LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

• Explain the nature of criminological theory, and discuss the role that social research plays in the development of such theory.
• Describe the Classical School of criminology, and show how it continues to influence criminological theorizing today.
• Describe the basic features of biological theories of crime causation, and know their shortcomings.
• Explain how the mapping of human DNA has enhanced contemporary psychobiological understandings of criminal behavior.
• Describe the fundamental assumptions of psychological explanations for crime, and know the shortcomings of such explanations.
• Describe the basic features of sociological theories of crime causation.
• Describe social process theories of criminology, and identify the kinds of crime-control policies that might be based on them.
• Describe conflict theories of criminality, and identify the kinds of crime-control policies that might be based on them.
• Identify three emergent theories of crime causation.
INTRODUCTION

On March 18, 2008, well-known rapper Busta Rhymes was sentenced by a judge in New York City to three years’ probation. The judge also ordered the 35-year-old man, whose real name is Trevor Smith, to perform ten days of community service and to pay a $1,250 fine plus court costs. The sentence resulted from a 2007 arrest in New York in which Rhymes was charged with beating his former driver, Edward Hatchett, and of kicking him in the ribs during a dispute over back pay. The attack, said to have taken place outside of Rhymes’s Lower Manhattan office, left Hatchett with cuts, bruises, and substantial pain, according to a court complaint.

Brushes with the law are nothing new to Rhymes. In February 2006, his bodyguard, 29-year-old Israel Ramirez, was shot to death outside a Brooklyn studio where Rhymes was recording a music video. About the same time, the performer and another of his bodyguards were sued by a fan who said the two men beat him after he asked for an autograph. Rhymes’s arrest record extends back at least as far as 1998, when he and his manager were apprehended and charged with third-degree criminal possession of a concealed weapon. Police reportedly found an unregistered but loaded .45-caliber semiautomatic handgun in the singer’s Mercedes after they stopped him for erratic driving.

Rhymes is certainly not the only rapper to become acquainted with the criminal justice system. In April 2000, hip-hop artist Curtis “50 Cent” Jackson, a rising star in the world of hard-core rap music, was shot nine times in front of his grandmother’s home in New York City. One of the bullets hit him in the face. “50,” as the singer is known to his fans, survived the shooting but spent months recovering. Two years later, 50 was back on the music scene, having recorded a top-selling album, Get Rich or Die Tryin’, propelled by his hit song “In Da Club.” In 2002, he made headlines when he was arrested on New Year’s Eve for illegal possession of a handgun. In 2005, 50 released the album The Massacre, which quickly went Platinum, and his songs “Disco Inferno,” “Candy Shop,” and “P.I.M.P.” topped the hip-hop charts.

As these stories illustrate, violent crime is no stranger to the world of hard-core rap music. Murdered rap stars include Tupac Shakur, Notorious B.I.G., Big L., and the Lost Boyz’s hip-hop hype man Raymond “Freaky Tah” Rogers. Whether rap music merely reflects the social conditions under which its artists come of age or whether it is a direct cause of the violence that surrounds them is a question to which we will return shortly.

No discussion of crime and of the criminal justice system would be complete without considering the causes of crime and deviance. Criminologists search for answers to the fundamental questions about what causes crime: Why do people commit crime? What are the root causes of violence and aggression? Are people basically good, or are they motivated only by self-interest? More precisely, we might ask why a particular person commits a particular crime on a given occasion and under specific circumstances.

In this chapter, we will look at the causes of crime. Before we begin, however, some brief definitions are in order. Crime, as noted in Chapter 1, is a violation of the criminal law without acceptable legal justification, while deviant behavior is a violation of social norms that
specify appropriate or proper behavior under a particular set of circumstances. Deviant behavior is a broad category that often includes crime.

Many theories have been advanced to explain all sorts of rule-violating behavior. Some observers of the contemporary scene, for example, blame much of today’s crime on commonplace episodes of violence in the American media—especially on television, in music, and on film. Experts who study the media estimate that the average American child watches 8,000 murders and 100,000 acts of violence while growing up. At an international conference, Suzanne Stutman, president of the Institute for Mental Health Initiatives, a nonprofit organization in Washington, D.C., reported that studies consistently show that the extent of exposure to television violence in childhood is a good predictor of future criminal behavior. One particular study, released in 2002, found that watching just one hour of television a day can make a person more violent toward others. The study, which was conducted over a 25-year period at New York’s Columbia University, used police records to confirm that 45% of young men who had watched three or more hours of television a day went on to commit at least one aggressive act against another person, compared to 9% of young men who had watched for less than one hour per day.

Robert Brown, executive director of the Washington, D.C., Children’s Trust Neighborhood Initiative, lays much of the blame for contemporary violence on rap music, especially “gangsta rap” and some forms of hip-hop. “So many of our young men,” says Brown, “have accepted false icons of manhood for themselves . . . because the popular culture of videos and rap—Snoop Doggy Dogg and the rest—reinforces that this is the correct way to be. Guys . . . try to exude an aura that says, ‘I am so bad that I am not afraid to take your life or to offer mine up in the process.’”

An African American critic of gangsta rap puts it this way: “The key element is aggression—in rappers’ body language, tone, and witty rhymes—that often leaves listeners hyped, on edge, angry about . . . something. Perhaps the most important element in gangsta rap is its messages, which center largely around these ideas: that women are no more than ‘bitches and Hos,’ disposable playthings who exist merely for men’s abusive delight; that it’s cool to use any means necessary to get the material things you want; and most importantly, it’s admirable to be cold-blooded and hard.” The Reverend Arthur L. Cribbs, Jr., an African American social critic, agrees. Cribbs calls gangsta rap “nothing but modern-day violence and vulgarity wrapped and packaged in blackface.”

Most people agree that media violence harms society. According to one survey, “57% of the public thinks violence in the media is a major factor in real-life violence” of all kinds. But it is less than clear whether violence in the media and aggressive themes in popular music are indeed a cause of crime, as many believe, or merely a reflection of the social conditions that exist in many American communities today. Findings from studies on the effect of television viewing, for example, may be inadvertently spotlighting existing criminal tendencies among lower-class undereducated teenagers with enough time on their hands for extensive TV viewing. Hence getting legislators to address the issue of violence in the media is difficult. For example, a proposed labeling system for video games and other forms of entertainment was advanced several years ago by Representatives Zach Wamp (R-Tenn.) and Bart Stupak (D-Mich.). They argued that the government requires warning labels on food, alcohol, and tobacco and should do likewise on sources of violence, but the proposal was voted down 266 to 161.

CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORY

It is easy to understand why the entertainment industry and the media are often targeted as the cause of crime and criminal violence. However, many other types of explanations for crime are also viable, such as genetic abnormalities, individual psychological differences, and variations in patterns of early socialization that may predispose some people to crime and violence. Likewise, it is prudent to examine social institutions such as the family, schools, and churches for their role in reducing or enhancing the likelihood of criminality among people.
One thing is certain: There is no single cause of crime; it is rooted in a diversity of causal factors and takes a variety of forms, depending on the situation in which it occurs. Nonetheless, some theories of human behavior help us understand why certain people engage in acts that society defines as criminal or deviant, while others do not. A **theory** is a kind of model. Theories posit relationships, often of a causal sort, between events and things under study. A theory’s explanatory power derives primarily from its inherent logical consistency, and theories are tested by how well they describe and predict reality. In other words, a good theory fits the facts, and it stands up to continued scrutiny. Figure 3–1 uses the association between poverty and crime as an example to diagram the important aspects of theory creation in the social sciences.

History is rife with theories purporting to explain rule-violating behavior. For example, an old Roman theory, based on ancient observations that more crime and deviance occur on nights with a full moon, proposed that the moon causes a kind of temporary insanity, or **lunacy**. According to this theory, deviant behavior isn’t random; it waxes and wanes in cadence with the lunar cycle. Although modern statisticians have noted an association between phases of the moon and crime rates, the precise mechanism by which the moon influences behavior—if it does—has never been adequately explained.

**FIGURE 3–1**
Steps in criminological theory building and social policy creation.
As mentioned, a complete theory attempts to flesh out all of the causal links between phenomena that are associated, or correlated. For example, some comprehensive theories of lunacy suggest that light from the full moon stimulates the reticular-activating system (RAS) in the limbic portion of the human brain, which makes people more excitable and hyperactive—and thus more likely to behave in deviant ways and to commit crime. Others have suggested, quite simply, that people commit more crimes when the moon is full because it is easier to see.

Theories, once created, must be tested to determine whether they are valid, and modern criminology has become increasingly scientific. Theory testing usually involves the development of hypotheses based on what the theory under scrutiny would predict. A theory of lunacy, for example, might be tested in a variety of ways, including (1) observing rates of crime and deviance on nights when the light of the full moon is obscured by clouds (we would expect no rise in crime rates if the RAS or visibility explanations are correct) and (2) examining city crime rates on full-moon nights—especially in well-lit city areas where the light of the moon hardly increases visibility. If the predictions made by a theory are validated by careful observation, the theory gains greater acceptability.

Generally accepted research designs—coupled with careful data-gathering strategies and statistical techniques for data analysis—have yielded considerable confidence in certain explanations for crime, while at the same time disproving others. Theories of crime causation that have met rigorous scientific tests for acceptability give policymakers the intellectual basis they need to create informed crime-control strategies. The ultimate goal of research and theory building in criminology is to provide models that permit a better understanding of criminal behavior and that enhance the development of strategies intended to address the problem of crime.

While we will use the word theory in describing various explanations for crime throughout this chapter, it should be recognized that the word is only loosely applicable to some of the perspectives we will discuss. As noted, many social scientists insist that to be considered “theories,” explanations must consist of sets of clearly stated, logically interrelated, and measurable propositions. The fact that few of the “theories” that follow rise above the level of organized conjecture, and that many others are not readily amenable to objective scrutiny through scientific testing, is one of the greatest failures of social science today.

Also, many contemporary theories of deviant and criminal behavior are far from complete, offering only limited ideas rather than complete explanations for the behavior in question. Moreover, when we consider the wide range of behaviors regarded as criminal—from murder to drug use to white-collar crime—it is difficult to imagine a theory that can explain them all.

For our purposes, explanations of criminal behavior fall into eight general categories:

- Classical
- Biological
- Psychobiological
- Psychological
- Sociological
- Social process
- Conflict
- Emergent

The differences among these approaches are summarized in Table 3–1. A ninth category could be interdisciplinary theories. Interdisciplinary approaches integrate a variety of theoretical viewpoints in an attempt to explain crime and violence. Harvard University’s Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods is one example of an ongoing interdisciplinary study of the causes of crime. Described in more detail later in this chapter, the Harvard project is examining the roles of personality, school, and community as they contribute to juvenile delinquency and criminal behavior. See Web Extra 3–1 at MyCrimeKit.com for more information on the project. Web Extra 3–2 leads to more information on the general categories of criminological theory mentioned here, and Library Extra 3–1 at MyCrimeKit.com discusses recent theoretical developments in the field of criminological theory.

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**hypothesis**
An explanation that accounts for a set of facts and that can be tested by further investigation. Also, something that is taken to be true for the purpose of argument or investigation.

**research**
The use of standardized, systematic procedures in the search for knowledge.

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**interdisciplinary theory**
An approach that integrates a variety of theoretical viewpoints in an attempt to explain something, such as crime and violence.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Theorists</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classical and Neoclassical</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Free will theories</td>
<td>Beccaria</td>
<td>Crime is caused by the individual exercise of free will.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hedonistic calculus</td>
<td>Bentham</td>
<td>Prevention is possible through swift and certain punishment that offsets any gains to be had through criminal behavior.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rational choice theory</td>
<td>Cohen &amp; Felson</td>
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<td>Routine activities theory</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Biological</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Phrenology</td>
<td>Gall</td>
<td>“Criminal genes” cause deviant behavior. Criminals are identifiable through physical characteristics or genetic makeup. Treatment is generally ineffective, but aggression may be usefully redirected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atavism</td>
<td>Lombroso</td>
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<tr>
<td>Criminal families</td>
<td>Dugdale; Goddard</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Somatotypes</td>
<td>Sheldon</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Psychobiological</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chromosome theory</td>
<td>Jacobs</td>
<td>Human DNA, environmental contaminants, nutrition, hormones, physical trauma, and body chemistry play important and interwoven roles in producing human cognition, feeling, and behavior—including crime.</td>
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<td>Biochemical approaches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heredity</td>
<td>Mednick; Wilson &amp; Herrnstein</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Psychological</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral conditioning</td>
<td>Pavlov</td>
<td>Crime is the result of inappropriate behavioral conditioning or a diseased mind. Treatment necessitates extensive behavioral therapy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychoanalysis</td>
<td>Freud</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychopathology</td>
<td>Cleckley</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sociological</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social disorganization</td>
<td>Park &amp; Burgess; Shaw &amp; McKay; Durkheim; Merton</td>
<td>The structure of society and its relative degree of organization or disorganization are important actors contributing to the prevalence of criminal behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anomie</td>
<td></td>
<td>Group dynamics, group organization, and subgroup relationships form the causal nexus out of which crime develops. Effective social policy may require basic changes in patterns of socialization and an increase in accepted opportunities for success.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subcultures</td>
<td>Cohen</td>
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<td>Focal concerns</td>
<td>Miller</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subculture of violence</td>
<td>Wolfgang &amp; Ferracuti</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social Process</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Differential association</td>
<td>Sutherland</td>
<td>Crime results from the failure of self-direction, inadequate social roles, or association with defective others. Social policy places responsibility for change on the offender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social learning</td>
<td>Burgess &amp; Akers</td>
<td>The source of criminal behavior is unknown, but an understanding of crime requires recognition that the definition of crime is imposed on behavior by the wider society. Individuals defined as “criminal” may be excluded by society from “normal” opportunities. Therapy requires a total reorientation of the offender.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Containment</td>
<td>Reckless</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social control</td>
<td>Hirschi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutralization</td>
<td>Sykes &amp; Matza</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Labeling</td>
<td>Becker</td>
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The Search for Causes  
CHAPTER 3  81

THE CLASSICAL SCHOOL

Theories of the Classical School of crime causation dominated criminological thought for much of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These theories represented a noteworthy advance over previous thinking about crime because they moved beyond superstition and mysticism as explanations for deviance. As noted criminologist Stephen Schaefer puts it, “In the eighteenth-century individualistic orientation of criminal law, the act was judged and the man made responsible.”17 A product of the Enlightenment then sweeping through Europe, the Classical School demanded recognition of rationality and the ability to exercise informed choice in human social life.

Most classical theories of crime causation, both old and new, make certain basic assumptions. Among them are these:

- Crime is caused by the individual exercise of free will. Human beings are fundamentally rational, and most human behavior is the result of free will coupled with rational choice.
- Pain and pleasure are the two central determinants of human behavior.
- Crime erodes the bond that exists between individuals and society and is therefore an immoral form of behavior.
- Punishment, a necessary evil, is sometimes required to deter law violators from repeating their crime and to serve as an example to others who would also violate the law.
- Crime prevention is possible through swift and certain punishment that offsets any gains to be had through criminal behavior.

**Cesare Beccaria: Crime and Punishment**

In 1764, Cesare Beccaria (1738–1794) published his *Essays on Crimes and Punishment*. The book was an immediate success and stirred a hornet’s nest of controversy over the treatment of criminal offenders. Beccaria proposed basic changes in the criminal laws of his day to make them more “humanitarian.” He called for the abolition of physical punishment and an end to the death penalty. Beccaria is best remembered for his suggestion that punishment...
Jeremy Bentham: Hedonistic Calculus

Among those influenced by Beccaria was the Englishman Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832). Bentham devised a “hedonistic calculus,” which essentially said that the exercise of free will would cause an individual to avoid committing a crime as long as the punishment for committing that crime outweighed the benefits to be derived from committing it. Bentham termed this philosophy of social control utilitarianism. Both Bentham and Beccaria agreed that punishment had to be “swift and certain”—as well as just—to be effective. Learn more about Jeremy Bentham at Web Extra 3–3 at MyCrimeKit.com.

The Neoclassical Perspective

A contemporary theory with roots in the Classical School, neoclassical criminology is a perspective that owes much to the early classical thinkers. Although classical criminology focuses primarily on pleasure and pain as motivators of human behavior, neoclassical criminology places greater emphasis on rationality and cognition. Central to such perspectives is rational choice theory, which holds that criminality is largely the result of conscious choices that people make. According to the theory, offenders choose to violate the law when they believe that the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs.

Rational choice theory is represented by a somewhat narrower perspective called routine activities theory. Routine activities theory was first proposed by Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson in 1979. Cohen and Felson argued that lifestyles significantly affect both the amount and type of crime found in any society, and they noted that “the risk of criminal victimization varies dramatically among the circumstances and locations in which people place themselves and their property.” Lifestyles that contribute to criminal opportunities are likely to result in crime because they increase the risk of potential victimization. For example, a person who routinely uses an ATM late at night in an isolated location is far more likely to be preyed on by robbers than is someone who stays home after dark. Rational choice theorists concentrate on “the decision-making process of offenders confronted with specific contexts” and have shifted “the focus of the effort to prevent crime . . . from broad social programs to target hardening, environmental design or any impediment that would [dissuade] a motivated offender from offending.”

Central to the routine activities approach is the claim that crime is likely to occur when a motivated offender and a suitable target come together in the absence of a capable guardian. Capable guardians are those who effectively discourage crime and prevent it from occurring. Members of neighborhood watch groups, for example, might be capable guardians. Capable guardians do not necessarily have to confront would-be offenders directly but might be people who have completed classes in crime prevention and who have taken steps to reduce their chances of victimization.

Social Policy and Classical Theories

Much of the practice of criminal justice in America today is built on concepts provided by Classical School theorists. Many contemporary programs designed to prevent crime, for example, have their philosophical roots in the classical axioms of deterrence and punishment. Modern heirs of the Classical School see punishment as central to criminal justice policy, use evidence of high crime rates to argue that punishment is a necessary crime preventive, and believe punishment is a natural and deserved consequence of criminal activity. Such thinkers call for greater prison capacity and new prison construction. In Chapter 1, we used the term public-order advocate, which can be applied to modern-day proponents of classical theory who frequently seek stiffer criminal laws and greater penalties for criminal activity. The emphasis on punishment as an appropriate response to crime, however, whether founded on principles of deterrence or revenge, and the resulting packed courtrooms and overcrowded prisons, has left many contemporary criminal justice policy initiatives foundering.
BIOLOGICAL THEORIES

Biological theories of crime causation, which had fallen into disrepute during the past few decades, are beginning to experience something of a contemporary resurgence. Most early theories of the Biological School of crime causation, which built on inherited or bodily characteristics and features, made certain fundamental assumptions. Among them are these:

- Basic determinants of human behavior, including criminal tendencies, are constitutionally or genetically based.
- The basic determinants of human behavior, including criminality, may be passed on from generation to generation. In other words, a penchant for crime may be inherited.
- At least some human behavior is the result of biological propensities inherited from more primitive developmental stages in the evolutionary process. Some human beings may be further along the evolutionary ladder than others, and their behavior may reflect it.

Franz Joseph Gall: Phrenology

The idea that the quality of a person can be judged by a study of the person’s face is as old as antiquity. Even today, we often judge people on their looks, saying, “He has an honest face” or “She has tender eyes.” Horror movies play on unspoken cultural themes to shape the way a “maniac” might look. Jack Nicholson’s portrayal of a crazed killer in The Shining and Anthony Hopkins’s role as a serial killer in The Silence of the Lambs turned that look into fortunes at the box office.

Franz Joseph Gall (1758–1828) was one of the first thinkers to theorize about the idea that bodily constitution might reflect personality. Gall was writing at a time when it was thought that organs throughout the body determined one’s mental state and behavior. People were said to be “hard-hearted” or to have a “bad spleen” that filled them with bile. Gall focused on the head and the brain and called his approach cranioscopy. It can be summarized in four propositions:

- The brain is the organ of the mind.
- The brain consists of localized faculties or functions.
- The shape of the skull reveals the underlying development (or lack of development) of areas within the brain.
- The personality can be revealed by a study of the skull.

Gall never systematically tested his theory in a way that would meet contemporary scientific standards. Even so, his approach to predicting behavior, which came to be known as phrenology, quickly spread throughout Europe. Gall’s student, Johann Gaspar Spurzheim (1776–1853), brought phrenology to America in a series of lectures and publications on the subject. By 1825, 29 phrenological journals were being produced in the United States and Britain. Until the turn of the twentieth century, phrenology remained popular in some American circles, where it was used in diagnostic schemes to classify new prisoners.

Cesare Lombroso: Atavism

Gall’s theory was “deterministic” in the sense that it left little room for choice. What a person did depended more on the shape of the skull than on the exercise of free will. Other biological theories would soon build on that premise. One of the best known is that created by the Italian psychologist Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909).

Lombroso began his criminal anthropology with a postmortem evaluation of famous criminals, including one by the name of Vilella. Before Vilella died, Lombroso had the opportunity to interview him on a number of occasions. After Vilella’s death, Lombroso correlated earlier observations of personality traits with measurable physical abnormalities. As a result of this and other studies, Lombroso concluded that criminals were atavistic...
human beings—throwbacks to earlier stages of evolution who were not sufficiently mentally advanced for successful life in the modern world. Atavism was identifiable in suspicious individuals, Lombroso suggested, through measures designed to reveal “primitive” physical characteristics.

In the late nineteenth century, Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution was rapidly being applied to a wide range of fields. It was not surprising, therefore, that Lombroso linked evolution and criminality. What separated Lombroso from his predecessors, however, was that he continually refined his theory through ongoing observation. Based on studies of known offenders, whom he compared to conformists, Lombroso identified a large number of atavistic traits, which he claimed characterized criminals. Among them were long arms, large lips, crooked noses, an abnormally large amount of body hair, prominent cheekbones, two eyes of different colors, and ears that lacked clearly defined lobes.

Atavism implies that certain people are born criminals. Throughout his life, Lombroso grappled with the task of determining what proportion of the total population of offenders were born criminals. His estimates ranged at different times between 70% and 90%. Career criminals and those who committed crimes of opportunity without atavistic features he termed criminaloids, and he recognized the potential causative roles of greed, passion, and circumstance in their behavior.

Today, Lombroso is known as the founder of the Positivist School of criminology because of the role observation played in the formulation of his theories. Stephen Schafer calls Lombroso “the father of modern criminology” because most contemporary criminologists follow in the tradition that Lombroso began—scientific observation and a comparison of theory with fact.
THE EVIDENCE FOR AND AGAINST ATAVISM  After Lombroso died, two English physicians, Charles Goring and Karl Pearson, conducted a test of atavism, studying more than 3,000 prisoners and comparing them along physiological criteria to an army detachment known as the Royal Engineers. No significant differences were found between the two groups, and Lombroso’s ideas rapidly began to fall into disrepute.

A further study of atavism was published in 1939 by Earnest A. Hooton, a distinguished Harvard University anthropologist. Hooton spent 12 years constructing anthropometric profiles—profiles based on human body measurements—of 13,873 male convicts in ten different American states. He measured each inmate in 107 different ways and compared them to 3,203 volunteers from National Guard units, firehouses, beaches, and hospitals. Surprisingly, Hooton did find some basis for Lombroso’s beliefs, and he concluded that the inmate population in his study demonstrated a decided physical “inferiority.”

However, Hooton never recognized that the prisoners he studied were only a subgroup of the population of all offenders throughout the country. They were, in fact, the least successful offenders—the ones who had been caught and imprisoned. Hooton may have unknowingly measured other criminals—the ones who had avoided capture—among his “conformist” population. Hence the “inferiority” Hooton observed may have been an artificial product of a process of selection (arrest) by the justice system.

Criminal Families

The concept of biological inheritance has been applied to “criminal families” as well as to individuals. The idea of mental degeneration as an inherited contributor to crime was first explored by Richard Dugdale. Dugdale used the family tree method to study a family he called the Jukes, publishing his findings in 1877. The Juke lineage had its beginning in America with “Max” (whose last name is unknown), a descendant of Dutch immigrants to New Amsterdam in the early eighteenth century. Two of Max’s sons married into the notorious “Juke family of girls,” six sisters, all of whom were illegitimate. Male Jukes were reputed to have been “vicious,” while Ada, one of the sisters, had an especially bad reputation and eventually came to be known as “the mother of criminals.”

Dugdale found that, during the next 75 years, Ada’s heirs included 1,200 people, most of whom were “social degenerates.” Only a handful of socially productive progeny could be identified. In 1915, Dugdale’s study of the Jukes was continued by Arthur A. Estabrook, who extended the line to include 2,094 descendants and found just as few conformists.
A similar study was published by Henry Goddard in 1912. Goddard examined the Kallikak family, which contained two clear lines of descent. One emanated from an affair that Revolutionary War soldier Martin Kallikak had with a “feebleminded” barmaid. She bore a son, and the line eventually produced 480 identifiable descendants. After the war, Kallikak returned home and married a “virtuous” Quaker woman in Philadelphia. This legitimate line produced 496 offspring by 1912, of whom only three were abnormal; not one was criminal. The illegitimate group, however, contained over half “feebleminded” or deviant progeny.

The underlying suppositions of these studies are that degenerate and feebleminded people are produced and propagated through bad genetic material and that crime is an outlet for degenerate urges. However, these studies fail to recognize any effect that socialization and life circumstances have on the development of criminal behavior.

William Sheldon: Somatotypes

“Constitutional” theories of crime causation refer to the physical constitution, or bodily characteristics, of offenders. The last of the famous constitutional theorists was William Sheldon (1893–1977), who developed the idea of somatotyping.

Sheldon studied 200 juvenile delinquents between the ages of 15 and 21 at the Hayden Goodwill Institute in Boston and decided that the young men possessed one of three somatotypes (or body types). The types of bodies described by Sheldon were (in his words):

- **Mesomorphs** with a relative predominance of muscle, bone, and connective tissue
- **Endomorphs** with a soft roundness throughout the various regions of the body; short tapering limbs; small bones; and soft, smooth, velvety skin
- **Ectomorphs** characterized by thinness, fragility, and delicacy of body

Sheldon developed a system of measurements by which an individual’s physique could be expressed as a combination of three numbers, such as 4.0–4.0–3.5 (the representation of an average male). The numbers represented the degree of mesomorphy, endomorphy, and ectomorphy present in the individual on a scale of 0 to 7, where 0 indicates a complete lack of features of one category. American females were said to average 5.0–3.0–3.5 on the scale. Sheldon wrote that each somatotype was possessed of a characteristic personality, and he believed that predominantly mesomorphic individuals were most prone to aggression, violence, and delinquency.

Social Policy and Biological Theories

Because traditional biological theories of crime causation attribute the cause of crime to fundamental physical characteristics that are not easily modified, they suggest the need for extreme social policies. During the 1920s and early 1930s, for example, biological theories of crime causation, especially those focusing on inherited mental degeneration, led to the eugenics movement, under which mentally handicapped women were sometimes sterilized to prevent them from bearing offspring. The eugenics movement was institutionalized by the 1927 U.S. Supreme Court case of *Buck v. Bell*, in which Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., writing in support of a Virginia statute permitting sterilization, said, “It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those persons who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind.”

Visit Web Extra 3–4 at MyCrimeKit.com to learn more about biological theories of crime and violence.

PSYCHOBIOLOGICAL THEORIES

During the past few decades, researchers have taken a sophisticated approach to biological theorizing about the causes of crime. Contemporary biochemical and physiological perspectives are sometimes termed psychobiology. The psychobiology of crime highlights the role of human DNA, environmental contaminants, nutrition, hormones, physical trauma (especially to the brain), and body chemistry in human cognition, feeling, and behavior.
Chromosome Theory

The detailed mapping of human DNA and other recent advances in the field of recombinant DNA have rekindled interest in genetic correlates of deviant behavior. More sophisticated than their historical counterparts, the biological theories of today often draw on the latest medical advances or build on popular health concerns.

The links between chromosome patterns and crime were first explored in the 1960s. A normal female has a chromosome structure often diagrammed as “XX” because of how the sex-determining gene pair looks in an electron microscope. A male has a Y chromosome in place of the second X, for a typical male XY pattern. Although it had been known for some time that a few people have abnormal patterns that include “extra” chromosomes (such as XXX females, XXY males with Klinefelter’s syndrome, and XXYY “double males”), it wasn’t until 1965 that the respected English journal *Nature* reported on the work of Patricia Jacobs, who identified supermales—men with an extra Y chromosome whose chromosome structure is diagrammed XYY. Jacobs found that supermales were more common in prisons than in the general population.28

Other early studies claimed that the XYY male was more aggressive than other males and that he possessed a number of specific physical and psychological traits, such as height (taller than 6 feet, 1 inch), thinness, acne, a tendency toward homosexuality, a somewhat low IQ, and “a marked tendency to commit a succession of apparently motiveless property crimes.”29 Later studies disputed many of these findings, and the significance of the XYY pattern for behavioral prediction is in doubt today.

Biochemical Factors and Imbalances

Research in the area of nutrition has produced some limited evidence that the old maxim “You are what you eat” may contain more than a grain of truth. *Biocriminology* is a field of study that links violent or disruptive behavior to eating habits, vitamin deficiencies, genetics, and other conditions that affect body tissues.

One of the first studies to focus on chemical imbalances in the body as a cause of crime was reported in the British medical journal *Lancet* in 1943.30 Authors of the study linked murder to hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), which is caused by too much insulin in the blood or by near starvation diets. Some researchers believe that hypoglycemia reduces the mind’s capacity to reason effectively or to judge the long-term consequences of behavior.

Allergic reactions to common foods have been reported as the cause of violence and homicide in a number of studies.31 Foods said to produce allergic reactions in sensitive individuals, leading to a swelling of the brain and brain stem, include milk, citrus fruit, chocolate, corn, wheat, and eggs. Involvement of the central nervous system in such allergies, it has been suggested, reduces the amount of learning that occurs during childhood and may contribute to delinquency as well as to adult criminal behavior. Some studies have implicated food additives, such as monosodium glutamate, dyes, and artificial flavorings, in producing criminal behavior.32

Other research has found that the amount of coffee and sugar consumed by inmates is considerably greater than in the outside population.33 Theorists have suggested that high blood levels of caffeine and sugar produce antisocial behavior.34 It is unclear whether inmates consume more coffee due to boredom or whether those with “excitable” personalities need the kind of stimulation coffee drinking produces. On the other hand, habitual coffee drinkers in nonprison populations have not been linked to crime, and other studies, such as that conducted by Mortimer Gross of the University of Illinois, show no link between the amount of sugar consumed and hyperactivity.35 Similarly, studies “have not yielded evidence that a change in diet will result in [a] significant reduction in aggressive or antisocial behavior” among inmate populations.36 Nonetheless, some prison programs have limited the intake of dietary stimulants through nutritional management and the substitution of artificial sweeteners for refined sugar.

Vitamins have also been examined for their impact on delinquency. Abram Hoffer found that disruptive children consumed far less than the optimum levels of vitamins B₃ and B₆.

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*supermale* A human male displaying the XYY chromosome structure.
than did nonproblem youths. He claimed that the addition of these vitamins to the diets of children who were deficient in them could control unruly behavior and improve school performance.

Overall, the role of food and diet in producing criminal behavior has not been well established. The American Dietetic Association and the National Council against Health Fraud have concluded that no convincing scientific relationship between crime and diet has yet been demonstrated. Both groups are concerned that poor nutrition may result from programs that reduce or modify diets in an effort to affect behavior.

Hormones have also come under scrutiny as potential behavioral determinants. The male sex hormone, testosterone, has been linked to aggressiveness in males. Some studies of blood-serum levels of testosterone have shown a direct relationship between the amount of hormone present and the degree of violence used by sex offenders, and steroid abuse among bodybuilders has been linked to destructive urges and psychosis. One 1998 study found that high levels of testosterone, especially when combined with low socioeconomic status, produced antisocial personalities, resulting in deviance and criminality. In 2007, researchers at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor found that the higher the blood levels of testosterone in young men, the more they enjoyed provoking anger in others.

Some studies of brain chemistry have led researchers to conclude that low levels of certain neurotransmitters, especially serotonin, are directly related to a person’s inability to control aggressive impulses. The presence of adequate serotonin levels in the human brain buffers irritating experiences that might otherwise result in anger and aggression. Low serotonin levels may result from the ingestion of toxic pollutants, such as the metals lead and manganese, according to one study. Reduced serotonin levels, say other researchers, are sometimes found in men with an extra Y chromosome.

Researchers have also implicated a malfunctioning endocrine system as a cause of physical abuse, antisocial behavior, and psychopathology. One Swedish study that focused on variations in blood-serum levels of two thyroid hormones, triiodothyronine (T3) and thyroxine (FT4), found that elevated T3 levels were related to alcoholism and criminality. Serum levels of FT4 were found to be negatively correlated to such behavior.

Heredity and Other Physical Factors

Other physical factors have been shown to play a role in an individual’s inclination toward criminality. Sarnoff Mednick, for example, found some basis for the claim that the autonomic nervous system (ANS) predisposes certain individuals toward criminality by limiting their ability to learn quickly. He claims that those with a slow ANS are unable to inhibit antisocial behavior quickly enough to avoid punishment and stigmatization. Physical trauma, especially brain injury, has also been shown to at times induce severe personality changes, including aggression and violent behavior in people with a previous behavioral history of neither. Similarly, people born with certain abnormalities of the brain, especially frontal lobe dysfunction, may display a penchant for violence. Frontal lobe dysfunction is sometimes caused by reduced cerebral blood flow.

Studies have shown that the behavior of biological children of criminals who are adopted at birth tends to reflect the criminality of biological parents, independent of the environment in which the children were raised. Also, identical twins exhibit a greater similarity in behavior than do nonidentical (or “fraternal”) twins, and a number of studies have shown that identical twins are more alike in patterns and degree of criminal involvement than are fraternal twins.

Perhaps the best known of modern-day biological perspectives on crime was proposed by James Q. Wilson and Richard Herrnstein in their book Crime and Human Nature, published in 1985. Wilson and Herrnstein argue that inherited traits, such as maleness, aggressiveness, mesomorphic body type, and low intelligence, combine with environmental influences, including poor schools and strained family life, to produce crime. Although the authors reject a firm determinism, asserting that it is the interaction between genetics and environment that determines behavior, they do claim that children who will eventually grow up to be criminals can sometimes be identified early in their lives. The most important...
factor in the diversion of potential offenders from lives of crime, according to Wilson and Herrnstein, is a healthy family life in which affection for others and conscience can develop. Wilson and Herrnstein also use cross-cultural data from Japan, where crime rates are very low, to suggest that tendencies toward introversion among the Japanese result in fewer serious crimes than in the United States. The Wilson-Herrnstein thesis has been criticized for failing to explain crime that extends beyond “traditional lower-class street crime” and for failing to recognize the political nature of criminal definitions.

Social Policy and Psychobiological Theories

Psychobiological theories often suggest modifying body chemistry to produce desirable behavioral changes. Hence, just as cancer researchers look for a “magic bullet” that might target defective chromosomes in the human immune system that allow for the growth of cancerous tissue, psychobiologists concerned with crime and its causes envision the day when similar techniques can be applied to the prevention and control of crime. If a gene for crime can be found, such researchers suggest, it might be turned off. In the meantime, psychobiologists have to be content with medicinal approaches to the treatment of crime and violence, such as employing tranquilizers, antipsychotic medications, mood-altering substances, and other drugs.

Studies show that drug treatments fashioned after psychobiological perspectives control aggressive and criminal behavior temporarily, but there is little evidence to suggest that they produce lasting results. In 1993, all biologically based theories of crime and violence were called into question by the National Academy of Sciences, whose review of hundreds of studies on the relationship among biology, violence, and crime concluded that “no patterns precise enough to be considered reliable biological markers for violent behavior have yet been identified.” The study did, however, find what it called “promising leads for future research.”

PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES

Theories of the Psychological School of crime causation have an increasingly significant place in the criminological literature. Most psychological theories of crime make certain fundamental assumptions. Among them are these:

- The individual is the primary unit of analysis.
- Personality is the major motivational element within individuals, since it is the source of drives and motives.
- Crimes result from inappropriately conditioned behavior or from abnormal, dysfunctional, or inappropriate mental processes within the personality.
- Defective or abnormal mental processes may have a variety of causes, including a diseased mind and inappropriate learning or improper conditioning—often occurring in early childhood.

Behavioral Conditioning

Two threads were woven through early psychological theories. One emphasized behavioral conditioning, while the other focused mostly on personality disturbances and diseases of the mind. Taken together, these two foci constituted the early field of psychological criminology. Conditioning is a psychological principle that holds that the frequency of any behavior, including criminal or deviant behavior, can be increased or decreased through reward, punishment, and association with other stimuli. The concept of conditioned behavior was popularized through the work of the Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov (1849–1936), whose work with dogs won him the Nobel Prize in physiology and medicine in 1904. Similarly, behavioral psychologists suggest that criminal behavior, which may be inherently rewarding under many circumstances, tends to be more common in those who are able to avoid punishment when involved in rule-breaking behavior.
Freudian Psychoanalysis

The name most widely associated with the field of psychology is that of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). Freudian theory posits the existence of an id, an ego, and a superego within the personality. The id is the source of drives, which are seen as primarily sexual. The ego is a rational mental entity, which outlines paths through which the desires of the id can be fulfilled. The ego is often called the reality principle because of the belief that it relates desires to practical behavioral alternatives. The superego is a guiding principle, often compared to conscience, that judges the quality of the alternatives presented by the ego according to the standards of right and wrong acquired by the personality of which it is a part. Freud wrote very little about crime, but his followers, who developed the school of Freudian psychoanalysis, believe that crime can result from at least three conditions.

The first possible source of criminal behavior is a weak superego, which cannot responsibly control the drives that emanate from the id. Sex crimes, crimes of passion, murder, and other violent crimes are thought to follow inadequate superego development. People who lack fully developed superegos are often called psychopaths or sociopaths to indicate that they cannot see beyond their own interests. Canadian criminologist Gwynn Nettler observes that “civilization is paid for through development of a sense of guilt.”

Freud also created the concept of sublimation to explain the process by which one thing is symbolically substituted for another. He believed that sublimation was necessary when the direct pursuit of one’s desires was not possible. Freud suggested, for example, that many children learned to sublimate negative feelings about their mothers. In the society in which Freud developed his theories, mothers closely controlled the lives of their children, and Freud saw the developing child as continually frustrated in seeking freedom to act on his or her own. The strain produced by this conflict could not be directly expressed by the child because the mother also controlled rewards and punishments. Hence dislike for one’s mother (which Freud thought was especially strong in boys) might show itself symbolically later in life. Crimes against women could then be explained as being committed by men expressing a symbolic hatred.

A final Freudian explanation for criminality is based on the death instinct, or Thanatos, which Freud believed each of us carries. Thanatos is the often-unrecognized desire of animate matter to return to the inanimate. Potentially self-destructive activities, including smoking, speeding, skydiving, bad diets, “picking fights,” and so on, can be explained by Thanatos. The self-destructive wish may also motivate offenders to commit crimes that are themselves dangerous or self-destructive—such as burglary, assault, murder, prostitution, and drug use—or it may result in unconscious efforts to be caught. Criminals who leave evidence behind may be responding to some basic need for apprehension and punishment.

Psychopathy and Crime

From a psychiatric point of view, crime might also occur because of a diseased mind or a disordered personality—conditions that may collectively be referred to as psychopathy. The study of psychopathic mental conditions is called psychopathology. The role of a disordered personality in crime causation was central to early psychiatric theorizing. In 1944, for example, the well-known psychiatrist David Abrahamsen wrote, “When we seek to explain the riddle of human conduct in general and of antisocial behavior in particular, the solution must be sought in the personality.” Later, some psychiatrists went so far as to claim that criminal behavior itself is only a symptom of a more fundamental psychiatric disorder.

By the 1930s, psychiatrists had begun to develop the concept of a psychopathic personality. This personality type, which by its very definition is asocial, was fully developed by Hervey Cleckley in his 1941 book, The Mask of Sanity. Cleckley described the psychopath, also called a sociopath, as a “moral idiot” whose central defining characteristic is the inability to accurately imagine how others think and feel. Hence it becomes
possible for a psychopath to inflict pain and engage in cruelty without appreciation for the victim’s suffering. Charles Manson, for example, whom some have called a psychopath, once told a television reporter, “I could take this book and beat you to death with it, and I wouldn’t feel a thing. It’d be just like walking to the drugstore.” According to Cleckley, psychopathic indicators appear early in life, often in the teenage years. They include lying, fighting, stealing, and vandalism. Even earlier signs may be found, according to some authors, in bed-wetting, cruelty to animals, sleepwalking, and fire setting.63

While the terms psychopath and criminal are not synonymous, individuals manifesting characteristics of a psychopathic personality are likely, sooner or later, to run afoul of the law. As one writer says, “The impulsivity and aggression, the selfishness in achieving one’s own immediate needs, and the disregard for society’s rules and laws bring these people to the attention of the criminal justice system.”64

Although much studied, the causes of psychopathy are unclear. Somatogenic causes, or those that are based on physiological aspects of the human organism, include (1) a malfunctioning central nervous system characterized by a low state of arousal, which drives the sufferer to seek excitement, and (2) brain abnormalities, which may be present in most psychopaths from birth. Psychogenic causes, or those rooted in early interpersonal experiences, include the inability to form attachments to parents or other caregivers early in life, sudden separation from the mother during the first six months of life, and other forms of insecurity during the first few years of life. In short, a lack of love or the sensed inability to unconditionally depend on one central loving figure (typically the mother in most psychological literature) immediately following birth is often posited as a major psychogenic factor contributing to psychopathic development. Learn more about psychopathology and crime at Library Extra 3–2 at MyCrimeKit.com. Read more about the Manson murders at Web Extra 3–5 at MyCrimeKit.com.

### The Psychotic Offender

Another form of mental disorder is called psychosis. Psychotic people, according to psychiatric definitions, are out of touch with reality in some fundamental way. They may suffer from hallucinations, delusions, or other breaks with reality. For example, a psychotic may believe that he or she is a famous historical figure or may see spiders crawling on a bare wall. Psychoses may be either organic (that is, caused by physical damage to, or abnormalities in, the brain) or functional (that is, with no known physical cause). Psychotic people have also been classified as schizophrenic or paranoid schizophrenic. Schizophrenics are characterized by disordered or disjointed thinking, in which the types of logical associations they make are atypical of other people. Paranoid schizophrenics suffer from delusions and hallucinations.

Psychoses may lead to crime in a number of ways. Following the Vietnam War, for example, a number of former American soldiers suffering from a kind of battlefield psychosis killed friends and family members, thinking they were enemy soldiers. These men, who had been traumatized by battlefield experiences in Southeast Asia, relived their past on American streets.

### Psychological Profiling

Psychological profiling is the attempt to derive a composite picture of an offender’s social and psychological characteristics from the crime he or she committed and from the manner in which it was committed. Psychological profiling began during World War II as an effort to really truly tried to stop—but I couldn’t.

—Henry Louis Wallace, convicted killer of nine women, in a tape-recorded interview with police

schizophrenic
A mentally ill individual who suffers from disjointed thinking and possibly from delusions and hallucinations.

psychosis
A form of mental illness in which sufferers are said to be out of touch with reality.

psychological profiling
The attempt to categorize, understand, and predict the behavior of certain types of offenders based on behavioral clues they provide.
by William Langer (1896–1977), a government psychiatrist hired by the Office of Strategic Services, to predict Adolf Hitler’s actions. Profiling in criminal investigations is based on the belief that criminality, because it is a form of behavior, can be viewed as symptomatic of the offender’s personality. Psychological evaluations of crime scenes, including the analysis of evidence, are used to re-create the offender’s frame of mind during the commission of the crime. A profile of the offender is then constructed to help in the investigation of suspects.

During the 1980s, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) led the movement toward psychological profiling through its focus on violent sex offenses and arson. FBI profilers described “lust murderers” and serial arsonists. Often depicted as loners with an aversion to casual social contact, lust murderers were shown to rarely arouse suspicions in neighbors or employers. Other personality types became the focus of police efforts to arrest such offenders through a prediction of what they might do next.

New areas for psychological profiling include hostage negotiation and international terrorism. Right-wing terrorist groups in the United States have also been the subject of profiling efforts.

Social Policy and Psychological Theories

Crime-control policies based on psychological perspectives are primarily individualistic. They are oriented toward individualized treatment, characteristically exposing the individual offender to various forms of therapy intended to overcome the person’s propensity for criminality.

Most crime-control strategies based on psychological theories emphasize assessing personal dangerousness, through psychological testing and other efforts to identify personality-based characteristics that predict interpersonal aggression. Although the ability to accurately predict future dangerousness is of great concern to today’s policymakers, definitions of dangerousness are fraught with difficulty. As some authors have pointed out, “Dangerousness is not an objective quality like obesity or brown eyes; rather it is an ascribed quality like trustworthiness.” Hence, dangerousness is not necessarily a personality trait that is stable or easily identifiable. Even if it were, some studies of criminal careers show that involvement in crime decreases with age. As one author puts it, if “criminality declines more or less uniformly with age, then many offenders will be ‘over the hill’ by the time they are old enough to be plausible candidates for preventive incarceration.”

Before crime-control policies can be based on present understandings of dangerousness, research must answer several questions: Can past behavior predict future behavior? Do former instances of criminality foretell additional ones? Are there other identifiable characteristics that violent offenders might manifest that could serve as warning signs to criminal justice decision makers faced with the dilemma of whether to release convicted felons?

Sociological Theories

Sociological theories are largely an American contribution to the study of crime causation. In the 1920s and 1930s, the famous Chicago School of sociology explained criminality as a product of society’s impact on the individual. The structure of prevailing social arrangements, the interaction between individuals and groups, and the social environment were all seen as major determinants of criminal behavior.

Sociological perspectives on crime causation are quite diverse. Most, however, build on certain fundamental assumptions. Among them are these:

- Social groups, social institutions, the arrangements of society, and social roles all provide the proper focus for criminological study.
- Group dynamics, group organization, and subgroup relationships form the causal nexus out of which crime develops.
- The structure of society and the relative degree of social organization or social disorganization are important factors contributing to the prevalence of criminal behavior.
All sociological perspectives on crime share the foregoing characteristics, but particular theories may give greater or lesser weight to the following aspects of social life:

- The clash of norms and values among variously socialized groups
- Socialization and the process of association between individuals
- The existence of subcultures and varying types of opportunities

Social Ecology Theory

In the 1920s, during the early days of sociological theorizing, the University of Chicago brought together such thinkers as Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, Clifford Shaw, and Henry McKay. Park and Burgess recognized that Chicago, like most cities, could be mapped according to its social characteristics. Their map resembled a target with a bull’s-eye in the center. Shaw and McKay adapted these concentric zones to the study of crime when they

Video Games and Violence: Is There a Link?

Gang members slitting the throats of their rivals and beating up strippers. Combatants hacking away with chain saw-equipped assault rifles. Football players taking steroids and celebrating game victories with hookers.

Those images flicker across the screen in some of the 10 video games that a media watchdog group warns should be avoided by kids and teens under 17. The National Institute on Media and the Family is unveiling its 13th annual video game report card . . . to help parents choose games that are appropriate for their children as the holiday shopping season picks up.

The institute in past years has urged the video game industry to develop better ratings and retailers to do more to prevent kids from being able to buy mature-themed games. This year, citing the positive steps taken by industry officials and retailers, the group is focusing on ways parents can play a more active role in safeguarding their children from games that glamorize sex, drugs and violence.

“In spite of the fact that all of the games are rated, in spite of the fact that the retailers are doing a better job, we still know that there are a lot of teenagers who still spend a lot of time playing adult-rated games,” said institute president David Walsh.

The institute cited figures from the Pew Internet and American Life Project showing 97 percent of all teens, boys as well as girls, play video games regularly, and most parents pay attention to what their kids are playing. The group wants stronger parental oversight.

“We parents need to wake up and realize that the games our kids play do influence them,” said Walsh. “And it’s our job to make sure they are playing age-appropriate games. It’s the next big step.”

A video game guide for parents, including tips on using the parental controls on game consoles, is highlighted in the new report, which will be available on the group’s Web site.

Bloodshed and brutality are staples in the list of 10 games to avoid. All the games were M-rated, intended for those aged 17 and over.

“Blitz: The League II” players can target which body part of their football rivals they want to injure. Warriors in “Gears of War 2” use a combination rifle and chain saw. “Saints Row 2” features gang violence and allows players to shoot police officers.

Other games listed were “Dead Space,” “Fallout 3,” “Far Cry 2,” “Legendary,” “Left 4 Dead,” “Resistance 2” and “Silent Hill: Homecoming.”

Meanwhile, the institute recommended five T-rated games, intended for ages 13 and older: “Guitar Hero World Tour,” “Rock Band 2,” “Rock Revolution,” “Spider-Man: Web of Shadows” and “Shaun White Snowboarding.”

realized that the zones nearest the center of the city had the highest crime rates. In particular, zone 2 (one removed from the center) consistently showed the highest crime rate over time, regardless of the groups or nationalities inhabiting it. This “zone of transition”—so called because new immigrant groups moved into it as earlier ones became integrated into American culture and moved out—demonstrated that crime was dependent to a considerable extent on aspects of the social structure of the city itself. Structural elements identified by Shaw and McKay included poverty, illiteracy, lack of schooling, unemployment, and illegitimacy. In combination, these elements were seen to lead to social disorganization, which in turn produced crime.

### Anomie Theory

The French word **anomie** has been loosely translated as a condition of “normlessness.” Anomie entered the literature as a sociological concept with the writings of Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) in the late nineteenth century. Robert Merton (1910–2003) applied anomie to criminology in 1938 when he used the term to describe a disjunction between socially acceptable goals and means in American society.

Merton believed that while the same goals and means are held out by society as desirable for everyone, they are not equally available to all. Socially approved goals in American society, for example, include wealth, status, and political power. The acceptable means to achieve these goals are education, wise investment, and hard work. Unfortunately, however, opportunities are not equally distributed throughout society, and some people turn to illegitimate means to achieve the goals they feel pressured to reach. Still others reject both acceptable goals and legitimate means of reaching them.

Merton represented his theory with a chart, shown in Table 3–2. **Conformists** accept both the goals and means that society holds out as legitimate, while **innovators** accept the goals but reject the means, instead using illegal means to gain money, power, and success. It is the innovators whom Merton identified as criminal. The inherent logic of the model led Merton to posit other social types. **Ritualists** are those who reject success goals but still perform their daily tasks in conformity with social expectations. They might hold regular jobs but lack the desire to advance in their careers or in other aspects of their lives. **Retreatists** reject both the goals and the means and usually drop out of society by becoming derelicts, drug users, hermits, or the like. **Rebels** constitute a special category. Their desire to replace the existing system of socially approved goals and means with some other system more to their liking makes them the revolutionaries of the theory.

Merton believed that categories are not intentionally selected by the individuals who occupy them but rather are imposed on people by structural aspects of society. Where people live, how wealthy their family is, and what ethnic background they come from are all significant determinants of the “box” into which people are placed.

Modern writers on anomie recognize that normlessness is not likely to be expressed as criminality unless people who experience it also feel that they are capable of doing

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**TABLE 3–2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conformist</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Law-abiding behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovator</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>Property offenses, white-collar crimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retreatist</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>Drug use/addiction, vagrancy, some “victimless” crimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritualist</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>A repetitive and mundane lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel</td>
<td>±</td>
<td>±</td>
<td>Political crime (for example, environmental activists who violate the law, violence-prone antiabortionists)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted with the permission of the Free Press, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc. from Social Theory and Social Structure, Revised and Enlarged Edition by Robert K. Merton. Copyright © 1967, 1968 by Robert K. Merton. Copyright renewed © 1985 by Robert K. Merton. All rights reserved.
something to change their lives. As Catherine Ross and John Mirowsky put it, “A person who has high levels of normlessness and powerlessness is less likely to get in trouble with the law than a person who has a high level of normlessness and a high level of instrumentalism.”

Merton’s anomie theory drew attention to the lack of equal opportunity that existed in society at the time he was writing. While considerable efforts have been made to eradicate it, much of that inequality continues today.

Subcultural Theory

Another sociological contribution to criminological theory is the idea of a subculture. A subculture is a group of people who participate in a shared system of values and norms that are at variance with those of the larger culture. Subcultural explanations of crime posit the existence of group values that support criminal behavior. Subcultures were first recognized in the enclaves formed by immigrants who came to America during the early part of the twentieth century. Statistics have shown that certain immigrant groups had low crime rates. Among them were the Scandinavians, Chinese, Dutch, Germans, and Japanese. Other immigrant groups, including the Italians, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Africans, demonstrated a significantly greater propensity for involvement in crime.

Albert Cohen (b. 1918) coined the term reaction formation to encompass the rejection of middle-class values by status-seeking lower-class youths who find they are not permitted access to approved opportunities for success. In Cohen’s eyes, reaction formation leads to the development of gangs and perpetuates the existence of subcultures. Walter Miller described the focal concerns of subcultural participants in terms of “trouble,” “toughness,” “excitement,” “smartness,” “fate,” and “autonomy.” It is a focus on such concerns, Miller suggested, that leads members of criminal subcultures into violations of the law. Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin proposed the existence of an illegitimate opportunity structure that permits delinquent youths to achieve in ways that are outside of legitimate avenues to success.

During the 1950s, Marvin Wolfgang and Franco Ferracuti examined homicide rates in Philadelphia and found that murder was a way of life among certain groups. They discovered a “wholesale” and a “retail” price for murder—which depended on who was killed and who did the killing. Killings that occurred within violent subgroups were more likely to be partially excused than those that happened elsewhere. The term subculture of violence has come to be associated with their work and has since been applied to other locations across the country.

Critiques of subcultural theory have been numerous. A major difficulty for these theories lies in the fact that studies involving self-reports of crime commission have shown that much violence and crime occur outside of “criminal” subcultures. Many middle- and upper-class lawbreakers are able to avoid the justice system and therefore do not enter the “official” crime statistics. Hence, criminal subcultures may be those in which crime is more visible rather than more prevalent.

Social Policy and Sociological Theories

Theoretical approaches that fault the social environment as the root cause of crime point to social action as a panacea. A contemporary example of intervention efforts based on sociological theories can be found in Targeted Outreach, a program operated by the Boys and Girls Clubs of America. The program’s philosophy is based on studies undertaken at the University of Colorado that showed that at-risk youths could be effectively diverted from the juvenile justice system through the provision of positive alternatives. The program recruits at-risk youngsters—many as young as seven years old—and diverts them into activities that are intended to promote a sense of belonging, competence, usefulness, and power. Social programs like Targeted Outreach are intended to change the cultural conditions and societal arrangements that are thought to lead people into crime.
The Physical Environment and Crime

Social ecology theory—an outgrowth of the Chicago School of sociological thought, which flourished during the 1920s and 1930s—posited a link between physical location and crime. A modern perspective, called crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED), bears a strong resemblance to earlier ecological theories. CPTED, which was first formulated in the 1960s and 1970s, focuses on the settings in which crimes occur and on techniques for reducing vulnerability within those settings. Because defensible space concepts are being increasingly applied to the design of physical facilities, including housing, parking garages, public buildings, and even entire neighborhoods, it is highly likely that applications of CPTED will accelerate throughout the twenty-first century.

Second-generation defensible space theory, upon which contemporary CPTED is built, developed around 1980 and considered more carefully how the impact of physical features on fear and victimization depends on other social and cultural features in the setting. Second-generation defensible space theory employed the broken windows thesis, which holds that physical deterioration and an increase in unrepaired buildings lead to increased concerns for personal safety among area residents. Heightened concerns, in turn, lead to further decreases in maintenance and repair and to increased delinquency, vandalism, and crime among local residents, which spawn even further deterioration both in a sense of safety and in the physical environment. Offenders from other neighborhoods are then increasingly attracted by the area’s perceived vulnerability.

Research on CPTED has shown environmental design to be effective in lowering crime and crime-related public-order problems. Effective use of CPTED to alter features of the physical environment can affect potential offenders’ perceptions about a possible crime site, their evaluations of the opportunities associated with that site, and the availability and visibility of one or more natural guardians at or near the site. CPTED is based on the belief that offenders decide whether to commit a crime in a particular location after they evaluate the area’s features, including (1) the ease of entry to the area, (2) the visibility of the target to others—that is, the chance of being seen, (3) the attractiveness or vulnerability of the target, (4) the likelihood that criminal behavior will be challenged or thwarted if discovered, and (5) the ease of egress—that is, the ability to quickly and easily leave the area once the crime has been committed.

According to the National Institute of Justice, CPTED suggests four approaches to making a location more resistant to crime and to crime-related public-order problems:

- **Housing design or block layout**—making it more difficult to commit crimes by (1) reducing the availability of crime targets, (2) removing barriers that prevent easy detection of potential offenders or of an offense in progress, and (3) increasing physical obstacles to committing a crime.
- **Land use and circulation patterns**—creating safer use of neighborhood space by reducing routine exposure of potential offenders to crime targets. This can be accomplished through careful attention to walkways, paths, streets, traffic patterns, and locations and hours of operation of public spaces and facilities. Street closings or revised traffic patterns that decrease vehicular volume may, under some conditions, encourage residents to better maintain the sidewalks and streets in front of their houses.

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**defensible space theory**

The belief that an area’s physical features may be modified and structured so as to reduce crime rates in that area and to lower the fear of victimization that residents experience.

**broken windows thesis**

A perspective on crime causation that holds that the physical deterioration of an area leads to higher crime rates and an increased concern for personal safety among residents.

**social process theory**

A perspective on criminological thought that highlights the process of interaction between individuals and society. Most social process theories highlight the role of social learning.

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**SOCIAL PROCESS THEORIES**

While psychological approaches to crime causation seek to uncover aspects of the personality hidden even from the mind in which they reside, and while sociological theories look to institutional arrangements in the social world to explain crime, social process approaches focus on the interaction between individuals and society. Most social process theories highlight the role of social learning. They build on the premise that behavior—both “good” and “bad”—is learned, and they suggest that “bad” behavior can be unlearned. Social process theories are often the most attractive to contemporary policymakers because they demand that responsibility be placed on the offender for actively participating in rehabilitation efforts and because they are consistent with popular cultural and religious values centered on teaching right from wrong.

**Differential Association Theory**

In 1939, Edwin Sutherland (1883–1950) published the third edition of his *Principles of Criminology*. It contained, for the first time, a formalized statement of his theory of differential association, a perspective that Sutherland based on the “laws of imitation” described by Gabriel Tarde (1843–1904), a French sociologist.
The theory of differential association explains crime as a natural consequence of the interaction with criminal lifestyles. Sutherland suggested that children raised in crime-prone environments were often isolated and unable to experience the values that would otherwise lead to conformity. Differential association provides the basis for much research in modern criminology. Even popular stories of young drug pushers, for instance, often refer to the fact that inner-city youths imitate what they see. Some residents of poverty-ridden ghettos learn quickly that fast money can be made in the illicit drug trade, and they tend to follow the examples of material “success” that they see around them.

Differential association views crime as the product of socialization and sees it as being acquired by criminals according to the same principles that guide the learning of law-abiding behavior in conformists. Differential association removes criminality from the framework of the abnormal and places it squarely within a general perspective applicable to all behavior. In the 1947 edition of his text, Sutherland wrote, “Criminal behavior is a part of human behavior, has much in common with non-criminal behavior, and must be explained within the same general framework as any other human behavior.”

A study of the tenets of differential association (listed in Table 3–3) shows that Sutherland believed that even the sources of behavioral motivation are much the same for conformists and criminals, that is, both groups strive for money and success but choose different paths to the same goal.
**TABLE 3–3** Sutherland’s Principles of Differential Association

1. Criminal behavior is learned.
2. Criminal behavior is learned in interaction with others in a process of communication.
3. The principal part of the learning of criminal behavior occurs within intimate personal groups.
4. When criminal behavior is learned, the learning includes (a) techniques of committing the crime, which are sometimes very complicated, sometimes very simple, and (b) the specific direction of motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes.
5. The specific direction of motives and drives is learned from definitions of the legal codes as favorable or unfavorable.
6. A person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favorable to violations of law over definitions unfavorable to violations of law.
7. Differential associations may vary in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity.
8. The process of learning criminal behavior by association with criminal and anticriminal patterns involves all the mechanisms that are involved in any other learning.
9. Although criminal behavior is an expression of general needs and values, it is not explained by those general needs and values since noncriminal behavior is an expression of the same needs and values.


However, differential association theory fails to explain why people have the associations they do and why some associations affect certain individuals more than others. Why, for example, are most prison guards unaffected by their constant association with offenders, while a few take advantage of their position to smuggle contraband? The theory has also been criticized for being so general and imprecise as to allow for little testing. Complete testing of the theory would require that all of the associations a person has ever had be recorded and analyzed from the standpoint of the individual—a clearly impossible task.

Other theorists continue to build on Sutherland’s early work. Robert Burgess and Ronald Akers, for example, have constructed a differential association–reinforcement theory that seeks to integrate Sutherland’s original propositions with the work of American psychologist B. F. Skinner’s work on conditioning. Burgess and Akers suggest that although values and behavior patterns are learned in association with others, the primary mechanism through which such learning occurs is operant conditioning. Reinforcement is the key, they say, to understanding any social learning as it takes place. The name social learning theory has been widely applied to the work of Burgess and Akers. It is somewhat of a misnomer, however, since the term can easily encompass a wide range of approaches and should not be limited to one specific combination of the ideas found in differential association and reinforcement theory.

**Restraint Theories**

As we have seen throughout this chapter, most criminological theories posit a cause of crime. Some theories, however, focus less on causes than on constraints—those forces that keep people from committing a crime. These theories are called restraint theories. However, since they focus primarily on why people do not break the law, restraint theories provide only half of the causal picture. They are especially weak in identifying the social-structural sources of motivations to commit crimes. Also, the ways in which bonds with different institutions interact with one another and with personal attributes, as well as the variety of bonds that operate throughout the life cycle, have yet to be clarified.

**CONTAINMENT THEORY** Containment theory, a type of restraint theory offered by Walter Reckless (1899–1988), assumes that all of us are subject to inducements to crime. Some of us resist these “pushes” toward criminal behavior, while others do not. The difference, according to Reckless, can be found in forces that contain, or control, behavior.

Reckless described two types of containment: outer and inner. Outer containment depends on social roles and the norms and expectations that apply to them. People who...
occupy significant roles in society find themselves insulated from deviant tendencies. A corporate executive, for example, is less apt to hold up a liquor store than is a drifter. The difference, according to Reckless, is not due solely to income, but also to the pressure the executive feels to conform.

Inner containment involves a number of factors, such as conscience, a positive self-image, a tolerance for frustration, and aspirations that are in line with reality. Reckless believed that inner containment is more powerful than outer containment; inner containment functions even in secret. For example, an inner-directed person who comes across a lost purse feels compelled to locate its rightful owner and return it. If theft or greed crosses the mind of an inner-directed person, he will say to himself, “I’m not that kind of person. That would be wrong.”

Reckless studied small close-knit societies—including the Hutterites, Mennonites, and Amish—in developing his theory. He realized that the “containment of behavior . . . is . . . maximized under conditions of isolation and homogeneity of culture, class, and population.” Hence its applicability to modern American society, with its considerable heterogeneity of values and perspectives, is questionable.

**SOCIAL CONTROL THEORY** Travis Hirschi emphasized the bond between individuals and society as the primary operative mechanism in his social control theory. Hirschi identified four components of that bond: (1) emotional attachments to significant others, (2) a commitment to appropriate lifestyles, (3) involvement or immersion in conventional values, and (4) a belief in the “correctness” of social obligations and the rules of the larger society. These components act as social controls on deviant and criminal behavior; as they weaken, social control suffers, and the likelihood of crime and deviance increases. Using self-reports of delinquency from high school students in California, Hirschi concluded that youngsters who were less attached to teachers and parents and who had few positive attitudes about their own accomplishments were more likely to engage in crime and deviance than were others.

**NEUTRALIZATION TECHNIQUES** Complementing restraint theory is the neutralization approach of Gresham Sykes and David Matza. The neutralization approach centers on rationalizations that allow offenders to shed feelings of guilt and responsibility for their behavior. Sykes and Matza believed that most people drift into and out of criminal behavior but will not commit a crime unless they have available to them techniques of neutralization. Their study primarily concerned juveniles for whom, they suggested, neutralization techniques provided only a temporary respite from guilt. That respite, however, lasted long enough to avoid the twinges of conscience while a crime was being committed. Neutralization techniques include the following:

- Denial of responsibility (“I’m a product of my background.”)
- Denial of injury (“No one was really hurt.”)
- Denial of the victim (“They deserved it.”)
- Condemnation of the condemners (“The cops are corrupt.”)
- Appeal to higher loyalties (“I did it for my friends.”)

Like containment theory, restraint theories tend to depend on a general agreement as to values, or they assume that offenders are simply conformists who suffer temporary lapses. Neutralization techniques, by definition, are only needed when the delinquent has been socialized into middle-class values or where conscience is well developed. Even so, neutralization techniques do not in themselves explain crime. Such techniques are available to us all, if we make only a slight effort to conjure them up. The real question is why some people readily allow professed neutralizations to affect their behavior, while others effortlessly discount them.

**Labeling Theory**

As we saw earlier in this chapter, the worth of any theory of behavior is proved by how well it reflects the reality of the social world. In practice, however, theoretical perspectives find acceptance in the academic environment via a number of considerations. Labeling theory, a social process perspective that sees continued crime as a consequence of the limited opportunities for acceptable behavior that follow from the negative responses of society to those defined as offenders.
for example, became fashionable in the 1960s. Its popularity may have been due more to the cultural environment into which it was introduced rather than to any inherent quality of the theory itself.

Labeling theory was first introduced by Frank Tannenbaum (1893–1969) in 1938 under the rubric of *tagging.* He wrote, “The young delinquent becomes bad because he is defined as bad and because he is not believed if he is good.” He went on to say, “The process of making the criminal, therefore, is a process of tagging. . . . It becomes a way of stimulating . . . and evolving the very traits that are complained of. . . . The person becomes the thing he is described as being.” Tannenbaum focused on society’s power to define an act or an individual as bad and drew attention to the group need for a scapegoat in explaining crime. The search for causes inherent in individuals was not yet exhausted, however, and Tannenbaum’s theory fell mostly on deaf ears.

By the 1960s, the social and academic environments in America had changed, and the issue of responsibility was seen more in terms of the group than the individual. In his book *Outsiders,* published in 1963, Howard Becker pointed out that criminality is not a quality inherent in an act or in a person. Crime, said Becker, results from a social definition, through law, of unacceptable behavior. That definition arises through *moral enterprise,* by which groups on both sides of an issue debate and eventually legislate their notion of what is moral and what is not. Becker wrote, “The central fact about deviance [is that] it is created by society. . . . Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance.”

The criminal label, however, produces consequences for labeled individuals that may necessitate continued criminality. In describing the criminal career, Becker wrote, “To be labeled a criminal one need only commit a single criminal offense. . . . Yet the word carries a number of connotations specifying auxiliary traits characteristic of anyone bearing the label.” The first time a person commits a crime, the behavior is called *primary deviance* and may be a merely transitory form of behavior.

However, in the popular mind, a “known” criminal is not to be trusted, should not be hired because of the potential for crimes on the job, and would not be a good candidate for the military, marriage, or any position requiring responsibility. Society’s tendency toward such thinking, Becker suggested, closes legitimate opportunities, ensuring that the only new behavioral alternatives available to the labeled criminal are deviant ones. Succeeding episodes of criminal behavior are seen as a form of secondary deviance that eventually becomes stabilized in the behavioral repertoire and self-concept of the labeled person.

Labeling theory can be critiqued along a number of dimensions. First, it is not really a “theory” in that labeling does not uncover the genesis of criminal behavior. It is more useful in describing how such behavior continues than in explaining how it originates. Second, labeling theory does not recognize the possibility that the labeled individual may make successful attempts at reform and may shed the negative label. Finally, the theory does not provide an effective way of dealing with offenders. Should people who commit crimes not be arrested and tried so as to avoid the consequences of negative labels? It would be exceedingly naïve to suggest that all repeat criminal behavior would cease, as labeling theory might predict, if people who commit crimes are not officially “handled” by the system.

**The Life Course Perspective**

Some of the most recent perspectives on crime causation belong to a subcategory of social process thought called *social development theory.* According to the social development perspective, human development occurs simultaneously on many levels, including the psychological, biological, familial, interpersonal, cultural, societal, and ecological levels. Hence social development theories tend to be integrated theories—that is, theories that combine various points of view on the process of development. Theories that fall into this category, however, highlight the process of interaction between individuals and society as the root cause of criminal behavior. In particular, they emphasize that a critical period of transition occurs in a person’s life as he or she moves from childhood to adulthood.
One social development perspective of special significance is the **life course perspective**. According to Robert Sampson and John Laub, who named the life course perspective in 1993, criminal behavior typically follows an identifiable pattern throughout a person’s life cycle. In the lives of those who eventually become criminal, crime-like or deviant behavior is relatively rare during early childhood, tends to begin as sporadic instances during early adolescence, becomes more common during the late-teen and early-adult years, and then gradually diminishes as the person gets older.

Sampson and Laub also use the idea of **transitions** in the life course, or turning points that identify significant events in a person’s life and represent the opportunity for people to turn either away from or toward deviance and crime. An employer who gives an employee a second chance, for example, may provide a unique opportunity that helps determine the future course of that person’s life. Similarly, the principle of **linked lives**, also common to life course theories, highlights the fact that no one lives in isolation. Events in the life course are constantly being influenced by family members, friends, acquaintances, employers, teachers, and so on. Not only might such influences determine the life course of any given individual, but they are active throughout the life course. Figure 3–2 diagrams some of the life course influences experienced by most adolescents. Also shown in the diagram are desired outcomes and positive and negative indicators of development.

In 1986, the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) began funding a study of life pathways as they lead to criminality. The Program of Research on the Causes and Correlates of Delinquency continues to produce results. Researchers have been examining how delinquency, violence, and drug use develop within and are related to various social contexts, including the family, peer groups, schools, and the surrounding community. To date, the study has identified three distinct pathways to delinquency, which are shown in Figure 3–3. These pathways are not mutually exclusive and can sometimes converge:

- The **authority conflict pathway**, along which children begin to move during their early years (as early as three or four years old), involves stubborn behavior and resistance to parental authority. Defiance of authority begins around age 11, and authority avoidance (that is, truancy, running away) begins about the same time.
- The **covert pathway**, which starts around age ten with minor covert acts such as shoplifting and lying, quickly progresses to acts of vandalism involving property damage. Moderate to severe delinquency frequently begins a year or two later.
- The **overt pathway** is marked by minor aggression, such as bullying, that develops around age 11 or 12. The overt pathway leads to fighting and physical violence during the teenage years and tends to eventuate in serious violent criminality that may include rape, robbery, and assault.

A similar study is under way at the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN), mentioned earlier in this chapter. PHDCN researchers are “tracing how criminal behavior develops from birth to age 32.” Participating researchers come from a variety of scientific backgrounds and include psychiatrists, developmental psychologists, sociologists, criminologists, physicians, educators, statisticians, and public health officials. The study focuses on the influence of communities, peers, families, and health-related, cognitive, and emotional factors to decipher the lines along which crime and delinquency are likely to develop. Learn more about the OJJDP’s causes and correlates study at [Web Extra 3–7](#) at MyCrimeKit.com; find out more about the PHDCN project at [Web Extra 3–6](#) and [Library Extra 3–3](#) at MyCrimeKit.com; and read about the possible effects of childhood victimization on later criminality at [Library Extra 3–4](#).

## CONFLICT THEORIES

Basic to the **conflict perspective** is the belief that conflict is a fundamental aspect of social life and can never be fully resolved. From the conflict point of view, formal agencies of social control at best merely coerce the unempowered or the disenfranchised to comply with the

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**Conflict perspective**

A theoretical approach that holds that crime is the natural consequence of economic and other social inequities. Conflict theorists highlight the stresses that arise among and within social groups as they compete with one another for resources and exist in a society of selfishness and greed.

—Patrick V. Murphy, former New York City Police Commissioner
FIGURE 3–2
A conceptual model of adolescent development.
rules established by those in power. Laws become tools of the powerful, tools that are useful in keeping others from wrestling control over important social institutions. Social order, rather than being the result of any consensus or process of dispute resolution, rests on the exercise of power through law. The conflict perspective can be described in terms of four key elements:

- Society is composed of diverse social groups, and diversity is based on distinctions that people hold to be significant, such as gender, sexual orientation, and social class.
- Conflict among groups is unavoidable because of differing interests and differing values. Hence conflict is inherent in social life.
- The fundamental nature of group conflict centers on the exercise of political power. Political power is the key to the accumulation of wealth and to other forms of power.
- Laws are the tools of power and further the interests of those powerful enough to make them. Laws allow those in control to gain what they define (through the law) as
legitimate access to scarce resources and to deny (through the law) such access to the politically disenfranchised.

Radical Criminology

Criminological theory took a new direction during the 1960s and 1970s, brought about in part by the turmoil that characterized American society during that period. Radical criminology placed the blame for criminality and deviant behavior squarely on officially sanctioned cultural and economic arrangements. The distribution of wealth and power in society was held to be the primary cause of criminal behavior, especially among those who were disenfranchised. Poverty and discrimination were seen to lead to frustration and pent-up hostilities that were expressed through murder, rape, theft, and other crimes.

Radical criminology had its roots in early conflict theories and in the thought of Dutch criminologist Willem Bonger (1876–1940). Some authors have distinguished between conflict theory and radical criminology by naming them “conservative conflict theory” and “radical conflict theory,” respectively. The difference between the two theories, however, is mostly in the rhetoric of the times. Conservative conflict theories held that conflict was a natural part of any society and that struggles for power and control would always occur. “Losers” of conflicts were defined as “criminal,” and constraints on their behavior would be legislated. Characteristic of this perspective are the approaches of Austin Turk and George Vold. An even earlier conflict perspective can be found in the culture conflict notions of Thorsten Sellin, who was concerned with the clash of immigrant values and traditions with those of established American culture.

Radical criminology went a step further. It recognized that the struggle to control resources is central to society, and it encompassed the notion that the law is a tool of the powerful. The focus of radical criminology, however, was capitalism and the evils that capitalism was believed to entail. The ideas of Karl Marx (1818–1883) entered the field of criminology through the writings of William Chambliss and Richard Quinney. According to Marx, the labor of the lower classes provides the basis for the accumulated wealth of the upper classes, and the lower classes are always exploited by the “owners” in society. The poor were trained to believe that capitalism was in their best interests and the working classes suffered under the consequences of a “false class consciousness” perpetrated by the powerful. Marx believed that only when the exploited workers realized their exploitation would they rebel and change society for the better.

American radical criminology built on the ideals of the 1960s and charged that the “establishment,” controlled by the upper classes, perverted justice through the unequal application of judicial sanctions. As David Greenberg observes, “Many researchers attributed the overrepresentation of blacks and persons from impoverished family backgrounds in arrest and conviction statistics to the discriminatory practices of the enforcement agencies. It was not that the poor stole more, but rather that when they did, the police were more likely to arrest them.” Conflict theories of criminality face the difficulty of realistic implementation. Radical criminology, in particular, is flawed by its narrow emphasis on capitalist societies. It fails to recognize adequately the role of human nature in the creation of social classes and in the perpetuation of the struggle for control of resources. Radical criminology implies that a utopian social arrangement—perhaps communism—would eliminate most crime. Such a belief is contrary to historical experience: A close look at any contemporary communist society will reveal both social conflict and crime.
Peacemaking Criminology

Peacemaking criminology, which some theorists see as a mature expression of earlier conflict theories, holds that crime-control agencies and the citizens they serve should work together to alleviate social problems and human suffering and thus reduce crime.\textsuperscript{113} Criminology as peacemaking has its roots in ancient Christian and Eastern philosophies, as well as in traditional conflict theory. Peacemaking criminology, which includes the notion of service and has also been called compassionate criminology, suggests that “compassion, wisdom, and love are essential for understanding the suffering of which we are all a part, and for practicing a criminology of nonviolence.”\textsuperscript{114} Peacemaking criminology also holds that official agents of social control need to work with both the victimized and the victimizers to achieve a new world order that is more just and fair to all who live in it. In a fundamental sense, peacemaking criminologists exhort their colleagues to transcend personal dichotomies to end the political and ideological divisiveness that separates people. “If we ourselves cannot know peace . . . how will our acts disarm hatred and violence?” they ask.\textsuperscript{115}

Peacemaking criminology was popularized by the works of Harold Pepinsky\textsuperscript{116} and Richard Quinney\textsuperscript{117} beginning in 1986. Both Pepinsky and Quinney restate the problem of crime control from one of “how to stop crime” to one of “how to make peace” within society and among citizens and criminal justice agencies. Peacemaking criminology draws attention to many issues, among them the perpetuation of violence through the continuation of social policies based on dominant forms of criminological theory, the role of education in peacemaking, “commonsense theories of crime,” crime control as human rights enforcement, and conflict resolution within community settings.\textsuperscript{118}

Social Policy and Conflict Theories

Because radical and conflict criminologists view social inequality as the cause of crime, many suggest that the only way to achieve real change in the rate of crime is through revolution. Revolution—because it holds the promise of greater equality for underrepresented groups and because it mandates a redistribution of wealth and power—is thought necessary for any lasting reduction in crime.

Some contemporary writers on radical criminology, however, have attempted to address the issue of what can be done under our current system, because they recognize that a sudden and total reversal of existing political arrangements within the United States is highly unlikely. Hence they have begun to focus on promoting “middle-range policy alternatives” to the present system, including “equal justice in the bail system, the abolition of mandatory sentences, prosecution of corporate crimes, increased employment opportunities, and promoting community alternatives to imprisonment.”\textsuperscript{119} Likewise, programs to reduce prison overcrowding, efforts to highlight injustices within the current system, the elimination of racism and other forms of inequality in the handling of both victims and offenders, growing equality in criminal justice system employment, and the like are all frequently mentioned as mid-range strategies for bringing about a justice system that is fairer and closer to the radical ideal.

Raymond Michalowski summarizes the policy directions envisioned by today’s radical criminologists when he says, “We cannot be free from the crimes of the poor until there are no more poor; we cannot be free from domination of the powerful until we reduce the inequalities that make domination possible; and we cannot live in harmony with others until we begin to limit the competition for material advantage over others that alienates us from one another.”\textsuperscript{120}

EMERGENT PERSPECTIVES

A number of new and developing criminological perspectives deserve special mention. They include feminist criminology, constitutive criminology, and postmodern criminology. We will briefly discuss each in the sections that follow.
Feminist Criminology

As some writers in the developing field of feminist criminology have observed, “Women have been virtually invisible in criminological analysis until recently and much theorizing has proceeded as though criminality is restricted to men.” Another puts it this way: “[Traditional] criminological theory assumes a woman is like a man.” Feminist criminologists are now working to change long-cherished notions of crime and of criminal justice so that the role of women in both crime causation and crime control might be better appreciated.

One of the first writers to attempt a definitive explanation of the criminality of women was Otto Pollak. Pollak’s book, The Criminality of Women, written in 1950, suggested that women commit the same number of offenses as men but that most of their criminality is hidden. Pollak claimed that women’s roles at the time, primarily those of homemaker and mother, served to disguise their criminal undertakings. He also proposed that chivalrous treatment by a male-dominated justice system acted to bias every stage of criminal justice processing in favor of women. Hence, according to Pollak, although women are just as criminal as men, they are rarely arrested, tried, or imprisoned. In fact, although the criminality of women may approach or exceed that of men in selected offense categories, today it is safe to say that Pollak was incorrect in his assessment of the degree of female criminality; overall, women commit far fewer crimes than men.

Early works in the field of feminist criminology include Freda Adler’s Sisters in Crime and Rita Simon’s Women and Crime. Both books were published in 1975, and in them the authors claimed that the existing divergences in crime rates between men and women were due primarily to socialization rather than biology. Women, claimed these authors, were taught to believe in personal limitations, faced reduced socioeconomic opportunities, and, as a result, suffered from lowered aspirations. As gender equality increased, they said, it could be expected that male and female criminality would take on similar characteristics. More recent researchers, however, have not found this to be true; substantial differences between the criminality of men and women remain, even as gender equality grows.

Contemporary feminist thinking in criminology is represented by the works of writers like Kathleen Daly and Meda Chesney-Lind. Daly and Chesney-Lind emphasize the need for a “gender-aware” criminology and stress the usefulness of applying feminist thinking to criminological analysis. Gender, say these writers, is a central organizing principle of contemporary life. Feminist criminology suggests that theories of crime causation and prevention must include women and that more research on gender-related issues in the field is badly needed. Additionally, some authors say, “Criminologists should begin to appreciate that their discipline and its questions are a product of white, economically privileged men’s experiences.” They suggest that rates of female criminality, which are lower than those of males, may show that criminal behavior is not as “normal” as once thought. Because modern-day criminological perspectives were mostly developed by white middle-class males, the propositions and theories they advance fail to take into consideration women’s “ways of knowing.” Hence the fundamental challenge posed by feminist criminology is this: Do existing theories of crime causation apply as well to women as they do to men? Or, as Daly and Chesney-Lind put it, given the current situation in theory development, “do theories of men’s crime apply to women?”

Recent perspectives on female criminality stress that “a key to understanding and responding to women as offenders is understanding their status as crime victims.” Psychologist Cathy Spatz Widom, for example, examined the life cycle of female offenders, looking for links between childhood abuse and neglect and later criminality. Widom suggests that the successful socialization of girls can be “derailed” by early victimization through mechanisms such as “running away, deficits in cognitive ability and achievement, growing up without traditional social controls, engaging in relationships with deviant or delinquent individuals, and failing to learn the social and psychological skills necessary for successful adult development.”

Contemporary statistics tell us that although females make up 51% of the population of the United States, they are arrested for only 18.3% of all violent crimes and 34.8% of property crimes. The relatively limited involvement of women in the FBI’s eight major crimes can be seen in Table 3–4. Data show that the number of female offenders is increasing faster.

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feminist criminology
A developing intellectual approach that emphasizes gender issues in criminology.

Library Extra 3–5
Read some of Chesney-Lind’s recent work via Library Extra 3–5 at MyCrimeKit.com.
than the number of male offenders, however. Between 1970 and 2000, the number of crimes committed by men grew by 46%, while crimes committed by women increased 144%. Violent crimes by men increased 82% during the period; by women, 260%. Property crimes perpetrated by men grew by 3%; by women, 85%.134

Relative increases in the FBI’s Part II offenses tell a similar story. Arrests of women for embezzlement, for example, increased by more than 228% between 1970 and 2000, versus only 8.5% for men—reflecting women’s increased entry into positions of financial responsibility. Arrests of women for drug abuse grew by 289%, and liquor-law violations by women increased 285% (versus 96% for men).135 In two officially reported categories—prostitution and runaways—women outnumber men in the volume of offenses committed.136 Other crimes in which significant numbers of women (relative to men) are involved include larceny-theft (where 41.3% of reported crimes are committed by women), forgery and counterfeiting (37.9%), fraud (43.5%), and embezzlement (51.7%).137 Nonetheless, as Table 3–4 shows, female offenders still account for only a small proportion of all serious crimes. Statistics on female criminality are difficult to interpret since reports of increasing female criminality may reflect the greater equality of treatment accorded women in contemporary society more than they do actual increases in criminal activity. In the past, when women committed crimes, they were dealt with less formally than is likely to be the case today.

When women do commit serious crimes, they are more often followers than leaders. A study of women in correctional settings, for example, found that women are far more likely to assume “secondary follower roles during criminal events” than “dominant leadership roles.”138 Only 14% of women surveyed played primary roles, but those who did felt that men had little influence in initiating or leading them into crime.” African American women were found to be more likely to play “primary and equal crime roles” with men or with female accomplices than were white or Hispanic women. Statistics such as these dispel the myth that the female criminal in America has taken her place alongside the male offender—in terms of either leadership roles or the absolute number of crimes committed.

### Constitutive Criminology

In the early 1900s, George Herbert Mead139 (1863–1931) set forth a theory called symbolic interaction, in which he demonstrated how people give meaning to the things around them and to their lives. About the same time, William Thomas140 (1863–1947) explained that the significance
of any human behavior is relative to the intentions behind it and to the situation in which it is interpreted. Hence, behavior that in one place or at one time is seen as acceptable, in another place or time may be perceived as deviant or even criminal. From this viewpoint, crime, like any other social phenomenon, is more a definition imposed by society on a particular type of activity than it is a quality inherent in the behavior itself. As a consequence, crime may mean different things to different people and is, no doubt, variously interpreted by the offender, by the victim, and by agents of social control. Seen this way, the significance of criminal behavior depends on one’s interests in the crime and one’s point of view and is ultimately knowable only to those who participate in it. Central to this way of thinking are the following principles:

- The significance of any behavior depends on a social consensus about what that behavior “means.”
- Crime is the product of an active process of interpretation and social definition.
- Continued criminal activity may be more a consequence of the limited opportunities for acceptable behavior that are imposed on individuals defined as “criminal” than it is a product of choice.

Contemporary criminologists Stuart Henry and Dragan Milovanovic use the term constitutive criminology to refer to the process by which human beings create “an ideology of crime that sustains it as a concrete reality.”44 A central feature of constitutive criminology is its assertion that individuals shape their world while also being shaped by it. Constitutive criminology claims that crime and crime control are not “object-like entities” but constructions produced through a social process in which offender, victim, and society are all involved.42 “We are concerned with the ways in which human agents actively coproduce that which they take to be crime,” write Henry and Milovanovic. For these theorists, the idea of crime itself is a social construction, and researchers, they say, should recognize that criminals and victims are also “emergent realities.” In short, constitutive criminology focuses on the social process by which crime and criminology become cultural realities.43 Read some of Milovanovic’s work via Library Extra 3–6 at MyCrimeKit.com.

Postmodern Criminology

Before concluding this chapter, it is important to note that postmodern criminology is a term applied to a wide variety of novel perspectives that have developed in recent decades. It encompasses evolving paradigms with such intriguing names as chaos theory, discourse analysis, topology theory, critical theory, realist criminology, constitutive theory, and anarchic criminology.44 Postmodern criminology builds on the belief that past criminological approaches have failed to realistically assess the true causes of crime and have therefore failed to offer workable solutions for crime control—or if they have, that such theories and solutions may have been appropriate at one time but no longer apply to the postmodern era. Because postmodern criminology challenges and debunks existing perspectives, it is referred to as deconstructionist, and such theories are sometimes called deconstructionist theories.
“weak” gene that might predispose some people toward criminal activity has been expanded to include the impact of environmental contaminants, poor nutrition, and food additives on behavior. Studies of fraternal twins and chromosome structure have helped bring biological theories into the modern day. Such theories, however, have their shortcomings, including a lack of recognition of other perspectives that might help better explain criminality. Similarly, strict biological theories attribute the cause of crime to fundamental physical characteristics that are not easily modified.

Psychobiological perspectives on crime causation note the role that human DNA, environmental contaminants, nutrition, hormones, physical trauma, and body chemistry play in behavior that violates the law. The detailed mapping of human DNA and other recent advances in the field of recombinant DNA have rekindled interest in genetic correlates of criminal behavior.

Psychological explanations of crime are individualistic. Some psychoanalytic theories see offenders as psychotic, psychopathic, or sociopathic. Other psychological theories claim that criminal behavior is a type of conditioned response. The stimulus-response model sees criminal behavior as the consequence of a conditioning process that extends over the entire life span of an individual. As with most other theories, psychological perspectives remain plagued by shortcomings. Among them are questions about whether past behavior can accurately predict future behavior and whether there are identifiable characteristics that violent offenders might manifest that could serve as warning signs of impending criminal activity.

Sociological theories hold that the individual is a product of his or her social environment. They emphasize the role that social structure, inequality, and socialization play in criminality. Although they are today’s perspective of choice, the danger of most sociological approaches is that they tend to deny the significance of any influences beyond those that are mediated through social interaction.

Social process theories of criminology claim that crime results from the failure of self-direction, from inadequate social roles, or from associating with others who are already criminal. Social policies based on such theories place responsibility for change largely on the offender.

Conflict perspectives attempt to explain crime by noting that conflict is fundamental to social life and by claiming that crime is a natural consequence of social, political, and economic inequity. Conflict criminologists believe that fundamental changes in the structure of society are needed if crime is to be eliminated or curtailed.

Included among emergent approaches to explaining crime are feminist criminology, constitutive criminology, and postmodern criminology. Feminist criminology challenges some long-held notions of crime and criminal justice that have been based solely on understandings of male criminality. Constitutive criminology highlights the fact that crime is a socially created phenomenon and that without some cultural agreements about right and wrong as reflected in the criminal laws of a society, crime, as we think of it, would not exist. Postmodern criminology, the last of the approaches discussed in this chapter, is often more an effort to debunk previous perspectives than it is a theoretical perspective in its own right.

key terms

- anomie, 94
- atavism, 84
- behavioral conditioning, 89
- Biological School, 83
- broken windows thesis, 96
- Chicago School, 92
- Classical School, 81
- conflict perspective, 101
- constitutive criminology, 108
- containment, 98
- dangerousness, 92
- deconstructionist theory, 108
- defensible space theory, 96
- deviance, 76
- feminist criminology, 106
- hypothesis, 79
- interdisciplinary theory, 79
- labeling theory, 99
- life course perspective, 101
- moral enterprise, 100
- neoclassical criminology, 82
- peacemaking criminology, 105
- phrenology, 83
- Positivist School, 84
- postmodern criminology, 108
- psychoanalysis, 90
- psychological profiling, 91
- Psychological School, 89
- psychopath, 91
- psychopathy, 91
- psychosis, 91
- radical criminology, 104
- rational choice theory, 82
- reaction formation, 95
- research, 79
- routine activities theory, 82
- schizophrenic, 91
- social development theory, 100
- social disorganization, 92
- social learning theory, 98
- social process theory, 96
- somatotyping, 86
- subculture of violence, 95
- supermale, 87
- theory, 78
questions for review

1. What is a theory? Describe the steps in criminological theory building, and explain the role that social research plays in the development of theories about crime.

2. List the basic assumptions of classical theories of crime causation, and describe the neoclassical perspective.

3. Describe the basic features of biological theories of crime causation. What shortcomings of the biological perspective can you identify?

4. How has the mapping of human DNA enhanced contemporary psychobiological understandings of criminal behavior?

5. Describe the basic features of psychological explanations for crime. What are the shortcomings of this perspective?

6. Describe the basic features of sociological explanations for crime. What are the shortcomings of this perspective?

7. Describe social process theories of crime causation, including labeling theory and the life course perspective. What types of crime-control policies might be based on such theories?

8. Describe conflict theories of crime causation, including radical criminology and peacemaking criminology. What sorts of crime-control policies might be predicated on the basis of such theories?

9. What is meant by “emergent perspectives”? List and describe three emergent perspectives on crime causation.

questions for reflection

1. Chapter 1 referred briefly to evidence-based practices. What evidence-based practices might be developed as a result of the studies discussed in this chapter?

2. What is the relationship between punishment and classical and neoclassical thought? With what types of offenders might punishment be the most effective in reducing recidivism?

3. Do you think that biological theories successfully explain the causes of crime? Why or why not?

4. What role, if any, might psychobiological theories play in the development of crime-reduction strategies?

5. Do you think that psychological theories of crime causation are sound? Why or why not?

6. Do you think that sociological theories are sound? Why or why not?

Discuss your answers to these questions and other issues on the CJ Today e-mail discussion list (join the list at MyCrimeKit.com).
Go to MyCrimeKit.com to explore the following study tools and resources specific to this chapter:

- Chapter Quiz and More Practice: dozens of multiple-choice and true-false questions
- Flashcards: 45 flashcards to test your knowledge of the chapter’s key terms
- Web Quest: visit the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS) website and explore each of the major informational categories it provides
- Assignments: real-world essay questions about current issues, e-homework, opinion-based essay questions, and chapter projects for research and analysis

Go to Chapter 3 of Criminal Justice Interactive to use the following resources and study tools:

- Learning Module: Theories of Crime
- Myths and Issues Videos:
  - Myth versus Reality: Criminologists Know What Causes Crime
  - Issue 1: Does Crime Theory Matter, and If So, to Whom?
- Simulation: Explaining Criminal Behavior. Identify and apply the key concepts of some of the main criminological perspectives.

Issue 2: What Influence Do Crime Theories Have on the Criminal Justice System?

Endnotes for this chapter can be found online at MyCrimeKit.com