

What Is Criminology? Understanding Crime and Criminals

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Learning Objectives

1.1 What is crime? What is the definition of crime that the author of this text has chosen to use?

1.2 What is deviance? How are crime and deviance similar? How do they differ?

1.3 Who decides what should be criminal? How are such decisions made?

1.4 What is criminology? What are its many roots?

1.2 What is deviance? How are crime and deviance similar? How do they differ?

1.3 Who decides what should be criminal? How are such decisions made?

1.4 What is criminology? What are its many roots?

1.5 What do criminologists do?

1.6 What is evidence-based criminology? How does it complement theoretical criminology?

1.7 How does criminology, and especially criminological research, influence social policy? What is translational criminology?

1.8 What is the theme of this text? Upon what two contrasting viewpoints does it build?

1.9 What is the social context of crime? What are crime's consequences?

1.10 What social science has traditionally provided a central theoretical basis for criminology? Why?

Introduction

Watch

Welcome to the Study of Criminology



According to social commentators, people are simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by crime—especially gruesome crimes involving extreme personal violence. The popularity of today's TV

According to social commentators, people are simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by crime—especially gruesome crimes involving extreme personal violence. The popularity of today's TV crime shows, Hollywood-produced crime movies, truecrime books and magazines, and Web sites devoted exclusively to the coverage of crime supports that observation. The CBS TV megahit *NCIS*, for example, was recently named the number one TV drama and received an impressive three nominations for TV's People's Choice Award.¹ The show was also nominated as the "Favorite TV Crime Drama," with individual episodes drawing more than 24 million viewers.² *NCIS* was in its 17th season as this book went to press. Earlier, *CSI: Miami*, which ran for 10 seasons until ending in 2012, garnered 50 million regular viewers in more than 55 countries. By its eighth season it had become the most popular television show in the world.³



A photo from the highly popular CBS TV show *NCIS*. Shown from left to right are Sean Murray, Brian Dietzen, and Pauley Perrette. Why do many people like to watch TV crime shows like *NCIS*?
Cliff Lipson/CBS Photo Archive/CBS/Getty Images

Other widely followed TV crime series, both past and present, include shows such as *True Detective* (HBO), *American Crime* (ABC), *Backstrom* (Fox), *Battle Creek* (CBS), *Bosch* (Amazon Prime), *Fargo* (FX), *Bones* (Fox), *Grimm* (NBC), *Castle* (ABC), *Criminal Minds* (CBS), *Blue Bloods* (CBS), *Without a Trace* (CBS), *CSI: Cyber* (CBS), *Lucifer* (Fox), *Magic City* (HBO), *The Unit* (CBS), *The Killing* (AMC), *White Collar* (USA), *The District* (CBS), *Boardwalk Empire* (HBO), *The Shield* (FX), *The Wire* (HBO), *Cold Case* (CBS), *NCIS* (CBS), *Homeland* (Showtime), and *Law and Order* (NBC)—along

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Most crimes cry out for explanation. Yet one of the things that fascinates people about crime—especially violent crime—is that much of it seems to be inexplicable. Some crimes are especially difficult to understand, but our natural tendency is to seek out some reason for the unreasonable. We search for explanations for the seemingly unexplainable. How, for example, can the behavior of child killers be understood, anticipated, and even prevented? Why don't terrorists acknowledge the emotional and personal suffering they inflict? Why do some robbers or rapists kill and even torture, utterly disregarding human life and feelings?

People also wonder about “everyday” crimes such as burglary, robbery, assault, vandalism, and computer intrusion. Why, for example, do people fight? Does it matter to a robber that he may face prison time? How can people sacrifice love, money, careers, and even their lives for access to illegal drugs? What motivates terrorists to give up their own lives to take the lives of others? Why do gifted techno-savvy teens and preteens hack sites on the Internet thought to be secure? While this text may not answer each of these questions, it examines the causative factors in effect when a crime is committed and encourages an appreciation of the challenges of crafting effective crime-control policy.

As the word implies, *criminology* is clearly concerned with *crime*. As we begin our discussion of criminology, let's consider just what the term *crime* means (**Table 1-1**). Like anything else, crime can be defined in several ways, and some scholars have suggested that at least four definitional perspectives can be found in contemporary criminology. These diverse perspectives see crime from (1) legalistic, (2) political, (3) sociological, and (4) psychological viewpoints. How we see any phenomenon is crucial because it determines the assumptions that we make about how that phenomenon should be studied. The perspective that we choose to employ when viewing crime determines the kinds of questions we ask, the nature of the research we conduct, and the type of answers that we expect to receive. Those answers, in turn, influence our conclusions about the kinds of crime-control policies that might be effective.

Table 1-1

What Is Crime?

Depending on how we look at it, "crime" can be understood in various ways. The four major perspectives useful in defining crime are:

The Legalistic

According to the legalistic perspective, crime is:

human conduct in violation of the criminal laws of a state, the federal government, or a local jurisdiction that has the power to make such laws. Seen this way, if there is no law against it, there can be no crime, no matter how deviant or socially repugnant the behavior in question may be.

The Political

According to the political perspective, crime is:

the result of criteria that have been built into the law by powerful groups which are then used to label selected undesirable forms of behavior as illegal. Seen this way, laws serve the interests of the politically powerful, and crimes are merely forms of behavior that are perceived by those in power as direct or indirect threats to their interests.

The Sociological (aka sociolegal)

According to the sociological (or sociolegal) perspective, crime is:

an antisocial act of such a nature that its repression is necessary for the preservation of the existing social order. From this viewpoint, crime is primarily an offense against human relationships, and secondarily a violation of the law.

The Psychological

According to the psychological point of view, crime is:

a form of social maladjustment, especially one which is against the law, that can be seen as a difficulty that an individual has in remaining in harmony with his or her social environment.

According to the legalistic perspective, crime is:

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a form of social maladjustment, especially one which is against the law, that can be seen as a difficulty that an individual has in remaining in harmony with his or her social environment. Seen this way, crime is problem behavior for both the individual and for society.



Source: Pearson Education, Inc.

Seen from a legalistic perspective, **crime** is *human conduct in violation of the criminal laws of a state, the federal government, or a local jurisdiction that has the power to make such laws*. Without a law that circumscribes a particular form of behavior, there can be no crime, no matter how deviant or socially repugnant the behavior in question may be.

The notion of crime as behavior⁴ that violates the law derives from earlier work by criminologists like Paul W. Tappan, who defined crime as "an intentional act in violation of the criminal law committed without defense or excuse, and penalized by the state as a felony or misdemeanor."⁵ Edwin Sutherland, regarded by many as a founding figure in American criminology, said of crime that its "essential characteristic is that it is behavior which is prohibited by the State as an injury to the State and against which the State may react by punishment."⁶

The Legalistic Perspective



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For purposes of this text, we will employ a legalistic approach because it allows for relative ease of measurement of crimes committed. Official statistics on crime, such as those shown in **Figure 1–1**, report crime in terms of legislatively established categories, and the number of offenses shown reflect statutory definitions of crime categories.

Figure 1-1

Crime Rates in the United States, 1933–2018



Source: FBI, Uniform Crime Reports, various years.

A serious shortcoming of the legalistic approach to crime, however, is that it yields the moral high ground to powerful individuals who are able to influence the making of laws and the imposition of criminal definitions on lawbreakers. By making their own laws, powerful but immoral individuals can escape the label "criminal." While we have chosen to adopt the legalistic approach to crime in this text, it is important to realize that laws are social products, so crime is *socially relative* in the sense that it is created by legislative activity. Hence, sociologists are fond of saying that "crime is whatever a society says it is." In **Chapter 8**, we will explore this issue further and will focus on the process of criminalization, which is the method used to criminalize some forms of behavior—or make them illegal—while other forms remain legitimate.

The Political Perspective



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A second perspective on crime is the political one, where crime is the result of criteria that have been built into the law by powerful groups and are then used to label selected undesirable forms of behavior as illegal. Those who adhere to this point of view say that crime is a definition of human conduct created by authorized agents in a politically organized society. Seen this way, laws serve the interests of the politically powerful, and crimes are merely forms of behavior that are perceived by those in power as direct or indirect threats to their interests. Thus, the political perspective defines crime in terms of the power structures that exist in society and asserts that criminal laws do not necessarily bear any inherent relationship to popular notions of right and wrong.

Even though political processes that create criminal definitions are sometimes easier to comprehend in totalitarian societies, the political perspective can also be meaningfully applied to American society. John F. Galliher, a contemporary criminologist, summarized the political perspective on crime when he wrote, "One can best understand crime in a class-structured society such as the United States as the end product of a chain of interactions involving powerful groups that use their power to establish criminal laws and sanctions against less powerful persons and groups that may pose a threat to the group in power."⁷ Galliher points out that, because legal definitions of criminality are arrived at through a political process, the subject matter of criminality will be artificially limited if we insist on seeing crime solely as a violation of the criminal law.

Some criminologists insist that the field of criminology must include behaviors that go beyond those defined as crimes through the political process; not doing so, they say, restricts rather than encourages inquiry into relevant forms of human behavior.⁸

Adherents of the third perspective, the sociological (also called "sociolegal") viewpoint, would likely agree with this statement, seeing crime as "an antisocial act of such a nature that its repression is necessary or is supposed to be necessary to the preservation of the existing system of society."⁹ Some criminologists have gone so far as to claim that any definition of crime must include all forms of antisocial behavior.¹⁰ Ron Claassen, a modern-day champion of restorative justice (discussed in more detail in **Chapters 9 and 10**), suggested, for example, that "crime is primarily an offense against human relationships, and secondarily a violation of a law—since laws are written to protect safety and fairness in human relationships."¹¹

A more comprehensive sociological definition of crime was offered by Herman Schwendinger and Julia Schwendinger in 1975: Crime encompasses "any harmful acts," including violations of "the fundamental prerequisites for well-being, [such as] food, shelter, clothing, medical services, challenging work and recreational experiences, as well as security from predatory individuals or repressive and imperialistic elites."¹² The Schwendingers challenged criminologists to be less constrained in what they see as the subject matter of their field, saying that violations of human rights may be more relevant to criminological inquiry than many acts that have been politically or legally defined as crime. "Isn't it time to raise serious questions about the assumptions underlying the definitions of the field of criminology," asked the Schwendingers, "when a man who steals a paltry sum can be called a criminal while agents of the State can, with impunity, legally reward men who destroy food so that price levels can be maintained whilst a sizable portion of the population suffers from malnutrition?"¹³

Jeffrey H. Reiman, another contemporary criminologist, asked similar questions. "The fact is that the label 'crime' is not used in America to name all or the worst of the actions that cause misery and suffering to Americans," said Reiman. "It is primarily reserved for the dangerous actions of the poor." Writing about unhealthy and unsafe workplaces, Reiman asked, "Doesn't a crime by any other name still cause misery and suffering? What's in a name?"¹⁴ While a sociolegal approach to understanding crime is attractive to many, others claim that it suffers from wanting to criminalize activities that cause only

indirect harm; that is, it is easier for most people to appreciate the criminality involved in a holdup or a rape than in cost-cutting efforts made by a businessperson.

Finally, a psychological (or maladaptive) perspective says that "crime is a form of social maladjustment which can be designated as a more or less pronounced difficulty that the individual has in reacting to the stimuli of his environment in such a way as to remain in harmony with that environment."¹⁵ Seen this way, crime is problem behavior, especially human activity that contravenes the criminal law and results in difficulties in living within a framework of generally acceptable social arrangements. According to criminologist Matthew B. Robinson, "[t]he maladaptive view of crime does not require any of the [traditional] elements in order for an act to be a crime: no actual harm to others; no prohibition by law before the act is committed; no arrest; and no conviction in a court of law. Any behavior which is maladaptive would be considered crime. If criminologists adopted this view of crime," said Robinson, "the scope of criminology would be greatly expanded beyond its current state. All actually or even potentially harmful behaviors could be examined, analyzed, and documented for the purpose of gaining knowledge about potentially harmful behaviors and developing strategies to protect people from all harmful acts, not just those that are called 'crime' today."¹⁶

As this discussion shows, a unified or simple definition of crime is difficult to achieve. The four points of view that we have discussed form a kind of continuum, bound on one end by strict, legalistic interpretations of crime and on the other by much more fluid, behavioral, and moralistic definitions.

No matter which definition we choose, it is important to recognize that most criminal behavior is typically associated with personal features such as impulsivity, risky decision making, antisocial demeanor, and aggression, as well as biological and social risk factors that are mediated by genes and by the social and physical environments.¹⁷ Hence, in seeking to understand crime and its causes, we must also examine the various kinds of behavior that are most likely to be associated with it. In other words, while aggression and risk taking are not necessarily against the law, they are also

Crime and Deviance

1.2 What is deviance? How are crime and deviance similar? How do they differ?

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Sociologically speaking, many crimes can be regarded as deviant forms of behavior—that is, as behaviors that are in some way abnormal. Piers Beirne and James Messerschmidt, two contemporary criminologists, defined deviance as “any social behavior or social characteristic that departs from the conventional norms and standards of a community or society and for which the deviant is sanctioned.”¹⁸ Their definition does not count as deviant, however, any sanctionable behavior that is not punished or punishable. Hence, we prefer another approach to defining deviance. The definition of deviant behavior that we will use in this text is as follows: *Deviant behavior is human activity that violates social norms.*

Abnormality, deviance, and crime are concepts that do not always easily mesh. Some forms of deviance are not violations of the criminal law, and the reverse is equally true (see **Figure 1-2**). Deviant styles of dress, for example, although perhaps outlandish to the majority, are generally not circumscribed by criminal law unless (perhaps) decency statutes are violated by a lack of clothing. Even in such cases, laws are subject to interpretation and may be modified as social norms change over time.

Check Your Understanding

Figure 1-2: The Overlap between Deviance and Crime



1.3 Who decides what should be criminal? How are such decisions made?

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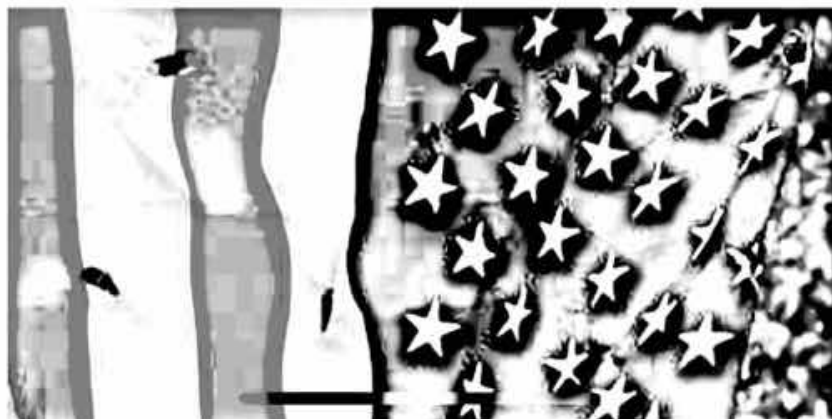
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By now, you have probably realized that the question "What is crime?" differs from the question "What should be criminal?"

While the question "What should be criminal?" can be answered in many different ways, the social and intellectual processes by which an answer is reached can be found in two contrasting points of view: (1) the consensus perspective and (2) the pluralist perspective.

The consensus perspective holds that laws should be enacted to criminalize given forms of behavior when members of society generally agree that such laws are necessary. The consensus perspective (described in greater detail in **Chapter 9**) is most applicable to homogeneous societies, or those characterized by shared values, norms, and belief systems. In a multicultural and diverse society like the United States, however, a shared consensus may be difficult to achieve. In such a society, even relatively minor matters may lead to complex debates over the issues involved, and these debates show just how difficult it is to achieve a consensus over even relatively minor matters in a society as complex as our own.



Crime in the News

What Should Be Criminal?

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Most people agree that certain forms of behavior, such as murder, rape, burglary, and theft, should be against the law, but there is far less agreement about the appropriate legal status of things like abortion, gay marriage, gambling, gun ownership, drug use, flag burning, undocumented immigration, and other controversial forms of behavior.

One issue that has been trending both in the political arena and on social media is the legalization of marijuana. While drug use and abuse will be discussed in greater detail in **Chapter 14**, the present wave of legislation and voter initiatives to legalize marijuana for both medical and recreational purposes (**Figure 1-3**) provides a good example of the difficulty in deciding what should or should not be considered criminal.

Figure 1-3

Legal Status of Medical and Recreational Marijuana Use in the United States



Sources: Governing. "State Marijuana Laws in 2019 Map." <https://www.governing.com/gov-data/safety-justice/state-marijuana-laws-map-medical-recreational.html> (accessed June 2019).

While existing federal law provides strict penalties for marijuana possession, production, sale, or use, a number of U.S. jurisdictions have recently modified their laws to legalize the possession of small amounts of marijuana for personal use. Most of these new laws, while they permit either recreational or medical marijuana use, prohibit the substance from being consumed in public and limit the amount (and sometimes the form) allowed. As with other substances that may affect reaction time and judgment, jurisdictions that have expanded the legal availability of marijuana prohibit operating a motor vehicle while under the influence, and do not permit marijuana intoxication to be used as a defense against criminal charges.

Although many observers expect marijuana legalization to soon expand to additional states, disparities between federal and state laws, and battles between opposing sides in state and federal courts, may yet lead to a rolling back of the movement toward marijuana legalization. See **Chapter 14** for more details on both the historical and current issues involved in marijuana legalization.

Discussion Questions

1. How do you feel about the legalization of marijuana for personal recreational use?
2. Would you want to live in a state in which marijuana is legal? Why or why not?

Source: NORML, "Marijuana Law Reform," January 4, 2019, <https://blog.norml.org/> (accessed February 10, 2019). Inverse, "Marijuana Legalization 2018: A State-by-State Guide to Legal Weed," December 5, 2018, <https://www.inverse.com/article/43850-marijuana-legal-weed-states-in-2018> (accessed May 20, 2019).

The attempt to understand crime and deviance predates written history. Prehistoric evidence, including skeletal remains showing signs of primitive cranial surgery, seems to indicate that preliterate people explained deviant behavior by reference to spirit possession. Primitive surgery was an attempt to release unwanted spiritual influences. In the thousands of years since, many other theoretical perspectives on crime have been advanced. This text describes various criminological theories and covers some of the more popular ones in detail.

Defining “Criminology”

Before beginning any earnest discussion, however, it is necessary to define the term *criminology*. As our earlier discussion of the nature of crime and deviance indicates, not only must criminologists deal with a complex subject matter—consisting of a broad range of illegal behaviors committed by frequently unknown or uncooperative individuals—but they also must manage their work under changing conditions mandated by ongoing revisions of the law and fluctuating social policy. In addition, as we have already seen, a wide variety of perspectives on the nature of crime abound and new ones are entering the literature all the time. All this leads to considerable difficulties in defining the subject matter under study.

There is some evidence that the term *criminology* was coined by a Frenchman, Paul Topinard, in 1889;²³ he used it to differentiate the study of criminal body types within the field of anthropology from other biometric pursuits.²⁴ While he may have coined the term, Topinard did little to help define it. As with the concept of crime, various definitions of criminology can be found in the literature today. About two decades ago, criminologist Joseph F. Sheley wrote, “There seem to be nearly as many definitions of *contemporary criminology* as there are criminologists.”²⁵

One straightforward definition can be had from a linguistic analysis of the word *criminology*. As most people know, *-ology* means “the study of something,” and the word *crimen* comes from the Latin, meaning “accusation,” “charge,” or “guilt.” Hence, linguistically speaking, the term *criminology* literally means “the study of criminal accusations,” that is, “the study of crime.” Some of the earliest criminologists of the

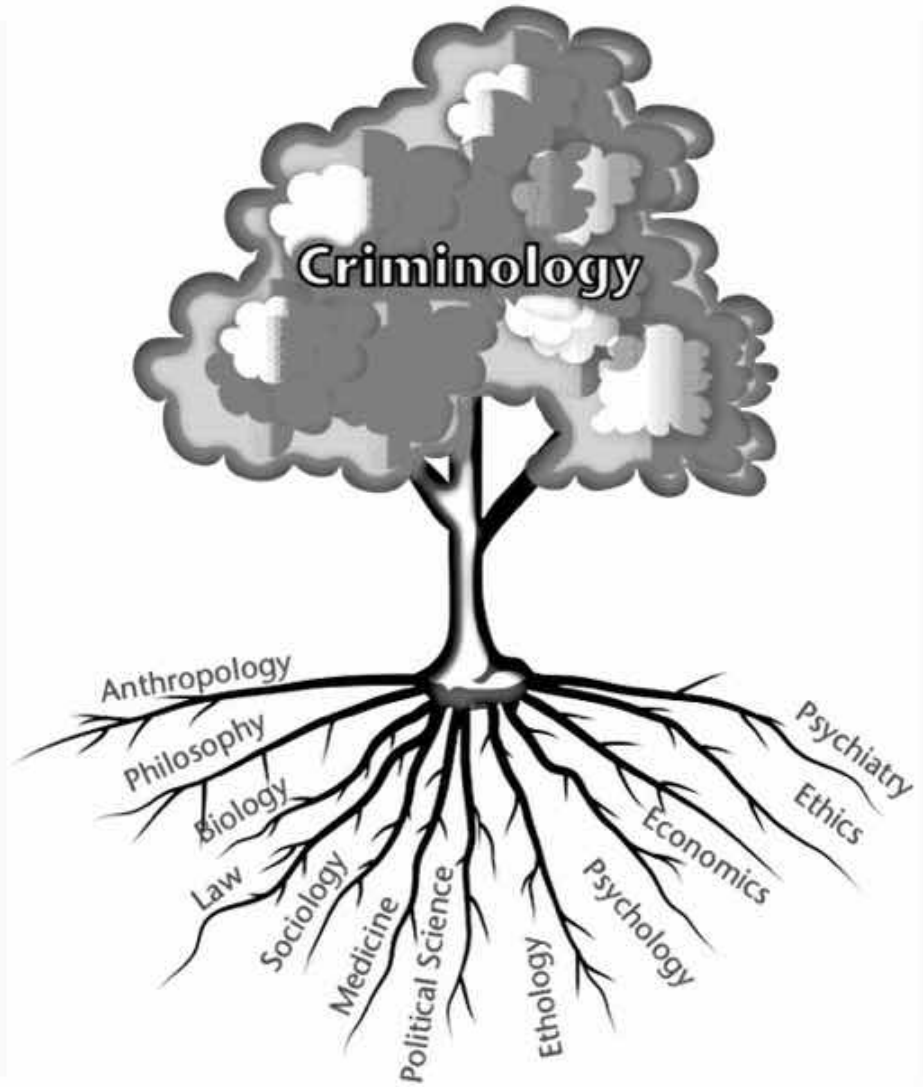
It is important to note that, although criminology may be interdisciplinary as well as cross-professional, few existing explanations for criminal behavior have been successfully or fully integrated. Just as physicists today are seeking a unified field theory to explain the wide variety of observable forms of matter and energy, criminologists have yet to develop a generally accepted integrated approach to crime and criminal behavior that can explain the many diverse forms of criminality while also leading to effective social policies in the area of crime control. The attempt to construct criminological theories that are relevant to the problems of today is made all the more difficult because, as discussed earlier, the phenomenon under study—crime—is very wide-ranging and is subject to arbitrary and sometimes unpredictable legalistic and definitional changes.

A successfully integrated field of criminology must bring together the contributions of various theoretical perspectives and disciplines, but it must also—if it is to have any relevance—blend the practical requirements of our nation's judicial system with emotional and rational calls for morality and justice. Is the death penalty, for example, justified? If so, on what basis? Is it because it is a type of vengeance and therefore deserved? Can we say that it is unjustified because many sociological studies have shown that it does little to reduce the rate of serious crime such as murder? Just what do we mean by "justice," and what can criminological studies tell us—if anything—about what is just and what is unjust?

Notably, criminology also contributes to the discipline of criminal justice, which emphasizes application of the criminal law and study of the components of the justice system, especially the police, courts, and corrections. As one author stated, "Criminology gives prominence to questions about the *causes of criminality*, while the *control of lawbreaking* is at the heart of criminal justice."³⁰ Learn more about the interdisciplinary nature of criminology via <https://www.csudh.edu/dearhabermas/osgood.htm>.

As a field of study, criminology in its present form is primarily a social scientific discipline. Contemporary criminologists generally recognize, however, that their field is *interdisciplinary*—that is, it draws upon other disciplines to provide an integrated approach to understanding the problem of crime in contemporary society and to advance solutions to the problems crime creates. Hence, anthropology (especially cultural anthropology or ethnology), biology, sociology, political science, psychology, psychiatry, economics, ethology (the study of character), medicine, law, philosophy, ethics, and numerous other fields all have something to offer the student of criminology, as do the tools provided by statistics, computer science, and other forms of scientific and data analysis (see **Figure 1–4**).

Figure 1-4
Criminology's Many Roots



Source: Printed and Electronically reproduced by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

The interdisciplinary nature of criminology was well stated by Jim Short, past president of the American Society of Criminology (ASC), who said, "The organization of knowledge by traditional disciplines has become increasingly anachronistic, as the generation of knowledge has become more interdisciplinary. From its earliest beginnings, when philosophers grappled with relationships between human nature and behavior and biologists sought to relate human physiology to behavior, criminology's concerns have reached across virtually all disciplines that focus on the human condition. Additionally, much of the impetus for criminology has come from concerns that crime be controlled. Criminology thus cuts across professions as well as disciplines."²⁹

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A typical dictionary definition of a criminologist is "one who studies crime, criminals, and criminal behavior."³¹ Occasionally, the term *criminologist* is used broadly to describe almost anyone who works in the criminal justice field, regardless of formal training. There is a growing tendency, however, to reserve application of the term *criminologist* to academics, researchers, and policy analysts with advanced degrees who are involved in the study of crime and crime trends and in the analysis of societal reactions to crime. Hence, it is more appropriate today to describe specially skilled investigators, crime-laboratory technicians, fingerprint experts, crime-scene photographers, ballistics experts, and others who work to solve particular crimes as criminalists. A criminalist is "a specialist in the collection and examination of the physical evidence of crime."³² Police officers, corrections professionals, probation and parole officers, judges, district attorneys, criminal defense attorneys, and others who do the day-to-day work of the criminal justice system are best referred to as criminal justice professionals.






A criminalist at work. Crime-scene investigators, like the person shown here, can provide crucial clues needed to solve crimes. How does the work of a criminologist differ from that of a criminalist? Would you like either kind of work?
Peter Kim/Shutterstock

Academic criminologists and research criminologists generally hold doctoral degrees (PhDs) in the field of criminology or criminal justice from an accredited university. Some criminologists hold degrees in related fields like sociology and political science but have specialized in the study and control of crime and deviance. Most PhD criminologists teach either criminology or criminology-related subjects in institutions of higher learning, including universities and two- and four-year colleges. Nearly all criminology professors are involved in research or writing projects by which they strive to advance criminological knowledge. Some PhD criminologists are strictly researchers and work for federal agencies like the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), and the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS) or for private (albeit often government-funded) organizations with names such as RAND and the Search Group, Inc.





A police officer speaks to a group of young people. Criminology examines the causes of crime and seeks ways to prevent or control it. Criminal justice examines the criminal justice system, including police, courts, and corrections. How do the two disciplines complement one another?
Peter Casolino/Alamy stock photo

The results of criminological research in the United States are generally published in journals like *Criminology* (the official publication of the American Society of Criminology [ASC]), *Theoretical Criminology*, *Justice Quarterly* (the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences), *Crime and Delinquency*, the *American Journal of Criminal Justice* (the Southern Criminal Justice Association), the *Journal of Qualitative Criminology*, *Social Problems*, and *Victimology*.³³ International English-language journals are numerous and include the *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, and the *British Journal of Criminology*. The journal, *Crime Science*, a Springer Open Journal, is Web-available at <https://crimesciencejournal.biomedcentral.com>.

People who have earned master's and bachelor's degrees in the field of criminology often find easy entrance into police investigative or support work, probation and parole agencies, court-support activities, and correctional (prison) work. Criminologists also work for government agencies interested in the development of effective social policies intended to deter or combat crime. Many criminologists with master's degrees also teach at two- and four-year colleges and schools.

Private security provides another career track for individuals interested in criminology and criminal justice. The number of personnel employed by private security agencies today is twice that of public law enforcement agencies, and the gap is widening. Many upper- and mid-level private managers working for private security firms hold criminology or criminal justice degrees. The same may soon be true for the majority of law enforcement personnel, especially those in managerial positions.

Anyone trained in criminology has many alternatives (see **Table 1–2**). Some people with undergraduate degrees in criminology or criminal justice decide to go on to law school. Some teach high school, whereas others become private investigators. Many criminologists provide civic organizations (such as victims' assistance and justice advocacy groups) with much-needed expertise, a few work for politicians and legislative bodies, and some appear on talk shows to debate the pros and cons of various kinds of social policies designed to fight crime. Some criminologists become police officers, investigate crimes and arrest fugitives (**Figure 1–5**), and some even write texts like this one!

Table 1-2

What Do Criminologists Do?

Activities of Criminologists	
Data gathering	Public service
Data analysis	Analysis of crime patterns and trends
Theory construction	Scholarly presentations and publications
Hypothesis testing	Education and training
Social policy creation	Threat assessment and risk analysis
Public advocacy	Service as an expert witness at trial or in other court proceedings
Teaching	Public speaking
Jobs in the Field of Criminalistics	
Forensics examiner	Crime-scene photographer
Crime-laboratory technician	Polygraph operator
Ballistics expert	Fingerprint examiner
Crime-scene investigator	

Jobs in the Field of Criminal Justice

Law enforcement officer	Judge
Probation or parole officer	Defense attorney
Correctional officer	Prosecutor
Prison program director	Jailer
Cybercrime investigator	Private security officer and supervisor
Juvenile justice worker	Victims' advocate



The term *criminologist* is usually applied to credentialed individuals, such as those holding advanced degrees in the field, who engage in the study of crime, criminal behavior, and crime trends. The word *criminalist* is used to describe people who specialize in the collection and examination of the physical evidence associated with specific crimes. Others working in the criminal justice system are called *criminal justice professionals*. This table and Figures 1-6 and 1-7 illustrate these differences.

Source: Pearson Education, Inc.

Figure 1-5

The FBI's 10 Most Wanted Fugitives

FBI

MOST WANTED

[Ten Most Wanted](#) | [Fugitives](#) | [Terrorism](#) | [Kidnappings/Missing Persons](#) | [Seeking Info](#) | [Parental Kidnappings](#) | [Bank Robbers](#) | [ECAP](#) | [VICAP](#)
[Ten Most Wanted Fugitives FAQ](#) | [Ten Most Wanted History Pictures](#)

Ten Most Wanted

Notice: The official FBI Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list is maintained on the FBI website. This information may be copied and distributed, however, any unauthorized alteration of any portion of the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives posters is a violation of federal law (18 U.S.C. Section 709). Persons who make or reproduce these alterations are subject to prosecution and, if convicted, shall be fined or imprisoned for not more than one year, or both.

Search for Filter by

Sort by:

Results: 10 items



ALEJANDRO ROSALES CASTILLO



YASER ABOEL SAÏD



JASON DEREK BROWN



RAFAEL CARO-QUINTERO



ALEXIS FLORES



EUGENE PALMER



SANTIAGO VILLALBA MEDEROS



ROBERT WILLIAM FISHER



BHADRESHKUMAR CHETANBHAI PATEL



ARNOLDO JIMENEZ

Figure 1-6

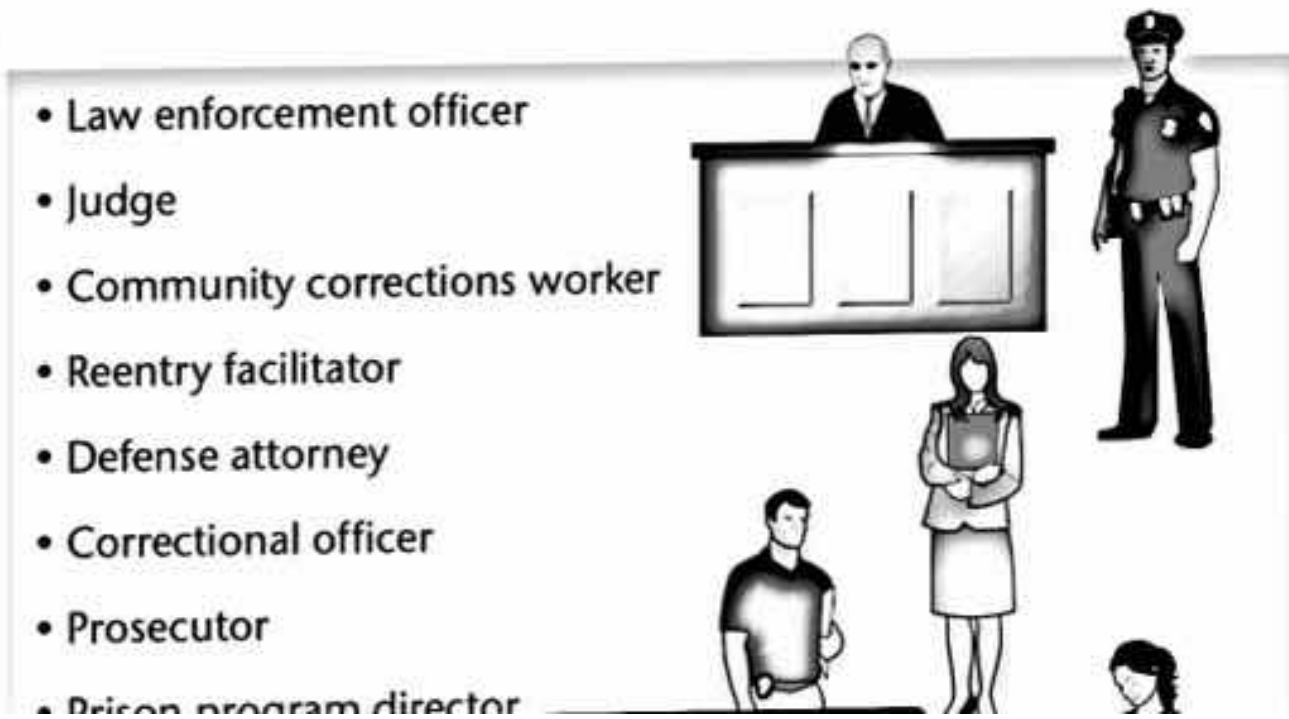
Jobs in the Field of Criminalistics



Source: Schmallegger, Frank, *Criminology*. Printed and Electronically reproduced by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

Figure 1-7

Jobs in the Field of Criminal Justice



Theoretical criminology, a subfield of general criminology, is the type of criminology most often found in colleges and universities.

Theoretical criminology, rather than simply describing crime and its occurrence, posits explanations for criminal behavior. As Sutherland stated, "The problem in criminology is to explain the criminality of behavior. However, an explanation of criminal behavior should be a specific part of [a] general theory of behavior and its task should be to differentiate criminal from noncriminal behavior."³⁴

To explain and understand crime, criminologists have developed many theories. As we shall see in **Chapter 2**, A theory, at least in its ideal form, is made up of clearly stated propositions that posit relationships, often of a causal sort, between events and things under study. An old Roman theory, for example, proposed that insanity was caused by the influence of the moon and may even follow its cycles—hence the term *lunacy*.

Theories attempt to provide us with explanatory power and help us understand the phenomenon under study. The more applicable a theory is found to be, the more generalizable it is from one specific instance to others—in other words, the more it can be applied to other situations. A general theory of crime is one that attempts to explain all (or at least most) forms of criminal conduct through a single overarching approach. Unfortunately, as Don M. Gottfredson, past president of the ASC, observed, "Theories in criminology tend to be unclear and lacking in justifiable generality."³⁵ When we consider the wide range of behaviors regarded as criminal—from murder to drug use to white-collar crime to cybercrime—it seems difficult to imagine one theory that can explain them all or that might even explain the same type of behavior under varying circumstances. Still, many past theoretical approaches to crime causation were unicausal while attempting to be all-inclusive; that is, the approaches posited a single identifiable source for all serious deviant and criminal behavior.

An integrated theory, in contrast to a general theory, does not necessarily attempt to explain all criminality but is distinguishable by the fact that it merges (or attempts to merge) concepts drawn from different sources. As noted criminologist Gregg Barak stated, "An

An integrated theory, in contrast to a general theory, does not necessarily attempt to explain all criminality but is distinguishable by the fact that it merges (or attempts to merge) concepts drawn from different sources. As noted criminologist Gregg Barak stated, "An integrative criminology seeks to bring together the diverse bodies of knowledge that represent the full array of disciplines that study crime."³⁶ Hence, integrated theories provide potentially wider explanatory power than narrower formulations. Don C. Gibbons, professor of sociology at Portland State University, noted, "The basic idea of theoretical integration is straightforward; it concerns the combinations of single theories or elements of those theories into a more comprehensive argument. At the same time, it would be well to note that in practice, integration is a matter of degree: some theorists have combined or integrated more concepts or theoretical elements than have others."³⁷

Both the general applicability and the theoretical integration of criminological theories to a wide variety of law-violating behaviors are intuitively appealing concepts. Even far more limited attempts at criminological theorizing, however, often face daunting challenges. "As we shall see," noted Gibbons, "criminologists have not managed to articulate a large collection of relatively formalized arguments in a general or integrated form."³⁸ So, although we will use the word *theory* in describing the many explanations for crime covered by this text, it should be recognized that the word will only loosely apply to many of the perspectives on crime causation that we will discuss.

As we shall learn in **Chapter 2**, many social scientists insist that, to be considered theories, explanations must consist of sets of clearly stated, logically interrelated, and measurable propositions. The fact that only a few of the theories described in this text rise above the level of organized conjecture—and those offer only limited generalizability and have rarely been integrated—is one of the greatest challenges facing criminology today.

Evidence-Based Criminology

1.6 What is evidence-based criminology? How does it complement theoretical criminology?

Audio

Listen to the Audio



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Criminologists make use of contemporary social scientific research methods in the development of criminological theories. The use of rigorous social scientific techniques to develop knowledge in the field of criminology is referred to as evidence-based criminology (also called *knowledge-based criminology*). The research conducted by today's criminologists results in a body of scientific evidence applicable to the problems and realities of today's world.

Because contemporary criminology is built on a social scientific approach to the subject matter of crime, the discipline has much to offer as we attempt to grapple with the problems of crime and crime control.

In 2009, in recognition of the growing significance of evidence-based criminology, the executive board of the American Society of Criminology (ASC) established a new division of experimental criminology; the division's purpose is "the promotion and improvement of experimental evidence and methods in the advancement of criminological theory and evidence-based crime policy."³⁹

Six years later, in 2015, ASC joined with the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS) to establish the Crime and Justice Research Alliance (CJRA). The Alliance, based in Washington, D.C., works to promote the use of objective research on crime and justice-related issues. Visit the American Society of Criminology on the Web at <https://www.asc41.com>.

1.7 How does criminology, and especially criminological research, influence social policy? What is translational criminology?

Audio

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Translational Criminology



The ultimate outcome of successful criminological theorizing is a set of meaningful social policies based on scientific evidence that proves the theory's usefulness (see **Chapter 2**). Translating the results of research in the field of criminology into workable social policy is sometimes referred to as translational criminology. The National Institute of Justice (NIJ), an arm of the U.S. Department of Justice, explains it this way: "The idea of translational criminology is simple, yet powerful: If we want to prevent, reduce and manage crime, we must be able to translate scientific discoveries into policy and practice."⁴¹

It is not always easy to translate research into practice, however,

evidence for their likely success. In a recent example, an editorial in the highly regarded British magazine *New Scientist* asked this question: "Why are we so reluctant to accept that onscreen violence is bad for us?"⁴² The article entitled "In Denial" noted that "by the time the average U.S. schoolchild leaves elementary school, he or she will have witnessed more than 8,000 murders and 100,000 other acts of violence on television." For children who play computer games and watch cable TV, the numbers will be far higher. Scientific studies show the obvious detrimental effects of media violence, according to the article, "yet every time a study claims to have found a link between aggression, violence, educational, or behavioral problems and TV programs or computer games, there are cries of incredulity. . . ."⁴³

A number of professional groups—including the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychological Association, and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry—agree that violence in television, music, video games, and movies leads to increased levels of violent behavior among children.⁴⁴ A joint statement issued by those organizations says that the effects of violence in the media "are measurable and long-lasting." The groups reached the conclusion "based on over 30 years of research . . . that viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behaviors, particularly in children." Moreover, "prolonged viewing of media violence can lead to emotional desensitization toward violence in real life." Similarly, some years ago the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) issued a report⁴⁵ on teenage violence that concluded that "Hollywood aggressively markets violent movies, music and electronic games to children even when they have been labeled as appropriate only for adults."⁴⁶ The complete FTC report *Marketing Violent Entertainment to Children* is available at <https://www.justicestudies.com/pubs/ftcreport.pdf>.

Even after such findings, however, policy makers are reluctant to slow the production of violent media. For this reason, violence on TV

Even after such findings, however, policy makers are reluctant to slow the production of violent media. For this reason, violence on TV and in video games is still prominent in the United States. *New Scientist* says media vendors dissuade "any criticism of a multibillion-dollar business" where they would lose profits resulting from any policies aimed at crime reduction.⁴⁷

Anyone interested in the creation of sound social policy must respect the well-researched findings of today's criminologists. In the words of NIJ, "Successful dissemination of the results of criminological research requires that the evidence is implemented correctly. In other words, it is not just about finding evidence that something works; it is figuring out why it works and how to implement the evidence in real-world settings."⁴⁸

Professional criminologists are acutely aware of the need to link sound social policy to the objective findings of wellconducted criminological research. A meeting of the ASC, for example, focused on the need to forge just such a link. At the meeting, ASC president Alfred Blumstein, of Carnegie Mellon University, told criminologists gathered there that "an important mission of the ASC and its members involves the generation of knowledge that is useful in dealing with crime and the operation of the criminal justice system, and then helping public officials to use that knowledge intelligently and effectively."⁴⁹ Blumstein added, "So little is known about the causes of crime and about the effects of criminal justice policy on crime that new insights about the criminal justice system can often be extremely revealing and can eventually change the way people think about the crime problem or about the criminal justice system."⁵⁰

Check Your Understanding: Translational Criminology

Select each row below to learn more about translational criminology

The Theme of This Text

1.8 What is the theme of this text? Upon what two contrasting viewpoints does it build?

Audio

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At the core of today's thinking about crime exists a crucial distinction between those who believe that crime is a *manifestation of underlying social problems* beyond the control of individuals (the social problems perspective) and those who emphasize that crime is a matter of *individual responsibility* (the individual responsibility perspective).

Building upon this distinction, this text contrasts two perspectives now popular in U.S. society and in much of the rest of the world (see **Figure 1–8**). One point of view, termed the social problems perspective, holds that crime is a consequence of underlying social problems such as poverty, discrimination, inequality of opportunity, breakdown of traditional social institutions, low level of formal education among some disadvantaged groups, pervasive family violence experienced by some during the formative years, and inadequate socialization practices that leave too many young people without the fundamental values necessary to contribute meaningfully to the society in which they live. Advocates of the social problems perspective, while generally agreeing that crime and violence are serious social problems, advance solutions based on what is, in effect, a public-health model. Adherents of that model say that crime must be addressed in much the same way as public health concerns like AIDS, herpes, or avian flu.

Check Your Understanding

Figure 1-8: The Theme of This Text: Social Problems versus Individual Responsibility

Check Your Understanding

Figure 1-8: The Theme of This Text: Social Problems versus Individual Responsibility



Proponents of the social problems perspective typically see solutions to the crime problem as coming in the form of largescale government expenditures in support of social programs designed to address the issues that are perceived to lie at the root of crime. Government-funded initiatives, designed to enhance social, educational, occupational, and other opportunities, are perceived as offering programmatic solutions to ameliorate most causes of crime. The social problems approach to crime is characteristic of what social scientists term a *macro approach* because it portrays instances of individual behavior (crimes) as arising out of widespread and contributory social conditions that enmesh unwitting individuals in a causal nexus of uncontrollable social forces.

A contrasting perspective lays the cause of crime squarely at the feet of individual perpetrators. This point of view holds that individuals are fundamentally responsible for their own behavior and maintains that offenders choose crime over other, more law-abiding courses of action. Perpetrators may choose crime, advocates of this perspective say, because it is exciting, because it offers illicit pleasures and the companionship of like-minded thrill seekers, or because it is simply personally less demanding than conformity. This viewpoint, which we shall call the individual responsibility perspective, has a close affiliation with what is known in criminology as rational choice theory (discussed in detail in **Chapter 3**). It is also closely associated with a strongly held belief in the importance of free will, which is common to Western societies. The individual responsibility perspective stresses

(discussed in detail in **Chapter 3**). It is also closely associated with a strongly held belief in the importance of free will, which is common to Western societies. The individual responsibility perspective stresses individual responsibility above all else.

Advocates of the individual responsibility perspective, with their emphasis on individual choice, tend to believe that social programs do little to solve the problem of crime because, they say, a certain number of crime-prone individuals, for a variety of personal reasons, will always make irresponsible choices. Hence, advocates of the individual responsibility approach suggest highly personalized crime-reduction strategies based on firm punishments, imprisonment, individualized rehabilitation, and increased security as well as a wider use of police powers. The individual responsibility perspective characteristically emphasizes a *micro approach* that tends to focus on individual offenders and their unique biology, psychology, background, and immediate life experiences.

A recent case from Napa, California, highlights the two perspectives found in this book. In 2019, Sara Lynn Krueger and boyfriend Ryan Scott Warner were both sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole after being convicted of the horrific torture and murder of Krueger's 3-year-old daughter, Kayleigh. Evidence in the case showed that Kayleigh, whose small body was found partially frozen in her mother's apartment, had been repeatedly kicked, hit, and beaten before she was sent to bed, where she died.

Investigators found 41 individual injuries all over her body, with the fatal one causing a rupture of her small intestines. It likely came from a blow to the stomach. Prosecutors pointed out how much the little girl must have suffered laying in bed with such injuries before she died.

Not long after Kayleigh died, surviving relatives sued the village of Napa and Napa County, claiming that the county's child welfare services and the town's police officers did not properly protect the girl. "If the police and social workers had done their jobs," Kayleigh's grandmother said, "Kayleigh would still be here." In fact, officers had been called to the apartment five times where Kayleigh lived before she died—and three of those calls occurred during the final two weeks of her life. For its part, Child Welfare Services argued that its

murder of Krueger's 3-year-old daughter, Kayleigh. Evidence in the case showed that Kayleigh, whose small body was found partially frozen in her mother's apartment, had been repeatedly kicked, hit, and beaten before she was sent to bed, where she died.

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After reading this story, we might ask ourselves some questions: Who was responsible for Kayleigh's death? Was it the city? Was it her mother and her mother's boyfriend? Seen from a social problems perspective, the only missing piece seems to be background information on the mother and boyfriend. What kinds of experiences did they have growing up? Were they beaten by their own parents? Did they play video games in which violence was not only accepted but also rewarded? Were they the victims of a drug culture that caused them to act out in such a violent way? If the answer to these questions are "yes," then some people might lay the blame for Kayleigh's demise on a society that cannot protect its young—and in which violence merely moves from one generation to the next.

Seen historically, the individual responsibility perspective—and not the social responsibility perspective—has substantially influenced national crime-control policies in this country. Examples of conservatism in our nation's approach to criminals abound. The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, for example (which is discussed in detail later in this text), expanded the number of capital crimes under federal law from a handful of offenses to 52.⁵² The law also made billions of dollars available to municipalities to put 100,000 new police officers on the streets and allocated billions for states to build and operate prisons and incarceration alternatives like "boot camps." Prison funding was intended to ensure that additional prison cells would be available to put—and keep—violent offenders behind bars. A subchapter of the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act created a federal three-strikes-and-you're-out law that mandated life imprisonment for criminals convicted of three violent federal felonies or drug offenses. Similarly, the law increased or created new penalties for over 70 federal criminal offenses, primarily covering violent crimes, drug trafficking, and gun crimes. The USA PATRIOT Act—enacted in 2001 and renewed with modifications in over the years since—targets terrorism and crimes committed in support of terrorist activity. The PATRIOT Act has been criticized by many for going too far in limiting individual freedoms and restricting personal choice, although its supporters argue that its provisions are needed to fight the war on terrorism effectively. The PATRIOT Act and the crime of terrorism are discussed in more detail in **Chapter 16**.

We should note, however, that the implementation of any social policy can result in unforeseen consequences—such as the massive increase in American prison populations over the past 30 years that resulted from get-tough-on-crime policies. Today, states and the federal government are straining under the financial burden of incarcerating huge numbers of felons, many of whom have been convicted of nonviolent and drug crimes, and efforts are being made to reduce the number of people behind bars.



Who's to Blame—The Individual or Society?

Is Criminology Really Just a Form of Academic Excuse Making?

Three teenage boys were arrested in the small town of Hillsboro, Maine, and charged with beating a homeless man to death with a baseball bat in an underground parking garage on a cold January evening. A surveillance camera captured the beating, and the youngsters were identified by residents who watched the video clip on local TV news.

Because the boys were juveniles, a storm of controversy swarmed around a local judge's decision to charge them as adults and to bind them over for trial in criminal court—something that state law allows for serious crimes if the suspected offenders were over 14 years of age at the time of the alleged offense.

Soon opinions were being heard from many quarters, and the news media arranged to interview a criminology professor, Dr. Roy Humbolt, at a local college to see if he might be able to shed some light on the boys' behavior.

The first question came from a reporter holding a digital voice recorder toward Professor Humbolt. "What happened here? How do you explain this kind of senseless killing?"

"Well," Humbolt began, "it's not senseless. Crime is a social event, not just an isolated instance of individual activity. And in much youth crime we see patterns of co-offending."

Humbolt felt as though he was hitting his stride and started lecturing as though he was in the classroom with his undergraduates. "Criminal behavior is often attributable to social failings rather than to individual choice. Consider, for a moment, the backgrounds of these young men. Were they subjected to physical abuse while they were growing up? Did they learn violence at the hands of older siblings or parents? Were they, in this instance, involved in some adolescent rite of passage, maybe even an initiation into a gang? Did they feel

"Dr. Humbolt," the reporter asked, bringing the professor back from his reverie, "even if you find that some of those things are true, isn't criminology just an exercise in excuse making for criminals?"



A news conference held to provide insight into a seemingly senseless killing. What value do criminological explanations hold for the understanding of criminal activity? How can we benefit from such explanations?
Cultural Creative/Alamy Stock photo

Think About It

1. What do you think of the explanations offered by Professor Humbolt for the boys' behavior? Which of his explanations, if any, makes the most sense? How can we know for sure if those explanations are accurate?
2. What do you think of the reporter's stinging criticism of the professor? Is the reporter right that criminology is "just an exercise in excuse making for criminals?" Explain your answer.
3. Generally speaking, does understanding absolve responsibility? In other words, if we can understand why someone does something, then should we hold him or her less responsible for doing it? Why or why not?

Note: Who's to Blame boxes provide critical-thinking opportunities based on actual cases.

The Social Context of Crime

1.9 What is the social context of crime? What are crime's consequences?

Audio

Listen to the Audio



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The Social Context of Crime



Crime does not occur in a vacuum. Every crime has a unique set of causes, consequences, and participants. Crime affects some people more than others, having a special impact on those who are direct participants in the act itself—offenders, victims, police officers, witnesses, and so on. Crime, in general, provokes reactions from its victims, from concerned groups of citizens, from the criminal justice system, and sometimes from society as a whole, which manifests its concerns via the creation of new social policy. Reactions to crime, from the everyday to the precedent-setting, may color the course of future criminal events.⁵³

In this text, we shall attempt to identify and examine some of the many social, psychological, economic, biological, and other causes of crime while expounding on the many differing perspectives that

witnesses, and so on. Crime, in general, provokes reactions from its victims, from concerned groups of citizens, from the criminal justice system, and sometimes from society as a whole, which manifests its concerns via the creation of new social policy. Reactions to crime, from the everyday to the precedent-setting, may color the course of future criminal events.⁵³

In this text, we shall attempt to identify and examine some of the many social, psychological, economic, biological, and other causes of crime while expounding on the many differing perspectives that have been advanced to explain both crime and criminality. Popular conceptions of criminal motivation are typically shaped by media portrayals of offender motivation, which often fail to take into consideration the felt experiences of the law violators. By identifying and studying this diversity of perspectives on criminality, we will discover the characteristic disjuncture among victims, offenders, the justice system, and society about the significance that each assigns to the behavior in question—and often to its motivation. It will not be unusual to find, for example, that sociological or psychological initiatives with which the offenders themselves do not identify are assigned to those offenders by theorists and others.

Making Sense of Crime: The Causes and Consequences of the Criminal Event



This text recognizes that criminal activity is diversely created and variously interpreted. In other words, this text depicts crime not as an isolated individual activity but as a *social event*.⁵⁴ Like other social events, crime is fundamentally a social construction.⁵⁵ To say that crime is a social construction is not to lessen the impact of the victimization experiences that all too many people undergo in our society every day, nor does such a statement trivialize the significance of crime-prevention efforts or the activities of members of the criminal justice system. Likewise, it does not underplay the costs of crime to individual victims and to society as a whole. It does recognize, however, that although a given instance of criminal behavior may have many causes, it also carries with it many different kinds of meanings—at least one for offenders, another (generally quite a different meaning, of course) for victims, and still another for agents of the criminal justice system. Similarly, a wide range of social interest groups, from victims' advocates to prisoner "rights" and gun-control organizations, all interpret the significance of law-breaking behavior from unique points of view, and each arrives at different conclusions about what should be done about the so-called crime problem.

For these reasons, it is important to apply the concept of social relativity to the study of criminality.⁵⁶ Social relativity means that social events are interpreted differently according to the cultural experiences and personal interests of the initiator, the observer, or the recipient of that behavior. Hence, as a social phenomenon, crime means different things to the offender who commits it, to the criminologist who studies it, to the police officer who investigates it, and to the victim who experiences it firsthand.

Figure 1–9 illustrates both the causes and the consequences of crime in rudimentary diagrammatic form. In keeping with the theme

criminologist who studies it, to the police officer who investigates it, and to the victim who experiences it firsthand.

Figure 1–9 illustrates both the causes and the consequences of crime in rudimentary diagrammatic form. In keeping with the theme of this text, it depicts crime as a social event. The figure consists of a foreground, or setting, which describes those features that immediately determine the nature of the criminal event (including responses to the event as it is transpiring), and a background, in which generic contributions to the crime can be seen along with interpretations of the event after it has taken place. We call the background causes of crime *contributions* and use the word *inputs* to signify the more immediate propensities and predispositions of the actors involved in the situation. Inputs also include the physical features of the setting in which a specific crime takes place. Both background contributions and immediate inputs contribute to and shape the criminal event.

Figure 1-9
Interpreting the Criminal Event



The more or less immediate results or consequences of crime are termed *outputs*, whereas the term *interpretations* appears in the diagram to indicate that any crime has a lasting impact both on surviving participants and on society. As **Figure 1–9** shows, although the criminal event may occur at a particular point in time and within a given setting, it is ultimately a result of the coming together of inputs provided by (1) the offender, (2) the criminal justice system, (3) the victim, and (4) society (including other individuals who do not fit in any of the first three categories).

Crime and the Offender

Audio

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Offenders bring with them certain background features, such as personal life experiences, a peculiar biology and genetic inventory (insofar as they are unique organisms), a distinct personality, personal values and beliefs, and various kinds of skills and knowledge (some of which may be useful in the commission of crime). Background contributions to crime can be vitally important. Research, for example, tends to cement the existence of a link between child-rearing practices and criminality in later life. Joan McCord, reporting on a 30-year study of family relationships and crime, found that self-confident, nonpunitive, and affectionate mothers tend to insulate their male children from delinquency and, consequently, later criminal activity.⁵⁷ Difficulties associated with the birthing process have also been linked to crime in adulthood.⁵⁸ Negative familial relationships and birth trauma are but two of the literally thousands of kinds of experiences individuals may have. Whether individuals who undergo trauma at birth and are deprived of positive maternal experiences will turn to crime depends on many other things, including their own mixture of other experiences and characteristics, the appearance of a suitable victim, the failure of the justice system to prevent crime, and the evolution of a social environment in which criminal behavior is somehow encouraged or valued.

Each of the parties identified in **Figure 1–9** contributes immediate inputs to the criminal event. Foreground contributions by the offender may consist of a particular motivation, a specific intent (in many cases), or a drug-induced state of mind.

Crime and the Criminal Justice System



Like the offender, the criminal justice system (meaning the various agencies of justice such as the police, courts, and corrections) also contributes to the criminal event, albeit unwillingly, through its failure to (1) prevent criminal activity, (2) adequately identify and inhibit specific offenders prior to their involvement in crime, and (3) prevent the release of convicted criminals who later become repeat offenders. Such background contributions can be seen in prisons (a central component of the justice system) that serve as "schools for crime," fostering anger against society and building a propensity for continued criminality in inmates who have been "turned out." Similarly, the failure of system-sponsored crime-prevention programs—ranging from the patrol activities of local police departments to educational and diversionary programs intended to redirect budding offenders—helps set the stage for the criminal event.

On the other hand, proper system response may reduce crime. A study by Carol W. Kohfeld and John Sprague, for example, found that police response (especially arrest) can, under certain demographic conditions, dramatically reduce the incidence of criminal behavior.⁵⁹ Kohfeld and Sprague also found that arrest "constitutes communication to criminals in general," further supporting the notion that inputs provided by the justice system have the power to either enhance or reduce the likelihood of criminal occurrences. Immediate inputs provided by the justice system typically consist of features of the situation such as the presence or absence of police officers, the ready availability (or lack thereof) of official assistance, the willingness of police officers to intervene in precrime situations, and the response time required for officers to arrive at a crime scene.

Crime and the Victim



Few crimes can occur without a victim. Sometimes the victim is a passive participant in the crime, such as an innocent person killed on the street outside his or her home by random gunfire from a drive-by shooting. In such cases, the victim is simply in the proverbial wrong place at the wrong time. Even then, however, merely by being present the victim contributes his or her person to the event, thereby increasing the severity of the incident (i.e., the random shooting that injures no one may still be against the law but is a far less serious crime than a similar incident in which somebody is killed).

Sometimes, however, victims more actively contribute to their own victimization by appearing defenseless (having characteristics such as old age, drunkenness, or disability), by failing to take appropriate defensive measures (leaving doors unlocked or forgetting to remove the key from a car's ignition), by unwisely displaying wealth (flashing large-denomination bills in a public place), or simply by making other unwise choices (walking down a dark alley off Times Square at 3 A.M.). In a study of Canadian victimization, Leslie W. Kennedy and David R. Forde found that violent personal victimization "is contingent on the exposure that comes from following certain lifestyles," which was especially true "for certain demographic groups, particularly young males."⁶⁰

Although lifestyles may provide the background that fosters victimization, a more active form of victimization characterizes "victims" who initiate criminal activity, such as the barroom brawler who picks a fight but ends up on the receiving end of the ensuing physical violence. Victim-precipitated offenses are those that involve active victim participation in the initial stages of a criminal event and that take place when the soon-to-be victim instigates the chain of events that ultimately results in the victimization. Victimization and victim-precipitation are discussed in greater detail in **Chapter 10, *Criminal Victimization***.

Crime and Society

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Finally, the general public (termed *society* in **Figure 1–9**) contributes to the criminal event both formally and informally. Society's formal contributions sometimes take the form of legislation, whereby crime itself is defined. Hence, as we shall discuss in considerable detail in **Chapter 15**, society structures the criminal event in a most fundamental way by delineating (through legislation and via statute) which forms of activity are to be thought of as criminal.

Society's less formal contributions to crime arise out of generic social practices and conditions like poverty, poor and informal education, and various forms of discrimination by which pathways to success are blocked as well as socialization (the process whereby people acquire the cultural patterns of their society). Socialization has an especially important impact on crime causation because it provides the interpretative foundation used to define and understand the significance of particular situations in which we find ourselves, and it is upon those interpretations that we may (or may not) decide to act. Date rape, for example, can occur when a man concludes that his date "owes" him something for the money he has spent on her. That feeling, however inappropriate from the point of view of the victim and the justice system, probably has its roots in early learned experiences—including values communicated from television, the movies, and popular music—about gender-related roles under such circumstances. In other words, society, through the divergent values and expectations it places on people, property, and behavior under particular conditions, may provide the motivational basis for many offenses.

The contributions society makes to the backgrounds of both offender and victim and to the structure of the justice system and the influences each, in turn, has upon the general social order provide for a kind of "feedback loop" in our vision of crime (even though the

The Consequences of Crime

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As mentioned earlier, the causes of crime, however well documented, tell only half the criminological story. Each and every crime has consequences. Although the immediate consequences of crime may be relatively obvious for those parties directly involved (e.g., the offender and the victim), crime also indirectly affects society and the justice system over the longer term. **Figure 1–9** terms the immediate effects of crime *outputs*. As with the causes of crime, however, the real impact of such outputs is mediated by perceptual filters, resulting in what the figure terms *interpretations*. After a crime has taken place, each party to the event must make sense out of what has transpired. Such interpretations consist of cognitive, emotional, and (ultimately) behavioral reactions to the criminal event.

Interpretations are ongoing. They happen before, during, and after the criminal event and are undertaken by all those associated with it. In an interesting and detailed study of the interpretative activity of criminal justice system personnel, James F. Gilsinan documented what happens when callers reach the 9-1-1 operator on police emergency lines.⁶⁴ Because many prank calls and calls for information are made to 9-1-1 operators, the operators must judge the seriousness of every call that comes through. What the caller says was found to be only a small part of the informational cues that an operator seeks to interpret before assigning the call to a particular response (or nonresponse) category. Honest calls for help may go unanswered if the operator misinterprets the call. Hence, quite early in the criminal event, the potential exists for a crucial representative of the justice system to misinterpret important cues and to conclude that no crime is taking place.

Other interpretative activities may occur long after the crime has transpired, but they are at least as significant. The justice system, taken as a whole, must decide guilt or innocence and must attempt

The Primacy of Sociology?

1.10 What social science has traditionally provided a central theoretical basis for criminology? Why?

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This text recognizes the contributions made by numerous disciplines, including biology, economics, psychology, psychiatry, physiology, and political science, to the study of crime and crime causation. It is important to recognize, however, that the primary perspective from which many contemporary criminologists operate is a sociological one. Hence, a large number of today's theoretical explanations of criminal behavior are routinely couched in the language of social science and fall within the framework of sociological theory. The social problems versus individual responsibility theme, around which this text is built, is in keeping with such a tradition.

Many would disagree, however, with those who claim that the sociological perspective should be accorded heightened importance in today's criminological enterprise. Those who argue in favor of the primacy of sociology emphasize the fact that crime, as a subject of study, is a social phenomenon. Central to any study of crime, they say, must be the social context of the criminal event because it is the social context that brings victims and criminals together.⁶⁵ Much of contemporary criminology rests on a tradition of social scientific investigation into the nature of crime and criminal behavior that is rooted in European and American sociological traditions that are now well over 200 years old.⁶⁶

One of sociology's problems, however, has been its apparent reluctance to accept the significance of findings from other fields as well as its frequent inability to integrate such findings into existing sociological understandings of crime. Another has been its seeming inability to demonstrate conclusively effective means of controlling violent (as well as other forms of) crime. As Diane Fishbein

One of sociology's problems, however, has been its apparent reluctance to accept the significance of findings from other fields as well as its frequent inability to integrate such findings into existing sociological understandings of crime. Another has been its seeming inability to demonstrate conclusively effective means of controlling violent (as well as other forms of) crime. As Diana Fishbein, professor of criminology at the University of Baltimore, said, "Sociological factors play a role. But they have not been able to explain why one person becomes violent and another doesn't."⁶⁷

While sociological theories continue to develop, new and emerging perspectives ask to be recognized. The role of biology in explaining criminal tendencies, for example, appears to be gaining strength as investigations into the mapping of human DNA continue. Charles F. Wellford, past president of the ASC, explained the current state of affairs, saying, "I strongly believe that the future development of causal theory is dependent upon our movement toward integrated theories that involve biological, social, and cultural dimensions. Our failure to achieve much in the way of understanding the causal sequences of crime is in part a reflection of our slowness in moving toward multidisciplinary, integrated theoretical structures. The fact is that for two-thirds of the twentieth century, as criminology developed, we remained committed to a small number of sociological models for which there is extensive proof of their important but limited value. Fortunately in the last 20 years, this has begun to change. Today we see under way substantial research efforts that are based upon models of explanation that far exceed the traditional sociological approaches."⁶⁸ In recognition of such approaches, in 2017, the American Society of Criminology (ASC), established a new division—the Biopsychosocial Division. The establishment of the division was meant to recognize important emerging trends in American criminology. The first was a renewed emphasis on biological theories of crime causation—theories that had been relegated to the dustbin of history for nearly 100 years (see chapters 3 and 4). The second purpose of the establishment of the division was to recognize that not one discipline could explain everything about crime and its causation, and that an interactive perspective, recognizing the roles of biology, psychology, sociology, and other sciences, in the explanation of criminal behavior was critical.

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Nonetheless, whatever new insights may develop over the coming years, it is likely that the sociological perspective will continue to dominate the field of criminology for some time to come. Such dominance is rooted in the fact that crime—regardless of all the causative nuances that may be identified in its development—occurs within the context of the social world. As such, the primary significance of crime and of criminal behavior is fundamentally social in nature, and any control over crime must stem from effective social policy.

- At the start of this chapter, the term *crime* was defined as a violation of the criminal law. Near the end of this chapter, we recognized the complexity of crime, calling it an "emergent phenomenon." In the process, crime was shown to be a lawbreaking event whose significance arises out of an intricate social nexus involving a rather wide variety of participants.
- Deviance, or deviant behavior, refers to a violation of social norms. Some forms of behavior (such as murder, rape, and most serious crimes) are both criminal and deviant. Others may be deviant but not criminal (e.g., nudity under certain circumstances) or may be criminal but not regarded as deviant by many members of society (e.g., the use of marijuana).
- Decisions about what should be criminal are generally made by legislatures, at both the state and federal levels. Such decisions are made through a political process that involves input from social interest groups, including those in favor of criminalizing certain behaviors and those opposed to criminalizing them.
- *Criminology* is "an interdisciplinary profession built around the scientific study of crime and criminal behavior, including their forms, causes, legal aspects, and control." Criminology has evolved from a long historical tradition and borrows features from psychology, economics, sociology, and other disciplines.
- The term *criminologist* is applied to credentialed individuals who engage in the study of crime, criminal behavior, and crime trends. *Criminalist* describes people who specialize in the collection and examination of the physical evidence associated with specific crimes. *Criminal justice professionals* include law enforcement officers, judges, criminal defense attorneys, prosecutors, cybercrime investigators, victims' advocates, jailers, correctional officers, and so on.
- Evidence-based criminology refers to the use of rigorous social scientific research methods in the development and testing of criminological theories. Evidence-based criminology offers the promise of building a valuable

- Evidence-based criminology refers to the use of rigorous social scientific research methods in the development and testing of criminological theories. Evidence-based criminology offers the promise of building a valuable collection of evidence-based knowledge that can be of service to policy makers and individuals concerned about the fight against crime.
- Criminologists are acutely aware of the need to link sound social policy to the objective findings of well-conducted criminological research. Unfortunately, political considerations and long-standing traditional solutions have formed the basis for much crime-control policy in the past, and the situation is only slowly changing.
- This text builds on a social policy theme by asking what the sources of crime and criminality are and what we can do to control crime. The theme contrasts two perspectives: The *individual responsibility perspective* holds that crime is a matter of individual choice; the *social problems perspective* holds that crime is a manifestation of underlying social problems beyond the control of individuals.
- Crime is itself a social problem, and this text sees crime as a social event, not an isolated individual activity. A given instance of criminal behavior may have many causes and many different kinds of meanings. Social relativity holds that social events are interpreted differently according to the cultural experiences and personal interests of the initiator, the observer, and the recipient of that behavior.
- Theoretical criminology, a special area within criminology, offers explanations for criminal behavior. The discipline of sociology has had the most impact on theoretical understandings of crime and crime causation, so a large number of today's theoretical explanations of criminal behavior are routinely couched in the language of social science and fall within the framework of sociological theory. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize the contributions made by numerous other disciplines (biology, economics, psychology, psychiatry, physiology, political science), making the study of crime and crime causation interdisciplinary.