

Biological Theories – Physiological Theories

LO1 – DESCRIBE BIOLOGICAL THEORIES OF CRIMINALITY

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

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 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.



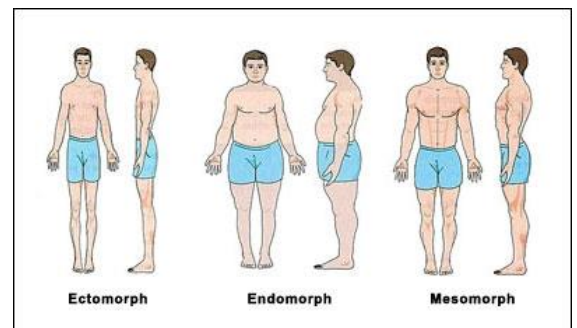
Examples of physiognomy of criminals illustrated from *L'uomo Delinquente* (Criminal Man), 1876, by Cesare Lombroso.

WILLIAM SHELTON'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).

Evaluation – Physiological Theories of Crime

Lombroso's 'Atavistic' Theory

STRENGTHS OF LOMBROSO'S THEORY



Lombroso was the first person to give criminology scientific credibility. Before this time criminal behaviour was seen as something criminal chose to do, Lombroso challenged the idea that criminals were evil or even that they had a choice in whether they offended.



LIMITATIONS OF LOMBROSO'S THEORY



Critics point out that not everyone with atavistic features is a criminal, in fact the majority are not. If atavistic features are the cause of criminality, then they should always be associated with criminal behaviour, and this simply is not the case.



Lombroso's 'Somatype' Theory

STRENGTHS OF SHELDON'S THEORY



Some studies (e.g., Putwain and Sammons) have confirmed the link between body build and criminality, although it is not clear that this is a direct causal link and the correlation is small. Similarly, Glueck and Glueck (1956) found in their research that in a sample of delinquents, 60% were mesomorphs, while in a non-delinquent sample there were only 31%. These results are noteworthy and need to be explained.



LIMITATIONS OF SHELDON'S THEORY



One problem with this theory is that people's body shape changes. If there was a causal link between criminality and body shape people would commit more crime if their body shape changed. This doesn't make any kind of sense.

