

# Biological Theories – Physiological Theories

## LO1 – DESCRIBE BIOLOGICAL THEORIES OF CRIMINALITY

Assessment Criterion	Content	Amplification
AC1.1 Describe Biological Theories of Criminality	<b>Criminal Behaviour</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Genetic Theories</li> <li><b>Physiological Theories</b></li> </ul>	<b>You should have knowledge and understanding of:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Jacob's XXX Theory</li> <li>✓ Twin and Adoption Studies</li> <li>✓ <b>Lombroso's Physiological Theory</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Sheldon's Type Theory.</b></li> <li>✓ Brain Abnormalities</li> </ul>

### LOMBROSO'S ATAVISTIC FORM THEORY

Cesare Lombroso wrote *L'uomo delinquente* (The criminal man) in 1876 setting out his view that offenders possessed similar characteristics to lower primates, and this could explain their criminality. He formulated his ideas at the time when Charles Darwin had recently introduced the theory of evolution. Based on this theory, Lombroso suggested that criminals are essentially throwbacks to an earlier species. He used the term atavistic to describe the physical appearance of criminals.

Atavistic Features Identified by Lombroso:

- High cheekbones
- Flattened or upturned nose
- Low, sloped forehead
- Large ears and a large jaw
- Long arms when compared to lower limbs

He believed you could tell what type of crime a person will commit due to the way they look. For example, a murderer had bloodshot eyes and curly hair whereas sex offenders had thick lips and ears that stuck out. Lombroso also suggested there were other aspects of a 'born criminal' including being insensitive to pain, using criminal slang, having tattoos and being unemployed.

Lombroso concluded that these characteristics indicated that such people were more primitive in an evolutionary sense. He went on to say that such individuals were therefore not responsible for their actions as they could not be blamed for their innate, inherited physiology.

### Lombroso's Research

**Lombroso's Research:** Lombroso based his theory on his own research using post-mortem examinations of criminals and studying the faces of living criminals. Over the course of his career, he and his co-workers examined over 50,000 bodies. In one particular study of 383 convicted Italian criminals, he found that 21% had one atavistic trait and 43% had at least five.

### MORE MODERN RESEARCH

Wu et al. (2016) found that facial features do give criminals away. 1,856 Chinese men (half of who had criminal convictions) were added to an artificial intelligence programme which went on to identify 83% criminals with only 6% of all men being incorrectly identified.



Examples of physiognomy of criminals illustrated from *L'uomo Delinquente* (Criminal Man), 1876, by Cesare Lombroso.

### William Sheldon's Theory

William Herbert Sheldon associated body types with human temperament types. He claimed that a body type could be linked with the personality of that person. He says that a fat person with a large bone structure tends to have an outgoing and more relaxed personality while a more muscular body-typed person is more active and aggressive. A slim or scrawny person with thin muscles is usually characterized as quiet or fragile. He split up these body/personality types into three categories called somatotypes.

- **Endomorphic** (fat and soft) tend to be sociable and relaxed
- **Ectomorphic** (thin and fragile) are introverted and restrained
- **Mesomorphic** (muscular and hard) are more aggressive and adventurous.

Sheldon argued that both mesomorphs were much more likely to commit crime. This is because they were impulsive and natural risk takers.

### SHELDON'S RESEARCH

Sheldon carried out a study using photographs of nearly naked college students and a sample of juvenile delinquents. He rated each on how closely they fitted to the mesomorph body type on a scale of 1 – 7. The results showed that the delinquents scored higher on mesomorphy (4.6) than college students (3.8).

