

Marriage and crime over the life course

The criminal careers of convicts
and their spouses

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Marriage and crime over the life course. The criminal careers of convicts and their spouses.
Dissertation, Utrecht University, The Netherlands.

Printing: Ipskamp Drukkers, Enschede, The Netherlands
Cover design: Textcetera, Den Haag, The Netherlands
DTP: Textcetera, Den Haag, The Netherlands

ISBN: 978-90-393-5653-1

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Marriage and crime over the life course

The criminal careers of convicts and their spouses

Trouwen en crimineel gedrag over de levensloop
De criminele carrières van veroordeelden en hun huwelijkspartners

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Utrecht
op gezag van de rector magnificus, prof. dr. G.J. van der Zwaan,
ingevolge het besluit van het college voor promoties
in het openbaar te verdedigen op
vrijdag 8 juni 2012 des middags te 2.30 uur

door

Marieke van Schellen

geboren op 16 september 1982 te Kampen

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This study was funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (“Marital relationships and crime across the life course: the criminal careers of convicts and their spouses”, NWO, 400-07-074).

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Voor Els en Gerrit



I keep a close watch on this heart of mine
I keep my eyes wide open all the time
I keep the ends out for the tie that binds
Because you're mine, I walk the line

I find it very, very easy to be true
I find myself alone when each day is through
Yes, I'll admit that I'm a fool for you
Because you're mine, I walk the line

Johnny Cash – 1956

Voorwoord

Het is volbracht! Na een leuke en leerzame, maar ook bewogen periode is het proefschrift nu af. Verschillende mensen hebben op een directe of indirecte manier bijgedragen aan de totstandkoming van dit proefschrift. Ik wil hen graag bedanken.

Allereerst gaat veel dank uit naar mijn (co-)promotoren. Paul, ik heb heel veel van je geleerd. Ik ben als student bij je begonnen, daarna als aio verder gegaan en nu heb je me de kans gegeven om als postdoc te starten. Ik ben je dankbaar voor het vertrouwen in mij. Je kennis van zaken, je motivering en steun zijn van groot belang geweest voor het slagen van dit proefschrift. Anne-Rigt, ik ben erg blij dat jij bij mijn project betrokken bent geweest. Je blik vanuit de familiesociologie was een waardevolle aanvulling op het project. Je scherpe analytische inzichten en constructieve commentaar hebben het proefschrift zoveel beter gemaakt. Werner, heel veel dank voor de kans die je me hebt gegeven om bij sociologie een nieuw aio-project te starten. Ik vond het erg leuk om gezamenlijk aan het zesde hoofdstuk van dit proefschrift te werken. Je nauwkeurigheid, kritische vragen en goede feedback gaven me altijd de motivatie om die extra stap te zetten.

Ook de leden van de leescommissie, Beate Völker, Robert Apel, Arjan Blokland, Wim Meeus en Tom Snijders, wil ik graag bedanken voor de tijd die zij hebben genomen om het proefschrift te lezen en te beoordelen. Bob, many thanks for not only having been a member of the reading committee but also for having been a wonderful host in Albany! I enjoyed my visit and in particular our pleasant cooperation. Thank you for all your substantive ideas and for your help with the statistical analyses.

De vakgroep sociologie en de ICS onderzoeksschool waren een hele prettige omgeving voor het schrijven van een proefschrift. Niet alleen vanwege de aanwezige expertise, maar ook vanwege de collegiale sfeer. Door alle sociale activiteiten (variërend van voetbalwedstrijden tot Sinterklaasavonden) was de scheidslijn tussen werk en privé vaak onscherp. Ik wil alle collega's graag bedanken en een aantal in het bijzonder. Annemarije, Dave, Dominik, Gerald, Karien, Lieke, Martijn, Sander (roomie!), Sigrid en Richard bedankt voor de vele gezellige gesprekken, borrels (GT's), hardlooptactiviteiten en andere mooie momenten – ook naast het werk! Arieke en Freek, bedankt ook voor de ASW-tijd (en Mainz niet te vergeten!). Mariska en Vincent, jullie last-minute statistiekhulp in de eindfase van mijn proefschrift was werkelijk onmisbaar. Mariëlle, jouw steun en wijze raad hebben me veel geholpen. Ellen, Els, Marjet, Miranda, Pim en Tineke veel dank voor alle ondersteuning op praktisch gebied.

Borja, een betere kamergenoot had ik me niet kunnen wensen! Hoewel we heel verschillende achtergronden hebben (Kampen versus Kroatië) delen we toch dezelfde (zwarte) humor. De vele gesprekken en niet te vergeten de brownie-

koffie- en andersoortige pauze's, maakten het werk zoveel leuker. We deelden niet alleen dezelfde kamer, maar buiten het werk heel veel meer. Ik vind het fijn dat je nu ook mijn paranimf wilt zijn! Anne, dank je wel voor je steun in goede en minder goede tijden, het delen van dilemma's, tegenslagen en successen. Ik kon altijd bij je terecht voor goede raad of gewoon om te kletsen. Heel fijn om zo'n goede vriendin op (en vooral ook naast) het werk te hebben. Agnieszka, het bezoek in New York was super! Onze hardloopsessies die later werden vervangen door wandelingen waren altijd een ontspannen moment van de dag. Antonie (Sjakie!), wij hebben genoeg gespreksstof om vier hele aio-jaren mee te vullen. Onze lachsalvo's zijn waarschijnlijk in de wijde omtrek van het Van Unnik te horen geweest. Dank voor de af en toe zo broodnodige afleiding. Jelmer, het proefschrift is af! Dank je wel voor het oudhollandsch koffiedrinken, de vele kilometers die we samen hebben gerend, het samen organiseren van de Batavierenrace, maar vooral ook voor de goede gesprekken en je vriendschap. Willem, het was heel fijn om samen onze aiocarrières te beginnen bij ASW, waar we ons voor het eerst onder professoren bevonden en de ups en downs van het (aio-)leven konden bespreken. Wouter (S.), mijn buurman en enige medecriminoloog onder de vele sociologen. Dank je wel voor je fijne gezelschap tijdens onze reizen (Essex, Edinburgh, San Francisco). Hopelijk volgen er nog vele congressen die we samen kunnen bezoeken (die foto van Mike moet er zeker een keer komen)!

Ook twee collega's uit Nijmegen wil ik graag bedanken. Marieke, dank je wel voor je hulp bij de dataverzameling, het wegwijs maken in de CCLS databestanden, de discussies over onze proefschriften, maar vooral voor de vele gezellige gesprekken. Rianne, de afstand Utrecht-Nijmegen stond ons contact gelukkig niet in de weg! Het was fijn om al die werk- en niet-werkgerelateerde dingen met je te kunnen delen.

Buiten het werk heb ik ook veel hulp, steun en afleiding ontvangen. Froukje, Hanneke, Judith, Marijke en Susanne, dank jullie wel voor alle gezellige weekendjes weg, de etentjes en jullie hulp en steun op vele fronten. Juud, ik wil jou in het bijzonder nog noemen. We zijn inmiddels bijna 25 jaar vriendinnen. En ook al wonen we inmiddels bijna 200 km uit elkaar, het is super om te weten dat je er altijd voor me bent. Dank je wel voor alle relativerende Groningse tegelwijsheden. La'shan en Melissa, we hebben elkaar tijdens onze stage bij het NSCR ontmoet. Op werkgebied zijn we daarna een hele andere kant op gegaan, maar onze vriendschap is steeds hechter geworden. Dank voor jullie betrokkenheid en alle afleiding tijdens het schrijven van mijn proefschrift. Ook de socio's, Andrea, Jaantje, Marloes, Martin en vooral Rixt wil ik niet onvermeld laten! Na onze studie wonen we nu verspreid over het hele land, maar gelukkig staat dat de socio-dates niet in de weg. Joris en Jornt, de roadtrip van Las Vegas naar het congres in San Francisco (samen met Anne) was een onvergetelijke ervaring! Joris, dank je wel voor alle afleiding in de vorm van post-arbeits-, Otterstraat- en Averechts-borrels.

De afgelopen jaren zijn een bewogen periode geweest. Ik wil de familie Bos, de familie Kwakkel en de familie Van Wijngaarden bedanken voor hun hulp en steun tijdens die periode. Erik, bedankt voor je advies op werkgebied en je Engelse taalcorrecties op cruciale momenten.

Lieve Wouter, je hebt me op onnoembaar veel manieren geholpen. Dank je wel voor je geduld, je relativering en je liefde. Zonder jou had ik dit niet bereikt. Anne, mijn broer en grote trots. We hebben de afgelopen jaren heel veel aan elkaar gehad. Je stond altijd voor me klaar. Ik vind het heel fijn dat je ook nu weer achter me staat als paranimf.

Mijn proefschrift draag ik op aan mijn ouders. Zij kunnen dit moment helaas niet meer meemaken, maar ik heb heel veel aan hen te danken. Zij waren er altijd voor mij en hebben me altijd geadviseerd en gestimuleerd. Mijn vader om alles uit mezelf te halen en mijn moeder om vooral ook te genieten van het leven. Ik ben hen dankbaar voor hun liefde.

Marieke van Schellen

Utrecht, augustus 2011

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CHAPTER 1
Introduction

1 Introduction

“Choosing whom we hope will be our life’s companion, the person who will contribute half the parenting and half the genome for our children [...] is perhaps the most important choice we ever make” (Lyken & Tellegen, 1993: 56).

“Marriage makes people better off in part because it constraints them from certain kinds of behavior, which, while perhaps immediately attractive [...] do not pay off in the long run” (Waite & Gallagher, 2000: 24, in: Sampson & Laub, 1993: 44).

1.1 Aim and research questions

With the rise of life course criminology, studies investigating the development of *individual criminal careers* have been accumulating (Piquero, Farrington & Blumstein, 2003). One important finding is that many offenders end their criminal careers during early adulthood. This observation has often been explained by the fact that individuals tend to marry during this period in life (Sampson & Laub, 1993). Marriage has been identified as one of the most important life course events that offenders can experience as adults. It is often argued that the decline in criminal behavior is caused by the social bond that forms as a result of marriage. Spouses monitor and attempt to control each other’s behavior and do not want to put their relationship at risk by committing crimes (Laub & Sampson, 2003). In recent years, a growing number of studies have shown that marriage does have the potential to suppress criminal behavior (Blokland & Nieuwebeerta, 2005; Farrington & West, 1995; Horney, Osgood & Marshall, 1995, King, Massoglia & MacMillan, 2007; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006; Theobald & Farrington, 2010).

The general aim of this study is to gain more insight into the presumed protective effects of marriage. By focusing on the “good marriage effect” (Laub, Nagin & Sampson, 1998), earlier studies seem to have forgotten the possible downsides of social bonds. We nuance earlier studies in three ways. First, we do not only investigate the effects of marriage but also study the opposite life course event: *the impact of divorce*. If marriage reduces crime, then divorce can be expected to have a reverse effect. Divorce leads to the breakdown of social bonds and, therefore, may stimulate criminal behavior. The fact that the effects of divorce on criminal offending have received relatively little attention in previous studies is partly caused by data limitations. Offenders have rarely been followed far into adulthood.

Second, we pay explicit attention to *selection into marriage and divorce* by investigating the impact of criminal offending on marriage formation and marital dissolution. A prominent idea in life course criminology is that life course transitions are, to a large extent, determined by chance (Laub & Sampson, 2003: 45). As a result, criminologists have mainly focused on the effects of life course events

on criminal offending and not on the opposite relationship: the impact of criminal offending on life course events. It may, however, very well be the case that offenders select themselves into certain situations. Offenders' individual characteristics as well as their criminal histories may make them less likely to marry and more likely to divorce (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). As a result, offenders may be less likely to experience any (long-term) protective effects of marriage.

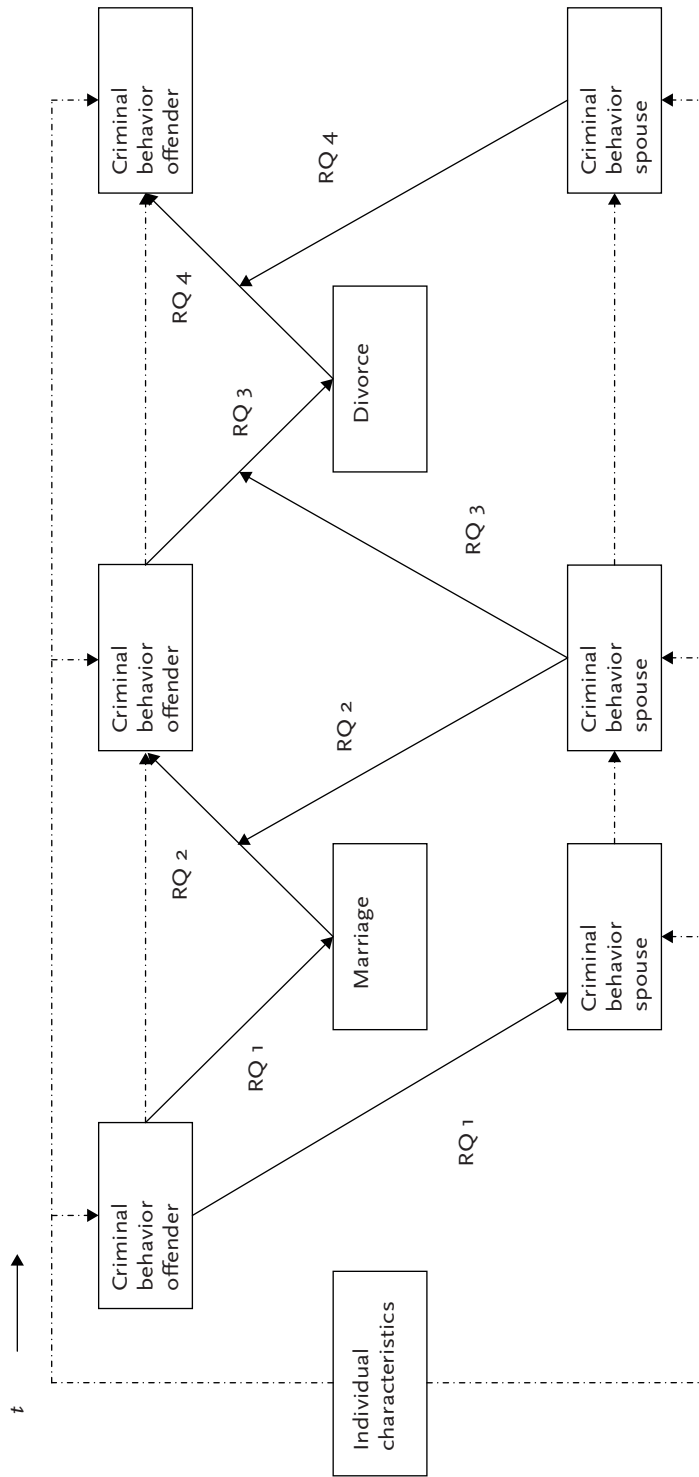
Third, and perhaps most importantly, we take into account *spouses' criminal careers* and study *partner selection* and *partner influence* processes. The concept of "linked lives" takes a prominent place within the life course perspective. Individuals do not live in isolation but rather are influenced by significant others (Elder, 1994). Remarkably, until now, almost no attention has been paid to the criminal careers of offenders' spouses. This is especially surprising because attachments to unconventional individuals are considered to be among the most important predictors of delinquent behavior during adolescence. Adolescents who have delinquent friends are more likely to become delinquent and commit more crimes than adolescents without deviant connections (Haynie, Giordano, Manning & Longmore, 2005; Simons, Stewart, Gordon, Conger & Elder, 2002). In a similar vein, the protective effects of marriage may very well depend on the criminal history of the partner to whom one is attached. If like marries like, and if criminal individuals disproportionately marry criminal partners, then the crime-reducing effects of marriage may be limited or even absent. Offenders probably have similar views on the appropriateness of criminal behavior, learn from each other, and pass on their criminal skills (Rhule-Louie & McMahon, 2007; Simons et al., 2002).

Building on previous research and making progress in the three discussed ways, we investigate four central research questions. Moving forward along offenders' life courses, the questions read as follows:

1. To what extent does criminal offending affect the likelihood of marrying, and to what extent do criminal offenders marry spouses who have a criminal history as well? (RQ1)
2. To what extent does marriage affect the development of criminal offending, and to what extent does the relationship between marriage and criminal offending depend on the criminal history of the spouse? (RQ2)
3. To what extent does criminal offending affect the likelihood of divorce, and to what extent does the relationship between criminal offending and divorce depend on the criminal history of the spouse? (RQ3)
4. To what extent does divorce affect the development of criminal offending, and to what extent does the relationship between divorce and criminal offending depend on the criminal history of the spouse? (RQ4)

In Figure 1.1, we present a schematic overview of the research questions. As shown in Figure 1.1, we study two life course events – marriage and divorce – and two criminal careers: those of offenders and their spouses. The offenders form the central actors in this study. We investigate to what extent offenders' criminal and marital careers depend on the criminal history of the spouse. We thus only examine moderating effects of spouses' criminal histories. The dotted lines represent relationships that are also of importance for understanding the development of criminal behavior (i.e., the direct impact of individual characteristics and criminal history) but are not the central focus of this study.

Figure 1.1 Schematic overview of the research questions



The remainder of this introduction is organized as follows. First, we discuss the general theoretical background of the thesis (Section 1.2). Second, we provide an overview of earlier empirical studies in the field of marriage and crime (Section 1.3). Third, we further elaborate on the contributions of this study (Section 1.4). Fourth, and finally, we outline the dissertation (Section 1.5).

1.2 General theoretical background

1.2.1 Life course criminology

This study builds on a long tradition of research in criminology and sociology. In particular, it builds on the tradition of life course criminology, which has its roots in two research areas: the criminal career paradigm and the more sociological life course approach.

The criminal career paradigm came to prominence in criminology in the 1980s. Whereas criminology traditionally was concerned primarily with describing and explaining *between-individual* differences in criminal behavior, the criminal career paradigm focused on *within-individual* changes in criminal behavior. The criminal career paradigm laid the basis for current research on the development of criminal careers. It defined criminal careers as a longitudinal sequence of crimes committed by an individual offender and distinguished several aspects of a criminal career: participation (whether one commits crimes or not), frequency (the number of crimes committed), duration (the time between the first and last crime), and seriousness (the type of crimes committed) (Blumstein, Cohen, Roth & Visher, 1986).

The underlying idea of the life course approach is that experiences in life influence the way individuals' life courses develop – not only in the short term but also in the long term. Trajectories and transitions are two central concepts within the life course approach. During their lives, individuals can engage in several trajectories that relate to various important aspects of life, such as work and marriage. Embedded in these trajectories are so-called transitions, or life course events, such as leaving the parental home, becoming unemployed, getting married, getting divorced, and having a child. Transitions influence the way in which trajectories further develop (Elder, 1991).

To better understand the development of individuals' life courses, the life course approach builds on four main principles. First, individuals' lives are located in historical time and place. Second, individuals' lives are socially embedded and influenced by significant others. Third, human agency plays an important role. Individuals make plans and choices to shape their lives. Fourth, the timing of life course transitions matters. The impact of transitions depends on when they occur during an individual's life (Elder, 1994).

Life course criminologists combine the two research traditions and consider a criminal career as another trajectory in which individuals can engage during life. In contrast to the criminal career paradigm, life course criminologists seek explanations for the development of criminal behavior. Whereas some scholars in this field argue that criminal career patterns can best be explained by the

circumstances in which persons find themselves (state dependence), others claim that variation in criminal behavior can best be understood in terms of different kinds of individual characteristics (population heterogeneity). This debate among criminologists has resulted in two different groups of theories that vary in their view on how marriage affects the development of criminal behavior (Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2006).

The first group of theories comprises so-called *static theories*. According to static theorists, variation in criminal careers can be fully explained by inherent individual differences. These so-called criminal propensities develop early in childhood and, once formed, remain relatively stable during the life course. The individual level of criminal propensity is usually assumed to result from a complex interplay between dispositional and family influences. The best-known static theory is self-control theory, developed by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990). Gottfredson and Hirschi argue that both crime and the occurrence of life course events are affected by a single underlying personal characteristic: self-control. Individuals with lower levels of self-control have a tendency to seek immediate gratification of their desires, with minimal effort and without long-term planning. A lower level of self-control results from parents failing to monitor, recognize, and adequately punish their child's deviant behavior. Individuals are likely to find themselves in situations that fit their underlying personal traits. As a result, individuals with lower levels of self-control are not only more likely to commit offenses but also less likely to bond with other conventional situations, such as work, marriage, and children (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1995). The relationship between marriage and criminal behavior is thus thought to be spurious. Biological factors in combination with fewer opportunities to commit offenses would explain why individuals eventually desist from crime (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990).

The second group of theories consists of *dynamic theories*. Dynamic theorists argue that although offending may be partly explained by differences in criminal propensity, life course circumstances can substantially change someone's criminal activities. Change can occur over the entire life course and is not limited to any particular period of life. The most prominent dynamic theory in criminology is Sampson and Laub's age-graded informal social control theory (Sampson & Laub, 1993; Laub & Sampson, 2003). Building on Hirschi's social control theory (1969), Sampson and Laub argue that crime and deviance become less likely when an individual's bond to conventional society is strengthened. The institutions providing informal social control may differ over the life course. During childhood, parental and family factors are especially important, while during adolescence, friends and peer groups have a large impact on the development of crime. During adulthood, life course events such as marriage, divorce and having children influence criminal offending. An important aspect of their theory is the idea of "cumulative continuity of disadvantage." Sampson and Laub use this term to explain continuity in criminal behavior from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood. The term refers to a negative downward spiral in which criminal behavior impedes opportunities to build or remain conventional social bonds, which makes future criminal behavior even more likely (Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2009; Sampson & Laub, 1995).

In short, static theories offer a so-called “kinds of people” explanation for the development of criminal offending, while dynamic theories offer a “kinds of context” explanation (Blokland, 2005). Static and dynamic theories can be considered useful for thinking about criminal career development. Current theories in the field of life course criminology contain both static and dynamic elements, and conceptual boundaries between theories are far less clear. Even Gottfredson and Hirschi’s theory is only static from adolescence onwards, when individuals’ final level of self-control is established (Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2006).

1.2.2 Marriage and crime over the life course

The focus of this study is on the relationship between marriage and crime over the life course. According to dynamic theorists, marriage is the most important life course event that offenders can experience during adulthood (Laub & Sampson, 2003). In the literature, three main theoretical mechanisms have been proposed to explain why marriage reduces criminal behavior. Although the different theoretical perspectives are not fundamentally incompatible, they differ in their central focus. Some explain the crime-reducing effect of marriage by processes external to the individual (e.g., changes in opportunities to commit crime), while others focus more on internal factors (e.g., changes in preferences to commit crime).

The first and most prominent explanation is based on Sampson and Laub’s informal social control theory. According to Sampson and Laub, a *bond* with a social institution, such as marriage, inhibits crime by fostering *social control* and increasing *social capital*. This is especially the case if the bond between spouses is strong and stable. Spouses monitor and attempt to control each other’s behavior and tend to discourage activities that do not pay off in the long run. Also, marital relationships create obligations and restraints that increase the costs of offending. Over time, as commitment and investment in relationships grow, there are fewer incentives to commit crime because even more is at stake (Laub, Nagin & Sampson, 1998).

A second explanation is given by Warr (1998). Warr emphasizes the role of *peers* in criminal career development. According to Warr, the decline in crime following marriage is caused by a decrease in time spent with (delinquent) friends and the accompanying reduction in opportunities and reinforcement for criminal behavior. Married individuals spend more time in each other’s company, stay home together more often, and spend less time on the streets or in bars at night (Warr, 1998).

A third explanation emphasizes internal processes. Accordingly, marriage reduces crime because it changes one’s sense of self through *cognitive transformations* (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002; Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006: 468). Marriage – if accompanied by an openness to and readiness for meaningful change – can lead to desistance from crime because it fosters pro-social role modeling. The accompanying cognitive transformations result in a change in the meaning and salience of criminal behavior. Criminal behavior is no longer viewed as positive, viable, or personally relevant (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002).

Although dynamic theorists consider divorce as an important life course event as well, they have mainly focused on the effects of marriage on crime. As a result, the theoretical mechanisms underlying the divorce-crime link are far less developed. The only explanation in the criminological literature is based on Sampson and Laub's informal social control theory. Divorce is expected to stimulate criminal behavior because it leads to the breakdown of social bonds. Individuals may no longer experience the social control exerted by their spouses, and putting their relationship at risk may no longer be a disincentive for committing crimes (Sampson & Laub, 1993).

1.3 Previous empirical research

In line with theory development, previous empirical research has especially focused on the impact of marriage on crime. Only a few studies have investigated the impact of divorce on crime, selection into marriage and divorce, or partners' criminal careers. Below, we provide a short overview of the results of the main earlier studies and their limitations. The aim is to provide a background to the current study and to make clear where we improve upon earlier research. More extensive overviews of the literature will be provided in the separate empirical chapters of this dissertation (Chapters 3 to 7). Earlier studies can be divided into three areas: the impact of marriage and divorce on criminal behavior, selection into marriage and divorce, and partners' criminal behavior.

1.3.1 The impact of marriage and divorce on criminal behavior

In recent years, an increasing number of studies have investigated *the impact of marriage* on criminal offending. Although older studies mostly used cross-sectional research designs, more recent studies were able to employ longitudinal designs. The results are quite consistent and in line with the dynamic vision on criminal development: partner relations reduce criminal offending – even in the short term. This so-called “good marriage effect” is found in various types of studies: studies that employ high-risk samples, population studies, studies that rely on official data, and studies on self-reported data. Moreover, the crime-reducing effect is found for both men and women, for minorities, and in different countries (Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2006; Farrington & West, 1995; Horney, Osgood & Marshall, 1995; King, Massoglia & MacMillan, 2007; Theobald & Farrington, 2010). The *impact of divorce* on criminal behavior has received far less scholarly attention. The few earlier studies in this area also seem to support dynamic theories. Divorce stimulates criminal offending – at least for male offenders (Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2005; Farrington & West, 1995; Sampson & Laub, 1993).

The best-known study on the effects of marriage and divorce on criminal offending has been conducted by Sampson and Laub (1993; Laub & Sampson, 2003). Their pioneering research is based on the Glueck and Glueck data (1950), which contains information on the delinquent development of 500 boys remanded to Massachusetts's reform schools and a matched control group of 500 non-

delinquent boys. The sample subjects were followed from age 8 until age 32. Sampson and Laub found that being in a good marriage – with strong attachments between spouses – reduces criminal offending. The results also showed that among married men, low attachment to a spouse (measured by separation, divorce, or neglect of marital responsibilities) during a given age range predicted higher crime levels during the following age range (Sampson and Laub, 1993). These effects did not disappear when childhood risk factors and prior criminal involvement were taken into account. In their most recent reanalysis of the Glueck and Glueck data, Sampson and Laub investigated the effects of marriage by using propensity score models. This enabled them to better control for selection effects (Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006). The results were similar to their earlier analyses. Being married was associated with an average reduction of 35 percent in the odds of crime compared to non-married states.

The Dutch equivalent of Sampson and Laub's research is the Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS) initiated by Nieuwbeerta and Blokland (2003). Blokland and Nieuwbeerta (2005) analyzed the officially registered criminal careers and life courses of nearly 5,000 Dutch offenders. Offenders were followed from age 12 until the age of 72. In analyzing the effects of marriage and divorce on criminal offending they distinguished various offender types. In line with Sampson and Laub's research, they found that being married is associated with a 27 percent decrease in conviction rates for low-rate offenders and a 55 percent decrease for moderate-rate offenders. Marriage, however, did not change conviction rates for sporadic and high-rate offenders. Divorce increases the rate of convictions for all offender groups. The increase is highest among moderate-rate offenders. When separated, they are three times more likely to be convicted than when they were married.

1.3.2 Selection into marriage and divorce

Researchers studying the effects of marriage and divorce on criminal offending acknowledged that some persons are more likely to marry, divorce, and commit crimes than others. However, they only considered these individual differences as selection effects that might bias their results. Researchers controlled for the disturbing impact of individual characteristics by including as many control variables as possible in the analyses, including various indicators of a criminal history.

Research that directly focused on the impact of criminal behavior on marriage formation and marital dissolution and the underlying theoretical mechanism is scarce. Moreover, the few earlier studies in this area limited their attention to incarceration and male offenders. The results, however, are consistent: incarceration decreases men's likelihood of marrying and increases men's likelihood of divorce. These relationships are found during imprisonment as well as after release (Apel, Blokland, Nieuwbeerta & Van Schellen, 2010; Lopoo & Western, 2005; Western, 2006).

1.3.3 Partners' criminal behavior

While an increasing number of studies have investigated the development of individual criminal careers, partners' criminal behavior has received hardly any attention. A number of cross-sectional studies provide insight into partner *similarity* for criminal behavior (see Chapter 3 for an extensive overview). Most of these studies focused on already married couples. The results showed that partners are quite similar with regard to their involvement in crime, although the strength of the associations varied (Galbaud du Fort, Boothroyd, Bland, Newman & Kakuma, 2002; Krueger, Moffitt, Caspi, Bleske & Silva, 1998; Moffitt, Caspi, Rutter & Silva, 2001; Quinton, Pickles, Maughan & Rutter, 1993; Simons et al., 2002; Taylor, McGue & Iacono, 2000).

Research disentangling the mechanisms underlying partner similarity (i.e., partner selection and partner influences) is much scarcer. As far as we know, studies examining the impact of criminal offending on partner selection have not been conducted thus far. Partner influences recently have been examined in a number of studies. These studies made use of cross-sectional measurements of partners' criminal behavior at the time of the relationship. On the one hand, researchers found a crime-stimulating effect of partners' delinquency, which in some cases was stronger for women (Capaldi, Kim & Owen, 2008; Haynie et al., 2005; Moffitt et al., 2001; Simons et al., 2002). On the other hand, there is also evidence that marriage has crime-reducing effects irrespective of the criminal involvement of the spouse (Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006).

1.3.4 Limitations of previous research

On the basis of the review of previous studies, we can conclude that there are several unexplored research areas in the literature on marriage and crime. The impact of divorce on crime, selection into marriage and divorce, and partners' criminal careers are topics that have scarcely been investigated. Earlier studies in these areas are not only few in number but are also characterized by several shortcomings. First, they lack longitudinal information on partners' criminal histories. The studies that did investigate spousal criminality used cross-sectional measurements. As relationship status and partner criminality are measured at the same time, this limits the causal inferences that can be drawn. The association between partners' criminal behavior can result from selection processes that occur before relationship formation as well as from influence processes during marriage. Second, earlier studies limited their focus to adolescence and early adulthood. This is remarkable because partner relationships are especially salient during adulthood. Moreover, by focusing on adolescence and early adulthood, the long-term effects of partner relationships are hard to establish. Third, earlier studies mostly focused on male offenders. The causes and consequences of crime may very well be different for female offenders (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996). Fourth, regarding selection into marriage and divorce, measures of criminal behavior were limited to incarceration. However, even without imprisonment, contact with the criminal justice system may influence marital chances and divorce risks in a significant way (King & South, 2008).

1.4 Contributions of the study

With this study, we aim to make three contributions. First, we introduce new research questions and extend theories in the field of life course criminology to answer these research questions. Second, we make methodological progress by using a unique longitudinal dataset: the Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS). Third, this study not only directly contributes to the literature in the field of marriage and crime but also has a broader scientific and societal relevance. Below, we further elaborate on each of these contributions.

1.4.1 New research questions and theoretical progress

In this study we address several new research questions. We not only investigate the effects of marriage on criminal offending but also study the opposite life course event: the impact of divorce. Furthermore, we focus on selection into marriage and divorce by studying the reverse relationship: the impact of criminal offending on marriage formation and marital dissolution. Finally, we examine spouses' criminal careers by studying partner selection and partner influences.

When addressing these new research questions, we aim to make theoretical progress as well. To answer our research questions, theories from life course criminology and sociology will be combined. Specifically, we will extend Sampson and Laub's age-graded informal social control theory with insights from criminology (i.e., Gottfredson and Hirschi's self-control theory) and family sociology.

Sampson and Laub's theory has two main shortcomings. First, they have hardly investigated selection into marriage and selection into divorce (i.e., marriage formation and marital dissolution). Although Sampson and Laub do recognize that individuals may select themselves into situations, they assume that life course transitions are, to a large extent, determined by chance (Laub & Sampson, 2003: 45). As a result, their theory has mainly focused on explaining the effects of marriage and divorce on crime. Although they do recognize the role of cumulative disadvantage (the idea that offending impedes conventional life outcomes, such as marriage), they remain unclear about the mechanisms underlying offenders' marital chances and divorce risks.

Second, Sampson and Laub did not take into account spouses' criminal careers. They solely focused on male offenders. The assumption behind their theory is that these male offenders marry non-criminal women: "Given the crime differences between men and women, it is almost invariably the case that men marry 'up' and women 'down' when it comes to exposure to crime" (Laub & Sampson, 2003: 45-46). As a result, Sampson and Laub did not pay attention to partner selection (i.e., the criminal history of the spouse) and partner influence processes.

In contrast to criminologists, family sociologists have extensively studied marriage formation and marital dissolution as well as partner selection and partner influence processes. Below, we discuss how we extend Sampson and Laub's theory with these four concepts. A more detailed discussion is given in the separate empirical chapters (Chapters 3 to 7).

Marriage formation and partner selection

First, we pay attention to the selection processes underlying marriage (see Chapter 4: RQ1). Although Sampson and Laub acknowledged the role of cumulative disadvantage, they remain unclear about how the underlying mechanisms may operate. We rely on Gottfredson and Hirschi's self-control theory and especially on theories from family sociology to gain more insight into the mechanisms underlying offenders' outcomes in the marriage market. According to family sociologists, both marriage formation and partner selection can be expected to depend upon preferences and opportunities (Becker, 1981; De Graaf & Kalmijn, 2003; Goldscheider & Waite, 1986; Kalmijn, 1998; Liefbroer, 1991; Oppenheimer, 1988). We argue that criminal behavior influences these preferences and opportunities and, through this, the likelihood of marrying as well as partner selection.

First, offenders may have lower *preferences* to marry. This idea is in line with Gottfredson and Hirschi's self-control theory (1990). Individuals with lower levels of self-control have a tendency to seek immediate gratification of their desires with minimal effort and without long-term planning. As a result, they not only are more likely to commit offenses but are also less likely to marry (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1995). Second, offenders may have fewer *opportunities* to marry. For example, a criminal record can render an offender a less attractive marriage partner to others. It is not only a predictor of future criminal activities but also gives information about one's success in the labor market and the ability to provide for a family (Pager, 2003; Western, 2002).

Not only marriage formation but also partner selection can be assumed to arise from an interplay between individual preferences for certain characteristics in a spouse and the opportunities that marriage candidates have to meet (dis)similar partners (Kalmijn, 1998). Regardless of whether offenders *prefer* a similar or non-criminal partner, homogamy (i.e., resemblance between partners) will be the likely outcome in both cases. Preferences for similar partners obviously lead to homogamy but so does competition for non-criminal partners. Persons with the most attractive characteristics have a high likelihood of selecting each other as partners first, leaving the less fortunate to end up together. The choice for a marriage partner is constrained by meeting *opportunities* (Kalmijn, 1998). Opportunities to meet similar others are generally assumed to be greater than opportunities to meet dissimilar others. Partners often meet each other at specific locations and occasions, such as the neighborhood, at school or through friends. The composition of these local marriage markets is often quite homogeneous. Criminal activity tends to be concentrated in certain neighborhoods and friendship networks. Therefore, individuals will have an increased probability of selecting someone who is similar with regard to involvement in crime (Krueger et al., 1998).

Partner influences

Second, we question the prominent idea that marriage reduces criminal behavior (see Chapter 5: RQ2). The effects of marriage may strongly depend on the criminal behavior of the spouse. It is plausible that an individual's choice of a marriage partner, and particularly the extent to which the partner is involved in a deviant

and antisocial lifestyle, may play a critical role in determining the risk of future criminal behavior (Rhule-Louie & McMahon, 2007). Marrying a criminal partner may very well have the opposite effect than is commonly assumed: it may stimulate one's criminal activities. In a similar vein, divorcing a criminal spouse may not necessarily stimulate criminal behavior (see Chapter 7: RQ4).

We nuance Sampson and Laub's theoretical ideas in two ways. First, marital ties are not necessarily strong if both spouses are involved in crime (Simons et al., 2002). Although the idea that marriages are less likely to dissolve if spouses resemble each other is popular in family sociology (Kalmijn, 1998), it is questionable whether this also applies when it concerns similarity in criminal behavior. If both partners are involved in crime, they are, for example, both likely to have personal traits and to be involved in situations that undermine the stability of marriage (Western, 2006: 5). Second, conventional behavior is not necessarily encouraged if both partners are delinquent. If their spouses are not involved in crime, offenders might, indeed, risk their relationships by violating the law. If spouses have a criminal history as well, offending is likely to be a conventional way of behaving, which is less likely to be discouraged or threaten the continuation of the relationship.

Marital dissolution

Third, we pay explicit attention to offenders' divorce risks (see Chapter 6: RQ3). Again, we rely on Gottfredson and Hirschi's self-control theory and theories from family sociology to gain more insight into the underlying mechanisms. Family sociologists argue that the likelihood of divorce depends on the costs and benefits of the current relationship as well as the costs and benefits of the possible alternatives: entering singlehood or a new relationship (Becker, 1981; Levinger, 1979). We assume that offenders' personal traits (e.g., self-control) and offenders' criminal behavior influence the costs and benefits for both offenders and spouses and, through this, the likelihood of divorce. Note that the sociological literature on divorce risks focuses on individuals' preferences (the trade-off between costs and benefits) and not on constraints. However, the costs and benefits of one actor (e.g., the spouse) can be considered as constraints for the other actor (e.g., the offender).

First, a relationship between criminal offending and divorce may result from the fact that individuals select situations for themselves on the basis of underlying personal traits (e.g., self-control). Individuals with lower levels of self-control are not only more likely to commit offenses but also have difficulty maintaining a stable marital union. Other explanations have focused on the direct causal effects of offenders' criminal behavior on divorce. One way in which criminal behavior increases the likelihood of divorce is through the stigma attached to a criminal record. Offenders may be blamed and held responsible for their criminal activities by their social environment. A stigma may lead to stress and may put the marital relationship under pressure (Lopoo & Western, 2005; Western, Lopoo & McLanahan, 2004).

Divorce risks may also depend on the criminal involvement of the spouse. Family sociologists have argued that marriages are more stable and less likely to dissolve if partners resemble each other (Kalmijn, 1998). Partners who have similar lifestyles and expectations about the organization of the relationship, the division

of labor, and having and raising children will get along with each other better than spouses who do not resemble each other in these ways (Janssen, 2001: 13). Partner similarity may not always promote marital stability. Resemblance in certain characteristics (e.g., income) makes marriages unstable and more likely to dissolve (Becker, 1981). This may very well be the case with criminal behavior as well. Both partners are likely to have personal traits (e.g., being short-sighted, impulsive, or non-verbal) that undermine relationship stability. As a result, both may consider the costs to leave the relationship as lower, leading to a higher likelihood of divorce.

1.4.2 Methodological progress

Aside from examining new research questions and extending current criminological theories, we also aim to make methodological progress by using a unique longitudinal dataset. One of the reasons for the lack of empirical research is that the requirements for the design of these studies are substantial. Longitudinal information is needed on the development of criminal behavior of both criminals and their marriage partners. In addition, very long periods of observation are required to examine sample subjects beyond adolescence into adulthood. This dissertation will build upon the work of Nieuwebeerta and Blokland (2003) by using and extending their CCLS data.

The CCLS contains information on the criminal careers of almost 5,000 Dutch offenders. For all offenders, longitudinal data have been collected on their officially registered criminal careers and life courses from age 12 (the minimum age of criminal responsibility in the Netherlands) until the year 2002 (the end of data collection). This means that, for all offenders, information is available on the exact timing of offenses, the number of offenses, the type of offenses, periods of incarceration, and (changes in) life circumstances: marriage, divorce, and having children. For this study, the original CCLS has been extended with longitudinal data on the criminal careers of offenders' spouses. By doing so, this study is the first to investigate the long-term criminal careers of offenders and their spouses simultaneously.

With the exception of the research of Laub and Sampson (2003), the CCLS is the only study in which criminal careers and life courses can be studied over such a long time period. Most criminological research is cross-sectional or consists of relatively short-term panel studies. Moreover, the CCLS improves upon the study by Laub and Sampson. Laub and Sampson were only able to reconstruct the criminal careers of a small group of 52 men up to the age of 70 through qualitative interviews. For the other delinquents, data are available for a much shorter period, namely, until the age of 32. Most importantly, Laub and Sampson did not have longitudinal data on spouses' criminal careers.

The CCLS has various advantages for studying the relationships among marriage, divorce and crime. First, it contains longitudinal data on the criminal careers of both offenders and their spouses. This enables us to pose new research questions and gain more insight into the causal nature of the studied relationships. Second, it provides information on both male and female offenders. Third, it contains a more detailed measure of criminal behavior than typically used in earlier

studies (i.e., the exact timing of offenses, number of offenses, type of offenses, and periods of prison confinement). Fourth, the CCLS enables us to study offenders' marital and criminal careers in a different cultural context: the Netherlands. Earlier studies mostly relied on data from the United States. We provide further details on the CCLS in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

1.4.3 Scientific and societal relevance

This dissertation not only improves upon earlier studies in the field of marriage and crime but also has a broader relevance. By examining marriage and divorce as life course events, the current study extends the existing knowledge about the causes and consequences of crime. This is of scientific relevance and also of importance for policy in the field of crime and justice (see Section 8.4.3). By studying the selection processes underlying marriage and divorce, more insight is obtained into the possible disruptive effects of a criminal record on *individuals' life courses*. Offenders may be less likely to experience any (long-term) protective effects of marriage, which stimulates inequality between individuals. The investigation of spousal criminality also contributes to a better understanding of the processes underlying inequality between *couples and families*. When criminal individuals have a tendency to marry criminals, this will lead to a clustering of individuals in a disadvantaged position. Their situations are likely to worsen, as they tend to influence each other's criminal activities during marriage. Moreover, it has been argued that similarity in the behavior of spouses increases the impact of parents on their children. A high likelihood of a criminal offender marrying a criminally active person leads to an increase in criminal behavior in the following generation. Finally, knowledge about the causes and consequences of crime is not only relevant for the life courses of offenders and their families but also for *society* at large. Criminal behavior has substantial societal costs and affects non-criminals as well. It may lead to victimization and feelings of unsafety and, as a result, affect the cohesion of society.

1.5 Outline of the study

This thesis is organized as follows. In Chapter 2, we elaborate on the dataset used to answer the research questions: the Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS). The chapter provides a detailed description of the data collection, the extension of the original CCLS with data on spouses' criminal careers, the historical time and place to which the data relate, and the methods used in the remainder of the dissertation. Chapter 3 is the first empirical chapter and contains bivariate analyses on the criminal careers of convicts and spouses. This chapter has two aims. The first aim is to establish the association, if any, between marriage and divorce, on the one hand, and criminal offending, on the other hand. The second aim is to establish the association between the criminal behavior of offenders and their spouses. Establishing the strength of these associations forms the basis for further analyses in this dissertation. Chapter 4 focuses on the first research question (RQ1 in Figure 1.1). In this chapter, we investigate the impact of criminal offending on

marriage formation and partner selection. Chapter 5 aims to answer the second research question of this thesis (RQ2). It investigates the effects of marriage and spousal criminality on offenders' criminal careers. In Chapter 6, we move one step further along the life course and study the effects of offenders' and spouses' criminal behavior on marital dissolution. This will answer the third research question of this dissertation (RQ3). Chapter 7 focuses on the last research question (RQ4) and investigates the effects of divorce and spousal criminality on offenders' criminal behavior. Finally, Chapter 8 presents the conclusion and discussion. It contains a summary of the findings, offers general conclusions, and discusses the strengths, limitations, and implications of the current study. We offer suggestions on how to improve theories, future empirical research, and policy in the field of marriage and crime. It should be noted that Chapters 3 to 7 were originally written as separate empirical articles and not as book chapters. This implies that there is an inevitable degree of overlap between the chapters in this dissertation.



CHAPTER 2

Criminal Career and Life Course Study

This chapter contains a description of the data that are used in Chapters 3 to 7. See also the dissertations of Blokland (2005) and Van de Rakt (2011), who collected and used parts of the same dataset.

2 Criminal Career and Life Course Study

2.1 Introduction

To answer our research questions, we make use of a unique longitudinal dataset: the Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS) (Nieuwbeerta & Blokland, 2003). The CCLS contains information on the criminal careers and life courses of a cohort of almost 5,000 offenders who have been convicted in 1977 in the Netherlands. In recent years, the CCLS has been used to study a variety of topics, among which the development of individual criminal careers (Blokland, Nagin & Nieuwbeerta, 2005), the impact of life course events on criminal offending (Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2005; Bersani, Laub & Nieuwbeerta, 2009), the impact of imprisonment on life course events and criminal careers (Apel et al., 2010; Nieuwbeerta, Nagin & Blokland, 2009), and the intergenerational transmission of crime (Van de Rakt, 2011).

This chapter is organized as follows. First, we discuss the CCLS sample and the original data collection (Section 2.2). Second, we explain how we extended the original CCLS with data on the criminal careers of offenders' spouses (Section 2.3). Third, we elaborate on the historical time and place to which the CCLS data relate (Section 2.4). Fourth, we describe the methods to be used in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation (Section 2.5).

2.2 The CCLS

2.2.1 The Recidivism 1977 Study

The CCLS has its roots in the Recidivism 1977 Study conducted by Van der Werff (1986) and Block and Van der Werff (1991). The aim of the Recidivism 1977 Study was to gain more insight into the recidivism rates of Dutch offenders. As a starting point of their data collection, Block and van der Werff used a file of Statistics Netherlands (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek – CBS) on which the criminal statistics of the year 1977 were based. From this file they drew a four-percent sample of all cases of criminal offenses ruled upon by a judge or decided upon

¹ In the Dutch criminal justice system, the public prosecutor has the discretionary power not to prosecute all cases forwarded by the police. First, the public prosecutor may decide to drop the case if prosecution would probably not lead to conviction due to lack of evidence, or for technical considerations (procedural or technical waiver). Second, the public prosecutor is authorized to waive prosecution "for reasons of public interest" (waiver for policy considerations). The Board of

by the public prosecutor in the Netherlands in 1977.¹ To ensure that all offense types would be sufficiently represented in the final sample, less common – mainly serious – offenses (e.g., murder, rape, drug offenses) were oversampled, while common offenses (e.g., drunk driving) were undersampled. This resulted in a total sample of 5,656 offenders.²

Block and Van der Werff (1991) used extracts from the General Documentation Files (GDF) of the Dutch Criminal Record Office (het Algemeen Documentatieregister – ADR – van de Justitiële Documentatiedienst van het Ministerie van Justitie) to reconstruct the criminal histories of the sample subjects from 1977 up until 1983. The GDF contain information on all criminal cases that are registered by the police at the Public Prosecutor's Office. This does not only concern convictions but also acquittals, fines, waivers for policy reasons, or waivers for technical reasons. Extracts from the GDF are comparable to “rap sheets” in the United States. An important outcome of the Recidivism 1977 Study is that a large share of the offenders recidivates. In the six-year period between 1977 and 1983, 51 percent of the offenders were reconvicted at least once (Van der Werff, 1986; Block & Van der Werff, 1991).

2.2.2 Extending the Recidivism 1977 Study

Criminal careers

In 2000 Blokland and Nieuwbeerta initiated a relaunch of the Recidivism 1977 Study. The general aim of their Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS) was to describe the long-term criminal careers and life courses of a Dutch offender population (Nieuwbeerta & Blokland, 2003; Blokland, 2005). They used the Recidivism 1977 sample as a starting point and extended the criminal histories of the sample subjects by collecting additional GDF extracts. In this way they reconstructed individuals' criminal careers from the age of 12 (the minimum age of criminal responsibility in the Netherlands) up to calendar year 2002 (the end of data collection). The information on the GDF extracts was supplemented with cases that normally would have been dropped from the file due to periods of

Prosecutors-General has issued national prosecution guidelines under which a public prosecutor may decide to waive a case for policy reasons. In some cases measures other than penal sanctions are preferable or more effective, or prosecution would be disproportionately unjust or ineffective in relation to the nature of the offense or the offender, or prosecution would be contrary to the interest of the state or the victim (Tak, 2003).

2 Two characteristics of the sample should be noted. First, it is a stratified sample. The sampling fraction for drunk driving offenses was set to 2 percent, while the sampling fraction for the following offenses was set to a higher rate: (attempted) murder, offenses against decency, rape, child molesting, other sexual assault: 100 percent; irrevocable community school sentences: 50 percent; (attempted) robbery, public violence, battery: 25 percent; soft drug offenses: 25 percent; hard drug offenses: 10 percent (Van der Werff, 1986). Second, the sample is a random one of cases and not of individuals: offenders who had two or more adjudications in 1977 were more likely to be included in the sample. To correct for these two biases, a weight factor is constructed so that the sample again represents the distribution of offenders and offense types in 1977 (see also: Block and Van der Werf (1991) and Blokland (2005)).

limitation (Nieuwbeerta & Blokland, 2003). A group of 492 individuals was not found in the GDF, resulting in a total sample of 5,164 offenders on which data are available on their officially registered criminal careers. In the Netherlands, individuals are not given a “clean slate” upon becoming an adult. The extracts thus contain information on both juvenile and adult offenses.

Life courses

To examine the unfolding of life circumstances, the judicial data were supplemented with data from population registration records (Gemeentelijke Basisadministratie – GBA). All Dutch municipalities collect these records since 1938. For individuals who died before 1994 registration was not made digitally available in the GBA. Their personal record cards were retrieved from the Centre of Genealogy and Heraldry (Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie – CBG). The GBA and CBG records contain information on the exact timing of marriages, divorces, the birth of children, and date of death. Based on the personal details from the 1977-offense, 82 percent of the sample could be traced in the GBA or CBG (i.e., 550 individuals were not found). This resulted in a final sample of 4,615 individuals for whom life course information is available from their year of birth until the year 2002. Individuals who were not found in the GBA or CBG are mainly foreigners and individuals without fixed abode.

Characteristics of the CCLS sample subjects

The analyses in this dissertation are based on the final CCLS sample ($N = 4,615$), for which data on criminal careers as well as life courses are available. Throughout this thesis we use the terms sample subjects, offenders and convicts interchangeably to refer to these sampled individuals. Almost ten percent (9,3%) of the 4,615 individuals in the CCLS sample are women. The final sample thus consists of 428 women and 4,187 men. Of all sample subjects, 13 percent was born outside the Netherlands. The majority of these subjects was Surinamese, which reflects the composition of the Dutch immigrant population at that time. By the year 2002, 16 percent of the sample had died.

Each sample subject is followed from age 12 until calendar year 2002. Because offenders' ages in 1977 (and thus 2002) differ, the sample subjects have different follow-up periods. Table 2.1 gives an overview of the number of sample subjects for different ages of follow-up. As can be derived from Table 2.1, the age of follow-up for almost 27 percent of the sample is 60 or older. The sample was followed until a mean age of almost 54 years (not shown in Table 2.1), which implies that we have data on criminal careers and life courses that reach far into adulthood for a large portion of the sample.

Life course criminologists distinguish various aspects of a criminal career (see Section 1.2.1): participation (whether one commits crimes or not), frequency (the number of crimes committed), duration (the time between the first and last crime), and seriousness (the type of crimes committed). We use this distinction to

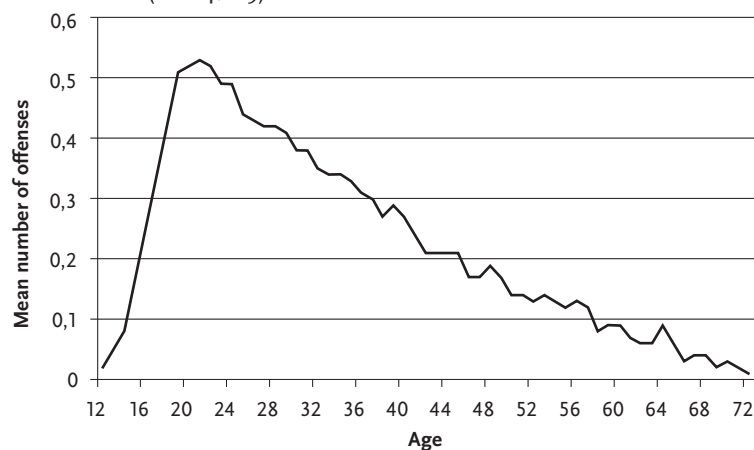
provide more background information on the criminal careers of the CCLS sample subjects.³

Table 2.1 Age of follow-up for the CCLS sample subjects ($N = 4,615$)

Age of follow-up	Number of individuals	Percentage of the sample
12	4,615	100.0
20	4,609	99.9
30	4,563	98.9
40	4,443	96.3
50	2,407	52.2
60	988	21.4
72	246	5.3

All CCLS sample subjects had a judicial contact in 1977 and thus were a suspect of crime at least once during their lives. During the period under study the sample subjects were convicted for a total number of 54,660 offenses. Figure 2.1 gives more insight into the frequency of their offending behavior.

Figure 2.1 Average age distribution of criminal offenses for the entire sample ($N = 4,615$)



The figure results from averaging the conviction histories of all 4,615 sample subjects. On average the number of offenses strongly increases during adolescence, peaks around the age of 20, and is followed by a more gradual decline during adulthood. The peak age in Figure 2.1 is higher than the peak of the well-known age-crime curve (Piquero, Farrington & Blumstein, 2003). This is caused by the

³ See the dissertation of Blokland (2005) for a more detailed description of the criminal careers of the CCLS sample subjects.

fact that the CCLS does not contain data on criminal behavior in general but on convictions. Convictions are associated with a higher age. They are only possible from the age of 12 onwards and also depend on the seriousness of a criminal history.

Figure 2.1 shows an average CCLS-criminal career. Sample subjects, however, vary in the number and type of crimes they commit. To gain more insight into the frequency and seriousness of crimes, we turn to the results presented in Table 2.2. The table reveals that sample subjects committed on average almost 12 offenses during their lives (s.d. = 16.9; median = 5; minimum = 0; maximum = 185). The distribution of offenses is skewed. On the one extreme 15.2 percent of the sample subjects were only convicted once. On the other extreme 6.2 percent of the sample subjects were convicted more than 40 times. These chronic offenders are responsible for 33.5 percent of the total number of offenses committed by the CCLS sample as a whole. Table 2.2 shows that the percentage of the sample that is ever convicted does not reach 100 percent. This is caused by the fact that for some individuals ($n = 177$) the 1977 sample-offense did not result in a conviction or a policy waiver, while these individuals likewise did not commit any offense that could be classified as such before and after 1977.

Table 2.2 Offense frequency by type of crime ($N = 4,615$)

	Percentage of the sample ever convicted	Mean number of offenses ever committed	
Criminal law			
Violent	50.0	1.6	(2.7)
Property	67.2	5.3	(10.7)
Damaging / Public order	43.5	1.2	(2.9)
Other criminal law	7.8	0.1	(0.4)
Non-criminal law			
Traffic	50.4	1.7	(3.3)
Drugs	17.8	0.6	(2.0)
Gun	18.1	0.3	(0.9)
Other non-criminal law	41.1	1.1	(1.6)
Total	96.2	11.8	(16.9)

Note: Standard deviations are provided in parentheses.

Table 2.2 also provides insight into the type of offenses committed by the CCLS offenders. Convictions for property offenses, violent offenses, and traffic offenses are the most common offenses: 67.2 percent of the sample subjects ever committed a property crime, 50.4 percent a traffic crime, and 50.0 percent a violent crime. On average, sample subjects committed more than 5 property offenses, almost 2 violent offenses, and almost 2 traffic offenses during their lives. Just as for the total number of offenses, the standard deviations of the different crime types are larger than the means. This indicates that there are large differences in the number of offenses for which sample subjects are convicted during their lives.

In additional analyses (not shown) we examined if the type of offenses differs over the life course. During the entire criminal career property offenses are on average the most common offenses. Offenses committed before the age of 15 mainly

concern property offenses and damaging / public order offenses. From the age of 20 onwards traffic offenses constitute a substantial share of the offenses as well. Drug offenses are especially common between ages 25 and 35. Convictions for gun offenses only occur from the age of 20 onwards. As the CCLS sample subjects grow older, they commit less violent offenses and less damaging/public order offenses. However, the number of convictions for property offenses and traffic offenses remains relatively high.

We now have insight into the average number and type of offenses committed by the CCLS sample subjects. The final step is to determine how long and when they were criminally active. Table 2.3 gives an overview of the criminal career duration, age of first conviction, and age of last conviction. The average CCLS-criminal career had a duration of 16 years. There is quite some variation in the duration of offenders' criminal careers. On the one hand, there is a large group that is only criminally active for a short period of time. About 26 percent of the sample subjects are criminally active for a period of less than 5 years. On the other hand, there is a large group with a long-term criminal career. More than 40 percent of the sample subjects are criminally active for a period of 20 years or more.

Table 2.3 Criminal career duration, age of first conviction and age of last conviction ($N = 4,615$)

Duration in years	Percentage of the sample	Age of first conviction	Percentage of the sample	Age of last conviction	Percentage of the sample
1	20.5	12-15	17.8	12-15	1.1
2-4	5.7	16-20	40.9	16-20	7.6
5-9	10.1	21-25	18.2	21-25	9.6
10-19	21.3	26-30	8.7	26-30	10.6
20-29	29.2	31-35	5.5	31-35	11.9
30-39	10.5	36-40	3.0	36-40	15.3
> 40	2.7	> 40	5.9	> 40	43.8
Total	100.0		100.0		100.0

Table 2.3 also reveals that for most sample subjects the first conviction occurred at an early age: 18 percent had a first conviction before the age of 16 and 59 percent before the age of 21. The mean age of first conviction is about 22 years, while the mean age of last conviction is about 38 years. The age of last conviction refers to the last conviction that is registered in the CCLS data. It may thus be the case that offenders are still criminally active after 2002. Those who start at a later age, logically also get their last conviction at a later age. However, it should be noted that among sample subjects who were convicted before the age of 20, a substantial share persists far into adulthood as well.

2.3 The CCLS-spouses

The aim of the present study is to obtain more insight into the protective effects of marriage. Therefore, the CCLS has been supplemented with data on the officially registered criminal careers of all marriage partners of the sample subjects from

age 12 to calendar year 2007. The data on spouses' criminal careers have been reconstructed in exactly the same way as for the CCLS sample subjects (i.e., by collecting extracts from the General Documentation Files). By enlarging the original CCLS we know – for all sample subjects and marriage partners – the exact timing of criminal offenses, the type of offenses committed, periods of prison confinement, the exact timing of marriages, divorces, and the birth of children. Table 2.4 gives an overview of several background characteristics of the CCLS sample subjects and their spouses.

Table 2.4 Background characteristics of the CCLS sample subjects ($N = 4,615$) and their spouses ($N = 4,409$)

Sample subjects		
Ever married (%)	74.9	
Mean number of marriages	1.3	(0.6)
Mean age at first marriage	25.9	(6.3)
Mean duration of first marriage in years	12.6	(12.0)
Ever divorced (%)	55.2	
Ever had children (%)	70.3	
Spouses		
Mean age in 2007	56.8	(12.3)
Ever convicted (%)	15.6	
Mean age of first conviction	29.9	(11.6)
Mean age of last conviction	39.9	(12.2)
Mean number of criminal offenses until 2007	4.9	(9.9)
Mean number of property offenses until 2007	2.4	(6.3)
Mean number of violent offenses until 2007	0.4	(1.4)

Note: standard deviations are provided in parentheses.

The population registration records revealed that 74.9 percent ($N = 3,456$) of the original 4,615 sample subjects married on at least one occasion, to a total of 4,409 partners (see Table 2.4). This concerns 73.6 percent of the male sample subjects ($N = 3,083$) and 87.1 percent of the female sample subjects ($N = 373$). On average married sample subjects marry 1.3 times during their lives. For most sample subjects, marriage is a one-time event: 74.6 percent of the married offenders marry only once (not shown in Table 2.4). A large share of the marriages ends in a divorce: 55.2 percent of the married sample subjects ever divorces during his or her life. This divorce rate is high, even compared to current divorce rates in the Netherlands (see Section 2.4).

The mean age of the spouses was almost 57 years in 2007. This means that data on spouses' criminal careers reach far into adulthood as well. 15.6 percent of the spouses have also been convicted once or more during their lives (females' spouses: 26.0%; males' spouses: 14.5%). The mean age of first conviction is 30 years, while the mean age of last conviction is 40 years. Note that for spouses the mean age of first conviction is higher than for sample subjects. Convicted spouses are far less criminally active than sample subjects. They have committed an average number of 4.9 offenses during their lives. The largest share of the spouses

is only convicted once (43.0%). The observation that spouses are far less criminally active can be explained by the fact that the CCLS mainly consists of male sample subjects who marry female spouses. Women are known to be far less deviant than men (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996). We provide more details on spouses' criminal careers in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

2.4 The Dutch context

A central idea within the life course perspective is that lives are embedded in time and place (Elder, 1994; see Section 1.2.1). The CCLS sample members are born between 1907 and 1965 and have been followed from age 12 to 72. There are three developments during this period that may have implications for the studied relationships. We will further comment on these developments in the separate empirical chapters (Chapters 3 to 7) and the conclusion and discussion (Chapter 8).

A first development is that – compared to the US and most other European countries – the Netherlands was characterized by a lenient penal climate at least until the 1990s. Few offenders were convicted, few convicted offenders were sentenced to prison, and sentences were relatively short (Kommer, 1994). This may influence the studied relationships in several ways. First, in 1977 criminals were less easily convicted than nowadays. The fact that the CCLS offenders were convicted at that time means that they were relatively serious offenders. Second, in a context where convictions and imprisonment are less common, the stigma attached to a criminal record is likely to be stronger. As a result offenders' attractiveness as potential partners may be even lower, leading to lower marital chances and higher divorce risks. Third, the idea that imprisonment removes offenders from the marriage market is less applicable to many offenders. Because prison sentences are relatively short, offenders' marital chances and divorce risks are less likely to be affected by incapacitation.

A second development is that from the 1970s onwards it became more and more common to cohabit, and cohabitation even became a substitute for marriage. Among individuals who start living together with a partner for the first time close to 100 percent were married in the first half of the century. Nowadays, almost 80 percent first cohabits among this group (Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2002: 93). This development is not unique for the Netherlands, and has taken place in the US and other European countries as well (Kalmijn, 2002; Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2000). For the current analyses the development is of less relevance because the CCLS contains data on a cohort of persons convicted in 1977. The CCLS sample subjects were on average 29 years old at that time. The largest share of the offenders already reached a marriageable age before the seventies.

A third development is that, just as in other countries, divorce rates have steadily increased from the 1970s onwards. Nowadays approximately one in three marriages dissolve (Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2000). Because it was less common to divorce during the period under study, the associated stigma is likely to be higher. As a result we may find a stronger impact of divorce on criminal offending than we would find nowadays.

2.5 Methods

Several characteristics of the analytic strategy and measures are of importance when interpreting the results of this study.

2.5.1 Analytic strategy

To conduct the analyses we constructed a person-period file, which contains for all CCLS sample subjects annual information on the number of offenses, the type of offenses, imprisonment, marital status, spousal criminality and several control variables (e.g., age, year of birth, sex, ethnicity and having children). The data thus have a nested structure in which years are nested within individuals. The complete file contains data on 275,555 years for 4,615 sample subjects.

Although the CCLS includes information on all marriage partners, the focus of this thesis – with the exception of Chapter 3 – will be on *first marriages* and *first divorces*. In this way we do not have to take into account feedback effects between marriage, divorce and crime (e.g., marriage affects the likelihood of crime which in turn affects the likelihood of remarriage). Accounting for such an endogenous relationship would greatly complicate the analyses and also increase the risk that estimates are contaminated by biases due to endogeneity (Nieuwbeerta, Nagin & Blokland 2009: 232).

To answer our research questions we use various longitudinal modeling strategies. To examine the effects of criminal offending on marriage formation, partner selection, and marital dissolution (RQ1 and RQ3) we use event history analyses. To investigate the effects of marriage, divorce and spousal criminality on criminal offending we employ fixed- as well as random-effects models (RQ2 and RQ4). We provide further details on the analytic strategy in Chapters 4 to 7.

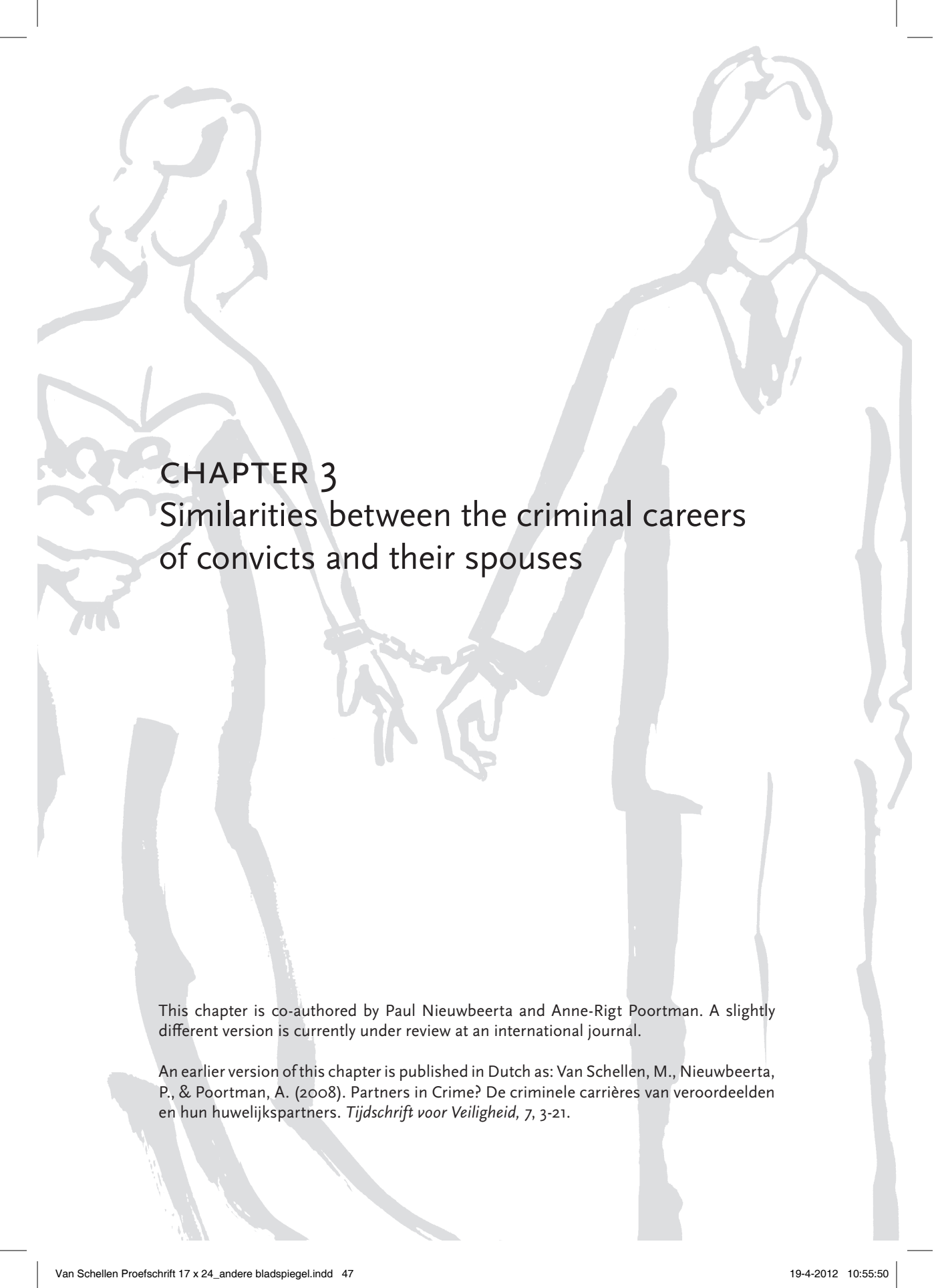
2.5.2 Measures

For the measurement of sample subjects' and spouses' criminal behavior we made use of the GDF extracts. Although GDF extracts contain information on all offenses that led to any type of judicial action (acquittal, conviction, fines, waivers for policy or technical reasons), here we use only information on those offenses that were either followed by a conviction or a prosecutorial disposition because of policy reasons. We therefore exclude cases that resulted in an acquittal or a prosecutorial disposition because of insufficient evidence. This implies that only those criminal law offenses are studied that most likely have been committed by the offenders. In addition, we only investigate felony offenses and exclude misdemeanors. In general, misdemeanors are less serious crimes. It should be noted that the GDF extracts do not contain information on the perpetration date of the offense but on the day the case was registered at the public prosecutor's office. In the CCLS the moment of registration is thus used to date the offense.

Note that the data only concern legal marriages and divorces. We do not have information about cohabitation (with or without contract) or other relationship types. With the exception of Chapter 3, we included the criminal history of the spouse as a dichotomous variable in the analyses (convicted: yes or no). The reason for doing so is that spouses are far less criminally active. When examining certain periods in life (Chapters 4 to 7), instead of the life course as a whole (Chapter 3), variation in number and type of offenses becomes too low to conduct reliable analyses.

Although the CCLS data are unusually rich with regard to offenders' marital and criminal histories, as with most sources of official data, information on several control variables known to be correlated with marriage, divorce and crime (e.g., personality characteristics, socioeconomic status) is unfortunately lacking. However, the selectivity of the CCLS sample partly offers a solution to the fact that we lack certain control variables. The CCLS sample is constructed in such a way, that all sample subjects have been in contact with the criminal justice system at least once (in 1977). For some this was before marriage, for others during or after marriage. The non-offenders in our analyses are thus actually not-yet offenders. Having a selective sample of offenders can be regarded as a strength. In fact, it might be more useful to compare the offenders with not-yet offenders than with non-offenders. Not-yet offenders are likely to be much more similar to offenders with regard to (un)measured characteristics that influence both the likelihood of offending and outcomes in the marriage market.

Despite the limitations of official measurements, we presume that the data are the best presently available to answer our research questions. The extended CCLS is the first study containing longitudinal data on the criminal careers of both offenders and their spouses. The fact that all data are derived from official sources means that they are of high quality and have very few missing values. Another advantage of official data is that they allow for the study of serious delinquent crimes, which is usually not the case in self-report studies. Moreover, our results are not disturbed by memory-problems, social desirability, and non-responses problems, which would likely have been the case if we had used self-reported data (Van de Rakt, 2011).



CHAPTER 3

Similarities between the criminal careers of convicts and their spouses

This chapter is co-authored by Paul Nieuwebeerta and Anne-Rigt Poortman. A slightly different version is currently under review at an international journal.

An earlier version of this chapter is published in Dutch as: Van Schellen, M., Nieuwebeerta, P., & Poortman, A. (2008). Partners in Crime? De criminele carrières van veroordeelden en hun huwelijkspartners. *Tijdschrift voor Veiligheid*, 7, 3-21.

3 Similarities between the criminal careers of convicts and their spouses

3.1 Introduction

With the rise of developmental and life course criminology (Donker, Kleemans, Van der Laan & Nieuwbeerta, 2004; Piquero, Farrington & Blumstein, 2003), studies examining the development of individual criminal careers have been accumulating. Researchers have not only followed high-risk children (Loeber et al., 2003) but also examined the criminal careers of adult convicts (Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2005). Results show that offenders differ in the age at which they start and end their criminal careers, the number of offenses they commit, and the factors underlying their behavior. Besides a small group of persistent offenders that remains criminally active far into adulthood, there appears to be a large group of delinquents that stops committing crimes after adolescence (Blokland, Nagin & Nieuwbeerta, 2005; Laub & Sampson, 2003).

The observation that many offenders end their criminal careers in early adulthood is often explained by the fact that individuals tend to marry during this period in life. The decline in criminal behavior would be caused by the social bond that forms as a result of marriage (Sampson & Laub, 1993). However, despite its prominence, the idea that marriage reduces crime is less straightforward than assumed. Although on average the effect might be protective, the benefits of marriage can be expected to depend on the criminal behavior of the spouse. From learning and socialization theories, for example, it can be derived that a marriage to a criminal partner is likely to sustain or stimulate an offender's engagement in criminal activities over time (Akers, 1973). Offenders probably have similar views on the appropriateness of criminal offending, learn from each other, and pass on their criminal skills (Rhule-Louie & McMahon, 2007; Simons et al., 2002).

To understand the development of criminal behavior more thoroughly, insight is needed into the criminal behavior of spouses. This chapter can be regarded as a first step in this largely unexplored area. The aim is to extend the current knowledge about similarities in spouses' criminal behavior. First, we examine to what extent offenders marry and divorce. Second, and this is the main focus of the chapter, the question is addressed to what extent offenders and spouses are similar in terms of their criminal behavior. We investigate similarities between marriage partners in the number and type of offenses they commit. Consistent

attention is paid to potential gender differences, by comparing male offenders and their partners to female offenders and their partners.

One of the reasons for the current lack of empirical research on partners' criminal involvement is that the requirements for the design of these studies are substantial. We will employ data from a unique long-term study of a cohort of Dutch offenders: the Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS) (Nieuwbeerta & Blokland, 2003). The CCLS enables us to study the life-long criminal careers of convicts *and* their partners – being the first study to do so. Before turning to the results, we first give an overview of the theoretical mechanisms that may underlie partner similarities in criminal behavior and the earlier studies that have been conducted in this area.

3.2 Theory and previous research

In contrast to criminology, numerous sociological studies have paid attention to similarities between (marriage) partners. Partner similarities – or *homogamy* – are often explained by two main theoretical mechanisms that may both be at play: selection and influence (Kalmijn, 1998; Yamaguchi & Kandel, 1993). In the following sections we discuss these theoretical mechanisms and apply them to criminal behavior.

3.2.1 Partner selection

First of all, similarities between spouses could be caused by *selection mechanisms* preceding marriage: individuals choose a partner with whom they have certain characteristics in common. Partner selection is assumed to arise from an interplay between individual *preferences* for certain characteristics in a spouse, the interference of *third parties* in the selection process, and the *opportunities* that marriage candidates have to meet (dis)similar partners (Kalmijn, 1998).

In the context of criminal activities, it could on the one hand be argued that offenders are likely to *prefer* a partner who shows criminal behavior. An advantage of similarity in criminal lifestyle is that it promotes mutual understanding between partners. On the other hand, it could be the case that all individuals, be it criminals or not, seek a trustworthy partner who is not involved in criminal activities. Being married to a criminal offender may introduce a variety of problems, such as trouble with the law, regular separation from the family as a result of incarceration, and no legal source of income. Regardless of whether offenders prefer a similar or a non-criminal partner, homogamy will be the likely outcome in both cases. Preferences for similar partners obviously lead to homogamy but so does competition over non-criminal partners: persons with the most attractive characteristics have a high likelihood of selecting each other as partners first, leaving the less privileged to further competition.

Apart from individual preferences, the preferences of significant others form part of the partner selection process. These so called *third parties* exert control by imposing sanctions on members who marry outside the social group. Criminal behavior is known to run in the family (Farrington, Barnes & Lambert, 1996).

Although the role of social control within criminal families is unclear, non-criminal families are likely to object to selecting a criminal spouse. Since marrying a criminal offender could threaten family stability this is likely to be discouraged. Preferences of significant others thus also promote similarity in spouses' (non-) criminal behavior.

Finally, the choice for a marriage partner is constrained by meeting *opportunities* (Kalmijn, 1998). Opportunities to meet similar others are generally larger than opportunities to meet dissimilar others. Chances to meet dissimilar partners are, for example, reduced by local marriage markets. Partners often meet each other at specific locations and occasions, such as the neighborhood, at school or through friends. The composition of these local marriage markets appears to be quite homogeneous: criminal activities tend to be concentrated in certain neighborhoods and friendship networks. As a result, individuals will have an increased probability of selecting someone who is similar with regard to involvement in crime (Krueger et al., 1998).

Although various mechanisms may apply, all of the preceding arguments lead to the expectation that criminal offending increases the likelihood of marrying a partner who is criminally active as well. Individual preferences, sanctions of third parties and limitations in meeting opportunities, all likewise suggest that marriages will be homogeneous with respect to the criminal behavior of the spouse.

3.2.2 Partner influences

Partner selection before marriage provides only one explanation for similarity in criminal behavior between spouses. During marriage, partners may also grow to be more similar by influencing each other's behavior. Partner influences have hardly been addressed in previous research (Yamaguchi & Kandel, 1993). Nonetheless, various mechanisms can be derived from the criminological and sociological literature to explain how spouses may influence each other's criminal behavior.

First of all, differential association theory and social learning theory offer valuable insights (Akers, 1973). These theories assume that delinquent behavior is learned through social interaction within a cohesive and intimate group, where criminal norms, values, and knowledge are passed on through socialization processes (Warr, 2002). Although these theories mainly have been used to explain delinquent behavior in peer groups, the same ideas can be applied to marital relationships (Rhule-Louie & McMahan, 2007). Partners may learn from each other, pass on their criminal skills, and bring each other in contact with other delinquents.

Furthermore, research on attitudes revealed that spouses tend to become increasingly similar over the course of marriage (Kalmijn, 2005). Increased resemblances in attitudes are explained by indicating the potential problems that partner differences may cause. Diverging attitudes may easily lead to conflicts between partners. Attitude alignments can be viewed as attempts to prevent such conflicts, particularly when the object of concern affects the internal functioning of the relationship – which is likely to be the case when it concerns criminal behavior.

Another line of research within family sociology has focused on the relationship between the professional careers of spouses and on how labor market related resources of one partner affect the career of the other partner (Bernasco, 1994). One important and useful idea highlighted by these studies is that the extent to which a person is able to establish a successful career depends on the resources of his or her spouse. In a similar vein, marrying a criminal offender and having access to partners' "criminal" resources could facilitate a more successful criminal career.

The above mentioned arguments lead to the expectation that spouses influence each other in such a way that they will become increasingly alike in their (non-)criminal behavior during marriage. If criminal offenders marry a partner who is criminally active as well, an environment is created that could sustain or even reinforce criminal tendencies over time (Rhule-Louie & McMahon, 2007). Marrying a non-criminal spouse, on the other hand, could reduce criminal behavior and might even lead to desistance from crime.

In sum, both selection and influence can explain similarities in criminal behavior between spouses. This study focuses on the question whether and to what extent the criminal behavior of marital partners correlates. Testing the underlying mechanisms is out of the scope of this study. Nonetheless, the discussed theories provide important insights into the mechanisms that may underlie similarities in spouses' criminal behavior.

3.2.3 Previous research

In the last couple of decades, several studies have been conducted which provide insight into the association between partners' criminal behavior. Table 3.1 gives an overview of the most recent studies – from the 1980s onwards. Although most of these studies were not primarily concerned with the criminal behavior of partners, they nonetheless indirectly addressed the association between (marriage) partners' criminal behavior and are therefore informative in this respect.

Overall, four types of studies can be distinguished. First, various studies focused on the concentration of criminal behavior within families (Farrington, Barnes & Lambert, 1996; Farrington, Jolliffe, Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 2001; Rowe & Farrington, 1997). Although the main concern of these studies was to examine the extent to which parents transmit criminal behavior to their children, the results of these descriptive studies also provide insight into correlations between the criminal behavior of other family members, such as marriage partners. Second, so-called twin and adoption studies examined the relative impact of genetic and environmental factors on children's antisocial behavior (Baker, 1986; Baker, Mack, Moffitt & Mednick, 1989; Krueger et al., 1998; Galboud du Fort et al., 2002; Taylor, McGue & Iacono, 2000). In order to correctly estimate the relative influence of genetic and environmental factors, these studies took into account the criminal behavior of both parents. Third, several studies investigated the association between partners' criminal behavior and the risk of partner violence (Kim & Capaldi, 2004, see also Capaldi & Crosby, 1997). Fourth, a number of studies have examined the impact of a deviant partner on the development of criminal behavior (Moffitt et al., 2001; Simons et al., 2002).

Table 3.1 Previous research on correlations between partners' criminal behavior

Authors	Year	Dataset	Sample subjects	Measurement criminal behavior	Strength of correlation
Baker	1986	Denmark Adoption Study	Biological and adoptive parents of 2,532 men, adopted in Denmark between 1924 and 1947	Official data: having ever been convicted for non-violent property offenses prior to 1976	Biological parents: $r = 0.11$ Adoptive parents: $r = 0.29$
Baker et al.	1989	Denmark Adoption Study	Biological and adoptive parents of 3,922 women and 3,630 men, adopted in Denmark between 1924 and 1947	Official data: having ever been convicted for non-violent property offenses prior to 1976	Biological: $r = 0.15$ (parents of sons) $r = 0.09$ (parents of daughters) Adoptive: $r = 0.09$ (ns) (parents of sons) $r = 0.15$ (parents of daughters) odds ratio = 5.4
Farrington et al.	1996	Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development	Biological parents of 397 boys from London (working class)	Official data: having ever been convicted	$r = 0.55$
Rowe & Farrington	1997	Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development	Biological parents of 343 boys from London (working class)	Official data: having ever been convicted	$r = 0.54$
Krueger et al.	1998	Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study	360 respondents aged 21 years from Dunedin and their partners approximately aged 21 years (≥ 6 months steady relationship, cohabitating or married)	Self-reports of respondent and partner: delinquent behavior in last year	$r = 0.54$
Taylor et al.	2000	Minnesota Twin Family Study	Biological parents of 345 twins aged 16 to 18 years from Minneapolis and surroundings	Self-reports: delinquent behavior during adolescence and adulthood	Parents of sons: $r = 0.23$ Parents of daughters: $r = 0.35$
Farrington et al.	2001	Pittsburgh Youth Study	Family members of 1,395 boys from public schools in Pittsburgh	Self-reports of one of the parents: having ever been in contact with police	Parents: odds ratio = 11.6 Grandparents: odds ratio = 19.1

Note: All correlations are significant unless stated otherwise.

Table 3.1 Continued

Authors	Year	Dataset	Sample subjects	Measurement criminal behavior	Strength of correlation
Moffitt et al.	2001	Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study	347 respondents aged 21 – 134 men and 213 women – from Dunedin and their partners of approximately 21 years of age (\geq 6 months steady relationship, cohabitating or married)	Self-reports of respondent and partner: delinquent behavior during past year and number of convictions since age 17	Delinquency: $r = 0.33$ (men and women) Convictions: $r = 0.21$ (men and partner) $r = 0.38$ (women and partner) odds ratio = 3.32 (ns)
Galboud du Fort et al.	2002	Family Study of Mental Disorders	519 adults – women mean age 43 years, men mean age 46 years – from Edmonton / Canada and their partners (cohabitating, married)	Self-reports of respondent and partner: number of arrests for multiple non-traffic offenses during adulthood	
Simons et al.	2002	Iowa Youth and Families Project	236 young adults – 102 men, 134 women – mean age of 22 years, from economic disadvantaged neighborhoods and their partners (steady relationship, cohabitating, married)	Self-reports on delinquent and criminal behavior in last year of respondent (t1: adolescence, t2: adulthood) and partner (t2: adulthood)	Men and partner: $r = 0.47$ (t1-t2) $r = 0.48$ (t2-t2) Women and partner: $r = 0.30$ (t1-t2) $r = 0.62$ (t2-t2)
Kim & Capaldi	2004	Oregon Youth Study (including Couples Study)	79 young men, age 20 to 24 years, at higher risk for delinquent behavior during childhood and their partners (steady relationship, cohabitating, married) of 16 to 37 years of age	Official data: convictions during last year Self-reports of respondent, partner and interviewer: anti-social behavior in last year	$r = 0.43$

Note: All correlations are significant unless stated otherwise.

Despite the fact that the above-mentioned studies differ substantially in terms of their background, nearly all have found significant correlations between the criminal behavior of partners. Similarities between partners even exist across generations. The Pittsburgh Youth Study for instance, showed that not only parents but also grandparents display similarities in their criminal behavior (Farrington et al., 2001). Studies differ in the strength of the associations that were found, with odds ratios ranging from 5.4 to 19.1 (see Table 3.1). Overall, stronger correlations were reported in studies that relied on self-report data rather than on official measurements of criminal behavior.

A small number of studies investigated gender differences (Moffitt et al., 2001; Simons et al., 2002). In some cases, depending on the specific outcome under study, the criminal behavior of female offenders and their partners appeared to correlate stronger than the criminal behavior of convicted men and their partners. Other studies examined spousal similarity for criminal behavior over different time points. The results indicate that marriage partners do not only resemble each other during adulthood but also with regard to problematic behavior during childhood (Galboud du Fort et al., 2002). In addition, Simons and others (2002) found that the criminal behavior of the one partner during adolescence correlates with the criminal behavior of the other during adulthood.

Research from related scientific fields provides further support for the reported associations. Several studies showed that spouses resemble each other with respect to characteristics that are related to criminal behavior, for instance drug abuse (Yamaguchi & Kandel, 1993), alcohol addiction (Olmsted, Crowell & Waters, 2003) and antisocial personality disorders (Jaffee, Moffitt, Caspi & Taylor, 2003; Meyer et al., 2000; Quinton et al., 1993; Stallings et al., 1997).

In order to adequately value the contributions of the foregoing studies, one must keep in mind that the reported associations between the criminal behavior of spouses are mostly based on cross-sectional data. Partners have not been tracked over longer periods of time. Furthermore, family studies and twin and adoption studies focused on selective samples, consisting of marriage partners who had children. These studies are not informative with regard to the criminal behavior of (still) childless couples. In other studies the samples often consist of adolescents or young adults for whom durable relationships and marriages are less common.

The aim of the present study is to investigate the correlations between the criminal behavior of spouses. Apart from being the first study to examine similarities in spouses' criminal behavior in the Dutch context, this study pays attention to several aspects that have hardly been addressed until now. First, we investigate similarities between spouses in the number and type of offenses. Second, we examine gender differences and consistently compare female convicts and their partners with male convicts and their partners.

3.3 Methods

To examine partner similarities in criminal behavior we use data from the Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS) (Nieuwbeerta & Blokland, 2003). The CCLS offenders were selected by taking a four-percent sample of all cases of criminal offenses tried in the Netherlands in 1977. This resulted in a total sample of 4,615 offenders (4,187 men and 428 women) for which data are available on their marital and criminal careers from age 12 to the year 2002. For the present study, the CCLS has been supplemented with data on the complete criminal careers of all sample subjects' marriage partners. The population registration records revealed that 74.9 percent ($N = 3,456$) of the original 4,615 sample subjects married on at least one occasion, to a total of 4,409 partners. This concerns 73.6 percent of the male sample subjects ($N = 3,083$) and 87.1 percent of the female sample subjects ($N = 373$). By enlarging the original CCLS we know – for all sample subjects and marriage partners – the exact timing of criminal offenses, the type of offenses committed, periods of prison confinement, and the exact timing of marriages and divorces. See Chapter 2 for an extensive description of the CCLS data.

3.4 Results

Before discussing our main results on similarities in spouses' criminal behavior, we first present descriptive statistics on sample subjects' marital careers in Table 3.2.⁴ The table provides an overview of the association between marriage and divorce on the one hand and criminal offending on the other hand. We first turn to the results for male sample subjects. Among male sample subjects the percentage that ever marries decreases as the number of offenses increases ($\chi^2 = 130.83$; $p < .001$). Among men who are convicted for 1 offense 82.4 percent ever marries, while among men who committed more than 15 offenses 61.5 percent ever marries. A reverse – and even stronger – relationship is found for divorce. As the number of convictions increases, the percentage that ever divorces increases ($\chi^2 = 367.35$; $p < .001$). For men who are convicted for 1 offense divorce rates are relatively low: 30.9 percent. Among men who are convicted for more than 15 offenses, 78.3 percent ever divorces. For the divorced men we also determined the duration of their first marriage. As the number of offenses increases, the mean duration of first marriage decreases ($F = 49.80$; $p < .001$). The mean number of marriages slightly increases as men commit more offenses ($F = 32.01$, $p < .001$). We found gender differences as well. For women there are no clear differences in marriage rates between the four distinguished offending categories. In all categories marriage rates vary between 80 and 90 percent. Just as for men, females' divorce rates increase as criminal histories become more severe ($\chi^2 = 19.52$; $p < .001$). Remarkably, females' divorce rates are even higher than males'

4 For some individuals the 1977 sample-offense did not result in a conviction or a policy waiver and these individuals likewise did not commit any offense that could be classified as such before and after 1977 ($n = 177$). In the current analyses, these individuals are included in the "1 offense" category.

divorce rates. Among women who are convicted for 6 or more offenses about 90 percent ever divorces. Just as for men, the duration of first marriage becomes shorter as women commit more offenses ($F = 7.27$; $p < .001$).

Table 3.2 Descriptive statistics on sample subjects' marital careers, by gender

	Male sample subjects				
	Total	1 offense	2-5 offenses	6-15 offenses	> 15 offenses
Ever married (%)	73.6	82.4	79.8	72.7	61.5
Ever divorced (%)	53.5	30.9	41.6	63.6	78.3
Mean duration of first marriage	12.5	18.1	15.4	11.5	8.4
Mean number of times married	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5
N	4,187	680	1,280	1,179	1,048
	Female sample subjects				
	Total	1 offense	2-5 offenses	6-15 offenses	> 15 offenses
Ever married (%)	87.1	88.5	87.7	81.0	87.5
Ever divorced (%)	69.4	60.5	71.9	89.4	92.9
Mean duration of first marriage	14.1	15.6	16.1	9.0	3.8
Mean number if times married	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.8
N	428	200	154	58	16

Similarities in criminal careers

The primary aim of this chapter is to investigate similarities in the criminal careers of convicts and their spouses. Table 3.3 gives an overview of the total number of offenses committed by spouses versus the total number of offenses committed by sample subjects. Note that the N in the table indicates the number of partners. Persons who have been married more than once will therefore be represented in the results more than once. The results presented in Table 3.3 first of all indicate that a substantial number of convicts married a *non-criminal* partner. Among male convicts 14.5 percent of the marriage partners has ever been convicted. Among female convicts 26.0 percent of the marriage partners has ever been convicted.

We are not only interested in the question if convicts marry criminal partners but also if partners resemble each other in terms of the *number of offenses* they commit over the life course. As Table 3.3 shows, the higher the number of offenses committed by criminal convicts, the higher is the number of offenses committed by their partners ($\chi^2 = 255.16$; $p < .001$). For example, among men who are convicted for more than 15 criminal offenses, 13.6 percent of the spouses have committed three or more offenses themselves. Among men who are only convicted once, 5.5 percent of the spouses have committed three or more offenses.

Similar results are found for female convicts, although the correlation appears to be less strong ($\chi^2 = 15.11$; $p = .09$). Moreover, females who are convicted for over 15 offenses form a remarkable group. In 32 percent of the cases their spouses have a criminal record as well and in 20 percent of the cases their spouses committed more than 10 offenses. In all distinguished categories the percentage of convicted

women who married a criminal partner turns out to be higher than the percentage of convicted men who married a criminal partner. For example, among the group of men who are convicted 2 to 5 times, 9.0 percent of the spouses have a criminal record as well. Among the group of female offenders who are convicted 2 to 5 times, this number is a striking 26.9 percent. Convicted women thus appear to marry a criminal husband more often than male convicts marry a criminal wife.

Table 3.3 Total number of offenses committed by spouses versus total number of offenses committed by sample subjects, by gender

	Male sample subjects				
	Total	1 offense	2-5 offenses	6-15 offenses	> 15 offenses
Spouses					
0 offenses	85.5	92.1	91.0	85.0	73.3
1-2 offense(s)	9.0	6.0	7.0	10.2	12.5
3-10 offenses	4.7	1.6	1.8	4.4	11.0
> 10 offenses	0.8	0.3	0.2	0.4	2.6
<i>N</i>	3,909	635	1,251	1,125	898
	Female sample subjects				
	Total	1 offense	2-5 offenses	6-15 offenses	> 15 offenses
Spouses					
0 offenses	74.0	77.7	73.1	65.0	68.0
1-2 offense(s)	9.8	9.6	9.7	11.7	8.0
3-10 offenses	9.8	9.2	9.7	15.0	4.0
> 10 offenses	6.4	3.5	7.5	8.3	20.0
<i>N</i>	500	229	186	60	25

Finally, we are interested in the question to what extent marriage partners are similar in terms of the *type of offenses* they commit. Can the earlier found similarities in the number of convictions be explained by the fact that correlations are strong for certain types of offenses but not for others? In order to answer this question, a distinction was made between the following categories of criminal offenses: property offenses, violent offenses, vandalism, traffic offenses, offenses of the drug act and offenses of the weapon act. Because the results of the different types of offenses appear to be quite similar, Tables 3.4 and 3.5 only present the findings for the two most prevalent crimes, namely property offenses and violent offenses.

Table 3.4 Number of property offenses committed by spouses versus number of property offenses committed by sample subjects, by gender

	Male sample subjects				
	Total	0 offenses	1 offense	2-3 offenses	> 4 offenses
Spouses					
0 offenses	90.8	94.8	93.7	91.9	83.6
1 offense	4.8	3.4	3.4	4.4	7.4
2-3 offenses	2.6	1.2	1.3	2.9	4.9
> 4 offenses	1.8	0.5	1.6	0.7	4.1
<i>N</i>	3,909	1,294	759	683	1,173
	Female sample subjects				
	Total	0 offenses	1 offense	2-3 offenses	> 4 offenses
Spouses					
0 offenses	83.6	88.1	83.4	84.3	75.5
1 offense	6.0	7.1	4.8	5.6	6.1
2-3 offenses	4.2	1.2	6.9	4.5	5.1
> 4 offenses	6.2	3.6	4.8	5.6	13.3
<i>N</i>	500	168	145	89	98

Table 3.4 reveals that the more property offenses convicts have committed, the higher is the number of property offenses committed by their spouses. This is the case both for convicted men and their partners ($\chi^2 = 158.92$; $p < .001$) and for convicted women and their partners ($\chi^2 = 18.49$; $p < .05$). With respect to violent offenses (Table 3.5), a significant correlation is only found for male offenders and their spouses ($\chi^2 = 99.81$; $p < .001$). The fact that such an association is not found for female convicts probably has to do with the small number of violent crimes females have committed. The results seem to suggest though that also for women the chances of marrying a partner who has committed a violent offense increase when women have been convicted for more violent crimes themselves. For female convicts who have never committed a violent offense, 9.6 percent of the partners has ever been convicted. This percentage is considerably higher for women who have committed more than 4 violent offenses: 17.6 percent of their spouses have been convicted for a violent offense as well.

Overall the findings for the different types of crimes (Tables 3.4 and 3.5) appear to correspond with the results for the total number of offenses (Table 3.3). The more offenses a person has committed, the higher is the number of offenses committed by their partner – irrespective of the type of crime. These results indicate that the reported associations between the numbers of convictions cannot be explained by the fact that partners are only similar with respect to certain types of offenses. Rather, spouses correspond in the degree to which they are criminally active.

Table 3.5 Number of violent offenses committed by spouses versus violent offenses committed by sample subjects, by gender

	Male sample subjects				
	Total	0 offenses	1 offense	2-3 offenses	> 4 offenses
Spouses					
No offenses	97.4	98.7	98.4	97.0	92.4
Offense(s)	2.6	1.3	1.6	3.0	7.6
N	3,909	1,797	822	701	589
	Female sample subjects				
	Total	0 offenses	1 offense	2-3 offenses	> 4 offenses
Spouses					
No offenses	90.2	90.4	91.7	86.7	82.4
Offense(s)	9.8	9.6	8.3	13.3	17.6
N	500	408	60	15	17

3.5 Conclusion and discussion

The aim of the present study was to examine the associations between the criminal behavior of marriage partners. While previous research focused on individual criminal careers, we investigated the criminal careers of spouses as well. Although the study is descriptive in nature, it can be regarded as an important step in this largely unexplored area. It has been the first study to examine the extent to which spouses correspond in the number and type of offenses they commit over the life course. Additionally, differences between male and female convicts have been explicitly addressed. To answer the research questions, data were used from the Criminal Career and Life Course Study. This dataset contains information on the complete criminal careers and life courses of almost 5,000 convicts and their marriage partners.

The findings first of all indicate that there are significant associations between marriage and divorce on the one hand and criminal offending on the other hand. As the number of offenses increases, marriage rates become lower and divorce rates higher. A substantial proportion of the criminal convicts has (had) a marriage partner who never committed an offense. This does not only apply to male convicts but also – although to a lesser extent – to female convicts. Despite this finding, marriage partners are found to be similar with respect to the *number* of criminal offenses they committed. For both men and women, a higher number of offenses increases the chance of having (had) a partner who has also been convicted more often. Convicted women appear to have a higher likelihood of marrying a criminal partner than convicted men. A potential explanation for this gender difference may lie in the fact that the population of criminal convicts mainly comprises men. If male offenders marry, they will have a higher chance to marry a non-criminal spouse (Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006). Another explanation might be that non-criminal men generally consider convicted women to be less attractive marriage candidates. The same would not have to be true for male convicts because a criminal lifestyle is more common and accepted for men. Finally, the results suggest that the association in the numbers of offenses committed cannot be ascribed to the fact

that marriage partners are only similar with respect to certain *types* of criminal offenses they commit.

Although the data used in this study are unique – they stem from a large-scale, prospective, longitudinal study with a very long observation period – some limitations have to be taken into account. First, we probably underestimated the total number of delinquent acts because our analyses rely on official data. Not all offenses are recorded by the police or prosecuted. This may also explain why the reported associations were less strong than those found in earlier studies that relied on self-reported crime (Farrington et al. 2001).

Second, we did not have information on partner relationships other than marriage. From the 1970s onwards, it has become more and more common to cohabit, and cohabitation has even become a substitute for marriage (Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2000). For our analyses this is less of a problem because the CCLS contains data on a cohort of individuals convicted in 1977. The largest share of these persons already reached a marriageable age before the seventies. However, with increasing rates of cohabitation in the Netherlands, the United States, and other countries, research on the relationship between criminal behavior and other living arrangements is much needed (see also Bersani, Laub & Nieuwbeerta, 2009).

In sum, we found significant associations between the main variables under study: marriage, divorce and criminal offending. Several mechanisms may underlie these associations. It may be the case that offenders are less likely to marry and more likely to divorce but it may also be the case that marriage reduces criminal offending and divorce stimulates criminal activities. The association between offenders' and spouses' criminal careers may not only indicate that criminals select each other as spouses but also that spouses influence each other's criminal behavior during marriage. Associations between partners' criminal behavior have also been found in earlier studies. The current study aims to improve upon earlier research by disentangling the underlying relationships. We do so by answering our central research questions (RQ1 to RQ4) in the subsequent empirical chapters (Chapters 4 to 7).



CHAPTER 4

The impact of convicts' criminal careers on marriage formation and partner selection

This chapter is co-authored by Anne-Rigt Poortman and Paul Nieuwbeerta. A slightly different version is accepted for publication as: Van Schellen, M., Poortman, A., & Nieuwbeerta, P. (forthcoming). Partners in Crime? Criminal Offending, Marriage Formation, and Partner Selection. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*.

An earlier version of this chapter is published in Dutch as: Van Schellen, M., Poortman, A., & Nieuwbeerta, P. (2010). Partners in crime? De invloed van crimineel gedrag op huwelijkskansen en partnersselectie. *Mens en Maatschappij*, 85, 109-134.

4 The impact of convicts' criminal careers on marriage formation and partner selection

4.1 Introduction

In life course criminology, marriage is considered to be an important event that can reduce an individual's criminal activity and can even lead to desistance from crime (Laub & Sampson, 2003). The decline in criminal behavior is often attributed to the social bond that forms as a result of marriage: spouses monitor and attempt to control each other's behavior, and do not want to endanger their marital relationship by committing crime (Sampson & Laub, 1993). Recent empirical studies show that marriage indeed has the potential to suppress criminal offending, especially among men (Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2005; King, Massoglia & MacMillan, 2007; Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006).

Although it has been widely acknowledged that marriage affects the development of crime, surprisingly few studies have examined the reverse relationship: the effects of a criminal history on the transition to marriage. As marriage has been shown to protect individuals from crime (Laub & Sampson, 2003), it is equally important to study the factors that determine offenders' marital chances. The few earlier studies in this area have mainly limited their attention to the effect of incarceration on the formation of marital unions. As a result they focused on a selective group of serious and persistent offenders (Huebner, 2005; Huebner, 2007; London & Parker, 2009; Lopoo & Western, 2005; Sampson, Laub & Wimer 2006; Western, Lopoo & McLanahan, 2004; Western & McLanahan, 2000). However, even without imprisonment, contact with the criminal justice system may diminish marital chances in a significant way (King & South, 2008: 3).

Moreover, despite its prominence, the idea that marriage is protective and reduces crime is less straightforward than assumed. The possible benefits of marriage can be hypothesized to depend strongly on the criminal behavior of the spouse. A marriage to a criminal partner may sustain or even stimulate an offender's criminal activities (Rhule-Louie & McMahon, 2007; Simons et al., 2002). For example, offenders may have similar views on the appropriateness of criminal offending, learn from each other, and pass on their criminal skills. Therefore, it is not only relevant to study if criminal convicts marry but also whom they marry.

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between criminal offending, marriage formation and partner selection. The current study is guided by two research questions. First, to what extent does criminal offending affect

the likelihood of marrying? Second, to what extent do criminal offenders marry spouses who have a criminal history as well? One of the reasons for the lack of empirical research on the effects of criminal behavior on marital outcomes is that the requirements for the design of these studies are substantial. First, longitudinal information on the development of offenders' criminal behavior is necessary. Second, this information is needed on marriage partners. Third, very long periods of observation are needed in order to examine persons beyond adolescence into adulthood.

To answer our research questions we use data from a unique long-term study of a Dutch conviction cohort: the Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS). The CCLS enables us to contribute to the current literature in several ways. First, it is the first study containing data on the criminal careers of a large number of offenders *and* their marriage partners. Both offenders and their spouses are followed over almost the entire life course, from age 12 until age 72. Second, the data include the exact timing of marriages, convictions, and periods of incarceration. In this way we can gain more insight into the causality of the studied relationships. Third, we use a more complete measure of criminal behavior than typically used in earlier studies. We investigate the number of criminal convictions, the time since last conviction, different types of offenses (i.e., violent offenses), and incarceration. Fourth, the data do not only allow us to investigate the marital outcomes of male offenders but also those of female offenders. Fifth, we are able to study offenders' marital outcomes in a different cultural context: the Netherlands. Earlier studies solely relied on data from the United States.

4.2 Theory and previous research

With the rise of life course criminology (Piquero Farrington & Blumstein, 2003), studies examining the development of individual criminal careers have been accumulating. Earlier research in this area has been primarily based on Sampson and Laub's age-graded theory of informal social control (Sampson & Laub, 1993). According to Sampson and Laub important life course events can act as turning points in the criminal career. During adulthood especially marriage has been identified as a significant transitional event.

Although Sampson and Laub do recognize that individuals may select themselves into marriage, they assume that life course transitions are to a large extent determined by chance (Laub & Sampson, 2003). As a result, their theory has mainly focused on explaining the effects of marriage on crime. Although they do recognize the role of cumulative disadvantage (the idea that offending impedes conventional life outcomes, such as marriage), they remain unclear about the mechanisms underlying offenders' marital chances. In addition, Sampson and Laub solely focused on male offenders. The assumption behind their theory is that these male offenders marry non-criminal women: "Given the crime differences between men and women, it is almost invariably the case that men marry 'up' and women 'down' when it comes to exposure to crime" (Laub & Sampson, 2003: 45-46). As a result, Sampson and Laub did not pay attention to partner selection (i.e., the criminal history of the spouse).

To explain offenders' outcomes in the marriage market, we extend Sampson and Laub's informal social control theory with criminological insights (e.g., Gottfredson and Hirschi's self-control theory) and especially with theoretical notions from family sociology. In contrast to criminology, family sociologists have extensively studied the mechanisms underlying marriage formation and partner selection. Sociologists argue that both marriage formation and partner selection can be expected to depend upon preferences and opportunities (Becker, 1981; Goldscheider & Waite, 1986; Kalmijn, 1998; Oppenheimer, 1988). In the following sections it will be argued that criminal behavior influences these preferences and opportunities and, through this, the likelihood of marrying as well as partner choice.

4.2.1 Marriage formation

There may be various reasons to enter a marital union but usually individuals prefer to marry because it enhances their wellbeing – emotional, financial, and social – or because they wish to have children (Becker, 1981). It has been argued that offenders may have lower *preferences* to marry. This idea especially takes a prominent place in Gottfredson and Hirschi's self-control theory (1990). Individuals with lower levels of self-control would have a tendency to seek immediate gratification of their desires with minimal effort and without long-term planning. Due to these underlying personal traits they would not only be more likely to commit offenses but also less likely to marry (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1995). "People with lower levels of self-control tend to dislike institutional arrangements that require discipline, supervision, or other constraints on behavior" such as marriage (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990: 157).

Besides offenders' preferences, a lack of marriage *opportunities* can reduce their marital chances. First, a criminal record can make them less attractive marriage partners to others. A criminal record is not only a predictor of future criminal activities but also gives information about one's prospects in the labor market and the ability to provide for a family (Pager, 2003; Western, 2002). In addition, a criminal record might signal that one is more likely to commit violence (towards a partner) and less likely to show characteristics that are valued in a spouse, such as personal empathy, responsibility, maturity, and reliability (King & South, 2008: 6, see also Edin, 2000; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Western & McLanahan, 2000). Second, besides offenders' unattractiveness as a partner, marriage formation can be constrained because offenders have lower chances to meet potential partners. This argument especially applies to incarceration. Incarceration, by way of incapacitation, removes individuals from the pool of eligible marriage partners. It may also strain and weaken bonds among those who already have established a relationship (Lopoo & Western, 2005).

Although various mechanisms may apply, it can be expected that offenders have lower marital chances than non-offenders. In this study we examine several aspects of offenders' criminal careers: the seriousness of convictions (i.e., the number of offenses, violent offenses, incarceration) and the timing of convictions. We argue that the mechanisms generating marital chances do not only apply to offending and non-offending but also to the seriousness of a criminal

history. The more serious a criminal history, the weaker offenders' preferences towards marriage, and the higher the perceived constraints will be. Furthermore, constraints in the marriage market are likely to diminish when criminal activities took place a longer time ago: potential partners may be unaware of or unconcerned about these offenses. Also, the offenders' own preferences might change, once a criminal lifestyle has been abandoned.

In line with the foregoing, we formulate three hypotheses. First, we expect that the more offenses a person has committed, the lower the odds of marrying become. Second, we expect that violent offenses and incarceration – as indicators of even more serious involvement in crime – decrease marital chances even further. Third, we expect that the longer ago the last conviction, the higher marital chances become.

Surprisingly, so far very little research exists on the effects of criminal behavior on marriage formation. One of the main studies is Sampson and Laub's reanalysis of the Glueck and Glueck data (1950). Although their primary aim was to investigate the effect of marriage on crime (i.e., the reverse relationship), they estimated a propensity score model of the chance to marry as a way to control for selection effects (Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006). The results showed that juvenile delinquent behavior, an early age at first arrest, arrest in the previous year, the total number of arrests until the previous year, and the length of incarceration in the previous year reduced men's marital chances throughout adulthood (odds ratios range from 0.59 to 0.99).

Other studies in this area solely focused on the effects of incarceration (Huebner 2005; Huebner, 2007; London & Parker, 2009; Lopoo & Western 2005; Sampson, Laub & Wimer 2006; Western, Lopoo & McLanahan, 2004; Western & McLanahan, 2000). In general, they supported the idea that incarceration has immediate effects but results were mixed when it concerned the long-term effects of incarceration after men's release from prison. For example, Lopoo and Western (2005) found that the odds of the transition to marriage were 78 percent lower for currently incarcerated men compared to non-incarcerated men (odds ratio = 0.22). They observed no such effect of having ever been incarcerated on the transition to marriage. In contrast, Huebner (2005; 2007) found a significant effect of adult incarceration on the likelihood of marrying that continues after release from prison (odds ratios varied between 0.42 and 0.68 for different racial groups).

4.2.2 Partner selection

In addition to the choice to marry, the choice of whom to marry can be assumed to arise from an interplay between individual preferences for certain characteristics in a spouse and the opportunities that marriage candidates have to meet (dis) similar partners (Kalmijn, 1998). In general, individual *preferences* to marry a certain person are based on an evaluation of the resources that a person has to offer. Individuals may either prefer a partner who is similar, which is likely to hold for sociocultural resources (i.e., ethnicity), or prefer a partner with many resources, which is plausible in case of socioeconomic resources (i.e., income) (Kalmijn, 2005). In the context of criminal activities, it could, on the one hand, be argued that offenders are likely to prefer a partner who shows criminal behavior as well.

An advantage of this similarity in criminal lifestyle is that it promotes mutual understanding between partners. On the other hand, it could be argued that all individuals, be it criminals or not, seek a trustworthy partner who is not involved in criminal activities. Being married to a criminal offender may introduce a variety of problems, such as trouble with the law and regular separation from the family as a result of incarceration. Regardless of whether offenders prefer a similar or a non-criminal partner, homogamy (i.e., resemblance between partners) will be the likely outcome in both cases. Preferences for similar partners obviously lead to homogamy but so does competition over non-criminal partners: persons with the most attractive characteristics have a high likelihood of selecting each other as partners first, leaving the less fortunate to end up together.

The choice for a marriage partner is constrained by mere meeting *opportunities* (Kalmijn, 1998). Opportunities to meet similar others are generally larger than opportunities to meet dissimilar others. Chances to meet dissimilar partners are, for example, reduced by local marriage markets. Partners often meet each other at specific locations and occasions, such as the neighborhood, at school or through friends. The composition of these local marriage markets is often quite homogeneous: criminal activity tends to be concentrated in certain neighborhoods or friendship networks. Therefore, individuals will have an increased probability of selecting someone who is similar with regard to involvement in crime (Krueger et al., 1998).

One's own preferences and the constraints of the marriage market both suggest that marriages are homogamous with regard to the criminal activities of the spouses. We formulate three hypotheses. First, we expect that the more criminal offenses a person has committed, the higher the chance that his or her partner is criminally active as well. Second, incarceration and violent offenses are expected to further increase the chance of marrying a criminal partner. Third, we expect that the longer ago a person has been convicted, the lower the chance of marrying a criminal spouse becomes.

Although long-term longitudinal data on partners' complete criminal careers were not available until now, some studies do provide insight in partner similarity. First, a number of studies examined criminal behavior among already married couples. These studies show that partners were similar with regard to their involvement in crime, although the strength of the associations varied (Galbaud du Fort et al., 2002; Krueger et al., 1998; Quinton et al., 1993; Taylor, McGue & Iacono, 2000). Second, there are studies that showed that youthful delinquent behavior was positively related to criminal behavior of one's intimate partner in young adulthood. Simons and others (2002) found significant effects of adolescent delinquent behavior on having an antisocial partner for men as well as women. Moffitt and others (2001) found significant correlations between individuals' antisocial behavior during adolescence and partners' self-reported delinquency, violence, and criminal charges at court (correlations varied from 0.21 to 0.34). In some cases, depending on the specific outcome under study, the criminal behavior of female offenders and their partners correlated stronger than the criminal behavior of male offenders and their partners (Simons et al., 2002; Moffitt et al., 2001). A disadvantage of all before mentioned studies is that they only had information about spouses' criminal behavior at the time of the relationship. The

similarity between partners is thus not necessarily caused by selection processes but may also result from the fact that partners influence each other's criminal behavior during the relationship.

4.2.3 Marriage and crime in the Netherlands

An important idea within the life course perspective is that offenders' lives are embedded and shaped by context (i.e., historical time and place) (Laub & Sampson, 2003). The data used in this study relate to a specific context: the Netherlands. The sample subjects were born between 1906 and 1965 and have been followed from age 12 until the year 2002. In this context two aspects are of importance. First, compared to the US (and most other European countries), the Netherlands was characterized by a lenient penal climate at least until the 1990s. Few offenders were convicted, few convicted offenders were sentenced to prison, and sentences were relatively short (Kommer, 1994). A lenient penal climate may affect offenders' marriage opportunities in several opposite ways. On the one hand, offenders' attractiveness as potential partners may be even lower. In a context where convictions and imprisonment are less common, the negative signal of a criminal record is likely to be stronger, leading to even lower chances to marry. On the other hand, offenders' meeting opportunities are likely to be higher because prison sentences are relatively short. The idea that imprisonment removes offenders from the marriage market is less applicable to many offenders.

Second, the Dutch context is also important because from the 1970s onwards it became more and more common to cohabit, and cohabitation even became a substitute for marriage. Among individuals who start living together with a partner for the first time close to 100 percent were married in the first half of the century. Nowadays, almost 80 percent first cohabit among this group (Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2002: 93). For our analysis the trend towards cohabitation is of less relevance. The CCLS contains data on a cohort of persons convicted in 1977. As a result, the largest share of the offenders already reached a marriageable age before the seventies. In addition, the trend towards cohabitation is universal and also present in the United States (Kalmijn, 2002). Therefore, the relationship between criminal behavior and marital outcomes is likely to be affected in a similar way by cohabitation.

4.3 Methods

4.3.1 Data

In order to answer our research questions, we analyze data of the Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS) (Nieuwebeerta & Blokland, 2003). The CCLS offenders were selected by taking a four-percent sample of all cases of criminal offenses tried in the Netherlands in 1977. This resulted in a total sample of 4,615 offenders (4,187 men and 428 women). Especially for this study, the CCLS was extended with data on the complete criminal careers of all marriage partners from age 12 to the year 2007. The earlier collected population registration records show that 74.9 percent ($N = 3,456$) of the 4,615 offenders married at least once. By enlarging the original CCLS we now know for all offenders and partners the exact timing of criminal

offenses, the type of offenses committed, periods of incarceration, and the exact timing of marriages. See Chapter 2 for more details on the CCLS data.

When interpreting the results of the analyses, it has to be taken into account that the CCLS sample consists of offenders only. All sampled individuals had their case tried in 1977 and – as a result – have been convicted at least once during their lives. Those who have no convictions prior to their marriage will, by construction, have at least one conviction during or after their marriage. Our results thus speak to the effect of criminal convictions on marriage among convicted and to-be-convicted individuals, and not necessarily to the population at large.

However, having a selective sample of offenders can actually be regarded as a strength as well. In fact, it might be more useful to compare the offenders with not-yet offenders than with a sample of non-offenders. Not-yet offenders are likely to be much more similar to offenders with regard to (un)measured characteristics that influence both the likelihood of offending and marriage. This might be especially relevant for the current analyses. Although the CCLS-data are unusually rich with regard to the offenders' criminal and marital histories, information on other variables known to be related to marital and offending behavior (e.g. SES, self-control) is lacking. The selectivity of the sample thus partly offers a solution to the fact that we do not have information on these control variables.

4.3.2 Analytic strategy

To analyze the relationship between criminal behavior and outcomes in the marriage market, we use discrete-time event history models (Allison, 1984; Yamaguchi, 1991). To estimate the discrete-time event history models, a person-period file was constructed with records containing information on criminal behavior, marriage and other relevant covariates for each individual in each year. We constructed a file that begins at age 16 – the minimum age for marriage in the Netherlands – and ends in the year in which the person first married or the year in which the data collection ended in case the person did not marry. The fully constructed data file contains information on 75,598 person-years for 4,615 individuals.

We restrict ourselves to examining the effects of criminal offending on first-time marriage for two reasons. First, the majority of the sample marries only once (74.6%). Second, and most importantly, the focus on first-time marriage allows us to avoid having to account for feedback effects between marriage and crime whereby marriage affects the likelihood of crime which in turn affects the likelihood of (a criminal) marriage. Accounting for such an endogenous relationship would greatly complicate the analyses and also increases the risk that our estimates of the effect of offending are contaminated by biases due to endogeneity. Although the focus on first-time marriage limits the generalizability of our findings, we eliminate an important source of bias (Nieuwbeerta, Nagin & Blokland, 2009: 232).

We estimate two types of event history models, one for each research question. First, to investigate offenders' marital chances, we applied logistic regression analyses to the person period file. In the logistic regression analyses we estimate the probability of marrying in a given year, conditional on whether one is still single in the previous year. The dependent variable is a binary variable that equals 1

in the year a person first marries and 0 for all earlier years (the years after marriage are deleted). Those persons who never marry obtain a score of 0 in all years.

Second, to investigate partner selection, we apply multinomial logistic regression analysis to the person-period file. In these so-called competing risk models, we estimate (1) the conditional probability of marrying a criminal partner versus staying unmarried in a given year and (2) the conditional probability of marrying a criminal partner versus a non-criminal partner in a given year. The dependent variable in these analyses is a categorical variable that is coded 2 in the year a newly married person marries a criminal partner, 1 in the year a newly married person marries a non-criminal partner, and 0 in all earlier years. Again the years after marriage are deleted, and those who never marry obtain a score of 0 in all years.⁵ In the competing risk models we thus take into account the characteristics of the persons who stay unmarried when estimating the chance to marry a particular partner. Marital outcomes are not considered to be a gradual process in which persons first decide to marry and after that decide to marry a particular kind of partner. The assumption is that persons make these choices simultaneously. By a criminal partner we mean a spouse who has ever been convicted before the year of marriage. All analyses have been conducted for men and women separately.

4.3.3 Models and measures

For both men and women we include two measures of criminal behavior in our models (Model 1).⁶ First, we measure the *total number of convictions until the last year*. Exploratory analyses revealed that the relationship between the number of convictions and marriage is not linear (i.e., there is a clear turning point). Therefore, we constructed different categories (0 convictions, 1 conviction, 2 – 5 convictions, 6 – 10 convictions, and more than 10 convictions). Second, we measure the *number of years since the last conviction*. By including this variable we can distinguish offenders who are criminally active in the period just before marriage from those who have been criminally active a longer time ago. Exploratory analyses showed that a linear function covers the relationship between this variable and marital outcomes adequately. The measurement of this variable is somewhat complicated because we are interested in assessing the effect of this variable for offenders and want to retain the non-offenders in the analyses as well. Therefore, we assigned a single value to the non-convicted persons. If we would not assign a value to the non-offenders, they would be missing by definition and the number of cases would substantially drop. We chose the age-specific mean. This is the average number of years since the last conviction for those convicted at that specific age. To decrease

5 Which code is assigned to a particular category (unmarried, married non-criminal, married criminal) does not influence the results. In the competing risk analyses each time one category is chosen as the reference category and used to compute contrast with the other categories.

6 We use “until the last year” for the measurement of all time-varying independent variables. In this way we can be surer about the causality of the studied relationships, e.g., criminal behavior precedes relationship formation.

the correlation with age, we centered the variable around the age-specific mean. As we already include a variable distinguishing offenders and non-offenders (*total number of convictions until last year*), the effect of *number of years since the last conviction* refers to offenders only. We checked if the results change if we impute other values but this was not the case.

For men we also estimate an additional model (Model 2) in which we include the effects of violent offenses and incarceration. We only estimate the effects of these variables for men because the number of violent offenders and incarcerated offenders appears to be very small among women (see Table 1). First, we measure whether men were *ever convicted for a violent offense until the last year*. Rape, assault, other sexual offenses, threat, battery, murder and manslaughter, robbery, and extortion are all classified as violent offenses. Second, we inquire whether men were *ever incarcerated until the last year*. The total number of convictions is too strongly correlated with ever being incarcerated ($r > .70$) and distorts the results. Therefore, we include a measure indicating whether a man was *ever convicted until the last year* instead of the total number of offenses until the last year. All three variables are coded 1 in every year following the year of first conviction or incarceration, and 0 otherwise.

In all models we control for a number of other characteristics that are known to confound the association between offending and marriage. First of all, we include *age* and *age squared* in the models. In order not to force the relationship between age and the risk of marriage to be a linear function, we also include the quadratic age-term in our models. Second, we add a time-constant dummy variable indicating whether sample subjects are *non-Dutch* (not born in the Netherlands). Third, we include a time-varying dummy variable capturing whether sample subjects have one or more *children* under the age of 18.

4.4 Results

The aim of this study is to investigate to what extent criminal offending is related to (a) marriage formation and (b) partner selection. Results of the discrete-time event-history models of the transition to marriage are shown in Table 4.2. Results of the competing risk analyses of partner selection are displayed in Table 4.3. Before we discuss the results of the explanatory analyses we provide descriptive statistics on the sample subjects in Table 4.1.

4.4.1 Descriptive analyses

Table 4.1 shows that we were able to trace men's criminal careers until an average age of about 53 and women's criminal careers until an average age of about 58. Examining criminal backgrounds, it appears that men have been convicted for a mean number of 12.7 offenses and women of 3.9 offenses. Compared to females, men started their criminal careers on average at an earlier age (age 20.7 versus 28.1). Between ages 12 and 21 (for most persons the period before marriage), a large share of the CCLS offenders already committed crimes. Compared to women, males have been convicted more often, committed more offenses, used violence more often, and were sentenced to prison more frequently.

Examining marital backgrounds, we find that a higher proportion of women has ever been married (87.1% versus 73.6%). For women first marriages occur at an earlier age than for men – on average three years earlier (age 23.2 versus 26.2). Remarkably, for women the age of first conviction is on average higher than the age of first marriage. On the one hand, this may result from the fact that their male partners stimulate criminal behavior during marriage. On the other hand, it may also result from a marital dissolution (e.g., single mothers who have to provide for their children).

Although the criminal history of women was less severe, the percentage marrying a criminal partner is almost six times higher compared to men (23.1% versus 4.0%). This might result from the fact that there are simply more men with a criminal record available and therefore chances to meet them are higher. Also, it might be the case that some of the female partners actually are delinquent but are convicted less often (e.g., because they commit less serious crimes).

Table 4.1 Descriptive statistics, by gender

	Men (N = 4,187)		Women (N = 428)	
Personal background				
Mean age in 2002	53.3	(10.4)	58.3	(11.4)
Death prior to calendar year 2002 (%)	16.1		14.7	
Non-Dutch (%)	12.6		15.9	
Criminal background				
Mean age of first conviction	20.7	(8.3)	28.1	(10.7)
Mean number of convictions until 2002	12.7	(17.4)	3.9	(8.3)
Convicted age 12-21 (%)	63.6		24.5	
Mean number of convictions age 12-21	2.2	(1.8)	1.4	(1.0)
Convicted for a violent offense age 12-21 (%)	23.7		3.5	
Incarcerated age 12-21 (%)	6.8		1.4	
Marriage background				
Ever married (%)	73.6		87.1	
Mean number of times married	1.3	(0.6)	1.4	(0.7)
Mean age of first marriage	26.2	(6.2)	23.2	(5.8)
Child before first marriage (%)	14.3		23.5	
Married a criminal partner (%)	4.0		23.1	

Note: Standard deviation in parentheses; standard deviation not reported for dichotomous variables.

4.4.2 Marriage formation

Our first research question concerns the impact of criminal offending on marriage formation. With the logistic regression analyses we estimated the likelihood of marrying in a given year, conditional on whether one is still single in the previous year. The analyses are conducted for men and women separately. The B-values in Table 4.2 represent logistic regression coefficients. These coefficients can be transformed to odds ratios by exponentiating them (e^B). Negative B-values indicate that the odds of marrying become lower. The extent of this decrease can be computed by subtracting the exponentiated coefficient from 1 ($1 - e^B$).

Model 1 shows that male offenders who committed 6 or more offenses have significantly lower chances to marry. Compared to men without a criminal record the odds of marrying are 24 percent lower for men who have been convicted of 6 to 10 offenses ($1 - e^{-.28} = 1 - 0.76 = 0.24$). The relationship is even stronger for men who committed more than 10 offenses until the last year. Their odds of marrying are 42 percent lower ($e^{-.55} = 0.58$). We thus only find an association between criminal behavior and marriage for men with an extensive criminal record. In addition, we see that the longer ago a man was convicted, the higher his odds of marrying become ($B = 0.04$). This suggests that the effects of a criminal record indeed diminish over time.

Table 4.2 Event history analyses of the effect of criminal behavior on the probability of marrying, by gender

	Men		Women			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Age	.54***	.02	.53***	.02	.32***	.06
Age squared	-.01***	.00	-.01***	.00	-.01***	.00
Non-Dutch	-.36***	.06	-.34***	.06	-.29*	.16
Child in the last year	.42***	.06	.40***	.06	-.08	.16
Number of convictions until last year (0 = ref.)						
1 conviction	.03	.06			-.36*	.17
2-5 convictions	-.03	.06			-.39*	.23
6-10 convictions	-.28***	.08			-.04	.40
> 10 convictions	-.55***	.08			-.00	.53
Number of years since last conviction	.04***	.01			.08*	.03
Ever convicted until last year			-.13**	.05		
Ever violence until last year			-.04	.05		
Ever incarcerated until last year			-.54***	.07		
Constant	-10.15***	.29	-9.96***	.29	-6.26***	.75
Number of person-years	70,596		70,596		5,062	
Number of persons	4,187		4,187		428	
χ^2 (df)	1243.32 (9)		1133.06 (7)		105.34 (9)	

Note: The B-values represent logistic regression coefficients. These coefficients can be transformed to odds ratios by exponentiating them (e^B).

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

In Model 2 we estimated the relative importance of convictions, violent offenses, and incarceration. For men the effect of incarceration appears to be even stronger than the effect of convictions. For those who were ever incarcerated until the last year, the odds of marrying in that year are 42 percent lower ($e^{-.54} = 0.58$). That we do not find a comparable effect for violent offenses can be explained by the fact that this variable is relatively strongly correlated with incarceration. On the basis of these results we can thus conclude that the seriousness of a criminal history matters even more than having a criminal record per se.

In contrast to the men in our sample, we see that women who were convicted once until last year have significantly lower chances to marry in that year. The

odds of marrying are 30 percent lower compared to non-offenders ($e^{-.36} = 0.70$). For women who have been convicted of 2 to 5 offenses the odds of marrying are even slightly lower ($e^{-.39} = 0.68$). This suggests that convictions have different implications for women. Because a criminal lifestyle is less common and accepted for women, a woman who has been convicted for a small number of offenses might be comparable to a man who has committed a large number of offenses. That we do not find significant differences for the other categories can be attributed to the fact that the number of women who have been convicted more than 5 times is very small. Finally, we find – just as for men – that the longer ago the last conviction, the higher the odds of marrying become ($B = 0.08$). We can thus conclude that, in addition to the seriousness of a criminal record, the timing of convictions is related to marital chances as well.⁷

Table 4.2 shows some other interesting findings as well. For example, non-Dutch are found to have significant lower chances to marry – this is the case for men as well as women. The presence of a child affects marital chances differently for both sexes. A child is related to a higher odds of marrying for males, whereas no relationship is found for women. In line with this result, it has been argued that women who have children out-of-wedlock might be more reluctant to marry the fathers of their children because of their poor economic prospects (Edin, 2000).^{8,9}

4.4.3 Partner selection

Our second research question concerns the impact of criminal offending on partner selection (see Table 4.3). In the competing risk models we estimate (1) the conditional probability of marrying a criminal partner versus staying unmarried, and (2) the conditional probability of marrying a criminal partner versus marrying a non-criminal partner. Within each model the second comparison most directly answers our research question: marrying a criminal partner versus non-criminal partner.

7 In additional analyses we checked if the relationship between time since last conviction and outcomes in the marriage market depends on the seriousness of a criminal history. If one has an extensive criminal record it might be less important if the last crime has been committed a long time ago. To investigate this possibility we extended Model 1 by adding interactions between “the number of convictions until last year” and “number of years since last conviction”. On the basis of the results we do not find support for this idea. The interaction effects turned out to be non-significant.

8 To check if the effects of a criminal history on marital chances differ when offenders have children, we added interactions between the seriousness / timing of a criminal history and having children to our models. The results did not yield any significant interaction effects.

9 To check if the coefficients in Table 2 significantly differ between sexes, we pooled the data and computed interaction terms between sex (0 = man, 1 = woman) and the other independent variables. In line with the earlier reported results, we found three significant interaction effects. First, the interaction between sex and the presence of a child is significant: a child only increases males’ marital chances (main effect “child in the last year”: 0,42 (0,06); interaction effect: -0,34 (0,17); the effect for women is thus close to zero (0,42 - 0,34 = 0,08). Second, the interaction between sex and 1 conviction until last year is significant: being convicted once only lowers women’s marital chances (main effect “1 conviction”: 0,04 (0,06); interaction effect: -0,42 (0,18)). Third, the interaction between sex and 2 to 5 convictions until last year is significant: 2 to 5 convictions only lower women’s marital chances (main effect “2-5 convictions”: 0,02 (0,05); interaction effect: -0,40 (0,24)).

For men as well as women, Model 1 shows that only those persons who committed more than 1 offense until the last year have a significantly higher likelihood of marrying a criminal partner (see the second comparison within each model). In line with our hypothesis, we see that the higher the number of convictions, the higher the chance to marry a criminal partner. For example, for men who have been convicted of 2 to 5 offenses the odds of marrying a criminal partner are about twice as high ($e^{.73} = 2.08$), and for men who have been convicted of 6 to 10 offenses the odds are three times higher ($e^{1.18} = 3.25$). For women the odds are even higher than for men (respectively $e^{-1.34} = 3.82$ and $e^{1.62} = 5.05$), although the differences between sexes are not significant.

Again, for men the relationship between having ever been incarcerated and marital outcomes appears to be stronger than between having ever been convicted and marital outcomes (although the difference is smaller now). The odds of marrying a criminal partner are 95 percent higher ($e^{.67} = 1.95$) for men who have ever been incarcerated compared to their non-incarcerated counterparts (see the last column of Model 2). In addition, we find that males' partner choices are related to their violent offenses. Being convicted for a violent offense until the last year increases the odds of marrying a criminal partner ($e^{.61} = 1.84$). The seriousness of a persons' criminal behavior is thus clearly related to the type of partner one marries. We do not find support for our hypothesis that the time since last conviction affects partner choice.

Finally, the control variables show some additional interesting findings (see again the second comparison of each model). The presence of a child is associated with higher odds of marrying a criminal partner. This does not only apply to men but also to women. When we assume that persons marry the mother or father of the child, this relationship could, for example, be attributed to the partners' lower levels of self-control. This characteristic does not only lead persons to have children out-of-wedlock but also makes them more crime prone. On the other hand – when not marrying the father or mother of the child – single parents may become less attractive marriage partners to others. As a result they may have to lower their standards, which increases the likelihood that they will partner with a convicted criminal. The fact that non-Dutch women have lower chances of marrying a criminal partner than Dutch women may be an artifact of the way our data have been collected. We only have information on offenses that have been tried in the Netherlands. As non-Dutch can be assumed to have higher chances to marry a partner who is non-Dutch as well, it is possible that we may not have the complete criminal histories of these partners.¹⁰

¹⁰ We conducted several additional analyses. First, we checked if the coefficients in Table 3 (the second comparison within each model) significantly differ between sexes. We pooled the data and computed interaction terms between sex and the other independent variables. Second, we checked if the effects of a criminal history on marrying a criminal spouse differ when offenders have children. We added interactions between the seriousness / timing of a criminal history and having children to our models. The results of these additional analyses did not yield any significant interaction effects.

Table 4.3 Competing risk analyses of the effect of criminal behavior on the probability of marrying a criminal partner, by gender

	Men				Women							
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2					
	(1) Criminal partner vs. Unmarried	(2) Criminal partner vs. Non-criminal partner	(1) Criminal partner vs. Unmarried	(2) Criminal partner vs. Non-criminal partner	(1) Criminal partner vs. Unmarried	(2) Criminal partner vs. Non-criminal partner	(1) Criminal partner vs. Unmarried	(2) Criminal partner vs. Non-criminal partner				
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE				
Age	.16**	.07	-.42***	.07	.18**	.06	-.38***	.07	.20*	.11	-.18	.13
Age squared	-.00**	.00	.00***	.00	-.00***	.00	.01***	.00	-.00**	.00	.00	.00
Non-Dutch	-.57*	.27	-.22	.27	-.62**	.27	-.30	.27	-1.23***	.38	-1.24**	.42
Child in the last year	.88***	.20	.50**	.21	.90***	.20	.55**	.21	.89***	.28	1.14**	.33
Number of convictions until last year (0 = ref.)												
1 conviction	.26	.33	.24	.33	-	-	-	-	-.19	.33	.29	.38
2-5 convictions	.68**	.27	.73**	.28	-	-	-	-	.67*	.36	1.34**	.46
6-10 convictions	.85**	.32	1.18**	.33	-	-	-	-	1.11*	.63	1.62*	.80
> 10 convictions	1.25***	.32	1.94**	.33	-	-	-	-	.16	1.10	.35	1.23
Number of years since last conviction	.01	.02	-.03	.02	-	-	-	-	.14**	.05	-.09	.07
Ever convicted until last year	-	-	-	-	.46*	.26	.54**	.19	-	-	-	-
Ever violence until last year	-	-	-	-	.47**	.18	.61**	.27	-	-	-	-
Ever incarcerated until last year	-	-	-	-	.06	.20	.67**	.22	-	-	-	-
Constant	-8.77***	.96	2.01	1.00	-9.06***	.92	1.40	.97	-5.75***	1.40	1.60	1.64
Number of observations	70,596		70,596		70,596		70,596		5,062		5,062	
Number of persons	4,187		4,187		4,187		4,187		428		428	
χ^2 (df)	1366.79 (18)		1227.76 (14)		137.92 (18)		137.92 (18)					

Note: The B-values represent logistic regression coefficients. These coefficients can be transformed to odds ratios by exponentiating them (e^B).
 *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05

Another remarkable finding shows up, if we look at the other comparison: the probability of marrying a criminal partner versus staying unmarried (the first comparison within each model). It appears that offenders do not eschew marriages altogether. The positive coefficients indicate that offenders are actually more likely to marry criminal spouses than to stay unmarried. This does not only apply to men but also to women. The more serious a criminal history, the higher the odds of marrying a criminal spouse become. For example, men who have been convicted for 2 to 5 offenses are almost two times more likely to marry a criminal spouse ($e^{.68} = 1.97$), while men with more than 10 convictions are more than three times more likely to marry a deviant spouse than not to marry ($e^{1.25} = 3.49$). Women who have been convicted for 2 to 5 offenses or 6 to 10 offenses are also two to three times more likely to marry a criminal spouse than to stay unmarried (the odds are respectively: $e^{.67} = 1.95$ and $e^{1.11} = 3.03$).¹¹

4.5 Conclusion and discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the extent to which criminal offending is related to marriage formation and partner selection. Various studies have shown that marriage can reduce criminal behavior (see for example Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2005; King, Massoglia & MacMillan, 2007; Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006). Therefore, it is equally important to investigate the factors that determine offenders' outcomes in the marriage market. The lack of research in this area can partly be explained by the fact that adequate data were lacking. We used data from a unique longitudinal study: the Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS). In contrast to earlier research, the CCLS enabled us to examine the complete criminal careers of both offenders *and* their spouses.

Overall our findings revealed that the *seriousness* of a criminal history is strongly related to outcomes in the marriage market. The more criminal offenses a person has committed, the lower the chances of marrying and, given marriage, the higher the chances of marrying a criminal partner. Both preferences and opportunities can explain these findings. For example, an increase in the number of offenses may not only lower opportunities to marry a non-criminal spouse (e.g., more involved in criminal networks) but also weaken preferences towards marrying a non-criminal spouse (e.g., lower levels of mutual understanding). Besides the seriousness of a criminal history, we found that the *timing* of convictions is associated with marital chances. The impact of a criminal record on marriage likelihood becomes weaker when offenders have been convicted a longer time ago. On the one hand, it might be that potential partners do not know or do not care about these offenses. On the

¹¹ We conducted several additional analyses. First, we checked if the coefficients in Table 3 (the last column of each panel) significantly differ between sexes. We pooled the data and computed interaction terms between sex and the other independent variables. Second, we checked if the effects of a criminal history on marrying a criminal spouse differ when offenders have children. We added interactions between the seriousness / timing of a criminal history and having children to our models. The results of these additional analyses did not yield any significant interaction effects.

other hand, it can be the case that the preference to marry becomes stronger once a criminal lifestyle has been abandoned.

These findings need to be nuanced in two ways. First, we found gender differences. Females' marital chances diminish as soon as they have been convicted once, while males' marital chances are only affected if they have an extensive criminal record. Given that a criminal lifestyle is less common and accepted for women, a criminal record may make them even less attractive marriage partners than male convicts. For men, incarceration is associated with even lower marital chances than having a criminal record per se. This finding is in line with the idea that incarceration does not only restrain inmates from committing crime but also hinders relationship formation (Lopoo & Western, 2005). Contrary to what we might have expected, this result (and also the effect size) is quite comparable with earlier studies on the relationship between incarceration and marriage formation that were based on US data (e.g., Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006).

Second, we found that offenders do not refrain from marriage altogether. They are more likely to marry criminal spouses than to stay unmarried. On the basis of these results we have to nuance Gottfredson and Hirschi's idea (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1995) that offenders tend to avoid the institution of marriage because of their underlying personal traits. The earlier finding that offenders are less likely to marry than to stay unmarried, can be attributed to the fact that they are less likely to marry *non-criminal* spouses. This may not only result from their own preferences (i.e., a preference for criminal partners) but also from a lack of opportunities to marry non-criminal spouses. As the group marrying non-criminal spouses is relatively large, this drives the results presented in Table 4.2.

The finding that offenders are more likely to marry a deviant spouse than to stay unmarried may be explained by pre-marital childbirth. The data show that a substantial share of the CCLS sample members had a child before marriage (14.3 percent of the men and 23.5 percent of the women). Among those who marry a criminal spouse these percentages are even higher (23.1 percent of the men and 29.6 percent of the women). Having a child may increase the chance to marry (Table 4.3 shows that this is indeed the case). In addition, the historical context should be taken into account. Most CCLS sample members reached a marriageable age before the 70s of the previous century. Singlehood was less common during that period. This means that the offenders had a high likelihood of getting married during their lives (irrespective of the characteristics of the spouse). Future studies are needed to see if this finding holds in other contexts.

Although the CCLS data are unique – and already improve upon earlier studies focusing on incarceration – some limitations have to be taken into account when interpreting the results. First, our analyses rely on official data. Therefore, we probably underestimate the total number of delinquent acts: not all criminal offenses are known to the police and not all offenses are prosecuted. The underestimation can be selective, when the probability of being convicted is not equal for all persons. Some criminal persons may be more likely to be intensely monitored by the police, while others have smarter strategies to keep out of the arms of the law. On the other hand, it should be noted that the use of official

data has important advantages as well. We are able to examine a wide range of criminal activities that differ in severity (i.e., violent offenses, property offenses, drug offenses, weapon offenses, and offenses against the public order). Also, our measure of criminal behavior is not disturbed by social desirability problems and memory problems, as would have been the case with self-report data (Van de Rakt, 2011). Ideally though, one would like to complement a longitudinal study such as the CCLS with self-report data in future research. This would not only create a more valid measure of criminal involvement but would also make it possible to disentangle the effects of involvement with the criminal justice system from the effects of committing crimes per se. The institutional effects associated with the criminal justice system might reduce marriage opportunities even more (e.g., through higher levels of stigma).

Second, our measure of marriage includes only legal marriage. The lack of information on cohabitation is less of a problem for our analysis because the largest share of the CCLS sample subjects had reached a marriageable age prior to 1970. However, with increasing rates of cohabitation in the Netherlands, the United States, and other countries, research on the relationship between criminal behavior and other living arrangements is needed (see also Bersani, Laub & Nieuwebeerta, 2009: 22). Cohabitation is considered to be a living arrangement indicative of lower levels of social integration with vaguer norms and expectations, which may be especially attractive to (more serious) offenders (London & Parker, 2009). Offenders may not only be more likely to enter less stable relationship forms, these type of relations might also have a different impact on the development of crime. Earlier research seems to support this idea. Living with a spouse has been found to be associated with lower levels of offending, while living with a girlfriend was associated with higher levels of crime, especially drug crimes (Horney, Osgood & Marshall, 1995).

Third, when investigating the relationship between criminal behavior and marital outcomes, we have not been able to control for a number of other characteristics likely to be correlated with both crime and marriage (e.g., socio-economic status, education, personality characteristics). Because of this lack of information we have not been able to gain complete insight in the mechanisms underlying the relationship between crime and marriage. Untangling these mechanisms and determining their relative importance is an important task for future research.

Notwithstanding these limitations, our conclusions have significant implications for criminological theories emphasizing the protective effects of marriage and give important guidelines for future research. In contrast to Sampson and Laub, Gottfredson and Hirschi did focus on the mechanisms underlying marriage formation (offenders' lower marital chances would be caused by their lower levels of self-control). However, just as Sampson and Laub they did not pay attention to partner selection (i.e., the criminal history of the spouse whom one is marrying). To gain more insight into the development of offenders' criminal careers, both theories need to be extended.

On the basis of the current findings, we have to nuance the prominent idea that marriage reduces criminal behavior (e.g., Laub & Sampson, 2003). First, offenders are less likely to experience the protective effects of marriage because of

their lower marital chances. Second, crime-reducing effects of marriage may very well be limited because criminals have a tendency to marry criminal partners. Questions on the effects of partner relationships on criminal offending need to be addressed in future research (see also Chapter 5 of this dissertation). These studies should take into account that young offenders face processes of cumulative disadvantage. This means that they should not focus on the relationship per se but also pay close attention to the criminal behavior of the partner.



CHAPTER 5

Marriage, spousal criminality, and changes in criminal offending over the life course

This chapter is co-authored by Robert Apel and Paul Nieuwbeerta. A slightly different version is accepted for publication as: Van Schellen, M., Apel, R., & Nieuwbeerta, P. (forthcoming). "Because You're Mine, I Walk the Line"? Marriage, Spousal Criminality, and Criminal Offending over the Life Course. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*.

An earlier version of this chapter is published in Dutch as: Van Schellen, M., Apel, R., & Nieuwbeerta, P. (2010). Het huwelijk als keerpunt? De invloed van trouwen en partnerselectie op de ontwikkeling van crimineel gedrag. *Tijdschrift voor Criminologie*, 5, 258-273.

5 Marriage, spousal criminality, and changes in criminal offending over the life course

5.1 Introduction

Marriage has long been correlated with a variety of beneficial outcomes for the involved individuals. Married individuals appear to have a larger network of help and support, show less risky and unhealthy behavior, have a higher income, and more assets and wealth. Accordingly, married persons tend to be happier, healthier, and better off financially (Waite, 1995; Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

The idea of marriage as a protective institution takes a prominent place in criminology as well. Marriage is considered to be an important transitional event that can reduce criminal activity and even lead to desistance from crime (Sampson & Laub, 1993). The decline in criminal behavior is often attributed to the social bond that forms and strengthens as a result of marriage: spouses monitor each other's behavior and do not want to endanger their marital relationship by committing offenses (Laub & Sampson, 2003). Recent empirical studies show that marriage is indeed associated with lower offending levels (Bersani, Laub & Nieuwbeerta, 2009; Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2005; Farrington & West, 1995; Horney, Osgood & Marshall, 1995, King, Massoglia & MacMillan, 2007; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006).

Despite its prominence, the idea that marriage reduces crime is less straightforward than assumed. Although on average the effect might be protective, the benefits of marriage might not be homogenous and are likely to depend, among other things, on the criminal history of the spouse. Marriage to a criminal partner could sustain or stimulate an offender's engagement in criminal activities over time (Rhule-Louie & McMahon, 2007). For example, offenders probably have similar views on the appropriateness of criminal offending, learn from each other, and pass on their criminal skills (Giordano, Schroeder & Cernkovich, 2007; Leverentz, 2006; Simons et al., 2002). At the very least, marriage to a criminal spouse could result in persistence in criminal offending, and at worst, escalation.

While empirical studies of marriage effects on criminal behavior have been accumulating, the impact of spouses' criminal careers has received far less attention (Rhule-Louie & McMahon, 2007). This is surprising, simply because attachments to unconventional persons are considered to be among the most important predictors of delinquent behavior during adolescence. Adolescents who have delinquent friends are more likely to become delinquent, and commit more crimes than adolescents without deviant connections (Haynie et al., 2005; Simons

et al., 2002). Although it has been argued that adolescents are more sensitive to social influence processes (Warr, 2002), this finding does clearly demonstrate that social ties are not necessarily protective but can stimulate criminal behavior as well.

To gain more knowledge about the development of individual criminal careers, insight is needed into the criminal behavior of spouses. One of the reasons for the lack of empirical research on the effects of partners' criminal history is that the requirements for the design of these studies are substantial. First, longitudinal information on the development of criminal behavior is necessary. Second, this information is needed for both marriage partners. Third, very long periods of observation are required in order to examine research subjects beyond adolescence into adulthood. So far, virtually no study meets these requirements.

In this study we investigate two research questions. First, to what extent does marriage affect the development of criminal offending? Second, to what extent does the relationship between marriage and criminal offending depend on the criminal history of the spouse? We employ data from a unique long-term study of a Dutch conviction cohort and their marriage partners: the Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS; Nieuwbeerta & Blokland, 2003). The CCLS contains data on the officially registered criminal careers of 4,615 Dutch offenders and their marriage partners, covering ages 12 to 72. We aim to contribute to the current literature in several ways. First, this study is the first to investigate the life-long criminal careers of a large number of offenders and their marriage partners. Second, the CCLS contains data on the exact timing of marriages, convictions, and periods of incarceration over the entire life span. Therefore, we can clearly distinguish partner influences from partner selection processes that took place before marriage. Third, the data allow us to investigate the criminal careers of male as well as female offenders.

It should be noted that the CCLS does not contain data on never-convicted individuals and their spouses. This research thus concerns the effects of marriage for individuals who have ever been convicted during their lives and their partners. Within the group of convicts, individuals differ in the timing, number, and seriousness of crimes committed. Because the CCLS does not provide information about other relationship types than marriage (e.g., cohabitation), the focus of this study is on the effects of marriage and not on partner relationships in general.

5.2 Theory and previous research

With the rise of developmental and life course criminology (Piquero, Farrington & Blumstein, 2003), a growing number of studies have focused on the unfolding of individual criminal careers over the life span. These studies show that offending rates tend to increase gradually during childhood, rise more sharply during adolescence and then begin to decline steadily as individuals enter adulthood. Although there appears to be a group of persistent offenders that continues committing crimes far into adulthood, most persons tend to stop their criminal careers after adolescence (Blokland, Nagin & Nieuwbeerta, 2005; Laub & Sampson, 2003). Desistance from crime is often explained by the fact that persons experience crime-inhibiting life course transitions as they navigate the bridge from adolescence to adulthood. The formation of marital relationships has been argued to play a key role in this

desistance process (Laub & Sampson, 2003).

Several theoretical mechanisms have been proposed to explain why the transition to marriage would reduce criminal offending (see also Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006: 467-468). These mechanisms can be grouped in four different categories: social bond, routine activities, social learning, and cognitive transformation. Originally, all explanations have centered on the development of individual offending trajectories, and neglected the criminal careers of partners. This is unfortunate, since several studies have shown that offenders have a higher chance to form relationships with partners who are criminally active as well, that is, they mate assortatively (Moffitt et al., 2001; Simons et al., 2002). Although the institution of marriage might be protective in itself, it could very well be the case that the effects of marriage depend on the criminal history of the spouse (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002). Marriage could explain desistance as well as persistence in crime – depending on the spouse's involvement in crime.

Below we discuss the main theoretical mechanisms, and derive hypotheses on the effects of marrying a non-criminal spouse versus criminal spouse. In doing so, we pay explicit attention to gender differences in the effects of marriage and spousal criminality. Although the different theoretical perspectives are not fundamentally incompatible, they differ in their central focus. Some explain the crime-reducing effect of marriage by processes external to the individual (e.g., changes in opportunities to commit crime), while others focus on internal factors (e.g., changes in preferences to commit crime). Although the data do not allow us to test the various underlying mechanisms, they give us more insight in why a relationship between marriage, spousal criminality, and crime can be expected.

Social bond

First, marriage may change criminal offending because it strengthens social bonds to conventional society. This idea takes a prominent place in Sampson and Laub's age-graded theory of informal social control (Sampson & Laub, 1993). Spouses monitor and attempt to control each other's behavior and tend to discourage activities that do not pay off in the long run, like hanging out with deviant friends. Also, especially if ties are strong and stable, marital relationships create obligations and restraints that increase the costs of offending. Over time, as commitment and investment in relationships grow, there are fewer incentives to commit crime because more is at stake (Laub, Nagin & Sampson, 1998).

Whether the effects of marriage are protective may, however, strongly depend on the criminal history of the spouse to whom one is attached. We nuance Sampson and Laub's theoretical ideas in two ways. First, marriages are not necessarily strong if both spouses are involved in crime (Simons et al., 2002). The idea that marital ties are of higher quality and less likely to dissolve if spouses resemble each other, takes a popular place in family sociology (Brines & Joyner, 1999; Kalmijn, 1998). It is, however, questionable whether this also applies when it concerns similarity in criminal behavior. If both partners are involved in crime, they are for example both likely to have personal traits and to be involved in situations that undermine the quality and stability of marriage (Western, 2006: 5). Second, conventional behavior is not necessarily encouraged if both partners are delinquent. If their spouses are not involved in crime, offenders might indeed risk their relationship

by violating the law. If spouses have a criminal history as well, offending is likely to be a conventional way of behaving, which is less likely to be discouraged and does not threaten the continuation of the relationship.

Routine activities

A different interpretation of marriage's role has been given by Warr (1998) (see also Laub & Sampson, 2003). Warr emphasizes the role of peers in criminal offending. The decline in crime following marriage would be caused by a decrease in time spent with (delinquent) friends and the accompanying reduction in opportunities and reinforcement for criminal behavior (Warr, 1998). Married individuals spend more time in each other's company, and stay home together more often. Although non-criminal partners can indeed be expected to promote a socially acceptable lifestyle (Simons et al., 2002: 404), this is less likely to apply to criminal partners. Criminal partners are likely to be enmeshed in a criminal network themselves, and may therefore stimulate contact with other antisocial individuals and bring one to risky places at risky moments.

Socialization

Another mechanism that may underlie the relationship between marriage and criminal offending can be derived from differential association and social learning theories. These theories state that behavior is learned through social interaction within a cohesive and intimate group, where criminal norms, values, and knowledge are passed on through ongoing socialization processes (Akers, 1973; Warr, 2002). Although these theories have traditionally been used to explain the influence of delinquent peers, the same ideas can be applied to marital relationships (see also Simons et al., 2002; Haynie et al., 2005). In contrast to the earlier discussed mechanisms, socialization theories make explicit that intimate associations can have a positive *or* negative influence on offending depending on the normative orientation of others. Although marrying a non-criminal partner is likely to lead to socialization in a conventional law-abiding environment, marrying a criminal partner is likely to sustain or stimulate an individual's criminal activities over time (Rhule-Louie & McMahon, 2007). Offenders probably have similar views on the appropriateness of criminal behavior, learn from each other, pass on their criminal skills, or may even start co-offending and become "partners in crime." It has been suggested that this form of socialization may be more powerful and important for females. As they would be more oriented toward relationships, their behavior would be more frequently determined by the behavior of their partners (Moffitt et al., 2001; Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996).

Cognitive transformations

Finally, marriage may also lead to changes in criminal offending because it changes one's sense of self through cognitive transformations (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002; Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006: 468). In contrast to the earlier mentioned mechanisms, processes internal to the offender are emphasized. Marriage – if accompanied by an openness to and readiness for meaningful change – can lead to desistance because it fosters pro-social role modeling. The accompanying cognitive transformations result in a change in the meaning and

salience of criminal behavior. Criminal behavior is no longer seen as positive, viable, or personally relevant (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002). Although marrying a non-criminal spouse may indeed lead to a pro-social and responsible lifestyle, criminal partners are less likely to function as positive role models and therefore may undermine conventional identity change.

Hypotheses

Although we are not able to directly test the underlying mechanisms, all before mentioned mechanisms lead to the expectation that marriage in general reduces criminal offending. It not only reduces the preference to commit crimes but also leads to fewer opportunities to offend. We nuance this hypothesis in two ways. First, we assume that the effect of marriage depends on the criminal behavior of the spouse. Being married to a non-criminal spouse is expected to lead to a decrease in the number of offenses, and being married to a criminal spouse to persistence in crime. On the one hand, we may find no change in the level of offending compared to singlehood. On the other hand, partners may influence each other in such a way that they stimulate criminal activity, resulting in an increase in the number of offenses. Second, we expect gender differences in the effect of marriage and spousal criminality. It has been argued that men would benefit more from marriage in general because they are more likely to marry non-criminal spouses than women are. In other words: “Men marry up” (Laub & Sampson, 2003). However, according to the socialization perspective, women would be more influenced by the behavior of their partners. Therefore, we expect the crime-reducing effects of marrying a non-criminal spouse and the crime-stimulating effect of marrying a criminal spouse to be even larger for women.

Previous research

Although a growing number of studies have investigated the relationship between marriage and crime, only a few of them considered the impact of partners' criminal behavior. Table 5.1 presents an overview of these studies. Using data from Glueck and Glueck's classic study of criminal careers (1950), Sampson and others (2006) investigated 226 delinquent men followed prospectively from adolescence to age 32. Although men with criminal or deviant wives displayed higher crime rates, within-individual estimates of the effects of marriage show that marriage is still significantly negatively related to crime, controlling for duration of marriage, marital attachment, and spousal criminal record.

Moffitt and others (2001) investigated the effects of partner relationships on antisocial behavior among a birth cohort of 360 individuals followed from age 13 to 21. The analyses revealed that women are more likely to persist in crime (measured as self-reported antisocial behavior at age 21) when they form unions with antisocial men. However, antisocial men continue to be antisocial regardless of whether their female partner was antisocial at the time of the relationship.

Simons and others (2002) simultaneously tested the impact of delinquent friends and partners on delinquent behavior among 236 young adults. Results showed that having an antisocial romantic partner is related to higher levels of criminal behavior both directly and through its effect on the quality of the romantic relationship and deviant friends. These relationships were significant for both men

Table 5.1 Earlier empirical studies on the effects of partners' criminal and deviant behavior

Authors	Year	Data	Measurement partner relationship	Measurement criminal behavior	Analytic strategy
Moffitt et al.	2001	Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study: birth cohort followed prospectively from age 13 to 21 (N = 360)	Married, cohabitating, dating for at least 6 months at age 21	Respondent: self-reported antisocial behavior in the last year at age 21 Partner: self-reported delinquent behavior at the time of the relationship	Hierarchical multiple regression analysis
Simons et al.	2002	Iowa Youth and Family Project: children from randomly selected two-parent families living in small towns in the Midwest (US) followed from age 14 to 22 (N = 236)	Ongoing romantic relationship - married, cohabitating, in an exclusive romantic union - at age 22	Respondent: self-reported deviant behavior in the past year at age 22 Partner: self-reported deviant in the past year	OLS regression analysis, structural equation modeling
Woodward et al.	2002	Christchurch Health and Development Study: birth cohort from Christchurch (New Zealand) followed from birth to age 21 (N = 938)	Steady boyfriend or girlfriend - married, engaged, cohabiting, going out seriously or in a casual relationship - at age 21	Respondent: self-reported offending behavior during the last 12 months at age 21 Partner: delinquent and substance-using behaviors reported by respondent at age 21	Logistic regression analysis
Haynie et al.	2005	National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health: a nationally representative sample of adolescents drawn from schools in the US (N = 1,321)	Romantic relationship in the past 18 months	Respondent: self-reported involvement in minor deviance and more serious delinquency in the past 12 months Partner: self-reported delinquency in the past 12 months	Negative binomial regression analysis
Sampson et al.	2006	Glueck data: delinquent boys from correctional schools in Boston followed from age 17 to 32 (N = 226)	Married at age 25	Respondent: official arrests between age 17 and 32 Partner: official records and deviance between age 17 and 25 reported by respondent at age 25	Hierarchical inverse probability-of-treatment weighting (IPTW) analysis
Capaldi et al.	2008	Oregon Youth Study and Couples Study: boys recruited through schools in higher crime rate areas of a medium-size metropolitan region in the Pacific Northwest in 1984-1985 followed from age 17 to 29 (N = 191)	A steady romantic relationship between ages 17 to 29	Respondent: official arrests in the year after the measurement of the relationship. Partner: mean of self-reported delinquency, official arrests, and interviewer / coder ratings at the time of the relationship	Zero inflated Poisson analysis

and women, although having an antisocial partner was associated with criminality more strongly for women. Using data from a nationally representative sample of school-going adolescents, Haynie and others (2005) reached similar conclusions. Romantic partners' deviance is stronger related to females' involvement in minor deviance, although gender does not condition the strength of the relationship between romantic partners' more serious delinquency and respondents' serious delinquency.

The study by Woodward, Fergusson and Horwood (2002) is unique in that it includes singles as well. Individuals involved with a non-deviant partner have lower rates of offending at age 21 than those with no partner, while those without a partner have lower rates of offending at age 21 than those involved with a deviant partner. Similar results are found for men and women.

The most recent empirical study has been conducted by Capaldi, Kim and Owen (2008). Using a sample of at-risk men ($N = 191$), the results show that partner's antisocial behavior was related to both onset and persistence of arrests (also when controlling for deviant peer associations). In contrast to earlier studies, respondents' and partners' offending behavior are not measured at the same time, which enables stronger conclusions about the direction of influence. Unfortunately, data on partners' criminal history before marriage were lacking. Another drawback is that they only investigated respondents' arrests in the first year after the relationship was formed. If a partner influences behavior, it might take a while before meaningful changes in criminal behavior appear.

In sum, most earlier studies find that partners' delinquency is related to an increase in offending. In some cases this relationship is stronger for women (Capaldi, Kim & Owen, 2008; Haynie et al., 2005; Moffitt, 2001; Simons et al., 2002). In addition, singles would be even better off than those involved with a delinquent partner: they display lower crime-rates (Woodward, Fergusson & Horwood, 2002). However, there is also some evidence that marriage has protective effects irrespective of the criminal behavior of the spouse (Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006).

Although these earlier studies have made important contributions to the marriage-crime literature, they are characterized by several limitations. First, they lack longitudinal information on partners' criminal history. As relationship status and partner criminality are measured at the same time, this limits the causal inferences that can be made. The association between partners' criminal behavior can also result from selection processes that take place before relationship formation. Second, most earlier studies limited their focus to adolescence and early adulthood. This is remarkable because partner relationships are especially salient during adulthood. Moreover, the long-term effects of relationships are hard to establish. Third, earlier studies investigated relationships of varying durations, at various stages of attachment (e.g., married, cohabiting, unmarried but committed relationship). In addition, the (marital) relationships under study might be the first relationship but also the second or even the third. Although these different types of relationships might very well have different effects, they are not analyzed separately (partly because of small sample sizes).

5.3 Methods

5.3.1 Data

To answer the research questions we use data from the Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS) (Nieuwbeerta & Blokland, 2003). The CCLS contains longitudinal information on the criminal careers and life courses of a total sample of 4,615 offenders (4,187 men and 428 women). The CCLS offenders were selected by taking a four-percent sample of all cases of criminal offenses tried in the Netherlands in 1977. Especially for this study, the CCLS was supplemented with data on the complete criminal careers of all of the marriage partners of the sample subjects from age 12 to calendar year 2007. The population registration records revealed that 74.9 percent ($N = 3,456$) of the original 4,615 research subjects married on at least one occasion. The enlargement of the CCLS data allows us to determine the exact timing of marriage and, for all research subjects and their marriage partners, the exact timing of criminal offenses, the type of offenses committed, and periods of prison confinement. See Chapter 2 for an extensive description of the CCLS data.

In this study we only examine sample subjects' first marriages. By focusing on first marriages we do not have to account for feedback effects between marriage and crime whereby (a criminal) marriage affects the likelihood of crime, which in turn affects the likelihood of (a criminal) marriage. Accounting for such an endogenous relationship would greatly complicate the analyses and also increases the risk that the estimate of the effect of marriage is contaminated by biases due to endogeneity. Although the focus on first-time marriage limits the generalizability of our findings, we eliminate an important source of bias (see also Nieuwbeerta, Nagin & Blokland, 2009: 232).

5.3.2 Analytic strategy

We are interested in what effect marriage to a non-convicted or convicted spouse has on an individual's post-marriage conviction frequency. One difficulty to overcome is that marriage and partner selection are not randomly determined. Individuals who marry are likely to have different characteristics than persons who do not marry, and individuals who marry convicted spouses are likely to have different characteristics than offenders who marry non-convicted spouses. This is known as the selection problem. It can cloud causal interpretations of correlations between marriage and criminality, since differences in crime risk probably exist even in the absence of marriage.

The most rigorous way to account for (un)observed heterogeneity would be to use an experimental setting in which persons are randomly assigned to the "treatment" of marriage. By means of this design all differences between persons in the experimental group and the control group are eliminated. Obviously individuals cannot be randomly assigned to marriage or to non-criminal or criminal partners. One solution to the selection problem is to attempt to adjust away these differences by including as many control variables as possible in a regression or

propensity score model.¹² This represents a “selection on observables” approach to causal effect estimation (see Heckman & Hotz, 1989). Although the CCLS data are unusually rich with regard to offenders’ marital and criminal histories, as with most official sources of data, information on other variables known to be correlated with marriage and crime (e.g., personality characteristics, educational attainment, socioeconomic status) is unfortunately lacking. Yet even with an exhaustive set of such control variables, the selection problem would persist because differences between individuals are always partly *unobserved*. A unique strength of the CCLS data, with lifetime conviction histories on all offenders, is the ability to estimate the effect of marriage and spousal criminality on conviction frequency in the presence of “selection on unobservables” (Heckman & Hotz, 1989). The most rigorous way to do so is through the use of a fixed-effects model.

Fixed-effects models adjust for so-called “unobserved heterogeneity” by restricting attention to within-individual change in marriage and crime over time. The model thus eliminates bias/inconsistency in the marriage-crime relationship that is attributable to any source of variation in criminality that remains constant over time such as biological or genetic differences (Halaby, 2004; Johnson, 1995). In other words, if we find an effect of marriage, we know that this does not reflect enduring differences between persons. By using fixed-effects models we thus take advantage of the strengths of the CCLS data (i.e., the unique longitudinal data on time-varying variables) and compensate as much as possible for the weaknesses (i.e., the lack of relevant time-stable confounding variables). Yet fixed-effects models have one important disadvantage: the estimates tend to be inefficient. To check the robustness of our results we therefore also estimated random-effects models. The results – which are very similar – are shown in an attached appendix.^{13 14}

12 Recent studies on the relationship between marriage and crime advocated the use of counterfactual models, i.e., propensity score models (Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006; King, Massoglia & MacMillan, 2007). This analytic strategy “thinks” like an experiment, in that it matches persons in the treatment group (e.g., those who marry) with those in the control group (e.g., those who do not marry) on their prior probability to receive the treatment. Counterfactual methods have been shown to yield consistent and unbiased estimates of causal effects as long as all potential confounding factors are included in the model used to create the propensity score. In other words, one needs to have information on a large number of variables known to be related to the chance to marry. A disadvantage of the CCLS data is that information on important time-stable variables known to be related to marital outcomes is lacking. Therefore, the use of counterfactual models would be a less favorable strategy.

13 The random-effects Poisson model makes assumptions that render it more efficient than the fixed-effects Poisson model, often considerably so. Yet the tradeoff between random- and fixed-effects models represents a tradeoff between efficiency and consistency. A key assumption for consistency of the random-effects estimator is that the unobserved determinants of criminal behavior captured by the individual effect are orthogonal to the regressors. By way of example, it must be assumed that some unmeasured trait such as intelligence, which is not believed to vary over time, is uncorrelated with marriage. Violation of this assumption renders the random-effects estimator inconsistent relative to the fixed-effects estimator, despite the gain in efficiency (see Hausman, 1978).

14 In an additional model (not shown) we estimated the random-effects model with two extra time-constant variables: birth year and ethnicity. The effects of the marriage indicators are comparable to those reported in the appendix.

To estimate the fixed-effects models, a person-year file was constructed with records containing information on each individual in each calendar year. For every person the records begin at age 12 – the minimum age of criminal responsibility in the Netherlands. The records end in the year 2002 (the end of data collection), in the last year of the first marriage (divorced subjects are excluded in all years after their first marriage), or in the year prior to death (in this way we account for “false desistance” caused by mortality). The fully constructed data file contains information on 150,315 person-years for 4,615 offenders.

To estimate the empirical models of conviction frequency, we eliminate the “criterion conviction,” referring to the conviction that brought each subject into the CCLS sampling frame. Because of the way that the CCLS data were collected, all subjects are convicted at least once during their lives. For most offenders (96.8%), this conviction was in either 1976 or 1977. If subjects who marry have no convictions prior to their first marriage then they must, by construction, have at least one conviction during or after their first marriage. This could result in a criminogenic effect of marriage that is artificial. To avoid this, we exclude the criterion conviction altogether.

5.3.3 Models and measures

In our empirical models the dependent variable, Y_{it} , is a discrete random variable representing a count of the number of convictions received by subject i ($i = 1, \dots, N$) in calendar year t ($t = 1, \dots, T_i$). It is distributed Poisson with density:

$$f(Y_{it} | X_{it}, S_{it}) = \frac{\exp(-S_{it}\lambda_{it})(S_{it}\lambda_{it})^{Y_{it}}}{Y_{it}!}$$

where S_{it} represents exposure, or each subject’s “street time” in a given calendar year, measured as the proportion of the year not confined in a correctional institution.^{15 16} By controlling for persons’ opportunity to commit crimes, we eliminate the possibility of false desistance attributable to incarceration. We begin with the baseline model specification that controls for characteristics that have been demonstrated to influence the development of criminal behavior:

$$\ln \lambda_{it} = \alpha_1 f(\text{Age}_{it}) + \alpha_2 \text{Child}_{it} + \alpha_3 \text{Con}_{i,t-1} + \alpha_4 \text{AccumCon}_{i,t-2} + \alpha_5 \text{Inc}_{i,t-1} + \alpha_6 \text{AccumInc}_{i,t-2} + u_i$$

15 To test the sensitivity of the Poisson models we also did all of our analyses using random-effects and fixed-effects logistic regression models as well as random-effects and fixed-effects negative binomial regression models. The results are very similar to those of the reported Poisson models.

16 The fixed-effects Poisson model proceeds by maximizing the conditional likelihood, where conditioning is achieved by summing across each individual’s T_i observations on the dependent variable. This technically makes it a *conditional fixed-effects model*. Therefore it necessarily excludes individuals whose observations (here, total number of convictions) sum to zero during the period of observation, resulting in the loss of degrees of freedom. In our model, 3,356 of the 4,187 men (80%) are retained, whereas 173 of the 428 women (40%) are retained.

Age is modeled as a cubic to capture age-related changes in the rate of conviction for the entire sample. $Child_{it}$ is a time-varying dummy variable for whether the subject has one or more children under the age of 18. We also include several time-varying measures of criminal history in the models. Two measures of prior convictions are added, including a dummy indicator for having been convicted in the previous calendar year ($Con_{i,t-1}$) as well as the total number of convictions accumulated as of two years ago ($AccumCon_{i,t-2}$). Two measures of imprisonment are also added, including a dummy indicator for having been incarcerated in the previous calendar year ($Inc_{i,t-1}$) and the total accumulated time spent in prison as of two years ago ($AccumInc_{i,t-2}$).¹⁷ The individual effect, u_i , captures unobserved heterogeneity in conviction risk, or that portion of the total variation in conviction that is unobserved (and unmeasured) but is stable over time. The individual effect or error component, u_{it} , is modeled as fixed in this analysis.

To the variables that comprise the baseline specification, henceforth denoted for the purpose of economy as $\alpha_k X_{itk}$, the first model of substantive interest adds a time-varying indicator for marriage. The model is thus specified as follows:

$$(1) \ln \lambda_{it} = \sum_{k=1}^K \alpha_k X_{itk} + \beta Married_{it} + u_i$$

$Married_{it}$ is coded “1” in each year that subjects are married and “0” in all earlier years. If marriage promotes desistance from crime, we expect β to be negative. Recall that, since all person-years after the first marriage ends are excluded, this indicator quantifies the effect of one’s first marriage on conviction frequency.

In our second model we take into account the criminal history of the spouse by adding a second marriage indicator in the following manner:

$$(2) \ln \lambda_{it} = \sum_{k=1}^K \alpha_k X_{itk} + \beta Married_{it} + \gamma MarriedConvict_{it} + u_i$$

The indicator $Married_{it}$ is coded as before. The new indicator $MarriedConvict_{it}$ is coded “1” in the years that subjects are married to a spouse who had a criminal conviction preceding the marriage. The paired marital states – $Married_{it}$ and $MarriedConvict_{it}$ – are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, β represents the effect of being married relative to being unmarried and γ represents the additional effect of being married to a convicted spouse relative to being married to a non-convicted spouse. In other words, γ is a contrast. In order to recover the impact of marriage to a convicted spouse relative to being unmarried, these two coefficients must be summed together and tested against zero. If marriage to a non-convicted spouse leads to desistance from crime, then β will be negative and significant. If, however,

¹⁷ The first order-lags, $Con_{i,t-1}$ and $Inc_{i,t-1}$, capture recency in criminal offending and are binary while the second-order lags, $AccumCon_{i,t-2}$ and $AccumInc_{i,t-2}$, capture the accumulated criminal history and are non-binary. By including both types of variables we can distinguish the short-term, state-dependent effects of criminal conviction and incarceration from the long-term effects.

marriage to a convicted spouse leads to persistence in crime, then we expect γ to be positive and significant. Additionally, if marriage to a convicted spouse exacerbates crime relative to being unmarried, then $\beta + \gamma$ will be positive and significant.¹⁸

In a third and final set of models, we evaluate whether the effects of marriage and spousal criminality depend on the offender's own criminal history as well as on the length of marriage. We provide a more extensive description of these models in later sections.

5.4 Results

5.4.1 Descriptive analyses

The aim of this study is to investigate the extent to which the effects of first marriage depend on the criminal history of the spouse. Before we turn to our panel models, we begin with descriptive statistics, provided in Table 5.2. It appears that three in four male offenders (73.6%) and six in seven female offenders (87.1%) marry before calendar year 2002. Of these married offenders, only one in twenty males (5.4%) but one in four females (26.5%) marries a convicted spouse.

The fact that women are far overrepresented among individuals who marry convicted spouses is consistent with the observation that “women marry down” while “men marry up” when it comes to crime (Laub & Sampson, 2003). This may indicate that there are simply more men with a criminal record available, and therefore chances to meet them are higher. Also, it may take more to become a female offender. A woman who has been convicted for a small number of offenses might be comparable to a man who has committed a large number of offenses on several unobserved characteristics correlated with crime and divorce (e.g., lower self-control, lower socioeconomic status, personality disorders). The fact that female offenders are relatively more deviant may explain why they are more likely to marry criminal spouses than male offenders. Finally, it might be the case that some of the female partners actually are delinquent but are convicted less often (e.g., because they commit less serious crimes).

Examining criminal backgrounds, male subjects who marry a convicted spouse in their first marriage accumulate twice as many convictions over their lifetime, on average, than subjects who marry a non-convicted spouse (21.1 versus 10.2 convictions). Correspondingly, they are more likely to have received an early first conviction (35.5% versus 24.8%) and to have ever been incarcerated (65.7%

¹⁸ The criminal behavior of the partner only pertains to convictions that occurred *before* marriage. Partners who are not convicted before marriage – and are considered to be non-criminals in the current analyses – can be convicted during marriage. Also, it can be the case that non-criminal partners are not convicted anymore during their marriage. We choose this operationalisation, because the focus of this dissertation is on the criminal career of the offenders. We are interested in the question to what extent partner selection on criminal behavior (a characteristic that is fixed at the time of marriage) influences offenders' criminal career development. Disentangling processes of mutual influence between partners during marriage remains an important topic for future research.

Table 5.2 Descriptive statistics, by gender

Variable	Men (N = 4,187)				Women (N = 428)			
	Non-convicted spouse	First marriage to a... Convicted spouse	Never married	First marriage to a... Convicted spouse	Non-convicted spouse	First marriage to a... Convicted spouse	Never married	First marriage to a... Convicted spouse
N	2,916	167	1,104	274	99	55		
Percentage of sample	69.6%	4.0%	26.4%	64.0%	23.1%	12.4%		
Years in study	40.9 (9.4) [39]	40.2 (9.3) [37]	35.6 (8.6) [35]	46.2 (10.5) [46]	41.9 (9.3) [42]	38.2 (9.8) [36]		
Years in analysis sample ^a	31.6 (12.5) [31]	30.5 (12.2) [31]	35.6 (8.6) [35]	32.2 (15.0) [31]	26.4 (12.7) [24]	38.2 (9.8) [36]		
Personal background								
Year of birth	1948.4 (10.9) [1951]	1949.6 (10.2) [1953]	1953.0 (8.0) [1955]	1942.3 (11.9) [1944]	1947.9 (9.3) [1948]	1950.6 (9.5) [1954]		
Non-Dutch	11.1%	9.5%	17.0%	17.6%	8.2%	21.1%		
Death prior to calendar year 2002	15.0%	14.8%	19.2%	16.5%	8.2%	17.5%		
Criminal background								
Age of first conviction	21.5 (8.8) [19]	19.2 (7.6) [17]	18.9 (6.3) [17]	30.5 (11.3) [29]	24.3 (8.0) [23]	23.1 (7.9) [20]		
Accumulated convictions	10.2 (14.9) [5]	21.1 (21.0) [15]	17.5 (20.8) [10]	3.4 (6.5) [1]	4.0 (5.2) [2]	6.4 (16.1) [2]		
Early first conviction (< 17 years)	24.8%	35.5%	33.6%	5.9%	12.2%	5.3%		
Ever incarcerated	43.9%	65.7%	61.6%	13.4%	18.4%	21.1%		
Accumulated prison time (months) ^b	14.8 (23.5) [5.6]	21.2 (26.6) [12.3]	21.6 (27.3) [10.0]	8.4 (14.0) [4.0]	6.0 (11.5) [1.9]	19.0 (45.9) [1.2]		
Ever convicted of violent crime	50.5%	66.9%	58.8%	14.9%	19.4%	15.8%		
Ever convicted of property crime	64.0%	79.9%	75.2%	63.6%	66.3%	54.4%		
Ever convicted of drug crime	12.9%	30.2%	31.5%	6.7%	10.2%	22.8%		
Marriage background								
Age of first marriage	26.0 (5.9) [25]	28.9 (8.4) [27]		23.3 (5.6) [22]	23.1 (6.4) [21]			
Length of first marriage (years)	17.1 (12.3) [15]	13.4 (11.9) [9]		20.2 (15.2) [17]	14.7 (12.1) [9]			
Convicted five years before married	49.7%	70.4%		13.1%	21.4%			
Total # convictions at marriage	4.1 (6.9) [2]	10.1 (12.2) [6]		0.6 (2.1) [0]	1.1 (2.4) [0]			

^a Married individuals have an artificially shorter length of follow-up in the analysis sample because they are excluded in all years after their first marriage dissolves. However, the descriptive statistics provided in this table use all available years.

^b Only individuals who were ever incarcerated are included.

Note: Means of binary variables are shown as percentages. For ratio-level variables, standard deviations are provided in parentheses and medians are shown in brackets.

versus 43.9%). The same pattern holds true for female subjects. Females who marry a convicted partner in their first marriage have more lifetime convictions (4.0 versus 3.4), a higher risk of early first conviction (12.2% versus 5.9%), and a higher incarceration risk (18.4% versus 13.4%).

Although the mean age of first marriage does not differ more than a couple of years (and only for males), the length of first marriage is substantially shorter for subjects who marry a convicted spouse compared to a non-convicted spouse, indicative of a greater marital instability (males: 13.4 versus 17.1 years; females: 14.7 versus 20.2). But note that marriages are quite durable, irrespective of the criminal behavior of the spouse. Most of the CCLS offenders grew up in an era in which divorce was less common than nowadays. As a result individuals were more likely to stay married. Subjects who marry a convicted spouse are also far more likely to have been convicted themselves in the five years prior to marriage (males: 70.4% versus 49.7%; females: 21.4% versus 13.1%) and to have accumulated more convictions at the time of their marriage (males: 10.1 versus 4.1; females: 1.1 versus 0.6), implying a substantial degree of assortative mating with respect to criminal behavior.

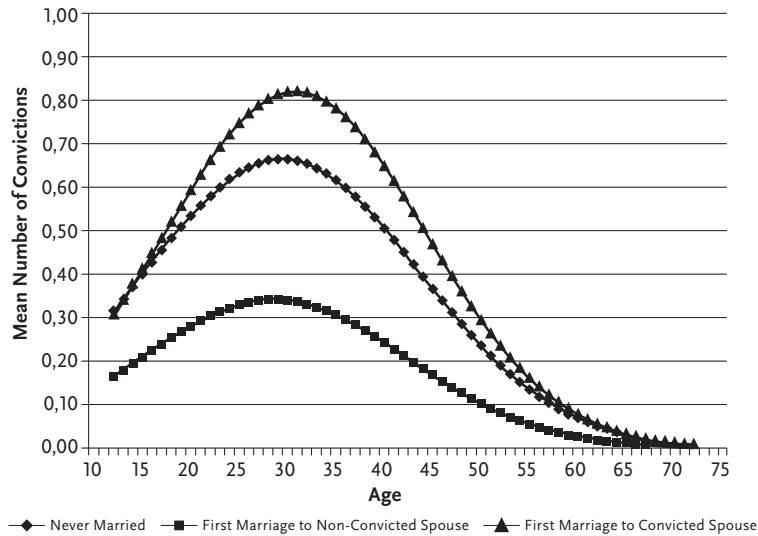
Interestingly, female subjects who never marry tend to be more crime prone than their counterparts who marry, and in many instances, more crime prone than those who marry a convicted spouse. For example, perpetually single females exhibit a younger age of first conviction, a higher volume of lifetime convictions, and a higher lifetime incarceration risk. The same is not necessarily true for male subjects, however. Male offenders who marry a convicted spouse are uniformly more crime prone relative to their married and never-married counterparts. Thus, first marriage to a convicted spouse tends to be the deviant marital state for men, whereas staying unmarried is the deviant marital state for women.

This gendered pattern is illustrated further in Figures 5.1 and 5.2, which provide mean conviction frequencies, stratified by lifetime marital status, by age for men (Figure 5.1) and women (Figure 5.2). Men who marry a convicted spouse have a higher mean conviction rate at almost all ages. A notable exception to this pattern is that, prior to age 20, men who marry a convicted spouse are virtually indistinguishable from men who never marry. This pattern provides prima facie evidence that marriage to a convicted spouse exacerbates criminality relative to singlehood.¹⁹ On the other hand, men who marry a non-convicted spouse have a lower mean conviction rate at all ages. There is a clear selection process at work in that these men are lower-risk individuals who have fewer convictions well before they begin to marry. Nevertheless, the substantially lower conviction risk that is sustained into adulthood could be attributable, in part, to a causal mechanism whereby marriage to non-convicted spouses accelerates the desistance process.

For female sample members, singlehood is associated with a higher rate of conviction at all ages. Considering that 87.1 percent of the women in the CCLS marry at some time in their lives, singlehood is clearly the deviant marital status.

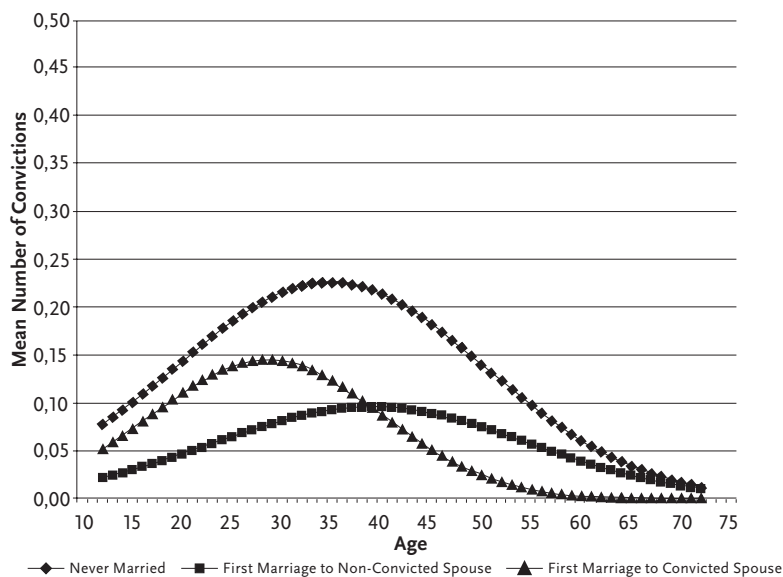
19 Figure 5.1 shows that the age-crime curves begin to diverge when a sizable proportion of men who will marry a convicted spouse begin to do so. For example, over half of men who marry a convicted spouse do so in their 20s (58.6%). By age 19, only 4.7 percent have married.

Figure 5.1 Age distribution of criminal convictions among men, by marital status



Note: The three groups are mutually exclusive. Married subjects who divorce are censored after the end of their first marriage. The age-crime curves are estimated using a single random-effects Poisson model with a quadratic age function and interactions between marital status and age.

Figure 5.2 Age distribution of criminal convictions among women, by marital status



Note: The three groups are mutually exclusive. Married subjects who divorce are censored after the end of their first marriage. The age-crime curves are estimated using a single random-effects Poisson model with a quadratic age function and interactions between marital status and age.

However, the pattern is more ambiguous with respect to spousal selection. Until their mid-30s, women who marry a convicted spouse have a higher conviction rate than women who marry a non-convicted spouse. The opposite is true from the early 40s onward, at which time women who marry a non-convicted spouse have a higher conviction rate than their peers who marry a convicted spouse. Also, while the age of peak rate of conviction varies little among men – conviction rates peak in the neighborhood of ages 29-31 for all three marital status groups – the same cannot be said of women. The peak age of conviction is 28 for women who marry a convicted spouse but 39 for women who marry a non-convicted spouse, with never-married women in between with a peak age of 35. Thus, the relationship between spousal selection and crime among the CCLS women appears to be age-graded.

5.4.2 The effects of marriage and spousal criminality on criminal convictions

Results from the fixed-effects Poisson models are provided in Table 5.3. Recall that these models estimate the effect of marriage and spousal criminality on the number of convictions per year of street time. Model 1 estimates the impact of marriage on conviction frequency irrespective of the criminality of the spouse, and is equivalent to Equation 1. Model 2 estimates the impact of spousal criminality on conviction frequency, and is equivalent to Equation 2. All models are estimated separately for male and female subjects. Note that in follow-up models that are not shown, we lagged the marriage indicators by one year to ensure temporal priority of marriage vis-à-vis criminal conviction. The results from these models were virtually identical to those reported in Table 5.3.

In Model 1, as expected from a variety of theoretical perspectives, being married is associated with a significant decrease in conviction frequency relative to being unmarried. This is true for male as well as female offenders. Exponentiating each of the coefficients (e^b) provides an incident rate ratio (IRR), and subtracting one ($e^b - 1$) yields the proportional increase/decrease in the number of convictions given a state of marriage as opposed to a state of being unmarried. The IRRs for males and females are 0.73 ($e^{-.314}$) and 0.45 ($e^{-.801}$), respectively. This can be taken to mean that, being married lowers conviction frequency by 27 percent among males and 55 percent among females, on average and all else equal.

Before proceeding to Model 2, we first draw attention to the remaining regressors. First, the expected age-crime relationship is observed, as the coefficients imply an inverted U-shape to the mean number of convictions per year of street time. Second, fertility status appears to have an inverse relationship with conviction frequency among male subjects but no relationship with conviction frequency among female subjects. Third, past conviction strongly influences current conviction frequency. For both males and females, having been convicted in the previous calendar year increases one's conviction rate in the current year, although the accumulated number of convictions is inversely associated with conviction. Because multicollinearity is not a problem in this model, the effect can be interpreted as a "slowing down" of the effect of accumulated convictions over time. Fourth and finally, past imprisonment influences current conviction risk. Having been confined in the last calendar year is associated with significantly

more convictions only for male offenders, while the accumulated time served in prison is positively associated with conviction among both males and females.

Model 2 examines the differential effects of marriage to non-convicted and convicted spouses on the number of convictions. In these models, the coefficient for marriage actually represents the effect of being married to a non-convicted spouse, while the coefficient for marriage to a convicted spouse represents a contrast with marriage to a non-convicted spouse. Recall that, to recover the effect of marriage to a convicted spouse relative to being unmarried, these coefficients must be summed together. Shaded coefficients in Table 5.3 indicate those for whom the summed coefficients are significantly different from zero.

For men, the coefficient for marriage is negative and significant, which means that marriage to a non-convicted spouse is associated with a significant decline in conviction frequency relative to being unmarried (IRR = .70). On the other hand, the contrast for marriage to a convicted spouse is positive and significant, meaning that the decline in conviction frequency is not as pronounced for these individuals. To test the effect of marriage to a convicted spouse compared to being unmarried, the two marriage coefficients summed together yields a coefficient of -0.055 (s.e. = .052) and an IRR of 0.95, an effect that is not statistically significant. In sum, being married to a non-convicted spouse reduces conviction frequency by 30 percent relative to being unmarried, while being married to a convicted spouse is statistically indistinguishable from being unmarried.

Table 5.3 Fixed-effects poisson models of the impact of first marriage on conviction frequency, by gender

Variable	Men (N = 3,356)		Women (N = 173)	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Age	.487 (.010)***	.489 (.010)***	.574 (.083)***	.577 (.083)***
Age squared	-.013 (.000)***	-.013 (.000)***	-.012 (.002)***	-.012 (.002)***
Age cubed	.000 (.000)***	.000 (.000)***	.000 (.000)***	.000 (.000)***
Have a child	-.157 (.021)***	-.154 (.021)***	-.026 (.140)	-.006 (.141)
Convicted last year	.470 (.013)***	.469 (.013)***	.267 (.105)*	.257 (.105)*
Accumulated convictions	-.013 (.001)***	-.013 (.001)***	-.130 (.015)***	-.129 (.015)***
Imprisoned last year	.283 (.015)***	.282 (.015)***	.296 (.161)	.316 (.162)
Accumulated prison time	.063 (.009)***	.064 (.009)***	.958 (.115)***	.947 (.114)***
Currently married	-.314 (.023)***	-.351 (.024)***	-.801 (.169)***	-.617 (.194)***
Currently married convict		.296 (.054)***		-.498 (.267)

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests)

Note: Coefficients and standard errors are provided. Models adjust for exposure time. Exponentiating the coefficient and subtracting one ($e^b - 1$) yields the proportional increase/decrease in the number of convictions associated with a unit increase in the regressor. Shaded coefficients represent those that are significantly different from zero when summed together, yielding the main effect of being married to a convicted spouse relative to being unmarried ($p < .05$).

The findings are somewhat different for female subjects. As expected, the coefficient for marriage is negative and statistically significant (IRR = .54), implying that being married to a non-convicted spouse leads to significantly fewer convictions relative to being unmarried. On the other hand, the contrast for

marriage to a convicted spouse is not significant, and in fact the sum of the two marriage coefficients yields a significant effect of marriage to a convicted spouse relative to being unmarried of -1.115 (s.e. = $.238$) with an IRR of 0.33 . This can be taken to mean that, for female offenders, marriage per se is the most salient transition, with no predictive influence of the criminal history of the husband. Thus, for both males and females, marriage slows the pace of criminal conviction. Yet for male offenders, only marriage to a non-convicted spouse is protective. On the other hand, for female offenders, marriage to a convicted or non-convicted spouse exerts a similar protective influence.^{20 21}

5.4.3 The moderating effect of criminal history

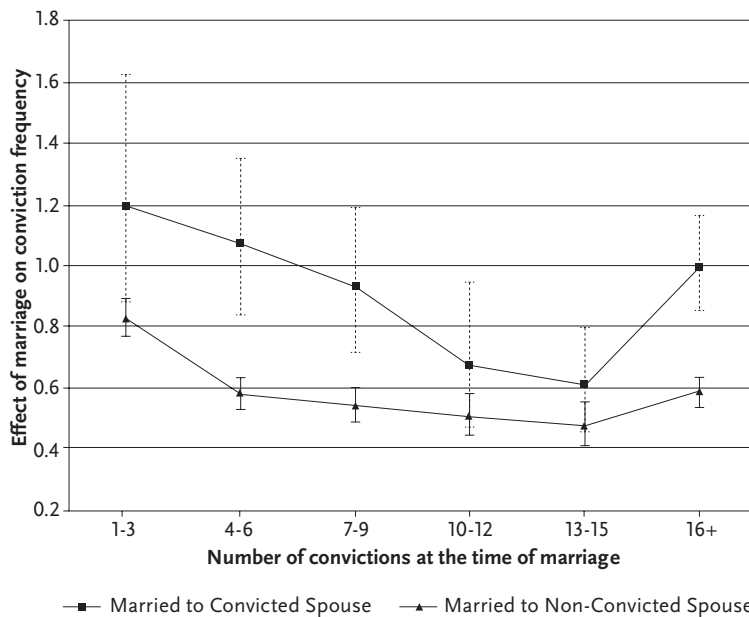
The influence of a (non-)convicted spouse may depend on the offender's own criminal history at the time of marriage. We expect the effects of marriage to become smaller if individuals committed more offenses before marriage. Chronic offenders would be more present-oriented and self-centered, and would not have developed the capacity and desire to invest in social relationships. Therefore, they would be less likely to be affected by social ties like marriage (Nagin & Paternoster, 1994; Moffitt, 1993; Rhule-Louie & McMahon, 2007). To investigate the degree to which this is the case, we modeled the interaction between the subject's current marital status, spousal criminality, and the subject's conviction history at the time of marriage. Conviction history is modeled as a series of mutually exclusive dummy indicators (0 convictions, 1-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10-12, 13-15, 16+).

20 Note that the analyses show average reductions over the entire span of marriage. However, some offenders (i.e., those who were older in 1977) were included more years than others. To test the sensitivity of the models we also estimated them limiting attention to discrete post-marriage intervals: the first one, five, and ten years during marriage. To be able to compare married and unmarried persons, singles were followed until the mean age of first marriage plus respectively one year, five years, or ten years. Importantly, for males and females alike, the findings are replicated when a limited number of post-marriage years are considered.

21 We also investigated cohort effects. Cohabitation has become much more widespread over the last decades. Therefore, the effects of marriage may have changed over time. We limited this investigation to male subjects, as the results for females did not exhibit sensitivity to birth cohort. We began by stratifying the men into one of three cohorts based on their birth year (1907-45, 1946-55, 1956-65), and then constructed separate marriage indicators for each cohort to include into the fixed-effects Poisson model. Interestingly, for the earliest cohort, the coefficient for marriage was positive and statistically significant, while it was negative and significant for the last two cohorts. This suggests that, relative to singlehood, marriage to a non-convicted spouse increases in salience and desistance potential over time. In the earliest cohort, in fact, these marriages appear to be criminogenic. However, the contrasting coefficient for marriage to a convicted spouse was positive and significant for all three cohorts, indicating that marriage to a non-convicted spouse is more beneficial compared to marriage to a convicted spouse, irrespective of cohort. An additionally interesting result was that, for the latest cohort only, marriage to a convicted spouse was associated with a significant reduction in convictions compared to being single. This suggests that even marriage to a convicted spouse possesses desistance potential in later cohorts (but not as much potential as marriage to a non-convicted spouse). The finding that the crime-reducing impact of marriage becomes stronger over time is in line with the study of Bersani, Laub and Nieuwebeerta (2009). They argue that the quality and stability of recent marriages may be higher, because these marriages are often preceded by cohabitation (p.20-21). Cohabitation is considered as a testing phase, and marriage as a further investment in the relationship.

Among female subjects, the effect of marriage did not differ by the criminal history of the spouse, nor did it differ by the number of convictions at the time of marriage. As described above, marriage per se is the relevant transition for female offenders. But we should note that small cell sizes limit this part of the analysis. Among male subjects, on the other hand, the impact of marriage does differ by the offender's criminal history. In order to facilitate interpretation of this model, we summarize the results in Figure 5.3, which plots the incident rate ratios (IRRs) and 95-percent confidence intervals for the interaction between marital status, spousal criminality, and the number of prior convictions. Because the distinction between marriage to a non-convicted spouse and marriage to a convicted spouse remained relevant, two fitted IRR curves are displayed.

Figure 5.3: Effect of marriage and spousal criminality on the number of convictions per year of street time, male subjects



Note: The estimates shown are exponentiated coefficients (i.e., incident rate ratios) from a random-effects Poisson model in which the effect of marriage is interacted with the total number of convictions at marriage. Error bars correspond to 95-percent confidence intervals. An exponentiated coefficient of 1.0 implies no relationship between marriage and conviction.

Notice first that the effect of marriage to a non-convicted spouse was estimated very precisely (the 95% error bars are comparatively tight around the fitted IRR). Additionally, marriage to a non-convicted spouse appears to grow significantly stronger in the number of pre-marriage convictions. In other words, men with lengthy conviction histories benefited in a quite pronounced way from these marriages. Although the results are not conclusive, the same can also be said of men who marry convicted spouses but only if they have accumulated at least ten

prior convictions. Men with fewer than ten convictions at the time of marriage are generally indistinguishable from singlehood when they marry a convicted spouse. However, the fitted IRR is unstable and the confidence intervals are quite wide.

5.4.4 The moderating effect of marital stability

The impact of marriage and spousal criminality on criminal conviction might also be influenced by characteristics of the marriage itself. Sampson and Laub (1993), for example, suggest that higher marital quality and stability increase the protective effect of marriage on criminal behavior. This is of extra relevance since individuals marrying a convicted spouse are more likely to have unstable marriages, as we saw in Table 5.2. We test this expectation in a set of additional analyses. We created interactions between the marriage indicators and a set of mutually exclusive indicators for the total length of the first marriage in years (1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16+) until divorce, death or the end of the observation period (calendar year 2002). These results are reported in Table 5.4.

For men, the pattern suggests that the beneficial impact of marriage to a non-convicted spouse generally increases in the total length of marriage, whereas marriage to a convicted spouse is indistinguishable from being unmarried no matter the length of marriage (the summed marriage coefficients are never significant). A notable finding, however, is that even marriages to non-convicted spouses that dissolve after a few years have desistance potential. In other words, even unstable marriages (to conventional women) reduce crime while they last.

Table 5.4 Fixed-effects poisson models of the impact of first marriage on conviction frequency, by gender and total length of marriage

Variable	Total length of marriage			
	1-5 Years	6-10 Years	11-15 Years	16+ Years
Men				
Currently married	-.107 (.040)**	-.357 (.042)***	-.528 (.049)***	-.445 (.034)***
Currently married convict	.149 (.097)	.184 (.149)	.463 (.134)***	.324 (.086)***
Women				
Currently married	-.586 (.285)*	-1.746 (.363)***	-.152 (1.07)	.530 (.431)
Currently married convict	.397 (.471)	.398 (.627)	-2.463 (1.35)	-2.110 (.514)***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests)

Note: Coefficients and standard errors are provided. Fully specified models are estimated as in Table 5.3. Exponentiating the coefficient and subtracting one ($e^b - 1$) yields the proportional increase/decrease in the number of convictions associated with a unit increase in the regressor. Shaded coefficients represent those that are significantly different from zero when summed together, yielding the main effect of being married to a convicted spouse relative to being unmarried ($p < .05$).

For women, the pattern differs somewhat from earlier results. For marriages lasting no more than 10 years the results are similar to male offenders, in that marriage to a non-convicted spouse leads to a significant decline in the frequency of conviction, while marriage to a convicted spouse is indistinguishable from being unmarried. On the other hand, in long-lasting unions, marriages to non-convicted spouses are indistinguishable from being unmarried; whereas marriages

to convicted spouses appear to be quite beneficial, as they lead to a significant reduction in the number of convictions. Yet we should caution that these results are highly unstable because of insufficient data.

5.5 Conclusion and discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between marriage, spousal criminality, and the development of criminal offending. Although numerous studies have shown that marriage is an important life course event that reduces criminal offending, the criminal history of the spouse has largely been neglected. We used data from the Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS), a long-term study of a conviction cohort of Dutch offenders. The data have a number of advantages for studying the effects of marriage on crime. In contrast to the few existing studies in this area, the CCLS contains data on the criminal careers of both offenders and their spouses that reach far into adulthood. Moreover, we had information on the exact timing of convictions and marriages. Therefore, we were able to clearly distinguish partner selection from partner influences during marriage. Furthermore, the data enabled us to investigate the criminal careers of male as well as female offenders.

The results show that marriage is indeed a salient transition in the criminal career but there are several qualifications to this conclusion related to characteristics of the offenders (gender, criminal history), characteristics of the spouse (criminal history), and characteristics of the marriage (duration). Among men, being married to a non-convicted spouse uniformly reduces criminal involvement. On the other hand, being married to a convicted spouse is indistinguishable from being unmarried, and thus sustains criminal involvement. Although “criminal” marriages are thus indeed not protective, we do not observe an increase in criminal behavior as has been found in earlier studies (Woodward, Fergusson & Horwood, 2002). One explanation might be that these earlier studies had no longitudinal information on spouses’ criminal behavior, and have not been able to clearly distinguish partner selection from partner influences during the relationship. Similarity in criminal behavior could also result from the fact that partners already resemble each other before relationship formation.

In contrast to our expectation, the effect of being married to a non-convicted spouse is especially pronounced for men with extensive criminal involvement prior to marriage. In line with this finding it has been suggested that the crime-reducing effects of relationships would be stronger for individuals with a higher propensity to commit crimes, simply because they have more potential criminal behavior in need of deterrence (Wright, Caspi, Moffitt & Silva, 2001). In addition, we find that the impact of a non-convicted spouse increases when males’ marriages are more stable (i.e., of longer duration). However, even the marriages that dissolve after a few years appear to affect crime while they last.

Women who marry tend to benefit from their union, and interestingly, this relationship holds up irrespective of the conviction history of the spouse. Thus, the institution of marriage per se tends to promote desistance among high-risk female subjects. Remarkably, we do not find support for the idea that women are

more strongly influenced by the criminal behavior of their partners than men. The fact that we do not find any effect of a convicted spouse might be partly attributed to the birth of children during marriage. The birth of a child might have a more pronounced impact on females' lives (both practical and emotional) and reduce the preferences and opportunities to commit crimes even more than for men (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002; Uggen & Kruttschnitt, 1998). The crime-reducing effect of childbearing might thus outweigh the crime-stimulating effect of a convicted husband. And in fact, in our data we do observe a modest tendency for the presence of children to contribute to the marriage effect (results of which are not shown). Untangling the complex interactions between marriage and parenthood is an important task for future research. In addition, it has been suggested that less contact with peers might explain the finding that marriage reduces women's criminal behavior irrespective of the criminal background of the spouse. Married women would prioritize family responsibilities over friends – more so than men (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002).

Although the data used in this study are unique – they stem from a large-scale, prospective, longitudinal study with a very long observation period – a number of limitations have to be taken into account when interpreting the results. These limitations offer several guidelines for future research. First of all, our sample consists of persons who were in contact with the Dutch criminal justice system in 1977 – all individuals in the sample have committed an offense at least once during their lives. The sampling frame influences the generalizability of our results in two ways. First, our results speak to the effect of marriage on criminal convictions among convicted and to-be-convicted individuals, and not necessarily among the population at large. Second, the results pertain to a particular time and place. The Netherlands was characterized by a lenient penal climate until the 1990s. This means that criminals were less easily convicted in 1977 than nowadays. The fact that the CCLS offenders were convicted means that they were relatively serious offenders. Convicted offenders are more likely to marry convicted spouses, and the effect of marrying a criminal spouse may be even more crime stimulating if the spouse is convicted (instead of “just” delinquent). Studies in different contexts are needed to test the generality of the findings.

In addition, due to the use of official data, we cannot rule out the possibility that we underestimate the total number of criminal acts. Not all offenses are recorded by the police or are prosecuted. The underestimation may be selective, when the probability of being convicted is not equal for all persons. For example, some criminals may be more likely to be intensely monitored by the police, while others (e.g., those with a higher IQ) may adopt more effective strategies to keep out of the arms of the law. It should be noted that the use of official data has important advantages as well. It enables us to examine a great variety of criminal acts that differ in severity, such as violent offenses, property offenses, drug offenses, weapon offenses, and offenses against the public order. Moreover, it enables us to investigate the development of criminal behavior over the entire life course.

Moreover, our measure of marriage includes only legal marriage. From the 1970s onwards, it has become more and more common to cohabit, and cohabitation has even become a substitute for marriage in the Netherlands (Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2000). This development is less of a problem for our analyses because the

CCLS contains data on a cohort of individuals convicted in 1977. The largest share of these persons already reached marriageable age before this time. Although nowadays the Netherlands is known for its high cohabitation rate, marriage patterns were comparable to other countries (e.g., the United States) during most of the period under study. The current increase in cohabitation rates is not unique to the Netherlands and has taken place in other countries as well (Kalmijn, 2002). Therefore, future studies should also focus on the impact of other relationship types on criminal offending (see also Bersani, Laub & Nieuwbeerta, 2009: 22).

Finally, we are unable to gain insight into the intermediate mechanisms underlying the relationship between marriage, spousal criminality, and criminal behavior. The question why marriage to a non-convicted spouse reduces criminal conviction, while marriage to a convicted spouse does not change conviction risk (at least for men), ultimately remains unanswered. It is unclear whether the changes in the former case are caused by social bonds, restructured routine activities, social learning processes or cognitive transformations. Untangling these mechanisms and determining their relative importance is an important task for future research. In addition, it will be important moving forward to further untangle the selection processes that are at work in the processes of marriage and partner selection. Most analyses (the present one included) treat the selection process as one sided, and only from the perspective of the sampled individual. Yet marriage is clearly a two-sided affair, as a sample subject chooses his (her) partner, while the spouse-to-be must likewise choose the sample subject as her (his) partner. To the extent that the partner's unobservables which jointly influence his/her marriage and crime decisions are highly correlated with the focal individual's unobservables, and both are fairly time stable, the results from the analysis will be robust. However, the veracity of this assumption is ultimately unknown (and unknowable) because these processes are poorly understood (and understudied). We would add further that this will be true of the study of any "market" behavior where outcomes depend on decisions made by two or more parties. Most notably, studies of the employment-crime relationship rarely acknowledge that an individual's employment decisions are determined, to an unknown degree, by the tastes and preferences of potential employers in addition to the applicant.

Despite these limitations, this study extends our knowledge about the role of marriage in the criminal career. Marriage matters for the development of criminal behavior but its impact depends in systematic ways on gender, criminal history, length of marriage, and spousal criminality. With regard to the latter observation, getting married does not necessarily mean the end of a criminal career. For men, the "good marriage effect" clearly depends on the criminal history of the spouse whom one marries. Our conclusions have significant implications for criminological theories emphasizing the protective effects of marriage and give important guidance for future research. On the basis of the current findings, we have to nuance the prominent idea that marriage uniformly reduces criminal behavior (e.g., Laub & Sampson, 2003). Future studies on the marriage-crime relationship should pay close attention to partner selection processes and the way in which partners influence each other during marriage.

Appendix

Random-effects poisson models of the impact of first marriage on conviction frequency, by gender

Variable	Men (N = 4,187)		Women (N = 428)	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Age	.458 (.010)***	.460 (.010)***	.397 (.075)***	.397 (.075)***
Age squared	-.012 (.000)***	-.013 (.000)***	-.009 (.002)***	-.009 (.002)***
Age cubed	.000 (.000)***	.000 (.000)***	.000 (.000)***	.000 (.000)***
Have a child	-.126 (.021)***	-.121 (.021)***	.210 (.130)	.209 (.130)
Convicted last year	.555 (.014)***	.555 (.014)***	.543 (.106)***	.543 (.106)***
Accumulated convictions	-.005 (.001)***	-.005 (.001)***	-.066 (.013)***	-.066 (.013)***
Imprisoned last year	.327 (.015)***	.326 (.015)***	.446 (.157)**	.446 (.158)**
Accumulated prison time	.060 (.008)***	.061 (.008)***	.523 (.102)***	.523 (.102)***
Currently married	-.336 (.022)***	-.379 (.023)***	-.790 (.150)***	-.792 (.172)***
Currently married convict		.360 (.052)***		.004 (.232)
Hausman tests				
Currently married	3.79	4.37	-0.14	1.92
Currently married convict		-4.55		-3.78

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests)

Note: Coefficients and standard errors are provided. Models adjust for exposure time. Exponentiating the coefficient and subtracting one ($e^b - 1$) yields the proportional increase/decrease in the number of convictions associated with a unit increase in the regressor. Shaded coefficients represent those that are significantly different from zero when summed together, yielding the main effect of being married to a convicted spouse relative to being unmarried ($p < .05$). The Hausman specification test is a z-test for the marriage coefficients, and indicates the degree of inconsistency and efficiency of the random-effects model relative to the consistency and inefficiency of the fixed-effects model. If this statistic exceeds a threshold such as 1.96, it indicates that the random-effects model is sufficiently inconsistent that the fixed-effects model overcomes its inefficiency. In our analyses the Hausman test favors the fixed-effects models in almost all cases, lending further support to the choice for these models.



CHAPTER 6

The impact of convicts' and spouses' criminal careers on marital dissolution

This chapter is co-authored by Anne-Rigt Poortman and Werner Raub. It is currently under review at an international journal.

6 The impact of convicts' and spouses' criminal careers on marital dissolution

6.1 Introduction

In criminological theory and research, marriage is considered to be an important life course event that can influence the development of criminal behavior (Laub & Sampson, 2003). Numerous empirical studies show that marriage fosters desistance from crime, especially among men (Blokland & Nieuwebeerta, 2005; King, Massoglia & MacMillan, 2007; Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006; Theobald & Farrington, 2010). Yet, it is also known that offenders are less likely to experience protective effects of marriage. Young offenders face processes of cumulative disadvantage. First, they have lower marital chances. Second, they are more likely to marry criminal spouses. These "criminal" marriages often lead to persistence in crime, and can even stimulate criminal offending (Capaldi, Kim & Owen, 2008; Haynie et al., 2005; Simons et al., 2002; Woodward, Fergusson & Horwood, 2002).

Although the reciprocal influences between crime and marriage are well established, almost no attention has been paid to divorce. Because marriage has such a significant role in the criminal career, it becomes important, too, to study the breakup of offenders' marital unions. Processes of cumulative disadvantage may very well continue after marriage formation. Offenders' marriages may be unstable, and more likely to dissolve. Marital dissolution, in turn, may affect the further development of crime (Farrington & West, 1995).

This is one of the first studies investigating the importance of divorce in the criminal career. The aim is to assess the impact of criminal offending on marital dissolution. Earlier research in this area is scarce but showed consistent results: incarceration increases men's odds of divorce during imprisonment as well as after release (Apel et al., 2010; Lopoo and Western, 2005; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Western, 2006). The studies of Lopoo and Western (2005) and Western (2006), for example, showed that separation was significantly more likely to occur during periods of incarceration (the odds ratios were respectively: 2.99 and 2.23). Sampson and Laub (1993) found that men sentenced to a reformatory as juveniles were more likely to be divorced in young adulthood (ages 17-25) and middle adulthood (ages 25-32). Other researchers (Apel et al., 2010) showed that incarceration resulted in significantly higher divorce risks even after 5 years following imprisonment (odds ratio: 2.10).

This study contributes to the current literature in several ways. First, we employ a more detailed measure of criminal behavior than has been used in

earlier research. The few earlier studies in this area limited their attention to incarceration. Even without the experience of incarceration, criminal offending may affect marital stability in a significant way. We include several other aspects of the criminal career: the number of convictions, convictions for violent offenses, and the timing of convictions. Second, we do not focus exclusively on male offenders but investigate the criminal careers of female offenders as well. Third, and perhaps most importantly, we take into account the criminal behavior of spouses. Although it is known that offenders are more likely to be married to delinquent spouses (Moffitt et al., 2001; Simons et al., 2002), earlier studies on offenders' divorce risks have not taken into account partners' criminal careers. This is remarkable because it may very well be the case that the likelihood of divorce depends on partners' offending history as well. A prominent idea in family sociology is that marriages are less likely to dissolve if spouses resemble each other (Kalmijn, 1998). It is, however, questionable whether this idea also applies when it concerns similarity in criminal behavior. If both partners are involved in crime, they are for example both likely to have personal traits and to be involved in situations that undermine the stability of marriage (Western, 2006: 5; Theobald & Farrington, 2011).

Our study addresses two research questions. First, to what extent does criminal offending affect the likelihood of divorce? Second, to what extent does the relationship between criminal offending and divorce depend on the criminal history of the spouse? In other words, are marriages most likely to dissolve if both spouses are involved in crime, or is divorce most likely to occur if only one of the spouses is delinquent? One of the reasons for why these questions have been understudied is substantial data requirements. First, comprehensive longitudinal information on the development of offenders' criminal behavior is necessary. Second, such information is needed for marriage partners, too. We employ data of a unique study of a conviction cohort of Dutch offenders and their marriage partners: the Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS; Nieuwbeerta & Blokland 2003). This is the first study containing longitudinal data on the criminal careers of a large number of offenders *and* their marriage partners. Both offenders and their spouses are followed over almost the entire life course, from age 12 until late adulthood.

6.2 Theory and previous research

With the rise of life course criminology (Piquero, Farrington & Blumstein 2003), studies examining the development of individual criminal careers have been accumulating. Earlier research in this area has been primarily based on Sampson and Laub's age-graded theory of informal social control (Sampson & Laub 1993). According to Sampson and Laub important life course events can act as turning points in the criminal career. During adulthood marital dissolution has been identified as a significant event that can stimulate criminal offending.

Although Sampson and Laub do recognize that offenders' may have higher divorce risks, they assume that life course transitions are to a large extent determined by chance (Laub & Sampson, 2003). As a result, their theory has mainly focused on explaining the effects of divorce on crime. Although they do emphasize the role of cumulative disadvantage (the idea that offending impedes conventional life outcomes, such as a stable marriage), they remain unclear about

the mechanisms underlying offenders' divorce risks. In addition, Sampson and Laub solely focused on male offenders. The assumption behind their theory is that these male offenders marry non-criminal women: "Given the crime differences between men and women, it is almost invariably the case that men marry 'up' and women 'down' when it comes to exposure to crime" (Laub & Sampson, 2003: 45-46). As a result, Sampson and Laub did not pay attention to partner selection (i.e., the criminal history of the spouse).

To explain offenders' divorce risks, we expand current theories in the field of life course criminology – especially the work of Sampson and Laub – by integrating criminological insights with theoretical notions from family sociology. In contrast to criminology, family sociologists have extensively studied the determinants of divorce. We first discuss mechanisms that may account for the effect of offenders' criminal careers on marital dissolution. Subsequently, we consider spouses' criminal careers and argue that the effect of offenders' criminal behavior on marital dissolution is likely to depend on the criminal career of the spouse.

6.2.1 The impact of offenders' criminal careers on marital dissolution

Family sociologists argue that the likelihood of divorce depends on the costs and benefits of the current relationship, as well as the costs and benefits of possible alternatives, that is, entering singlehood or a new relationship (Becker, 1981; Levinger, 1979). We assume that offenders' *personal traits* (i.e., selection effects) and offenders' *criminal behavior* (i.e., direct causal effects) influence the costs and benefits of both offenders and spouses, and through this the likelihood of divorce.

The impact of offenders' personal traits

One view on the relationship between criminal offending and divorce follows from the idea that individuals select themselves into situations on the basis of underlying personal traits. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) refer to self-control as a driver of such processes. Individuals with lower levels of self-control tend to seek "immediate gratification of their desires with minimal effort or without long-term planning, and tend to dislike institutional arrangements that require discipline, supervision, or other constraints on behavior like marriage" (Gottfredson & Hirschi 1990: 157). As a result, these individuals are not only more likely to commit offenses but also have difficulty maintaining a stable marital union. This would render the relationship between criminal offending and divorce spurious. It is not criminal offending as such but offenders' personal traits that increase the risk to divorce. These traits decrease their ability and willingness to maintain a stable relationship and make it relatively attractive to be single. Offenders' lower levels of self-control may also make the relationship less beneficial to spouses. Their personal traits would make them insensitive, non-verbal, and more likely to commit violence against their partners (Apel, et al., 2010; Western, 2006), which further increases the risk that the marriage will dissolve.

The impact of offenders' criminal behavior

Other explanations have focused on the direct causal effects of offenders' criminal behavior on divorce. One way in which criminal behavior would increase the

likelihood of divorce is via the *stigma* attached to a criminal record. First, a stigma can lead to social stress. Offenders may be blamed and held responsible for their criminal activities by their social environment. A criminal record can stigmatize the spouse (and other family members) as well. This may result in feelings of shame, anger, depression, and isolation for both partners (Lopoo & Western, 2005; Western, Lopoo & McLanahan, 2004). Second, a stigma can lead to financial stress. Although offenders may find other – illegal – ways to provide for their families, they have less favorable prospects in the legal labor market. Offenders have been found to have more difficulty in finding a job, to be employed at lower rates, to earn less, and to experience a slower rate of wage growth (Apel et al., 2010; Pager, 2003; Western, 2002). Both social and financial stress may put the marital relationship under pressure and may motivate the spouse to search for an alternative partner. As a result, offenders' divorce risks would be higher.

Another way in which criminal offending would increase the likelihood of divorce is *incapacitation*. Incapacitation may disrupt marital ties in several ways. Due to isolation, the marital relationship is not confirmed on a daily basis, and individuals do not experience the advantages of being together with a partner. Spouses may even seek alternative sources of emotional support during the period of incapacitation, and may find it difficult to adjust to their partners after release. The loss of economic support may cause marital strain as well and may even lead a spouse to search for a new partner who can help stabilize the financial situation in the household (Apel et al., 2010). As incarceration is likely to erode human capital, offenders' prospects on the (legal) labor market – and their divorce risks – would be affected even after release (Western & McLanahan, 2000).

Opportunities outside the marital relationship

The above explanations for the effects of offenders' criminal behavior on divorce risks focused on processes internal to the marital relationship. Offenders' criminal behavior might also affect the costs and benefits of offenders' alternatives outside the relationship. For example, incapacitation may reduce offenders' opportunities to meet potential other partners, and lower levels of self-control, stigma and incapacitation could make offenders less attractive to alternative partners. This may lead to a lower – rather than a higher – likelihood of divorce. Offenders are likely to be less viable players in the marriage market and therefore may be more inclined to stay with their current partner.

Hypotheses

We have argued that offenders' personal traits and criminal careers may affect marital stability through various mechanisms, some of them increasing, others decreasing the likelihood of divorce. Compelling theory on the net effects of these mechanisms would require a careful specification of the relative strength of the separate mechanisms. Although we are unaware of convincing theoretical arguments on the relative strength of the mechanisms, we nevertheless expect – in line with the results of earlier empirical studies – that offenders are more likely to divorce than non-offenders. In this study we examine several other aspects of offenders' criminal careers: the seriousness of convictions (i.e., the number of offenses, violent offenses, incarceration) and the timing of convictions. We argue

that the mechanisms generating divorce risks do not only apply to offending and non-offending but also to the *seriousness* of a criminal history. The more serious a criminal history, the lower offenders' levels of self-control, the higher the stigma, and the higher the disruptive effects of incapacitation will be. First, we expect that the more offenses a person has committed, the higher the odds of divorce become. Second, we expect that violent offenses and incarceration – as indicators of even more serious involvement in crime – increase the risk of divorce even further. In addition, we expect that the *timing* of criminal convictions matters. The longer ago the last conviction, the smaller the effect on divorce will be. Spouses may be unaware about offenses that occurred a long time ago. Also, the stigmatizing effects of a criminal record may become less severe over time. As a result, the attractiveness of the relationship is less likely to be affected.

6.2.2 The interaction between offenders' and spouses' criminal careers

Until now, we have neglected the criminal careers of spouses, implicitly assuming that offenders have partners who are themselves *not* involved in crime. Several studies, however, show that offenders have higher chances to form relationships with individuals who are criminally active as well, that is, they mate assortatively (Moffitt et al., 2001; Simons et al., 2002). In family sociology there are different theoretical arguments and empirical evidence on the impact of partner similarity on divorce risks. On the one hand similarity between partners may promote marital stability, on the other hand it may promote marital instability.

It is often argued that marriages are more stable and *less likely to dissolve* if partners resemble each other (Kalmijn, 1998). Partners, who have similar lifestyles and expectations about the organization of the relationship, the division of labor, and having and raising children, would get along with each other better than spouses who do not resemble each other. Also, family and friends of both spouses will probably be more alike, and be able to get along better. As a result, they are likely to support the marriage more and the step towards divorce is less easily taken (Janssen, 2001: 13). In a similar vein, the disruptive effects of criminal offending on marital relationships may be smaller if both spouses are involved in crime. For example, the fact that both partners are likely to have lower levels of self-control does not necessarily put the relationship under pressure but may also lead to mutual understanding. Moreover, if both spouses are criminal, chances are higher that their family members, friends and acquaintances are involved in crime as well. This reduces the stigma imposed by the social environment. Also, spouses themselves may care less about a stigma if they have a criminal record as well (Western, Lopoo & McLanahan, 2004: 4). Finally, both partners' chances in the marriage market may be limited, which reduces their alternatives and makes them more willing to stay together.

Partner similarity may not always promote marital stability. Resemblance in certain characteristics (e.g., income) would make marriages unstable and *more likely to dissolve* (Becker, 1981). This may very well be the case with criminal behavior as well. If both partners are involved in crime, relationships are more likely to be contentious and stormy (Simons et al. 2002). Both partners are likely to have personal traits (e.g., being short-sighted, impulsive, non-verbal) that undermine

relationship stability. As a result, both may consider the costs to leave the relationship as lower, leading to a higher likelihood of divorce. Also, if both partners are criminal, problems – such as social and financial stress – increase, which may put the marital relationship under even more pressure and increase the risk of divorce.

Hypotheses

Different hypotheses can be formulated about the moderating impact of spouses' criminal careers on marital stability. On the one hand, the stability perspective suggests that marriages are least likely to dissolve if spouses resemble each other on criminal behavior: if both partners are criminal or if both spouses are non-criminal, the odds of divorce would be lower than if only one of the partners is involved in crime. On the other hand, the instability perspective suggests that marriages are most likely to dissolve if both partners are criminal, followed by marriages where only one of the partners shows criminal behavior. Marriages would be least likely to end in a divorce, if both spouses are not involved in crime.

6.3 Methods

6.3.1 Data

In this study we use data from the Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS) (Nieuwbeerta & Blokland, 2003). The CCLS offenders were selected by taking a four-percent sample of all cases of criminal offenses tried in the Netherlands in 1977. This resulted in a total sample of 4,615 offenders (4,187 men and 428 women). For the present study, the CCLS has been supplemented with data on the complete criminal careers of all of the marriage partners of the sample subjects from age 12 to calendar year 2002. The population registration records revealed that 74.9 percent ($N = 3,456$) of the original 4,615 sample subjects married on at least one occasion. This concerns 73.6 percent of the male sample subjects ($N = 3,083$) and 87.1 percent of the female sample subjects ($N = 373$). By enlarging the original CCLS we know – for all sample subjects and marriage partners – the exact timing of criminal offenses, the type of offenses committed, periods of prison confinement, and the exact timing of marriages and divorces. All data are derived from official sources, which means that they are of high quality and have very few missing values. See Chapter 2 for an extensive description of the CCLS data.

Although the CCLS data are unusually rich with regard to the offenders' criminal and marital histories, the use of only official data also implies limitations. First, the CCLS does not provide information about other relationship types than marriage. It could be the case that individuals in our sample did in fact have a relationship, just not a marital one (e.g., cohabitation). Second, we are not able to control for a number of other characteristics likely to be correlated with both crime and divorce (e.g., socio-economic status, personality characteristics). This could lead to an *overestimation* of the effect of criminal behavior on divorce risks. Third, all sampled individuals had their case tried in 1977 and – as a result – have been convicted at least once during their lives. The selectivity of the sample could lead to an *underestimation* of the effects of criminal behavior on divorce. Those who have no convictions prior to their divorce will, by construction, have at least one

conviction after their divorce (212 of the 3,083 men have not been convicted before or during marriage (6.9%), and 109 of the 373 women have not been convicted before or during marriage (29.2%)). The composition of the sample, however, can be considered an asset as well. It might be more useful to compare the offenders with not-yet offenders than with a sample of non-offenders. Not-yet offenders may be much more similar to offenders with regard to (un)measured characteristics that influence both the likelihood of offending and divorce (e.g., lower SES, lower self-control). The selectivity of the sample thus partly compensates for the fact that we lack certain control variables.

6.3.2 Analytic strategy

To analyze the relationship between criminal offending and divorce, we use discrete-time event history analysis with years as intervals (Allison, 1984; Yamaguchi, 1991). To estimate the event history models, a person-period file was constructed with records containing information on convictions, incarceration, spousal criminality, marital status, and other relevant covariates for each sample subject in each year. For every sample subject the records begin at the year of first marriage, and end in the year of first divorce, the year of death, or in the year 2002 (the end of data collection). Sample subjects who never marry are thus deleted from the analyses. The fully constructed data file contains information on 60,885 person-years for 3,456 individuals.

We restrict ourselves to examining the effects of criminal offending on first-time divorce. The focus on first-time divorce allows us to avoid having to account for feedback effects between divorce and crime whereby divorce affects the likelihood of crime, which in turn affects the likelihood of (a criminal) marriage and divorce. Accounting for such an endogenous relationship would complicate the analyses and would increase the risk that our estimates of the effect of offending are contaminated by biases due to endogeneity (Nieuwbeerta, Nagin, & Blokland, 2009: 232). Although the focus on first-time divorce limits the generalizability of our results, it eliminates an important source of bias.

We conduct stepwise analyses and estimate four types of models. In Models 1 and 2 we include several measures of sample subjects' criminal history. In Model 3 we add the criminal history of the spouse. In Model 4 we include interactions between the criminal careers of sample subjects and spouses. All models are estimated for male sample subjects and female sample subjects separately.

6.3.3 Models and measures

In all models the dependent variable – *divorce* – is indicated by a binary variable, which equals 1 in the year a person first divorces and 0 for all earlier years. Those individuals who never divorce obtain a score of 0 in all years. Note that in the Netherlands, it takes three months for a divorce to become legally processed.

In Model 1 we include two independent variables to measure sample subjects' criminal behavior. First, we measure the total *number of offenses until last year*. Exploratory analyses revealed that the relationship between the number of convictions and divorce is not linear. Therefore, we constructed different categories

(0 convictions, 1 conviction, 2 – 5 convictions, 6 – 10 convictions, and more than 10 convictions). Second, we measure the *number of years since the last conviction*. Exploratory analyses showed that a linear function covers the relationship between this variable and the likelihood of divorce adequately. The measurement of this variable is somewhat complicated because we are interested in assessing the effect of this variable for offenders, and want to retain the non-offenders in the analyses as well. Therefore, we assigned a single value to the non-convicted persons: the age-specific mean. This is the average number of years since the last conviction for those convicted at that specific age. For example, for persons who have not been convicted at the age of 25 we assigned the mean number of years since last conviction for those who have been convicted at age 25. As a result the effect of time since last conviction refers to offenders only. If we would not assign a value to the non-offenders, they would be missing by definition, and the number of cases would drop substantially.

In Model 2 we include the effects of violent offenses and incarceration. First, we measure whether sample subjects were *ever convicted for a violent offense until last year*. Rape, assault, other sexual offenses, threat, battery, murder and manslaughter, robbery, and extortion are all classified as violent offenses. Second, we inquire whether sample subjects were *ever incarcerated until last year*. The total number of convictions is too strongly correlated with ever being incarcerated ($r > .70$) and distorts the results. Instead, we measure whether persons were *ever convicted until last year*. All three variables are coded 1 in every year following the year of first conviction or incarceration, and 0 otherwise.

In Model 3 we take the criminal history of the spouse into account. Spouses have committed far less offenses, have hardly been convicted for violent offenses, and have hardly been sentenced to prison. Therefore, we are not able to include the same variables as for the sample subjects. Instead, we measure if the spouse was *ever convicted until last year*. The variable is coded 1 in every year following the first conviction and 0 in all earlier years. In Model 4 we include interactions between sample subjects' and spouses' criminal behavior. We construct four variables to distinguish four types of couples. The variable *both not convicted* is coded 1 if both sample subject and spouse have not been convicted until the last year, and 0 in all other years. The variable non-convicted sample subject and *convicted spouse* is coded 1 in every year following the spouse's first conviction, and 0 in all earlier years (the sample subject him/herself has not been convicted). The variable *convicted sample subject* and non-convicted spouse is coded 1 in every year following the sample subject's first conviction, and 0 in all earlier years (the spouse him/herself has not been convicted). The variable *both convicted* is coded 1 following the year in which both spouses have been convicted, and 0 in all earlier years. In the analyses the variable *both not convicted* is used as a reference group.

In all models we control for a number of other characteristics that are known to be correlated with offending and divorce. First of all, we include *age*. Second, we add a variable indicating whether sample subjects were *non-Dutch* (not born in the Netherlands). Third, we include a time-varying dummy variable capturing whether sample subjects had one or more *children* under the age of 18. Fourth, we add a time-varying variable measuring the *duration of marriage*. Several of the background characteristics are also available for spouses (i.e., age, ethnicity,

age at first marriage). These characteristics are, however, strongly correlated with the characteristics of the sample subject ($r > .70$). It would disturb the results if we would add the characteristics of both spouses. Therefore, we decided to only include the variables for the sample subjects.

6.4 Results

The aim of this study is to investigate to what extent offenders' criminal careers affect the likelihood of divorce and to what extent this relationship depends on the criminal history of the spouse. Before we turn to the results of the explanatory analyses (Table 6.2 and Table 6.3), we start with descriptive analyses on sample subjects' criminal and marital careers (Table 6.1).

6.4.1 Descriptive analyses

As can be derived from the year of birth, we were able to trace the criminal careers of men until an average age of 55 and the criminal careers of women until an average age of 59. Examining criminal backgrounds, men started their criminal careers on average at an earlier age than women (age 21.4 vs. 28.9). Almost 35 percent of the male sample subjects have been convicted before age 18 and can be characterized as juvenile offenders. Among female sample subjects the percentage of juvenile offenders is substantially lower: 12 percent has been convicted before

Table 6.1 Descriptive statistics, by gender

	Men (N = 3,083)		Women (N = 373)	
Personal background				
Year of birth	1948	(10.9)	1944	(11.5)
Non-Dutch (%)	11.0		15.1	
Death prior to calendar year 2002 (%)	15.0		14.3	
Criminal background				
Age of first conviction	21.4	(8.8)	28.9	(10.9)
Early first conviction (< age 18) (%)	34.9		12.1	
Accumulated convictions	10.8	(15.5)	3.6	(6.4)
Ever convicted of violent crime (%)	51.4		16.1	
Ever incarcerated (%)	45.1		14.7	
Accumulated prison time (months)	15.1	(23.7)	7.8	(13.3)
Marriage background				
Ever divorced (%)	53.5		69.4	
Number of times married	1.3	(0.6)	1.4	(0.7)
Age of first marriage	26.2	(6.2)	23.2	(5.8)
Age of first divorce	37.4	(12.7)	37.0	(12.9)
Length of first marriage	16.9	(11.2)	18.7	(14.0)
Children during first marriage (%)	82.0		81.2	
Spouse convicted before marriage (%)	5.4		26.5	
Spouse convicted during marriage (%)	11.1		30.4	
Spouse convicted before or during marriage (%)	15.5		34.4	

Note: Standard deviation in parentheses; standard deviation not reported for dichotomous variables.

age 18. During their lives, men have been convicted for a mean number of 10.8 offenses, and women for 3.6 offenses. In addition, men have been convicted for violent offenses more often, have been sentenced to prison more frequently, and have spent more time in prison. The accumulated incarceration time is 15 months for male (ex-)inmates and 8 months for female (ex-)inmates.

Examining marital backgrounds, it appears that among men 53.5 percent of the marriages ends in a divorce, whereas among females 69.4 percent of the marriages dissolve. These numbers are high even compared to the current divorce rates in the Netherlands. Divorce rates increased from 10 percent to 25 percent between the 1970s and 1990s, and have stabilized since then (Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2000). Females' higher divorce rates may, for example, indicate that they are even less attractive partners than male offenders. Female offenders are more likely to be stigmatized by their social environment because they are not conforming to prevailing norms and expectations. In addition, female offenders would more often have psychological problems and would be more likely to be drug-dependent (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002), putting additional pressure on the marital relationship.

For women, first marriages occur on average three years earlier than for men (age 23.2 versus 26.2). Remarkably, for women the age of first conviction is on average higher than the age of first marriage. On the one hand this may result from the fact that their male partners stimulate criminal behavior during marriage, on the other hand it may also result from a marital dissolution (e.g., single mothers who have to provide for their children). Although the criminal history of women is less severe, the percentage married to a spouse who has been convicted before or during marriage is two times higher compared to men (34.4% versus 15.5%). The fact that women are far overrepresented among individuals who are married to convicted spouses is consistent with the observation that "women marry down" whereas "men marry up" when it comes to crime (Laub & Sampson 2003).

6.4.2 Explanatory analyses

Results of the discrete-time event-history models of the likelihood of first divorce are shown in Table 6.2 (male sample subjects) and Table 6.3 (female sample subjects). In Models 1 and 2 we investigate the impact of offenders' criminal behavior on divorce. In Models 3 and 4 we include the criminal behavior of spouses, and examine to what extent the relationship between offenders' criminal behavior and divorce depends on the offending history of the spouse. We will start with the results for the male sample subjects and then discuss the results for the female sample subjects.

Table 6.2 (Model 1) shows that the odds of divorce become significantly higher if men committed 2 or more offenses. Compared to non-convicted men, the odds of divorce are 72 percent higher for men who have been convicted of 2 to 5 offenses until the last year ($e^{.54} = 1.72$). The relationship is even stronger for men who committed 6 to 10 or more than 10 offenses until the last year: their odds of divorce are about three times higher ($e^{1.00} = 2.72$; $e^{1.16} = 3.19$). Criminal convictions thus affect the likelihood of divorce but only for men with a relatively extensive criminal

record. In addition, we see that the longer ago a man was convicted, the lower the odds of divorce become ($B = -0.06$). In line with our expectation, this suggests that the effects of a criminal record indeed diminish over time.

In Model 2 we estimate the relative importance of convictions, violent offenses, and incarceration. For men the effect of incarceration appears to be even stronger than the effect of convictions. For those who have ever been incarcerated until the last year, the odds of divorcing in that year are almost two times higher ($e^{.66} = 1.93$). We do not find a comparable effect for violent offenses. This can be explained by the fact that this variable is relatively strongly correlated with incarceration ($r = .47$). On the basis of the results of Model 1 and Model 2, we can thus conclude that both the seriousness and the timing of a criminal history affect men's divorce risks.

Table 6.2 Event history analyses of the effect of criminal offending on risk of divorce: male sample subjects

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Control variables								
Age	.36***	.04	.39***	.04	.36***	.04	.38***	.04
Age squared	.00*	.00	-.00*	.00	.00*	.00	.00	.00
Non-Dutch	.32***	.08	.24**	.08	.32***	.08	.41***	.08
Child in the last year	.21**	.06	.20**	.06	.21**	.06	.21**	.06
Duration of marriage	-.42***	.04	-.42***	.04	-.42***	.04	-.42***	.04
Criminal background sample subject								
No. offenses until last year (0 = ref.)								
1 offense	.33	.19			.33	.19		
2-5 offenses	.54***	.09			.54***	.09		
6-10 offenses	1.00***	.10			.99***	.10		
> 10 offenses	1.16***	.10			1.12***	.10		
No. years since last conviction	-.06**	.01			-.06***	.01		
Convicted until last year			.47***	.09				
Violent offense until last year			.22***	.06				
Incarcerated until last year			.66***	.06				
Criminal background spouse								
Convicted until last year					.18**	.07		
Criminal background sample subject * Criminal background spouse								
Convicted until last year								
Both not convicted (ref.)								
Sample subject convicted							.82**	.09
Spouse convicted							.73***	.29
Both convicted							1.30***	.11
Constant	-2.61***	.32	-2.90***	.32	-2.62***	.32	-3.08***	.32
N (person-years / persons)	54,096 / 3,083		54,096 / 3,083		54,096 / 3,083		54,096 / 3,083	
χ^2 (df)	856.53 (10)		648.36 (8)		862,10 (11)		512,18 (8)	

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

In Model 3 we add the effect of spousal criminality. When we control for the sample subjects' criminal behavior, the criminal behavior of the spouse additionally increases the likelihood of divorce ($e^{1.8} = 1.20$). In Model 4 we include interactions between sample subjects' and spouses' criminal history, by estimating the divorce risks for the four types of couples: both not convicted, sample subject convicted, spouse convicted, and both spouses convicted. It appears that marriages are most likely to dissolve if both spouses are involved in crime ($e^{1.30} = 3.67$), followed by marriages where only the sample subject is convicted ($e^{.82} = 2.27$), and marriages where only the spouse is convicted ($e^{.73} = 2.07$). The difference between the last two categories is not significant ($p = 0.76$). This implies that, for the instability of the marriage, it does not matter if it is the offender or the spouse who has been convicted. On the basis of the results of Model 4 we find support for the marital instability perspective. Marriages are least stable and most likely to dissolve if both spouses are involved in crime. If both spouses have been convicted until the last year the odds of divorcing in that year are almost four times higher compared to marriages where none of the partners is involved in crime.

Table 6.3 provides the results for female sample subjects. In contrast to the men in our sample, we see that women already have a higher odds of divorce if they have been convicted once until the last year: the odds of divorce are 58 percent higher compared to non-offenders ($e^{.46} = 1.58$). Women are most likely to divorce if they have been convicted of 6 to 10 offenses ($e^{1.11} = 3.03$) or more than 10 offenses ($e^{1.16} = 3.19$). In contrast to men, we do not find support for the idea that the impact of a criminal record diminishes over time. The effect of "years since last conviction" is non-significant.

In Model 2 we estimate the relative importance of convictions, violent offenses, and incarceration. Just as for men, the effect of incarceration ($e^{.78} = 2.18$) appears to be stronger than the effect of convictions ($e^{.57} = 1.77$). The fact that we do not find a significant effect for violent offenses could be caused by the small number of cases. Female violent offenders are rare. During the period under study 9.1 percent of the women has ever been convicted of a violent offense ($n = 34$), compared to 43.1 percent of the men ($n = 1,329$). On the basis of Model 1 and Model 2, we can thus conclude that – just as for men – the seriousness of a criminal history matters even more than having a criminal record per se.

In Model 3 we include the criminal history of the spouse. Again, we see that the criminal behavior of the partner additionally increases the likelihood of divorce ($e^{.28} = 1.32$). In Model 4 we combine sample subjects' and spouses' criminal careers by separately estimating the divorce risks for the four partner types. It appears that marriages are most likely to dissolve if both spouses are involved in crime ($e^{.94} = 2.56$), followed by marriages where only the sample subject is convicted ($e^{.68} = 1.97$) and marriages where only the spouse is convicted ($e^{.41} = 1.51$). The difference between the last two categories is not significant ($p = 0.22$). It does not matter if it is the offender or the spouse who has been convicted. Just as for men, we find support for the marital instability perspective. Marriages are most likely to end in a divorce if both spouses are involved in crime. If both partners have been convicted until the last year, the odds of divorcing in that year appear to be almost three times higher compared to marriages where none of the partners is involved in crime.

Table 6.3 Event history analyses of the effect of criminal offending on risk of divorce: female sample subjects

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Control variables								
Age	-.02	.04	-.01	.04	-.02	.04	.00	.04
Age squared	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Non-Dutch	.08	.18	.03	.18	.13	.18	.17	.18
Child in the last year	.17	.15	.19	.15	.16	.15	.19	.15
Duration of marriage	-.05***	.01	-.05**	.01	-.05***	.01	-.05***	.01
Criminal background sample subject								
No. offenses until last year (0 = ref.)								
1 offense	.46**	.16			.52**	.18		
2-5 offenses	.83***	.17			.83***	.19		
6-10 offenses	1.11**	.33			1.18***	.35		
> 10 offenses	1.16**	.46			1.25**	.47		
No. years since last conviction	-.02	.01			-.02	.01		
Convicted until last year			.57***	.15				
Violent offense until last year			.19	.25				
Incarcerated until last year			.78**	.27				
Criminal background spouse								
Convicted until last year					.28*	.13		
Criminal background sample subject * Criminal background spouse								
Convicted until last year								
Both not convicted (ref.)								
Sample subject convicted						.68***	.18	
Spouse convicted						.41*	.22	
Both convicted						.94***	.18	
Constant	-3.28***	.64	-3.36*	.63	-3.36***	.64	-3.62***	.64
N (person-years / persons)	7,331 / 373		7,331 / 373		7,331 / 373		7,331 / 373	
χ^2 (df)	54.27 (10)		52.02 (8)		58.63 (11)		47.69 (8)	

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

6.4.3 Additional analyses: criminal offending before versus during marriage

In our theoretical section we addressed three underlying mechanisms to explain offenders' divorce risks: self-control, stigma, and incapacitation. The second and third mechanism – stigma and incapacitation – focus on the immediate effects of criminal offending: the effect of a criminal record on divorce risks would be stronger if offenders are convicted during marriage. On the basis of the first mechanism – self-control – no differences are to be expected between the impact of criminal offenses before and during marriage. If a person commits a crime before marriage, this reflects that he or she has a low level of self-control. This personal trait is relatively stable over time and will still be present during marriage.

To obtain more insight into the impact of the timing of criminal offenses we conducted the same analyses as before (see Tables 6.2 and 6.3) but included separate variables for criminal offending before and during marriage (in the same model). Because our person-year file starts at the year of first marriage, the variables measuring offending before marriage are time-constant: they capture offending from age 12 until the year of first marriage. The variables measuring criminal offending during marriage start from the year of first marriage and thus do not include the criminal offenses that have been committed before marriage. An individual is considered an offender from the year he or she is first convicted during marriage onwards. Although we estimated all models for men and women separately, we only discuss the results for men. The results for women appeared to be unstable. The number of cases becomes too small when distinguishing females' offenses before and during marriage.

The results show that both offenses before and during marriage significantly influence divorce risks. For both periods we find a similar pattern: the higher the number of offences, the higher the odds of divorce. For example, for men who have been convicted for 2 to 5 offenses *before* marriage, the odds of divorce are 20 percent higher compared to non-offenders ($e^{.18} = 1.20$). For men who have been convicted for more than 10 offenses before marriage, the divorce risks are 82 percent higher ($e^{.60} = 1.82$). The impact of convictions appears to be largest if the offenses have been committed *during* marriage. During marriage the divorce risks are respectively more than two times higher and more than three times higher for offenders who have been convicted for 2 to 5 or more than 10 offenses ($e^{.78} = 2.18$; $e^{1.20} = 3.32$). This suggests that, besides self-control, stigma and incapacitation additionally increase the risk of divorce. The relative importance of convictions, violent offenses and incarceration differs between the period before and during marriage. Before marriage, the effect of being incarcerated is stronger than the effect of being convicted until the last year ($e^{.34} = 1.40$ versus $e^{.13} = 1.14$). During marriage, however, there is no significant difference between the impact of being convicted or being incarcerated until the last year ($e^{.79} = 2.20$ versus $e^{.75} = 2.12$). This suggests that, although a conviction can have a large immediate impact on the stability of marriage, this effect diminishes faster over time than the effect of incarceration.

The moderating impact of spousal criminality also differs between the period before and during marriage. If we focus on convictions before marriage, we see that divorce risks are highest if one or both spouses are involved in crime (odds ratios vary between 1.27 and 1.43). There are no significant differences between these different types of couples. If we focus on convictions during marriage, however, we find support for the marital instability perspective. Divorce risks are highest if both partners offend during marriage ($e^{1.44} = 4.22$), followed by marriages where only the offender or spouse is involved in crime ($e^{1.00} = 2.72$; $e^{.54} = 1.71$). On the basis of these results we can thus conclude that convictions during marriage cause additional marital instability.

6.5 Conclusion and discussion

As marriage has such a significant role in the development of criminal careers, it is also important to gain insight into the dissolution of offenders' marital unions. Remarkably, almost no attention has been paid to offenders' divorce risks. In addition, the impact of spouses' criminal careers has been neglected thus far. To gain more insight into offenders' divorce risks we combined insights from criminology and family sociology. One of the reasons for the lack of empirical research is that adequate data were lacking. We used data from a unique longitudinal study: the Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS). In contrast to the few earlier studies in this area, the CCLS contains data on the life-long criminal careers of both offenders and their spouses. Because the CCLS does not contain data on never-convicted individuals our results speak to the effect of criminal convictions on divorce among convicted and to-be-convicted individuals and their spouses. Within the group of convicts, we compared individuals who differ in the timing, number, and seriousness of crimes committed.

Our results show that processes of cumulative disadvantage appear to continue during marriage. For both men and women criminal offending increases the likelihood of divorce. The higher the number of convictions, the higher the odds of divorce become. The more serious a criminal history, the higher the likelihood of divorce. Not only lower levels of self-control but also increasing levels of stigma may attribute to this outcome. Incarceration appears to be even more disruptive than being convicted per se. This supports the idea that incarceration does not only restrain individuals from committing crimes but also has unintended side effects – such as the disruption of marital ties (Lopoo & Western, 2005). The criminal history of the spouse affects divorce risks as well. Marriages are most likely to dissolve if both spouses are involved in crime. This seems to suggest that mutual understanding between partners does not weigh out the disruptive effects of both partners' personal traits and criminal behavior.

We also found gender differences. First, females' divorce risks already increase if they are convicted once. Second, although men's odds of divorce decrease when the last conviction has been committed a longer time ago, females' divorce risks are not affected by the timing of convictions. Both findings suggest that a criminal record has different implications for women than for men. Because a criminal lifestyle is less common and less accepted for women, the stigmatizing effects of a criminal record may be larger and may not diminish over time. In addition, it may take more to become a female offender. A woman who has been convicted for a small number of offenses might be comparable to a man who has committed a large number of offenses on several unobserved characteristics correlated with crime and divorce (e.g., lower self-control, lower socioeconomic status, personality disorders).

When interpreting the results of this study, it should be noted that the data relate to a specific context: the Netherlands. Compared to the US and most other European countries, the Netherlands had a lenient penal climate until the 1990s. Few offenders were convicted, few convicted offenders were sentenced to prison, and sentences were relatively short (Kommer, 1994). A lenient penal climate may

have affected offenders' divorce risks in several opposite ways. On the one hand, offenders' attractiveness as potential partners may become even lower. In a context where convictions and imprisonment are less common, the negative signal of a criminal record is likely to be stronger, leading to even higher odds of divorce. On the other hand, because prison sentences are relatively short, the idea that imprisonment removes offenders from their spouses and families (for a long time) is less applicable to many offenders. The disruptive effects of incapacitation would thus be smaller, leading to a lower likelihood of divorce. To obtain more insight into the effects of criminal offending on divorce, studies in other contexts are needed. The results, however, seem to suggest that the two mechanisms cancel each other out. The effect of males' incarceration is comparable to earlier studies that used data from the United States.

Although the data used in this study are unique, a number of limitations have to be taken into account. These limitations likewise offer important guidelines for future research. First, our analyses are based on officially registered crimes. This means that we probably underestimate the total number of delinquent acts. Not all criminal offenses are known to the police, and not all offenses are prosecuted. The underestimation can be selective, when the probability of being convicted is not equal for all persons. For example, some criminal persons may be more likely to be intensely monitored by the police than others, whereas others have smarter strategies to keep out of the arms of the law. It should, however, be noted that the use of official data has important advantages as well. We are able to examine a wide array of criminal activities that differ in offending severity (Bersani, Laub & Nieuwbeerta, 2009). Also, our measure of criminal behavior is not disturbed by social desirability problems and memory problems, as would have been the case with self-report data. Ideally though, one would like to complement a longitudinal study such as the CCLS with self-report data in future research.

Second, the focus of this study is on legal marriage. We investigated marital dissolution and not relationship dissolution in general. From the 1970s onwards, it has become more and more common to cohabit, and cohabitation has even become a substitute for marriage in the Netherlands (Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2000). For our analysis this development is of less relevance because the CCLS contains data on a cohort of individuals convicted in 1977. The largest share of these persons already reached marriageable age before this time. During the period under study marriage patterns were quite comparable to other countries (e.g., the United States). Because the trend towards cohabitation is not unique for the Netherlands (Kalmijn, 2002), studies on the relationship between criminal behavior and (the dissolution of) other relationship types than marriage are needed (see also Bersani, Laub & Nieuwbeerta, 2009: 22).

Third, when investigating the relationship between criminal behavior and marital outcomes, we have not been able to control for a number of other characteristics likely to be correlated with both crime and divorce (e.g., socio-economic status, personality characteristics). As a result, we have not been able to gain insight into the mechanisms underlying offenders' divorce risks. The current study can be regarded as an important first step in determining the impact of criminal behavior on divorce risks. Untangling the underlying mechanisms and determining their relative importance remains a task for future research.

Our conclusions have significant implications for criminological theories on the relationship between crime and marriage. Due to their higher divorce risks, offenders are less likely to experience any (long-term) protective effects of marriage. Moreover, divorce may affect the further development of crime (Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2005). Individuals may have to compensate for the loss of income once the spouse has left the household, and may consider criminal behavior as a way out. Also, offenders may no longer experience the social control exerted by their spouses, and putting their relationship at risk may no longer be a disincentive for committing crimes (Laub & Sampson, 2003). The relationship between divorce and crime may depend on the criminal history of the spouse as well. If individuals divorce a criminal spouse, crime-stimulating effects of divorce could be limited. Studying the effect of divorce on crime remains an important task for future research (see also Chapter 7 of this dissertation). To gain more insight in the development of criminal behavior, future studies should not only focus on the relationship per se but also pay close attention to the criminal careers of partners.

Although selecting a particular spouse, and staying married are private choices in which it is less easy and desirable to intervene, our study has practical implications as well. A criminal record, and especially imprisonment, may have a large impact on individuals' life courses. It may not only have intended consequences but also unintended consequences, among which the breakdown of marital ties. Earlier studies have shown that marriages to non-criminal spouses are protective. Being married to a non-criminal spouse reduces criminal offending (see Chapter 5). Interventions could focus on how to maintain these protective marital relationships. For example, by locating inmates close to their partners' place of residence and by stimulating contact between partners during imprisonment divorce may be prevented.



CHAPTER 7

Divorce, spousal criminality, and changes in criminal offending over the life course

This chapter is co-authored by Paul Nieuwbeerta. It is currently under review at an international journal.

7 Divorce, spousal criminality, and changes in criminal offending over the life course

7.1 Introduction

In life course criminology, marriage is considered to be an important protective institution that reduces criminal offending (Sampson & Laub, 1993). Criminologists often argue that the reduction in crime can be explained by the social bond that forms as a result of marriage. Spouses control each other and do not want to put their relationship at risk by committing crimes (Laub & Sampson, 2003). Remarkably, the impact of divorce – the opposite life course transition – has received hardly any attention. However, if marriage reduces crime, then divorce can be expected to have the reverse effect. Divorce leads to the breakdown of social ties and therefore may stimulate criminal behavior.

Studying the impact of divorce on criminal offending is especially relevant because it is known that offenders face processes of cumulative disadvantage. Due to their personal characteristics as well as their criminal lifestyle, offenders are more likely to experience divorce. The more serious a criminal history, the higher the likelihood of divorce becomes (Apel et al., 2010; Lopoo & Western, 2005; Sampson & Laub, 1993). Offenders' divorce risks appear to be especially high if their spouses are involved in crime as well (Western, 2006; see also Chapter 6).

The fact that the effects of divorce on crime have hardly been studied is remarkable because several studies have shown that marital dissolution can have various negative consequences for the development of individuals' life courses. Divorce may not only lead to a loss of income but also to less social contacts, mental health problems, and lower wellbeing (Amato, 2000; Kalmijn & Broese van Groenou, 2005; Poortman, 2002). In addition, marital dissolution would not only influence the partners who make the decision to divorce but also their possible children. Divorce may affect children's life outcomes in various areas. It may, for example, lead to psychological problems, criminal behavior, lower academic achievement, and health problems (Amato & Keith, 1991; Van de Rakt, 2011). These effects of divorce would not only last in the short-term but would be visible long after the divorce took place (Amato & Booth, 1991).

Studies on the effects of marital dissolution on criminal behavior mostly investigated the criminal behavior of offenders' children (Van de Rakt, 2011). The few earlier studies that focused on offenders' criminal behavior show consistent results: divorce is associated with an increase in criminal behavior (Blokland &

Nieuwbeerta, 2005; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Farrington & West, 1995). Although these earlier studies enlarged our knowledge about the effects of divorce on crime, they are characterized by a number of limitations. First, earlier research did not pay attention to spouses' criminal careers. However, the effects of divorce may strongly depend on the criminal career of the spouse. A criminal spouse is less likely to exert a social control function, and may actually stimulate criminal offending. Offenders probably have similar views on the appropriateness of criminal offending, learn from each other, and pass on their criminal skills (Giordano, Schroeder & Cernkovich, 2007; Leverentz, 2006; Simons et al., 2002). Dissolving the relationship with a criminal spouse may, therefore, not necessarily lead to an increase in criminal offending. Second, earlier studies solely focused on male offenders. The impact of divorce on criminal offending may very well differ between male and female offenders. Because women would be more oriented toward personal relationships, their behavior would be more often determined by the behavior of their partners (Moffitt et al., 2001; Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996). As a result, dissolving the relationship with a spouse may have a larger impact on the development of females' criminal careers.

Our study addresses two research questions. First, to what extent does divorce affect the development of criminal offending? Second, to what extent does the relationship between divorce and criminal offending depend on the criminal history of the spouse? In addressing these questions consistent attention will be paid to potential gender differences. The fact that these research questions are understudied is partly caused by substantial data requirements. To examine the impact of divorce and spousal criminality on criminal offending, one needs to have data on offenders' as well as spouses' criminal careers that reach far into adulthood. In this study we will use a unique dataset: the Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS; Nieuwbeerta & Blokland, 2003). These data enable us to contribute to current research in several ways. First, this study is the first to investigate the life-long criminal careers of a large number of offenders *and* their marriage partners. Second, the CCLS contains data on the exact timing of marital dissolutions, convictions, and periods of incarceration over the entire life course. This enables us to gain more insight into the causality of the studied relationships. Third, the data allow us to investigate the criminal careers of male as well as female offenders.

7.2 Theory and previous research

Criminologists are divided about the salience of life course events for the development of criminal behavior. Whereas some scholars in this field argue that criminal career patterns can best be explained by the life course circumstances in which persons find themselves (dynamic theorists), others claim that variation in criminal behavior can best be understood in terms of different kinds of personal characteristics (static theorists). Studies on the effects of divorce are scarce because offenders have rarely been followed far into adulthood. The few earlier studies on the divorce-crime link, in general found support for the dynamic vision on criminal offending and show that divorce increases criminal offending – even

when controlling for pre-existing individual differences (Farrington & West, 1995; Horney, Osgood & Marshall, 1995; King, Massoglia & MacMillan, 2007; Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006). In Section 7.2.1 we discuss several mechanisms that may underlie the relationship between divorce and criminal offending. In Section 7.2.1 we elaborate on the moderating impact of spouse's criminal history.

7.2.1 The impact of divorce on criminal offending

Criminological theories and research traditionally focused on marriage as a life course event and hardly paid attention to the impact of marital dissolution on criminal offending. The most prominent theory in the field of life course events and crime is Sampson and Laub's informal social control theory (1993). According to Sampson and Laub, important life course events such as marriage and divorce affect criminal offending because they cause changes in social bonds. A (strong) tie to the conventional institution of marriage would reduce criminal offending because spouses monitor and attempt to control each other's behavior, and tend to discourage activities that do not pay off in the long run. Over time, as commitment and investment in relationships grow, there are fewer incentives to commit crime because more is at stake (Laub, Nagin & Sampson, 1998). Similar reasoning can be applied to divorce. Divorce leads to the breakdown of social ties, and therefore may stimulate criminal behavior. Individuals may no longer experience the social control exerted by their spouses, and putting their relationship at risk may no longer be a disincentive for committing crime (Laub & Sampson, 2003).

Other explanations for why divorce may affect criminal offending can be derived from family sociology. First, divorce may lead to financial stress. During marriage many spouses share their income. After a marital dissolution individuals can no longer rely on their spouse's income (Amato, 2000; Poortman, 2002). They may have to compensate for the loss of income now the spouse has left the household and may consider criminal behavior as a way out. Second, divorce may cause changes in social networks and routine activities (Kalmijn & Broese van Groenou, 2005; Therhell, Broese van Groenou & Van Tilburg, 2004). Spouses tend to spend more time in each other's company, and less time with deviant friends (Warr, 1998). A divorce may again increase the opportunities to associate with deviant peers. In sociology the negative spiral associated with divorce is also known as the "*accumulation of problems hypothesis*" (Amato & Keith, 1991).

The before mentioned mechanisms (breakdown of social bond, financial stress, changed routine activities) lead to the expectation that being divorced increases criminal offending. Earlier studies on the relationship between divorce and criminal offending are few in number but in general support this expectation. A first study is Sampson and Laub's (1993) reanalysis of the Glueck and Glueck data (1950). Sampson and Laub found that among married men, low attachment to a spouse (measured by separation, divorce, or neglect of marital responsibilities) during one age range related to higher crime levels during the next age range. A second study is conducted by Farrington and West (1995). Farrington and West used data from the CSDD: a prospective longitudinal survey on the development of offending and antisocial behavior in 411 London males, who were followed from

approximately age 8 until age 32. The results show that during periods of separation, the separated men ($N = 36$) had an offending rate 44 percent higher than during periods married. A final study is conducted by Blokland and Nieuwebeerta (2005). Analyzing the life courses of almost 5,000 Dutch offenders they found that divorce increases the rate of convictions. Individuals when separated are 44 percent more likely to be convicted than when they were married, and 4 percent more likely than when they were single.

7.2.2 The moderating impact of spousal criminality

In contrast to criminologists, family sociologists have emphasized the importance of partners' characteristics in explaining the effects of divorce. Family sociologists formulated the so-called "*escape hypothesis*", which postulates that the impact of divorce on life-outcomes may depend on the characteristics of the relationship and the partner. Divorce does not necessarily have to have detrimental effects. For individuals in a poor marriage (i.e., dissatisfactory, unfair, or characterized by conflict and aggression) divorce can be a relief of marital problems (Kalmijn & Monden, 2006).

Similar reasoning can be applied to criminal offending. Whether the effects of divorce are crime-stimulating may depend on the criminal history of the spouse to whom one is attached. We nuance Sampson and Laub's theoretical ideas in two ways. First, marital relationships are not necessarily strong if both spouses are involved in crime (Simons et al., 2002). If both partners are involved in crime, they are, for example, both likely to have personal traits and to be involved in situations that undermine the quality of marriage (Western, 2006: 5). Second, conventional behavior is not necessarily encouraged if both partners are delinquent. If spouses have a criminal history as well, offending is likely to be a conventional way of behaving, which is less likely to be discouraged and does not threaten the continuation of the relationship. Both the characteristics of the "criminal" relationship as the characteristics of the criminal spouse may thus make the marriage less protective. Therefore, we expect that losing the tie to a criminal spouse may have a smaller or even no effect on offenders' criminal career development.

7.3 Methods

7.3.1 Data

To test the hypotheses we use data from the Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS) (Nieuwebeerta & Blokland, 2003). The CCLS contains longitudinal information on the criminal careers and life courses of a total sample of 4,615 offenders (4,187 men and 428 women). The CCLS offenders were selected by taking a four-percent sample of all cases of criminal offenses tried in the Netherlands in 1977. Especially for this study, the CCLS was supplemented with data on the complete criminal careers of all of the marriage partners of the research subjects from age 12 to calendar year 2007. The population registration records revealed

that three in four male sample subjects (73.6%) and seven in eight female sample subjects (87.1%) ever married. The enlargement of the CCLS data allows us to determine the exact timing of divorce and, for all sample subjects and their married partners, the exact timing of criminal offenses, the type of offenses committed, and periods of prison confinement. See Chapter 2 for an extensive description of the CCLS data.

Although the CCLS contains information on all divorces that offenders experience during their lives, we only examine the effects of first divorce. By focusing on first divorce we do not have to account for feedback effects between divorce and crime. Accounting for such an endogenous relationship would greatly complicate the analyses and also increases the risk that the estimate of the effect of divorce is contaminated by biases due to endogeneity. Although the focus on first-time divorce limits the generalizability of our findings, we eliminate an important source of bias (see also Nieuwbeerta, Nagin & Blokland, 2009: 232).

7.3.2 Analytic strategy

In this chapter we are interested in two research questions: to what extent does divorce influence offenders' criminal behavior? And to what extent does the relationship between divorce and criminal behavior depend on the criminal history of the spouse? One difficulty to overcome when examining these questions is that divorce and partner selection are not randomly determined. Individuals who divorce are likely to have different characteristics than persons who do not divorce, and individuals who divorce convicted spouses are likely to have different characteristics than offenders who divorce non-convicted spouses.

To deal with this selection problem, we make use of the longitudinal nature of the CCLS data and employ traditional panel modeling. We estimate both fixed-effects models and random-effects models. These models have their own specific way of dealing with (un)observed heterogeneity. Random-effects models attempt to adjust away differences between persons by including as many control variables in the model. This represents a "selection on observables" approach to causal effect estimation (Heckman & Hotz, 1989). Yet even with an exhaustive set of control variables, the selection problem could persist because differences between individuals may be partly unobserved. A unique strength of the CCLS data, with lifetime conviction histories of all offenders, is the ability to estimate the effect of marriage and spousal criminality on conviction frequency in the presence of "selection on unobservables" (Heckman & Hotz, 1989). The most rigorous way to do so is through the use of fixed-effects models. Fixed-effects models are entirely based on within-individual variation over time. Within-individual change models assume that a person him/herself is the best control possible. By restricting attention to within-individual variation, fixed-effects models reduce inconsistency in the divorce-crime relationship that is attributable to enduring unobserved differences between persons such as biological or genetic differences (Halaby, 2004; Johnson, 1995). It would seem that a fixed-effects model is always preferred under these circumstances because one can never be certain that time-stable unobservables are uncorrelated with divorce or crime. While appealing, however,

there is an important tradeoff between random-effects and fixed-effects models that must also be taken into consideration. Although it is true that the fixed-effects model is consistent in the presence of correlation between unobservables and marriage, it is also inefficient compared to random-effects models.²²

To estimate the panel models, a person-period file was constructed with records containing information on each individual in each year. For every person the records begin in the year of first marriage. Sample subjects who never marry are thus deleted from the analyses. The records end in the year 2002 (the end of data collection), in the first year of remarriage (subsequent marriages are excluded), or in the year prior to death (in this way we account for “false desistance” caused by mortality). The fully constructed data file contains information on 134,192 person-years for 3,456 offenders.

Because of the way that the CCLS data were collected, all subjects are convicted at least once during their lives. For most offenders (96.8%), this conviction was in either 1976 or 1977. If subjects who marry have no convictions prior to their first divorce then they must, by construction, have at least one conviction after their first divorce. This could result in a criminogenic effect of divorce that is artificial. To solve this problem, we exclude the conviction that brought each subject into the CCLS sampling frame.

7.3.3 Models and measures

We estimate two models: one for each research question. The models are analogous to the models used in Chapter 5, except that instead of the effects of marriage we now examine the effects of divorce. In both models the dependent variable represents a count of the number of convictions in a given year and is Poisson distributed.²³

In the first model we investigate the impact of divorce. *Divorced* is coded 1 in each year that subjects are divorced and 0 in all earlier years. If divorce stimulates crime, we expect the corresponding coefficient to be positive. Recall that, since all person-years after the first divorce ends are excluded, this indicator quantifies the effect of sample subjects’ first divorce on conviction frequency. In the second model we take into account the criminal history of the spouse and add a second divorce indicator. The new variable *DivorcedConvict* is coded 1 in the years that subjects are

22 The fixed-effects Poisson model proceeds by maximizing the conditional likelihood, where conditioning is achieved by summing across each individual’s T_i observations on the dependent variable. This technically makes it a *conditional fixed-effects model*. Therefore it necessarily excludes individuals whose observations (here, total number of convictions) sum to zero during the period of observation, resulting in the loss of degrees of freedom. In our model, 2,255 of the 3,083 men (73%) are retained, whereas 276 of the 373 women (74%) are retained.

23 To test the sensitivity of the Poisson models we also did all of our analyses using random-effects and fixed-effects logistic regression models as well as random-effects and fixed-effects negative binomial regression models. The results are very similar to those of the reported Poisson models.

divorced from a spouse who had a criminal conviction *before or during* marriage.²⁴ The paired states – *Divorced* and *DivorcedConvict* – are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, *Divorced* represents the effect of being divorced from a non-convicted spouse relative to being married and *DivorcedConvict* represents the additional effect of being divorced from a convicted spouse relative to being divorced from a non-convicted spouse. In order to establish the impact of divorce from a convicted spouse relative to being married, these two coefficients must be summed together and tested against zero. If divorce from a non-convicted spouse promotes criminal offending, then *Divorced* will be positive and significant. If divorce from a convicted spouse leads to a decrease in crime, then we expect *DivorcedConvict* to be negative and significant. Additionally, if divorce from a convicted spouse exacerbates crime relative to being married, then *Divorced* + *DivorcedConvict* will be positive and significant.

In both models we include a number of time-varying variables that are known to influence the relationship between divorce and criminal offending. *Age* is modeled as a cubic to capture age-related changes in the rate of conviction. *Child* is a time-varying dummy variable for whether the subject has one or more children under the age of 18. We also include several time-varying measures of criminal history in the models. Two measures of *prior convictions* are added, including a dummy indicator for having been convicted in the previous calendar year as well as the total number of convictions accumulated as of two years ago. Two measures of *imprisonment* are also added, including a dummy indicator for having been incarcerated in the previous calendar year and the total accumulated time spent in prison as of two years ago.²⁵ In all models we control for each subject's "street time" in a given calendar year, measured as the proportion of the year not confined in a correctional institution. By controlling for persons' opportunity to commit crimes, we eliminate the possibility of false desistance attributable to incarceration. Both models are estimated separately for male and female sample subjects.

24 The impact of spouses' convictions may be stronger if convictions occurred during marriage. To investigate this possibility we estimated two additional models (not reported). In the first model we only focus on spouses' offenses before marriage. *DivorcedConvict* is coded 1 if the spouse was convicted before marriage and 0 otherwise. In the second model we only include spouses' offenses during marriage. *DivorcedConvict* is coded 1 if the spouse was convicted during marriage and 0 otherwise. We did not find support for the idea that the timing of spouses' convictions matters. In the additional models the divorce coefficients are similar to those reported in Table 7.2.

25 The first order-lags, $Con_{i,t-1}$ and $Inc_{i,t-1}$, capture recency in criminal offending and are binary while the second-order lags, $AccumCon_{i,t-2}$ and $AccumInc_{i,t-2}$, capture the accumulated criminal history and are non-binary. By including both types of variables we can distinguish the short-term, state-dependent effects of criminal conviction and incarceration from the long-term effects. Although offenders become less criminally active later in life, a substantial share of the sample subjects still commits crimes during the period under study. 73.1 percent of the male sample subjects and 73.6 of the female sample subjects is convicted once or more. 31.9 percent of the male sample subjects and 10.4 percent of the female sample subjects is incarcerated for some period of time.

7.4 Results

7.4.1 Descriptive analyses

Before we turn to the results of the fixed- and random-effects models, we start with descriptive statistics on sample subjects' marital and criminal careers. Because we are interested in the impact of divorce on criminal offending, the descriptive statistics only pertain to married sample subjects.

Table 7.1 Descriptive statistics, by gender

	Men (<i>N</i> = 3,083)		Women (<i>N</i> = 373)	
Personal background				
Years in analysis sample	24.1	(11.4)	29.7	(13.0)
Year of birth	1948	(10.9)	1944	(11.5)
Non-Dutch (%)	11.0		15.1	
Death prior to calendar year 2002 (%)	15.0		14.3	
Criminal background				
Age of first conviction	21.4	(8.8)	28.9	(10.9)
Early first conviction (< age 18) (%)	34.9		12.1	
Age of last conviction	37.5	(12.3)	38.0	(12.3)
Accumulated convictions	10.8	(15.5)	3.6	(6.4)
Ever convicted for violent crime (%)	51.4		16.1	
Ever incarcerated (%)	45.1		14.7	
Accumulated incarceration time (months)	15.1	(23.7)	7.8	(13.3)
Marriage background				
Ever divorced (%)	53.5		69.4	
Age at first marriage	26.2	(6.2)	23.2	(5.8)
Age at first divorce	37.4	(12.7)	37.0	(12.9)
Length of first marriage (years)	16.9	(11.2)	18.7	(14.0)
Children during first marriage (%)	82.0		81.2	
Spouse convicted before marriage (%)	5.4		26.5	
Spouse convicted during marriage (%)	11.1		30.4	
Spouse convicted before or during marriage (%)	15.5		34.4	

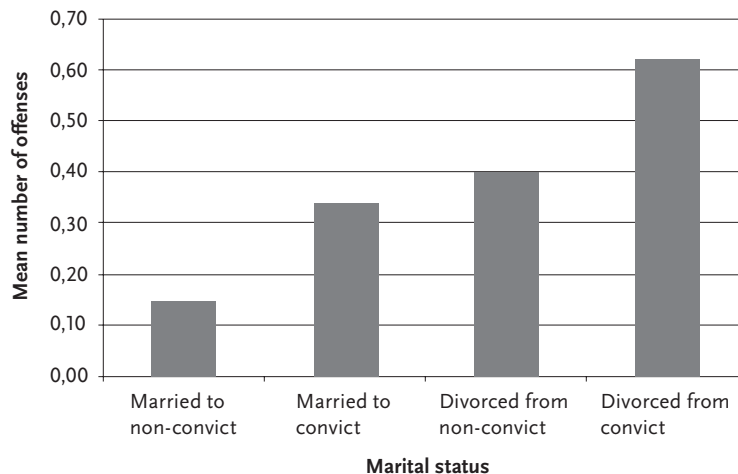
Note: Standard deviation in parentheses; standard deviation not reported for dichotomous variables.

In Table 7.1 we see that married men and women differ in their criminal background. Men started their criminal careers on average at an earlier age than women (age 21.4 versus 28.9). Almost 35 percent of the male sample subjects have been convicted before age 18 and can be characterized as juvenile offenders. Among female sample subjects the percentage of juvenile offenders is substantially lower: 12 percent has been convicted before age 18. During their lives, men have been convicted for a mean number of 10.8 offenses, and women for 3.6 offenses. In addition, men have been convicted for violent offenses more often, have been sentenced to prison more frequently, and have spent more time in prison. The accumulated incarceration time is 15 months for male (ex-)inmates and 8 months for female (ex-)inmates.

Examining marriage backgrounds, we see that among men 53.5 percent of the marriages ends in a divorce, whereas among females 69.4 percent of the marriages dissolve. These numbers are high even compared to the current divorce rates in the Netherlands. Divorce rates increased from 10 percent to 25 percent between the 1970s and 1990s, and have stabilized since then (Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2000). For women, first marriages occur on average three years earlier than for men (age 23.2 versus 26.2). Remarkably, for women the age of first conviction is on average higher than the age of first marriage. On the one hand this may result from the fact that their male partners stimulate criminal behavior during marriage, on the other hand it may also result from a marital dissolution (e.g., single mothers who have to provide for their children). Although the criminal history of women is less severe, the percentage married to a spouse who has been convicted before or during marriage is almost two times higher compared to men (34.4% versus 15.5%). The fact that women are overrepresented among individuals who are married to convicted spouses is consistent with the observation that “women marry down” whereas “men marry up” when it comes to crime (Laub & Sampson 2003).

Figures 7.1 and 7.2 provide insight into the bivariate relationships between sample subjects’ marital status and the mean number of offenses committed per year. Figure 7.1 pertains to the male sample subjects and Figure 7.2 to the female sample subjects. In both figures we see that being divorced is associated with a higher yearly offense rate than being married: the two bars on the right side are higher than the two bars on the left side. If we take into account the criminal history of the spouse (i.e., convicted before or during marriage), we see that sample subjects commit on average more offenses in years in which they are divorced from a non-criminal spouse compared to years in which they are married to a non-criminal spouse.

Figure 7.1 Mean number of offenses per year among men, by marital status



This patterns holds for men (0.40 versus 0.15 offenses: $t = 26.81$; $p < .001$) as well as women (0.15 versus 0.05 offenses: $t = 7.07$; $p < .001$). In addition, sample subjects commit on average more offenses in years in which they are divorced from a criminal spouse compared to years in which they are married to a criminal spouse. Again, this applies to men (0.62 versus 0.34 offenses: $t = 11.24$; $p < .001$) as well as women (0.12 versus 0.07 offenses: $t = 4.38$; $p < .001$). Remarkably, women commit on average more offenses in years in which they are divorced from a non-convicted spouse compared to years in which they are divorced from a convicted spouse ($t = 1.72$; $p = .09$).

Figure 7.2 Mean number of offenses per year among women, by marital status



7.4.2 The effects of divorce and spousal criminality on criminal convictions

To gain more insight into the causality of the studied relationships, we turn to the results of the panel models. We tabulate the results from the fixed-effects models and included the results of the random-effects models in an appendix. This decision is based on the coefficient from a specification test known as the Durbin-Wu-Hausman test. The DWH specification test is a z-test and indicates the degree of inconsistency and efficiency of the random-effects model relative to the consistency and inefficiency of the fixed-effects model. If this statistic exceeds a threshold such as 1.96, it implies that the fixed-effects model is preferred on consistency grounds, whereas a non-significant DWH test means that the random-effects model is preferred on efficiency grounds. As is shown in the appendix, the DWH statistic for the divorce coefficients is larger than 1.96 in almost all cases. This indicates that the fixed-effects model is preferred over the random-effects model.²⁶

²⁶ In an additional model (not shown) we estimated the random-effects models with two extra time-constant variables: birth year and ethnicity. The effects of the divorce indicators in the extended models are similar to those reported in the appendix.

The results of the fixed-effects analyses are presented in Table 7.2. Model 1 estimates the impact of divorce on conviction frequency irrespective of the criminality of the spouse. Model 2 estimates the impact of spousal criminality on conviction frequency. All models are estimated separately for male and female sample subjects. In Model 1, we see that being divorced is associated with a significant increase in conviction frequency relative to being married. This applies to male as well as female offenders. Exponentiating each of the coefficients (e^b) provides an incident rate ratio (IRR), and subtracting one ($e^b - 1$) yields the proportional increase/decrease in the number of convictions following divorce as opposed to marriage. The IRRs for males and females are 1.30 ($e^{.264}$) and 1.22 ($e^{.202}$), respectively. This means that being divorced increases conviction frequency by 30 percent among men and 22 percent among women.

Table 7.2 Fixed-effects poisson models of the impact of divorce on conviction frequency, by gender

Variable	Men (N = 2,241)		Women (N = 268)	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Age / 10	-.912 (.253)***	-.846 (.253)**	2.126 (1.011)*	2.187 (1.015)*
(Age / 10) ²	.207 (.064)**	.191 (.064)**	-.347 (.247)	-.356 (.248)
(Age / 10) ³	-.020 (.005)***	-.019 (.005)***	.013 (.019)	.013 (.019)
Have a child	.228 (.025)***	.226 (.025)***	.394 (.127)**	.384 (.127)**
Convicted last year	.072 (.004)***	.072 (.004)***	.040 (.032)	.037 (.031)
Accumulated convictions	-.004 (.001)***	-.004 (.001)**	-.021 (.009)*	-.022 (.009)*
Imprisoned last year	-.102 (.061)	-.103 (.061)	-.707 (.759)	-.760 (.764)
Accumulated prison time	-.093 (.015)***	-.091 (.015)***	-.034 (.139)	-.076 (.141)
Currently divorced	.264 (.026)***	.330 (.028)***	.202 (.126)*	.329 (.158)*
Currently divorced convict		-.262 (.045)***		-.518 (.207)*

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests)

Note: Coefficients and standard errors are provided. Models adjust for exposure time. Exponentiating the coefficient and subtracting one ($e^b - 1$) yields the proportional increase/decrease in the number of convictions associated with a unit increase in the regressor.

Before proceeding to Model 2, we first draw attention to the control variables. Note that the effects of the control variables partly differ from the effects found in Chapter 5. This can be explained by the fact that we examine a different subsample. The years in which individuals are unmarried are excluded from the current analyses, while the years in which sample subjects are divorced are included. First, for female sample subjects the expected age-crime relationship is observed, as the coefficients imply an inverted U-shape to the mean number of offenses per year of street time. For male sample subjects we find a negative effect of age. An explanation might be that we moved further along offenders' life courses (i.e., we study the right side of the age-crime curve). Second, having one or more children under the age of 18 appears to be related to a higher conviction frequency among

male subjects and female subjects.²⁷ Third, for men having been convicted in the previous calendar year increases one's conviction rate in the current year, although the effect is relatively small. Fourth, the accumulated number of convictions is inversely associated with conviction. Because multicollinearity is not a problem in the analyses, the effect can be interpreted as a "slowing down" of the effect of accumulated convictions over time. Fifth, for men the accumulated time served in prison is negatively associated with convictions. Again, the effect is quite small. For female sample subjects we do not find any significant effects of past imprisonment.

Model 2 examines the differential effects of divorcing from non-convicted and convicted spouses on the number of convictions. In these models, the coefficient for divorce actually represents the effect of being divorced from a non-convicted spouse, while the coefficient for divorce from a convicted spouse represents a contrast with divorce from a non-convicted spouse. To recover the effect of divorce to a convicted spouse relative to being married, these coefficients must be summed together and their sum must be tested against zero. Recall that fixed effects models analyze within-individual change over time. This implies that the coefficient for divorce compares the years in which individuals are divorced from a non-convicted spouse to the years in which they are married to a non-convicted spouse. The coefficient for divorce from a convicted spouse compares the years in which individuals are divorced from a convicted spouse to the years in which they are married to a convicted spouse.

For male sample subjects we see that the coefficient for divorce is positive and significant. This means that divorce to a non-convicted spouse is associated with a significant increase in conviction frequency relative to being married to a non-convicted spouse (IRR = 1.39). On the other hand, the contrast for divorce from a convicted spouse is negative and significant, meaning that the increase in conviction frequency is not as pronounced for these individuals. To test the effect of divorce from a convicted spouse compared to being married from a convicted spouse, the two divorce coefficients summed together yields a coefficient of 0.07 (s.e. = 0.04): an effect that is statistically non-significant. Being divorced from a criminal spouse is not associated with more offenses than being married to a criminal spouse.

The findings are similar for female subjects. As expected, the coefficient for divorce is positive and statistically significant (IRR = 1.39), implying that being divorced from a non-convicted spouse leads to significantly more convictions relative to being married to a non-convicted spouse. Again, the contrast for being divorced from a convicted spouse is negative and significant. Summing the two divorce coefficients yields a coefficient of -0.19 (s.e. = .17), an effect that is statistically

27 In an additional model we added interaction terms between "having a child" and "currently divorced" to check if the crime-stimulating effect of under-aged children is stronger during periods in which offenders are divorced. Single parents who have to provide for their children may see criminal behavior as a way out. For men and women alike, we did not find any significant interaction effects.

non-significant. Being divorced from a criminal spouse is not associated with more offenses than being married to a criminal spouse.²⁸

7.5 Conclusion and discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between divorce, spousal criminality, and the development of criminal offending. Although numerous studies have shown that marriage is an important life course event that reduces criminal offending, the impact of divorce on criminal career development has received far less attention. Moreover, the criminal history of the spouse has been neglected thus far. We used data from the Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS): a unique long-term study of a conviction cohort of Dutch offenders. The data have several advantages for studying the effects of divorce on crime. In contrast to the few existing studies in this area, the CCLS contains data on the criminal careers of both offenders and their spouses that reach far into adulthood. Furthermore, the data enabled us to investigate the criminal careers of male as well as female offenders.

In line with the results of earlier studies, we found that divorce on average stimulates criminal behavior (e.g., Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2005). However, a different picture emerges when the criminal history of the spouse is taken into account. Crime-stimulating effects of divorce are only found for offenders who divorce a non-convicted spouse. Offenders who divorce a criminal spouse do not commit more offenses than during marriage. On the basis of these findings we have to nuance Sampson and Laub's informal social control theory. Both the characteristics of the relationship and the characteristics of the spouse may make marriages to criminal spouses less protective than marriages to non-criminal spouses. As a result, losing the tie to a criminal spouse may have had no effect on offenders' criminal career development. We did not find support for the idea that the impact of relationships is stronger for females. The impact of divorce and spousal criminality is similar for male and female offenders.

A number of limitations have to be taken into account when interpreting the results. First of all, our sample consists of individuals who were in contact with the Dutch criminal justice system in 1977 – all sample subjects have committed an offense at least once during their lives. Our results speak to the effect of divorce on criminal convictions among convicted and to-be-convicted individuals, and not necessarily among the population at large. Also, the results pertain to a particular time and place. The Netherlands was characterized by a lenient penal climate until the 1990s. This means that criminals were less easily convicted in 1977 than

²⁸ Note that the analyses show average increases over the entire period after divorce. However, some offenders (i.e., those who were older in 1977) were included more years than others. To test the sensitivity of the models we also estimated them limiting attention to discrete post-divorce intervals: the first one, five, and ten years after divorce. For males as well as females, the findings are replicated when a limited number of post-divorce years are considered. The effects of the divorce indicators are somewhat stronger if we focus on shorter periods.

nowadays. The fact that the CCLS offenders were convicted means that they were relatively serious offenders. Studies using different samples are needed to test the generality of the findings.

Second, our measure of divorce includes only legal divorce. Just as in other countries, divorce rates have steadily increased from the 1970s onwards. Nowadays approximately one in three marriages dissolves (Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2000). Because it was less common to divorce during the period under study, the associated stigma is likely to be higher. As a result we may find a stronger impact of divorce on criminal offending than we would find nowadays. Studies in other contexts are needed to see if similar effects are found. These future studies should also focus on other relationship types than marriage (e.g., cohabitation). During the last couple of decades it became more and more common to cohabit, and cohabitation even became a substitute for marriage.

Third, we are unable to gain insight into the mechanisms underlying the relationship between divorce, spousal criminality, and criminal behavior. For example, the question why divorce increases criminal convictions for those who divorce a non-criminal spouse ultimately remains unanswered. It is unclear whether the changes in the former case are caused by social bonds, economic stress or restructured routine activities. Disentangling these mechanisms and determining their relative importance is an important task for future research.

Notwithstanding the limitations of our official data, this study extends our knowledge about the role of divorce in the criminal career. On the basis of the current findings, we have to nuance the idea that divorce increases criminal behavior (Laub & Sampson, 2003). Not only the characteristics of the relationship but also the characteristics of the spouse may make marriages to criminal spouses less protective. The results of our study suggest that future research on the divorce-crime link should pay close attention to the criminal career of the spouse. Divorce may not necessarily have detrimental effects if the spouse is involved in crime.

Appendix

Random-effects poisson models of the impact of divorce on conviction frequency, by gender

Variable	Men (N = 3,083)		Women (N = 373)	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Age / 10	-1.436 (.250)***	-1.360 (.250)***	.002 (.946)	.025 (.946)
(Age / 10) ²	.263 (.063)***	.245 (.063)***	.023 (.236)	.022 (.236)
(Age / 10) ³	-.022 (.005)***	-.021 (.005)***	-.009 (.019)	-.009 (.019)
Have a child	.235 (.023)***	.226 (.023)***	.451 (.103)***	.452 (.103)***
Convicted last year	.084 (.003)***	.083 (.003)***	.128 (.031)***	.124 (.031)***
Accumulated convictions	.005 (.001)***	.005 (.001)***	.033 (.008)***	.032 (.008)***
Imprisoned last year	.185 (.059)**	.177 (.587)**	-1.361 (.810)*	-1.392 (.813)
Accumulated prison time	-.009 (.012)	-.006 (.012)	-.116 (.154)	-.143 (.155)
Currently divorced	.418 (.025)***	.522 (.027)***	.708 (.099)***	.904 (.125)**
Was married to convict		.779 (.068)***		.161 (.146)***
Currently divorced convict		-.380 (.045)***		-.451 (.177)**
Hausman tests				
Currently divorced	-22.00	-2.39	-6.48	-2.91
Currently divorced convict		1.97		-0.62

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests)

Note: Random-effects models do not solely focus on within-individual change. To be able to distinguish the four marital statuses that are depicted in Figures 7.1 and 7.2, we added a time-constant variable to Model 2 indicating if a sample subject “was married to a convict”. In this model “was married to convict” represents the effect of being married to a convicted spouse compared to being married to a non-convicted spouse. “Currently divorced” represents the effect of being divorced from a non-convicted spouse compared to being married to a non-convicted spouse. “Currently divorced convict” represents the effect of being divorced from a convicted spouse compared to being divorced from a non-convicted spouse.



CHAPTER 8
Conclusion and discussion

8 Conclusion and discussion

8.1 Introduction

Marriage has been identified as one of the most important life course events that offenders can experience during adulthood. A growing number of studies have shown that marriage fosters desistance from crime, especially among male offenders (Blokland & Nieuwebeerta, 2005; Farrington & West, 1995; Horney, Osgood & Marshall, 1995, King, Massoglia & MacMillan, 2007; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006; Theobald & Farrington, 2010). Although these studies enlarged our knowledge about the relationship between marriage and crime, the possible downsides of social bonds seems to be forgotten. The aim of the current study was to gain more insight into the presumed protective effects of marriage.

In contrast to earlier studies we did not only focus on individual criminal careers but also examined the criminal careers of offenders' spouses. We nuanced earlier studies in three ways. First, we argued that if marriage reduces crime, then divorce might very well have the opposite effect. Second, we stated that offenders' individual characteristics as well as their criminal histories may make them less likely to marry, and more likely to divorce. Third, we argued that the effects of marriage may strongly depend on the criminal history of the spouse. If offenders marry offending spouses, crime-reducing effects of marriage may very well be limited or even absent. In line with the shortcomings of earlier studies we examined four central research questions:

1. To what extent does criminal offending affect the likelihood of marrying, and to what extent do criminal offenders marry spouses who have a criminal history as well? (RQ1)
2. To what extent does marriage affect the development of criminal offending, and to what extent does the relationship between marriage and criminal offending depend on the criminal history of the spouse? (RQ2)
3. To what extent does criminal offending affect the likelihood of divorce, and to what extent does the likelihood of divorce depend on the criminal history of the spouse? (RQ3)
4. To what extent does divorce affect the development of criminal offending, and to what extent does the relationship between divorce and criminal offending depend on the criminal history of the spouse? (RQ4)

To answer the research questions we extended Sampson and Laub's informal social control theory with insights from criminology (e.g., Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) and family sociology (e.g., Becker, 1981; Kalmijn, 1998). In contrast to criminologists, family sociologists have extensively studied partner selection and partner influences during marriage. By combining these two research lines, we

were able to formulate new hypotheses about the relationships between marriage, divorce, and crime. To test the hypotheses we used a unique longitudinal dataset: the Criminal Career and Life Course Study (CCLS). The CCLS is very well suited to answer our research questions for several reasons. First, it contains longitudinal information on the criminal and marital careers of both offenders and their spouses. Second, it includes a more complete measure of criminal behavior than commonly used in earlier studies. Third, the data do not only contain information on male offenders but also on female offenders. Fourth, the CCLS enables us to study offenders' marital and criminal careers in a different cultural context: the Netherlands. To analyze the data, we used various longitudinal modeling strategies (i.e., event history analyses, fixed-effects models, and random-effects models).

In this final chapter we first summarize the main results and answer the research questions that were addressed in Chapters 3 to 7 (Section 8.2). In Section 8.3, we offer general conclusions and link our findings to topics that play a central role in (life course) criminology. In Section 8.4, we address the strengths, limitations, and implications of the current study. We provide several suggestions for future research and policy in the field of crime and justice.

8.2 Answers to the research questions

Table 8.1 gives an overview of the main findings per empirical chapter. Before answering our central research questions, we investigated the associations between the main independent and dependent variables in Chapter 3. First, we examined the extent to which offenders marry and divorce. Second, we investigated spousal similarity for criminal behavior. On the basis of our findings we can draw several conclusions. First, we found that the largest share of the offenders marries at least once during their lives (74 percent of the men and 87 percent of the women ever marries). The majority of those who marry ever experience a divorce (54 percent of the men and 69 percent of the women ever divorces). These divorce rates are high even compared to current divorce rates in the Netherlands. Second, we observed significant associations between marriage and divorce on the one hand, and criminal offending on the other hand. As the number of convictions increases, marriage rates become lower and divorce rates higher. Third, the findings indicate that a substantial proportion of the criminal convicts married a partner who has never been convicted. Among male sample subjects 86 percent of the partners has never been convicted. Among female sample subjects 74 percent of the partners has never been convicted.

Although a large share of the offenders marry non-convicted spouses, we found significant associations between offenders' and spouses' criminal careers. Marriage partners are found to be similar with respect to the number of criminal offenses they commit. The higher the number of offenses committed by criminal convicts, the higher is the number of offenses committed by their partners.

Table 8.1 Research questions, analytic strategy, and main findings for each of the empirical chapters

	Research questions	Analytic strategy	Main findings
Chapter 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent do criminal offenders marry and divorce? To what extent are offenders and spouses similar in terms of the number and types of offenses they commit? 	Bivariate analyses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As the number of convictions increases, marriage rates become lower and divorce rates higher. Marriage partners are found to be similar with respect to the number of criminal offenses they committed.
Chapter 4 (RQ1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent does criminal offending affect the likelihood of marrying? To what extent do criminal offenders marry spouses who have a criminal history as well? 	Event history analyses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The more serious a criminal history, the lower the likelihood of marrying and the higher the chance of marrying a partner with a criminal history. The impact of criminal offending on marriage likelihood becomes weaker when offenders have been convicted a longer time ago. Among men marital chances are only affected if they have an extensive criminal record Offenders do not avoid the institution of marriage altogether: they are more likely to marry a criminal spouse than to stay single.
Chapter 5 (RQ2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent does marriage affect the development of criminal offending? To what extent does the relationship between marriage and criminal offending depend on the criminal history of the spouse? 	Fixed- and random-effects models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Among men, being married to a non-convicted spouse reduces criminal offending. Being married to a convicted spouse is indistinguishable from singlehood, and sustains criminal involvement. Among women being married reduces criminal offending, irrespective of the conviction history of the spouse.
Chapter 6 (RQ3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent does criminal offending affect the likelihood of divorce? To what extent does the likelihood of divorce depend on the criminal history of the spouse? 	Event history analyses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The more serious a criminal history, the higher the chance of divorce becomes. The longer ago males' last conviction, the lower their chance to divorce becomes. Marriages are most likely to dissolve if both spouses are involved in crime. The impact of convictions on divorce is largest if they occur during marriage.
Chapter 7 (RQ4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent does divorce affect the development of criminal offending? To what extent does the relationship between divorce and criminal offending depend on the criminal history of the spouse? 	Fixed- and random-effects models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being divorced from a non-criminal spouse increases criminal offending compared to being married. Being divorced from a criminal spouse does not lead to changes in criminal offending.

In sum, we established significant associations between the main variables under study: marriage, divorce and criminal offending. Several mechanisms may underlie these associations. It may be the case that offenders are less likely to marry and more likely to divorce (e.g., in line with Gottfredson and Hirschi's self-control theory) but it may also be the case that marriage reduces criminal offending and divorce stimulates criminal activities (e.g., in line with Sampson and Laub's age-graded informal social control theory). The association between offenders' and spouses' criminal careers may not only indicate that criminals select each other as spouses but also that spouses influence each other's criminal behavior during marriage. These associations have also been established in earlier studies. The current study aimed to improve upon earlier research by disentangling the underlying relationships in Chapters 4 to 7.

8.2.1 The impact of convicts' criminal careers on marriage formation and partner selection

In Chapter 4, we investigated the impact of offenders' criminal histories on marriage formation and partner selection (Chapter 4: RQ1). We hypothesized that not only offenders' preferences but also offenders' opportunities influence their outcomes in the marriage market. Criminal offending would decrease the chance to marry and – given marriage – increase the chance to marry a criminal spouse. To test the hypotheses, we used event history models. In these models, we estimated the extent to which a criminal history until the last year influences the likelihood of marrying and the likelihood of marrying a (non-)criminal spouse in the current year.

We found that the *seriousness* of a criminal history is strongly related to outcomes in the marriage market. The more criminal offenses a person has committed, the lower the chances of marrying and – given marriage – the higher the chances of marrying a criminal partner. Both preferences and opportunities could explain these findings. For example, an increase in the number of offenses may not only lower opportunities to marry (e.g., persons are considered to be less attractive partners) but also weaken preferences towards marriage (e.g., lower levels of self-control are incompatible with the institution of marriage). For men the effect of imprisonment appears to be even stronger than the effect of convictions. The effect of imprisonment is comparable to earlier studies on the relationship between incarceration and marriage formation that were based on US data (e.g., Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006). It supports the idea that incarceration does not only restrain delinquents from committing crimes but also has collateral effects: it impedes relationship formation (Lopoo & Western, 2005).

Besides the seriousness of a criminal history, the *timing* of convictions was associated with marital chances as well. The impact of a criminal record on marital chances becomes weaker when offenders have been convicted a longer time ago. Several mechanisms may underlie this finding. On the one hand, it might be that potential partners do not know or do not care about these offenses. On the other hand, it might be the case that the preference to marry becomes stronger once a criminal lifestyle has been abandoned.

We also found *gender differences*. Females' marital chances diminish as soon as they have been convicted once, while males' marital chances are only affected if

they have an extensive criminal record. The impact of a criminal record on marital outcomes thus appears to differ between men and women. We elaborate on this finding in Section 8.3.5.

In contrast to what we would expect from Gottfredson and Hirschi's self-control theory, offenders appeared to be *more likely to marry convicted spouses than to stay unmarried*. On the basis of these results we have to nuance Gottfredson and Hirschi's idea (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1995) that offenders tend to avoid the institution of marriage because of their underlying personal traits. The earlier finding that offenders are less likely to marry can be attributed to the fact that offenders are less likely to marry non-criminal spouses. This may not only result from their preferences (i.e., a preference for criminal partners) but also from a lack of opportunities to marry non-criminal spouses.

8.2.2 Marriage, spousal criminality, and changes in criminal offending over the life course

From Chapter 4 we learned that offenders are not only less likely to marry but also more likely to marry criminal spouses than non-criminal spouses. In Chapter 5 (RQ2) we hypothesized that the protective effects of marriage may strongly depend on the criminal history of the spouse. For offenders who marry criminal spouses, crime-reducing effects of marriage may very well be limited or absent. One difficulty to overcome in the analyses is that marriage and partner selection are not randomly determined. To control as much as possible for (un)observed heterogeneity we employed fixed- and random-effects models. To disentangle partner selection from partner influences during marriage, we focused on the impact of partner's criminal history at the time of marriage.

We found *gender differences* in the impact of marriage and spousal criminality. The results showed that among men, the *protective effects* of marriage depend on the criminal history of the spouse. Being married to a non-convicted spouse reduces criminal involvement. Being married to a convicted spouse is indistinguishable from singlehood and thus sustains criminal involvement. Although "criminal" marriages are indeed not protective, we do not observe an increase in criminal behavior as has been found in a number of earlier studies (Capaldi, Kim & Owen, 2008; Haynie et al., 2005; Moffitt, 2001; Simons et al., 2002). An explanation might be that these earlier studies did not have longitudinal information on spouses' criminal behavior, and were not able to clearly distinguish partner selection from partner influences during the relationship. For women being married reduces criminal offending irrespective of the conviction history of the spouse. The institution of marriage per se tends to promote desistance among female subjects. Remarkably, we did not find support for the idea that women would be more influenced by the criminal behavior of their partners than men. We elaborate on this finding in Section 8.3.5.

8.2.3 The impact of convicts' and spouses' criminal careers on marital dissolution

In Chapter 6 (RQ3) we moved one step further along the life course and examined the opposite life course event: divorce. We argued that criminal behavior may

influence the costs and benefits of the relationship and through this the likelihood of divorce. We did not only focus on the criminal careers of the offenders but also on the criminal careers of their spouses. First, we hypothesized that offenders' criminal behavior increases the likelihood of divorce (through self-control, stigma and incapacitation). Second, we formulated contrasting hypotheses about the impact of spousal criminality. On the one hand similarity in criminal behavior may promote marital stability (mutual understanding), on the other hand it may lead to instability (criminal lifestyles). To test the hypotheses we used event history models. In these models we investigated to what extent a criminal history until the last year is related to the likelihood of divorce and to what extent this relationship depends on the criminal history of the spouse.

Processes of cumulative disadvantage appear to continue during marriage. The *seriousness* of a criminal history is strongly related to divorce risks. The higher the number of convictions, the higher the likelihood of divorce becomes. Not only lower levels of self-control but also increasing levels of stigma may attribute to this outcome. Imprisonment appears to be even more disruptive than being convicted per se. The effect of imprisonment is comparable to earlier studies on the relationship between incarceration and marriage formation (e.g., Apel et al., 2010). It supports the idea that incarceration does not only restrain individuals from committing crimes but also has unintended side effects such as the disruption of marital ties (Lopoo & Western, 2005).

The *timing* of offenders' convictions is of importance as well. We found that divorce risks become lower when the last offense has been committed longer ago. This may indicate that the stigma attached to a criminal record becomes less severe over time. Not only the seriousness of offenders' convictions but also the timing of offenders' convictions thus influences their divorce risks.

Moreover, the effects of divorce on crime depend on the *criminal history of the spouse*. Marriages are most likely to dissolve if both spouses are involved in crime, followed by marriages where only one of the partners is involved in crime. Mutual understanding between partners apparently does not weigh out the disruptive effects of both partners' personal traits and lifestyles.

Finally, the impact of convictions appears to be especially strong if they take place *during marriage*. This lends support to the idea that not only self-control but also other factors (stigma, incapacitation) play a role. If only self-control influences marital dissolution, then the timing of convictions would not matter. Self-control is a personal trait that is relatively stable over time and will be present to the same extent before as during marriage.

8.2.4 Divorce, spousal criminality, and changes in criminal offending over the life course

Chapter 6 revealed that offenders are more likely to divorce, especially if the spouse is involved in crime as well. In Chapter 7 (RQ4) we hypothesized that the effects of divorce may strongly depend on the criminal history of the spouse. For offenders who divorce from criminal spouses, crime-stimulating effects of divorce may very well be limited or absent. Just as in Chapter 5, one difficulty to overcome in the

analyses is that divorce and partner selection are not randomly determined. To control as much as possible for (un)observed heterogeneity we again employed fixed- and random-effects models. In this chapter we considered spouses' criminal history before and during marriage.

In line with the results of earlier studies, we found that divorce on average stimulates criminal behavior (e.g., Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2005). However, a different picture emerges when the criminal history of the spouse is taken into account. Crime-stimulating effects of divorce are only found for offenders who divorce non-convicted spouses. Offenders who divorce criminal spouses do not commit more offenses than during their marriage. This may again indicate that marriages to criminal spouses are less *protective* than marriages to non-criminal spouses. Both the characteristics of the relationship and the characteristics of the criminal spouse may explain why divorcing a criminal spouse does not necessarily have detrimental effects. We did not find *gender differences* in the impact of divorce and spousal criminality on criminal offending.

8.3 General conclusions

The results of our study have relevance for several topics that play a central role in (life course) criminology.

8.3.1 Static and dynamic theories

To answer our research questions we extended current theories in the field of life course criminology. We used Sampson and Laub's dynamic informal social control theory (1993) as a starting point and added four central notions: marriage formation, partner selection, partner influences, and marital dissolution. In doing so, we also incorporated ideas from Gottfredson and Hirschi's static self-control theory (1990). In contrast to Sampson and Laub, Gottfredson and Hirschi did focus on the processes underlying marriage formation and marital dissolution. Offenders' lower levels of self-control would make them less likely to marry and more likely to divorce. However, just as Sampson and Laub, Gottfredson and Hirschi did not pay attention to partners' criminal careers. The results of our study show that it is particularly relevant to take into account spouses' criminal history. In contrast to what we would expect from self-control theory, offenders are more likely to marry criminal spouses than to stay unmarried. Both life course criminological theories thus need to be extended.

8.3.2 Protective effects of marriage

The idea of marriage as a protective institution takes a prominent place in life course criminology. Marriage would reduce criminal activity and even lead to desistance from crime, while divorce would stimulate criminal behavior (Laub & Sampson, 1993). The results of our study show that the idea of marriage as a protective institution does not always apply. Marriage only diminishes criminal offending and divorce only stimulates criminal offending if the spouse is not involved in

crime. The crime-reducing effects of marriage and the crime-stimulating effects of divorce depend on the criminal history of the spouse.

On the basis of these findings, we nuanced Sampson and Laub's theoretical ideas. Marriages to criminal spouses may be less protective for two reasons. First, marital ties are not necessarily strong if both spouses are involved in crime (Simons et al., 2002). If both partners are involved in crime, they are for example both likely to have personal traits and to be involved in situations that undermine the stability of marriage (Western, 2006: 5). Second, conventional behavior is not necessarily encouraged if both partners are delinquent. If their spouses are not involved in crime, offenders might risk their relationship by violating the law. If spouses have a criminal history as well, offending is likely to be a conventional way of behaving, which is less likely to be discouraged or threaten the continuation of the relationship.

8.3.3 Change versus continuity in criminal offending

Sampson and Laub's informal social control theory is not only a theory of change but also of continuity in criminal offending. To explain continuity in criminal behavior over the life course Sampson and Laub use the notion of "cumulative continuity of disadvantage". A history of offending may diminish offenders' future conventional opportunities and as a result increase the likelihood of committing crimes (Sampson & Laub, 1993). For example, a criminal record may make offenders less attractive partners, which makes them less likely to marry a conventional spouse and more likely to continue offending. Although Sampson and Laub acknowledge the existence of these kinds of processes, they have received hardly any attention in prior research.

The results of our study show that processes of cumulative disadvantage are clearly at work. We found that offenders are less likely to marry, and more likely to marry criminal spouses. In addition, criminal marriages can sustain criminal behavior and are more likely to dissolve. Prior criminal offending thus influences marital outcomes in such a way that it makes future crime more likely. Future studies in the field of marriage and crime should be aware of the selection processes underlying offenders' marriages and pay explicit attention to the impact of criminal behavior on marriage formation, partner selection, and marital dissolution.

8.3.4 Selection versus influence

The fact that the criminal careers of spouses did not receive more attention until now is surprising because the importance of significant others has been acknowledged when it concerns adolescents' criminal behavior. The few studies that did focus on spousal criminality mostly examined similarity in criminal behavior, without disentangling partner selection from partner influences during marriage. The lack of research can be partly attributed to the fact that adequate data were lacking thus far. One needs to have longitudinal data on the criminal careers of both offenders and spouses.

In contrast to earlier studies, the CCLS enabled us to disentangle selection and influence processes. For men as well as women we found clear support for selection processes: criminal offending increases the likelihood of marrying a criminal spouse. For men we also found support for partner influences during marriage. Marrying a non-criminal spouse decreases criminal offending, while marrying a criminal spouse stimulates the continuation of a criminal career.

8.3.5 Gender differences in the causes and consequences of criminal behavior

While gender differences in criminal behavior received more and more attention in criminological theory and research, the topic is understudied because women used to be less criminal and committed less severe offenses than men. In recent years, scholarly interest increased because men and women became more similar with regard to their involvement in crime. However, it is argued that men and women still differ in the causes and consequences underlying their criminal behavior (Steffensmeier & Allen, 1996).

Our analyses revealed several differences between men and women. First, convicted women more often marry a criminal partner than convicted men. Second, females' marital chances diminish as soon as they have been convicted once, while males' marital chances are only affected if they have an extensive criminal record. Third, females' divorce risks already increase if they are convicted once, while males' divorce risks are only affected if they are serious offenders. Fourth, for females marriage promotes desistance from crime – irrespective of the criminal history of the spouse. For males only marriages to non-criminal spouses reduce criminal behavior.

A potential explanation for the gender difference in partner choice may lie in the fact that the population of criminal convicts mainly comprises men. If male offenders marry, they will have higher chances to end up with a non-criminal spouse (Sampson, Laub & Wimer 2006). Another explanation might be that non-criminal men consider convicted women to be less attractive marriage candidates. The same would not have to be the case for male convicts. It can be expected that for men a criminal lifestyle is more common and accepted. In addition, it takes more to become a female offender. Female offenders who are equal to male offenders on offending behavior are likely to score “worse” on the unobserved variables that lead to criminal activity (lower SES, lower self-control). This may also make them more likely to marry criminal spouses than male offenders.

The fact that we do not find any effect of a convicted spouse on females' criminal career development might be partly attributed to the birth of children during marriage. The birth of a child would have a larger impact on females' lives (both practical and emotional) and reduce preferences and opportunities to commit crimes even more than for men (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002; Uggen & Kruttschnitt, 1998). The crime-reducing effect of childbearing might outweigh the crime-stimulating effect of a convicted male spouse. Less contact with criminal peers may also explain the finding that marriage reduces women's criminal behavior irrespective of the criminal background of the spouse. Married women tend to prioritize family responsibilities over friends – more so

than married men (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002). Finally, it has been suggested that gender differences in sentencing may explain the finding that a convicted spouse has no impact on females' criminal careers (Bersani, Laub & Nieuwbeerta, 2009). Women tend to receive more lenient sentences, especially if they are married and have childcare responsibilities (Koons-Witt, 2002; Johnson, Van Wingerden & Nieuwbeerta, 2010). In this study we used convictions as an outcome measure. It could be the case that convicted males actually stimulate the criminal behavior of their female spouses but that these crimes less often result in convictions.

8.4 Strengths, limitations, and implications of the study

The current study was the first to investigate the criminal careers of both offenders and their spouses over almost the entire life course. We were able to improve upon earlier studies in several ways. First, we provided several new research questions. Second, we made theoretical progress by combining insights from life course criminology and family sociology. Third, we made methodological progress by using a unique longitudinal dataset. Besides these strengths, a number of limitations have to be taken into account when interpreting the results. These limitations offer important guidelines for future research in the field of marriage and crime (see Section 8.4.1). In addition, our study has broader implications as well. It leads to new research questions (Section 8.4.2) and has implications for policy in the field of crime and justice (Section 8.4.3).

8.4.1 Limitations and guidelines for future research

Theoretical mechanisms

First, more insight is needed into the mechanisms underlying the studied relationships. For example, we do not know if stigma, incapacitation or self-control underlies the relationship between criminal offending and marriage. Also, we do not know if the effects of marriage on criminal offending are caused by changes in social bonds, routine activities, cognitive transformation or social learning. The current study can be regarded as a first step in determining the relationship between marriage, divorce, spousal criminality, and offenders' criminal careers. Disentangling the underlying mechanisms and determining their relative importance remains an important task for future research. For example, (qualitative) interviews could be used to gain more insight into offenders' life courses and the motives behind their behavior.

Measurement of criminal behavior

Our analyses are based on officially registered crimes rather than self-reported crimes. This means that we probably underestimate the total number of delinquent acts. The police know not all criminal offenses and not all offenses are prosecuted. The underestimation can be selective when the probability of being convicted is not equal for all persons. For example, some criminals may be more likely to be intensely monitored by the police, while others (e.g., those with a higher IQ) may adopt more effective strategies to keep out of the arms of the law.

Furthermore, the fact that the CCLS contains data on relatively serious criminals (convicted offenders) may have influenced the results. Offenders may be more likely to marry offending spouses, and the effect of marrying a criminal spouse may be even more crime-stimulating if the spouse is convicted (instead of “just” delinquent). Additional research is needed to examine if the results hold if other samples and other measures of criminal behavior are used.

It should be noted that the use of official data has important advantages as well. We were able to examine a wide array of criminal activities that differ in offending severity, that is, violent offenses, property offenses, drunk driving, drug offenses, weapon offenses, and offenses against the public order (Bersani, Laub & Nieuwbeerta, 2009). In particular severe offenses are not always included in self-report data. Also, our measure of criminal behavior is not disturbed by social desirability problems and memory problems, as would have likely been the case with self-report data (Van de Rakt, 2011).

Ideally, though, one would like to complement a longitudinal study such as the CCLS with self-report data in future research. Especially for females it would be relevant to gain more insight in less severe forms of criminal and antisocial behavior. Probably this would also make it possible to analyze other aspects of spouses’ delinquent behavior such as the number of offenses and type of offenses committed.

Measurement of partner relationship

The CCLS only contains data on legal marriage. It could be the case that individuals did in fact have a relationship, just not a marital one (e.g., cohabitation). From the 1970s onwards, it has become more and more common to cohabit, and cohabitation has even become a substitute for marriage (Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2000). For our analysis this development is of less relevance because the CCLS contains data on a cohort of individuals convicted in 1977. The largest share of these persons already reached marriageable age before this time. The trend towards cohabitation did not only take place in the Netherlands but also in other countries (e.g. the US) (Kalmijn, 2002). It has been suggested that other relationship types are less protective because the bonds between partners would be less strong (Rhule-Louie & McMahon, 2007). However, earlier studies in this area are scarce and the results are inconclusive (Horney, Osgood & Marshall, 1995; Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006; Warr, 1998). Studies on criminal behavior and other relationship types than marriage are thus much needed (see also Bersani, Laub & Nieuwbeerta, 2009: 22).

Control variables

When investigating the relationship between criminal behavior and marital outcomes, we have not been able to control for a number of other characteristics that are likely to be correlated with crime, marriage, and divorce. This concerns, for example, education, socio-economic status, and personality characteristics. As a result, we were likely to overestimate the relationship between marriage and divorce on the one hand and crime on the other hand. To overcome this shortcoming, future studies should also use self-reported data and collect information on offenders’ background and personality characteristics.

Generalizability: sample of offenders

Our sample consists of persons who were in contact with the criminal justice system in 1977 – all individuals in the sample have committed an offense at least once during their lives. Our results thus speak to the effect of marriage on criminal convictions among convicted and to-be-convicted individuals, and not necessarily to the population at large. Ideally one would like to have a control group drawn from the general population, consisting of individuals who are not necessarily convicted during their lives.

However, the selectivity of our sample has advantages as well. It partly compensates for the fact that we lack certain control variables. Those who have no convictions prior to their marriage or divorce will, by construction, have at least one conviction after their marriage or divorce. It might be more useful to compare the offenders with not-yet offenders than with a sample of non-offenders. Not-yet offenders may be much more similar to offenders with regard to (un)measured characteristics that influence both the likelihood of offending and divorce.

Generalizability: time and place

When interpreting the results of this study, it should be noted that the data relate to a specific time and place: the Netherlands between 1910 and 2002. Compared to the US and most other European countries, the Netherlands had a lenient penal climate until the 1990s. Few offenders were convicted, few convicted offenders were sentenced to prison, and sentences were relatively short (Kommer, 1994). In a context where convictions and imprisonment are less common, the negative signal of a criminal record is likely to be stronger. However, the disruptive effects of incapacitation are likely to be smaller. Because prison sentences are relatively short, the idea that imprisonment removes offenders from their spouses and families (for a long time) is less applicable to many offenders. Moreover, in 1977 criminals were less easily convicted than nowadays. The fact that the CCLS offenders were convicted at that time means that they were relatively serious offenders. This study should be replicated to see if the results hold in other contexts as well.

8.4.2 New research questions

On the basis of our results, several new questions arise that could be addressed in future studies. First, although we included parenthood as control variable, untangling the complex interactions between marriage, divorce, and parenthood is an important task for future research. For example, marriages may be especially protective when children are involved. Social bonds between spouses may become even stronger (Farrington & West, 1995).

Second, future studies could focus more on the timing and sequence of marriage and divorce. An important idea within the life course perspective is that the impact of life course events may depend on when they take place (Elder, 1986). For example, marriages may be less protective if persons marry at a “wrong” age, or first have children and then marry (Theobald & Farrington, 2010).

Third, subsequent (marital) relationships remain an important topic for future research. For practical reasons, we mainly limited our attention to first marriages

(see Chapters 4 to 7). However, in Chapter 3 we observed that criminal offending increases the chance to remarry. It has been argued that offenders would marry more often because of their lower levels of self-control (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). These subsequent marital relationships may very well have a different impact on the development of crime. The bonds between partners may be less strong in a second or third marriage.

Fourth, although we made a first step in disentangling partner selection from partner influences, we did not examine mutual influences in criminal behavior between partners during marriage. In determining the effect of marriage and spousal criminality, the focus of our study has been on spouses' criminal behavior before marriage. It could be the case that these spouses do not commit any crimes during their marital relationship. Future studies could focus on the period during marriage and disentangle processes of mutual influence between offenders and their spouses.

Fifth, the concentration of criminal behavior within families remains an important topic for future research. It has been argued that similarity in the behavior of spouses would increase the influence of parents on their children (Farrington et al. 1996; Farrington et al. 2001; Rowe & Farrington, 1997). As a result, we would expect high levels of similarity in the criminal involvement of fathers, mothers, and their children.

8.4.3 Practical implications

Our findings have several practical implications. The results showed that finding and keeping a non-deviant partner is essential for a pathway out of crime. If offenders are married to a conventional (non-criminal) partner, marriages can diminish criminal behavior. Of course we cannot force persons to marry a particular partner or to stay married. These are private decisions in which it is less easy and less desirable to intervene. However, what policy makers and justice officials can do, is influence the mechanisms that underlie the relationship between marriage, divorce, and crime (e.g., stigma, incapacitation, social bonds, routine activities). They should be aware of the fact that a criminal record and especially imprisonment may not only have intended but also unintended consequences, such as the breakdown of marital ties. In line with our findings, we formulate several suggestions for policy in the field of crime and justice.

First, other interventions than imprisonment could be stimulated, such as electronic house arrest. This intervention is less disruptive because offenders are not isolated from their (potential) partners. Interactions with deviant others can be discouraged, for example, through the use of curfews (Blokland, 2005). Second, when individuals are assigned a prison sentence, it may be preferable to locate them close to their partner's place of residence. If the distance between partners is large, it is more difficult to visit the offender. Less contact between partners might undermine the relationship quality. Third, also during imprisonment contact between partners should be stimulated as much as possible (e.g., by telephone or visiting hours). Fourth, recently dating services for inmates have been launched (www.bonjo.nl). Inmates as well as non-convicts can place an advertisement

and initially contact each other via mail. Our results suggest that these kinds of services should be supported, although the effects are likely to depend on the type of partners that are contacted. The effects may not be crime-reducing if offenders meet partners who are involved in crime as well. Fifth, when Dutch convicts are released from prison, they receive aftercare to help them readjust to society and prevent them from recidivating. Aftercare traditionally focused on work and housing. Partner relationships seem to be forgotten. By monitoring and mediating between offenders and their potential partners after release, partner relationships may be formed and sustained.

Nederlandse samenvatting (Summary in Dutch)

Inleiding, doel en onderzoeksvragen

Binnen de criminologie wordt het huwelijk gezien als een belangrijke levensloopgebeurtenis die voor een afname in crimineel gedrag kan zorgen. Vaak wordt verondersteld dat een afname in crimineel gedrag wordt veroorzaakt door de sociale binding die door het huwelijk ontstaat: partners houden elkaar in de gaten, controleren elkaars gedrag en willen hun relatie niet op het spel zetten door het plegen van delicten (Laub & Sampson, 2003). Recente studies ondersteunen deze gedachte en laten zien dat het huwelijk – vooral bij mannen – een criminaliteitsremmend effect heeft (Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2005; King, Massoglia & MacMillan, 2007; Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006).

Het doel van deze studie is om meer inzicht te krijgen in de relatie tussen trouwen en crimineel gedrag. Eerder onderzoek heeft zich vooral gericht op de beschermende – criminaliteitsremmende – werking van het huwelijk. Daarmee is de keerzijde van sociale bindingen onderbelicht gebleven. In deze studie wordt daar juist wel op ingegaan. Er wordt op drie manieren voortgebouwd op eerder onderzoek. Ten eerste zijn niet alleen de effecten van het huwelijk onderzocht, maar ook de effecten van de omgekeerde levensloopgebeurtenis: echtscheiding. Als het huwelijk voor een afname in crimineel gedrag zorgt, dan kan van echtscheiding een tegengesteld effect worden verwacht. Echtscheiding zorgt ervoor dat de binding met de partner verloren gaat. Dit zou crimineel gedrag kunnen stimuleren. Het feit dat aan de effecten van echtscheiding op crimineel gedrag tot nu toe nauwelijks aandacht is besteed, wordt mede veroorzaakt door databeperkingen. Veroordeelden zijn zelden tot ver in de volwassenheid gevolgd.

Ten tweede is ook de omgekeerde relatie onderzocht: de effecten van crimineel gedrag op huwelijkskansen en echtscheidingskansen. Een prominent idee binnen de levensloopcriminologie is dat het zich voordoen van levensloopgebeurtenissen, zoals trouwen en scheiden, voor een groot deel door toeval wordt veroorzaakt (Laub & Sampson, 2003: 45). Daarom hebben criminologen zich tot nu toe voornamelijk beziggehouden met het bestuderen van de effecten van levensloopgebeurtenissen op crimineel gedrag en niet met de omgekeerde relatie. Het zou echter goed zo kunnen zijn dat veroordeelden – bijvoorbeeld vanwege hun persoonlijkheidskenmerken en hun criminele levensstijl – minder geneigd zijn om te trouwen en meer geneigd zijn om te scheiden (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). In dat geval zouden veroordeelden minder vaak (langdurige) beschermende effecten van het huwelijk ervaren.

Ten derde richt deze studie zich niet alleen op de criminele carrières van veroordeelden, maar ook op die van hun echtgenoten. Door ook de criminele carrières van echtgenoten in kaart te brengen, kunnen processen van partnerselectie en partnerbeïnvloeding worden ontrafeld. Het idee dat het huwelijk crimineel gedrag vermindert, is minder vanzelfsprekend dan gedacht. Als criminelen geneigd zijn om met criminelen te trouwen, dan is het maar de vraag of het huwelijk een criminaliteitsremmende werking heeft. Wanneer de partner zelf ook delinquent gedrag vertoont, dan zou het goed zo kunnen zijn dat een criminele levensstijl juist gestimuleerd of gecontinueerd wordt. Criminele partners hebben wellicht dezelfde normen en waarden op het gebied van crimineel gedrag. Ook zouden ze van elkaar kunnen leren en hun criminele technieken en vaardigheden aan elkaar over kunnen dragen (Leverentz, 2006; Rhule-Louie & McMahon, 2007; Simons, Stewart, Gordon, Conger & Elder, 2002).

In aansluiting bij de drie tekortkomingen van eerder onderzoek zijn vier centrale onderzoeksvragen geformuleerd. De onderzoeksvragen luiden als volgt:

1. In hoeverre is crimineel gedrag van invloed op de kans om te trouwen? En in hoeverre trouwen veroordeelden een partner die eveneens crimineel gedrag vertoont?
2. In hoeverre is trouwen van invloed op de ontwikkeling van crimineel gedrag? En in hoeverre hangt het effect van trouwen op crimineel gedrag af van het criminele verleden van de huwelijkspartner?
3. In hoeverre is crimineel gedrag van invloed op de kans om te scheiden? En in hoeverre hangt het effect van crimineel gedrag op echtscheidingskansen af van het criminele verleden van de huwelijkspartner?
4. In hoeverre is echtscheiding van invloed op de ontwikkeling van crimineel gedrag? En in hoeverre hangt het effect van echtscheiding op crimineel gedrag af van het criminele verleden van de huwelijkspartner?

Om de onderzoeksvragen te beantwoorden zijn huidige theorieën binnen de levensloopcriminologie (Sampson en Laub's informele sociale controle theorie (1993) en Gottfredson en Hirschi's zelfcontrole theorie (1990)) uitgebreid met inzichten uit de familiesociologie. In tegenstelling tot de criminologie is er in de familiesociologie uitgebreid aandacht besteed aan de effecten van echtscheiding, de determinanten van huwelijks- en echtscheidingskansen en processen van partnerselectie en partnerbeïnvloeding (Becker, 1981; De Graaf & Kalmijn, 2003; Goldscheider & Waite, 1986; Kalmijn, 1998; Liefbroer, 1991; Oppenheimer, 1988).

In deze studie wordt gebruik gemaakt van een unieke longitudinale dataset: de Criminele Carrière en Levensloop Studie (CCLS; Nieuwbeerta & Blokland, 2003). De CCLS bevat gegevens over de officieel geregistreerde criminele carrières en levenslopen van 4.615 veroordeelden – waaronder meer dan 400 vrouwen. De veroordeelden zijn over vrijwel de gehele levensloop gevolgd: van leeftijd 12 tot 72. De CCLS is om tenminste vier redenen uniek te noemen. Ten eerste is de CCLS speciaal voor dit onderzoek uitgebreid met gegevens over de criminele carrières van alle huwelijkspartners van de veroordeelden. Daarmee is het de eerste studie die de levenslange criminele carrières onderzoekt van een grote groep delinquenten en hun partners. Ten tweede biedt de CCLS inzicht in de exacte timing van huwelijken, veroordelingen en perioden die in de gevangenis zijn doorgebracht.

Hierdoor kan meer inzicht worden verkregen in de causaliteit van de onderzochte relaties dan in veel eerdere studies het geval was. Ten derde kunnen niet alleen de huwelijksuitkomsten van mannelijke criminelen, maar ook die van vrouwelijke criminelen worden bestudeerd. Ten vierde voorziet de CCLS in een completere meting van crimineel gedrag dan tot nu toe is gebruikt in eerder onderzoek (aantal delicten, type delicten, gevangenisstraf).

De invloed van crimineel gedrag op huwelijkskansen en partnerselectie

Als een eerste stap op de huwelijksmarkt hebben we ons gericht op de vraag in hoeverre crimineel gedrag van invloed is op de huwelijkskansen en partnerkeuze van veroordeelden (onderzoeksvraag 1 – hoofdstuk 4). In de familiesociologie wordt ervan uitgegaan dat uitkomsten op de huwelijksmarkt niet alleen worden bepaald door individuele voorkeuren, maar ook door de mogelijkheden die er zijn om deze voorkeuren te realiseren (Becker, 1981; Goldscheider & Waite, 1986; Kalmijn, 1998; Oppenheimer, 1988). We verwachtten dat crimineel gedrag van invloed is op deze voorkeuren en mogelijkheden en daardoor zowel de kans op een huwelijk als de keuze voor een (niet-)criminele partner bepaalt. Om de hypothesen te toetsen hebben we gebruik gemaakt van event history modellen. Met deze modellen wordt geschat in hoeverre een crimineel verleden (aantal delicten, type delicten, gevangenisstraf) van invloed is op de kans om te trouwen en op de kans om een criminele partner te trouwen.

De resultaten laten allereerst zien dat de ernst van een crimineel verleden sterk samenhangt met uitkomsten op de huwelijksmarkt. Hoe meer veroordelingen een persoon op zijn of haar naam heeft staan, hoe kleiner de kansen om te trouwen en, gegeven het feit dat iemand trouwt, hoe groter de kans om een criminele partner te trouwen. Zowel individuele voorkeuren als de mogelijkheden om deze voorkeuren te realiseren zouden de bevindingen kunnen verklaren. Een toename in het aantal veroordelingen zorgt waarschijnlijk niet alleen voor minder mogelijkheden om te trouwen (veroordeelden worden bijvoorbeeld gezien als minder aantrekkelijke partners), maar kan ook de wens om te trouwen verminderen (het huwelijk past bijvoorbeeld niet bij een criminele levensstijl). Voor mannen blijkt dat geweldsdelicten en gevangenisstraf de kans om te trouwen nog verder verkleinen dan het veroordeeld-zijn op zich. Deze laatste bevinding komt overeen met de resultaten van eerdere Amerikaanse studies die zich hebben beziggehouden met de relatie tussen gevangenisstraf en huwelijkskansen (zie bijvoorbeeld: Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006). Het strookt met het idee dat gevangenisstraf delinquenten niet alleen weerhoudt van het plegen van delicten, maar ook onbedoelde neveneffecten heeft: het vermindert de kans om een huwelijkspartner te vinden die crimineel gedrag afremt (Lopoo & Western, 2005).

Naast de ernst van een crimineel verleden blijkt de timing van veroordelingen van belang te zijn: de relatie tussen het hebben van een strafblad en de kans om te trouwen wordt zwakker naarmate de veroordeling langer geleden is. Aan de ene kant kan het zo zijn dat potentiële partners niet op de hoogte zijn van deze delicten of minder geven om delicten die langer geleden gepleegd zijn. Aan de andere kant kan het zo zijn dat de eigen voorkeur om te trouwen sterker wordt wanneer een criminele levensstijl eenmaal is afgezworen.

We vinden ook sekseverschillen in de effecten van crimineel gedrag op huwelijkskansen. De huwelijkskansen van vrouwen nemen af zodra ze een veroordeling op hun naam hebben staan, terwijl de huwelijkskansen van mannen pas worden beïnvloed als ze een uitgebreid strafblad hebben. Een mogelijke verklaring zou kunnen zijn dat een criminele levensstijl voor vrouwen minder geaccepteerd is dan voor mannen. Een strafblad zou vrouwelijke veroordeelden nog onaantrekkelijkere huwelijkspartners kunnen maken dan bij mannelijke veroordeelden het geval is.

Tot slot, en in tegenspraak met Gottfredson en Hirschi's zelfcontrole theorie (1990), komt uit onze analyses naar voren dat veroordeelden het huwelijk niet geheel ontwijken. Gottfredson en Hirschi veronderstellen dat veroordeelden vanwege hun onderliggende persoonlijke kenmerken (hun lagere niveau van zelfcontrole) minder geneigd zijn om te trouwen (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1995). Op basis van onze resultaten moeten we dit idee nuanceren. Uit de analyses komt namelijk naar voren dat veroordeelden een grotere kans hebben om een veroordeelde echtgenoot te trouwen dan om ongehuwd te blijven. De eerdere bevinding dat veroordeelden kleinere huwelijkskansen hebben, kan dus worden toegeschreven aan het feit dat ze kleinere kansen hebben om niet-criminele partners te trouwen. Dit zou niet alleen veroorzaakt kunnen worden door hun eigen voorkeuren (een voorkeur voor criminele partners), maar ook door een gebrek aan mogelijkheden om niet-criminele partners te trouwen.

De invloed van trouwen en partnerselectie op de ontwikkeling van crimineel gedrag

In hoofdstuk 5 (onderzoeksvraag 2) hebben we ons bezig gehouden met de vraag in hoeverre trouwen en partnerselectie van invloed zijn op de verdere ontwikkeling van crimineel gedrag. De invloed van het huwelijk zou sterk af kunnen hangen van het criminele verleden van de partner waarmee getrouwd wordt. Wanneer de echtgenoot zelf ook delinquent gedrag vertoont, dan zou het goed zo kunnen zijn dat een criminele levensstijl juist gestimuleerd of in ieder geval gecontinueerd wordt (Rhule-Louie & McMahon, 2007; Simons e.a., 2002). Bij het vaststellen van de effecten van levensloopgebeurtenissen, zoals trouwen, doet zich het probleem voor dat het om gebeurtenissen gaat die niet "at random" plaatsvinden. Om zo goed mogelijk rekening te kunnen houden met dit selectieprobleem, zijn twee soorten panelmodellen geschat: random effects en fixed effects modellen. In de modellen worden echtgenoten als crimineel geclassificeerd als zij voor het huwelijk een of meerdere keren veroordeeld zijn.

Uit de analyses komt naar voren dat er sekseverschillen zijn in de effecten van trouwen en partnerselectie op crimineel gedrag. Voor mannen blijkt het beschermende effect van het huwelijk inderdaad af te hangen van het criminele verleden van de huwelijkspartner. Trouwen met een niet-criminele partner gaat gepaard met een afname in het aantal delicten. Trouwen met een criminele partner heeft daarentegen geen effect op de criminele carrière: het aantal delicten verschilt niet van perioden waarin mannen ongehuwd zijn. Hoewel "criminele huwelijken" dus inderdaad geen criminaliteitremmende werking hebben, vinden we geen toename in crimineel gedrag zoals in een aantal eerdere studies is gevonden (zie bijvoorbeeld: Simons e.a., 2002). Een mogelijke verklaring zou kunnen zijn dat deze stu-

dies geen longitudinale gegevens hadden over het criminele gedrag van de partners. Hierdoor waren zij niet goed in staat om processen van partnerselectie te onderscheiden van partnerbeïnvloeding gedurende de relatie.

Voor vrouwen blijkt het huwelijk – ongeacht het criminele verleden van de partner – voor een afname in het aantal veroordelingen te zorgen. Opmerkelijk genoeg vinden we geen ondersteuning voor het idee dat vrouwen meer beïnvloed zouden worden door hun criminele partner dan mannen. Het huwelijk op zich lijkt vrouwen te veranderen. Het feit dat we geen effect vinden van het trouwen met een criminele partner zou ook veroorzaakt kunnen worden door de geboorte van kinderen gedurende het huwelijk. De geboorte van een kind zou een grotere invloed hebben op het leven van vrouwen (zowel praktisch als emotioneel) en de voorkeuren en mogelijkheden om crimineel gedrag te plegen zelfs verder doen afnemen dan bij mannen (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002; Uggen & Kruttschnitt, 1998). De criminaliteitsremmende werking van het krijgen van kinderen zou bij vrouwen dus groter kunnen zijn dan het criminaliteitsstimulerende effect van het trouwen met een criminele partner.

De invloed van crimineel gedrag op echtscheidingskansen

In hoofdstuk 6 (onderzoeksvraag 3) gaan we een stap verder in de levensloop van de veroordeelden door de tegenovergestelde levensloopgebeurtenis te onderzoeken: echtscheiding. We hebben ons gericht op de vraag in hoeverre crimineel gedrag van invloed is op de kans om te scheiden. We houden daarbij niet alleen rekening met het criminele gedrag van de veroordeelde, maar ook met het criminele gedrag van de partner. Op basis van theoretische ideeën uit de familiesociologie verwachtten we dat het criminele gedrag van de veroordeelde van invloed is op de kosten en baten van de relatie en daarmee de kans op echtscheiding vergroot (Becker, 1981; Levinger, 1979). Over het criminele gedrag van de partner zijn tegengestelde effecten te verwachten. Aan de ene kant zouden overeenkomsten tussen partners in crimineel gedrag de stabiliteit van het huwelijk ten goede kunnen komen (wederzijds begrip). Aan de andere kant zouden overeenkomsten – in het geval van crimineel gedrag – tot instabiliteit kunnen leiden (beide partners hebben een criminele levensstijl en contact met justitie). Om de hypothesen te toetsen maken we gebruik van event history modellen. Met de modellen schatten we in hoeverre een crimineel verleden van invloed is op de kans om te scheiden.

We hebben allereerst gekeken naar de invloed van het criminele gedrag van de veroordeelden zelf. De resultaten laten zien dat de ernst van een crimineel verleden sterk samenhangt met de kans om te scheiden. Hoe meer veroordelingen een persoon op zijn of haar naam heeft staan, hoe groter de kans om te scheiden. Niet alleen een lager niveau van zelfcontrole, maar ook een toename in het ervaren stigma zou deze bevinding kunnen verklaren. Gevangenisstraf blijkt de kans om te scheiden nog verder te vergoten dan het veroordeeld-zijn op zich. Dit resultaat is in overeenstemming met de resultaten van eerdere Amerikaanse studies die zich gericht hebben op de relatie tussen gevangenisstraf en echtscheidingskansen. Het strookt met het idee dat gevangenisstraf delinquenten niet alleen weerhoudt van het plegen van delicten, maar ook onbedoelde neveneffecten heeft: het zet huwe-

lijksrelaties op het spel (Lopoo & Western, 2005). Naast de ernst van een crimineel verleden blijkt de timing van veroordelingen van belang te zijn: de relatie tussen het hebben van een strafblad en de kans om te scheiden wordt zwakker naarmate de veroordeling langer geleden is. Een mogelijke verklaring voor deze bevinding zou kunnen zijn dat het stigma dat verbonden is aan een strafblad minder sterk wordt gedurende de tijd.

Vervolgens hebben we ook rekening gehouden met het criminele verleden van de huwelijkspartner. De resultaten laten zien dat de effecten van crimineel gedrag op echtscheidingskansen eveneens afhangen van het criminele gedrag van de echtgenoot. Huwelijken waarbij beide partners crimineel zijn hebben de grootste kans om in een echtscheiding te eindigen, gevolgd door huwelijken waar slechts een van de partners een strafblad heeft. Wederzijds begrip tussen partners weegt blijkbaar niet op tegen de ontwrichtende werking van hun criminele levensstijlen.

Tot slot komt uit de analyses naar voren dat de effecten van het criminele gedrag van veroordeelden en hun partners vooral sterk zijn als veroordelingen tijdens het huwelijk hebben plaatsgevonden. Dit lijkt erop te duiden dat niet alleen zelfcontrole, maar ook andere factoren (stigma, gevangenisstraf) een rol spelen. Als alleen zelfcontrole de scheidingskansen zou beïnvloeden dan zou de timing van veroordelingen geen effect moeten hebben. Zelfcontrole is een kenmerk dat relatief stabiel blijft over de tijd en dus in dezelfde mate aanwezig zal zijn voor als tijdens het huwelijk.

De invloed van scheiden op crimineel gedrag

Uit hoofdstuk 6 kwam naar voren dat een crimineel verleden de kans om te scheiden vergroot, vooral als de echtgenoot zelf ook een strafblad heeft. In hoofdstuk 7 (onderzoeksvraag 4) hebben we ons gericht op de vraag in hoeverre scheiden van invloed is op de verdere ontwikkeling van crimineel gedrag. De effecten van echtscheiding zouden sterk af kunnen hangen van het criminele verleden van de echtgenoot. Voor personen die van een criminele echtgenoot scheiden zou het goed zo kunnen zijn dat criminaliteitsstimulerende effecten van echtscheiding beperkt of zelfs afwezig zijn. Net als bij trouwen doet zich het probleem voor dat scheiden een gebeurtenis is die niet “at random” plaatsvindt. Om zo goed mogelijk rekening te houden met dit selectieprobleem, worden twee soorten panelmodellen geschat: random effects en fixed effects modellen. Bij de echtgenoten is zowel het criminele verleden voor als tijdens het huwelijk meegenomen in de analyses.

In overeenstemming met de uitkomsten van eerdere studies blijkt uit onze analyses allereerst dat echtscheiding voor een toename in crimineel gedrag zorgt. Als we vervolgens ook rekening houden met het criminele verleden van de echtgenoot, dan komt er echter een heel ander beeld naar voren. Criminaliteitstimulerende effecten van scheiding worden alleen gevonden voor veroordeelden die van een niet-criminele partner scheiden. Voor veroordeelden die van een criminele echtgenoot scheiden verschilt het aantal veroordelingen niet van perioden waarin ze ongehuwd zijn. Dit suggereert dat huwelijken met criminele echtgenoten minder beschermend zijn dan huwelijken met niet-criminele echtgenoten. Niet alleen de kenmerken van de “criminele relatie” (instabiel), maar ook de persoonlijke

kenmerken van de criminele partner (lage zelfcontrole) zouden kunnen verklaren waarom het verbreken van de binding met een criminele partner geen criminaliteitsstimulerende werking hoeft te hebben.

Conclusie en discussie

Het doel van deze studie was om meer inzicht te krijgen in de beschermende – criminaliteitsremmende – werking van het huwelijk. Het is de eerste studie waarin niet alleen de complete criminele carrières van veroordeelden, maar ook die van hun huwelijkspartners centraal staan. Er is op verschillende manieren vooruitgang geboekt ten opzichte van eerder onderzoek. Ten eerste hebben we verschillende nieuwe onderzoeksvragen geformuleerd. Ten tweede hebben we theoretische vooruitgang geboekt door inzichten uit de levensloopcriminologie te combineren met inzichten uit de familiesociologie. Ten derde hebben we methodologische vooruitgang geboekt door gebruik te maken van een unieke longitudinale dataset. De resultaten van onze studie hebben belangrijke implicaties voor theorieën en onderzoek op het gebied van de levensloopcriminologie.

Een eerste belangrijke bevinding die uit het onderzoek naar voren komt is dat veroordeelden te maken hebben met zogenoemde “processen van cumulatief nadeel.” Eerder crimineel gedrag beïnvloedt de huwelijksuitkomsten van veroordeelden op zo’n manier dat het hun toekomstige criminele gedrag verder doet toenemen. Veroordeelden hebben een kleinere kans om te trouwen, een grotere kans om een criminele partner te trouwen en een grotere kans om te scheiden – vooral als de partner zelf ook crimineel is. Echtscheiding kan vervolgens weer de verdere ontwikkeling van crimineel gedrag stimuleren. Toekomstige studies op het gebied van partnerrelaties en crimineel gedrag zouden zich bewust moeten zijn van dit soort selectieprocessen en expliciet aandacht moeten besteden aan de invloed van crimineel gedrag op huwelijksvorming, partnerselectie en echtscheidingskansen.

Een tweede belangrijke bevinding die uit het onderzoek naar voren komt, is dat het idee van het huwelijk als een beschermende – criminaliteitsremmende – institutie genuanceerd moet worden. Voor mannen blijkt de criminaliteitsremmende werking van het huwelijk af te hangen van het criminele verleden van de echtgenoot. Huwelijken hebben alleen een criminaliteitsremmende werking als er met een niet-criminele partner getrouwd wordt. Voor scheiding vinden we een soortgelijk resultaat: zowel voor mannen als vrouwen zorgt scheiden alleen voor een toename in crimineel gedrag als er van een niet-criminele partner wordt gescheiden. Op basis van deze resultaten plaatsen we twee kanttekeningen bij huidige theorieën binnen de levensloopcriminologie (met name de informele sociale controle theorie van Sampson en Laub). Ten eerste hoeven de bindingen tussen partners niet noodzakelijk sterk te zijn als beide partners crimineel zijn (Simons e.a., 2002). Als beide partners er een criminele levensstijl op na houden, dan hebben zij beide waarschijnlijk persoonlijke kenmerken of zijn zij beide betrokken bij situaties die de stabiliteit van het huwelijk ondermijnen (Western, 2006: 5). Ten tweede wordt crimineel gedrag niet noodzakelijk ontmoedigd als beide partners delinquent zijn. Als de huwelijkspartner ook een crimineel verleden heeft, dan zal het vertonen van crimineel gedrag minder snel ontmoedigd worden en minder

snel de continuïteit van de relatie bedreigen. Om meer inzicht te krijgen in de relatie tussen trouwen en crimineel gedrag zouden toekomstige studies zich niet alleen moeten richten op de relatie op zich, maar ook aandacht moeten besteden aan de criminele carrières van de partners.

Ondanks de unieke gegevens die in deze studie gebruikt zijn, kent het gebruik van officiële data een aantal beperkingen. Deze beperkingen bieden tevens aanknopingspunten voor vervolgonderzoek. Ten eerste gaat het hier om een onderzoek naar officieel geregistreerde criminele carrières. Niet alle delicten worden bekend bij de politie of leiden tot een rechtszaak. Dit betekent dat we waarschijnlijk het criminele gedrag van de veroordeelden onderschatten. Hoewel aan zelfgerapporteerde data ook nadelen verbonden zijn (non-respons, sociaalwenselijke antwoorden, geheugenproblemen), zou een combinatie van beide soorten data meer inzicht kunnen geven in het daadwerkelijke criminele gedrag. Ten tweede was er voor deze studie alleen informatie beschikbaar over huwelijken. Vanaf de jaren zeventig werd het echter steeds gewoner om eerst te gaan samenwonen voor het huwelijk en werd samenwonen ook steeds meer gezien als een alternatief voor het huwelijk (Kalmijn, 2002; Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2000). Met het groeiende aantal samenwonenden in Nederland, de Verenigde Staten en andere landen is vervolgonderzoek naar andere typen relaties hard nodig. Ten derde hebben we geen volledig inzicht gekregen in de mechanismen die aan de bestudeerde relaties ten grondslag liggen. Het ontrafelen van deze mechanismen en het vaststellen van hun relatieve belang is een belangrijke taak voor vervolgonderzoek. In het ideale geval zou een studie als de CCLS aangevuld moeten worden met enquêtes en interviews. Hierdoor kan niet alleen meer inzicht worden verkregen in andere (niet-geregistreerde) relatievormen en niet-geregistreerd crimineel gedrag, maar bijvoorbeeld ook in persoonlijkheidskenmerken, sociaaleconomische status, stigma en de eigen houding ten opzichte van een relatie of huwelijk.

Tot slot kunnen op basis van onze resultaten verschillende nieuwe onderzoeksvragen worden geformuleerd voor vervolgonderzoek. Ten eerste blijft het ontrafelen van de complexe relaties tussen trouwen, scheiden en ouderschap een belangrijke taak voor vervolgonderzoek. Huwelijken zouden bijvoorbeeld vooral beschermend kunnen zijn als er ook kinderen aanwezig zijn (Farrington & West, 1995). Ten tweede zouden toekomstige studies zich kunnen richten op de timing van trouwen en scheiden. Huwelijken zouden bijvoorbeeld minder beschermend kunnen zijn als personen op de “verkeerde” leeftijd trouwen of eerst kinderen krijgen en daarna pas trouwen (Theobald & Farrington, 2010). Ten derde blijven opeenvolgende huwelijksrelaties een belangrijk onderwerp voor vervolgonderzoek. Tweede en derde huwelijken zouden een heel andere invloed kunnen hebben op de ontwikkeling van crimineel gedrag dan eerste huwelijken. Ten vierde hebben we in de huidige studie om pragmatische redenen alleen het criminele gedrag van de partner voor het huwelijk meegenomen bij het vaststellen van de effecten van trouwen en partnerselectie op crimineel gedrag. Vervolgonderzoek zou zich meer kunnen richten op wederzijdse beïnvloeding tussen partners in crimineel gedrag tijdens het huwelijk. Ten vijfde blijft de concentratie van crimineel gedrag binnen families een belangrijk onderwerp voor vervolgonderzoek. Als beide partners crimineel zijn, dan zou dat de kans vergroten dat de kinderen eveneens op het

criminele pad belanden (Farrington, Barnes & Lambert, 1996; Farrington, Jolliffe, Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber & Kalb, 2001; Rowe & Farrington, 1997).

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Curriculum vitae

Marieke van Schellen was born in Kampen, the Netherlands, on September 16, 1982. She studied Sociology at the University of Groningen and received her Master's degree in 2005 (cum laude). During her study, she conducted a traineeship at the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR). Her thesis was awarded with the Gadourek thesis award (Sociology, University of Groningen) and the thesis award of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV). In 2006 she started as a PhD student at the Department of Sociology / ICS, Utrecht University. Her PhD project "Marital relationships and crime across the life course: the criminal careers of convicts and their spouses" was subsidized by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) in the Open Competition. In 2008 she was a visiting scholar at the School of Criminal Justice, University at Albany, State University of New York. She is currently employed as a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Sociology / ICS, Utrecht University. Her research is part of the Prison Project: a large-scale national study on the (un)intended effects of imprisonment.

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