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# A rational choice approach to professional crime using a meta-synthesis of the qualitative literature

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A Rational Choice Approach to Professional Crime Using a Meta-synthesis of the  
Qualitative Literature

by

Douglas J. Wholl

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Department of Criminology  
College of Behavioral and Community Sciences  
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## Dedication

I would not have been able to reach the end of this journey without the understanding, love, and support of my friends and family. Thank you all for being there for me through this challenging process.

## Acknowledgements

The successful completion of this thesis could not have been accomplished without the knowledge and guidance of my thesis committee. I would like to thank Drs. Cochran and Palacios for encouraging my involvement in the Professional Thieves Working Group, which both sparked my interest in this offender group and allowed me to become immersed in the literature on professional crime early in my graduate career. Dr. Cochran's insights into the ability of the rational choice perspective to serve as a guiding theoretical framework capable of synthesizing concepts from multiple disciplines became a central theme for my thesis, and his constant input and guidance had significant impact on my research and methodological decisions throughout the thesis process. This thesis would also not have been possible without Dr. Palacios' discovery of a methodological technique that could be effectively implemented within the current study. I would also like to thank Dr. Sellers for her guidance with respect to keeping the objectives of my thesis focused and prioritized in a way that would offer the greatest benefit to the criminological literature. I would also like to give special thanks to Dr. Palacios, who became my qualitative mentor as I embarked upon this demanding but worthwhile journey. Finally, I would like to thank the faculty and graduate students within the Department of Criminology who offered me academic and emotional support throughout this entire process.

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## A Rational Choice Approach to Professional Crime Using a Meta-synthesis of the Qualitative Literature

Douglas J. Wholl

### ABSTRACT

Since the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, rational choice models have been applied extensively to criminological research, theory, and policy in an effort to understand crime and criminality. Over the past few decades, the rational choice perspective has attempted to integrate theoretical concepts, operational measures, and research findings from contemporary studies within the psychology, sociology and criminology disciplines, which have attempted to re-operationalize what was already conceptualized in the expected utility model (i.e., individuals choose to engage in criminal activity if the expected utility of crime exceeds that of all other behavioral options) by incorporating additional factors (e.g., a broader range of potential rewards, moral inhibition, emotional elements) into the measurement process. However, despite an effort to expand the expected utility function in the rational choice perspective, rational choice studies have most often been applied to street offenders. Using a sample of six books containing the lives and experiences of professional criminals, this study utilizes a qualitative meta-synthesis (in which grounded theory methods and thick description are employed for the identification and integration of key concepts from within the sample) to examine the effectiveness of the rational choice perspective in the explanation of professional crime,

and assess the efficacy of these operational enhancements while providing conceptual clarity within the rational choice perspective.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Since the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, rational choice models have been applied extensively to criminological research, theory, and policy in an effort to understand crime and criminality. Derived from economic models of expected utility, rational choice models of crime propose that individuals choose to engage in criminal activity if the expected utility of crime exceeds that of all other behavioral options (Clarke & Cornish, 1985; Clarke & Cornish, 1986). An offender's perceptions of the benefits and costs of criminal activity may be affected by social, psychological, and situational factors (Clarke & Cornish, 1985; Clarke & Cornish, 1986). The rational choice perspective (RCP) offers a theoretical framework for explaining the rationality of individual choice, and its theoretical explanatory power has grown substantially over the past few decades (McCarthy, 2002).

While early rational choice models built around the expected utilities (EU) function have often been criticized as being limited by their simplistic cost-benefit analysis in the criminal decision-making process, these early models were actually designed to neglect specifying some cost and benefit variables in order to simplify the measurement process (Von Nuemann & Morgenstern, 1953). In other words, economists who organized their models around the EU function intentionally refrained from measuring concepts such as emotion, experience, or the specific perceived costs and

benefits of a criminal act as separate variables because it was believed that simplifying the measurement process in this respect would provide satisfactory operational measures without sacrificing conceptual clarity. Over the past few decades, contemporary studies within the psychology, sociology, and criminology disciplines have attempted to re-operationalize what was already conceptualized in the EU model, and have incorporated additional factors (e.g., a broader range of potential rewards, moral inhibition, emotional elements) into the measurement process that were simply measured as “tastes,” “risks,” or “costs” in the early economic models.

An attempt to create a synthesis of these measures and research findings took place in the mid-1980's with the development of the rational choice perspective (RCP), which proposed that in order to gain a full understanding of the offender decision-making process, it was first necessary to examine the commonalities between the theoretical concepts and operational measures of these disciplines and explore how contemporary concepts of human rationality and the process of choice could be connected within a rational choice framework through the original concept of expected utility (Clarke & Cornish, 1985; Cornish & Clarke, 1986; Grasmick & Bursik, 1990, Cochran et al, 1990; Clarke & Felson, 1993). The new RCP framework was designed with the intention of studying the criminal decision-making process while recognizing an offender's limited (i.e., bounded) rationality, having a crime-specific focus, and making the distinction between criminal involvement and criminal events (Clarke & Cornish, 1985, p. 178). Cornish and Clarke's landmark contributions to the development of the RCP framework, including such prominent works as *The Reasoning Criminal* (1986) which advanced notions of rational choice and reasoning offenders through the integration of several

theoretical strong points from several disciplines, heavily influenced the advancement of contemporary RCP models over the next few decades.

The explanatory power of the RCP has been recognized as exceptionally versatile in its application to a wide variety of criminological phenomena (Cornish & Clarke, 1986; Clarke & Felson, 1993). However, from its inception and throughout its evolution, the RCP has most widely been applied to the study of street crime (Shover & Hochstetler, 2006). While empirical findings on the decision-making processes of street criminals have led to important theoretical developments and criminal justice policy initiatives, there is an extremely large gap in the RCP literature concerning the choices and decision-making processes of professional criminals. Some research has been conducted on white-collar, corporate, or organized crime within an RCP framework and has demonstrated that these offenders engage in more rational decision-making processes than street criminals, are not consumed by drugs or other self-destructive behaviors, and can delay short-term self-gratification for more long-term rewards (Shover & Routh, 2005). The efficacy of studying professional criminals within an RCP framework remains to be sufficiently addressed.

The classification of “professional criminal” subsumes a variety of offender types (e.g., thieves, fences, drug dealers) who share several commonalities: in addition to viewing crime as a career, offenders within these groups often exhibit higher levels of organization, risk management and rationality than what may be seen in the criminal activity of street offenders, thereby offering them greater levels of status and success (Sutherland, 1937; Klockars, 1974; Steffensmeier, 1986; Adler, 1993; Chambliss, 2004; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005). Although this offender group is well-suited for a study

embracing concepts of rational choice (due to the levels of rationality exhibited in their decision-making processes and risk-management strategies), professional criminals comprise an offender group rarely studied in criminology due to their hidden nature. The statement of the problem below addresses how the current study attempts to utilize a qualitative meta-synthesis in a sample of professional criminals to address the research objectives of the current study.

### ***Statement of the Problem***

The periodical assessment of theory is an important endeavor to undertake in the discipline of criminology in order to “have a clear sense of where we are and where we should head” (Cullen, Wright, & Blevins, 2006, p. 2). Cullen et al. (2006) recognize that such endeavors are rare within the field of criminology, yet necessary in order to “move criminology forward in the organization of its theoretical knowledge” (p. 2). While meta-analysis has been demonstrated as a useful analytic technique to formulate such assessments (see Cullen et al., 2006), it is inappropriate to use for qualitative studies. Research that addresses the lives and decision-making processes of professional criminals (especially within an RCP framework) is mostly available in the form of ethnographic accounts and other forms of qualitative material. In order to “take stock” (p. 2) of the RCP, a qualitative meta-synthesis is implemented within the current study in an effort to assess the explanatory power of the RCP with respect to the decision-making processes and criminal activity of professional criminals. Unlike meta-analyses of quantitative data, which attempt to reduce data findings to a unit of commonality and are aggregative in nature, qualitative meta-synthesis aims to enhance theory through the development of possible interpretations of the data and the integration of such concepts (Noblit & Hare,

1988; Sandelowski et al., 1997). In other words, while quantitative meta-analysis is concerned with data synthesis, a qualitative meta-synthesis focuses on synthesizing the substance of the data and bringing to light conceptual themes which, as a whole, are “greater than the sum of parts” (Noblit & Hare, 1988; Campbell et al, 2003, p. 672).

The current study also attempts to offer conceptual clarity within the RCP. While the RCP finds its origins in the expected utility model, contemporary studies within several disciplines (e.g., psychology, sociology, criminology) have identified operational shortcomings within the EU formula. Specifically, these studies attempted to incorporate additional factors into the measurement process in an effort to operationally specify the conceptual components of offender decision-making within the EU formula, and in turn present a more thorough exploration of the offender decision-making process. In the mid 1980’s, the RCP identified the necessity to examine the commonalities between the concepts and measures of these disciplines and connect them within a rational choice framework that emphasizes human rationality and notions of crime-as-choice. In addition to assessing the efficacy of the RCP with respect to the explanation of professional crime, a meta-synthesis of the qualitative literature on professional criminals is utilized in the current study in an effort to assess the utility of these operational enhancements. As a result of this process, the current study intends to offer conceptual clarity within the RCP framework by clarifying concepts that have often been taken for granted within the framework. The review of the literature and the methodological framework of the current study are outlined below.

Chapter 2 begins with a comprehensive review of the rational choice literature, starting with the Von Nuemann-Morgenstern expected utility (EU) model and

progressing to economic and deterrence models of criminal offending. An exploration of the literature from several disciplines (e.g., cognitive psychology, sociology, environmental criminology) is then presented in this chapter, with respect to how these disciplines have contributed to the RCP in their own attempt to operationally expand the expected utility function, and further, how these contributions were then synthesized within a rational choice framework of criminal offending. After identifying the core theoretical principles of the RCP and exploring how the incorporation of additional measures (i.e., the specification of variables within the EU function) into the framework has affected the study of the offender decision-making process, this chapter addresses several criticisms of the RCP, recommendations for strengthening or replacing the perspective, and some responses to these challenges. The chapter concludes by presenting a review of the research on white-collar, corporate, and organized crime relevant to the RCP, as well as addressing the efficacy of using the RCP in a qualitative study of professional crime.

Chapter 3 identifies the study's research design and methods employed. The study characteristics are provided and justification for the purposive case selection process is offered. This chapter also describes the key concepts and coding procedures used within the meta-synthesis process and how these data will be synthesized using a line of argument approach.

Chapter 4 begins with an examination of the appraisal process that resulted in the exclusion of several books in the sample from the final synthesis. Operationalizations of RCP categories which have been added, revised or further specified during the global review process are also examined. This chapter presents the findings of the synthesis,

beginning with an examination of the prevalence of specific operationalizations and an exploration of the similarities and differences between the books in the final sample. Next, this chapter explores patterns and themes across the sample as a whole, and identifies key descriptors extracted from the data, which leads to the creation of metaphors that are integrated within the final line of argument synthesis.

Chapter 5 presents a discussion and concluding remarks of the study. The purpose of the study is revisited, with an examination of how these objectives were approached in the research process. Interpretations of the findings are offered, followed by an examination of the reliability and validity of the study. The limitations of the study are also presented, followed by concluding remarks that identify future research possibilities in the area of the RCP and assess the utility of applying a qualitative meta-synthesis to criminological phenomena.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

A review of the literature on rational choice begins by exploring the economic origins of the RCP, beginning with the Von Nuemann-Morgenstern expected utility (EU) model.

#### *The Von Nuemann-Morgenstern Expected Utility Model*

Von Nuemann and Morgenstern (1953) argue that there is no reason why economics should not include the use of mathematics. They claim that any lack of success in using mathematics in economics has been due to the ambiguity in economic concepts and the misuse of mathematical tools, and not due to the lack of incorporating psychological factors or other factors related to the “human element” (Von Nuemann & Morgenstern, 1953, p. 3). Von Nuemann and Morgenstern (1953) identify the importance of knowing as much as possible about individual behavior and “the simplest forms of exchange” (Von Nuemann & Morgenstern, 1953, p. 7).

Traditional economists have identified the principle motivation of individuals within the economic community as the “maximum of utility or satisfaction” (Von Nuemann & Morgenstern, 1953, p. 8). In turn, “rationality” (p. 9) in the EU model is defined by the individual who attempts to achieve this maximum (Von Nuemann & Morgenstern 1953). Von Nuemann and Morgenstern (1953) recognize the conceptual and operational complexities when addressing notions of utility and have attempted to

simplify the measurement of utilities or preferences to a “single monetary commodity” (p. 8) that may be quantified and subject to comparative mathematical analysis.

The utility function in the EU model measures the strength of an individual’s preferences, as well as one’s attitudes toward risk, which are central to models of criminal choice (Lattimore & Witte, 1986). Economists do not claim that risk taking is a preferred outcome of individuals but rather that one’s attitude toward risk taking results in the differences between an individual’s expected utility and expected value of an action (McCarthy, 2002). In other words, an individual’s risk attitudes (e.g., risk-averse, risk-neutral, or risk-seeking) will have an effect on one’s preferences through its influence on the individual’s definitions of different probability outcomes (McCarthy, 2002). While there has been some debate regarding the subjective (perceived) versus the objective probabilities of possible outcomes within a situation, Lattimore and Witte (1986) note several arguments (Hey, 1979; Schoemaker, 1982) that recognize the EU model’s inability to mathematically distinguish between the two, thereby rendering the distinction unnecessary.

The expected utility of an action is calculated by “multiplying a person’s utility of each possible outcome by the probability that it will occur if an action is chosen, and then summing across all possible outcomes” (McCarthy, 2002, p. 420). Within the EU model, an individual’s preferences are complete (i.e., an individual is able to order all possible outcome combinations in terms of value), as well as being transitive and stable (i.e., an individual’s preferences are logically consistent) (McCarthy, 2002). Individual preferences are influenced by time preferences (i.e., level of value placed on current and future benefits) and the potential costs and benefits of the act (relative to one another),

which are often described as individual assessments of the potential level of satisfaction that may be obtained (McCarthy, 2002).

Theories of decision making under risk that have developed from the EU model identify that when faced with a complicated decision, an individual will choose an alternative that represents one's "basic" (p. 11) taste and forms to one's risk-taking preferences (Schoemaker, 1980). The utility function incorporates each of these factors into the decision-making process and therefore an individual's attempt to maximize the expected utility of a complex situation is representative of their rationality (Schoemaker, 1980). In the next section, developments of expected utility concepts within the field of economics are explored.

### ***Economics***

Becker (1968) suggests that "a useful theory of criminal behavior can dispense with special theories of anomie, psycho-logical inadequacies, or inheritance of special traits and simply extend the economist's usual analysis of choice" (p. 170). Within early economic models developed by Becker (1968) and other economists, this choice was based on an individual's recognition of legal and illegal incentives which led to the assessment of potential rewards from non-criminal and criminal opportunities (Dahlback, 1998). In other words, an individual will choose to engage in a criminal activity if the perceived criminal rewards outweigh the potential rewards from legal work (Dahlback, 1998). This assessment is based on the Von Neumann-Morgenstern (1953) EU model, in which an individual will make a choice in an attempt to maximize the expected utility while considering the probability and severity of punishment (Dahlback, 1998). Deterrence research is based on this notion of utility-based choice, in that as the

probability and severity of punishment increases, an individual's likelihood of engaging in criminal activity is reduced (Dahlback, 1998).

Becker (1974) also demonstrates the ability of the economic theory to expand beyond the monetary market framework in his article on the "new economics of the family" (p. 317). Becker explains that "commodities" (p. 317), or objects of choice, are both consumed and produced by the family based on time, goods, and services (Becker, 1974, p. 317). Further, the family is then assumed to maximize utility based on these commodities and relative to other variables and functions within the family (i.e., wages, time and production in and out of the home) (Becker, 1974). Becker also contests that the economic theory, a "powerful tool for understanding human behavior" (p. 319), is also applicable to other socially relevant issues such as the economic analysis of education and government regulation and politics (Becker, 1974).

### *Contemporary Studies*

Dahlback (1998) contests that the temporal ordering of factors, methodological problems of measurement, and causal interpretations of deterrence relationships have led to different conclusions regarding the effect of punishment probability and severity perceptions on the choice to engage in criminal behavior. Specifically, the probability and severity of punishment has not been measured accurately with respect to risk perceptions (i.e., the likelihood of getting caught, expectations of punishment) in cross-sectional or panel studies in the past (Dahlback, 1998). Dahlback (1998) therefore proposes a decision-making model of expected utility based on the Von Neumann-Morgenstern model which stresses the individual's desire to maximize utility and incorporates perceptions of risk. Through this model, the choice whether or not to

engage in crime can be measured with respect to perceptions of punishment severity and probability, as well as considerations of the utilities of non-criminal and criminal alternatives and the utility of success (Dahlback, 1998). Dahlback (1998) recognizes that when individuals are making deliberate choices, they do make criminal decisions that are strongly affected by products of utility values. Dahlback (1998) also recognizes that the complexities of the decision-making process (e.g., unconscious decisions, complications in identifying new information while dealing with concurrent effects of risk and uncertainty) may have an effect on an individual's choice through their influence on the perception of the probability and severity of punishment.

In Mocan, Billups, and Overland's (2004) proposal of a new economic model of criminal activity expanding on classical economic concepts, two types of human capital are identified: legal and criminal. In this model, both legal and criminal capital can be enhanced or depreciated based on participation and investment in legal and criminal sectors, and each sector can be influenced by the other (i.e., time spent in each sector) (Mocan et al., 2004). The probability of incarceration depends on an individual's level of criminal activity and the level of criminal human capital, and while both types of human capital may depreciate in prison, legal capital depreciates more due to a "loss-of-reputation effect" (Mocan et al., 2004, p. 678). Punishment also leads to a loss of income, and the change in the level of human capital while in prison may influence post-prison behavior in two ways: legal human capital can be enhanced through rehabilitation (which may decrease criminal activity after release) or criminal human capital can be enhanced through prison culture (which may increase criminal activity after release) (Mocan et al., 2004). The benefits of switching from the criminal to the legal sector is

explained in this model through: the uncertainty of obtaining criminal income which encourages the acquisition of legal human capital, changes in the perceptions of punishment (e.g., certainty, severity), and changes in the legal and criminal capital returns relative to one another (Mocan et al., 2004).

### ***Deterrence***

Notions of economic deterrence can be traced back to Beccaria's (1986) landmark work *On Crimes and Punishments (1764)*, which asserted that punishment should be "public, prompt, necessary, the minimum possible under the given circumstances, proportionate to the crimes, and established by law" (p. 81). In this work, Beccaria illustrated the importance of creating punishments that were proportionate to the crime committed, while considering the harm that was done against society by the criminal. The purpose of punishment, according to Beccaria (1986), is not to torment the criminal or undo the crime, but instead to discourage the criminal from committing new crimes and deterring others from engaging in such harmful activities as well. In this way, an appropriate punishment will impose the least amount of harm on the criminal but create the longest-lasting and most effective impression on the criminal's mind (Beccaria, 1986). In addition, Beccaria (1986) asserted that the certainty of punishment has a much greater deterrent effect on a criminal than the severity of punishment, in that exceedingly severe punishments would only lead to more hardened criminals and an inability to maintain a proportionate crime-punishment continuum. Therefore, prompt punishments that both follow the crime in close temporal proximity and are proportionate to the nature of the crime/motive of the criminal will help create the association between crime and

punishment in the criminal's mind, thereby weakening the seductions of potentially adventitious crimes in the future (Beccaria, 1986).

Derived from Beccaria's (1986) work and other economic models of crime (e.g., Becker, 1968), the deterrence model arrived at the center of classical criminology in the 1960's (Akers, 1990). Its basic premise was that motivation for criminal activity was counteracted by a rational calculation of the distress caused by legal penalties (Akers, 1990). An individual's involvement in illegal behavior was said to be determined by the perceived certainty of arrest and perceived severity of punishment (Grasmick & Green Jr., 1980). Ecological studies (that studied how sanction levels and crime rates varied across time and space) and interrupted time-series studies (that studied how specific policy interventions affected specific criminal activity) displayed some success in identifying a negative relationship between sanction threats and crime rates (Nagin, 2002).

Assertions of deterrence as capable of reducing crime, however, were often critiqued based on the findings that perceived formal risks of punishment had no impact on criminal behavior without taking other factors into consideration (Piliavin, Gartner, Thornton, & Matsueda, 1986). In their examination of the RCP, which employed a longitudinal design using three populations of individuals at increased risk of formal sanctions, Piliavin et al. (1986) found that the opportunities and rewards that present themselves in a criminal act, as well as respect for the criminal act itself (i.e., criminal status), have a significant effect on the individual's decision to offend, whereas the perception of risk of formal sanctions alone had no effect. This study also demonstrated

that a more complex RCP model was needed that did not oversimplify the cognitive process that takes place during criminal activity (Piliavin et al., 1986).

Erickson and Gibbs (1978) identified the importance of directly testing both the objective properties (i.e., the ratio of prison admission to the number of offenses reported to the police) and the perceptual properties of punishment (i.e., the perceived risk of arrest) within the deterrence doctrine. They contest that findings in past studies have not directly tested the main principles of the deterrence doctrine and have not proved that “objective certainty of punishment is related to crime rates *through* the perceived certainty of punishment” (Erickson & Gibbs, 1978, p. 254). In their study, which compared the objective and perceived certainty of arrest and the crime rate across ten different types of crime using interview techniques in a random sample of 1200 Tuscan (Arizona) residents, findings indicated that: objective and perceived certainty of punishment were moderately (directly) related; perceived certainty of punishment and the crime rate were moderately (inversely) related; and there was no relation between the objective certainty of punishment and crime rates “through the perceived certainty of punishment” (p. 263), which indicates that deterrence alone (i.e., the objective threat of formal punishment) has no significant effect on an individual’s likelihood of engaging in criminal activity (Erikson & Gibbs, 1978).

Clarke and Cornish (1985) stated that engaging in crime is what leads to the reassessment of moral standards that Greenberg (1981) referred to as “after-the-fact rationalizations” (p. 1095). In other words, while offenders go through processes of assessment in regards to money, certainty of success, and amount of gain and risk involved, an offender’s perception of the criminal behavior is affected by the behavior

itself, and not by the perceived risk that may result from the behavior (Clarke & Cornish, 1985). Paternoster, Saltzman, Waldo, and Chiricos (1983) reached similar findings in their study, in which they analyzed two different sets of panel data including interviews with 300 randomly selected college students at two different times (one year apart) and self-administered questionnaires of high school students at two different times (six months apart). Their findings indicated that cross-sectional analysis has no way of determining causal order, that low risk perceptions of punishment certainty and severity may result after criminal involvement, and that little perceptual stability is found over time with respect to sanctions (Paternoster et al., 1983; see also Green, 1989).

With respect to crime participation, continuation, and desistance, Paternoster (1989) found that the perceived certainty or severity of punishment had no effect on the decision to offend for the first time, and the decision to desist from offending was also unaffected by perceptions of legal threats. In their study, in which data were collected from nine public high schools that were demographically representative of their respective SMSA (Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area), an offender's decision to initially participate and continue to participate in criminal behavior portrayed a more cognitive approach than was offered by most deterrence models of criminal offending (Paternoster, 1989).

Nagin and Pogarsky's (2001) study supported early deterrence research that stated that the certainty of punishment has a much greater deterrent effect than the severity of punishment, and also found support that extralegal consequences such as stigma costs had deterrent effects as least as substantial as legal consequences. Green's (1989) study which used cross-sectional and panel measures to test deterrence effects on drunk driving

resulted in mixed findings. Cross-sectional analysis indicated that engaging in drunken driving was mostly influenced by threats of social disapproval and some demographic and social variables (e.g., age, gender, marital status, frequency of drinking), while the panel analyses indicated that moral commitment (in addition to the same socio-demographic variables with the exception of gender) had the greatest influence on an individual's likelihood of engaging in drunken driving (Green, 1989).

Pogarsky, Kim and Paternoster (2005) confirmed the assertion that there was little deterrence research that addressed how criminal perceptions were actually formed and modified. They stated that sanctions can not deter a possible offender without first having some effect on their perceptions of the risks involved with, or possible consequences of, the criminal behavior (Pogarsky et al., 2005). Similar declarations about offender perception were found in a study conducted by McCarthy and Hagan (2005), who stated that research must also pay attention to offenders' perceptions of a criminal occupation's prestige, the acquisition of new social criminal capital, and acquiring new skills. In addition, self-report questionnaires completed by 482 youths who were either homeless or living in some form of shelter indicated that the offender's perception of the danger involved in the criminal action also had a significant relationship with their decision to offend (McCarthy & Hagan, 2005). In Pogarsky et al.'s (2005) study, which utilized the National Youth Survey, it was found that prior offending experience, moral inhibition and perceived social costs all showed an effect on an offender's decision to engage in criminal activity while controlling for formal punishment.

Nagin (1998) suggests that deterrence research should move in several major directions: understanding the relationship between sanction risk perceptions and actual policy (as well as the consistency between intended and actual policy); examining the variation in policy responses across time and space; and recognizing the long-term effects of policy as opposed to only studying the short-term consequences. Massoglia and Macmillan (2002) also suggest incorporating the concept of “legal subjectivity” (p. 324) into deterrence research, which refers to an individual’s perceptions of criminal justice policy. Specifically, this concept identifies that individuals are socialized (at different levels) to perceive themselves to be subject to criminal justice control, and will therefore exhibit different degrees of how these perceptions are embedded into their “everyday cognitions” (p. 328). The next section moves beyond economic theory and notions of deterrence and identifies approaches to rational choice and the decision-making process within theories of cognitive psychology.

### ***Cognitive Psychology***

Psychologists recognize the necessity of understanding an individual’s motivation in order to predict individual behavior (Restle, 1961). In an attempt to understand how individual behavior is connected to motivation, psychologists draw from the economist’s notion of utility (Restle, 1961). However, in an attempt to make this connection, psychologists are more inclined to measure the choices actually made by individuals as opposed to the choices they think they should make (Restle, 1961, Manktelow & Over, 1993). Further, cognitive psychologists contest that an empirically tested theory of an individual’s decision-making processes must be constructed due to the fact that there are differences between the real world and the individual’s perception of the world based on

one's inability to collect and process all of the relevant information of a situation (Simon, 1997).

Within psychology, theories of bounded rationality recognize that rational or reasonable decisions are reached by processes that are "sensitive to the complexity of decision-making contexts and to learning processes as well" (Simon, 1997, p. 383). The decision-making process can be affected by unconscious choices or emotions and does not have to be self-maximizing in the short term (Monroe, 2001). In this way, rational approaches to decision-making can be consciously learned and developed to repeat successful outcomes of choices and lead to long term optimization strategies (Monroe, 2001).

While the study of the criminal decision making process is often identified as a cognitive issue, several studies illustrate the importance of incorporating emotion into this process (Hogarth, 1987; Mellers, Schwartz, Ho & Ritov, 1997; Nagin, 2007). Through their proposal of decision affect theory, Mellers et al. (1997) found that emotional experiences involved in the decision-making process of a criminal act are related to perceptions of risk and expected utility. They found that while decisions to engage in criminal acts are affected by the opportunity for and level of monetary gain, an emotional element based on perceived level of risk also affects the decision making process, in that an offender will choose an offense that will minimize the amount of experienced displeasure (Mellers et al., 1997). For example, an individual who experiences anxiety may fail to consider relevant alternatives in one's decision-making process and automatically expect to experience negative consequences as a result of one's choices (Hogarth, 1987). While emotions such as anxiety may actually help individuals

make better decisions in certain contexts, states of emotional arousal often lead to choices which do not represent the individual's best interest (e.g., an individual's momentary angered state may lead to choices that may be understood as "self-defeating") (Nagin, 2007, p. 265).

While cognitive psychologists recognize the importance of economic and decision-models in the examination of individual choice, they also propose the incorporation of psychological principles such as motivation, values, and emotion into models of cognition in order to gain a complete understanding of an individual's decision-making processes and choices (Shafir, 1993; Hogarth, 1987). In the next section, sociologists support the notion of incorporating such principles as emotion into a rational choice framework and identify the value of sociological contributions to the RCP.

### *Sociology of Choice*

Skepticism or criticisms of the RCP by sociologists are often based on misconceptions of the theory (Hechter & Kanazawa, 1997). The RCP is a multi-level theory, but due to the methodological complexity involving the social aspects of the theory, the RCP often focuses on individual action (i.e., subjective expected utility). Hechter and Kanazawa (1997) identify the value of sociological rational choice in its provision of a heuristic framework that can unify diverse findings within many sociological fields and can aid in making the logical links between different theories more explicit.

Sociological approaches to the RCP that recognize the emotional elements involved in the decision-making process have also demonstrated the utility of applying

rational choice models to areas outside of economics (Hechter & Kanazawa, 1997). Sociological rational choice utilizes rational choice principles to explain sociological issues within the realms of family (see also Becker 1974), religion, race, gender and politics (Hechter & Kanazawa, 1997). Sociological RCP approaches also attempt to explain social outcomes based on individual action as well as social context (Hechter & Kanazawa, 1997). Through the sociological RCP approach, rational actors will either look backwards (based on past choices and outcomes), forwards (assigning subjective probabilities to future choices based on available information) or sideways (attempting to imitate the success of individuals in the present) to help aid their decision-making process (Hechter & Kanazawa, 1997).

McCarthy (2002) suggests that sociological criminologists move beyond the “thrill of crime versus its material returns” (p. 437) debate and make an attempt to understand the differences in an individual’s preferences and cost benefit assessments, and stresses the importance of recognizing that offenders may adopt different strategies for different situations. In addition, these preferences and strategies must be more accurately specified in order to fully understand an offender’s decision-making process (McCarthy, 2002). McCarthy (2002) also suggests that criminologists should focus less on the background or deterministic forces of an individual and concentrate more on an individual’s “agency in making decisions” (p. 428).

Within the field of criminology, advances in the study of the human agency and rational choice were heavily influenced by environmental criminologists who identified the importance of studying an offender’s target selection and decision-making processes

(Brantingham & Brantingham, 1981). A review of the literature on environmental criminology is examined in the next section.

### ***Environmental Criminology***

Environmental criminologists argue that crime is contingent on the interaction and convergence of offender, victim/target, legal and locational dimensions of the situation (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1981). With respect to rational choice considerations, a major theme within environmental criminology is the recognition that an offender's choice for a victim or location is based on target selection and decision-making processes (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1981). These processes and choices are based on situational and environmental perceptions that allow the offender to distinguish which criminal opportunities provide the greatest level of reward with the least amount of risk involved (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1981, p. 3).

High rationality offenders are motivated by knowledge about the specifics of a target, which can come from a variety of sources including someone on the inside or a general review of the situation (Hochstetler, 2001). The information is then scrutinized through a process of "flaw hunting" (p. 45), in which offenders will look for weaknesses in one's target's security systems (Walsh, 1986). A "window of vulnerability" (p. 45) is then determined, which may influence the methods that will be used in that specific criminal situation (Walsh, 1986). These strategies illustrate that offenders use a logical decision-making process to select a target that best suits one's respective needs and prefer targets with low amounts of risk and high probability of success (Walsh, 1986).

Ever since studies on criminal events began in the 1970's, research in this field has continued its attempts to conceptually expand in its understanding of the complex

nature of the crime-environment connection (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1993). As a result, research on criminal motivation, readiness, and opportunity as well as target identification, suitability, and selection have been carefully scrutinized in an effort to identify criminal patterns within these relationships (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1993). By identifying and analyzing these patterns, or connections made between the offender, the target, and the process in between, there has been a better understanding of offender decision-making processes within the complexities of the environment (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1993). Contemporary studies that have contributed to this understanding are explored in a later section.

This section has examined the origins of the RCP, including the Von Nuemann Morgenstern expected utility (EU) model, as well as economic and deterrence models, heavily influenced by Becker (1968) and Becarria (1986), respectively, which advanced ideas related to the crime-punishment connection (e.g., punishment certainty; punishment severity). Elements found within the cognitive psychology and sociology disciplines (e.g., morals/values, motivation, emotion) were identified as essential to study in order to gain a full understanding of the offender decision-making process. Concepts of target selection, opportunity recognition, and risk management strategies found in environmental criminology were also provided important as important considerations in the study of the offender decision-making process.

### ***A Synthesis of Disciplines***

While studies exploring environmental and sociological factors were emerging and new decision-making models containing criminological concepts of information processing were being explored by the psychology and economic disciplines, it was not

until the mid 1980's that an effort to integrate the findings of these disciplines within a rational choice framework was attempted (Clarke & Cornish, 1985; Cornish & Clarke, 1986). As a result, new methods of studying criminal offending stemming from the core principles of economic models embracing notions of expected utility were implemented that incorporated findings from several disciplines into a rational choice framework and presented contemporary views on the criminal decision-making process. This interest in the offender's decision making process moved beyond specific situational factors or criminal opportunities and focused on "crime as a way of life" (Clarke & Felson, 1993, p. 4). Longitudinal cohort studies, studies of the criminal opportunity structure, target vulnerability studies, and crime-prevention studies using interview techniques were developed to gain a greater understanding of the offender decision-making process (Clarke & Cornish, 1985). These studies offered new focuses and methods of investigation in an attempt to understand the role that opportunities and rewards played in criminal lifestyle, as well as how this lifestyle actually developed (Clarke & Cornish, 1985). Studies on burglary (with a focus on risk perceptions and target selection) and auto-theft demonstrated the importance of studying concepts of choice within a decision-making framework (Clarke & Cornish, 1985). These studies, which emphasized the importance of expanding the RCP to study the choices and decision-making processes of rational criminal actors (i.e., by operationally expanding the EU function through the integration of theoretical principles and research findings from several disciplines), are examined in the following section.

### ***The Rational Choice Perspective***

The RCP is centered on the rationality of criminal offending, based upon the offender's perceived balance of the costs and rewards of crime relative to the expected utility of other choices that may influence the decision to offend (Cornish & Clark, 1986). The three main components of the RCP are: 1) the concept of a reasoning offender, 2) a crime-specific focus, and 3) establishment of distinct decision models for both criminal events and criminal involvement (Cornish & Clark, 1986). The RCP proposes that offenders will engage in criminal behavior to benefit themselves, and that engaging in criminal activity requires a rational involvement of decisions and choices to weigh that benefit (relative to risk and cost perceptions), a process that is often constrained by limits of time, ability, and availability of relevant information (Cornish & Clark, 1986).

The term "rationality" has been defined in many different capacities within different theories or disciplines. Rational choice approaches to criminal offending do not argue that all individuals engage in literal cognitive calculations throughout all phases of criminal offending, but instead suggest that rationality is determined by how individuals make decisions based on information collected (with respect to their assessments of the perceived costs and benefits of a criminal act), and how these decisions reflect "the consistency between people's preferences and choices" (McCarthy, 2002, p. 422). In other words, in order to determine an individual's rationality, one must know or make assumptions about an individual's outcome and risk preferences and test the level of consistency between one's expected utility and actions taken (McCarthy, 2002). Further, contemporary rational choice models suggest that an individual becomes a "rational offender," or "reasoning decision maker," when one weighs the perceptions of the costs

and benefits of the crime, relative to the specific situation, and within the constraints of limited time, information, judgment and cognitive processing capabilities, and makes a rational choice between several alternatives in an effort to benefit oneself (Clarke & Cornish, 1985; Cornish & Clarke, 1986, p. 13).

Rational or reasoned offenders also often adopt planning and risk-management strategies in an effort to achieve the greatest level of benefit with the least amount of risk or cost involved (Cornish & Clarke, 1986). In other words, reasoned decision makers within the RCP exercise some degree of planning and foresight and adapt their behavior to their surroundings and situational circumstances (Cornish & Clark, 1986). In this way, offenders are repeatedly evaluating information, making behavioral decisions, then re-evaluating information and making new and sometimes different offending decisions (Paternoster, 1989). In accordance with the offender's perspective and based on one's respective skills and opportunities, crimes are categorized by benefit, including but not limited to, personal needs and monetary gains (Guerette, Stenius & McGloin, 2005). Crime, according to the RCP, is an acceptable mechanism to achieve these needs and benefits. (Guerette et al., 2005).

The RCP also acknowledges that criminal offenders are goal oriented but one's decisions are often made in order to satisfy one's needs with the least amount of effort required, as opposed to a deliberate calculation made to maximize one's success (Clarke & Felson, 1993). This concept, known as "satisficing" within theories of bounded rationality, asserts that individuals do not always optimize, or make the best possible choice based on a set of alternatives, but rather choose an alternative that meets certain levels of expectations but may not always provide the best possible outcome (Simon,

1997). Satisficing presents a more realistic approach to the decision-making process in that it assumes individuals do not live in a purely objective reality where decisions are easily calculated among a set of fixed alternatives, but rather must make their choices in uncertain situations where constraints and limitations in the forms of available information and processing capabilities are constantly present (Simon, 1997).

The development of offense-specific models in the RCP is recognized as an important component of the perspective since specific informational dynamics that influence decisions change with each offense (Paternoster, 1989). In other words, crimes will vary based on the situational factors present (e.g., money and influence, immediate needs and motivation, perceived costs and benefits of the act) and the assessments of these elements are made within the varying limits of time or judgment (Cornish & Clarke, 1986). In turn, offending decision-making processes will vary across different types of crimes (Cornish & Clarke, 1986). In order to develop crime-specific models that account for rationality, the examination of an offender's assessment and decision processes is required for each criminal event (Cornish & Clarke, 1986).

According to the RCP, the stability of opportunities and benefits may lead to criminal involvement, where crime becomes an acceptable part of an individual's lifestyle, and is based on respective needs as well as learning experiences, moral codes, and self-concepts (Guerette et al., 2005). Criminal involvement pertains to the multistage process of initial involvement, continuation, and possible desistance of crime, which takes into account a large range of information over a long period of time (Cornish & Clarke, 1986). The importance of studying an offender's criminal involvement may be

seen in how changes in motivation, learning, rationality and choices occur over the life-course (Cornish & Clarke, 1986).

As Grasmick and Bursik (1990) note, most survey research has focused on the differences between deterrence theory and other theories of criminal behavior. During the period of revived interest in rational choice models of offending that began in the mid 1980's, Grasmick and Bursik (1990) identified the importance of focusing on the "commonalities and linkages" (p. 839) between different theories of criminal behavior and integrating concepts of rational decision-making within such a perspective. During this time, an increasing number of studies were conducted that supported this notion by identifying the need to re-operationalize the expected utility function within the RCP framework. These studies have attempted to expand the expected utility function by incorporating concepts and findings from the economic, psychology, sociology, and criminology disciplines within a rational choice framework of criminal offending.

#### *Expanding the Expected Utility Function*

In Grasmick and Bursik's (1990) study, which was comprised of face to face interviews with a simple random sample of approximately 360 individuals in a large Southwestern city, significant others and conscience were incorporated into a rational choice model of criminal offending. Grasmick and Bursik (1990) proposed that the costs of these non-legal sanctions (while varying in terms of certainty and severity) would combine to decrease the expected utility of criminal behavior (Grasmick & Bursik, 1990). Findings indicated a consistently strong deterrent effect of formal sanction threats and self-imposed shame (while controlling for prior offending) existed for all three offenses (tax cheating, theft, and drunk driving), while the threat of socially imposed

embarrassment failed to yield a consistent deterrent effect within the rational choice model (Grasmick & Bursik, 1990). Cochran, Chamlin, Wood, and Sellers (1999) attempted to replicate this study by testing the deterrent effect of self-imposed shame, socially imposed embarrassment, and formal sanctions (with respect to perceptions of certainty and severity for each) on five types of cheating. Similar results were found in their study: shame had a consistent deterrent effect on each form of cheating while socially imposed embarrassment did not (Cochran et al., 1999). One discrepancy between the findings of these two studies is that Cochran et al. (1999) found no deterrent effect of formal sanction threats on the students' levels of cheating. While these findings are more consistent with recent deterrent research on formal sanction perceptions than Grasmick & Bursik's (1990) findings, Cochran et al. (1999) do not support the position that deterrent effects of formal or legal sanction perceptions are non-existent. Nevertheless, both of these studies argue for the integration of the commonalities between theories of deterrence and other theories of choice in which additional factors (e.g., significant others, conscience) may be incorporated into a rational choice perspective of criminal offending (Grasmick & Bursik, 1990; Cochran et al., 1999).

In a study utilizing data collected from anonymous questionnaires returned by undergraduate students in a university behavioral science class, Tibbetts (1997) displayed the importance of using an offense-specific rational choice approach to crimes that are likely to produce higher states of shame (e.g., shoplifting, drunk driving) and recommended the measurement of other emotions such as guilt, pride, and narcissism within rational choice models of offending. Using a similar sample, Zimmerman (2008) also recognized the importance of measuring more than formal sanction perceptions and

exploring self-and socially-imposed sanctions such as guilt and other moral issues that have a significant effect on the decision to offend. In their study of corporate crime, Paternoster and Simpson (1996) also illustrated the importance of considering moral beliefs in a study utilizing rational choice factors, with findings suggesting that individuals with high states of morality were less likely to be influenced by considerations of rational choice factors. In other words, these studies illustrate that moral costs and psychological factors may act as a filter in which the costs and rewards of a criminal act receive their value.

In a study of street culture and motivation conducted by Jacobs and Wright (1999), findings drawn from 86 in-depth interviews with active armed robbers indicated that offenders often have feelings of “emotional desperation” (p. 167) as a result of perceptions of present crises (e.g., perceptions of immediate financial needs, struggle to find criminal identity within a subculture that exhibits strong criminal norm pressures). Carmichael and Piquero (2004) found that informal sanctions can be affected by emotions such as perceived anger as well. In their study that collected data from a random sample of young adults using hypothetical assault scenarios, findings that anger had an effect on the perception of risks and rewards were consistent with Nagin’s (2007) assertion that high states of emotional arousal may impair an individual’s ability to consider the long-term consequences of an act (Carmichael & Piquero, 2004).

Katz (1988) also recognizes the importance of studying emotion in the decision-making process and claims that crime often represents an emotional process that “seduce(s) people to deviance” (p. 321). According to Katz (1988), criminal activity may be expressed as an individual’s internal desire to be deviant, wherein the act itself is

profoundly moving. Katz (1988) illustrates the necessity of exploring the offender's thought process (in addition to an one's perceptions of costs and opportunities) by stressing the importance of examining the offender's personal construct of the experience from the inside out (Katz, 1988).

*Risk Perceptions, Risk Management, Target Selection, and the Criminal Decision-Making Process*

To emphasize the importance of studying perceptions of offenders in an RCP framework, Carroll and Weaver (1986) examined the perceptual and decision-making processes of shoplifters. In their study of thirty-four shoplifters (seventeen "experts" and seventeen "novices"), which implemented store walk-through and verbal protocol techniques (i.e., "think aloud" procedures), the experimenter coded characteristics relating to security, layout, and individuals in the store (Carroll & Weaver, 1986). Findings indicated that these offenders were sensitive to several crime opportunity features such as: the assessment of the value of items, an awareness of the risks, a motivation by attraction of or need for the item, and a consideration of strategy (Carroll & Weaver, 1986, pp. 26-27). These findings suggested that many deterrence policies were ineffective in that many offenders would continually adapt their own strategies to these policies in order to achieve criminal success (Carroll & Weaver, 1986).

While much research has concentrated on deterrence aspects of criminal events, thereby narrowing their focus to the early planning stages of a criminal act, Cherbonneau and Copes (2005) identified the importance of studying risk perceptions of offenders throughout the entire criminal event (i.e., planning and target selection decisions as well risk management techniques within the act itself that are by that point not affected by the

threat of formal sanctions alone). These risk perceptions and techniques implemented to counteract or minimize the chances of being caught directly affect the decision-making process not only during the planning phases of the criminal act, but during the act as well (e.g., the amount of time a burglar might search a dwelling) (Cherbonneau & Copes, 2005). In their study of auto-theft, Cherbonneau and Copes (2005) found clear evidence that these criminal offenders were constantly making decisions and implementing risk management techniques throughout each stage of the criminal act.

The impact of environmental criminology on rational choice models of offending has been demonstrated by a number of contemporary studies that identify the rational decision-making processes employed by offenders in their selection of targets based on the perceived risks and rewards of the situation (Hochstetler, 2002). Hakim, Rengert and Shachmurove's (2001) study utilizing a survey on active residential burglars residing in a wealthy community in Connecticut adds to a vast number of ethnographic studies that aim to demonstrate the importance of using qualitative methodology to connect the offender's target selection strategies and decision-making processes to their perception of the environment. While most ethnographic research in this realm of study have suggested that burglars tend to focus on the perceived rewards of a crime as opposed to the perceived risks, Hakim et al. (2001) found that the main concerns of the residential burglars in their sample were the relative risks of the situation. Specifically, the target selection and decision-making processes of this sample were mostly affected by the presence of a burglar alarm, and to a lesser extent factors such as the type of house (e.g., a single family detached home versus a townhouse or apartment), the location of the house (e.g., on a dead-end street or near the woods) and the appearance of the house (e.g.,

lights on, cars in the driveway), with little importance placed on the perceived value of the house or other potential rewards by comparison (Hakim et al., 2001). Coupe and Blake's (2006) findings supported this notion that target selection strategies employed by the offender were related to the amount and kind of risk they were willing to accept with respect to factors such as transportation, location and type of house, and elements of daylight and darkness.

In their study of auto-burglars, which implemented three stages of data collection (phone interviews with a focus group comprised of park managers and law enforcement personnel; interviews with key informants; and on-site analyses), Michael & Zahm (2001) found that auto-burglars employed rational procedures to increase their likelihood and level of rewards while minimizing their effort and risk factors. Physical attributes of the environment that provided concealment (e.g., vegetation, lighting) and the possibility of a quick escape (e.g., tunnels, crowds) were key components in their risk management procedures (Michael & Zahm, 2001). In addition, other rational actions within the target selection process such as identifying and inspecting the desired goods, assessing the best tactics to retrieve the goods, and determining the presence or absence of police or possible victim resistance were employed to minimize risk (Michael & Zahm, 2001). These findings suggest that situational measures such as clearing vegetation, increasing lighting or installing surveillance may reduce criminal opportunities for specific criminal events such as auto-burglary (Michael & Zahm, 2001).

Cherbonneau and Copes (2005) also recognize the importance of studying "the risks and rewards that offenders attach to specific forms of crime and how these perceptions guide their behaviour" (p. 193). Auto-thieves engage in several risk-

management techniques that are aimed to reduce the likelihood of police detection and arrest (Cherbonneau & Copes, 2005). Based on one's perceptions of specific situational factors within the criminal act, the risk management techniques employed to avoid detection are related to anticipatory appearance-related strategies (i.e., manipulating their physical appearance to fit the situation) and reactive behavior-related strategies (i.e., modification of behavior and controlling of emotions to create appearance of normality in police presence) and are embedded in the decision-making process (Cherbonneau & Copes, 2005). These strategies, comprising the concept of arrest avoidance, are identified as considerably applicable to research on the criminal decision-making process, both in specific criminal event decisions as well as criminal involvement (Cherbonneau & Copes, 2005).

While the majority of qualitative research exploring the offender's decision-making process has been applied to property crime, Beauregard, Rossmo and Proulx (2007) used information collected from police investigative reports and semi-structured interviews to examine the hunting process of serial sex offenders through a rational choice approach. They found that while serial sex offenders may vary in terms of their hunting processes, they do in fact act in a rational way in their crime commissions (Beauregard et al., 2007). The target selection processes of serial sexual offenders are related to geographic models of offending found in environmental criminology, which revolve around the offender's victim selection and crime commission strategies with respect to environmental and situational factors (Beauregard et al., 2007). Beauregard et al. (2007) identified the importance of studying the differences between a serial sex offender's intended and actual method of crime commission and how the geographic

factors of the crime (e.g., location of the encounter, offense, and possible release) impact the hunting process and criminal act. A better understanding of these decision processes may lead to psychological or geographical profiling measures, as well as the creation of avoidance or escape strategies. (Beauregard et al., 2007).

In their study of sex offenders, Beauregard and Leclerc (2007) illustrated the importance of not only connecting the personal and psychological factors of the offender with situational elements of the crime, but also providing a deeper examination of the internal decision-making processes of the offender within a rational choice framework (Beauregard & Leclerc, 2007). For example, sex offenders strategically plan and execute their offenses based on the perceived costs and benefits of the act, and strategic decisions often carry over to behaviors that occur after the offense has been committed (e.g., if and where to release the victim) (Beauregard & Leclerc, 2007). Examination of the decision-making process of sex offenders can be applied through a rational choice approach in that sex offenders make several choices before they offend in which they consider: a) where to look for victims, b) when to attack, c) the type of victim, d) the victim approach strategy, and e) the strategy used to engage the victim in sexual activity (Beauregard & Leclerc, 2007). In addition, situational elements such as victim resistance and the type of environment affect these strategies and how they are employed by the offender (Beauregard & Leclerc, 2007).

#### *Fear, Coping, and the Criminal Career*

While fear resulting from the threat of formal punishments rarely affects an offender's decision-making process, apprehensive thoughts related to the danger of a criminal situation (e.g., victim confrontation, injury, or death) are often present and must

be overcome if the offender wishes to be successful in the criminal act (Hochstetler & Copes, 2003). Offenders often “engage in social and psychological behaviors that allow them to overcome the immediate deterrent potential of fear associated with crime” (Hochstetler & Copes, 2003, p. 104). These behaviors may include using drugs or alcohol, relying on co-offenders, or using “cognitive tricks” (p. 109) (e.g., thrill seekers can focus on the situation as exciting, apprehensive offenders can ignore negative consequences) to redefine the situation as more favorable than originally perceived (Hochstetler & Copes, 2003). Often times, offenders adopt risk management strategies to counteract the presence of the distressing emotions inherent in the criminal act (Cherbonneau & Copes, 2005). In order to persist in successful criminal careers, offenders must either use these strategies to control their emotions or engage in criminal acts that do not require an increased level of confidence or present overwhelming levels of emotional stress (Cherbonneau & Copes, 2005).

Another way that offenders will maintain levels of comfort and avoid high levels of fear or apprehension is that they often strike targets that are similar to targets they had previously attacked and found criminal success (Hochstetler & Copes, 2003). Offenders may also use similar methods in one’s criminal activity in order to gain confidence and reduce fear or anxiety (Hochstetler & Copes, 2003). In this way, previous criminal acts may determine the assessment of future criminal opportunities (Hochstetler & Copes, 2003).

With respect to criminal careers, Hochstetler and Copes (2003) found that fear had very little influence on an offender’s decision-making process. This may be attributed to the fact that a) older and more experienced offenders had achieved skill

levels and confidence that minimized any level of apprehension during a criminal act, b) offenders who had been arrested and sent to jail no longer possessed that fear, and c) offenders who found a specific target to be overly overwhelming could easily decide to choose a less intimidating target (Hochstetler & Copes, 2003). In this way, formal sanctions and criminal justice policies that attempt to instill fear in the minds of career criminals have not had success in altering their decision-making process or decreasing levels of criminal motivation (Hochstetler & Copes, 2003).

Further, oftentimes criminals who have been repeatedly successful in their crimes develop criminal identities and self-perceptions of expertise and prominent criminal status (Hochstetler & Copes, 2003). Offenders who develop such an identity take great pride in their success and perceive themselves to surpass other criminals with respect to their possession of special technical, intellectual, and intuitive skills (Hochstetler & Copes, 2003). These skills offer them a greater likelihood of minimizing risks, avoiding detection or arrest, and confidently and successfully achieving the desired benefits of their participation in criminal activity (Hochstetler & Copes, 2003).

Criminal self-concepts can also become embedded into the decision-making process and often shape the actions taken in criminal situations with respect to an offender's level or frequency of offending and one's perception of the risks and rewards of the situation (Hochstetler et al., 2007). In Hochstetler's (2002) study of street thieves, findings from 110 semi-structured interviews (drawn from two samples including 60 imprisoned persistent thieves and 50 community-supervised adult males convicted of burglary and robbery) suggested that the decision-making processes of many street offenders are so ingrained in their criminal culture or lifestyle that many preventative or

reactive criminal justice policies are highly ineffective. The decisions of these offenders revolve around the cultural context of their actions, which are embedded in their lives through co-offenders and their environment (Hochstetler, 2002). In addition, the abundance of criminal opportunities and lack of effective policy initiatives provide these offenders with the perception that crime is the most viable choice to achieve their goals over the life-course (Hochstetler, 2002).

Some criminologists may contest that focusing on decision-making processes and crime over the life course is a tangent of focus within a rational choice framework and that it is more important to study the specific crime (situational factors) and not the career of the criminal/offender (Cornish & Clarke, 1986). However, contemporary models of the RCP illustrate the utility of viewing crime as a way of life and addressing the involvement processes of criminal offenders as well as the criminal events themselves (Cornish & Clarke, 1986). In this way, levels of rationality and patterns of decision-making processes can be examined over the course of a criminal's career (Cornish & Clarke, 1986). The RCP recognizes that the attractive features of crime may vary with persistent offenders depending on one's criminal lifestyle, one's status in the community, and the availability of alternatives throughout one's criminal career (Hochstetler et al., 2007). In addition, growing levels of expertise may lead to changes in learning and information processing strategies over the course of a criminal career (Carroll & Weaver, 1986). The RCP is well-equipped to explain the variation in criminal motivation, opportunity, and decision-making processes over the life course while considering the differences in offender types (Hochstetler et al., 2007; DeLisi & Puhmann, 2007).

Despite the strength the RCP has gained in its development over the last few decades, some have found the perspective to be weak or flawed. Some of the criticisms presented below claim that the RCP over-simplifies the balance of incentives and deterrents, disregards certain psychological or emotional factors, and presents an unrealistic assertion of the level of rationality present in the decision-making process. In the following section, these criticisms are addressed, followed by the rebuttals of criminologists who have found support for the RCP.

#### *Criticisms of the Rational Choice Perspective*

*Overly Simplistic Cost-Benefit Model.* One of the biggest criticisms of the RCP is that it is overly simplistic in its examination of incentives and deterrents (De Haan & Vos, 2003). There is a certain complexity involved in criminal decision making, in that offenders often have flawed perceptions of costs and benefits that may lead to an elevated expected utility (Hochstetler, 2001). In turn, one's diminished assessment of the potential risks and costs of a criminal situation allows one to view criminal activity in overly optimistic ways, and these perceptions may negate any deterrent effects that criminal sanctions may have had (Claster, 1967; Cherbonneau & Copes, 2005).

Those offenders who actually identify the risks of the criminal act often feel that focusing on them would inhibit one's chances of success and choose to focus on the immediate goals or rewards of a crime (Cherbonneau & Copes, 2005). In this way, any kind of cost/benefit assessment is constrained by an overly optimistic outlook that concentrates energy on the means to succeed rather than on the threat of criminal punishment (Cherbonneau & Copes, 2005). By remaining overly optimistic, avoiding careful thought about the act or potential consequences, or redefining a dangerous act as

exciting, criminal offenders are often able to perceive the act as more appealing and therefore are more inclined to commit the crime (Hochstetler & Copes, 2003).

*Disregard of Psychological or Emotional Factors.* In Akers' (1990) essay, he stated that the RCP model disregards how morals, values, and a variation of beliefs may influence the perceptions of benefits and costs. He suggests that "moral costs" (p. 671) such as conscience and religious values are sometimes included in the RCP, but already well established in the social learning theory (SLT), as well as social background factors including learning, family, and friends (Akers, 1990, p. 671). De Haan and Vos (2003) also contest that the RCP neglects emotional elements such as guilt and shame, and that offenders do not always make choices that are rational. According to De Haan & Vos, (2003), by failing to include these factors, as well as other factors such as impulsiveness and moral ambiguity into the model, the RCP portrays an incomplete view of crime.

*Unrealistic Assertion of Rationality.* Many street offenders take pride in abandoning conventional lifestyles and possessing criminal identities that are comprised of social ideals surrounding elements of partying, drug use, and spontaneity (Hochstetler & Copes, 2003). In this way, one's criminal behavior is largely dependent on how one's life on the streets is socially constructed and is often determined by one's continual necessity to obtain fast money and drugs (Hochstetler & Copes, 2003). Offenders also often use these drugs and alcohol to reduce one's fear when engaging in risky criminal behavior and therefore often "make criminal decisions through a heavy cognitive fog created by drug use" (Hochstetler and Copes, 2003, p. 104). In this way, any kind of reasoning ability an offender may possess may be severely constrained by the use of drugs or alcohol (Hochstetler & Copes, 2003). In conjunction with the limits of time,

judgment, availability of relevant information, and decision-making capabilities, the criminal offenses of many street offenders are therefore less likely to be characteristic of deliberate planning or rational calculations than is suggested by rational choice models of offending (Cornish & Clarke, 1986; Hochstetler & Copes, 2003).

*Suggestions for Strengthening or Replacing the RCP.* Piliavin et al. (1986) suggest that a more behavioral model can explain how the costs and benefits of a criminal act are subjectively perceived by the actor. Akers (1990) claims that the SLT already establishes the importance of behavioral learning principles, and that the RCP in general is already encompassed by this theory. He contends that the link between the RCP and the SLT has been missed in the literature, in that the RCP has no new element that explains how the risk of crime is perceived and offers nothing of new or specific importance in terms of criminal rationality that is not already established in the SLT (Akers, 1990). While the RCP goes beyond the deterrence theory with regard to the balance of costs and benefits, Akers (1990) contests that it does not go beyond SLT with its already established concept of differential reinforcement, in which the balance of rewards and punishments for behavior is dependent on and examined through positive and negative inhibitors and facilitators, direct and indirect sanctions, penalties, punishments and reinforcements.

Akers (1990) also contests that behavioral learning principles are overlooked in both deterrence and the RCP, and therefore criminal deviance can be best explained by a behavioral approach to socialization found in the SLT. This entails the examination of individual responses to rewards and punishments in the current situation, the learned patterns of responses one already possesses, and the anticipated consequences of one's actions (Akers, 1990). It is this behavioral response to environmental conditions that

allows for the individual's cognitive process to proceed with respect to the choices made, adaptations to different conditions, and in turn a continuing learning experience (Akers, 1990).

*Responses to Criticisms.* As response to the criticisms regarding unrealistic assertions of rationality, while offenders may not always carefully plan and execute each of their criminal actions methodically, evidence suggests that criminal decisions are also not made spontaneously (Hochstetler & Copes, 2003). Offenders often plan their crime and slowly move towards executing one's criminal decision in incremental steps, only deciding to follow through with the decision at the last moment (Hochstetler & Copes, 2003). While this process allows the offender flexibility in one's decision-making process (i.e., even after considerable planning one can decide not to offend at the last moment before a potential criminal event), it also may create the illusion that one is acting on impulse (Hochstetler & Copes, 2003).

Ethnographic studies have demonstrated that while offending decision-making processes of thieves are often rooted in a risky drug-using subculture and lifestyle, they are also affected by prior criminal experience (Hochstetler, 2002). As a result, thieves often develop preferences within their criminal careers based on mental constructions of the cost-benefit calculations they have processed in past criminal events (Hochstetler, 2002). Thieves on sprees ("two or more offenses committed without a break in the action" (p. 48)), for example, often strike similar targets and rely on past methods of crime commission that led to success, rather than exhibiting a carefully calculated decision-making process for each target (Hochstetler, 2002, p. 48).

In addition, contemporary RCP models do not assume criminal acts result from educated and calculated decisions on all levels of rationality (Akers, 1990). Despite confusions in previous literature, it is possible for a criminal to behave rationally without behaving in a strictly utilitarian manner (Clarke & Cornish, 1985). Purely informed rational choice is both unattainable and unnecessary to the theory, and excessive planning is not always necessary (Paternoster, 1989; Akers, 1990). In fact, often times offenders will rely on their hunches or intuition over a complete rational decision making process in order to reduce their fear and anxiety and the pressure of failing (Clarke & Cornish, 1985). Experienced criminals may rely on their experience and confidence in avoiding detection rather than engaging in strict and organized measures of planning (Clarke & Cornish, 1985).

Criticisms of the overly simplistic RCP cost-benefit model may be attributed to preconceived notions of early economic rational choice models that focused more on the conceptual function of expected utility than operationalizing the “taste” and “cost” measures. Rational choice models have always considered the presence of risk perceptions and the ability to expand the cost-benefit measures beyond monetary values (Von Nuemann & Morgenstern, 1944; McCarthy 2002) and contemporary models have attempted to produce such an expansion of measures within the RCP framework (e.g., Grasmick & Bursik, 1990; Cochran et al. 1990, Paternoster & Simpson, 1996; Tibbetts 1997; Tibbetts & Gibson, 2002; Zimmerman 2008). Further, arguments identifying the shortcomings of the RCP with respect to its alleged failure to incorporate emotional or cultural elements into the model become unwarranted when many of the contemporary RCP crime-as-choice models, which focus on the offender’s complete decision-making

process, are taken into consideration (e.g., Hochstetler, 2002; Carmichael & Piquero, 2004; Jacobs & Wright, 1999; Beauregard & Leclerc, 2007; Nagin, 2007).

With respect to some of Akers' (1990) arguments, McCarthy (2002) contests that the RCP offers individuals more agency than deterministic explanations of offending with respect to social experiences and conditions such as peer association and socialization. Also in response to Akers (1990), Cornish (1993) contests that the RCP is well suited to serve as an "action theory" (p. 376) in criminology, meaning that in its development of its key principles of choice and rationality, there is great reason to believe that the RCP framework would do well in addressing the theoretical and practical issues of the field. Cornish (1993) claims that the synthesis of several theoretical strong points, such as its conceptual utility in its examination of individual interaction and language, its ability to adapt to and draw from other disciplines while avoiding those assumptions that might restrict the theory, and its solid foundation of conceptualized ideas of choice, rationality, and individual processes, is what allows the RCP to stand out as an extremely useful theoretical perspective within criminology and all social sciences (Cornish, 1993).

This section has demonstrated the utility of synthesizing findings, measures, and theoretical concepts from several disciplines (e.g., economics, psychology, sociology, criminology) into an RCP framework. The RCP has developed as a strong theoretical framework over the past few decades and has presented new ways of looking at the criminal decision-making process, which have emerged as a result of the operational expansion of the expected-utility function (e.g., including emotion and morals in studies of rational choice). The RCP, which presents the image of a reasoning offender,

identifies that rational human actors view crime as a choice and engage in decision-making processes in which the perceived costs and benefits of a criminal act are weighed. This section has also demonstrated the importance of studying the risk perceptions of offenders, as well as the risk management and target selection strategies inherent in the decision making process, using a wide variety of offender groups (e.g., auto-thieves, burglars, sex offenders). Psychological and emotional issues (e.g., fear, coping) have also been identified as important issues to be considered, as well as how criminal methods and self-concepts may be developed over the course of a criminal's career. This section has also identified several criticisms of the RCP that address the cost-benefit model, as well as psychological/emotional considerations and assertions of rationality, followed by responses to these criticisms that lend support to the RCP.

Since evidence suggests that offender decision-making processes vary across different types of crime (e.g., Clarke & Cornish, 1985; Paternoster, 1989; Pogarsky et al., 2005; Hochstetler et al., 2007), findings on street criminals cannot be generalized to all types of offenders. Specifically, Simpson, Piquero and Paternoster (2002) note that while criticisms concerning the efficacy of rational choice models (which stress the importance of the decision making process) may have some merit with respect to some violent or street crime, they lack authority with respect to corporate crime. The next section identifies the importance of extending the RCP beyond the study of street crime and examines some of the research which has been conducted on white-collar, corporate and organized crime within an RCP framework. The next section also explores how professional criminals may be effectively examined in a qualitative study embracing concepts of rational choice.

### ***Rational Choice and Professional Criminals***

The explanatory power of the rational choice perspective has been recognized in realms of criminology that have not often been tested through traditional theoretical frameworks (e.g., sexual offenses, white-collar crime) (Clarke & Felson, 1993). However, while rational choice models of offending have received attention for their ability to explain variation in crime across “time, space, populations, and individuals” (p. 2), they have mostly been applied to street crime over the past few decades (Shover & Hochstetler, 2006). Cornish and Clarke (1986) identify that one of the most critical concerns of the RCP is “the need to extend the reach of rational choice approaches to a wider variety of crimes” (p. 14). For example, they recognize the RCP as clearly applicable to the study of corporate crime and encourage that further research be conducted within this otherwise neglected area (Cornish & Clarke, 1986). This section identifies some of the research that has been conducted on white-collar, corporate, and organized crime through an RCP framework, and demonstrates the utility of applying the RCP to the study of professional crime.

#### ***White Collar, Corporate, and Organized Crime***

Drawing from their own work on the rational choice perspective found in *The Reasoning Criminal* (1986), Cornish and Clarke (2002) suggest several reasons why the rational choice perspective could be effectively utilized in the study of organized crime. First, crimes committed by organized criminals are purposive in nature and closely represent rational choice factors such as costs versus benefit calculations (Cornish & Clarke, 2002). In this way, criticisms of rational choice models’ inability to analyze spontaneous or “senseless” (p. 43) crimes are not an issue (Cornish & Clarke, 2002).

Second, rational choice models are well suited to approach the organization and business aspects of organized crime, which involve specific technical skills and mechanisms within each criminal process (Cornish & Clarke, 2002). Third, while crimes are never committed with perfect rationality and economic gain is still the principal motivation, the planning and complex decision-making processes of organized criminals represent the concepts embedded in contemporary RCP models (Cornish & Clarke, 2002). According to Clarke and Felson (1993), contemporary models of the RCP that focus on crime-as-choice tenets, stress the importance of criminal involvement and criminal events, and provide “a more flexible and dynamic view of criminal action than most contemporary criminology” (p. 12), should be expected to achieve the same or greater levels of success in explaining the decision-making process of a population of criminals who by their very nature engage in deliberate and carefully calculated criminal actions.

*Empirical.* Research on white collar and corporate crime through a rational choice framework has demonstrated the explanatory power of the perspective that reaches beyond more commonly researched types of criminal activity (Piquero, Exum, & Simpson, 2005). Similar to studies on street crimes, Makkai and Braithwaite (1994) found that perceived formal sanction threats alone did not have a significant effect on the decision to offend in their study of corporate deterrence. Using panel data from nursing homes (comprised of home inspections and interviews), they found that low emotionality or emotions of guilt (self-disapproval) had a higher deterrent effect for managers than perceptions of social disapproval or formal sanctions (Makkai and Braithwaite, 1994).

In their study of corporate crime Elis and Simpson (1995) demonstrated that offending behavior was not significantly affected by the perceived risks or social costs of

informal detection. Using data from a factorial survey design comprised of hypothetical vignettes collected from M.B.A. students at three different graduate schools and M.B.A. business school executives, they demonstrated that perceptions of immorality and informal sanction certainty were negatively related to the decision to offend (Elis & Simpson, 1995). In addition, levels of offending were positively related to the corporate environment and also increased when the offense was not a choice but rather an order from a manager (Elis & Simpson, 1995). Social costs at both firm and individual levels had an influence on offense intentions while perceptions of personal benefits had no effect on motivation (Elis & Simpson, 1995).

Paternoster and Simpson (1996) also argued that a rational choice approach to corporate crime should examine not only the perceived risks and rewards of a criminal act (for the firm and the individual) but also the individual's sense of morality, self-imposed shame and punishment, and perceptions of status or prestige in an organizational context. In their study, which utilized hypothetical vignettes in a sample of 96 graduate students in M.B.A. programs, findings suggested that appeals to morality had a significant effect on an individual's decision to commit a corporate offense when controlling for individual and organizational risk and reward perceptions (Paternoster & Simpson, 1996). When obligations to morality were in a weakened state, perceptions of formal and informal sanctions were found to have a deterrent effect with respect to an individual's perception of risk for the firm and themselves (Paternoster & Simpson, 1996). In general, Paternoster & Simpson (1996) suggest that it is necessary to examine the joint effect that morality and rationality have on an individual's decision to commit a corporate offense. In this way, policy initiatives that stress both the enforcement of

business laws and the moral education of business individuals can have complementary deterrent effects within a corporation context (Paternoster & Simpson, 1996).

Piquero et al.'s (2005) study adds to a number of studies that identify white-collar or corporate offending characteristics as distinct from street-level offending characteristics, such as loyalty to the organization, distribution of benefits in the organization, and individual status within the organization. Piquero et al. (2005) also identified the importance of integrating psychological concepts such as the desire-for-control into rational choice models. In their study, 46 individuals involved in M.B.A. programs responded to hypothetical vignettes, with findings indicating that the desire-for-control personality characteristic had a significant effect on an individual's decision to offend, as well as how rational choice related concepts were perceived and processed (Piquero et al., 2005).

While research on white-collar, corporate, and organized crime has scratched the surface on testing the explanatory power of the RCP beyond street criminals, the continued application of the RCP framework to the study of professional criminals is still necessary. Some of the findings from the white collar, corporate, or organized crime research may translate to professional crime (e.g., perceptions of certain risks and rewards, concepts of status, and levels of rationality inherent in a criminal act), while others may not (e.g., organizational contexts versus the professional criminal subculture, types of criminal opportunity and motivation, risk or reward perceptions specific to each offender population, and distinct risk management strategies). Regardless of these similarities or differences, studies conducted within a professional criminal context must continue to stress the importance of expanding the RCP to include emotional and

psychological principles such as perceptions of morality and shame when studying the offending choices of professional criminals. In order to understand the choices made by professional criminals, qualitative research must be conducted that uses an RCP approach in order to comprehensively examine their decision-making processes.

#### *A Rational Choice Approach to Professional Criminals*

As with organized criminals, when studying the decision-making process of professional criminals, the RCP's primary contribution to research, theory, and policy lies in its attempt to answer the question of not why these criminal activities occur, but how they occur (Cornish & Clarke, 2002). Katz (1998) confirms this notion, explaining that an individual would "respond with self-justifying rhetoric" (p. 7) if asked why he committed a crime, whereas by asking him what he did and how he did it, a "detailed account of the processual development of his experience" (p. 7) may emerge that will bring to light his situational definitions and involvement conditions. Simon (1997) also recognizes that an individual's ability to report the factors (and their respective levels of importance) that affected one's decision-making process is unlikely to be effective. Instead, he suggests that by "reconstructing successive steps of the processes and the information available at each step" (p. 310), it is much more likely that insight will be gained into not only the offender's current state (e.g., offense intentions and expectations, beliefs and attitudes), but also one's information gathering mechanisms (i.e., how information is collected and evaluated) and more importantly, how one's decision-making processes affect the ultimate choices made in a criminal event (Simon, 1997). In other words, through this type of qualitative inquiry, the researcher can form objective

assessments of the individual's decision-making process with the offender's step-by-step descriptions of their criminal accounts.

In a study of professional criminals, the utility of this type of questioning is apparent in that it provides insight into offenders' criminal "style" with respect to criminal tactics or strategies, as well as their primary motivation with respect to how they approach criminal opportunities (Johnson et al., 1993). These types of interviews also provide insight into an offender's perceptions of risk and one's risk management strategies (Cherbonneau & Copes, 2005). By repeating these types of open-ended and exhaustive interviews, additional patterns and themes with respect to RCP concepts may be observed, providing insight into these offenders' decision-making processes (Johnson et al., 1993).

Hobbs (1997) also showed the utility of using qualitative measures to conceptualize professional criminals through his study of the criminal underworld. Using qualitative research to study the shared cultural elements of professional criminals, including skills and status, with respect to the differential association and organizational elements within the subculture, Hobbs displayed the immediate benefit this kind of research has to offer to criminology (Hobbs, 1997) The benefit can be seen in the in-depth examination of a criminal subculture that has been considerably under-researched in criminology through the utilization of contemporary models of rational choice, which can provide insight into the professional criminal subculture and decision-making processes (Hobbs, 1997).

This chapter has traced the evolution of the RCP from its economic origins that advanced ideas of the crime-punishment connection (e.g., certainty and severity of

punishment) to contemporary RCP models that have taken into account theoretical concepts and findings from a variety of studies conducted within several disciplines. For example, sociologists and cognitive psychologists identified several elements (e.g., morals/values, motivation, emotion) as essential to consider in the study of the offender decision-making process, while environmental criminologists identified the importance of studying an offender's target selection and risk management strategies. Beginning with the RCP's synthesis of these findings, measures, and theoretical concepts from these diverse disciplines that took place in the mid 1980's, and through its development over the next few decades (e.g., the operational expansion of the expected-utility function), the RCP has presented new ways of exploring the criminal decision-making process. This chapter has also demonstrated the importance of extending the RCP beyond the study of street crime and has examined some of the research that has been conducted on white-collar, corporate, and organized crime within an RCP framework. Further, the importance of understanding how criminal methods and self-concepts may be developed over the course of a criminal's career has provided insight into how professional criminals may be effectively examined in a qualitative study embracing concepts of rational choice. The purpose of the current study is examined below, followed by the methods chapter, which describes how a qualitative meta-synthesis is used in order to accomplish the research objectives of the current study.

### ***Purpose of the Study***

The purpose of this study is to assess the effectiveness of the RCP in the explanation of professional crime through the qualitative examination of the lives and decision-making processes of professional criminals. Professional criminals, an offender

group that has rarely been studied in criminology yet who exhibit many elements of rational choice in their decision-making processes, provide a universe by which shared concepts of rational choice can be systematically identified, coded, and synthesized. The analytic technique employed for the systematic extraction and integration of key concepts within the RCP from a sample of professional criminals is a qualitative meta-synthesis. The goal of using a qualitative meta-synthesis in the current study is to draw inferences from the sample as a whole and to form new interpretations of the qualitative findings on professional criminals in a holistic context, which in turn may offer conceptual clarity of RCP concepts and help assess the RCP's theoretical and methodological developments over the past few decades. In turn, the primary research objective of the current study is to assess the RCP's effectiveness in the explanation of professional crime. An additional research objective of the current study is to examine the utility of the operational enhancements offered by the sociology, psychology, and criminology disciplines to the RCP framework. In the following chapter, the research design and methods used in the current study are examined, with emphasis on how qualitative researchers who have implemented qualitative meta-syntheses in the past have influenced the sampling, coding, and analytic processes employed in the current study.

## Chapter Three

### Methods

There has not been much research conducted that has attempted to visually reconstruct or model the detailed processes of a criminal episode (Clarke and Felson, 1993). Ethnographic approaches and qualitative methodologies in general are beneficial in that they can fill in this gap in criminological theory and policy (i.e., through the time spent with active criminals during their normal routines, a wealth of information is gained with respect to the offender's decision-making processes through each step of a criminal act) (Clarke and Felson, 1993). Within the current study, the depth of insight ethnographic and other qualitative studies can provide into the lives of professional criminals through a rational choice perspective can be seen in Johnson et al.'s (1993) descriptions of "Offenders' Choices Relating to the Criminal Episode" (pp. 212-219). Concepts such as criminal background, cost-benefit calculations, situational factors, the criminal event itself (successfully executed or avoided) and post-crime activity are thoroughly detailed and provide a template for rational choice themes that can be efficiently utilized in the qualitative study of professional criminals (Johnson et al., 1993, pp. 212-219). The benefits of using such qualitative studies may be seen in the insight provided into the decision-making processes of professional criminals, with respect to issues of criminal intent and motivation, target selection, technical skills and strategies, and the benefits of successful crimes (Johnson, Natarajan, & Sanabria, 1993). A

qualitative meta-synthesis is an extremely useful technique that may be utilized to systematically identify, extract and integrate these concepts from within the sample and examine them within an RCP framework in an effort to examine the effectiveness of the RCP in the explanation of professional crime (Maher & Hudson, 2007). The integral components of a qualitative meta-synthesis (grounded theory and thick description) are explored in the next sections.

### ***Grounded Theory***

With the primary objectives of the current study being the assessment and refinement of theory, the most appropriate guiding methodological framework for the current study is grounded theory. Grounded theory involves “[constant] comparative analysis” (p. vii), in which the researcher is constantly going back and forth between the data and the theoretical framework that is guiding the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This iterative process allows for the systematic conceptualization of data categories based on the similarities and differences of the studies within the sample (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Sampling, conceptualization, and coding methodologies within the grounded theory tradition all contribute to an analytic process that embraces multiple perspectives and interpretations in an effort to achieve greater understanding of the individual studies and the sample as a whole (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). These interpretations and perspectives are based on the multiple voices that frame a synthesis: the voices of the offender and researcher within the study and the voice of the author of the synthesis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The author of the synthesis constantly shapes the synthesis process through one’s methodological decisions and presents the data in one’s own interpretive context while preserving the original perspectives of the offenders and the

interpretations of the researchers (Wright & Decker, 1994). One particular example of this within the sample may be observed in *The Fence* (1986), in which the voices of Sam Goodman (the professional criminal) and Darrell Steffensmeier (the researcher) must be considered while the author of the synthesis offers one's own voice in the explanation and interpretation of the synthesis. In order for the original contexts of the data to be preserved, the author of the synthesis must present an explanation that takes into account each voice that had a hand in shaping the synthesis.

Strauss & Corbin (1994) caution that if the author of the synthesis is “overly familiar” (p. 87) with the theoretical concepts guiding the analytic process, the findings of the synthesis may not be genuinely grounded in the studies. In order to account for this, the current study took advantage of the “fluid” (p. 81) process of grounded theory methods and allowed for specific categories and operationalizations to emerge from the data while using the RCP as a guiding framework during the process (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). By engaging in a research process that allows for the constant interaction between data collection and analysis, it is possible to determine how well the concepts used in the synthesis “fit” (i.e., the concepts' applicability to and representativeness of the data) and “work” (i.e., the relevance and explanatory power of the concepts) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Grounded theory is also supported by the concept of theory elaboration, which is examined below.

### *Theory Elaboration*

Thornberry (1989) and Vaughan (1992) offer support for grounded theory methodology by presenting the concept of “theory elaboration” (p. 175), a method in which qualitative case analysis is used to develop theory based on specific phenomena.

Thornberry (1989) identifies three sources of theory elaboration: 1) the theorist's addition, reduction, or reformulation of theoretical propositions; 2) empirical observations (which constantly lead to theoretical refinement); and 3) other theoretical models, in which concepts from other theories may play an integral role in the revision of the theory's "assumptions, propositions, and structure in an effort to improve its explanation of delinquency" (p. 58). Theory elaboration, a process by which theoretical concepts are refined with the goal of specifying their explanatory power relevant to specific circumstances, is conducted when the goal of a research study is the maximization of explanatory power within a theoretical framework (Thornberry, 1989). The concept of "theory elaboration" therefore supports the main objectives of the current study: refining concepts within the RCP (which has integrated concepts and findings from several disciplines into the theoretical framework), and increasing the potential for explanation (with respect to professional criminals) by offering conceptual clarity within the framework as a whole. In addition to using the comparative and interactive processes of theory elaboration and grounded theory methods, specific methods of explanation must be used to convey meaning. The process of utilizing thick description in a qualitative meta-synthesis is examined below.

### ***Thick Description***

Thick description, developed in Geertz's *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), is related to clinical inference in psychology and medicine. Thick description is the process by which human behavior is described in context so that it becomes meaningful to an outside audience. Within ethnography, "the office of theory is to provide a vocabulary in which what symbolic action has to say about itself – that is, about the role of culture in

human life – can be expressed” (Geertz, 1973, p. 365). In other words, within ethnographic research processes thick description complements grounded theory methods in that the goal is to use language (i.e., the integration of metaphors) to make holistic interpretations from individual observations relating to similar phenomena (Geertz, 1973).

Similar to grounded theory methods, Geertz (1973) suggests that an interpretation of individual observations “conceptually depends on” (p. 365) the guiding theoretical framework. Strauss & Corbin (1994), however, make a point to clearly differentiate between Geertz’s (1973) concept of “thick description” and their concept of “conceptual density” (p. 74), which refers to “the richness of concept development and relationships – which rest on great familiarity with associated data and are checked out systematically with these data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 74). In other words, while thick description is an important part of ethnography in that it uses language to theoretically ground individual observations in a holistic context meaningful to a particular audience, conceptual density within grounded theory methods emphasize theory development through every phase of a research process (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Both grounded theory methods and thick description are integral parts of a qualitative meta-synthesis, which is examined in the next section.

### ***A Qualitative Meta-synthesis***

The most appropriate analytic technique to be used for the type of sample being used in the current study (i.e., offender population with a hidden nature; mostly qualitative research available) is a qualitative meta-synthesis. Meta-synthesis is a relatively new yet effective technique for the integration of key findings and concepts

found within qualitative studies examining similar phenomena (Noblit & Hare, 1988; Sandelowski et al, 1997; Hodson, 2004; Zimmer, 2004; Bondas & Hall, 2007; Maher & Hudson, 2007). The goal of a meta-synthesis is to provide a greater wealth of knowledge and a more extensive understanding of both the theory and the phenomena being studied through the recognition and integration of patterns and concepts found in the data (Bondas & Hall, 2007).

While narrative reviews of qualitative research present findings of individual studies which are examined in the context of other studies, much of this research is not examined in a collective way where a wide variety of qualitative work may be compared and contrasted (McCormick, Rodney & Varcoe, 2008). A meta-synthesis is not secondary data analysis and provides more than just a summation or review of findings in the qualitative literature (Zimmer, 2004; Bondas & Hall, 2007). Through the analysis and integration of individual study findings, a qualitative meta-synthesis contributes to a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon, which aids in the building of knowledge and the development of theory (Zimmer, 2004; Bondas & Hall, 2007, McCormick et al., 2008). In this way, qualitative meta-synthesis moves beyond a narrative literature review (which provides descriptions and summarizations of general findings of qualitative research studies and attempts to link them in a linear manner), in that a meta-synthesis of individual qualitative study findings provides deeper insight into the phenomenon as a whole through its recognition and refinement of shared theoretical concepts (Campbell et al, 2003; Doyle, 2003).

Choosing to implement a qualitative meta-synthesis does present certain challenges. Challenges to this kind of analytic technique are due in large part to its

scarce utilization in the literature and lack of consensus with how to implement sampling and analytic techniques within the synthesis (Sandelowski, Docherty & Emden, 1997; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002a). Although potential difficulties may arise when attempting to synthesize qualitative literature, which are due in large part to the distinct findings, methods, and differences in a researcher's perspectives (e.g., theoretical, disciplinary, philosophical, social, ethical, political) within a sample, a meta-synthesis both adds to the development of the theory and enhances the generalizability of qualitative research findings through the integration of key research findings and concepts pertaining to a specific phenomenon (Sandelowski et al, 1997). Sandelowski & Barroso (2002a) recognize that without efforts to integrate the findings of different qualitative studies which address a common research area, "qualitative research will remain underutilized in practice disciplines" (p. 215). While studies implementing qualitative meta-syntheses have been conducted in fields outside of criminology (e.g., Campbell, Pound, Pope, Britten, Pill, Morgan, & Donovan's (2003) study of diabetes; Maher & Hudson's (2007) study of women in the drug economy), its utilization in the current study demonstrates the opportunity to use this analytic technique to gain a deeper understanding of many types of criminological phenomena.

Studies of professional criminals, which exist mostly in the form of ethnographies and life-histories, often apply different theoretical approaches and utilize different qualitative methodological approaches. The utility of using a qualitative meta-synthesis in the current study is that it allows for the integration of theoretical concepts that are derived from multiple studies that use different qualitative methods; this is possible as long as the methodological assumptions of each individual study are carefully considered

and the studies chosen to be included in the synthesis offer the most rewarding data with respect to the original research objectives (Doyle, 2003; Zimmer, 2004). In addition, synthesizing studies that are derived from a diverse set of methodological approaches and backgrounds may in fact strengthen the analysis in a meta-synthesis by counteracting the methodological limitations that exist within the individual studies (McCormick et al., 2008). A qualitative meta-synthesis is proposed for the current study due to its ability to provide a deeper level of understanding within the RCP than may be provided by a qualitative literature review or a meta-analysis, and this understanding may help assess the explanatory power of the RCP with respect to professional crime, as well as the conceptual efficacy of the operational refinements offered by several disciplines over the past few decades. Further, a qualitative meta-synthesis is being implemented in the current study in the hopes of providing conceptual clarity within the RCP as a whole (i.e., taking into account and clarifying the concepts found in the RCP literature which have often been overlooked or taken for granted within the framework).

In order to conduct a meta-synthesis that fits with the sample used in the study, it is first important to determine how the studies are related to one another (Noblit & Hare, 1988). Noblit & Hare (1988) suggest three ways in which the studies may be related: 1) a reciprocal translation (i.e., direct translation), in which ethnographies are synthesized when they are generally about similar phenomenon; 2) a refutation (translation of refutational accounts), in which ethnographies possess competing explanations of a similar phenomena; or 3) a line of argument, in which the ethnographies are viewed as parts of a whole. The relationship of studies as identified above determines the synthesis approach to be used (Noblit & Hare, 1988). The utilization of a qualitative meta-

synthesis in the form of a line of argument approach is proposed for the current study because the units of analysis (books containing qualitative accounts of the lives and decision-making processes of professional criminals) illustrate that the offenders being utilized in the current study belong to identifiable criminal subgroups that comprise a larger (professional) criminal subculture. The utilization of a line of argument synthesis within the current study is examined in more depth later in the chapter, following the sampling procedures and coding processes that comprise the first steps of the synthesis process.

In an attempt to find the best approach to a qualitative meta-synthesis within the current study, the work of several researchers heavily influenced the sampling and analytic methods employed: Noblit & Hare's (1988) landmark contributions to the synthesis of qualitative studies; Sandelowski & Barroso's (2002b) template for reading and appraising qualitative studies; Campbell et al.'s (2003) meta-synthesis of qualitative research on diabetes and diabetes care; Doyle's (2003) recommendations for enhancements of the meta-synthesis process; Hodson's (2004) meta-analysis of workplace ethnographies; and McCormick, Rodney and Varcoe's (2007) approach to meta-analysis within qualitative health research. Following the approaches of these scholars (specifically Noblit & Hare (1988), Doyle, (2003) and McCormick et al. (2008)), the meta-synthesis process employed in the current study adhered to the following steps: First, an initial research interest was identified (i.e., the conceptual efficacy of rational choice) which may be informed by qualitative research. Second, the studies to be included in the sample were identified through an inclusion/exclusion criteria process based on their relevance to the initial research interest and quality of the study. Third, the

studies were read repeatedly and relevant concepts were identified. Fourth, similarities and differences between these concepts were examined across the entire sample to determine how the studies were related. Fifth, while maintaining the main concepts of each individual study (i.e., preserving the context of individual themes), idiomatic translations were created which translated the meaning of the text from one book to another (i.e., common metaphors were created for the sample as a whole) (Barnwell, 1980). Sixth, the translations were synthesized, meaning that the concepts and metaphors were examined in order to determine if the new interpretations could be further translated into each other (i.e., assessing the “economy” (p. 34), or parsimony, of the metaphors to determine if they were “the simplest concept that accounts for the phenomena” (Noblit & Hare, 1988, p. 34)). Finally, the synthesis was expressed in a way in which the translations (i.e., metaphors) were deemed appropriate for the intended audience. The steps described in this analytic process that have been heavily influenced by the works of Noblit & Hare (1988), Doyle (2003), and McCormick et al. (2008) are examined in more depth in the following sections, beginning with the sampling process which is described below.

### ***Sample***

#### *Case Selection*

Following the sampling search procedures of Hodson (2004), the books used in this study were found through computer assisted searches of campus libraries (interlibrary loans were also used in order to obtain certain books not available locally), and by searching for books referenced in the bibliographies of the books already located, as well as by perusing the books located on the shelves that were in close proximity to the

originally located books. While this sampling procedure was purposive and not exhaustive, the methodological integrity of the study is not weakened in this respect since the purpose of a meta-ethnography is “interpretive explanation and not prediction” (Noblit & Hare, 1988; Doyle, 2003, p. 326; Campbell et al, 2003). In other words, the goal of a meta-ethnography is to help create an understanding of the connections and interactions between comparable situations and phenomena, and further, to produce new conceptualizations of the collective interpretation of the phenomena as a whole (Noblit & Hare, 1988, Doyle, 2003). This suggests that a purposive sampling strategy is justified in the current study in that the goal is not to predict future behavior or provide “a means to a greater ‘truth’” (McCormick et al., 2008, p. 936), but rather is to take into account multiple perspectives, consider new ways to approach and reflect upon the data, and to provide a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon (Noblit & Hare, 1988; McCormick et al., 2008). In addition, since a meta-ethnography’s purpose is interpretive and not additive, it is possible to have a sample of books that have different research perspectives, purposes, findings, or interpretations as long as they offer the most rewarding data to the synthesis (i.e., how well they address the original research objectives) (Doyle, 2003). Therefore, the inclusion of a wide variety of professional criminal subgroups within the sample is acceptable as long as the characteristics of each subgroup fit within the classification of professional criminals identified in Chapter 1 (i.e., viewing crime as a career and exhibiting higher levels of organization, risk management, and rationality than may be seen in street criminals). These characteristics of professional criminals comprise the boundary conditions for the units of analysis in the current study (i.e., inclusion/exclusion criteria) (Doyle, 2003). Using books containing information on the

lives and criminal decision-making processes of professional criminals as the units of analysis in this sample allows for the organization and comparison of theoretical concepts across a diverse set of professional criminal subgroups. In addition to establishing boundary conditions for the units of analysis, it is also necessary to define the boundary conditions for case requirements (Doyle, 2003). These criteria are examined below.

#### *Boundary Conditions for Case Requirements*

In order to be included in the sample for the current study, books had to contain qualitative material regarding the lives of professional criminals. Following Doyle's (2003) suggestion, each study had to contain not only case descriptions, but also interpretations and analysis preferably using widely established theories. This assertion is supported by Sandelowski & Barroso's (2002a) contention that researchers should not simply reproduce data without offering an interpretation of the findings, but rather should offer their own view of the findings and explain the resultant interpretations from their own perspective. This study uses both books that specifically implement a rational choice perspective on the study of professional criminals (e.g., Tunnell, 1992; Shover, 1996) as well as books whose accounts represent tenets of rational choice that were identified/predetermined to become key concepts to be included in the data collection process (these concepts are identified later in the section). In addition, each book had to have been written by an academic (e.g., professor, researcher) or professional criminal (or a combination of the two) in order to be included in the study, as well as contain strictly defined qualitative methodology (Campbell et al., 2003).

### *Characteristics of the Studies*

The qualitative methods employed within the sixteen books below range from informal talks and direct observation to in-depth interviews, all of which are utilized to gain insight into the lives and decision-making processes of professional criminals. Some of the books include large sample sizes while others provide information gained from individual case studies and life histories (Noblit & Hare, 1988). The books which comprise the sample and are included in the meta-synthesis conducted within the current study are identified below in the form of an annotated bibliography. The characteristics of these books are summarized in Table 1.

1. Adler, P. (1993). *Wheeling and Dealing: An Ethnography of An Upper-Level Drug Dealing and Smuggling Community*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Using direct participant observation and unstructured, open-ended taped interviews and follow-up interviews with key informants, Adler (1993) provides insight into the lives and decision-making processes of upper-level drug dealers and smugglers. This study, which spanned six years in Southwest County, California, provides an ethnographic account of the drug trafficking subculture, utilizing the perceptions and perspectives of the drug dealers themselves to shed light on the deviant nature of their business and social worlds.

2. Chambliss, W. (2004). *Boxman: A Professional Thief's Journal*.

iUniverse Publishing, Incorporated.

Through the compilation of notes from direct observations, transcription tapes and extensive interviewing that took place over the span of three years, Chambliss (2004) presents the life of a professional thief, Harry King, who spent most of his fifty year criminal career in the area of safe-cracking. This first person narrative, organized and presented by Chambliss (2004), provides great insight into the lifestyle and experiences of King, which are thoroughly documented over the course of his long criminal career.

3. Cromwell, P., Olson, J., D'Aunn W. (1990). *Breaking and Entering: An Ethnographic Analysis of Burglary*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Cromwell and Olson (1990), who hold Ph.D.'s in criminology and psychology, respectively, interviewed burglars in Texas with special emphasis on examining their target selection processes and strategies. The fencing strategies of burglars are also examined, as well as how burglars take advantage of those not involved in the criminal lifestyle to further their own criminal career. An ethnographic approach to this study provides the reader with the offenders' own words, and in turn, their own perspectives of their criminal behavior.

4. Jacobs, B. (1999). *Dealing Crack: The Social World of Street Corner Selling*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.

Within the realm of professional drug dealers, Jacobs (1999) uses open-ended interviews guided by specific category and subject headings in his ethnographic study of crack dealers. Jacobs (1999) identifies the importance of ethnographies and qualitative research in general in that it allows the exploration of an otherwise hidden population. In this case, chain referrals led to forty initial interviews and fourteen in-depth follow-up interviews with crack dealers in St. Louis Missouri.

5. Klockars, C. (1974). *The Professional Fence*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.

In Klockars' (1974) individual case study of Vincent Swaggi, which utilizes both in-depth interviews and observation techniques, the twenty-year career of a professional fence is thoroughly examined with respect to the illicit goods market and its relationship to the legitimate world. Through Klockars' ethnographic approach and presentation of Vincent's first-hand accounts (in his own words), there is much to be gained through the examination of the life and career of a professional fence.

6. Maher, L. (1997). *Sexed Work: Gender, Race, and Resistance in a Brooklyn Drug Market*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Maher's (1997) three years of ethnographic work with female drug users in New York City provides a comprehensive account of

the lives of a rarely studied offender group. Using the women's own words, Maher (1997) describes how these women view crime as work and a way of life, and how gender, race, and class divisions affect how they work and live in a drug economy.

7. Polsky, N. (2006). *Hustlers, Beats, and Others*. New York, NY: Aldine

Polsky (2006) utilizes several qualitative measures (field research, direct observation, informal talks, and participant observation) to gain insight into the lives of professional hustlers. Using the sociology of deviance as the theoretical backdrop for such an exploration, Polsky provides an in-depth examination of the lives and decision-making processes of over 50 professional pool-room hustlers over the course of approximately eight months.

8. Prus, R., Irimi, S. (1988). *Hookers, Rounders, and Desk Clerks: The Social Organization of the Hotel Community*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

Prus & Irimi (1988) use observation and interview techniques to gain insight into the lives of sex workers. The complex processes involved in finding a location, obtaining clients, avoiding police and violence, and making enough money to support their lifestyles are explored and the perspectives of these women are presented in their own words.

9. Shover, N. (1996). *Great Pretenders: Pursuits and Careers of Persistent Thieves*. New York: NY: Perseus Publishing.

Shover (1996) utilizes over fifty autobiographies on persistent thieves, as well as previously published research and his own studies to examine the careers of persistent thieves. Shover's (1996) work is strongly theoretically based, using a crime-as-choice framework to examine the lives and decision-making processes of career criminals over the life course.

10. Simon, W., Mitnick, K. (2005). *The Art of Intrusion: The Real Stories behind the Exploits of Hackers, Intruders and Deceivers*. Somerset, NJ: Wiley, John & Sons, Incorporated.

Simon and Mitnick (2005) interview several hackers (some of whom who have used their former hacking skills and techniques to become security professionals) in an effort to identify and provide insight into some of the threats posed by hackers today. The interviews conducted by Simon and Mitnick (2004) were conducted in an attempt to help businesses protect their information and resources by illuminating the methods employed by hackers to attack their systems and networks.

11. Steffensmeier, D. (1986) *The Fence: In the Shadow of Two Worlds*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, Publishing, Incorporated.

Steffensmeier (1986) provides an in-depth look into the criminal career of a professional fence (dealer in stolen goods) in

his case study of Sam Goodman, which utilizes in-depth interviews and observation techniques. Sam's direct quotes are included in the text which provides an accurate portrayal of his criminal career, including the management of business and social relationships as well as some of the technical aspects of running a successful fencing business.

12. Steffensmeier, D., Ulmer, J. (2005). *Confessions of A Dying Thief: Understanding Criminal Careers and Illegal Enterprise*. Somerset, NJ: Transaction Publishing.

Steffensmeier & Ulmer (2005) return to the case study of Sam Goodman, a professional fence, but present the material in a theoretical context. Specifically, this work chronics the life of Sam Goodman, tracing his criminal career from onset through desistance, providing theoretically relevant concepts as the subtext for Sam's criminal experiences.

13. Sutherland, E. (1988). *The Professional Thief*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

In Sutherland's landmark contribution to the study of professional crime, *The Professional Thief* (1937) offers a conceptualization of the professional thief, which has considerably impacted the study of other professional criminal subgroups over the next 70 years. Through the contributions of Sutherland and Chic Conwell (the professional thief whose life history this work is

based upon), several themes (e.g., languages, codes of ethics, abilities, tools of the trade, and techniques) that have great bearing on an offender's decision-making process are extensively explored.

14. Tunnell, K. (1992). *Choosing Crime: The Criminal Calculus of Property Offenders*. Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Using interviews and official records, Tunnell (1992) explores the criminal activities and decision-making processes of repeat property offenders in Tennessee State prisons. Specifically, issues of motivation, neutralization of fears and alternatives to criminal activity are explored in an effort to gain insight into the decision-making processes of these offenders. The concept of specialization is examined and the utility of deterrence is also addressed.

15. Wright, R., Decker, S. (1996). *Burglars on the Job: Street Life and Residential Break-Ins*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.

Using semi-structured interviews, Wright & Decker explored the criminal lives of 105 currently active burglars in St. Louis, Missouri. Insight into offender motivation, ideals and decision-making processes in general are provided in the form of vignettes which are expressed in the offender's own words.

16. Wright, R., Decker, S. (1997). *Armed Robbers in Action: Stickup and Street Culture*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.

Using semi-structured interviews and revisiting crime scenes, Wright & Decker (1997) explore the decision-making processes and criminal activity of 86 armed robbers. With special emphasis on target selection and risk-management techniques, this study also identifies specific motivations for these offenders to engage in such a criminal lifestyle.

The exclusion criteria for the current study were heavily influenced by the work of Sandelowski & Barroso (2002b) and Campbell et al. (2003). They suggest that an appraisal process may be used to screen out papers that are either inappropriate for inclusion or are of poor quality. Campbell et al. (2003) suggests that by reading through each of the books originally selected in the sampling procedure and checking for a) defined qualitative measures and b) the consistent occurrence of the predetermined rational choice categories, it will become apparent which books should be included in a sample and which books will not fit within the synthesis and should thus be excluded (Campbell et al., 2003). This process, which is an important component of grounded theory methodology (i.e., the reliance on constant comparative methods and the interplay between data and theory), also facilitates the identification of key concepts found within the sample that will eventually be coded and serve as the data for the meta-synthesis; (Glaser & Straus, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Campbell et al., 2003). Sandelowski & Barroso (2002b) provide further detail into how a qualitative work should be read and appraised, and suggest that the quality of the study should be evaluated across several dimensions: the statement of the problem, the purpose/research questions, the review of the literature, the mindset toward the target phenomenon, the methods employed, the

sampling strategy and techniques, the sample, the data collection techniques and sources, the data management techniques, the findings, the discussion, the study's validity and ethics, and the study's form (pp. 31-47).

The original sampling procedures resulted in thirty-four books that contained the criminal experiences and life histories of professional criminals. Following the guidelines of Sandelowski & Barroso (2002b), Campbell et al. (2003), and Doyle (2003), several books that were originally included in the sample that contained information pertinent to the lives of professional criminals were later excluded from the synthesis for several reasons (Campbell et al., 2003; Doyle, 2003; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002b). First, several books were in the form of novels and did not exhibit true representations of ethnographic or qualitative material (e.g., Dunn's *Ponzi: The Incredible True Story of the King of Financial Cons* (1975); Abagnale's *Catch Me If You Can* (1980); Garcia's *Matchstick Men* (2002)). In addition, there were several books that did not discernibly use qualitative research methodology (e.g., Schneier's *Secrets and Lies: Digital Security in a Networked World* (2000); Mitnik & Simon's predominant use of fictional stories in *The Art of Deception* (2002); Thomas' *Hacker Culture* (2002); Harris et al.'s *Gray Hat Hacking: The Ethical Hacker's Handbook* (2005); Tunnell's theoretical examination of the class-crime connection in *Living Off Crime* (2006)) or did not explicitly state the qualitative methodology used (Miller's *Odd Jobs: The World of Deviant Work* (1978); Maurer's *The Big Con: The Story of the Confidence Man* (1999); Verton's *The Hacker Diaries: Confessions of Teenage Hackers* (2002)). It has been suggested that books such as those described above (e.g., lacking in ethnographic/qualitative material used or absent in clear descriptions of the methodologies employed) would not synthesize well with

other books in the sample that employ qualitative material with defined methodologies (Campbell et al., 2003; Sandeloski & Barroso, 2002b).

In addition, several other books comprised numerous methodologies and offender types, as well as being derived from a variety of sources for data collection (e.g., Katz' *Seductions of Crime* (1988); Parnell's (2004) *Crime's Power: Anthropologists and the Ethnography of Crime*; Hyde and Zanetti's (Eds.) *Players* (2003); Moore's (Ed.) *Con men and Cutpurses: Scenes from the Hogarthian Underworld* (2000).) Campbell et al.(2003) and Sandelowski & Barroso (2002b) suggest that books such as these add to an already large number of voices being heard in the study (e.g., voices of the offenders within the sample, voices of the researcher, voice of the synthesis) and may potentially over-complicate the synthesis process. Allen's *Games Criminals Play: How You Can Profit By Knowing Them* (1981) was excluded from the synthesis because the conceptual basis of the book (i.e., how the offenders/prisoners manipulate the guards) did not fit with the rest of the sample or adequately address the current study's research aim (e.g., the concepts of rational choice identified for synthesis in the current study were lacking in this particular book) and would thus not synthesize well with the other books in the sample. Cameron's *Booster and the Snitch* (1964) was also excluded from the synthesis because the data was largely quantitative in nature. A final list of the books included in the sample along with their respective study characteristics may be seen in Table 1 below.

### ***Analytic Plan***

In order to assess the conceptual efficacy of the RCP and permit conceptual refinement of the theory, the current study employs a qualitative meta-synthesis in which

Table 1. Study Characteristics.

<b>Author</b>	<b>Study location</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>Professional Criminal Subgroup</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race/ethnic composition</b>
Sutherland (1937)	Not documented	Written descriptions by participant on topics prepared by the author and in depth discussions	Thief	Chic Conwell (male)	50	Not documented
Klockars (1974)	Not documented	Case study In-depth interviews Observation	Fence	Vincent Norfior Swaggi (male)	Approx. 60	Not documented
Steffensmeier (1986)	Midstate penitentiary & Sam's home post-release (unnamed cities)	Case study In-depth interviews Observation	Fence	Sam Goodman (male)	60	White
Prus & Irini (1988)	Over 50 bars/hotels in "Eastville"	Observations and interviews	Sex worker	Not documented	Not documented	Not documented
Cromwel & Olson (1990)	Texas	Interviews	Burglar	30 27 male 3 female	16-43 (mean=25)	Nearly evenly distributed among white, Hispanic, & African-American burglars
Adler (1993)	Southwest County, California	Unstructured, open-ended taped interviews and follow-up interviews with key informants and participant observation	Drug dealer	Observation of 65 dealers/smugglers Taped interviews with 24 Smugglers: Male Drug Dealers: 10% Female	25-40	Predominantly White

Table 1 (Continued). Study Characteristics.

<b>Author</b>	<b>Study location</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>Professional Criminal Subgroup</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race/ethnic composition</b>
Wright & Decker (1994)	Saint Louis, Missouri	Semistructured interviews	Burglar	105 currently active offenders 87 male 18 female	Under 18- Over 40	69% Black 31% White
Shover (1996)	NA	Based on author's original studies, previously published research, interviews, autobiographies	Thief (robber, burglar)	Over 50 autobiographies of persistent thieves	NA	NA
Maher (1997)	Bushwick	Ethnographic – Repeated interviews, multiple field observations	Sex worker	45 women (full ethnographic sample of 211 women)	19-41 (mean=27.9)	White, Latino, African-American
Wright & Decker (1997)	Saint Louis, Missouri	Semistructured interviews & revisiting crime scenes	Armed robber	86 72 male 14 female	Under 18- Over 40	97% Black 4% White
Jacobs (1999)	Saint Louis, Missouri	Ethnographic – Open-ended interviews guided by specific category and subject headings	Drug dealer	40 initial interviewees (34 male, 6 female) 14 "intensive" interviews (10 new subjects, all male)	Average age in "intensive fourteen": 17.5 (similar to original 40)	African American

Table 1 (Continued). Study Characteristics.

<b>Author</b>	<b>Study location</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>Professional Criminal Subgroup</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race/ethnic composition</b>
Tunnell (2002)	Tennessee State Prisons	Interviews Official records Field notes	Repeat Property Offenders	60 Males	NA	NA
Simon & Mitnik (2003)	Not documented	Interviews	Hacker	Not documented	Not documented	Not documented
Chambliss (2004)	Seattle, Washington	Interviews, direct observations, transcribed tapes	Thief	Harry King (male)	Approx. 60	White
Steffensmeier & Ulmer (2005)	Sam's home; Hospital (unnamed city)	Case study In-depth interviews Observation	Thief	Sam Goodman (male)	Approx. 60	White
Polsky (2006)	Chicago, Illinois; New York	Field Research Direct observation, informal talks, participant observation	Hustler	Interaction with over 50 poolroom hustlers	Not documented	Not documented

key concepts from within the RCP are systematically extracted from individual studies of professional criminals and integrated to form new interpretations of the sample in a holistic context. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, Noblit & Hare (1988) propose seven steps in conducting a qualitative meta-synthesis, which begins with the selection of a research interest and moves through the identification and documentation of key concepts (from a sample of works pertaining to a similar phenomena) to the construction and integration of key themes and metaphors. The resultant synthesis provides a deeper understanding of key theoretical concepts within the RCP than may be provided by a literature review or meta-analysis and these concepts may also be refined through the knowledge gained from the new interpretations (Noblit & Hare, 1998). To expand on this, Noblit & Hare (1988) recognize three important steps within the analytic process that serve to reach this goal, and this analytic process has been replicated by other ethnographers attempting a qualitative meta-synthesis (See McCormick et al., 2008). This process suggested by Noblit & Hare (1988) forms the basis of the analytic plan within the current study. First, theoretical perspectives and assumptions must be clarified in order to ensure compatibility across each study (McCormick et al., 2008). Next, the concepts that are relevant to the theory must be identified in order to recognize how they may be translated into each other (McCormick et al., 2008). In other words, an iterative process of determining common metaphors that represent the collective themes and concepts across different studies increases one's ability to see the "big picture" (McCormick et al., 2008, p. 942). Finally, an "interpretation of interpretations" (p. 940) is constructed, meaning that while the original meanings and contexts are preserved, the

goal of the synthesis is to examine and understand the phenomenon in a broader context and allow for greater conceptual clarity within a theoretical context than may have been offered by the individual studies themselves (McCormick et al., 2008). These steps, as they have been implemented within the current study, are examined in more detail in the following sections.

### *Theoretical Concepts and Coding Process*

The current study follows the methods employed in the studies by Noblit & Hare (1988), Hodson (2004), and McCormick et al., (2008) for identifying and developing concepts and codes within a qualitative work. First, a list of concepts relevant to expected utility and rational choice was created based on recurrent concepts found in both the literature and the sample, including but not limited to the perceived costs and benefits of a criminal act, risk and cost management strategies, as well as emotional/moral factors and additional elements embedded in the criminal career (see Tables 2 and 3). Second, each book within the sample was carefully read and scrutinized several times in an effort to identify these concepts and allow for the recognition of new related concepts. As the readings progressed, the number of concepts deemed important for inclusion expanded and contracted as commonalities between the concepts found in each book emerged. A documentation strategy was then implemented in which codes were created for each concept in order to aid in the process of recording these concepts from each book within the sample. Within this documentation strategy, a methodical reading approach was used in which each book was carefully scrutinized and codes were documented by page number and verbatim transcription of text was used to encourage an overall consistency

in the data collection process. After each book had been read numerous times in conjunction with the continued documentation of key concepts within the material, a final list of key concepts was created which best represented the sample and research aims. These key concepts and codes are defined below and summarized in Tables 2 and 3.

*Expected Utility.* According to the EU model, individuals choose to engage in criminal activity if the expected utility of crime exceeds that of all other behavioral options. The expected utility of crime is based on the offender's assessment of the perceived costs and benefits of a criminal act. Within the current study, three dimensions to both the perceived benefits and costs of a criminal act within the expected utility formula are measured: probability, intensity, and salience. These six dimensions represent the key concepts of the study within the expected utility framework. These concepts are explored below, with examples of how quotes or passages of text which fall into these respective categories are documented by code and page number and recorded verbatim from books within the sample. These concepts, as well as how they are coded for the synthesis, is displayed in Tables 2.

The *probability* dimension of the benefits component refers to the professional criminal's perception of the likelihood of obtaining benefits from criminal offending:

Though crack income may be ephemeral, when it does come, it comes fast and furiously. The cash that could purportedly be made in a short period of time with little effort was attractive. (Jacobs, 1999, p. 27)

[PPB]

Table 2. Economic Origins Concepts & Operationalizations.

Concepts	Operationalizations
Expected Utility	
Benefits	PPB (Perceived Probability of Benefit) PIB (Perceived Intensity of Benefit) PSB (Perceived Salience of Benefit)
Costs	PPC (Perceived Probability of Cost) PIC (Perceived Intensity of Cost) PSC (Perceived Salience of Cost)

The *intensity* dimension of the benefits component refers to the professional criminal’s perception of the level of gains obtained from criminal offending (e.g., amount of money attained):

I’d say for most burglars—I mean the decent ones, if they come out with a couple of thousand or so, that would be satisfactory... There will be some bigger hits, but lotta smaller ones too. (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p. 82) [PIB]

The *salience* dimension of the benefits component refers to the professional criminal’s perception of the importance of obtaining benefits in criminal offending:

As an incentive for fencing stolen goods, money is important to Sam for more than just its potential for acquiring material possessions. As with the rest of us, Sam places great importance on the symbolic value of money for satisfying all sorts of diverse needs in our society. Thus, when Sam interprets his fencing involvement as money-motivated, he means several things. First, he enjoys what money can buy—the goods and services that

can be bought with it. Second, he enjoys the process of making money—the feelings of satisfaction and well-being that come from turning a fast dollar.

Third, Sam enjoys the peer recognition that comes both from having and making money, since money is associated with achievement and recognition or, conversely, of failure. (Steffensmeier, 1986, pp. 220-221)[PSB]

Similarly, the *cost* component of the expected utility model (i.e., the perceived or actual negative consequences resulting from criminal activity such as arrest, incarceration, injury, or death) are divided into three dimensions (probability, intensity, and salience). The *probability* dimension of the costs component refers to the professional criminal's perception of the likelihood of incurring certain costs of a criminal act (i.e., risk of getting caught) when becoming involved in specific criminal acts and general types of criminal offending:

I was arrested six, maybe seven times in American City. By the state police usually, once or twice by the local cops. But these didn't go anywhere, didn't get past the magistrate or the DA. *I thought I had a license to steal as far as handling the warm stuff. Turns out I didn't.* Got popped for buying from a couple of in-between burglars and from Dorothy Ford snitching on me. Ended up doing about four years in the Midstate Penitentiary. *The only good thing to come out this was, this was my last time in the penitentiary. My last fall.* (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p. 183) [PPC]

The *intensity* dimension of the costs component refers to the professional criminal's perception of the level or severity of costs that may be incurred as a result of criminal activity (e.g., number of arrests, length of incarcerations):

Many of the offenders had unrealistic or erroneous perceptions of the punishment severity for the crime they committed. Each participant reported that they knew their actions were illegal and therefore did their best to avoid capture...Most learned the "going rate" for certain crimes after their arrest rather than before (Walker, 1985). Their perceptions of the severity of legal sanction were unrealistic. Therefore, risk was weighted less than it ideally should have been. (Tunnell, 2002, p. 90)

[PIC]

The *salience* dimension of the costs component refers to how important the professional criminal views the costs incurred as having an impact on one's professional or personal life:

To me prison life is a case of being thrown out of society; you're thrown out of a free world and get locked up and that's all there is to it. You just like a bear hibernatin' as far as I'm concerned—you try to make your mind a blank and settle down; you have so much time to do and that's all.

(Chambliss, 2004, p. 94) [PSC]

*Rational Choice Considerations.* In order to address the research aim of the current study, it is necessary to include concepts of rational choice within the coding and synthesis processes. As illustrated in Chapter 2, there are several elements of an

offender's criminal decision-making process that are not operationally included in the expected utility formula. In order to test the conceptual efficacy of the RCP and permit conceptual refinements of the RCP, it is necessary to identify these concepts and include them in the synthesis. These concepts, as well as how they are coded for the synthesis, is displayed in Table 3.

While the measures for expected utility within the current study take into account the perceived costs to an offender (e.g., probability, actual/perceived intensity and salience), the measures for the RCP concepts have been adapted from the operational additions to the EU formula offered by several disciplines as described in Chapter 2. Therefore, measures of costs to an offender have been expanded to include emotional elements such as shame/embarrassment, anxiety, and guilt. The *shame/embarrassment* measure in the current study refers to the professional criminal's feelings of low self-worth or self-disgust before, during, or following a criminal act:

Last, when party pursuits are not going well, feelings of shame and self-disgust are not uncommon. When offenders find themselves in these straits, they often take steps to reduce these feelings by distancing themselves voluntarily from conventional others. (Shover, 1996, p. 99)

[S/E]

The measure for *anxiety* in the current study refers to the professional criminal's feelings of tension which contribute to uneasy feelings when engaged in criminal activity:

Table 3. Rational Choice Concepts & Operationalizations (Synthesis era and beyond).

Concepts	Operationalizations
Costs	Sh/Em (Shame/Embarassment) An (Anxiety) G (Guilt)
Benefits	M (Money) Pr (Property) E (Excitement) OS (Offender Status)
Opportunity	Opportunity (O) SO (Situational Opportunity) OT (Opportunity from Tips)
Risk	PR (Perceived Risk)
Risk Management	RT (Rational Techniques) TS (Target Selection) LC (Connections with Law)
Cost Management	CM (Cost Management)
Emotions	A (Anger) F (Fear)
Morals/Values	M/V (Morals/Values) R (Rationalizations)
Necessity/Limited Alternatives Situational Factors	N (Necessity/Limited Alternatives) SF (Situational Factors)
Criminal Codes/Rules of Ethics Criminal Careers	CC/RE (Criminal Codes/Rules of Ethics) CWL (Crime as Way of Life) S (Specialization) CO/T/T (Career Opportunities Trajectories/Transitions) D (Desistance)

It's hell being on the run. It's very hard to make it. In the beginning you're always looking over your shoulder. (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p. 48) [A]

The measure for *guilt* in the current study refers to the professional criminal's experience of painful negative emotions in the form of feelings of dishonor or responsibility for wrongdoings the offender has committed:

For our purposes, the important point is that during their robberies a majority of the offenders could not be constrained by a guilty conscience; they simply did not have one. That said, some of them reported feelings of guilt immediately following a stickup, especially if the victim had been hurt...Such feelings, however, had a tendency to dissipate quickly so that, when the need to commit another stickup arose, they no longer carried much emotional force for the offenders. (Wright & Decker, 1994, p. 127) [G]

Similar to the expansion of the cost measures of expected utility described above, the RCP measures for perceived *benefits* in the current study are also defined in specific operational terms in order to clarify the 'tastes' component of the EU formula.

Therefore, the RCP measures of *benefits* in the current study move beyond measures of probability, intensity, or salience and clearly delineate the specific perceived benefits involved in the offender decision-making process. These concepts and measures have been adapted from both the RCP literature and the books in the sample. The RCP measures of offender benefits within the current study include *money, property,*

*excitement*, and *offender status*. These measures are described below, along with how these passages were documented.

The *money* component of the *benefits* measure refers to the professional criminal's monetary gains, but may also include the symbolic importance of these gains with respect to feelings of status or success:

As an incentive for fencing stolen goods, money is important to Sam for more than just its potential for acquiring material possessions. As with the rest of us, Sam places great importance on the symbolic value of money for satisfying all sorts of diverse needs in our society. Thus, when Sam interprets his fencing involvement as money-motivated, he means several things. First, he enjoys what money can buy—the goods and services that can be bought with it. Second, he enjoys the process of making money—the feelings of satisfaction and well-being that come from turning a fast dollar. Third, Sam enjoys the peer recognition that comes both from having and making money, since money is associated with achievement and recognition or, conversely, of failure.

(Steffensmeier, 1986, pp. 220-221) [PSB]

The *property* component of the *benefits* measure refers to additional gains to the professional criminal that may have monetary or status-related value (e.g., clothes, cars, jewelry):

I can remember when I would pay \$250 for a suit of clothes and then overhaul a slot machine with them on and get them all greasy and take

them off and throw them away. I didn't care. I wore the best clothes attainable. The only thing I was very conservative about was my cars.

(Chambliss, 2004, p. 18) [Pr]

The *excitement* component of the *benefits* measure refers to one of the non-monetary/material pleasures of being a professional thief, in which an offender may experience a positive emotional rush in the process of committing a crime:

Third, Sam was drawn to the excitement and action of *making money* from crime. The wheeling and dealing of fencing, the risk of getting caught, the possibility of a really big deal, were all sources of stress and tension, but also excitement...one of the things he seemed to miss was this very excitement, that "little kick you need once in awhile." The desire for excitement seemed to be one thing, along with the money, of course, that could draw him back into crime in his moonlighting phase.

(Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, pp. 349-350) [E]

The *offender status* component of the *benefits* measure refers the professional criminal's feelings of high standing in the criminal hierarchy, levels of respect gained from peers, and feelings of pride:

The whole thing was being noticed. That everybody knew me, knew who I was...It's human nature to want that recognition, not so much that you're the center of attention, now, but that they look up to you, respect you for what you are. Take the thieves asking for advice, really they are looking up to you. (Steffensmeier, 1986, p. 222) [OS]

Beyond the expansion of the cost/benefit measures within the RCP framework, other RCP considerations have been included in the coding process that have been adapted from the review of the literature and found in the sample. For example, concepts of opportunity and risk management characterize an offender's efforts to manipulate elements found in the expected utility formula, while concepts addressing an offender's ability to deal with emotions or situational factors may influence how expected utility and other rational choice factors are perceived and managed. These concepts and their respective codes are described below.

The *opportunity* measure is separated into several components: *opportunity*, *situational opportunity*, and *opportunity from tips*. *Opportunity* is defined as chances to engage in criminal activity which are recognized by a professional criminal as attractive yet may require careful planning techniques and strategies (e.g., staking out a residence or following a potential victim):

Throughout the study, it was obvious that burglars exhibited wide variation in experience, skill, commitment to burglary and the level of planning and forethought given to their crimes. One way to categorize them would be to the extent to which they were opportunists as opposed to being planners. Our subjects fell along a continuum between being passively opportunistic—that is, taking advantage of presented opportunities when they occurred randomly in the course of their routine activities—to seeking out and creating opportunities for crime. However, an opportunistic burglar was not

necessarily an amateur. Opportunism does not necessarily imply lack of rationality. A burglar may make a completely rational decision to take advantage of certain criminal opportunities when they arise, or to seek out or even create opportunities in a systematic manner. (Cromwell & Olson, 1990, pp. 39-40)

The *situational opportunity* measure refers to situations that arise in which the offender recognizes as a low-risk or rewarding target to be taken advantage of (e.g., seeing an unlocked door or open window) and does not necessarily require planning or the utilization of rational techniques:

The sites, more often than not, were targets of opportunity rather than purposeful selections...The burglar happened by the potential burglary site at an opportune moment when the occupants were clearly absent and the target was perceived as vulnerable (open garage door, windows, etc.). (Cromwell & Olson, 1990, p. 19) [SO]

The *opportunity from tips* measure refers to the information given to professional criminals from a variety of sources (e.g., other offenders, court officials) that awards one with the knowledge of specific and potentially lucrative criminal activity:

We always got a lot of tips on places to clip—like from a bartender, an insurance man, a salesman, maybe a guy that drives a delivery truck. But more from lawyers than anybody...It would be like eating cake for us, it was so easy. You can't imagine how nice it is, unless you went through it the other way. When someone can tell you, so and so is going on

vacation for two weeks. Even knows that someone two doors down the street checks the place twice a day. And when you get in, the money or whatever is always there where it's supposed to be. Now that makes you feel wonderful in itself. (Steffensmeier, 1986, pp. 47-48) [OT]

While inferences about an offender's perception of risk may be drawn from their feelings about the probability, intensity, or salience of costs of a criminal act (within the expected utility measure described above), instances of risk perception are also specifically documented with the rational choice measures. *Perceived risk* therefore refers to specific instances where an offender perceives a criminal situation to contain higher or lower chances of being caught, or would result in greater or less severe punishment costs:

In short, the armed robbers in our sample typically adopted a pragmatic approach when assessing the risks of potential robbery sites (see also Murray 1983). Did they stand a good chance of getting away? Were they likely to be seen by passersby? If the answers to those questions were yes and no respectively, most of them appeared to spend little extra time worrying about less predictable and more remote hazards (e.g., being surprised by a security patrol). Given that the offenders were desperate to get cash as quickly as possible, this makes perfect sense. From their perspective, it was better to get on with the offense than to ponder the risks indecisively. (Wright & Decker, 1997, p. 81) [PR]

The *risk management* measure is comprised of several components within the current study which refer to an offender's effort to minimize the possibility of incurring the potential negative consequences of a criminal action (e.g., being arrested or incarcerated) including: *rational techniques*, *target selection*, and *connections with the law*. The *rational techniques* measure refers to the specific criminal methods used by professional criminals that demonstrate their careful planning and rational decision-making processes:

In addition to his covering of stolen goods under the guise of legitimate businesses where the stolen goods did not look out of place with the legitimate merchandise, Sam used a variety of other techniques at one time or another, depending on the situation, to avoid prosecution including:

1. not asking explicit questions about the origins of goods;
2. being extra careful with goods known to be stolen locally;
3. telling thieves not to "clip" too often, thus attracting attention to the theft and the goods;
4. having "drops" or secure places to hide stolen goods (e.g., a concealed space under the floor in his American City shop, or an old abandoned railroad car);
5. moving/selling stolen goods as quickly as possible (while still making a profit);
6. creating vague or false receipts for goods; and finally,

7. gaining the complicity of law enforcement through outright corruption, giving bargains to police, or else occasionally helping to recover stolen property (as long as it did not involve snitching). (Steffensmeier and Ulmer, 2005, p. 99) [RT]

The *target selection* measure refers to an offender's selection of a potential victim or establishment which offers the greatest likelihood of success or reward with the least amount of risk (e.g., an armed robber searching for a victim perceived to offer little resistance, a burglar searching for a housing unit with no alarms or close-by neighbors):

Being motivated to commit a crime is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the actual commission of the act. Even a highly motivated burglar—one who has immediate need for money—must still locate a vulnerable target and manage to effect entry without detection. These tasks are not as simple as they may appear to be. As Wright and Decker observe, “In theory, the supply of residential properties seems so vast that finding a target would seem to be a simple matter. In practice, however, potential targets are fairly limited” (p. 62). The potential burglary target must:

- Be unoccupied (90 percent of the burglars we interviewed stated that they would not knowingly enter a residence where they knew someone was at home)
- Not be easily observed from the street of neighboring homes

- Be in a neighborhood or area where the burglar would not “stand out” or be noticed as a suspicious stranger
- Be accessible—relatively easy to break-in to
- Contain items worth stealing. (Cromwell & Olson, 1990, p. 18) [TS]

The *connections with law* measure refers to the professional criminal’s use of public officials (cops, lawyers, judges etc) to minimize potential risk or costs of a criminal activity:

Infrequent police investigation is the fence’s first line of defense against legal interruption of his business. If strategies of avoiding arrest and police investigation fail, however, the fence must turn his efforts to exploitation of the criminal justice system. For one thing, he may enjoy, as a result of personal contact, favors owed, or payoffs, the complicity of one or more of the main actors of the justice system: the prosecutor (or one of his assistants), the district magistrates or lower court judges, and the trial court judges. Less directly, the fence may rely on the services of a skilled or well-connected attorney to manage his dealings with the prosecutor or the judiciary. (Steffensmeier, 1986, p. 154) [LC]

The *cost management* measure refers to the methods used by professional criminals to manage costs already incurred to limit their negative effect (e.g., becoming friends with or bribing law officials to decrease the intensity of one’s punishment):

Things were going smoothly. Was doing easy time, really. Knew how to handle myself from being in jail before, the juvenile reformatory.

Fuck with me, I will fuck you back...O'Keefe put the word into the warden for me to help out in the office. This was a plum job. The warden was an old Dutchman, ran a pretty loose operation...O'Keefe and me were getting stuff from guys we knew from before and guys from jail who were now out—cigars, candy, hams, different things. We'd hold some for the warden, to keep him happy. We both had a lotta leeway but O'Keefe had a lot more than me. (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p. 47) [CM]

Offenders often experience certain emotional responses to the criminal activity in which they are involved. As seen in the review of the literature, two common emotions involved in crime commission are *anger* and *fear*. The *anger* measure refers to an emotional arousal in which the offender experiences heightened states of hostility or rage:

No one can say confidently what the net result of such a development would be, but it is useful to note that enduring extremely harsh or brutal treatment can reassure some prisoners even as it kindles dangerous emotions. I refer specifically to embitterment, anger, and the desire to wreak revenge...Instead of deflecting him from a criminal pathway, this experience toughened and made him resolute. (Shover, 1996, pp. 181-182) [A]

The *fear* measure refers to a negative emotional reaction to a criminal situation in which the offender experiences feelings of immense concern or apprehensiveness:

Men and women with a distinct preference for burglary often are afraid of the drama and uncertainty of armed robbery. They do not want to “have to shoot anyone,” and they fear the risk of serious injury or death at the hands of the victim or the police. Equally feared are the long prison terms that this contingency would bring. Burglary for them represents a favorable compromise between safety and the quest for bigger money. (Shover, 1996, p. 65) [F]

Offenders often have certain morals or values that guide the kind of criminal activity they engage in or at the very least shape how they perceive it. The *morals/values* measure refers to an offender’s recognition or awareness of their own feelings about the criminal activity they are involved in (e.g., notions of right vs. wrong, refusal to engage in certain kinds of crime, mechanisms to deal with feelings of guilt):

The great majority of these sixty criminals never thought of punishment or capture and did not feel guilty about what they had done. This is not to imply that they are amoral misfits, for my findings and earlier studies suggest that offenders are moral individuals who experience guilt feelings at some point in their criminal careers (e.g., Frazier and Meisenhelder, 1985). Even while frequently engaging in criminal actions, these offenders knew their actions were wrong. But, they were able to rationalize their feelings due to desire or necessity, or they were able to put the wrongfulness of their actions out of their minds and not

dwell on them. Likewise, the offenders did not desire punishment.

(Tunnell, 2002, p. 97) [M/V]

The *rationalizations* measure refers to the professional criminal's justifications of one's criminal acts/lifestyle (e.g., blaming the victim, denying that one's actions are harmful):

In sum, by offering positive anecdotes about his own generosity, by defining the average citizen as having larceny in his heart, and by finding others—thieves, corrupt police, and unscrupulous fences—more morally bankrupt than himself, Sam can lay claim to his own good character (namely, that in spite of everything he has done, he is a pretty decent fellow). This claim is reinforced by Sam's judgment that he is not a "thief," that comparatively few people are hurt by his fencing activities, and that matters of conscience seldom keep respectable people from buying stolen items from him. (Steffensmeier, 1986, pp. 251-252)

[R]

The *necessity/limited alternatives* measure refers to an individual's need to engage in criminal acts or turn to a criminal career/lifestyle based on their inability to secure a lifestyle through legitimate means:

Legitimate opportunities for the majority of these respondents to earn a decent wage were structurally limited. Although they may not have been able to articulate it, they were aware, at least intuitively, of the odds against them, and often opted for illegitimate means to obtain

socially approved success goals (Merton, 1949; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Gordon, 1973). The majority had “everything going against them,” that is, most had dropped out of school or were dismissed at a young age and were unable to develop marketable job skills... They then experienced those well-known difficulties associated with being ex-convicts (Goffman, 1963; Becker, 1963). (Tunnell, 2002, p. 57) [N/LA]

The *situational factors* measure refers to specific situations or conditions that may arise during a criminal activity and how they may affect a professional criminal’s decision-making process (e.g., victim resistance, police presence, security/guard dogs):

We found that burglars are opportunistic and are easily deterred or displaced from one target site to another. Situational factors such as the presence of a dog, an alarm system, security hardware, and alert neighbors may be the most effective deterrents. (Cromwell & Olson, 1990, P. 32) [SF]

The *criminal codes/rules of ethics* measure refers to the common understandings between professional criminals which guide one’s criminal endeavors (e.g., not snitching on other offenders, splitting a cut from a score fairly, not speaking about criminal endeavors with friends/family outside of one’s criminal peer group):

Are rules, understandings, that burglars and thieves have, at least the better ones. Not to be a snitch is a main, main one. And don’t be a blabber puss, running off the mouth, to your buddies or girlfriend about the clipping you are doing ’cause then the whole world will know.

Settle things amongst yourselves, with your partner or the guys you're are working with. Don't be whining and carrying your grief to others. Are other understandings, too. One is that everybody on the job should get the same, except I don't always work that way. The main guys on a job will split it evenly amongst themselves but may chisel the dropoff or if somebody is not a regular but is just brought in for this job.

Generally, you don't wanna break into a place if you know the people are there. This is common sense, you don't want to risk that there's now a witness who has seen your face. And what if the fucker has a gun and starts firing. Another understanding is, say, you come across another crew operating—then move on and let them be. It is first come, first served. (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, pp. 81-82) [CC/RE]

The crime-as-career concept represents an important tenet of the RCP literature. The oscillation of criminal activity through different phases of a professional criminal's career is important to consider when examining an offender's decision-making processes over the life course. Within the *criminal careers* concept, measures of *crime as a way of life*, *specialization*, *career trajectories/transitions* and *desistance* are presented below.

The *crime as a way of life* measure refers to an offender who persists in criminal activity for an extended period of time and views crime as a lifestyle. *Crime as a way of life* also indicates that an offender is making one's living primarily from the illegal activities in which one is engaged:

The persistent offender is one who has been criminally active over a long period of time, sees himself as somewhat of a professional, and concentrates on planning more than the sporadic offender. The sporadic criminal offender identified in this research is one who has committed crimes infrequently and often opportunistically. This type is uncommitted to a criminal lifestyle and has a lower "success" record (i.e., they have been punished for a greater percentage of their crimes than the persistent offender). (Tunnell, 2002, p.116) [CWL]

The *specialization* measure refers to the instances where a professional criminal remains in one realm of offending for an extended period of time during one's career, which may be a result of an offender being comfortable or successful with that type of criminal activity, or from an absence of opportunity or a lack of the required skills needed for other types of crime:

*There are different sides to whether a thief will specialize or not. Many will want to avoid that 'cause they will know if you are doing anything to make a buck, you will more likely end up in jail. Will depend, can the guy get the contacts, can he hook up with other guys who are decent, which will limit what kinds of clipping he is doing. Then, are you good at it and how comfortable do you feel. If that falls into place, then this will become your main thing. (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p. 320) [S]*

The *career opportunities/trajectories/transitions* measure refers to the existence and recognition of opportunities over the course of the criminal career that may heavily

influence an offender's transition to different forms of criminal offending or a desistance from criminal activity altogether:

On the other hand, criminal careers empirically exhibit both consistency and change, as well as key turning points. As abundant literature shows (see the review in Ulmer and Spencer 1999), many pathways exist into and out of crime across the life course, and criminal propensity is not inherently stable over time. Some of the themes from Sam's narrative suggest that much change in criminal careers stems from variations over time in differential association processes and in access to attractive criminal opportunities and networks. Furthermore, labeling processes can heavily influence deviant career trajectories, as can luck, and situational and other factors. In addition, the original causes of behavior may not be the same as the later causes that sustain or entrench criminal behavior. There is considerable ebb and flow in (most) criminal careers as offenders adjust to shifts in tastes, abilities, and opportunities. Furthermore, these shifts are often age-related. (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p. 302) [CO/T/T]

The *desistance* measure refers to instances when professional criminals stop engaging in criminal activity and may be due to: aging out, lack of opportunities, or a greater awareness of risks:

The rational choice perspective appears to be a useful way of understanding and analyzing not only the initiation of criminal

behavior and drug taking, but also the cessation of these behaviors. Burglars reported desisting from crime or functionally displacing (to less serious types of crime such as shoplifting) for a variety of reasons. Some simply appeared to “age out”—losing interest in the activities that excited and thrilled them when younger. Some gained powerful ties to conventional society through marriage or by obtaining a meaningful job, making burglary less attractive. Many others, however, desisted only after having served one or two previous incarcerations. These desisters reported that they had finally begun to consider the potential long-term consequences of their behavior. Their past criminal history made them more subject to increasingly severe penalties. (Cromwell & Olson, 1990, pp. 80-81) [D]

The final list of concepts and codes to be included in the synthesis (seen in Tables 2 and 3) are utilized in several analytic steps that culminate in the creation of a line of argument synthesis. The utilization of a line of argument synthesis within the current study is now explored.

### ***Line of Argument Synthesis***

Since each of the studies to be used in the meta-synthesis is representative of a particular professional criminal subgroup, the most appropriate synthesis for the current study is a line of argument synthesis (Noblit & Hare, 1988). This analytic technique allows for the drawing of inferences about a particular culture or organization as a whole

by examining studies based on its component parts (Noblit & Hare, 1988). The purpose of the synthesis is to attain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and higher levels of conceptual clarity within the guiding theoretical framework than what would be offered by any of the individual qualitative studies (Campbell et al., 2003). As described at the beginning of this chapter, the first step in the analytic process of the current study (once the concepts and codes have been created and documented from the sample) was to examine the similarities and differences between the concepts as they vary across the criminal experiences and decision-making processes of a diverse set of professional criminal subgroups (Noblit & Hare, 1988; Doyle, 2003). This step was employed in order to determine how these concepts might take on new interpretive meanings within the sample and be integrated on a holistic level when the synthesis takes place (Noblit & Hare, 1988; Doyle, 2003). Next, it was necessary to create what Doyle refers to as “key descriptors,” a process that leads to the creation of common metaphors that can be created for the entire sample (Doyle, 2003). The purpose of this step was to recognize the common patterns and themes that emerge within the sample (while maintaining the original meanings/contexts of the offenders and authors within the sample) with respect to the theoretical concepts being addressed and to start viewing the sample as a whole. The final step was to synthesize these concepts and metaphors in a way that provided a broader view of the phenomenon while preserving the original contexts and meanings of the initial concepts (McCormick et al., 2008). As a result of this synthesis, which allowed for the integration of key concepts found within the sample (which pertain to the decision-making processes of professional criminals and embody the tenets of the RCP),

opportunities to refine theoretical concepts within the RCP and provide greater conceptual clarity of the RCP framework as a whole emerged (Noblit & Hare, 1988). In the following chapter, the results of the meta-synthesis are presented and discussed.

## Chapter Four

### Results

#### *Appraisal*

While the 16 books that were originally chosen to be included in the meta-synthesis appeared to have satisfied the boundary conditions for inclusion in the sample, the final stages of the rigorous global review process demonstrated that several of the books would not synthesize well with the others because they did not satisfy the boundary conditions for units of analysis. The conceptualization of the professional criminal within the current study is established in Chapter 1, and acknowledges that the term “professional criminal” embodies certain distinctive characteristics that distinguish this offender type from other classes of offenders (e.g. higher levels of organization, risk management and rationality, greater levels of status and success, viewing crime as a career). The first paragraph of Sutherland’s *The Professional Thief* (1937), one of the first books written on the subject of professional criminals, illustrates this point:

The professional thief is one who steals professionally. This means, first, that he makes a regular business of stealing. He devotes his entire working time and energy to larceny and may steal three hundred and sixty-five days a year. Second, every act is carefully planned. The selection of spots, securing of the property, making a get-away,

disposing of the stolen property, and fixing cases in which he may be pinched (arrested) are all carefully planned (p. 3).

While some may question the accuracy of such a description in more contemporary eras, and claim that the term “professional” may be used haphazardly by the police or media (and may not even be used by the professional criminal himself), several authors have illustrated that the main components of the professional criminal have not significantly changed since the time of Sutherland’s *The Professional Thief* (1937). For example, it is made apparent in Steffensmeier’s *The Fence* (1986) that:

...notions like career, status, rationality, skill, which the word professional connotes, already inhere in the concept of fence as used in the underworld (p. 3).

Cromwell & Olson (2004) also support this conceptualization of the professional criminal and demonstrate that it transcends different types of offenders within this subgroup:

Professional burglars constitute the elite of the burglary world. They are differentiated from the other categories by the level of their technical skill, their organizational abilities, and the status accorded them by peers and generally by law enforcement authorities.

Professionals do not usually commit crimes of opportunity. They plan and execute their crimes with deliberation. They have excellent contacts for disposing of stolen merchandise... Their status is recognized and accepted by others (other thieves, law enforcement,

fences, etc.), and they are accorded “respect” befitting that status (p. 42).

Several books that were reviewed in the analytic process and coded with the intention of including them in the final sample based on their use of qualitative methodology appropriate to the meta-synthesis process, as well as their respective authors’ reputations for working with offender types that would fit well in this sample, were ultimately excluded from the line-of-argument synthesis. These books were excluded because after a more intensive examination of the offenders that made up these studies, it was realized they did not fit the conceptualization of a “professional” criminal as described above. In order to stay faithful to the meta-synthesis process, which requires that the data pertain to a similar phenomenon and is capable of producing concepts that fit and work within a guiding theoretical framework, it was important to ensure that the offenders included in the final sample shared the main components of professional crime as conceptualized within the current study: being part of a criminal underworld, viewing crime as a business, possessing special skills that differentiate them from other types of offenders, engaging in planning and risk management strategies, being persistent in their criminal endeavors (viewing crime as a way of life), with their primary goal being money, and enjoying higher levels of success than other types of offenders due to these characteristics and higher levels of rationality in general. The books that were excluded at this stage of the analytic process are presented below, with quotes and explanations illustrating why they were excluded from the final synthesis.

*Books Excluded from the Final Line of Argument Synthesis*

Maher's *Sexed Work* (1997) was excluded not only because the criminal activity of the offenders in this book was most often unplanned and opportunistic, but also because the author's objective was to present a "theoretical framework for understanding the ways in which gendered and raced cultural narratives structure the organization of illegal work" (p. x). While these themes are not thoroughly examined in the current study (see limitations section in Chapter 5), themes of rational choice are also not developed in this book in a way that may provide fruitful data for synthesis with the other books in the sample.

The offenders in Jacob's *Dealing Crack* (1999) made their choices "in a context where not only rationality is sharply bounded, but it barely exists" (p. 41). These offenders did not engage in decision-making processes representative of the "professional" criminal as conceptualized in the current study, but rather made decisions "in a social and psychological terrain bereft of realistic alternatives" (p. 41).

Upon closer review, Wright and Decker's *Armed Robbers in Action* (1997) was more representative of the decision-making processes of street offenders:

Desperate to obtain quick cash to keep the party going, most armed robbers are primed to settle for the first, rather than the best, target available to them. The cool rationality that characterizes the target-selection decisions described by imprisoned armed robbers is in short supply on the streets (p. 94).

In addition, Wright and Decker's *Burglars on the Job* (1994) did not focus on offenders who engaged in any level of rational decision-making in their criminal activity:

Our results show that nothing could be further from the truth; the active residential burglars we talked with made hurried, almost haphazard, decisions to offend while in a state of emotional turmoil (p. 211).

While Cromwell and Olson's *Breaking and Entering* (2004) appeared to offer fruitful data with respect to the application of rational choice concepts to professional crime, a more rigorous examination during the later stages of the global review process revealed that the burglars in their study:

exhibited a wide variation in experience, skill, commitment to burglary, and the level of planning and forethought given to their crimes (p. 39).

Therefore, while some offenders in their study exhibited characteristics of professional criminals, a large part of the sample was representative of novice offenders who did not consider long-term risk and focused only on immediate and situational factors.

Shover's *Great Pretenders* (1996) also provided a wealth of information on criminal activity representative of rational choice factors yet did not specifically examine the decision-making processes and criminal activity of professional criminals. Not only was this study comprised of multiple samples (which would overcomplicate the synthesis process as explained in Chapter 3), these samples, while pertaining to persistent or career

thieves, were not comprised of professional thieves as conceptualized within the current study:

Nevertheless, stealing in the contemporary world requires use of skills street-level thieves have little knowledge of or experience with. They know little or nothing about entrepreneurship, the ability to organize personnel and resources for productive purposes. The same is true of their knowledge of managing hierarchical work organizations.

Inability or refusal to discipline themselves, to assume an entrepreneurial posture, or to rationalize their stealing through organization, careful planning, and assessment of changing criminal opportunities marks and handicaps them. Successful stealing over any appreciable period of time requires the same skills needed for success in legitimate occupational pursuits. Those who cannot or will not employ these skills are destined for the correctional netherworld (p. 111).

Tunnell's sample in *Choosing Crime* (1992) was comprised of "ordinary repeat offenders who were once very active" (p. 14). With respect to the decision-making processes of the offenders in this sample, "criminal decision problems seem to be resolved in a less than rational fashion" (p. 82), indicating that the offenders "rarely considered the threat of capture, arrest, and imprisonment and that risk was considered a nuisance rather than a real, tangible threat" (p. 100). "Thus, the decision to commit a crime for these persistent offenders was not...one of calculation" (p. 154). These

offenders did not make criminal decisions that would categorize them as professional criminals and therefore were excluded from the synthesis.

In addition, after revisiting Hodson's *Meta-analysis of Workplace Ethnographies* (2004), it was deemed important to only include books in the final synthesis that concentrated on a "specific identifiable group" (p. 13). As evidenced by their titles, Polsky's *Hustlers, Beats & Others* (1967) and Prus & Irini's *Hookers, Rounders & Desk Clerks* (1980) focused on offenders across a range of criminal subgroups, often making comparative statements and collective interpretations. While there were doubts about the synthesizing potential of these books (i.e., whether or not the "hustlers" or "hookers" fit the conceptualization of professional criminal as utilized in the current study, or if these books offered enough fruitful data with respect to RCP concepts to synthesize with the other books in the sample), the bigger issue is that because these books included multiple offender subgroups, the coding processes became overcomplicated when trying to collect "detailed information for a specific identifiable group" (p. 13) of offenders. Their inclusion in the meta-synthesis process would thus jeopardize the reliability and validity of the synthesis (see Chapter 5) (Hodson, 2004).

While it may appear that some of the books were excluded from the final meta-synthesis because they did not support the tenets of the RCP, it was necessary to exclude them to be faithful to the meta-synthesis process. Although data were collected and coded for each of the books listed above, the importance of maintaining fidelity to the meta-synthesis process justifies the exclusion of these books from the final synthesis, which was due to their inability to synthesize well with the other books. This inability to

synthesize may be due to inconsistencies in conceptualizations, the focus of the data collected (i.e., the framing/presentation of the findings), or the qualitative methods employed. Including these books in the final synthesis when previous meta-syntheses studies have demonstrated the inability of studies such as these (i.e., similar data or methodological components/issues) to synthesize with the other books in the sample would jeopardize the quality of the final synthesis (See Appraisal Process in Chapter 2) (Campbell et al., 2003).

### *Revised Operationalizations*

During the later stages of the global review process, certain operationalizations of the rational choice categories were added or specified to more accurately represent the data. The iterative process of grounded theory methodology (i.e., constant interplay between data and theory) allows for the constant revision of conceptual and operational definitions as long as they are grounded in the data, guided by theory, and aim to illuminate relationships, patterns, and themes within the sample (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). For example, a specific operationalization of “incarceration” (coded as “Inc”) was included in the “cost” category based on the plethora of references within the sample that demonstrated the importance of recognizing this specific component of an offender’s perceptions of cost:

I sat down and thought about it a lot of times. *Prison takes something out of you. I can’t explain it. You come out a different person. I don’t know if it makes you bitter, hard, or whatever. You learn to trust only yourself in life.* (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p. 328) [Inc]

In addition, “enjoyment” was joined with the operationalization of “excitement” within the “benefits” category, as the data suggested that these emotions were tied closely together and viewed as some of the non-monetary benefits experienced by the offenders:

Doing it for fun, the devilment and to bullshit with your buddies about what you pulled, what you go away with. These were still the main reasons. (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p. 46) [E]

“Offender status” was specified to include definitions of “pride” in one’s criminal activity and lifestyle:

The professional thief, like any other professional man, has status. The status is based upon his technical skills, financial standing, connections, power, dress, manners, and wide knowledge acquired in his migratory life. His status is seen in the attitudes of other criminals, the police, the court officials, newspapers, and others. The term “thief” is regarded as honorific and is used regularly without qualifying adjectives to refer to the professional thief... This term is applied with reserve and only to habitual criminals. It is considered a high compliment. (Sutherland, 1937, p. 200) [OS]

An operationalization of “criminal subculture” (coded as “CSC”) was created within the “criminal careers” category to include references to criminal hierarchy, language and other elements specific to the criminal underworld:

The professional thief lives in the underworld and has sympathetic and congenial relationships there. He is isolated from legitimate society

except as he contacts it in his professional capacity, and legitimate society is largely isolated from the underworld. The underworld is an exclusive society because of the danger involved from strangers.

Within the underworld communication regarding the law, which is the common enemy, is free. (Sutherland, 1937, p. 16) [CSC]

“Crime as business” (coded as “CB”) was also added as a distinct operationalization within the “criminal careers” category in order to capture the business aspects of professional criminals as they have been conceptualized in the current study:

Vincent’s location, his ability to pay immediately and to buy in large quantities, and his willingness to buy almost anything account far more for the thief’s choice to do business with him than the prices the thief will be paid for merchandise. Such competitive advantages should not be considered less significant merely because they do not directly determine prices. In running a fencing business it is most important that one gets the first opportunity to buy merchandise.

Location, ready money, and reputation get the thief to come to Vincent first, giving him the chance to apply those techniques of bargaining I have described above. One can always pass up an offer. One can never buy that which has already been sold to someone else.

(Klockars, 1974, pp. 132-133) [CB]

“Specialization” was subsumed within the “Career Opportunities/ Transitions/ Trajectories” operationalization because references to this concept were in the context of

an offender's career path, and as a concept derived from the data, the final global review process demonstrated that it was not common or salient enough to contribute to the synthesis or offer conceptual clarity within the RCP framework. Other operationalizations that were considered (e.g., "injury," "death," "revenge") were not added because although there were some references to these concepts in the sample, their occurrences were also not common enough to make a considerable contribution to the synthesis. The operationalizations that have been added were frequently referenced in each of the books within the sample and were deemed an important consideration with respect to the criminal decision-making processes of the professional criminals included in the sample. The line of argument synthesis is examined in the next section.

### *The Synthesis*

With hundreds of pages of data in the form of thousands of quotes and passages recorded from the final six books in the sample, the analytic process was divided into six steps (the first two steps have been added since the beginning of the research process to help provide organization and clarity within the analytic process): 1) a final appraisal process to determine the books to be used in the final line-of-argument synthesis; 2) the documentation of the "counts" of the operationalization codes for each book and drawing basic inferences from these findings; 3) the utilization of the counts in conjunction with a final global review process to identify similarities/differences and patterns/themes in the concepts found in the sample; 4) the creation of key descriptors for each book, which leads to 5) the creation of common metaphors for the sample as a whole to best represent the concepts in each book in a holistic and simplified manner; and 6) the synthesis of

these metaphors in order to make general interpretive statements about the sample as a whole.

### *Final Appraisal Process*

Simon & Mitnik's *The Art of Intrusion* (2003) raised some concerns during earlier appraisal processes about its potential ability to synthesize with the other books in the sample due to its lack of focus on certain concepts that were heavily addressed in the other books (e.g., offender status, criminal subculture, crime as a way of life). In addition to potentially compromising the final line of argument synthesis due to its lack of several significant concepts being addressed, there were also serious doubts as to whether or not these offenders fit the conceptualization of the professional criminal. While these offenders did exhibit rationality and use their skills to engage in risk management strategies in order to obtain money, elements of criminal persistence (i.e., criminal career), offender status, and criminal subculture were lacking in the book when compared to the other books in the sample. This book was excluded from the final line of argument synthesis in an effort to maintain the richness of data across all aspects of the professional criminal and rational choice categories.

At first, it was not evident whether Adler's *Wheeling and Dealing* (1993) would synthesize well with the other books in the sample based on discrepancies between the offenders' rationality in the business aspect of their lives and their irrational hedonistic lifestyle:

While these dealers and smugglers are business-like in their occupational orientation, profit motivation, and rationally organized

work behavior, they are fundamentally committed to drug trafficking because of the uninhibited lifestyle it permits them to lead. They therefore act rationally for the ultimate end of living irrationally. This, then, is a study of a subculture of hedonism whose members have revolted against conventional society's rationalism and repression in order to indulge the impulses of their brute beings. (pp. 2-3)

However, having fit the overall conceptualization of the professional criminal in conjunction with their representation of the rational choice concepts included in the current study, the addition of these offenders to the sample was an opportunity to expand the diversity of the offender subgroups included in the meta-synthesis. The fluidity of the appraisal and conceptualization processes described here and in the previous chapters is a testament to the complexities of grounded theory methods. The advantage of such an iterative process may be seen in the conceptual density (“the richness of concept development and relationships”) (p. 74) and the potential for thick description and theory elaboration offered by the meta-synthesis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The books included in the final line of argument synthesis (Sutherland, 1937; Klockars, 1974; Steffensmeier, 1986; Adler, 1993; Chambliss, 2004; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005) are listed in Appendix A. Findings from the operationalization counts are examined in the next section.

#### *Operationalization Counts*

While some researchers may question the use of “counts” during the analytic process, Kirk & Miller (1986) justify this type of methodological technique in a

qualitative research endeavor by stating that the importance of qualitative research lies in its focus on human interaction with the consideration of the language and environment of the people being studied, and “less important is whether or not, or at what level of sophistication, numbers are employed to reveal patterns of social life” (p. 12). Offering counts as a way to reveal these patterns does not preclude the use of qualitative methodology, as qualitative research often relies on the utilization of a diverse set of research methods (Kirk & Miller, 1986). The benefit of using counts in the current study is that it facilitates the analytic processes integral to grounded theory methods (e.g., examining similarities and differences between each book within the synthesis, discovering patterns and themes across the sample as a whole) that are essential to the formation of a successful meta-synthesis. The findings from the operationalization counts utilized in the current study are examined below and illustrated in Figure 1 and Appendix B.

*Findings from the Operationalization Counts.* The operationalizations that had the greatest prevalence among the sample of books included in the final synthesis were related to four main RCP concepts: “criminal careers” (“crime as a way of life;” “criminal subculture;” “career opportunities/trajectories/ transitions;” “desistance”), “risk” (“perceived risk”) and “risk management” (“rational techniques;” “connections with the law”), and “benefits” (“offender status;” “money;” “excitement”) (See Figure 1 below for the averages of the operationalization counts across the 6 books in the sample; See Appendix B for the individual operationalization counts within each book). “Opportunity” was also prevalent in the sample as a general category, but the specific

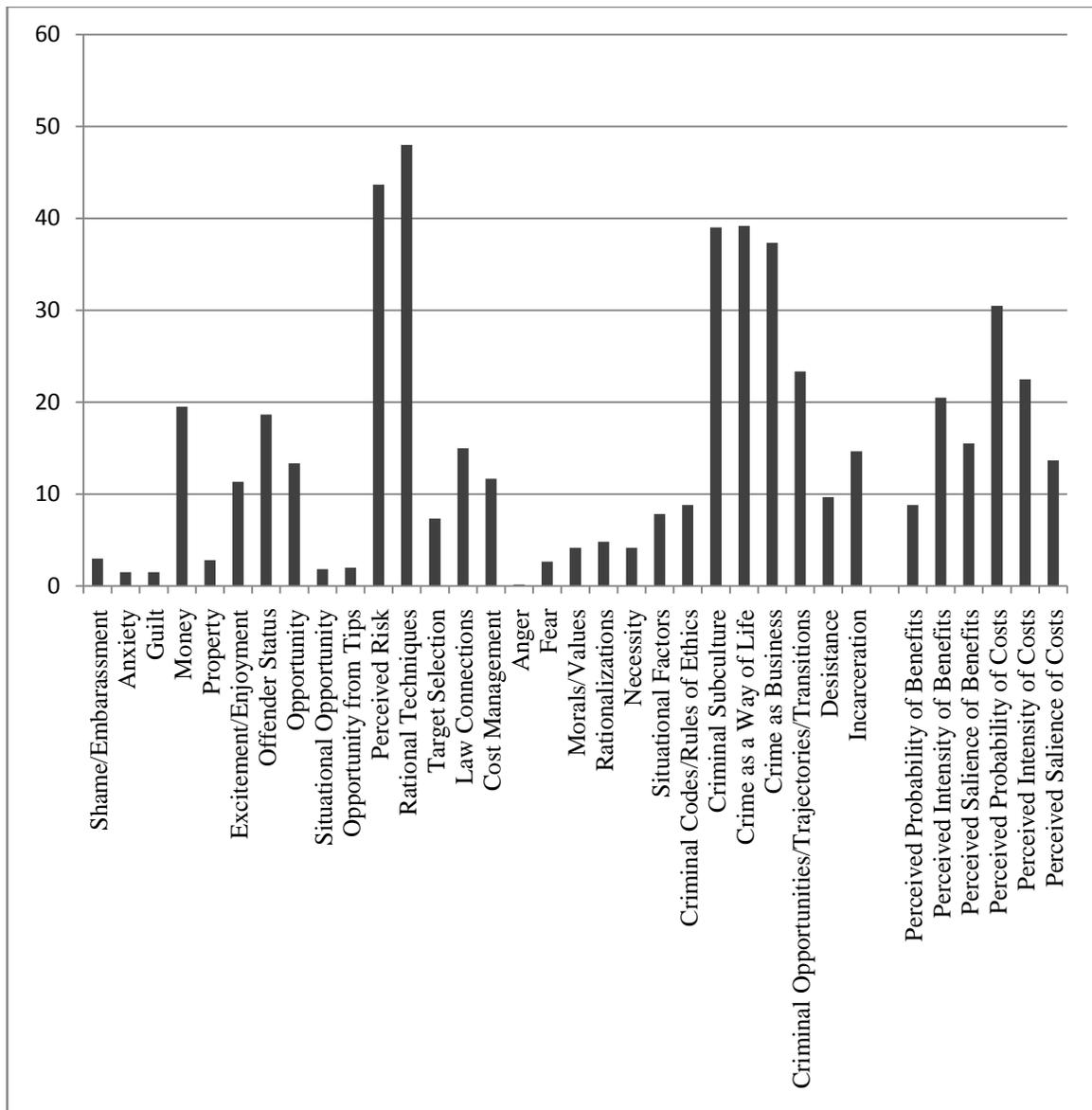


Figure 1. Averages of Operationalization Counts.

operationalizations of “situational opportunity” and “opportunity from tips” were not nearly as common. Each operationalization of the “expected utility” categories (perception of the probability, intensity, and saliency of costs and benefits) was also highly prevalent in each of the books included in the synthesis, with the highest prevalence of references to the perceived probability of costs, the perceived intensity of

costs, and the perceived intensity of benefits, with the lowest prevalence of references to the perceived probability of benefits. The added operationalization of “incarceration” also had a fairly high prevalence among the sample.

References to RCP categories that were not as prevalent as those listed in the preceding paragraph yet were still common enough to be considered an important part of the criminal decision-making process included: “target selection,” “situational factors,” “cost management,” and “criminal codes/rules of ethics.” Rational choice categories that did not appear to have a considerable impact on the criminal decision-making process were: “costs” (“shame/embarrassment;” “anxiety;” “guilt”), “emotions” (“anger;” “fear”), “morals/values,” “rationalizations,” “property,” and “necessity.” While these elements of the RCP were referenced in several of the books, they did not possess the same level of universal pervasiveness as the other RCP categories and operationalizations.

The most intriguing aspect of examining the counts was the discovery of a high amount of overlap with respect to the individual codes within the RCP categories being observed. For example, within Steffensmeier and Ulmer’s *Confessions of a Dying Thief* (2005), one passage revealed 11 individual operationalizations across several main RCP categories. The codes have been placed in the appropriate part of the passage to demonstrate this overlap:

For Sam, the opportunities were plentiful [O], the risks were manageable [PR], the rewards were attractive (e.g., money [M], excitement [E], pride in his skill [OS]), and the criminal behavior was

a part of his sense of self. At the height of his career [CWL], Sam (and many of his co-offenders) believed he would gain an attractive income from crime [PPB/PIB], would not get caught [PPC], would not serve much prison time if he got caught [PIC] (e.g., because his business employs workers who provide economic support to their families), and he was not afraid to serve time because life in prison, while unpleasant, was not threatening to him [PSC]. (p. 299)

Another example from Sutherland's *The Professional Thief* (1937) contains references to nine operationalizations of the RCP categories used in the current study:

The profession of theft, with the characteristics which have been described, is organized around the effort to secure money [M] with relative safety [PPB]...The thief is relatively safe in his thefts for three reasons [PR]: First, he selects rackets in which the danger is at a minimum [TS]. The professional thief scrupulously avoids the types of theft which are attended with great danger and especially those which involve much publicity...Second, by training and experience the professional thief develops ingenious methods [RT] and the ability to control situations [SF]. A thief is a specialist in manipulating people and achieves his results by being a good actor [CWL]. Third, he works on the principle that he can "fix" practically every case in which he may be caught. [LC/PPC] (pp. 217-218)

While not every passage was as representative of the diverse set of operationalizations within the RCP categories considered within the current study, the majority of passages did contain some form of overlap, with almost every one containing multiple codes. This suggests the potential of concepts within the RCP to be simplified and/or combined in a way that provides clarity and refinement within the framework. In general, the importance of constructing these counts is that it facilitates the analytic processes in which similarities and differences between the books in the sample are identified, common patterns and themes within the sample are recognized, and common metaphors may be created for the sample that can then be used to make interpretive statements in a holistic manner.

While these counts facilitate the analytic process, they are limited in certain respects. For example, they do not indicate degree or directionality: a high prevalence of references to “perceived probability of costs” or “perceived risks” does not necessarily indicate that offenders viewed particular criminal activities to contain high levels of risk. Within this example, these counts indicate the number of references an offender makes to one’s perceptions of risk or cost probabilities but does not indicate how salient these perceptions are in their decision-making processes. Using these counts to make direct inferences about the offenders in the sample would be misrepresentative of their actual decision-making processes, especially when the counts can also be skewed based on the length of a book within a sample of only six books. The utility of these counts is that they offer an initial construction of the stratification of concepts (according to importance) within an offender’s decision-making processes by identifying the average

number of times specific operationalizations are referenced across the sample. The degrees of which these concepts are important and how they actually impact the decision-making processes of the offenders in the sample are examined through the careful observation of the data (specifically the language used). These steps in the analytic process are examined throughout the remainder of the chapter.

### *Recognizing Similarities, Differences, Patterns & Themes*

In addition to documenting operationalization counts, the global review process also provides the opportunity to recognize similarities and differences between the books in the sample, as well identifying overall patterns and themes across the sample as a whole. The most overwhelming similarity between the offenders in the sample with respect to their motivation to offend was their desire to make money. While respect and thrill were also commonplace among the perceived non-monetary benefits of these offenders, the primary benefit in their criminal activity was the acquisition and spending of money. Sutherland's *The Professional Thief* (1937) was the only book that claimed excitement was not a desired benefit of professional criminals. According to Sutherland (1937), the professional thief "seeks money, not thrills" (p. 141). This may be attributed to the time period that this book was written, in that in more recent eras of criminal offending, professional criminals are more likely to have fun in the process of making money (as well as enjoying the thrilling aspects of a criminal lifestyle where money is not the primary issue) than in the possession of money.

Other similarities between the offenders in the books are their constant adaptation and progression of methods and techniques, their use of the "fix" as a risk/cost

management strategy, their distrust of women, their clannish behavior, their understanding of criminal classes (i.e., stratification), their belief that prisons do not rehabilitate, their perceptions of places/situations getting “hot” (i.e., risky), and the difficulty in going straight due to an isolation and/or estrangement from legitimate society in conjunction with the constant temptation and opportunities to engage in criminal activity. While each of the professional criminals in the sample possesses specific attributes and highly specialized skills (e.g., awareness, heart, confidence, wits, front, ability to manipulate), certain attributes and skills pertain to the type of offender subgroup. For example, a professional safe-cracker may possess more technical skills, while a professional burglar may have more manual dexterity and be more inclined to use physical knowledge and ability, whereas a professional fence may rely on one’s ability to manipulate people and handle business aspects of that particular illegal enterprise (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005). Regardless of the specific skills that are required to become involved in a particular offender subgroup, an offender “is not professional until he is proficient” (Sutherland, 1937, p. 14).

Two of the most important themes within the sample are that professional criminals exhibit high levels of rationality in their criminal activity (i.e., they use highly developed skills and rely on planning and risk management strategies that are constantly being developed) and they view crime as a business (i.e., they are dedicated to their work and use specific angles and techniques to maximize their profit). Common risk management strategies are related to the planning and execution of crimes, the disposal of stolen goods, the fixing of cases, and controlling the situation. Despite some feelings of

invulnerability, most of the offenders in the sample believed in the law of averages and considered being arrested a part of the criminal lifestyle. Most of the offenders attributed their arrests to the luck of the police or their own greediness. Overall, if one is careful and engages in the rational techniques described above, the professional criminal is “frequently arrested, occasionally convicted, and very rarely compelled to do a bit” (Sutherland, 1937, p. 122). They are frequently arrested because of their known presence in the criminal subculture (which often makes them prime suspects in a number of cases) and they are only convicted if they can’t “fix” the case prior to or during the trial, which is certainly not the norm (thus making time in prison highly unlikely). For many offenders in the sample, “the judgment of the law...is irrelevant” (Klockars, 1974, p. 138).

Another important theme within the sample is the oscillation of criminal activity within an offender’s career. The books in the sample make reference to specialists and generalists, to full-time operating and moonlighting, to desistance and a return to a criminal lifestyle. These offending pathways are based on the skills, opportunities, and desires of the offender and are often age-related (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005). The theme of career oscillations represents a non-dichotomous view of desistance and identifies that many possible trajectories are possible over the course of a criminal career.

#### *Key Descriptors*

Following Doyle’s recommendations to enhance the meta-synthesis, the next step in the analytic process (after identifying similarities/differences and themes/patterns in the sample) was to identify “key descriptors,” a process that is used to maintain the

“salient language” of the books in the sample and facilitate the creation of metaphors to be synthesized (Doyle, 2003, p. 333). According to Doyle (2003), implementing this stage of the analytic process helps to preserve the original meanings and contexts of the offenders studied in the books used in the sample, while maintaining the perspectives of the original authors as well. Identifying key descriptors within the sample uses language as a tool to accomplish this, as well as serving as an organizational tool that may be used to identify further similarities/differences, patterns and themes among the studies.

By examining Table 4 below, one may make initial inferences about the sample in a holistic manner and recognize how these concepts may be translated into each other. For example, the key descriptors used with respect to the concept of “morality” identify that offenders used “loopholes of morality” (Steffensmeier, 1986) to suggest that they have done “nothing morally wrong” (Adler, 1993), were “not ashamed” (Chambliss, 2004) and were “not morally bad” (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005), as well as making allusions to “society’s hypocrisy” (Klockars, 1974) by suggesting that they as thieves were “not the only dishonest people” (Sutherland, 1973). This step in the analytic process also demonstrates the similarities and differences in how offenders and authors within the sample used language to describe similar concepts. For example, offenders in five of the six books used the term “respect” to communicate the importance of status within the criminal subculture, while “prestige” and “professional loyalty” were also used to convey similar conceptualizations of status. With respect to the concept of cost management, offenders in three of the six books used the term “fixing” a case or an arrest to describe how one would engage in “legal maneuvers” (Adler, 1993) to take advantage of the

Table 4. Key Descriptors.

	<b>Sutherland (1937)</b>	<b>Klockars (1974)</b>	<b>Steffensmeier (1986)</b>	<b>Adler (1993)</b>	<b>Chambliss (2004)</b>	<b>Steffensmeier &amp; Ulmer (2005)</b>
<b>Expected Utility</b>	“secure money with relative safety”	“embrace illegitimate entrepreneurial career”	“rewards must compensate for time/effort and risks” (p. 3)	“downward prestige mobility” “rational organization”	“lucrative” “no need to change”	“rational act”
<b>Costs</b>	“frequently arrested, occasionally convicted, rarely compelled to do a bit” “long sentence can be a shock” “isolation” “counterfeit existence” “social outcast/renegade”	“rarity of costs incurred from law” “jail as vacation” “estrangement from legitimate society” “regular suspect”	“wears on a person” (p. 234) “major losses” (p. 231)	“tension” “pressures” “stress” “common arrests/incarcerations” “feelings of failure”	“sometimes too hot” “brutality” “thrown to lions” “bear in hibernation”	“loser reputation” “overall rejection” “loneliness” “life of crime is hell in many ways”
<b>Benefits</b>	“irregular earnings” “money and merchandise” “respect for success” “status” “seeks money, not thrills”	“dramatic economic advances” “cars, clothes and money” “occupational loyalty” “professional respect”	“money first” “excitement/enjoyment” “status” “respect” “adventurous deviance” (p. 225) “competitive play” (p. 225)	“flash” “euphoria” “lavish experiences” “overabundance” “money” “thrill seeking” “beautiful people” “in crowd” “glory in material wealth” “ego” “prestige” “hedonism” “materialism” “freedom” “excitement” “power” “respect”	“money” “property” “lucrative” “enjoyment” “autonomy” “simpler life”	“serious money” “small and big hits” “spending money” “getting over on somebody” “autonomy” “challenging” “excitement/enjoyment” “respect” “rewards were attractive” (p. 299) “pride in skill” “confidence”
<b>Opportunity</b>	“business opportunities”	“contacts” “willing and able” (p. 178)	“larceny sense” (p. 190) “risk management affects perception of opportunity” “willing and able” (p. 257)	“market conditions”	“insatiable curiosity” “marks everywhere” “automatic casing” “situational” “tips”	“situational” “tips” “inventiveness” “ingenuity” “plentiful opportunities” (p. 299)

Table 4 (Continued). Key Descriptors.

	<b>Sutherland (1937)</b>	<b>Klockars (1974)</b>	<b>Steffensmeier (1986)</b>	<b>Adler (1993)</b>	<b>Chambliss (2004)</b>	<b>Steffensmeier &amp; Ulmer (2005)</b>
<b>Risk</b>	“extreme suspicion” “arrests/ incarcerations part of life”	“judgment of law is irrelevant”	“hard to catch, hard to convict” “less detection risk, more economic risk” “not afraid to take chances”	“risk elements” “did not create arbitrary risks” “very real danger of arrest” “optimistic in ability to evade law” “law of averages” “sheer happenstance” “sensitization to extreme risks” “repressed awareness of danger” “invulnerability”	“no fear of anything” “understanding of risk”	“tastes for risk” “more to lose when older” “law of averages” “free spirit” (p. 361) “not afraid to take risk” “manageable risks” (p. 299) “no threat of prison” (p. 299)
<b>Risk Management</b>	“corruption in law” “mutual compromise with law” “larceny sense” (p. 32) “special techniques/ methods”	“quick turnover of merchandise” “special techniques/ methods”	“special techniques/ methods” “layers” “police corruption” “knowledge” “planning” “target selection” “theft as business” “strategic connections” “front” “ingenuity” “industry”	“special techniques/ methods” “greater security precautions” “secrecy” “insulation” “manipulation” “forms of smuggling”	“special techniques/ methods” “stealing as business” “metronome in head” “smart decisions” “conscientious”	“special techniques/ methods” “connections” “illegal networks” “layers” “license to steal” “no threat of prison” (p. 299) “stages” “people skills” “self-discipline” “business”
<b>Cost Management</b>	“‘fixing’ a case”	“good performances” “utilize experience”	“fixing cases”	“legal maneuvers” “bribery”	“‘fixing’ hundreds of arrests” “corruption everywhere”	“handle yourself” “learn by experience”
<b>Morals/ Values</b>	“doesn’t justify stealing in general” “not only dishonest people”	“not a thief” “worth” “businessman” “denial of responsibility” “denial of injury” “society’s hypocrisy” “ledger of morality”	“robin hood” “loopholes of morality” “American values”	“cool” “nothing morally wrong” “provided commodity”	“people beg for it” “not ashamed” “legitimate”	“not morally bad” “good people” “moral qualms” “no guilt”

Table 4 (Continued). Key Descriptors.

	<b>Sutherland (1937)</b>	<b>Klockars (1974)</b>	<b>Steffensmeier (1986)</b>	<b>Adler (1993)</b>	<b>Chambliss (2004)</b>	<b>Steffensmeier &amp; Ulmer (2005)</b>
<b>Criminal Careers</b>	“selection” “tutelage”	“dealer” “successful” “public” “career” “tough”	“legitimate business” ‘skill, time, planning, & organization’ “regular basis” “heart” “reputation for personal integrity” (p. 27) “relationships” “attributes” “itch”	“disillusionment” “progressive burnout” “occupational pattern of shifts and oscillations” “commitment” “legitimate work” “primary occupations” “drug careers” “self-image” “business sense”	“hard to settle down” “little respect for society” “hard adjustment to society” “criminal as an alcohol” “temptation” “doubts decision to go straight”	“driven out by lack of opportunity” “heart” “personal commitment” “money, prestige & power” “network” “connected” “valuables and costs” “sense of self” “conditions” “crime is business” “phases and shifts” “ebbs and flows” “pushes and pulls” “career crime” “versatility” “specialization” “desistance not dichotomous” “oscillation” “larceny in heart” “temptation”
<b>Criminal Subculture</b>	“professional courtesy” “exclusive society” “common love” “common enemy” “gradations within profession” “few fixed rules of ethics, but common understandings” “never squawk”	“in a class by himself”	“elite underworld class”	“subculture of hedonism” “fast life” “glitter crowd” “criminal organizations” “vertical continuum” “prestige hierarchy” “peer social organization” “evolution of structure/social organization”	“language” “changes in underworld” “clannish” “classes”	“criminal underworld activities” “tutelage” “changes in criminal subculture” “helluva code” “understandings” “no snitching”

“corruption everywhere” (Chambliss, 2004). Offenders in other books communicated that one would “utilize experience” (Klockars, 1974) to “handle yourself” (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005) in situations that may pose a threat to one’s criminal lifestyle or well-being in general.

This process of identifying key descriptors in the sample served two main purposes: 1) it maintained the language used in the original books of the sample (thus preserving their original meanings and contexts), and 2) it facilitated the transition to the next step of the analytic process (i.e., the development of common metaphors for the sample) which is examined in the next section.

#### *Creation of Metaphors*

The creation of metaphors in the form of idiomatic translations of text (i.e. the metaphors are not literal translations of text, but rather are translations of the meanings of the text) is the culmination of the previous steps in the analytic process. This stage of analysis illustrates the importance of using an iterative process to identify concepts, recognize similarities/differences, document patterns and themes, as well as identify key descriptors in each of the books included in the sample. By utilizing this iterative process to create common metaphors for the sample (which preserve the original salient meanings and contexts of the original studies), the phenomenon being studied in the sample may be understood in a broader context and allow one to see the “big picture” (p. 942) through the representation of the collective concepts and themes within the sample that are presented in a new interpretive and holistic context (Kirk & Miller, 1986; Noblit & Hare,

1988; McCormick et al., 2008). The eleven metaphors created for the line of argument synthesis utilized within the current study are examined below.

*Larceny Sense.* “Larceny sense” refers to the “natural aptitude and a range of specialized knowledge” (Adler, p. 105) possessed by professional criminals. Professional criminals with larceny sense are “observant and sensitive to circumstances and opportunities for illicit gain, and know when to take advantage of them or to desist” (Steffensmeier, 1986, 190). They also have a “working knowledge of the theft subculture, the business community, and the society at large” (p. 187) and possess attributes of trustworthiness, heart, awareness, luck and brazen which help him “manage relationships with different audiences from both legitimate and illegitimate walks of life” (Steffensmeier, 1986, p. 187).

While larceny sense takes an offender’s attitude into account, it also refers to an offender’s business sense with respect to one’s “wits, “front,” and talking ability” (Sutherland, 1937, pp. 197-198). The common attributes and (highly specialized) skills possessed by professional criminals, which increase one’s levels of success when compared to other kinds of offenders, are only utilized to their full potential when one recognizes that “*crime is a business*” (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p. 330). The offenders in all six books in the sample identified the importance of running professional crime as a legitimate business, and implementing business-oriented techniques and strategies (e.g., utilizing knowledge of market conditions, negotiation tactics, buying and selling strategies) to increase the likelihood of success.

*Respect.* The professional criminals being studied in the sample had “an expectation of occupational loyalty and a kind of professional respect” (Klockars, 1974, p. 155). These expectations were warranted based on their development of “a certain sophistication and elegance” (Klockars, 1974, p. 93) in their occupational dealings. The possession of good ethics and reputations are also important components to being respected, as well as the level of success enjoyed in one’s criminal lifestyle. While some offenders “relished the spread of their reputations” (p. 94) as it fed their ego and sense of prestige, the overwhelming connotation of respect as it pertains to the offenders studied within this sample is the professional level of respect that one gains through one’s skills, attributes, success, and status as a professional criminal.

*Networks.* This metaphor recognizes the importance of maintaining networks comprised of “multiple layers and types of relationships” (Adler, 1993, p. 63). Not only does “a network of contacts” (p. 67) lead to a consistent presence of criminal opportunities, but it also allows one to receive assistance from other “connected” (p. 67) professionals (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005). Networks may consist of “partnership bonds,” “connectional liaisons,” “friendship networks,” and a “circle of acquaintances” which are often based on reputation (Adler, 2005, pp. 63-64).

*Prestige Hierarchy.* “Prestige hierarchy” refers to the stratification of offenders across a “vertical continuum, or hierarchy of levels” (Adler, 1993, p. 55). Professional criminals, who reside at the top of this continuum, belong to “a more elite class of underworld members” (p. 223) who make specific distinctions between different classes of offenders (Steffensmeier, 1986). For example, “violent behavior was least prevalent in

the upper echelons of the prestige hierarchy” (Adler, 1993, p. 119) and offenders who “steal through necessity...[and] do it as a matter of supporting the habit, not because it’s a lucrative trade” aren’t “considered to have any class at all” (Chambliss, 2004, p. 62). While each offender provides their own “stratification system of the underworld” (p. 218) based on their specific offending subgroup and racket, the “pecking order” (p. 218) for classes is consistently based on skills, pride, respect/status, ethics, and success.

*Subculture.* The professional criminal subculture is comprised of “acquaintances, congeniality, sympathy, understandings, agreements, rules, codes of behavior, and [common] language” (Sutherland, 1937, p. 4). The criminal underworld is an exclusive society with common attitudes, activities, and codes that attest to the professional courtesy and loyalty inherent to the subculture (Sutherland, 1937). In addition, professional criminals have a common love (money) and a common enemy (the law) (Sutherland, 1937). Professional criminals are clannish in nature, and often congregate outside of their business activities to discuss capers and techniques (in their own language) in a fraternity setting (Chambliss, 2004).

*Money.* Stated simply, money is consistently the highest priority of the offenders in the sample with respect to their objectives and measures of success. While “it is impossible to estimate how much he will have at the end of the year” (p. 143) based on one’s irregularity of earnings, the monetary successes enjoyed by the professional criminals in this sample were overwhelmingly positive. The professional criminals enjoyed making, having and spending money and often enjoyed “dramatic economic

advances” (p. 67) in their careers in which exclusive and lavish clothes, cars and homes were a constant reminder of their lucrative criminal enterprise.

*Adventurous Deviance.* “Adventurous deviance” refers to the ways in which “the uncertainty, the anxiety, the risks involved are an intrinsic source of pleasure. When kept at a manageable level, the risks may be viewed as excitement, challenge, or fun” (Steffensmeier, 1986, p. 225). Adventurous deviance as a metaphor represents the non-monetary benefits of offending with respect to the thrill of the act, where offenders were “doing it for fun, the devilment and to bullshit with your buddies about what you pulled” (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p. 46). Offenders were often “drawn to the excitement and action of *making money* from crime” (p. 349) and felt they “need[ed] a little kick once in a while” (p. 320) (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005). In this way, “the risk of getting caught, the possibility of a really big deal, were all sources of stress and tension, but also excitement” (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p. 349). These offenders “reveled in the thrill-seeking associated with their close scrapes [and] their ever-present danger” (Adler, 1993, p. 85).

*Competitive Play.* “Competitive Play” (Steffensmeier, 1986, p. 225) refers to the professional criminal’s desire and ability to “match wits with others” (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p. 349). Competitive play may appear in financial transactions, evading the law, legal maneuvers, and in other dealings with a variety of “thieves, buyers, and police” ((Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p. 349). Competitive play serves as an intrinsic source of pleasure for the professional criminals in the sample, as their ability to outwit their

competitors provides them not only with a sense of enjoyment, but aids in their development of status and earning of respect.

*Loopholes of Morality.* The professional criminals in each book offered several rationalizations or justifications of their criminal behavior which exhibited a common moral stance among the sample. These offenders offered three basic rationalizations of their action: 1) what they did wasn't wrong or immoral ("denial of responsibility"); 2) what they did didn't hurt anyone ("denial of victim"); and 3) the "victims" either deserved it or had just as much "larceny in [their] heart[s]" as the professional criminals being studied (Klockars, 1974, p. 147; Steffensmeier, 1986, p. 251). An offender who is "unable to rationalize his guilt and is unable to reconcile his wish for a positive self-image with his actual career in crime" (p. 236) will often have to desist from criminal activity altogether (Steffensmeier, 1986). However, the professional criminals in this sample were generally content with their lives, had positive self-images, and were unashamed of their activities. These offenders saw what they did as justified and their interaction with "legitimate" members of society made their criminal lifestyles easy to rationalize, especially when one "adheres to deeply ingrained "American" values—competition, material success, individual action, freedom, hard work, acquisitiveness, and loyalty" which allows them to feel part of the general "moral order" (Steffensmeier, 1986, p. 251).

*Commitment.* Commitment refers to the "rewards, positive emotions and attitudes, preferences, and valued identities" inherent to the criminal lifestyle. This takes into account "positive attitudes toward *his criminal activities themselves*" (p. 348) as well

as the “associations with and mutually positive attitudes toward others in the underworld” (p. 350) which reinforce a professional criminal’s desire to remain in one’s criminal lifestyle (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005). Admiration of money, prestige and power, in conjunction with a love of criminal underworld activities become embedded in a professional criminal’s self-concept and criminal identity (which are often inseparable) (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005). The importance of recognizing an offender’s level of commitment to their criminal lifestyle is that “one cannot understand the continuity and longevity of [an offender’s] criminal career without understanding the degree to which [one is] personally invested in the social world of criminal enterprise, and [finds] it personally rewarding” (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p. 348).

*Career Oscillations.* Career oscillations refers to the “considerable ebb and flow in (most) criminal careers as offenders adjust to shifts in *tastes*, *abilities*, and *opportunities*” (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p. 302). While professional criminals are distinct from other types of situational or opportunistic criminals in that they view crime as a career and engage in criminal activity on a regular basis as their primary occupation, there are “different *pathways* and *trajectories* of offending careers” (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p. 310). . An important insight within this metaphor is that desistance is not a dichotomous concept, in that within these career oscillations, possibilities for specialization and/or moonlighting (background operating) phases are always present as long as the offender maintains the skills and connections needed to engage in criminal activity. As a result of these opportunities, offenders often feel an “itch,” where “the

danger of returning to the old life *always is there*” (Steffensmeier, 1986, p. 60; Chambliss, 2004, p. 122).

The metaphors depicted above were created as a result of the iterative analytic process as described in this chapter. Before moving on to the next step of the analytic process (the synthesis of these metaphors), it is important to make reference to certain criteria which attest to the adequacy of these metaphors. These criteria are examined below.

#### *Adequacy of Metaphors*

Noblit & Hare (1988) draw from Brown (1977), Martin (1975) and House (1979) to identify the criteria for the “adequacy of metaphors in social science” (p. 34). They suggest that the metaphors are adequate when they meet the following five criteria: *economy* (i.e., parsimony; “the simplest concept that accounts for the phenomena” (p. 34)); *cogency* (i.e., the metaphors are non-ambiguous, non-contradictory, and non-redundant); *range* (i.e., ability to integrate a wide range of data relative to a similar phenomena); *apparency* (i.e., successfully demonstrating the meaning of the data); and *credibility* (i.e., the metaphors are understood by the audience) (Noblit & Hare, 1988). These criteria have been carefully considered in the creation of metaphors within the current study, and the adequacy of these metaphors may be measured by the degree of success of the synthesis. The line of argument synthesis is the final analytic process within the current study and is examined in the next section.

### *Line of Argument Synthesis*

Following the translation of metaphors into one another, a line of argument synthesis is the culmination of all the analytic steps that have been taken throughout the research process and is “essentially the construction of an interpretation” (Noblit & Hare, 1988, p. 74). Through the utilization of grounded theory methods and thick description, the author of the synthesis can preserve the perspectives of the offenders in the sample, as well as the interpretations of the original authors, while presenting concepts and metaphors in a new interpretive and holistic context (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955; Kirk & Miller, 1986; Noblit & Hare, 1988). This is achieved through the constant interplay between data and theory throughout the research process, culminating in a line of argument synthesis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The synthesis reveals hidden meanings from within the individual studies and provides new ways of looking at the metaphors (i.e., placing them in a new interpretive and holistic context) to provide a better understanding of the sample as a whole (Noblit & Hare, 1988).

The line of argument (See Figure 2 below) for the current study reveals several important factors concerning the lives and decision-making processes of professional criminals. First, there are several factors that secure one’s place in professional crime that may be organized along a cyclical path that is in perpetual motion. In order to be considered a “professional,” an offender must possess “larceny sense,” which has been conceptualized in the current study as having business sense and a special set of skills and attributes that increase the likelihood of success when utilized in a rational manner. Once the professional criminal becomes proficient in the implementation of these skills

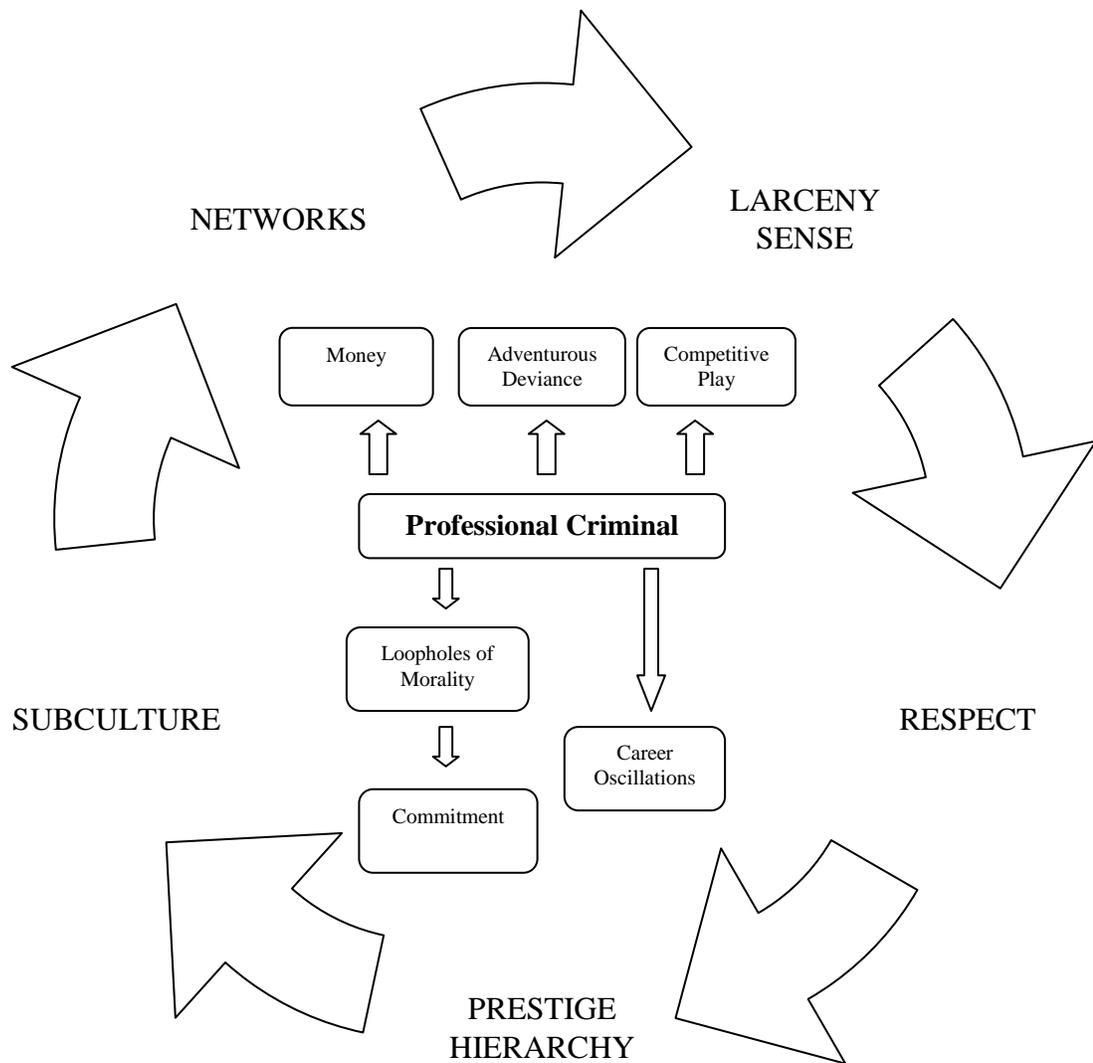


Figure 2. Line of Argument Synthesis.

and has attained the reputation of being successful, he earns the “respect” of other criminals. “Respect” is both a symbol of status as well as a reward in itself, in that professional criminals find pride in their work and pleasure in earning the admiration of others. Along the different pathways of a criminal’s career, the level of respect one has achieved then determines their place in the “prestige hierarchy”, a vertical stratification of offending classes. Professional criminals must maintain the skills, techniques, and

attributes that led them to a life of professional crime in the first place in order to remain at the top of this hierarchy. As time goes on, the professional criminal's place in the prestige hierarchy also affords one the benefit of congregating with other elite classes of professional criminals outside of the criminal activities themselves. This "subculture" is a clannish underworld where language, criminal codes/rules of ethics, and understandings are shared among professional criminals. The subculture of professional criminals also leads to the creation of criminal "networks," which exists as a web of relationships composed of friends, acquaintances, and partners. These networks offer opportunities to learn, refine techniques, or engage in specific criminal activities, thereby leading back to the development of skills within their repertoire of "larceny sense". While the elements of this cycle are not dependent on one another in a strictly causal manner, they do represent the fluid nature of a professional criminal's career. If any of these links should dissipate (e.g., violation of a code of ethics leading to a loss of respect, the loss of skills due to age), the cycle may be broken, leading to the disappearance of networks, and the ultimate outcast from the top of the prestige hierarchy or the disappearance from the professional criminal subculture altogether.

At the center of this cycle, the professional criminal has three main motivations: "money," "adventurous deviance," and "competitive play." Money refers to the primary objective and most important component of criminal offending among this sample of professional criminals: the acquisition of material wealth. Other important motivations and benefits for the professional criminals in this sample are a sense of "adventurous deviance" (i.e., the thrill inherent in the criminal act) and "competitive play" (i.e., the

ability to match wits with others). It is important to recognize that these professional criminals do not create arbitrary risks, and their inclination towards adventure and thrill-seeking activities is not impulsive by nature. Rather, these offenders are not afraid of taking risks, and enjoy the excitement afforded to them through this kind of high-tension activity.

Professional criminals also engage in several mental processes which serve as “loopholes of morality.” This concept illustrates the rationalization processes of professional criminals, in which they justify their actions by maintaining a positive self-image, focusing on the corruption of the average citizen, and denying responsibility/injury to others. If these offenders felt shameful of their actions and could not rationalize their guilt, they would be unable to remain personally committed to their criminal lifestyles. Their “commitment” is based on the rewards and positive emotions acquired through their criminal activity, including their appreciation of money, prestige and power and their collegueship with fellow professional criminals. While professional criminals are committed to their way of life for the majority of their career, certain factors may contribute to “career oscillations,” which refers to the trajectory of their career path (e.g., specialization, background operation, desistance). These trajectories are not cut-and-dried, and oscillations within the criminal career are subject to “considerable ebb and flow... as offenders adjust to shifts in *tastes, abilities, and opportunities*” and deal with potential losses (e.g., financial, acquired knowledge, identity, reputation, power, fun/excitement) and problems (e.g., fatigue, respectability, depression) that may result

from a downward shift in their criminal activity and/or lifestyle (Steffensmeier, 1986; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p. 302).

One of the most important insights gained through this line of argument synthesis is the fluidity of the professional criminal's career. While there are individual motivations and components that shape the path of a professional criminal's career and provide sense of commitment to crime over an extended period of time (which in turn may dictate specific decision-making processes depending where they are along this path), these factors are also highly dependent on one other. As seen earlier in the section, within the cycle of sub-cultural and hierarchical factors based on skills/attributes and status/respect, many of the concepts included in the line of argument co-exist in a delicate balance of criminal offending. For example, a good reputation among professional criminals may lead to the development of certain contacts that provide an offender with particular criminal opportunities. These opportunities may require a specific set of skills that a professional criminal develops over time, and in conjunction with continued interaction with these particular networks, may result in specialization (Sutherland & Ulmer, 2005). This path, as well as all career trajectories among professional criminals, is different for each offender and relies on the interplay between the factors in the line of argument synthesis.

The final chapter offers concluding remarks with respect to the original objectives of the study. This chapter also addresses issues of reliability and validity, identifies the limitations of the current study, and explores the possibility for future research with respect to the RCP and the application of meta-syntheses to the field of criminology.

## Chapter Five

### Discussion & Conclusion

This study has attempted to “take stock” (p. 2) of the RCP by assessing the explanatory power of this theoretical framework with respect to professional criminals (Cullen et al., 2006). This study has implemented a qualitative meta-synthesis (utilizing grounded theory methods and thick description) in order to systematically identify, extract and integrate concepts from within a sample of books containing qualitative accounts of the lives and decision-making processes of professional criminals, and examine them within an RCP framework. Through the utilization of a qualitative meta-synthesis (with the goal of providing a greater wealth of knowledge and a more extensive understanding of both the theory and the phenomena being studied) among a sample of professional criminals (offenders who exhibit many tenets of the RCP and would synthesize well within such a framework), this study has demonstrated the RCP’s immense explanatory power with respect to professional criminals, and has been able to conceptually refine and develop the RCP as a theoretical framework (Bondas & Hall, 2007).

#### ***Explanatory Power of the RCP***

The effectiveness of the RCP’s explanation of professional crime was demonstrated throughout the entire analytic process. From a methodological standpoint,

the ability of the concepts found in the data to synthesize well with the theoretically derived concepts of the RCP is a testament to the applicability of RCP factors to professional criminal decision-making processes. The creation and subsequent synthesis of metaphors, albeit a long and arduous process, was a relatively smooth one from a conceptual standpoint. From a theoretical standpoint, the line of argument synthesis offered a specific model of the professional criminal's career within an RCP framework, taking into account motivations and other factors central to one's decision-making processes. The synthesis demonstrated that 28 concepts derived from the RCP literature and the data (as guided by the RCP framework) could be collapsed into 11 metaphors that could be synthesized in a way that maintained the meanings of these original concepts while presenting them in simplified and holistic manner with respect to the sample of professional criminals.

The RCP's explanatory power with respect to the professional criminal's decision-making processes may be seen in how this class of offenders embraced concepts of rationality through every facet of their criminal activity: a professional criminal's rational decision-making processes were constantly utilized to create and implement progressive risk-management strategies that were also representative of one's skills, ingenuity, planning, and dedication. "Crime as a way of life" concepts within the RCP were illustrated in the professional criminal's career, in which one views crime as a business, is aware of one's place in the criminal class hierarchy, and is personally committed to one's criminal activity over the life course. While money, excitement, and competition were primary motivations and benefits of criminal offending, the

professional criminal found additional rewards inherent in one's criminal lifestyle (e.g., status, respect, collegueship) that encouraged one to stay committed to crime without the need to focus on the negative aspects of this way of life. The most important insight gained from the synthesis was that the relationships of these rational choice factors (e.g., rationality, motivation/perceived benefits, low perceptions of risk/costs, and one's criminal commitment, career, and involvement in the subculture) considerably impacted one's decision-making processes and how one viewed their criminal activity and lifestyle.

Concepts of expected utility were not included as specific components of the line of argument synthesis because neither the perceived risks nor the perceived probability, intensity or salience of costs had a considerable effect on the criminal decision-making processes of the professional criminals in the sample. This class of offenders enjoyed such high levels of success due to one's highly developed sets of skills, attributes, and planning/risk management strategies, that the potential risks and costs of a criminal act were only considered in a subconscious effort not to get caught. These offenders actually found pleasure in the stressful activity and intense way of life one's criminal career offered, and considerations of the potential negative consequences of criminal offending were consistently overshadowed by one's criminal motivations and the substantial rewards obtained through one's criminal activity. These insights have important policy implications with respect to police crackdowns or "get-tough" strategies that attempt to increase the certainty or severity of punishment in the eyes of the offender. This study supports Hochstetler and Copes' (2003) findings that criminal justice policies that aim to use formal sanctions in an attempt to instill fear in the minds of career criminals have not

had success in decreasing levels of criminal motivation or altering their decision-making process. While these tactics may receive empirical support with respect to other types of offenders, they are ineffective with respect to professional criminals. The efficacy of the operational enhancements to the RCP is examined below.

### ***Efficacy of Operational Enhancements to the RCP***

Another important objective within the current study was the assessment of the operational enhancements of several disciplines that are included in the contemporary RCP framework. The line of argument synthesis has demonstrated that factors such as status (e.g., as a measure of class/respect, as a reward in itself in the form of pride) and excitement (e.g., as an intrinsic source of pleasure gained from high-intensity criminal activity) have considerable effect on the lives and decision-making processes of professional criminals, while certain emotional elements (e.g., shame/embarrassment, anxiety, guilt) did not have such an effect. This may also be a result of the high levels of skill, rationality, and success enjoyed by professional criminals, which may render these negative emotions negligible when looking at the big picture. While morals and values do not affect how a professional criminal views crime in general (i.e., as a deterrent factor), it often acts as a prism through which certain criminal acts, lifestyles and classes (i.e., types of offenders) are viewed and/or rationalized, and is a necessary part of the professional criminal's mental processes.

In addition to offering a greater wealth of knowledge with respect to the RCP as a theoretical framework (e.g. assessing its explanatory power, examining the utility of operational enhancements, providing conceptual clarity), the line of argument synthesis

also provides a deeper understanding of the sample as a whole based on the individual studies in the sample. Based on the insights into the lives and decision-making processes of professional criminals gained from the meta-synthesis process, a more thorough conceptualization of professional criminals may be developed. This conceptualization, which has been derived from the synthesis of data from each of the six books included in the final line of argument (Sutherland, 1937; Klockars, 1974; Steffensmeier, 1986; Adler, 1993; Chambliss, 2004; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005), is presented below.

### ***Conceptualization of Professional Criminals***

Professional criminals live in a criminal “underworld” (p. 16) in which they are largely disconnected from legitimate society and therefore must create their own relationships (Sutherland, 1937). These associations form the basis of a subculture comprised of shared understandings of criminal behavior, codes of ethics, common language, and a collective rebellion against the law. Once these bonds are created, they are extremely difficult to break from the outside. In order for a professional criminal to become successful, however, one cannot be completely separated from legitimate society. The professional thief, for example, must have contact with legitimate society members “in order to steal from them” (Sutherland, 1937, p. 209).

One of the most important conceptualizations of the professional criminal is that one views crime as a business. Whenever one is working, one must devote all available time and effort to the careful planning and execution of every criminal act. Crime commission requires just as much hard work as any legitimate business. A successful professional fence, for example, must have a comprehensive knowledge of the theft and

business worlds, and maintain working relationships with both legitimate and illegitimate members of society. A professional box-man (safe-cracker) also must view stealing as a legitimate business requiring similar attributes (e.g., planning, readiness, reliability) in order to increase the likelihood of success.

In order for one to employ a successful business attitude of crime, one must first possess the skills necessary to be successful, such as discipline, patience, and “people skills” (p. 349), and then also possess the will to work hard to successfully implement these skills (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005). The professional criminal must stay up to date on new laws, methods, and opportunities in order to finely tune one’s own methods and criminal strategies. The professional criminal does not rely on physical or manual skills but rather takes advantage of mental abilities such as one’s “wits, ‘front’, and talking ability” (Sutherland, 1937, p. 198). The professional criminal must also manipulate one’s appearance and project the image of a conventional lifestyle so as not to be detected in the first place.

The professional criminal’s main goal is to acquire money and to do it as safely as possible. In order to accomplish this, professional criminals must seek out and identify criminal opportunities which pose the least amount of risk (i.e., avoiding crimes that possess high levels of danger or publicity), carefully plan and execute the criminal act while taking into account potential situational factors (e.g., how to obtain and dispose of property, how to fix a case (i.e., use connections with law officials to escape punishment in which an arrest is unavoidable). Professional criminals have solid connections with

law officials on several fronts (e.g., police officers, lawyers, court officials), so that if caught one would be able to handle the situation without much fear of legal recourse.

The confidence of the professional criminal also resonates in one's feelings about prison. In the rare occasion that one is actually caught and sent to prison, the professional criminal views incarceration as an opportunity to learn new techniques and fine-tune criminal methods in order to avoid any further punishment. In this way, the prison experience leads the professional criminal to believe that success is attainable as long as one works harder to plan and execute their criminal acts.

The professional criminal, unlike the street-level criminal who does not usually rely on long-term planning and often cannot defer the need for immediate gratification, prepares for the criminal act in a strict and comprehensive manner. For example, the professional thief can spend anywhere between two and six months monitoring potential victims and learning everything possible about them in order to be properly prepared to take advantage of them. In this way, professional criminals understand the importance of planning, ingenuity, and delaying gratification in order to achieve a much bigger pay off in the long run. Professional criminals are persistent offenders due to their ability to apply their specialized skills and attributes to their criminal endeavors (i.e., ability to evade the law and avoid negative consequences of their criminal acts), and are successful offenders due to their highly rational approach to their criminal activity.

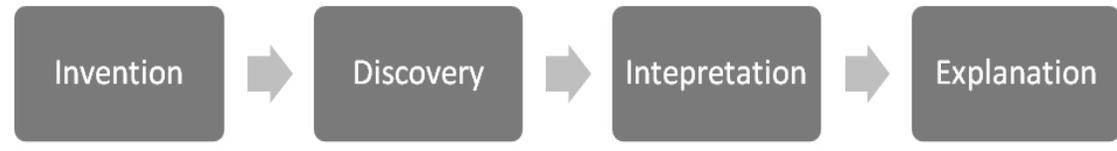
#### *Professional Crime in a Historical Context*

The line of argument synthesis used in the current study is also able to place insights into the lives of professional criminals in a historical context due to its inclusion

of books written in a wide range of time periods (1937-2005), as well as the inclusion of two books which present case studies on the same offender 19 years apart (i.e., the study of Sam Goodman's criminal career in Steffensmeier's *The Fence* (1986) and in Steffensmeier & Ulmer's *Confessions of a Dying Thief* (2005)). Several insights have been gained from the sample with respect to the criminal subculture across this time period: professional theft is "falling apart" because thieves will do anything for money and do not exhibit the same kind of loyalty to one another anymore; there is still a stratification system (i.e., "pecking order") but levels of respect for higher classes of criminals have declined over the years; there are new languages being used within the subculture; there is less of a criminal code and lot more risks due to the impact of drugs and the federal government on professional crime; and there has been an evolution of the structure and social organization of criminal offending as a response to changes in price, supply and demand, and law enforcement (Adler, 1993; Chambliss, 2004, p. 69; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p. 218). The ability of the meta-synthesis to offer such insights in the current study is due to the careful implementation of each of the analytic steps involved in a qualitative research process. The meta-synthesis process (as it applies to a four-phase model of qualitative research) is examined below.

### ***Meta-synthesis Process corresponding to a Four-Phase Model of Qualitative Research***

Figure 3 below illustrates the meta-synthesis process employed in the current study as it applies to a four-phase model of qualitative research (see Kirk & Miller, 1986). In each phase of the process (invention; discovery; interpretation; explanation), the corresponding methods and processes utilized in a meta-synthesis (Doyle's (2003)



<p><i>Purpose:</i>          Reconceptualization to contribute to human discourse*          Assessment of RCP's explanatory power          Conceptual clarity within RCP</p>	<p>Global Review Process (constant comparative analysis)</p>	<p><i>Process:</i> constructing interpretations*           Identification of conceptual linkages</p>	<p><i>Product:</i>          Interpretations across case studies*           New interpretive/holistic context</p>
<p><i>Data Sources:</i> findings and interpretations of existing case studies*</p> <p>6 books containing qualitative material regarding the lives of professional criminals</p>		<p>Creation of analogies/metaphors (new interpretive order)</p> <p>Synthesis of metaphors</p>	<p>Presentation of LOAS in audience appropriate language</p>
<p><i>Data Collection:</i>          purposive sampling*</p> <p>Appraisal Process (Boundary conditions for case requirements &amp; units of analysis)</p>			

\*Doyle (2003), p. 324

Figure 3. Meta-synthesis Process Corresponding to a Four-Phase Model of Qualitative Research.

general explanation of the steps used in the meta-synthesis process and the specific implementation of these steps within the current study) are identified. In a research study utilizing grounded theory methods (i.e., a highly iterative research process), it is helpful to have a structured framework to help organize the methods and processes employed in the study while remaining focused on the purpose and objectives of the study (Kirk & Miller, 1986). While the methodological techniques and analytic processes have been carefully documented in Chapters 3 and 4 (as illustrated in Figure 3), it is important to recognize the reliability and validity issues inherent in the research study. These issues are examined in the next section.

### ***Reliability and Validity***

The primary goal of the appraisal process used in the current study was to increase the reliability and validity of the meta-synthesis. In order to accomplish this, books were only included in the final sample if their research processes were deemed valid:

consideration of the components of the research situation (place, time, informant) and the research problem and tools. At issue is the validity of observations (i.e., whether or not the researcher is calling what is measured by the right name) (p. 69)

and reliable:

whether or not (or under what conditions) the ethnographer would expect to obtain the same finding if he or she tried again in the same way. (Kirk & Miller, 1986, p. 69).

The reliability and validity of the books included in the final sample were determined based on a review of the sampling methods and analytic measures used within each book. In order to carefully scrutinize the methodologies of each book, it was necessary for the researchers of each study to document the research procedures that were used and explain how the data collection and analysis processes were employed within each phase of the study (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Through the structured documentation of the decision-making processes for data collection and analysis within each phase of the ethnographic process (invention; discovery; interpretation; and explanation), the researcher increases the reliability of the research process (Kirk & Miller, 1986). The need for this kind of exhaustive documentation is supported by Lincoln and Guba's (1985) notion of *consistency* as a measure of reliability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) also suggest that *transferability*, or postulating how qualitative research findings may apply to other studies, may be used as a form of external validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Only books which satisfied these conditions of reliability and validity were included in the final synthesis.

Within a qualitative research endeavor such as this, the most important measure of validity (with respect to the quality of the meta-synthesis as a whole) is assessing how well the data being collected and analyzed relates to the theoretical framework being utilized in the synthesis process (i.e., construct validity) (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955; Kirk & Miller, 1986). By using grounded theory methods, in which the interaction between the data and guiding theoretical framework is constantly being examined throughout the research process, the presence of this relationship may be observed in every phase of the

qualitative research process. Although some of these studies did make occasional references to each other (e.g., Steffensmeier's (1986) reference to Sutherland's (1937) issues of specialization; Steffensmeier's (1986) reference to Klockars' (1974) outline/necessary conditions for becoming a fence; Steffensmeier & Ulmer's (2005) reference to Sutherland's (1937) basic features of thievery) the fact that the findings from these six separate books containing qualitative material regarding the lives of professional criminals were able to be synthesized demonstrates that construct validity has been achieved in the current study, in that the concepts and metaphors used in the synthesis both fit and work within an RCP framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Campbell et al., 2003)

Assessing the reliability of the meta-synthesis may be viewed in a similar manner, in that data observations are not required to be identical across each title to achieve reliability, but rather must demonstrate that the meaning and context of these observations are relevant to the guiding theoretical framework (Kirk & Miller, 1986). The goal of achieving theoretical reliability reiterates the importance of using an appraisal process (which eliminates studies which are inappropriate or of poor quality while facilitating the process of identifying conceptual categories which fit and work) to determine which studies which will synthesize well within an RCP framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Campbell et al., 2003)

In addition, the quality of the line of argument synthesis may be assessed across four measures: 1) it is emic (i.e., the meta-synthesis preserves the original contexts of the studies included in the synthesis); 2) it is historical (i.e., time is used to give order and

context to the studies); 3) it is comparative (e.g., it explores the relationships between the studies); and 4) it is holistic (i.e., a final interpretation of the studies is offered which takes into account these relationships and contexts) (Noblit & Hare, 1988). The current study has attempted to remain faithful to these measures by offering interpretations which take into account the voices of the offenders and the perspectives of the original authors (emic); by exploring the evolution of concepts (e.g., theoretical; concepts derived from the data) over a time period of 67 years (with all but one of the books ranging over a time period of 31 years), as well including a book in the sample which updates a previous ethnographic account of a particular offender which is also included in the sample (i.e., the study of Sam Goodman's criminal career in Steffensmeier's *The Fence* (1986) and the revisiting of his criminal career 19 years later in Steffensmeier & Ulmer's *Confessions of a Dying Thief* (2005) (historical); though the in-depth examination of the similarities and differences between the titles used in the synthesis and offering interpretations of these relationships (comparative); and by using common metaphors to place the shared concepts found in the sample (as determined by the constant comparative method) into a new interpretive context to make general statements about the sample as a whole (holistic) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Noblit & Hare, 1988).

While the measures described in Chapters 3 and 4 have been taken in order to contribute to the overall quality of the line of argument synthesis, the limitations of the current study are important considerations to be discussed and are examined in the following section.

### *Limitations*

While the current study has attempted to use a contemporary theoretical framework (i.e., an RCP framework which has incorporated the concepts and findings from several disciplines into the study of the offender decision-making process) and contemporary methodological and analytic processes (i.e., applying a qualitative meta-synthesis to the study of criminological phenomena), it is important to note the limitations of the current study, which may lead to opportunities for future research in this area. This study has been focused on specific RCP concepts, and therefore several theoretical concepts and other concepts derived from the data were not included as part of the synthesis process: social learning theory and differential association (e.g., Sutherland, 1936); gender and race (e.g., Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005); social class (e.g., Tunnell, 2006); and drug use (e.g., Cromwell & Olson, 2004). While these concepts were not included in the meta-synthesis because they were beyond the scope of the current study (i.e., they did not address the objectives of the current study and would have detracted from the focus on the utility of the meta-synthesis), their presence in the sample demonstrate that they are still important concepts to consider in the study of the relationship between the RCP and professional crime.

Other possible limitations within the current study pertain to the difficulties in locating qualitative literature (e.g., difficulties in identifying appropriate books to include in the synthesis through searches or references of books that have been obtained) and the absence of using a computer program to aid in the coding and analytic processes, thereby increasing the chances of human error in the complex analytic processes employed in the

current study (Campbell et al., 2003). In addition, Lincoln & Guba (1985) and Doyle (2003) suggest the use of member checks (i.e., contacting the original authors of the books in the sample) to contribute to the internal validity of the meta-synthesis; the current study's only measure of internal validity pertains to the careful implementation of grounded theory methods to assess the consistency of data across the sample and relative to the RCP framework, and does not benefit from this added measure of validity. There is also no mention of inter-coder reliability in the current study because only one coder was used to implement each of the steps throughout the analytic process; it is recommended that if a greater wealth of data is used in future studies implementing a methodological approach similar to the one used in the current study, that multiple coders be utilized to aid in the analytic process.

While using two books that study the same offender (i.e., Sam Goodman in Steffensmeier's *The Fence* (1986) and Steffensmeier & Ulmer's *Confessions of a Dying Thief* (2005)) may help provide historical context in the meta-synthesis, the perspective of the offender (Sam Goodman) and author (Steffensmeier) used in these books may have had a larger influence on the creation of metaphors and the synthesis process than the other books in a study (due to the small sample size used in a qualitative meta-synthesis). However, the inclusion of these two books does not jeopardize the reliability or validity of the study, in that (with respect to Steffensmeier's *The Fence* (1986)) Steffensmeier & Ulmer's *Confessions of a Dying Thief* (2005) possesses unique and fruitful data that offers new insights into the concepts derived from the other books in the sample as well as the guiding theoretical framework. The inclusion of *Confessions of a Dying Thief*

(2005) also presents a new voice within the synthesis (i.e. Ulmer's perspective and interpretations of Sam's criminal accounts).

In addition, persistent offenders who were not considered "professional" as determined by the boundary conditions for units of analysis within the current study would serve as a suitable offender group to study in a research endeavor implementing a qualitative meta-synthesis within an RCP framework. The identification of similarities and differences in the decision-making processes between persistent offenders and the professional criminals utilized in the current study (e.g. levels of rationality, perceptions of costs, benefits, and risks) would allow for: 1) the assessment of the explanatory power of the RCP with respect to a group of offenders who are persistent but not professional; and 2) further conceptual clarity within the RCP framework through the assessment of the varying degrees of explanatory power within the RCP with respect to the lives and decision-making processes of each specific offender group (i.e., exploring the efficacy of RCP concepts in a comparative context relative to these two offender groups). By implementing a qualitative meta-synthesis that can make these kinds of comparative and interpretive statements, the efficacy of the RCP as a theoretical framework can be more sufficiently assessed with respect to the explanation of criminal offending in general.

### ***Conclusions***

Through the careful implementation of grounded theory methods and the utilization of thick description in a highly iterative research process that culminated in a line of argument synthesis, this study has offered a greater understanding of the lives and decision-making processes of professional criminals as seen within a contemporary RCP

framework. The explanatory power of the RCP has been successfully demonstrated with respect to professional criminals, and conceptual refinements have been offered in a way that may aid in the development of the theoretical framework. The line of argument synthesis offered within the current study may be used to aid future studies that attempt to model the detailed decision-making processes of this class of offenders. This study also recommends the incorporation of persistent offenders into a study of professional criminals within an RCP framework, which may offer new insights and comparative interpretations that may result in further conceptual clarity within the theoretical framework and increase the explanatory power of the RCP in general. This study has also demonstrated the utility of applying a qualitative meta-synthesis to criminological phenomena, and the author encourages the continued use of this methodological technique in the field of criminology, with the recognition that other offender groups and theoretical frameworks may be used as long as the study embraces qualitative methodological techniques and aims to offer explanations that are interpretive in nature.

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## Appendices

Appendix A: Books Included in the Final Line of Argument Synthesis

- Adler, P. (1993). *Wheeling and Dealing: An Ethnography of An Upper-Level Drug Dealing and Smuggling Community*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Chambliss, W. (2004). *Boxman: A Professional Thief's Journey*. iUniverse Publishing, Incorporated.
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## Appendix B: Operationalization Counts

	Sutherland (1937)	Klockars (1974)	Steffensmeier (1986)	Adler (1993)	Chambliss (2004)	Steffensmeier & Ulmer (2005)	Average Counts
Shame/Embarrassment	3	4	6	4	1	0	3
Anxiety	2	0	3	3	1	0	1.5
Guilt	0	2	3	0	1	3	1.5
Money	17	19	22	25	5	29	19.5
Property	2	2	3	3	4	3	2.83
Excitement/Enjoyment	3	0	17	17	6	25	11.33
Offender Status	29	8	15	20	6	34	18.67
Opportunity	6	16	13	1	4	40	13.33
Situational Opportunity	1	1	2	0	3	4	1.83
Opportunity from Tips	1	3	1	0	2	4	2
Perceived Risk	64	37	46	43	7	65	43.67
Rational Techniques	36	55	37	75	24	61	48
Target Selection	7	11	3	0	10	13	7.33
Law Connections	46	5	14	4	18	3	15
Cost Management	40	7	2	6	5	10	11.67
Anger	0	1	0	0	0	0	0.17
Fear	2	0	4	1	4	5	2.67
Morals/Values	5	5	3	2	2	8	4.17
Rationalizations	5	10	4	3	2	5	4.83
Necessity	5	1	2	3	8	6	4.17
Situational Factors	11	0	0	3	11	22	7.83
Criminal Codes/Rules of Ethics	28	5	1	2	3	14	8.83
Criminal Subculture	68	6	13	45	17	85	39
Crime as a Way of Life	16	10	10	75	9	115	39.17
Crime as Business	14	64	26	83	6	31	37.33
Career Opportunities/Trajectories/Transitions	13	3	6	13	2	103	23.33
Desistance	11	0	4	7	22	14	9.67
Incarceration	14	16	12	5	20	21	14.67
Perceived Probability of Benefits	10	7	8	13	2	13	8.83
Perceived Intensity of Benefits	9	12	20	29	12	41	20.5
Perceived Salience of Benefits	5	2	20	26	7	33	15.5
Perceived Probability of Costs	40	40	20	30	10	43	30.5
Perceived Intensity of Costs	35	16	16	15	17	36	22.5
Perceived Salience of Costs	17	10	12	10	8	25	13.67