

MENTORS AND CRIMINAL ACHIEVEMENT*

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Much of the research focusing on conventional occupations concludes that mentored individuals are more successful in their careers than those who are not mentored. Early research in criminology made a similar claim. Yet contemporary criminology has all but ignored mentors. We investigate this oversight, drawing on Sutherland's insights on tutelage and criminal maturation and incorporating ideas on human and social capital. We argue that mentors play a key role in their protégés' criminal achievements and examine this hypothesis with data from a recent survey of incarcerated adult male offenders in the Canadian province of Quebec. In this sample, a substantial proportion of respondents reported the presence of an influential individual in their lives who introduced them to a criminal milieu and whom they explicitly regarded as a mentor. After studying the attributes of offenders and their mentors, we develop a causal framework that positions criminal mentor presence within a pathway that leads to greater benefits and lower costs from crime.

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Co-offending research focuses on the prevalence of intersecting criminal careers (Reiss, 1988) but has not identified which types of contacts systematically influence criminal activities or achievement (Sarnecki, 2001; Warr, 1996). The presence of significant others in criminal experiences is nonetheless a recurrent theme in early research in criminology. In his work on professional thieves, for example, Sutherland (1937) argues that established offenders shape the careers of potential thieves through recognition and tutelage. One of his interlocutors is explicit on this matter: “Any man who hits the big-time in crime, somewhere or other along the road, became associated with a big-timer who picked him up and educated him.... No one ever crashed the big rackets without education in this line” (23).

We build on these observations and examine the effects of criminal mentors on the development of protégés’ criminal careers. Our study begins with a review of Sutherland’s work on tutelage and maturation within criminal settings. We then connect his ideas with the extensive research on mentoring in conventional work settings. This is followed by an investigation into the experiences of contemporary offenders. Our analysis focuses on the effects of mentors on two aspects of criminal achievement: illegal earnings and incarceration experiences.

MENTORSHIP, TUTELAGE, AND CRIMINAL MATURATION

Most definitions of mentoring agree that it involves teaching, advising, and sponsoring protégés (Kram, 1988; Levinson, 1978). Although a person can mentor or be mentored by several people simultaneously, the relationship is best conceptualized as a dyad. In most cases, it involves a mutual selection process in which an individual attempts to become recognized and selected for tutelage by an expert, master, or a person skilled in a field; at the same time, a potential mentor chooses a protégé from the pool of possible candidates on the basis of an individual’s potential for success.

Several criminologists note that seasoned offenders are important sources of information, support, and guidance for an orientation conducive to offending (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Shaw, 1930), but Sutherland (1937, 1947) provides the most detailed discussion on this topic. According to him, people acquire the definitions, skills, beliefs, and rationalizations that facilitate crime through their interactions with others. One type of interaction involves offenders who provide tutelage or training to novices. This “on-the-job” training involves a variety of components: “Not only is he [the neophyte] instructed in the execution of the crime, but also in the codes of behavior; and he is made acquainted

with other thieves, with the fixer and the fences. This personal acquaintance is necessary for a safe career in the underworld” (1947: 225).

Sutherland’s emphasis on tutelage as a key feature in criminal careers, and its importance for the criminal mentorship issue, should be understood within the context of his overall analytical scheme. Differential association theory was designed to explain the onset of criminal behavior (a genetic or historical theory of crime; see chapter 4 in *The Principles of Criminology*), whereas his elaboration of criminal maturation was concerned with the subsequent development of criminal ways (see chapter 12).

Sutherland’s use of maturation contrasted with the Gluecks’ application within the context of reform or desistance. Overall, maturation is the process through which individuals become committed to particular life goals. Specifically, it is the stage when “criminality has become an integrated part of his [the delinquent’s] personality” (Sutherland, 1947: 199). But not all offenders reach criminal maturity. Embezzlers interviewed by Cressey, for example, never achieved it because they continued to rationalize their frauds as borrowing; they were “extremely nervous, tense, emotionally upset, and unhappy;” they disapproved of, and turned away from other offenders; and they were prompt to reform when caught (Sutherland and Cressey, 1960: 221–22). An offender reaches criminal maturity when “he makes plans for the execution of his delinquencies, but quite as carefully considers how to secure immunity in case he is caught. Furthermore, in case his precautions in these respects are inadequate, he takes imprisonment philosophically as a part of his life” (Sutherland, 1947: 200).

We argue that tutelage guides the criminal maturation process and that the mentor is a key figure. This is not simply a feature of a criminal acquaintance or formative process but instead helps explain why some offenders become more committed to and involved in crime. In other words, mentors may initiate involvement in crime, but are more likely to enhance the career of someone already familiar with offending.

In legitimate fields, the channels through which mentors influence protégés’ careers are documented in several ways. Protégés increase their human capital by drawing on their mentors’ occupational experience and expertise (Reeve, 1990; Roche, 1979; Tenner, 2004). For example, mentors train or coach their pupils and may provide them with challenging assignments. They may also advance their protégés’ cultural capital by exposing them to signals that are part of the habitus of their particular profession (Lamont and Lareau, 1988).

Although human and cultural capital often contribute to occupational achievement, social capital is essential for success, particularly in some occupations. Social capital refers to the potential resources of interpersonal relationships. Relationships become social capital when

people actively use them to gain resources or to secure outcomes (Coleman, 1988). Thus protégés may gain access to important social capital by meeting and establishing relationships within their mentors' network. Mentors also sponsor and affirm their apprentices' talents. Their opinion, support and allocation of resources signal others to recognize "the potential to excel."

As Burt (1992, 1998) notes, some occupational networks actively restrict access, forcing newcomers to use "borrowed social capital." In such settings, outsiders have a greater chance for success if they have a sponsor who gives them access to her or his entrepreneurial network. Protégés may subsequently learn how to develop strong ties with actors in powerful positions within an occupation (Lin, 2001), access a wide network of weak ties that can provide new information on a variety of occupational opportunities (Granovetter, 1995), or position themselves as brokers between others and become a "mechanism for re-allocating resources" within a network (Burt, 1998, 2005). A competitive advantage is expected in each scenario.

The impact of mentors on achievement may be particularly salient for criminal careers relative to conventional ones. Most offenders earn little money from their crimes and only a small set of illegal activities provide noticeable economic returns (Levitt and Venkatesh, 2000; Williams, 1989). Individuals hoping to prosper from crime must thus gain access to the small set of human and social criminal capital associated with illegal achievement (McCarthy and Hagan, 2001). Offending lacks the formal institutions that advertise and concentrate potential mentors and, whereas the mentor concept may incite an image of Fagin-like characters, there are no schools for crime. Meanwhile, potential criminal mentors have several incentives to limit access to their tutoring. Many criminal enterprises require co-participants, but trusting others involves considerable risk (McCarthy, Hagan, and Cohen, 1998) and it is in offenders' interests to require that people vouch for potential co-offenders before working with them. Gatekeepers in crime have the additional need to protect their identities from criminal justice officials and others. The inherent secrecy of crime and consistent threat of arrest means that offenders are often outsiders to one another. The interplay between security and efficiency in an offender's actions touches on the need for both strong and weak ties within a co-offending network (Tremblay, 1993). Mentorship addresses the need for security that strong ties offer, while opening doors to the more efficient extensions that emerge from weak ties. In this sense, the criminal mentor is an asset.

RESEARCHING MENTORSHIP AND ITS IMPACT

The presence of mentor-like figures emerges from several ethnographic, case study, and life history accounts of criminal experiences. In two early studies, Maurer (1955, 1940) documented their role among pickpockets and confidence men. He notes that: “these men got into the rackets young [and] had the benefit of training under the best con men then operating” (1940: 175). Similar relationships appear in many life history accounts. For example, Chambliss (1972) describes how Denver Dick took Harry King under his wing and taught him the basics of safe-cracking. Klockars (1974) reported that Vincent Swaggi was considerably influenced and oriented by his Uncle Hoppo in fencing goods. Criminal memoirs are also filled with personal accounts of criminal mentorship. Career thief, Jack Black, had the “Smiler” (Black, 2000) and career pimp, Iceberg Slim, had the “Master” (Beck, 1969). In drug trafficking settings, Howard Marks had Graham Plinston (Marks, 1997), and Billy Joe Chambers had Perry Coleman (Adler, 1995). In more traditional organized crime settings, Joe Valachi learned from Dominic Petrilli (Maas, 1968), Antonio Calderone had his brother Guiseppe (Arlacchi, 1993), Tommaso Buscetta had Giovanni Andronico (Arlacchi, 1994), “Giovanni” was connected to Don Peppe and Michele Navarra (Anonymous, 1991), Salvatore Gravano had Salvatore Aurello (Maas, 1997), and Henry Hill had Paul Varrio (Pileggi, 1985).¹

More recent research has focused on various forms of co-offending and finds that recruitment-like roles appear in a diversity of settings (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996; McCarthy et al., 1998; Padilla, 1991). In his ethnography of the inner city, Sullivan (1989) reports that many of the adolescents he spoke with were recruited into crime by older youths and adults, particularly those involved in auto theft, drug selling, and organized gambling. These activities incorporated vertical lines of organization in which youth could move into higher levels of criminal enterprise. Sullivan notes that successful offenders attribute their proficiency to their skills in techniques of offending and dealing with customers: “Those who claimed such skills acknowledged learning them from older or more experienced individuals” (120). Similarly, case studies of the networks of long-term offenders reveal that a majority of their criminal contacts were rooted in the established networks of one or two influential sponsors (Morselli, 2005). Meanwhile, a small set of studies finds that connections with other offenders or a willingness to work with

1. Not all biographical accounts reveal mentors. Steffensmeier (1986) does not mention a key contact in Sam Goodman’s experience as a fence, nor does Shover (1996) reveal mentoring relationships in the careers of his persistent offenders—but his sample was built around “unsuccessful” thieves (xiii).

them have a positive effect on illegal earnings (McCarthy and Hagan, 2001; Morselli and Tremblay, 2004; Tremblay and Morselli, 2000; Uggen and Thompson, 2003; Viscusi, 1986).

A significant body of research on mentors in conventional settings provides further evidence of the positive effects of mentorship. For example, research on biochemists who graduated in the late 1950s and early 1960s indicates that mentors who collaborated with students increased the students' pre- and postdoctoral productivity and citations and improved their academic placement, relative to those who were supervised by mentors who did not collaborate with them (Long and McGinnis, 1985; Long, 1990). Business executives (Reeve, 1990; Roche, 1979), scientists (Kanigel, 1986; Long, 1990; Long and McGinnis, 1985; Zuckerman, 1977), and educators (Tenner, 2004) also agree that having a mentor increases the likelihood of professional success.

Yet, other research suggests that many mentors actually hinder success (Oglensky, 2002; Simon and Eby, 2003). In an examination of various professions, Oglensky (2002) finds that mentoring encouraged protégés' hopes and expectations that clashed with the realities of the instrumental and political motivations of some mentors and with the aggressive, competitive nature of many occupations. In an analysis of co-authorship in sociology journals, Moody (2004) reports that mentorship is negatively related to being at the heart of a co-authorship network; in other words, students of many mentors are relatively isolated and publish less frequently with other scholars than their counterparts. Furthermore, in their meta-analysis of forty-three studies of mentoring, Allen and colleagues (2004) find that although mentoring benefits a protégé's compensation, career advancement, and career satisfaction, the effects associated with financial compensation are small.

Systematic evidence on criminal mentorship is scant in current life-course and criminal career research (Blumstein, Cohen, Roth, and Visser, 1986; Laub and Sampson, 2003; Piquero, Farrington, and Blumstein, 2003), partly because co-offending investigations have restricted the scope and complexity of collaborative relationships among offenders (McCarthy, 1996; Tremblay, 1993). The failure to examine the consequences of mentors in crime is surprising given the attention to mentoring in conventional occupational careers and the frequency with which offenders who desist from crime refer to the involvement of noncriminal mentors in their decision (Maruna, 2001, 1997).

Some criminologists may suggest that criminal mentors are more likely fiction than fact. According to Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), the very nature of crime "works against collusion... organization... and stable long-term relationships" (73). In other words, people who offend and manifest low self-control typically lack the requisite skills and abilities to establish

ongoing relationships in which they mentor others. Moreover, Gottfredson and Hirschi argue that offenders who discover “the immediate and easy rewards of charm and generosity” (90) will likely use their gregariousness and other social skills to take advantage of, rather than to assist, others. Thus the small number of offenders who offer to help others are more likely to exploit their trainees than promote their well-being. As a result, the few criminal mentors who may exist are likely to diminish than augment their protégés’ accomplishments.

Our inquiry asks whether criminal achievement is as much accounted for by criminal mentors as conventional mentors account for desistance. We do so by studying whether criminal mentors are: substantially present in the experiences of a wide array of offenders, distinguishable from other criminal contacts, rooted in distinct circumstances, and significant contributors to criminal experiences.

DATA AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The data used in this study include a sample of 268 male inmates from five federal prisons in Quebec: two minimum-security institutions, two medium-security institutions, and one multiple-security center. The survey began in the summer of 2000 and ended a year later. In each prison, we selected a random sample from the population serving sentences that began after 1992. Inmates participated on a voluntary basis and received no financial inducements (see Morselli and Tremblay, 2004 for more details on this survey).

Face-to-face interviews were conducted in questionnaire format and lasted approximately 2 hours. Our questions inquired about inmates’ backgrounds, criminal activities, entourages, and earnings in a window period restricted to the 3 years immediately preceding their incarceration at the time of the interview. Respondents were, on average, 28 years old at the beginning of the window period (minimum age = 14 years; maximum age = 56 years) and 33 at the time of the interview (minimum = 18 years; maximum = 63 years). The average sentence at the time of the interview was 58.4 months (minimum = 6 months; maximum = 27 years).

A monthly calendar was used to construct measures of some of the key benefits and costs of offending the respondents experienced during the window period. Specifically, we collected information on monthly illegal earnings and on the number of days that respondents were incarcerated. After calculating the total for criminal earnings and incapacitation experiences for the period, we applied logarithmic (base 10) transformations to create our dependant variables.

The key independent variable, the presence of a mentor, was obtained with the following question: “Amongst the people that influenced you

throughout your life, was there one person that introduced you to a criminal milieu and that you consider to be your mentor?" The mentor question was part of a series of network questions that asked respondents to identify up to fifteen criminal contacts during the window period. Separate items inquired about possible partners in crime, regular co-offenders, respected others whom respondents would turn to for suggestions for suitable co-offenders, contacts whom they deemed as inferior (in that they gave orders to them) or superior (in that they received orders from them), and regular suppliers of illicit goods. We asked the mentor question after situating each respondent in his core criminal network and after he identified a series of key contacts. We use the additional information on contacts to create several measures of each inmate's criminal network. Several of these network indicators, incorporated only in this paper's descriptive analyses, include traditional measures of duration, strength, frequency, and multiplexity of relationships between respondents and their network members (Boissevain, 1974).

Other variables are included. Background variables help assess whether our analysis of a mentor's effect on criminal achievement is sensitive to a possible selection effect. In other words, we examine whether protégés have unique characteristics that both distinguish them from their counterparts who did not have a criminal mentor and contribute to their achievements.² We have a limited set of background factors and a relatively small sample. We thus examine only a few measures that might contribute to both mentorship and achievement, but which influence the latter primarily through their effect on the former. Our comparison variables include four factors that measure aspects of the respondents' childhood and may have contributed to their first becoming involved with a criminal mentor: parents' imprisonment (whether either parent ever spent time in prison); class background (a subjective assessment of the extent to which the family was well-off); family dissolution (parental divorce); and an indirect measure of parents' supervision (did both parents work full-time). We also include the age at which respondents reported committing their first crime. We assess criminal propensity—or its major antecedent, low self-control (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990)—with the Grasmick, Tittle, Bursik, and Arneklev (1993) self-perception scale.

Foreground variables integrate respondents' experiences with crime during the 3-year window period and their age at the beginning of it. The first of these is the network measure, effective size (Burt, 1992), an indication of the number of nonredundant contacts in an individual's net-

2. Our survey contained too few variables and cases to estimate a sample selection or propensity score model.

work (mean for overall sample = 3.9 nonredundant contacts). It represents the scope of structural holes—entrepreneurial opportunities to broker between disconnected or nonredundant others—within a personal network. This form of social capital improves performance in criminal activities much as it does in legitimate entrepreneurial settings (see Morselli and Tremblay, 2004). In operational terms, this variable measures the difference between an individual's total contacts and the sum of the proportions of dyadic redundancy that each contact maintains within the network.³

The second foreground variable is a classification of respondents' crime commission rates during the window period. This measure accounts for the sample members' involvement in predatory and market crimes. In constructing it, we began by excluding respondents who had not committed (or reported) the crime in question and identifying low-, mid-, and high-rate offenders within the scope of predatory (robbery, burglary, fraud, auto-theft, and theft) and market crime categories (drug dealing, fencing, smuggling, loan sharking, sex peddling, and illegal gambling operations). Low-rate predatory offenders (the first quartile) declared between one and three crimes, whereas low-rate market offenders reported between 1 and 72 crimes or transactions. The mid-rate predatory group (second and third quartiles) reported between 4 and 156 crimes, whereas mid-rate market offenders reported between 73 and 7,344 transactions. The remaining sample members (the fourth quartile) consisted of high-rate predatory or market offenders. The proportion of the sample in the low-rate categories increased once we added the 0-rate respondents ($n=71$ for predatory crimes; $n=75$ for market crimes; see Table 1). For predatory crimes, 53.9 percent of the sample was within the low-rate class, 30.6 percent in the mid-rate and 15.5 percent in the high-rate. Similarly, for market crimes, 54.4 percent was within the low-rate category, 30.6 percent in the mid-rate and 15 percent in the high-rate.

Table 1. Crime Commission Rates: Predatory Offenses by Market Offenses
Market

		Low	Medium	High	Total
<i>Predatory</i>	Low	53 (27.5%)	33 (17.1%)	18 (9.3%)	104 (53.9%)
	Medium	41 (21.2%)	12 (6.2%)	6 (3.1%)	59 (30.6%)
	High	11 (5.7%)	14 (7.3%)	5 (2.6%)	30 (15.5%)
	Total	105 (54.4%)	59 (30.6%)	29 (15%)	193 (100%)

3. For symmetrical personal networks, Borgatti (1997: 37) offers a simplified formula for calculating Burt's effective size: $\text{effective size} = n - 2t / n$; where n = the number of ego's alters and t = the number of ties between ego's alters (not including ties to ego).

The separate predatory and market crime commission rate groups were subsequently crossed in creating our total crime commission rate indicator. The six categories (predatory-market by low-mid-high) identified offenders who had low commission rates in both crime types (the intersection between low predatory and low market crime rates in Table 1), mid-rate offenders in either or both types, and high-rate offenders in either type. These categories were merged into three groups that qualified low-rate offenders (27 percent), mid-rate offenders (45 percent), and high-rate offenders (28 percent).

We use a restricted sample of 193 respondents in this study. The final sample size is based on the overall survey design and a specific condition for the study. First, although 268 valid questionnaires were completed during the survey, only 218 respondents were eligible because 50 (18.6 percent) were neither incarcerated for money-oriented crimes nor reported participation in money-oriented crimes during the period.⁴ The percentage of inmates not involved in money-oriented crime matches that obtained in the first RAND survey (19.7 percent; see Tremblay and Morselli, 2000: 637). Second, an additional twenty-five respondents were removed because they did not answer the mentor question (see footnote 9 for an assessment of this exclusion's implications).

THE EMERGENCE AND UNIQUENESS OF CRIMINAL MENTORS

More than one-third of the inmates ($n=75$ or 39 percent) we interviewed reported that a mentor introduced them into a criminal milieu at some point. Consistent with the unique character of such a dyadic relationship, none of the inmates reported having more than one mentor. What particular role do these mentors play? A criminal mentor could very well be a partner in crime, a supplier, or fulfill any number of other functions. During the contact generating segment of the questionnaire, we asked respondents to identify those other roles. There is some crossover, but in 50 percent of cases, such contacts were classified exclusively as mentors. Other links between respondents and their mentors involved close co-offenders or partners (22.5 percent), useful crime contacts who

4. No inmates were excluded from the survey on the basis of their crimes. Before interviewing, we only had information on the inmate's name, correctional service identification number, the crime or crimes for which he was incarcerated, and the year of incarceration. Information concerning self-reported crimes was revealed only midway throughout the interview. The fifty inmates who did not match the money-oriented crime criterion did not respond to the portions of the questionnaire that are studied here.

were not directly implicated in respondents' crimes (17 percent), illicit commodity (primarily drugs) suppliers (7 percent), and superiors in criminal activities (those who gave the respondents orders; $n=2$). There is also logical consistency surrounding the mentor qualification and its overlap with other contact types. For example, no mentor was also classified as an inferior, nor was any mentor attributed a negative feature.

MENTOR ENCOUNTERS AND AGE-CRIME EXPERIENCES

Aside from an overlap in co-offending roles, fourteen respondents (19 percent) who reported having a criminal mentor said that they had known these individuals all their lives. This subset constitutes a special group in that nine were reported as family members; the other five were not classified because the respondents felt that additional information would reveal the mentors' identity.⁵

After excluding the lifetime mentors, we checked the age differences between mentors and protégés. We had information in forty-eight of these mentoring relationships. On average, mentors were 11.4 years older than the protégés. Only three were younger, one by 14 years, one by 1 year, and one by 2 years.

We also examined whether the emergence of criminal mentors fit traditional age-crime patterns. On average, our mentored respondents (lifetime mentors excluded) reported that they committed their first crime at 15, were first arrested at 18, and were first convicted at 19. Although these respondents met their mentors on average during late adolescence (at 17), there are no significant correlations between the time of encounter and any of the age-crime variables. However, one less traditional age-crime indicator, the age that mentored respondents reported earning money through crime on a regular basis (average age = 19 years), does correlate with the age of mentor encounter ($r=.63$, $\alpha<.001$). This association adds substance to our claim that, as in legitimate contexts, mentors are more often enhancers than triggers of criminal careers.

DISTINGUISHING MENTORS FROM OTHER CO-OFFENDERS

The personal network segment of the survey allowed us to collect information on the various characteristics of all reported crime-based contacts. Aside from the seventy-five mentors, we obtained information on 1,008 co-offenders from the personal networks of mentored and non-mentored respondents. Among these, 499 were reported by the 75 mentored respondents and 509 were reported by the remaining 118

5. We suspect that these five unclassified mentors were also family members.

(response rates vary across variables; see Table 2). Because no respondents reported having more than one mentor, attributes of mentors were analyzed straightforwardly (see column 2 in Table 2). Descriptive statistics for the attributes of other co-offenders (columns 3 and 4) were derived in two-step fashion. First, we calculated the average or proportion of contacts sharing this characteristic within each of the respondent's networks (the proportion of male contacts for Respondent 1, Respondent 2, and so on). Second, we computed the mean distribution of these network characteristics for mentored and nonmentored respondents (the mean of the proportions of male contacts for both groups of respondents).

Table 2. Characteristics of Mentors and Other Crime-Oriented Contacts by Mentored-Nonmentored Networks

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Mentors</i>	<i>Other Contacts in Mentored Networks</i>	<i>Other Contacts in Nonmentored Networks</i>
% male contacts	95.2 n=62	89.5 n=70	92.6 n=97
% family members	32.7 n=49	20.3 n=63	15.0 n=81
% met in prison	6.3 n=61	6.0 n=69	7.1 n=96
% met in criminal contexts (prison included)	37.1 n=61	56.6 n=69	67.4 n=96
% very close or close relationship	81.7 n=60	56.2 n=69	56.6 n=97
Mean number of years of relationship	17 n=61	11 n=69	10 n=96
% frequented on a daily basis	50.9 n=57	38.0 n=71	41.9 n=101
% also in contact for noncrime	78.3 n=60	56.6 n=69	57.2 n=97
% with higher criminal earnings than ego	59.6 n=47	32.2 n=61	56.4 n=76
% with higher legitimate earnings than ego	72.0 n=25	57.5 n=52	54.3 n=69
% having served time in prison	74.1 n=58	56.3 n=67	50.9 n=93

According to our data, mentors and other contacts are disproportionately male (all around 90 percent). A greater proportion of mentors were family members (33 percent), compared with other contacts in mentored networks (20 percent) or in nonmentored networks (15 percent). Conventional wisdom would assume that prison is an obvious context for crime learning and possible mentor encounters, but this is not the case here: Only 6 to 7 percent of contacts (mentors or other) were met in a prison context. However, if we add general criminal-based encounters

to the prison context, initial encounters were more prevalent: Initial mentor encounters are the least likely to occur in criminal contexts (37 percent), compared with 57 percent of other contacts in mentored networks and 67 percent in nonmentored.

Mentors differ from other contacts in other ways. A greater proportion of these contacts were described as strong ties (82 percent) than other co-offenders in mentored or nonmentored networks (both at 56 percent). On average, respondents had known their mentors for longer periods (17 years) than other contacts (11 or 10 years) and a greater percentage of mentors had met their protégés on a daily basis (51 percent versus about 40 percent) during the window period. In terms of relational multiplexity, more mentors interacted with the respondents in noncriminal contexts (78 percent versus 57 percent for other co-offenders).

A final comparison concerns incarceration and earning patterns. Just under 75 percent of mentors had experienced time in prison (74 percent), compared to 56 percent for other co-offenders in the mentored group and 51 percent in the nonmentored. We also asked respondents to assess whether their contacts made more or less in legitimate and criminal earnings than they did. Although this was the most difficult portion of the interview (as attested by the drop in cases in Table 2), the results provide additional insights about the uniqueness of mentors. Seventy-two percent of the mentored respondents concluded that their mentors' legitimate earnings exceeded their own. In contrast, 58 percent of other co-offenders in the same networks received higher legal incomes, as did 54 percent of co-offenders in nonmentored networks. Similarly, 60 percent of respondents said that their mentors earned more from crime than they did. In contrast, mentored respondents appear to be better positioned within their networks. Only 32 percent of other contacts in mentored networks had higher criminal earnings than the respondent, compared to 56 percent of other contacts of nonmentored respondents.

In sum, when compared to other criminal contacts, mentors are unique in several ways. However, except for their relative status in criminal earning patterns, aggregate characteristics of other criminal contacts surrounding mentored and nonmentored offenders are quite similar. Although suggestive, this exception cannot yet be taken as evidence that criminal mentor presence has an influence on criminal networking and earning outcomes.

THE BACKGROUND AND FOREGROUND OF CRIMINAL MENTORSHIP

Comparisons between the mentored and nonmentored respondents indicate that more of those who had mentors came from intact families (53

percent compared to 45 percent) that were financially secure (40 percent compared to 20 percent), in which both parents worked full-time (35 percent compared to 19 percent), but in which one or more of the parents had spent time in prison (24 percent compared to 16 percent). On average, mentored respondents committed their first crime, were first arrested, and were first convicted earlier than nonmentored respondents (approximately 2 years earlier for each event).⁶ Those with mentors also scored higher than others on the measure of low self-control (means = 84 and 75, respectively).

Mean comparisons reveal, however, that the mentored and the nonmentored differ significantly only in terms of low self-control and parents' employment. This pattern is also evident in a logit model of mentorship that includes the mentioned variables (results not shown, but available on request). In this model, the probability of criminal mentor presence is significantly greater for those whose parents worked full-time ($b=.809$, $se=.388$) and who reported lower self-control ($b=.032$, $se=.012$).

Analyses of foreground variables are also revealing. Descriptive data on logged criminal earnings reveal that, on average, those who had a mentor reported almost nine times greater earnings than nonmentored men during the 3 years (geometric means of \$105,000 versus \$12,000, respectively).⁷ As expected, the bivariate relationship between mentorship and illegal income (see Table 3, Model 1) is sizable and significant ($b=.961$, $se=.271$). As for costs, mentored offenders experienced fewer days of incapacitation during the window period (geometric means of 28 days to 42 days).⁸ A negative bivariate relationship is apparent between mentor presence and criminal costs, but the association is not significant (Table 3, Model 4: $b= -.178$, $se=.145$).⁹

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6. Individuals who reported lifetime mentors manifested even greater precocity, with average ages of onset of offending, first arrest, and first conviction three years younger than nonmentored respondents.
 7. The mean difference in criminal earnings before applying logarithmic transformations is \$649,279 for the mentored group and \$483,846 for the nonmentored group, but the dispersion within the distribution is too high for the mean to be of use. Logging the variable decreases the coefficient of variation considerably (from 324 percent to 42 percent).
 8. Mean differences before logarithmic transformations for number of days incapacitated amounted to 205 days for the mentored and 156 days for the nonmentored. The coefficient of variation drops from 141 percent to 63 percent after the variable is transformed.
 9. Recall that we excluded twenty-five inmates from our sample who did not respond to the mentor question. This exclusion likely leads to an underestimation of the effects of criminal mentorship on criminal achievement. First, they reported much smaller criminal networks (1.36 contacts, on average; compared with an average 4.3 contacts for nonmentored respondents and 7.7 contacts for mentored respondents). To the extent that mentored respondents have larger networks, this suggests that

Table 3. Linear Regression of Criminal Earnings and Days Incapacitated

Variable	Criminal Earnings			Days Incapacitated		
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Parents were divorced	—	.281 (.314)	.158 (.274)	—	-.026 (.167)	.055 (.181)
Either parent spent time in prison	—	-.327 (.378)	-.489 (.335)	—	.142 (.201)	.206 (.222)
Both parents had full-time work status	—	.455 (.326)	.315 (.286)	—	-.235 (.173)	-.247 (.190)
Low self-control	—	.023 [†] (.010)	.017 (.009)	—	.013 [†] (.005)	.014 [†] (.006)
Age at first crime	—	-.061 ^{**} (.022)	-.042 (.022)	—	-.024 [†] (.012)	-.021 (.015)
Criminal mentor	.961 ^{***} (.271)	.624 [*] (.311)	.104 (.273)	-.178 (.145)	-.309 (.165)	-.382 [†] (.181)
Age at beginning of window period	—	—	-.013 (.017)	—	—	.005 (.011)
Effective size	—	—	.112 [†] (.049)	—	—	-.002 (.032)
Crime commission rate	—	—	.788 ^{***} (.201)	—	—	.073 (.133)
Constant	4.06 ^{***}	3.099 ^{**}	2.133 ^{**}	1.628 ^{***}	1.096 [*]	.735
R ²	.06	.19	.38	.01	.14	.16

* $\alpha < .05$; ** $\alpha < .01$; *** $\alpha < .001$

The impact of mentor presence on the benefits and costs of crime is considerably influenced by both background and foreground factors. As indicated in Model 2, criminal mentor's large direct effect on logged criminal earnings is reduced (by 35 percent), but remains sizable and significant after incorporating background variables ($b=.624$, $se=.311$). Thus, though low self-control has a positive effect on criminal earnings and age at first crime has a negative effect, neither variable makes spurious the relationship between mentorship and income.

In Model 3, we introduce foreground factors. In this model, the effect of a mentor on criminal earnings drops more considerably (by 83 percent; $b=.104$, $se=.273$) and is no longer significant. In this equation, effective size and respondents' crime commission rate emerge as the only significant

the excluded group was less likely to have a mentor within their network, and not simply more reluctant to expose their network. Second, individuals in the excluded group also proved to be among the sample's lowest criminal achievers during the window period. They were lowest in their reported criminal earnings (annual geomean of \$1,360) and highest in experiencing criminal costs (annual geomean of 52 days incapacitated).

predictors.¹⁰ Hence, Model 3 suggests that criminal mentorship increases criminal earnings by rendering protégés more entrepreneurial, more active, or both.

Our analysis of criminal costs reveals a suppressor effect for mentors, once background and foreground variables are added to our reduced equation (Model 4). Although the significant effect of criminal mentors on incapacitation is unmasked only after foreground factors are included (see Model 6), this suppressor effect is already apparent in Model 5, when background variables are added to the equation; in Model 5, the mentor effect (nonsignificant) increases by 74 percent ($b = -.178$, $se = .145$ to $b = -.309$, $se = .165$). Respondents who reported lower self-control also faced greater incapacitation, as did those who reported that they committed their first crime at an earlier age. Including foreground factors in Model 6 increases the direct impact of mentor presence by an additional 24 percent ($b = -.382$, $se = .181$), even though none of these variables has a significant direct effect. In this final model, the significant negative mentor effect (criminal mentor presence decreases the costs of crime) is countered only by low self-control's impact (lower self-control increases the costs of crime). Thus, two clear effects emerge: Mentored offenders see a reduced risk of incapacitation, and nonmentored offenders an increased risk.¹¹

DIVERGING PATHWAYS TOWARD CRIMINAL ACHIEVEMENT

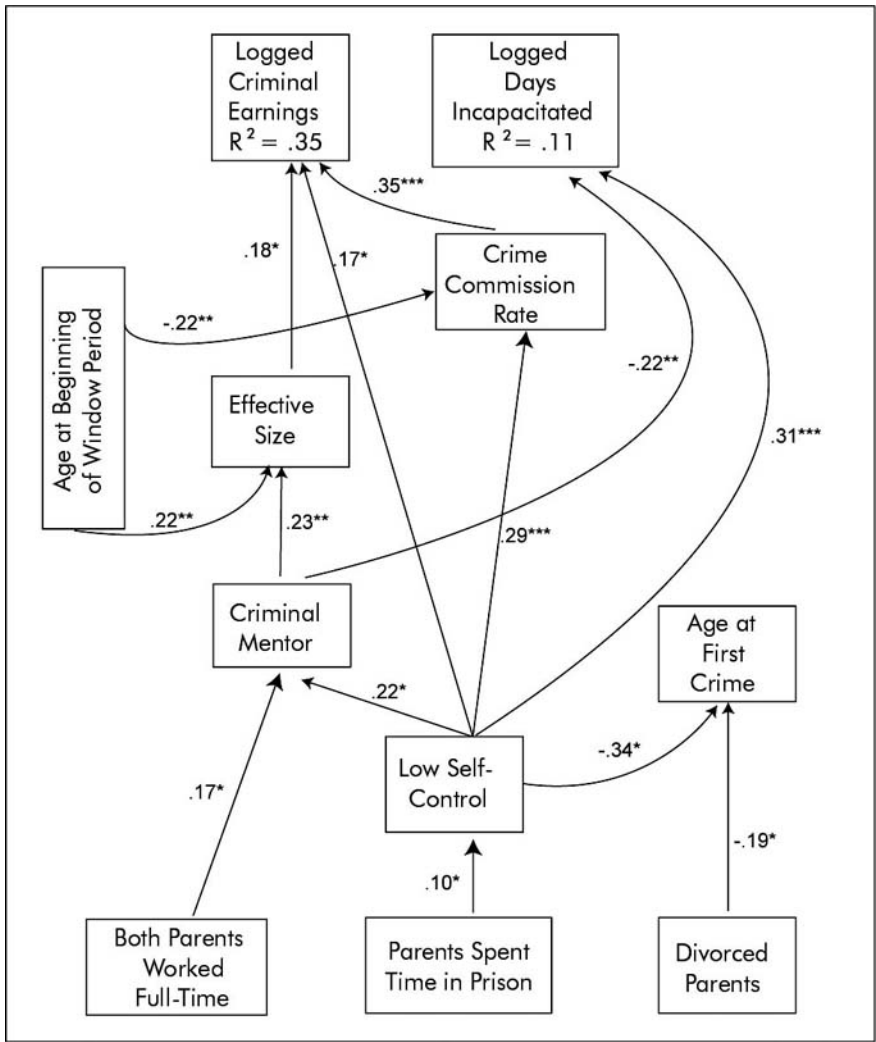
Criminal mentorship's direct and indirect effects on the benefits and costs of crime are best understood when disentangling the links between the variables in our model. In this section, we develop a causal path model of criminal achievement outcomes. Recognizing the limits of our cross-sectional data, we use the path model as a heuristic device to illustrate the place of criminal mentorship between background factors (parents' full-time employment status, parents' prison experiences, whether parents were divorced, respondents' low self-control, and age at first crime), foreground factors (the effective size of networks and crime commission rates), and favorable (criminal earnings) and unfavorable (incapacitation) criminal outcomes. Standardized stepwise regression is used to estimate the causal links specified in Figure 1 (standardized betas are displayed).

Due to data limitations, we use a measure of self-control during adulthood—at the time of the interview—as an indication of self-control

10. We also include age at the beginning of the window period as a control variable, but it does not have a significant effect.

11. No multicollinearity problems were detected. Results from tolerance tests for regression models were all greater than 0.7, with the strong majority surpassing 0.9.

Figure 1. Path Model of the Criminal Achievement Process



* $\alpha < .05$; ** $\alpha < .01$; *** $\alpha < .001$

Note: For clarity, two effects, age at first crime on criminal earnings (Beta= -.17*) and parents' full-time employment on crime commission rates (Beta= .17*), were removed from the model.

during youth. This decision is based on a key assumption in low self-control theory and some support in subsequent empirical research. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argue that individual differences in low self-control (or criminality) are relatively stable across the life course. Arneklev, Cochran, and Gainey (1998) report some stability in self-control over time, but focus on a short time frame. Turner and Piquero (2002: 462) use a much wider period (about 6 years for a behavioral scale and 4 years for an attitudinal scale), but whether their results support the stability thesis depends on one's reading of correlation scores ($r = .33$ to $.66$). Finally, Wright, Caspi, Moffitt, and Silva (2001: 351) report a correlation of $.45$ between low self-control during childhood (ages 3 to 11) and adolescence (ages 15 to 18). Although the issue is far from settled, we argue that self-control measured during adulthood is a reasonable proxy of self-control during youth.

Gottfredson and Hirschi also argue that low self-control is a product of primary socialization, particularly within the family. We use three family background variables that they include among the "causes of low self-control" (97–105) and therefore place them as causally before respondents' low self-control. Consistent with Gottfredson and Hirschi, we find that parents' criminality (or prison experience) has an impact on low self-control. In turn, respondents with lower self-control and those who grew up in families with divorced parents were younger when committing their first crimes.

Replicating our previous analysis, our path model demonstrates that criminal mentor presence is more common among respondents with lower self-control and those who had grown up with both parents working full-time. These paths emphasize the mutual selection that criminal mentorship involves: Youth with low self-control and less supervision at home search out or come across potential criminal mentors, and potential mentors recruit protégés from a pool of youth who are less supervised and have some taste for risk. Could mentorship initiate low self-control? We consider this unlikely. Wright et al.'s (2001) longitudinal design showed that low self-control precedes delinquent peers, providing some empirical merit to Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) statement that "one thing is... clear: low self-control is not produced by training, tutelage, or socialization" (94–95).

The results presented in Figure 1 further substantiate two kinds of enduring effects that criminal mentors have: indirect enhancement and direct prudential. The enhancement effect involves a process in which mentorship increases effective size, which in turn increases criminal earnings. In other words, criminal mentors improve their protégés' social capital and such brokerage-like networking offers a competitive advantage in crime. The mentorship-effective size impact on criminal earnings is even

more salient when we consider that such an increase is achieved without increasing individual crime commission rates. By contrast, nonmentored offenders pursue rudimentary paths, either through straightforward low self-control or through low self-control's effect on increasing crime commission rates, which in turn increase criminal earnings. The latter path represents the recklessness commonly associated with most offenders.

Judging by the path leading to higher criminal earnings, criminal mentorship appears to offer structure to individuals with low self-control; the causal pathways that shape the costs of crime further illustrate this pattern. Low self-control has a direct effect on criminal mentor presence and on the number of days incapacitated during the window period; however, having a mentor reduces incapacitation. In essence, criminal mentors have a prudential effect, attenuating the negative consequences of low self-control. Our path model suggests that protégés with lower self-control attract the attention of some criminal mentors who provide the structure and restraint that lead to a more prudent approach to crime. This approach involves fewer and more profitable offenses that lower the risks of apprehension and, perhaps, promote long-term horizons in crime.

CONCLUSION

Our study finds that criminal mentors are prevalent and unique contacts among offenders, that they emerge during the period (late adolescence and early adulthood) when most offenders become less involved in crime and are most likely to stop their criminal activity altogether. Criminal mentors also have an enduring impact on protégés' criminal careers.

These results highlight both the merits of studying criminal mentorship and the usefulness of a criminal achievement approach for rethinking past research. In exploring the background of criminal mentorship, we meet Elliott, Ageton, and Cantor's (1979) integrated model of strain, social control and learning theories of crime. Our analysis suggests that a lack of parental supervision provides the opportunity and the freedom to meet and eventually be co-opted by accomplished offenders. We also match conventional mentorship research, which finds that unsupervised youths find themselves informally supervised by extrafamilial mentors, who may serve as alternative social control agents (Basso, Graham, Pelech, DeYoung, and Cardey, 2004). Our alternative agent offers a quite different orientation.

We also investigated individual difference theories and find that respondents with low self-control (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990) attract the attention of criminal mentors. After all, Sutherland acknowledged that privileged tutelage was mainly a pattern of accomplished law-

breakers extending their assistance as a result of mutual attraction and shared affinities. Moreover, low self-control does not per se impede achievement in crime, it improves it (Morselli and Tremblay, 2004). In a word, the behavioral components inherent in low self-control (impulsive, simple-task oriented, risk seeking, physicality, self-centered, and short-tempered) can all be expressed as key assets (quick-thinking, uncomplicated, risk seeking, action-oriented, individualistic, and unforgiving-ruthless) in many competitive settings. We expect such assets to be the basis of the mutual selection process that appears to underlie tutelage or mentoring relationships.

Our findings are admittedly tentative. Future research would benefit from adjusting for the limits of our study. First, an inmate survey does not offer a representative sample of offenders. Although it provides access to a subset of more resolute offenders who are more likely to search for or attract a potential mentor, research on mentors among a noninstitutionalized sample would further our understanding of mentoring in crime. Second, we elaborate a causal model using retrospective data, but that would be best treated by a longitudinal research design. This is most obvious for our background variables, such as low self-control and family characteristics, but also relevant for foreground variables, such as our network measure. We use static representations of our respondents' criminal networks during a 3-year period; repeated measures would have allowed us to study how these networks change with the surfacing of new contacts and the withdrawal of others throughout this time. They would also provide information on the cooperative processes that unite mentors and protégés. Third, our small sample precludes crime-specific analyses, though mentors may be more prevalent or necessary in certain crimes. Fourth, our limited measures do not allow us to study criminal mentors' involvement in the transfer of criminal human capital or their intervention in other aspects of their protégés' careers. Future research should pursue these matters, examining capital transfers from mentors to novices, and mentors' role in helping their protégés gain more privileged positions within the scope of their specific crimes. A more specific focus would also permit the identification of possible negative consequences extending from mentor-protégé relationships.

These limitations notwithstanding, our findings suggest that strong foundations in crime offer an advantageous position for continuous achievement and the presence of a criminal mentor is pivotal for achievement over one's criminal career. Indirectly, criminal mentors enhance criminal gains by promoting protégés' agency in capitalizing on their resources; directly, criminal mentorship renders the criminal pursuits of protégés less costly. Both processes echo Sutherland's "safe career in the underworld."

Of course, the issue of a safe career is tainted by the fact that all of our respondents experienced at least one incarceration term. Criminal mentors do not eliminate the costs of crime; they reduce them and, as Sutherland discussed, they are among the tutors of crime that help others gain the maturity to accept and absorb the many plights associated with such a career. That the strong majority of reported mentors had their own experiences in serving time in prison further supports the likelihood that mentorship is not simply a transfer of instrumental techniques and social capital, but also a catalyst to forming a stoic outlook on life and neutralizing conventional beliefs.

Criminal career research has swayed between the quantitative modeling of individual pursuits and qualitative inquiries of social group formations that orient individual experiences. At the same time, co-offending research, with its particular focus on group offending, has been unable to identify key individuals within the scope of criminal experiences. These approaches are largely detached, have rarely merged, and have introduced few mid-level concepts. One way of building such a bridge and identifying unique contacts is to introduce the dyad as an alternative to both the individual and group. Apart from relationships within a group, individuals are likely involved in a multitude of other dyadic relationships. The dyad carries the focus beyond both the individual (by introducing a proximate social element) and the group (by carrying the social element beyond the specific group).

Refocusing analysis from individuals and groups to dyads has important implications for how we study relationships between offenders. Warr (1996), for example, looked for instigators across criminal events marked by co-offending patterns but failed to identify any consistency for individuals occupying such roles. He focused, however, on consistency in group content across offences. By contrast, a dyadic approach would look across the wider scope of relationships between individuals. Systematic mentors and instigators are not necessarily present within the criminal event, but are revealed to a substantial extent within the personal networks of co-offenders that shape the events in which individuals find themselves. Mentors are therefore not necessarily key accomplices in the criminal event, but are key criminal contacts across the life course.

Similarly, Reuter (1983) found that illegal markets were comprised primarily of small, ephemeral groups of co-offenders. His emphasis on group endurance within particular criminal activities overlooks the long-term dyadic relationships that provide opportunities for other group formations. Hence, the working groups in which offenders find themselves may be transient and short-term, but the variety of working relationships that individuals turn to in initiating new or regenerating old groups are available on a consistent and long-term basis. This, in short, is the criminal milieu toward which key others, such as mentors, allow entrance.

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