

Theories on criminal behavior

[Law](#), [Criminology](#)



There are many theories that provide an explanation of criminal behavior. According to some theories, delinquent behavior is innate in an individual. Other theories say that crime is influenced by environmental, economic, and psychological aspects (University of North Texas, nd). Biological Theories According to the biological theories, criminals have a different physiological makeup from non-criminals. Their biological inferiority is what pushes them to resort to criminal activities.

There had been multiple studies that attempts to find out if criminality is hereditary through analysis offamilytrees, identical and fraternal twins, statistics, and adopted children. However, these approaches have proved futile because they cannot distinguish hereditary from environmental influences (University of North Texas, nd). Contemporary researches, on the other hand, has discovered a wide array of biological factors that have direct or indirect connection with criminal or delinquent activities.

Among them are lack of chemicals, minerals, and vitamins in thefoodthey eat, sugar and carbohydrates-rich food, and hypoglycemia. Exposure to radiation, dysfunctions in the brain, and swallowing of food dyes and lead also play an important role in criminal behaviors. Likewise, criminal acts have something to do with hormonal abnormalities, particularly those that are connected with testosterone (the male sex hormone) and progesterone and estrogen (the sex hormones related to female). By injecting estrogen to male sex offenders would minimize their sexual drives(University of North Texas, nd).

In addition, biological theorists likewise believe that the interplay of biological, environmental and social conditions can have an effect on <https://assignbuster.com/theories-on-criminal-behavior/>

criminal behavior. The genetic makeup of the criminal gives them a predisposition to act in a certain manner. The environmental and social conditions determines the actual behavior as well as the definition of that act(University of North Texas, nd). Psychological Theories The belief that criminal behavior is caused by low intelligence gained ground in the United States.

In order to prove this view, a study was conducted in 1931 and reached a zero correlation between the intelligence of an individual and criminal behavior(University of North Texas, nd). According to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, criminal behaviors are associated with psychopaths or those who have internal problems that have been unresolved. Psychopaths are people who are ruled by senseless guilt, subjective conscience, and do not know how to distinguish right from wrong. In general, they find it hard to establish relationships with other people and do not know how to be emphatic(University of North Texas, nd).

Sociological Theories

According to sociologists, how people behave is determined by the social group as well as the social structure. The conditions of their society may cause them to commit crimes and delinquency(University of North Texas, nd).

Sub-cultural Theory of Delinquency

In the 1920s, the Chicago School, composed of sociologists, attempted to discover the connection between the crime rate of a community and its

characteristics. According to this theory, social disorganization can take place in a neighborhood where the rate of delinquency is high.

Social disorganization takes place when:

- 1) there is absence of delinquency control;
- 2) the criminal behavior is most of the time with the consent of parents as well as the community;
- 3) the opportunity for delinquency presents itself; 4) there is minimal encouragement, training, or possibility for legal employment(University of North Texas, nd).

Anomie Theory

This theory was proposed by Robert Merton in 1938. Anomie explains the major difference between the cultural objectives and social structure of the United States. People experience strain as a result of their limited access to legal means of achieving wealth.

In order to cope up with this inadequacy, people accumulate wealth through illegal methods as well as through conformity. Other forms of adaptation, according to the anomie theory, include ritualism, wherein the individual does not pursue the wealth actively, and rebellion, where the individual does not accept both the goal of the wealth as well as the legal means of obtaining it(University of North Texas, nd).

Differential Association

This theory, introduced by Edwin Sutherland, is one of the major beliefs that explains the causes of criminal behavior.

According to Sutherland, criminal behavior takes place because the delinquent individual has been exposed to criminal elements and isolated from anti-criminal patterns(University of North Texas, nd).

Social Learning Theory

According to the principles of learning theory, the best way to approach criminality is to implement policies that would effectively punish criminals. Sadly, this is not being implemented in the United States. At present, the delinquent individual is usually not incarcerated and returned to the same community where they have been exposed to criminal behavior.

Likewise, the method of punishment lacks consistency and is not immediately implemented. Alternative or prosocial behaviors is not rewarded with positive reinforcement(University of North Texas, nd).

Social Control Theory

The social control theory does not attempt to uncover the reasons why criminal behavior is committed but rather focuses on why people conform and accept these behaviors(University of North Texas, nd). Travis Hirschi, in his 1969 book Causes of Delinquency, provides a comprehensive presentation of contemporary social control theory.

In his book, Hirschi concluded that delinquent behavior is likely unless the offender is exposed in a society that is characterized by attachment to other people, commitment to traditional means of action, involvement in usual activities, and concurrence to moral order and law(University of North Texas, nd). Moreover, Hirschi explained that the leading cause of delinquency is

ineffective child rearing, which results to individuals with low self-control(University of North Texas, nd).

Labeling Theory

This theory places emphasis on the criminalization process itself as the reason for some crimes.

The criminalization process refers to the definition of criminals and delinquent behavior. According to the labeling theory, the first time a person commits a delinquent act and gets punished by the criminal system, they are already viewed as a criminal and it eventually becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy(University of North Texas, nd).

Conflict Theory

This theory delves on the struggle between rich and poor, management and employees, majority and minority group. According to the conflict theory, society involves conflicts between rival interest groups and that the law and justice system functions in order to control subordinate groups.

Crime results from the lack of power(University of North Texas, nd).

Radical/Marxist Theory

According to this theory, capitalism demands competition of people in order to gain material wealth. Because of the uneven distribution of wealth, people have taken advantage of people who are less powerful than them as they accumulate wealth(University of North Texas, nd). According to the radical theory, criminal behavior is caused by what Marx calls class struggle (University of North Texas, nd).

Real Life Cases of Criminal Behavior For a period of two years, FBI Special Agent Robert Hazelwood and Janet Warren from the University of Virginia's Institute of Psychiatry and Law conducted interviews of 41 men who were convicted for the rape of 837 victims. Based on the interviews, 55-61% of the criminals committed premeditated rape during the first, middle, and final act. 15 - 22% of the criminals said that their acts were results of their impulse while 22 - 24% said that the opportunity to rape presented itself(Hazelwood & Warren, 1990).

According to Janet Warren from the University of Virginia, there are methods of sexual attacks on women. The first one is called the ' con' approach. In this method, the rapist openly talks to their victims and asks if they can do anything to help them. As soon as the victim is within their control, that is the time they perpetrate their evil plans. This was the case used by one of the interviewed rapists named John, who was responsible for raping 20 victims(Hazelwood & Warren, 1990). The second method used by rapist is the ' blitz.

Here the rapist physically assaults their victims by using chemicals or gases. Most of the times, however, they use their strength to overpower the woman. This was the case of 28 year-old Phil, who raped one of his victims in a vehicle(Hazelwood & Warren, 1990). Finally, the third method is the ' surprise. ' In this approach, the rapist pre-selects their would-be victim. The physical assault is perpetrated by the offender waiting for the woman. Weapons, such as guns or knives, as well as threats are involved in the surprise approach. 24-year old Sam chooses his victims by observing her patterns.

He was able to rape 20 victims before he was caught(Hazelwood & Warren, 1990).

Conclusion

There are many theories that explain the reasons why people resort to criminal behaviors. The causes of criminality may be psychological, social, or biological.

References

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