Framework for a Developmental Model of Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Conduct Disorder

BENJAMIN B. LAHEY and ROLF LOEBER

It is a heartfelt honor to have been asked to contribute to this volume honoring Herbert C. Quay for his contributions to the field of developmental psychopathology. We have long benefitted personally in our teaching and research from his voluminous and seminal work and have valued his friendship and mentoring immensely over the years. In choosing a topic for this chapter, we selected one that we have discussed many times with Herb, a model of the development of serious conduct problems. We chose this topic because it reflects, and indeed incorporates, many of Herb's contributions to the classification and development of conduct problems. Because the scope of Herb's work and impact is broad, however, we could just as easily have chosen to write on our views on the environmental and biological correlates of conduct disorder, as his work has stimulated our interest in that field as well.

It is a truism that one cannot understand any maladaptive pattern of
behavior in children and adolescents without understanding how that syndrome changes during the course of development. We change throughout our lives, but at no time more rapidly than in childhood and adolescence, and the psychological disorders that afflict us change as well. In spite of this truism, we have typically studied disorders in cross-sectional samples that provide no more than static “snapshots” of the disorder. This strategy has been costly, as a definitive understanding of phenomenology, prognosis, immature precursors to later serious maladaptive behaviors, and factors that cause and maintain psychological disorders can only come from longitudinal research.

Gradually, however, progress has been made in the longitudinal study of conduct problems, beginning with the pioneering longitudinal studies of delinquency and antisocial behavior of Robins (1966; Robins & Ratcliff, 1979), Glueck and Glueck (1968), West and Farrington (1977), Henn, Bardwell, and Jenkins (1980), MacFarlane, Allen, and Honzik (1962), and Greene et al. (1973). More recently, important longitudinal studies have been conducted by Anderson, Williams, McGee, and Silva (1987), Harrington, Fudge, Rutter, Pickles, and Hill (1991), Offord et al. (1992), Stanger, McConaughy, and Achenbach (1992), Stattin and Magnusson (1989), and Verhulst and van der Ende (1992). We will draw on these studies and our own ongoing prospective and cross-sectional studies as sources for the developmental model presented in this chapter. Our focus will be on the maladaptive patterns of behavior known as oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) and conduct disorder (CD).

Framework for a Developmental Model

In this chapter, we will sketch the broad outline of a developmental model of ODD and CD. In doing so, we will be elaborating ideas laid down in earlier papers (Lahey, Loeber, Quay, Frick, & Grimm, 1992; Loeber, 1988; Loeber, Lahey, & Thomas, 1991). The sketchiness of this outline reflects the relative paucity of relevant literature, but enough is now known to begin to describe the development of child problem behavior in broad terms. At the end of this chapter, we will point to several areas for future elaboration of this model. We will not discuss factors that give rise to and maintain conduct problems, but we will discuss some ways in which viewing ODD and CD from a developmental perspective may facilitate studies of such factors.

The essential postulates of this model are summarized in Figure 1. The developmental relationships among the maladaptive behaviors referred to as ODD and CD are assumed to be predominantly nonrandom.