

# TheCrimAcademy\_43\_DiPietro

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## SPEAKERS

Stephanie DiPietro, Jenn Tostlebe, Jose Sanchez

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Jenn Tostlebe 00:00

Hey everyone! Welcome back to The Criminology Academy podcast where we are criminally academic. My name is Jenn Tostlebe.



Jose Sanchez 00:21

And I'm Jose Sanchez.



Jenn Tostlebe 00:23

And today we have Professor Stephanie DiPietro on the podcast to talk with us about life course criminology and how mass violence experiences impact human development and behavior.



Jose Sanchez 00:36

Stephanie DiPietro is an associate professor of sociology and criminology at the University of Iowa. She received her MA in sociology from the George Washington University and her PhD in criminology and criminal justice from the University of Maryland College Park. Her research interests center on life course criminology, criminal desistance and patterns of adaptation, or maladaptation, among immigrant and refugee groups with a particular focus on violence and delinquency. Thank you for joining us, Stephanie, we are really excited to have you.



Stephanie DiPietro 01:08

Thanks for having me!





Jenn Tostlebe 01:09

All right, so a brief overview of what we're going to be talking with Stephanie about. As I mentioned, we're going to start with kind of an overview of life course, criminology, then we'll move into a paper written by Stephanie, about how mass violence experiences, in particular the Bosnian war, impact human behavior and development. And then we'll move into--if we have time--a third paper or a second paper on religiously motivated desistance. So Jose, I will let you get us started.



Jose Sanchez 01:39

Thanks, Jenn. And yeah, this should be a fun discussion and a pretty timely one with some of the current events. And I think we've mentioned this before, but we plan these pretty far ahead. So it just so happened that, unfortunately, some events are happening in the world right now that make this a timely episode to talk about. But let's start off with our usual broad question that is probably a little broader than it needs to be. But that's how we do it here. So much of your research revolves around life course, criminology, which concerns the study of offending and other problem behaviors over time. So from usually from childhood to adolescence to adulthood, could you give our listeners a more nuanced breakdown of life course criminology?



Stephanie DiPietro 02:23

I mean, you know, I think at its core life course criminology is really about the study of individual change in behavior over the life course. And what's really central to this perspective is understanding patterns of both continuity and change in behavior over time. I think from a sociological standpoint, Elder's life course paradigm, and his four interrelated principles really provide much of the foundation for the study of lives over time and across social historical contexts. And I think, you know, collectively, these principles really emphasize the social embeddedness and interconnectedness of human lives. The role of timing in the life course, you know, this idea that how we respond to or adapt to various life events, is really contingent on where we're at, at this nexus of social and biological development. And then finally, the role of human agency and sort of choice within the constraints of our life.



Jose Sanchez 03:18

Often times we see life course criminology sort of lumped with developmental work and even at ASC [American Society of Criminology], you know, we have the Division of Developmental and Life Course Criminology. Is there a difference to these two? And if there is, could you tell us a little bit more about them?



Stephanie DiPietro 03:36

That's a tough question. I'm sure that you know, someone else would give a much better answer than I will. But I think, you know, obviously, within criminology there's been very different theoretical approaches to understanding the life course. And, you know, you've got Moffitt's taxonomy, you've got Sampson and Laub's theory of age graded informal social

control, Peggy Giordano's work on cognitive change. And when I think back to when I learned, you know about life course theory as a grad student, I think I understood the fundamental divisions between developmental and life course to relate primarily to how much emphasis is placed on these underlying risk factors. So for example, in Moffitt's taxonomy, you know, this is a perspective that places more emphasis on underlying neurological/psychological deficits, risk factors that could set in motion these patterns of disadvantage over the life course. On the other hand, you have perspectives like Sampson and Laub's that are much more firmly rooted in social structure, social bonds. And really what these emphasize are the ways in which these sources and the strength of our bonds change over the life course and how this bears on our behavior. So it's almost like a difference between internal and external mechanisms is the primary focus. But that's my two cents on that.



Jenn Tostlebe 04:52

Yeah, I've always kind of considered it as like more psychological and more sociological.



Stephanie DiPietro 04:59

Yeah.



Jenn Tostlebe 05:01

Alright, so as you kind of talked about your life events, where you're structured in society, cohort effects can have major impacts on the course of your development. And in this episode, in particular, we're going to focus a lot on violence. And therefore, we're wondering how exposure to violence and other forms of trauma and victimization fit into life course criminology. Another way of saying this would be like, if a child experiences trauma, how could this impact their future?



Stephanie DiPietro 05:32

Right. Well, you know, I think, on one hand, we can think of trauma and victimization as a sort of discrete transitional event in the life course, something that might catalyze a turning point. And I think a really interesting example of this is a paper that was written by Scott Jakes and Richard Wright more than a decade ago, in which they found that, you know, the experience of being victimized among drug dealers was this transitional point in their lives that helped catalyze their desistance. On the other hand, trauma and victimization that is chronic and acute, you know, think of living in a neighborhood that's beset by extreme forms of violence is probably better viewed as more of a developmental context, something that shapes our interpersonal relationships or interactions, the way we move about our communities, and especially our worldview, so I think that it can be relevant to to either of those perspectives.



Jose Sanchez 06:29

So let's start moving into your paper a little bit and kind of start setting that foundation for it. And I will say this topic hits a little close to home because my dad was a child soldier in El

And I will say this topic hits a little close to home because my dad was a child soldier in El Salvador during the Civil War. I don't know if I've mentioned this in the podcast before, but he was actually in active combat as a 14 year old. So I kind of have some personal experience with this topic. But so we're talking about what the implications of mass violence can have and this is a topic that seems to be under studied, especially as it pertains to human development and behavior. So why might mass violence events like a war be especially significant and important when thinking about life course criminology?

S

Stephanie DiPietro 07:15

Well, you know, I think, you know, going back to Elder and his, you know, concept of historical time in place in the life course, I think the context of war is this formidable backdrop that fundamentally shapes the life course, I mean, it marks the most dramatic and violent restructuring of human lives. And it has tremendous implications for our social networks, interpersonal relationships, you know, families are torn apart by death, by separation, even by alliances, communities are torn apart. And so everything that anchors a person to the collective, is fundamentally damaged in times of war. And so I think we have to think about it as both a developmental context, especially for children who are exposed, as well as a profoundly transitional event, you know, that fundamentally alters the life course, whether it's through forced migration, or this drastic reconfiguration of social roles. This is something that reverberates you know, across time and geographic space.

J

Jose Sanchez 08:15

One of the terms that uses violent adaptations, and it comes up pretty often in the papers that we'll be talking about. And so what does this term mean? And how does it sort of fit within life course criminology?

S

Stephanie DiPietro 08:28

I'm glad you're asking this question, because I wrote this paper a few years ago, and since the time that it was published my thinking about this subject, it really continues to change and evolve quite a bit. And I don't particularly like this term that I use, to be honest. In the context of the paper, I was trying to provide sort of an umbrella term for the ways in which experiences of violence and trauma imprints upon the life course. And you know, in particular, how people adapt to these experiences and sort of to connect these experiences to their own behavioral trajectories. But my fear is that something about this term is sort of overly deterministic. So it's something that I think I will move away from in future work for that reason.



Jenn Tostlebe 09:11

So in a way, it's like they're experiencing these violent events, and they're adapting to them in some way.

S

Stephanie DiPietro 09:19

Yeah.



Jenn Tostlebe 09:20

Okay.

S

Stephanie DiPietro 09:21

It's overly vague. It's not, I don't think it's such a useful term. And so I regret, I cringed a little bit when you said you use it many times in your paper. And I thought, Yes, I know, I wish I had not, but I did.



Jenn Tostlebe 09:31

That's why I had to put it in the podcast, because I was like, what exactly does this mean? Because yeah, I did kind of see it as more of a vague term. Yeah. Is there something like have you thought about what you would use instead?

S

Stephanie DiPietro 09:45

The more I think about this topic, the more complicated it gets for me, and I think trying to sort of use any kind of summary term, it creates almost this reductionist account, and so I'm struggling with that terminology, this is something that you know, the nomenclature is so important in this work because you just want to be careful about, you know, talking about things like risk factors and sort of anything that veers toward a positivistic kind of orientation. So it's a very long way of saying no, I have not come up with a better term just yet.



Jenn Tostlebe 10:20

But yes, terminology is important. That's something that we've talked about quite a few times on the podcast too. Alright, so with that being said, let's get into your paper then. It's authored obviously by our guest, Stephanie. It's called "Roads diverged: An examination of violent and nonviolent pathways in the aftermath of the Bosnian war." It was published in Criminology in 2019. And so I'm gonna pull basically directly from your paper, so it's not plagiarism I'm citing in the podcast. This study aims to examine how early experiences with war and genocide contextualized pathways of human development and behavior over the life course, Stephanie uses detailed life history data gathered from 55 males, who experienced the Bosnian war and genocide during their youth to investigate their shared beginnings, as well as their divergent pathways over time and across two distinct post work contexts. One being St. Louis, Missouri, and the other I'm going to destroy the city name in Bosnia. I'm not even going to try how do you say?

S

Stephanie DiPietro 11:24

Sarajevo.



Jenn Tostlebe 11:25

Can you say it one more time?

S

Stephanie DiPietro 11:26

Sarajevo.



Jenn Tostlebe 11:29

Okay. Sarajevo, Bosnia. So we know based off of previous discussions with you that this paper is part of this larger project you're working on examining the ways in which the life course is shaped by exposure to war in childhood. And so to get us started, can you tell us a bit more about this larger project that this paper is a part of?

S

Stephanie DiPietro 11:50

Absolutely, you know, I get almost overwhelmed talking about it, because it is such a big project. And it's something I've been working on--this data collection and this research--for quite a while. But so this project really began in the city of St. Louis, where I was fortunate enough to spend 10 years as a professor at UMSL. And St. Louis happens to be home to the largest diaspora population of Bosnian refugees in the entire world. So when I began this project there, the broader goal was really to study patterns of assimilation among immigrant and refugee groups, that was sort of my area of interest. But in the course of doing this work and conducting these interviews, I really my attention shifted toward the ways in which the experience of war shaped the life course I really found this profoundly interesting. And it was completely unlike anything that I had studied or been exposed to in my academic career. And just listening to these stories of what people had survived was really extraordinary. And so I started to hone in on that topic, and then specifically started to seek out individuals who had experienced the war as children. Now, because the war in Bosnia and the genocide there ended in 1995, this provided an amazing opportunity to consider the long term impact of war. You know, this is something that I can look at and understand, you know, people who experienced this 20 years ago, how did it affect their lives? How did they think it affected their lives today. I was very fortunate to be able to go to Bosnia and to spend a total of over seven months there, including the six months spent living in the city of Sarajevo and conducting interviews and fieldwork. So the entire sample from which this particular paper is drawn is much larger. It includes 110 people, both men and women. There are sub samples in there of individuals who were incarcerated for violent offenses at the time of the interview. I also have a handful of former child soldiers who I'm writing about right now, as a matter of fact. And I think so one of the unique aspects of these data is that I can compare across these contexts and sort of examine, you know, the experiences of people that are forced to leave their homes as refugees with those who stay behind in the aftermath of war.



Jenn Tostlebe 14:04

Sounds like quite the fascinating project to be a part of.

S

Stephanie DiPietro 14:07

It is. It's been great.



Jenn Tostlebe 14:10

And also kind of difficult, I'm sure to do some of the interviews and live in the environment.

S

Stephanie DiPietro 14:16

Yeah, that's a whole other podcast.



Jenn Tostlebe 14:19

Yeah. Oh, I bet. Yeah.

S

Stephanie DiPietro 14:22

But it was great. It was great at the same time.

J

Jose Sanchez 14:26

Okay, so moving specifically to this paper on how early experiences with war and genocide contextualized pathways of human development and behavior. What was the driving motivation behind writing this paper? And sort of, what gaps was it addressing when you wrote this paper?

S

Stephanie DiPietro 14:45

Well, you know, I think probably the biggest underlying motivation behind this particular paper is our own disciplines in attention to this context of war and genocide, it's a developmental context. You know, there are extraordinary scholars out there who are writing about the subject of criminology and war and you know, I mean, Ruth Jameson, Vincenzo Ruggiero, Ross McGarry, and there's there's a whole and I'm leaving out so many important people Holly Nyseth Brehm, but no one's really sort of, or very few people are sort of addressing this question of how this kind of shapes, longer trajectories of behavior and adaptation over the life course. And so that was really the major catalyst. And another, you know, sort of impetus behind this is that I was very interested in the subjective experiences of these individuals, you know, I don't want to sort of make the mistake of assuming that I understand how war impacts an individual. I had any

individuals tell me that the war was some of the best times of their lives because people were close, and there was a sense of camaraderie. So the relationship between you know, war and later outcomes is very complicated. And I wanted to learn from people themselves, how it impacted them and not impose any of my ideas upon them. So that was kind of a big catalyst there.



Jenn Tostlebe 16:05

As we've mentioned, in this paper, you're focusing on the Bosnian war, but just to kind of help situate this idea of mass violence and genocide. Can you provide some other examples of events of mass violence that might relate to what we'll be discussing in this podcast?

S

Stephanie DiPietro 16:21

Yeah, I mean, so with respect to violence, obviously, any situation of extreme political conflict and genocide, I mean, I think of what's happened in Darfur, which has been going on for years, in terms of, you know, finding a parallel with war and genocide, I don't think there is one, it's just far too unique in its brutality, and it's atrociousness. But I do think there's some interesting parallels between the context of more and other cataclysmic events, and situations of massive disorder. And so one example that comes to mind is the horrendous mining disaster in Buffalo Creek, West Virginia in 1972. And Kai Erickson wrote, you know, his absolutely brilliant book, *Everything in its Path*, about this disaster. And I think what connects the Bosnian study in the context of war and genocide with these other events of catastrophe is the profound individual and collective trauma that is wrought by disaster and the ways in which individuals and communities have to sort of piece their lives together in the aftermath.



Jenn Tostlebe 17:31

Yeah, that's interesting. Definitely not an example that I thought you would mention, but I can see how they would tie together.

S

Stephanie DiPietro 17:38

Yeah, his work is very useful to me, because I think, you know, it's that sort of collective and individual traumas highly relevant to this.

J

Jose Sanchez 17:48

Absolutely. How might risk factors related to childhood trauma and separation from one's family, which we tend to see pretty frequently when something like war and genocide occur? How do they contribute to future adverse behaviors?

S

Stephanie DiPietro 18:06



Yeah, you know, I'm always reticent, I hate using the term risk factor again, because I think it belies a lot of the complexity of this relationship. And really, what I want to do in this work is shed light on these interstitial processes that link war to later life outcomes. But with that meandering blathering introduction, I do think there's a few key processes at work here. So, you know, for one, in times of war, social bonds are fractured. You know, as I mentioned, this type of trauma marks the most violent restructuring of social roles from a social control perspective, you know, bonds with families and communities are heavily strained, if not totally fractured for many. So if our social bonds serve to inhibit crime and violence, well, this type of catastrophic event, it jeopardizes those bonds in a very fundamental way. And so, you know, one theme that came up in this paper among the men who did have histories of chronic violence was this loss of male role models in their lives in the absence of these models kind of gravitating toward more antisocial peers. I think a second process that is at work here is that war forces children into a sort of precocious maturity. And you mentioned the case of, you know, your father, who's a former child soldier. And it's hard to even wrap our heads around the experience of being conscripted at such a young age, and sort of thrust into this environment where violence is normalized and expected, and you're instructed to kill and to shoot people and then somehow try to reenter society as a child and sort of undergo this radical shift in your whole orientation of self. And so in my other work that's ongoing, I've done a case study of a man who was forcibly conscripted at the age of 11 and had to worked as a sniper at the age of 11. And he went on to have a very, very difficult, you know, future in terms of crime and violence and arrest and homelessness. And so we're talking through, you know, how that experience shaped his trajectory? And I think there's no question it has a pretty profound impact. And I think finally, you know, another big theme is that, you know, the way in which exposure to extreme forms of mass violence, the way it shapes your worldview, and your perception of violence is very, very important. And I think that, you know, sometimes these perceptions can be used to sort of justify violence, they can be used to sort of, you know, essentially, sort of shape one's worldview, which I think has major implications for criminal behavior. So there's no straight path, you know, I mean, that's the thing. These are just some of the mechanisms. But, you know, there's no clear cut path to violence.

**J** Jose Sanchez 20:57

I mean, yeah, I can't just help think about, like, you know, my dad's story. Growing up, I heard the stories of him getting drafted four times. My grandpa was a ranking military official. So he was able to pull strings and get them out. But he kept getting drafted. And they told them, you're out of favors, if you really don't want your kid to fight, like you got to ship him out. And so that's when my grandpa shipped out my dad and my grandma. So my dad had to basically leave everything behind, all of his siblings and move to Los Angeles to this country that he'd never been to before with just his mom. And then I heard some of the stories from when he was actually on active duty, and kind of trekking through the jungles of El Salvador.

**S** Stephanie DiPietro 21:42

Wow. That's unbelievable.

**J** Jose Sanchez 21:44

With other child soldiers, so it kind of just seeing how my dad has sort of dealt with everything

and kind of turned out like, I don't know if I would say, best case scenario, but he seems to be doing fairly well. Considering what you know, after reading your paper, considering some of the outcomes that could have happened, but you know, it's tough, right. And then, thankfully, the advent of like Zoom and WhatsApp and the sort of these technological advances have helped him reconnect with family that he hasn't seen in four or five decades.

S

Stephanie DiPietro 22:18

Incredible. It's an incredible story. It really is. And I think, if there's any good news to this work, it's that you know, people who actually end up with these very problematic outcomes. They're the exception, not the rule. Most people are extraordinarily resilient, and they experienced these dreadful things. And they go on to lead, you know, relatively normal lives. And so this is not in any way deterministic experience. It's more of that, I keep getting back to that issue of more of a developmental context, but a really difficult one.



Jenn Tostlebe 22:53

So prior to your study what we're talking about right now, you acknowledge that there had been shown to be a link between exposure to war and genocide and violent adaptations using that term, you're not really a fan of, however, you did note that there were like three very notable and important gaps in this literature. Can you discuss briefly what these gaps are? Because I think they're important for your paper moving forward.

S

Stephanie DiPietro 23:21

Yeah. I mean, I think the first one, you know, is kind of this pesky anomaly in criminology. And that's that we identify these so called risk factors, like growing up in a context of extreme violence. But we're hard pressed to explain how so many people who have experienced these contexts never go on to exhibit any sort of criminal or otherwise problem behavior. So it gets back to that point we were just talking about. And so I think understanding divergent trajectories that stem from these shared contexts and experiences is really critical. So that was one of the first gaps. The second is that we tend to think of the more proximate impacts of these types of traumas, you know, we quantify the immediate harms of war and genocide, the number of casualties, the number displaced, the extent of physical destruction, without really considering in full the ways in which these things resonate over time, and across the whole span of the life course. So a second kind of goal of this work was thinking more broadly about the implications of war, you know, over time. And then finally, it was, you know, I was really interested, as I mentioned in getting at the subjective experience of war. And a lot of the literature that's in this area is outside of criminology, it's in social work, even public health, and it doesn't attend at all to the meaning that people ascribe to their lived experiences. And this is critical to understanding you know, pathways to crime and violence. You know, how do people internalize these experiences? How does it shape their own story? What are the implications of this narrative itself for crime and violence?



Jenn Tostlebe 25:05

I don't know if you would agree with this, but I feel like it's like that third gap that you

I don't know if you would agree with this, but I feel like it's like that third gap that you mentioned, the subjective experiences, that seems more like a broad thing in criminology that we haven't focused a lot on. And people are trying to do that now. I know, like, I mostly do work in corrections. And so going in and doing interviews with people who are actually incarcerated, that's been one thing that I've really enjoyed doing.

S

Stephanie DiPietro 25:29

Absolutely. It's such an important perspective. And it's, you know, a lot of our theories and ideas are kind of rooted in work that was done decades ago. And we sort of need to do this work to develop new understandings and new concepts, you know?



Jenn Tostlebe 25:43

Right.

S

Stephanie DiPietro 25:44

Yeah.

J

Jose Sanchez 25:45

Okay. But who don't address these gaps, you seemingly didn't rely on any one theoretical perspective or idea. Rather, you propose an integrated framework that combines elements of life course paradigm, social ecology, and a narrative criminological framework. And so in doing so, you not only address the gaps that we just discussed, but you also offer a framework for examining how childhood exposure to war can shape both objective developmental contexts and turning points, in addition to their subjective worldviews over the life course. And so before we get into sort of like the nitty gritty of this integrated framework, we would like to have you briefly discuss these elements. We've already sort of touched on the life course paradigm a bit. Can you provide a brief overview of the social ecology and the narrative criminological framework that you also draw from?

S

Stephanie DiPietro 26:46

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, so you know, in brief, social ecological perspectives, adopt a view of the individual as nested within these multiple spheres of influence. And it's really analogous to, you know, a set of Russian dolls, where you're located within these different interdependent systems that range from the micro level, you know, your family, your peers, all the way up to the macro level, which captures these much broader systems of structure and culture and ideology. And of course, this is Urie Bronfenbrenner model. Narrative criminology is quite different. And this is something that's concerned primarily with with examining how people make sense of their own lives, it heavily emphasizes one subjective worldview and the symbolism and meaning that individuals attach to their lived experiences, you know, the ways in which people make sense of their own histories, the sort of affective dimensions of what Dan

McAdams would call their, their personal myth, they have really significant implications for behavior, you know, these narratives may serve to justify or neutralize behavior, they may help us to position ourselves as agentic beings. And so integrating these perspectives in this paper was all about giving fuller consideration to both the social structural elements of one's experiences, and also the psychosocial dimensions, the psychological dimensions, just really with the goal of kind of enhancing our understanding of the complexity of this relationship.

**J** Jose Sanchez 28:17

Okay, so now that we've had you sort of describe the individual components, can you give us the rundown on your integrated theoretical framework for examining the impact of war on children over the life course?

**S** Stephanie DiPietro 28:29

I mean, so again, just like I mentioned, how, you know, my thinking has really changed and evolved since this first article, I think, now, I've sort of taken this even further. And so in this particular paper, I was really, you know, just trying to incorporate, you know, elements of social structure and in sort of the more traditional life course paradigm that looks at key transitions and turning points and relationships, and I was trying to sort of merge that with one's subjective point of view. And now in my more recent work, I've delved much deeper into psychosocial criminology, which really is even more concerned with not only one's conscious, rational, deliberate retelling of their story, but also these unconscious vulnerabilities and sort of defenses against anxiety that, you know, are produced by certain life experiences. And so, that gets into a very different literature. But, you know, it's a way of saying that we need to look at this from multiple angles. You know, it sort of seems like a bit of a kitchen sink model to sort of talk about all of these different theoretical perspectives. But if we prioritize the sociological over the psychological, we're missing a really critical element of this relationship. And so I think it is necessary to draw from multiple perspectives to try to get a handle on again, the sort of nuances in this relationship.

**J** Jose Sanchez 29:57

One of the focuses that your paper touches on is sort of how the exposure of war torn contexts can contextualize pathways of both positive and negative human development in adulthood. So how does this integrated framework explain why some individuals may engage in violence later on in life, while others may not?

**S** Stephanie DiPietro 30:18

I think you know, the answer to that is, it's complicated. And I can say that, you know, in this particular study, there were a number of important themes that were consistent in the life stories of violent men. And so this is something you know, one of these was, it's something that I talk about, it's part of my ongoing work is like, the ways in which notions of masculinity are formed is very much context specific. And so, you know, one sort of thing that helped explain why some men had these violent pathways and others didn't--and it was just one thing--was

that violent men seem to really sort of espouse these models of masculinity that really, you know, sort of promoted violence promoted kind of a lot of that sort of, you know, retaliatory violence, if you will. So in a way, it was very relatable to something like Elijah Anderson's work or something like that. So there was one theme that connected them. And then there were others, you know, the loss of male role models, and the adherence to sort of these almost toxic models of masculinity. But the point was that it wasn't, the pathways are not so clear. And that's something that I'm still sort of teasing out in ongoing work is that, you know, I think one of the biggest differences between the men, the violent and non violent men, was that the non violent men had a very different way of looking at their life history. And they were often drawing upon the good experiences in their lives, you know, talking again, about how family and friends helped each other during the war, and how they learned to be strong and resilient. And there's, you know, this really clear indicator that it helped promote a certain level of resiliency for them, whereas for others, the effects were far more damaging, and that pathways is kind of convoluted.



Jenn Tostlebe 32:16

Okay, so so far, we've kind of laid out this groundwork for your study, just kind of rehash in conducting your research you use this cross national study of post war adaptation among Bosnian refugees and nationals that pulled life history data gathered through in depth qualitative interviews. And based on these data, as you just mentioned, there were some emergent patterns that help distinguish between both violent and non violent pathways. And so some of this might be a little repetitive off of what you just said, but we'd like to go through each theme. And so the first theme that I believe you identify is that there was no indication that violent men experienced more exposure to violence or traumatic events in their youth than non violent men. So there was this similarity that we saw between these groups. Can you tell us a little bit more about this theme and how, you know why it was so important?

S

Stephanie DiPietro 33:12

Absolutely. I mean, I think this is one of the most important findings here because it completely refutes the idea that exposure to contexts of extreme violence are in any way deterministic of problematic outcomes later on, you know, nearly every single one of the men in the sample was exposed to atrocity, and experienced profound trauma, both personally or intergenerationally, you know, through the effects on family members. But that exposure, that trauma in and of itself, absolutely was not, it did not help differentiate between the violent and nonviolent men. And that in you know, in a sense, is a good thing, because it shows that, that people can still, you know, experience these horrendous things, and then go on to have perfectly functional lives.

J

Jose Sanchez 34:04

The second theme, and again, sort of asking you to elaborate on something that you touched on was how the narratives among non violent and violent men diverge with respect to masculine identity formation in the aftermath of the war. And so yeah, could you elaborate a little bit more on that theme?

 S

Stephanie DiPietro 34:22

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think this is one of the more interesting themes that I really have just been working on quite a bit lately. And, you know, one thing that's interesting is that, you know, the ways in which notions of masculinity are formed are very context specific. And so one's environment really, it constrains resources for performing masculinity. And it also shapes you know, how masculinity is perceived. And the context of war is very unique, because it really forges these very distinctive ideas about what real men are, you know, and this was something that came up time and time again in the narratives and interviews, you know, you think of these archetypal, you know, heroic, fearless soldiers. And you know, these sort of these models of masculinity that emerge from these contexts. And so when we think about the socialization of men and their investments, in particular discourses of masculinity, we have to understand them within the broader context of social change and these institutional constraints that are wrought by things like war. And so one of the prominent themes, one of the big findings in studies that the violent men specifically really embraced these notions of masculinity that, again, they've espoused violence and aggression, the willingness to retaliate against any affront to their masculinity, you know, and these discursive investments of their's really appeared to rationalize to justify violent behavior, and like I said, I think this resonates quite a bit with some cultural theories, that sort of, again, talk about these, you know, both the way in which violence and masculinity is perceived and understood is very much context specific.



Jenn Tostlebe 36:06

Tying into this idea of context. You mentioned, I think the third theme is that varying contexts helps shape the pathways to violence in particular. So not just masculinity, but also violence. Can you talk about that a little bit more?

 S

Stephanie DiPietro 36:21

Yeah, I mean, absolutely, you know, comparing the context of Sarajevo to St. Louis, one of the biggest differences related to the men's opportunities for achieving or performing masculinity, and sort of the unique challenges to masculinity that were posed by these contexts. In Sarajevo, the economic situation is extremely dire, and especially then, and opportunities for meaningful employment are incredibly scarce. And so for some of the men that I interviewed, crime and violence was a means of sort of attaining the spoils of hegemonic masculinity in a way. Compare that to St. Louis, a prominent theme among the violent men specifically, was this experience of being persecuted, you know, because they were refugees, they were forced into exile. And we have to think about it - exile is such an archaic terrible punishment, it's it's long been deemed, you know, too cruel and inhumane to impose on people. And so people who are undergoing tremendous disruption to their lives are forced into exile. And so the experience of, you know, being sort of persecuted and exiled, it really seemed to kind of heighten this sense of persecution that really fueled some of the violent behavior. You know, there was one interesting case that I remember that I believe I write about in this article of a guy who was describing to me some of the assaults that he had perpetrated in his adolescence in St. Louis. And, you know, he was explaining to me that by the time he got to St. Louis, you know, after the end of the war, after he experienced all of these things, he said, you know, the fuse was already short, he'd had enough, he had been persecuted senselessly, you know, he'd lost

absolutely everything. And so I think it's pretty, you know, easy to understand how this kind of context of sort of, you know, being violently, you know, disrupted and sort of placed in a new environment could, in a way posed certain challenges to one's, you know, sense of self and their sense of masculine identity.



Jenn Tostlebe 38:24

Absolutely. Complete culture shock too on top of everything else.



Stephanie DiPietro 38:29

Yep.



Jose Sanchez 38:31

Okay, so what are the larger scale implications of the study and your results for academic research, but also policy and practice?



Stephanie DiPietro 38:41

Yeah, I mean, gosh, with respect to, you know, research, there's so much more to be done. I mean, we need to understand both the proximate effects of war, as well as these more distal effects that reverberate for decades. And so I really see, you know, this work that I'm doing is just the beginning of my own work in this area. And now I'm in the process of collecting a brand new, I'm doing a new data collection that involves refugees from areas with recent conflict, including Afghanistan and Syria to sort of, you know, compare across these experiences and across contexts. With respect to policy, I think it's imperative that we advocate for and support programs that aid in the relocation and resettlement of refugee populations. This is critical. It's been heavily politicized, especially during the Trump administration. But this is, you know, a massive global restructuring, and it's a global crisis. And so I think we need to prioritize aiding people coming from these war torn countries without a doubt.



Jenn Tostlebe 39:43

And so one kind of topic that we want to touch on before moving to the next section, is the fact that as Jose has mentioned, this discussion is super timely given the current situation in Ukraine, and that situation is still developing, but we want to know if you have any ideas of how we could apply what you've learned and presented in this paper from the Bosnian war to the war in Ukraine, or what do you think may come out of this present situation, especially thinking about children experiencing these events?



Stephanie DiPietro 40:18

I mean, you know, it's such a difficult question. I mean, there are so few events that are as far

reaching in their damage than war. And I think what's happening in Ukraine is getting increasingly impossible to deny that what's happening there constitutes genocide. I think the fact that civilians are being deliberately targeted, it's an abomination. And so I don't even feel comfortable just referring it to as war at this point. You know, as I mentioned, before, in times of war, you know, the entire social fabric of societies is completely torn apart. And these detrimental effects are manifested. So many levels, you know, very abruptly, we have these whole marginalized social groups, widows, orphans, refugees, we've got massive physical destruction, mass migration, disrupt community organization, all of these institutions of informal social control, schools, religious organizations are rendered inoperable. And so for children in particular coming of age, in these contexts of mass violence, this is going to leave a profound imprint on the trajectories of their lives. You know, there's a phrase that I believe was coined during the Vietnam War. And it's simply that, you know, war is not healthy for children and other living things. And so, it's a pretty, you know, simplistic statement, but this is going to have profound detrimental effects. But I don't think we fully understand how far reaching these effects are, because we again, we haven't fully studied this topic. And so you know, the situation in Ukraine is absolutely horrendous. These people are undergoing these these atrocities. And I think we can't forget the countless others who are facing similar horrors or have very recently in Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan, this is something that is happening worldwide. And it goes on and on tragically, so again, we really need to prioritize what we do to aid in the resettlement of refugee populations, because that's all that can be done at this point, in terms of helping.

S

Stephanie DiPietro 42:17

Absolutely. So you know, as you mentioned, I wrote this with my colleague, Tim Dickinson. And our goal here was really to explore the nexus between religion and desistance with a particular focus on Islam, in part because it's been so under studied in criminology, you know, most studies of the religion-desistance Nexus, they focus on Judeo Christian religions, and studies of Islam tend to focus more on topics like extremism and radicalization. And so part of the motivation for me was really examining a religion that hasn't garnered much attention in criminology, and bringing to light the ways in which Islam shaped these men's lives for the better. So the data is taken from the Bosnian project, but the focus is very, very different, because we're honing in on a sample of just four men who are all in the process of criminal desistance. And, and so we're not as concerned as sort of how they got to be criminal offenders, but now we're looking at sort of the endpoint of their criminal careers.

J

Jose Sanchez 42:17

Okay, so we're going to wrap up with a discussion on another paper that you sent us, this will be a brief discussion, but it's also part of the larger project that we are involved with regarding how the life course is shaped by exposure to war, and other cataclysmic events in childhood. So this paper was authored by you and your colleague, Timothy Dickinson, it's titled "God is real: Narratives of religiously motivated desistance," and it was published in criminology in 2021. Could you give us a rundown on the background of this paper and where the idea came from? For it?



Jenn Tostlebe 43:56



And so, yeah, I guess one of the first questions is kind of how could religion itself actually impact desistance?

S

Stephanie DiPietro 44:05

Yeah, yeah. I mean, in this particular study, I think one of the big takeaway point is that men's adherence to Islam, it really helped catalyze their desistance by fundamentally reshaping their worldview. And part of this meant reconciling with these traumatic pasts, and even sort of cultivating a new moral universe, a new way of looking at the world. And I think that's what is so interesting and unusual about this study is that their transformation came about in spite of a lot of these external structural things that are supposed to sort of impact desistance so strongly. I mean, one of the more interesting men in the study, he was at the height of his criminal career. He had a very successful career as a very well regarded professional, he was married he had military service. And none of these things that are traditionally associated with desistance had any impact on his offending at all. But it was really rather this more sudden cognitive transformation in his sort of embracing of Islam. That was the most important changing transition in his life. And so I think that, you know, it's kind of interesting, because it does kind of give us a point of divergence from some sort of well known, sort of, you know, correlates and persistence.

J

Jose Sanchez 45:33

What the results of your study show with regard to the role of Islam, and I know, you just talked about one case, but for the rest, what were the results on the role of Islam in shaping this process of criminal desistance?

S

Stephanie DiPietro 45:44

Yeah, I mean, that was sort of, you know, I think that those kind of themes that I just touched on, were sort of the big one, that it was really about kind of bringing about a certain level of cognitive change for these men. And, you know, one of the sort of themes that that emerged that was part of it is that, you know, again, because these men are part of the bigger study, and a lot of their pathways to violence, were shaped by again, the sort of embracing these notions of masculinity is, you know, you have to be violent, you have to be aggressive. And Islam fundamentally changed that orientation for them. And it almost gave them a new sort of moral code, if you will, that sort of replaced this old one. And so I thought that was one of the more interesting themes as well as how, really Islam just fundamentally helped them not only shaped their worldview, but almost reshaped their understanding of their own history.





Jenn Tostlebe 46:39

Yeah, that's fascinating, and how that underlying process works would be, I don't know exactly how you'd fully get it that but that would be interesting. Yeah.

S

Stephanie DiPietro 46:47

 Stephanie DiPietro 46:17  
Definitely.

 Jenn Tostlebe 46:49

So then our last question for you on this papers, just more about the implications. So what should we take away? Or what could we take away from these results regarding desistance or the process of change?

 Stephanie DiPietro 47:01

Yeah, I mean, I think you know, so I just think, in general that religion marks such a critical area in the study of desistance, you know, both with respect to how it shapes interpersonal relationships, and our connections to a bigger collective, that more sociological aspect, but also how it helps us reconfigure our identity and our personal narrative. And, of course, this is something that Peggy Giordano, Shadd Maruna, and others have written about extensively. But I think the findings of this paper might give us some new directions to pursue, including the way in which religion and Islam specifically really helps individuals to change their perception of and even their resources for accomplishing masculinity. So again, I think, you know, it's a recurring theme for me, because it's something that I'm so interested in, and it's something that has been so prominent throughout these narratives.

 Jose Sanchez 47:52

Alright, well, that's all the major questions that we had for you today. Is there anything else you'd like to add to our discussion of life course criminology, how war and genocide, impact human development and behavior, or religion and desistance?

 Stephanie DiPietro 48:05

Nothing related to those. I mean, I just, you know, I think one thing that I would just add, to sort of conclude is that I think the hardest part of doing this work for me has been wanting to do justice to these stories, and really sort of, you know, telling them as people conveyed them to me in a way to show gratitude to the people that I interviewed who sat with me and shared their extraordinary stories and introduced me to relatives. And so you know, more than anything, I just, I hope I'm getting it right. It's very much a work in progress.

 Jenn Tostlebe 48:34

I really like what you're doing. And I appreciate you coming on. Both Jose, and I thank you for being a guest on the podcast, we enjoyed talking to you. Is there anything so it sounds like especially coming out of this project, that there's some things in the works? So is there anything that listeners should be aware of who might be particularly interested in this?



 S

Stephanie DiPietro 48:58

Yeah, I mean, there's a couple of things right now. And they're all sort of in either r&r stage or they're close, I think, you know, there's something that I could hopefully pass along in the next two weeks or so that that will be forthcoming. So yeah. But I mean, I think the stuff that I'm working on now, I think one of the bigger pieces that is under work is the consideration of women's voices in this and this is something that has not come up yet in my published work. I've got this tremendous sample of young women. And so I think comparing the experiences of young women and men is going to be a very interesting dynamic that I have not yet been able to explore. So I'm really very much looking forward to completing that work and and sort of, you know, getting some feedback and thoughts about that.



Jenn Tostlebe 49:39

And where can people find you? Are you on Twitter, email?

 S

Stephanie DiPietro 49:44

None of those. No I have email.



Jenn Tostlebe 49:46

None of those. \*laughter\*

 S

Stephanie DiPietro 49:48

I'm in the great state of Iowa, so the University of Iowa and so I do have my University of Iowa email address, but other than that, no, I don't really have any of those other things. I'm a bit of a dinosaur in that regard. So, no, none of that stuff but definitely by email would be great.



Jenn Tostlebe 50:05

Cool. And I do have to say, I don't know if you know this, but I'm actually from Iowa. So you're in my home state.

 S

Stephanie DiPietro 50:11

You are? Where about? Where are you from?



Jenn Tostlebe 50:13

I'm from Ankeny, which is like, right by Des Moines. So Central Iowa. I went to Iowa State.



Stephanie DiPietro 50:19

Ames. Okay. Well, I love I've only been here two years. I love it here so far. So it's a great place to live.



Jenn Tostlebe 50:25

Yep. So had to mention that before we close.



Stephanie DiPietro 50:31

Thank you for having me.



Jenn Tostlebe 50:33

Thank you.



Jose Sanchez 50:34

Thank you.



Stephanie DiPietro 50:35

All right. Well, thanks so much, guys. And take care.



Jenn Tostlebe 50:38

You too.



Stephanie DiPietro 50:38

You too.



Jenn Tostlebe 50:40

Hey, thanks for listening!



Jose Sanchez 50:42

Don't forget to leave us a review on Apple podcasts or iTunes. Or let us know what you think of

the episode by leaving us a comment on our website, [thecriminologyacademy.com](http://thecriminologyacademy.com).



Jenn Tostlebe 50:52

You can also follow us on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook at The Crim Academy. That's THECRIMACADEMY.



Jose Sanchez 51:04

Or email us at [thecrimacademy@gmail.com](mailto:thecrimacademy@gmail.com).



Jenn Tostlebe 51:07

See you next time!



Jose Sanchez 51:09

See you next time!