

Welcome to *Juvenile Delinquency: An Integrated Approach*. We believe that most students have a natural curiosity about juvenile delinquency. Perhaps they were once involved in delinquency, but were never caught. Regardless of their personal histories, students come to class with an almost endless list of questions. Why do some kids engage in delinquent acts? Is delinquent behavior a normal part of adolescence? Is the delinquency problem growing worse? Are adolescents becoming more violent? Why is delinquency rampant in some areas? What causes delinquent behavior? How can we best respond to the problem of juvenile delinquency? Can delinquency be prevented and controlled? As criminologists and authors of this book, we share this interest and desire to understand juvenile delinquency—that’s why we wrote this text.


As we describe in Chapter 1, the scientific study of delinquent behavior uses two basic tools: theory and research. Theories of delinquency provide a systematic presentation of key causal factors, and offer insight into the causes of juvenile delinquency. Delinquency research seeks either to test theory or to provide sufficient information to develop theory. Thus, theory and research go hand-in-hand. The primary purpose of this book is to cultivate an understanding of juvenile delinquency by integrating theory and research.

■ Organization of the Text

Juvenile Delinquency: An Integrated Approach is divided into four main sections, containing 15 chapters. The first two sections focus on *defining* and *describing juvenile delinquency*. The third section of the book concentrates on *explaining delinquent behavior*, and the fourth section considers *responding to juvenile delinquency* through contemporary juvenile justice systems.

In Section I, *Studying Delinquency*, we describe the basic components of theory and conceptual tools for assessing theory, as well as research methods and sources of data for studying delinquent behavior. In this section we also discuss the invention and historical transformation of the concept of “juvenile delinquency” and the juvenile justice system.

In Section II, *The Nature of Delinquency*, we present a trilogy of chapters in which we consider the nature of delinquent offenses, offenders, and patterns of offending. We begin by examining the extent of delinquent behavior and the types of offenses in which young people are involved. We then attempt to answer the question “Who are the offenders?” by exploring the social correlates of delinquency: age, gender, race, and social class. Next, we consider patterns of offending, presenting the key elements of the developmental perspective and influential developmental models.



In Section III, *Explaining Delinquency*, we present the primary sociological, psychological, and biological theories that criminologists have offered to explain delinquency and social responses to it. First, we describe classical and positivist schools of thought in criminology, and consider the question “Is delinquent behavior chosen or determined?” We then examine biological and psychological approaches to delinquency, as well as social control, social learning, and social structure theories. In this section, we also explore characteristics of situations and the routine activities of adolescents that create opportunities for delinquent behavior. Finally, we consider social responses to delinquency from the perspectives of labeling theory and critical criminologies.

Section IV, *Responding to Juvenile Delinquency*, considers contemporary juvenile justice. There is no single juvenile justice system in the United States; rather, each state has its own juvenile justice system, made up of various components at both the state and local levels and operated by both public and private agencies. Thus, contemporary juvenile justice is hardly a “system.” Juvenile justice practices and procedures are examined with regard to law enforcement, courts, and corrections, providing a full understanding of contemporary juvenile justice in action.

■ Distinctive Features


In addition to the pedagogical features that we describe in the following section, this text includes these distinctive features:

Chapter Opening Case Studies

We begin each chapter with a case study or excerpt that illustrates key ideas addressed in the chapter. These case studies provide students with a compelling introduction to the topic at hand. The cases are not sensationalized accounts of recent high-profile cases, that fail to illustrate the characteristics and true nature of the vast majority of delinquent offenders and acts. Instead, most of the cases we use are drawn from classic works in the field of criminology. At the end of each chapter, a critical thinking question revisits the case study and invites students to consider the case study again, in light of what they have read in the chapter.

Applying Criminological Theory and Research

Application boxes appear throughout this book in an effort to enhance understanding of juvenile delinquency. These boxes provide students with practical, relevant, and engaging applications of criminological theory and research. We offer five types of application boxes, which serve distinct purposes.

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- *Case in Point* boxes provide real-life case examples, appellate court cases, or statutory law to illustrate points of discussion.
 - *Research in Action* boxes describe delinquency research, highlighting particular programs of research, and offering insight into how researchers actually carry out their work. For example, these boxes often describe the measurement of variables used to test theories.
 - *Theory into Practice* boxes illustrate how theory is translated into policy or practice. These boxes describe specific programs or strategies, derived from the theories we discuss, for preventing or reducing delinquency.
 - *Expanding Ideas* boxes elaborate on key points or highlight theoretical issues presented in the text. For example, *Expanding Ideas* boxes sometimes list and discuss the basic elements or propositions of theories.
 - *Links* boxes provide descriptions of Internet sites relevant to the theories and research we discuss. The actual Internet addresses for these sites will be listed and continually updated at <http://criminaljustice.jbpub.com>.

Emphasis on Integration of Theory and Research

As the title of the book indicates, we emphasize the integration of theory and research in understanding juvenile delinquency. We discuss research within its theoretical context. For example, we consider families, peers, and gangs within the context of the theoretical traditions that most actively address these arenas. This integrated approach helps students understand how social scientists actually “do” criminology by developing theory and conducting research.

Throughout the book, we present the key theories of delinquent behavior, along with the most relevant research used to test these theories. However, our coverage of research is not encyclopedic. We do not attempt to cite every study in every area of research, but instead we discuss selected research studies thoroughly. This approach provides *depth* of understanding, rather than sheer *breadth* of coverage. Neither do we try to oversimplify our presentation of theory and research. Much of what is interesting and insightful about delinquency theory and research is lost when it is offered in an abbreviated fashion, and we do not want to lose the richness of this field of study.

■ **Resources to Aid Learning**

Juvenile Delinquency: An Integrated Approach includes several pedagogical features that will assist students in mastering the material we present.



Beginning of Chapter

- **Chapter outlines:** Identify the major themes and topics discussed in each chapter.
- **Chapter objectives:** Alert students to the issues and concepts they should understand after reading each chapter. The list of objectives also includes key terms and theories students should watch for as they read.

In Text

- **Running glossary:** Supplies students with definitions of key terms.
- **Application boxes:** Enhance understanding of juvenile delinquency by providing students with practical, relevant, and engaging applications of theory and research. (See our descriptions on the preceding page of the different types of boxes we use throughout this text.)

End of Chapter

- **Chapter summaries and conclusions:** Draw attention to important points from the chapter, and provide conclusions to chapter materials.
- **Lists of theories:** Highlight the theories presented in the chapter.
- **Critical thinking questions:** Invite readers to apply knowledge acquired through reading the chapter, and to consider the chapter opening case study in light of the materials presented in the chapter.
- **Suggested readings:** Offer references to primary sources discussed in the chapter, and to interesting applications of key concepts.

■ Supplements

Juvenile Delinquency: An Integrated Approach is accompanied by several supplements to aid instructors. These supplements, available from the book's Web site at <http://criminaljustice.jbpub.com>, include:

- A detailed outline of each chapter
- A test bank of questions for exam preparation
- PowerPoint presentations to accompany each chapter