



The Nature and Causes of Crime

OBJECTIVES

- 1** Know the strengths and weaknesses of the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) and the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS).
- 2** Understand how self-report studies add to our knowledge of criminality.
- 3** Be familiar with the “dark figure of crime” and know how it affects crime statistics.
- 4** Know the age, gender, race, and ethnicity of the most likely persons to be criminal offenders or crime victims.
- 5** Distinguish between choice, trait, and sociological theories.
- 6** Explain the social policy applications of the theories.

PROFILES IN CRIME AND JUSTICE



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I followed a rather indirect route to criminal justice. Throughout high school and college, I assumed that I would pursue a career in journalism. Later, at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, I majored in journalism and political science, envisioning myself as a political reporter for a big-city newspaper or a national news magazine. After spending the summer following graduation from college writing about engagements, weddings, and symphony debutantes for the *Lincoln Journal-Star*, I decided to consider other options. I weighed the merits of law school and graduate school, and eventually decided to pursue a PhD in political science. I obtained my PhD in 1978 and spent the next eight years with a joint appointment in a political science department and an academic program for bright but economically disadvantaged students at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO). Then, in 1986, the tides turned and I joined the Department of Criminal Justice at UNO, where I was a faculty member for 20 years, chair of the graduate program for 13 years, and department chair for one year. In 2006, I left UNO to accept the position as director of graduate programs in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Arizona State University.

My route into criminal justice notwithstanding, the research that I have conducted over the past 30 years has been firmly grounded in issues of justice and fairness in the criminal justice system. My research generally revolves around issues related to criminal justice case-processing decisions, especially judges' sentencing decisions and prosecutors' charging decisions. One strand of my research focuses on the effects of the offender's race, ethnicity, gender, and age on sentencing decisions; another explores the influence of victim characteristics on charging decisions in sexual assault cases. I would like to think that my research has added to what we know about the treatment of those who either find themselves in the arms of the law or are victimized by a violent crime such as sexual assault. I hope that over time my work will influence criminal justice policies and practices.

One of the most rewarding aspects of my job is the opportunity to interact with undergraduate and graduate students who are concerned about the issues that spark my interest and stimulate my research. My experiences mentoring graduate students have been particularly satisfying. Helping these intellectually curious students to develop their theoretical and methodological expertise and collaborating with them on research projects and publications have been extremely rewarding.

Introduction

Historically, crime has been difficult to measure and crime data have always been problematic to count. Years ago the economist Sir Josiah Stamp suggested a reason for why crime statistics are dubious when he observed that they “come in the first instance from the village watchman, who just puts down what he damn pleases.”¹ Even today, criminologists agree that public information about crime is not very accurate. This inaccuracy arises in part because crime is both context- and time-specific. Behavior is evaluated differently depending on where and when it occurs. For example, in 1992, chewing gum was illegal in Singapore. This ban has since been relaxed, but not entirely removed. Singaporeans today may purchase chewing gum only in a pharmacy and must submit their names and ID card numbers.² By contrast, governments in the United Kingdom and other European countries are now fining persons who spit chewing gum on the street. Another problem



AROUND THE GLOBE

Chewing Gum Crime

Governments in the United Kingdom and other European countries are cracking down with on-the-spot fines of \$75 for people who spit their chewing gum onto the street. This “crime” costs taxpayers millions of dollars annually in clean-up expenses for sidewalks covered with wads of chewing gum. Ireland, in an effort to clean up the streets of Dublin, now fines gum litterbugs \$160. In the United Kingdom, about 80 percent of major streets have gum spots, and the government spends about \$15 million per year to remove wads of gum from its sidewalks.

Just about every major city in Europe has grappled with the sticky situation, and an entire industry has evolved around gum removal. The Dutch-developed GumBusters machine uses steam and a nontoxic solvent to remove gum at sites such as Barcelona’s Las Ramblas pedestrian mall and Amsterdam’s Schiphol airport. Launched in 2000, GumBusters International earns about \$10 million in business annually cleaning walkways covered with the sticky remains of abandoned wads of chewing gum in Europe, the United States, Australia, and Japan.

Sources: Cesar Soriano, “Europe Tries to Eradicate Gum Crime,” *USA Today*, July 25, 2006, p. 7A; Preston City Council, “We’d Hate to Burst Your Bubble, but . . .,” August 14, 2007, available at <http://www.preston.gov.uk/News.asp?id= SX9452-A780C883>, accessed August 18, 2008.

with crime data is that some people commit crimes at relatively high levels but are never caught, while others may be arrested when committing their first offense.

Thus arrest records do not always reflect a person’s *actual* involvement in crime. To ease these problems, criminologists have developed multiple yardsticks that, when taken together, provide a respectable approximation of the extent and nature of criminality.

Two of the principal measures of crime are **official crime statistics**, which are based on the aggregate records of offenders and offenses processed by police, courts, and corrections agencies; and **unofficial crime statistics**, which are produced by people and agencies outside of the criminal justice system. The majority of criminal statistics comes from one of three sources: the Uniform Crime Reports, which are produced by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), which is produced by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, and one unofficial measure—self-report surveys.

■ Uniform Crime Reports

One of the earliest national measures of crime was the **Uniform Crime Reports (UCR)**.³ Since its inception in 1929, the UCR has collected statistics from local and state law enforcement agencies on Part I offenses, also known as **Crime Index** offenses, which are the violent crimes of murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault, and the property crimes of burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson (which was added in 1979) (see **TABLE 3-1**). In addition to covering crimes known to the police, the UCR provides information on (1) number of arrests and (2) characteristics of persons arrested, including the suspects’ age, race, and sex. Today, the UCR represents a nationwide, cooperative effort of more than 17,000 law enforcement agencies (about 95 percent of all U.S. policing agencies) that *voluntarily* report data on crime to the FBI. The data submitted to the FBI are published annually in a report titled *Crime in the United States*.

TABLE 3-1 UCR Serious Criminal Offenses

Beginning in 2004, the UCR no longer reported a Crime Index; rather, it now simply provides data on the number of people arrested and crimes known to the law enforcement agencies for the following eight categories of serious violent and property crimes.

Serious Violent Crimes

Murder and non-negligent manslaughter is the willful killing of one person by another.

Forcible rape is the carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will.

Robbery is the taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or violence and/or by putting the victim in fear.

Aggravated assault is the unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury.

Serious Property Crimes

Burglary is the unlawful entry into a structure to commit a felony or theft.

Larceny-theft is the unlawful taking, carrying, leading, or riding away of property from the possession or constructive possession of others.

Motor vehicle theft is the theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle.

Arson is any willful or malicious burning or attempt to burn, with or without intent to defraud, a dwelling house, public building, motor vehicle or aircraft, or the personal property of another.

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2007* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2008).

Problems with UCR Data

While UCR data are an improvement over the village watchmen's haphazard guesses, there are still several criticisms about the data's accuracy.

The UCR reports only crimes known to the police. Because a large percentage of crime victims do not report their experiences to a law enforcement agency, the data reported to the FBI *underestimate* the number of crimes committed (**incidence**) and the number of persons committing crimes (**prevalence**). There exists, in other words, a large gap between the *actual* amount of crimes committed and crimes reported. The **dark figure of crime** is the term criminologists use to describe the amount of unreported or undiscovered crime.⁴

The UCR reports on only the most serious crime incident. The information reported in the UCR is based on the **hierarchy rule**, which means that for a single crime incident in which multiple offenses were committed, only the most serious offense is reported. (Arson is an exception and is always reported to the FBI.) Thus, if an offender robs and murders a victim, and then steals his or her car, only the murder is reported to the FBI.

The UCR does not collect all the relevant data. The UCR collects crime details about the victim, the offender, and the circumstance *only* for homicide cases. The types of weapons used are gathered only for murder, robbery, and aggravated assault. Weapons used in forcible rape are not reported, and data for rapes include only female victims. (Male victims of forcible rape are recorded as aggravated assault.)

The UCR tells us more about police behavior than it does about criminality. Some law enforcement agencies falsify the reports they submit to the FBI. Once a citizen reports a crime, police must make an official record for the crime to be counted in the UCR. Sometimes law enforcement officers do not complete a crime report. For example, in Atlanta, it was found that crimes reported to police were not recorded for a number of years to help the city land the 1996 Olympics and boost tourism. In 2002, it was discovered that more than 22,000 police reports were never submitted to the FBI. In those reports were more than 4000 violent offenses that were committed but were never counted.⁵

In spite of these criticisms, the UCR is the most widely used source of national estimates of the nature and extent of criminality. Inaccuracies in UCR data are believed to be consistent over time and provide reasonably accurate estimates of crime trends.⁶

Reforming the UCR

Recognizing the need for more detailed crime statistics, law enforcement leaders called for a thorough evaluative analysis that would modernize the UCR program. These studies led to the creation and implementation in 1982 of the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).⁷

The NIBRS currently is a component of the UCR program and is expected to replace the UCR. The NIBRS differs from the UCR in several significant ways (see **TABLE 3-2**). For example, the NIBRS collects data on each single incident and arrest. When a crime becomes known to the police, information is then gathered on the following categories: the crime incident, the victim, the nature of the property, and characteristics of the arrested suspect. A total of 53 data elements are recorded for crimes in 22 categories.

Data produced by the NIBRS are already benefiting law enforcement agencies. Having access to such comprehensive crime data, local police agencies today are making more effective arguments for acquiring and efficiently allocating resources needed to respond to crime.⁸ Although only about 36 percent of all law enforcement agencies (approximately 6500 agencies) are currently reporting data to the NIBRS, it is expected that over the next few years the number of participating agencies will increase dramatically.⁹

In addition to the NIBRS, another important change to the UCR took place in 2004 when the FBI discontinued using the Crime Index. The purpose of the Crime Index was to show whether overall serious crime in the United States was increasing or decreasing. It was arguable whether it was achieving this goal. Now, efforts are under way to construct a “new” Crime Index. Until this work is completed, the FBI will report only the number of serious violent and serious property crimes known to police in its annual publication, *Crime in the United States*.¹⁰

■ National Crime Victimization Survey

A **victimization survey** asks crime victims about their crime experiences. The first victimization survey appeared in the late 1960s, partly in response to the inability of the UCR to provide accurate estimates of the dark figure of crime. Like the NIBRS, victim

TABLE 3-2 Differences Between UCR and NIBRS Data

	UCR	NIBRS
Offenses reported	Part I offenses (8 crimes)	Group A offenses (22 crimes)
Rape	Female victims only	Male and female victims
Attempted versus completed offenses	Does not differentiate	Does differentiate
Multiple-offense crime incidents	Hierarchy rule: reports only the most serious offense	All offenses are reported
Weapons	Recorded only for cases of murder, robbery, and aggravated assault	All weapons data are recorded
Crime categories	Crimes against persons (e.g., murder, rape, and aggravated assault)	Crimes against persons
	Crimes against property (e.g., robbery, burglary, and larceny-theft)	Crimes against property
		Crimes against society (e.g., drug or narcotic offenses)



Murder is not measured by the NCVS because the victim obviously cannot be interviewed.

surveys gather specific information about such crime characteristics as when and where the crime occurred, whether a weapon was used, and whether there was any known relationship between victim and offender.¹¹

In 1972, the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics launched the National Crime Survey, renamed the **National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)** in 1990, which is the most comprehensive and systematic survey of victims in the United States.¹² The NCVS produces data on both personal and household crimes. The crimes it measures include the personal crimes of assault, rape, and sexual assault and the household crimes of burglary, motor vehicle theft, and theft. These seven offenses form the **crimes of interest**, selected because victims are more likely to report them to police and victims are usually able to recall them when questioned about them. Murder is not measured by the NCVS because the victim obviously cannot be interviewed.

In addition to providing a better estimate of the dark figure of crime, NCVS data:

- Help criminologists understand why so many victims do not report crime incidents to police.
- Demonstrate that variations in crime reporting depend greatly on the type of offense, crime situation factors, the characteristics of the victim (for example, the victim's race, sex, and social class), and the nature of the victim–offender relationship.
- Allow criminologists to establish theoretical explanations for how crime often results from the social interactions between victims and offenders.¹³

Problems with NCVS Data

The NCVS is limited in scope. Obviously, the small number of crimes of interest is a problem because they represent only a small fraction of all crimes committed. The majority of crimes committed involve alcohol and illegal drugs, and many robberies, burglaries, and crimes committed against commercial establishments such as bars, businesses, and factories are not included in the NCVS.¹⁴ By excluding these and other crimes, such as computer hacking, insider trading, and public order crimes (e.g., driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, illegal gambling, and prostitution), the NCVS provides data on only a small subset of crime incidents.

Interview data may be unreliable. Because respondents do not have to meet legal or evidentiary standards to report crimes committed against them, NCVS data may over-report crimes that law enforcement would have considered unfounded and excluded from UCR data.

Additionally, because the NCVS is based on answers people give to questions regarding past and sometimes troublesome events, subjects may experience some of the following phenomena:

- *Memory errors*—difficulty recalling details about the event.
- *Telescoping*—difficulty remembering the time of the crime. It may feel as though the event occurred more recently than it did because the incident remains vivid in the interviewee's memory.
- *Errors of deception*—difficulty reporting events that are embarrassing, unpleasant, or self-incriminating. (It is also possible that people fabricate crime incidents.)
- *Sampling error*—difficulty including populations outside of ordinary households and resolving discrepancies between sample estimates of behavior and the actual amount of behavior. For instance, because the sampling unit in the NCVS is households, homeless persons, who are at greater risk of victimization, are excluded from the sample.¹⁵

Changes have recently been made to the NCVS to increase the likelihood of respondents recalling events accurately. Some of the changes made include having interviewers ask respondents questions and give them cues to help them possibly recall a crime incident.

Acclaim for the NCVS

Even though much more crime is reported by victims than the amount of crime reported to police, the trends reported in NCVS data and UCR data are very similar. For instance, when Janet Lauritsen and Robin Schaum compared UCR and NCVS data for robbery, burglary, and aggravated assault in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York from 1980 to 1998, they found that for burglary and robbery, UCR crime rates were generally similar to NCVS estimates. Some discrepancies were noted between UCR and NCVS data for aggravated assault, but the differences reported were not statistically significant.¹⁶ In other words, the UCR and NCVS data tell roughly the same story about these three serious crimes. Indeed, for more than 30 years, criminologists have found that UCR and victimization data generally reach similar conclusions regarding the nature of criminality.¹⁷

■ Self-Report Surveys

In a **self-report survey**, criminologists ask persons to identify their own criminality during a specific time period, such as during the prior year. For more than 60 years, criminologists have conducted self-report surveys and have consistently found that 85 to 90 percent of persons have committed behavior that could have led to arrest had they been caught.¹⁸

The most comprehensive self-reported survey is the **National Youth Survey (NYS)**.¹⁹ This survey began in 1976. At that time, 1725 adolescents between the ages of 11 and 17, as well as one of their parents, were interviewed. Participants were chosen by a scientific method designed to select individuals who were representative of the national population. More than 30 years later, the survey is still going. Its name has been changed to the *National Youth Survey: Family Study* because the original participants who were once 11–17 are now 43–49 years old. This study has followed these same individuals over time to look at their changing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors about topics such as career goals, involvement with community and family, attitudes about violence, drugs, and social values.²⁰

Problems with Self-Report Surveys

Self-report survey data are not always reliable. When people are asked to report to strangers their illegal acts, they may lie about their criminal involvement. In addition, many people forget, misunderstand, or distort their participation in crime. Typically the most active criminals do not participate in self-report surveys because they are not likely to reveal themselves or their activities to strangers.²¹

Self-report studies often exclude serious chronic offenders. Because most self-report surveys sample high-school or college student populations, it is not surprising that only a small amount of serious crime is detected using this method. These concerns have led criminologists to develop methods to validate the findings from self-report studies. Findings from studies using validity checks have provided general support of the self-report method. In a comprehensive review of the reliability and validity of self-reports, Michael Hindelang and his colleagues concluded that the difficulties of self-report instruments are surmountable and the self-report method is not fundamentally flawed.²² Like the UCR and the NCVS, self-report studies provide criminologists with a variety of data for use in making generalizations about the nature and extent of crime in the United States.

Self-report studies typically discover trivial events. Studies often find an abundance of respondents stealing a small sum of money, using fake identification, occasionally smok-

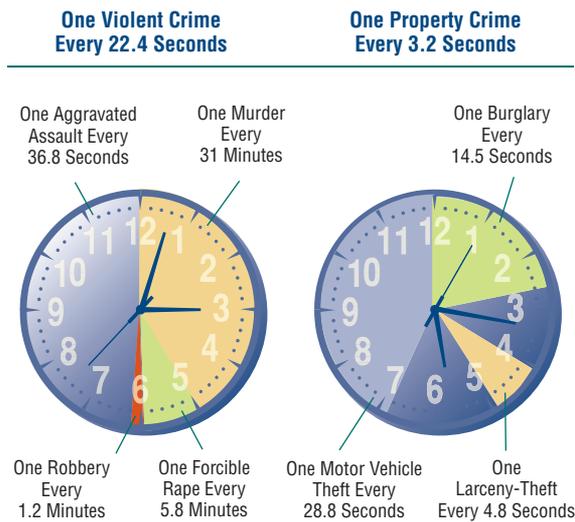


FIGURE 3-1 U.S. Crime Clock

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2007* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2008).

ing marijuana, and having premarital sex prior to age 18 (a crime in some states). These crimes do not help criminologists better understand or construct policies to address the problem of crime.²³

Acclaim for Self-Report Surveys

Self-report surveys provide criminologists with much information about crime. For example, it is now widely accepted that more than 90 percent of all juveniles have committed at least one criminal act.²⁴ The surveys have also added to our awareness of the real extent of the dark figure of crime, being somewhere between 4 and 10 times greater than that reported in the UCR. Finally, self-report research provides clear evidence of ethnic, gender, and race bias in the official processing of suspects.²⁵

Crime Statistics for the United States

There is no perfect measure of crime. Each method of producing crime data has both strengths and weaknesses. The best single source of data for estimating serious violent and property crimes is the UCR, which provides an indication of annual, 5-year, and 10-year trends in murder rates and circumstances. Reasonable estimates of less serious crimes can be derived from victimization surveys and self-report studies, although self-report studies are best for estimating drug offenses. When the data from the various sources are merged, they provide criminologists with a much better understanding of the nature and extent of crime than any one of them does alone.

More than 300 million people live in the United States, and the U.S. population is projected to increase in the coming decades. In the United States, a serious violent crime is committed every 22 seconds and a serious property crime is committed every 3 seconds (see [FIGURE 3-1](#)).²⁶ In 2007, more than 1 million serious violent crimes and more than 10 million serious property crimes were reported to law enforcement agencies.²⁷ These figures represent a very conservative estimate of the amount of crime committed because a lot of crime is not reported to law enforcement agencies. NCVS data published in the same year (2007) found that Americans age 12 and older reported being the victims of 14 million property crimes, 3.3 million violent crimes, and nearly 200,000 personal thefts.²⁸ Yet, between 1991 and 2007, the overall crime rate in the United States dropped by more than 35 percent, and the crime rates for serious violent and serious property crime during this period also declined (see [FIGURE 3-2](#)).²⁹

There are several possible explanations for the lower crime rate in recent decades, including the controversial idea that legalized abortion may have played a significant role.³⁰ Other explanations for the dramatic decrease in crime during the past decade include changes in the following areas:

- **The economy.** The lower crime rate may be tied to the economy. During a recession, fewer crimes may occur because unemployed parents are more likely to stay home and supervise their children. In times of economic expansion, the economy might provide people with legitimate opportunities to earn money, making crime a less desirable option.
- **Prisons.** It is likely that incarcerating a greater number of offenders for longer periods of time will reduce crime rates. For example, the incarceration rate per 100,000 persons increased 350 percent from 139 in 1980 to 501 in 2006. The crime rate dropped by more than 36 percent during this same period.³¹
- **Policing.** Strengthened policing efforts may have led to a reduction in crime. In recent years, law enforcement has implemented more effective crime-controlling

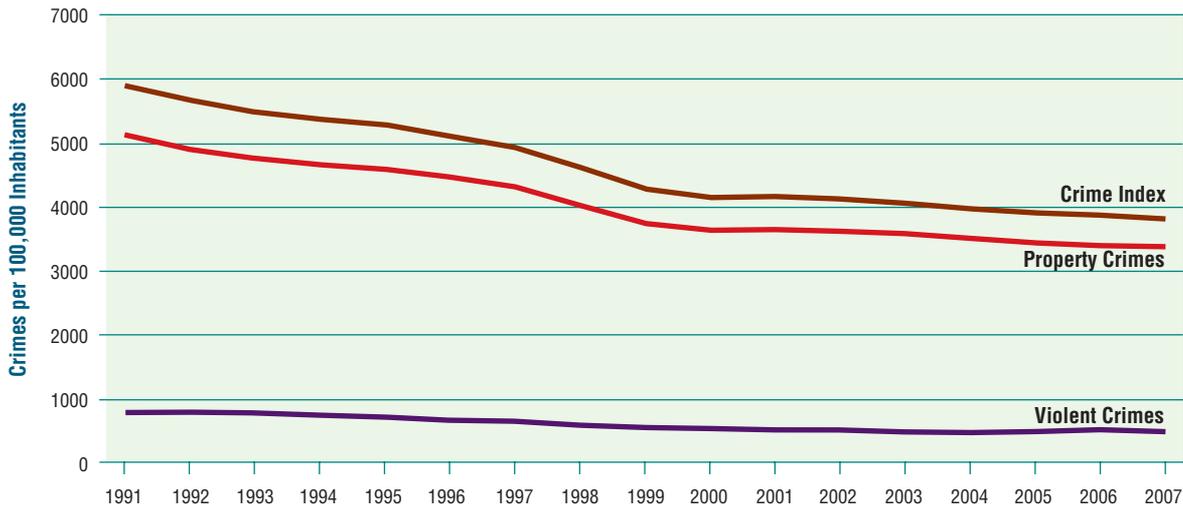


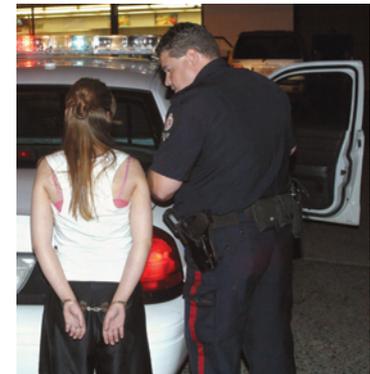
FIGURE 3-2 U.S. Crime Rate Index, 1991–2007

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2007* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2008).

strategies, such as community-oriented policing, and assigned a larger number of officers to the streets to fight crime.

- **Age.** Changes in crime rates are closely related to changes in the age distribution of the population. Males between the ages of 20 and 39 are the most likely to commit crimes. When young males account for a smaller portion of the total population, it would seem to follow that there will be less crime.³²

Despite these correlated trends, criminologists do not know with certainty why the crime rate has fallen, although the violent crime rate ticked slightly upward in 2006 and 2007.³³ Most likely, the general decline in crime is the work of several factors entangled in complex and as yet unknown ways.



In 2007, nearly 2 million juveniles were arrested for committing either serious violent or serious property crimes.

Criminal Offenders

Data from the UCR, NCVS, and self-report studies have provided criminologists with an abundance of information about criminal offenders. Collectively, these sources show that 60 percent of persons arrested are between the ages of 19 and 39, even though this group represents only 28 percent of the U.S. population. With regard to race, about 13 percent of the population is African American, but African Americans are arrested for 37 percent of serious violent crimes and 28 percent of serious property crimes. While approximately 49 percent of the population is male, men are arrested for 82 percent of serious violent crimes and 68 percent of serious property crimes. Pulling the data together, the persons most likely to be arrested for both serious violent and serious property crimes are African American males between the ages of 19 and 39.³⁴

Offenders by Age

Age and crime are closely related. The **age-crime curve** (see **FIGURE 3-3**) illustrates that crime rates increase during preadolescence, peak in late adolescence, and then decline steadily thereafter.³⁵ The high point of the curve is different for violent offenses and property offenses. Seri-

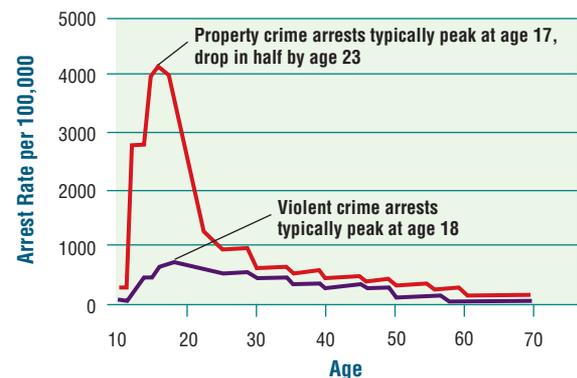


FIGURE 3-3 Age-Crime Curve

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2006* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2007).

FOCUS ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE

The Criminal Unborn

Between 1991 and 2007, the percentage of persons arrested for Crime Index offenses declined by about 35 percent. Many explanations for the decline have been offered, including the economy, population changes, aggressive police practices, and increased incarceration of chronic offenders. One of the most controversial explanations is suggested by John Donohue III and Steven Levitt: They attribute the decrease in crime to the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision that legalized abortion.

Donohue and Levitt present evidence that legalized abortion is primarily responsible for lower crime rates. The relationship between legalized abortion and crime is straightforward: A steep rise in abortions after 1973 has meant that many persons who would have been prone to criminal activity in the 1990s when crime began to decline were never born. There are two reasons for this relationship:

1. Abortion shrinks the number of people who reach the age where they are most prone to commit crimes.
2. Abortion is not random. Teenagers, unmarried women, the poor, and African Americans are more likely than others to have abortions; they are also more likely to have children who are “at risk” for committing crimes later in life.

Similarly, women with unwanted pregnancies are less likely to be good parents and may harm their fetuses during pregnancy by drinking alcohol and taking drugs that increase the likelihood of future criminality.

Donohue and Levitt present three strands of evidence to support each claim:

1. The precipitous drop in crime across the United States coincides with the period in which the generation affected by *Roe v. Wade* would have reached the peak of its criminal activity.
2. The five states that legalized abortion in 1970, three years before *Roe v. Wade*, were the first to experience the drop in crime.
3. States with high abortion rates from 1973 to 1976 have seen the largest decrease in crime since 1985, even after controlling for incarceration rates, racial composition, and income.

Donohue and Levitt conclude that the current crime rate in the United States would be 10 to 20 percent higher if abortion had not been legalized. They estimate that legalized abortion may account for as much as 50 percent of the recent drop in crime. In terms of costs of crime, they believe that legalized abortion has saved Americans more than \$30 billion annually.



Sources: Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2007* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2008); Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner, “Freakonomics: Opinion,” *The New York Times* Blog, available at <http://freakonomics.blogs.nytimes.com/>, accessed April 12, 2008; Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner, *Freakonomics*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper, 2006); John Donohue and Steven Levitt, “The Impact of Legalized Abortion on Crime,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 116:379–420 (2001).

ous violent crime arrests peak at age 18 and then decline; property crime arrests hit their highest point at age 16 and then decrease.

Juveniles (persons younger than age 18) account for approximately 26 percent (about 80 million people) of the population and, in 2006, were arrested for 16 percent of serious violent crimes and 26 percent of serious property crimes. Between 1997 and 2006, overall, serious juvenile violent crime decreased by 20 percent. In the same period, arrests of juveniles for serious property crimes dropped sharply by 44 percent.³⁶

The age–crime curve also shows that older persons commit fewer crimes, something criminologists call the **aging-out phenomenon**, as reductions in strength, energy, and mobility with age make it more difficult to commit crime. Other reasons why crime decreases with age have been attributed to personality changes, increased awareness of the cost of crime, decreased importance of peer influences, and lower testosterone levels linked with decreases in male aggression. Some people, however, do not age out of crime. These chronic offenders start offending at a very young age and continue to commit crime throughout their lives. Unfortunately, many chronic juvenile offenders become adult criminals who cannot be rehabilitated.³⁷



Kenneth Lay, who was the CEO of the Enron Corporation, one of the largest companies in the U.S., was convicted of conspiring to inflate the energy company's stock price and misleading investors and employees who lost billions of dollars in its 2001 bankruptcy. Lay, who was to spend the rest of his life in prison, died of a heart attack before he could be sentenced.

■ Offenders by Socioeconomic Status

When most Americans think of crime, they think of street crime, which includes acts of personal violence and crimes against property. These perceptions of crime are reinforced by the news media, whose stories typically emphasize street crimes and magnify people's fears about their personal safety and belongings. The UCR and NCVS also stress street crimes, but white-collar crime, which is "a crime committed by a person of respectability and high social status in the course of his or her occupation," is also harmful to society.³⁸ Examples of white-collar crime include ATM fraud, cellular phone fraud, computer fraud, counterfeiting, credit card fraud, embezzlement, forgery, identity theft, illegal dumping of toxic waste, insider stock market trading, telemarketing fraud, and welfare fraud.

Over the years there have been countless incidents of white-collar crime.³⁹ The actual monetary cost of white-collar crime is unknown because very little information on this topic is available. The best source of data on white-collar crime is the NIBRS, which suggests that more than 6 million people are victims of white-collar crime in the United States each year. The FBI has estimated the annual monetary cost of white-collar crime in the United States to be greater than \$300 billion.⁴⁰

Crime Victims

There are no victimless crimes; criminal behavior always has consequences, although the cost of crime may not be immediate or the consequences may be hidden for many months and years. The study of the characteristics of crime victims and why certain people are more likely than others to become victims of crime is called **victimology**. Crime victims play an important role in the operation of the criminal justice system. Although police depend on victims to report crimes and to act as complainants and prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, and juries rely on them as witnesses. Interest in studying crime victimization was limited until 1967 when the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, in a special task force report, declared that crime victims had been neglected.⁴¹ Since then, more than 3000 state and federal laws have been passed to aid crime victims, and many states have added victims' rights amendments to their state constitutions (see [FIGURE 3-4](#)).



There are no victimless crimes. Behavior always produces consequences. Sometimes the consequences are immediate; other times they remain hidden for years.

■ Children

Children of all ages are vulnerable to becoming crime victims. Often the offenders are family members and acquaintances. Some juveniles are the victims of abuse and neglect at the hands of their caregivers. Child victimization and abuse have been linked with problem behaviors later in life, such as teen pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, and criminality.⁴²

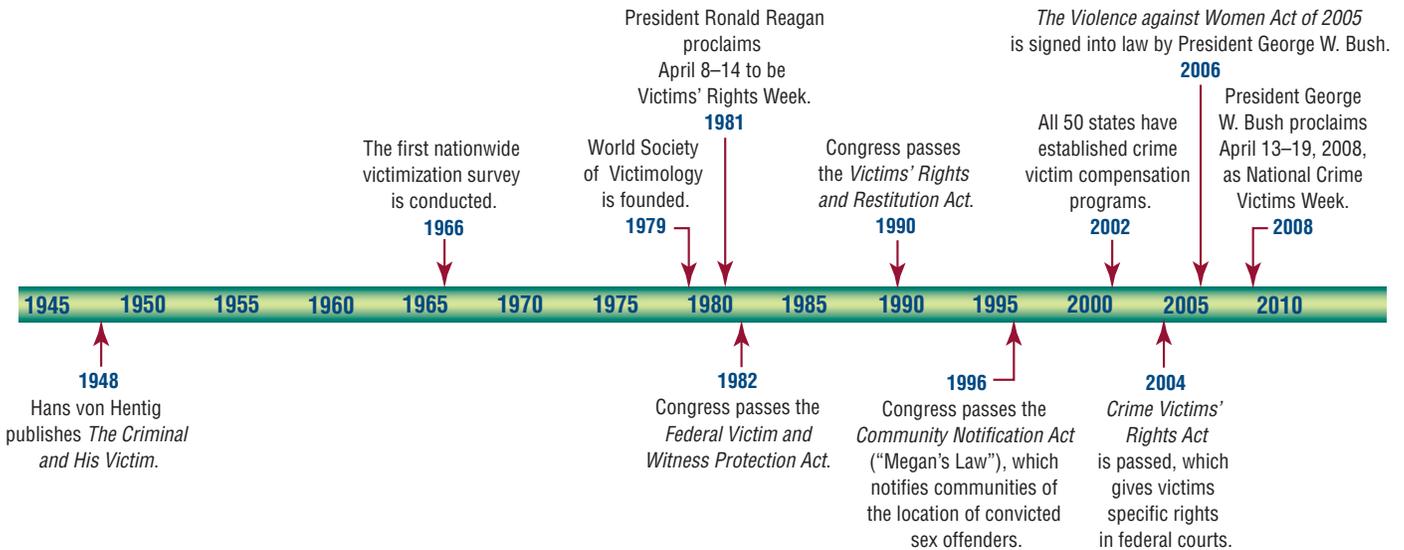


FIGURE 3-4 Victimology Timeline

Source: The National Center for Victims of Crime, available at www.ncjv.org/ncjv/main.aspx, accessed October 16, 2008.



The long-term consequences of child maltreatment are severe and often include substance abuse and crime.

One of the most common forms of child victimization is child maltreatment, which is an act or an omission to act by a parent or other caregiver that causes harm or serious risk of harm to a child. Child maltreatment may take one of several forms, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, or emotional abuse. Each year, approximately 3 million cases of child maltreatment are referred to child protective service agencies. Almost 6 million children were included in these referrals. Of these cases about one-third are confirmed, which means that roughly 1 million children are victims of maltreatment each year. Moreover, experts estimate that the actual number of incidents of abuse and neglect is three times greater than what is reported.⁴³

Senior Citizens

There are approximately 36 million senior citizens (persons age 65 and older) in the United States, accounting for about 12 percent of the population. These persons generally experience victimizations at much lower rates than younger groups of people. Seniors experience nonfatal violent crime at a rate that is 5 percent of that of young persons (only 4 per 1000 persons 65 and older). Households headed by seniors experience property crimes at a rate about 25 percent of that for households headed by persons younger than age 25. At the same time, seniors are disproportionately victimized by thefts of their purses and wallets, which accounts for 20 percent of personal crimes against seniors.⁴⁴

Intimate Partner Violence Victims

One characteristic many victims share is that they run the risk of **intimate partner violence** (IPV)—violent victimization by intimates, including current or former spouses, boyfriends, girlfriends, or romantic partners. IPV includes violent acts such as murder, rape, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault. Data released in 2007 reported that less than 1 percent of households experienced IPV. While this number appears to be low, framed in another way, IPV occurs in 1 in 320 homes every year.⁴⁵ Roughly 1 million violent crimes are committed against intimates each year. Women are five times more likely than men to be victims of IPV; each year on average, more

than 570,000 women are injured by intimates.⁴⁶ African American, young, divorced or separated women, as well as those with low incomes, living in rental housing, and living in an urban area are most likely to be victimized. Among men, those who are young, African American, divorced or separated, or living in rented housing are the most likely victims of IPV.⁴⁷

■ Hate Crime Victims

Crimes of hatred and prejudice are a sad fact of American history. The term “hate crime” did not become part of the nation’s vocabulary until the 1980s, when emerging hate groups like the Skinheads launched a wave of bias-related crime. Today, a **hate crime** (or bias crime) is defined as a crime in which an offender chooses a victim based on a specific characteristic, and evidence is provided that hate or personal disapproval of this characteristic prompted the offender to commit the crime.

The Southern Poverty Law Center has estimated that 888 hate groups were operating in the United States in 2007, up 5 percent from 844 hate groups in 2006. The hate groups with the largest number of chapters operating in the United States are the Neo-Nazis, Ku Klux Klan, White Nationalists, Neo-Confederates, Black Separatists, and Racist Skinheads. At least 90 other organizations are categorized as “General Hate” groups, which are anti-gay and anti-immigrant and favor Holocaust denial and racist music.⁴⁸

Headline Crime

The Beating of Billy Ray Johnson



Even though thousands of hate crimes are reported annually, some hate crimes are so atrocious that they capture the attention of a nation. One such incident took place on the night of September 27, 2003, in Linden, Texas.

On that night, Billy Ray Johnson, a 42-year-old, mentally disabled African American, was brought to a “pasture party” where more than a dozen young white partygoers were having a bonfire. They got Johnson drunk, humiliated him, and jeered at him with racial epithets. When Johnson started to get angry, one of

the men, Colt Amox, punched him, knocking Johnson to the ground. For nearly an hour, Johnson lay unconscious, bleeding from the head, as the group debated what to do. Eventually, they loaded Johnson into the back of pickup truck and drove two miles down a rural back road (rather than one mile to the nearest hospital) where they dropped Johnson onto a pile of stinging fire ants near a mound of rotten rubber at a used tire dumpsite.

The beating left Johnson severely injured with irreversible brain damage. Today he lives in a nursing home where he drools and soils himself. His speech has been severely impaired, and he has trouble swallowing food and walking unassisted.

Four men were arrested for the assault. One of those arrested defended his actions by claiming that Johnson aggressively charged toward him. The all-white jury acquitted two of the

defendants of serious felony charges, instead convicting them on less serious charges, with a recommended sentence of probation. The men were fined and sentenced to both imprisonment and probation, though none served more than 60 days in jail.

The Southern Poverty Law Center filed a civil suit against the four men, alleging that the defendants were liable for assault and negligence and sought compensatory damages to help pay for Johnson’s care. On April 22, 2007, a jury awarded Johnson \$9 million in damages.

Sources: “Billy Ray Johnson Trial Set for April 17, 2007,” Southern Poverty Law Center, available at <http://www.splcenter.org/news/item.jsp?aid=246>, accessed August 3, 2008; “Why I’m Angry—Billy Ray Johnson,” *Angry Black Women*, <http://theangryblackwoman.wordpress.com/2007/03/07/why-im-angry-billy-ray-johnson/>, accessed August 3, 2008; Pamela Colloff, “The Beating of Billy Ray Johnson,” *Texas Monthly*, February 2007, available at <http://www.texasmonthly.com/2007-02-01/index.php>, accessed August 12, 2008; Andre Coe, “‘Good Ole Boys’: Weapons of Black Destruction,” available at <http://www.blackpressusa.com/news/Article.asp?SID=3&Title=National+New&NewsID=4552>, accessed August 12, 2008.

Following passage of the *Hate Crime Statistics Act of 1990*, the FBI has gathered and published statistics on hate crime every year since 1992.⁴⁹ These data illustrate that the most likely motivation for a hate crime is the victim's race. Other factors about the victim may also motivate an offender, such as the victim's sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, or disability. The most frequently committed hate crimes are verbal threats or intimidation, simple assaults, vandalism, and aggravated assault. The most likely victims of hate crimes are males, whites, and persons 30–49 years old.

Causes of Crime

Armed with information about how criminologists measure crime and who are the most likely criminal offenders and crime victims, you are probably curious to know *why* people commit crime. To explain why people commit crime, criminologists have developed **theories**, or integrated sets of ideas that explain when and why people commit crime. Different theories explain crime in different ways and often lead to different social policy recommendations for its prevention.

There are three types of crime theories:

- **Choice theories** insist that people have free will, are rational and intelligent, and make informed decisions to commit crimes based on whether they believe they will benefit from doing so.
- **Trait theories** blame crime on biological and psychological factors over which individuals have little—if any—control, such as low intelligence and personality disorders.
- **Sociological theories** attribute crime to social factors external to the individual, focusing on how the environment in which the person lives affects his or her behavior.

Choice Theories

Choice theories are derived from the classical and neoclassical schools of criminology, which were particularly popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Choice theories state that the decision to commit (or refrain from) crime is an exercise of free will based on the offender's efforts to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.

Classical School

The founding father of the **classical school** was Cesare Beccaria, who developed his ideas about crime and punishment at a time when European systems of criminal justice displayed callous indifference toward human rights. People were held accountable and punished for crimes against religion (including blasphemy and witchcraft) as well as for crimes against the state. Offenders would be punished without explanation, and anyone could be taken to jail for any variety of reasons.⁵⁰ These conditions inspired Beccaria to write an essay titled *On Crimes and Punishments*, in which he laid out the framework for a new system of justice—a system emphasizing consistency, rationality, and humanity.⁵¹

In spite of its good intentions, the classical school ultimately failed owing to its rigidity. In the end Beccaria's ideas did not explain *why* people committed crime—only that they did. Classical theory held that people were equally responsible for their behavior; those who committed similar crimes received comparable punishments, regardless of the reason why crime was committed. The classical school, in other words, focused on the criminal act, not on the actor. Of course, in reality, people are quite different. People who are insane, incompetent, or still children may not be as responsible for their behavior and criminally culpable as normative adults. This idea that people are different from one another led to the formation of the neoclassical school.



Did Debra LaFave, a Tampa, Florida, teacher exercise her free will when she had sex with her 14-year-old student?

Neoclassical School

The **neoclassical school** built on the works of the classical school by focusing on the role of the criminal justice system in preventing crime. While the founders of the neoclassical school were sympathetic to what the classical school had hoped to achieve, they also recognized that crime may be influenced by factors that are beyond the offender's control.

Mitigating circumstances, such as age or mental disease, affect the choices that people make and influence a person's ability to form criminal intent (*mens rea*). The introduction of mitigating circumstances at criminal trials led to the notion of *individual justice*—the idea that criminal law must take into consideration the significant differences among people and the unique circumstances under which the crimes they commit occur. Individual justice led to a number of important developments in the operation of criminal justice systems, including the introduction of the insanity defense and the inclusion of expert witnesses.⁵²

Rational Choice Theory

Rational choice theory, developed by Ronald Clarke and Derek Cornish, explores the reasoning process of criminals and suggests that offenders are rational people who make calculated choices before they commit a criminal act.⁵³ According to this theory, offenders collect, process, and evaluate information about the crime; they weigh the costs and benefits of the crime before they make the decision to commit it. Offenders then use the same calculated process to decide where to commit crime, who to target, and how to execute the crime.

Routine Activities Theory

Expanding on rational choice theory, Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson constructed **routine activities theory**, which argues that for crime to occur, three elements must converge:

- Motivated offenders
- Suitable targets
- An absence of people to deter the would-be offender

In other words, crime increases when motivated offenders focus on vulnerable targets (e.g., keys in the car ignition), with few people (e.g., bystanders, police) available to protect them.⁵⁴

Two objections have been raised to the routine activities theory. First, it does not identify those factors that would motivate someone to commit a crime in the first place; the theory incorrectly assumes that people are inclined to commit crime when opportunities arise (some people are and others are not). Second, the theory overlooks factors that cause the criminalization of some behavior (e.g., smoking marijuana) and the legalization of equally harmful behavior (e.g., drinking alcohol).⁵⁵

Lifestyle Theory

Michael Hindelang, Michael Gottfredson, and James Garofalo have proposed **lifestyle theory**, which is closely related to routine activities theory, to explain why some people are more likely than others to be crime victims.⁵⁶ Hindelang and his colleagues suggest that people become crime victims because of the situations in which they put themselves (for example, spending time alone on dimly lit streets at night with no bystanders). Lifestyle theory proposes that the more time people spend away from home, the greater their risk of being victimized due to their increased visibility and accessibility. Additionally, when they are out, their cars and homes may be left unattended and, therefore, are likely to be victimized.

People are more likely to be crime victims because of situations they put themselves in.



Social Policy Implications of Choice Theories

Crime control legislation based on classical and neoclassical theories is designed to increase the certainty, severity, and swiftness of punishment. These measures include the following activities:

- Implementing cell-phone tracking surveillance
- Establishing three-strikes sentencing and truth-in-sentencing
- Hiring more police officers
- Making it physically more difficult to commit crimes (e.g., locks on steering wheels of motor vehicles)
- Increasing the perceived risk of crime (e.g., electronic merchandise tags or garments in department stores)
- Reducing anticipated rewards of crime (e.g., requiring a personal identification code to operate a stereo in a motor vehicle)⁵⁷

■ Trait Theories

Trait theories offer a different way of thinking about crime and criminals. These theories are rooted in biology and psychology and claim offenders commit crimes because of certain traits, characteristics, or deficits they possess.

Biological Theories

The individual justice of the neoclassical school formed the foundation for a new explanation of crime, one that blamed criminality on individual characteristics that were in place *before* the act was committed. This new way of thinking about crime was called *scientific determinism* and relied on the application of the scientific method to explain crime, which became the centerpiece of the positive school of criminology. The **positive school** of criminology was based on the work of French sociologist August Comte, who described how as a society progressed, people embraced more of a rational and scientific point of view of the world. Scholars who adopted this position called themselves positivists and used factual information to test hypotheses.⁵⁸

The first criminologist to apply positivism to the study of crime was Cesare Lombroso. He believed criminals were **atavistic beings**—that is, throwbacks to an earlier, more primitive stage of human development. Because they were not as highly evolved, criminals possessed **stigmata** or distinctive physical features, such as an asymmetrical face or large and protruding ears, that distinguished them from ordinary people. Lombroso did test his theory and produced evidence in support of it that led him to conclude that through no fault of their own, criminals were incapable of obeying the complex rules and regulations of modern society and should be placed in restrictive institutions, like prisons.⁵⁹

Following Lombroso's landmark studies, others reexamined his data and found mixed support for his findings.⁶⁰ For a variety of reasons, not the least of which had to do with the eugenics movement in the United States and Nazi Germany during the early twentieth century, this line of research was largely abandoned. However, in recent years the link between biology and crime has been resurrected and some very impressive studies have been published. Today, biological theories of crime have one of three broad areas of focus: genetic factors, neurological factors, or environmental factors.

Genetic Factors

Criminality may be partially inherited. One way of determining whether heredity plays a role in criminality is by studying twins. **Monozygotic twins** (MZ), or identical twins, have identical DNA and come from a single fertilized egg. By contrast, **dizygotic twins** (DZ), or fraternal twins, come from two separate eggs fertilized at the same time; DZ

twins are no more alike genetically than nontwin siblings. If there is a genetic factor in criminality, the behavior of MZ twins should be more alike than DZ twins. This similarity is called *concordance*. For instance, if one twin is involved in crime and the other twin also commits crime, there is concordance with respect to crime. Conversely, if one twin is criminal and the other twin is not, this is called *discordance*. Research investigating the amount of concordance for criminality among twins generally has found that criminal concordance is much higher for MZ twins than for DZ twins, which supports the idea of a link between heredity and crime.⁶¹

A second way of evaluating the association between heredity and crime is by studying adoptees. Adopted children usually have little or no contact with their biological parents. Therefore, to the extent that the behavior of adopted children and their biological parents is similar, an argument can be made that genes influence behavior. In one of the largest studies of adoptees, Sarnoff Mednick and his colleagues matched the court convictions of more than 14,000 adoptees with the court convictions of their biological parents and adoptive parents. They found that the criminality of the child was more strongly related to the criminality of the biological parents.⁶² Other studies of adoptees have since reported similar findings.⁶³

Neurological Factors

One of the most consistently documented biological correlates of crime is an under-aroused system marked by a low resting heart rate. Research has found a low resting heart rate more frequently among chronic and violent criminals. For example, when David Farrington examined the predictors of violence using 48 sociological, psychological, and biological independent variables, he found that low resting heart rate was the strongest and most consistent predictor of crime.⁶⁴

A growing body of literature confirms that criminality is tied to differences in brain structure, which affects an individual's ability to exercise self-control (frontal lobe) and respond to environmental changes (temporal lobe). The brains of some people produce more or fewer chemicals than they need. A brain, for example, that produces too little *serotonin* may cause a behavioral condition, *attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder* (ADHD), that has been coupled with impulsivity, aggression, and violent offending.⁶⁵

Environmental Factors

Behavior is under the control of the brain. Even though the brain directs people's activities in everyday life, the activities themselves shape how the brain processes information throughout life. The environment, in other words, contributes to both the brain's contents and its wiring. Two environmental conditions—parental cigarette smoking and chemical toxins—are known to cause serious biological damage to the brain and create risk factors for criminality.⁶⁶

Good, strong evidence shows that mothers who smoke while pregnant, fathers who smoke around pregnant women, and parents who smoke around their children are placing the fetus and children in harm's way. Nancy Day and her colleagues studied the effects of prenatal nicotine exposure on preschoolers' behavior and produced several distressing findings. They discovered that children whose mothers smoked while pregnant were more likely to be emotionally unstable, physically aggressive, and socially immature, and to have oppositional defiant disorder.⁶⁷ Similar conclusions have been reached by Patricia Brennan and her colleagues in their research on the long-term effects of maternal smoking during pregnancy. Controlling for a variety of predictors of crime, they found that children whose mothers smoked while pregnant with them were much more likely to participate in criminal behavior into adulthood.⁶⁸

Few people blame crime on environmental toxins and chemicals. While chemicals do not *cause* people to commit crime, they indirectly affect behavior by interfering with the ability of the brain to perceive and react to the environment. One toxin that adversely



Monozygotic (identical) twins share the same DNA. Studies of MZ twins have shed light on the genetic underpinnings of behavior. While identical twins have the same DNA, however, all people share more than 99 percent of the same DNA.

affects brain functioning and causes changes in behavior is *lead*. Lead can get into the body in many different ways. A pregnant woman, for instance, may transmit lead to her child. Some people ingest lead by playing with toys, by inhaling dust particles traveling in the air or, in the case of children, by eating sweet-tasting lead-based paints peeled or chipped from walls and candy wrappers.⁶⁹

Once lead enters the body, it makes its way into the bloodstream, then into soft body tissues (which include the brain and kidneys), and finally into hard tissues (bones and teeth).⁷⁰ Lead damages an individual's internal organs and causes brain and nerve damage that results in intelligence and behavioral problems, particularly in children. Lead poisoning has also been tied to criminality. Herbert Needleman and his colleagues have found children with high levels of bone lead tend to be more aggressive, self-report more criminal behavior, and exhibit more attention difficulties.⁷¹

Psychological Theories

Some criminologists blame crime on psychological flaws found inside of individual offenders. Many criminals grew up in dysfunctional families and lived in conflict with their parents, neighbors, peers, classmates, and teachers. The conflict they have experienced throughout their lives is a “red flag” to criminologists, who believe they may have mental deficiencies that cause them to “act out” and commit crime. However, psychologists disagree on why people are criminal.

Three popular crime theories based on psychology are psychoanalytic theory, behavioral theory, and social learning theory.

Psychoanalytic Theory

According to **psychoanalytic theory**, unconscious mental processes that develop in early childhood control the personality. This idea originated with the Austrian physician Sigmund Freud, who suggested that the personality consists of three components: *id*, *ego*, and *superego*.⁷²

The **id** is present at birth and consists of blind, unreasoning, instinctual desires and motives; it represents basic biological and psychological drives and does not differentiate between fantasy and reality. The id is antisocial and knows no rules, boundaries, or limitations. If the id is left unchecked, it will destroy the person.

The **ego** grows from the id and represents the problem-solving dimension of the personality. The ego is able to differentiate reality from fantasy and teaches people to delay gratification because acting on impulse will only get them into trouble.

The **superego** emerges from the ego. It represents the moral code, norms, and values the person has acquired. The superego is responsible for feelings of guilt and shame.

In mentally healthy people the three parts of the personality work together. It is when the parts are in conflict that a person may turn to crime. In some people, for instance, the superego is underdeveloped. If the superego is too weak to curb the impulses and drives of the id, the person's behavior becomes a direct expression of the id—for example, “If you want something, steal it.” Another possibility is that an individual may have an *overdeveloped superego*. When this occurs, impulses and urges of the id may elicit strong disapproval from the superego. This ongoing conflict causes the ego to experience guilt and anxiety. Because the ego knows that punishment must follow crime, the ego will lead the person to commit a crime. To minimize guilt and make sure he or she is punished, the ego will then unconsciously leave clues at the crime scene.⁷³

Behavioral Theory

In **behavioral theory**, the behavior of people is seen as a consequence of their interactions throughout their lifetime. Psychologist B. F. Skinner theorized that people learn conformity and deviance from the *punishments* and *reinforcements* they receive in response to their behavior. Put differently, the environment shapes the behavior of people. People

identify those aspects of their environment they find pleasing and those that are painful. Their behavior, therefore, is the result of the consequences it produces, so people will repeat behavior that is rewarding and discontinue behavior that is punishing.⁷⁴

Social Learning Theory

An alternative way of thinking about crime is found in **social learning theory**, which was developed by Albert Bandura. He suggested that people learn by modeling and imitating others.⁷⁵ People may learn to be aggressive, for instance, by seeing parents argue, watching friends fight, viewing television, listening to violent music lyrics, and playing violent video games.

For example, recently in Greeley, Colorado, a teenage girl and her boyfriend were charged with beating her seven-year-old half-sister to death while imitating the video game “Mortal Kombat.” It is alleged that the teens kicked, karate-chopped, and body-slammed the little girl while imitating the video game. The young child died of blunt-force injuries. The autopsy showed she had a broken wrist, more than 20 bruises, swelling in the brain, and bleeding in her neck muscles and under her spine.⁷⁶ It seems as though what some people learn from frequent and intensive playing of violent video games is that aggression may produce a desired outcome.

Sadly, if Bandura is correct, people learn aggression and commit violent crimes from what they see in the media. More concretely, media violence—whether it is in film, music, video games, or television—likely contributes to criminality.⁷⁷

Some experts disagree with this conclusion. In *Grand Theft Childhood*, Lawrence Kutner and Cheryl Olson argue that video games in the “Grand Theft Auto” series, launched in 1997, have social benefits. They believe the games are a social tool for boys who use them to interact, build friendships, and learn problem-solving skills.⁷⁸

Social Policy Applications of Biological and Psychological Theories

Social policies resulting from *biological theories* include recommendations that society must invest more money in prenatal and postnatal care for women, provide closer monitoring of young children during their most crucial developmental years, offer paid maternal leave, and make available nutritional programs for pregnant women, newborns, and young children. Although biologists do not believe that any of these programs alone will be a cure for internal deficiencies, taken collectively they may help to prevent future criminality. In addition, some biologists recommend that offenders receive pharmaco-

Headline Crime

Should Video Games Be Censored?



Researchers have shown that playing violent video games are linked to antisocial behavior.

In 2008, a new online video game stirred controversy across the nation. In the game, players shoot presidential candidates with paintballs. The game allowed the players to stalk then-candidates Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, John McCain, Mitt Romney, John Edwards, and Rudy Giuliani through the White House with a high-powered rifle.

While paintballs are nonlethal, concern mounted regarding the

game’s impact on children. Some adults feared that the game was equivalent to “planting a seed in the mind of adolescents and young adults.” Is there a point where video games “cross the line” and should be censored for the protection of the morality of society and of innocent people? Or should no game be censored regardless of its content?

Source: “Only in America,” *The Week*, February 1:4 (2008).

logical treatments, such as medication for persons diagnosed with biological disorders like ADHD. The idea behind prescribing drugs to offenders—and specifically to young children—is that early intervention in their lives may help to promote factors that insulate them from crime, minimize or erase the risk factors that contribute to crime, and equalize the life chances for them to develop into healthy, prosocial adults. Finally, some biologists believe that some individuals pose a serious risk to public safety because their internal deficiencies cannot be controlled with drug therapy and, therefore, must be incarcerated. If offenders cannot control their biological predisposition to commit crimes on their own, public safety mandates that when the cause of the behavior is known, it must be neutralized.

Psychological theories, in contrast, begin with the view that individual differences predispose some people to commit crime. These differences may arise from personality characteristics or social interactions. Consequently, psychoanalytic theory, for example, argues that offenders need counseling to help them understand how destructive thinking has adversely affected their lives and has caused mental or emotional disturbance. Behavioral and social learning theories propose very different policies to prevent crime because they blame crime on individuals' interactions with their environments. Policies derived from these theories emphasize teaching people different ways to respond to their environment through techniques such as behavior modification. For instance, in **aversion therapy**, the individual learns to connect unwanted behavior with punishment. Alcohol offenders, for instance, receive treatment where they are required to ingest a drug that causes nausea or vomiting if they drink alcohol. If the theory is correct, these offenders will connect drinking with an unpleasant experience and will stop drinking to avoid the ill effect.

■ Sociological Theories

In the 1920s, criminologists began to look beyond individual-focused theories about crime, and sociological theories emerged. These theories suggested that the causes of crime were located *outside* the offender. Rather than blaming criminality on some biological or psychological flaw of the person, sociologists blamed crime on social factors found in people's environments, including their neighborhoods, schools, and family.

Cultural Deviance Theory

The first sociological explanation of crime was published in the 1920s and focused on the influence of the neighborhood in which an individual lives on that person's behavior. In **cultural deviance theory**, criminality is blamed on social and economic factors located within a neighborhood. In other words, crime is seen as a function of how a neighborhood is structured.⁷⁹ If this theory is correct, it would be expected that in more affluent neighborhoods the crime rate will be lower. These neighborhoods provide more consistency in values and norms and are in a better position to meet the needs of the children who are closely supervised by parents. In low-income neighborhoods characterized by *social disorganization*, crime rates will be higher because residents are more likely to have conflicting values and norms. In more socially disorganized neighborhoods, children do not receive the support or supervision they need to encourage them to obey the law. Through a process of **cultural transmission**, criminal values are transmitted from one generation to the next.

The transmission of values begins early in the life of a child. In Colorado, for instance, recently police received a call regarding a public disturbance. Upon further investigation they discovered a couple was fighting over which street gang their four-year-old son should join. The child's mother, who was African American, had her heart set on her toddler joining the Crips organization, while the little boy's father (who was Latino) wanted his son to become a member of the largely Latino Westside Ballers.⁸⁰

Differential Association Theory

Differential association theory aims to explain both individual criminality and group crime by identifying those conditions that need to be present for crime to take place (and that must be absent when there is no crime). This theory tells us that criminal behavior is learned in interactions with family, friends, and other intimates through verbal and nonverbal communication.⁸¹ From these interactions people acquire the techniques of committing crime, along with the attitudes, drives, motives, and rationalizations needed to do so. The longer, earlier, more intensely, and more often someone is exposed to attitudes about criminality (either positive or negative), the more likely it is that he or she will be influenced toward or away from committing crime.

Strain Theory

Strain theory faults American culture for teaching *all* of its members to strive for economic success (the American dream), while restricting some individuals' access to legitimate means to achieve that success. This theory blames crime on a lack of integration between cultural goals (what people are told they should want) and institutionalized means (allowable ways to achieve success within the social structure). When goals and ways to achieve those goals are not aligned, social norms break down, creating a condition called **anomie** in which people feel alienated and uncertain about society's expectations and are less able to control their behavior.⁸²

According to this theory, crime is a normal response to a social condition that limits the opportunities for some members of society to obtain the economic success that all members try to achieve. For instance, one cultural goal in the United States is acquisition of money. The socially approved ways to acquire money are through training, education, career advancement, and hard work. Under this rubric, it is easy to see that some people confront fewer barriers on the path to success than others who are born in less advantaged circumstances.

The strain between means and goals is always present. Individuals adapt to this strain in one of five ways (see **TABLE 3-3**):

1. *Conformity*—buying into the system, accepting both cultural goals and the means approved to achieve those goals
2. *Innovation*—deviating from socially acceptable ways to achieve cultural goals
3. *Ritualism*—abandoning accepted cultural goals and accepting the status quo
4. *Retreatism*—withdrawing from society altogether
5. *Rebellion*—refusing to accept socially accepted goals or ways to achieve those goals

Strain theorists believe that people are inherently good and commit crime only out of desperation. If policymakers could find a way to eliminate those conditions that produce strain, crime could be eliminated.



Cultural values are transmitted from generation to generation, for example, from father to son.

TABLE 3-3

Merton's Modes of Adaptation

Mode of Adaptation	Cultural Goals	Institutionalized Means
Conformity	Accept	Accept
Innovation	Accept	Reject
Ritualism	Reject	Accept
Retreatism	Reject	Reject
Rebellion	Reject prevailing goals and means and substitute new ones	

Source: Adapted from Robert Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1968).



There are negative consequences of homelessness, including increased risks of crime and victimization.

Social Control Theory

Social control theory, in contrast to strain theory, argues that people are, by their very nature, amoral (without morals) and will break the law unless obstacles are thrown in their paths. Crime is expected behavior, according to this theory, which is why social control theorists are curious about why people do *not* commit crime, not why they commit crime. The theory claims that crime is something all people will engage in if there are no controls on their behavior.⁸³

Controls are attitudes implanted quite effectively in most people, but less so in individuals who have a weak **social bond**, or connection to society. The bond consists of four components: attachment, belief, commitment, and involvement. The best predictor of criminality is a child's *attachment* to parents, schools, and peers—the primary agents of socialization. The second component of the bond, *belief*, refers to

how strongly someone believes in the moral validity of law. *Commitment*, unlike attachment, is about success, achievement, and ambition, rather than respect, admiration, and identification. Finally, the theory proposes that *involvement* in conventional activities helps to prevent participation in crime by keeping people busy with conventional activities, such as involvement in recreational programs or after-school clubs.

Each component of the bond forms its own continuum. When the continua are merged, they provide a gauge of how strongly someone is tied to society. The stronger the bond to society, the less likely it is that someone will commit crime.

Self-Control Theory

Self-control theory argues that people are self-gratifying and pleasure seeking. According to this theory, individuals commit crime because they are unable to regulate their behavior owing to low self-control.⁸⁴ Some people are more impulsive, insensitive, and short-sighted; these risk takers have a low tolerance for frustration, making them more likely to engage in criminal behavior. In contrast, people with high self-control are less likely to commit crime.

The amount of self-control someone has is a product of early childhood rearing; post-childhood experiences have little effect on self-control. Parents who monitor the behavior of their children, supervise them closely, recognize unacceptable behavior, and administer punishment are, therefore, more likely to have children who have the self-control necessary to resist easy gratification and the desire to commit crime.

Labeling Theory

Labeling theory examines the role of societal reactions in shaping behavior; in other words, it focuses on why some people and behaviors are considered criminal and others are not.

Labeling theory reached the height of its popularity in the 1960s when it was believed that:

- Deviants and nondeviants are more similar than they are different.
- Whether people are labeled deviant depends on how people react to their behavior, rather than on the behavior itself.
- Behavior is neither moral nor immoral; it becomes one or the other depending on people's reaction to it.⁸⁵

In addition, labeling theory specifies the process someone goes through to become deviant, which may also be applied to the process of becoming a criminal. The first step is to commit the deviant act, followed by getting caught or being accused of the act. Once caught, the spotlight is placed on the offender, giving him or her new status with a label (i.e., “skank,” “drug user,” “thief”). After the person is labeled, he or she is presumed by others to be more

likely to commit other deviant behaviors. The negative label or stigma is, therefore, generalized to the whole person, such that someone who is accused of one type of deviance (i.e., being a “ho”) is expected to commit other types of deviance (i.e., stealing).

When the label is successfully applied, being a deviant becomes the person’s **master status** (what others think about him or her when they first meet). The final step in the process is for the deviant to join an organized group (e.g., delinquent or criminal gang) where members learn to rationalize their deviant activities so they may continue to commit crime without experiencing feelings of remorse, guilt, or shame.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory views society in terms of inequalities in power and influence. This theory is grounded in the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who argued that in industrialized societies, the economic interests of those who own the means of production (the bourgeoisie) and those who sell their labor (the proletariat) are incompatible. The ensuing class conflict produces conditions ripe for criminality.⁸⁶ The bourgeoisie also exert control over all aspects of social life, including the production of ideas, which means they control the creation of the criminal law. Their beliefs form the basis for both law and its enforcement, which become important tools to protect their economic interests. Crime is the product of a disheartened working class that is trying to get ahead and thinking only of their personal needs.⁸⁷

Developmental Theories

Developmental theories have recently gained popularity for their emphasis on treating behavior as constantly changing, evolving from demands, opportunities, interests, and events that people experience as they grow older. These theories focus on the offenders’ early childhood and the way these experiences influence the onset of their participation in crime at later stages in life over the course of their **criminal career**. At the core of developmental theories is the idea that human development does not end either in childhood or during adolescence, but rather is a continuous process that stretches across the life cycle. These theorists look beyond what happened in the lives of people immediately before they got into trouble and instead assess what has been going on in their lives during all the years preceding their involvement in criminal activity.⁸⁸

Social Policy Applications of Sociological Theories

Sociological theories point to a variety of external factors as the causes of crime. Crime prevention policies based on these theories are designed to change the relationship between criminal offenders and society.

Policies based on cultural deviance theory, for instance, try to find a way to alter the landscape of a neighborhood to make it easier to mainstream people—that is, to bring them into the larger society. One large-scale community program is the Chicago Area Project (CAP), started in 1931, which mobilizes residents living in neighborhoods with high crime rates by focusing on direct service, advocacy, and community involvement. Community residents work with CAP officials to keep children out of trouble, help children when they do get into trouble, and keep the neighborhood clean.⁸⁹

Strain theorists promote policies that will reduce crime by creating new opportunities for disadvantaged people. Opportunities for offenders to “go straight” and be successful in the legitimate world should reduce the need to commit crime. Several far-reaching prevention programs based on strain theory were implemented in the 1960s. The best known is probably Project Head Start, which is a comprehensive child development program serving the needs of children from birth to age five. It still operates today: More than 1 million children are currently enrolled in Head Start programs throughout the nation.⁹⁰

The purpose of social policies derived from social control theory is to strengthen the bond between children and their parents, other adults, schools, and the community

by involving young people in prosocial activities. The Police Athletic League (PAL) is one example of this kind of effort. It offers youth a positive experience with police and provides at-risk children with guidance, discipline, and the inculcation of values from adults who serve as mentors, along with educational support, increased awareness of career options, and assistance for setting prosocial goals.⁹¹

Programs designed on principles of self-control theory will touch a child's life at a very young age, such as early childhood intervention programs that assist single parents with what child care might do. Other programs that have been successful include ones with a parent-training curriculum that helps to strengthen parents' monitoring and disciplinary skills and build confidence in their parenting abilities.⁹²

Labeling theory sees the best strategies for reducing crime as being to ignore minor acts of deviance, react informally to crime by diverting people from the formal criminal justice system, and bring the offender, victim, and community together to restore justice. Formal intervention should be a last resort, and diversion programs should be used whenever possible.⁹³

Conflict theory has had a negligible impact on crime policy. The theory is too radical for state and federal governments to implement, as it calls for sweeping changes to the social and economic organization of society (e.g., such as eliminating inherited wealth). Nevertheless, conflict theory has led to productive discussions about the consequences of structural inequalities, such as the variable prison sentences for possessing crack versus powder cocaine, efforts to eliminate overt discrimination within the criminal and juvenile justice systems, and, more generally, state legislation.

Developmental theories have been implemented in many ways, most of which focus on prevention programs for at-risk people of various ages. For younger children, programs will often be geared toward strengthening family ties and engaging in effective communication. For youths in high school, programs may be designed to address issues such as drug use, gang involvement, peer pressure, teen pregnancy, and other concerns of at-risk children. Later intervention strategies will focus on teaching people how to make an effective transition to the job market and avoiding dysfunctional personal relationships.

Headline Crime

PETA Activists Protest Kentucky Fried Chicken



In 2008, the state of Kentucky considered a proposal introduced by State Representative Charles Siler to make Kentucky Fried Chicken the official picnic food of the state. According to Siler, the purpose of the bill was to honor the late Colonel Harland Sanders, who created a signature blend of herbs and spices that made Kentucky famous for its fried chicken.

Not all agreed with Siler's efforts. Bruce Friedrich of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) argued vehemently that it was wrong

to honor fried chicken because it amounted to an endorsement of animal cruelty. If the Kentucky legislature passed Siler's proposed legislation, PETA recommended that it should also "change Kentucky's state bird from the cardinal to the debeaked, crippled, scalded, diseased, dead chicken." The resolution did not pass in the Kentucky House of Representatives.

Sources: "Only in America," *The Week*, February 22:4 (2008); "PETA Opposes Tribute to Fried Chicken," *The Boston Globe*, February 9, 2008, available at http://www.boston.com/news/odd/articles/2008/02/09/peta_opposes_tribute_to_fried_chicken/, accessed April 20, 2008.

WRAPPING IT UP

Chapter Highlights

- The Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) include data on crimes known to the police, number of arrests, and persons arrested.
- The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) asks people directly whether they have been victims of a crime during the past year.
- Self-report studies ask people directly about which crimes they have committed in a recent period of time during the past year.
- The “dark figure of crime” is the gap between the actual amount of crime committed and the number of crimes reported to police.
- Classical and neoclassical theories claim that criminals are rational and intelligent and choose to commit crime. Crime may be prevented if the pain of punishment is greater than the pleasure the offender receives from committing the crime.
- Biological theories suggest that criminals are inherently different from noncriminals. Social policies based on these theories may focus on investing more money in prenatal and postnatal programs, offering paid parental leave, and medicating offenders to reduce aggression, for example.
- Psychological theories, such as psychoanalytic theory, behavioral theory, and social learning theory, recommend the use of counseling and behavior modification strategies as tools for preventing crime.
- Sociological theories blame crime on external forces. Crime can be prevented by improving the community, eliminating social and structural obstacles to achievement, strengthening the bond people have to society, and improving parenting practices.

Words to Know

age-crime curve A curve showing that crime rates increase during preadolescence, peak in late adolescence, and steadily decline thereafter.

aging-out phenomenon Older persons commit fewer crimes in part because reductions in strength, energy, and mobility with age make it more difficult to commit crime.

anomie A social condition where the norms of society have broken down and cannot control the behavior of its members.

atavistic beings Individuals who are throwbacks to an earlier, more primitive stage of human development, and more closely resemble their ape-like ancestors in traits, abilities, and dispositions.

aversion therapy Therapy in which people are taught to connect unwanted behavior with punishment.

behavioral theory Theory that views behavior as a product of interactions people have with others throughout their lifetime.

choice theories Theories that assume people have free will, are rational and intelligent, and make informed decisions to commit crimes based on whether they believe they will benefit from doing so.

classical school A school of thought that holds criminals are rational, intelligent people who have free will and the ability to make choices.

conflict theory Theory that blames crime on inequalities in power.

Crime Index A statistical indicator consisting of eight offenses that was used by the FBI to gauge the amount of crime reported to the police. It was discontinued in 2004.

crimes of interest The seven offenses in the National Crime Victimization Survey, which asks people whether they have been victims of these crimes during the past year.

criminal career The progression of criminality over time or over the life-course.

cultural deviance theory Theory that proposes crime is the product of social and economic factors located within a neighborhood.

cultural transmission The process through which criminal values are transmitted from one generation to the next.

dark figure of crime A term used by criminologists to describe the amount of unreported or undiscovered crime; it calls into question the reliability of Uniform Crime Reports data.

developmental theory Theory that focuses on the offenders' early childhood and the way these experiences influence the onset of their participation in crime at later stages in life.

differential association theory Theory that proposes that through interaction with others, people learn the attitudes, values, techniques, and motives for criminal behavior.

dizygotic twins Twins who do not share the same set of genes (DZ twins).

ego Component of the personality that represents problem-solving dimensions.

hate crime A crime in which an offender chooses a victim based on a specific characteristic, and evidence is provided that hate or personal disapproval of this characteristic prompted the offender to commit the crime.

hierarchy rule A rule dictating that only the most serious crime in a multiple-offenses incident will be recorded in the Uniform Crime Reports.

id Component of the personality that is present at birth, and consists of blind, unreasoning, instinctual desires and motives.

incidence The number of crimes committed in a specific time period.

intimate partner violence Violent victimization by intimates, including current or former spouses, boyfriends, girlfriends, or romantic partners.

labeling theory Theory that examines the role of societal reactions in shaping a person's behavior.

lifestyle theory Theory suggesting that people become victims because of the situations in which they put themselves.

master status The status bestowed on an individual and perceived by others as a first impression.

mitigating circumstances Factors such as age or mental disease that influence the choices people make and affect a person's ability to form criminal intent.

monozygotic twins Twins who share the same set of genes (MZ twins).

National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) An annual survey of criminal victimization in the United States conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics.

National Youth Survey (NYS) A comprehensive, nationwide self-report study of 1700 youths who have reported their illegal behaviors each year for more than 30 years.

neoclassical school A school of thought that considers mitigating factors when deciding culpability for criminal behavior, such as the offender's age and whether he or she has a mental disease.

official crime statistics Statistics based on the aggregate records of offenders and offenses processed by police, courts, corrections agencies, and the U.S. Department of Justice.

positive school A school of thought that blames criminality on factors that are present before a crime is actually committed.

prevalence The number of offenders committing crime during a specific time period.

psychoanalytic theory Theory that unconscious mental processes developed in early childhood control the personality.

rational choice theory Theory suggesting that offenders are rational people who make calculated choices to commit crimes.

self-control theory Theory claiming that people who seek pleasure are self-gratifying, and commit crimes owing to their low self-control.

self-report survey A survey that asks offenders to self-report their criminal activity during a specific time period.

social bond A measure of how strongly people are connected to society.

social control theory Theory that holds people are amoral and will break the law unless obstacles are thrown in their path.

social learning theory Theory that suggests children learn by modeling and imitating others.

sociological theories Theories that attribute crime to a variety of social factors external to the individual, focusing on how the environment in which the person lives affects his or her behavior.

stigmata Atavistic beings who possess unique, distinguishing features, such as large and protruding ears.

strain theory Theory that proposes a lack of integration between cultural goals and institutionalized means causes crime.

superego Component of the personality that develops from the ego and comprises the moral code, norms, and values the person has acquired.

theories Integrated sets of ideas that explain when and why people commit crime.

trait theories Theories that argue offenders commit crimes because of traits, characteristics, deficits, or psychopathologies they possess.

Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) An annual publication from the Federal Bureau of Investigation that presents data on crimes reported to the police, number of arrests, and number of persons arrested.

unofficial crime statistics Crime statistics produced by people and agencies outside the criminal justice system, such as college professors and private organizations.

victimization survey A method of producing crime data in which people are asked about their experiences as crime victims.

victimology The study of the characteristics of crime victims and the reasons why certain people are more likely than others to become victims of crime.

Think and Discuss

1. Of what value are the UCR, NCVS, and self-report studies? What are their strengths and weaknesses?
2. If you could use only one source of crime data on which to develop policies, would you choose the UCR, NCVS, or self-report surveys?
3. What is the relationship between theory and crime control policies?
4. Are people rational when they commit crime? What evidence supports your position?
5. Is crime learned in the same way other behaviors are learned? If so, what are the implications of this idea for parenting and for a community's responsibility for crime?
6. According to labeling theory, crime is a social construct. If this is true, should society assign labels to criminals in attempt to control crime?
7. What are the inherent flaws of conflict theories of crime? Are state legislatures likely to adopt their basic ideas? If not, of what value are such theories?

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