



The Life-Course of a Life-Course Criminologist: the David P. Farrington Lecture for the Division on Developmental and Life-Course Criminology Lifetime Achievement Award Address 2020

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Introduction

Honored and humbled are words not strong enough to convey my deep appreciation in receiving the Division of Developmental & Life-Course Criminology's (DLC) Lifetime Achievement Award and to be privileged to deliver the David P. Farrington Annual Lecture to all of you.¹ Being among a list of individuals, some of whom I've written with, but all whom I regard as leading researchers and even better people (Loeber, Hawkins & LeBlanc, Lösel, Blumstein, Sampson & Laub, Moffitt, and Thornberry), I still have imposter syndrome that someone like me could be in this group. So, like Moffitt (2020) noted in her 2018 address, this award means the most to me because it comes from those colleagues who matter the most to me, my DLC family. So, I thank you.

One thing though. Instead of a lecture, I prefer to give 'my story'. I want to pivot my address in this regard because many of the members of the audience, and those who could not attend but will hopefully read the article that reflects this talk, are graduate students and/or young scholars who are finding their way in criminology generally, and in DLC in particular. So, I think telling you about the life-course of a life-course criminologist may provide some useful nuggets—or at least make for an entertaining and memorable 30 min! The lessons to take away from my life course are (1) serendipity and (2) human agency—two themes that are relevant to DLC.

¹ Although this was originally scheduled for November 2020, the coronavirus forced the American Society of Criminology to postpone its meeting and therefore, this address is delivered one year later here in Chicago.

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The Past Is Prologue

In just about every way possible, I should not be here receiving this recognition. I am the son of two Cuban political refugees who came to the United States as teenagers soon after Fidel Castro seized control of Cuba. I grew up in the Washington, DC-area, with an older brother, my parents, and my mom's parents. My parents nor grandparents ever had the opportunity nor resources to graduate from college. But they instilled several principles in me as a child that carry me to this day, including the importance of education and especially hard work. My dad, a former professional baseball player in Cuba, always said 'work hard', 'work harder', and 'when you think you've worked hard enough, work even harder because someone else is doing that at this precise instance'. When I was becoming a pitcher myself, we threw every afternoon when he came home from a long day of work at the office. And my mom was there as well. Neither of them made any excuses when things were difficult at work and when their efforts did not always succeed. All that is good in me comes from them.

After high school, I entered undergraduate at the University of Maryland College Park as a Radio, Television, and Film major. Having grown up listening to hard rock and heavy metal, I wanted to be around music. I was a disc jockey in the making. That is until the Spring semester of my freshman year. One of the courses that I registered for did not make enrollment minimum so I had to go and wait in line at drop/add (yes, you waited in line, no computers back then) and when I got to the front of the cue all that was left was an Introduction to Criminal Justice course that was taught by Dr. Laure Weber Brooks. She and that course changed my life. Her teaching style, the enthusiasm for the topic, and the topic itself came alive and I changed my major to criminology. Lesson #1: Serendipity. Things happen that you do not plan for and when these events or transitions occur, they change your life's trajectory.

During my sophomore and junior years, Laure invited me to collaborate with her on a research project surveying police officers in Maryland. That is how I learned to create surveys, input data, code data, and clean data. We even published a paper in *American Journal of Police* (Brooks et al., 1993) and I was fortunate to present the paper at an American Society of Criminology conference in San Francisco. The summer of my junior year serendipity occurred again as I took a juvenile delinquency course with a professor who would later become my mentor, collaborator, and friend, the late Ray Paternoster. For those who did not have the pleasure to meet much less know him, he was electric. And funny. And crazy smart. He invited me to a small project he had on the Maryland death penalty where I interviewed death penalty jurors about their weighing of aggravating and mitigating circumstances. One outcome of that project was from the first interview in north Baltimore, where an individual could not recall what a mitigating circumstance was in a death penalty case they decided on just nine months prior. I was shocked but learned a lot about asking questions.

As I started my senior year, Ray asked me one day while he was walking his dog Mickey around LeFrak Hall (yes, true story, and I had the privilege of dog-sitting Mickey a number of times), he said 'why don't you go to graduate school', to which

I said ‘what’s graduate school’? After explaining it to me, and after I explained it to my parents, I entered the Master’s programs at Maryland in Fall 1992. Though I did not have funding, I was fortunate to get a part-time assignment working with Dr. Doris MacKenzie on her boot camp evaluation grant. After submission and re-submission, and extensive mark-ups in red ink from the editor Don Gibbons, it led to a publication in *Crime & Delinquency* (MacKenzie & Piquero, 1994).

I highlighted that I began graduate school in 1992 for a reason, it was the beginning of the new movement in what was yet to be officially termed Developmental and Life-Course criminology. At the heels of Gottfredson and Hirschi’s (1990) *A General Theory of Crime*, a new trajectory in the field of criminology was born with the publication of Moffitt’s (1993) seminal developmental taxonomy outlining two distinct groups of offenders and Sampson and Laub’s (1993) *Crime in the Making*. Many of you may not know that Moffitt was a young Assistant Professor at that time and has struggled to get that paper published. Yes, *that* paper, which has received over 14,000 citations as of this writing (May 17, 2021). I read that paper in 1993 when my dear friend and colleague at Maryland, Paul Mazerolle, got it from the library and shared it with several of us, including two of my other closest friends, Bobby Brame and the late Steve Tibbetts. And yes, I still have my original marked-up copy!

Soon after, Nagin and Land published their *Criminology* paper on trajectory methods and Sampson and Laub published *Crime in the Making*, both in 1993. All of this was in my second year of graduate school. I became a life-course criminologist simply by being in the right place at the right time and being trained by researchers who had already been studying criminal career issues, especially Doug Smith and Ray Paternoster, at the heels of the 1986 National Academy of Sciences report (Blumstein et al., 1986). I distinctly remember taking a class with Doug who said, ‘go read the criminal careers report, volumes I and II, and then let’s talk’. During Christmas break. So, I did, and that transitioned me into studying longitudinal patterns of crime, something that I have carried through my entire academic career.²

Towards the end of my graduate school career, I got involved in the National Consortium on Violence Research (NCOVR) that was directed by Al Blumstein and his colleagues at Carnegie Mellon University. The idea of NCOVR was to bring together researchers from around the world to collaborate on research aimed at studying violence, especially in a longitudinal manner. A great many set of researchers participated, and two of the initiatives that the Consortium sponsored included a young scholar program and a minority scholar program. I was part of the latter and it introduced me to people whom I have not only collaborated with, but who remain dear friends with to this day, whom aside from Al includes Daniel Nagin, David Farrington, and Terrie Moffitt. Had I not applied for and been selected to be part of NCOVR, I never would have had the opportunity to participate in summer bootcamps in Pittsburgh, and then fortunately in San Juan, Montreal, and the Dominican Republic! At the same time, I got the opportunity to help lead an effort with Trudy Bonsell and the late Norm White that brought in several minority high school students for a

² My training at Maryland was impeccable, as was the leadership of the department under Charles Wellford, whom to this day I still look to for his sage, Yoda-like advice.

week of lectures and discussions that we had with them, doing our best to show them that graduate school and a career in criminology was a fruitful path.

Agency Matters...As Does Context

I graduated with my PhD in 1996 and assumed my first Assistant Professor position at Temple University in Philadelphia. The decision to go there was hard, as I had multiple offers and my soon-to-be-wife Nicky Piquero, was still in graduate school at Maryland. We lived in Baltimore for four years while I commuted up I-95 three days a week, 2.5 h each way, and she commuted south on I-95 every day an hour each way. But my time at Temple was fortuitous and filled with serendipity as well.

Temple was great and the 5th floor of Gladfelter Hall was filled with world renown criminologists, including Joan McCord, John Goldkamp, Ralph Taylor, Jack Greene, and several other excellent scholars. But being in Philadelphia also had its perks—not the least of which included pretzels and cheesesteaks ‘wit wiz’ of course!³

I also made it a point to make an important phone call to Marvin Wolfgang at the University of Pennsylvania, located in West Philadelphia (same place where the Fresh Prince was from!). He was tucked away at an old brownstone near Walnut Street by Abner’s Cheesesteaks. We talked for about an hour about the Philadelphia Birth Cohort studies and he also put me in touch with Sal Katz, who was involved in helping Debbie Denno with the National Collaborative Perinatal Project study and obtaining crime data to link those two together. I worked with Sal as a result.

In 1997, my colleagues and I published a paper in the *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* on continuity and change in offending careers (Paternoster et al., 1997). I highlight this paper because I had sent a copy to Terrie Moffitt (I will call her Temi from now on) who not only read it but took the time to write all of us a letter complimenting us on her work and how honored she was that we found it of interest to test her theory. I remember thinking that *I* was the one who should be honored. Four years earlier her paper changed my thinking and my pathway, so to speak, on what has been a main focus of my work: understanding starts and stops with offending, potential variation in the pool of offenders, what risk and protective factors separate them over the course of their lives, and then developing and evaluating prevention and intervention programs (Augimeri et al., 2018; Piquero & Rocque, 2020; Piquero et al., 2009) that help to thwart children from a life-course of crime which are very costly (e.g., Cohen & Piquero, 2009). The bottom line here is that we can be smart on crime by being smarter on people (Piquero, 2019).⁴

³ Pat’s or Geno’s, hard to say, but I’ll take either of them any day.

⁴ In the late 2000s, I started to become very serious and engaged in translating research to policymakers, practitioners, and the general public. In 2009, for example, I gave a congressional briefing on early childhood development and antisocial behavior, which was followed by other such remarks such as my 2012 testimony to the Attorney General Holder’s Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence, which was chaired Robert Listennee, Jr. and Joe Torre—yes, that Joe Torre. Soon thereafter, I was appointed to the Science Advisory Board of the Department of Justice and in 2021 I was appointed to the Council on Criminal Justice. My work most recently has been strongly influenced by those researchers who have developed effective programs that seek to improve self-control and, in turn, reduce antisocial development (Piquero et al., 2010)—in particular, my friend and colleague Leena Augimeri.

In 1998, I was honored to be selected to be part of the Summer Institute on ‘Violence over the Life Course’ at the Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University that was co-led by Robert Sampson and Ken Dodge. The six weeks I spent in Palo Alto were intellectually stimulating, personally enriching, and downright fun. About twenty of us young Assistant Professors from various disciplines, gathered together every morning from 10 until noon to hear presentations by one another, talk about issues in the field, and then listen to guest lecturers, which included Al Bandura. Yep. Al Bandura. Then, after a lunch break, we had a daily volleyball game. Nothing like spiking a winner past Sampson, I tell you! After that break, we would spend time in our own offices, each other’s offices, or walking the grounds or visiting the library at the center. That time proved fortuitous for me because of the friendships I made, 6am jogs with Lisa Broidy, Dorothy Espelage, Shawn Bushway, and Paul Mazerolle, and weekly gatherings that Paul, Shawn, and I hosted at the house we rented, but also people I started working with and skill sets I learned that remain with me to this day, including the use of Item Response Theory (Piquero et al., 2000, 2002) and my life-long collaborations with Broidy and Espelage on issues related to bullying, empathy, and so forth (Broidy et al., 2003, 2018; Espelage et al., 2003).

Around the same time, while still at Temple, I made a cold phone call that would change the next fifteen years—well actually it continues to this day—of my career to a developmental psychologist at Temple University who was just leading a new MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice, Larry Steinberg.

I met Larry near the food trucks by Weiss Hall where the psychology department was at Temple. I told him about me, my research, and he invited me to give a talk at a Network meeting in Washington, DC. I accepted of course but was scared that I would not live up to his high expectations.

At the DC meeting, the room was filled with people whom I did not yet know (but whom I would ultimately become colleagues and close friends with for the next ten years) and others whom I knew from their research but not yet knew them well: Jeff Fagan, Darnell Hawkins, Ed Mulvey, Frank Zimring, Tom Grisso, Buffy Scott, and several practitioners including Bob Schwartz of the Juvenile Law Center.

Somehow, I managed to pass the test and I started to become an active participant in the Network. We had amazing support from the Foundation, thanks in large part to our monitor Laurie Garduque. At one point during a conversation about what do we not know about juvenile offenders and their offending, the idea arose about a new longitudinal study of serious adolescent offenders. Such a study, across multiple jurisdictions, with both males and females, and with whites, blacks, and Hispanic youth had not yet been undertaken (and knowing now what I did not know then know just why—it is hard and it is expensive). But we took it on and started planning the Pathways to Desistance Study at the US Airways Club in the Philadelphia airport (see Mulvey et al., 2004; Schubert et al., 2004). At that meeting, I recall Larry, Ed, Jeff, and a few young people, including myself, Bobby Brame, and one of Larry’s former PhD students and my colleague and dear friend, Beth Cauffman. I think our first survey was a ten-hour battery!

That's what happens when you get a bunch of smart people from different disciplines together in a room with the task of 'design a study'.

Pathways has gone on to become one of the field's most important studies, generating many theses and dissertations, important research papers, and one of the most downloaded data sets on ICPSR. I say that because within the research team, there was a very strong belief that we give back to the field these data so that the data can be an important resource. And they have for many researchers around the world. In my own work with the Pathways data, I have used them to study procedural justice and legal socialization (Fagan & Piquero, 2007; Piquero et al., 2005), ethnic identity and perceptions of police among African American juvenile offenders (Lee et al., 2010, 2011), immigration and crime (Bersani et al., 2013; El-Sayed et al., 2016), over- and under-reporting (Bersani & Piquero, 2017), measurement properties associated with the psychopathy checklist (Tsang et al., 2014), the concordance between self-reported and official records across gender and race/ethnicity (Piquero et al., 2014b) and the concordance between time and age within trajectory analyses (Piquero, et al., 2013), perceptions of death and offending (Piquero, 2016), repeat victimization (Turanovic et al., 2017), human capital among Hispanic juvenile offenders (Piquero et al., 2014a), links between remorse and offending (Piquero, 2017), developmental pathways of offending (Mulvey et al., 2010), the effects of juvenile transfer (Loughran et al., 2010; Schubert et al., 2010), the effect of lengths of stay while institutionalized on recidivism (Loughran et al., 2009), the age/crime relationship (Sweeten et al., 2013), gang membership (Sweeten et al., 2011), solo-/co-offending patterns (Goldweber et al., 2011), race/ethnic differences in offending (Piquero, 2015; Piquero & Brame, 2008), long-term recidivism patterns (Brame et al., 2018), correlates of early death (Chassin et al., 2013), alcohol/drug pathways (Chassin et al., 2010; Feldstein et al., 2015), ecological context and concentrated disadvantage (Wright et al., 2014), patterns of moral disengagement (Cardwell et al., 2015; Shulman et al., 2011), deterrence-related perceptions (Loughran et al., 2009, 2011a, b, 2012a, b, 2013a, b), institutional placement and illegal earnings (Nguyen et al., 2017), criminal capital (Loughran et al., 2013a, b), race/ethnic differences in the relationship between mental health and offending (El Sayed et al., 2016), and how research on juvenile offenders has influenced public policy (Monahan et al., 2015). Lesson #2: Human agency matters. Had I not made that call to Larry, none of this would have ever happened.

After my time at Temple, I have moved on to many other universities (Northeastern, University of Florida, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, University of Maryland, Florida State University, University of Texas at Dallas, and now at both the University of Miami and Monash University), but my focus on studying issues related to developmental and life-course criminology has continued in ways I never even expected. Consider another case of serendipity.

At a meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Criminology Association in Queensland Australia in 2013, I met a young researcher, Jason Payne, who was working on his dissertation at the Australian National University testing aspects of Moffitt's theory. Jason sought me out in the lobby of the Brisbane Convention Center in the South Bank area, and we talked for a while about his research. Total

happenstance because Jason and I have worked together ever since, become very good friends, and just published what I think to be one of the most interesting (and hopefully important) pieces of research in the developmental/life-course criminology area that focuses on how this framework can help us understand the crime drop in Australia.

In our book *Developmental Criminology and the Crime Decline: A Comparative Analysis of the Criminal Careers of Two New South Wales Birth Cohorts*, Jason and I use the lens of developmental and life course criminology to compare the criminal offending trajectories of two Australian birth cohorts born ten years apart in 1984 and 1994 (Payne & Piquero, 2020). Studying the crime drop within the Australian context, we find that the drop in crime was not likely due to any significant change in the prevalence or persistence of early onset and chronic offending but instead the disproportionate disappearance of their low-rate, adolescent-onset peers. Thus, while attempts have been focused on intervening in the lives of chronic offenders, in large part because of their costs to society (Cohen & Piquero, 2009), the greatest crime prevention achievement in Australia was reducing the prevalence of criminal offending in the general population. Once again, the distinction between prevalence and frequency outlined by the criminal career framework has shown its relevance (see e.g., Blumstein et al., 1986). As Laub and Sampson (2020) noted in their 2017 Farrington Lecture, macro-level changes that occur among different cohorts present a unique lens to examine changes in the individual life-course development and offending patterns (p. 167).

Just Like Transitions Affected My Trajectory, Such Changes Also Have Intergenerational Effects

I could go on and discuss the many other projects and studies I've been a part of, including those that I have co-authored with several previous lifetime achievement award winners, including the late Rolf Loeber (Jennings et al., 2016; Loeber et al., 2017) and especially my dear friend David Farrington, with whom I've worked with for well over twenty years (Farrington et al., 2013; Piquero et al., 2003, 2007). I have learned so much from David, including the fact that he is an Everton football fan, but more importantly he and I share our love for simple crosstabs, odds ratios, and precision. But I think one of the legacies of an individual who is recognized as having been a recipient of a lifetime achievement award, other than their advanced age, is the legacy they leave behind with their students.

I have had the distinct honor and privilege, and let me underscore that last point—privilege, of mentoring dozens upon dozens of students—a great majority of whom are in this room and/or have gone on themselves to be key players in DLC. I cannot list all of you here, but just know that you have made me so very proud as you have worked on DLC-related topics and have pushed not just my thinking forward but the research trajectory in DLC more generally. In my mind, Thornberry's (2020) 2019 Farrington Lecture on inter-generational patterns in offending provides a useful foil to re-think the intergenerational transmission of knowledge from student to mentor and mentor to student. The effects are strong and reciprocal.

In closing, I hope that my life-course has shown you what both agency, context, and serendipity can do for one's career, just as it does for understanding decision-making in a criminal context (Piquero, 2020). In fact, in some ways, agency, which is purposeful action, can sometimes help an individual 'see' opportunities that come along with the serendipity of happening to be in a particular context or situation. I have been so blessed to have written some key papers in the DLC area, the great majority of which are collaborative efforts where different people bring different skill sets to the table, and to be able to talk about my research around the world, literally around the world. I could not be here without my mentors, my family, my colleagues, my students, all of you here in this room who have challenged me to be a better scholar, and of course to the one person in this world to whom I will spend the rest of my life-course in crime with, Dr. Nicky Leeper Piquero, my partner in crime.

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