was better. In the old days, I think there's a lot to be done. I have my own biases, which I've stated, there was what I think is important to do, I think, the linking of the micro and macro, that's something that people talk a lot about. I'd like to see more of that in a little bit more conceptual, theoretical direction. That is to say a lot of the researches, is methodologically multilevel. But again, it's really thinking hard about those interactions. And there's good work being done there. I think that's one direction. And other is better unification of theories of crime, and theories of criminal justice. That's something I've really been thinking a lot about. To me, they're sort of criminology in the sense of theories of crime, then there's a lot on punishment, mass incarceration, they tend to be somewhat bifurcated, but they go together in important ways. So, theorizing that is something I'm working on. So, almost by definition, I think that's important. In terms of neighborhood criminology. I like a lot of recent work out there spatial criminology, a lot of new geographic methods, a lot of interesting work being done, like situational action theory. One thing that we've been pursuing that as my research team is thinking about going beyond the neighborhood or community, people don't just live in their neighborhoods, they travel throughout the metropolis, or at least differentially people travel throughout the metropolis in are exposed to different types of neighborhoods. So we're looking at that, as are others, what I think of is mobility based criminology, and we published a paper last year and American Sociological Review and one called triple neighborhood disadvantage, looking at how it's not just about social isolation of concentrated disadvantage in the neighborhood, which I've written about a fair bit, but in fact, neighborhoods vary a lot in terms of the extent to which people are exposed or traveled to affluent neighborhoods or other disadvantaged neighborhoods, and visitation into the neighborhood. We've created metrics to measure that and argue, theoretically, that that makes a difference not just for crime, by the way, but for general measures of community well being. So, I think that's a direction I'd like to see. And, as I've noted, I think social change, which is fundamentally and historic focus of sociology could be better integrated into criminology. It has been in the sense of the focus on mass incarceration, and there's a lot of interest in, you know, what caused the crime drop. So I think that's all healthy. That's why I said, there's a lot of good directions, I like to see more of that, like, see more emphasis on in my own work, I think of it as historical turning, right. It's not just individual, but historical turning points. And while these are interesting times, the study that as we showed, and then finally, I guess, just different types of crime, there's always been the critique of criminology is focusing too much on street crime. And there's a lot of types of crime, deviance including political that we need to be focusing on. I see that happening as well, too. So I'm really optimistic.



Jenn Tostlebe 55:47

And I'm glad you are as two people going into the field.



 R**Rob Sampson 55:52**

Lots to do, let's put it that way. So right, rather than viewing it, as you know, closed issues, we know everything. That's not true. One of the main reasons is because the world keeps changing and forcing us to rethink what we think we know. I put myself in that. Alright, yeah.

**Jenn Tostlebe 56:11**

All right. So we have one final question for you. And that is, what advice would you give to a newly hired Assistant Professor Rob Sampson?

 R**Rob Sampson 56:23**

Well, that's a good question. Well, one way to answer it is what I tell my students or graduate students in particular, which is following your passions, your intellectual passions, that's what I've done. And I don't think you can do good work if you're trying to be too strategic or doing what seems to be hot at the moment, or things like that. You know, it's easy to say, but I think you really have to follow one's passions. So, that would be I guess, my first piece of advice. The second would be to be open to random encounters in situations and don't try to plan it out too much. It's correlated with following actions, right? But at least, if I think back on the works that been most influential, the best experiences I've had, most of them really weren't, right. They weren't in a rational choice framework. They were, again, a lot of random things. You stumble into things, you get an intellectual Spark, then you follow that, you really have to be open to that rather than saying, Okay, I've got it pre planned. Here's what I'm going to do. And I'm going to follow that path. You have to be open to turning points, intellectual turning points. That's what I would say.

**Jenn Tostlebe 57:44**

Right. Love that. All right. Do you have any last thoughts that you want to share or things that we didn't touch on that you think are important?

 R**Rob Sampson 57:55**

We've covered a lot, I would, I guess, just close by again, emphasizing that there's so much yet to be explored. And so in that sense, I think it's great to be a young scholar, and to be able to be open to be exposed to works that challenge you and excite you. And then, right, we're passing the baton to the next generation. So, put a little pressure on you young scholars to go out there and do great things.

 R**Rob Sampson 58:27**

Yeah. Yeah, we'll try it. Thank you. All right. Well, thank you so much, Rob, for joining us and sharing about your history and your career and theoretical developments. It's been great learning more, is there anything that you would like to plug or share things that are coming out soon or anything like that?

R

Rob Sampson 58:52

No. I mentioned the work on the new phase, I guess I think of it as PHDCN plus, focus on individual social change working on a book, as opposed to paper and crime and justice lays out sort of a perspective on that and propensity theory and how the theory of individual and social change really forces us to rethink fundamental criminological concepts like propensity and character. So I'm excited about that.



Jenn Tostlebe 59:24

doing some work on that Jose and I are actually writing a book chapter right now on propensity so we'll have to go and check that out.

R

Rob Sampson 59:30

Yeah, there you go. Yeah, just came out. So awesome. That's got me pumped up to continue that work. So, look forward to seeing your chapter.



Jenn Tostlebe 59:41

Yeah. And then last, where can people find you? Email, online, on the Harvard website? Twitter?

R

Rob Sampson 59:49

Yeah, I guess that's one aspect where I'm a bit old fashioned. I'm not a, you know, part of the Twitter crowd. So, as of now, no, I'm not on Twitter. But I do have a website at Harvard that people can find stuff. I try to keep it fairly up to date in terms of publications in the links, so you can go there. Email me, be happy to share material, answer questions. Perfect.



Jenn Tostlebe 1:00:24

All right. Well, thank you again. It was a pleasure talking to you.

R

Rob Sampson 1:00:28

Pleasure talking with you. Thanks for great questions and good luck in your work. Thank you. Take care. Bye. Bye.



Jenn Tostlebe 1:00:37

Hey, thanks for listening.



Jose Sanchez 1:00:38

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Jenn Tostlebe 1:00:48

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Jose Sanchez 1:01:00

or email us at thecrimacademy@gmail.com.



Jenn Tostlebe 1:01:04

See you next time.