The development and implementation of responsive treatment programs for serious juvenile offenders requires a clear understanding of the causes and correlates of delinquency and related problem behaviors. Although low levels of offending are relatively typical during adolescence, a smaller group of offenders has more serious criminal involvement (Elliott, 1994). It is this group of offenders described by Williams, Tuthill, and Lio in Chapter 1 who are the primary focus of this volume and whose delinquency is linked to a multitude of causes. As illustrated by the all-to-common experiences of one young man,
highlighted above, these causes include individual factors (e.g., "bad decisions"), family relationships (e.g., paternal absence), peer influences (e.g., "kickin' it with the homies"), and exposure to violence in the community and the home.

Although there is some debate regarding the most important causes of serious juvenile offending and associated mechanisms of influence, a general consensus prevails that no single cause is sufficient; rather, it is the accumulation of risk factors over time and across contexts that most directly leads to offending (Agnew, 2005; Chung & Steinberg, 2006). A general consensus also prevails that offending is the result of the complex interplay of nature and nurture—whatever predispositions toward violence or criminality may be written on an individual's biological birth certificate, these unfold within a specific environment that both shapes and is shaped by them (Guerra & Knox, 2002; National Research Council, 2000; Niehoff, 1999).

The scope and complexity of this back-and-forth process of development and how it can lead to serious patterns of offending would seem to make it difficult, at best, to delineate clear guidelines for treatment linked to specific causes. Yet, this mandate has shaped juvenile justice practice at least since the early 1990s, when Andrews and colleagues articulated the need principle of effective juvenile justice practice; that is, treatment should focus on risk factors associated with offending behavior, labeled criminogenic needs (for a review see Andrews & Bonta, 2006). An important contribution of this approach was to focus efforts directly on risk for offending rather than risk for any type of problematic developmental outcome (although, as Siggins and Seidlitz note in Chapter 6, even this may be difficult in systems tasked with the overall well-being of youth in custody). Further, a distinction was made between static risk factors that could not be changed (such as parental criminality) and dynamic risk factors that could be changed, and, if changed, should reduce subsequent offending. From a practical standpoint, this framework requires precise specification and assessment of malleable risk factors for offending and the development of corresponding treatment programs.

Fortunately, just as juvenile justice practice was emphasizing risk for offending as the basis for treatment, research on the causes and correlates of delinquency was also on the upswing. In addition to a host of cross-sectional studies looking at risk factors and delinquency, several major longitudinal studies were yielding important results (see Thornberry & Krohn, 2003, for reports from several of these studies). A number of meta-analytic reviews also were conducted, highlighting the relative salience of individual and contextual risk predictors across childhood and adolescence (e.g., Lipsey, 1992; Lipsey & Derzon, 1998). Corresponding efforts examined protective factors that buffered risk, although it was often unclear if protective factors were measured as independent effects (i.e., predicting lower levels of offending) or as indirect moderators of risk (i.e., decreasing the likelihood of delinquency, given an identified risk). In any case, lists of risk and protective factors for offending were developed and circulated among researchers, practitioners, and juvenile justice agencies as guides for the design and implementation of interventions.

As risk and protective factor models of antisocial behavior matured, increasing emphasis was placed on the ecology of development and the need to develop multicomponent programs to address multiple risk factors across multiple contexts simultaneously (Metropolitan Area Child Study, 2002; Kerns & Prinz, 2002; Tolan, Guerra, & Kendall, 1995). Still, although ecological models emphasized both personal and contextual predictors of risk, they did not specifically consider "person in context" interactions focused on how behavior unfolds over time as part of the regular and ongoing interplay between individual action and social intervention in daily life (Raudenbush, 2005). They also did not distinguish adequately among risk for different aspects of delinquent careers, including onset, course, and desistance.

Over the last decade or so, developmental life-course (DLC) theories of delinquency have integrated the risk-factor prevention and treatment paradigm with research on features of criminal career trajectories as well as the effects of life transitions on offending (Farrington, 2005). As Thornberry (2005, p. 157) notes, "Driven in part by the empirical insights of descriptive longitudinal studies, in part by theoretical dissatisfaction with traditional models, and in part by a burgeoning interdisciplinary approach to the study of crime and delinquency, developmental models have greatly expanded the reach of our understanding of crime and delinquency." What has emerged is a rich portrait of how delinquency is intertwined with human development, with implications for treatment that go beyond the delineation of risk and protective factors.

Building on the last several decades of research on delinquency and antisocial behaviors, we begin this chapter with an illustrative review of the causes of juvenile offending using a risk- and protective-factor framework. We also briefly address the treatment implications of this framework. Next we turn to a discussion of DLC theory, noting how this approach highlights the reciprocal nature of person–environment influences on offending over time. As we point out, DLC
theories emphasize the importance of moving beyond considerations of prevalence and frequency to a careful analysis of predictors of early delinquency (onset), length of delinquent career (duration), increases in delinquency over time (escalation), and moving away from criminal activity (desistance). We conclude with a discussion of the next steps—that is, moving beyond a traditional risk framework to integrate the assumptions of DLC theories into treatment programs for juvenile offenders.

A Risk- and Protective-Factor Framework for Understanding Juvenile Offending

As discussed throughout this volume, it has generally been acknowledged that treatment should be geared particularly toward the relatively small group of juveniles that commits the most significant proportion of serious offenses. Knowledge of the characteristics that distinguish this group of offenders from other youth is essential for the development of programs to alter these characteristics (as well as to identify, for targeted prevention programs, groups of youth most likely to offend). A large volume of research has examined the correlates and predictors of offending, often labeled risk and protective factors, in cross-sectional and longitudinal studies. This research examines prediction of delinquency onset or delinquent behavior at a specific point (or points) in time.

Risk factors are characteristics that increase the likelihood that a young person will engage in delinquent behavior. In contrast, protective factors decrease the likelihood of engaging in delinquent behavior and/or buffer the effects of known risk. A risk- and protective-factor approach is consistent with public health models of disease and prevention. For example, looking at heart disease, children of parents with heart disease are more likely to develop it themselves; however, exercise can buffer the correlation between family history and heart disease as well as decrease the likelihood of heart disease without considering family history (American Heart Association, 2007). Relevant to juvenile offending, association with antisocial peers is one of the most robust risk factors for delinquency (Brendgen, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 2000; Chung & Steinberg, 2006; Haynie, 2002). On the other hand, parental monitoring is a protective factor because it is associated with a decreased likelihood of offending and may also serve to buffer the effects of antisocial friends (Crosnoe, Erickson, & Dornbush, 2002; Gorman-Smith, Tolan, Loeber, & Henry, 1998). In practice, many risk and protective factors are simply opposite ends of a continuum; for instance, high parental monitoring can reduce delinquency, whereas low parental monitoring can increase it.

Most listings of risk and protective factors include dozens of predictors. For example, Agnew (2005) lists more than 30 risk factors that have relatively moderate-to-large direct effects on delinquency and crime. At the individual level, modifiable risk factors for delinquency include impulsivity, hyperactivity, attention deficits, low ability to learn from punishment, sensation seeking, irritability, low empathy, poor social problem-solving skills, and beliefs supporting crime. At the family level, these include family conflict, child abuse, negative parent–child bonding, low supervision and monitoring, and low social support. At the school level, risk factors include poor academic performance, negative bonding to school, and low educational goals. At the peer level, these include association with delinquent peers, gang membership, and unstructured and unsupervised activities with peers.

In Chapter 12 of this volume, Hoge and Robertson discuss individual and contextual predictors of risk in more detail, with particular reference to gender differences in the prevalence of risk factors and the processes by which they influence delinquency. In this chapter, we focus on how knowledge of risk and protective factors can be integrated into treatment for offenders, including new developments in theory that emphasize a life-course perspective and the corresponding implications for practice.

Summarizing the risk- and protective-factor research in order to make recommendations for “best bets” for treatment has proved challenging. It is often difficult to compare findings from studies with diverse samples, differences in timing of measurement, and inclusion of outcome measures of delinquency that range from less serious forms of problem behavior (e.g., initiation of smoking) to extremely serious forms of violence (e.g., homicide). Nevertheless, these efforts have culminated in relatively long lists of risk and protective factors, as illustrated above, that have been infused into juvenile justice assessment and practice. As discussed by Hoge in Chapter 3 of this volume, commonly used assessments for juveniles include risk- and protective-factor profiles designed to guide treatment planning. The literature on risk factors has also been used to guide the development of interventions targeting one or more potentially changeable risk or protective factors within individuals (e.g., cognitive-behavioral programs targeting individual cognitions) or contexts (e.g., family interventions designed to facilitate more effective family functioning and parental involvement).

Our understanding of risk for delinquency and related implications for treatment has been further refined through reviews and meta-
analyses that have identified and provided a rank ordering of the most robust predictors of specific types of offending (e.g., serious and violent delinquency; Lipsey & Derzon, 1998). An important advance has been the inclusion of age comparisons to examine the relative strength of the main predictors at different ages. This advance is particularly relevant for treatment because programs must not only be age-appropriate in content, but must target risk factors for a given age group most linked to adolescent delinquency.

One line of investigation that is centrally important to understanding delinquency has emphasized the contribution of early antisocial behavior to later delinquency during the adolescent and young-adult years. A substantial body of research suggests that youth who begin their offending careers at an early age are more likely to become persistent, serious offenders during adolescence and beyond. For example, based on the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study of 1,000 persons from New Zealand over a 30-year time period, Moffitt (2004) identified an early-starter, “life-course persistent” group who tended to offend more frequently, with greater behavioral diversity, and whose offending lasted well into adulthood. This pattern is hypothesized to be due, in part, to time-invariant neuropsychological traits typically manifested in cognitive deficits, difficult temperament, and hyperactivity, with the influence of these traits exacerbated by other characteristics of social contexts, such as poor parenting, disrupted social bonds, or disadvantaged social circumstances (Piquero & Moffitt, 2005).

The link between early antisocial behavior and future offending has been supported in several studies—and when compared to other predictors, it comes to the forefront. For instance, in their meta-analysis of delinquency predictors, Lipsey and Derzon (1998) found that general offenses and substance use between the ages of 6 and 11 were the two best predictors of violent or serious delinquency between the ages of 15 and 25, followed by gender (male), low socioeconomic status, and parental criminality (ranked in the second group of predictors). This finding suggests a clear prevention mandate to target early antisocial behavior and its correlates prior to adolescence. However, in practice it is often difficult to accurately identify this group for focused services (Loeber et al., 1993; Tolan, 1988). A related problem is that although child antisocial behavior is one of the best predictors of adult offending, most antisocial children still do not grow up to be antisocial adults (Robins, 1978). Nevertheless, for treatment programming it is important to bear in mind that the most serious offenders are likely to have a prior pattern of habitual antisocial behavior.

A second, late-starter “adolescent-limited” group tends to confine offending to the adolescent years. Such offending is associated with a maturity gap in which youth experience a disjunction between their biological maturation and access to more adult roles and responsibilities. It is also associated with a peer context in which offending serves to demonstrate autonomy from adults, establish status and connections with friends, and provide alternative venues to social maturation (Piquero & Moffitt, 2005). This group of offenders is believed to have fewer enduring (and often unchangeable) risk factors, such as temperamental difficulties, with risk linked more to the circumstances of contemporary adolescence. The picture of late-onset offending is one of normative exploration rather than heightened risk. Still, although their crimes may be less serious than their early-starter counterparts overall, they do account for more than 25% of the most serious crimes, suggesting the importance of identifying the most proximal risk factors for both types of offenders (Elliott, 1994). It is also likely that these risk factors will increase the likelihood of delinquent offending for all youth, regardless of whether they began their careers early or are just getting started (Sampson & Laub, 2005).

Indeed, the risk factors at ages 12–14 that best predicted violent or serious delinquency at ages 15–25, as reported in the Lipsey and Derzon (1998) meta-analyses, were lack of social ties and involvement with antisocial peers, followed by a history of offenses (ranked in the second group), followed by aggression/physical violence, poor school attitude/performance, psychological difficulties, parent-child problems, and male gender (ranked in the third group). Interestingly, social influences provided the most significant contribution to future risk; these influences should be important for both early- and late-starter groups, and may be particularly important for early starters, who are more likely to be rejected by mainstream youth and gravitate toward delinquent peers (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). In any event, because treatment programs cannot undo past behavior but can only focus on preparing youth for the future, and because the scientific basis for developing unique treatments based on age of onset is limited, it may be most prudent for treatment programs to emphasize risk factors that are most proximal (i.e., close in time) and most amenable to change. However, as we shall now discuss, risk- and protective-factor models have not emphasized the development of, and desistance from, offending over time, which is particularly relevant for treatment programs that attempt to “redirect” youth rather than prevent the onset of antisocial behavior. Let us now turn to a discussion of the DLC perspective.
DLC Perspectives on Juvenile Offending

The application of a risk- and protective-factor framework to prevention and intervention stressed the need to focus on dynamic risk factors (Andrews & Bonta, 2006). The term “dynamic” was used to describe the nature of a risk factor, specifically whether it could be changed, based on an association with potential for change or progress. However, we can also consider offending itself as a dynamic process involving individual development over the life course and factors that promote or interfere with criminal as well as conventional behavior. Rather than focus on variations between individuals (interindividual differences) in their frequency of offending, a more dynamic approach seeks to account for variation within individuals (intraindividual change) as they age, or put more generally, as they move through age-graded, developmental stages of the life course.

This shift in emphasis vis-à-vis understanding the causes of offending has been reflected in a burgeoning literature on DLC criminology spanning the last decade or so. This recent tradition of theoretical and empirical work builds on the risk- and protective-factor framework and also incorporates research on trajectories of criminal involvement and the role of life transitions. As such, the DLC framework has made several contributions to understanding the etiological pathways into crime as well as events along the way that can redirect those pathways into more conventional lifestyles. DLC theories have been reviewed in several recently edited books (e.g., Farrington, 2005; Thornberry, 2004), and our discussion draws from that work.

The DLC perspective emphasizes trajectories of criminal offending over time, which essentially involves tracing behavioral involvement by age. This approach marks a major shift of emphasis in criminological research that historically has been more static or fixed in nature. This recent tradition also seeks to identify the personal and contextual characteristics associated with these intraindividual changes in behavioral trajectories. The research and theoretical applications in this tradition have produced many new insights about criminal offending, but five key contributions to the understanding of such behavior are particularly relevant because of their implications for the treatment of juvenile offenders.

First, analyses of intraindividual changes in behavioral trajectories over time have highlighted important dimensions of criminal offending previously shrouded by more static accounts of interindividual differences in the frequency of criminal offending. Tracing offending over time allows the identification of behavioral onset (when it starts), duration (how long it lasts), escalation or deescalation in the frequency and seriousness of offending, and desistance from offending (when it stops). These dimensions are important because they can be linked to different risk or protective factors involved in the generation, escalation, and persistence of criminal offending as well as those connected to the prevention, deescalation, and desistance of such behavior (Farrington, 2005).

For example, family factors such as harsh and inconsistent discipline, parental neglect, or abuse may be dominant aspects associated with the onset of offending during adolescence, but their direct influence wanes in significance as youth age into adulthood, with such factors playing virtually no role at all in the reduction or termination of criminal behavior. Other life events may slow down or stop the offending behavior, such as building stakes in conformity through education, job acquisition, or integration into highly valued intimate relationships. The point is that the trend in offending can be associated with life-course developments that shift trajectories in positive or negative directions. Such issues cannot be recognized, let alone addressed, without examining criminal offending dynamically—that is, as it unfolds over the life course of individuals. An important issue for treatment of adolescent offenders thus becomes the identification of specific risk and protective factors that increase or decrease the likelihood of desistance from offending and how best to support desistance.

Second, as evidenced by the work of Moffitt (2004) and others, DLC models have sought to identify distinct groups of offenders with distinct trajectories. A correlative contribution of focusing on groups of offenders has been the utilization of sophisticated statistical methodologies for the systematic analysis of behavioral trajectories (i.e., empirically documenting offending patterns over time). For example, Nagin and Land (1993) developed an analytical technique called “group-based trajectory modeling.” The technique allows the tracking of criminal offending as youth age, but as the name implies, it also allows age-graded trajectories in such behavior that have common temporal patterns to be identified and consolidated into groupings or clusters. This statistical methodology has been used recently to identify categorical groupings of offenders in addition to the two groups discussed by Moffitt and colleagues (Nagin & Tremblay, 2005; Sampson & Laub, 2005; Thornberry, 2005).

Moreover, these analyses have also demonstrated that regardless of the intraindividual changes in criminal offending over time (i.e., when it begins, when the frequency of offending peaks, how long it lasts), all identified groups ultimately show temporal patterns of desistance from all types of serious and less serious offending. Thornberry (2005) offered one exception to this important finding. He
identified a small group of “late bloomers” whose offending escalated after the age of 18 and continued until age 23, the last year for which he had data (see also Thornberry & Krohn, 2003).

Third, analyzing behavioral trajectories through the life course permits an investigation of factors that foster or inhibit the acquisition of human capital at specific times over the course of development. The notion of human capital is used here to denote “strengths” related to the attainment of personal competencies, such as a positive identity, a sense of personal agency, self-regulation skills, social problem-solving skills, a system of prosocial normative beliefs, a hopeful future goal orientation, academic excellence, and vocational skills. Lack of these markers of human capital has been associated with increased risk for criminal behavior; at low levels, many of these characteristics have been included in lists of individual risk factors. Although a DLC perspective builds on the risk-factor research, a critical distinction is the emphasis on how and why these characteristics are associated with adjustment (at high levels) and delinquency (at low levels).

The acquisition of human capital is seen as part of the overall process of development in context, whereby successfully building human capital is critical for individuals to meet the normative expectations of their developmental stage, as defined across a range of social settings. Doing so enhances the chances of meeting the performance demands of social situations and adequately preparing for the transition into new situations and/or new stages of development in the life course. Failing to do so can result in maladaptation and insufficient preparation for the demands facing youth as they move into the next stage of the life course. For example, inadequate preparation for the transition into high school may result in poor academic performance and dropping out of school, which, in turn, can potentially restrict opportunities for further education and conventional employment. The resulting restricted opportunities may push youth into illicit activities. In some sense, a DLC model provides a developmental framework for how risk and protective factors operate over time and across settings.

Moreover, the timing of transitions in the life course is seen as crucial, with some being normative in that life events occur in an age-appropriate manner, whereas other events can be “off-time.” Normative timing can be protective, whereas being off-time can increase risk. For example, transitioning into marriage and having children or acquiring a job can be positive accomplishments in adulthood, fostering stakes in conformity or prosocial behavior (e.g., Sampson & Laub, 2005). However, if such events occur too soon in life, as in early adoles-

cence, the off-time developments can have a reverse effect, restricting access to venues of personal growth and accomplishment and inhibiting rather than fostering the acquisition of human capital and the building of stakes in conformity. Thus specific events can be either risk factors or protective factors depending on developmental timing.

Fourth, DLC places emphasis on person-in-context interactions. Granted, some accounts of persistent offending tend to minimize the influence of social context and focus more on time-invariant personal traits such as difficult temperament or low self-control (e.g., Moffitt, 2004; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). However, even among DLC investigators who acknowledge the influence of time-invariant personal traits on persistent offending, the emphasis remains on how others within social contexts respond to those traits and how those responses may undermine prosocial bonding and promote the pursuit of criminal opportunities through connections with “deviance service industries” (Hagan, 2004) and the transition into criminal lifestyles (e.g., Sampson & Laub, 2004; Matsueda & Heimer, 2004). Conversely, youth headed down the road to increasing criminal involvement can experience “turning points” that result in deescalation or termination of offending. For example, they may pursue conventional venues for prosocial lifestyles such as marriage or employment or have a window of opportunity fortuitously open in their life (Sampson & Laub, 2004, 2005).

Fifth, DLC models allow for the active role of the individual in constructing his or her social reality. Criminal activity is part of an emergent process rather than solely an outcome of identified risk, and this process hinges on personal agency. Personal agency refers to the conscious process by which people create their own lives, through the choices and actions they take, given specific opportunities and constraints. In terms of offending, the implication is that individuals do not fall into crime but make conscious decisions to follow this path. Similarly, they do not fall out of crime but actively participate in the process of desistance, or at least invest so much in conventional goals that they do not want to risk jeopardizing their investment (Sampson & Laub, 2005).

Thus DLC theories build on the risk- and protective-factor framework but also go beyond the delineation of discrete individual and contextual “variables” that correlate with, or predict, offending. This wider purview is accomplished, in part, by incorporating the notion of life-course trajectories. As we shall now discuss, DLC theories offer a new framework that can address some of the limitations of risk- and protective-factor models and provide new directions for treatment.
Contributions and Limitations of a Risk- and Protective-Factor Framework for the Treatment of Juvenile Offenders

The risk- and protective-factor framework and associated principles of juvenile justice practice (e.g., the need principle) have made significant contributions to the development of treatment programs for offenders. In particular, the inclusion of both individual and contextual risk factors and related studies demonstrating the significant influence of context during childhood and adolescence have served to underscore the role of social and community conditions in offending, providing a solid foundation for the rehabilitation philosophy emphasized throughout this volume. Further, the recognition that delinquent behavior is the result of multiple risk factors that coalesce rather than a single cause has fostered the development of programs focused on multiple risk factors within individuals (e.g., aggression replacement training; Goldstein, 2004) or specific contexts (e.g., multisystemic family therapy for family risk; Henggeler, Melton, & Smith, 1992), as well as the emergence of multicomponent, multicontext programs designed to prevent and mitigate risk across contexts (e.g., Metropolitan Area Child Study [MACS] for individual, peer, school, and family risk; Metropolitan Area Child Study Research Group, 2002).

Just as this approach has produced significant contributions in understanding factors that increase the likelihood of offending and how they can be prevented or ameliorated through prevention and treatment, important limitations remain, particularly for translation of this framework into treatment programs for juvenile offenders. These limitations include (1) the lack of a broad evidence base for effective treatment programs addressing individual and contextual risk and protective factors; (2) the infeasibility of impacting contextual risk for identified individual offenders; and (3) the lack of identified risk and protective factors specifically associated with desistance.

In Chapter 4 of this volume, Guerra, Kim, and Boxer provide clear guidelines for treatment grounded in evidence-based principles linked to identified risk for delinquency; however, the evidence base for effective programs, particularly for treatment of juvenile offenders, is relatively scant. As they note, applying strict standards for effectiveness reduces the field to a handful of programs, most of which involve both delinquents and their families. Family interventions also require that families are willing and able to participate—which may not be the case, for instance, when youth are incarcerated several hundred miles from their homes or families are simply uninterested in treatment. They are also increasingly less appropriate during the transition into adulthood, when youth are moving towards independence and starting new families of their own.

In contrast to prevention programs that address risk at the population level (primary or universal prevention) or within a group of identified at-risk participants (secondary or selective prevention), treatment programs are, by definition, designed to impact an identified offender or those tasked with his or her care (i.e., families). The emphasis is on helping specific individuals change, in some cases by helping their families do better. The risk- and protective-factor framework has made a significant contribution by also highlighting the importance of contextual influences beyond families (e.g., peers, schools, neighborhoods, and even society as a whole), but it is beyond the scope of treatment programs to address these multiple influences directly.

The primary goal of treatment programs is to help offenders learn how to manage their own behavior within specific contexts rather than to change the contexts themselves. For example, when a low-income juvenile offender from a high-crime neighborhood is referred for treatment, it is impractical (and impossible) to focus treatment on changing neighborhood conditions; such interventions can only be part of larger, system-level changes. Although understanding how contexts shape behavior is vitally important for identifying social influences on offending and how they operate, in truth, contexts are difficult and costly to change, especially when the focus is on treatment programs for identified offenders. Rather, comprehensive treatment programs must build on knowledge of risk and protective factors across these contexts but ultimately help youth learn how to better navigate these settings to minimize risk and promote healthy adaptation.

Helping juvenile offenders learn to navigate developmental contexts in order to redirect their energies towards conventional pursuits requires a more precise understanding of characteristics implicated in desistance from offending. One of the most glaring limitations of the risk- and protective-factor model for treatment programs is the lack of distinction between prediction of onset (or delinquency at certain time points) and the prediction of desistance. As DLC theorists have noted, it is unclear whether the causes of onset and the causes of desistance are simply opposite ends of a spectrum, whether there is a completely different set of influences on desistance, or whether there are some shared and distinct causes of onset and desistance (Farrington, 2005). However, research grounded in a DLC orientation is beginning to shed light on some potential areas for treatment designed to encourage desistance. Let us now turn to a discussion of the specific treatment implications of this emergent perspective.
Implications of DLC Theories for the Treatment of Juvenile Offenders

As we have discussed previously, DLC theories incorporate research on risk and protective factors for offending, but also emphasize the importance of trajectories of criminal involvement and the role of life transitions and turning points. Because delinquency unfolds in real time, key life events can sustain or shift the course of behavior toward continued criminal involvement or a more conventional lifestyle. Rather than ask which factors are correlated with or predict delinquency, a central question for treatment of referred offenders thus becomes: What individual factors, life experiences, and contextual supports are most likely to foster desistance from offending?

Although research on desistance during late adolescence and early adulthood is scant, some potential candidates for intervention can be identified. For example, recent studies have found that strong adult social bonds, as evidenced by a marital attachment and job stability, are significantly related to lower levels of crime among groups previously identified as both delinquent and nondelinquent (Sampson & Laub, 2005). These experiences can redirect behaviors embedded in childhood propensities just as they can redirect the risky acts of adolescent experimentation, suggesting that programs to strengthen social ties during early adulthood can be important in reducing recidivism, irrespective of age of onset or offense history. Adult social bonds also provide opportunities for structured routines and new social networks that can replace unstructured time with delinquent peers. However, as mentioned previously, these accomplishments are time sensitive, in that they can increase risk when they occur during the teen years versus the young-adult years.

DLC theories emphasize the acquisition of strengths or human capital. These strengths include attitudes, beliefs, and skills that are frequently cited in listings of risk and protective factors. The emphasis shifts somewhat in DLC theories, however, toward factors that help foster personal competency and prepare individuals to maneuver life’s ups and downs successfully. These factors include a positive identity, a sense of personal agency, self-regulation skills, social problem-solving skills, a system of prosocial normative beliefs, empathy, a hopeful future goal orientation, academic success, and job skills. Still, human capital is also bound by reality—individuals who cannot access job opportunities or who do not have a voice in their future are unlikely to sustain a positive outlook.

By concentrating on requisite strengths needed to navigate the transition to adulthood successfully within a context of identified con-

- sustain a positive outlook.
- transition to adulthood successfully within a context of identified opportunities or who do not have a voice in their future are unlikely to future goal orientation, academic success, and job skills. Still, human capital is also bound by reality—individuals who cannot access job opportunities or who do not have a voice in their future are unlikely to sustain a positive outlook.

strains. DLC theories provide a slightly different way of thinking about treatment of offenders. Risk and protective factors become important as they contribute to or interfere with an offender’s ability to shift his or her life path from criminal to noncriminal involvements. For example, a risk factor such as low self-control can limit an individual’s ability to take advantage of available opportunities for successful engagement. It can also interfere with the resolution of conflicts and problems, with the end result being continued aggression or delinquency.

A DLC perspective thus allows us to reconsider the risk- and protective-factor framework, focusing specifically on the requisite social capital needed for adolescent offenders to make the transition to becoming law-abiding adults. Most programs derived from risk- and protective-factor models focus primarily on skill development without considering motivation to continue offending or change course or an individual’s ability to bring about and sustain changes. For example, many individual-level treatment programs emphasize cognitive-behavioral (e.g., reframing, stop and think, social problem solving) and vocational skills. Yet, most practitioners who work with youth or with writers who tell their stories know that some youth seem to favor a criminal lifestyle over a more conventional one, often because of perceived rewards, defiance of the system, or the already entrenched status of their deviant social network (e.g., for youth who are second- or third-generation gang members). This preference for criminality is particularly likely for the smaller group of more chronic and serious offenders, for whom delinquency is not the result of time-limited experimentation but rather an emergent lifestyle.

From a DLC perspective, skills are important for healthy adaptation but must be consistent with an individual’s identity, lifestyle, and future goals if they are to be used. Desistance from offending thus requires motivation to change, agency to purposely follow a path toward change, as well as the skills to bring about change. As one young offender put it, “No matter what, some people don’t want to change, so nothing you can do, no program or skills you can give them, is going to change them until they truly want to change themselves.”

A focus on the centrality of motivation is consistent with recent efforts in juvenile justice to integrate principles of motivational interviewing (MI) into practice (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). This approach acknowledges that individuals often have multiple and sometimes conflicting goals, so an important goal of treatment is to enhance intrinsic motivation to change by exploring and resolving this ambivalence. MI is a process rather than a specific treatment. It can enhance
the effectiveness of treatment when it precedes such treatment (Brown & Miller, 1993) or can be used as a counseling and communication style throughout a treatment program (Miller & Rollnick, 2002).

Beyond the importance of specific techniques to enhance motivation to change, we can also consider specific topics that should be included in treatment programs to address motivation. For instance, aggression replacement training (ART; Goldstein, 2004), which is primarily a skills-based anger management program, also includes a moral reasoning component designed to help youth consider the harmful consequences of aggressive and antisocial behavior and strengthen empathy. Indeed, most cognitive-behavioral programs derived from evidence-based principles (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 of this volume) include components on changing norms about aggression and delinquency, understanding the feelings of others, and acknowledging the harmful consequences of criminal behavior.

In addition to motivation, change requires confidence in one's ability to make a difference. Consistent with the principles of MI, a counselor can convey confidence in the client's ability to change, but the ultimate responsibility lies with the person's own beliefs that change lies within. This self-confidence has been referred to over the years using various terms, including internal locus of control, self-efficacy, and personal agency. The term "agency" is used here because it is consistent with the DLC approaches guiding the present discussion.

As reviewed previously, "personal agency" refers to the active involvement of individuals in creating their own lives through conscious choices and related actions within a context of ongoing constraints. The concept of active participation is especially relevant for juvenile offenders, who are moving from the restrictions of childhood and adolescence into the multiple options of adulthood. A cornerstone for juvenile offenders, where a key goal is helping participants learn somewhat because of personal characteristics or early behavioral patterns, individuals at this stage still have the capacity to learn from their experiences, set future goals, and move into contexts (e.g., a new family, a good job) that provide opportunities to accomplish more conventional goals. A primary focus of intervention thus becomes helping offenders construct their own noncriminal identities and corresponding life course by believing in their ability to do so, making choices, learning skills, and taking purposeful action toward this goal.

Rather than modifying contexts, per se, the focus is on helping youth learn to manage contexts by avoiding situations likely to increase risk for offending (e.g., spending unstructured time with delinquent peers) and seeking out contexts likely to decrease risk for offending (e.g., gainful employment). This focus can be particularly important for incarcerated offenders who must frequently return to the same communities with the same set of risk factors that contributed to their criminal involvement, but must now learn to avoid risky situations and develop a conventional lifestyle (e.g., Fagan, 1990). In some sense, this is similar to the approach of multisystemic therapy (Henggeler et al., 1992), one of the most effective treatment programs for juvenile offenders, where a key goal is helping participants learn how best to manage interconnected systems in their social ecology in order to reduce youth delinquency risk.

Summary and Conclusion

A central premise of this chapter is that effective treatment programs for offenders must be based on a clear understanding of the causes of delinquent behavior. As we have discussed, over the last several decades a risk- and protective-factor framework has guided much of juvenile justice assessment and practice, and an array of correlates have been identified. A major contribution of the risk- and protective-factor framework has been to highlight the importance of the multiple individual and contextual causes of offending. Still, much of the research looking at prediction of adolescent offending has concentrated on the enumeration, rather than the integration, of risk factors, resulting in a large number of empirically based predictors with less emphasis on how these risk factors interact over time.
More recently, the risk-and-protective-factor framework has been integrated into a DLC perspective on offending. A DLC approach emphasizes individual development over the life course and factors that promote or interfere with criminal as well as conventional behavior. How individuals change over time is more important than why individuals are different from each other (e.g., comparisons of offenders and nonoffenders). As such, DLC theories have directed our attention toward the importance of moving beyond correlates and predictors of offending to a greater understanding of trajectories of offending, including onset, course, and desistance. Of particular importance for treatment of the more serious and chronic offenders is why they desist or stop offending. A corresponding focus of interventions thus becomes how to promote strengths and build human capital in order to maximize the likelihood that offenders will veer away from a delinquent lifestyle toward more conventional goals. Still, less is known about the specific factors that lead to desistance, how they vary by demographic characteristics, and whether they are similar or different across varied risk profiles.

We have suggested that shifting developmental pathways from criminality to conventionality requires more than a diverse skill base. Drawing on the DLC perspective, we emphasized the importance of motivation to change and personal agency to bring about change. Even when constraints loom large, individuals still have a hand in constructing their own identities and their own future. Treatment programs must help offenders develop a new sense of purpose and identity as hard-working citizens rather than lifelong criminals, and provide personal and vocational skills that allow this identity to unfold. In other words, skills should not be taught in isolation, but rather as part of efforts to help offenders see their future self as engaged in healthy relationships and purposeful activities as constructive members of society.

Notes

1. From interviews described in Chapter 4 of this volume.
2. As Note 1.

References


