



# Unit 3 Tutorials: Biological, Psychological, and Critical Theories of Crime Causation

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## Origins of Biological Explanations



In this lesson, you will be introduced to the biological explanations of criminal behavior and how these theories have evolved over time. Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

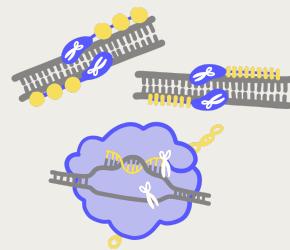
- [1. Origins of Biological Explanations](#)
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## 1. Origins of Biological Explanations

Biological theories allow criminologists to differentiate between the effects of the environment, lived experiences, and **genotype** (genetic constitution) on antisocial behavior and understand how they interact. They are useful in evaluating the impact of stress on the **epigenome**, or the chemical compounds that modify the genome, and how adverse experiences in childhood may have lasting effects in adulthood and beyond.

### IN CONTEXT

The **genome** is a person's complete set of genetic instructions or blueprint (the DNA sequence), and it is controlled by the epigenome, an array of chemicals that tell the genome which genes should be turned on (expressed) and which should be turned off. The epigenome can also change in response to experiences, altering the way a gene is expressed—that is, what the gene actually does—without changing the DNA sequence. Therefore, a person's genome remains the same, but its functions may change in response to experiences (DeLisi & Vaughn, 2015).



Criminologists examine current and past biological approaches to the study of crime and behavior in order to do the following:

- Understand how the impacts of lived trauma can be passed to the next generation.
- Demonstrate how equating a heritable factor with a behavior or outcome without considering the social implications of the heritable factor has led to systemic discrimination and abuses.
- Evaluate the protective factors that have been identified and could be valuable in treatment and intervention.

In the past, many people believed that almost all behavior, including criminal behavior, was based on biology alone, with no room for environmental influences. Yet, these beliefs had no basis in fact or science; they were simply politically, and often racially, motivated. Furthermore, many noncriminal issues, such as poverty and destitution, were considered inherited behavior.



### IN CONTEXT

In the 18th and early 19th centuries, physician Franz Gall believed that the shape of a person's head reflected the shape of the underlying soft brain, indicating which parts of the brain were responsible for different behaviors. This was called **phrenology**, and while it is obviously absurd, it acquired an almost cult following in the Western world, though even at the time, there were strong critics. Many of Gall's "facts" were based on observations of just one person; for example, a lump on the head of an animal torturer suggested cruelty (Niehoff, 1999).

Eventually, the scientific community managed to convince the public that phrenology was a false science. Nonetheless, you will remember that Cesare Lombroso performed "experiments" comparing the features of criminals and noncriminals. From these experiments, he stated that certain features were indicative of a born criminal, such as twisted lips, protruding jaws, large noses, and sloping foreheads (Baum, 2011). Lombroso believed that such people were inferior and that they should be punished due to their perceived threat.

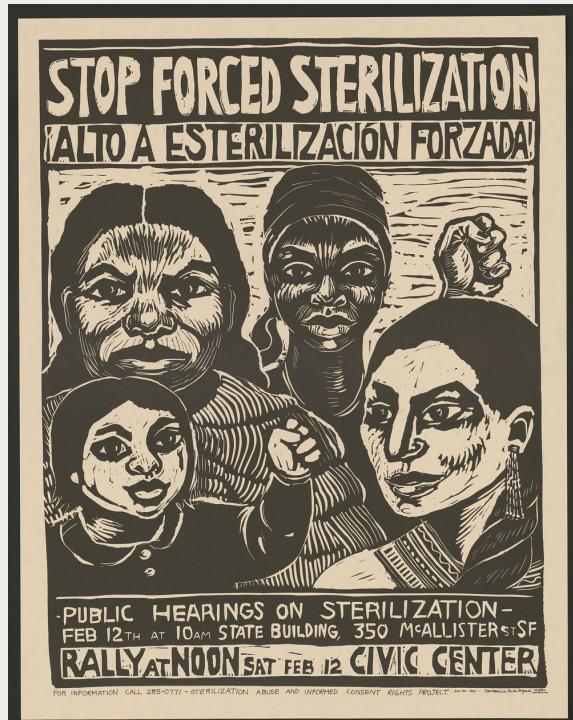
Although these ideas began to fall out of favor, people still incorrectly believed that tendencies toward poverty, destitution, and petty crime were biologically inherited.

### IN CONTEXT

Certain powerful people, led by English eugenicist Francis Galton, began to suggest that the poor, who had very large families, were contributing to crime, and they should thus be "dissuaded" from having children and that the "better" members of society (i.e., richer upper classes) should be encouraged to reproduce instead. This idea is known as **eugenics**, and it evolved into people considered "unfit" being actively prevented from reproducing through forced sterilization (Niehoff, 1999).

This movement became incredibly popular in the United States, with Americans terrified that the large number of immigrant families flocking to its shores would overwhelm them, neatly ignoring the fact they had done the exact same thing to the Indigenous populations for millennia. Immigration laws were passed that allowed new immigrants from "undesirable" countries to be sterilized before entering the country. Some were forced to take IQ tests in a language they could not understand and were sterilized for being "inferior" if they failed, resulting in cultural genocide. Similar movements existed in Europe, peaking in the Nazi genocides of Jews and other groups during World War II. As the

rest of the world began to acknowledge these atrocities, support for eugenics faltered; however, eugenics persists in our modern world with the coerced sterilization of Indigenous women in vast numbers in the 1970s, which still continues to this day in Canada (Ataullahjan et al., 2021).



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Genotype

The genetic constitution of an organism.

### Epigenome

The chemical compounds that modify the genome in a way that tells it what to do, where to do it, and when to do it.

### Genome

A person's complete set of genetic instructions.

### Phrenology

A detailed study of the shape and size of the cranium as a supposed indication of character and mental abilities.

### Eugenics

A study of how to arrange reproduction within a human population to increase the occurrence of heritable characteristics regarded as desirable.

## 2. The Role of Biology and the Environment

In response to the horrors of eugenics, many criminologists ceased exploring biological impacts on behavior, focusing instead on environmental impacts. Unfortunately, because the past was rife with systemic racism that ensured privilege to some, often justified with references to faulty or false scientific findings, efforts to explore

the true relationships between behavior, biology, and environment have been delayed. Biology alone does not determine our behavior, but then neither does the environment. Even the old dichotomy of nature versus nurture does not tell the whole story—neither acts in a vacuum. Instead, behavior results from complex interactions of both our biology and our environment.

Human behavior is certainly influenced by factors such as the following:

- Our genetic background
- Our body and brain chemistry
- Any trauma or damage our brain may receive during life
- Our exposure to pollutants and toxins

However, all these factors are also influenced by our environment. In fact, much of our biology has evolved to be shaped and changed by our experiences.

It must be clearly understood that any biological or environmental influence over a behavior is only that—an influence. Neither biology nor environment causes crime, but a certain biological or environmental influence may increase a person's **predisposition** or tendency to exhibit criminal behavior.



#### THINK ABOUT IT

Consider how having a medical predisposition for a heart attack does not necessarily mean that a person will have a heart attack. A change in diet or lifestyle may greatly reduce the predisposition. That is the importance of studying biological influences on criminal behavior—so many predispositions can be managed by a change in environment, peer influence, medication, or lifestyle.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Predisposition

A tendency to suffer from a particular condition, hold a particular attitude, or act in a particular way.



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the **origins of biological explanations** of crime. Biological theories examine how the environment and the genotype interact when looking at criminal behavior. They evaluate the impact of stress on the epigenome and how lived trauma can be passed on from one generation to the next.

In the 18th and early 19th centuries, phrenology was popular, whereby the shape of the head was thought to influence how people behaved. Phrenology fell out of favor and became known as a false science. However, another damaging idea that was prevalent in the early 20th century was eugenics, which hoped to increase the occurrence of heritable characteristics regarded as desirable by sterilizing people with seemingly undesirable characteristics.

Criminologists now recognize that biology is not the only factor related to crime. They study **the role of biology and the environment** to understand why some people have a predisposition toward

committing crimes. This is a very complex relationship, and you will learn more about the role that genetics plays in crime in the next lesson.

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## ATTRIBUTIONS

- [Phrenology](#) | Author: David M Busto | License: CC
- [Political Poster on Eugenics](#) | Author: Library of Congress | License: CC



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Epigenome

The chemical compounds that modify the genome in a way that tells it what to do, where to do it, and when to do it.

### Eugenics

A study of how to arrange reproduction within a human population to increase the occurrence of heritable characteristics regarded as desirable.

### Genome

A person's complete set of genetic instructions.

### Genotype

The genetic constitution of an organism.

**Phrenology**

A detailed study of the shape and size of the cranium as a supposed indication of character and mental abilities.

**Predisposition**

A tendency to suffer from a particular condition, hold a particular attitude, or act in a particular way.

# Genetics

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn more about the role that genetics plays in crime, as well as the social implications of the relationship between crime and genetics. Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

- 1. Crime and Genetics**
  - 1a. Heritability Studies**
  - 1b. Gene–Environment Interactions (G x E)**
  - 1c. Epigenetics**
  - 1d. Social Implications**

## 1. Crime and Genetics

It is a common misconception that the link between biology and crime is primarily genetic, as there is much more to biology than the study of genes. Our genes do have a profound influence on us, so a great deal of research has been conducted on the genetics of behavior. As behavior is highly complex, in almost all cases, any behavioral trait will be influenced by a large number of genes, not just two or three.

Therefore, a gene for “crime” or for any complex behavior cannot exist. Most behavior is governed by thousands of genes, with each contributing a small amount toward a person exhibiting that behavior.

These genes are not **criminogenic** or capable of producing criminals on their own but could lead to a person offending under particular circumstances.

☞ **EXAMPLE** Impulsivity is a behavior that could potentially lead to a criminal event, such as not considering the consequences of stealing a car for a joyride. Of course, impulsivity could equally result in buying way too many shoes, which is not a criminal behavior.

How such a behavior is enacted is greatly influenced by many other factors, including socioeconomic status (SES), education, and peers.



## TERM TO KNOW

**Criminogenic**

A production of or a tendency to produce crime or criminals.

## 1a. Heritability Studies

A great deal of genetic and environmental research has been conducted using twin and adoption studies. These studies compare the impacts of genes and the environment on behavior.

Twins are an ideal study group, as there are two types of twins:

- Monozygotic (MZ) or “identical” twins begin as a single zygote (one egg and one sperm) that, very shortly after fertilization, divides into two, resulting in two genetically identical babies, aside from small early mutations that may occur (Jonsson et al., 2021).
- Dizygotic (DZ) twins result from two zygotes and only share 50% of their genes. (Actually, we share 99% of our DNA with every other human being, but of the 1% that is different between all people, siblings share 50%.) DZ twins, in general, share 100% of their environment and 50% of their genes, whereas MZ twins, in general, share 100% of both their environment and genes.

Comparing behaviors between DZ and MZ twins helps us understand whether the environment or genes have a greater influence on a behavioral trait. As both types of twins share the same environment, any differences relate to genetics. A great many twin studies have been conducted globally over the last 100 years and have consistently shown both a heritable component to criminogenic behavior and an environmental component (Anderson, 2020).



### DID YOU KNOW

One problem with twin studies is the assumption that each set of twins shares the same environment, but MZ twins, who look identical, may share more of their environment than DZ twins, who look less similar and may be of different sexes. Such factors would impact the results (Burt & Simons, 2014).

Adoption studies offer a much more powerful method of separating the effects of genes and the environment by comparing adopted children with their adopted and biological families. In such situations, biological parents can only contribute biological effects, and adoptive parents can only contribute environmental effects on the behavior of adopted children, as the studies focus on children adopted by nonrelatives, neatly separating biological and environmental effects.

☞ EXAMPLE Many large studies conducted worldwide have shown that a child is much more likely to offend if their biological rather than adoptive parents were offenders, and even more likely if both are offenders (Mednick et al., 1987).

These findings show both a heritable relationship and the impact of the environment.

## 1b. Gene–Environment Interactions (G x E)

People with different genetic backgrounds may react differently to the same environment. We know that many risk factors influence the likelihood of committing a crime, such as the following:

- Child abuse
- Low socioeconomic status (SES)

- Peer pressure

Most people who experience these environmental factors do not turn to crime and may be exemplary members of society. Likewise, privileged, wealthy people with supportive peers and abuse-free childhoods may still commit crimes. We now understand that persons with certain genetic backgrounds are more sensitive to specific environmental triggers than others (Mullineaux & DiLalla, 2015).

☞ **EXAMPLE** Someone without a predisposition for criminal behavior may never offend, regardless of an adverse environment, and a person with a predisposition for criminal behavior may never offend if they do not experience adversity.

**Adversity** may be any form of hardship, which includes trauma; physical, sexual, or emotional abuse; starvation; or any form of severe suffering.



### DID YOU KNOW

Males with a certain form of a gene for a **neurotransmitter** or chemical messenger have a higher predisposition for aggressive behavior only if they are severely physically abused as a child. If they are not abused or never exposed to this trigger, they are no more likely to be aggressive than any other male (Caspi et al., 2002).

A predisposition, together with an adverse environment, increases risk but still does not guarantee a criminal outcome, because there are so many combinations that could occur related to predispositions and environment (Gajos et al., 2016). Several models predict these variations, such as the **diathesis–stress model**, which suggests that a genotype has a number of different **alleles**, or different gene variants, and each adds a tiny bit of risk (Bersted & DiLalla, 2016). So, this model predicts that the basic causes of antisocial behavior are triggers in the environment interacting with the person's genotype (Boardman et al., 2014).

☞ **EXAMPLE** Children with certain risk factors are at greater risk of antisocial behavior if they experience parental conflict (Feinberg et al., 2007). Additionally, if they are exposed to a bad environment, they are very likely to be antisocial, but if they are exposed to a good environment, they may not show any antisocial behavior at all.

These findings help identify not only environmental triggers but also protective factors that can enhance or even eliminate risk.



### TERMS TO KNOW

#### **Adversity**

A state or instance of serious or continued difficulty or misfortune.

#### **Neurotransmitter**

A chemical that allows neurons to communicate with each other throughout the body.

#### **Diathesis–Stress Model**

A psychological theory, also known as the *vulnerability–stress model*, which attempts to explain a disorder or its trajectory as the result of an interaction between a predispositional vulnerability, the diathesis, and stress caused by life experiences.

## Allele

One of two or more alternative forms of a gene that arise by mutation and are found at the same place on a chromosome.

## 1c. Epigenetics

**Epigenetics**, like criminology, studies how your behaviors and environment can cause changes that affect the way your genes work. Unlike genetic changes, epigenetic changes are reversible and do not change your DNA sequence, but they can change how your body reads a DNA sequence.

Interestingly, although only the expression of the genes changes and not the DNA sequence, these epigenetic changes can be passed on to the next generation, so they are heritable (National Human Genome Research Institute, 2020). This exciting new area of study is only just being explored, primarily as it relates to health care, but some work has been done on criminogenic behavior that helps explain G x E interactions. The epigenome is changed by the environment to allow the body to respond; changes may occur in neural development or in neurotransmitter or hormonal function, which could impact behavior.



### DID YOU KNOW

A study on rodents showed that maternal care could result in gene expression changes in the first week of life, with increased maternal care resulting in calmer offspring that exhibit less stress in new environments than those with low maternal care (Weaver et al., 2004). Another study showed that when rat pups were abused for 30 min a day during their first week of life, the brain changes lasted a lifetime, resulting in rats that abused their own offspring (Roth & Sweatt, 2011). In both studies, the changes could be reversed with medication.

Many studies on children have demonstrated that early life adversity and parenting decisions have an epigenetic effect on a child's developing brain that can impact their future behavior, mental abilities, reaction to stress, and resilience to further adversity, making them less able to cope. Such changes can be **transgenerational**, or passed on to later generations. This is a relatively new understanding and means that the experiences of your parents can epigenetically affect their DNA, which will impact the way your genes and even your children's genes will be expressed.

Studies, like the one by DeLisi & Vaughn (2015), show that this epigenetic effect can do the following:

- Increase antisocial behavior and aggression
- Reduce empathy
- Increase depression
- Reduce normal stress responses, resulting in a lack of fear of danger or consequences

It has long been accepted that experiencing an abusive childhood increases the risk of later offending. These studies not only show the environmental impacts of such abuse but now also a major biological impact on a child's developing brain, making them more susceptible to later environmental triggers, potentially resulting in the following:

- Antisocial behavior
- An inability to deal with stressors

- A lack of parenting skills

Moreover, these changes can be transgenerational.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### Epigenetics

The study of changes in organisms caused by modification of gene expression rather than alteration of the genetic code itself.

##### Transgenerational

The characteristic of genetic information passed on from one generation to the next without direct genetic inheritance.

### 1d. Social Implications

When considering any heritable factor that impacts a physical characteristic with social implications, it must be separated from the social effect.

When certain heritable characteristics such as skin color or ancestry put a person at a social disadvantage—for instance, by making them more likely to experience poverty, a lack of education, starvation, or abuse—their lack of success or increased risk is blamed on the inherited factor. In reality, this is a social construct and a result of systemic discrimination.

Possessing that heritable characteristic greatly reduces that person's chances of success in that particular society, and it is purely the environmental disadvantages that cause the outcome, not genetics or physical differences themselves.



#### DID YOU KNOW

This discrimination, rather than ancestry, in part explains the disproportionate number of African Americans incarcerated in the United States.



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the relationship between **crime and genetics**. There is no particular gene related to crime; rather, our behavior is governed by thousands of genes, and each contributes a small amount toward someone exhibiting a particular behavior. One of the ways criminologists can determine the relationship between genetics, environment, and crime is through **heritability studies**, including twin studies. These studies indicate that there is both a biological and environmental component to criminogenic behavior.

Through **gene–environment interactions**, you learned that people with different genetic backgrounds react differently to the same environment. People with a predisposition toward offending may never offend, and those without a predisposition may end up offending. Moreover, neurotransmitters can also play a role in offending. A predisposition toward offending, along with an adverse environment, increases risk but does not guarantee a criminal outcome. Different models can try to predict these

variations, suggesting that a genotype has different alleles which can add risk, but it is nearly impossible to predict who will engage in crime.

The study of **epigenetics** considers that the genome is controlled by the epigenome. While a person's genome remains the same, its epigenome may change how it functions in response to experiences. These changes can be transgenerational, and these effects increase traits to be passed down, including antisocial behavior and aggression.

Finally, there are many important **social implications** that arise from examining the effects of genetics on crime. When considering any heritable factor that impacts a physical characteristic with social implications, it must be separated from the social effect. Always remember that environmental disadvantages often make people more susceptible to committing crimes, and these typically have nothing to do with genetics. In the next lesson, you will learn about trait theory.

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## ATTRIBUTIONS

- **Genome Editing** | Author: Innovative Genomics Institute (IGI) | License: CC



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Adversity

A state or instance of serious or continued difficulty or misfortune.

### Allele

One of two or more alternative forms of a gene that arise by mutation and are found at the same place on a chromosome.

#### **Criminogenic**

A production of or a tendency to produce crime or criminals.

#### **Diathesis–Stress Model**

A psychological theory, also known as the *vulnerability–stress model*, which attempts to explain a disorder or its trajectory as the result of an interaction between a predispositional vulnerability, the diathesis, and stress caused by life experiences.

#### **Epigenetics**

The study of changes in organisms caused by modification of gene expression rather than alteration of the genetic code itself.

#### **Neurotransmitter**

A chemical that allows neurons to communicate with each other throughout the body.

#### **Transgenerational**

The characteristic of genetic information passed on from one generation to the next without direct genetic inheritance.

# Biological Trait Theory

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about biological trait theory in criminology and some of its related case studies. Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

- [\*\*1. Biological Trait Theory\*\*](#)
- [\*\*2. Phineas Gage\*\*](#)

## 1. Biological Trait Theory



### BEFORE YOU START

Consider how, in television shows and movies, criminals are often depicted as abnormal and as having certain characteristics that influence their behavior. Likewise, in the real world, trends in crime, like the many mass shootings in the United States over the past 30 years, have caused speculation about whether there is a trait that makes people commit these atrocities.

However, how much of this is related to biological traits, and how much of it is influenced by other factors? **Biological trait theory** suggests that certain biological factors, such as genetic and physiological characteristics, may contribute to the predisposition of individuals to engage in criminal behavior. This perspective explores the idea that aspects of an individual's biology can influence their propensity for criminal activities. But, as you have learned, it's important to consider other factors as well.

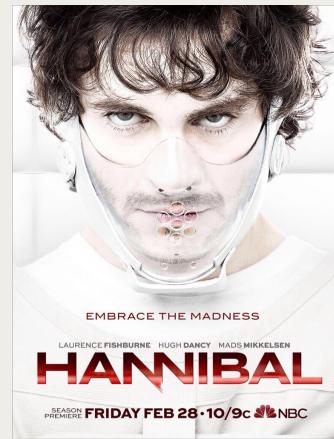
☞ **EXAMPLE** The relationship between traits and the commission of mass shootings is a complex and debated topic. While biological trait theory suggests that certain genetic traits may influence behavior, it is important to note that mass shootings are complex events influenced by a combination of factors. Research has explored various aspects such as mental health, social environments, access to firearms, and individual experiences. It is now known that focusing only on biological traits oversimplifies the reasons why people engage in mass shootings.

Individuals develop characteristics at birth or shortly thereafter, shaping their social functioning and influencing their choices. Uncommon traits occur infrequently, resulting in only a small proportion of people pursuing criminal paths. This fact can be at odds with how we see criminals portrayed in entertainment media.

## IN CONTEXT

As you have likely seen, television shows often depict criminals differently than noncriminals for several reasons, primarily driven by the need for dramatic storytelling and entertainment value.

These shows are created to entertain and captivate audiences. Portraying criminals in a distinctive and often exaggerated manner can add drama and tension to the narrative, making it more engaging for viewers (Kort-Butler & Hartshorn, 2011).



Moreover, criminal characters are frequently depicted with traits that contrast sharply with those of noncriminals. This sharp contrast serves to heighten the conflict in the story, creating a more compelling and suspenseful narrative. While these portrayals may be entertaining, they can contribute to stereotypes and misconceptions about crime and the individuals involved in criminal activities.

In reality, individuals who engage in criminal behavior are diverse, and the reasons behind criminal acts are complex and not only attributed to biological traits.



### DID YOU KNOW

Cohort studies have revealed that a minority of individuals become involved in criminal activities and that, among them, only a fraction persist as repeat offenders; most individuals naturally outgrow criminal behavior (Siegel, 2023).

According to this theory, chronic offenders differ from the average criminal based on the following:

- An abnormal biochemical makeup
- Brain structure
- Genetic constitution
- Some other personal traits

A purely biological explanation of criminality is no longer thought of as valid for a few reasons:

- Characteristics believed to be inherited may not be genetically dictated; instead, they could result from environmental factors, such as deprivation in surroundings.
- Even if most criminals exhibit certain biological traits, these traits might stem not from heredity but from environmental conditions, like inadequate nutrition or health care.
- It is possible that individuals were labeled and punished by the justice system not because of their behavior but, rather, their unconventional appearance (Siegel, 2023).

Today's criminologists believe that biological traits interact with environmental conditions to influence behavior. Each person possesses unique physical, mental, and personality traits, which explains why, when confronted

with similar life situations, one may turn to crime, while another may engage in conventional activities like attending school, church, and neighborhood functions, adhering to society's laws (Siegel, 2023). However, before we move on to talking more about the intersections of biological and social factors in the next lesson, let's look at the case of Phineas Gage.



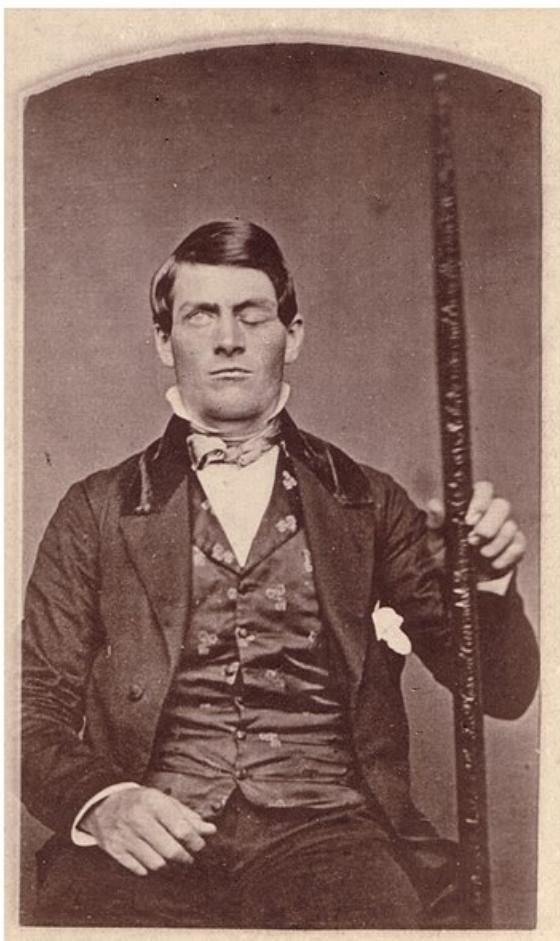
#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Biological Trait Theory**

A theory that suggests that certain biological factors, such as genetic and physiological characteristics, may contribute to the predisposition of individuals to engage in criminal behavior.

## 2. Phineas Gage

Phineas Gage's case is often referenced in the context of neuroscience to illustrate the relationship between brain function and behavior. His case is also referenced with trait theory, and it has implications for our understanding of personality and the role of brain structures in shaping behavior (Twomey, 2010).



Phineas Gage was a railroad construction foreman in the 19th century who became famous for surviving a severe brain injury that affected his personality and behavior. While working on a railroad construction project, Gage was using a tamping iron to pack explosive powder into a hole when the powder unexpectedly ignited. The tamping iron, which was about 3 ft 7 in. long and 1.25 in. in diameter, was propelled upward, entering Gage's skull below his left cheekbone and exiting through the top of his head (Twomey, 2010).

Despite the severity of the injury, Phineas Gage survived. His physical recovery was surprisingly quick, but the injury had profound effects on his personality. Before the accident, Gage was described as responsible and capable. However, after the injury, he became impulsive, irresponsible, and socially inappropriate.

Phineas Gage's case is often cited to highlight the connection between brain function, personality, and behavior. The damage to his frontal lobe, which is associated with higher cognitive functions and personality regulation, provided insight into the role of specific brain regions in shaping behavior. Gage's transformation from a responsible and capable individual to someone impulsive and socially inappropriate suggests that damage to specific brain regions

can impact behavior. This case demonstrates the importance of understanding the neurological basis of behavior and how alterations in brain function can influence personality and traits.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about **biological trait theory**. This theory suggests that certain biological factors, such as genetic and physiological characteristics, may contribute to the predisposition of individuals to engage in criminal behavior. People often wonder if there are certain traits that make individuals engage in certain crimes.

By now, you should have realized that biological traits play only a small role in the commission of crimes, as there are so many other factors that influence whether or not someone commits a crime. Social and environmental factors interact with biological factors, and criminologists realize that this relationship is complex.

You also learned about **Phineas Gage** in this lesson. Gage was a railroad worker who survived an injury to his brain that significantly altered his behavior and personality. His case is often cited when examining how the brain influences personality and traits. In the next lesson, you will learn more about the relationship between biological and social factors that lead to people committing crimes—these ideas are connected to biosocial theory.

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## ATTRIBUTIONS

- [Hannibal Season 2 Artwork](#) | Author: Wes Candela | License: CC
- [Phineas Gage](#) | Author: OpenStax College | License: CC



## TERMS TO KNOW

**Biological Trait Theory**

A theory that suggests that certain biological factors, such as genetic and physiological characteristics, may contribute to the predisposition of individuals to engage in criminal behavior.

# Biosocial Theory

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the biochemical and environmental conditions related to the development of the biosocial theory of criminology. Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

### 1. Biosocial Theory

- 1a. Biochemical Conditions
- 1b. Improper Diet
- 1c. Glucose Metabolism
- 1d. Hormone Levels
- 1e. Environmental Contaminants

## 1. Biosocial Theory

Contemporary trait theorists do not propose that a single biological or psychological characteristic can fully account for all criminal behavior. Instead, they recognize the uniqueness of each offender, both physically and mentally. As a result, there is a need for diverse explanations for individual behaviors. Some individuals may have inherited predispositions to criminality, while others might experience neurological issues, and some could have disorders contributing to their antisocial activities. Genetically determined physical and mental traits could influence the effects of environment and socialization. However, possessing any such trait puts an individual at risk for antisocial behavior.

Contrary to the notion that criminal behavior is solely determined by conditions present at birth, many criminologists argue that a combination of physical, environmental, and social factors collaboratively shapes human behavior. This perspective is known as **biosocial theory**, a theoretical framework suggesting that the roots of antisocial behavior are best understood through the intersection of the following:

- Biological traits
- Hormone levels
- Diet
- Neurological composition

These also include external influences:

- Neighborhood
- Family conditions

In the following sections, we will explore some of the primary ideas related to biosocial theory.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Biosocial Theory

A theory suggesting that crime is understood through the intersection of biological traits as well as social influences.

### 1a. Biochemical Conditions

Certain trait theorists argue that **biochemical conditions**, which include both genetically predetermined factors and those influenced by diet and environment, play a significant role in shaping and impacting antisocial behavior.

The impact of harmful chemical and biological substances may begin before birth if the mother has a poor diet, potentially leading to developmental issues in her offspring (Siegel, 2023). Historically, maternal alcohol abuse and smoking during pregnancy have been linked to prenatal harm, resulting in antisocial behavior in children.

⇒ EXAMPLE Exposure to smoke has been correlated with increased psychopathology in offspring, and exposure to secondhand cigarette smoke during pregnancy has been linked to subsequent conduct disorder (Siegel, 2023).

Having a parent who smokes appears to have a more pronounced effect on *behavior* than other factors.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Biochemical Conditions

The conditions based on genetically predetermined factors as well as those influenced by diet and environment.

### 1b. Improper Diet

According to some criminologists, an inadequate diet may be linked to criminal behavior. The absence of certain chemicals and minerals in one's diet can contribute to conditions like these:

- Depression
- Mania
- Cognitive issues

Studies also indicate that consuming excessive amounts of harmful substances like caffeine, food dyes, and artificial flavors may trigger hostile, impulsive, and antisocial behaviors.

⇒ EXAMPLE Ingredients commonly found in candy and soda have been associated with increased hyperactivity, which, in turn, is linked to antisocial behaviors.

However, research suggests that maintaining a healthy diet can contribute to a reduction in aggressive behavior. Individuals with poor dietary habits, particularly youth, are at a higher risk of engaging in violence than those with healthier diets (Ramsbotham & Gesch, 2009). Other research has examined the connection between consuming high levels of sugar and displaying antisocial and aggressive behavior (Wender & Solanto, 1991).

#### IN CONTEXT

Studies have been conducted where children's diets were modified, replacing sweet drinks with fruit juices, using honey instead of table sugar, and substituting molasses for sugar in cooking. The findings suggest a correlation between sugar intake and levels of aggression. Moreover, individuals who excessively consumed sugary foods during childhood were more apt to be convicted of violent offenses in adulthood (Siegel, 2023).



### 1c. Glucose Metabolism

Research also indicates that persistent abnormalities in the brain's glucose metabolism may be associated with antisocial behaviors. **Hypoglycemia** occurs when blood glucose levels drop below what is necessary for normal brain function. During hypoglycemia, the brain lacks an alternative energy source, slowing metabolism and impaired function. Symptoms of hypoglycemia include the following:

- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Confusion

Hypoglycemia has been linked to a syndrome characterized by aggressive and assaultive behavior, disturbances in glucose levels, and impaired brain function (Siegel, 2023).



#### DID YOU KNOW

Studies conducted on jail and prison inmate populations have revealed a higher prevalence of hypoglycemia than normal. Additionally, groups of habitually violent and impulsive offenders have shown elevated levels of reactive hypoglycemia.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Hypoglycemia**

A condition that occurs when the level of glucose in your blood drops below what is healthy.

### 1d. Hormone Levels

Understanding human behavior and explaining gender differences in crime rates may be closely tied to hormones. Biological differences contribute to the fact that males tend to be more biologically aggressive, while

females naturally exhibit nurturing qualities. Hormone levels are important in accounting for how people age into or out of crime.

☞ **EXAMPLE** Testosterone, the principal male sex hormone, declines over the life cycle, potentially accounting for the decrease in violence rates over time. It has been associated with violence and aggression when present at excessive levels (Armstrong et al., 2022).

Self-reported violent criminality and antisocial behaviors correspond with masculine traits, such as the following:

- Mannerisms
- Body appearance
- Physical strength
- Sex drive
- Deep voice
- Body hair

These also involve other androgen-related male traits:

- Sensation seeking
- Impulsivity
- Dominance
- Lower verbal skills

Growing evidence suggests hormonal changes are associated with mood and behavior, with adolescents experiencing more intense mood swings, anxiety, and restlessness, possibly due to the peak in hormonal activity during adolescence (Siegel, 2023).



#### DID YOU KNOW

Drugs that reduce testosterone levels are being used in some cases to treat male sex offenders, while female hormones like estrogen and progesterone are administered to sex offenders to decrease sexual potency. However, the long-term side effects and potential risks of such treatments remain unknown (Lee & Cho, 2013).

Research on hormones has not exclusively focused on male offenders. There has been a suspicion that the onset of the menstrual cycle leads to increased levels of female sex hormones, impacting antisocial and aggressive behavior. This phenomenon is commonly known as **premenstrual syndrome (PMS)**. The connection between PMS and delinquency gained attention over four decades ago, with studies suggesting that women are more prone to suicide, aggression, and other antisocial behaviors just before or during menstruation. During this period, lawyers started utilizing PMS as a legal criminal defense (Siegel, 2023).



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)

A combination of symptoms that many women get about a week or two before their period.

## 1e. Environmental Contaminants

Exposure to hazardous substances, including lead, copper, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and inorganic gases like chlorine and nitrogen dioxide, can result in severe illness or even death. These environmental pollutants can be particularly detrimental to the developing brains of infants and young children, affecting their nervous systems.

Contaminants, such as those found in insecticides and pesticides, have also been associated with developmental delays and emotional issues. Another potential contributor to dysfunctional behavior is phthalates, industrial chemicals extensively used as plastic solvents and ingredients.



### DID YOU KNOW

Phthalates are present in numerous household items, ranging from shampoos to flooring products, and research indicates that exposure is linked to misbehavior and impaired functioning in children (Siegel, 2023).

Studies suggest a connection between lead exposure and aggressive behaviors (Naicker et al., 2018), which is particularly significant as many children experience harmful levels of lead ingestion. Elevated lead levels in the blood can impact the following:

- IQ
- Attention span
- Academic performance

All of these, when negatively impacted, are linked to antisocial behavior.

Regions with higher lead concentrations also report elevated homicide rates (Doleac, 2017). Long-term global crime trends are closely correlated with changes in environmental lead levels, with violent crime rates in various nations aligning with earlier trends in preschool blood lead levels, with a delay of around 20 years.

Children exposed to increased lead levels during their preschool years are thus more likely to engage in criminal activity in their late teens and early 20s. One contributing factor to this exposure is the presence of metals like lead, copper, and zinc in popular snack foods sold in Asia and other regions. An estimated 65% to 90% or more of the considerable variation in violent crime rates in these countries can be attributed to lead exposure.

☞ EXAMPLE In the United States, the surge in juvenile arrest rates during the 1960s coincided with the increased use of leaded gas after World War II. As the use of leaded gas declined, so did the crime rates (Siegel, 2023).



### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about **biosocial theory**, which suggests that the roots of antisocial behavior are understood through the intersection of biological traits and external influences. Some biosocial criminologists argue that **biochemical conditions**, which include genetic factors and those influenced by diet and environment, play a role in shaping and impacting antisocial behavior.

Some criminologists focus on the connection between **improper diet** and criminal behavior, citing that

excessive consumption of sugar or food additives plays a role. Other criminologists study the role of **glucose metabolism** and how it is associated with antisocial behaviors. Most notably, hypoglycemia has been linked to aggression. Furthermore, you learned that **hormone levels**, such as testosterone, have been linked to aggression. **Environmental contaminants**, such as lead, also have a connection with violent behavior.

As you can see, biosocial theory has evolved to encompass how biological traits interact with social and environmental factors. In an upcoming lesson, you will learn about the limitations of the biological trait and biosocial theories.

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## ATTRIBUTIONS

- [Brown Ceramic Bowl with Brown and White Beans](#) | Author: Tamas Pap | License: CC



## TERMS TO KNOW

Biochemical Conditions

The conditions based on genetically predetermined factors as well as those influenced by diet and environment.

**Biosocial Theory**

A theory suggesting that crime is understood through the intersection of biological traits as well as social influences.

**Hypoglycemia**

A condition that occurs when the level of glucose in your blood drops below what is healthy.

**Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)**

A combination of symptoms that many women get about a week or two before their period.

# Case Analysis: Political Crime

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will determine whether or not biological theories can explain a politically motivated crime. Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

- 1. Rolling Hills PD Examines Political Crime**
  - 1a. The Case of the Bomb**
  - 1b. The Debrief**

## 1. Rolling Hills PD Examines Political Crime

Throughout this Challenge, we looked at the biological or inherited causes of criminal behavior. Often, people with different genetic backgrounds respond differently to the same stimuli, thus creating the assumption that people can be predisposed to criminality or more likely to engage in socially unacceptable behavior.

**Click on the plus sign to review gene X environmental interactions:**



The basic causes of criminality or antisocial behaviors are triggers in the environment (e.g., adversity, low SES, child abuse, peer pressure, and parental conflict) interacting with the person's genotype.

**Click on the plus sign to review biological trait theory:**



Certain biological factors, such as genetic and physiological characteristics, may contribute to the predisposition of individuals to engage in criminal behavior. Individuals develop characteristics at birth or shortly thereafter, shaping their social functioning and influencing their choices. Uncommon traits occur infrequently, resulting in only a small proportion of people pursuing criminal paths.

**Click on the plus sign to review biosocial theory:**



Crime is understood through the intersection of biological traits and social influences. The interplay of biological traits, hormone levels, diet, neurological composition, and external influences of family and neighborhood forms the root of antisocial behavior.

Can genetics, environmental factors, or other biological factors explain a crime related to politics?

#### CONVERSATION BETWEEN COWORKERS

"It seems like there is a pattern of kids getting into crime."



"Do you think it has something to do with their genetic makeup?"



"I think there's something to that point. There's a case I'd like to discuss with you."



### 1a. The Case of the Bomb

Watch and listen as Detective Henson and Professor Joon look into this case of misguided ideologies.



WATCH

### 1b. The Debrief

Detective Henson and Professor Joon will see how biological theories fit into the case of the bomb.

#### CONVERSATION BETWEEN COWORKERS

"In the attack, they killed at least 23 people and injured more than 80. I don't see how this can be justified."



"Did the adversity and marginalization they faced growing up change their disposition to be more criminally motivated?"



"To improve their lives, to them, the crimes they committed felt necessary."



"Alicia, unfortunately, I think you're right."

"I just wonder how this could have been prevented."



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you watched and listened as the **Rolling Hills PD** examined political crime. You saw how the intersection of biological factors and external factors within the environment shaped criminal behavior in **the case of the bomb**.

Just like Detective Henson and Professor Joon did in the **debrief**, you will learn how modern criminologists apply the elements of these biological theories in the next lesson.

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# Critiques of Biological Theories

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the concepts of the main biological theories that current criminologists deem outdated. Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

1. Critiques of Biological Trait Theory
2. Critiques of Biosocial Theory

## 1. Critiques of Biological Trait Theory

The concept of strict biological trait theory, suggesting that certain traits associated with criminal behavior are solely determined by genetics, is no longer accepted. Many characteristics believed to be inherited may not be genetically determined but could be influenced by factors like deprivation in one's surroundings. Poverty, education, family dynamics, and community influences are considered contributors, and a sole focus on biological factors may divert attention from addressing these issues.

The idea that most criminals share specific biological traits is questioned, as these traits may result from environmental conditions, such as inadequate nutrition, rather than solely hereditary factors. The justice system may have thus labeled and punished individuals based on their unusual appearance rather than actual behavior (Siegel, 2023).

There are ethical concerns associated with labeling certain biological traits as “criminal” or individuals predisposed to criminality based on their genetic makeup (Bedoya & Portnoy, 2023). It raises issues of stigmatization, which occurs when individuals are labeled as deviant or socially undesirable, leading to negative stereotypes and social exclusion.

Due to these shortcomings, the credibility of a purely biological explanation for criminality is now doubted and no longer considered valid. Contemporary criminologists propose that environmental conditions interact with human traits and circumstances, collectively shaping behavior. This perspective has led to the term “biosocial theory,” highlighting the connection between physical and mental characteristics, the social environment, and behavior.

## 2. Critiques of Biosocial Theory

Even though biosocial theory is currently more recognized than biological trait theory, there are some elements that are still criticized.

One critique is that the theory falls short in explaining human behavior, as it neglects the influences of the mind and culture (Crossman, 2018). The contention is that biosocial theory fails to provide a comprehensive understanding of human behavior by neglecting the significant contributions of mental processes and cultural contexts that influence behavior. This critique suggests that a more comprehensive approach should take into account the interplay between biological, psychological, and cultural factors to fully explain human behavior.

Another criticism revolves around sociobiology's continued reliance on genetic determinism, implying an acceptance of the existing social order. Critics argue that if male aggression is considered genetically predetermined and beneficial for reproduction, it implies a biologically predetermined reality beyond our control (Crossman, 2018). In other words, if aggression in men is seen as a trait encoded in their genes and beneficial for reproductive success, it implies that this behavior is driven by biological factors and not easily subject to conscious control or societal influence. This perspective raises questions about the extent to which certain behaviors are inherent and predetermined by genetics, as opposed to being shaped by environmental and cultural factors.

Despite these limitations, biosocial theory is still more widely recognized than strict biological trait theory.



### BIG IDEA

Let's compare the concepts, proponents, assumptions, and limitations of both the biological trait and biosocial theories from this lesson.

	Concepts	Proponents	Assumptions	Limitations
<b>Biological Trait Theory</b>	Genetics; physiological characteristics	Cesare Lombroso	Biological factors contribute to criminality.	Biological theories have been linked to biological determinism and racism.  These theories neglect the role that sociological and environmental factors play in determining if someone commits a crime.
<b>Biosocial Theory</b>	Biochemical conditions; diet; hormones; environmental contaminants	Edward Wilson	Biological factors interact with social and environmental factors to produce crime.	There is still a reliance on biological determinism.  This theory neglects the mental processes related to committing crimes.



### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you first learned about the **critiques of biological trait theory**. Biological trait theory is no longer recognized as an acceptable criminological theory, as it relies completely on how biological traits are related to crime. This theory has since evolved into biosocial theory, which takes into consideration how biological traits interact with social and environmental factors.

However, there are also **critiques of biosocial theory**. For instance, this theory falls short in explaining human behavior, as it neglects the influences of the mind and culture. It also continues to rely on genetic determinism, which is something theorists now see as problematic.

In the next lesson, we will move away from biological theories, and you will learn about psychological theories of crime.

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# Individual Psychological Theories of Crimes

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the differing perspectives on the origins of behavior through the psychological theories of crime that focus on individuals. Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

### 1. Individual Psychological Theories of Crime

1a. Nature

1b. Nurture

## 1. Individual Psychological Theories of Crime

Why do people break the law?

Psychology attempts to answer this question by studying the intricacies of the brain, including how human minds make sense of their environment and are shaped by evolution, culture, and society. The earliest and most persistent explanations of criminal behavior locate the flaw in the individual. From the “original sin” in Christian theology to antisocial personality disorder and psychopathy in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*, the concept of bad people doing bad things has been a universal starting place for our approach to criminality (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

The key question stemming from this approach is “What differentiates individuals who commit crimes from those who do not?”

Many psychological theories of criminal behavior focus on identifying personality traits, characteristics, and developmental pathways believed to be shared by people who commit crimes. Some theories focus on the **temperament**, or mood, and **personality**, or emotional characteristics, that people are born with (nature). Others focus on how life experiences shape people’s behaviors and attitudes (nurture). We will discuss both of these ideas in the sections below.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Temperament

An aspect of personality concerned with emotional dispositions and reactions and their speed and intensity; the term is often used to refer to a person's prevailing mood or mood pattern.

## Personality

The characteristic set of behaviors, cognitions, and emotional patterns that evolve from biological and environmental factors. While there is no generally agreed-upon definition of personality, most theories focus on motivation and psychological interactions with the environment one is surrounded by.

### 1a. Nature

The core of the “nature” focus is the assumption that people behave consistently across time and situations, and this consistency allows us to predict future behavior, including criminal behavior.

Research on natural temperament and personality development in children has consistently found differences over the first 3 years of life across the following:

- Activity level
- Distractibility
- Adaptability
- Sensitivity
- Quality of mood

↗ EXAMPLE Psychologists Tang et al. (2020) found that behavioral inhibition in infancy predicts shyness and introversion in adults 30 years later, suggesting that early temperament persists throughout the lifespan.

The two temperaments associated with criminal behavior are as follows:

1. High sensation-seeking combined with low self-control, which leads to impulsive risk-taking
2. Negative emotionality, which leads to increased hostility (Bonta & Andrews, 2017)



#### DID YOU KNOW

Of these aspects of temperament, low self-control and impulsivity have received the most research attention and are considered major contributing factors in violent crime (Garofalo et al., 2018).

Researchers have long engaged in classifying humans into different categories of personality to predict differences in individual behavior. The Myers-Briggs personality type indicator, rooted in the work of Carl Jung, divides people along four continuums:

- Introversion or extraversion (E/I)
- Sensing or intuition (S/N)
- Thinking or feeling (T/F)
- Judging or perceiving (J/P)

This theory suggests that differences in behavior are largely due to basic differences in the ways individuals perceive and judge the world around them, resulting in 16 personality types (Myers, 1962).

Here are the Myers-Briggs personality types (Myers & Briggs Foundation, 2021):

Type	Traits
------	--------

ISTJ	Quiet, serious, logical, and loyal
ISFJ	Quiet, friendly, responsible, and conscientious
INFJ	Connected, insightful, values driven, and decisive
INTJ	Creative, driven, visionary, and independent
ISTP	Tolerant, flexible, solution oriented, and efficient
ISFP	Quiet, friendly, sensitive, kind, and conflict averse
INFP	Idealistic, values driven, curious, and adaptable
INTP	Logical, abstract, quiet, and analytical
ESTP	Pragmatic, energetic, spontaneous, and active
ESFP	Outgoing, accepting, realistic, and adaptable
ENFP	Warm, imaginative, and appreciative
ENTP	Quick, ingenious, resourceful, and outspoken
ESTJ	Practical, decisive, organized, and systematic
ESFJ	Warmhearted, harmonious, loyal, and helpful
ENFJ	Empathic, responsible, sociable, and facilitative
ENTJ	Frank, decisive, well informed, and a leader



LEARN MORE

Interested in seeing what type you fit into? See [The 16 MBTI® Personality Types](#) in more detail.

Another common personality measure is the five-factor model of higher-order traits from psychologists Costa and McCrae:

1. **Extraversion** (i.e., outgoingness, high energy, and talkativeness)
2. **Neuroticism** (i.e., more likely to experience such feelings as anxiety, worry, fear, anger, frustration, envy, and jealousy)
3. Openness to experience
4. Agreeableness
5. **Conscientiousness** (i.e., being careful or diligent)

Applying the five-factor model to antisocial behavior has typically found that antisocial behavior is associated with lower agreeableness and lower conscientiousness, as seen in the table below (Jones et al., 2011).

This table illustrates the five-factor model of personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992):

Personality Trait	Low Scorer	High Scorer
-------------------	------------	-------------

Openness	Favors conservative values, judges in conventional terms, is uncomfortable with complexities, and is moralistic	Values intellectual matters, is rebellious and nonconforming, has an unusual thought process, and is introspective
Conscientiousness	Is unable to deny gratification, is self-indulgent, and engages in daydreams	Behaves ethically, is dependable and responsible, is productive, and has high aspiration levels
Extraversion	Is emotionally bland, avoids close relationships, exhibits overcontrol of impulses, and is submissive	Is talkative, gregarious, and socially poised and behaves assertively
Agreeableness	Is critical and skeptical, behaves in a condescending manner, tries to push limits, and expresses hostility directly	Is sympathetic, considerate, warm, compassionate, and likable and behaves in a giving way
Neuroticism	Is calm, relaxed, and satisfied with self; has a clear-cut personality; and prides self on objectivity	Is thin skinned, anxious, irritable, and guilt prone



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Extraversion

A personality trait typically characterized by outgoingness, high energy, and/or talkativeness.

### Neuroticism

A personality trait in which people are more likely than average to be moody and to experience such feelings as anxiety, worry, fear, anger, frustration, envy, jealousy, pessimism, guilt, depressed mood, and loneliness.

### Conscientiousness

A personality trait of being careful or diligent.

## 1b. Nurture

Theorists who focus on “nurture” argue that personality develops in response to childhood experiences. Sigmund Freud’s (2012) **psychodynamic theory** was one of the first theories to chart the development of personality through childhood. Psychodynamic, or psychoanalytic, theory focuses on the psychological drives and forces within individuals that explain human behavior and personality.

Freud proposed five stages of psychosexual development:

- Oral
- Anal
- Phallic
- Latency
- Genital

During each stage, sexual energy (libido) is expressed, and the reaction of parental figures determines whether the stage resolves successfully or not. If stages resolve positively, the resulting adult is able to “love, work, and play.” If developmental stages do not resolve successfully, the result is an adult who is likely to violate ethical and moral standards.

Here is a breakdown of Freud’s (2012) stages of psychosexual development:

Stage	Age	Pleasure/Sexual Focus	Key Developmental Tasks	Fixation Results In
Oral	Birth to 1 year	Mouth (chewing and sucking)	Weaning	Obsessive eating, smoking, and drinking (alcoholism)
Anal	2–3 years	Anus	Toilet training	Obsession with cleanliness; sexual anxiety
Phallic	4–5 years	Genitals (masturbation)	Identifying with gender role models (Oedipus/Electra complexes)	Difficulty with intimate relationships
Latency	6–12 years	None	Social interaction	No fixation (stage not present in all cultures)
Genital	Puberty and later	Genitals (sexual intimacy)	Intimate relationships and productivity	Previous fixation equals low sexual interest; no previous fixation equals normal sexual motivation

Psychologist Erik Erikson’s psychosocial developmental theory (1950) extended Freud’s theory of psychosexual development throughout the lifespan. At each stage of life, individuals face developmental challenges on the road to **self-actualization**, or the fulfillment of one’s potential:

- Early stages of childhood development determine whether a child will trust or mistrust the world around them, develop autonomy or shame in their own abilities, and perceive themselves as “good” by being rewarded for their initiative or “bad” for failing to live up to the expectations of parental figures.
- Later stages focus on identity, intimacy, productivity, and satisfaction with life.

Erikson’s work informs Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory of moral development (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Kohlberg asked people of various ages about their views on right and wrong in moral dilemmas and found that people’s reasons for deciding right versus wrong followed a predictable path. Kohlberg theorized that criminals would be more likely to show preconventional moral thinking. Research on criminal offenders has linked preconventional moral thinking, as seen in the table below, to higher rates of **recidivism** or reoffending (Van Vugt et al., 2011). Here is a breakdown of Kohlberg’s theory of moral development (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977):

Stage of Morality	Description
Preconventional morality	Good versus bad is defined by getting rewards and avoiding punishments. If someone can avoid punishment or not get caught, then a person at this stage deems the action acceptable.

<b>Conventional morality</b>	The focus at this stage is on strict adherence to the concepts of right and wrong, as determined by the rules of society and other significant people like parents and teachers.
<b>Postconventional morality</b>	Right and wrong are determined by an individual's principles of equality, justice, and respect; rules are critically evaluated against these standards. Kohlberg posited this as the most advanced level of moral development.

Under “nurture” explanations of behavior, parenting (usually mothering) is a major early shaping factor in the development of personality and morality. Two dimensions of parenting appear particularly important:

- Support
- Control

Baumrind (1991) created a typology of parenting styles differentiated by support and control.

This table describes Baumrind’s parenting styles:

Parenting Style	Characteristics
<b>Authoritative</b>	High warmth and high behavioral control. Characterized by firm rules but open communication and rational discussion about those rules, coupled with emotional support.
<b>Authoritarian</b>	Low warmth and high/harsh control. Characterized by rigid rules, the expectation that those rules are followed with no questions asked, and low support and a reliance on punishment to enforce rules.
<b>Permissive</b>	High warmth and low control, with few rules or expectations. Parents generally are warm and tolerant of their children’s behavior but with few boundaries.
<b>Rejecting-neglecting</b>	Low on both warmth and control. The parent is uninvolved, and if the neglect is severe, it becomes abusive.

Research shows how parents’ styles affect their children:

- An authoritative style fosters higher levels of self-control, which is a protective factor against criminal behavior.
- Rejecting-neglecting parenting is most often linked to violent behavior (Chung & Steinberg, 2006).
- Parental monitoring, which can be supportive or controlling, has also been linked to criminal outcomes.
- Harsh control (physical/verbal punishment and intrusiveness), low warmth, and low monitoring are particularly related to criminal and violent behavior (Pinquart, 2017).
- Warm, active parental monitoring and consistent rules/expectations may protect against violent behavior in youth (Fosco et al., 2012).
- Discipline that emphasizes positive reinforcement over punishment appears to be the most effective (Surjadi et al., 2013).

Although parents clearly influence their children, children also influence their parents. Gerald Patterson (1995) developed **coercion theory** to describe an escalation pattern of parents and children negatively influencing

each other. This theory proposed that coercive parent–child interactions serve as the training ground for the development of antisocial behavior.

☞ **EXAMPLE** If a parent gives in to escalating demands from their child, the child learns that they will get what they want if they intensify their anger and resistance; therefore, the child will use this tactic the next time they want something. If the parent increases their hostility in response, they effectively increase the level of demand their child must reach to succeed, thereby feeding a coercive cycle.

Children also learn that coercive actions are effective in achieving one's goals and may emulate this behavior with others. Children engaged in frequent coercive interactions with their parents are more likely to have aggressive and oppositional behavior (Shaw et al., 1998).

There are, however, challenges to such parenting research:

- Establishing unbiased ratings of parent and child behavior is challenging (Pinquart, 2017).
  - When rating themselves, parents will often respond in a socially desirable way, intentionally or not.
  - Similarly, children's behavior ratings are potentially biased, depending on who is rating them.
- When ratings are given by researchers, they usually involve artificial settings that affect the behavior of both parents and children.
- Research on parenting relies on correlation, because experiments cannot ethically expose children to harm.

Other research focuses on the quality of a child's early connection to their primary caregiver and how it affects adult emotional and relationship functioning. Early caregivers must provide security; infants are completely dependent on their caregivers and must feel protected and trust they can rely on their caregivers to meet their needs.

☞ **EXAMPLE** When that trust is strained or broken, a child forms a dysfunctional attachment toward their parents. Instead of security, they experience ambivalence, fear, or anger toward their caregivers, which leads to clingy preoccupation or dismissive rejection of caregivers.

Early disrupted attachments translate into an inability to trust and rely on others in adult intimate relationships and may contribute to violence in intimate relationships (Dutton, 2007). Insecure attachments also affect how positively or negatively we view others, which can increase or decrease the likelihood of offending against others.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Psychodynamic Theory

A psychological theory, sometimes referred to as psychoanalytic theory, focusing on the psychological drives and forces within individuals that explain human behavior and personality.

### Self-Actualization

The fulfillment of one's full human potential.

### Recidivism

The tendency of a convicted criminal to reoffend.

### Coercion Theory

A psychological developmental theory proposing that coercive parent–child interactions serve as the training ground for the development of antisocial behavior.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about **individual psychological theories of crime**. Some of these ideas focus on the temperament and personality that people are born with, and others look at how life experiences shape people's behaviors and attitudes.

You first learned of a person's **nature** and how most people are inherently born with different temperaments. Research consistently indicates that high sensation-seeking combined with low self-control leads to impulsive risk-taking and that negative emotionality leads to increased hostility. Overall, low self-control and impulsivity are considered contributing factors in violent crime.

You then learned about the role of **nurture** and how the personality develops in response to childhood experiences. Much of this research examines the role of parents, particularly mothers, and how parenting affects a child's risk of engaging in crime. Overall, the better children's relationships are with their parents, the less likely they will be to commit crimes.

In the upcoming lessons, you will see the interplay between psychological theories and criminality. Specifically, in the next lesson, you will examine the role that mental illness plays in criminal behavior.

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## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Coercion Theory**

A psychological developmental theory proposing that coercive parent–child interactions serve as the training ground for the development of antisocial behavior.

### **Conscientiousness**

A personality trait of being careful or diligent.

### **Extraversion**

A personality trait typically characterized by outgoingness, high energy, and/or talkativeness.

### **Neuroticism**

A personality trait in which people are more likely than average to be moody and to experience such feelings as anxiety, worry, fear, anger, frustration, envy, jealousy, pessimism, guilt, depressed mood, and loneliness.

### **Personality**

The characteristic set of behaviors, cognitions, and emotional patterns that evolve from biological and environmental factors. While there is no generally agreed-upon definition of personality, most theories focus on motivation and psychological interactions with the environment one is surrounded by.

### **Psychodynamic Theory**

A psychological theory, sometimes referred to as psychoanalytic theory, focusing on the psychological drives and forces within individuals that explain human behavior and personality.

### **Recidivism**

The tendency of a convicted criminal to reoffend.

### **Self-Actualization**

The fulfillment of one's full human potential.

### **Temperament**

An aspect of personality concerned with emotional dispositions and reactions and their speed and intensity; the term is often used to refer to a person's prevailing mood or mood pattern.

# Mental Illness and Criminal Behavior

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the relationships between different mental illnesses or disorders and criminality. Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

### 1. Mental Illness and Criminality

- 1a. Antisocial Personality Disorder
- 1b. Psychopathy
- 1c. Psychosis
- 1d. Substance Abuse Disorders

## 1. Mental Illness and Criminality

Although mental illness would seem to fall in the camp of individual psychology, the interface between mental illness and criminality is as much socially determined as it is individually determined. Theories that draw a straight line between individual mental illness and criminal behavior rely on the medical model of mental illness, with its focus on abnormal psychology.

In the early 1900s, doctors and psychiatrists sought ways to classify recurring patterns of thought and behavior that significantly reduce an individual's ability to function in an attempt to diagnose and treat "mental illness" utilizing an approach similar to that used to deal with physical disease. Today, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013) is used in North America to diagnose mental disorders. The *DSM-5* describes mental disorders, their symptoms, and the criteria for diagnosing them.

### IN CONTEXT

The *DSM-5* seeks to ensure clinicians are consistent in their communication about disorders and diagnostic criteria, and researchers are consistent in how they define disorders so that they can meaningfully add to the body of scientific knowledge. As most research that informs the *DSM* has predominantly involved White Americans, it is acknowledged that there is limited evidence of the cross-cultural validity of the *DSM*. To the extent that mental illness leads to behaviors that violate the

norms and standards of a particular society, people with mental illness would be expected to have a higher rate of contact with the criminal justice system.

The overrepresentation of people with mental illness in the corrections system appears to be increasing over time. Between 1997 and 2010, symptoms of serious mental illness reported by federal offenders at admission increased by 61% for males and 71% for females (Sorenson, 2010). During this time frame, psychiatric institutions were being shut down in favor of community-based mental health care. Unfortunately, community mental health did not receive adequate funding, causing individuals with disruptive symptoms and untreated mental illness to come to the attention of the police.

⤔ **EXAMPLE** Sapers (CTV News, 2010) stated that the mentally ill are being “warehoused” in prisons instead of receiving the health care they need; prisons simply do not have the capacity to meet the complex mental health needs people housed in them have.

When mental illness and addiction are treated as health issues instead of criminal justice issues, we see hopeful results (Hammond, 2007). Collaborative partnerships between the criminal justice system and the health care system are associated with better outcomes for youth.

⤔ **EXAMPLE** Cuellar et al. (2006) found that offending youth with mental illness who accessed diversion programs that offered treatment fared better than those who faced punishment.

Lamberti (2016) also advocates for mental health consideration within the criminal justice system so that treatment, not punishment, is the focus.

Although social factors such as underfunded mental health systems, poverty, deinstitutionalization, and a lack of access to treatment play a part in the overrepresentation of people with mental illness in the criminal justice system, some mental illnesses include criminal behavior as part of their diagnostic criteria, including the following:

- Antisocial personality disorder
- Psychopathy
- Psychosis
- Substance abuse disorders

We will discuss these types of mental illness in the upcoming sections.

## 1a. Antisocial Personality Disorder

**Antisocial personality disorder (ASPD)** is one of a class of diagnoses that describe persistent, long-standing, maladaptive ways of thinking and feeling about oneself and others that detrimentally affect how one functions. ASPD is the personality disorder most strongly linked with violence; it is defined by a continual remorseless disregard for the rights of others, including the following:

- Repeated criminal acts
- Impulsiveness
- Irresponsibility

- Deceptiveness
- Aggression

To be diagnosed with this disorder, the person must have exhibited aspects of antisocial behavior prior to age 15, such as aggression toward people or animals, theft, or property destruction (APA, 2013).



#### DID YOU KNOW

While only adults over the age of 18 can be diagnosed with personality disorders under *DSM-5* criteria, personality disorders are commonly attached to youth in order to secure treatment.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Antisocial Personality Disorder**

A disorder characterized by continual remorseless disregard for the rights of others, including repeated criminal acts, impulsiveness, irresponsibility, deceptiveness, and aggression.

## 1b. Psychopathy

Although **psychopathy** is not recognized in the *DSM-5*, it is associated with conceptualizations of ASPD. Psychopathy is characterized by two main factors:

1. Interpersonal and emotional traits, such as manipulation, grandiosity, and impaired empathy
2. Antisocial behavior and lifestyle traits, such as impulsive behavior and sensation-seeking

Psychopathy is defined by subjective emotional and interpersonal criteria that are not part of ASPD, and because the *DSM* emphasizes observable, objective behavioral criteria, it is not part of the *DSM*. The “Psychopathy Checklist—Revised” (PCL-R), developed by Hare (2016), is the most commonly used measure for psychopathy.

The 20 traits assessed by the PCL-R score are as follows:

Glib and superficial charm	Grandiose (exaggeratedly high) estimation of self
Need for stimulation	Pathological lying
Cunning and manipulativeness	Lack of remorse or guilt
Shallow affect (superficial emotional responsiveness)	Callousness and lack of empathy
Parasitic lifestyle	Poor behavioral controls
Sexual promiscuity	Early behavior problems
Lack of realistic long-term goals	Impulsivity
Irresponsibility	Failure to accept responsibility for own actions
Many short-term marital relationships	Juvenile delinquency
Criminal versatility	Revocation of conditional release

Research indicates that psychopathy involves brain-based differences that impact emotional and cognitive functioning (Patrick, 2018). Two models are the current top explanations for this impaired emotional functioning (Smith & Lilienfeld, 2015):

1. The low fear model, which states that emotional deficits result from an impaired recognition/experience of fear (Lykken, 1995), leading to increased sensation-seeking and an inability to be deterred by a fear of punishment
2. The response modulation hypothesis, which describes an individual's impaired ability to modify their behavior once they have focused their attention, even though the situation might warrant a behavior change (Newman et al., 1987)

Psychopathy is associated with high reoffending rates (Shepherd et al., 2018) and treatment resistance (Olver et al., 2011). For these reasons, psychopathy has been an important consideration for decision-making in the justice system, with a diagnosis of psychopathy leading to dangerous offender classifications and indefinite sentencing. In recent years, though, there have been concerns about how psychopathy has been defined and utilized in the justice system (Skeem et al., 2011), leading to alternative conceptualizations of psychopathy (Lilienfeld & Widows, 2005).



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Psychopathy**

A disorder marked by deficient emotional responses, lack of empathy, and poor behavioral controls, commonly resulting in persistent antisocial deviance and criminal behavior.

### **1c. Psychosis**

**Psychosis** is a condition that impacts how your brain processes information; it is present in some severe mental illnesses, including schizophrenia and mood disorders such as depression and bipolar disorder. The vast majority of individuals experiencing breaks from the shared reality of the general population do not engage in aggressive or criminal behavior.



#### DID YOU KNOW

People with mental illnesses are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators (Elbogen & Johnson, 2009).

Psychosis can generate specific hallucinations, such as hearing voices or seeing things that do not exist, and delusions, where a person experiences strongly held but false beliefs that may include paranoid ideas about being persecuted (APA, 2013). In rare cases, the nature of the hallucination or delusion can lead to inappropriate “self-defense” or other criminal behavior that would be understandable in light of the beliefs held during a psychotic break (Chan & Shehtman, 2019).

Although some psychoses can lead to violent behavior, far more often, people with active mental illnesses are charged with minor offenses that begin a long cycle of involvement with criminal justice systems.

↗ EXAMPLE A major depressive episode with catatonic features in a homeless person looks very much like loitering in the eyes of the police.

One study found that 40% of police encounters with people with mental illness involve nonviolent crime, and another 40% involve noncriminal mental health crises, bizarre behaviors, or criminal victimizations. Conversely, only two in 10 police interactions with people with mental illness involved any type of violent crime (Brink et al., 2011).



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Psychosis

A condition that impacts how your brain processes information and is present in some severe mental illnesses, including schizophrenia and mood disorders such as depression and bipolar disorder.

### 1d. Substance Abuse Disorders

**Substance abuse disorders** are characterized by difficulties in reducing substance use, causing problems in one's personal and work life (APA, 2013). Because many substances are in themselves illegal to possess and use, the defining behavior of substance abuse is criminalized if the addictive substance is restricted.

Aside from the inherent criminal behavior of using a prohibited substance, the **tripartite conceptual model of the drugs/violence nexus** (Goldstein, 1985) outlines three main ways that substance use is connected to violent criminal behavior:

Type of Crime	Relation to Substance Use
Systemic crime	This refers to crime related to the drug trade, including selling drugs and the violence associated with that.
Economically compulsive crime	This results from people engaging in money-making crimes to support their substance use.
Psychopharmacologically driven crime	The substance itself produces an effect on the brain and behavior, resulting in crime or violence.

Legal codes that criminalize addiction set the stage for systemic and economically compulsive crimes:

- If access to drugs that people are addicted to is against the law, unlawful organizations that provide drugs to people with addictions become highly profitable and are maintained through violence, if necessary.
- If people addicted to drugs are less likely to have the ability to support themselves through legal means, they will be more likely to commit crimes to meet their needs.

☞ EXAMPLE Countries such as Portugal have been decriminalizing drugs in favor of on-demand treatment, resulting in reductions in drug use and related crimes.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### Substance Abuse Disorder

A treatable mental disorder that affects a person's brain and behavior, leading to their inability to control their use of substances like legal or illegal drugs, alcohol, or medications.

##### Tripartite Conceptual Model of the Drugs/Violence Nexus

A conceptual framework used for examining the drugs/violence nexus. Drugs and violence are seen as being related in three possible ways: the psychopharmacological, the economically compulsive, and the systemic.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about **mental illness and criminality**. People with mental illnesses are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Unfortunately, many people who should be treated by mental health professionals end up under the supervision of the criminal justice system.

You then learned about several disorders that are common among individuals with mental illness who are also involved in the justice system. **Antisocial personality disorder** is often linked with violence, and **psychopathy** is a disorder associated with reoffending. Individuals with **psychosis** are also more apt to have their behavior criminalized, while people with **substance abuse disorders** often find themselves involved in the system as a result of either committing a crime under the influence or being arrested for a crime due to the illegal nature of many substances.

In the next lesson, we will look into cognitive behavioral theories that lead to criminal behavior.

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## TERMS TO KNOW

### Antisocial Personality Disorder

A disorder characterized by continual remorseless disregard for the rights of others, including repeated criminal acts, impulsiveness, irresponsibility, deceptiveness, and aggression.

### **Psychopathy**

A disorder marked by deficient emotional responses, lack of empathy, and poor behavioral controls, commonly resulting in persistent antisocial deviance and criminal behavior.

### **Psychosis**

A condition that impacts how your brain processes information and is present in some severe mental illnesses, including schizophrenia and mood disorders such as depression and bipolar disorder.

### **Substance Abuse Disorder**

A treatable mental disorder that affects a person's brain and behavior, leading to their inability to control their use of substances like legal or illegal drugs, alcohol, or medications.

### **Tripartite Conceptual Model of the Drugs/Violence Nexus**

A conceptual framework used for examining the drugs/violence nexus. Drugs and violence are seen as being related in three possible ways: the psychopharmacological, the economically compulsive, and the systemic.

# Cognitive and Cognitive-Behavioral Theories of Criminal Behavior

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the development of cognitive theories of behavior in the field of criminology and how cognitive processes relate to behavior. Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

- 1. Cognitive Theories**
  - 1a. Conditioning**
  - 1b. Techniques of Neutralization**

## 1. Cognitive Theories

**Cognitive theories** of criminal behavior look for faults in cognitive processes or mental development or a defective moral compass. Rather than focusing on behavior as an expression of individual personality or development, cognitive and cognitive-behavioral theories look at the way thoughts and feelings influence human behavior.

In the context of these theories, we will look at the idea of conditioning and how people's behavior is shaped by rewards and punishments. We will also look at the techniques of neutralization, which are ways that people justify engaging in criminal or deviant behavior.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Cognitive Theories

The criminological theories that focus on the idea that how and what people think leads to certain thoughts and beliefs, which affect how they behave.

#### 1a. Conditioning

The behavioral component of cognitive-behavioral psychology focuses on how rewards and punishment shape behavior—a process called **conditioning**. We discussed rewards and punishments when we looked at learning theory in a previous lesson.

Here is a table on positive and negative conditioning for review:

+

	Add Stimulus	Remove Stimulus
More	<u>Positive reinforcement</u> : A stimulus is added to increase a desired behavior (e.g., a candy)—I am more likely to do this behavior again.	<u>Negative reinforcement</u> : A stimulus is removed to increase a desired behavior (e.g., my parents take away my electronic device at the dinner table so that I eat my dinner)—I am more likely to do this behavior again.
Less	<u>Positive punishment</u> : A stimulus is added to decrease an undesired behavior (e.g., spanking)—I am less likely to do this behavior again.	<u>Negative punishment</u> : A stimulus is removed to decrease an undesired behavior (e.g., losing electronic privileges after skipping class)—I am less likely to do this behavior again.

In this section, we will go into further detail about the cognitive processes behind conditioning. Recall that positive reinforcement occurs by receiving a positive stimulus, while negative reinforcement is the removal of a negative stimulus. Consistent reinforcement should result in an increase in the reinforced behavior.

⇒ EXAMPLE Criminal behavior is more likely to reoccur when crime leads to a positive outcome (e.g., obtaining cash or drugs) or removes a current negative stimulus (e.g., the stress of being unable to feed your family).

Punishment has the opposite effect. Positive punishment occurs by receiving a negative stimulus, while negative punishment involves having a positive stimulus taken away. Consistent punishment should result in a decrease in the punished behavior.

⇒ EXAMPLE Administering a negative stimulus (e.g., incarceration in an unpleasant space) or removing a positive stimulus (e.g., loss of access to friends and family) is meant to reduce criminal behavior.

In real life, perfectly consistent reinforcement and punishment are rarely achievable. Intermittent conditioning occurs when the same behavior has unpredictable results.

⇒ EXAMPLE The behavior “attempt to rob a corner store” will be repeated many times if experience tells the individual there is a higher chance of a reward than a punishment and that there is a neutral outcome most of the time.

Intermittently reinforced behavior, meaning behavior that is sometimes but not always rewarded, is the most difficult kind of behavior to extinguish (Skinner, 1963).



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Conditioning

A process focusing on how rewards and punishment shape behavior.

## 1b. Techniques of Neutralization

The cognitive aspect of cognitive-behavioral psychology examines how reinforcement and punishment turn into thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes that maintain and justify behavior.



### THINK ABOUT IT

Our thoughts are affected by witnessing what happens to others as well as our own experiences. Can you think of a time when you engaged in any of the techniques of neutralization listed below to justify your own behavior?

If criminal behavior provides reliable or intermittent rewards or relief, a person can develop rationalized antisocial attitudes. **Techniques of neutralization** refer to a set of rationalizations that individuals may use to temporarily justify deviant or morally questionable behavior. These techniques are often used to reconcile the conflict between societal norms and one's own actions. The theory of neutralization was first introduced by sociologists Gresham Sykes and David Matza in the 1950s.

See the table to learn about the five techniques of neutralization (Sykes & Matza, 1957):

Technique	Description
Denial of responsibility	Individuals may claim they had no control over their actions, attributing the responsibility to external factors such as peer pressure, societal circumstances, or authority figures.
Denial of injury	Offenders may downplay the harm caused by their actions, arguing that no real harm was done or that the victim deserved the consequences. This allows them to diminish the moral and social significance of their behavior.
Denial of the victim	Perpetrators may dehumanize or delegitimize their victims, making it easier for them to rationalize their actions. By casting doubt on the worth or innocence of the victim, individuals can distance themselves from the moral implications of their behavior.
Condemnation of the condemners	This technique involves criticizing those who criticize the offender. By shifting the focus onto the perceived wrongdoing of others, individuals attempt to deflect attention from their own actions and reduce feelings of guilt.
Appeal to higher loyalties	Offenders may argue that their actions were justified because they were committed in the service of a higher cause or loyalty. This could include loyalty to a group, family, or ideology, providing a rationale for deviating from societal norms.

Antisocial attitudes are more likely to be acted upon when individuals are surrounded by others with similar perspectives and with whom they identify. In other words, associating with others who have similar antisocial attitudes makes acting on these attitudes more likely. There is a rejection of conventions, including the values of work, education, and legal institutions (e.g., the police and the courts). These techniques may be used alone or in combination to rationalize and justify deviant behavior. However, not everyone who engages in deviant

behavior will necessarily employ these techniques. They simply provide insight into the cognitive processes that individuals may undergo to reconcile their actions with societal norms.



## TERM TO KNOW

### Techniques of Neutralization

A set of rationalizations that individuals may use to temporarily justify deviant or morally questionable behavior.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about **cognitive theories**, which focus on how thoughts and feelings influence human behavior, especially criminal behavior. You first looked in depth at **conditioning** and how rewards and punishment shape people's behavior.

You also looked at **techniques of neutralization** or the different ways that people justify deviant or morally questionable behavior. Techniques of neutralization are used to reconcile the conflict between societal norms and one's own actions.

In the next lesson, you will have the opportunity to apply psychological theories to a case study.

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## TERMS TO KNOW

### Cognitive Theories

The criminological theories that focus on the idea that how and what people think leads to certain thoughts and beliefs, which affect how they behave.

### Conditioning

A process focusing on how rewards and punishment shape behavior.

### Techniques of Neutralization

A set of rationalizations that individuals may use to temporarily justify deviant or morally questionable behavior.

# Case Analysis: Corporate Crime

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will determine whether or not psychological theories apply to a corporate crime case. Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

1. [Rolling Hills PD Explores Corporate Crime](#)
  - 1a. [The Case of a Con Artist](#)
  - 1b. [The Debrief](#)

## 1. Rolling Hills PD Explores Corporate Crime

We looked at many psychological theories that focused on the flaw in the individual and the patterns of personality or common traits that have developed in those who have committed crimes.

[Click on the plus sign to review temperaments:](#)



The two temperaments associated with criminal behavior are as follows:

1. High sensation-seeking combined with low self-control, which leads to impulsive risk-taking
2. Negative emotionality, which leads to increased hostility

[Click on the plus sign to review the Myers-Briggs personality type indicator:](#)



Type	Traits
ISTJ	Quiet, serious, logical, and loyal
ISFJ	Quiet, friendly, responsible, and conscientious
INFJ	Connected, insightful, values driven, and decisive
INTJ	Creative, driven, visionary, and independent
ISTP	Tolerant, flexible, solution oriented, and efficient

ISFP	Quiet, friendly, sensitive, kind, and conflict averse
INFP	Idealistic, values driven, curious, and adaptable
INTP	Logical, abstract, quiet, and analytical
ESTP	Pragmatic, energetic, spontaneous, and active
ESFP	Outgoing, accepting, realistic, and adaptable
ENFP	Warm, imaginative, and appreciative
ENTP	Quick, ingenious, resourceful, and outspoken
ESTJ	Practical, decisive, organized, and systematic
ESFJ	Warmhearted, harmonious, loyal, and helpful
ENFJ	Empathic, responsible, sociable, and facilitative
ENTJ	Frank, decisive, well informed, and a leader

Click on the plus sign to review Baumrind's parenting styles:



An authoritative style fosters higher levels of self-control, which is a protective factor against criminal behavior. Rejecting-neglecting parenting is most linked to violent behavior. Parental monitoring, which can be supportive or controlling, has also been linked to criminal outcomes. Harsh control (physical/verbal punishment and intrusiveness), low warmth, and low monitoring are particularly related to criminal and violent behavior.

Parenting Styles	Characteristics
<b>Authoritative</b>	High warmth and high behavioral control. Characterized by firm rules but open communication and rational discussion about those rules, coupled with emotional support.
<b>Authoritarian</b>	Low warmth and high/harsh control. Characterized by rigid rules, the expectation that those rules are followed with no questions asked, and low support and a reliance on punishment to enforce rules.
<b>Permissive</b>	High warmth and low control, with few rules or expectations. Parents generally are warm and tolerant of their children's behavior but with few boundaries.
<b>Rejecting-neglecting</b>	Low on both warmth and control. The parent is uninvolved and, if the neglect is severe, it becomes abusive.

Can personality traits and certain pathways in a person's life explain a corporate crime?

## CONVERSATION BETWEEN COWORKERS

"The study of the human mind has always fascinated me."



"Early theorists like Freud are influential even today."



"Yes, let's look at a case in which the perpetrator studied psychology."



### 1a. The Case of a Con Artist

Watch and listen as Detective Henson and Professor Joon look into a case of a fake identity.



WATCH

### 1b. The Debrief

Detective Henson and Professor Joon will see how elements of psychological theories fit into this profile of a con artist.

## CONVERSATION BETWEEN COWORKERS

"How did he get into scamming people? What were his motives?"



"Can we cut it down to just his personality? He seemed to get a rush getting away with cons."



"Sensation-seeking? Definitely. We could also talk about the relationship with his parents."



"What relationship? It seems like they were absent."



"Exactly. He was desperately seeking something."



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you watched and listened as the **Rolling Hills PD explored corporate crime**. Aspects of the perpetrator's personality traits, along with his relationships with his family and peers, developed his propensity toward manipulation and criminal behavior in this **case of a con artist**.

Just like Detective Henson and Professor Joon did in the **debrief**, you will see how modern criminologists use the elements of psychological theories in the next lesson.

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# Critiques of Psychological Theories

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the limitations of psychological theories of crime. Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

1. Critiques of Individual Psychological Theories
2. Critiques of Mental Illness
3. Critiques of Cognitive-Behavioral Theories

## 1. Critiques of Individual Psychological Theories

Individual psychological theories of crime focus on understanding criminal behavior through the lens of individual characteristics, such as personality. While these theories have contributed significantly to the field of criminology, they are not without criticisms.

Critics argue that individual psychological theories overemphasize individual factors, neglecting the impact of social, economic, and cultural factors when looking at why people commit crime.

→ EXAMPLE Factors such as poverty and inequality are important when understanding criminality.

However, these factors are overlooked in purely individual-focused theories (Kubrin et al., 2009). Moreover, some critics say that these theories are overly deterministic, meaning they suggest that individuals are predisposed to criminal behavior based solely on their psychological traits. This view does not consider the role that free will plays when someone decides whether or not to commit a crime.

## 2. Critiques of Mental Illness

There have been many critiques related to linking mental illness with crime. For one, the link between specific mental illnesses, such as antisocial personality disorder, psychopathy, and psychosis, and criminal behavior has been a subject of debate. Critics argue that associating these disorders with crime can lead to overgeneralization and stigmatization of people with the disorders. Not everyone with one of these disorders engages in criminal behavior, and most individuals with criminal tendencies do not have one of these disorders. The misconception that anyone suffering from mental illness is a criminal can lead to the overrepresentation of people with these disorders in the criminal justice system.

Additionally, there is debate over the importance of biological and environmental factors in the development of both mental health disorders and criminal behavior. Some critics argue that focusing solely on biological factors, such as genetics and brain abnormalities, oversimplifies the relationship between genetics and environment. Environmental factors, such as childhood trauma and socioeconomic conditions, also play a significant role in shaping behavior and whether or not someone commits a crime.

Furthermore, establishing a causal relationship between mental health disorders and criminal behavior is challenging. While there is a correlation between the two, it is not clear whether mental health disorders cause criminal behavior or if they share common risk factors.

⤓ EXAMPLE Some individuals with a mental health disorder may engage in criminal activities, but criminal behavior is multifaceted, and other factors contribute to its manifestation (Kubrin et al., 2009).

Similarly, there have been criticisms of linking substance abuse disorder to criminality. Critics argue that while there is a correlation between substance abuse and criminal behavior, it does not necessarily imply causation. Most people who use substances do not engage in criminal activities, and not all criminal behavior is directly linked to substance abuse. Again, underlying factors such as socioeconomic conditions, mental health issues, and environmental stressors also contribute to criminality.

Furthermore, associating substance abuse with criminality can lead to the stigmatization of individuals with addiction issues (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2022). This stigma can hinder their ability to seek help, access treatment, and reintegrate into society, perpetuating a cycle of substance abuse and criminal involvement. Similarly, criminalizing substance abuse can exacerbate the problem by pushing individuals into the criminal justice system rather than providing them with the necessary support and treatment. Critics argue for a shift toward a public health approach that emphasizes treatment, harm reduction, and rehabilitation over punitive measures.

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### 3. Critiques of Cognitive-Behavioral Theories

A critique of cognitive-behavioral theories is that many of the principles of cognitive-behavioral psychology have been established through what is known as “WEIRD research”—research that exclusively draws participants from university students in Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic societies (Henrich et al., 2010). As a result, it remains to be seen if the findings can be generalized to the wider population and across cultures.

⤓ EXAMPLE Participants are often White male offenders, raising doubts about the findings' applicability to female offenders and other diverse groups (Hart, 2016).

Moreover, cognitive-behavioral approaches assume that prosocial, conventional behavior is the preferred and rational path forward for people, leading to a successful and law-abiding life. Theorists assign personality traits and values such as adaptive or maladaptive and rational or irrational. The assumption that behavior that upholds the status quo is adaptive and rational ignores findings indicating that the behavior of individuals from marginalized groups has significantly different positive and negative conditioning than that of individuals from groups that have easier access to wealth, education, and opportunity.

➡ EXAMPLE For individuals who have experienced surveillance by police, are threatened and powerless during police encounters, and are significantly more likely to be arrested and prosecuted for minor crimes, negative perceptions of police and the justice system may make the rejection of convention a rational decision (Nordberg et al., 2018).



### BIG IDEA

Let's compare the concepts, proponents, assumptions, and limitations of both the biological trait and biosocial theories from this lesson.

	Concepts	Proponents	Assumptions	Limitations
Individual Psychological Theories	Psychological characteristics; nature vs. nurture	Sigmund Freud; Carl Jung	There are psychological traits or factors that make someone more apt to commit crime.	These theories do not consider other factors that play a role in criminality, such as social or environmental factors.
Mental Illness	Anti-social personality disorder; psychopathy; psychosis; substance abuse disorders		People with mental illness are more apt to be involved in the criminal justice system.	These theories are overly deterministic. These ideas lead to stigma around mental health.
Cognitive Behavioral Theories	Conditioning; techniques of neutralization	Gresham Sykes and David Matza	These theories assume that people with cognitive issues are more apt to engage in crime.	Findings are limited to research conducted in westernized countries.



### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the criticisms and limitations of psychological theories of crime. One of the main **critiques of individual psychological theories** is that they overemphasize individual factors and neglect the impact of social and economic factors when looking at why people commit crime.

There have also been many **critiques of mental illness** and its relationship with crime. Doing so can lead to overgeneralization and stigmatization of people with various mental health disorders. Most people with mental illness do not engage in crime, so it is crucial not to assume that everyone with a mental illness is doing so. Critics argue that mental illness and substance abuse should be addressed as health concerns in order to get people the help they need.

Lastly, one of the primary **critiques of cognitive-behavioral theories** is that research on these theories has mainly been conducted on White men, so the results may not apply to other populations. In the

next lesson, we will move away from psychological theories of crime and start learning about critical theories of crime.

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# The Rise of Critical Criminology

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will be introduced to the concepts and ideas about the connection between crime and punishment presented in critical criminology. Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

### [1. Introduction to Critical Criminology](#)

## 1. Introduction to Critical Criminology

**Critical criminology** encompasses a set of concepts and ideas examining how crime and criminal justice agencies are used as a form of social power that benefits some groups over others. It investigates inequality by examining the oppressive nature of criminal justice agencies, law, and the social practices of criminalization and marginalization. That said, defining critical criminology is a difficult task because almost any form of criminology that attempts to interrogate power and investigate dominant social institutions could be construed as critical criminology. By no means can we settle any debates about exactly what critical criminology includes and excludes in the coming lessons. However, the next few lessons outline some of the key points of critical criminology.

Given the contention of its definition, critical criminology scholarship represents a break from the orthodoxy or custom of the discipline of criminology (Tierney, 2006). Critical criminology initially evolved alongside criminological theories loosely called “new deviancy” that proposed new theories of crime such as labeling theory, which you learned about in the last unit, and was a significant part of a general move in the social sciences away from the dominant positivistic **paradigm** of criminology (Tierney, 2006).

In general, the dominant paradigm (traditional positivist criminology) did the following:

- Focused on identifying and studying causes of crime that could be corrected
- Assumed the purpose of criminological knowledge was to control crime
- Had the effect of legitimizing control over the lower classes and normalizing punishment

Criminologist Micheal Lynch (2000) found that this dominant knowledge was rarely questioned and became standardized in criminology. Critical criminology questioned this normalized idea of crime and justice and its connection to crime control and punishment. It also encouraged research that questioned this idea and focused on thinking more broadly about crime in society (Martel et al., 2006).



## HINT

Criminologist Robert Ratner (2006) refers to this as “the push to construct an alternative to the ruling paradigm of a state-saturated field.” By this, Ratner means we should question what crime means in society and the government’s power to punish people considered to be criminals.

Most critical criminology adopts a critical social science anti-positivist position that does the following:

- Examines normative boundaries of criminological knowledge and its use
- Focuses on the big picture instead of individual determinants of people’s behavior (e.g., trauma, upbringing, psychological traits)

This focus allows scholars to do these things:

- Deconstruct dominant knowledge
- Engage in social change by questioning established ways of thinking or knowing

Criminologist Andrew Sayer (2009) discusses denaturalizing dominant knowledge as a way to propose that another world is possible and to rethink and reconstitute accepted ideas about how to administer justice (Kraska & Newman, 2011). Critical criminology is an attempt to investigate power relations and domination as they occur in social systems and social structures while providing alternatives to the existing power relations and dominant social institutions. Thus, critical criminology involves research and investigation, and it calls for activism and attempts to change things.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Critical Criminology

A group of perspectives in criminology that challenges traditional beliefs about crime and criminal justice.

### Paradigm

A typical example or pattern of something; a model.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you received an **introduction to critical criminology**. As you now know, it can be difficult to define critical criminology, but it encompasses ideas that look at criminology and criminal justice from the lens that some groups exert social power over others. Critical criminology focuses on inequalities and oppression related to the criminal justice system.

In the coming lessons, you will learn more about the history of critical criminology and some emerging ideas in this area.

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### TERMS TO KNOW

#### Critical Criminology

A group of perspectives in criminology that challenges traditional beliefs about crime and criminal justice.

#### Paradigm

A typical example or pattern of something; a model.

# Marxism

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about Karl Marx's contributions to critical criminology and the ideas of others who have built upon those contributions. Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

1. [Karl Marx, Conflict Theory, and Critical Criminology](#)
2. [Other Marxists and Early Critical Criminologists](#)

## 1. Karl Marx, Conflict Theory, and Critical Criminology

Most people would probably not identify Karl Marx as a criminologist, though he is often seen as a political economist, a critical historian of economics, and a sociologist. Marx's writings were concerned with the rise of social institutions during industrialization, which included the following:



- The development of criminal law
- The power of police and prisons
- The processes of criminalization

At the core of his work, Marx rejected the idea that societies operate based on a consensus, which we learned about in one of the first lessons of this course. Instead, he suggests that societies are full of conflict, which is often reflected in and stems from their relations to production.

Marx (2004) examines the mode of production of **capitalism** and explores the social formation that occurs alongside it. He argues there is nothing natural about

- The creation of private property (e.g., owning land or factories),
- The extraction of resources from the land (e.g., cutting trees or drilling oil), or
- The extraction of value from those resources (e.g., paying for gas or profiting from selling it).

Marx stated that our capitalist order is a political and economic one formed through attempts at social control of these processes of private property, extraction, and value. He claimed that the process of so-called **primitive accumulation**, or separating the producer from production, and the extraction of value from the resources

found in the land is only possible through the development of a state apparatus (e.g., government) that supports capitalist exploitation. Part of that state apparatus, perhaps the main part, is social control agents such as police and prisons.

Marx (2004) argued that, instead of land being collectively governed and people benefiting in a collective way from the value of resources and land, the capitalist mode of production requires the expropriation of people from their land, their territory, and the resources found there. To achieve control of resources and land, social control agents of the state apparatus forcibly seize populations from the land to privatize it and its resources (such as lumber, oil, and minerals) for capitalist landowners.

Marx (2004) also wrote about **bloody legislation**, a swath of laws passed by the state apparatus in the 18th and 19th centuries in the Commonwealth countries that do two things:

1. They enable the creation of private property, thus enabling the privatization of wealth, value, resources, and land, creating a powerful capitalist class.
2. They are used against the working class and against the **lumpenproletariat** (underclass) who cannot work or choose not to work.

These laws force people to work in the capitalist mode of production in factories. If people choose not to work, bloody legislation is applied to them to criminalize and punish them. If persons are unhoused and move from region to region or from the country into the city because their land has been stolen from them by the capitalist class, they too have bloody legislation applied to them, specifically **vagabondage laws**. Laws are also passed to discourage labor organizing and resistance (Kuriakose & Iyer, 2021).

These laws were created to control the working class and the lumpenproletariat and to enforce the capitalist mode of production. Although Marx is usually not identified as a criminologist per se, his work offers a rich history and analysis of how the state apparatus was formed to support the capitalist mode of production and how criminal law emerged as a tool of control for elites. From a Marxist perspective, criminal law, police, and prisons exist to control the population; force people to work; and prevent people from equally sharing land, resources, and wealth. These ideas form the basis of **conflict theory**, which asserts that interpersonal conflicts influence human behavior and that crime arises from such conflicts.

It was not until the social and political upheaval of the 1960s, marked by events like the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the women's movement, that criminologists began scrutinizing the social conditions in the United States conducive to class conflict and crime. This period gave rise to early critical criminology, which is discussed in the section below.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Capitalism

An economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit.

### Primitive Accumulation

The historical process of separating the producer from the means of production.

### Bloody Legislation

Legislation that uses state power for its own ends, against workers and against the old, landed aristocracy.

#### Lumpenproletariat

The underclass of society.

#### Vagabondage Laws

Laws condemning people who refuse to work.

#### Conflict Theory

A theory suggesting that interpersonal conflicts influence human behavior and that crime arises from such conflicts.

## 2. Other Marxists and Early Critical Criminologists

A significant figure in early critical criminology, William Chambliss (1964), drew on Marx's ideas to analyze the origin of **vagrancy laws** and concluded that these laws were created to force people to work in factories and other places by criminalizing those who did not. These laws were pivotal in capital expansion, and Chambliss (1964) notes how different categories of "the criminal" were created as capitalism expanded. These included the following:



- Individuals who made and sold goods in traveling shows
- Those who organized gambling events
- Those who took goods that were in transit from one factory to another

Chambliss (1964) defined crime as "conduct that is defined and controlled by agents of the dominant economic class in a politically organized society, to benefit capitalism." To enforce these laws, the police, courts, and prisons are obviously necessary.



Another Marxist, Louis Althusser (1971), named this set of policing agencies "repressive state apparatuses" and defined them as bodies granted the legal right to use physical force to control the masses. These include the military, the police, the judiciary, and the prison system. It is argued that these bodies are used to enforce laws and to demand obedience to laws based on unfair expropriation. Generally, the presence of these institutions is enough to gain compliance, but when the unfairness of capitalism is questioned, these bodies engage in explicit legalized violence.

A Marxist criminologist named Richard Quinney (1978) argued that there are instrumental and structuralist Marxist positions:



- An **instrumental Marxist** position continues Marx's understanding that the state apparatus and criminal law exist as a direct result of capitalism to uphold capitalism and the capitalist mode of production.

- A **structuralist Marxist** position argues that governments are somewhat autonomous and are not simply installed by the owning class. Leo Panitch (1977) and Nico Poulantzas (1975) argue that the state acts on behalf of capital, not at its request. Theorists such as these suggest that although governments might pass laws that appear to help protect the population (e.g., minimum wage and labor law) and reduce the power of the owning class, *overall*, police and corrections operate to maintain the capitalist economy.

Structural Marxists agree that the law works to ensure capitalist accumulation and to maintain conditions where the generation of wealth is possible. Therefore, structural Marxists focus less on the coercive nature of law alone and more on the ideological function of law. Quinney and others examine how ideas of crime and criminals are shared in the general population.

Contemporary Marxists argue that ideologies are necessary to support and legitimize the actions of the state to enforce definitions of crime in law, policing, and corrections. These ideologies are often detached from the broader social system, and individuals are thought to be responsible for their behavior. Althusser (1971) called these institutions the **ideological state apparatus**. These concepts about crime include the following ideas:

- “Criminals are bad.”
- “Punishment is good and helpful.”
- “Law is equal.”

However, according to Marxist theory, laws are created to ensure capitalism continues to thrive and control the conduct of individuals who might threaten it. This is also known as **hegemony**, or when the ideas of the dominant class become the ideas of everyone (Gramsci, 1971).

Structuralists offer a compelling set of arguments about the law–society relationship. This includes how ideas of human rights and democracy are used to justify and legitimize oppressive law. Anatole France, a French novelist, captured this ideology of equality in his quote:

*“The Law in all its majestic impartiality forbids both rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread.”*

This quote speaks to the ideological dimension of law, which often clouds the exploitative relations of law itself. This ideology of capitalism and crime is the illusion that capitalism is noncoercive; therefore, the law itself is an ideological form (Reiman, 2013).

Another dimension of Marxism we find in critical criminology is the study of corporate crime or crimes of the powerful. Criminologist Sutherland (1949) distinguished between working-class crime and crimes of the elite or “white-collar crime.” The criminalization of both categories of acts is related to the act of becoming wealthy through investments and profits or **capital accumulation**:

- Working-class crimes, such as theft, uphold private property relations.
- Assault upholds the need for a healthy body to work.
- Crimes of the elite, such as fraud or insider trading, uphold “proper” relations of capital accumulation.

However, it is more difficult to criminalize the wrongdoings of the powerful.

➡ EXAMPLE Bitte and Snider (2015) found that police rarely enforce legislation that outlines the criminal liability of corporations.

Bitte (2012) contends that this type of legislation is rarely enforced for several reasons, including the idea that criminalizing the actions of capitalists is dangerous and could harm capital accumulation, thereby affecting jobs and profits.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Vagrancy Laws

Laws preventing people from begging.

### Instrumental Marxist

A theorist who views the state as the tool for the capitalist.

### Structural Marxist

A theorist who believes the law is not an exclusive domain of the rich but is used to maintain the interests of the capitalists' system and control members of any class threatening its existence.

### Ideological State Apparatus

An institution that spreads bourgeois ideology and ensures that the proletariat is in a state of false class consciousness.

### Hegemony

The political, economic, and military predominance of one state over other states.

### Capital Accumulation

The growth in wealth through investments or profits.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about **Karl Marx, conflict theory, and critical criminology**. Marx's work looked at the rise of social institutions during industrialization, including the development of criminal law and the power of the criminal justice system in society. Marx's work also examined capitalism's influence on society. He argued that our capitalist system was formed through attempts at social control and that the primary agents of social control are the police and prisons.

Additionally, Marx wrote about bloody legislation, or laws passed by the government to enable the creation of private property and the privatization of wealth, making a powerful capitalist class. These laws were also used against the working class, known as the lumpenproletariat, who could not work or chose not to work. In fact, vagabondage laws criminalized those who did not work during this period. Marx's ideas lead to conflict theory, which suggests that interpersonal conflicts influence human behavior and that crime arises from such conflicts.

Conflict theory set the stage for the ideas of **other Marxists and early critical criminologists**. William Chambliss expanded upon Marx's ideas, criticizing vagrancy laws, which also criminalized people who did not work. Chambliss and Louis Althusser spoke against the government and the criminal justice

system, suggesting that they were agencies intended to control the masses. Furthermore, Richard Quinney argued that there were both instrumental and structuralist Marxists. Instrumental Marxists believed that the government and criminal law existed because of capitalism. Structuralist Marxists argued that governments were somewhat autonomous and not simply installed by the owning class.

Contemporary Marxists suggest that ideologies are needed to support the actions of the state to enforce definitions of crime in law, policing, and corrections. They believe that laws were created to ensure that capitalism continued to control the conduct of people who might threaten it. They also refer to hegemony, or the notion that the ideas of the dominant class become the ideas of everyone else.

In the next tutorial, you will learn about post-structural ideas and how they have shaped critical criminology.

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- [Louis Althusser](#) | Author: Store Norske Lekiskon | License: CC
- [Richard Quinney](#) | Author: Encyclopædia Britannica | License: Attribute
- [William Chambliss](#) | Author: Rogerio.fdusp | License: CC



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Bloody Legislation

Legislation using state power for its own ends, against workers and against the old, landed aristocracy.

### Capital Accumulation

The growth in wealth through investments or profits.

### Capitalism

An economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit.

### Conflict Theory

Theory suggesting that interpersonal conflicts influence human behavior and that crime arises from such conflicts.

### Hegemony

The political, economic, and military predominance of one state over other states.

### Ideological State Apparatus

An institution that spreads bourgeois ideology and ensures that the proletariat is in a state of false class consciousness.

### Instrumental Marxist

A theorist who views the state as the tool for the capitalist.

### Lumpenproletariat

The underclass of society.

### Primitive Accumulation

The historical process of separating the producer from the means of production.

### **Structural Marxist**

A theorist who believes the law is not an exclusive domain of the rich but is used to maintain the interests of the capitalists' system and control members of any class threatening its existence.

### **Vagabondage Laws**

Laws condemning people who refuse to work.

### **Vagrancy Laws**

Laws preventing people from begging.



## PEOPLE TO KNOW

### **Karl Marx**

German philosopher, economist, political theorist, historian, sociologist, journalist, and revolutionary socialist.

### **Louis Althusser**

French Marxist philosopher.

### **Richard Quinney**

American sociologist and critical criminologist.

### **William Chambliss**

American criminologist and sociologist.

# Post-Structural Marxism

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the ideas of Michel Foucault and other post-structural Marxists and their impact on the field of criminology. Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

- 1. Foucault and Power**
- 2. The Phases of Foucauldian Thought**
  - 2a. The Archaeological Phase**
  - 2b. The Genealogical Phase**
  - 2c. The Phase of Ethics**
- 3. Garland, Governmentality, and the Culture of Control**

## 1. Foucault and Power

Another key figure in critical criminology is Michel Foucault. While not a Marxist, the influence of Marx is evident in his work. As discussed in the previous lesson, for Marx, power was always connected to economic power and how it manifested at the level of the state. Marx's contemporaries focused on how bloody legislation and state repression uphold capitalist relations of capitalist social structures. Foucault, considered by many a proponent of **post-structuralism**, reconsidered how power works and viewed power through language and how we think and know about things or, in other words, how power works *between* people, not on people.



### HINT

What makes Foucault's work important is that he extended the analysis of power away from economic oppression and instead thought about power circulating between people and groups or institutions.

Foucault rejected the idea that people were duped into submission by ideology, arguing that people actively engaged with power daily. For him, power operates like a network of relations that we are all a part of. This encompasses more than economic power and includes power in the form of language and action. He argued that thinking about power this way encourages us to understand it. If we are interested in investigating power relations, turning to Foucault helps broaden our scope of analysis.



### TERM TO KNOW

## Post-structuralism

An intellectual movement that expresses the belief that individual meaning and values are taken from the milieu and the common meanings of a group of individuals so that their reality is contextualized, socially constructed, and mediated by language and discourse.

# 2. The Phases of Foucauldian Thought

Foucault's arguments changed over time. Although it is difficult to periodize Foucault's work, some have argued that there are three movements or phases to Foucault's thinking:

1. The archaeological phase
2. The genealogical phase
3. The phase of ethics

## 2a. The Archaeological Phase

In the **archaeological phase**, Foucault (1972) was interested in the emergence of discourses and how these are translated into techniques or methods of power. In this case, power is not thought of as repressive but is based on knowledge and takes the form of charts, maps, diagrams, and tables that make human activity understandable. A **discourse** is defined as the general domain of classifications about a topic or issue.

⤓ **EXAMPLE** There is a discourse of child development (i.e., benchmarks of biological, emotional, and psychological changes occurring in young people as they grow) or a discourse of victimhood (i.e., the condition of being hurt, damaged, or made to suffer).

Grounded in this way of thinking, rather than seeing law simply as a bloody mechanism or a mechanism of force, Foucault understood law as a discourse or a mechanism for categorizing and classifying people, and he used developments in the human and natural sciences to do this.

Discourse is like a system of categories captured in language that creates the way we perceive reality. Foucault said discourse is both an instrument and an effect of power. In the study of criminology, discourse is important.

⤓ **EXAMPLE** Discourses that come from and are used by courts and the law operate as machines, trying to produce truth out of complexity and categorizing human beings in particular ways.

Therefore, discourse becomes a transfer point of power relations between groups (such as prisoners, advocates, and politicians) and how a social issue gets framed or thought about as a problem.

⤓ **EXAMPLE** The criminal could be viewed as a category. Public discourses about criminals as immoral, violent, troubled, abnormal, and to be feared or avoided appear commonsense. These discourses become entwined with discourses of law, punishment, and justice.

This language extends beyond the criminal justice system, and we can examine how the criminal is amplified and reinforced in crime literature and media that feed on the fascination with the sensationalistic imagery of criminal life. We can focus on how these notions of criminality inscribe meaning and play a central role in historical and contemporary social and cultural life (Atack, 2001).

**Archaeological Phase**

A phase in Foucault's thinking that was interested in the emergence of ideas and how they are translated into methods of power.

**Discourse**

The general domain of classifications related to a topic.

## 2b. The Genealogical Phase

The second phase of Foucault's work was the **genealogical phase**. Foucault (1975) was interested not only in the techniques of classification but also in how these types of classifications or discourses turn into different mechanisms of discipline and normalization. He examined how techniques of discipline and normalization that developed in the criminal justice system developed and operated in parallel ways in other institutions such as schools, factories, hospitals, and asylums. He detailed the historical development of timetables that organize one's day and discipline one's activity.

**IN CONTEXT**

In prisons, prisoners are subjected to a timetable that structures their day, requiring them to rise, eat, work, and sleep at certain times. This disciplinary timetable was used in numerous social institutions that developed around the same time. Schools used timetables to organize the day and discipline students into routines. Factories used timetables to order shifts and ensure the discipline of workers. Foucault argued that all these places tend to resemble one another to the extent that they deploy similar techniques of discipline and normalization.

In his key genealogical work, *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault focused on a detailed history of how punishment changes from the body of the condemned (e.g., hanging or beheading) to the soul of the convicted (e.g., therapy, reflection, or confinement).

⤓ EXAMPLE In the primary punishing institution, prison, the soul of the convicted is no longer tortured in public, but instead it is subjected to hierarchical observation, normalizing judgments, and practices of discipline.

Such practices and techniques of punishment eventually become normalized. These techniques of disciplinary power are not about the use of the bloody power of the state on the individual but how things such as a daily schedule and the use of surveillance become the mechanisms people find themselves exposed to and how institutions, programs, and policies are created. This approach is nuanced enough to understand how domination operates and develops in different ways in various social settings. For Foucault, power and domination are not limited to the state. There are power relations operating that do not simply stem from law or from the government but are actually located in individual relationships (e.g., guard/prisoner or lawyer/accused), though they may reinforce the power relations at some points in time. The terms and processes Foucault advanced allow critical criminologists to locate power relations and domination in many sites in a genealogical way.



## TERM TO KNOW

### Genealogical Phase

A phase in Foucault's thinking that examined how discourses turn into mechanisms of normalization.

## 2c. The Phase of Ethics

The third phase of Foucault's work is often referred to as the **phase of ethics**, where Foucault (1990) turned from an interest in the genealogy of disciplinary institutions to self-control or self-discipline and ultimately to how individuals engage in "care of the self" or make themselves up as people, or what he called an "ethical self." Foucault was interested in how people govern themselves in a free society, how we make ourselves into members of society, and how we control our own behavior.

Foucault was careful to note that self-governance does not happen in a vacuum. It may happen in relation to the forms of knowledge he uncovered in his archaeological work or in relation to the discourses he investigated in his genealogical work. This raises interesting questions, such as how we make ourselves into subjects of law, including being or not being a law-abiding citizen. He thought that although we seemingly have the freedom to control our own actions (e.g., freely obey the law), he outlined that these choices are not truly free and that we are "governed from a distance" by the discourses and knowledge that we experience.

Foucault's work allows us to think about power as an intersection between some knowledge about something and techniques for organizing the behavior of others and ourselves. He called this **governmentality**, which is the analysis of who can govern and who is governed and how our own and other activities are shaped (Foucault, 2011). Foucault offered this concept as a tool for looking at the intersection of these different phases of his work. The goal is to examine how a governmental rationality or classificatory system intersects with the way a whole population starts to govern itself.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Phase of Ethics

A phase in Foucault's thinking that looked at how individuals engage as people and govern themselves in society.

### Governmentality

The analysis of who can govern and who is governed.

## 3. Garland, Governmentality, and the Culture of Control

David Garland (2001) picked up on Foucault's concept of governmentality and his method of genealogy. He analyzed how crime is problematized and controlled by examining the structure of the crime control apparatus that emerged from cultural, social, and economic shifts in society. Garland linked Foucault's idea of the self-governing subject and how power creates people to the history of crime control policies in the United States and Britain between 1970 and 2000.

He was particularly interested in how the penal welfare state that was designed to assess, diagnose, and treat offenders changed into a sector of crime control characterized by the rise of prevention and security apparatuses. He detailed how the system moved from a system of punishment and rehabilitative justice to one of safety and risk management. He also discussed the rise of the victims' rights movements and interest groups that call on the criminal justice system to address social problems.



In the transformation of **penal welfarism**, Garland (2001) outlined how rehabilitation gets redefined away from the offender's needs to the safety of the victim and the protection of society.

⤵ **EXAMPLE** An offender who committed a crime because they suffered from addiction may be given community treatment under penal rehabilitation; however, if that prisoner rates as high risk on a risk assessment tool, they could be incarcerated, where they could be more easily managed.

This transformation affects how prisoners are treated in prisons, and where they are tracked, monitored, and controlled, based on the risk they are said to pose to society at large. This process often includes the use of tools and knowledge, such as risk categories, which Garland suggests are ways to "govern offenders from a distance." This is accompanied by a change in normative criminology to study the criminology of everyday life and the criminology of the other, which is based on the desire for expressive justice, zero tolerance, and individual safety. Such interventions are assessed based on cost–benefit analyses and techniques of managerialism in which the point of crime control is to manage risk.

Garland (2001) detailed how these changes occur as political, cultural, and economic structures take on a **neoliberal** form. The term "neoliberal" refers to advocating for free market capitalism, deregulation, and a reduction in government spending. These changes result in different forms of governmental power (e.g., new types of punishment), differences in how we govern our own conduct and the conduct of others, and differences in how we make ourselves up within these new sets of social relations. For the criminal justice system, Garland argued that a new culture of crime control changes the way we think about people who break the law; we begin to see them not as people who need rehabilitation but as others who pose a risk and as delinquents to be feared and controlled. This changes the way we think about crime and the criminogenic situation as one to be managed using law and order practices, securitizing places and spaces using more aggressive surveillance practices. Garland argues that this new culture of control does not help communities become safe spaces but instead makes us afraid of those around us.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Penal Welfarism

A theory in the study of criminal justice that holds that prisoners should have the right and the positive motivation to gain opportunities for advancement within the criminal justice system.

### Neoliberal

The favoring of policies that promote free market capitalism, deregulation, and reduction in government spending.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you first learned about **Foucault's views on power**. Foucault reconsidered how power works, seeing it as a force working between people rather than on people. Instead of being a form of oppression, he thought that power was a network of relations that we are all part of.

There are three **phases of Foucauldian thought**. First was the **archaeological phase**, which was interested in the emergence of discourses and how they are translated into techniques or methods of power. Discourse is the general domain of classifications related to a topic, and it can be used for a variety of classifications, including crime. The second phase was the **genealogical phase**, which examined how discourses turn into mechanisms of normalization, which is often seen in prisons. Lastly, in the **phase of ethics**, Foucault looked at how individuals engage as people and govern themselves in society. Foucault's work was concerned with governmentality, or the analysis of who can govern and who is governed.

You then learned about **Garland's views on governmentality and the culture of control**. David Garland expanded upon Foucault's ideas to look at how crime is controlled, especially in prisons, by examining the cultural, social, and economic shifts in society.

In the next lesson, we will move away from post-structuralism and look at some emergent elements of critical criminology.

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## ATTRIBUTIONS

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## TERMS TO KNOW

### Archaeological Phase

A phase in Foucault's thinking that was interested in the emergence of ideas and how they are translated into methods of power.

### Discourse

The general domain of classifications related to a topic.

### Genealogical Phase

A phase in Foucault's thinking that examined how discourses turn into mechanisms of normalization.

### Governmentality

The analysis of who can govern and who is governed.

### Neoliberal

The favoring of policies that promote free market capitalism, deregulation, and reduction in government spending.

### Penal Welfarism

A theory in the study of criminal justice that holds that prisoners should have the right and the positive motivation to gain opportunities for advancement within the criminal justice system.

### Phase of Ethics

A phase in Foucault's thinking that looked at how individuals engage as people and govern themselves in society.

### Post-Structuralism

An intellectual movement that expresses the belief that individual meaning and values are taken from the milieu and the common meanings of a group of individuals so that their reality is contextualized, socially constructed, and mediated by language and discourse.



## PEOPLE TO KNOW

### David Garland

American sociologist and criminologist.

### Michel Foucault

French philosopher associated with post-structural Marxism.

# Emergent Elements of Critical Criminology

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about newer ideas or emergent elements related to critical criminology. Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

1. Police Abolition
2. Penal Abolition
3. Convict Criminology

## 1. Police Abolition

When one thinks of abolition or the act of officially ending or stopping something, one likely thinks of abolishing prison before abolishing the police. However, the idea of **police abolition** has recently become more popular.

↗ EXAMPLE Since the police killing of George Floyd in May of 2020, police abolition has become a frequent and heavily debated topic of public discussion.

Police abolitionists argue that the police exist only to enforce social order. According to this view, the police do not provide real safety, although they cause harm through violence, racism, and corruption. At its theoretical core, much abolitionist work draws on both Marxist and Foucauldian conceptions that view criminal justice systems as part of the social structure and discourse.

### IN CONTEXT

Discussions about police abolition have roots in the Black radical tradition in the United States and the Black feminist tradition. Police abolition was also a core feature of the Black Panther Party. The Black Panther Party and movement called for more community responses rather than state responses to transgression and critiqued the violence of the state articulated through the police (Jeffries, 2002). Several Black feminist scholars have been calling for police abolition for some time, regarding transgressions such as violence against women and domestic violence. Thus, even for these types of transgressions, the Black feminist tradition views police as often causing more harm to women in these scenarios.

Before 2020, Maynard (2017) called for police defunding and abolition, arguing the police are an institution that upholds White supremacy and does not address transgression in a way that decreases harm. Instead, policing increases harm and state violence, and police as an instrument of state violence needs to be reduced. This abolitionist work then became important in 2020 when the police abolition movement flourished in mass mobilization and protests against police.

Other important abolitionist works have emerged:

- Diverlus et al. (2020) wrote an abolitionist work focusing on the intersection of social control and White supremacy.
- Pasternak et al. (2022) brought together activists and academics to explain why police abolition is necessary to move toward a free and just society.
- Whynacht (2021) adopted an abolitionist view to assess the failures of policing to address the most serious forms of harm and transgression in our society.

These works do not all identify as criminology, and they represent a critique of its orthodoxy. However, an abolitionist approach fits well among Marxist and Foucauldian concepts that ground critical criminology. Similarly, Purnell (2021) examines why people who work in the criminal justice system should take abolition seriously. Purnell is someone who has experience working in the criminal justice system, and it is from those experiences that they developed an abolitionist perspective.

Fernandez (2019) likewise argues that critical criminology should adopt an abolitionist perspective, while McDowell's (2019) article on insurgent safety theorizes alternatives to policing and argues that state-sponsored social control fails to provide real safety against harm and fails to reduce it. They argue that community-based safety is the only way to reduce harm and achieve safety.

All these contributions show the affinity between a police abolitionist approach and critical criminology and are among the major contributing schools of thought in the abolitionist line of argumentation.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Police Abolition**

A movement that advocates replacing policing with other systems of public safety.

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## 2. Penal Abolition

As noted earlier, prison abolition is more well known in criminology than police abolition. Prison abolition, sometimes called **penal abolition**, focuses on the whole set of sanctions, rules, and punishments involved in institutional and community corrections.

Claire Culhane was a prominent prison abolitionist who began her work in 1974 as a teacher in a prison for women. She then became an activist and advocate for the human and legal rights of prisoners. Culhane (1991) connected the politics of imprisonment and the state's socioeconomic practices. She argued that the reliance on imprisonment for addressing social problems speaks more to our failure as a society to provide for all its members than it does to success in maintaining public safety.

Mathiesen (1974) also offers some useful concepts on prison abolition. He focuses on positive and negative reforms and argues it is not contradictory for abolitionists or critical scholars to advocate for negative reforms or reforms that diminish the power of the state and prisons. However, it is contradictory to argue for positive reforms or reforms that do add to the power of the carceral state. Mathiesen argues there is no precise formula for abolitionist inquiry or activism. Instead, there is a terrain of shifting tactics and strategies. Questions of negative reform and penal power constantly emerge, and the project of abolition is thus ongoing and requires constant struggle and analysis.

The works of Mathiesen have inspired a generation of penal abolitionists. These works focus on penal expansion and prison and jail construction. Research has noted that shifting targets of penal and carceral abolition may extend toward immigration detention practices (Piché & Larsen, 2010). There are also blind spots of abolitionist thinking that require penal abolitionists to think seriously about how to address certain cases, including those of mass murderers or offenders who hurt children (Carrier & Piché, 2015).

McLeod (2015) argues that prison abolition should be an accepted perspective within legal studies and that prison abolition is necessary for justice to exist in the world. Saleh-Hannah (2017) argues that abolitionist approaches to prison must take seriously the issues of racial justice and gender that feminists and critical race scholars have pointed to. An abolitionist perspective that does not account for other forms of domination, such as racism and sexism, would not be a complete abolitionist theory. Whalley and Hackett (2017) similarly argue that feminist scholars need to take penal abolition more seriously, because any kind of feminism that advocates for police and prison responses to things like gendered violence is contradictory and undermines the goal of both feminism and critical criminology.

Finally, Brown and Schept (2017) argue that a new abolition is emerging in critical criminology, using an approach that brings together critical geography and critical criminology. There is a movement to go beyond prison abolition and focus on penal and carceral abolition, which would include all kinds of carceral sites that need to be investigated and confronted. This is consistent with Marx and Foucault, who argued that the criminal justice system is entwined with other social institutions.



#### HINT

One major difference between abolitionist critical criminology and some forms of critical criminology that remain mostly analytical is that it is scholar-activist oriented. Abolitionist critical criminology advocates for material change. It follows the path of critical social sciences with a focus on deconstructing dominant knowledge and engaging in social transformation by questioning established ways of thinking.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Penal Abolition**

A movement to reduce or eliminate prisons and replace them with systems of rehabilitation and education that do not focus on punishment and government institutionalization.

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## 3. Convict Criminology

Another approach somewhat connected to abolitionist work is convict criminology. **Convict criminology** is an approach to criminology that privileges the voices and standpoints of persons who have been criminalized or who have been affected by the criminal justice system (Richards & Ross, 2001). People who have experienced incarceration combine their time inside prisons with their academic knowledge to provide new insights into the operation of the criminal justice system. Using **ethnographic** methods and **empirical research**, they highlight the impact of prisons and penalties from an experiential position.

Convict criminology began two decades ago (Jones et al., 2009) and was largely a U.S.-based approach bringing together scholars who had experience behind bars or experience being criminalized to use their insights as a platform for analyzing the criminal justice system and exploring the power relations involved in the criminal justice apparatus.

Convict criminology has now branched out and become a global phenomenon (Ross et al., 2014). What is important about this expansion is that convict criminologists in different countries are uniquely positioned to shed light on and investigate the criminal justice system in each country and to provide comparative insights. The works of convict criminology are experiential and provide insights from inside prisons and jails, which is important because scholarly criminological work that is primarily based on deductive academic concepts can, at times, be alienating to people who have experienced the harms of the criminal justice system.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Convict Criminology

The study of crime and prisons by ex-convict academics and associated critical and radical scholars.

### Ethnographic

The scientific description of peoples and cultures with their customs, habits, and mutual differences.

### Empirical Research

Research that is based on observed and measured phenomena and that derives knowledge from actual experience rather than from theory or belief.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about emergent elements of critical criminology. One of the newer directions that critical criminology is taking is examining police and penal abolition. The idea of **police abolition** has gained momentum in recent years and involves looking at different ways to reform the existing institution of law enforcement. Some people think that we need to abolish the entire institution, while others argue that some of the funding that goes toward the police should be allocated to various community resources.

Similarly, **penal abolition** examines ways in which we could improve the existing correctional system. The United States has a history of incarcerating people to solve problems, but this has created other social problems. Penal abolitionists advocate for rehabilitation and other measures that are less punitive than incarceration.

Finally, **convict criminology** is a newer branch of critical criminology. This approach includes the

experiences of people who have formerly been incarcerated to drive theories and research. It stresses how important it is to have insight from individuals who have directly experienced the criminal justice system.

In the next lesson, you will have an opportunity to use what you have learned about critical criminology and apply it to a case study.

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## TERMS TO KNOW

### Convict Criminology

The study of crime and prisons by ex-convict academics and associated critical and radical scholars.

### Empirical Research

Research that is based on observed and measured phenomena and that derives knowledge from actual experience rather than from theory or belief.

### Ethnographic

The scientific description of peoples and cultures with their customs, habits, and mutual differences.

### Penal Abolition

A movement to reduce or eliminate prisons and replace them with systems of rehabilitation and education that do not focus on punishment and government institutionalization.

### Police Abolition

A movement that advocates replacing policing with other systems of public safety.



## PEOPLE TO KNOW

**Claire Culhane**

Canadian scholar who advocated for prisoners' rights.

# Case Analysis: Public-Order Crimes

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will determine if the elements of critical criminology apply to a public-order crime. Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

1. Rolling Hills PD Explores a Public-Order Crime
  - 1a. The Case of the Red Orchid
  - 1b. The Debrief

## 1. Rolling Hills PD Explores a Public-Order Crime

In this Challenge, we did a deep dive into the theories of Marxism.

[Click on the plus sign to review conflict theory:](#)



From a Marxist perspective, criminal law, police, and prisons exist to control the population; to force people to work; and to prevent people from equally sharing land, resources, and wealth. These ideas form the basis of conflict theory, which asserts that interpersonal conflicts influence human behavior and that crime arises from such conflicts.

[Click on the plus sign to review instrumental and structuralist Marxist positions:](#)



- A structuralist Marxist position argues that governments are somewhat autonomous and are not simply installed by the owning class. The state acts on behalf of capital, not at its request. Structural Marxist theorists suggest that although governments might pass laws that appear to help protect the population (e.g., minimum wage and labor law) and reduce the power of the owning class, *overall*, police and corrections operate to maintain the capitalist economy.
- An instrumental Marxist position continues the understanding put forward by Marx that the state apparatus and criminal law exist as a direct result of capitalism to uphold capitalism and the capitalist mode of production.

Click on the plus sign to review the phases of Foucauldian thought:



1. The archaeological phase: Discourse becomes a transfer point of power relations between groups (such as prisoners, advocates, and politicians) and how a social issue gets framed or thought about as a problem.
2. The genealogical phase: The techniques of disciplinary power are not about the use of the bloody power of the state on the individual but how things such as a daily schedule and the use of surveillance become the mechanisms people find themselves exposed to and how institutions, programs, and polices are created.
3. The phase of ethics: Although we seemingly have the freedom to control our own actions (e.g., freely obey the law), these choices are not truly free, and we are “governed from a distance” by the discourses and knowledge that we experience.

How have those in power influenced the criminality of the underclass?

#### CONVERSATION BETWEEN COWORKERS



“We’ve been talking about the lives of many who are struggling to get by. What about those who have it easy?”

“Like who? The rich?”



“I think we need to look at a case of exploitation and privilege.”

#### 1a. The Case of the Red Orchid

Watch and listen as Detective Henson and Professor Joon investigate a missing person last seen at an establishment called the Red Orchid.



WATCH

#### 1b. The Debrief

Detective Henson and Professor Joon will see how the elements of critical criminology and the influence of Marxism work within this case.

### CONVERSATION BETWEEN COWORKERS

“But the Orchid Keeper got away?”



“That is what happened—the wealthy patrons and the Orchid Keeper lawyered up.”

“Justice wasn’t there for those without money and influence.”



“Even though we had a system of laws in place to save Lily, it wasn’t as important, in the eyes of the government, as trying to prosecute the Orchid Keeper.”



“Ultimately, they still got away since the government wanted to also protect the economy and the money that was coming in from their businesses.”



### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you watched and listened to the **Rolling Hills PD exploring a public-order crime**. In the **case of the Red Orchid**, those in power continued to control people in the lower class and keep them from gaining any advantages. This aligns with theories in critical criminology and Marxism, which state that the government creates the illusion of equality but is largely influenced by the people who run the economy.

Just like Detective Henson and Professor Joon did in the **debrief**, you will see how modern criminologists use the elements of critical criminology and conflict theory in the next lesson.

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# Critiques of Critical Criminology

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about some critiques and limitations of critical criminology. Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

- 1. Critiques of Critical Criminology**
  - 1a. Marxism and Conflict Theory**
  - 1b. Instrumental and Structural Marxism**
  - 1c. Post-structuralism**
  - 1d. Police and Penal Abolition**
  - 1e. Convict Criminology**

## 1. Critiques of Critical Criminology

Critical criminology has faced several critiques over the years. For one, critics argue that critical criminology is characterized by a strong political bias, especially in its emphasis on Marxist and socialist perspectives (Chao, 2022). This bias may lead to a narrow analysis of criminal behavior, neglecting other important factors such as individual agency, psychology, or biology. Similarly, some scholars argue that critical criminology tends to overemphasize structural factors (like capitalism) at the expense of individual agency and personal responsibility. This may downplay the role of personal choices when people decide whether or not to engage in crime.

Other critics suggest that critical criminology sometimes lacks methodological rigor (Chao, 2022), relying more on theoretical frameworks or limited case studies rather than empirical research. While these works apply to particular cases, they are not necessarily generalizable to larger populations. This can limit critical criminology's ability to provide evidence-based policy recommendations to improve upon existing situations.

### 1a. Marxism and Conflict Theory

Marx's conflict theory, which is a foundational perspective within critical criminology, has been subject to criticism in the field of criminology. For one, critics argue that Marx's conflict theory tends to oversimplify crime by reducing it to economic determinism (Resnick & Wolff, 1982); that is, the theory often emphasizes the role of economic factors, such as class struggle and capitalism, to the neglect of other social, cultural, and individual

factors that contribute to criminal behavior. Similarly, by focusing on class conflicts, it limits its ability to explain other forms of social conflict and crime that arise from factors such as race, gender, and ethnicity.

Moreover, critics suggest that Marx's theory tends to downplay the role of individual agency (Sovacool & Hess, 2017) and personal responsibility in criminal actions. By focusing on structural determinants, the theory neglects the fact that individuals make choices to engage in criminal behavior independent of their economic circumstances. Finally, Marx's theory is criticized for neglecting the gendered nature of crime and social relations (Belkhir, 1994). Feminist scholars argue that the theory does not sufficiently address how patriarchy and gender inequalities contribute to criminal behavior and the criminal justice system's functioning.

## 1b. Instrumental and Structural Marxism

Instrumental Marxism is a perspective within Marxism that focuses on the instrumental use of the state and legal system by the ruling classes to maintain their dominance. While this perspective shares some common ground with classical Marxism, it has faced several of its own critiques.

Critics argue that instrumental Marxism, like Marxism, tends to overemphasize economic factors and class struggle at the expense of other social, cultural, and political dynamics (Resnick & Wolff, 1982). This may limit the theory's explanatory power in understanding the complexities of modern societies. Other critics argue that instrumental Marxism tends to focus on domestic class relations and may not adequately address global dynamics, including issues related to imperialism and globalization.

Structuralist Marxism is a theoretical approach combining Marxist principles with structuralist ideas. Critics argue that structuralist Marxism tends to overemphasize the role of overarching structures in shaping social relations, often leading to a deterministic view of historical and social development. This focus on structures may downplay the agency of individuals and the role of innovation in social change. It treats individuals as passive recipients of structural forces, neglecting how they actively shape and contest social structures (Kortesoja, 2023).

## 1c. Post-structuralism

Post-structuralist perspectives in criminology have also faced critiques. Post-structuralism places a significant emphasis on language, discourse, and the construction of meaning (Howarth, 2013). Critics argue that this focus leads to an overemphasis on symbolic aspects, neglecting the power structures that contribute to criminal behavior and social control.

Post-structuralist perspectives have also been criticized for providing limited guidance for policy development and implementation. The emphasis on deconstructing dominant discourses and challenging categories may not offer clear directions for addressing practical issues within criminal justice systems. Furthermore, post-structuralist theories may face challenges in translating theoretical insights into practical applications. Critics contend that the abstract nature of post-structuralism may hinder its ability to inform effective strategies for crime prevention, rehabilitation, and reintegration (Howarth, 2013).

## 1d. Police and Penal Abolition

Police abolition is a radical and contentious idea that often calls for the complete dismantling or abolition of traditional law enforcement agencies. While the movement has gained traction in recent years, it has faced

several critiques. One of the primary critiques of police abolition is the concern that without a traditional law enforcement structure, there may be a lack of immediate response to crimes and emergencies. Critics argue that abolishing the police could jeopardize public safety and lead to increased crime rates, as well as increased vigilante justice (Chua et al., 2023).

Furthermore, critics contend that the police abolition movement lacks clarity in defining viable alternatives to traditional policing. The absence of well-defined and widely accepted alternatives can contribute to skepticism about the feasibility and effectiveness of the proposed changes. Additionally, while police abolition advocates often argue that dismantling the police is a step toward addressing systemic inequalities, critics assert that abolishing the police alone may not be sufficient. They argue that broader structural changes are needed to tackle issues of poverty, lack of access to education, housing insecurity, and other root causes of crime (Chua et al., 2023).

Penal abolition is another radical perspective that advocates for the elimination of the prison system. Critics argue that the complete elimination of prisons raises concerns about public safety. They contend that without incarceration as a deterrent and means of separating individuals who pose a danger to society, there may be increased risks of harm and victimization to the public (Davis & Rodriguez, 2000). They also question how societies would maintain order without the threat of incarceration, especially when it comes to individuals who engage in violent behavior.

Critics also argue that penal abolitionists do not provide clear and viable alternatives to the prison system. Skeptics assert that abolishing prisons without well-defined and effective alternatives could lead to chaos, particularly in cases of serious and violent crimes (Davis & Rodriguez, 2000). While there have been many negative consequences of the current correctional system, there is yet to be a viable alternative to it.

## 1e. Convict Criminology

Convict criminology is a perspective that involves individuals with personal experiences of incarceration engaging in criminological research and scholarship. While this approach has been praised for providing unique insights and perspectives, it has still faced certain critiques. Critics argue that the experiences of individuals who have been incarcerated may not be representative of the broader population (Aresti & Darke, 2016). This limitation raises concerns about the applicability of findings derived from convict criminology research to the larger community.

Some critics express concerns about potential bias and subjectivity in the research conducted by individuals with personal experiences of incarceration. There may be a risk of the researchers' personal experiences influencing their interpretations and conclusions, potentially compromising the objectivity of the research (Aresti & Darke, 2016). Furthermore, others contend that convict criminology research lacks methodological rigor. The concern is that methodological weaknesses, such as small sample sizes and inadequate research designs, undermine the credibility and reliability of the research findings. It places a heavy emphasis on personal narratives and lived experiences, potentially at the expense of more systematic and empirical research methods.



BIG IDEA

Let's compare the concepts, proponents, assumptions, and limitations of the theories within critical criminology from this lesson.

	Concepts	Proponents	Assumptions	Limitations
<b>Marxism and conflict theory</b>	Class struggles and capitalism	Karl Marx	Crime is a result of the oppressed lower class rebelling against the oppressive capitalist system.	Crime is only the result of economic issues.
<b>Instrumental and structural Marxism</b>	Class struggles and capitalism	Louis Althusser, William Chambliss, and Richard Quinney	Instrumental Marxists believe that crime is a response to the inequalities created by capitalism, serving as a means for the oppressed to challenge the capitalist system. Structural Marxists believe that crime is a product of the capitalist structure itself, with the inequalities in the system leading to criminal behavior as a form of social resistance.	They focus too heavily on economic issues. They do not consider the role of globalization.
<b>Post-structuralism</b>	Foucauldian thought, power, and discourse	Michel Foucault and David Garland	Post-structuralism emphasizes the complex interplay of power relations, language, and discourse in shaping crime.	It has an overemphasis on symbolism.  It is difficult to implement in practice.
<b>Police and penal abolition</b>	Police abolition and prison abolition	Rodney Diverlus, Thomas Mathiesen, and Robyn Maynard	Police and penal abolitionists view crime as a social issue rooted in systemic inequalities and advocate for addressing its underlying causes through community-based solutions rather than relying on policing and prisons.	Without police and prisons, there would be a lack of law and order in society.
<b>Convict criminology</b>	Involvement of the formerly incarcerated	Frank Tannenbaum	Convict criminology seeks to amplify the voices and perspectives of individuals who have been directly impacted by the criminal justice system, using their experiences to critique and reform criminological theory and practice.	It lacks methodological rigor.  Experiences are not generalizable.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the **critiques of critical criminology**. Overall, critics of critical criminology argue that it overemphasizes structural factors, neglecting the role of personal choice in committing a crime. Another general criticism is its perceived lack of methodological rigor.

As schools of thought within the area of critical criminology, **Marxism and conflict theory** also face several critiques. Critics suggest that Marx's conflict theory oversimplifies crime because it does not adequately address the role of sexism or racism in relation to inequalities. **Instrumental and structural Marxism** also have some limitations. Instrumental Marxism focuses on domestic class relations, but it neglects global dynamics; structural Marxism treats individuals as passive recipients of structural forces, neglecting how they actively shape social structures.

**Post-structuralism** has been criticized for providing limited guidance for policy development and implementation, while emerging trends in critical criminology like **police and penal abolition** and **convict criminology** have faced their own criticisms. One of the primary critiques of both police and penal abolition is the concern that without a traditional law enforcement or correctional structure, there will be a lack of immediate response to crimes, which is a concern for public safety. Finally, the largest critique of convict criminology is that it deals with case studies and small sample sizes, meaning it could lack applicability to the larger population.

In the next lesson, we will move away from learning about critical criminology and focus on victimology, which is a subfield of criminology.

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# Terms to Know

## **Adversity**

A state or instance of serious or continued difficulty or misfortune.

## **Allele**

One of two or more alternative forms of a gene that arise by mutation and are found at the same place on a chromosome.

## **Antisocial Personality Disorder**

A disorder characterized by continual remorseless disregard for the rights of others, including repeated criminal acts, impulsiveness, irresponsibility, deceptiveness, and aggression.

## **Archaeological Phase**

A phase in Foucault's thinking that was interested in the emergence of ideas and how they are translated into methods of power.

## **Biochemical Conditions**

The conditions based on genetically predetermined factors as well as those influenced by diet and environment.

## **Biological Trait Theory**

A theory that suggests that certain biological factors, such as genetic and physiological characteristics, may contribute to the predisposition of individuals to engage in criminal behavior.

## **Biosocial Theory**

A theory suggesting that crime is understood through the intersection of biological traits as well as social influences.

## **Bloody Legislation**

Legislation using state power for its own ends, against workers and against the old, landed aristocracy.

## **Capital Accumulation**

The growth in wealth through investments or profits.

## **Capitalism**

An economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit.

## **Coercion Theory**

A psychological developmental theory proposing that coercive parent–child interactions serve as the training ground for the development of antisocial behavior.

## **Cognitive Theories**

The criminological theories that focus on the idea that how and what people think leads to certain thoughts and beliefs, which affect how they behave.

## **Conditioning**

A process focusing on how rewards and punishment shape behavior.

## **Conflict Theory**

Theory suggesting that interpersonal conflicts influence human behavior and that crime arises from such conflicts.

## **Conscientiousness**

A personality trait of being careful or diligent.

## **Convict Criminology**

The study of crime and prisons by ex-convict academics and associated critical and radical scholars.

## **Criminogenic**

A production of or a tendency to produce crime or criminals.

## **Critical Criminology**

A group of perspectives in criminology that challenges traditional beliefs about crime and criminal justice.

## **Diathesis–Stress Model**

A psychological theory, also known as the *vulnerability–stress model*, which attempts to explain a disorder or its trajectory as the result of an interaction between a predispositional vulnerability, the diathesis, and stress caused by life experiences.

## **Discourse**

The general domain of classifications related to a topic.

## **Empirical Research**

Research that is based on observed and measured phenomena and that derives knowledge from actual experience rather than from theory or belief.

## **Epigenetics**

The study of changes in organisms caused by modification of gene expression rather than alteration of the genetic code itself.

## **Epigenome**

The chemical compounds that modify the genome in a way that tells it what to do, where to do it, and when to do it.

## **Ethnographic**

The scientific description of peoples and cultures with their customs, habits, and mutual differences.

## **Eugenics**

A study of how to arrange reproduction within a human population to increase the occurrence of heritable characteristics regarded as desirable.

## **Extraversion**

A personality trait typically characterized by outgoingness, high energy, and/or talkativeness.

## **Genealogical Phase**

A phase in Foucault's thinking that examined how discourses turn into mechanisms of normalization.

## **Genome**

A person's complete set of genetic instructions.

## **Genotype**

The genetic constitution of an organism.

### **Governmentality**

The analysis of who can govern and who is governed.

### **Hegemony**

The political, economic, and military predominance of one state over other states.

### **Hypoglycemia**

A condition that occurs when the level of glucose in your blood drops below what is healthy.

### **Ideological State Apparatus**

An institution that spreads bourgeois ideology and ensures that the proletariat is in a state of false class consciousness.

### **Instrumental Marxist**

A theorist who views the state as the tool for the capitalist.

### **Lumpenproletariat**

The underclass of society.

### **Neoliberal**

The favoring of policies that promote free market capitalism, deregulation, and reduction in government spending.

### **Neuroticism**

A personality trait in which people are more likely than average to be moody and to experience such feelings as anxiety, worry, fear, anger, frustration, envy, jealousy, pessimism, guilt, depressed mood, and loneliness.

### **Neurotransmitter**

A chemical that allows neurons to communicate with each other throughout the body.

### **Paradigm**

A typical example or pattern of something; a model.

### **Penal Abolition**

A movement to reduce or eliminate prisons and replace them with systems of rehabilitation and education that do not focus on punishment and government institutionalization.

### **Penal Welfarism**

A theory in the study of criminal justice that holds that prisoners should have the right and the positive motivation to gain opportunities for advancement within the criminal justice system.

### **Personality**

The characteristic set of behaviors, cognitions, and emotional patterns that evolve from biological and environmental factors. While there is no generally agreed-upon definition of personality, most theories focus on motivation and psychological interactions with the environment one is surrounded by.

### **Phase of Ethics**

A phase in Foucault's thinking that looked at how individuals engage as people and govern themselves in society.

### **Phrenology**

A detailed study of the shape and size of the cranium as a supposed indication of character and mental abilities.

### **Police Abolition**

A movement that advocates replacing policing with other systems of public safety.

### **Post-Structuralism**

An intellectual movement that expresses the belief that individual meaning and values are taken from the milieu and the common meanings of a group of individuals so that their reality is contextualized, socially constructed, and mediated by language and discourse.

### **Predisposition**

A tendency to suffer from a particular condition, hold a particular attitude, or act in a particular way.

### **Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)**

A combination of symptoms that many women get about a week or two before their period.

### **Primitive Accumulation**

The historical process of separating the producer from the means of production.

### **Psychodynamic Theory**

A psychological theory, sometimes referred to as psychoanalytic theory, focusing on the psychological drives and forces within individuals that explain human behavior and personality.

### **Psychopathy**

A disorder marked by deficient emotional responses, lack of empathy, and poor behavioral controls, commonly resulting in persistent antisocial deviance and criminal behavior.

### **Psychosis**

A condition that impacts how your brain processes information and is present in some severe mental illnesses, including schizophrenia and mood disorders such as depression and bipolar disorder.

### **Recidivism**

The tendency of a convicted criminal to reoffend.

### **Self-Actualization**

The fulfillment of one's full human potential.

### **Structural Marxist**

A theorist who believes the law is not an exclusive domain of the rich but is used to maintain the interests of the capitalists' system and control members of any class threatening its existence.

### **Substance Abuse Disorder**

A treatable mental disorder that affects a person's brain and behavior, leading to their inability to control their use of substances like legal or illegal drugs, alcohol, or medications.

### **Techniques of Neutralization**

A set of rationalizations that individuals may use to temporarily justify deviant or morally questionable behavior.

### **Temperament**

An aspect of personality concerned with emotional dispositions and reactions and their speed and intensity; the term is often used to refer to a person's prevailing mood or mood

pattern.

### **Transgenerational**

The characteristic of genetic information passed on from one generation to the next without direct genetic inheritance.

### **Tripartite Conceptual Model of the Drugs/Violence Nexus**

A conceptual framework used for examining the drugs/violence nexus. Drugs and violence are seen as being related in three possible ways: the psychopharmacological, the economically compulsive, and the systemic.

### **Vagabondage Laws**

Laws condemning people who refuse to work.

### **Vagrancy Laws**

Laws preventing people from begging.

## **People to Know**

### **Claire Culhane**

Canadian scholar who advocated for prisoners' rights.

### **David Garland**

American sociologist and criminologist.

### **Karl Marx**

German philosopher, economist, political theorist, historian, sociologist, journalist, and revolutionary socialist.

### **Louis Althusser**

French Marxist philosopher.

### **Michel Foucault**

French philosopher associated with post-structural Marxism.

### **Richard Quinney**

American sociologist and critical criminologist.

## **William Chambliss**

American criminologist and sociologist.