

CHAPTER 3



Criminological Theory and Crime Explanation

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SCIENCE/SOCIETY/LAW/CRIME/CRIMINOLOGY

In studying crime, or examining the various constructs that provide the structure from which to study crime scientifically, what is sometimes overlooked is that process, although important, is nonetheless an academic exercise. The canons of science demand *value-free* investigation and consideration. This can be understood against the political incrimination of “flip-flopping,” which has no relevance in scientific inquiry. The aim is to gather as much useful information as possible, that is, to collect data and then to competently assess what has been collected. It is not until this analysis has been completed that any sort of determination, one way or another, can be made. Scientists must be constitutionally willing to change their minds because their minds can be made up based solely on what they find. This same reminder is provided to criminology students who are regularly frustrated when they realize that these explanations that they have painstakingly committed to memory are *only theories*. Scientific theories are constructed to fail as well as to succeed. A good theory is intended to be controversial, to stimulate investigation, and to be tested and examined and ultimately may indeed be discredited based exclusively on the data collected in testing it.

The outcome of theory construction and testing provides understanding, even enlightenment. Because this discussion comes in conjunction with lessons in investigation and jurisprudence, a context must be provided. There is only modest interest in turning these explanations into courtroom legal defenses or prosecution strategies. Criminological theories attempt to explain what is often inexplicable and to examine what is often the cruelty, oppression, or even evil some visit on others. They are scientific examinations of a particular social phenomenon. This said, there is no attempt in this presentation to be comprehensive in either the discussion of individual theories or their number but rather to highlight them, to pique the curiosity of those who become interested, and to thus stimulate greater subsequent exploration.

Akers (1994) noted that the criteria for determining the value of any theory are their logic, testability, empirical support, and utility. The hope is that upon constructing reasonable explanations and then testing their fit, the enterprise will influence reasonable and effective enactment of public policy that will minimize levels of victimization and reduce instances of crime. Thus, criminological theories are created so that we can better understand why people behave as they do and that in understanding the *why*, we can respond more effectively to these actions and actors.

Criminology focuses on crime as the question, Why? This differs from the criminal justice question, which asks, What now? Answering the why question offers a range of challenges and opportunities from many perspectives and disciplines. In this endeavor there are many “right” answers. For instance, introductory criminology and criminal justice students learn that the earliest explanations of criminal behavior were theological in orientation. Demonic possession, for instance, was once believed to be the sole answer to the question, Why? (Vold & Bernard, 1979). As technology and the scientific method evolved and influenced scholars, theories likewise increased. It is important to appreciate this evolution so that we can better understand and assess contemporary theories.

A theory is a series of statements that seek to explain or understand a particular phenomenon. Merton (1968, pp. 59–60) suggested that those with a more practical orientation should focus their attention on what he called “theories of the mid-range,” that is, specific explanations of specific behaviors—rather than look for one broad-based theory, or what Babbie (2013) identified as a nomothetic, comprehensive, all-inclusive explanation that in this sense addresses all forms of crime. This exercise, naturally, would be fraught with frustration because of the nature, breadth, and complexity of crime. A concentrated, more uniquely directed, that is, idiographic, theory that seeks to explain specific crime typologies would serve end users and students more effectively.

The professoriat is often guilty of passing along the myriad explanations, what are called here “named theories,” through lectures that pass as academic erudition but that are often interpreted by rote and less so by conviction. It is no wonder that because of their abundance, these explanations are discouragingly seen as superfluous or even worse, irrelevant. A legitimate criticism is that if everything is important, then what is truly important? From a student’s perspective, the question remains, What is the relevance of studying theories? The abstract reasoning necessary to consider scientific theories from a particular academic perspective often holds little attraction for the student who is more interested in the practice and application of criminal justice. While examinations that focus on *why* may not compete favorably against interest focusing on *how*, or *who*, or *what now*, the *why* is the focus of this examination. A lengthy discussion could be had defining criminology and its parameters, but that is not the intent here. Criminology is the study of crime; specifically, the focus here will be on the causes of crime by those who engage in it.

MICRO-LEVEL ANALYSES

Biological Explanation

While it is true that many criminal justice students believe that the answers to crime understanding can be found in the social sciences, many others gravitate to these disciplines because of their previous inconsistent or modest academic success in what some perceive to be the harder, that is, more rigorous, sciences: biology, chemistry, physics, and math, believing that a less arduous journey to a college degree can be found in a “practical” major. The history of criminal justice program acceptance has met a complementary bias as colleagues in the natural sciences have been quick to discredit their social science brothers and sisters. It can be argued that this has also led to the infusion of sophisticated methodological designs and analyses as a response to charges of lack of scientific rigor.

Students are compelled to enroll in a required criminology theory class and, as a typical starting point, are thrust headfirst into the criminal justice/criminology-catechism and exposed to the father of modern criminology, Cesare Lombroso. Atavism and the *born criminal* now enter their vocabulary as they listen to how the scientific method was first introduced to the study of criminal behavior along with data collection, hypotheses testing, and ultimately statistical analysis. Eyes roll, shoulders tense, and teeth grit.

Lombroso’s education and training led to his securing the role of chief pathologist of the Italian penal system (Sellin, 1937). His lasting contribution to criminology was in being the first to ask the question, Why? Why did those convicts to whom he had access, and on whom he performed autopsies, commit the crimes for which they were convicted? Given the technology and research methods of this day, Lombroso offered cutting-edge analysis. The answer had to lie in each individual’s physiology. Since all these criminals were male and possessed similar physical characteristics that were pronounced and obvious, the traits that each carried from birth had to provide the answer to the question why.

Although the notion that criminals are born and not made is often found to be incredible by today’s student, that certain innate behaviors and characteristics seem to dispose those who exhibit them with tendencies that may lead to criminal behavior is not likely. Having an abundance of body hair or an asymmetrical face, such as Lombroso proposed in his early work (1876), may be disputed links to criminal behavior, but on the other hand, irritability and impatience that are only occasionally controlled through overt effort are part of an individual’s makeup that given the proper catalyst, need, situation, or encouragement can coalesce in a meaningful way as criminal behavior.

Lombroso never imagined that his findings would or could be turned into public policy that discriminates against those particular social members possessing particular physiological characteristics that he identified. Rather, he was performing science

by assessing his data; these “stigmata” helped identify those social members who were “predisposed” to engage in criminal behavior. As an investigatory tool, these characteristics simplified detection. It can be seen how his broad-based generalizations, based on the body type, physicality, and even genetics, turned into such controversial contemporary law enforcement techniques as racial profiling or even the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

Brain Development

One of the more fascinating directions the study of human biology and neuroscience has taken in the study of crime is with the emerging research regarding the brain’s prefrontal cortex. Raine (2013) argued that the brains of violent criminals function differently from others. Murderers can be identified as falling into one of two categories, reactive or proactive killers. Reactive killers can be observed as tending to have measurably reduced activity in their prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for decision making and impulse control. Reactive killers are unable to, or even uninterested in, controlling their urge to act out. On the other hand, proactive killers are manipulative, calculating, and can deliberately target and plan their attack. Their prefrontal cortex glows under brain scans as does their limbic system, the brain’s center of emotion.

At different times and to varying degrees in anyone’s physical and mental development, the prefrontal cortex is virtually encased in dopamine, the brain’s motivation, reward, and pleasure-producing neurotransmitter chemical. This substance is also related to both the inhibition of rational processing of consequences and delaying gratification. An abundance of dopamine virtually prohibits the consideration of potential repercussions of behavior, which can be seen as its link to crime as it limits the prefrontal cortex’s ability to control. Because we all develop at different rates, from infancy through adolescence, as we mature, some can be found to be incapable of making rational choices or understanding the consequences of their actions even into young adulthood while others seem to be wise beyond their years. Although the results of this research are not absolute, the potential for greater understanding is significant.

Psychology

The field of psychology has routinely lent itself to analysis involving aberrant or antisocial behavior. One controversy that reigns is with the release of each new edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s guidebook, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*. Since the *DSM* includes treatment protocols along with its descriptions of symptomology and effects, the value and use of psychotropic drugs as control mechanisms for mental disorders is only one of the debates raging among *DSM* subscribers. One issue is the *over-diagnosis* of mental illnesses that could or should be chemically treated. Longtime psychiatric

gainsayer Thomas Szasz (1974) argued that aside from specific brain diseases that produce outcomes such as autism or Alzheimer's disease, that mental illnesses are more theoretically constructed than they are organic.

In spite of this criticism, the connection between psychology, mental illness, and crime is prominent as many concepts or constructs generated by investigators promote examination of cognitive processing, personality disorders, and even levels of intelligence as personality characteristics possessed by the criminal. In this regard, impulsiveness, egoism, incorrigibility, and temperament are discussed as psychological states that foster criminality (Agnew, 2005; Lanier & Henry, 1998). According to cognitive psychology, when those who possess these characteristics interact with influences existing in their social environments, they are more likely to engage in criminality than those not so ably equipped (Walters, 1989). Because of what are seen as intrinsic compulsions, when faced with temptation, frustration, anger, or lust, those individuals are more likely to behave aberrantly. Lacking the desire to control his/her urges, short-term hedonism wins out over prosocial behavior. Obviously, the journey to crime is not as simple or linear as this, but cognitive psychologists argue that these traits are linked to crime.

Yochelson and Samenow (1976) conducted a case study of over 200 inmates at Washington, D.C.'s St. Elizabeth's Hospital for the Criminally Insane. Through interviews, self-reflections, and group discussions with their patients, they concluded that the common thread running through all of these criminals was an inherent "criminal personality." Criminals think differently than noncriminals. Through an integration of rational choice, free will, and antisocial decision making, criminals "choose to be" criminals. But this is closest to the suggestion that criminals have some sort of identifiable personality characteristic.

Kohlberg (1984) added to the discussion, suggesting that individual morality can be examined along a continuum. As we age, we also grow morally. Developmental psychology, behaviorism, and Freudian psychoanalysis all find their way into Kohlberg's model. Moral development can be measured, does not occur at the same rate in everyone, and does not emerge consistently; but until morality is mastered through the various developmental stages identified by Kohlberg, moral behavior is improbable. Kohlberg takes overt behavior and loops it back to the basic philosophy of the existence of crime, that is, that crime is a violation of morality.

Such areas of examination as offender typologies and profiles, such as those constructed to identify serial killers; the effect of post-traumatic stress disorder and antisocial behavior; and the development of various intervention methodologies seeking to rehabilitate criminals are demonstrations of the link between psychology and crime. Because of the plethora of media portrayals, areas of abnormal psychology often are the gateway for students becoming interested in careers in criminal justice.

Gender

When asked to describe a criminal, the first characteristic most respondents would identify is "male." Other sociodemographic characteristics may emerge, but

maleness is generally the first. Aside from popular culture depictions, a cursory look at the data produced by any criminal justice agency show that males commit the vast majority of all crime. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2012) reported that in 2011, women made up 24% of all arrests that year, while contributing over 50% of the total U.S. population. While the number of female offenders has been steadily increasing over the past few decades, few would argue that females are more criminal than males.

The scholarship that addresses female criminality is often couched in terms of offender oppression, discrimination, conflict, and economic disadvantage. Using traditional criminological explanations, just as it can be postulated that men feel strain and anomie in their attempts to secure social capital, so a social reality is that women face greater distress. Just as men engage in neutralization as they appeal to higher loyalties, such as their gangs or their neighborhoods, so women feel the same about their families and friends.

Interest in female criminality has grown proportionately: matching their increase in criminality as well as the changing demographics of the researchers and academics. In a not too distant past, women had difficulty in finding a place in any area of criminal justice. Along with an increase in offenders, women have increased their numbers in virtually every arena of practical and administrative criminal justice. Along with the raw numbers of women engaged in the criminal justice enterprise has emerged a criminology devoted to their crime activity (see Chesney-Lind, Chapter 7, in this volume). While the context of feminism has taken a place in academic examination, a review of crime explanations asks, Do women commit crimes for reasons different from men's? The scholarship responding to this question answers yes.

Cohen and Felson's (1979) routine activities theory, aside from its modest attempt at explaining crime causation, highlights crime as the often random intersection of a motivated offender meeting a target of opportunity. No attempt is made to explain why this motivated offender became motivated. Under this same construct, the increased number of women engaged in activities outside their domiciles, provides more women with the opportunity to both engage in and be victimized by crime. While this does not provide the sole explanation for their behavior, it does provide a perspective to understand the influences that women in an earlier historical epoch might not have considered. If you are out in public, you have a greater chance of engaging in a range of human contact.

The feminist perspective argues that women face a number of social obstacles that men do not. While men may feign understanding, or even sympathy, one challenge they are unlikely to truly understand is the existence of rampant cultural sexism. To say that criminal justice is a male-dominated enterprise is a gross understatement. There is no area in the crime arena in which men do not prevail. To suggest that this overt, institutional, and systemic discriminatory interaction would not have a dilatory response on those facing it would be disingenuous. The suggestion that women might be better equipped to "take it" because of some genetic predisposition to tolerance is itself discriminatory. The social pressure felt by a constant and insidious prejudice may be grounds enough for an aberrant response.

The complement to sexism is paternalism. Chesney-Lind and Sheldon (1992) contended that a reason provided for why girls are often taken into custody is, “for their own good.” The protective father in the form of the criminal justice practitioner is exercising his nurturing nature by taking care of his (even though the law enforcement practitioner may be a woman) wayward offspring. The underlying suggestion is that female offenders obviously cannot take care of themselves. Language comes into play here as derogatory terms, such as *sluts*, *hoes*, and *bitches*, do not have similar masculine counterparts.

Messerschmidt (1993) goes in a different direction as he addresses the gender inequality existing in criminal justice. He argued that crime is simply one of the resources men have at their disposal to fulfill their male-dominance (i.e., hegemonic) destiny. Males exist in a state of privilege. Their wants, needs, desires, motivations, and expressions are accepted, even expected, as universal. To question male superiority is irrelevant; men simply are. All their activity supports this basic contention. Thus, the more aggressive, the more violent, more clever, the more insidious the crime, the greater the thrill and reward. This is what men do. To not act in this fashion is to be thought of as less manly, that is, to be womanly.

It should be recognized that gender, both masculinity and femininity, is as critical to social behavior as is class or race and ethnicity. Societies, for good or ill, differentiate resources, opportunities, and even perspective based on these sociodemographic characteristics. One unfortunate artifact of this discrimination can be seen in correctional settings where programs and opportunities for rehabilitation or reentry for women are dramatically fewer in number and kind than are male-oriented programs. Those that do exist seem to focus on female “trades,” like cosmetology or data entry, if they exist at all.

More and more females are gaining entry into all facets of the crime enterprise. Scholars such as Chesney-Lind, Daly, Miller, Belknap, Wonders, Adler, Morash, Danner, Cook, and many others are now as prominent in the criminological literature as are Merton, Sutherland, Cressey, Cohen, Hirschi, and other male scholars cited in this chapter. In criminal justice terms, women have now become the majority of first-year law students and are increasing in critical mass across all practical areas of criminal justice. It is no surprise that their activity in crime creation has also become recognized. While not dominant, at least the recognition that gender matters has taken root in both the study and practice of crime.

MACRO-LEVEL ANALYSES

Social Learning

Edwin Sutherland was attempting to provide a reasonable explanation for the behavior of a particular kind of criminal. Chic Conwell, the thief in Sutherland's *The Professional Thief* (1937), grew up in a comfortable environment but fell into crime after getting involved in drug use and a misguided relationship with a “showgirl.”

This relationship led to contacts with an underworld that enticed him and provided what Katz (1988) might later call “sneaky thrills.” Conwell became a thief. It was a profession that required him to acquire techniques, mores, and ethics and learn the culture of thieving.

Sutherland later interviewed other thieves who were far more unscrupulous and dangerous. These criminals also happened to hold prestigious positions in American business and industry. They were chairmen (for there were no women in these positions at that time) of the boards of directors of many of the major corporations of the early to mid-20th-century corporate America. They practiced collusion, fraud, and larceny against the public and the federal government. These men passed their trade secrets and practices around in a similar fashion as did Chic Conwell and his associates. Because of the stature and position of these previously unrecognized offenders, Sutherland (1983) coined a new term to describe them. They collectively became the “white collar criminal.”

The common thread running through the professional and white-collar thief culture was their criminal activities. After matriculating through an apprenticeship where they were initially naïve, which then led to interaction with skilled others, they learned how to become criminal. In creating his explanation, the critical components of Sutherland’s explanation consisted of the intensity and frequency with which these associates interacted, as well as the knowledge they exchanged and the quality of their interactions. These gentlemen engaged in *differential association*, which was offered up as the explanation as to why these criminals did what they did. Sutherland wedded nascent American sociology to a more polished political economic perspective to develop his understanding of the cause of these crimes. As one of the first scholars to write in the field of criminology, he used techniques that contemporary methodologists now recognize as grounded theory and ethnographic data collection.

Sutherland’s explanation was a deductive process where his original seven propositions (1939) eventually grew to nine (Sutherland & Cressey, 1947; in the 3rd, or 1939, edition of Sutherland’s *Principles of Criminology* there are six propositions of his theory; in the 4th edition, the 1947 redo of this book, with coauthor Cressey, there are now nine) and evolved from the explanation of a particular kind of behavior into one of the most popular criminological theories ever formulated as it has been used to explain behaviors as diverse as juvenile delinquency (Smith & Braeme, 1994) and computer crime (Skinner & Fream, 1997).

If it is so, that nascent criminals can become more accomplished criminals by closely, differentially associating themselves with those who know how to be better criminals, then the connection between science and society generates this uncomfortable question, Why do we send those young criminals who we capture and prosecute to prison to associate with more veteran offenders? If differential association makes sense, then incarceration is an illogical response to crime reduction. Herein lies the social science quandary; after constructing reasonable explanations about a phenomenon (i.e., crime), acquiring reliable, relevant support from methodologically sound research, what should be done with the information produced? Advocacy is not the responsibility of science.

Anomie/Strain

Anomie, according to Durkheim (1893), is a psychological state of confusion caused by rapidly changing industrial evolution and an accompanying societal dislocation and the effect this change has on people. This state is popularly conceptualized as “normlessness.” It is a feeling, an attitude, a psychological perspective that causes those who experience it to feel confused, frustrated, annoyed, angry, hostile, embarrassed, and even resigned or doomed. Angst lingers as they adjust their thinking and behavior to deal with it. This onus can be debilitating or just uncomfortable, but it exists in reality. Durkheim (1951) contended that those who feel this way may attempt to relieve themselves by committing deviant acts while others may resort to an extreme aggravated resolution and commit suicide. Either may be considered an overreaction, but many are ill equipped to deal with the pushes and pulls they face, and for some, those extreme measures described by Durkheim may have been the only viable solution.

The American version of anomie comes from Merton (1968) who saw that psychological stress results from a perceived inability to successfully compete for social capital. On a continuum, those who have access, or can successfully compete for social capital (money), are more content (have less anomie), whereas those who do not are less satisfied and thus experience more anomie. While Merton believed that the dream to be successful is universal, the ability to achieve that dream is not. The causes of this inequality may be structural: education, training, social status, and so on, but they are aspirations shared by everyone.

Merton suggested that those feeling anomie were likely to respond through one of five modalities: *conformity* (dealing with it); *innovation* (creatively circumventing it); *ritualism* (recognizing that success was unlikely but beyond complaining about it, accepting the reality that they had done all they could); *retreatism* (dropping out typically through substance abuse, homelessness, etc.); or *rebellion* (creating alternative processes to achieve the rewards that are impossible through mainstream or traditional means; i.e., becoming involved with gangs, organized crime, etc.). The universality of this theory is that everyone at one time or another faces anomie. We may be frustrated at life; our work efforts go unrecognized or are poorly rewarded; incompetent motorists continually confound us; and so on—we are hassled. While these experiences are all unnerving, as they happen or in their totality, Merton contended that we adapt. This version of anomie has been recontextualized by others and been fashioned into social strain and hence social strain theories.

A complaint students often voice as they learn criminological theories is the seeming disconnect they have with real-world public policy. That is, as they learn about the assumptions, propositions, hypotheses, and so on that come from constructing and testing theories, students rightly ask, Now what? With social strain comes the recognition that at least these theories had a direct effect on actual public policy.

Collectively, social strain theories suggest that when confronted with the inability to achieve success and when faced with the strain that ensues following the realization that personal talents, training, or desires cannot achieve that which is

desired, criminal behavior may result. Obviously, there are those who elect not to become criminals, which adds to the frustration in accepting strain theory's basic premise; however, strain theory suggests that a plausible outcome to those who do not possess patience or who cannot handle stress (i.e., anomie or strain) well is crime.

The fathers of strain theory are Cohen (1955) and Cloward and Ohlin (1960). Cohen believed that juveniles joined gangs because they seek traditional social status but do not possess the wherewithal to achieve it legitimately. This inability is exacerbated by the reality that culture dictates upward mobility, which divines a "middle-class measuring rod" as the status-defining standard. We are naturally competitive, so when Cohen's low-income juveniles compete with others of the same class, they see themselves as more or less equal players in the same game. However, when they compare themselves to a middle or higher status, they recognize the inequality of their lives and that while their relative status was not problematic when compared with their gang friends, when juxtaposed to those having greater resources, strain ensues. In fact, antagonism may arise and crime is committed to assuage the strain.

Popular culture also influences some (see Swan, Chapter 9, this volume). Television commercials, print ads, product placement in movies, and so on identifies to the masses what is cool, what products are "hot," and, conversely, defines what is not. Having that which has been identified as the "in" thing but which can only be attained with enough social capital (money) establishes the standard from which many recognize their depraved status. Their wants cannot be satisfied through prosocial activity. Nefarious, deceitful, criminal means and associations are necessary to achieve success.

In trying to understand juvenile criminality, Cloward and Ohlin believed that equal *opportunity* to achieve social capital would reduce the desire to become delinquent. Those living in urban areas experience poverty and low-quality education delivered in often blighted schools; they face all the failings associated with the social disorganization found in the "inner city" (Shaw & McKay, 1942). They are more likely to make life choices that include crime. Thus, if greater opportunities were available to mitigate the influence of society's neglect, their lives would improve, or at least the opportunity to become criminal would be less profound and crime would be reduced.

Strain and opportunity theories have been credited with influencing the presidential efforts of President Kennedy's creation of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) and President Johnson's war on poverty and the Mobilization for Youth program (Short, 1975). The foundation for HEW and the war on poverty was that social problems found in urban areas are the product of the unequal distribution of wealth and access that many experience. Social programs that provide access to medical and/or psychological treatment, better educational opportunities, and job training and placement could positively affect society. The point strain theory makes is that if access to social capital was normalized, prosocial behavior would ensue. Much social science research and the

contemporary movement to evidence-based programming are tangible outcomes of social strain theory.

Conflict

The social upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s caused a reassessment of crime causation explanations in the academic criminology world. With the increased cultural and social awareness that was taking place via the civil rights movement, the war in Vietnam, assassinations of popular political and social icons, Kent State, and Watergate, this was a time of turmoil. Liberal positivist criminology was not prepared, was inadequate, and even thought to be inappropriate to explain or understand crime in this era. The state and the ruling moneyed classes, the age old battle between the haves and have-nots, and a generation of adolescent immaturity were seen as the genesis of much social unrest and certainly crime. The generation of scholars who came of age at this time, questioned authority and focused their inquiry on the inequity, oppression, discrimination, and rage that existed throughout society. Explanations of criminal behavior were found in the creation of law, the war between the classes, and a culture that nurtured exploitation. Controversy exists but various descriptors were used to identify this perspective: *radical criminology* (Platt, 1974), *new criminology* (Taylor, Walton, & Young, 1973), *Marxist criminology* (Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1970), *critical criminology* (Quinney, 1973), and *Anarchist criminology* (Tifft, 1979; Meltzer, 1996), but now this discussion is carried under the mantle of *conflict criminology*.

The conflict perspective is broken down into three areas: conflict between groups (cultures, societies, ethnicities, races, genders, etc.); conflict between classes (bourgeois vs. the proletariats, haves vs. the have-nots); and economic conflict caused by the unequal distribution and control of social resources. The struggle to attain limited social access to money, services, employment, education, and so on was seen as the genesis of that era's social upheavals. Social justice could be achieved only when all societal members had equal access to all social resources. Until equity was achieved, conflict and thus crime would continue to exist.

The controversy surrounding the basic premises of conflict criminology focus on a lingering shortcoming: the difficulty faced when attempting to scientifically test its propositions. Although status equity might reduce crimes of exploitation, there is little evidence suggesting that crimes of violence are fewer in those societies professing no class distinctions. In fact, uncovering existing societies that are classless is impossible. Access to crucial goods and services is distinctly class related. Thus, conflict theories become statements of belief rather than scientific explanations. In spite of the dissonance that surrounds it, conflict theory exists and demands consideration and thus fulfills one proposition needed in determining a "good" theory: It stimulates critical thought and demands efforts to discredit it. Few would argue that conflict does not contribute to crime. Defining conflict becomes the problem.

Labeling

Tannenbaum's (1938) "dramatization of evil," Merton's (1968) self-fulfilling prophecy, and Becker's (1963) deviant behavior as an outcome of individual self-definition and society's response to that behavior provide the foundation for labeling theory. Lemert (1951) suggests that those stigmatized with the label of criminal are destined to live their lives dictated by that label and would therefore comport themselves as such. The theory, however, is even more insidious than that.

Under Merton's gaze, many of us live up or down to the expectations placed on us by others. This is old school University of Chicago, Department of Sociology symbolic interactionism. In the framework of labeling theory, the actor has engaged in criminal behavior (labeling theory does not address the original act) and once detected is adjudicated criminal through a successful degradation ceremony (Garfinkel, 1965); thus, s/he has been certified with a state-endorsed label. The actor then succumbs and internalizes the label believing him/herself to be the essence of that label. Whether or not s/he is sentenced and incarcerated and then eventually reforms or not is irrelevant. Labeling theory is classified as a conflict theory because of the process it describes, that is, designation by the state.

Upon release, that individual now bears the accursed label *ex-convict*, and it now matters not what s/he feels that s/he is; the state and his/her community now recognize the label and not the individual and believe him/her to be dangerous, suspicious, and contemptible. Employment, housing, and services are denied or grudgingly provided making reintegration back into society at best challenging and at worst impossible. To say that the effect of labeling has little to do with the way this actor may behave is disingenuous.

Social Control

It is the province of crime theories to answer the question, Why did that individual become a criminal? Social control theories turn this inquiry around by asking its converse, Why didn't that individual become a criminal (Hirschi, 1969)? Since the potential to become a criminal is ubiquitous, as opportunities are readily available to anyone, why isn't everyone criminal? For social control theorists, the answer is simple: because we are controlled. The method of control then becomes the interest of control theory. As is the case in all theory construction, control theories include vestiges of many other theoretical conventions.

Reiss (1951) established the foundation for control theories by arguing a psychological perspective that when an individual lacks sufficient "inner controls," what some might call morality or Freud might call the super ego, and this deficit is juxtaposed to an absence of effective social controls, like prosocial significant others, effective schools, or family, the outcome could easily be crime commission. Reckless (1955) followed by adding his own interpretation of control, calling it "containment." Containment theory stipulates that the self, identified

by such diverse psychological concepts as self-concept and super ego, is responsible for maintaining a social equilibrium that balances potential to do crime with the realization that crime is inappropriate. A healthy, prosocial, contained self, can “insulate” the individual from antisocial influences (Reckless, Dinitz, & Murray, 1956).

Although not typically thought of as a control theory, Sykes and Matza's (1957) *techniques of neutralization* resides in this domain. Neutralization is not a theory in the scientific testing sense but rather an approach at understanding a criminal's mind-set. It spins the control question and asks, Why do good people do bad things? When faced with the choice or opportunity to commit a crime, or not, neutralization surmises that individuals “drift” (where Matza, 1964, eventually took this perspective), allowing the actor to *neutralize*, that is, rationalize his/her decision. Martyrs, victims of wrong place at the wrong time, or those who may believe they were coerced into crime commission may claim *denial of responsibility*. Those who believe that their actions are so insignificant that they would not be noticed or indeed cause little harm may neutralize a *denial of injury*. Sometimes, offenders even claim that their victims got what they deserved. Through a mental mind switch that depersonalizes the recipient of a criminal act, these offenders neutralize a *denial of the victim*. Other offenders believe that their victim was some sort of miscreant and therefore “had it coming,” for whatever that reason is, and thus these offenders neutralize by *condemning the condemners*. One of the most likely, and even understandable, techniques rationalizes crime as an act to support or even protect significant others, the gang, the family, even the state and thus neutralization is caused by an *appeal to higher loyalties*. The actor understands what s/he has done and does not deny the action s/he has taken but feels that there was good reason for what s/he did and therefore is not culpable. A broader interpretation of control theory might suggest that if this offender had been better controlled, s/he would not have had to neutralize.

One of the most popular control constructs, and one of the most widely tested criminological theories in the literature, followed the strategy of Reckless. Hirschi (1969) continued the integration of various theories: anomie, social disorganization, differential association, labeling, and containment in proposing *elements of the social bond*. *Bond* consists of four elements: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief and when wedded together form a bond to the conventional order.

Hirschi postulates that the stronger the bond, the greater the chances of prosocial activity. Conversely, the weaker the bond, the more likely crime will ensue. Conventional behavior was instilled through close interaction with school, work, family, community, and friends. Alienation or dissonance with these elements, that is, weaker bonds will more likely result in crime. Unfortunately, Hirschi never addressed associations that were made with institutions or significant others who were already criminal, such as felonious parents or friends, gangs, or various other threat groups. The key to Hirschi's bond is the interaction anyone has with those who are important to his/her life.

Social Ecology

Social disorganization theories are the legacy of the University of Chicago. Its Department of Sociology is hallowed ground for American criminology. Using the city of Chicago as a starting point, faculty set out to examine the urban setting as a social science laboratory. Chicago sociologists collected data from those urban entities that interested them, people and the places and things with which and where people interacted. Today's students take these dicta as common sense, as they blithely disregard the fact that all of these explorations were novel for the Chicago alliance—this was innovative.

That ethnic, cultural, and economic kin shared similar environments generated theories that examined the “inner city” with its “concentric zones” (Park & Burgess, 1924), its prevalent “social disorganization” (Shaw & McKay, 1942), and existent “culture conflict” (Sellin, 1938) that those groups living in these environments shared. Cities stimulated misbehavior. Human interaction happened in cities, and while people were usually cordial, sometimes they acted criminally, even violently. There was a distinct absence of “collective efficacy,” ties among community residents that provide a sense of symbiosis (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).

From the family interactions that occur in the confines of any home to the streets where unsupervised youth might congregate and turn boasts and posturing into conflict or dangerous interaction, the specific geographic location of those interactions, the street or block or corner where people live and spend time is related to the types of activities in which those actors engaged. Language, words, gestures, and symbols that are exchanged, interpreted, or misinterpreted, even the clothing that is worn, can be provocative. Who a particular person is, his/her stature in the community or gang, or his/her influence, or the way that influence is interpreted is information that can be substantively assessed. In the infancy of criminology—what is now commonplace—these parameters were first examined. “Hot-spot analysis,” the “hood,” CompStat, “broken windows,” “turf wars,” and “gang” examinations of today, as well as one of the most esteemed scholarly publishing houses in the social sciences, are the contemporary progeny of the Chicago school parent.

General Theory

Two versions of a diverse crime explanation, coincidentally calling themselves by the same name, have recently emerged. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) expanded on Hirschi's social bond to create an extended control theory they call the general theory of crime. At its center is the recognition that the most reasonable and effective form of crime prevention is individual self-control. The failure to exhibit better control over one's impulses leads to crime. Controversy is sparked over the quality of parenting strategies, which were highlighted as the root cause of effective or ineffective self-control. Gottfredson and Hirschi suggested that if

parents were more effective at instilling delayed gratification skills in their children, crime and delinquency could be prevented.

In Agnew's (2005) vision of a general theory of crime causation, various life influences intersect to form a "web of crime." These influences, or domains, comprise the self, family, school, peers, and work. Each domain ebbs and flows in its influence over the others, prosocially at times and antisocially at others. Agnew argued that when an impulsive individual, who has ineffective parents, finds him/herself in a poor school experience, which encourages interactions with other disinterested, confused, or frustrated peers, which then leads to under or unemployment, a web or nexus is created that results in crime. This web is affected by either low constraints and/or high motivation to commit crime.

These general theories suggest that more effective parenting strategies along with greater accountability placed on individuals by all social enterprises, because we would all pay greater attention to those in need, would influence those individuals at society's margins to disassociate themselves with criminality. We are truly all responsible for each other.

CONCLUSION

Other named theories than those presented here can be found throughout the literature, enough to encourage some to continue to exercise their curiosity and seek their own answers to the why crime question. We remain intrigued by those unknowns that tempt, confuse, confound, and frighten us. Crime is one of the most curious of all human activities. Criminology is the scholarly attempt to understand crime. While the criminal is an enigma, being his/her potential victim is what concerns us. We understand that the criminal justice mechanism is reactive; it is unlikely to adequately protect any one of us from harm. Our hope is that criminology, in spite its foibles, has the ability to help us understand, to predict who among us, given his or her constitution and situation, will commit crimes against us. That will be our protection. Alas, that is also our frustration: that a plausible explanation may successfully increase our awareness of the conditions that could affect a crime's commission but that this only intellectually affects us. Ultimately, we want to understand the motivation to commit crime and how to discourage this. As we become more sophisticated in our endeavors, what we must understand is that in our efforts to study crime, there are not too many theories; there are not enough.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What perspective, sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, political science, biology, or others, is best equipped to explain crime?
2. If reducing crime is the goal, what is the role of science in achieving that goal? What is the role of the state or society?

3. Are there areas of investigation that have not yet been tapped in trying to understand the causes of crime? If the role of science is to ask questions and provide answers, what questions have not yet been asked?
4. What is the value of constructing theories reflecting crime causation? Is there an identifiable end product that this activity is intended to produce?
5. What are the major considerations or variables necessary in constructing a reasonable crime causation explanation? What factors are likely to increase the probability of crime, and what factors are likely to decrease the probability? Do we actually know?

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