# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION TO CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

## Chapter Objectives

■ Emphasize that criminal behavior has multiple causes, manifestations, and developmental pathways.

■ Identify the different perspectives of human nature that underlie the theoretical development and research of criminal behavior.

■ Introduce various theories that may help explain crime.

■ Describe the three major disciplines in criminology: sociological, psychological, and psychiatric.

■ Point out that the study of criminal behavior and delinquency, from a psychological perspective, has shifted from a personality toward a more cognitive and developmental focus.

■ Define criminal behavior and juvenile delinquency.

■ Introduce the reader to the various measurements of criminal and delinquent behavior

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## Chapter Overview

Crime in the United States, including violent crime, has fallen since a high point in the 1990s. This is surprising in light of its coverage in both news and entertainment media and in proclamations of political candidates. The falling crime rate is good news, but it does not imply that efforts to reduce it further are not needed, nor can crime rates of the future be predicted with confidence. There is continuing need to study and prevent the behavior that is defined as criminal, but this is a complex undertaking. It involves theorizing, data gathering, and the development of strategies for its prevention and control, as well as treatment of individuals who engage in criminal activity.

This chapter introduces readers to the major theoretical viewpoints on crime and the dominant methods used to measure it. The authors also discuss the difficulty in defining criminal behavior for purposes of examining it from a psychological perspective. Although criminology is an interdisciplinary enterprise, the approach in this text is predominantly psychological, with research and theory in that field emphasized throughout the book.

The authors review the dominant methods of measuring crime, emphasizing that each has its strengths and weaknesses. The U.S. government’s major measures—the summary system of the UCR and the NIBRS—are covered in detail and may be quite unfamiliar to those students without backgrounds in criminal justice studies. Likewise, they are likely to be unfamiliar with the government’s major approach to measuring victimization, the NCVS. It is more likely that they have been exposed to academic research on victimization, such as reports of stalking, domestic violence, or campus sexual assaults. Official victimization data confirms that crime is decreasing, but it is always important to acknowledge that crime victims often do not wish to report crime to either government or private researchers. In fact, self-report data—in which people report their own offending, indicate that much criminal behavior is never unearthed. Official, victimization, and self-report data sources are revisited throughout the text, so it is important that students grasp their strengths and weaknesses early in their study.

The topic of juvenile delinquency is introduced briefly, not because delinquency is on the increase but because many serious and chronic offenders began their offending early in their development. Delinquency has its own chapter in Chapter 6, but information about juveniles is woven into many other chapters as well.

## Lecture Outline

1. Introduction to Criminal Behavior
   1. Definition of criminal behavior
   2. Complex issue
2. Theories of Crime
   1. Just-world hypothesis
   2. Belief in general just-world and belief in personal just-world
   3. Scientific theory of crime
      1. Should provide a general explanation that encompasses and systematically connects many different social, economic, and psychological variables to criminal behavior, and it should be supported by well-executed research
      2. Theory verification or falsification
   4. The primary purpose of theories of crime is to identify the causes or precursors of criminal behavior
   5. Models of behavior are graphic representations of a theory or a concept, designed to enhance its understanding
   6. Classical theory
      1. Free will as the hallmark of human behavior
      2. Many of today’s approaches to crime prevention are consistent with classical theory, which in its modern form is also known as deterrence theory
   7. Positivist theory
      1. Closely aligned with the idea of determinism
      2. Looks for causes
3. Theoretical Perspectives on Human Nature
   1. Conformity perspective
      1. Views humans as creatures of conformity who want to do the “right” thing.
      2. Represents the foundation of the humanistic perspectives in psychology
      3. Strain Theory
         1. Robert K. Merton
         2. General Strain Theory
   2. Nonconformist perspective
      1. Human beings are basically undisciplined and need to be held in check
      2. Social control
         1. Crime and delinquency occur when an individual’s ties to the conventional order or normative standards are weak or largely nonexistent
         2. General Theory of Crime
      3. Self-control theory
         1. A deficit of self-control or self-regulation is the key factor in explaining crime and delinquency
         2. Self-control as a stable trait
   3. Learning perspective
      1. Human beings are born neutral and learn behavior and beliefs from social environment
      2. Social learning theory
      3. Differential association theory
         1. Criminal behavior is learned, as is all social behavior, through social interactions with other people
         2. Reinforcement is an important component of contemporary D.A. theory.
      4. Developmental criminology
         1. Identify periods in human development across the life course, sometimes conceived of as stages
         2. Concept of emerging adulthood
4. Disciplinary Perspectives in Criminology
   1. Sociological criminology
      1. Society’s influence on crime
      2. How crime is defined, laws are enforced
      3. Structuralists are more likely to look at the underlying foundations of society
      4. Culturalists view the values and patterns of living within a given group of people
      5. Unequal distribution of power in society
   2. Psychological criminology
      1. How criminal behavior is acquired, evoked, maintained, modified
      2. Cognitive approach
         1. Offenders’ distorted cognitions
         2. Allow offenders to justify their behavior
      3. Biological or neurological approach
         1. Link between biology and human behavior
         2. Aggression and violent behavior
      4. Developmental approach
         1. Examines the changes and influences across a person’s lifetime that may contribute to the formation of antisocial and criminal behavior
         2. Risk factors
      5. Trait approach
         1. People show consistent behavior across time and place, and that these behaviors characterize personality
         2. Callous-unemotional traits
   3. Psychiatric criminology
      1. Training differences with psychology
      2. Contemporary versions more diverse, research-based
      3. Psychoanalytic tradition
      4. Freudian Psychodynamic approach
      5. Medical model of illness
         1. Diagnoses
         2. DSM-5

1. Defining and Measuring Crime
   1. Shortcoming of legal definition
   2. Methods of measuring crime
   3. FBI Reporting Systems
      1. Uniform Crime Reporting Program
         1. Most cited source of U.S. crime statistics
         2. The only major data source permitting a comparison of national data broken down by age, sex, race, and offense
            1. Summary reporting system
            2. Supplementary Homicide Report
         3. Index crimes and non-index crimes (Part I and Part II)
         4. Violent and property offenses
         5. Crime rates on only these offenses
            1. The percentage of crime known to police per 100,000 population
            2. Distinguish from arrest rates
         6. Clearance rate
            1. An offense is cleared when at least one person is arrested, charged with the commission of the offense, and remanded to the court for prosecution
            2. Cleared by exceptional means when something happens to an offender outside the control of the reporting law enforcement agency
         7. UCR Problems
            1. Dark figure
            2. Hierarchy rule
      2. National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)
         1. Initiated as supplement to UCR
         2. Group A offenses (46 serious)
         3. Group B offenses (11 less serious, arrest data only)
         4. Federal law enforcement agencies and 15 states report data through NIBRS
      3. Self-Report Studies
         1. Individuals report own offending
         2. Most focus on delinquency, risk-taking behaviors associated with physical or mental health
         3. National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health
         4. Data is gathered through interviews or questionnaires
         5. Drug use self-report surveys
            1. Monitoring the Future Study
            2. NHSDA
            3. ADAM
   4. Victimization Surveys
      1. Victims provide information on the crimes committed against them
      2. National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)
         1. Designed to measure the extent to which households and individuals are victims of rape and other sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, simple assault, household burglary, motor vehicle theft, and theft
         2. Consistently show demographic differences in victimization rates
         3. Relationship patterns
2. Juvenile Delinquency
   1. Like adult crime, juvenile crime has decreased since the 1990s
   2. Juveniles commit a disproportionate amount of crime, but not necessarily the most serious offenses
   3. Status offenses
      1. Behavior forbidden only to juveniles because of their age
      2. Debate over whether status offenders should be punished
   4. The nature and extent of delinquent behavior is essentially an unknown area
   5. Crime as rite of passage to adulthood
3. Recap: Defining Crime and Delinquency
4. Many psychologists and other mental health professionals prefer the term “antisocial behavior” to “crime” or “criminal behavior” to refer to the more serious habitual actions that violate personal rights, laws, and/or widely held social norms
5. From a psychological point of view, we encounter problems when we limit ourselves to studying persons legally defined as criminals or behavior legally defined as crime
6. Those individuals sentenced to jail or prison are not representative of the “true” criminal population, because many true criminals go undetected and/or unpunished
7. The great majority of crime in the United States and other countries is not violent
8. The main focus of the book is the persistent, repetitive offender—or the persistent, repetitive antisocial behavior—whether detected or undetected by the criminal justice system

Contemporary Issues: Hate or Bias Crimes

##### Questions for Discussion

1. It is not unusual for law enforcement agencies to report no hate crime in their jurisdiction. For example, in 2009, 85.9 percent of agencies reported none. Discuss a number of reasons that might explain this.

2. Victims of hate crimes, such as assaults, do not often report their victimization to law enforcement. Discuss reasons for this.

## Contemporary Issues: The Problem of Internet-Facilitated Crime

Questions for Discussion

1. Evaluate the following statement: It is not difficult to name crimes that are, or that can be, facilitated by the Internet; it is more of a challenge to name crimes that cannot be.

2. FBI Director James Comey has referred to “the evil layer cake of Internet crime.” Picture the layer case as a traditional wedding cake, with the smallest layer at the top. In Comey’s metaphor, the worst crimes are at the top and the least serious are at the bottom. Is this the wedding cake a good metaphor for Internet crime? For example, should we assume that the least serious are also the most frequent? Which specific Internet crimes would you place at each layer.

## Review Questions

1. Briefly explain the difference between psychological criminology and sociological criminology. How do these differ from a psychiatric approach to the study of criminal behavior?
2. Provide examples of crime control or crime prevention policies—other than those mentioned in the chapter—that are consistent with (a) classical theories of crime and (b) positivist theories.
3. Define and provide examples of the conformity, nonconformist, and learning perspectives of human nature.
4. Identify and provide one example of each of the three predominant methods of measuring crime.
5. How does the NIBRS differ from the UCR’s Summary Report Statistics (SRS)?
6. List the strengths and weaknesses of self-report surveys.
7. What are status offenses and how do they differ from other juvenile offenses?
8. Compare and contrast the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reports and the National Crime Victimization Survey, focusing on (a) how the data are obtained and (b) what type of information is available from each.