3

Theories of Delinquency
INTRODUCTION

The causes of crime and delinquency have not been understood until relatively recently. In the town of Salem, Massachusetts, for example, witchcraft trials held in the late 1600s resulted in the execution of 20 people—14 of whom were women. Five other people, including two infants, died in prison. The witchcraft hysteria began in 1692 when two children, 9-year-old Betty Parris and 11-year-old Abigail Williams, experienced what might today be described as seizures. The two girls soon claimed that they were the victims of witchcraft—and they named women who they said had initiated spiritual attacks against them. Soon arrest warrants were issued for more than 40 people, charging them with “afflicting others with witchcraft” and “making an unlawful covenant with the Devil.” Proof of witchcraft was pretty simple and consisted largely of the testimony of the young girls who had brought the accusations. The girls described seeing demons and hearing sounds from the underworld, and their testimony came to be referred to as “spectral evidence.” At trial, “touch tests” were also entered into evidence. Such tests relied on the testimony of people who were present when the girls experienced seizures. If the seizures went away when they were touched, then the person who had touched them was assumed to be in league with the Devil. This is one of dozens of explanations that have, in the past, been advanced as a cause of juvenile criminality.
THE IMPORTANCE OF THEORY AND RESEARCH

LO 3.1   Explain the importance of theory and research.

Spiritual explanations of criminality have existed for thousands of years, but it was not until the 18th century that they fell into disfavor and not until the 19th century that scientific research was used to study the causal relationships involved in deviance and delinquency. It was only within the past 150 years that the testing of theory became an integral part of explaining criminal behavior. Theories posit relationships between observable phenomena and attempt to explain why those relationships exist. Theories are either validated or invalidated by empirical research, which is used to test whether a theory is credible. The research either supports or debunks the theory.

An effective criminological theory can demonstrate causation. Causation shows that a certain factor results in an effect. So, for example, tests of a theory that says poverty leads to crime can be conducted to see whether the theory is true. While it may be true that poverty is sometimes associated with criminal behavior, such a relationship does not necessarily prove that poverty causes crime. To demonstrate causation, four factors must be present. First, there must be a sound theoretical rationale as to why a causal relationship would exist. Second, there must be correlation—or demonstration of the fact that changes in the purported cause and effect occur in relation to each other. For example, research may indicate that drug abuse significantly increases the likelihood of a person committing a crime. If the crime rate and drug use rate are rising at the same time, that is a correlation. However, it is important to note that correlation does not necessarily imply causation. In other words, two variables can be correlated, or occur together, but that does not equate to a cause-and-effect relationship. If the number of puppies in the United States is rising and the crime rate is declining, these variables are correlated but that does not necessarily mean the existence of more puppies is causing a lower crime rate.

Third, there must be a demonstrated time sequence between the purported cause and effect. A theory must indicate which variables are the cause and identify their effects. Last, a nonspurious relationship must be present; that is, it must be possible to show that the relationship between the purported cause and effect exists without requiring other factors. The association of drug abuse with crime, for example, may be a spurious relationship, because other factors could be in play.

This chapter will explore various criminological theories introduced since the 18th century, and each theory will be explained and critiqued. Keep in mind that some theories are more accepted than others as a way of explaining juvenile delinquency. Take time to consider the usefulness of each theory as you read about it.

THE CLASSICAL SCHOOL AND BIOLOGICAL THEORIES

LO 3.2   Explain the differences between classical and biological theories of delinquency.

It was in the mid-1700s, during a time of historical upheaval and change, when the first modern criminological school of thought emerged. This was when the age of the Enlightenment, ending the Dark Ages, sparked changes in philosophical thought and scientific innovation. With the introduction of the classical school of
Criminology, Cesare Beccaria (1738–1794) and Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) revolutionized the way society viewed the cause of criminal behavior. Rather than looking to spiritual explanations, these thinkers asserted that human beings are rational and make choices based on their own free will. Decisions to commit criminal acts are based on the expectation of a favorable rather than a painful outcome, they argued.

Beccaria opposed the erratic and severe methods of punishment that then existed, such as stoning people to death for stealing a loaf of bread or a silver spoon. Beccaria asserted that if individuals could appreciate a clear set of statutes that indicated definite punishment, they would be more likely to refrain from committing a crime. For legal sanctions to be an effective deterrent for future criminality, he believed they must be swift (occurring almost immediately after commission of the crime), certain (all offenders who committed a crime should be punished), and not overly harsh.

Bentham held that since humans are hedonistic (pleasure-seeking), they use free will to make decisions that bring them the most benefit. In every decision, he said, humans intuitively use a hedonistic calculus—a mental (and perhaps less than fully conscious) calculation of the pleasure and pain associated with a particular behavior. A person who is considering robbing a bank, for instance, will weigh the benefits (money and material possessions) against the detriments (arrest and prison time). A rational person will then make a choice that he believes will produce the best results for himself.

Contemporary Applications of the Classical School

The classical school led to new approaches, such as rational choice theory. Rational choice theory, introduced in the late 20th century, assumes that offenders make a choice to commit crime based on the opportunities that are available to them in their surroundings. Much like Bentham’s hedonistic calculus, this theory posits that offenders weigh the pros and cons of participating in the behavior to make a decision. However, rational choice recognizes that some behavior is spontaneous, resulting from past experience and the routine of daily life.

Similarly, routine activities theory (or lifestyle theory) focuses more on explaining what increases a person’s likelihood of victimization, rather than on offending behavior. Routine activities theorists Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson describe three components in the commission of a crime: (1) a motivated offender, (2) a suitable target, and (3) lack of capable guardianship. Suitable targets—people who are desirable and available victims—may, for example, post on a social networking website that they are going on vacation, unwittingly signaling to motivated offenders that their home will be unguarded. The potential victim may also have failed to arrange for capable guardianship, such as bringing in a caretaker, putting a lock on a door, setting an alarm, or creating a strong password for an online account. Motivated offenders can also take advantage of lifestyle routines, such as leaving the house at the same time for work or leaving a car unlocked in the driveway at night.

Positivism

Almost a century after the introduction of the classical school, positivism put a new spin on explaining criminality. Positivists believed that criminality did not result from individual choice but from factors beyond an individual’s control. Positivists acknowledged that many factors cause people to commit crime, so each person must...
be assessed individually. Much like a doctor assesses a person’s symptoms before creating a treatment plan, positivism holds that each offender must be properly assessed to identify the root causes of deviancy. Only then can a customized rehabilitation and treatment plan be developed. There cannot be a “one-size-fits-all” treatment plan.7

Positivism was the dominant school of thought in the late 1800s, shaping attitudes about criminology as well as sociology, medicine, and psychology. The juvenile justice system was particularly affected, as positivism called for identifying the specific causes of delinquency in each youth, rather than treating every problem adolescent the same way. However, our current juvenile justice system has largely built on the Classical viewpoint and created what is called neoclassicism. Advocates of neoclassicism assert that individuals have some degree of free will in choosing their actions but these choices are limited because some factors are outside their control. This is called soft determinism. Soft determinism says that individuals have a limited number of choices available to them, and these choices determine how much free will is in play.

The Biological School

The biological school of criminology, which emerged in the mid- to late 1800s, proposed another theory of crime causation. Instead of relying on philosophical pondering, this school used scientific testing to support or debunk theoretical assertions, looking for possible biological and genetic components of criminality. This school believed that criminality can result from an inherited predisposition to be deviant or genetically determined physical attributes that affect behaviors. Franz Gall, for example, applied phrenology, the study of the shape of the skull, to predict criminality.

Physical Appearance

Cesare Lombroso, a representative of the biological school, is considered by many to be the father of criminology, but he had very different views from most modern criminologists. He believed that criminal offenders were evolutionary throwbacks to previous stages of human evolution who hadn’t physically and mentally developed to the level necessary to fit in with modern society. Most criminals exhibit, he said, poorly developed physical traits, or atavistic characteristics, such as a protruding

Biological theorists often believed that offenders were evolutionary throwbacks, not completely developed human specimens. How did such theorists explain criminal behavior?
jaw, close-set eyes, excess hair, or a high forehead. Lombroso viewed individuals who had apelike characteristics as “born criminals,” while other offenders were “criminaloids” or simply “insane.” Criminaloids committed crime due to a convergence of factors such as physical, social, and mental conditions, while insane offenders had severe mental and psychological deficiencies.8,9

Like the positivists who used scientific research to test theories, Lombroso examined incarcerated offenders and concluded that more than 40% of them exhibited at least five atavistic traits. However, Lombroso’s findings were later called into question because he did not use control groups. That is, he did not validate his conclusion by comparing his research group of offenders to a control group of other people in the general public. Subsequent studies using control groups found little physical difference between offenders and non-offenders. This prompted Lombroso to look for other characteristics that might cause deviant behavior.10

Body Types

Despite problems with the approach of early biological school theorists, further research in the mid-1900s found a relationship between physical composition and criminal behavior. William Sheldon, observing residents in a juvenile facility, identified three somatotypes (body types) that he felt were related to deviant behavior. Endomorphs had heavy, soft bodies or short stature, which Sheldon associated with viscerotonic personalities that were easygoing and fun-loving. Ectomorphs were skinny and delicate, and likely to be anxious introverts who complained frequently. And mesomorphs had an athletic build, exhibiting a muscular composition and somatotonic (dynamic and aggressive) personalities.

Based on his findings, Sheldon asserted that mesomorphs were the most likely to commit delinquent acts.11 This approach was taken up by the Gluecks12 and Cortes over the next 25 years, but it had methodological problems. Determinations of body type were subjective, often based only on viewing photographs of delinquents. Researchers did not consider that many delinquent youths were mesomorphic because their athletic build made them preferable recruits for criminal acts. Also, as youths grow, their body type often changes, a factor that these studies didn’t consider.

In re Winship, 397 U.S. 358 (1970)

Samuel Winship was 12 years old when he was arrested for breaking into a woman’s locker and stealing $112 from her purse. The charge also noted that if Winship had been an adult, he would have been charged with larceny. Section 744(b) of the New York Family Court Act affirmed that juvenile guilt should be based on preponderance of the evidence. Winship was found guilty. His appeal to the Appellate Division of the New York Supreme Court and in the New York Court of Appeals was denied.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the standard of guilt “beyond a reasonable doubt” must apply to juveniles and adults. With the majority opinion written by Justice William Brennan, Jr., the court stated that using the preponderance of the evidence standard to determine guilt was denying defendants a fundamental constitutional protection. As long as an individual is facing potential loss of liberty, age variations should not matter with the standard of evidence for determination of guilt.

1. Do you agree with the ruling?
2. What standard of evidence do you think should be used with juveniles: the preponderance of evidence or reasonable doubt standard? Why?
3. In your opinion, would this ruling be the same today?

Online Case Opinion
Genetic Inheritance

One of the core components of biological theory is the idea of a genetic predisposition to commit crime. Biological theorists of the late 20th century looked for variables that were related to criminality, such as poor self-control, and attempted to relate them to physical features. To identify genetic propensities toward deviance, researchers studied twins. Comparing monozygotic (MZ) twins, those who shared the same egg, with dizygotic (DZ) twins, those who were fertilized in two separate eggs, researchers found a higher degree of deviant behavior in the MZ group.\(^\text{13}\)

However, while the twin studies indicated support for genetic inheritance of criminality, they did not consider environmental influences. To deal with this issue, adoption studies in the late 1900s examined the relationship between the criminality of biological parents and their children who were adopted, and found a higher \textit{concordance}, or similarity, in criminality for the adopted children of offending parents. In addition, a recent meta-analysis of twin and adoption studies revealed a significant relationship between heritability and criminality. The studies did not show, however, that the criminal behavior itself was inherited but only that a propensity to commit crime was. In other words, burglars might not produce offspring who committed burglary, but they were more likely to produce descendants who were deviant in some way.\(^\text{14}\)

Biosocial Criminology

Early biological school assertions have been challenged recently by a new \textit{biosocial theory}. In recent decades, biosocial criminologists have merged the original idea of genetic predisposition as a predictor of crime with environmental factors to create a modern explanation of criminality. One’s genetic makeup impacts the composition of the brain, but environmental factors also influence how the brain responds. When specific biological conditions converge with surrounding environmental factors, they may lead to deviant behavior. For example, some individuals with attention deficit disorder may be easily frustrated and can be disruptive in social situations. If these people encounter a particularly frustrating situation, such as waiting hours to see a doctor or to get assistance at a government agency, they may become aggressive.\(^\text{15}\) In other environments, however, they are likely to remain sociable and react positively to those around them.

Multiple factors have been linked to delinquency in biosocial studies. Not surprisingly, alcohol and drug use are often linked to criminal behavior. Biosocial criminologists have suggested that alcohol, which can diminish a person’s inhibitions, can also prompt aggression or irritability. Drug use has also been correlated with violence based on its biological effect on users,\(^\text{16}\) but it can also bring about criminality in people who are under pressure to steal to get the money to buy drugs.

Hormones and aggressive behaviors have been often linked in criminological theory. Androgen, the male sex hormone in testosterone, has been linked to aggressive and violent behaviors. Epinephrine and norepinephrine, both responsible for flight or fight reactions in the body, due to increases in adrenaline and increased energy rates, have also been linked to aggressive behaviors. However, while all these hormones can be triggered by environment, they are not necessarily required for criminality. Other body chemicals have also been associated in empirical research with criminal behavior. \textit{Neurotransmitters}, or chemicals responsible for transmission of impulses in the nervous system, can alter the behavior of an individual by impacting the processing of information in the brain. Two specific neurotransmitters, \textit{serotonin} and \textit{dopamine}, have been correlated with aggression. Serotonin controls impulse and hyperactivity, and low levels of serotonin have been associated with aggression and behaviors related to low self-control. Dopamine is a pleasure-inducing chemical, and behaviors that increase levels of this neurotransmitter can also be associated with law violation.\(^\text{17}\)
Contemporary views on biosocial criminology are an improvement over the old assertions of the biological school, but they still meet with criticism. For example, some of the relationships asserted in biosocial studies have problems with time order and often do not consider other important contributing factors of criminality, such as social factors, environment, and other forces.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES**

> **LO 3.3** Describe how psychological factors affect criminality.

Developed from the fields of biology, psychiatry, and physiology, the psychological school examined the effect of early life experiences on deviant behavior. Some early psychologists (especially psychotherapists) asserted that criminal behavior is a result of psychological problems not identified or treated during childhood and adolescent years. However, diagnosis is very individualistic. That is, different individuals may exhibit the same behaviors, such as multiple personalities or antisocial behaviors, but the root cause of these symptoms varies for each person. Psychological school advocates assert the importance of treatment and rehabilitation, rather than taking a punitive stance, when handling these offenders. This next section will investigate the varied pathways of psychological schools and how they predict and explain offending behavior.

**Psychoanalysis**

Psychoanalysis attempts to uncover the instinctual, subconscious factors that underlie a person’s deviant behavior and to determine conscious therapeutic methods for dealing with such issues. The psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, for example, described three distinct aspects of human personality and explained how they affect behavior. The *id*, he said, is the pleasure-seeking portion of the psyche,
consumed only with what benefits “me.” The superego is the result of early moral teachings and distinguishes between right and wrong. Last, the ego is the balancing act between the first two parts, and determines the person’s actual behavior. The strength of the id or the superego will essentially determine what behavior will be permitted by the ego.18

While psychoanalysis may be useful in uncovering unconscious cognition, it comes into play only after the behavior has already taken place. The purpose of psychoanalysis is to determine why the individual behaved a certain way and what can be done to correct it in the future. However, psychoanalysis assumes that once a person reaches adolescence, it is difficult to shift his or her behavior, because the superego has already cemented the person’s morals and values, and it does not consider other environmental and social factors in a person’s life. Such criticisms raise doubts about the actual value of psychoanalysis in criminology.

Learning and Imitation

Some psychological theories focus on learning and examine how an individual learns. They also seek to identify what promotes appropriate learning. Modeling, or imitation, is the simplest form of learning. It involves mimicking the behavior of another person and is seen primarily in children, who copy the behaviors of persons closest to them. These people can be real, such as parents or siblings, or fictional, such as superheroes.19

Operant conditioning describes the process of reinforcement of behavior with rewards and punishments. Early examples such as B. F. Skinner’s experiment with rats demonstrated how easy it is to use rewards to condition behavior.20 Children who receive a piece of candy or money for performing a chore will hypothetically continue to perform the positive behavior. If a response to an act is pleasurable (positive reinforcement) or removes a painful experience (negative reinforcement), the act will be repeated in the future. In addition, if children perceive that a person exhibiting a certain behavior is not punished for it, they may decide that it is appropriate behavior. For instance, if Batman physically assaults the bad guys and receives adoration from the citizens of Gotham, then a child may believe it is acceptable to hit someone on the playground.

Mental Illness and Mental Disability

Psychologists have linked mental illness with deviant behaviors in children and adults. Many adult offenders and juvenile delinquents exhibit traits of mental illnesses listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition, or the DSM-V, published by the American Psychiatric Association. For example, serial and violent offenders often exhibit antisocial personality disorder, or behavior that violates social norms. A person with antisocial personality disorder may be charismatic but manipulative and not demonstrate remorse for harming or violating the rights of others (see Table 3.1).21 Environmental and genetic conditions apparently contribute to this disorder,22 but it is extremely difficult to treat, generally requiring medication, and it is usually not identified until adulthood. While this diagnosis can be helpful in classifying adults in the corrections system, it may not help in identifying problem juveniles.

<p>| TABLE 3.1 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Antisocial Personality Disorder²³</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disregard for right and wrong</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pathological lying</td>
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<td>Arrogance</td>
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A diagnostic tool often used to connect mental illness with deviancy is the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), which has more than 500 true/false questions that measure personality dimensions. While the test may be useful for treating offenders, critics argue that the results cannot explain past acts or even predict future behavior. In addition, critics point to the fact that refinements of the tool have been based on the life experiences of incarcerated individuals rather than the general population.

Mental disability, also known as deficiency, has also been linked with deviancy. Mental ability, also known as the intelligence quotient, or IQ, is based on performance on a standardized test. Questions are geared toward a variety of different age groups, and older individuals are more likely to answer more difficult questions. Multiple studies have indicated that incarcerated individuals are often less educated and have lower scores on academic achievement tests, but it is not clear whether this indicates a low IQ. Even so, many criminologists say there is an indirect link between low IQ and delinquency. Juveniles with low IQ have been tied to poor school performance, truancy, and rebellious behavior, including criminal acts.

DEVELOPMENTAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS

**LO 3.4** Discuss developmental and sociological theories of criminality.

Similar to Lombroso’s theory of stunted physical development, many psychological theorists claim that criminality results from arrested emotional development. That is, the person never reaches an appropriate level of maturity. Developmental theories focus on an individual's conception of right and wrong that emerge over a period of time (particularly in childhood). Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg identified six stages of moral development, beginning with basic childhood recognition of obedience and rules for self-preservation, and ending in a final stage of development that is often not reached, in which adults make decisions to benefit all parties involved and recognize those decisions to be morally right (see Table 3.2). Kohlberg asserted that deviants were individuals whose moral development was incomplete. They did not reach the same levels of development as those who refrained from criminal activity. Adults who do not consider the effect of their behavior on others would be considered to have stunted development.

One concept used to assess development is Interpersonal Maturity Levels (I-Levels). These are a continuum from the child's consciousness of “me” and “everyone else” to the often unattained final stage of development, where adults make decisions to benefit all parties involved. There are seven I-Levels, and deviant behaviors generally occur in Levels 2 through 4 (see Table 3.3). Individuals may even commit deviant behaviors to cope with stress or to act out against authority.

**Social Disorganization**

The theories discussed earlier in this chapter posit that crime results from individual choice or from genetic and mental abnormalities. However, the Chicago school of criminology says that criminal behavior does not result from individualistic characteristics but, rather, from environmental challenges. Social ecology is a related concept that involves the interaction of social groups competing for resources in the same area. Sociologists Robert Park and Ernest Burgess examined waves of new immigrants from around the world who settled in Chicago in the
1920s. The people studied were found to exhibit a variety of cultural norms, impeding the development of an organized community with shared norms, focusing on things such as religious beliefs, food preferences, languages, and expectations of right and wrong.28

Park and Burgess mapped the city of Chicago into five **concentric zones** (Figure 3.1) to highlight a variety of environments. Since most immigrants were poor upon arrival in Chicago, they generally settled in the same area of low-income housing that was close to factory jobs. Once financially stable, they would move to more desirable neighborhoods and new immigrants would move into the low-income area, which Park and Burgess referred to as the zone of transition (also known as Zone 2).

Almost twenty years later, Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay applied the concept of concentric zones to understand juvenile delinquency. What they called the “zone of transition” was the area with the least **collective efficacy** (the ability of the neighborhood to control the behaviors of its residents). That area had the highest rates of juvenile delinquency, no matter the nationality of its inhabitants. Their work proposed that an environment exhibiting **social disorganization** and lack of cohesive social norms fostered criminality. While this theory has been continuously used to

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<tr>
<th><strong>TABLE 3.2</strong> Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LEVEL 1. PRECONVENTIONAL LEVEL</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
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<td>Stage 2</td>
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<td><strong>LEVEL 2. CONVENTIONAL LEVEL</strong></td>
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<td>Stage 3</td>
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<td>Stage 4</td>
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<td><strong>LEVEL 3. POSTCONVENTIONAL LEVEL</strong></td>
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<td>Stage 5</td>
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<td>Stage 6</td>
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<th><strong>TABLE 3.3</strong> Interpersonal Maturity Levels (I-Levels)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Level 1</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Level 2</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Level 3</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Level 4</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Level 5</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Level 6</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Level 7</strong></td>
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explain delinquency, it has been criticized for its tendency toward ecological fallacy.
While the crime rate may be higher in low-income areas, that does not mean that
every person who lives in government housing and is on the poverty line will be
delinquent.29

Strain

Strain theories, which developed about the same time as social disorganization the-
ories, predicted criminal behavior based on the amount of pressure that individuals
feel to obtain societal goals and successes. According to the strain theorists, success
is measured in terms of achievement—such as college education, career and finan-
cial success, and positive relationships—and individuals often experience stress (or
strain) when trying to obtain those goals. Strain occurs when individuals feel unable
to reach such goals through legitimate (legal) means. They may then experience
anomie, an inability to handle the resulting strain, and then react with delinquent
behavior.

Robert Merton believed that there were five ways a person could adapt to anomie.
They are (1) conformity, which is the acceptance of socially approved goals and legit-
imate means to obtain them; (2) innovation, or the pursuit of illegitimate means to
obtain acceptable goals, such as stealing or selling drugs to afford the cars or homes
desired; (3) ritualism, where individuals do not invest in socially approved goals but
adhere to legitimate means—for example, a person who has no religious faith but
continues to go to church because it is expected of him or her; (4) retreatism, or a
lifestyle that focuses on a temporary high or relief, rather than long-term success—
for example, alcoholics and drug addicts; and (5) rebellion, or an attempt to replace
accepted goals and means with new standards that provide more opportunity for all
members of society.30

A contemporary application of Merton’s assertions was introduced by Robert
Agnew in 1992. He proposed general strain theory, which asserts that individu-
als who commit crime use it as a coping mechanism to deal with strain. Agnew
believed that strain would be induced by (1) removal of or the threat to remove
positively valued stimuli or (2) introduction of or the threat to introduce noxious
stimuli.31
Social Learning

One of the most influential criminological theories was developed by Edwin Sutherland. It involves the concept of social learning and holds that delinquency involves learned behaviors. That is, said Sutherland, individuals learn how to commit crimes in the same manner they learn to tie their shoes or drive a car. They learn in interaction within intimate peer groups promoting this behavior. Sutherland noted that individuals learn the most from people with whom they spend the most time and in whom they have the most interest. When individuals are in a peer group that supports deviant behavior, they are likely to follow along. Sutherland termed this process differential association and described it in nine propositions (see Table 3.4). His initial ideas were criticized for lack of clarity—for instance, what does “excess of definitions” mean, and how is “frequency” defined? Nevertheless, Sutherland’s ideas continue to be influential today.\(^\text{32}\)

The concept of differential reinforcement was later added to Sutherland’s theory of differential association to explain the importance of learning. That is, if a person steals a sweater from a store and does not get caught, the shoplifting behavior is reinforced. But if the shoplifter is arrested or suffers public humiliation, then that person will be less likely to want to shoplift again.\(^\text{33}\)

Labeling

Another criminological school of thought involves the idea of symbolic interaction, in which individuals are thought to create a self-image based on their reaction to the surrounding world. To explain juvenile delinquency, theorists of labeling hold that juveniles’ self-perceptions are based on how they are thought of by others and how they are treated by people around them. Calvin Cooley called this the looking-glass self. Juveniles who commit an initial act of delinquency, called primary deviance,

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**TABLE 3.4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sutherland's Nine Propositions of Differential Association</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong> Criminal behavior is learned.</td>
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<td><strong>2.</strong> The learning occurs in interaction with other persons in a process of communication.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3.</strong> This takes place within intimate groups of people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.</strong> Learning includes (a) crime techniques, which can be quite simple or very complicated, and (b) specific motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes.</td>
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<td><strong>5.</strong> The direction of motives and drives is learned from definitions of the legal codes as favorable or unfavorable.</td>
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<td><strong>6.</strong> Individuals become delinquent because they accept more definitions favorable to violating the law than definitions favorable to following the law.</td>
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<td><strong>7.</strong> Differential associations may vary in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity.</td>
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<td><strong>8.</strong> Learning criminal behavior by associating with criminal and anticriminal patterns involves the same mechanisms involved in any other learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>9.</strong> Criminal behavior is a result of needs and values, but it is not explained by those needs or values.</td>
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are labeled delinquent by the juvenile justice system. They then perceive that society sees them as “bad” and continue to commit more delinquent acts, or secondary deviance. Their attitude is, “Why should I try to do better when everyone thinks I am bad?” Moreover, society often denies them the opportunity for self-improvement once they have been negatively labeled.

The rehabilitative strategy of **reintegrative shaming** is related to labeling. Using this strategy the juvenile justice system shows disapproval of bad behavior but provides forgiveness and reintegrates offenders back into society. For instance, juveniles who vandalize a school are required to clean up what they did but then, in an act of forgiveness, are reintegrated into society.

**Subculture Theory**

A subculture is a smaller group within a larger culture that provides an identity for its members. In the United States, subcultures contribute to a melting pot of language, customs, and values. Subcultures can also foster criminality that often includes aggressive and violent behavior. While the dominant culture views such acts as deviant behavior, members of a particular subculture, such as a gang, may embrace them as their values.

Looking at lower-class boys involved in gang subcultures, Albert Cohen observed that the boys encouraged each other to commit delinquent acts because they believed they could not meet middle-class standards. When they became involved in the juvenile justice system, they acquired negative self-esteem and felt that they were failures in the eyes of the larger society. Cohen believed that delinquents did not necessarily commit crime for personal benefit but as a vengeful act for being left with feelings of inadequacy.

Walter Miller developed a theory of behavior that he applied to all males in lower-class subcultures. He said that lower-class males had a set of values and beliefs that was different from those of other groups. He called such values and beliefs **focal concerns**. The goal of the delinquent, he said, was not to act out against the middle class but to embrace a distinctive yet different lifestyle, which included the following aspects:

1. Autonomy—Independence and lack of control by other people
2. Excitement—activities that provide immediate gratification or thrill
3. Fate—allowing what happens, rather than planning, to determine life choices
4. Smartness—rellying on wit and street savvy rather than intelligence
5. Toughness—showing masculinity and physical skill
6. Trouble—getting out of trouble, which becomes very time-consuming

According to Miller, these values are integral to the daily lives of the lower class, much like eating and breathing, and are essentially acts of defiance.

The three subcultural theories discussed here were introduced at the same time, but only Miller’s approach implies that members of the lower class try to meet the expectations of their subculture and of the middle class at the same time. Sykes and Matza believed that while juveniles commit delinquent acts based on lower-class expectations, they still wish to fit into the middle class at least superficially. They do not believe they are less respectable than the middle class. Sykes and Matza said that lower-class juveniles use **techniques of neutralization** to justify deviance and crime when faced with the expectations of a law-abiding culture (see Table 3.5).
Social Control

Rather than investigating predictors of delinquent behavior, social control theorists try to identify factors that keep individuals from committing deviant acts despite having opportunities to do so. Walter Reckless, an early control theorist, developed containment theory, which identifies two types of forces that can control behavior. Factors of outer containments provide direct controls over an individual’s behavior and consist of things such as family, peers, and other individuals who provide mentorship. Factors of inner containments are the values, beliefs, and level of self-control that an individual refers to when deciding on behavior. Both forms of containment can help a person avoid deviant behavior, but that person has to cope with external factors that might lead to deviance. These include external pushes (anxiety, discontentment), external pressures (unemployment, poverty), and external pulls (deviant peers, subcultural expectations). The continuous battle between containment and the external pulls and pushes determines whether a person will engage in criminal activity.38

One of the more popular social control theories is Travis Hirschi’s bond theory. Hirschi believed that an individual’s bonds to his or her community develop in early childhood and encompass four elements: attachment, belief, commitment, and involvement (see Table 3.6). Juveniles, he said, were more likely to become delinquent if social bonds were weak—a conclusion based on research on some 4,000 high school boys. He found that delinquent behavior among those boys was significantly related to the following personal characteristics: weak attachment to parents and education (attachment), low respect for the police (belief), lack of aspiration toward measures of legitimate success (commitment), and activities driven by boredom (involvement). However, Hirschi’s theory did not adequately explain how the social bond between the juvenile and society was broken, and it did not clarify whether all or just some of the components of the bond must be broken for delinquency to occur.39

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 3.5</th>
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<tr>
<td>Techniques of Neutralization</td>
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<tr>
<td>TECHNIQUE</td>
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<td>Denial of responsibility</td>
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<td>Denial of injury</td>
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<td>Denial of victim</td>
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<td>Condemnation of the condemners</td>
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<th>TABLE 3.6</th>
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<tr>
<td>Elements of Hirschi’s Social Bond</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELEMENT</td>
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<td>Attachment</td>
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<td>Involvement</td>
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A more recent school of thought, the general theory of crime, also links low self-control to criminal behavior. It holds that self-control develops at an early age through parental management and is the determining factor for participation in deviant behaviors. The general theory emphasizes that parents are responsible for the formation of self-control through proper socialization. Individuals with low self-control are impulsive, risk-taking, and lack the ability to see long-term consequences, which makes them more likely to participate in delinquency. The general theory has been used to explain personal, property, and cybercrimes, but it does not explain behavior changes later in life.40

Techniques of Neutralization

Review the examples of the five techniques of neutralization in Table 3.5. These techniques are denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of victim, condemnation of the condemners, and appeal to higher loyalties.

Putting It Into Action

Collect deviant narratives from fellow students, asking them to talk about times when they broke social norms. Also ask them to explain either (1) why they did something they knew to be wrong or (2) why they believe they didn’t do anything wrong (even though others did).

Use the assembled narratives to identify techniques of neutralization in the accounts of your fellow students. Are they similar to the neutralization techniques described in this chapter? If yes, how so? Do they provide any excuses or justifications not described in this chapter?

Submit your conclusions to your instructor when asked to do so.

NAVIGATING THE FIELD 3.1

SUMMARY

» LO 3.1 Explain the importance of theory and research.

A theory proposes relationships between variables and attempts to explain how and why those relationships exist. Criminological theories specifically try to provide predictive factors of criminality, which hopefully allows policymakers and lawmakers to develop programs and laws to proactively and reactively address crime. For a theory to be valid and demonstrate a cause-and-effect relationship, it must possess the following factors: theoretical rationale, correlation, time sequence, and nonspurious relationship.

Key Terms

causation 32  
empirical research 32  
three way 32

correlation 32  
nonspurious 32  
time sequence 32

» LO 3.2 Explain the differences between classical and biological theories of delinquency.

These first criminological schools of thoughts challenged earlier assumptions that crime was a result of demonic possession or spiritual influences. Classical school criminologists believed that criminal behavior resulted from the exercise of free will and the use of rational choice. In addition, as historical punishments were overly severe and generally not effective deterrents, these theories stressed the importance of the punishment fitting the crime. Biological school theorists believed that criminality was inherited and rooted in instinct, often a result of genetic maldevelopment. Multiple factors relating to crime were suggested, including body type, physical attributes, and hormonal imbalances. During this time period, empirical research that examined theoretical assertions was introduced.
**Key Terms**

atavistic 34  
biosocial theory 36  
classical school 32  
consensus 36  
dopamine 36  
the Enlightenment 32  
free will 33  
henodistic calculus 33  
neoclassicism 34  
neurotransmitters 36  
phrenology 34  
positivism 33  
routine activities  

**LO 3.3** Describe how psychological factors affect criminality.

Psychological theories use multiple explanations for criminal behavior. Criminality can be a result of the inability to achieve certain stages of moral development or can flow from mental disability or instability. In addition, reward and punishment can be used to influence a person's choices to commit crime or to conform to acceptable social standards.

**Key Terms**

antisocial personality disorder 38  
Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory 39  
operant conditioning 38  
psychoanalysis 37  
psychological school 37  
modeling 38  

**LO 3.4** Discuss developmental and sociological theories of criminality.

Criminological theories introduced in the 20th century focused on a variety of factors. One of them, social disorganization, identified lack of community organization and efficacy as a causal factor in crime. Strain theory blamed a lack of the ability to cope with the expectations of conforming others. Social learning theories identified association with deviant peers as the determining factor in criminality. More recent criminological theories, including labeling and the impact of negative labels, have provided a variety of explanations for delinquent behavior. Self-control, seen in terms of social pressures and pulls, can also affect a person's criminality.

**Key Terms**

anomie 41  
Chicago school 39  
collective efficacy 40  
concentric zones 40  
containment theory 44  
developmental theories 39  
differential association 42  
differential reinforcement 42  
eduological fallacy 41  
focal concerns 43  
general strain theory 41  
general theory of crime 45  
inner containments 44  
labeling 42  
outer containments 44  
primary deviance 43  
reintegrative shaming 43  

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. In your opinion, which of the theories discussed in this chapter provides the best explanation of juvenile offending? Explain your answer.
2. Why do people choose to rationalize bad behavior? Have you ever used techniques of neutralization in your own life?
3. Do you believe that labeling theory provides a better explanation for juvenile offenses or for adult crime? Why?
1. Create a program for at-risk youths in a violent, urban area based on the concepts of one of the criminological theories. The program should be an after-school program for both male and female juveniles.

2. Create a program for at-risk youths in a rural area based on the concepts of one of the criminological theories. The program should be a residential program for either male or female juveniles.

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