

The Life Course Perspective Through the Lens of Race

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Abstract

Life course theorists argue that key transitions such as marriage and employment heavily influence criminal desistance in adulthood among those who committed delinquent acts during their adolescence. Although much research supports this notion, race has generally been left out of the discourse. Very few researchers have examined whether and how race plays a role within life course theory. This is surprising insofar as race is an important correlate of crime, marriage, employment, and other life course transitions that are associated with criminal desistance. Data from Waves 1, 2 and 4 of Add Health are used to examine differences in the effect of marriage and employment on desistance among 3,479 Black, Hispanic, and White men. Results show mixed support for the life course perspective in that classic life theory applies to Whites, but less so to Blacks and Hispanics.

Introduction

Life course theorists argue that key transitions such as marriage and employment heavily influence criminal desistance in adulthood among those who committed delinquent acts in adolescence (Laub & Sampson, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 1990; 1992; 1997; 2005; Giordano, Schroeder, & Cernkovich, 2007). Within their age-graded theory, Laub and Sampson (1993, Sampson & Laub, 2005) adhere to the general principle of social bonding: if an individual has weak bonds to society, he or she will have an increased chance of committing crime (Hirschi, 1969). Therefore, bonds formed within a marriage or job will increase the likelihood of criminal desistance. If these bonds are absent or weak, the individual is more likely to continue on a trajectory of criminal behavior.

An important research question in this area is whether these processes of criminal desistance are invariant across race. Laub and Sampson (1993) specifically note that their life course theory is race-neutral, which allows researchers to examine crime “in a ‘deracialized’” way (254). Very few researchers have examined whether and how race plays a role within life course theory (Gabbidon, 2010). This is

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surprising as race is important in terms of understanding crime rates, arrests, contributing neighborhood factors, as well as race is also linked to transitions, such as marriage and employment, that are typically associated with criminal desistance. For example, Piquero, MacDonald, and Parker (2002) argue that the transitions of marriage and employment are tied historically to social inequalities in America. Structural and cultural changes that have occurred to the family and employment over time -- especially in the 1960s and 1980s which saw the beginnings of some new trends, such as low rates of marriage, higher rates of separation, higher rates of unemployment, and higher rates of single parent headed households -- have had different effects on Blacks as compared to Whites (Piquero et al., 2002; Wilson, 1987).

These effects are often magnified because marriage and employment are linked transitions. Specifically, Wilson (1987) argues that Black men have experienced more adverse consequences from job loss than have Whites, and these consequences can greatly affect marriage opportunities. As Edin and Kefalas (2005) iterate, many lower income individuals will not marry when there is not enough money to support a married lifestyle. This is most apparent among men who are unable to hold down steady employment for extended periods of time and who, consequently, are not viewed as viable marriage partners. Therefore, many lower income women face a shortage of marriageable men, which places both minority men and women at a disadvantage in terms of the positive outcomes typically associated with marriage. Given that these transitions aid in the desistance from crime, having less access to employment and marriage places racial minorities at an increased risk for continued criminal behavior when compared with their White counterparts.

The present study uses the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) to contribute to the existing criminological literature by broadening the scope of the life course perspective. This study illuminates the importance of race within the life course and illustrates that everyone does not experience critical life course events in the same manner. Above all, this study seeks to introduce race into the life course model as an important element in understanding crime and desistance. In doing so, mixed support for the life course perspective is provided through a racial lens.

Literature Review

Black Men and Marriage

Marriage is believed to produce many positive outcomes for individuals. It is argued by life course theorists that those who are married are more likely to desist from criminal behavior than those who are not married. While marriage clearly has many positive outcomes, it is important to note that it has declined in recent years in the United States (Cherlin, 2010; 2009), particularly in the Black population (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000). Arguments generally offered for the decline in marriage rates and for the increase in female-headed households focus on a broad spectrum of factors. One argument is that as women gain economic independence, the need to marry a man for support is no longer a driving mechanism (Lichter, LeClere, & McLaughlin, 1991). Historically, Black women have had higher rates of labor force participation than White women (Lichter & Constanzo, 1987), which could translate into lower incentives for Black women to marry, as compared to White women (Lichter, LeClere, & McLaughlin, 1991).

A second explanation for the decline in Black marriage rates is that there are fewer marriageable Black men, in comparison to their White counterparts, in the market. Wilson (1987) argues that *local* marriage markets may be affected by sex-ratio balances in areas where there is high unemployment, incarceration and mortality rates (affected by violent crime) in the Black male population. Consistent with this argument is the fact that although there may be men of marriageable status in these neighborhoods, they are not economically attractive (Lichter et al., 1991). In the criminological literature a third consequential life course transition has been suggested – incarceration. Pettit and Western (2004) argue that this is particularly true for low-skilled Black men. Being an ex-convict reduces the likelihood that young Black men will be able to marry. Hagan and Dinovitzer (1999) and Western and McLanahan (2000) state that not only do ex-convicts earn less and have fewer employment opportunities than their

non-incarcerated counterparts, but these individuals are also less likely to get married or cohabit with the mothers of their children.

Hispanic Men and Marriage

Union formation and attitudes towards marriage among Hispanics differ from those among Blacks. Prior research illustrates that Mexican Americans tend to look like Whites in terms of first marriage behavior, even though Mexican Americans tend to have lower levels of education and lower levels of income and earnings than do Whites (Oropesa, Lichter & Anderson, 1994). Although Mexican Americans have first marriage rates that are similar to Whites, Puerto Rican women are more similar to Black women, and are less likely than White and Mexican American women to marry by age 25 (Bean & Tienda, 1987). Puerto Rican women tend to have similar disadvantages as Blacks, while Mexican American women have only a slightly higher advantage in terms of employment. Still, Mexican women are just as likely as whites to be married, as well as to be married at younger ages regardless of their lower earnings and higher unemployment levels (Bean & Tienda, 1987).

South (1993) suggests that marriage behavior can be explained by marriage desires, which vary among the races. For instance, Hispanic men tend to have a stronger desire for marriage than do Black men. Out of all three races, Tucker (2000) found that that Mexican Americans actually have the strongest desire to marry, followed by Blacks, then Whites. Although Blacks have a higher desire to marry than do Whites, Blacks place great emphasis on economic stability as a prerequisite to marriage (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993). Furthermore, assimilation patterns may also affect marriage desire and patterns among Hispanics. Portes and Rumbaut (1990) posit that first generation Hispanics who have not yet assimilated into American culture will hold cultural values of marriage and traditions that are comparable to their nativity. This is in comparison to those who had have time to adopt American values which may extend to attitudes toward marriage and cohabitation. This assimilation may result in a delay in age of first marriage.

Black Men and Employment

Increasing modernization has dramatically changed the labor market and the demand for jobs that young Black males once held (Holzer, 1994). Freeman (1991) states that when labor demand in the aggregate economy decreases, Blacks feel the effects in higher proportion in terms of reduced employment opportunities and earnings. Traditional manufacturing and other jobs that require little skill or education are disappearing from the inner city, thus reducing the number of possible income sources for those residing in these areas (Holzer, 1994). This has created a “mismatch between skill needs and/or geographic locations of employers” (701), thereby decreasing wages and affecting regional balance (Holzer, 1994). Furthermore, many Black employees are unable to make lengthy commutes to the changing suburban markets in order to follow their relocated jobs, or to find new ones.

Not only has the job market changed, but perceptions and attitudes held about Black workers remains complex (Holzer, 1994). Specifically, Blacks face boundaries of perceived discrimination when entering the workforce. Kirschenman and Neckerman (1991) found that employers admit that they perceive Blacks to be less skilled, as having poorer attitudes, as being less motivated and as not possessing the desire to work. Such views mean that employers are less likely to hire Black employees. Turner (1991), in an experimental design, found that Blacks received fewer job offers compared to Whites. Pager (2003), in another experimental design study, found that Black men without a criminal record were less likely to receive a call back from a job interview than White men with a criminal record.

Data have shown for quite some time that Blacks are disproportionately represented in prison. This is consequential given that ex-inmates have reduced chances of receiving the steady work that is necessary for earning growth among young men (Western, 2002; see also Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999). Pager (2003) argues that those who pass through the criminal justice system are “branded as a particular class of individuals” (942), and this affects the placement of these individuals in the stratification

hierarchy. Sampson and Laub (1997) contend that being formally labeled by the criminal justice system will directly impact an adult's ability to gain stable employment. The absence of stable employment, in turn, increases the odds that an ex-convict will return to criminal activity.

Hispanic Men and Employment

As with Blacks, Hispanics are disadvantaged in terms of job attainment and income earnings when compared to White workers. Specifically, Mexican-origin workers are more likely to be underemployed (De Anda, 1994) and, like many other minority workers, are more likely to have unstable employment (Clogg et al., 1990). In 2008, due to the decreased employment need in construction, the unemployment rate for Hispanics increased to 6.5 percent, in comparison to a rate of 4.7 percent for non-Hispanics (Kochhar, 2008). Specifically, the Hispanic immigrant unemployment rate reached 7.5 percent in 2008, with a Mexican immigrant unemployment rate of 8.4 percent (Kochhar, 2008). This significant job loss among Hispanics in the United States has been coupled with a working age population growth for Hispanics in recent years, meaning that an even smaller proportion of Hispanics is employed.

Mexican Americans also have to face discrimination based on skin color. Arce, Murgulia and Frisbe (1987) found that skin color affected Mexican American employment, while Murguia and Telles (1996) found that Mexican Americans with darker skin were worse off both socially and economically than lighter skin Mexican Americans. Morales (2008) argues that it is this skin color that may drive whether or not some Mexican Americans enter into an ethnic niche. Specifically, darker skinned Mexican Americans are more likely to enter into an ethnic niche and find themselves located at the bottom of the workforce, whereas lighter skinned Mexican Americans do not enter into a niche and are considered "honorary Whites." Hispanics may also be hindered from obtaining fruitful and stable employment by the consequences stemming from assimilation. Portes, Fernandez-Kelly and Haller (2005) argue that although many second-generation youth tend to move ahead of their parents in terms of education and occupation, there is still a significant minority of second-generation youth who are being left behind. These youth may be hindered by parental human capital, family type, and segmented assimilation (Portes et al., 2005).

The Current Study

The focus of this research is on Sampson and Laub's notion of racial invariance in patterns of desistance from crime. According to this perspective, both marriage and employment have the same effect on desistance from crime among Blacks, Hispanics and Whites. Given the background above, I expect that **(1)** a high quality marriage and employment will reduce the likelihood of participation in crime in adulthood. Given the arguments of the theory I would assume that **(2)** a high quality marriage and employment would mediate the relationship between race and adult crime. Given that cohabitation is considered less stable than marriage I would suspect **(3)** being in a cohabiting union would not reduce the likelihood of adult offending. Counter to the claims of a race neutral perspective, I hypothesize that **(4)** race will moderate the relationship between life course factors such as job duration, high quality marriage, and being employed on adult crime.

Methods

Data

The current study uses the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health (Add Health). The Add Health data are constructed from 132 schools and stratified by region, urbanicity, school type, ethnic mix, and size. The respondents consist of adolescents in grades 7-12 during the first wave of data collection in

1995. Subsequent waves were collected in 1996, 2002, and 2008. Wave 4 of data collection includes respondents aged 24-32.

The entire sample produced a nationally representative sample of 20,745 respondents at Wave I. The analytical sample for this research consists of male respondents under the age of 18 who were delinquent at waves 1 or 2. The total analytical sample size is 3479 men, of which 20 percent are Hispanic, 23 percent Black, and 57 percent White (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean/Freq.	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Dependent Variable				
Adult Crime	0.42	-	0	1
Race^a				
Black	0.23	-	0	1
Hispanic	0.20	-	0	1
Relationship^a				
LQ Cohab	0.08	-	0	1
HQ Cohab	0.18	-	0	1
LQ Marriage	0.10	-	0	1
HQ Marriage	0.31	-	0	1
Employment				
Working	0.71	-	0	1
Full-time	3.75	0.58	1	4
Duration ^a	0.33	-	0	1
Fired	0.40	-	0	1
School/Work	4.62	0.71	1	5
Controls				
Age	28.44	1.64	24	33
SES	6.37	2.58	1	10
Child HH^a				
Two Parents	0.17	-	0	1
Single Mom	0.24	-	0	1
Single Dad	0.05	-	0	1
Other	0.05	-	0	1
Education^a				
High School	0.17	-	0	1
Some College	0.45	-	0	1
College	0.17	-	0	1
Graduate	0.08	-	0	1

^aOmitted reference categories are White, single, less than 5 years, biological parents, and no high school degree

Note: N=3479

Abbreviation SD=Standard Deviation

Measures

Dependent variable. The dependent variable is involvement in criminal behavior. *Criminal Involvement* is coded 0 if the respondent is not involved in criminal activity in Wave 4 and coded 1 if the respondent acknowledges participation in criminal activities at Wave 4. *Criminal Involvement* measure includes both major and minor offenses. Minor offenses include damaging property, stealing more than 50 dollars, stealing less than 50 dollars, entering a house without permission to steal something, selling marijuana or other drugs, buying/selling/holding stolen property, and using someone's credit card/bank card/debit card without permission; more serious offenses include threatening to use a weapon to get something, group fighting, participating in a serious fight, hurting someone to the extent that they needed medical attention, pulling a knife or gun on someone, and shooting or stabbing someone. Of those in the sample, 42 percent admit to committing at least one criminal act in adulthood.

Focal independent variables. *Race.* This variable is coded as a set of dummied variables referred to as *Black* and *Hispanic* and is taken from Wave 1 with *White* as the reference.

Relationship status and relationship quality. Relationship status and relationship quality is a combined variable created to capture high and low quality unions at Wave 4. First, relationship quality is assessed via an additive scale created from five measures: enjoyment of everyday things with partner, satisfaction with how well the respondent perceives how the couple deals with disagreements/problems, satisfaction with how they handle finances, expression of affection, and how well the other partner listens to the respondent. Each measure ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The additive scale scores range from 5 to 25. This quality scale is dichotomized at the midpoint score of 16. Those who scored between 5-15 are considered to have lower quality relationships, while those who scored 16-25 are considered to have higher quality relationships. This quality variable is combined with union status (single, married, or cohabiting) to create four dummied variables with single being the reference group: *High Quality Marriage*, *Low Quality Marriage*, *High Quality Cohabiting Union*, and *Low Quality Cohabiting Union*.

Job. In order to assess whether having a job increases desistance, a respondent is deemed to have a job if he is currently working 10 hours a week or more at Wave 4. The variable is dichotomized and is measured as 0 = no and 1 = yes.

Job Stability. Two indicators at Wave 4 measure stability of employment. The first indicator uses the respondent's recollection of the start month and year for their current job to calculate the amount of time they have worked at this job. This variable is dichotomized into 0 = those who have worked less than five years and 1 = those who work 5 years or more in their current job. This indicator will be referred to as *Duration*. A second indicator, *Fired*, measures whether the respondent has ever been fired or laid off from a job. The original question asks the respondent how many times he or she has been fired or laid off. This variable is dichotomized, with a code of 1 assigned to those who have been laid off or fired at least one or more times, and 0 for those who have never been fired or laid off.

Full-Time. This variable measures whether the respondent is working less than 10 hours a week, working 11-30 hours a week, or working 31-or more hours a week at Wave 4. The respondent is considered to be working full time if he or she is working 31 or more hours a week.

School-Work. The variable *School-Work* measures whether the respondent is currently in school while also working. The purpose of this variable is to gauge the time spent in school with time spent at work since many respondents in the Add Health data are balancing both school and work and may not be fully integrated into employment which may lessen the importance of employment. *School-Work* is measured at Wave 4 and is coded 1 if the respondent is in-school and not working, 2 if currently going to school and working less than 25 hours a week, 3 if currently going to school and working between 25 or more hours, and 4 if not in school and working.

Control variables. *Child* measures whether the respondent has a least one child residing in the home at Wave 4. This variable is coded 0 = no and 1 = yes.

Age is a continuous variable constructed from Wave 4 information concerning the respondent's birth month and birth year.

SES. The variable for socioeconomic status is a scale that ranges from 1 to 10 derived from the Moody and Bearman (Ford, Moody & Bearman, 1999) approach. Specifically, *SES* is measured by a combination of educational and occupational scales, each of which range from 1 to 5. The respondent's mother's and father's *SES* is first calculated using their respective educational and occupational backgrounds, as reported by the respondent at Wave 1. In order to reduce the number of missing cases, parental interview reports and the adolescent in-school reports were used to both verify the respondent's report of their parent's education and occupation, and to fill in missing information not provided by the respondent. Finally, after scores for both parents are calculated, the family *SES* is then constructed using the maximum or highest value, of the mother and father's *SES*.

Childhood Household Structure. Structure of the respondent's adolescence family is taken at Wave 1 and includes whether the respondent lived with both biological parents, lived with one biological parent and one non-biological parent, lived with a single mother, lived with a single father or lived in some other type of family relationship. The variable is dummy coded with two biological parents as the reference category.

Education is a measure of the respondent's highest level of education earned. It is dummied coded with less than a high school degree as the reference group. It includes high school diploma or GED, some college or vocation schooling, bachelor's degree, and graduate or professional degree.

Foreign Born is a measure of whether the respondent was born inside or outside of the United State; it is used as a control variable and only in the analysis involving Hispanics

Analytic Strategy

The analytical sample for this study includes respondents who have valid data for the key independent variables and for the dependent variable. The analysis begins with pertinent descriptive statistics for the focal independent variables and dependent variable, followed by separate analyses for the various research questions. All analyses are conducted with an analytical sample of men who were delinquent at either Waves 1 or 2. Logistic Regression was used in each of the analyses

Results

Zero-Order Model

The Zero-Order Model (Model 1) in Table 2 indicates that many of the variables included in the analysis are statistically significant and in the predicted direction. As argued by Sampson and Laub (2005), being in a high quality marriage (determined by if a respondent scored higher than the midpoint on the relationship happiness scale) significantly reduces the likelihood of adult criminal involvement for men who were delinquent in adolescence. On the other hand, being in a low quality marriage and a low quality cohabiting relationship actually increases criminal involvement. That is, relationships of lower quality tend to increase adult criminality instead of offering a protective effect against crime. The data in Model 1 also show that being employed, being employed full time, and being employed for five years or longer also reduces the likelihood of adult criminal involvement. In addition, being fired or laid off from a job increases the odds of adult criminality. This is also supportive of life course theory claims of the importance of having and maintaining employment in adulthood. Being in school as opposed to in the workforce, however, does not have a statistically significant effect on adult criminality. Overall, the zero-order model is congruent with Laub and Sampson's major life course propositions that a high quality marriage and stable employment offer a protective effect and reduce the likelihood of adult criminal offending.

Life Course Assumptions and Race

In Model 2 in Table 2, relationship status and quality of union are added to the basic model. These data show that being in a low quality cohabiting union increases the likelihood of adult criminality by 0.71, whereas being in a high quality marriage decreases the likelihood of adult criminality by 0.67. Although these relationships are significant, the introduction of these variables into the model does not reduce the relationship between race and adult criminality. That is, even controlling for relationship type and quality, being either Black or Hispanic, as compared to being White, still increases the likelihood of adult criminality.

To examine the effects of the employment variables on adult crime, relationship status and quality of union are removed from the model and the key employment variables are added. The data in Model 3 show that although being currently employed is not statistically significant, having held a job for 5 years or longer reduces the likelihood of criminal involvement, which is congruent with Sampson and Laub's stress on the importance of job stability. Furthermore, being employed full-time also reduces the likelihood of adult criminal involvement. Conversely, being laid off or fired greatly increases the odds of adult offending. In contrast to the zero-order model, the impact of the proportion of time spent in school compared to work is now statistically significant: the more time one spends in school, the greater the likelihood of criminality in adulthood. As with the relationship variables examined in Model 2, these statistically relevant employment variables do not reduce the relationship between race and adult criminal involvement that was evident in the zero-order model.

Model 5 includes both the relationship and employment life course variables in the analysis. These data show that high quality marriages still decrease the likelihood of adult criminality, whereas low quality cohabiting unions increase the likelihood of offending. It is interesting to note, however, that with the relationship variables in the model, the effect of job duration and holding a full time job are no longer statistically significant. However, being fired or laid off, and the proportion of time in school/employment remain significant. In regard to race, being Black or Hispanic continues to increase the odds of adult criminality, even when controlling for all key life course characteristics specified in Laub and Sampson's theory.

Model 5 in Table 2 adds the non-life course theory controls to the model. With the inclusion of age, socioeconomic status, childhood family structure, the presence of children, and education, being in a high quality cohabiting union becomes statistically significant and actually increases the odds of adult criminality. Additional tests were conducted to verify the variable or combination of variables that suppressed the effect of this cohabitation variable in the prior models, and it was concluded that it is due to the combination of all the additional controls. Currently working is now statistically significant, reducing the likelihood of criminal involvement by 0.25. Although the addition of the control variables did not reduce the effect of being Black to non-significance, the effect of being Hispanic is now insignificant. In order to determine which variable is affecting this relationship, each control was removed and included separately in a series of equations. This process revealed that the addition of age at wave 4 reduced the effect of being Hispanic to non-significance. Age also is responsible for suppressing the effect of currently working.

Table 2. Logistic Regression Coefficients for Life Course Variables Predicting the Likelihood of Adult Criminality for Males

	Model 1 ^b		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Black ^a	0.45***	0.1	0.56***	0.15	0.52**	0.16	0.62***	0.16	0.53**	0.17
Hispanic ^a	0.30**	0.11	0.35*	0.15	0.31*	0.16	0.32*	0.16	0.20	0.16
Relationship^a										
LQCohab	0.73***	0.22	0.71**	0.27			0.62*	0.28	0.73*	0.31
HQCohab	0.15	0.11	0.18	0.15			0.21	0.16	0.33*	0.17
LQMarriage	0.52*	0.12	0.17	0.30			0.14	0.32	0.31	0.36
HQMarriage	-0.69***	0.09	-0.67***	0.15			-0.59***	0.15	-0.54**	0.18
Employment										
Working	-0.18*	0.09			-0.19	0.13	-0.21	0.13	-0.22*	0.12
Full Time	-0.26***	0.07			-0.15 ⁺	0.09	-0.12	0.09	-0.11	0.10
Duration ^a	-0.33***	0.10			-0.26*	0.13	-0.18	0.13	-0.15	0.13
Fired	0.54***	0.11			0.45***	0.10	0.41***	0.10	0.41***	0.10
School/Work	-0.01	0.05			0.08*	0.04	0.08*	0.04	0.07 ⁺	0.04
Children	-0.52***	0.04							-0.04	0.16
Age	-0.13*	0.07							-0.11**	0.03
SES	-0.03*	0.01							0.03	0.02
Child HH^a										
Two Parents	-0.18*	0.10							0.15	0.19
Single Mom	-0.12	0.09							0.09	0.15
Single Dad	0.38*	0.19							0.39	0.24
Other	0.15	0.14							0.50	0.30
Education^a										
High School	0.05	0.10							0.13	0.21
Some College	0.20**	0.08							0.22	0.17
College	-0.21*	0.11							-0.03	0.22
Graduate	-0.28*	0.15							-0.27	0.25

^aOmitted reference categories are White, single, less than 5 years, biological parents, and no high school degree

⁺ p<.10 *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

^bZero-Order Model

Salience of Life Course Factors for Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites

The original sample is split by race and a logistic regression analysis is performed separately for Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics. As with the previous combined race analysis, models are created in order to examine the effects of relationship factors and employment factors separately and then together. The last model in each split race analysis (Tables 3-5) contains the same controls as did the initial analysis in Table 3.

Black Men

Logistic regression models for Blacks are presented in Table 3. Model 1 includes the key relationship status by relationship quality variable: low quality marriage, high quality marriage, low quality cohabiting union, and high quality cohabiting unions. An examination of Model 1 illustrates that none of the effects are statistically significant. Model 2 removes the relationship factors from the equation and adds the employment variables: currently working, full time employment, job duration, being fired or laid off from a job, and amount of time spent in school and work. Here, again, there are no significant effects on adult criminality.

Table 3. Logistic Regression Coefficients for the Effect of Life Course Variables Predicting the Likelihood of Adult Criminality for Black Males (N=800)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Relationship^a								
LQCohab	0.22	0.53			0.21	0.51	0.43	0.61
HQCohab	0.18	0.37			0.21	0.39	0.44	0.38
LQMarriage	0.20	0.72			0.20	0.74	0.42	0.72
HQMarriage	-0.13	0.48			-0.25	0.49	-0.14	0.49
Employment								
Working			-0.36	0.30	-0.39	0.30	-0.45	0.36
Full Time			-0.03	0.19	-0.12	0.20	-0.02	0.22
Duration ^a			-0.49	0.32	-0.57*	0.33	-0.49*	0.22
Fired			0.27	0.28	0.27	0.28	0.29	0.28
School/Work			0.01	0.11	0.03	0.11	-0.08	0.12
Children							-0.19	0.37
Age							-0.06	0.09
SES							-0.01	0.05
Child HH								
Two Parents							0.60	0.55
Single Mom							0.50	0.43
Single Dad							-0.74	0.88
Other							0.21	0.47
Education								
High School							0.26	0.43
Some College							0.04	0.38
College							-0.05	0.55
Graduate							-0.37	0.58

^aOmitted reference categories are single, less than 5 years, biological parents, and no high school degree

+ p<.10 *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Model 3 in Table 3 includes both the relationship and employment factors. Examination of the model illustrates that although none of the relationship variables are significant, the addition of these variables causes job duration to become significant. For Blacks, job duration decreases the odds of adult criminality by 0.57. Lastly, Model 4 shows that even after the statistical controls are added to the model, job duration still remains significant and reduces the likelihood of adult criminal involvement among Blacks.

Hispanic Men

The analysis for Hispanics includes a variable not previously examined: having been foreign born. The analysis for Hispanics does not illustrate an importance of being a foreign born Hispanic on adult criminal offending.

Table 4. Logistic Regression Coefficients for the Effect of Life Course Variables Predicting the Likelihood of Adult Criminality for Hispanic Males (N=696)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Foreign Born	-0.09	0.44	-0.24	0.44	-0.10	0.44	-0.46	0.55
Relationship^a								
LQCohab	1.66*	0.82			1.58*	0.86	1.23	0.82
HQCohab	0.83 ⁺	0.78			1.06*	0.51	1.70**	0.56
LQMarriage	-0.86	0.85			-0.98	0.86	-0.76	1.26
HQMarriage	-0.53	0.47			-0.44	0.49	-0.37	0.44
Employment								
Working			-0.45	0.46	-0.57	0.51	-0.27	0.59
Full Time			-0.16	0.26	-0.25	0.27	-0.40	0.40
Duration ^a			-0.07	0.49	-0.09	0.53	-0.25	0.59
Fired			0.21	0.31	0.10	0.34	0.52	0.39
School/Work			0.11	0.16	0.13	0.18	0.13	0.20
Children							-0.17	0.43
Age							-0.16	0.14
SES							0.06	0.09
Child HH^a								
Two Parents							0.43	0.69
Single Mom							-0.30	0.52
Single Dad							0.92	0.92
Other							-0.13	1.16
Education^a								
High School							0.04	0.66
Some College							0.77	0.60
College							-0.40	0.88
Graduate							-0.15	1.06

^aOmitted reference categories are single, less than 5 years, biological parents, and no high school degree
⁺ p<.10 *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Model 1 in Table 4 illustrates that cohabiting unions are significantly associated with adult criminal offending among Hispanics. Specifically, low quality cohabiting unions significantly increase the likelihood of adult crime. High quality cohabiting unions are only marginally significant and do not have as big of an effect, but they too increase the odds of adult criminal involvement. Although in the expected direction, marital unions are not significantly related to criminality.

Model 2 excludes the relationship variables and includes the employment factors. Interestingly, none of the employment factors have statistically significant effects. Model 3 includes all of the life course factors, and in doing so we see that cohabiting unions remain statistically significant. However, in contrast to Model 1, these findings show that Hispanics in a high quality cohabiting union are also likely to be involved in criminal behavior, although being in a low quality cohabiting union is still significant and has a greater effect than being in a high quality cohabiting union. Nonetheless, both low quality and high quality cohabiting unions increase the likelihood of adult criminal involvement.

Lastly, Model 4 adds the statistical controls. While none of the controls are significant, their introduction into the model reduces the impact of being in a low quality cohabiting union to non-significance. Being in a high quality cohabiting union, however, remains significant

White Men

As with the above analyses, low quality cohabiting union, high quality cohabiting union, low quality marriage, and high quality marriage are added to the first model in Table 5 for Whites. In Model 1, being in a high quality marriage reduces the likelihood of adult criminal offending by 0.81 whereas being in a low quality cohabiting union increases the likelihood of adult criminality for by 0.87.

Model 2 reveals that employment factors also are important predictors of criminality among Whites. Specifically, job duration and being fired from a job are statistically significant. Working at a job for five years or longer reduces the likelihood of engaging in adult criminal behavior, whereas being fired increases the odds of criminal involvement in adulthood. Furthermore, having a full time job is marginally significant and reduces the likelihood for criminal involvement in adulthood among Whites.

Both relationship and employment factors are included in Model 3. In this model, high quality marriage remains highly significant and reduces the likelihood of adult criminality for Whites. Low quality cohabiting union is now just marginally significant. Job duration is still important but is reduced in significance as well, whereas working full time drops from significance entirely.

Model 4, which includes the statistical controls, reveals that high quality marriage remains significant for Whites, but both low quality cohabiting union and job duration drop from significance. The effect of currently working at a job is at its strongest in this model. It is interesting to note the significance of the control variables in this model: having a resident child, higher levels of education, and higher SES reduce the likelihood of adult criminality for Whites.

Table 5. Logistic Regression Coefficients for the Effect of Life Course Variables Predicting the Likelihood of Adult Criminality for White Males (N=1983)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Relationship^a								
LQCohab	0.87*	0.37			0.75 ⁺	0.40	0.44	0.32
HQCohab	0.12	0.18			0.18	0.17	0.14	0.13
LQMarriage	0.41	0.37			0.50	0.38	0.31	0.24
HQMarriage	-0.81***	0.17			-0.69***	0.17	-0.61***	0.12
Employment								
Working			-0.13	0.15	-0.13 ⁺	0.15	-0.18 ⁺	0.09
Full Time			-0.22 ⁺	0.11	-0.16	0.12	-0.01	0.07
Duration ^a			-0.42**	0.15	-0.33*	0.15	-0.15	0.10
Fired			0.55***	0.12	0.50***	0.00	0.53***	0.10
School/Work			0.08	0.05	0.70	0.05	0.06	0.03
Children							-0.39**	0.11
Age							-0.07*	0.03
SES							-0.04 ⁺	0.02
Child HH^a								
Two Parents							0.17	0.14
Single Mom							0.20	0.13
Single Dad							0.21	0.27
Other							0.23	0.32
Education^a								
High School							-0.10	0.21
Some College							-0.05	0.18
College							-0.38 ⁺	0.20
Graduate							-0.71**	0.26

^aOmitted reference categories are single, less than 5 years, biological parents, and no high school degree

+ p<.10 *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Discussion

Life Course Factors

As prior research has demonstrated, life course factors such as marriage and employment are important in reducing the likelihood of adult criminal behavior. As expected, being in a high quality marital relationship greatly decreased the odds of adult criminality. This is congruent with Laub and Sampson (1993), who argue that high quality bonds formed in marriage increase the likelihood that one will not engage in criminality. Also congruent with life course literature is the significance in the data of working at a job for five years or longer, as well as working full time.

Cohabiting unions are increasingly being seen as a stepping-stone to marriage or even as an alternative to marriage. Although societal perspectives on cohabiting have changed, research has illustrated that cohabiting unions typically do not provide the same protective effects that increase general well-being and decrease the likelihood of criminality that marital unions do. Relationship quality tends to be lower in cohabiting unions compared to marital unions. Given this, it is not surprising that being in a cohabiting union actually increased the likelihood of adult criminality in our data.

Race

Although high quality marriages and employment factors were important in regard to desistance in the combined sample, these variables did not mediate the effect of race on criminality in the analysis. This finding does not mean, however, that race is the most important predictor of desistance. Instead, it suggests that there are likely other factors not included in the analysis, such as neighborhood structure or duration of criminality, which likely reduce the probability of adult criminality among Blacks. As for Hispanics, although life course factors did not reduce the effect of race on criminality to non-significance, the addition of age to the analysis did reduce its effect to non-significance. Therefore, although life course factors were salient in regard to desistance for both Blacks and Hispanics, other factors also influenced the likelihood of desistance.

When the sample was split by race, the analyses revealed a more complex picture of the effects of marriage and employment on desistance than theorized by Laub and Sampson. Specifically, an examination of the impact of life course factors separately for each race revealed that the Laub and Sampson conception was most strongly supported in the analysis for Whites. Among Whites, currently having a job and being in a high quality marriage decreased the likelihood of adult criminality.

But important variation in the effects of these variables was revealed in the analyses on Blacks and Hispanics. The models that best predicted desistance among these groups were not completely consistent with Laub and Sampson's conception of the life course. For Blacks, working at a job for five years or longer was the only factor that decreased the likelihood of adult criminality. This is not inconsistent with Sampson and Laub's (2005) conception of the life course theory that posits that job stability, and not simply having a job per se, is the critical factor. On the other hand, none of the relationship variables were significant predictors of desistance among Blacks, a finding contrary to the basic tenets of the Laub and Sampson model.

Although being in a high quality marital union was not significant for Black men, an argument can be made that this finding may be due to a selection bias. Blacks tend to marry less often than Whites and also marry later in the life course than Whites. Given this, it might be reasonable to argue that Blacks in the sample who were more likely to be married by age 34 may also be less likely to be criminal in adulthood. Whatever increased the likelihood of desistance for these individuals could also have impacted their likelihood of marriage, or caused them to desist at younger ages without the need of the protective factor of marriage. Furthermore, the effect of marriage may only be important by way of employment, given that Wilson (1987) argues that Black men appear less marriageable because they lack sufficient, steady work. Therefore, it might be reasonable to argue that the effect of stable employment is what truly

influences desistance, regardless of marital status. It is also reasonable to argue that what affects desistance is actually a packaged deal.

As for Hispanics, neither employment factors nor marital factors decreased the likelihood of criminal desistance in adulthood. Instead, being in a high quality cohabiting union was the only significant factor among Hispanics. Furthermore, given that Hispanics closely resemble Whites in regard to marriage patterns, it would seem that high quality marriages would be significant for Hispanics. However, neither of these expectations was upheld in our data. A possible explanation for this is that a selection effect is occurring for the Hispanics in this sample; that is, some unmeasured common variable, such as generation, nativity, or neighborhood structure, may increase the likelihood of marriage and employment, as well as desistance.

Limitations

A disadvantage of the data set is that since it is a school-based sample, chronic offenders are likely underrepresented, insofar as they are less likely than other adolescents to be in school. However, since respondents were interviewed at home, there could be a segment of chronic offenders who were followed throughout the survey. Chronic offenders are more likely than other offenders to come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and lack access to stable employment and cohesive marriages, all factors that decrease the likelihood of desistance. As a result, our analysis is necessarily limited by the extent to which such respondents are underrepresented or absent in these data.

Further, by splitting the sample into various categories (those who were delinquent in waves 1 and 2 and by gender), I lost many cases of Hispanics. This is an important limitation in that I had intended to test the research hypotheses across the multiple groups of Hispanics: Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican. Given the different traditions and cultures for each of these groups, there may be important differences in terms of desistance patterns and in the influence of the life course variables on desistance.

Regardless of the limitations, this study adds a unique addition to the life course literature. Future research should extend an examination of gender, social class, and age. It could be argued that all three of these demographics would be affected by life course events differently. Further, given the changes in marital timing and multiple marriages, future research should examine the complex nature of marriage throughout the life course.

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