

# Chapter 10

## The Life Course

Why do most individuals increase their level of offending during adolescence?

- Biological and social changes associated with - adolescence lead to:
  - An increase in strain
  - A reduction in control
  - An increase in the social learning for crime
- Certain biological and social factors cause some individuals to experience, over the course of their lives
- Biological changes associated with adolescence
  - The **Prefrontal Cortex** is still maturing
    - This is responsible for decision making, impulse control and reasoning
    - This is our “super ego”
    - The prefrontal cortex is the last part of the brain to develop fully
  - Executive Functions
    - Abilities that support voluntary goal directed behavior and include sustained attention, response planning, retaining plans in working memory, self monitoring, attention shifting
    - Executive function is supported by exerting cognitive control
  - The limbic system becomes more active during adolescence
    - This is responsible for regulating emotions and behavior
    - This results in a heightened emotional sensitivity
  - Adolescent males experienced levels of certain hormones, like testosterone
- Social changes associated with adolescence
  - Adolescence is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood
  - Adolescents are given some but not all of the privileges and responsibilities of adults
    - More autonomy than children
    - More material resources than children
    - Higher status than children
    - More responsibility for managing their own behaviors and relationships
    - More responsibility for their educational and career goals
- Reduction in control
  - Adolescents may also experience a reduction in their stake in conformity
  - Disputes with elders over issues involving the privileges and responsibilities of adolescence often lead to weakening ties
  - Often become less likely to condemn delinquency and exercise self control

- Increase in social learning for crime
  - Adolescents spend more time with their peers
  - Adolescents place more importance on peer activities
  - More loyal to their peers than are children and adults
  - Adolescents have greater freedom to associate with delinquent peers
    - They are subject to less direct control than children
    - They spend more time on the street
    - They attend large secondary schools with delinquent peers
  - Delinquent peers possess many of the adult privileges they desire
- Increase in strain
  - Adolescents experience more strain than children and adults
  - Adolescents are more likely to have trouble achieving their goals
  - More likely to experience the loss of positive stimuli or presentation of negative stimuli
  - Live in a larger and less protected social world than children and adults
    - Secondary school is more impersonal than elementary school
    - Much of the interaction with peers occurs away from adults
  - Adolescents are less able to cope with the strains they experience legally
    - Have fewer coping skills and resources than adults
- Theory
  - Control theory – adolescence leads to a reduction in control, especially direct control
  - Strain Theory – Adolescents are more likely to cope with strain through delinquency
  - Social learning of Crime Theory – Adolescence is associated with an increased association of delinquent peers

Why do a small percentage of individuals offend at high rates over much of their lives?

- About 4 - 10% of the population will become life course persistent offenders
- Life course persistent offenders differ from adolescence-limited offenders in that they tend to suffer from many related problems early in life
- LCPO's have traits conducive to crime:
  - They have low self control
  - They are irritable
  - They experience poor parenting
- These problems persist over time, contributing to additional problems later in life
- Traits conducive to Crime
  - Tend to be irritable and low in self-control
  - Develop these personality traits early in life
  - Certain biological factors increase the likelihood of developing these traits