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On Criminogenic Grit and Theoretical Criminology
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Abstract

Given the interdisciplinary nature of criminology, this paper presents the perspective that the continued attention to trends in other social science disciplines is necessary for the theoretical advancement of the field. The paper presents the idea of criminogenic grit being a useful theoretical perspective that can help to improve some of the most popular criminological theories. The paper begins with a review of the extant literature on psychological grit, suggests theoretical improvements to the concept of grit, and discusses some of the specific ways in which psychological grit can be related to contemporary theoretical criminology.

Introduction

At its core, criminology is an interdisciplinary field. Commencing as a promising subfield of sociology, criminology has developed into its own field that utilizes aspects of psychology, urban studies/geography, and other social and policy sciences. The development of criminology has also coincided with the theoretical maturation of other fields of study. In the decade prior to the turn of the century, impressive developments were made that reinvigorated the field of theoretical criminology (see Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Sherman, 1993; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997) after a period of theoretical stagnancy (Wellford, 1989).

Theoretical improvement in the field of criminology is often measured by how many new tests of existing theories can be accomplished, whereas creative theorizing is often relegated to the scholarly backburner. In an effort to encourage criminologists to begin theorizing more creatively, Osgood (1998) pointed out the necessity of criminologists utilizing fruitful ideas in other disciplines in order to inform criminological knowledge. It is vital for criminologists to broaden theoretical approaches in the field, and also to relax the staid supposition that for theories to be useful, they must explain crime universally. As current research has shown, there is also intellectual benefit to positing specific explanations for criminal behavior, as opposed to the reliance on the major theories of criminology to be wholly explanatory of all kinds of criminality (Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011).

Psychological grit is one of the popular theoretical perspectives that has not only illuminated the field of psychology but is also popular with respect to studies on efficacious pedagogy. However, psychological grit has not been integrated with the criminological literature, despite the many overlaps that grit has with many criminological theories. This paper will begin with a review of the extant literature regarding grit and its related theoretical concepts, it will proceed with suggested theoretical improvements to the concept of grit, then the paper will close with a discussion of some of the myriad ways that psychological grit can be linked to and improve the understanding of contemporary criminological theories.

Literature Review

Psychological grit, an emerging psychological phenomenon, has predominantly been studied in the areas of educational attainment and occupational success. Studies have also attempted to ascertain whether or not grit overlaps with other theoretically related psychological concepts. This section will review this emergent body of literature.

Prior to its contemporary nomenclatural framing, grit was studied via perseverance research. Fernald (1912) made the argument that integral to success is the capacity and willingness to work hard in the face of seemingly intractable hardship. Similarly, Webb (1915) engaged in theoretical development surrounding the concept of the *w* factor. This, he argued, was the trait of being able to unremittingly work hard to attain goals that one seeks. In further establishing the importance of continuance in hard work, Morgan and Hull (1926) pointed out that lacking persistence while having ability can often be a less favorable position than having reduced natural ability with a strong work ethic.

After this history of early twentieth century research regarding success being the result of persistence and perseverance, the twenty-first century saw the emergence of psychological grit. In their pioneering study, Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) not only defined grit as the ability to persevere through difficult situations in order to achieve goals over the long term, but they also created a grit scale (Grit-O) that served as the principal instrument upon which future studies were based. Duckworth and colleagues (2007) found that grit was a significant ingredient in the successes of people from a multiplicity of backgrounds, including National Spelling Bee champions, undergraduate students in elite universities, and also military officials. The scholars also posited that grit was a more robust explanatory variable vis-à-vis the achievement of success than both intelligence quotient (IQ) and Big Five Conscientiousness, which is characterized by self-discipline and dutifulness.

Further studies on grit were focused on the realm of educational success. Duckworth and Seligman (2005) conducted longitudinal research with 140 eighth graders in an effort to determine the relationship between self-discipline and their academic achievement. To this end, the scholars employed the Eysenck Junior Impulsiveness scale and the Tangney, Baumeister and Boone (2004) self-control scale to operationalize self-discipline. Utilizing a sample of 140 students, the authors found that even after holding achievement test scores constant, self-discipline maintained explanatory power with respect to academic achievement. The scholars also noted that self-discipline was vital in crafting a theoretical explanation as to why some students improve their academic performance and why others stagnate academically.

Similarly, grit has also been shown to be effective in explaining the success of participants in the National Spelling Bee. Duckworth, Kirby, Tsukayama, Berstein, and Ericsson (2011) conducted a longitudinal study in which they attempted to decipher which preparatory methods were more likely to result in success. When preparing for the Spelling Bee, there are three methods that can be utilized: leisurely reading, engaging in quizzing, and practicing in a deliberate and concentrated manner. Deliberate and dedicated practice is the method shown to be most useful in preparation, but it is widely considered boring. The scholars found that grittier participants in their study were more likely to engage in the boring practice over a long period of time, which was necessary to improve their performances in the Spelling Bee.

Research has also been done on grit and minority populations within the context of academics. Strayhorn (2014) used a sample of 140 black college male students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs), a noted subgroup with academic vulnerabilities. His research found that although grit has less explanatory power than the previous grades that students had received in their academics, grit still had a positive relationship with increased GPAs.

In another study addressing grit and an academically vulnerable subgroup, Vela, Lu, Lenz, and Hinjosa (2015) conducted a study with a sample of 128 students. Using the Hope Scale and the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ), Vela and colleagues found that hope was associated with higher levels of grit, whereas, conversely, meaning in life was negatively associated with grit. Due to its negative association with grit, the authors of the study maintained that the search for meaning in life can be problematic and students would be better served by deriving life meaning internally.

Although many studies on grit have been conducted within the American context, it is important to note that some studies have occurred internationally. In an effort to determine the role of grit and other personality factors in the attainment of academic success, namely strong achievement in the United Kingdom's General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) scores, Rimfeld, Kovas, Dale and Plomin (2016) employed the Twins Early Development Study (TEDS) with 4,642 participants. The authors found that grit has some explanatory power with respect to academic achievement, but a marked reduction in this explanatory power occurred when other personality factors were held constant, such as Big Five conscientiousness. Interestingly, the scholars maintain that the conceptual difference between grit and Big Five conscientiousness is miniscule at best.

Grit on the Asian continent has also been a subject of empirical research. In their study on female Korean university students, Hwang, Lim, and Ha (2017) sampled 509 people and with the utilization of structural equation modeling, the scholars were able to determine that grit had a positive relationship with academic achievement and a negative relationship with poor academic performance. The scholars, like many others before them, also noted that there are theoretical links between Big Five conscientiousness, self-control, and psychological grit.

Much of the research on grit has been done in order to make key theoretical distinctions between grit and its conceptual relative, self-control. In the criminological context, self-control, as formulated by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), is essentially the ability to avoid engagement in enticing but injurious behaviors. As a result, self-control and self-discipline often are treated as twin concepts. That notwithstanding, according to Duckworth and Gross (2014), despite the similarities between self-control and grit, they do not simply measure the same concepts. Importantly, Duckworth and Gross (2014) note that the possession of high self-control does not instantaneously translate to a high score on the grit scale. Self-control suppresses injurious behavior, but grit is the necessary engine to propel a person towards the accomplishment of their long-term goals.

In an attempt to determine the precise theoretical mechanisms involved in the relationship between self-control and psychological grit, Galla and Duckworth (2015) used a sample of 2,274 across six different studies. The scholars found that not only does self-control have significant benefits vis-à-vis the abjuring of injurious behaviors, but it also can help with the development of favorable habits. The study was important because self-control is traditionally conceptualized as a trait that encourages behavior-avoidance, not necessarily a trait that can also encourage the creation and continuation with positive traits.

Oriol, Miranda, Oyanedel, and Torres (2017) also engaged in research on the link between self-control and grit in the Peruvian context. In their study, Oriol and colleagues utilized a sample of 5,681 students in primary schools and a secondary school sample that consisted of 10,017 students. The results of their structural equation modeling indicated that both grit and self-control were relevant predictors of academic success across both primary and secondary school students. Secondary school students, however, had lower grit scores when compared to primary school students.

In addition to studies on the educational success of students, grit research has been focused on the pedagogical success of educators. Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth (2014) engaged in research to determine whether the pedagogical improvement of inexperienced teachers was influenced by the possession of psychological grit. The results of their study of teachers in lower socioeconomic status areas showed that grit had significant explanatory power with respect to teacher success. Vitaly, the study also showed that greenhorn teachers with gritty resumes were more likely to persevere and become efficacious teachers in the long run.

As the literature to this point has highlighted, psychological grit enjoys a lot of empirical support in the realm of educational and pedagogical success. That notwithstanding, there is some scholarship that disputes the effectiveness of grit, particularly as it relates to educational achievement. For instance, Ivcevic and Brackett (2014) conducted in research to ascertain the psychological traits that are most important vis-à-vis academic performance. Utilizing a sample of 213 students with a hierarchical regression model design, the scholars point out that once Big Five conscientiousness and emotional control were held constant, grit was incapable of predicting academic success.

Another concern that scholarship has highlighted is the operationalization of grit, namely the Grit-S scale. In their study on grit in the Philippines, Datu, Valdez, and King (2016) attempted and failed to validate Duckworth and Quinn's (2009) scale. The scholars make the argument that grit as it currently exists is insufficient, and it would be improved if grit were separated into two distinct categories. The first, the scholars argue, would measure consistent interest. The second would measure the perseverance of effort.

Grit was also shown to be ineffective in a study on science students' success. Bazalais, Lemay, and Doleck (2016) utilized a sample of college physics students to determine the role of grit on their success. After controlling for high school GPA and gender, the scholars noted that grit did not effectively predict academic performance, but high school GPA was a positive predictor of academic performance in college.

Suggested Theoretical Extensions to Grit

Although psychological grit is an inarguably useful theoretical concept, as evidenced by its contemporary popularity, it is not without theoretical shortcomings. Improving its theoretical shortcomings would enable it to be used to explain myriad social phenomena. First, it is critical for grit to no longer be viewed as a psychological trait that can only lead to positive results. Grit would become much more useful if conceptualized as being contextually beneficial, as opposed to the current presupposition that all gritty people are necessarily prosocial. Grit, this paper will hypothesize, can be found in people who resist prosocial norms.

Integral to the understanding of grit is that people who possess this characteristic can engage in an activity over a long period of time, but little in the literature actually fleshes out what constitutes a long period of time. The concept of a long period of time is relative. Rather than considering perseverance as something that people have or do not have, it would be more useful to consider perseverance as existing on a continuum. It simply would not be an accurate way to measure perseverance by suggesting that those who accomplish their goals can be considered perseverant, whereas those who worked hard toward their goals, and eventually gave up can be considered completely deficient in perseverance. To this end, the concept of grit could be improved with the understanding that there is such a phenomenon as a grit breaking point.

The idea of the *grit breaking point* would entail that there are some subjective obstacles that people experience that simply cannot be overcome by improved grit. The fact that gritty people are generally more capable of overcoming seemingly intractable obstacles in order to accomplish long-term goals becomes nonsensical if it evolves into the idea that grit is a trait that makes it impossible to fail in the accomplishment of long-term goals. The idea of the grit breaking point is simply based on the understanding that grit can be depleted.

Also important to the improvement of grit would be the introduction of the concept of *grit-resistant obstacles*. Grit-resistant obstacles are essentially obstacles that are impervious to the application of grit. An instructive example would be the case of someone who has significant developmental issues but wishes to become a medical doctor. It does not matter how gritty such a person is. His or her developmental issues would present a grit-resistant obstacle to the long-term goal of becoming a practicing medical doctor. Similarly, a gritty decathlete who has a major accident and becomes a quadriplegic cannot be said to be devoid of grit because he or she can no longer reach their lifelong goal of becoming an Olympic medalist. It makes much more sense to understand that the state of being quadriplegic presents a grit-resistant obstacle to that lifelong goal.

The idea of *grit-independent goals* also makes sense theoretically and can meaningfully improve the concept of grit. Examples of grit-independent goals can be found in the political realm. Presidential candidates who lose elections, for instance, cannot be said to have lost their elections because they were grit-deficient. The U.S. presidential election of 2016 provides the most glaring example. Hillary Clinton had double the amount of spending that the Trump campaign had, and although she won the popular vote, she did not win the election (see Pramuk, 2016). Fundamentally, being elected U.S. president is a grit-independent goal inasmuch as the public votes for candidates for a whole host of different reasons, and the result is out of the hands of the candidates themselves. While it is the case that many of the qualifications one needs to be an attractive presidential candidate require some level of grit, such as graduating from Ivy League schools and obtaining advanced degrees, the ultimate decision relies on the public vote, which does not reward the grittiest.

Another example of a grit-independent goal is the achievement of a tenure-track professorship. Given the structural changes to the university, many tenure-track positions are vanishing in many disciplines. As a result, many PhDs who work hard to attain their degrees have to find alternatives to academia, rather than fulfilling their long-term dream of becoming professors (see Bartram, 2018 and the “quit lit” genre). The acquisition of a tenure-track position is a grit-independent goal given that even being chosen is out of the hands of the individual with goal and entirely in the hands of capricious search committees.

Grit-independent goals can also be found in the criminological realm. Crimes of fraud, particularly e-mail phishing scams, are not reliant upon the grit of the offender. One simply is reliant on people falling for the phishing scam in order for the long-term goal of becoming rich from it to actually occur. This makes the goal independent from the activity at hand.

While grit has a lot of positive attributes and it has been shown to be correlated with a lot of success, it is also important to note that grit can also be found in people who do not achieve momentous success. It is entirely plausible that someone could be gritty, and their long-term goal could simply be to fend for themselves and their families over a long period of time, despite multiple barriers. Understanding that grit can be present in people who do not value the attainment of social positions that are most revered by bourgeois society is a key point to remember.

Grit and Criminology

Background

Before discussing the manifold ways in which psychological grit can be used to improve criminological inquiry, it is vital to discuss the research that has been conducted that is adjacent to grit and crime. This essentially is research on self-efficacy and crime. In their study on self-efficacy, Brezina and Topalli (2012) set out to determine whether or not self-efficacy has any theoretical importance as an independent variable in the study of crime. Their study showed that not only were criminals found to have a high degree of self-efficacy, but they also found that criminals who were found to have high levels of self-efficacy were less likely to show criminal desistance. Also important, is that criminals who were not successful, as evidenced by their contact with law enforcement, still had a high degree of self-efficacy. This study is significant as it shows that contemporary

psychological variables can actually aid criminological understanding. However, psychological grit can improve on this important area of research.

Similarly, self-control is a vital theoretical relative of psychological grit. Self-control has been a staple of theoretical inquiry in criminology since the emergence of Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) general theory of crime (Jo & Zhang, 2014; Piquero, MacIntosh, & Hickman, 2000). Central to the general theory of crime is the notion that crime can be best explained by the chief independent variable of low self-control. Said differently, individuals with low self-control are likely to engage in criminal behavior and their deviant analogues. The lack of self-control, according to Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) is a factor that works in tandem with opportunity. When opportunities for criminal behavior present themselves, people with low self-control are likely to indulge, whereas high self-control provides a buffer against such engagement. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) postulated that self-control is an ability that develops in preadolescence, and once formed becomes largely invulnerable to change. However, this particular line of argument has been questioned by both the criminological (see Turner & Piquero, 2002) and the psychological scholarship (see Caspi & Roberts, 2001).

Integral to the development of high self-control, according to Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), is the presence of efficacious parenting. The scholars note that there are three critical elements of parenting that leads to the development of high self-control in preadolescence. The first element is the behavioral monitoring of the child. The second element is the recognition of deviant conduct. The third and final element is appropriate punishment as a response to the deviant behavior.

The general theory of crime enjoys a significant amount of empirical support, and its survival after multiple tests makes it one of criminology's most important and valid theories (see Burt, Sweeten, & Simons, 2014; Burton, Evans, Cullen, Olivares, & Dunaway, 1999; Hay, 2001; Meldrum & Hay, 2012; Meldrum, Young, & Weerman, 2009; Piquero & Bouffard, 2007; Piquero & Tibbetts, 1996; Sellers, 1999). Pratt and Cullen (2000) conducted one of the most significant meta-analyses on the general theory of crime in order to determine the empirical validity of the theory. Not only did they find that self-control theory is empirically valid, but they also found that its validity held across a diversity of samples. The scholars, however, noted that the general theory was less likely to be valid in studies that employed longitudinal research designs, as opposed to the findings in cross-sectional studies.

Although the general theory of crime has a lot of empirical support, it is also vital to note that there are categories of criminal behavior that are better explained by other theoretical perspectives. Because the lion's share of criminological research is focused on street crimes, it makes sense that the general theory of crime is well-supported. However, contra Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), self-control is not the most important variable for explaining *all* kinds of crime. Self-control has not been found to be an effective explanatory variable with respect to corporate crime (Simpson & Piquero, 2002).

Fundamentally, psychological grit can be an important mediator variable that can help enrich and refine criminological theory. The next section of the paper will address some of the criminological theories that marry well with psychological grit.

Classic and General Strain Theories

According to Duckworth and Quinn (2009) grit can be best defined as the ability to continue to pursue long-term goals despite encountering difficulties and obstacles along the way. This definition of grit pairs well with strain/anomie theories inasmuch as these theories are focused on the negative feelings and behaviors that occur when people experience blocked goals (see Merton, 1938; Cohen, 1955; and Cloward and Ohlin, 1960).

While classic strain theory focused mostly on economic strain as the cause of criminal behavior, theoretical criticism (see Hirschi, 1969; Kornhauser, 1978) led to the development of general strain theory which broadened the possibility for criminal behavior to be caused by noneconomic, subjective strains. This broadening of strain theory by Agnew (1992) allowed for the

possibility to consider familial, relational, scholastic, and other strains as causal elements in criminal behavior. To this end, Agnew (1992) theorized that there are three significant constituents of strain. The first is failing to achieve goals that one values positively. The second is the subtraction of stimuli that one positively values. The third is the materialization of stimuli that is noxious or negative. It is vital to consider how grit can be involved in the further development of general strain theory. In general strain theory, strain is hypothesized to lead to negative affective states, and those negative affective states could result in either criminal coping or prosocial coping, depending on the presence or absence of mediating factors. Research has shown that mediating factors, such as religion, can affect whether or not someone engages in criminal coping (see Jang & Johnson, 2003, 2005; Piquero and Sealock, 2000).

It is vital to consider the possibility that grit could lead to criminal coping in those who have antisocial cognition, and it could also lead to prosocial coping in those who have prosocial cognition. In essence, socialization and peer groups matter. In a grit study, Singh and Jha (2008) discovered that grit is negatively related to negative affect, whereas grit was positively related to positive affect. This study with a student sample was not conducted with respect to general strain theory. The area is ripe for possible research in the future. Agnew (2006) did not address grit and crime, but he did note that low self-efficacy can be related to criminal behavior given that people who believe that they cannot accomplish their goals on their own are likely to look to crime as a solution to their strains. An area for future research is testing whether or not grit explains the behaviors of active offenders.

Deterrence Theories

Deterrence theory is a significant theory in the history of criminological thought and can be traced back to the utilitarian founding of the field (Paternoster, 2010). The crux of deterrence theory is the notion that the desirability of criminal behavior can be lessened by the presence of sanction threats and the timely utilization of sanctions (Andenaes, 1974). When considering deterrence theory, there are three main elements that are considered: swiftness (or celerity) of punishment, certainty of punishment, and severity of punishment (Bentham, 1789/1988; Gibbs, 1975). Integral to the concept of deterrence is that humans are rational beings who operate in decidedly self-interested ways. Since crime is committed by people who make the personal calculation that the benefits outweigh the costs, it stands to reason that crime can be curbed by the establishment of disincentives to engage in such behavior. The deterrence perspective has spawned other important contemporary rationality-based theories, such as rational choice theory (Cornish & Clark, 1986) and routine activities theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

The fact that recidivism is a reality within the criminal justice system is evidentiary support for the idea that the assumptions of deterrence theory do not always hold. Some individuals clearly see sanction threats and sanctions as obstacles that they need to overcome. Grit, then, can be a powerful explanatory tool to address why certain people continue in criminal behavior despite the existence of strong sanction threats, and in some instances the experiencing of strong sanctions. Jacobs' (2010) analysis discussing the important distinction between deterrence and deterrability is instructive here. Humans have differing degrees of deterrability. Those with strong antisocial cognition are less likely to be deterred than those without such strong antisocial cognition. Similarly, bounded rationality is an important factor when discussing deterrence theory. Bounded rationality is the idea that real-world decision-making is not an objective process where everybody makes the most rational decisions, as there are a multitude of factors that influence decisions being made, including epistemic and cognitive limitations of the actor.

It is important to take into consideration that those with antisocial cognition could indeed be gritty, and as a result of this grit, see deterrence indicators—either sanction threats or actual punishment—as obstacles to overcome, as opposed to risky outcomes by which to be deterred.

Labeling Perspective

Labeling theory is a conceptual framework that was born out of the literature on symbolic interactionism. Scholars have noted that symbolic interactionism is based on the idea that collective understandings and interpretations of symbols are critical to both social interaction and personal identity (Mead, 1918; Blumer, 1969). Drawing on the early theoretical work of symbolic interactionists, labeling theory posited that human behavior can be attributed to the social labels that people have been given.

Lemert's (1951, 1967) work was instrumental in the development of labeling theory. Lemert noted that there are two kinds of deviance: primary deviance and secondary deviance. Primary deviance is the antisocial behavior committed by an individual, which is commonplace. Secondary deviance, by contrast, is committed when an individual adopts the self-identity of a criminal after being labeled, as thus commits criminal behavior as a consequence of that self-identification.

A principal reason for labeling becoming a part of criminology is due to the work of Becker (1963). Building on the theoretical work of Lemert, Becker made the argument that there are three important stages in the making of a criminal. First, he argues that the criminal conduct takes place. This conduct does not necessarily have to be calculated and intentional. Second, Becker posits that the person who breaks the law is apprehended and labeled. This process of labeling leads to the labeled individual developing both the public image of a criminal, but his label also affects his or her sense of self, and the criminal identity becomes an integral part of an individual's self-identity. Finally, once the person has been successfully labeled as a criminal, and both the person's self and public identity is marked by this label, the labeled person begins to become part of deviant groups, which entails adopting the criminal rationalizations and motives of their fellow group members.

Importantly, labeling demonstrates how social control can engender increased criminality (Bernburg & Krohn, 2003; Wellford & Triplett, 1993). Rather than being a traditional criminological theory that explains the etiology of crime, labeling is simply effective at explaining continuation in criminal behavior, as it is assumed that crime happens. However, this widely regarded drawback of the theory means that it works well with psychological grit, inasmuch as grit explains the *continuation* of behavior for the purpose of long-term goal attainment, and it is not so much concerned with why people start certain goals. Given is the idea that everyone can commence actions to reach a certain goal, but few are able to survive the obstacles in one's way to attain those goals. Similarly, labeling theory assumes that primary deviance is an unremarkable occurrence that does not need explanation. Secondary deviance, by contrast, needs explanation. People with antisocial cognition and grit could conceivably engage in secondary deviance as a result of their gritty attitude.

Considering Braithwaite's (1989) reintegrative shaming with respect to grit could also be useful. Braithwaite argued that shame is an efficacious punishment when it is utilized for the purpose of both correcting negative behavior and with the ultimate goal of the offender rejoining society with a prosocial disposition. By contrast, Braithwaite maintained that the kind of shaming that merely labels offenders with no effort to reintegrate offenders to society is likely to lead to continued criminal behavior. Labels, one could argue, calcify antisocial cognition and lead to the gritty pursuit of antisocial goals.

Sherman's (1993) defiance theory is also concerned with shame as a punishment. In order for defiance to occur, Sherman hypothesized that there are four vital elements. First, the punishment must be construed as unfair. Second, the person being sanctioned must have inadequate social bonds, particularly to the sanctioning party. Third, the offender construes the sanction as an attempt to anathematize their person, as opposed to condemning an illegal act that the person committed. The final characteristic that must be in place is that the offender has no willingness to accept the shame of the sanction. Some people with calcified antisocial cognition simply do not have the willingness (or, in some instances, the capacity) to feel shame for their behaviors, and criminogenic grit could be a meaningful mediator that explains the development of defiance and continuance in criminality.

Social Disorganization and Collective Efficacy

Social disorganization theory is an essential and unique theory in criminology for the mere fact that it centers the environment in the etiology of crime. Although most people cite Shaw and McKay (1942) when discussing the genealogy of social disorganization, it is critical to highlight that earlier Chicago School scholars, such as Thomas and Znaniecki (1996) and Park, Burgess, and McKenzie (1925), in the early 20th century were instrumental in developing the groundwork for the theoretical perspective. Fundamental to social disorganization is the idea that poverty, racial heterogeneity, and residential instability are factors endemic to socially disorganized neighborhoods, which breeds criminality. Collective efficacy, as promoted by Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997), is the notion that people in socially organized neighborhoods have both the willingness and the capacity to intervene in order to prevent crime and deviance in the neighborhood. When collective efficacy exists in a particular neighborhood, the likelihood for crime to occur is lower than when it does not exist in a particular place.

Given the manifest theoretical relationship between collective efficacy and self-efficacy, and also the relationship between self-efficacy and grit, it is conceivable that people who create neighborhoods with high collective efficacy are themselves gritty people. Another way in which grit could be related to social disorganization is the fact that immigrants are prosocial people with many attributes that encompass the psychological phenomenon of grit (Amundson, Yeung, Sun, Chan, & Cheng, 2011). These gritty, prosocial people are the ones who essentially create the phenomenon of residential instability. Immigrants who are poor move to the zone of transition, but as they rise socioeconomically, they move out of the zone of transition towards the suburbs creating residentially instable neighborhoods. Lastly, people who have antisocial cognition but are stuck in neighborhoods that are socially disorganized would be more likely to live a life of crime within their given context.

Life-Course Criminology

Life-course criminology has always been a rich area of criminological thought. Integral to the idea of life course criminology is the notion that different people have different offending trajectories. One of the strongest findings vis-à-vis developmental criminology is the existence of an age-crime curve, which means the criminality decreases with age (Farrington, 1986; Moffitt, 1993; Tremblay & Nagin, 2005; Quetelet, 1984/1833). Moffitt's (1993) contribution to the life-course perspective includes the developmental taxonomy, where she argues that there are adolescence-limited offenders and life-course persistent offenders. Adolescence-limited offenders are those who engage in criminal behavior throughout their youth but knife off from criminality as they approach adulthood and become more bonded to society. Life-course persistent offenders are those who engage in crime across their life span with no sign of desistance. Moffitt also proposes that there are people called abstainers who do not ever engage in criminality at any point in the life course. The idea that life-course persistent offenders have antisocial cognition is not controversial (Moffitt, 2006), but perhaps such individuals also have criminogenic grit that could lead to their persistent criminality. Similarly, given the general positivity of grit as a psychological trait, it stands to reason that the kinds of people who are abstainers are likely to have high prosocial grit, and people who knife off from criminal behavior may develop prosocial grit as they approach adulthood.

Another critical theoretical perspective in life-course criminology is the age-graded theory of crime proffered by Sampson and Laub (1993). Fundamentally, Sampson and Laub pushed back against the concept that the etiology of crime is primarily due to invariant individual characteristics. Rather, the scholars make the argument that critical life changes, or *turning points*, are critical to understanding why some people desist from criminality and others persist in criminality. Central to their theory is the concept of social bonding. The scholars make the argument that with increased age, individuals are more likely to develop bonds to society, which protects against engagement in crime and deviance.

The concept of life-course criminology ultimately involves studying the mechanisms involved in persistence in crime, and also desistance from crime. Life-course criminology is inherently concerned with data across a long period of time. Similarly, grit is concerned with the long term. Fundamentally, psychological grit is concerned with the pursuit of long-term goals in the face of seemingly intractable obstacles. Given that persistence is integral to both ideas, it makes sense for there to be a theoretical marriage between the two areas.

Criminogenic Grit

Far too often, criminological thinking is excessively focused on criminal indolence, mainly due to the popularity—and empirical support—that the general theory of crime has enjoyed over the decades. However, while it is true that many criminals lack self-control, it is also important to note that not all criminals are shiftless and lazy. It is vital to cognize that there are some criminals, such as life-course persistent offenders, who, due to a combination of biological risk factors and environmental triggers, have been so hardened in their antisocial cognition that their goals simply do not have any orientation towards traditional prosocial achievement. There are also those who start off with a belief in their capacity to achieve within the confines of legal behavior, such as white-collar criminals, but decide that criminality is a more rational choice. All criminals are not the same, and criminological theory benefits from a more nuanced consideration of the diversity of criminal motivations and dispositions.

Criminogenic grit is the notion that there are some people who—as a result of a variety of biological, psychological, and sociological factors—are oriented towards the achievement of criminal and deviant goals, and their hard work reflects that reality. This paper has highlighted the manifold ways in which criminogenic grit can be an explanatory asset to traditional criminological theory. With respect to general strain theory, criminogenic grit in those with antisocial cognition could lead to criminal coping. With respect to deterrence theory, those with criminogenic grit could be less likely to see sanction threats as reasons to disengage and desist from criminal behavior. Instead, those with criminogenic grit could see sanction threats as obstacles to overcome. Criminogenic grit also pairs well with the labeling perspective, as labeling is concerned with what causes *continuation* in crime—i.e., secondary deviation—not necessarily any one act of primary deviance. Similarly, grit takes for granted that everybody is capable of starting to pursue a goal, but is more focused on what causes people to continue pursuing their goals when met with obstacles. Social disorganization was also discussed, and the ways in which prosocial gritty people leaving the zone of transition are partly responsible for creating the neighborhood conditions that allow for crime to thrive. Lastly, life-course criminology was addressed, and its focus on longitudinal assessment of the criminal career is perfectly suited to be analyzed with grit in mind, which is also concerned with results across a long period of time.

Conclusion

Fundamentally, it is vital to note that criminological theory has always benefited from scholars being cognizant of the developments from other fields of study that are related to human behavior (Osgood, 1998). Likewise, Williams (1999) has noted the fundamental importance of “look[ing] for similarities *and* differences between theories, to integrate materials from various approaches and to use those materials in ways that seem reasonable (rather than only the way that the original theorist used them)” (p. 12). Psychological grit increasing in theoretical popularity within psychology can also be useful for criminological thought. Rather than conceiving of psychological grit as a phenomenon that is wholly positive, it makes more theoretical sense to understand psychological grit contextually. This paper advances the notion that psychological grit can lead to societal positives when attached to those with prosocial cognition, but could also lead to criminal behavior when attached to those with antisocial cognition.

Criminogenic grit, which is essentially the idea that grit can be found in people with antisocial cognition and dispositions and thus lead to criminal behavior, is a line of theoretical reasoning that ought to be given more attention in the field. Similarly, the idea that grit can be found in people who are prosocial, thus making them less likely to engage in criminal behavior is also a theoretical point that needs further consideration and research. Once antisocial cognition is remedied, grit could be a factor that improves rehabilitative techniques, curbs recidivism, and perhaps aids successful reentry. Considering the fact that many of the most popular theories of criminology have goals, blockages, and obstacles as themes, grit is a variable with extraordinary explanatory utility. The potential avenues for future research are abundant.

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