

taken-for-granted fact and thus largely ignored in theories of homicide offending. While we know that most men do not murder and some women have murdered, the fact that nearly 9 out of 10 people who murder are men is important.

To understand men's use of violence and what function violence serves Brookman (2000) interviewed 20 men who had killed or violently assaulted other men. She found that the men used violence to control others and to boost their masculine identity. It was important to these men that others perceive them as tough because to be masculine is to be tough. Brookman (2000) is careful to note that some men are quicker to use violence than others. Moreover, drawing from Messerschmitt's (1993) work on masculinity and violence, Brookman points out that men's use of violence is likely related to the positions they hold in society. Put another way, men who have alternative means to control others or to get what they want may not need to use violence. Either way, however, masculinity and control seem to be linked. Thus, Brookman suggests that there is a subculture of masculinity and this subculture (discussed in Chapter 5) sometimes requires men to be violent.

## SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND HOMICIDE

Much research suggests a link between crime and economic conditions. With regard to homicide, data suggests that poor people in the United States and throughout the world are more likely to be found among homicide offenders and victims than are individuals in higher economic categories. As discussed by Shaw, McKay, and other criminologists in the social disorganization tradition, crime rates, and especially violent crime rates, tend to be higher in communities where people are economically disadvantaged. The reality of living a day-to-day existence in poverty is extremely stressful. For some people, the stress of living on the edge can push them to the brink, and thus violence may result. Additionally, growing up in an area where violence is common and where negative role models may overshadow positive role models may help foster criminal ways among youngsters.

Along these lines, in his 1987 book *The Truly Disadvantaged*, William Julius Wilson argued that high levels of concentrated disadvantage and poverty generate high levels of crime, including homicide. Further, this relationship is not simply a one-to-one

### BOX 4.9 Violence in the United States

Violence has always been an important part of U.S. history. Richard Maxwell Brown (1979) wrote that violence in the United States has been both negative and positive. Negative aspects include crime, political assassinations, and racial conflict. However, some of the most positive events in U.S. history have been very bloody. Beginning with U.S. independence, violence has led to what many in the United States view as important and valuable. The extremely bloody civil war preserved the nation and freed enslaved African Americans. He ends his article by writing the following:

Violence is clearly rejected by us as a part of the American value system, but so great has been our

involvement with violence over the long sweep of our history that violence has truly become part of our unacknowledged (or underground) value structure. (Brown, 1979, p. 41)

What evidence is there that the United States values violence? What evidence is there that violence is not a value in the United States? Do you think violence as a value is related to homicide in the United States? Do you think that there is a culture of violence or subculture of violence in the United States today?

relationship, but communities with many people living in poverty are likely to have exponentially greater rates of homicide than those communities that are not saturated with poverty. Krivo and Peterson (1996) examined neighborhood violent crime rates in Columbus, Ohio, where there are both Black and White high-poverty neighborhoods. Krivo and Peterson's findings support Wilson's ideas. They found that "extremely high disadvantaged communities have qualitatively higher levels of crime than less disadvantaged areas, and that this pattern holds for both black and white communities" (Krivo & Peterson, 1996, p. 640).

### WHY DO WE KILL SO OFTEN IN THE UNITED STATES?

Despite the great amounts of wealth overall in the United States, United States residents are at much higher risk for homicide victimization than those who live in many other countries. As noted in Chapter 3 and can be seen in Table 4.1, the United States has one of the highest homicide rates in the world. It may be surprising to learn that other countries have issued travel warnings about the risk of gun violence and homicide in the United States. Japan indicates that we are a "gun society," and Germany specifies that it is easy to obtain firearms in the United States and thus more common to encounter shootings and sporadic attacks in the United States (Hu, 2019).

In his *Criminology* textbook, Steven Barkan (1997) poses and gives possible answers to the question "Why is the United States more violent than other industrial nations?" (p. 261). The first answer he discusses involves economic stratification. Barkan notes that countries with high-income inequality have higher rates of homicide. In the United States, we see great disparities between those at the top and those at the bottom of the economic ladder. Second, many people in the United States own guns, and assaults with guns may more likely end in death than assaults with other weapons. Third, similar to the subcultural arguments postulated to explain high rates of homicide in the South and high rates of homicide among young African American men, some argue that we have a history and culture of violence in the United States.

**TABLE 4.1 Homicide Rate (per 100,000) for Five Highest Rate Countries and Countries of Interest**

Rank	Country	Subregion	Rate	Count	Year
1	El Salvador	Central America	82.84	5,257	2016
2	Honduras	Central America	56.52	5,150	2016
3	Venezuela	South America	56.33	17,778	2016
4	Virgin Islands	Caribbean	49.26	52	2012
5	Jamaica	Caribbean	47.01	1,354	2016
90	United States	Northern America	5.35	17,250	2016
157	Canada	Northern America	1.68	611	2016
174	United Kingdom	Northern Europe	1.20	791	2016
175	Germany	Western Europe	1.18	963	2016
188	Australia	Oceania	0.94	227	2016

Source: UNODC (2014).

## THE ROLE OF ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE IN HOMICIDAL BEHAVIOR

According to Parker and Auerhahn (1999), the role of alcohol and drug use in homicidal behavior has not been widely studied. Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that there is a strong relationship between homicide and alcohol or illegal drug use (Carcach & Conroy, 2001; Collins & Messerschmidt, 1993; Fagan, 1990). The evidence tends to show that over one-half of homicides involve offenders or victims that are under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of the incident. However, it is important to note that alcohol is more frequently involved than illegal drugs (Parker & Auerhahn, 1999). The reason for the connection is not altogether clear, and theories are still being developed to explain the relationship. Nevertheless, Parker and Auerhahn (1999) report that alcohol appears to be "a causal agent, albeit one among many, in the genesis of homicide" (p. 188). With regard to illicit drugs, Parker and Auerhahn (1999) report that the research does not yet explain the causal relationship, if any, between drugs and homicide. It could be that drug use and homicide is part of a generally violent lifestyle that may be explained by other theories. However, it could be some combination of biological and environmental effects that mix in the presence of illicit drugs to contribute to homicide.

Although alcohol use is still a concern for those who study and work to prevent homicide, another drug has become a cause of concern. At the beginning of the 21st century, police were seeing increasing use of methamphetamines linked to all types of crime, including homicide (see Box 4.10; Rubin, 2005). In a comparison to those incarcerated for murder and those incarcerated for other crimes, Stretesky (2009) found that while all drug use was positively related to homicide, the strength of the relationship between methamphetamine use and homicide was the highest. The odds of being a homicide offender are nearly 9 times greater for an inmate who used methamphetamines compared with an inmate who had not used methamphetamines. More recently, McKetin et al. (2014) also found a link between methamphetamine use and violence, but they also noted that the use of violence was confounded by psychotic symptoms and using a combination of alcohol and methamphetamines. Time will tell how methamphetamines affects homicide across the United States and worldwide.

### BOX 4.10 Methamphetamine and Homicide

Toxicology reports during the first 6 months of 2005 indicated that one-third of Phoenix's 115 homicide victims had ingested methamphetamines sometime near their death. Methamphetamines in the blood systems of murder victims is just one indication of what reporter Paul Rubin (2005) reported that Phoenix police officers knew about homicide in their city. According to Rubin's report, Phoenix police were seeing an increase in homicides linked to

methamphetamines at that time. The police noted that alcohol was still very prevalent among both offenders and victims and they still handled a case involving crack cocaine every now and then as well as cases in which no drugs or alcohol influences could be found. Police in Maricopa County, Arizona, however, were seeing increasing use of methamphetamines linked to all types of crime, including homicide (Rubin, 2005).

## SUMMARY

This chapter explored various explanations for crime with a focus on homicide in particular when possible. The first half of the chapter presented biological and psychological explanations, while the second half was dedicated to structural or cultural explanations. Each section was presented somewhat chronologically, beginning with Lombroso's idea of the atavistic criminal as a biological explanation of crime. The discussion then moved to Sheldon, who also postulated that criminality was biological. Evidence of the possibility that criminality might be an inherited trait was also included. Early studies of families such as the Jukes and the Kallikaks that appeared to support this contention were included, as were twin studies and adoption. The possible links between chromosomes, hormones, and crime were also reviewed. Then the connection between psychophysiological factors and crime, as reported by Adrian Raine, who argues that people who are antisocial or criminal tend to have low heart rates and lower arousal compared with "normal" individuals, was discussed. The first half of the chapter ended with sections on sociopathic personalities, which are believed to be common among serial killers, and an overview of sociobiological theory, which posits that humans will behave in ways to increase the chances that their genes will survive.

Most of the theories included in the second half of the chapter postulate an explanation for crime that looks to structural or cultural explanations. Beginning with the classical school, criminologists saw crime not as a result of biological or psychological abnormalities but as a consequence of a person's choice. As criminologists continued to study crime, they found that there were patterns of who was involved in crime and who was not. This observation led to social disorganization theory, which posits a link between environment and criminal offending. In time, Edwin Sutherland explained that the mechanisms by which we learn to commit crime are the same as those by which we learn anything. Social control theorists turned the questions about crime offending upside down by asking *not* why individuals do crime, but why don't we all do crime? Hirschi, a social control theorist, argued that bonds to society prevent us from doing crime. Later, however, with Gottfredson, Hirschi suggested that individuals with low self-control and opportunity were most likely to commit crimes. Similar to control theorists, Sykes and Matza argued that even if we know the rules or norms, we sometime cross over the line. In order to do so, we use what they called techniques of neutralizations. These techniques allow offenders to rationalize their criminal acts before they do them. More recently, Jack Katz proposed the idea of righteous slaughter, in which some homicide offenders feel justified in killing another.

Following brief overviews of the major sociocultural explanations for crime and their application to homicide, common correlates of homicide—including race, sex, social class, and region as well as some of the theories postulated to explain these connections, including subcultural theories—were reviewed. Feminist explanations for masculine violence and William Julius Wilson's ideas about the truly disadvantaged as applied to high rates of homicide in the United States as compared to other industrial nations were noted. Finally, the chapter ended with a discussion about the unknown role of drugs and alcohol in homicidal behavior. In Chapter 5 and several succeeding chapters, different types of homicide are reviewed. Additional theories postulated to explain these particular types of homicide are included, and theories discussed in this chapter are expanded.

## CHAPTER QUESTIONS

1. What is an atavist, and how does Lombroso believe they are related to crime?
2. Name and explain Lombroso's three types of criminals.
3. Name and explain Sheldon's three body types, and note which is most likely to be criminal according to Sheldon.
4. Who are the Jukes and the Kallikaks, and what is their importance in the history of criminological theory?
5. What is a concordance rate?
6. What might we conclude about crime from twin and adoption studies?
7. What are hormones, and how are they believed to be related to crime? What does the evidence suggest?
8. What are the arguments against the connection between women's menstruation and their offending behaviors?
9. Who was Phineas Gage, and why is he important to the study of crime?
10. How might Twinkies and lead be linked with homicide? What does the evidence tell us?
11. What is a sociopath? Are all sociopaths killers? Are any?
12. According to a sociobiological theory of crime, who is more likely to kill a child: a parent, a stepparent, a father's brother, or a father's brother's wife? Why?
13. How are biological, psychological, cultural, and structural explanations for homicide different?
14. How would Beccaria or another person using a classical perspective explain homicide?
15. Why does the transitional zone have the most crime according to social disorganization theorists?
16. Differential association theory postulates that crime is learned. Give an example of how homicide is learned.
17. What do social control theorists ask with regard to crime?
18. List and explain Hirschi's four social bonds. Can you imagine a case in which all four social bonds are strong but a homicide still occurs? Explain.
19. How well do you think a general theory of crime explains homicide in the United States? Explain.
20. Give one example of homicide that might fit each of the techniques of neutralization.
21. What is meant by "murder as righteous slaughter"?
22. List and explain at least three correlates of homicide discussed in this chapter.
23. Compare the subculture of violence and the subculture of honor.
24. How are masculinity and homicide linked according to feminists?
25. Discuss why homicide in the United States is relatively high compared to many other nations.
26. Which has a higher correlation with homicide, alcohol or illicit drugs?

## THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Which theory do you think is best for explaining homicide? Why is it best?
2. Look up a recent homicide in your home city or state, and give a short summary of what is known about the case. Then apply one of the theories or explanations in this

- chapter to explain the homicide. Be sure to explain the entire theory and note what applies and what might not fit.
- Using the three criteria for causation discussed in Box 4.4, discuss whether or not the relationship between corn consumption and homicide is likely to be a causal one.
  - What characteristics are common among sociopaths? Discuss whether all or some murderers are psychopaths and whether all psychopaths are murderers.
  - How would a sociobiologist explain the research in Box 4.6? What else might explain the findings? And, finally, does this study prove sociobiological theory?

## WEB ASSIGNMENTS

- James Garbarino is a Loyola University psychologist who has written a book about his work with murderers, and in 2015 he talked about his experiences at Cornell University. This talk was recorded and is available on YouTube: You can search for "James Garbarino Listening to Killers." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5OrTbL5G9RQ>.
- The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime produces a Global Study of Homicide. It is well worth your time to look at this information. It gives you an idea about the loss of life to homicide worldwide and how much the rates vary across the world. The latest report is available at <http://www.unodc.org/gsh/>. There is a full report as well as informative statistics and an interactive dashboard to help you navigate to different information you may find interesting.
- Watch this video about two fathers who murdered and how they are covered in the media: <https://nowthisnews.com/videos/news/how-two-fathers-charged-with-murder-are-covered-by-media>. What do you think about the two stories and how they are covered? Can you think of other cases in which there are some similarities but the coverage is so different?

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