

TheCrimAcademy_56_Laub

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SPEAKERS

John Laub, Jenn Tostlebe, Jose Sanchez



Jenn Tostlebe 00:14

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



Jose Sanchez 00:21

And my name is Jose Sanchez.



Jenn Tostlebe 00:23

And today we have Professor John Laub on the podcast to talk with us about his career as a criminologist, his book "Shared beginnings, divergent lives," and his reflections on the discipline of criminology and academia.



Jose Sanchez 00:36

John H. Laub is Distinguished University Professor Emeritus in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Maryland, College Park. From July 22, 2010 to January 4, 2013, Dr. Laub served as the Director of the National Institute of Justice in the Office of Justice Programs in the Department of Justice. Dr. Laub, along with his colleague, Robert Sampson, was awarded the Stockholm Prize in Criminology in 2011 for their research on how and why offenders stop offending. Dr. Laub's areas of research include crime and the life course, crime and public policy, and the history of criminology. Thank you so much for joining us today, John. We're really excited to speak with you today.



John Laub 01:14

Thank you for inviting me.



Jenn Tostlebe 01:15

So to provide an overview of where we are headed in this episode, we're going to start off by asking John some questions about the beginning of his career as a criminologist and what got him interested in life course criminology, from there we will move into the book that we are going to be discussing, "Shared beginnings, divergent lives: Delinquent boys to age 70," and then last but not least, we'll do some reflection and look back on John's career and get his thoughts on the discipline of criminology moving forward. So with that being said, Jose, I'll let you get us started.



Jose Sanchez 01:17

Okay, so we'd like to start at the beginning of your career as a criminologist. You attended the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, where you earned your Bachelor's in criminal justice in 1975. From there, you went to the State University of New York at Albany and earn your master's in 1976 and PhD in 1980, both of which were in criminal justice. So given this, it appears that you've had a long standing interest in criminology and criminal justice. And so our first question is what spurred your interest in the discipline and what sort of motivated you to then pursue a PhD in this discipline?



John Laub 02:27

Well, to give you some context, I grew up in Chicago in a working class family. And while I was in high school, I decided I wanted to be a Chicago police officer. You had to be 20 years old to be a cop in Chicago, but they had a police cadet program, where you could join at 18 and then go to college, either full time or part time, and then be a cadet either full time or part time, depending upon what you chose. The summer of my getting ready to go into my senior year of high school, Mayor Daley Senior, the mayor of Chicago, there were severe budget cuts and the police cadet program became in jeopardy. So I was faced with what do I do? There was this thing called the Vietnam war raging in the background. And the University of Illinois, Chicago announced that they were creating a criminal justice major. So I applied, got a scholarship, and ended up going there for a bachelor's degree. And like most criminal justice majors at the time, I assumed I would eventually land in law school, but I got really excited about criminology, and also had an important experience where I worked one summer with prisoners legal assistance. So I was trying to decide what to do was, encouraged to continue pursuing education, and I decided I wanted to go to University of California, Berkeley, and study at the feet of Tony Platt who I admired cuz I loved his book, "The child savers," that I read as an undergraduate. Again, another event changed my life course trajectory. Ronald Reagan, the governor of California, decided to close the school of criminology because it was considered to be a hotbed of radicalism. And as a result, there was no school of criminology at Berkeley to go to and Albany had a one year master's program that was attractive. And the folks that prisoner legal assistance said, why don't you go to Albany for a year, get some more research experience, and we'll hire you back. In fact, during my first year at Albany, getting my master's degree, I received a letter from them with a job offer. And I went to Mike Hindelang and said, I'm really excited about this. And he read it and said, You could do that or you could stay for your PhD. And I said, Are you talking to me, Mike, as I was not thinking of a PhD track at the time, and so

Mike encouraged me to stay, I got an assistantship working with him, and the rest I guess, is history. Albany was a great place and it was clear turning point intellectually in my life, and I'm glad I stayed and didn't go back to Chicago. As I tell many friends now, I'm glad it wasn't a Chicago police officer.



Jenn Tostlebe 04:54

It does feel like when we're asking a lot of people about what led them into criminology. That is seems to be a lot of different circumstances that people were fortuitous enough to have kind of landed in to propel their career forward. So it's really neat to learn about those different circumstances and things that changed your trajectory. So all of that being said, you know, you're perhaps best known for your work in life course criminology. And so what got you interested specifically in this sub discipline of life course.



John Laub 05:28

I think that my interest really was again, generated in Chicago by listening to Studs Terkel, and I became fascinated with oral histories, and particularly the study of lives, and how major events like the Great Depression, World War II, affected people's lives. And in fact, my first book in criminology was an oral history of criminologists called "Criminology in the making," and I was very interested in the role of personal history in relationship to one's criminological theory. And so prior to the kind of life course focus really was this interest in lives over time, and how people change and what role do early events play in later events, which obviously is consistent with the life course criminology. And then through a series of events, particularly working with Rob, we were able to develop this idea of a life course criminology, which is fairly recent, I think, in terms of our thinking, in terms of this project. But originally, it was this strong interest in oral history and lives over time.



Jenn Tostlebe 06:26

And speaking of Rob and your book, and your work together with life course, as we mentioned, in our episode with Rob, we know that you are the one who found the data set used to develop your life course theory, which was in "Crime in the making: Pathways and turning points through life." We know there's a story here. So could you share with us how exactly you found the Glueck data?



John Laub 06:48

Sure. So I was a professor at Northeastern University for my first job. My research interests were in areas of history of criminology, as I said, in fact, started doing oral histories as a graduate student that turned into my first book, I also used National Crime Victimization Survey data for my dissertation. So I was interested in juvenile offending using that dataset as well as juvenile victimization. I was interested in juvenile justice. In 1984, I was invited to be a visiting scholar at the Center for Criminal Justice at the Harvard Law School. And it was a fairly open invitation. But it gave me an important piece, a important document. And that was a Harvard ID, which allowed me to gain access to the Harvard libraries. And so I was trying to think about

what I wanted to do. Criminology in the making book came out in 1983. I was thinking, maybe I would do another follow up with the next generation of criminologists and do another oral history. And then I wasn't sure whether I should go back in time and try to really get at the origins of American criminology, because the oral history book I did really focused on the period of 1930 to 1960. And so I thought maybe I should go back to the earlier days and learn more about those origins. And so I was interested in Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, as a pair of researchers who were at Harvard Law School, doing longitudinal research, it just seemed so odd to me. And not many people know, but they actually did four longitudinal studies, the Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency study with their last study, and their most famous study, but they had done three earlier longitudinal studies. So I went over to the law school library, and I asked the archivist, you know, what do you have on the Gluecks, and it turns out, they had a very large archive there. Mainly their papers, manuscripts, all their correspondence, photographs, awards, just you name it. And it was the fourth largest archive in the Harvard Law School Library. And so I asked the archivist, I said, Whatever happened to their data, and I have to say, she had no idea what I was talking about. And so I tried to describe it as best I could. I'm not sure she still understood what I was asking. But she took me she said, maybe this is what you're looking for. And she took me to the basement of the Harvard Law School Library, to a storage area. And it turned out that there were boxes there of the Glueck's original data from their four longitudinal studies. And so for one day a week, I went down and basically said, Okay, this the contents of box one, box two, box three, so on so forth. I called my good friend from grad school, Rob Sampson, and said, I found the Glueck data, I think we could do a paper, and I remember this distinctly, I said, a quick and dirty paper, where we could use fancy statistical techniques that were not available to the Glueck's to see if their studies, particularly regarding families, and crime and delinquency held up. And I said, I'm sure and this will show my naivete. I said to Rob, I'm sure there will be a data tape somewhere. Well, there was no data tape. There were probably 25,000 computer cards and the original raw records. So we decided to write a grant to the National Institute of Justice because, again, to put this in important context, the National Academy of Science report on criminal careers came out in 1986. We're in the midst of this archiving the basement 1986/1987. And they're saying we need data from childhood into adolescence into adulthood. And we basically said, we could give you those data, we could give you 30 plus years of data in two years. And so we got the grant, the data were moved, thankfully out of the basement, into a Data Archive at the Murray Research Center, which was a Center for the study of lives over time, particularly lives of American women. And that's where we began our reconstruction of the data through a combination of literally recoding and building a longitudinal data file with respect to criminal careers, but then also reading computer cards and figuring out what those computer cards told us because in many instances, we had no code books. And so it was going back to your original published work of the Gluecks' and saying, Ah, that variable is parental supervision, given the frequency distribution that we see here. And so it was this massive reconstruction, which took probably, we had a two year grant and it probably took about 18 months to literally reconstruct with a team of coders and through a series of things. So it was an exciting time. It was a time though, I have to tell you, in all honesty, we were wondering whether there would be payoff, because



Jenn Tostlebe 11:26

Oh I bet.



John Laub 11:26

we were making this huge investment. And it was a while before we could actually show findings.



Jenn Tostlebe 11:31

Yeah, I've worked with text file datasets from the 70s and 80s, where, you know, the descriptives don't match up perfectly. So you're just scratching your head, but at least I had a codebook. I can't even imagine.



John Laub 11:47

When I teach crime in the life course, I bring this in, which is a computer card, which none of the graduate students have ever heard of. And the other thing that was unusual about the computer cards in those days, because it was quite expensive to run computer cards, they use what was called multiple punches. So in a column, you could have three or four variables, and not just one variable. And so it was quite a challenge.



Jenn Tostlebe 12:08

It sounds like it.



Jose Sanchez 12:09

I remember having to work with floppy disks. And that was a nightmare. Can't imagine having to work with a card. You know, we've talked about like your work in life course and the Glueck data and all the work that you've done, but this was happening during a time where it seemed like people were starting to really contest if life course or longitudinal data was even worth it. You know, like, to me the first things that really come to mind is the Petersilia work on criminal careers. But then you have people like Hirschi that was like, What is knowing that someone offends at 30 tell us that we didn't know if they're offending at 14 and longitudinal is expensive? And like, is it really worth it? How did this debate impact you and your work?



John Laub 12:51

I think it was a huge part of the motivation for really reconstructing the Glueck data. And again, I think, as you pointed out, Blumstein and colleagues saying that the correlates of offending are different for those that are high rate offenders compared to low rate offenders. That was an important question that was being asked. The whole central issue about age and crime started with the Hirschi and Gottfredson in 1983 paper that then also was part of the debate with Blumstein, but then also, Hirschi and Gottfredson's work regarding self control, and whether or not childhood really could explain all offending across the lifespan. And so all those things were kind of playing into our reconstruction of the Glueck data, it really intellectual questions that were motivating our recoding. Also, as you're both sociologists, I think what's important to point out here, too, is structural positioning. Rob and I were students of Gottfredson and Hirschi at Albany, Rob had a postdoc with Al Blumstein at Carnegie Mellon. So he's in the midst of the

criminal career stuff. And I'm now a visiting scholar at the Murray Research Center, where I'm exposed to people like Glen Elder and so again, all these kinds of influences were playing out. And quite frankly, we're trying to figure it out. And I think we were really attracted to many aspects of a general theory of crime because it kind of brought back to criminology a focus on family, which we thought was really important. But at the same time, we're just kind of scratching our heads and saying, Can life really be over at age eight? Does that really predict what people are going to look like as adolescents and adults? And there was something that just struck us as not quite right about that. And we felt if we could get the Glueck data up and running, we could actually test that very notion and that became obviously a central part of Crime in the Making.



Jenn Tostlebe 14:34

Alright, so now that we've started to move into life course criminology on this podcast, we're big into defining what we're talking about. And so can you provide a quick definition for how you define life course criminology?



John Laub 14:48

Yes, I defined it as examining continuity and change in offending over the lifespan. So childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and you could break up parts of adulthood. And so it allows you to look at the causes of offending at each of those life phases. You could look at things, to use the criminal career language, things like the onset of offending, persistence in offending or desisting or ceasing offending. And so I feel that life course criminology is the umbrella for covering those topics in one kind of unit.



Jose Sanchez 15:18


And we've mentioned this book "Crime in the making" a couple of times and in the book, you put forward the age graded theory of informal social control, which becomes the starting point for the book that we are going to discuss in just a minute. But before that, can you describe to us what the age graded theory of informal social control is?



John Laub 15:36

Yeah, obviously, Rob and I owe a great debt to Travis Hirschi, who was our mentor professor. And really, if you think about the delinquency book 1969 that Hirschi did, he laid out his theory of informal social control, or as people like Ron Akers like to call it the social bonding theory. So what we basically wanted to do is take the elements of that theory and really make it more dynamic. I mean, Hirschi had a cross sectional dataset. We were looking at it longitudinally. One of the fundamental questions is how do social ties change as one ages? So obviously, during adolescence and childhood, parents become very important, but as people aged parents become less important, not unimportant, but less important. And so what would be the social ties for somebody transitioning from adolescence to young adulthood? And that's where we began looking at things like employment, ties to employers, spouses in the case of the Glueck

project, given the timing in terms of marriage, and so on, and so forth. So it's really that fundamental idea of looking at social ties, social connections, but over time, and treating it dynamically. And recognizing that those things change with age.

 Jose Sanchez 16:39

Did you ever get like a phone call from Travis Hirschi being like, Hey, what are you doing with my theory? Like, what is this longitudinal nonsense?

 John Laub 16:49

Good question, Jose. Never got a phone call. But there was a very clever editor of a journal in Sweden, who sent Rob Sampson a paper that Gottfredson and Hirschi wrote, as a reviewer, and Rob basically reviewed it very positively and said, but we should have an opportunity to comment. And the editor, of course, he got exactly what he wanted. Hirschi's response to that was, I never wanted to engage with my formal students in a public arena. And so that was our first time where there was a public back and forth about life course. But he never was really critical of our theory, it was more critical about our use of the life course. Gottfredson and Hirschi just believe in this notion that there's stability, and that when people's crime changes, it's not because necessarily of a new set of social ties, it's because they are aging, or they had a certain level of self control that you would have predicted that they would have changed. So again, it was more of this issue about life course, events influencing offending more than the actual mechanisms of the theory itself. I don't know if that makes sense, but that's kind of the thrust. And I think now actually, particularly, you know, Travis, unfortunately passed away recently. I mean, Gottfredson has kind of come along where he recognizes the marriage effect, but he also says it's reduced opportunity, and it's not any change in propensity. Again, that's the debate I have with one of my graduate students, Bianca Bersani, as well. So it's not an unusual critique, but I don't think there's the kind of negativity towards life course as there was back in the 90s from Gottfredson and Hirschi.



Jenn Tostlebe 18:28

Alright, so let's start moving into the book that we're discussing for this episode, "Shared beginnings, divergent lives: Delinquent boys to age 70," which was coauthored with Rob Sampson and published by Harvard University Press in 2003. To provide a short summary of this book. It draws on a classic study by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, and analyzes newly collected data on crime and social development up to age 70 for 500 men born in Boston, who were remanded to reform school in the 1940s. In short, the book studies continuity and change in criminal behavior or over the life course. Is that a fair quick summary of your book?

 John Laub 19:08

Yes, it is.



Jenn Tostlebe 19:10

 JOHN TOSTLEBE 20:10

So our first question for you about this book, then is what gave you and rob the idea to take what you'd already written and kind of extend it to age 70? Or what was the motivation for this book?

 John Laub 19:23

Yeah, again, I think there were some important intellectual motivations, much like there were with "Crime in the making" A couple of things were going on. First, the reality is, we didn't know a lot about the age crime trajectories at the individual level. So here we had an opportunity to really look at individual age crime trajectories for a large group of men from age seven to 70. And that seemed just from a descriptive standpoint, very important because as you both know, there was a lot of emphasis on the age crime curve that Gottfredson and Hirschi talked about, but that was all aggregate level data. So that was one motivation. The second is, although we did use qualitative data from the Glueck interviews in "Crime in the making," we really wanted to see if we could do a true mixed method strategy and collect life history interviews from the delinquent men themselves. And that seemed very important to be able to push that. And then thirdly, there were dynamic statistical techniques that came out after "Crime in the making." And here, I'm thinking of some of the trajectory analyses that Dan Nagin developed, hierarchical linear modeling, growth curves, and so forth. So we wanted to see if we could take advantage of some of those more dynamic because a lot of the work I mean, we use survival analysis in "Crime in the making," we used a lot of regression analyses. But those new techniques really were much more suited to looking at continuity and change with longitudinal data. And then finally, I mean, again, in 1993, Terrie Moffitt's dual taxonomy theory came out which had a huge splash on the field, that there really are these two groups of offenders, and that one needs to consider them. And that seemed to be something that we wanted to investigate as well. So all those things came together, saying we should really do this. But then we kind of faced the reality, could this really even be done? Was it possible? There were a lot of challenges there that we had to go through.

 Jenn Tostlebe 21:12

Speaking of one of those possible challenges, you mentioned wanting to do this mixed method design and collecting your own life narrative data. And so we know there has to be some kind of story to this. How is it that you found the Glueck men, I think, 52 of the original individuals in the sample, all of these years later.

 John Laub 21:34

Basically, their project ended in the early 60s. So the men had not been contacted for about 35 years when we started to do this. And we also got some resistance from the human subjects review board about this projec. They were worried that we were going to interview men later in their lives about these early, in some cases, you know, really horrific, early childhood adolescent experiences. And they basically said no, and so we tried to convince them that it was, you know, a doable project, a project that could not be replicated, and so forth. And so they ended up allowing me to do a pilot study, where I interviewed two individuals and came back and reported on what happened and it was all fine, and they gave us the green light. You're right, we interviewed 52 of the men, but we actually found a lot more. Because of

resources, we were really limited in terms of what we could do with respect to that. So we use the variety of methods to find the men. And also I think it's important given the lower class/working class nature of the Glueck men as adults, there was less geographic mobility than you would perhaps see in a sample today. We also had the advantage of we were looking for all men, so we didn't have to deal with name changes with people getting married, women in particular. So some of it was easy. We found some of the men through the phonebook, believe it or not, but the two sources that were really key were the criminal records, which provided us addresses and we had complete criminal records on all men that were alive. So we started with a sample, about 240 of the 500 had passed away. So we had about half of the sample to start with. And then we had criminal records on all of them. And then we got their addresses. And then Motor Vehicle records were open in Massachusetts, so we were able to get addresses to the motor vehicle registry. But then last but not least, and then we use other sources, Department of Corrections, parole, voting records, and so forth, but really became important kind of towards the end when we were really having a large group, but a smaller group that we had trouble finding. I was at Northeastern and I had a graduate student who was doing an internship with the Boston Cold Case Police Squad, and they offered to help us. And what they were able to do is, we were able to get access to all 50 Motor Vehicle registries across the country. And that was kind of, the dam burst. And we got a lot of people that way. And so we ended up finding everybody, except for about 35 men. And those 35 men, the cops thought those guys were probably dead. But and we only counted someone dead if we had a certificate in hand. And we had death certificates not only from Massachusetts, but we also had the national death certificates from other states as well. So it was fairly successful. We had some constraints, though, because of the human subjects review board. We could send letters out, even though we had a phone number, we had letters we had to send first and then we could follow up with a phone call. But we couldn't knock on any person's door without that.



Jenn Tostlebe 24:25

Ever?



John Laub 24:26

Ever, ever, ever. That was constraining. Now the good news is our sampling design, we had built in variation based on their criminal records, men who had no arrests at all since their time in reform school to the other extreme, men had arrest virtually every decade of their life and all the variations in between and were able to get men in each of those cases, which was really good. So we had nice variation there. And we ended up I think it was somewhere in the 60% of people that we contacted agreed to be interviewed. Some people decline because their spouse was sick, the timing wasn't right, they were ill. Others were just, you know, don't call me again, I don't know what you're bothering me for. The other interesting tip in terms of just thinking about human service reviews, a lot of the human subject review said, well provide us the consent forms. There were no consent forms in the Glueck project whatsoever. And so when I asked the men to sign a consent form, they were reluctant, because they said, We never had to do this before. Another also funny story about one of the pilots, we actually use some of his words from the interview with the Gluecks subject, and I brought "Crime in the making" with me to the interview thinking in my bookbag, thinking, if it goes, well, I'm going to show him his quote, and I showed it to him, he asked me, Why didn't I include his name? All there was was a

number, and I tried to explain about confidentiality and so forth. So it was an interesting twist in terms of what the human subjects review boards are concerned about, versus the participants in the project.



Jenn Tostlebe 25:55

Totally. I mean, I was gonna say, in the original study, there probably wasn't even an IRB. Right? That was 1970s when IRB started to come out?



John Laub 26:04

Yeah. After the Milgram experiments at Yale. No, in fact, one of the reasons why the Gluecks were so successful in terms of their follow up is they did all of the socially inappropriate things that researchers should not do. They went to people's houses during dinner, they showed up at family events, and they were quite persistent and aggressive, quite frankly, in terms of getting their subjects. And in fact, I could never document this. But there was a lot of anecdotes that the FBI office in Boston would often go to the Gluecks' when they were looking for somebody because they were so well known for their techniques. And it was just a remarkable research enterprise. I mean, they had 93% success rates at wave, age 25, and age 32, wave three. And if you adjust for mortality, those even go up further. And it's just remarkable in terms of attrition; the lack of attrition, I should say.



Jenn Tostlebe 26:59

Right.



Jose Sanchez 26:59

Right. So what are some of the most significant findings from your quantitative examination of age crime trajectories or the life history narratives that you conducted?



John Laub 27:10

Right. I would say that clearly, one of the striking things is when you look at individual trajectories of crime across this wide lifespan is there's just enormous heterogeneity, and it just screams out at you. But at the same time, the second major finding was we found that for all of the subjects in the study, even those that most high risk for long term offending, there's a decline in crime with age. So in a sense, kind of, we feel there's this middle ground between Blumstein and Gottfredson and Hirschi. Blumstein's right, there is no uniform age crime curve. But at the same time, Gottfredson and Hirschi are right, because all offenders do decline with age, even those that are most at risk for offending. And I think the other important piece about the quantitative data was I think we demonstrated convincingly, at least to me that while childhood factors are extremely important in terms of understanding crime, they do not predict long term offending very well. And so it does suggest moving away from what we would call childhood or adolescent determinism. And I give a talk where the title is "Bad boys do not

become bad men." And we can also say "Bad girls do not become bad women." But I think the thrust there is this thing is not deterministic. Related to the life history narratives, there it was our opportunity to--it was risky--but our opportunity would be to say, okay, you've had this life, when you look at your life, what led to certain changes, what led to you remaining the same? Some people call these things turning points? Have you had any turning points in your life? And of course, we were thrilled when someone would say, Yes, I had a turning point, it was getting married, they would sometimes point to their spouse who was sitting at the kitchen table during the interview. And so there was confirmation, I think, in terms of the importance of marriage, work, the military through the life history narratives. And then we were able to then take that and go back to the quantitative data, because we created again, this age array, where we looked at for each age of a man's life, were they married, were they working, were they in the military? And there we use hierarchical linear modeling to look at whether or not when a man is in a state of marriage, are they less likely to offend compared to that same man? So it was within person analysis, that same man when they're not in the state of marriage. There appeared to be a reduction of about 35%, on average, on offending when the man was in the state of marriage. So those are the highlights in my view of the book.



Jenn Tostlebe 29:41

Okay, so as Jose previously mentioned, that age graded theory of informal social control was really the beginning point for this book, but we know you made some changes to this theory. So what is it that made you change the theory from the 1993 version to the 2003 version, which includes five new mechanisms that contribute to desistance?



John Laub 30:04

Yeah, again, I think this is related to the idea of using a mixed method strategy. When you do that, and particularly using these life history narratives, one of the reasons we wanted to do that was Howard Becker talks about the importance of qualitative data as you allow room for the unanticipated. And one of the topics that emerged in our interviews was agency, men took action to facilitate their desistance from crime. Moving out of Boston to states like Maine. And being very explicit about why they did that. Also, another fellow used his cousin social security number, so he could enter the military and not get kicked out. And at the same time, the persistent offenders talked about how they chose crime. They didn't make excuses about their backgrounds or their awful mother or father, and they said, I wanted money and this was a good way to get money, I committed crime. So we were confronted with this idea of agency and develop the idea of situated choice in the book. I mean there were other examples, residential relocation, which we didn't really think about very much. And obviously somebody like Dave Kirk has used in his work on Hurricane Katrina. The other surprise, I think that emerge was informal social control by spouses, we did not anticipate that there would be some active monitoring of the men's behavior by the spouses. And then finally, it was quite clear, when you look at the activities of the desisters versus the activities of persisters the role of routine activities. The persisters really were so disconnected from almost every aspect of life, whether it be work, family, education, military, what have you. And what was left was either connection to the criminal justice system, mainly incarceration, or a lot of unstructured time with equally unstructured time folks in terms of delinquents, so it was the classic unaffiliateds joining together. And so routine activities became really important. And in fact, some of the spouses were quite clear about that, about getting a vacation home that was in need of repair so the

men had to work on Saturdays and Sundays to keep busy and stay out of trouble. Again, these things emerged and kind of forced us to reconsider aspects of the informal social control theory that was presented in "Crime in the making."

 Jose Sanchez 32:21

So you just talked about things like marriage, and how that could lead to desistance. And it seems that when ever people talk about the age graded theory of informal social control, marriage is usually like the biggest talking point followed by employment. Your theory goes beyond that, right? Like, it's much bigger than just those two things. What parts of the theory would you say haven't been developed enough by academics?

 John Laub 32:45

I mean, and again this is probably over the last 10 to 15 years, when I talk about my work, I really try to make the point that you just made that yes, marriage is important. Yes, employments important, But there's a broader theme about the importance of social connections. And that's, I think, what is one of the major takeaways in my view. And I think what also has been kind of not focused on are what we would call the underlying mechanisms of why something like marriage can be a turning point, or why something like the military service can be a turning point. And we develop this idea of there are four underlying mechanisms. What cuts off a person from their delinquent past? What opportunities are there for social support or some sort of informal monitoring? What are the opportunities for routine activities? What are the opportunities for identity transformation? And when you think about those mechanisms, you could say, Okay, what would fit under those four mechanisms as a possible turning point in the current structure. And so you could think about things like religion, you could think about things like education, you could think about residential relocation, and a whole variety of things then open up, and I think that that piece of the theory has not gotten as much attention as I would have liked. But I think again, there's some encouraging, I think, particularly, I've really been following Dave Kirk's work. And I think that there is an example of, it's consistent with many aspects of informal social control theory, but it's really looking at something other than marriage.

 Jenn Tostlebe 34:13

So much of your theory really emphasizes sociohistorical context. And this is something that, you know, Rob and you are still working on, but do you believe that employment and marriage are as relevant today, as they were with the Glueck men in the post world war II context?

 John Laub 34:33

Probably not. I mean, we actually just wrote a paper about this. If you think about it, this what we talked about in the paper. The 1950s was the golden age of wage labor. So employment was very different than today. Also, as we know, during the 1950s, people got married at a much earlier age. When I talked about my work with undergraduates. I basically say the average age of the Glueck men when they got married was 21 and there's a look of horror on

their face. The idea that they could be married at the ages they are. And so again, I think the reality is people aren't getting married, and they're aren't the entry level jobs that there were before. And so I think it's important to think about how cohorts, particularly with these macro level events can change dramatically. And I think that's actually, to anticipate one of your questions down the road, I mean, that I would put a central for kind of what needs to be done in terms of a better understanding of those things. Again, that's where I think about education. And I think, you know, again, an important question that we don't have a good answer to at this point is whether or not something like cohabitation can be similar to marriage in terms of its effects of informal social control and crime. I'm intrigued with religion as a possible turning point in terms of this work, not our work, but the general theory. And then also a graduate student had done a really interesting paper on whether or not different kinds of educational experiences can do, like a junior year abroad for disadvantaged kids, can that turn their lives around? And I've also been really interested in the idea of national service as a possible also mechanism.


J Jose Sanchez 36:07

Okay, so like you mentioned, you've kind of started to move into this a little bit, and cohorts, some of the lived experiences like cohabitation, but what are some of the other key questions, in your opinion in life course criminology that we still need to answer that we should explore? Or in other words, where do you think that life course criminology needs to go from this point on?


J John Laub 36:29

Well, I think the one I just mentioned is kind of raises this fundamental question of what is a turning point? And how is development altered by events? And I think that our work has really focused on this transition from adolescence to young adulthood, and particularly things like marriage and employment. And what I would say are positive turning points. But I think what we need to do is step back and really ask the question, can there be turning points during childhood? Can there be turning points during adolescence? Can there be turning points during adulthood? And can turning points be negative? And so in the paper that I referenced, our most recent paper in the Journal of Developmental and Life Course Criminology, we actually focus on two that Rob's been involved with in his other work, and that is exposure to violence during childhood and exposure to lead during childhood. And the question there is, can those events alter later developmental outcomes? And I think that that's really important. Related to the question that Jenn asked about cohorts, there, I think the whole transition from adolescence to young adulthood has changed. I've been involved in some work looking at emerging adults in the justice system, and whether there's a third stage that we need to be talking about. And I guess related to that is, you know, what's the effect of growing up and moving from adolescence to young adulthood during this period, up until recently of this major crime decline? I has that altered developmental trajectories? The third part, and I think this is the one that hasn't got attention enough in life course criminology, is what role do criminal justice policies and even state policies, how do they affect developmental outcome? Looking at things like mass incarceration, collateral consequences, and so forth. So this notion about macro level context has really been ignored in life course criminology, and I think that's a major hole. And there's so many questions there about whether or not the governmental intervention is a

positive outcome in terms of later development, or is it a negative outcome, or is it a combination of both? And that gets out, I think, a whole set of interesting questions for the field to address.

 Jose Sanchez 38:35

All right, everybody, you have your marching orders.

 Jose Sanchez 38:38

Now at this point in the podcast, we want to talk about your career in general and start reflecting back to it and getting your thoughts on the field. And so the first question that we want to ask you here is what would you consider to be your greatest career success?

 John Laub 38:51

Well, I have had a blessed career, a career that I had never imagined I would have when I was thinking about being a Chicago police officer or going to University of Illinois Chicago Circle, wishing I could go to Berkeley and follow the Grateful Dead or Tony Platt or going to Albany. So it just been in all honesty, a blessed career. You know, at Maryland, I was distinguished scholar, teacher, university professor within criminology. Fello. President. Sutherland Award. But when you asked me about the greatest success, it has to be the two books that I wrote with Rob, that led to the awarding of the Stockholm prize. I would also add to that something I'm very proud of, but doesn't have the same cachet within the world of academia was when I was selected to be the Director of the National Institute of Justice because I was the first PhD criminologist to run the National Institute of Justice in it's almost 40 plus year history. And so that was a real feather in my cap and something that I'm very proud of. And I would also hope that by doing that, it would encourage other people to think about doing that as well. And since I was there, I'm happy to say that all of the directors have had some background in criminal justice or criminology. So it seems to have worked and I'm happy about that.



Jenn Tostlebe 40:09

Awesome. And so what do you consider to be the greatest lesson that you've learned throughout your career?

 John Laub 40:16

A number of lessons. I mean, this is hard work. I think you can't cut corners. And I will not tell you which papers Rob I wrote 20 plus drafts on, how many titles we had for "Crime in the making" before we chose "Crime in the making." And you have to be persistent, you have to work hard. And I think that's also one of the beauties of our partnership, is that when Rob gets tired, I'm persistent, and when he's persistent, I'm tired. So we kind of feed off each other. And I think also just in mentioning the Stockholm prize. I mean, we're the only research team that was awarded the prize. So I'm very proud of that as well.

J John Laub 40:52

I would say my advice is to be open to new ideas, to take risks. I think it's easy to get discouraged. And when somebody tells you no, I'm saying that you shouldn't, nor that, but there are times where you should really say hmmm Don Cressy had a criminology meeting when he heard I was going to reanalyze the data, just really gave me an earful. Basically saying those data are terrible, why would you, you're gonna ruin your career. And Lloyd Ohlin came to my defense, but it was the kind of thing where I think you have to when people say no examine it, is this really something that you should follow or should you follow your heart? And I think the last thing, I was really interested in history and theory and Albany was a very quantitatively oriented place. When I asked Mike Hindelang what he thought about "Delinquency and opportunity" by Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin and he told me, the only thing empirical in that book are the page numbers. That was something that I said, Really? And I had a strong interest in history, there wasn't a lot of interest in history there. I wanted to do a historical dissertation. And so what you need to do, I think, in those situations, and I was able to do it, is find mentors who encourage your interests. And that's, I think, really important. So that's kind of a bucket of lists. And I guess I would say last, but not least, as I said, this is hard work. But we also should have fun doing it. Good intellectual work, could be a lot of fun.

J Jose Sanchez 42:14

To your point earlier when you were talking about the Glueck data, and you just didn't know what was going to shake out. But it was something that you're interested in doing, you know, I think that's part of the fun of it, right? Like my advisor and I have been working on this project for over four years now, pretty much since I came into the program, and we have no idea if there's gonna be any payoff whatsoever to it. But that's kind of the fun of it.

J John Laub 42:36

Yeah.

J Jose Sanchez 42:36

So I think don't get discouraged. I think that's a big one. We've mentioned in this podcast, many times, that failure comes with the territory in the work that we do, but I mean, just gonna have to keep your head up and keep moving forward.

J Jose Sanchez 42:48

Okay, so now we'd like to ask you about the current state of the discipline, what are your thoughts on where we are in criminology and criminal justice, and maybe some of your thoughts on where you think we should go? I know we've gotten some of your thoughts on life course. But you know, just as a whole.



John Laub 43:02

Yeah, this is an exciting time. I was an undergraduate in the late 60s, early 70s. And that period, criminology, and criminal justice was going through massive changes because of the civil rights movement, the women's rights movement, Vietnam War, and then Watergate protests for racial justice, and so forth. And I think there's some parallels today, where there's a whole series of external events that are impinging on criminology and criminal justice. The me too movement, Black Lives Matter, corporate crime, state crime, corruption in government, so forth. So I think it's exciting, and really interesting to see how it's going to shake out. I think that, for me, what I hope to see is where the field moving forward is that whatever questions are asked, and I think that big questions at this point should be asked. I think one of the things that didn't happen as much as I would like in the 60s and 70s, is the answers to the questions became more ideological than grounded in research and data. And so what I would like to see is if we could kind of keep asking these really, really big questions, but at the same time, really ground the answers to those questions in research and data. And I think that's going to be the challenge. I really would hope that we could also move away from I don't want to say mindless, but this idea of churning out publications for the sake of churning out publications. I got in a lot of trouble when I went to NIJ when I said once, you know, academics write more and more and say less than less. And I felt that a lot of times people were writing for each other and not. I hope that we could have more emphasis on social impact. All throughout my career. I've been really interested in research, influencing policy and practice, and I think we should continue that. I think it's really hard to do in many ways, but it was one of the reasons why I decided to pursue the NIJ job because it was almost put up or shut up moment, and so forth. And I've always felt, I think that theory and research should be part of public policy and practice and not you know, these two cultures, these two worlds never the twain shall meet. I mean, ironically, you know, Hirschi, even though he was known for his theory work, really talked about how theories can organize fields and identify questions that need to be answered for policy and practice. And I think that that's the case. And I think related to, and I've already said this with respect to life course criminology, I mean, all of my recent work had been really focused on how can the facts from life course criminology, findings, I should say, that emerge from life course criminology, how can they be translated into policy and practice? So for instance, what would the criminal justice system look like if it were desistance focused? How would you organize probation if was focused on desistance? How would you organize parole if it was focused on desistance? And that may mean simple things like removing some of the obstacles to facilitate desistance from crime, like many of the collateral consequences people face. But at the same time, it kind of pushes you to ask a larger question, can the criminal justice system actually be a positive turning point in the lives of young men and women who are involved in the system? And what would that system look like? If you really were trying to create a opportunity for positive change? And so I hope that, you know, again, that's specific to life course. But I would hope that orientation would apply to criminology and criminal justice writ large. But I do think it's exciting times. And I think there's so many external forces, much like the 60s and 70s that I witnessed, really changing our field. I mean, you can't escape anymore, I think, and you can't escape asking, what are always the fundamental questions? What is crime? What does social order look like? How do we control crime? What's a fair and just criminal justice system? How can we envision that and so forth? So it's exciting, hard, but exciting.



Jenn Tostlebe 46:57


Definitely hard questions to answer. And it seems like to your point, always changing, you know. with the times. with your cohorts. and I really loved your idea of. you know. if we're


wanting to be focused on assistance, how do we make the criminal justice system reflect that and be a positive turning point, because I feel like that's not what it's currently set up to be. And that's what everyone or a lot of people say they feel when they come out of the system. And so yeah, how do we restructure our thinking and hopefully, in some way, create some kind of policy change, which is hard, as you mentioned.

 John Laub 47:34

I use the metaphor of headwinds and tailwinds. So if you could remove the headwinds, like access to education, which is now thankfully happening within the prison system. And then the question that you're asking is that, can you create a tailwind so that the justice system can actually push somebody not in a negative way, but push somebody forward? That's really the key. And I mentioned this work on emerging adults. But I think there's so much going on now with this emerging adult world, in the justice system. And so there are opportunities, I think, to really change how we respond to emerging adults, whether it be to raise the age of juvenile court jurisdiction, whether to create specialized units of probation, parole, whether to bring back what was an old idea of youthful offender statutes, so that people 18 to 24 were treated differently from juveniles, but also treated differently from adults. I think there's a lot there. But I do think, you know, again, I mentioned the importance of groundedness, and research and data, you know, when when I talk about life course, I mean, that's where everyone says, But where's the data going to come from? And that's where the whole notion of whether or not administrative records can be used in creative ways to get more of a longitudinal database, because a lot of people are very skeptical about surveys, and there will not be another Glueck project, I don't think, in my lifetime. I think the Project on Human Development that Sampson's involved in comes closest to what can be done, but again, that was launched in the early 90s. And there hasn't been any new longitudinal data. I noticed from your summer recap, you mentioned Del Elliot, and I had a smile on my face thinking about when the National Youth Survey came about my great excitement about that survey. Boy, we could use another national youth survey today.

 Jenn Tostlebe 49:17
Yeah.

 Jose Sanchez 49:17
Yeah, agreed.

 Jenn Tostlebe 49:19
Absolutely. All right. Well, thank you so much for sharing your thoughts to our questions and taking the time to do your homework as you mentioned, hopefully, it wasn't too much work.

 John Laub 49:29

No, no.



Jenn Tostlebe 49:29

Are there any last thoughts that you have that you want to share? I know we skipped over a couple of questions. But



John Laub 49:36

Yeah, I mean, the only one that I remember you skipped over was desistance by default. But that's fine. Good to give another shout out to Howard Becker based on commitment by default, which helped us figure that out. First off, I just want to thank both of you for doing this. It almost reminds me of what I wanted to do with the oral histories of criminology because I think that the group of people I interviewed were this kind of mysterious, and I assume they were all, they figured out they wanted to be a criminologist at age two and



Jenn Tostlebe 50:06

Right.



John Laub 50:06

and it went like this, and so forth. And you hear stories about Lloyd Ohlin and Don Cressey, you know, driving to a prison and stopping to get beer on the way home and thinking, Oh, we have an idea or how they came about what they wanted to do. I mean, Al Cohen, you know, here's this kid grows up in Boston, I'm thinking he's trying to figure out working class delinquency. And you know, he's trying to figure out because he went to Harvard and studied with Merton and then he went to Indiana and studied with Sutherland. He says, Okay, there's these two intellectual giants, can I reconcile their views of the world? And so it just unveiled as a graduate student, and particularly when I did most of the interviews, it just was an eye opener. And so I really do applaud you for doing this. I'm sure it takes a lot of your time. And I'm sure you're not both working on your dissertation on The Criminology Academy.



Jenn Tostlebe 50:08

No. *laughter*



Jose Sanchez 50:11

No. *laughter*



John Laub 50:18

Somebody told me when I was doing the oral histories during my dissertation time, they said, Why isn't this your dissertation? I said, somebody told me save your good ideas for something other than your dissertation. I do just appreciate and I think, you know, the ones I've listened to have been really great. I mean, you guys do your homework. So tip my cap to you as my, I don't know if this is my final say, but I think that it's just been really exciting what you're doing, you know, hopefully, it's gonna have an impact in terms of people's again, exposure to new ideas. I mean, I think even I don't know if it was Jose, I think, on your recap said, you know, or maybe it was you Jenn, I didn't think a lot about private prisons, and they're just everywhere. And you know, whether it's detention centers for immigrants, I think it's just you open up ideas for people in terms of the pursue for their own work. So I applaud both of you for doing this.



Jenn Tostlebe 51:40

Well, thank you. Yeah, it's been fun. It's been a lot of work, especially because I think we started this when we were comping and then prospectus. And yeah, but it's been really rewarding too because we are very, you know, siloed, kind of in what we do on a day to day and so this is allowed us to read more about what people are doing outside of our little, you know, me corrections bubble, Jose gangs bubble. So it's been really neat.



John Laub 52:07

Are you guys on the job market for next fall?



Jenn Tostlebe 52:09

Yeah. Well, I'm on the job market right now. Yeah. For next Fall.



John Laub 52:12

So you're applying for next fall?



Jenn Tostlebe 52:14

Yep.



John Laub 52:14

Good luck.



Jenn Tostlebe 52:15

Yeah. Thank you. I can imagine. Yeah. Very personal level. Yes. In Boulder is a great place to live. It's beautiful. And yeah, and being close to family definitely helps. But all right. Our last

question for you is where can people find you? Is email the best route if people want to reach out?

 John Laub 52:33

Yes, email, JLaub AT umd.edu. That's the best route. And I look forward to any comments that people have. And again, I hope that this is what you had hoped for, both of you.

 Jenn Tostlebe 52:42

Oh, yeah.

 John Laub 52:43


Yeah, absolutely.

 Jenn Tostlebe 52:44

This was perfect.

 John Laub 52:45

OK. Good. All right.

 Jenn Tostlebe 52:46

Thanks again. And good to meet you!

 John Laub 52:47

Thank you so much. Thanks for the invite. Good luck with everything.

 Jenn Tostlebe 52:51

Thank you.

 Jenn Tostlebe 52:53

Hey, thanks for listening.



Jose Sanchez 52:54

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.



Jenn Tostlebe 53:03

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Jose Sanchez 53:14

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



Jenn Tostlebe 53:18

See you next time!