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SPEAKERS

Del Elliott, Jenn Tostlebe, Jose Sanchez



Jenn Tostlebe 00:00

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Jenn Tostlebe 00:34

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



Jose Sanchez 00:41

And I'm Jose Sanchez.



Jenn Tostlebe 00:43

And in this episode, we will be speaking with Professor Delbert Elliott about his impressive career surrounding the prevention of crime and deviance.



Jose Sanchez 00:51

Dr. Del Elliott is a distinguished professor emeritus of sociology Research Professor in the Institute of behavioral science, and founding director of the Center for the Study and prevention of violence. He is also the founder of Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development. In addition, Del directed the National Youth Survey, which is one of the few national longitudinal studies of

crime, substance use and mental health problems. Del served as the president of the American Society of Criminology from 1992 to 1993. And His research interests include adolescent problem behavior, and the prevention of violence, crime and juvenile delinquency. Thank you so much for joining us today, Del.

D

Del Elliott 01:32

My pleasure.



Jenn Tostlebe 01:33

All right. So just an overview of what we'll be talking about today. We're going to start off with some questions surrounding kind of the beginning of Del's career, and some of his experiences with theory and crime prevention. And then we'll dive into a book authored by Del and one of his colleagues on the prevention of crime. And then last but not least, we will talk about or ask Del about his ideas of the past of criminology and then looking forward into the future of criminology. So Jose, why don't you get us started?

J

Jose Sanchez 02:06

Okay, so, Del, for your undergraduate degree, you chose to attend Pomona College where you earned your Bachelor's in sociology in 1955. From there, you went on to the University of Washington, where you earned your masters and PhD in Sociology, can you tell us why you decided to get your degrees in sociology, and then how you started drifting into criminology?

D

Del Elliott 02:33

Well, I think, as you inferred in your last statement, it was a drifting into criminology. I think that's true. There's no logical path that led me, no kind of sense from the beginning that that's where I was going. So I went to Pomona College, which is the Oxford of the West. And I got interested in sociology, I think, at that point, and did well in it. There was a student that went through Pomona, through the sociology department there that went to the University of Washington ahead of me, it's Dan Wheeler, you probably know that name. But he was a very good criminologist as well who graduated from the University of Washington and then went on to Harvard. So I was told about this sequence and I thought that sounded good to me. So I applied to the University of Washington and got a teaching assistantship to start off with George Lundberg, who you may not know but who was the major proponent of positivism in sociology. So there, I met Clarence Schrag who had just completed a leave from his academic appointment and served as a deputy warden at the Walla Walla state prison. And its Clarence Schrag who really turned me on to criminology. And I got interested particularly from the theoretical side of it, trying to come to grips with understanding of how it was that individuals would come to become involved in delinquency and in crime, and started thinking at that point, you know, about criminological theory. And at that point, the major theories were, I guess, Al Cohen's work on delinquent boys, and Cloward and Ohlin's subsequent work on delinquency

and opportunity were the leading ideas around criminological theory. So I just kind of drifted into interest in criminology. Because that's what I guess piqued my interest as I was going through both the undergraduate and graduate school experience.



Jenn Tostlebe 04:47

Yeah, I feel like we've had a few others on the podcast with similar like they ran into people or different opportunities, and that's kind of what piqued their interest into criminology. So then you graduated. And you began your position at the University of Colorado. Was that your first appointment?



Del Elliott 05:07

My first one was at San Diego State



Jenn Tostlebe 05:09

San Diego.



Del Elliott 05:10

San Diego, right. So I started there as an assistant professor.



Jenn Tostlebe 05:15

Okay. And so when you began at the University of Colorado, it was pretty unique in the sense of having kind of a halftime teaching position in the sociology department and the halftime research position at the Institute of behavioral science, which, at the time, and I think still today is very interdisciplinary. So how did this kind of unique opportunity and experience impact your career moving forward?



Del Elliott 05:42

Oh, it had a huge impact on my career in all honesty, I feel I was really fortunate. From the beginning, I knew that I wanted to be a researcher, as well as a teacher. So that was my understanding of what it meant to be a professor. And the opportunity to have half of my time paid by NSF [National Science Foundation], actually, in this kind of position, gave me a lot of freedom to work on research grants. So that was, I think, a special gift to me. I love the teaching, that part was good as well. But I was guaranteed, you know, my salary, and only had to teach half time. And as a result, I was very successful in getting research grants. But you know, I had a lot of time to spend on doing that. And the experience and being in the Institute of Behavioral Sciences, I knew from the beginning, was going to be an experience with an interdisciplinary team. So often, when you're in an academic department, you may be the only person specializing in criminology, or there might be one other. In this kind of an institute, I was

exposed to four or five people from different academic disciplines, some in sociology, some not, that were interested in criminology. So there was kind of a core group there that could bounce ideas off of each other, you know, review each other's grant proposals and articles. So it was a very rich experience for me. And the institute provided all kinds of special research. So we had a librarian, who you could ask for any article you wanted to get, they would find it for you. They reviewed all of the RFPs, requests for proposals, that were being submitted by the government. So they would refer all of those dealing with criminological issues to you, they would run down all of your citations for articles that you needed. And a group of colleagues, you know, that were really supportive. So not only did I have a half time to work on research, but I had a rich research environment, that process grants for you, that did all of this. It was a dream job. It was a dream job.



Jenn Tostlebe 08:09

It sounds like it just as I think Jose and I both about to be on the job market, that sounds like a dream job. Yeah.



Del Elliott 08:17

It led me into some other special opportunities too. So in my career, I got to work on a MacArthur Foundation on successful adolescent development. And the list of people that were on that network that I got to work with are some of the, you know, really competent, accomplished people, not just in criminology, but in social sciences and behavioral sciences. So I met Tom Cook there who became a real friend and on the Blueprints board with me, Al Bandura, maybe these names don't mean anything to you, but they are real leaders in their field. So that interdisciplinary group also was a huge boon to my thinking and to my career. So I had opportunities that grew out of that initial experience, which further developed that interdisciplinary approach. All of that said, I still think we don't have much in true interdisciplinary research going on. It's still kind of compartmentalized. So the criminologist will do that part of it and the psychologist will look at, you know, personality issues or something else. And they write separate articles. It doesn't get integrated into a single, comprehensive model or theory, which is one of the reasons I got into integrated theory.



Jose Sanchez 09:41

Well, that's actually a perfect segue to our next question, and you mentioned Tom Cook and Al Bandura. So I don't know about Jenn, but I am familiar with those names, especially Bandura, and the social learning and social cognitive. And I think most people in crim know social learning from Akers. But so like you mentioned, one of your big areas of interest is crim theory and theory validation. And so it'd be a pretty big oversight for us to not talk about this. And so you talked about your theoretical integration, which is also interesting, given that you've called yourself a control theorist at times, and so 1979, with your colleagues, Suzanne Ageton and Rochelle Cantor, you presented an integrated theoretical model of the etiology of delinquent behavior. And this integrated theory combines strain, social learning, and social control perspectives into a single explanatory paradigm, can you give us an overview of your integrated theory and why you believe theoretical integration provides a better explanation of crime than these theories worked separately?

D

Del Elliott 11:02

I was really disappointed, to be honest, when I started my career and looking at the success of our theoretical models and explaining delinquency. So at that time, and you know remember, I got my PhD in 1961. So at that point, we were looking primarily at those three theoretical models. But the tests of those models were really disappointing. The level of explained variance, even in cross sectional studies with no controls for prior delinquency, so you have a confounding going on right there. But those levels of explained variance, were at most 10-12%. And I thought that was really disappointing. I also began to question the idea that there was a single cause that led kids into delinquent behavior or led adults. And I thought, you know, it's possible that these theories each account for some different part of the onset of delinquent behavior. So that was kind of a background to it. And then I looked at Cloward and Ohlin's delinquency and opportunity work in which they tried to combine Sutherland's work on differential association together, you know, with learning theory. And I thought I could expand that and took the three theories, and decided that I would see if I couldn't work out an integrated model. And the first problem there, of course, is that these three theories each have a different set of underlying assumptions. So I had to reconcile those underlying assumptions. So the way I did that is essentially, I took on the control theory assumption, which meant that learning theory and strain theory had to be modified in some sense to fit in to that theoretical set of assumptions about human nature. So the integrated theory really postulated as to simplify that, that there were direct causal paths from strain. And when we looked at strain, we looked at strain not only as occupational educational goals, long term goals, but in more immediate goals that were experienced as kids were going through school. So we looked at academic success, we looked at other kinds of goals, involvement in a peer group activities, etc. But we postulated a direct path from failure to achieve those goals or to anticipate failure to achieve longer range goals as a direct path to delinquency. And then a direct path from social learning theory to onset and delinquency involvement with delinquent peers, we argued was one of the major risk conditions that lead to delinquent behavior. And then we took the control path as well saying weak bonding to conventional groups and norms had a direct path. And then we postulated a fourth path. And that fourth path, postulated that there was an interaction between bonding to conventional peers and groups, and bonding or involvement in delinquent peer groups. So that was an interaction pattern. So there are four paths. And we postulated that two of those paths would be the strongest paths: a direct path from delinquent peers, bonding to delinquent peers, and the interaction between that and bonding to conventional groups and peers. So those were the four causal paths. And we test that model. I thought at the beginning, it might very well be that these different theories accounted for different kinds of delinquency. So given the strain argument, you would think that the kinds of delinquency that would be involved would be to address the problem of failure to acquire wealth or status, those kinds of things. Turns out when we tested the model, we found no evidence for that. The question for me really was, will the Integrated Model provide a better explanation for delinquency? Because if these theories aren't additive, if the results of these theories aren't additive and cumulative, then there's no advantage to an integrated theory. So the critical question was, would we get a higher level of explained variance with the integrated model, then if we were to use each of those separate individuals, and just sum them. So the interaction we're postulating is critical to the integration process as far as we were concerned. So we tested that model. And we were successful in getting significantly higher level of explained variance. If we looked at them as three separate models, and we added those explained variances, you still didn't get as high an R square as we got. When we were actually controlling with longitudinal data from the National Youth Survey, we could control for prior

involvement and delinquency. So we're getting a true measure of onset, for example, or to measure of increased involvement in behavior. R square was typically around point three to .35 something like that. So we're, this theory could account for approximately a third of the variation in the onset of delinquency or in the increase in delinquent behavior over time. So I think we did meet that goal. So saying that this theory did improve the level of explanation.

 Del Elliott 16:47

There were some other benefits from it, it also for interest in that strategy, that is the integration strategy. Prior to that time, the strategy as illustrated primarily by Travis Hirschi was what's called a critical test approach, a single theory you're testing and you compare that with another theory and you can prove when one of those theories is correct, and the other is incorrect. A classic example that is the hypothesis about delinquent peers and delinquent behavior. How does that work does involvement in delinquent peers lead to delinquent behavior, or does delinquent behavior lead to involvement with delinquent peers? And Travis Hirschi was on one side of that argument. Ron Akers and social learning theory was on the other side of that argument. And Travis, you know, essentially argued that you perform a test and you prove one of these as being right and the other one as being wrong. Well, turns out both of those things are true, we were able to demonstrate that clearly. So the idea that you can do a critical test rules out the possibility that both of these things are true. And what we know now is involvement with delinquent peers leads to delinquent behavior, which leads to more involvement with delinquent peers. So the integrated theory posed a different way of constructing theory. And so others have followed our lead really, and the integrated theory, actually started with Cloward and Ohlin. And then we proposed a broader expansion. And we have other work, David Hawkins' work on the social development model, Crumbs work on network theory, Thornberrys work on interaction theory are all additional iterations, really of an integrated approach.



Jenn Tostlebe 18:36

Yeah. And so I also really like looking at underlying theoretical assumptions and trying to figure out how to, if it's possible, to kind of integrate them together because of that. And so we do want to kind of probe a little bit more about what you're talking about with this. And so I was, I mean, in prepping for this episode, I was reading your recent article in the Annual Review of Criminology. And it mentioned that you and Travis were at least associates and had, you know, a lot of debates surrounding this.

 Del Elliott 19:12

Oh yeah.



Jenn Tostlebe 19:12

And so we kind of are interested if you can give us a rundown of this in particular thinking about Travis's idea of separate and unequal is better, especially owing to things like parsimony, and kind of how you would respond to that argument?

D

Del Elliott 19:29

It was a great discussion. And of course, I knew Travis, I considered Travis a friend. He was critical of our work. And I learned a lot from that. And I think he was wrong. So. But it was always a pleasure. He was a really engaging guy. So I want to be sure that you understand we're friends and that we benefited, I think we did, from the critique. So his response to our model was he was very unhappy, of course, because he was a control theorist. And our model from his standpoint, essentially said, there's only one variable that counts. And that's the variable that's the most proximate variable to the behavior. And that's involvement in delinquent peers. And it relegated his theory, actually, he said, it was a theory which relegated control theory to having no effect. And in that article, you noticed, I gave the quote that he said that, in that theory, in my theory, the only variable was involvement in delinquent peers, and all of the other variables didn't count, were irrelevant. So that's the first issue. And he's, of course, right. If we hadn't proposed an interaction, then it's true, that you know that the variable, which explain as much variance as you're going to get is involvement with delinquent peers. The interaction, though, argues that it's not just interaction with delinquent peers, the group that is really most likely to become delinquent are those who have a weak conventional bonding, and have involvement and bonding to delinquent peers. But beyond that, my understanding of theory is that understanding the process that leads to that outcome is as important as knowing what the last variable in that process might be. So we were really arguing that it's a weak attachment to conventional peers, which leads one to get involved with delinquent peers that then into delinquent behavior OR it's strain and a struggle to achieve ones goals and being discouraged and that that might lead to certain kinds of delinquent behavior and involvement and delinquency. So from the standpoint of developing interventions, prevention programs, the model we propose is much, much richer than just looking at that last variable, because it suggests that we can intervene earlier ensuring the kids have a healthy positive development, which is going to minimize the chances they're going to get into delinquent peer groups and into delinquent behavior. So from an understanding of the sequence of events and circumstances and environmental situations that lead one into this outcome, provided a better theoretical grounding for the development of prevention programs. And if you look at some of the prevention programs, Scott Hanglar, for example, with MST has credited our theory and that work as part of the grounding or the basis for his development of MST, which is, from my standpoint, is a good successful intervention. So I think Travis was wrong on that issue. But I understand his frustration. But, you know, I can think of looking at involved with delinquent peer groups as a control variable. And so from my theological understanding, I'm a committed Christian, and control theory fits my understanding of human nature. And I agreed with him about that.



Jenn Tostlebe 23:14

Yeah, I mean, Travis Hirschi is someone that I wish I could have met, just because I feel like he was always in the center of all of these debates. And I feel like being in your position, and both of you talking and having this discussion could definitely, you know, spark ideas and help improve your own work. So yeah, it sounds like that's what it did for you.

D

Del Elliott 23:35

It did. It was a great experience. He really was

it did. He was a smart guy. He really was.

J Jose Sanchez 23:38

I know, a few weeks ago, or I guess it's been a month or two now. But we spoke with Robert Sampson, who we learned was a student of Hirschi's, and, you know, Robert Sampson is known for his life course, criminology work and Travis Hirschi was a pretty well known critic of life course criminology. So, of course, we were interested in knowing how that dynamic was, but I mean, he, Robert had similar comments to yours, where, you know, Travis was a mentor to him, but that he pushed him theoretically.

J Jose Sanchez 24:12

And we keep mentioning this word assumptions, I think we should maybe give like a quick and dirty intro or explanation as to what we're talking about for those that don't know. But basically, when we talk about criminological theory, in this case, there are certain assumptions about why people commit crime that each theory sort of builds on. So for example, control theory would take more of a stance that people are mainly driven by their self interest and whatever is best for them and so you have a set of informal or formal controls that keeps them from engaging in criminal behavior. Whereas a learning theory would argue that people may come with a built in instincts, but that for the most part their behavior is learned. I think there's some people that would argue for a tabula rasa [blank slate] type thing. But I generally don't agree that we are complete blank slates. And then you have like the strain assumption that we have a set of widely accepted norms and goals. And we strive for those goals. But for some people, those goals are blocked off through conventional means, and so therefore, they turn to crime as a way to achieve those goals. So they're basically pressured into it because of those expectations. I think that's somewhat fair, if not basic description of what an assumption is, since we keep mentioning assumptions. Del if you feel like I completely butchered that, please feel free to let us know.

D Del Elliott 25:48

No, no, I think that's the heart of it. An assumption is something which is not tested, it's just given. So the basic assumption is axiomatic to the theory, it has to be a given and you don't test that, but it leads you then to establish a set of risk conditions or contextual conditions, which are illustrative or which are examples of, you know, that underlying set of assumptions that you're using.



Jenn Tostlebe 26:17

Yeah. And so it sounds like based off of your development of an integrated theory, that you believe that the assumptions shouldn't clash, that they, you need to find some harmony there.

D Del Elliott 26:28

Yeah. within the theory. if it's going to be a whole and make sense and have logical

relationships, if the variables are going to have logical relationships to one another, then there has to be a common underlying assumption. Otherwise, they're in conflict with one another. So then that's the hard part of the integration. And many who have attempted that have mixed models that they're not integrated. So



Jenn Tostlebe 26:53

Right. Yeah, that's why I wanted to ask just because that's something that when I was studying for my comprehensive exams, I was looking a lot at theoretical integration. And I felt like I kept running into that where a lot of these theories, there wasn't actual integration, because they weren't, you know, figuring out the underlying assumptions and how to make them compatible.



Del Elliott 27:18

Right. Yeah. Yeah, I think that's critical for theory development.



Jenn Tostlebe 27:21

Yeah. All right. So let's move now into more of this idea of crime prevention. So as we mentioned, in your introduction, you're the founding director of the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the Institute of Behavioral Science. And currently, Beverly Kingston is the director of the center. But we know that the founding of the center came at kind of this turning point in your career that was more or less sparked by a desire to actually apply criminological research and theories to the problem of preventing delinquent behavior. So can you elaborate or expand on that more as to what motivated you to institute the center and kind of how that center actually came to be?



Del Elliott 28:07

Yeah, it was a long path, actually, to that. And for the first part of my career, I was essentially involved in the National Youth Survey, which was a big long national probability sample we followed for almost 30 years. And that ate up most of my time, or at least the research time that I had. And so I thought we were making real progress, both theoretically and empirically. We were looking at the epidemiology of delinquency using that whole new set of conceptualization of crime out of Al Blumstein and national panel on crime and criminal careers, which was another really great experience for me. So we were able to look not only at onset, but able to look at offending rates, looking at seriousness of offending, and looking at all those different dimensions of crime. And I thought, you know, we know enough about the onset of crime and the continuation continuity of crime, not so much about termination, but at least a little bit about termination. And I started wondering, you know, what's the value of this? How is it going to be used? At that time, I was doing some work for the Carnegie Corporation, they had a series of colloquia and training seminars around youth violence. At that point, time wise, violence was very, very high youth violence was very, very high. And so they were really concerned about violent behavior. And so I was participating as a presenter in a number of presentations they had, and at the end of those presentations, I got an invitation from the

Carnegie Corporation to develop a center that would try to bridge the gap between the scientific knowledge base and the practitioner level of actually prevention. And there's a huge gap.

D

Del Elliott 30:13

And so I submitted a proposal for the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence. They funded three centers, it was kind of interesting. So the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence was there to bridge that gap, we were charged with taking the scientific information, and trying to present it in a way which could be understood and implemented in a practical way. That led to my working with government officials, with congressmen and representatives and their staff, with reporters, who was, you know, people who are writing in the popular journalism area, a thing I wasn't prepared for. So you know, just starting out talking academic jargon to some senator's staff about what we should be doing for the Delinquency Prevention Act. I learned, they don't want these statements with 10 qualifications on what we're saying. So I had to learn a whole new language and a way to proceed.

D

Del Elliott 31:23


Another thing was happening at the same time I was doing the evaluation for the state of Colorado, on an initiative they had, which was burn, I don't know if you know, this burn money coming out of Congress, that went to the States for both delinquency and dropout. So the state was funding these programs out of that, and I had to contract to do the evaluation of that. And it was an impossible task. I mean, they would fund an organization to do this grant based upon a proposal. They would be given a year's funding, and they could come back in and ask for funding for another year, they had to submit that proposal. By the time the nine month point reached. So nine months into this, they had to present findings for funding for another year. And they were starting from scratch. Most of them weren't even up and delivering, you know, their product. So it was very, very frustrating. And so I went to this board, the board was members appointed by the governor and by the President of the Senate. So they were politicians or related to politicians and I urged them to fund on a three year cycle instead of a one year so there would be time to actually do. That they needed to put money in these grants for evaluation, so that there was money for the people doing this to actually do some evaluation. And I proposed that they have two pots of money, one for people who were funding things for which there was some credible idea that this might work. And those that were political patronage because it was clear to me that's what was happening. Well, of course, they were very unhappy with that.

D

Del Elliott 33:12

But that led me then to think about, what do we know about what works, what's working? That led to the establishment of the Blueprint initiative that we had, which also came in out of the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence. So that became, for me a really objective for my career, hoping that I could make some significant contribution to the development and verification and validation of interventions that actually worked. At that time, you may not

know, but Romag and Secret and Martinson and you know, this group, we're all saying nothing worked. Nothing worked. So it was in that context, that I got interested in that part, which became my latter part of my career.

 Jose Sanchez 34:07

I think that sums up nicely to talk about your book. And so this book was authored by our guest Del and his colleague, Abigail Fagan. It's called the prevention of crime. It was published in 2017 by Wiley Blackwell. And this book provides an up to date and comprehensive account of what is currently known about crime prevention. Topics that are covered vary from the theoretical foundation of crime prevention, evaluating the effectiveness of prevention programs, the identification of programs proven to work, as well as those that are shown to actually increase crime and issues involved in implementing crime prevention programs. And the overall goal of this book is to describe what works to reduce crime. Is that a fair summary of your book, Del?

 Del Elliott 34:56

With one caveat, it was written in 2017. So the research was for the most part up through 2016. And it's now out of date.



Jenn Tostlebe 35:07

Well hopefully you can key us into those changes.

 Del Elliott 35:11

Yes, well Abby and I have already started on the second edition, we're working with Wiley, we don't have the contract signed, but they've encouraged us to do a second edition. So we think that we will have a second edition out by 2023. Which updates, particularly the findings about what works because it's changing fast. And so you know, we had 10 programs in our first, you know, Blueprints initiative, and now we're, you know, up to 60, or something like that. So,



Jenn Tostlebe 35:44

That's changing very quickly

 Del Elliott 35:45

Very fast.

 Jose Sanchez 35:48

Okay, so you've talked about this a little bit, but can you tell us what the motivation was for writing this book?

D

Del Elliott 35:55

Yeah, it was very simple. I looked at the well, first of all, I was asked by Charles welfares, from University of Maryland several times, who worked for one of the publishers, if I would write this book, and I had turned him down three or four times, but decided, looking at the other books that were available on prevention, that they were not up to date. That is they were far behind. And we're not, I thought, we're not presenting a good description of where the field was, with respect to prevention. So I decided, you know, Abby and I were directly involved on what I thought were the front lines of research on prevention programming. And we could write that book. So it was a hope of advancing the field, up to the level of knowledge that I thought we had about prevention.



Jenn Tostlebe 36:52

And so we've talked about this term many times now, and it's one of your main areas now. But can you give us kind of a brief description of what crime prevention is and how it's changed over time?

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Del Elliott 37:08

Yeah, prevention refers basically to an intervention, which reduces the number or the rate of criminal, first of all of persons who are committing crime, and secondly, to the number of criminal offenses which are taking place. And, and that, in some ways, is inconsistent with what was being taught earlier, which made a distinction between crime control and crime prevention. Crime control referring to interventions, which successfully reduced rates of crime after onset. So the criminal justice system, all of their work would be an effort at crime control. But to reduce the rate of delinquent behavior on the part of someone who is in a delinquent institution, is preventing crime as far as I'm concerned. So, for me, crime prevention is a more generic concept than crime control. I think, in part, this difference grew out of deterrence theory and the difference between general deterrence and specific deterrence. So specific deterrence is really deterrence that would be applied to somebody who's already engaging in crime. And general deterrence would be prevention before onset. So onset is a critical variable that would distinguish between these two, but both of them are engaging in the same objective of reducing the number of criminal events or the number of persons engaging in crime. So that's our perception of prevention.

D

Del Elliott 38:51

So prevention programs are programs which we can demonstrate by experimental studies, so that we can make causal inference that have an effect of reducing involvement in criminal behavior or in the prevalence rate of crime. But more than that is needed for an effective prevention intervention. I struggle over that, though, because the whole field of prevention, for the most part, was involved with cross sectional studies and comparisons that you couldn't

make causal inferences from. And I think that the whole notion that nothing worked, you know, that was really a failure of our research as much as it was any demonstrating failure of programs.

D

Del Elliott 39:42

So it wasn't until we were able to do longitudinal research with probability samples, that we were in a position to begin to do experimental studies of interventions. And when I started they were rare. Now, you know, we're seeing a lot of good experimental studies and replications, and the knowledge base about what works is growing. And we are the place where I personally think we could mount a national initiative, using good programs, and have a significant effect on the rates of crime in this country. So that may be too bold a statement. But I actually think we could do that. We've seen that done in the state of Washington. Washington developed an initiative where they required their juvenile justice programs to use one of four what they called evidence based programs, two of which were MST [Multisystemic Therapy] and FFT [Functional Family Therapy], two family based interventions for which we've got good evidence that they work. And so on the basis of that they have achieved a 10% reduction in recidivism rates for those kids going through their justice system. And that may not seem like a lot. But in terms of costs, the state of Washington was planning on building another prison. The rates were such that they knew that they had to have another prison facility to handle and they canceled that. With this 10% reduction in crime thing no longer needed that and the savings, something like, you know, 10 years out, were going to be something like \$400 million a year savings in costs associated with crime.

D

Del Elliott 41:31

So prevention programs, we have some. We know more is needed than just that evidence. I've been in a debate with Mark Lippy, about the standard, what is the standard we have for certifying a program as being a proven program. And I've argued that there had to be experimental evidence. Correlational evidence I argued, wasn't satisfactory. Mark believes that the correlational evidence is at least some evidence, and that's true. But I'm more cautious. And I think we have a mandate from the public now to implement, you know, proven programs. And there's some trust that these programs are going to work. And I fear that if we start implementing programs that don't have that level of evidence, they're going to fail. And we're going to lose the public mandate and the public support for using prevention programs. So I've argued very consistently for a very high standard for certifying a program as being an effective program. I don't like the term evidence based, because it's ambiguous about what the evidence is. So the Blueprints website now doesn't talk about evidence based. We talk about experimentally proven programs, EPPS.

D

Del Elliott 42:54

In addition to knowing that this program works, you have to know that it can be implemented with fidelity. Because there are some programs, came out of Oregon, as a matter of fact. Jerry Patterson has done some great work and was successful, but the costs of the intervention was so so high, that it was impossible for communities really, to be able to support that, at least in comparison with some other options that weren't expensive. So knowing the cost benefit of a

program has to be another consideration. And knowing that it can be implemented with fidelity, because some are very hard to implement. And the resources required to implement that in a given community may not be there. So the Blueprint initiative really talks about an experimental proven program, replicated at least once by another randomized control trial, evidence of high fidelity can be implemented as it's supposed to be implemented, and has a reasonable cost benefit, and doesn't have any iatrogenic effects. Because some programs that we know, do have the possibility of doing harm, as well. So that's the standard that I think we should have for prevention programs. And we have some.



Jenn Tostlebe 44:17

I mean, it's been a couple of years now. But I worked with Fred Pampel and.



Del Elliott 44:22

Oh, you were one of our reviewers?



Jenn Tostlebe 44:23

and Pam Buckley. Yes.



Del Elliott 44:25

Yeah. Okay.



Jenn Tostlebe 44:26

Just first semester, but it was really cool to see the process. And just, I mean, it is a very high standard. I don't think I reviewed a program that actually passed, like at all. So it is, but I also, I think I agree with you that if we're going to implement these types of programs, we want them to be successful and we need the community to be able to support them. So yeah.



Del Elliott 44:50

I mean, this is a judgment question. I mean, I've argued with NIJ's, you know, crime prevention. Their Crime Solutions website has a lot of programs that they recommend as excellent evidence based programs. But their standard is lower. And they feel they have an obligation to all of the people who look to them for help to be able to recommend things. So I understand that. But there's just a risk in doing that. And I'd rather play it safe and want to be able to say, we know that this works. And it's been replicated to work and, you know, all that evidence is there. So high level of evidence. But I do understand that there are other groups that are proposing certification programs with lower evidence. I guess you have to make that judgment. What's the level you want? I do think and I was going to mention this when we talked about the future, I do think we need to have a national organization that has the responsibility for

establishing the standard, and essentially, implementing that standard for the certification of programs, you know, at a national level. Right now, there's just not a lot of agreement about this question about the standard.

J Jose Sanchez 46:06

So we typically, like we know, we mentioned before we started recording, we typically try to stay away from getting too into the weeds and too technical. No, no. So that's typically we try to do, but there are some really great chapters in the book related to evaluation science and establishing the standards for judging effectiveness, which you've just talked about. And so all that being said, we'd like to get into the types of programs that work and perhaps some that don't. And so what are some, maybe some examples of effective programs or practices that may prevent or delay the onset of crime?

D Del Elliott 46:47

Well, I'm glad you phrased the question that way. First of all, let me say that the evidence necessary to say that a program works, which we just described, is also necessary to say that a program doesn't work. And I think that's often missed the fact that you do an evaluation, and you don't get the results that you want. One of the first problems is that those studies, don't make it into professional journals. And so we have a problem around the question of what doesn't work because a lot of the evidence that we might have that would help us to make that decision, we don't get into the journals.

D Del Elliott 47:27

I talked about, you know, the two programs that Washington has implemented a part of the four they had for four programs. They had aggression replacement training, which we do not certify on Blueprints, but which is accepted as evidence based program by other websites on prevention programs. And then they had another program, which was really kind of more of an administrative kind of program. So those are two programs, probably two programs, which are being implemented most widely. And the problem with those two programs is of course is that they are dealing with just in some ways with a small segment of the at risk population that we're concerned about. But those are two family based interventions [MST and FFT], which are attempting to deal with the quality of parenting that is going on in the home and that's integrated, these are multi dimensional prevention strategies, which also work with schools and what's happening at the schools, and with what's happening in the peer group. So they're dealing with the three primary social context in which social development takes place. And they I think, have demonstrated their effectiveness. Florida, for example, is using those two programs. And they achieved with kids that were in their juvenile justice system, and they achieved a 24% reduction in recidivism and major savings cost wise. So we do have programs that work at scale, that can have an effect upon, a genuine effect upon rates of delinquency in communities and states.

D Del Elliott 49:10

So I think there's one of the things is what's common about them. And I do think that these

So I think there's one of the things is what's common about them. And I do think that these individual level intervention strategies, as opposed to some of the contextual or situational kinds of prevention strategies tend to focus upon a successful positive life course developmental strategy. And with the introduction of the life course developmental idea, I call it a paradigm. It's not a theory for me, it's a paradigm, but it has revealed some really important things. So for example, we know that risk factors actually can have a different effect at different stages of development. So one of the things we learned in the National Youth Survey was that for kids who are still in school and not graduated from high school who go to work 20% of the time or more are at increased risk for involvement with delinquency and drug use. Whereas once you graduate from high school, having a job is a protective factor. So we're learning that protection and protective factors have different effects at different stages of the life course, and the most critical stage, of course, is the early stage up to age 18. You know, if you haven't initiated involvement in a crime, by the time you reach 18 or 20, the chances of your ever becoming involved in any significant kind of delinquent behavior drops precipitously, it becomes very, very low. So the critical time developmentally is this early childhood and adolescent period. And so these successful programs tend to look at variables related to a positive development during that developmental stage of the life course.



Jenn Tostlebe 51:10

And so to flip this a little bit, what are some of the commonalities amongst programs that perhaps are still being used today, such as DARE, for instance, that I know both Jose and I went through.



Del Elliott 51:23

Did you?



Jenn Tostlebe 51:24

Yeah. That don't prevent or delay the onset of crime? What are some of the characteristics that they have in common?



Del Elliott 51:32

Well, let's look at the programs that don't work Scared Straight doesn't work. And we have experimental studies. So we've got the kind of evidence that we can bring to Scared Straight. Scared Straight was the idea that if you take kids who are at risk of committing delinquent acts and you pair them up with an inmate in an institution, it tells them the horrors of being locked up and the effects of being in prison, that it would scare them out of it that this is in a deterrence kind of model, the punishment risk goes way, way up and so the probability goes down. Well, it didn't work that way. And it turns out that in some of those cases, those men, typically, were actually seen as heroic, or they were seen as a kind of person you'd like to be like: strong. So we know that doesn't work.



Del Elliott 51:33



Del Elliott 52:23

We know that none of the after school programs that we've been able to look at, have proven to be effective, which is a surprise to me, quite frankly, you know. We know that so much crime takes place from the point of kids getting out of school until the parents get home that are working. So from three o'clock to six o'clock is a period where most takes place among adolescents. And yet those programs have not proved to be effective.



Del Elliott 52:52

And it's disturbing to me that the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, has proven with good evaluations not to be effective. And we're still spending millions and millions of dollars on that program in the United States. Of course, it was a program which was initially sponsored by two senators, I mean, that helps. So you know, that's a program doesn't work.



Del Elliott 53:17

The DARE programs didn't work, we know that. There's a whole new DARE program now. I have not seen an evaluation of it. So it's possible that the new iteration of that program might be effective.



Del Elliott 53:32

So in some cases, the after school programs looked like they were addressing risk factors. But prevention program has two theories it in. One is the theory that we typically think of when we talk about theory: what are the risk factors and protective factors and how are they related to the outcome? But there's another theory and that is how do we change that risk factor? So there's a change model that has to be involved. And so a failure of a program may not be a theory failure, it could be a failure in that change model, it's just not a successful way to change that risk factor. In some cases, the theory may be wrong, and that risk factor isn't really one that's strong enough to impact. So prevention programs are sophisticated things because they have to involve a theory about what the risk factors are and the protective factors are AND a separate way of how to change those things. And I think that a lot of the programs that fail fail there, I mean, they fail because they didn't work in changing the risk conditions that should have influenced the likelihood of delinquency. And in that respect, that's a major weakness of our experimental studies. We don't do the analysis, a mitigating effects analysis to demonstrate the risk factor that your targeting changed. And it's that change, which led to the reduction in delinquency. Because if we were to do that work that then verifies the theoretical model and the change model that you're using. Very few experimental studies do that. And that's something that has to be done to really enhance our field.



Jenn Tostlebe 55:24

Complicated. But important.



Inse Sanchez 55:30



Jose Sanchez 55:50

Okay, so in the last few minutes that we have Del, we have a couple of questions that we'd like to get your thoughts on. The first one being, you know, we've been spending the last, I don't know, 50ish minutes or so talking about crime prevention and programs. But do you believe that we're actually doing a good job at preventing crime in the United States?



Jenn Tostlebe 55:54

The big question.



Jose Sanchez 55:55

I mean, we could probably do an entire podcast on just that question. But can you give us just like the abstract response?



Del Elliott 56:04

No, I don't think that we are. And that raises a good question. So not long ago, I did an article for the Eisenhower Foundation, which did a 50 year follow up to the Watts riots, you remember, there was a major report that came out and major commission that was established the Kerner Commission to look at the problem of violent crime in the United States. And they issued a report, which was very direct in saying, you know, we've got to deal with this problem. There are some things that we should be doing, we need to be doing. So 50 years later, we looked at that, to see where we are in terms of what we're doing. And the results are discouraging. And so the question we have is, we don't have a lot of programs that we can propose, at least Blueprints isn't proposing a lot of violence reduction programs that we think are effective. We also have to say that the effect size of them are modest, there are no dramatic, we're not reducing crime, you know, by 50%, or anything like that, you know, we're talking in the places that I've described where if you get a 10% reduction, that's considered good. So that's a problem, that we have few programs with modest effects. I don't think that it's the expense. We are spending enough money trying to deal with the problem with rehabilitation with prevention programming, what things are called prevention programming. So I think the money's there, if we could just allocate it to things that worked, things we knew worked, I think it would have an effect. But the political will, right now, the political will is not there. And it's become politicized in ways which are not helpful. So the violence that we're experiencing, I'm for gun registration, I'm for those kinds of things. But if you believe that that's going to change the rates of violence and crime in this country, those things that have been proposed, they're not. I mean, they'll be a help in some way. But there are other things that we know we could be doing. And we get caught up always. That's the first response. And we need to get deeper, we need to get down to what the original kinds of problems are that lead to crime and we know what they are and we have some solutions to them. And if we could just get the public and political will to do that, I think we could have an effect. It's kind of not be dramatic initially. But over the years, a 10% reduction over a number of years would have a dramatic effect on the violence and crime rates in this country. So the big barrier, as far as I'm concerned, is the political will to do it.



Del Elliott 56:04



Jenn Tostlebe 58:59

Right. And then thinking more broadly here, what do you think of the current state of criminology and criminal justice? And where would you like the field to go from here?

D

Del Elliott 59:09

A couple of things that I thought of there. First, for a while when we were doing the National Youth Survey, we published annual reports of rates of crime on the basis of self reported data. So we do that for victimization, which I think is very important. And those data are critical for us understanding what's happening, but we have nothing looking at self reported crime. So we're relying upon the official measures of crime. And I have a problem with that. I mean, the accuracy of those measures, if you want to know about actual behavior and persons who are involved in serious behavior is not very good. We report on what those rates are, but those who are self reported, serious violent offenders, you know, 10% of them were known as a serious violent offender when we're looking over 20 years of experience. So to understand the problem, I think we have to have measures of serious self reported offending, as well as official. So I've advocated that we add the self reported dimension to the victimization survey the data as well.

D

Del Elliott 1:00:23

I think there's still a real need for theory development, I'm still not satisfied with the level of explained variance. So we have, I think, that there is a need, particularly integrating our theories into the life course developmental paradigm, one of the critical things that we learned that I thought was so important was an answer to what's called the maturation effect, we know that involvement in crime on the part of adolescence is high. And once you reach 18/19/20, there's a dramatic drop off. And that fact, comes to be able to explain the race differential that we see in this country [USA], which I think is important to note. And the theoretical model that we're using, African American males do not show that maturation effect. African American males are no more involved in delinquency than whites are during the adolescent years, but the whites tend to mature out and African American males do not. And that has to do with whether they still had ties to the conventional social order, norms, and values, and commitment to conventional activities. And it turns out that if we control for having a job, a stable job, or being in a stable intimate relationship, that race differential disappears. So African American males, who are able when they reach that age 18/19/20, to get a stable job, start a family, be in an intimate relationship, their maturation effect is just like that of the whites. So I think that that's understanding that life course developmental paradigm, and developing our theories within that, and Rob Sampson's tried to do that and others have tried to do that. So I think we've got a good start. I just think there's more work that can be done there.

D

Del Elliott 1:02:22

I think with it, we need more work. And I just described that a little bit around understanding the evidence for demonstrating program effectiveness. There's an issue around understanding what a failure to find an effect means and how to interpret it. Because most of the evaluations that are done are looking at marginal return effects, that is effects compared to some other

intervention. Typically, whatever the common intervention is in an agency, whatever they're doing, you develop a new program, and you compare it to that. So what you're getting is the effect above and beyond whatever the other program is doing. Does it improve recidivism rate? Or does it not? But you have to remember that that program itself may also have a positive effect. So you can't say that that's evidence of the failure of the other effect, which it often is interpreted like that. So I think we need to understand that. So one of the criticisms of MST involves one of the evaluations that was done against the Montreal Delinquency Prevention Program and they failed to get a significant difference. And there are some who then say on the basis of that MST doesn't work. Well. Turns out that was a very, very good [inaudible]. So we have to be careful on interpreting that. And the other issue is, we need to start looking at experimental studies getting the measurement that we need to validate the theories, the change theory and the causal theory, because that will help us improve our interventions.

D

Del Elliott 1:04:02

And I am skeptical of the practice approach. And one of the issues as we look at programs, practices and policies. There's almost no practices or policies that have been demonstrated to be effective. There are a couple: hotspots policing looks like it's an effective practice. So there are a couple I think that we could identify there. But the value of the practice for new programming is that it tells you what theoretical framework and what change models are likely to be effective. And that should guide us in the development of new programs. But in a practical level, if you are looking at a practice, what are you going to do with that information? You're going to start a new program using those mechanics, that theory and that change model, or you're going to pick one of those and replicate it. Well, if you're going to pick one, you better be careful because in the practice, the range of individual program success varies a lot. And you could get one, because some of the practices I can cite to you, have programs in it that are actually iatrogenic, that have significant rates of negative effects. So then you're back to picking a program, and you should use the criteria we have for picking a program. So for the practical business of actually implementing something, the program level is the strategy I think that we need to stick with. But there's a lot of pressure to go with the practice level as well. And I'm not high on that yet. I think we could do some work on the practice level, upgrading the standards for what we mean by an effective practice. And then it would become more useful, I think, if we were to do that. But you need to be careful from my standpoint of using that information as the basis for developing a grand scheme or a national kind of intervention strategy. Okay.



Jenn Tostlebe 1:06:15

Still work to be done.

J

Jose Sanchez 1:06:19

Well, that's all the time we have for today. Thank you so much for joining us today.



Jenn Tostlebe 1:06:23

Yeah thank you

Yeah, thank you.

J Jose Sanchez 1:06:23

It was a pleasure speaking with you. Where can people find you? Are you still like taking emails from people? Or are we like, leave Del alone because Del is retired?

D Del Elliott 1:06:37

Well, you know, I'd be happy to answer questions at a reasonable level. I am retired. So I would try to do that. If people have questions. And in a lot of cases, I just be happy to refer them where they can find that. So I think our book really could be used to answer a lot of questions. So I recommend that as a starting point and hopefully we'll have a new book out soon. It'll be more up to date.

J Jose Sanchez 1:07:05

Sounds great. Well, thank you again. And yeah, it was a pleasure talking to you. And yeah, unfortunately, we got to run.



Jenn Tostlebe 1:07:12

Yeah.

D Del Elliott 1:07:13

Well, thanks!



Jenn Tostlebe 1:07:13

Thank you so much.



Jenn Tostlebe 1:07:15

Hey, thanks for listening.

J Jose Sanchez 1:07:16

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Jenn Tostlebe 1:07:26

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Jose Sanchez 1:07:37

Or email us at thecrimacademy@gmail.com



Jenn Tostlebe 1:07:42

See you next time!