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Abstract

The innovative theory of the “criminal spin” presents a phenomenological description and interpretation of criminal conduct. The theory indicates a process that occurs in different phases of criminality, involving an escalation of criminal activity, thinking, and emotions that run beyond self-control, sometimes contrary to initial decision. Its phenomenology indicates an interaction between individual, group, and situation and a growing self-centeredness with two leading motives: “I can” and “I must.” The first denotes a perceived legitimacy and capability to perform criminal conduct. The second reflects an existential threat and a belief that it must be removed by any action. These motives may operate in an acute or a chronic phase, within individuals, groups, or societies. The spin is a detectable process with known characteristics and prognosis. Implications for intervention are outlined.

Keywords

criminal spin, phenomenology, self-centeredness

Introduction

Most people and cultures are familiar with the concept of criminality. Although the content and definitions of criminality vary across cultures and time, the notion itself has been enduring and universal ever since “Cain killed Abel.” Although criminality as a core quality of related phenomena is generally recognized by lay people, professionals, and scholars, it evokes many different, sometimes contradicting descriptions, insights, and understandings. My aim here is to present an innovative, integrative concept of

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criminality, which I call *the criminal spin*, and to outline several of its characteristics that are manifested in different criminal behaviors.

Criminological writing is often content-dependent, describing and explaining certain criminality within a certain context, such as the development of the criminal career (Blumstein, Cohen, & Farrington, 1988), the influence of gang membership on criminality (Battin, Hill, Abbott, Catalano, & Hawkins, 1998), gender and crime (Tracy, Kempf-Leonard, & Abramoske-James, 2009), corporate offenses (Piquero, Schoepfer, & Langton, 2008), and the like. Moreover, according to Muftić (2009), criminological writing usually focuses either on the micro level (characteristics of individuals) or the macro level (characteristics outside individuals) and ignores the complexity of human and criminal behavior. Content- and context-dependent as well single-leveled theories are usually effective in explaining some of the complex phenomena of criminality. However, in cases where the content of inquiry is multifaceted, each of its different aspects may call for different explanations (e.g., Klein, 1998). The result is an accumulation of various criminological theories (Hagan, 1988; Shoam, Adad, & Rahav, 2004) that are based on different, sometimes contradicting assumptions (Young, 1981). One may ask whether it is possible to synthesize several dissimilar understandings of this wide, culturally dependent, yet universal and everlasting, field of study (Arrigo, 2001). To date, causal and structural formulations designed to describe and explain the existence of crime (Polizzi & Arrigo, 2009) have not provided such a unified theory of criminality.

Phenomenological criminology, however, meets this challenge from a different perspective. Originally, phenomenology was created as the science of the “pure” human consciousness that observes and interprets phenomena that appear in front of the human mind (Bruyn, 1966; Kockelmans, 1987). The phenomenological mode of inquiry attempts to reach into the phenomenological unity of social life (Husserl, 1952), which exists independent of individual experiences. Accordingly, phenomenological criminology attempts to explore the phenomenological nature of criminality independent of its particular causes, content, cultural background, or individual experience. The subject of investigation is criminality itself, as a human experience within human consciousness (Katz, 2002). This category of phenomena has two aspects: (a) criminality as an identifiable consciousness—a being in the world (Crewe & Lippens, 2009)—that accompanies criminal behaviors of individuals, groups or societies, and cultures; and (b) the perception of criminality and its impact by noncriminal others. My focus here is on the first aspect, that is, on the phenomenological meaning and nature of the criminal mind, intention, and behavior.

In light of the complexity, social context, and power distribution of defining certain acts and accompanying consciousness as criminal, I limit the discussion here to those behaviors that most people in most social, cultural, or individual contexts (including the very actors!) would consider as inappropriate and criminal when inflicted upon themselves, such as violence, property offenses, assaults, neglect, and so forth (a limited criminological understanding of the negative formulation of the golden rule; see, e.g., Reinikainen, 2005). This also includes behaviors of an addictive nature, such as drug

abuse, gambling, and sex addiction, without taking any stance regarding their legitimacy. Following Levinas (2004), the following relates to a meaning of criminality as a universal phenomenon that stands beyond relative power-, context-, or culture-dependent meanings. However, the reader will need to decide whether other behaviors, not cited here, also represent the spin process, whether criminal or simply behavioral, and not necessarily criminal.

The phenomenological approach to criminology is a matured paradigm, which can be applied to any account of the consciousness that accompanies criminal behavior. A. K. Cohen's (1955) description of youth gangs and the criminal subculture is but one example. Sykes and Matza's (1957) neutralization theory is another example, as are Maruna and Mann's (2006) reaction to the overuse of this theory, Matza's (1969) description of the criminal drift, labeling theory (Becker, 1963; Robbers, 2009), and Murphy and Robinson's (2008) more recent expansion of Merton's strain theory. In a recent phenomenological account, Timor (2001) describes the criminal mind as lacking a solid behavioral or personality center. This description well portrays the consciousness of specific offenders, usually prisoners who belong to the criminal subculture. The theory of the criminal spin follows a similar path, but it attempts to broaden the scope of discussion to include individuals, groups, and even cultures with acute or chronic criminality. The concept of the criminal spin unifies these various levels.

What Is the Criminal Spin?

The criminal spin is an event or set of events that present a process of escalation in criminal behavior accompanied by a criminal cycle of thinking or corresponding emotions. We can discern a spin when there is a sudden, rapid, or gradual acceleration of behavior that is considered criminal. The process operates as an almost inevitable chain of events, one linked to the next one, in the generation of criminal behavior, which continually intensifies. The overall process is that of a spinning flywheel that after being set in motion preserves its own continuity. All components of the process work coherently to increase the movement and create an integrated process that is stronger than its own parts and separate factors (Collins, 2001). Usually, when nothing interferes with the natural order of events, this process leads to a crisis that halts its movement, or it reaches a peak and then subsides.

The process appears to have its own "life cycle," although the person involved may not be aware of it. Within the integrative progress of a criminal spin, personal sense of control is but one distinct factor. Hence, there is a marked diminishment of personal control as the process proceeds, which the person involved may either deny or acknowledge. The loss of self-control may be typical to the individual, as the general theory of deviance claims (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Hay & Forrest, 2006); however, contrary to that theory, it may also be limited to the particular process only, with the person involved demonstrating a strong desire for control and displaying such control in other aspects of life and at different times (Piquero et al., 2008).

Although described here in an active voice, the criminal spin can be manifested passively, as well. In such cases, the spin is expressed in increasing carelessness and abandonment of one's duties, to the point of losing control of the process. The description of the spin in active voice holds for its passive appearance as well.

In his famous novel, *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky (1961) portrayed a process that begins with an innocent but wrong thought that deteriorated into an apparent criminal spin. Raskolnikov, the protagonist, examined elitist ideas and claimed the privileges of those who are above ordinary people. This led to a malicious cognitive, behavioral, and emotional spin: an erroneous idea of his moral right to rob and kill a "worthless" woman trapped his mind, followed by a set of behaviors that culminated with an emotional outburst and extremely violent behavior, unplanned and without self-control.

The Bible also cautions against the tendency to criminally spin in the story of King David and Bathsheba (II Samuel, 11). After King David watched Bathsheba bathing (actually a *sin*, albeit minor, according to Judaism), the spin process went into motion: he desired her, although she was married (an offense against the Ten Commandments), called for her to spend a night with him (a greater offense), and finally led her husband to death by intrigue (one of the greatest offenses in most legal and cultural systems). One can assume that when initially tempted, the king would not have agreed to the final results; however, the process deteriorated gradually and ended tragically.

The spins of King David and Raskolnikov are extreme examples. In everyday life, many people experience moments of minor behavioral spins, but only a few lead to criminality. Eating is one of the most typical examples. It is quite a common experience to decide on a proper diet, then be confronted with "forbidden" food, and decide on "just one bite," which is followed by "only one more" and after several more bites, by unrestricted eating. In the same manner, a young person may join a friend in performing an illegal activity for the first time, and without taking the overall meaning into account, this person may repeat the criminal behavior, increase the frequency, perform it alone, and become a chronic offender. Or a man may angrily argue with his partner, eventually exploding with violence although they were both convinced this could never happen, or will never happen again. And of course, a very typical example is that of a drug addict who relapses after recovery, time and again leading to re-entry into the drug scene, against one's wishes, intentions, or assertions.

A recent phenomenological study of juvenile delinquents just released from young offenders' institution provides numerous life stories in which a recurring criminal spin is a typical narrative (Uzan, 2009). For example, Raphael, a 19-year-old with a history of property offenses, minor violence, and drug abuse, described his experience as a lived example of criminal spin: "You begin something and you don't know how to get out of it . . . going with a friend, this friend breaks in, you share it half-half. Another car comes. It is hard for you to go. You don't want to be messed up . . . you are drawn in, mixed up; you get caught. You say—'What did I do? Why?' Then you get into more trouble, go on, go on . . . and fall. Then it's as though you are mad; someone comes and you fight with him . . . without any control. You have no control" (p. 54).

The common factor among all of these examples is the spin process—uncontrolled escalation and deterioration in spite of the absence of such a plan or preference. Even when there is some initial desire for the result, the process may still get out of control in the described manner, thus becoming a criminal spin.

A criminal spin involves behaviors, emotions, and cognition. This process can be easily traced in emotive, expressive forms of criminality. In these cases, the behavior (e.g., arguing with one's intimate partner) or the emotion (e.g., anger) ignites the spin process. In other cases of instrumental forms of criminality, one may trace a cognitive spin, that is, a calculated chain of decisions where the thinking is increasingly aimed at the direction of the spin. The behavior follows and the spin runs its cycle. In either form, the phenomenological qualities of the spin described later are present.

A criminal spin can be detected in individuals in an acute phase. Based on various causes, internal as well as external, many individuals exhibit an acute spin with violent or other forms of criminal characteristics. An acute spin can be manifested in almost any life domain. Because it is common and widespread among almost all individuals several times in the course of life, the acute spin can be considered the basis for any other form of a criminal spin. Individuals may exhibit one-time-only, or segregated, nonrelated events of acute criminal spin. For many individuals there is no development beyond this point of an acute criminal spin or several isolated episodes of this type. Conversely, when an individual is trapped in related or recurring episodes of an acute criminal spin, or when there is a sequential development of criminal, deviant, or violent activity, the spin is no longer acute but chronic. A chronic spin is manifested in the development of a criminal lifestyle or career (Farrington, 1995). It is also manifested in the development of certain forms of criminal or deviant behavior that do not necessarily represent a criminal lifestyle, as is the case of domestic violence (Feld & Straus, 1989). In addition, the chronic spin is rarely an individual process, but rather involves interaction among environment, individuals, and the situation that leads individuals in the direction of the spin (Haney & Zimbardo, 2009).

Within a group, parallel processes can be detected: A group may interact in an acute criminal or deviant spin but may also, as a group, be trapped in a chronic spin, such as a youth gang (Battin-Pearson, Thornberry, Hawkins, & Krohn, 1998). Within each case, as discussed later, the relationship between the group's spin and those of its individual members is not necessarily linear.

A criminal or deviant spin can be manifested in larger entities as well. We may detect such a spin at the neighborhood level (Bursik, 1988), across cultures and social classes, or even at a national level. Table 1 summarizes the various manifestations of the criminal spin.

Regardless of its level—individual, group, or societal—all spins share some similar features. The advantage of the criminal spin theory is revealed in its ability to discern the common features of different manifestations of criminality at different levels. I begin with a discussion of the most basic, the acute individual spin.

Table 1. Manifestations of the Criminal Spin

Individual	Acute spin	One time only or several but not related spins
	Chronic spin	Recurring same acute spins, recurring related spin or a criminal career Social reaction may increase the spin
Group	Acute spin	One time only or several but not related spins Individual members are in acute or chronic spins
	Chronic spin	Recurring same acute spins or recurring related spins. Most individual members are in chronic spin (newcomers or passive members may be in an acute spin when involved in a group criminal behavior) Social reaction may increase the spin
Environmental Social Cultural	Chronic spin	Recurring same acute spins or recurring related spins. Salient individual members are in a chronic spin (newcomers or silent passive members may be in an acute spin when involved in a communal criminal behavior)

The Phenomenology of an Acute Individual Spin

According to common experience and criminal statistics, we know that most individuals do not perform crimes (e.g., Aebi et al., 2006). Nevertheless, looking back on their lives, many people can identify at least one if not several cases of deviant, illegal, violent, or addictive behavior, beyond the almost inevitable violation of traffic laws. These occurrences of criminality and similar behavior represent a choice taken by actors that is inconsistent with their everyday norms (when the choice does represent one’s everyday norms or customs, it is a chronic phase, as described later). It is possible to identify an initial moment of decision, when the individual is able to choose from various alternatives. These alternatives may be innocent in nature, but the chosen one has the power to trigger a spin. When the spin is in process, the initial choice, accompanied by a behavior, is strongly linked to a second and subsequent choices. The individual is directed by a chain of behaviors, emotions, thoughts, and decisions and continues in a direction that may reflect the initial decision at times, but contradict it on other occasions. Finally, the individual may perform a behavior that he or she would never have intentionally chosen. The process that began with an innocent decision turned into a transgressing one. Although the process may include a wide range of behaviors, the deviant or criminal spin has specific phenomenological characteristics. Figure 1 illustrates these characteristics in the individual criminal spin.

An acute criminal spin leads to a distinct behavior that is neither part of the individual’s everyday life nor of a developing or existing criminal career. Rather, it is related to a single occasion or typically separated processes within the individual narrative. During this process, the person and the environment interact in a way that seems to

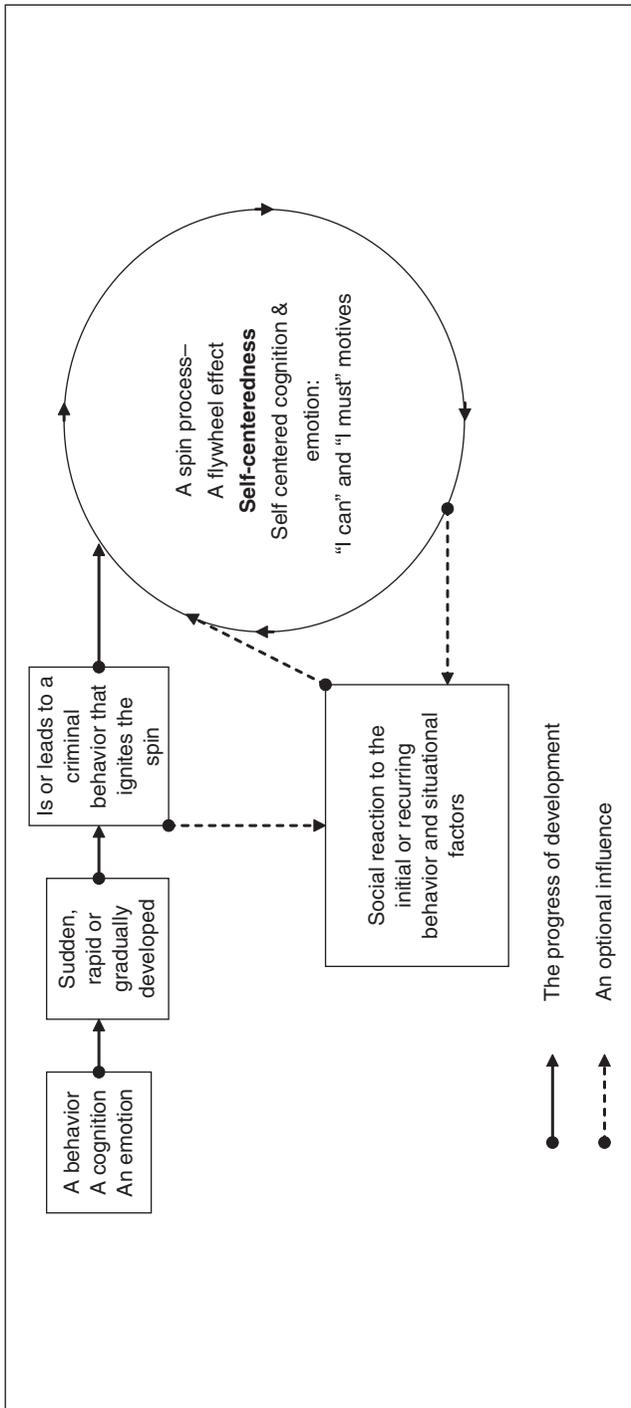


Figure 1. Development of an individual criminal spin

temporarily transform them (Haslam & Reicher, 2007). If different spin processes are associated, they become a more solid self-transformation and a developmental process of criminality (Blumstein et al., 1988), or a chronic criminal spin.

As asserted, an acute spin may rise suddenly, rapidly, or gradually. In its sudden or rapid mode, the acuteness of the spin is apparent. In its gradual mode, we can consider a spin process as acute when it lasts for a short period that is distinct within the individual narrative. The above biblical example of King David demonstrates an acute spin. It developed gradually and lasted for some time, but can be considered as a one-time event in the king's life story. Raskolnikov's example, however, is one of a chronic spin, because it played a central role within the overall life narrative of this protagonist. Raphael's self-narrative, quoted above from Uzan's (2009) research, is another example of a chronic spin process.

During any kind of criminal spin, the consciousness of the individual is entrapped, in an escalating manner, in a self-centered approach (Ronel, 2000). Self-centeredness is a state of consciousness in which the main focus is on the self and one's own interests, expectations, wishes, desires or risks, rage, fears and emotions, or cognitions, whereas those of others are essentially ignored. Usually, this state of consciousness involves some repression of awareness that makes any socially presented action possible (Katz, 2002). Although all people are self-absorbed at times during a normal life, in a self-centered phase this quality is extreme, becoming the leading motive and content of consciousness. In this phase, the individual's reasoning is dominated by self-centeredness (Elkind, 1967; Gibbs, 1991; Ronel & Tim, 2003), accompanied by corresponding motivation and emotions. Sometimes self-centeredness involves an illusion of grandeur supported by inflated self-concepts; however, it may also involve feelings of self-negation, experienced as total dependence on external stimuli. In a self-centered state, a person may engage in behaviors that are directed outwards by self-centered motives. In other cases, a self-centered person may become inactive, inwardly directed, but still absorbed in his or her own moods, fears, anxiety, melancholy, or any other self-directed content.

Self-centeredness is a major feature of any form and phase of criminal, deviant, violent, or addictive behavior, reflected in egotistical motives, interests, emotions, or cognition. The association of self-centeredness with criminality, deviance, violence, and addiction is by no means causal, but phenomenological. Self-centeredness is a phenomenological description of a certain state of consciousness, of being within the world (Denzin, 1984; Ronel, 2000). As a state of consciousness, self-centeredness may lead into a consequent behavior. However, as the criminal spin theory strongly asserts, the process operates as a vicious circle (Denzin, 1987). It may begin with relatively innocent behavior that represents an everyday level of the individual's self-centered motives. If this initial behavior or subsequent ones evoke self-centered cognition, motives, and emotions that may enhance corresponding behavior, it becomes a full-fledged criminal, violent, deviant, or any similar spin. Because this is an acute spin, the growing self-centeredness is not necessarily typical of the individual; nevertheless, until the spin is over, it controls one's consciousness.

As typical of growing self-centeredness, during the criminal spin there is a narrowing of the consciousness to the point of focusing almost exclusively on one's own personal wishes, requests, threats, and interests. Personal needs become values with only one significance and means of fulfillment (Levinas, 2004), that of self-centeredness. Consequently, the individual's ability to experience caring or empathy toward others declines as the criminal spin develops, reappearing only afterwards, when the acute spin is over (Hoffman, 1976, 1984; Hornstein, 1991). To illustrate, let us take a familiar scene where adolescent friends playing a game argue, to the point of a physical fight in which they try to hurt each other. Temporarily, there is no sign of their former mutual concern and warm friendship. The lack of empathy enables a process of neutralization (Agnew, 1994) that supports their aggressive spin by self-justification of the violence. Conversely, any trace of empathy would prevent the fight or, more generally, contradict the spin.

During the acute criminal spin, two leading motives are inherent in the self-centered consciousness. These motives indicate the need and the ability to perform the criminal, deviant, or violent act. The first may be defined as an "I must" motive, and the second as an "I can" one. Each can operate separately; however, they usually appear together, supporting one another.

The "I must" motive appears when initially, or through the spin process, the consciousness is filled with the perception of an existential threat. This threat requires action that will remove it and regain one's safety. For example, it is common for male batterers to be in a state of an existential threat, which they project on their partners (Ferraro, 1988). Experiencing powerlessness over their threatening emotions, these men wrongly choose violence as the only alternative they know for existential survival (Denzin, 1984; Ronel & Tim, 2003). The stronger the threat is, the more extreme the actions taken. The self-centered consciousness typically becomes limited by the spin, and directs itself toward the expected existential outcome, that is, surviving the threat. Therefore, the individual experiences the chain of survival behaviors as a must, even though he may perceive himself as in control and free to choose the behavior, as is the case with many male batterers.

The "I must" motive can be initiated by provoked affect as well by a certain cognition or behavior. In the above biblical example, when King David learned that Bathsheba had become pregnant by him, he attempted to cover up their adultery by letting her husband stay the night with her. When the husband refused, the risk became an existential threat that had to be removed by stronger, planned means—killing the betrayed husband. When "I must" serves as a ruling motive that directs one into a survival-oriented chain of behaviors, optional consequences are temporarily ignored. In the earlier illustration of the fighting adolescents, the existential risk caused by an initial behavior, their verbal argument, led to a perceived need to act. Any means is justified, while ignoring other outcomes, including the pain of friends.

A complementary motive that rules the self-centered consciousness is a perception of one's personal ability to perform the act, or an "I can" motive. This motive represents the cognitive and emotional state that, at least temporarily, accepts, supports, and allows

the chain of behaviors. For various reasons, people allow themselves to proceed with the behavior, simultaneously sensing a personal ability to continue to the desired end while minimizing other possible consequences. This sense of personal ability may be connected to situational factors, as demonstrated by Gottfredson, Gottfredson, and Weisman's (2001) finding of elevated juvenile delinquency when there is a lack of adult supervision. There are several possible explanations for this, including the relative ease of committing an offense in the absence of supervision, or the tendency of those prone to delinquency to reject adult care. In both these cases, the "I can" spin may be present.

During such a spin, an individual may ignore any negative message that might reduce the sense of personal ability. The more a person is trapped in a spin with the "I can" motive, the less he or she is willing to accept external or internal restrictions. In this phase, the spin dominates an increasingly broad scope of one's life; an individual may sense growing ability and therefore be unprepared to accept almost any restrictions from others. When in motion, it illustrates another aspect of the vicious circle of the spin, that is, a process where the "I can" motive nourishes and is nourished by the spin. A person performs an initial act that somehow proves successful, and despite some negative results, the sense of "I can" grows. The increasing "I can" motive encourages the person to continue the same line of behavior with even greater force, and the spin is on, driving the person to yet more of the same, in greater intensity. In this process, the person may experience a growing sense of self-control, as part of the growing self-efficacy, although external agents may doubt any self-control of that person.

The "I can" motive may develop gradually, but can also take the form of an immediate urge. A common example is risky driving, where individuals sense an "I can" motive that lets them undertake wrongdoings, such as crossing the street just as the light turns red.

The two motives described—"I can" and "I must"—rarely operate separately; usually both exist in a spinning, self-centered consciousness. They may support each other as the spin develops. A person may sense a growing sense of ability along with an intensifying existential need. During a criminal spin, the heightened self-centeredness increases and the "I can" or "I must" motives shape one's perception of reality. The situation becomes one-dimensional in accordance with the content of the spin controlling the individual's behavior. Although the person may be at least partially conscious of the situation, this awareness is also influenced by the distorted, one-dimensional consideration. Usually, the distorted perception overcomes the sense of personal responsibility and shifts its burden to others or to situational causes, as described by the neutralization theory (Minor, 1984). For example, a parent may get angry with his or her child and fall into a violent spin, blaming the child for both the anger and the subsequent violence. In the parent's experience, at least during the spin, the aggressive behavior is justified. Sometimes, such distortion and denial of responsibility are experienced as temporary powerlessness—such individuals feel they cannot control events. For instance, such an angry parent may feel unable to control his or her behavior, and

as a result they may attempt to control the situation by aggressively controlling the child's behavior.

The criminal spin is never an individually isolated process but occurs within the individual's world. Consequently, the spin, with its phenomenological characteristics, represents an interaction of the individual with the world to which he or she belongs (Katz, 2002). The meaning attributed to the interaction enables and denotes the progress of a spin. Thus, the "I can" and "I must" motives, separately or together, represent a certain meaning of interaction within the symbolic reality in which the individual acts. In different circumstances with different interaction and meaning, the route of action might be different, involving no spin. Furthermore, during the interaction that leads to a spin, individuals are never passive victims of the circumstances that guide the spin but rather experience a process of initial and recurring choices. However, in these symbolic circumstances, the ability to choose is reduced through the seemingly known route of the spin. Although people involved might make different choices at any stage, thus ending the spin, their cognitive and emotional function according to the spin. The result is as described: a process in which the individual loses self-control in an environment of free choice.

A Chronic Spin

An acute criminal spin is defined by a distinct event or chain of events in a personal narrative. As asserted earlier, it is often the only criminal episode in the individual's biography, and there is no criminal development beyond that point. However, when the individual's biography contains a repeated criminal spin or a developmental line of connected episodes that indicate a criminal career (Ulmer & Spencer, 1999), it is considered a chronic criminal spin.

The appearance of deviant, abusive, or criminal behavior in the personal narrative may begin at any age, even very early (Loeber & Hay, 1997). Initially, there is an acute spin bearing the described characteristics. Based on the interplay of various factors, which are extensively described in the criminological literature (see, e.g., Akers & Jensen, 2006; DeLisi & Vaughn, 2008; Hagan, 1988), this acute spin may occur repeatedly, with greater strength and scope, thus becoming a chronic one. In this chronic phase, the spin presents two aspects: First, there is a developmental process of increased criminal, violent, deviant, or addicted behavior; second, once they are in a chronic criminal spin, individuals usually repeatedly perform similar or different acute criminal spins.

The first aspect, the link that connects occasional manifestations of the spin in a chronic process, is well documented in many diverse studies, although using different conceptualization. Developmental criminology, for example, has widely studied this issue in the discussion of different factors that contribute to the development of criminality (Farabee, Joshi, & Anglin, 2001; Nagin, Farrington, & Moffitt, 1995). The general theory of deviance also raises sound claims about becoming a chronic career criminal (DeLisi, 2005; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), as does the interactionist approach (Haslam

& Reicher, 2007). The latter, however, contributes an important aspect, namely, that the chronic spin symbolizes an interaction between the individual and the world. Furthermore, labeling theory describes a mutual spin process of individual and society, where the social reaction, through labeling, enters a spin of its own, with “we must” being the prevailing motive (Becker, 1963; Robbers, 2009). This reactive social spin affects individuals and contributes to their ongoing chronic spin and their self-identification as chronic offenders that interact best with similar individuals (Clark, 2006; Johnson, Simons, & Conger, 2004). However, a more detailed description of the reactive social spin is beyond the scope of the present article.

Similarly, other fields of criminology contribute to the understanding of the escalation and persistence of criminal behavior. For example, based on his study of male batterers and their abused partners, Winstock (1999) describes the escalation of violence from minor, separated episodes to stronger, more frequent ones. Feld and Straus (1989) illustrate a similar process in their study of 380 married men who were violent at home. Athens (2005) analyzes the interaction between perpetrator and victim and describes stages of escalation and types of violence that may also be seen as representing the progress of a violent spin. In these and many other examples, the process presents a typical pattern of repetition of the initial manifestation of criminal or deviant behavior, which appears to have a life of its own, a self-preserving force. In other words, such individuals act almost as though there is a strong force pushing them in a known direction of greater criminality of the same type. The conceptualization provided here, that of a chronic spin, provides a phenomenological understanding of this force, which adds to the various, sometimes contradicting, causal explanations.

An analysis of the narratives of individuals with various types of chronic criminal spins reveals major themes that shape the individual consciousness (Geiger, 2006; Presser, 2009). These themes typify the individual chronic spin, as they link separate events into patterns of behavior and provide a sense of coherence. To demonstrate, in a study of hardcore street criminals, Topalli (2005) explored a narrative that contains themes of a street ethic of violence, hedonism, opportunism, and self-sufficiency. The centrality of this narrative to the people involved typifies their chronic spin. Another study, which analyzed the self-portrayed narratives of prisoners, found common, repeated themes of growing chaos and lack of a personality center. The existence of these themes within the life narratives contributed to the individuals’ chronic involvement in criminal behavior (Timor, 2001). In another example, Yassour Borochowitz’s (2008) phenomenological study of male batterers shows how their violence developed to fit a central narrative in each man’s life. The development of each personal narrative is associated with the deterioration into a chronic, violent criminal spin. Still another example is the extensive 12-Step literature, which presents the narrative of addiction with its typical themes of powerlessness and self-centeredness (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1952; Kurtz, 1982; Ronel, 2000), considered to lie at the very root of addiction. Phenomenologically, such narratives accompany every chronic criminal spin. A break in such a narrative denotes recovery (Maruna, 1997), that is, the end of the criminal spin.

The second aspect of the chronic criminal spin is the accumulation of acute spins that constitutes a chronic one. In other words, although the concept of the chronic spin relates to the overall process of being involved in criminality, this process is built by separate acute spins. They may be of the very same nature, as for example, is the case of a male batterer who is not violent outside the home but has recurrent domestic outbursts. On the other hand, they may vary in manifestation, as in the case of male batterers who also suffer from substance dependency (Brown, Caplan, Werk, & Seragianian, 1999; Maiden, 1996) or that of any person involved in diverse criminal behaviors (Halsey & Young, 2006). Whichever the case, the person in a chronic criminal spin displays acute criminal spins in relevant situations at any given frequency. For example, in a rare account by a recovering male batterer who participated in writing a clinical interpretation of the recovery process, he confessed: "I had an abusive argument with my wife, suddenly portraying her as something other than my wife—an opponent! At the same time, I felt enveloped in an isolation that seemed to render me speechless. I was about to smash this, when I was able to break away, snapping a pencil that I happened to be holding" (Ronel & Tim, 2003, p. 72).

In this quotation, the recovering male batterer illustrates the existential threat and the elevated "I must" motive within the violent spin. In general, the chronic criminal spin manifests attributes that are similar to those of the acute one, although they are usually stronger and cover a larger portion of the individual's life. The first such trait is self-centeredness, which becomes a central motivation in many moments of the chronic phase, sometimes becoming a major theme in the person's sense of being in the world. People in a chronic spin are increasingly occupied with internal issues of desire, fantasy, fears, power, self-denial, and the like, all pointing toward themselves. These self-centered issues may represent a sense of self-grandeur ("I can"), what Tiebout (1954) termed "the big ego," or a sense of self-negation ("I must"), or, more usually, an oscillation between the two (Ronel & Libman, 2003).

Thus the "I can" and "I must" consciousness becomes the primary narrative of the self. Motivation develops accordingly and the self is caught in an endless existential struggle with its surroundings, while facing a continuous threat and a growing need for as much gratification as possible. In the same vein, in a qualitative study of adolescents who were property offenders, Lopez (2008) found that the adolescents claimed to commit their crimes for thrills, to cope with stressors, to defend their gang, and for economic gain. All of these are self-centered motivations that may contain "I can" and "I must" motives.

Naturally, the ability of the self-occupied person to empathize with others is diminished. With little empathy and a dominant self-interest, criminal behavior becomes a commonplace option while life as a whole becomes increasingly one-dimensional, controlled by the self-centered consciousness and situational factors that frequently trigger acute spins. In the absence of a crisis or an external intervention, continued criminal behavior is perceived as the preferred option and the chronic spin remains in motion, thus preserving itself. Junebug, a persistent violent offender on the St. Louis

street scene, summarizes this succinctly: “I don’t think that I will ever stop doing these robberies until the day that somebody kills me. There is nothing in the world that would stop me from doing it” (Topalli, 2005, p. 806).

A Group in a Criminal Spin

The variety of criminological models and theories of the interplay between individuals and the criminality of their groups of belonging expresses the perceived significance of group influence. Usually, these models describe leading factors and processes of becoming deviant within a group (Brotherton, 2008; A. K. Cohen, 1955; B. D. Johnson, 1980; Shoam et al., 2004; Sutherland & Cressey, 1974), as well as the desistance of criminality within a group of recovery (Terry, 1996; Volkman & Cressey, 1963). The analysis of a group criminal spin is based on this knowledge, stressing the phenomenology of the group as a single entity that may spin and affect each of its members.

A group can be presented as a unit that functions parallel to the individual level and may spin as individuals do. As a unit, a group of individuals may perform an initial behavior that proceeds in a criminal direction far beyond the initial intention of its participants, with most manifestations of the individual criminal spin described earlier. Within this process, group members contribute a certain role—even the passive members, who are silent participants, support the spin by their very presence. An unfortunately common example is that of group rape, where: “the presence of another might also provide an individual with ideas that s/he would not have alone, or provide the opportunity for committing acts that an individual may not think possible alone. . . . The presence of a majority can both help to legitimize acts to convince others to follow and also provide peer pressure upon the minority to conform” (Porter & Alison, 2006, p. 306).

The criminal group spin operates in two phases, acute and chronic, similar to the individual level. A common case is when individuals who usually refrain from delinquency and similar behaviors join in a one-time criminal, violent, or similar activity. Coming together in this acute group spin, each of the group members may exhibit an acute individual spin that is not typical of that person. A very common example is a small group of adolescents who use illicit drugs together. They may do this in an acute manner, once or occasionally. For many of the young individuals, this is the only use of such drugs and it may last for a limited period in their lives, not becoming a chronic drug abuse. It is considered a group spin because the youngsters perform this act only during a group interaction, “letting themselves” deviate from their everyday norms. On these occasions, the group interaction provides the “I can” component of a spin: Although each member does not usually sense an inner ability and permission to act in the criminal direction, the perceived power of the group supplies this sense and allows the act. In the same way, a group interaction may display the “I must” motive, for example when performing violent behavior against other group. In any case, the interaction of members of a group in a spin gives rise to self-centered norms that contribute to the further development of the spin. The social learning theory of criminology describes and predicts this phenomenon, where mutual imitation, group definition of norms, and

interaction among members work together to elevate the behavior to a spin (Akers & Jensen, 2006). Differential reinforcement, as presented by social learning theory, is a factor in the progression of a group criminal spin into a chronic one.

Within a group in an acute spin there may be a variety of members, some fitting the description above but others displaying a chronic phase. In this case, delinquents and nondelinquents interact and engage in a criminal spin. An example is a group rape performed by individuals of whom only few have been involved in such behavior previously. The others would never initiate it on their own, but when together, functioning as a group and coming across an unanticipated opportunity, they cospin, reinforcing and neutralizing each other, ending with a violent rape. Individuals who would not choose illicit or deviant behavior on their own either influence one another or are influenced by another member of the group to engage in criminal group behavior. Within this process, each participant of the group in a spin displays an individual criminal spin. Although for some it may be an acute spin, or even a single incident, for the more experienced it represents a chronic spin. Nevertheless, as a whole the group constitutes something that is more than the sum of its parts, that is, more criminal as a whole than its individual participants are. Because the group is in a criminal spin, its members engage in criminal behavior that is far beyond the usual norm of the majority of them.

Another case is when most or all members of a group are in a chronic criminal spin. Again, during the group interaction they may cospin along an unintended path. Porter and Alison (2006), for example, maintain that about one fifth of the cases of group rape are unplanned and occur while participating in another criminal activity, such as robbery. In these cases, even though most group members are in a chronic criminal spin, together they produce an acute criminal group spin that increases the extent and magnitude of their former criminal activity. The acute aggregation may be a one-time occurrence only; hence, it is an acute phase for that group interaction. Again, the criminality of the group as a whole exceeds that of some of its members.

Still another type of group spin occurs when participants, each in an individual chronic spin, routinely join together to perform criminal activities as a group. In this case, there is mutual reinforcement of the criminal involvement (Akers & Jensen, 2006). The group spins as a whole, intensifying the chronic spin of each participant. A familiar example of this type of a group spin is the street gang (Huff, 1998; Klein, 1998). A study that compared youth gang members and nongang youth who had delinquent friends found that gang membership significantly intensified delinquency beyond the expected effect of simply associating with delinquent friends (Battin et al., 1998; Battin-Pearson et al., 1998). Similar results were obtained in a longitudinal study of young adolescents in Norway (Bendixen, Endresen, & Olweus, 2006), where it was found that the criminal activity of the members increased during active gang periods. Winfree, Mays, and Vigil-Backstrom (1994) obtained somewhat contradicting results. Based on social learning theory, they found that gang membership was not related to delinquency, but gang members had acquired more pro-gang attitudes than nongang youths and were more favorably inclined toward gang activities. Nevertheless, gang membership did contribute to offenses that were associated with the group. In contrast,

Gatti, Tremblay, Vitaro, and McDuff (2005) conclude from their study that “the higher delinquency rates among gang members are largely linked to the experience of the gang itself” (p. 1188). This conclusion is consistent with the model of the group criminal spin presented here. The chronic spin of the group, the sum that is more than its parts, may increase the illicit behavior of individual participants of that group, and joining a group in a spin affects the criminality of individuals accordingly.

Community and Culture in a Criminal Spin

The model of a group spin assumes that a group is more than the sum of its members and has a quality of its own. This assumption refers to small groups, but it may also describe the function of larger ones, and even of certain areas, communities, and (sub) cultures. In other words, being part of a larger entity, individuals interact in a pattern that represents a combination of their personal patterns with a common pattern that is typical to that area or (sub)culture, as described by social structure and social learning (SSSL) theories (Akers & Jensen, 2006). The common pattern bears an impact on individual behavior that may be criminal and may have the nature of a criminal spin. Halsey and Young’s (2006) qualitative research of graffiti writers provides a good illustration of this relationship between individual and subculture pattern. The following discussion of a criminal community spin maintains that a community can function as an entity with associated motives that resemble individual ones.

Several patterns illustrate the operation of a community criminal spin. First, from a historical perspective, a community criminal spin may be connected to communal processes within specific periods. Heightened criminality appears in distinct waves, when there are “new opportunities to commit crimes that arise following changes in the environment of everyday life” (Kilias, 2006, p. 12).

Second, it has been shown that increased criminality may be typical to certain areas, with an interplay of different variables contributing to this phenomenon (Rai, 2008; Weisburd, Telep, & Braga, 2010). A high crime rate in a given community is connected to “social disorganization” (Bursik, 1988), a term that might indicate the existence of a criminal spin within the specific community. Schuerman and Kobrin (1986) described a neighborhood process that may be considered as a community criminal spin process. Based on ecological changes, the neighborhood goes through social and cultural transformations, which may include an increased rate of criminality. Then, however, the increase in criminality exceeds the rate of other changes within the community. In other words, the amplified criminal spin of individuals or groups may exceed a certain limit within a community, so that the entire community appears to enter into a criminal spin that exceeds any other changes within it. The Broken Windows model (Wilson & Kelling, 1982) describes a similar circle: “increasing fear of crime related to disorder leads to a growing reluctance among many citizens to use public space, which in turn reduces natural surveillance in local areas, which then heightens the risk of further increases in disorder” (Newburn & Jones, 2007, p. 225). It should be noted that the community criminal spin appears only in the chronic phase,

because it requires a development process and attainment of a noticeable degree of chronic criminality within that community.

Third, when a community is in a criminal spin there is a process of legitimization and normalization of crime and similar behaviors. Within that community, delinquency and behaviors considered as deviant previously or elsewhere are now established as local norms (Newburn & Jones, 2007). For example, while introducing a new concept for Merton's strain theory, that is, the Maximizer—which merges elements of both the Conformist and the Innovator—Murphy and Robinson (2008) describe the “normalization” of white-collar delinquency: “The culture of big tobacco—referring to the beliefs, values, and norms that dictate its corporate practices and the behaviors of its employees—is criminogenic. Although the companies make a legal product in pursuit of the American Dream (Conformity), they simultaneously and regularly engage in reckless, negligent, and knowing behaviors that lead to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Americans every year (Innovation)” (p. 515).

When law-breaking and like behaviors become legitimized in a particular community, a growing number of local individuals and groups may adopt these norms, turning to criminality and experiencing chronic individual criminal spins. As more members of the community discover that they can transgress the law, and as their transgressions increase, the magnitude of the community spin, as well as its ability to affect other members of the community, grows. In this chronic phase, when there is a shift in norms within the community, even nondeviant members of the community may allow themselves to behave according to the new norms. At that stage, criminality “contaminates” social interactions inside the local community (Fagan, Wilkinson, & Davies, 2007). The more widespread the criminal spin in the given community and the more it reaches “normative” members, the deeper the distress of the particular community as a whole.

A different case is when an entire society goes through a spin that is represented by legitimizing behaviors that would be considered as criminal or deviant in most other societies. In these cases, the cultural system of values, norms, conventional attitudes, language, and social roles may reflect the spin. For example, during the Nazi period in Germany, the dominant German culture as a whole was identified as Nazi. Consequently, individuals who belonged to the mainstream adopted the extremely racist value system of the Nazis, and behaved accordingly. More specifically, anti-Semitic prejudice and harm to Jews became normative, accepted, and even expected behavior. As the spin increased, mass killing became “normative” and organized by the authorities. Individuals considered normal and respectable citizens became regular murderers, torturers, and abusers, as had never been seen elsewhere. When the spin ended (Germany lost), international law saw those “law-abiding” individuals as criminals. Another example is the prejudice and discrimination against African Americans that took place in certain areas of the United States. This discrimination was also considered as normative within the ruling culture, and individuals who might consider themselves relatively human participated in the cultural racism while ignoring the incongruity. In such cases of cultural criminal spin, the choices taken by individuals are markedly directed by the progress of the spin.

Typically, a cultural criminal spin of a whole society is based on a distinction between that society or culture and others, usually by ethnic or religious identity. There is a growing, spinning division of people into “us” and “them,” and belonging to any given social group bears profound significance. Cognitive perceptions of the others and elevated emotions typify this cultural spin. The emotional spin is interwoven with the cognitive one to mutually increase each other in a process that creates double standards for one’s culture or nation and for “the others.” Fear of the others, a sense of religious sanctification through a struggle, resentment, hate, or contempt, may lead to violence, abuse, and exploitation. A subsequent rationalization and neutralization process supports the normalization of the abusive behaviors toward the others, whereas the same behaviors are not legitimized when turned on those who belong to the group of us. Cultural self-centeredness, sense of existential necessity, perception of normative legitimization, and the view of social ability render the cultural and societal spin parallel to the criminal spin of individuals and groups.

This narrative can be traced throughout the history of most regions of the world. The cultural, societal, or religious spin, which is criminal by nature (i.e., which leads to violence and abuse while representing cultural self-centeredness), is one of the greatest sources of harm that we face today in the form of wars, terrorism, suppression, and discrimination.

Epilogue

There is a certain formidable machine, have you seen it? It is the rolling-mill. You must be on your guard against it, it is crafty and ferocious; if it catches hold of the skirt of your coat, you will be drawn in bodily. That machine is laziness. Stop while there is yet time, and save yourself! Otherwise, it is all over with you; in a short time you will be among the gearing. Once entangled, hope for nothing more. (Hugo, 1887, Chapter 2)

In the above words of Jean Valjean preaching to Montparnasse, a young offender, about the inevitable negative consequences of criminal life, Victor Hugo essentially describes the criminal spin in its chronic phase as analogous to being caught in a destructive machine. The free choice is to move away, but once an individual is slightly caught, the spin is on and the process is beyond his or her control. Can a person stop it? Can a society? When and how? These questions have stood at the core of criminological thinking since biblical times, producing an enormous volume of contradicting answers. In this sense, the criminal spin theory, like most others, does not offer a new explanation, *but an integrative theory with an innovative perspective* that is phenomenological rather than causal. This theory, by no means an all-inclusive, universal one, connects personal to social processes and may indicate principles for optional interventions.

The phenomenology of the spin indicates a growing state of self-centeredness with two motives that may exist separately or simultaneously within a criminal consciousness: “I (we) can” and “I (we) must.” The first denotes a perceived legitimacy, possibility, and

capability to engage in desired self-centered, hedonistic, and/or criminal conduct. The second reflects a sense of existential threat and the belief that it must be removed by deviant or violent acts. These motives can function infrequently (acute phase) or frequently (chronic phase), within individuals, groups, or societies. The sources, causes, and development of these motives vary and may be subject to different explanations, based on different perspectives. Their phenomenological interpretation, however, offers a unifying consideration.

The discussion of the criminal spin is associated with issues of free choice and determinism. Phenomenology, including phenomenological criminology, treats individuals as nondeterministic, free-willed beings (Crewe & Lippens, 2009; Kockelmans, 1987). As a phenomenological theory, the criminal spin makes similar assumptions about the potential of free choice and thus deviates from positivistic, deterministic theories of criminology (e.g., the general theory of deviance or social learning theory).

However, the assumed human potential of free choice notwithstanding, the criminal spin theory adds a semi-deterministic component, namely, the spin itself and its phenomenology, which indicates the subsidence (at least temporarily) of free choice and the ability to exercise self-control. According to Levinas (2004), the human ethic of fulfilling one's potential for free choice involves intending outwards, toward the Other. In a discussion of the highest stage of moral reasoning, Kohlberg and Ryncarz (1990) present a comparable notion. The criminal spin theory, while making a similar assumption, focuses on cases where the opposite takes place. Individuals in a spin represent a reverse direction: that of a self-centered, inward intention toward relief of threat (I must) or gaining reward (I can). The narrowing of consciousness during the spin, as described, occurs when individuals with self-centered intentions undergo a semi-deterministic process that reduces their free choice and ability for self-control. Thus, an acute criminal spin is an experience, limited in time, of a growing surrender of free choice, a process that may progress into a life experience of chronic spin.

This also applies to groups and societies. Being part of a group or society in a spin heightens this experience further whenever an individual is involved in spin-like behavior. The spin process is a vicious cycle that contradicts the very human potential—as self-centeredness grows, the ability for free choice is narrowed (Ronel, 2000). In the words of Lewis (2005): “It is the magician’s bargain: give up our soul, get power in return. But once our souls, that is, ourselves, have been given up, the power thus conferred will not belong to us. We shall in fact be the slaves and puppets of that to which we have given our souls” (p. 54).

Conversely, at any moment during a spin process, an individual may potentially decide differently and resume some degree of free choice and self-control, although this rarely happens by itself, as this theory describes. When an individual gets out of the spin, with the aid of an external agent or not, the potential for free choice is renewed. In this sense, the theory of the criminal spin offers an understanding that differs from that of more deterministic approaches. Going through a semideterministic phase is part of the condition of a self-centered spin and whenever this condition subsides, the semideterministic process subsides correspondingly. Again, this applies to groups

and societies as well, although it is more complicated to transform group or societal consciousness compared with that of individuals. This indicates several pragmatic implications for intervention and research.

First, the criminal spin is detectable and predictable at the individual, group, community, or societal level. Criminologists and other agents of intervention may evaluate a criminal process and assess the level, nature, and degree of the spin process. The result of such an evaluation, at any level, may call for an appropriate intervention. For example, on the individual level it may call for a mandatory yet agreed treatment alternative, as in the field of addiction (Peyrot, 1982); on a neighborhood level, it may call for more appropriate policing (Weisburd et al., 2010; Wilson & Kelling, 1982). Second, detection of such a criminal spin indicates the relative intensity and level of intervention required. An external intervention is usually necessary, because the spin seems to be driven by inertia. To induce transformation of a spin process, the intervention should be immediate, intensive, noticeable, and stronger than the spin in question. However, too strong an intervention, which may be experienced as an inappropriate social reaction, is liable to ignite a spin-like interaction of the intervention agent with their target individuals. Third, it is worthwhile to disrupt the cycle of the spin as early as possible, before it reaches its self-preservation stage. Otherwise, the consequences may be inescapable. In many fields of intervention, there is a risk-assessment procedure (e.g., Dutton & Kropp, 2000). The ideas presented here suggest an additional aspect of risk assessment—assessment of the criminal spin, its magnitude, progress or coherence, and an intervention program based on such an assessment.

The recommendation of an external intervention that is stronger than the spin should not be interpreted as one that is only forceful (Ronel & Elisha, 2010). Research in criminology, as well as all other human sciences, generally oscillates between a humanistic-liberal approach and a more conservative one (Etzioni, 1997). Although the exertion of excessively forceful stress on a population may lead to a growing sense of “I (we) must,” as some schools of criminology emphasize (Brotherton, 2008; S. Cohen, 1985; Horwitz, 1990), a reaction that is too soft may nourish a growing sense of “I (we) can” in a larger portion of the population (Newburn & Jones, 2007). Hence, any reaction, at any level, should balance between the two and compensate when needed, based on careful evaluation of social and personal factors that indicate the degree and nature of the given criminal spin.

I developed the criminal spin theory based on my clinical experience and observations, as well as previous literature. Further research is needed to enhance our understanding of the phenomenology of the spin. For example, it is important to define the different stages of the spin and the relative magnitude of its components. Another study might address the possibility of a mutual spin between a violent perpetrator and a victim and the possibility of a victimization spin. Future research may also link moral reasoning and being a spin. Finally, as the spin is presented in behavior and in the consciousness, their interrelationship should be further explored. To conclude, the criminal spin suggests a new, integrative theory; past studies support its assumptions and interpretations, but future studies are still needed to develop it further.

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