# S H O C A P

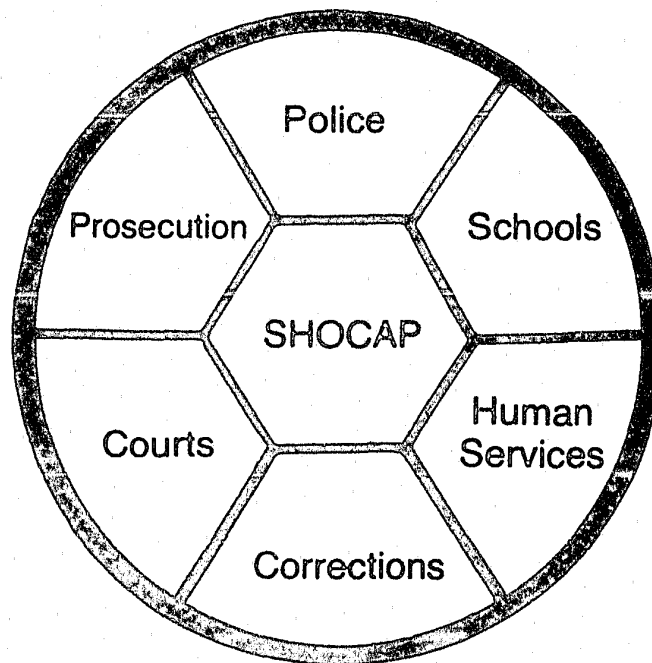## Serious Habitual Offender Comprehensive Action Program

MFI

120238

# EXPLANATIONS OF DELINQUENCY

## FACT AND FICTION

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120238

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# I. Explanations of Delinquency: Fact and Fiction

Trying to interpret the youth's hostility, the judge stared at the young man in front of him. Was he as uncaring as his record indicated? Had he been influenced by other wiser and more mature offenders? Why had he engaged in these seemingly senseless criminal acts? Is society to blame? Is this young man salvageable? As the judge drummed his fingers on the desk top, he realized that he had ample facts concerning the youth's offense but only guesses concerning the causes of his behavior.

> **With the knowledge of the literature including research supporting or refuting the theories of delinquency, we can make more well-informed decisions.**

The young man's mother sat tensely watching the judge and her son. She had not been surprised when told that her son was in the detention center and, thinking back, she had even anticipated that call. She had tried so hard and failed so miserably with this child that it was almost as if he were destined to do the things he had done. Had she caused his behavior? Was it unfair to this child and to her other children to have divorced and given him only a one-parent home? Had she been too lenient? Too strict? What could she have done differently? What could she do differently in the future? Still no answers, only guesses.

The police officer had seen scenes like this unfold many times. This young man had been stoic during his arrest and hearings. Others took different tactics and used apologies, confessions and tears to cleanse their souls or manipulate the system. Only a seasoned observer could guess at the different motives. Had the die been cast with this young man? Is there any hope for his future?

A caring teacher willing to expend hours of extra work with problem children may be a rarity in many school systems today. Such a teacher sat in the audience and sadly watched the proceedings. This young man had potential and the capability to do well, but he had chosen other ways to define "success." Could she have motivated him another way? Could she have spent more time with him and stimulated his interest in academic success? Could she have trained him to defer gratification and think to the future? Could she have seen this coming and referred him to others within the school system more capable of handling his problems?

Were the thoughts that filled the courtroom ignoring the possibility that this young man alone was responsible for his behavior--that he had freely chosen to commit the offenses?

The answers to all of these questions are yes--and no--and maybe. Each of these people interested in this young man's situation had valuable information but did not know how to assess it or apply it. There is

a vast amount of criminological literature that would have helped each of them better understand this youth and also understand their role in causing or altering his behavior. Criminology is a young discipline, and the "true" origins of crime and delinquency continue to evade us. With the knowledge of the literature including research supporting or refuting the theories of delinquency, we can make more well-informed decisions.

> It is naive to think there is a single evil that "causes" delinquency.

Theories of crime and delinquency range from the non-behavioral, classical school of criminology which began in 1764 to the contemporary, but again, non-behavioral, radical/conflict approach to criminology. Between these two extremes are hosts of behavior explanations focusing on the biological, psychological and sociological schools of thought. These perspectives do not generally have discrete beginning and ending points, but each has a "golden age" during which it was the most acceptable explanation of deviant behavior. The purpose here is not to engage in an indepth analysis of the explanations of delinquency but to present an overview of the major perspectives. This work will not limit itself to an introduction of the theoretical perspectives but will synopsize research "facts" supporting or refuting the theories. Some theories clearly lack factual support while others have factual integrity. As the reader proceeds through the various explanations of delinquency, it will be evident that some are false explanations and some have promise. But it will also be evident that it is naive to think there is a single evil that "causes" delinquency.

# II. Origin of Explanations of Crime: Classical School

Perspectives and Theories
Discussed in This Section:

**Causes of Crime**

**Punishment**

**Social Contract**

In the mid-18th century, criminal "justice" was arbitrary and discriminatory. A youth who stole a loaf of bread was often as likely to be executed as one who murdered, raped or robbed. The determining factors of a person's sentence for a crime were not the element of crime itself but the person's or the victim's status and standing in the community. There was no body of science or literature to help officials make their decisions.

It was against this backdrop that Beccaria wrote On Crimes and Punishment. Beccaria first wrote this paper anonymously because he was shy and retiring and because he thought his ideas were so far afield. His comrades, a small group of men who met periodically in taverns to drink and discuss varying philosophies, had encouraged Beccaria to write such a paper because of his astute conversations regarding crime and justice. Beccaria wrote his paper with no thought of it achieving recognition outside this small group of men. In-

stead, this treatise began the discipline of criminology and influenced political thinking regarding crime, justice and the criminal justice system for many, many years. There is still evidence of the classical school in our criminal justice system today.

## Causes of Crime

The classical school of criminology does not place a great deal of emphasis on the causes of criminal behavior. The assumption is that men operate from a "free will" perspective. We freely choose to do right or wrong, and if we choose to do wrong we suffer the consequences of that choice. Outside influences such as our social system, our community, or our economic status have little bearing on crime, according to the classical theorists. In this respect, the classical school did nothing to change the opinions of criminal justice officials in the mid to late 18th century. All believed that people have free will and can freely choose to do whatever they please regardless of biological, psychological or social variables.

## Punishment

The classical school, and specifically Beccaria's treatise, maintains that there should be a schedule of punishments so that the punishment would fit the crime regardless of one's station in life. This type of schedule would remove a great deal of the arbitrariness and capriciousness from decisions made by criminal justice officials.

This strategy is consistent with the lack of information regarding the causes of criminal behavior and the purpose of punishment.

The sole purpose of punishment, according to the classical theorists, is deterrence. Punishment should serve as an example to the offender and others that the criminal act is unacceptable behavior. In this regard, Beccaria opposed capital punishment saying that the offender would serve as a better example for a longer period of time if incarcerated than if executed quickly.

> The classical school of criminology maintained that there was no "cause" of crime or delinquency other than one's free will and ability to choose right or wrong.

The classical school favored the legal definition of crime because there was really no alternative. No social definition of crime had been developed, and Beccaria was proposing a strict interpretation of the law. He would have preferred to remove all discretion from the criminal justice system in an effort to remove all discrimination from the process.

## Social Contract

Society's right to punish stems from the philosophical view of "the social contract" to which we all presumably agree. The social contract implies that each of us gives up some rights for the benefit of society. If we all sought our own pleasures without regard to the rights or happiness of others, there would be what one philosopher called "a war of all against all." In order to live in a social system, each of us must relinquish some rights for the benefit of society. If, on the other hand, we break the rules of the social system--laws--then the social system has a perfect right to punish us. The "contract" implies that the social system will protect us as much as possible in return for our agreeing to giving the society the general power to punish

## Conclusion

In sum, the classical school of criminology maintained that there was no "cause" of crime or delinquency other than one's free will and ability to choose right or wrong. If one chose to commit a crime, it was society's right, and even responsibility, to punish. This punishment was for the purpose of deterring the individual and deterring others who might consider similar behavior. Beccaria maintained that there should be a schedule of punishments so that discretion and therefore discrimination would be kept to a minimum.

> The entire classical philosophy is the basis for at least part of our criminal justice system.

You would think that a school of thought that began in 1764 would have passed into oblivion long ago. This is not the case with the classical school of criminology. Not only are remnants of this thinking still apparent, the entire classical philosophy is the basis for at least part of our criminal justice system. The police and prosecutors are concerned more with the legal definition of crime and operate under the assumption that people act from free

will. In the adjudicatory phase of the courts, the same assumptions are held. The basic questions for these three phases of the criminal justice system are "Did a crime occur?" and "Did the accused commit the crime?" If the answers to these two questions are yes, then the police, the prosecutor and the court have little alternative but to arrest, prosecute and convict. The causes of behavior are really not considered. It is in the next phase of the criminal justice system, the sentencing phase, that we begin to consider the causes of delinquent or criminal behavior. It is at this point that we move beyond the classical school into what has been called the positive school of criminology.

# III. Evil Causes Evil: The Positive School

The problem of crime is quickly reaching the crisis stage in the United States. Youth gangs terrorize the cities, and burglary rings are rampant in the suburbs. The fear of crime becomes so debilitating that many citizens of this country--the land of the free, home of the brave--turn their homes into fortresses with locks, alarm systems, burglar-bars and guard dogs so that they can retreat to their dens with their families around them, their guns in their hands and their televisions tuned to the nightly news reflecting on the latest styles of murder, rape and robbery. Certainly this may seem to be an exaggeration, but in fact, the fear of crime can and does curtail our movements and our pleasures by causing us

Things that "caused" the delinquent or criminal behavior are the topics of concern to the positive school of criminology.

to be very aware of the possibility of becoming a victim. A letter to the editor of the New York Times states, "Crime makes hostages of us all...the fear of crime--concern over basic survival--clutters everyone's mind, diverting thought and energy."

Crime is both a social pathology and an index of such pathology. When we read of the crimes of Ted Bundy or Charles Manson, we see them as sick people--physically, psychologically or socially--yet when we read of an increase in the crime rate of a certain city or geographical area, we think not of the people who commit the crimes but of the city or area that "generated" the crime. Criminologists do much the same thing. Some view crime as an individual characteristic, while others view it as a societal or social ill. Still others maintain that crime is a political phenomenon caused by the distribution of wealth and power. These things that "caused" the delinquent or criminal behavior are the topics of concern to the positive school of criminology.

## Positive School

The basic assumption of the positive school of criminology is that human behavior is determined by forces outside the individual's control. The perspective maintains that we do not act as free agents and do not possess free will because everything we do is influenced by our biological make-up, our psychological condition and our social surroundings. We learn to eat with knives, forks and spoons not because it is

easier but because it is more socially acceptable. Allergies and chronic illnesses plague some, while others are always hearty and robust. Certainly we can change some of the influencing factors, and we can compensate for certain types of determinants of behavior. Criminologists maintain that youth are more susceptible to influences than adults because they generally lack the ability or maturity to compensate for these biological, psychological or social influences.

> **H**uman behavior is determined by forces outside the individual's control.

Unlike the classical school, the positive school of criminology rejects a strictly legal definition of crime or delinquency and looks more to abnormal or deviant clues of one's future behavior. The positive school of criminology would consider one's classroom demeanor as important if it reflected aggression, over-activity or a disregard for the rights of others. Obviously, this would not fit into any legal definition of crime, but it would be the subject of concern and consideration by criminologists trying to understand the causes and influences of delinquency.

## Criminology

Criminology is vital and dynamic. It is constantly fluctuating from perspective to perspective. This movement is not capricious but is based on research and revelation. In discussing the continuity within criminological theory, Meier maintains that "There is nothing which is absolutely or uniquely new, but rather there are improvements on existing developments." In the succeeding portions of this booklet, we will consider various perspectives within the positive school of criminology and look at points of relevance and irrelevance as well as continuity and divergence. Each perspective will be critically examined as to its ability to solve the puzzle of delinquency.

# IV. Biological Causes of Delinquency

Perspectives or Theories
Discussed in This Section:

**Phrenology**

**Physical Characteristics**

**Heredity**

**Somatotypes**

**Neurological Dysfunction**

**Chemistry and Crime**

**Minimal Brain Dysfunction
(Learning Disabilities)**

**XYY Males**

If we sit down and pragmatically consider all of the variables that we think are related to delinquent behavior and reject all of them that we really cannot control or treat, our list becomes very short. In fact, we are left with only one: the offender.

Sarnoff A. Mednick, a psychologist and one of the most respected criminologists, prefers the biological theories in saying that we are in a better "position to change biological function to prevent crime than to change the way mothers raise their children." After years of research, Mednick maintains that "A pill has a better

chance of success than an effort to eliminate unemployment." Treating the individual is easier than treating the social system, but has criminology reached the point where delinquents can be accurately diagnosed and treated? We may be getting close.

Phrenology was one of the first perspectives favored by anatomists in Europe, Great Britain and America in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Although these theorists have been called "the medicine men" of criminology, they began the effort to identify the biological or physical characteristics representative of criminals. The practice of phrenology maintains that one can "read" the bumps on the head to determine the areas of development and overdevelopment of the brain. The assumption was that the skull conforms to the shape of the brain and the brain controls all behavior. "Mapping" the bumps would allow the phrenologists to predict the behavior of a person. Today we give little credence to such theories.

**Treating the individual is easier than treating the social system.**

The "scientific study" of character and behavior based on anatomy served as a springboard for a more acceptable theory of delinquency--criminal anthropology. Criminal anthropology gained attention in the late 19th century when an Italian physician, Cesare Lombroso, systematically studied hundreds of criminals for evidence

of physical abnormalities which would indicate that these people reflected characteristics of earlier evolutionary forms. This degeneracy was presumed to show that the criminal was "less than human in some ways and was biologically deficient." The deficiency was thought to cause the delinquency or criminality. Evidence of being a

> Lombroso and his followers then set out to locate the physical and biological characteristics that set apart criminals from the normal population.

"throw-back to a more primitive state" or an atavist included deviations of head size and shape, fleshy or swollen lips, long arms and hair characteristic of the opposite sex. It is interesting to note the event that led to this theory. The physician who formulated the theory, Cesare Lombroso, became acquainted with a dangerous criminal named Villella. Villella was a powerful, aggressive man. When Villella died, Lombroso performed an autopsy and discovered an unusual formation which reminded him of the brains of lower primates. His immediate conclusion was that this criminal, Villella, was an atavist or ancestor to modern man. Lombroso and his followers then set out to locate the physical and biological characteristics that set apart criminals from the normal population. Sloping foreheads, large earlobes, beady eyes and tattoos were some of the items they thought were "related" to criminal behavior. Today we would scoff at such conclusions, but the real value of the work done by these biological theorists, Lombroso, Garofalo and Ferri--credited with being the founders of the positive school of criminology--is that they began the scientific inquiry into the causes of delinquent and criminal behavior.

The biological theorists who followed Lombroso used techniques that were just as unsound by today's standards, although they were quite acceptable at that time. Two researchers, Dugdale and Goddard, studied families in the early 20th century to determine the influence of heredity on criminal behavior. Many of the assumptions of these researchers were either inappropriate or invalid (such as illegitimacy causing a genetic strain that predisposes one to criminal behavior) but again they were using the best research methods of the time. These two researchers, in separate research projects, concluded that heredity caused many forms of criminal and delinquent behavior. Dugdale's research, begun in the late 19th century and concluded by another researcher in the early 20th century, traced the history of a family known as the "Jukes." One branch of the family tree stemmed from the mother, Ada Juke, and her illegitimate offspring. Dugdale characterized Ada Juke as the "mother of criminals" and found that of 1000 of her descendants, 200 were paupers, 60 thieves,

> The founders of the positive school of criminology...began the scientific inquiry into the causes of delinquent and criminal behavior.

7 murderers, 40 persons with venereal diseases, 140 "general" criminals, 50 prostitutes and many others were assorted "deviants." Dugdale's definitions were at times a little sloppy. If, in his research, Dugdale found a female descendent of Ada Juke who was reputedly promiscuous but without evidence of being arrested or identified as a prostitute, he labeled her worse than a prostitute, an "unindustrious harlot." Obviously there was no evidence for this

label and no sound or scientific rationale for fitting the lady in that category. Dugdale did not consider the effects of environment on the people he studied but focused strictly on illegitimacy and heredity. Again the value of this type of research was that it opened up new avenues of inquiry for future criminologists.

> **The early biological theorists focused on the relationship between physical characteristics and one's propensity to do crime.**

Another branch of the biological theory was that of body type or "somatotype." This approach argued that delinquents have different physiques than non-delinquents and that one's physique is representative of his temperament. William Sheldon was the most famous proponent of this view. He maintained that young men with a muscular build or "mesomorphs" are more active, aggressive and violent and are the most likely

to be delinquent. The other body builds, endomorphs (heavy build and slow moving) and ectomorphs (tall and thin), each have different temperaments. The endomorph is more likely to be lethargic and jolly, while the ectomorph is less social and more intellectual than other body types. Sheldon studied the body types and behaviors of some 500 young men in arriving at his conclusions, but modern theorists maintain that many other variables should be considered in addition to body type.

The early biological theorists focused on the relationship between physical characteristics and one's propensity to do crime.

Virtually all of these early theories have been refuted by more current research.

> **Modern studies of the genetic relationship to crime and delinquency support the proposition that crime and violence may be inherited.**

Modern biological theorists possess the scientific rigor that was missing in the earlier approaches. Today's researchers look to biochemical relationships, endocrine imbalances, chromosomal complements, brain wave activity and other biological determinants of behavior.

## Inherited Crime

"Like father, like son" is a cliche that we accept without question. Children inherit their parent's build, hair color, eyes, allergies and heart problems. It is reasonable then to believe that a violent disposition can be inherited. Again, the inherited traits may _predispose_ a person to crime or violence. Modern studies of the genetic relationship to crime and delinquency support the proposition that crime and violence may be inherited.

One way of supporting or refuting the influence of genetics on delinquent behavior is to study the similarity of twins. If identical (monozygotic) twins are "concordant" or similar regarding delinquency and criminal behavior, the proposition would be supported. After studying thousands of twin pairs in Denmark, Karl Christiansen determined that identical twins who have identical genetic make-up are twice as likely to behave similarly than fraternal twins,

who share only 50 percent of their genetic combination. Still, the influence of the environment cannot be ignored since the twins were exposed to the same home-life and community.

> If we can control repeat offenders, we can control most of the violence.

A better way of testing the genetic inference is to compare the behavior of adopted children with that of their biological parents. An extensive study by Sarnoff Mednick and Bernard Hutchings found that sons whose biological fathers were criminals but whose adoptive fathers were non-criminal were twice as likely to be delinquent than adopted sons whose fathers were not criminals. Again, the influence of the environment was considered and, if a young man's biological and adoptive fathers were criminal, he was over three times more likely to be criminal than if either were non-criminal.

What are the implications of genetic research on delinquency? Those youth who may inherit criminal tendencies should warrant serious consideration once they have shown an inclination to delinquency. "If criminality is even partly genetic, this could have a lot of implications for the criminal justice system, which assumes that criminal acts are voluntary," Mednick notes. "If we can control repeat offenders, we can control most of the violence."

## Neurological Dysfunction

Just what is it that is inherited that causes delinquent behavior? Researchers are quick to point out that behavior is not inherited. The central nervous system and certain chemical combinations do, however, have links with heredity.

A number of studies have found that criminals have trouble learning to avoid punishment. The criminal's nervous system is slow in responding to controlling factors such as fear of pain, punishment or getting caught.

For example, Harvard researcher Anneliese Pontus found that one-third of the criminals she studied were inflexible and could not "shift gears" to withdraw from or conclude a dangerous situation. These were the same criminals who tended to be recidivists. It was as if once their behavior was initiated--to include burglary, robbery and assault--they had to carry it out. Such behavior was related to brain dysfunction.

> The criminal's nervous system is slow in responding to controlling factors such as fear of pain, punishment or getting caught.

Habitually aggressive delinquents have brain wave abnormalities at the rate of five times the normal population, according to recent research by Charlotte Johnson and William Pelham. The results of the brain wave abnormalities include hostility, destructiveness, hyperactivity and poor impulse control.

Some youth display a callousness and a failure to consider the consequences of their actions. This proposition has been supported by objective, scientific tests such as skin conductance tests, which use

machines to measure the electrical conductivity of the skin in response to anxiety, fear or arousal. These tests have consistently shown that the criminal, especially the violent criminal, is different, and his or her nervous system causes the body to behave differently than others. One study has used skin conductance tests to predict accurately which of a group of adolescents would become delinquent.

> **V**iolence and aggression have been associated with the presence or absence of certain chemicals in the brain.

In examining 190 violent persons, Frank Elliott found that 94% had minimal brain dysfunction, epilepsy, head injuries or tumors. He found evidence of "significant neurological or metabolic abnormalities" in the group. Dorothy Otnow Lewis and others have found that a significant number of death row inmates studied had suffered severe head injuries. Another study of violent prisoners showed that 75 percent had lost consciousness from head injuries and about half had abnormal brain wave patterns. The rate of temporal lobe epilepsy, often associated with violence, has, among violent prisoners, been reported to be 10 times the normal rate.

## Chemistry and Crime

Violence and aggression have been associated with the presence or absence of certain chemicals in the brain. Numerous studies have shown that violent offenders have high levels of those neurotransmitters (chemicals that facilitate or inhibit specific brain activity) that cause violence and an absence of chemicals that suppress violence. These studies are "lengthening the list of hard-focused pieces of evidence that the brain itself has something to do with criminal or violent behavior," according to Park Dietz.

Other studies considering diet and behavior have found that high concentrations of sweets and carbohydrates as well as certain vitamins such as A, B3, B6 and C are related to aggressiveness, restlessness and antisocial behavior.

Hyperactivity among children is generally caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain. This imbalance can be compensated for by other chemicals such as amphetamines, although this would seem counterproductive. The child's body is forced into hyperactivity in order to compensate for the lack of internal, chemical stimulus-producers. Once the imbalance is compensated for, the brain allows the body to relax.

## Other Biological Theories

One longstanding argument as to the causes of delinquency has been that minimal brain dysfunction (MBD), an abnormality of the brain structure which causes aggressive or injurious behavior, is directly related to delinquency. One type of MBD which is most often related to delinquency is learning disability. For many years, it was believed that children with learning disabilities exhibited behavioral disorders. The reason for their delinquent behavior may or may not be directly related to the learning disability, but the belief was that a learning disability was a good predictor of delinquency. Recent studies seem to refute that belief. Studies by Pasternak and Lyon seem to question the relationship between

learning disabilities and delinquency. In these studies, the researchers used self-reported delinquency rather than official delinquency as the dependent variable and found that children with learning disabilities did not commit more or more serious acts of delinquency than those without learning disabilities. These children come into juvenile court with a background of disruptive behavior, poor school performance and the like. Therefore, the juvenile justice system is more likely to react in a custodial way toward these children than those who have a better school and behavioral record.

> The chromosome complement may produce or determine aggressive criminal behavior.

One type of biological theory of passing interest to researchers is the relationship between chromosomes and crime. Every cell in the human body contains 23 pairs of chromosomes. One pair comprises the sex chromosomes. In the normal male, these sex chromosomes are labeled XY. Studies of prisoners, however, have indicated the presence of XYY males or "super males" in the prison population. Men with these chromosome abnormalities appeared much more often in prisons or as patients in institutes for the criminally insane than in the general population. These findings led to the belief that the chromosome complement may produce or determine aggressive criminal behavior. Close inspection of this research seems to indicate that the chromosomal complement theory is not as important or valid as it first appeared. The number of males in the population who possess the XYY chromosomal complement is very few, and the crimes committed by those who are XYY males are not as violent or as serious as crimes committed by non-XYY males. The most remarkable

> The biological theories attempt to identify the factors associated with a tendency to violence and aggression.

case of the XYY male and criminal behavior was that of Richard Speck who murdered seven nurses in Chicago. As part of his defense, Mr. Speck maintained that he was an XYY male and therefore was destined to perform the acts he did and had no control over his behavior. The jury failed to recognize that argument.

## Verdict?

The modern approaches to research into the biological theories are showing great promise. The results will certainly not be a panacea but, since Mednick's research shows that 1.6 percent of offenders commit 43.4 percent of violent crimes, by identifying and treating the biological causes of crime among a few offenders, we can achieve remarkable results.

The biological theories attempt to identify the factors associated with a tendency to violence and aggression. Once the factors are isolated, treatment may be effective. As more and better diagnostic techniques are developed in medicine, the evidence may increase. At the very least, the biological explanations are supported by research and cannot be ignored.

# V. Psychological Causes of Delinquency

> **Perspectives or Theories Discussed in This Section:**
>
> **Psychoanalytical Approach**
>
> **Development of the Child**
>
> **Frustration-Aggression**
>
> **Learning Theory**
>
> **Psychological-Environmental Factors**
>
> **IQ and Delinquency**

A pioneer in the study of delinquency, David Abrahamsen, once said, "Every element that prevents children from developing in a healthy way both physically and emotionally tends to bring about a pattern of emotional disturbances, which is always at the root of antisocial or criminal behavior." This belief that the psychological theories are the driving forces in the explanation of delinquency has been a prominent part of criminology. No field of study has established stronger inroads in the explanation of delinquency than psychology.

When we read of a brutal murder or an offender who tortures his victim, the obvious conclusion is that the offender is "mentally ill." Violence and mental illness have been linked through the history of civilized man. The first mental hospital in the American colonies was begun after a forceful argument by Benjamin Franklin that mental illness and violence went hand in hand. Interestingly, the research of the past 20 years has _failed_ to support the belief that those who are severely mentally disturbed are more likely to commit serious offenses. One extensive study by Henn and his colleagues found that of 2,000 people arrested for homicide, only about one percent could be considered "psychotic" or suffering from serious mental illnesses. Other studies have shown that clinicians have seemed _obligated_ to diagnose offenders as something. Psychology and Psychiatry have a wide range of categories into which offenders can be classified. Classification and categorization are major elements of the post-adjudicatory process in our juvenile and adult justice systems, so it is easy to see why criminal behavior is linked so often to psychological defects.

> **No field of study has established stronger inroads in the explanation of delinquency than psychology.**

Psychology and psychiatry are complex areas of study and do not easily lend themselves to brief or cursory discussions. Nevertheless, the following pages will attempt to give "snapshots" of the major perspectives, along with evidence supporting or refuting the approach.

## Psychoanalytical Approach

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, has been responsible for much of the popularity of this approach. In explaining violence, Freud painted the picture of a sealed container, the human psyche, where pressures build from birth. If there are no mechanisms for draining off the pressure, a process he labeled catharsis., the pressure builds until an explosion occurs. This "explosion" is likely to involve aggression and violence.

According to the psychoanalytic view, violence is an expression of tension or psychic energy built up as a result of the faulty emotional development of the person and the absence of appropriate outlets for the pressure. This pressure is particularly apparent in adolescents. "The main characteristic of the juvenile delinquent is that he acts out his inner conflicts. Emotionally immature, he is unable to withstand pain and discomfort or to postpone immediate gratification of his desires," according to Abrahamsen. Adolescence is normally a time of inner tensions, excessive energy and ambiguity. It is a "twilight" time when the adolescent is neither child nor adult. The person still has childish needs and desires such as immediate gratification and a desire for dependency but also has adult expectations imposed by himself and others. If the emotional foundation is weak, the results can be catastrophic.

According to psychoanalysis, a poor emotional foundation for an adolescent or adult is the result of the faulty psychological development of the child. This development is divided into three periods--the infantile period, the latency period and the puberty period.

The infantile period consists of three phases. The first phase is the oral stage of development. Everything pleasurable in the early life of an infant centers around food and nursing. The area of the mouth is unconsciously associated with pleasure, love and security. Mishandling the oral phase can happen through cutting the phase short or allowing it to continue past an appropriate time. If the child is weaned early or denied satisfaction orally, he may feel insecure or feel a loss of love and desperately seek love and security in later years. If the oral phase continues too long, the child becomes spoiled and demands immediate gratification. Excessive eating, drinking, smoking and talking are believed to be adult forms of pleasurable oral eroticism. Other defects are passivity and dependency which are believed to relate to aggression.

> The main characteristic of the juvenile delinquent is that he acts out his inner conflicts.

The second phase of the emotional development of the infant, according to psychoanalysts, is the anal phase. During this stage, toilet training occurs. Rigid toilet training can produce a stubborn, formal and suspicious person. Lax or indifferent toilet training can result in a careless, sloppy and unresponsive person. There are restrictions, demands, approval and disapproval related to this stage which, if handled poorly, can result in a negative, rebellious, hostile, fearful or submissive person.

The genital phase of the child's development is generally between the ages of three and six. The child becomes aware of sexual feelings and often develops intense love for

the parent of the opposite sex. The normal child overcomes feelings of love/hate and hostility, but if the development is faulty, the child may rebel against authority, remain hostile and antisocial.

The latency period is actually repression or postponement of sexual development. If mishandled, through authoritarianism or permissiveness, the child enters the future being hostile, oppressive or promiscuous.

Puberty is the last phase of the child's development. It is at this stage that the child is most confused and tense about his or her behavior. If the previous stages have been mishandled, the child may become rebellious and hostile or shy and fearful.

"When an individual shows criminalistic tendencies in his teens, it is not because he suddenly becomes delinquent at that time, but because he has been suffering from a character deformation since childhood which was more or less hidden and so un-noticed earlier," according to Abrahamsen. The psychoanalytic view tries to determine the appropriate balance between the id and the superego so that the person is able to control himself. Once previous difficulties or deficiencies in development have been identified through psychoanalysis, the treatment consists of realigning relation-ships with others and appropriate catharsis.

> When an individual shows criminalistic tendencies in his teens, it is not because he suddenly becomes delinquent at that time, but because he has been suffering from a character deformation since childhood.

According to many researchers, there is little value to the psychoanalytic perspec-tive. The determination of problems is sub-jective, and patients who receive psychoanalytic treatment have no better chance of success than those who receive no treatment.

Abrahamsen's evaluation of criminal behavior led him to conclude that crime could be "explained" using the simple for-mula:

$$C = \frac{T + S}{R}$$

Where "C" stands for criminality, "T" for Tendency, "S" for situation and "R" for resis-tances to criminal behavior. Everyone has the tendency to do crime. As Tolstoy said, "The seeds of crime are in all of us." The tendency may be biological or psychologi-cal. Situational forces may include peer pressure, opportunity, perceived need or stress. The resistance to delinquent be-havior would be internal controls such as strong superego and self concept. The in-teresting thing about this crime "formula" is that it considers environmental or "situa-tional" factors and not just psychological ones.

## Frustration-Aggression

People who are frustrated or threatened are more likely to be aggressive. This view is held by some psychologists who see ag-gression as an automatic response to frustration. The leading proponent of this view, Berkowitz, has conducted many ex-periments to determine stimuli that may increase or facilitate aggression. These stimuli include pain, odors, temperature changes and noises. Other experiments have focused on "aggressive stimuli" such as

weapons. "The mere sight of the weapon might elicit ideas, images, and expressive reactions that had been linked with aggression in the past," said Berkowitz. When these stimuli are present, the person is more likely to behave aggressively. The research has been moderately supportive of this view.

## Learning Theory

One of the problems with the frustration-aggression view is the learning of aggressive responses to stimuli. Learning is a psychological phenomenon (but with strong social ties as we will see later). We learn and maintain behavior that produces the results we want and expect. The result reinforces the behavior. If we "learn" that violence produces submission and reduces defiance, that may be the procedure a person relies upon when faced with frustration or when having difficulty succeeding. The learning models may include parents, friends, cartoons, "heroes," newspapers or movies.

Some researchers have found that aggressive parents produce aggressive children. Parents represent the most powerful model for their children, and if they are aggressive (and violent) toward their children, each other or other people, the children learn that this is an appropriate and successful way of controlling others or reacting to situations. Even if schools, counselors or concerned friends try to mediate the learned aggression, during times of stress, we revert to the earliest successful behavior in responding to the situation. That behavior may be violent.

Bandura, one of the most respected learning theorists, has identified three models for a youth's behavior: the family,

peers or members of one's subculture and media models. The combination of these models gives credibility to some of the social psychological theories to be discussed later.

## Psychological-Environmental Factors

Related to the frustration-aggression theory, some researchers conclude that the denser the population, the more aggressive the public. Population density studies began with studies of the behavior of laboratory rats. The animals became more aggressive and violent as their territory was reduced. The over-population of the rat colonies led to "abnormal" behavior.

The population density theory is attractive considering the high rates of delinquency in urban areas. Unfortunately, recent studies fail to support a relationship between density of population and violence. When social and economic conditions are considered, violence may decrease with increases in population density.

The facts seem clear that intelligence is an extremely important variable that differentiates juvenile offenders from non-delinquents.

Robert Baron sought to explain violence and aggression due to ambient temperature. "Long hot summers" that produce riots give credence to this theory. When we are uncomfortable--too hot or too cold--we become irritable. From "irritable" to "violent" is not a long step. The

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research on this topic as well as air pollution and aggression has been equivocal, with some studies supportive of the proposition and others refuting it.

## IQ and Delinquency

Some of the earliest criminologists' studies considered "feeblemindedness" and crime and the relationship between intelligence and delinquency. It comes as no surprise to criminal justice practitioners that children with low IQs are responsible for a large percentage of offenses. Travis Hirschi and Michael Hendelang said "the weight of evidence is that IQ is more important" in predicting delinquency than many of the other factors such as race and social class. Don Gibbons suggests, "The facts seem clear that intelligence is an extremely important variable that differentiates juvenile offenders from non-delinquents, in spite of much sociological wisdom to the contrary."

> **Psychology alone cannot provide the answers to the issue of delinquency**

The research seems clear that there is a relationship between IQ and delinquency. The difficulty is understanding the meaning of the relationship. IQ is certainly related to school performance, and school performance is related to delinquency. Using this model, IQ may be _indirectly_ related to delinquency. Other elements of the model might include frustration and redefinition of goals. The research is clear but the meaning is not. This is supported by James Q. Wilson and Richard Hernstein who said,

"The poor school achievement of delinquents probably is the result of some combination of intelligence and temperament, and this combination may, in turn, help explain their delinquency."

## Conclusion

As has probably been evident, the review of the psychological theories has gotten progressively "softer" and became more involved in social or environmental explanations coupled with the psychological. Abrahamsen's explanations included situational or social factors. Learning theory begs the question "From whom and how does one learn?"

Curt and Anne Bartol, leading researchers in the psychosocial approach to criminal behavior, stated, "the research literature fails to support the widespread and enduring myth that the severely mentally disturbed tend to be killers or unpredictable violent offenders." We must look elsewhere for our answers.

A psychologist and a psychiatrist, Stanton Samenow and Samuel Yochelson, concluded a 14-year study of criminals and the criminally insane, with the statements "our period of 're-search' ended when we realized that criminal thinking and action patterns were not explained by the sociological or psychological molds into which the material was being forced." Offenders appreciated the "excuses" for their crimes which psychology and psychiatry provided. They said "a period of 'search' began when we dropped these excuses and bowed to the overwhelming evidence that the criminals were not mentally ill." Psychology alone cannot provide the answers to the issue of delinquency.

# VI. Sociological Causes of Delinquency

If you do not blame yourself, blame others. This sort of truism may sound trivial, but for the past 60 years the theories most popular in criminology have been those that look to elements of the social system for the causes of delinquency. Parents teach proper (or improper) behavior, friends represent models of behavior, television shows and billboards depict the goals we seek (regardless of our means to attain them) and our communities, school and churches try (or fail) to control behavior. If we agree that these "social institutions" influence the behavior of youth, then we must attach some of the responsibility of misbehavior to them either directly or indirectly.

Why all the interest in the social system? Criminology is a social science, every part of the criminal justice system collects historical information on offenders' social behavior and, further, the social information criminologists can gather lends itself to analysis. Remember though, the concepts used are imprecise and loosely defined, and the entire sociological perspective appears, at times, to be a confused mishmash of common sense approaches. The fact that some of the perspectives are consistent with common sense, however, should increase their respectability because, as Benjamin Franklin once said, "Nothing is as uncommon as common sense."

Most criminologists today recognize that the biological or psychological perspectives may help explain an individual's delinquency, but they feel that the social perspectives help explain a wider range of delinquent behavior.

If a "high crime" area of any city can be identified, it gives validity to the social perspectives. Obviously there is not a crime "epidemic" in the medical sense in those areas, so there must be some social or sociological influence.

> **M**ost criminologists today recognize that the biological or psychological perspectives may help explain an individual's delinquency, but they feel that the social perspectives help explain a wider range of delinquent behavior.

Delinquency is often viewed as a "normal" reaction to one's particular situation. While this may seem to be an oxymoronic statement, examples help to support it. Certain subcultures condone and even prefer, it would seem, violence as a means of establishing dominance and of handling

conflict. In these subcultures, violence is "normal." Similarly, it is normal for youth to pursue certain goals such as a nice car, nice clothes and an identity as a "special" person. Some learn quickly that there are innovative ways of accomplishing these goals such as dealing drugs, theft, burglary or robbery. If these means are reasonably accepted within the delinquent's social setting, they are the "normal" ways of accomplishing goals. "Normal" is not synonymous with "acceptable" but simply means that, knowing what we know about a delinquent's home life, subculture and social setting, his or her acts are consistent with those of others in similar situations.

The social theories have been well accepted in criminology because their explanatory power is reasonably strong and they apply to a wide range of behavior. These perspectives also give us specific information on how to correct the social circumstances that caused or influenced the delinquency.

# VII. Controlling Juveniles by Sociological Means

Perspectives and Theories
Discussed in This Section:

**Social Bond Theory**

**Self Concept**

**Neutralization Theory**

Are Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and a church's youth choir members likely to be delinquent? Are youth whose names consistently appear on their schools' honor rolls likely to be delinquent? Will boys and girls who are members of a close and caring family seek the support of a youth gang? "Probably not" is the answer to all these questions but the next question becomes "why?"

**Delinquent acts are often more pleasurable and result in greater peer support than non-delinquency.**

"Control theories assume that delinquent acts result when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken," according to Travis Hirschi, the leading proponent of control theory. A basic assumption of this perspective is that all youth would find certain delinquent acts attractive and even preferred. This behavior might be supported by television, movies or an impression that this type of behavior is "tough" or represents maturity. Further, the control theories assume that people are "pleasure seeking," and delinquent acts are often more pleasurable and result in greater peer support than non-delinquency. Why, then, aren't all youth delinquent? Predictably, control theorists say that conforming youth are "controlled."

## Social Bond Theory

Control theory tries to account not only for delinquency but also for the absence of delinquent acts. In answering the question, "why aren't all kids delinquent?" control theorist Travis Hirschi says that a youth's bond to conventional (non-delinquent) values is the basis for stemming bad behavior. This bond is the sociological equivalent of the conscience. The elements of this bond are:

- Attachment - sensitivity to and caring for others.

- Commitment - acceptance of conventional values such as saving for the future, getting a good education and shunning risk-taking.

- Involvement - activities that bring the youth closer to the family, church, community and schools help to insulate him from delinquent acts. This is similar to the old adage "an idle mind is the devil's workshop."

- Belief - the moral doctrine and value system that goes beyond simple acceptance and represents a dedication to conventional society.

> A youth's bond to conventional (non-delinquent) values is the basis for stemming bad behavior.

The bond is supposed to be between the youth and the accepted moral and value system of our society. This may be a little vague and far fetched. Youth, and most adults, would have trouble bonding themselves to a value system. Hirschi recognized this difficulty and identified several elements of the social system to which the child should be bonded. These elements include the family (the primary means of socialization), school (our society's identified means to success) and peers (an element that can influence the youth in a good or bad direction).

The research of the past two decades has shown moderate to strong support of Hirschi's social bond theory. Hirschi himself found that youth with strained family relations, lack of interest in school activities and inadequate or inappropriate peer group relations tended to be delinquents. Regardless of race or social class, if there was a strong attachment to parents, school and peers, the youth were unlikely to be delinquent.

Attachment to parents and peers has been measured with questions such as "Would you like to be the kind of person your father is?" and "Would you like to be the kind of person your friends are?" Commitment is measured by asking the youth questions about educational aspirations, smoking and drinking behavior and conduct on dates. Involvement was measured by asking about the amount of time spent on homework and spent riding around with peers. Hirschi's major findings include:

- "The child with little stake in conformity is susceptible to pro-delinquent influences in his environment; the child with a large stake in conformity is relatively immune to these influences."

- Rarely do gangs recruit "good" boys and turn them into "bad" boys; rather "birds of a feather flock together."

- Delinquents' peer relationships are poor, even with other delinquents; they have not simply found themselves among a bad group.

- Adherence to middle-class values insulates youth from the influence of friends, even if the friends are delinquent.

> Regardless of race or social class, if there was a strong attachment to parents, school and peers, the youth were unlikely to be delinquent.

One of the most interesting aspects of recent research testing the social bond

theory is that the effect of the weak bond is greatest for youth in their mid-teens and diminishes as they grow older.

## Self-Concept

One version of control theory maintains that delinquents are deficient in their inner or psychological restraints. Walter Reckless saw two types of controls: internal or "inner containment" such as a healthy, pro-social self concept, tolerance for frustration and goal directness; and outer containment, such as social ties to others, consistent discipline and acceptance of norms, goals and values.

Reckless also saw "pushes" and "pulls" toward delinquent behavior. Internal pushes included restlessness, rebellion, hostility, discontent and immediate gratification. All youths experience these "pushes" to varying degrees. External pushes toward delinquency include poverty, unemployment, inequalities and other elements that limit a youth's opportunities. External pulls toward delinquency involve easy access to gang membership, drugs, violent subcultures and delinquent companions.

This perspective consists of pushes and pulls in favor of delinquency defended by inner and outer containment or controlling forces. The strongest of these controlling mechanisms is a healthy self concept. As another prominent criminologist, Albert Reiss, put it, delinquents lack the "personal controls" to conform.

The research has produced only weak support for the self-concept proposition.

## Neutralization Theory

Control theorists are quick to recognize that even children who develop the social bonding or the controlling mechanisms are not immune to delinquency. Control is not like a small pox vaccination which is needed only once in a lifetime. Even if the controls are in place, they can be neutralized.

A comedian popular a few years ago quipped "the devil made me do it!" when he behaved inappropriately. The audience invariably laughed, probably because each of them had used similar rationalizations. Two criminologists, Gresham Sykes and David Matza, decided that delinquents are often law-abiding citizens who have successfully neutralized the bonds or controls and they have used something we all use often--rationalizations.

> **Delinquents lack the "personal controls" to conform.**

How can a juvenile justify delinquency to himself or herself? Easy. He or she uses the same procedures we do when we lie to our spouse, friends or boss. The techniques of neutralization allow delinquents to "drift" away from normal law-abiding behavior. The offenders experience some guilt and have personal rules that determine how far they will go in victimizing whom. The techniques offenders use in justifying their behavior are:

- Denial of responsibility
  The delinquent views himself as a victim of circumstances and claims the offense was not really his fault.

- Denial of injury

  The delinquent maintains that often nobody is harmed by the act. Stealing a car, for example is called "borrowing" or, worse, "joyriding" rather than auto theft. This makes the offense more acceptable.

- Denial of victim

  Sometimes the delinquent believes that the injury was not wrong, given the situation. They may feel that the victim "had it coming" or "asked for it." The delinquent sometimes justifies offenses by ignoring or refusing to recognize the victim. For example, a delinquent may justify shoplifting from major department stores by asking, "Who's hurt? They have plenty of money."

- Condemnation of the condemners

  The delinquent may displace guilt by claiming that justice is biased, parents are uncaring, businesses do not subscribe to a moral code and the like. Everyone and everything is to blame except the offender.

- Appeal to higher loyalties

  The offender may claim that it is more important to be loyal to his peer group than to the norms and values of the society. This is especially true of youth gangs.

> **D**elinquents are often law-abiding citizens who have successfully neutralized the bonds or controls and they have used something we all use often--rationalizations.

Neutralization theory has generally been supported by research and seems to help explain gang related offenses as well as drug usage. Juvenile justice officials often hear comments such as "everybody is doing it," "it doesn't hurt anyone," "everybody is picking on me" or "it's not my fault."

## Conclusion

Social control theories have been well accepted by criminologists as partial explanations of delinquency. The research has generally supported the control propositions and, equally important, the perspective makes sense. Those who have a stake in respectability or who are bonded to the appropriate values are less likely to deviate.

# VIII. Strain Causing Delinquency

Perspectives and Theories
Discussed in This Section:

**Modes of Adaptation**

**Opportunity Theory**

**Middle-Class Measuring Rod**

We all have goals, aspirations and ideals for which we strive. We define our "success" by our ability to attain those goals. Sometimes, however, we lack the means to attain our goals and we become frustrated. The ability to attain our goals may be blocked because of social or financial reasons. The blockage or absence of means to attain the goals has been called a strain.

Strain theorists maintain that everyone is innately good and prefers not to deviate. It is the "strain" that pushes youth into criminal behavior. Robert Merton, the most prominent strain theorist, said "social structures exert a definite pressure upon certain persons in the society to engage in nonconforming rather than conforming conduct." This theory is not intended to "explain" all crime but useful in explaining high rates of delinquency in certain groups.

It has been said that today's youth do not know where they are going but they know they need a car to get there. Owning an automobile has become an expectation in our society, just as we expect to own televisions and stereos. What if we cannot afford these "necessities"? We adapt. Everyone wants to be successful, but not everyone can meet our culture's definition of success--attaining at least a moderate degree of wealth. The culture also defines the means for achieving this success--hard work, education, honesty, deferred gratification. These means lead presumably to success, acceptance (by the middle- and upper-class) and financial security. Is this how a seventeen-year-old buys a car or a thirteen-year-old a television? Strain theorists maintain that those who live in poverty are hindered because they lack the means to attain middle-class goals, but the middle class goals are still the dominant ones. The resulting strain is called anomie, a term used by Emile Durkheim in explaining suicide. Anomie means normlessness, lawlessness or a social state in which controls, limits or boundaries--rules--thought to be in place are removed or absent. When there are financial upheavals in a society, such as a stock market crash or high inflation, or the death of a national leader, the society would be anomic.

> Strain theorists maintain that everyone is innately good and prefers not to deviate.

Lower class cultures suffer from anomie because they are in a reasonably constant state of economic depression. Yet at the same time, the goals prescribed by the mid-

dle class are still present. The image of the carrot dangling from a stick tied to the head of a mule is appropriate. The goals are going to stay out of reach of the poor unless something extraordinary occurs. This approach was the basis for President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" in the 1960's.

## Modes of Adaptation

How do people adapt to or adjust to culturally defined goals and the means to attain the goals? Robert Merton identified five "modes of adaptation."

○ Conformity
Conformity is the acceptance of the goals and the means (hard work, education, deferred gratification) to attain the goals. In middle- and upper-class cultures, conformity is rewarded by success (acceptance, material wealth, recognition). In the lower-class cultures, conformity to middle- and upper-class "rules" is not as likely to produce success. Quite the opposite, the goals will still be unattainable, and the lower-class cultures will be anomic.

If a strain exists between the attainment of the goals in our society and the availability or acceptability of the means, people tend to replace the goals or the means, or both, with ones that are more appropriate to them. The strain or anomie is then resolved.

○ Innovation
It is difficult to ignore or discard the goals of success through wealth because, no matter what our economic situation, we still see billboards beseeching us to "vacation in the Bahamas" or ads suggesting we buy "the most exquisitely crafted automobile in

the world--the Jaguar." Do we settle (compromise) for a vacation in Slippery Rock and buy a motor scooter? Some youth adapt to the difficulty of attaining the goal (success and recognition) by innovating. Most delinquency, according to strain theorists, takes this form. The youth figures out other means to attain the goals. These may include gambling, prostitution, drug dealing, or stealing. The person is pursuing acceptable goals but using unacceptable means.

○ Ritualism
Merton labeled people who recognize their inability to attain the goals but continue to use acceptable means "Ritualists." There is little chance of success so the goals are not that important, but there is a rigid adherence to means. Ritualists may feel that their reward will come later, or they refuse to innovate because of moral reasons.

○ Retreatism
If both goals and means are rejected, the person is labeled a retreatist. Merton included "psychotics, psychoneurotics, chronic autists, pariahs, outcasts, vagrants, tramps, chronic drunkards, and drug addicts" in this category. Since the goals may not be available or attainable, instead of ritualistic adherence to the means, the retreatist rejects both.

○ Rebellion
The frustration of not being able to accomplish the goals of the culture using the acceptable means is remedied by replacing both the goals and the means with those that are attainable and available. While this sounds like a worthy and reasonable alternative, youth will often choose recognition within their

neighborhoods or gangs as the goal and criminal behavior as the means. In effect, they develop a counterculture with its own goals and means.

In discussing Merton's theory, Larry Siegel and Joseph Senna said, "The inescapable demand to succeed that pervades American culture places such an enormous burden on those lacking economic opportunity that delinquent modes of adaptation are not a surprising result. This condition accounts for the high rate of delinquency in poverty areas, where access to legitimate means is severely limited." Merton said more simply: "Ambition, the cardinal American virtue, produces deviance, the cardinal American vice."

Although strain theorists maintain that most delinquent behavior is of the "innovative" variety, innovators are not necessarily delinquents. Lower class youth who use sports or athletics to escape poverty or who hold the Horatio Alger dream of "poor boy makes good" are placed on high pedestals in our culture.

> **Ambition, the cardinal American virtue, produces deviance, the cardinal American vice.**

Merton's "Modes of Adaption" or strain theory has been well accepted but seldom tested. Although some of his contentions seem apparent (most crime is committed by those in the lower class), many researchers have found that delinquent behavior is by no means (no pun intended) restricted to the lower class. Further, it is difficult to define and test some of the elements of Merton's theory such as "culturally defined goals." Despite the difficulty in supporting the theory through research, the theory of anomie has strong support. As one criminologist said, "It might not be true but it's a good story."

## Opportunity Theory

In an attempt to explain the creation and continuation of delinquent gangs, Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin adopted Merton's strain theory and applied it to gangs. They saw gangs as the result of difficulties that lower class (working class) youth face in attaining cultural goals by acceptable means. These youth have limited opportunity to succeed, and gang membership is the result of their anomic situation. While these youth have limited opportunities for success, in their neighborhoods, there are many illegitimate opportunity structures. These illegitimate opportunities provide upward mobility, chances of recognition and "success" which, although contrary to the rest of society, represent attainable goals for the youth.

Opportunity theory identifies three types of illegal juvenile subcultures or gangs: the criminal, conflict and retreatist. The criminal gang is the "traditional" materialistic gang with a stable hierarchy. The means of success include theft, extortion and property offenses. Stable slums or lower class neighborhoods would have this type of "opportunity" structure in which youth can succeed and excel.

Conflict gangs or subcultures are characterized by disorganized slums undergoing racial or ethnic change. Gang status, and individual status, results from violent crime as well as property crime. The worse the reputation, the higher the status.

The retreatist subculture is made up of those who have failed to succeed in either conflict or criminal gangs. These youth seek the social networking of the gang but, as a group, seek status through drug abuse. Outlandish dress and appearance, definition as "dopers" and general recognition are the substitutes for success even in crime.

> Through illegitimate opportunities, delinquents achieve self-esteem, recognition and even wealth.

According to the opportunity theory, some youths who lack the means or opportunity to achieve legitimate success find other means, quite easily in some neighborhoods. Through illegitimate opportunities, delinquents achieve self-esteem, recognition and even wealth. They develop their own microculture.

As many researchers point out, delinquent subcultures are not restricted to the lower class, the group upon which opportunity theory focuses. Additionally, many more categories of subcultures or gangs come together for similar reasons--to find self-esteem and recognition.

## Middle-Class Measuring Rod

Albert Cohen, a noted criminologist, used a variation of strain theory to explain crime in slums or ghettos. He did not feel that crime was a result of any class inferiority but was due to social and economic limitations or strain. He observed that the lower class, and every other class, is compared to the middle class regarding values,

goals and criteria. These develop into a middle-class measuring rod. The most important institutions in our society-- churches, schools, justice system, business--are dominated by the middle class, so it is natural that such a standard develop. Lower class youth cannot satisfy this standard, so they adopt a set of norms, principles, goals and means in opposition to middle-class society.

The development of the subcultures, according to Cohen, is due to the strain of lower-class youth being subjected to a middle-class measuring rod. This represents a relatively unattainable goal. The subcultures that develop were later expanded to include other than lower-class youth. These subcultures are:

* Parent-male subculture (negative)

* Drug addict subculture

* Semi-professional theft (monetary gain)

* Middle-class subculture (developed because of pressure of living in middle class)

> Opportunity theory has been the one most supported by research looking at the differences between aspirations and expectations.

The common theme, consistent with strain theory, is that the materialistic focus of the society is forced upon a group ill-prepared to accept it and accomplish the goals with legitimate means.

## Conclusion

George Vold said, "Strain theories argue that certain social structural arrangements generate forces that drive individuals toward crime and delinquency." Empirical research seems to support this view but with the criticism that not all crime is lower-class crime. Opportunity theory has been the one most supported by research looking at the differences between aspirations and expectations.

The conclusion is that certain types of delinquency are structurally induced, but the policy implications are less clear. Improving educational opportunities, affirmative employment practices, and the War on Poverty are intuitively worthwhile, but there must be real, not perceived changes. Even then, there is no evidence of the ex-tent of change in delinquency that would occur. George Vold asked the probing questions:

*Do untalented people have the same rights as talented people to want material goods, the respect of their peers, and power and control over their own lives?*

*Does society have an obligation to provide untalented as well as talented people with legitimate opportunities to obtain these things?*

> The conclusion is that certain types of delinquency are structurally induced, but the policy implications are less clear.

Talent is no more restricted to certain groups than is crime. Talented people will succeed, regardless of their social circumstances, but it will be more difficult for some than others. Ours is a classed society. There exists a lower class and an upper class; the middle class may be slowly absorbed into one of the other two. In 1984 there were over 500,000 millionaires in the United States, while 10 percent of the population lived in poverty. Urban areas where the poor congregate produce the most crime. Strain theory helps explain this variance, but other theories propose that the culture, not the society, perpetuates delinquency.

# IX. Social and Cultural Causes of Delinquency

"Stealing in the neighborhood was a common practice among the children and approved by the parents," said Stanley. "I hardly knew any boys who did not go robbing." Stanley was writing of his childhood in the stockyards area of Chicago in the early 1900's. Stanley's story, collected by criminologist Clifford Shaw, is a classic example of a case study, written by the delinquent himself, vividly showing the impact of the culture on delinquency. As Shaw said, "It is always important to study the delinquent behavior of the child in its relation to the social and cultural setting in which it occurs." If crime and delinquency are "normal" in a community or neighborhood, can we expect a youth to ignore those influences and be law abiding? In that community, conforming behavior is "deviant."

Travis Hirschi, in describing cultural theories of delinquency, said this perspective assumes "that men are incapable of committing 'deviant' acts. A person may indeed commit acts deviant by standards of, say, middle-class society, but he cannot commit acts deviant by his own standards." If this position is correct, it means that neighborhoods, communities and portions of our cities have subcultures of deviance where adults have abandoned their responsibility in teaching values and norms. Is this possible?

> It is always important to study the delinquent behavior of the child in its relation to the social and cultural setting in which it occurs.

Criminologists Larry Siegel and Joseph Senna reported that in 1985:

- 20 percent of white children were born out of wedlock.

- 75 percent of black children were born out of wedlock

- 25 percent of all American families are single-parent households, with the vast majority headed by the single mother.

- 2 million children are left unattended after school each day.

- 7.2 percent of all youth between the ages of 5 and 14 are latchkey children fending for themselves with no adult supervision after school.

Standards of acceptable and responsible behavior (by adults and youth) seem to vary throughout our social system. It is very possible that deviant pockets of the population exist. Somehow these people are socialized to socially unacceptable standards and values.

## Ecology and Delinquency

In the early 1920's, Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay made the earliest attempts to explain delinquency in certain areas of a city. They saw the city in a constant state of change, where some areas were experiencing increases in the income of their citizens while other areas were becoming more poverty prone. Delinquency abounded in the decaying areas of the city. There were clear differences in the social values of the slums versus those of the suburbs. Interestingly, even as the population of the transitional neighborhoods changed from generation to generation, they were still delinquency prone. The standards and values seemed to be transmitted to each new generation of delinquents.

> If youth are exposed to "The Good Life" but, because of relative deprivation, are unable to participate in it, they tend to resort to delinquency.

Transitional neighborhoods, by definition, are zones between the relatively wealthy and the poor. Recent research by Richard Block in Chicago supports the notion that crime rates are highest in those areas where the wealthy and the poor live close to one another. Similarly, other research has shown that as neighborhoods undergo racial change, delinquency increases.

If youth are exposed to "The Good Life" but, because of relative deprivation, are unable to participate in it, they tend to resort to delinquency.

Unemployment has often been linked with delinquency and crime. Research by Richard McGahey has shown that delinquency is high in neighborhoods where employment opportunities are low. The link may result partly from by-products of unemployment, however. When employment opportunities are low or decline, households become unstable, frustration increases and youth give different definitions to "success" than the work ethic would require.

Econometric studies in the 1960's and 1970's showed that as unemployment rose, so did delinquency. Researchers found that for each 1 percent increase in unemployment, delinquency rose .15 percent. More recent studies have found little or no relationship between unemployment and delinquency.

## Lower-Class Culture Generating Delinquency

In an effort to explain lower-class gang activity, Walter Miller found that slum areas have a "cultural climate" which creates and perpetuates focal concerns. These focal concerns fit the conditions of the slums and, in some cases, take traditional (middle-class) values and redefine them. The focal concerns include:

o Trouble
   Miller observed that "getting into" and "staying out of" trouble were major focal

concerns. Trouble was a way of obtaining attention. Actual or perceived involvement in trouble-making activities such as fighting or drinking and one's ability to escape the dangers of trouble--arrest, injury and the like--were important. Prestige came from being able to handle oneself in a fight, but staying out of trouble could show cunning.

○ Toughness
Lower-class youth prize physical toughness as well as a tough or "macho" attitude. Athletic ability, tolerance for pain, fighting skill and even one's ability to withstand the trials and tribulations of the justice system afford lower-class youth a positive (by their definition) image. The undesirable characteristics would be weakness and ineptness.

○ Smartness
Unlike middle-class youth who attempt to prove their "smartness" in the classroom, Miller saw lower-class youth as striving for streetwise savvy. Lower-class youth value the ability to "con" or "outsmart" others along with the quickness of wit to insult or put down others as in "playin' the dozens." This represents success in a street-wise way.

○ Excitement
Lower-class youth consider the constant quest for danger and taking risks as "fun." To be held in high esteem, a youth must be active rather than passive regarding excitement.

○ Fate
Luck and good fortune are integral parts of ghetto youths' lives. Winning at gambling and playing the numbers or a big score are just around the corner. The future is predestined so there is little use in planning for it.

• Autonomy
Being in control of oneself is a valued freedom in the lower class and, conversely, being controlled by others is a sign of weakness. Institutions of control--family, schools, church--are in conflict with this value. Miller felt this contributed to the difficulties youth had with those institutions.

> The cohort studies by Wolfgang support the idea that a small group of offenders contribute disproportionately to the violent crime in cities

If Miller's contention is correct that these are the focal concerns of the lower class, it is easy to see how its youth come into conflict with the traditional culture. From a policy standpoint, it would be very difficult to reshape the focal concerns and define them in a way more consistent with those of the middle-class culture. It is evident, however, that these definitions are learned in the subculture, and the subculture perpetuates the focal concerns. John Kitsuse and David Dietrick said, "The delinquent subculture persists because, once established, it creates for those who participate in it, the very problems which were the basis for its emergence."

## Subculture of Violence

Marvin Wolfgang and Franco Ferracutti explored the existence of a subculture of violence. This approach combines psychology and sociology to explain the existence and perpetuation of violence in certain subcultures. Violence is seen as the "normal" way of reacting to an act of aggression such

as a nudge or a push. The violent reaction is not innate but learned. The researchers said, "The development of favorable attitudes toward, and the use of, violence in a subculture usually involve learned behavior, and a process of differential learning, association or identification." The norms produced in certain subcultures are counter to those of the dominant culture.

Since violence is viewed as a normal reaction to certain situations, the users escape feelings of guilt. The cohort studies by Wolfgang support the idea that a small group of offenders contribute disproportionately to the violent crime in cities. This violence is especially evident among males.

## Conclusion

Actually, it is inappropriate to conclude the discussion of cultural and subcultural theories since "Learned Delinquency" (discussed in the next section) is tied so closely to this perspective. The cultural theories, however, focus on the environment while learning theories focus on the individual in the environment.

Cultural deviance theories maintain that the culture, usually the lower class culture, produces an environment with norms in conflict with the dominant (middle-class) culture. Conventional rules are not as important or rewarded so the youth subscribes to the rules, norms and values of the subculture. Unfortunately, these are often in conflict with legitimate rules, norms and values.

There are differences between cultures. Two million "latchkey" children being unsupervised after school each day represent a sizable amount of this society's future. Their lives will be lived according to the rules of the neighborhood. Redefinitions are needed so concerns such as "smartness" and "excitement" will have wholesome, acceptable meanings. For this to occur, we must consider delinquency (and conformity) as learned behavior.

# X. Learning Delinquency Through Social Interaction

Perspectives and Theories

Discussed in This Section:

**Symbolic Interaction**

**Differential Association**

**Social Learning Theory**

"Why do they do it?" This is a question every juvenile justice professional asks himself or herself scores of times. Just understanding the motivation --frustration, strain, lack of control, biological or psychological abnormality--is not enough. "Why did the youth do that crime in that way?" are the questions we must answer to understand delinquents.

"People learn to do crime just as they learn to like peanut butter," said one criminologist. According to the "crime as learned behavior" perspective, people do not become involved in delinquent or criminal behavior because of innate drives, uncontrolled human nature, or frustrations. They become socialized to the behavior just as others are socialized to conforming behavior. Socialization is a learning process. We learn to talk (a child first speaks the language that is dominant in his or her home, regardless of the parents' country of

origin), we learn how to eat, how to ride a bicycle and how to view politics and religion. We learn all of these "behaviors" from others. None are inherited. It is just as plausible that we learn to adopt criminal behavior in the same way.

Learning and cultural deviance theories are similar in this regard. Both view delinquency and criminality as the result of community or family value systems and standards. The difference in the two approaches is one of focus: learning theory focuses on the individual and his or her social (learning) processes, while cultural deviance focuses on the social system or subculture and its influence on others. Said another way, according to learning theory, delinquents adopt deviant behavior; according to cultural deviance, delinquents adapt to a deviant culture. Not all delinquency is restricted to certain cultures or subcultures, and not all youth within certain

> People learn to do crime just as they learn to like peanut butter.

cultures are delinquent so the cultural deviance theory offers an incomplete explanation. Learning theory, on the other hand, is not restricted to a particular social or economic strata and may have broader application.

## Symbolic Interaction

The basis for the learning theories in criminology is found in social psychology and specifically in a perspective called symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is a way of looking at the world. Herbert Blumer, a social psychologist who pioneered symbolic interaction, described its premises: "The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them." We define things, philosophies and behaviors as good or bad. Kittens are good, communism is bad and it is inappropriate to eat with your fingers. Based on these definitions, regardless of their validity, we act or react toward things and people. "The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction one has with one's fellows," according to Blumer. The meaning or "definition" of things and situations is learned from others. "Significant others" are those people who are held in high esteem by someone and those from whom the person seeks praise. Parents are usually "significant others" as are teachers, older brothers and sisters and friends. These people have more influence in establishing a person's "meanings" or definitions of situations and behavior.

> Differential association says as much about what does not cause criminal behavior as it does about the causes.

The third premise of symbolic interactionism is that the meanings and definitions can be modified through the same interaction process that gave birth to them. If the cuddly kitten scratches us or our best friend becomes a communist, we can change our "definitions" of those things. Similarly, we revise our acceptance or rejection of behaviors based on the definitions shared by others, especially those who are most respected or liked. How does all of this fit into deviant behavior? Symbolic interaction forms the basis for one of the most accepted theories of criminal behavior—differential association.

## Differential Association

Edwin H. Sutherland, the originator of differential association, has been called the single most important contributor to American criminology. His theory of differential association includes nine propositions:

1. Criminal behavior is learned.

2. Criminal behavior is learned in interaction with other persons in a process of communication.

3. The principal part of the learning of criminal behavior occurs within intimate personal groups.

4. When criminal behavior is learned, the learning includes (a) techniques of committing the crime, which are sometimes very complicated, sometimes very simple, and (b) the specific direction of motives, drives, rationalizations and attitudes.

5. The specific direction of motives and drives is learned from definitions of the legal codes as favorable or unfavorable.

6. A person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favorable

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to violation of law over definitions unfavorable to violation of law.

7. Differential associations may vary in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity.

8. The process of learning criminal behavior by association with criminal and anticriminal patterns involves all of the mechanisms that are involved in any other learning.

9. While criminal behavior is an expression of general needs and values, it is not explained by these general needs and values, since noncriminal behavior is an expression of the same needs and values.

> **Youth are more likely to commit delinquent acts in groups rather than alone.**

Differential association says as much about what does not cause criminal behavior as it does about the causes. Criminal behavior and delinquency are not caused by biological deficiencies, psychological deficiencies, low IQ, family problems or other environmental variables. It is the result of learning how to behave, just as law-abiding behavior is learned. The learning occurs in interaction with others, the close social companions of the criminal or delinquent. Techniques and skills associated with the crimes are learned and imitated as are the attitudes and rationalizations. A law-breaking youth is not "right" in learning criminal behavior, so he or she understands that the behavior is wrong. They are able, however, to rationalize it based on the rationalization and

motives learned from others. A youth comes to define law-breaking situations as favorable if his or her close associates define them similarly. This is the result of the learning of the motivation for delinquency. The associates are not simply casual acquaintances even though there may be more or longer association with non-influencing others such as co-workers or casual schoolmates. If simple association were the key, prison guards, police and defense attorneys would be most criminal in the society. It is association with "significant others" that produces the definitions.

The picture painted by differential association shows good kids influenced by bad associates and adopting the values, norms and definitions of bad kids. A good apple thrown in a bad barrel will go bad. A number of studies have shown that youth are more likely to commit delinquent acts in groups (often as many as 70 percent of offenders) rather than alone. This seems to support the theory. Other studies have shown that association with other delinquents was related to law-breaking. It is

> **Deviant behavior is learned according to the principles of operant conditioning.**

just as reasonable, however, to propose that "birds of a feather flock together" and that a youth already held definitions favorable to delinquency so he or she sought associates with similar definitions.

Differential association is a difficult theory to test. It is hard to measure "excess of definitions," "intensity," "duration" and

other broad terms. There is, however, general research support as well as common sense support for the theory. One of the strongest of the criminological theories developed from differential association is social learning theory.

## Social Learning Theory

In the mid-1960's, Ronald Akers and Robert Burgess reformulated differential association into a "differential association-reinforcement" theory. This approach looked not just at the concept that crime was learned but how crime and delinquent behavior were learned. Emphasis was placed on the reinforcement of acts or behavior.

This social learning theory begins with the premise that "deviant behavior is learned according to the principles of operant conditioning." Reinforcement of behavior is the key to learning. The reinforcing influences may proceed or follow the behavior. Reinforcement may be positive (pleasing, desirable or enjoyable) or negative (withdrawal of something unpleasant or good to avoid). Similarly, punishment reinforces behavior by adding punishment as consequences of behavior (positive) or taking away privileges or pleasantries (negative).

The theory is both psychological and social--it considers the psychological elements of learning theory but focuses on the social environment for the rewards and punishments. Akers said, "We recognize that learning can occur in connection with nonsocial rewards and punishment, but it is the power and centrality of the direct and symbolic social rewards in society which lead to labelling this theory social learning." The nonsocial reinforcers can be

pleasurable physiological effects such as those of drugs or alcohol. Most reinforcers, however, come from group associations such as family and peers. In this regard, social learning theory is very similar to the bonding theory of social control. Attachment, commitment, involvement and belief are rewarded intrinsically by the group.

> **Violence was learned and "practiced" prior to the violent act.**

Akers, through his own research in the past two decades, has accumulated impressive support for this theory. He has used social learning to help "explain" drug use, drinking, white-collar crime, seemingly "compulsive" violent crimes, suicide and mental illness. Regarding violent crime, Akers turned to Wolfgang and Ferracutti's statement in Subculture of Violence:

*The development of favorable attitudes toward and the use of violence in a subculture usually involves learned behavior and a process of differential learning, association, or identification.*

The culture perpetuated violence through principles of learning. The violence was learned and "practiced" prior to the violent act. It becomes part of a pattern of violence rather than an isolated act.

In considering the social learning of suicide, Akers states the obvious: "The act of taking one's own life, as such, cannot have been reinforced in the past." Accord-

ing to Akers, the suicide process of learning includes:

- Learning and applying cultural definitions of suicide as attention-getting behavior

- The existence, real or perceived, of life crises and problems

- Loss of hope for the solution of the problems or crises

- Reinforcing or punishing reactions of others to the person's suicidal behavior

Approaches to redefining behavior must extend beyond the criminal or juvenile justice system.

By including the principles of operant learning and reinforcement, Akers has developed a much stronger, more complete theory than that of differential association.

## Conclusion

Learning theories of delinquency build upon the principles of symbolic interaction by considering the social and psychological processes by which delinquent behavior is adopted. These approaches have been among the most popular and accepted theories of criminology. In addition to their explanatory appeal, learning theories, and especially social learning theories, present viable ways to redefine acceptable behavior and the reference groups necessary to reinforce appropriate behavior.

Obviously, these approaches to redefining behavior must extend beyond the criminal or juvenile justice system. The family, church, neighborhoods and schools must exercise more reinforcement and punishment and do so in a consistent way, in order to effect change. Police, courts, corrections and juvenile justice workers do not necessarily consist of "significant others" who can influence the behavior of youth. That responsibility lies with parents, neighbors, teachers and friends.

# XI. Labelling Theory

In the turbulent, traumatic decade of the 1960's, a theory of delinquency developed that appealed to those who felt the justice system was inherently evil. This theory, sometimes called labelling theory but later called social-reaction theory (what's in a name?), gained immediate appeal and acceptance, not based on research support but because it just seemed to feel right. These were times when the federal government was blamed for Vietnam, and it seemed appropriate to blame state government for crime.

Frank Tannenbaum, a respected criminologist writing in the late 1930's, condemned the juvenile justice system for stigmatizing delinquents as "evil people." He said, "The process of making the criminal . . . is a process of tagging, defining, identifying, segregating, describing, emphasizing, making conscious and self-conscious; it becomes a way of stimulating, suggesting, emphasizing, and evoking the very traits complained of . . . the person becomes the thing he is described as being." Once

labelled, the youth is believed to develop a delinquent self image which perpetuates delinquency. He becomes the thing he is described as being. Is this possible?

## Symbolic Interaction

Symbolic Interactionism forms the theoretical basis for labelling. Charles H. Cooley, a founder of the symbolic interaction perspective, maintained that we see ourselves through the eyes of others. The "looking-glass self" implies that others become the looking-glass that we use to judge our self-worth and self-esteem. If others see us as bright, happy, witty, handsome, pretty or studious, we perpetuate the opinions--the labels. If asked to evaluate ourselves, we mentally look into the mirror formed by others and give a generalized other's impression of us.

> The "looking-glass self" implies that others become the looking-glass that we use to judge our self-worth and self-esteem.

This process is supported by the writing of another symbolic interactionist, George Herbert Mead. He maintained that we can view the "self" as a social object. Just as we glance in the mirror to check (critically evaluate) our clothes, hair and general appearance, we evaluate our social self based on others' impressions of us. We even say things based on the anticipated reaction of

others. At parties we talk about things we have in common with others, not necessarily the things we prefer talking about, because we perceive that tactic to be the most acceptable. "Acceptability" becomes defined as that which is preferred or expected by others. Politicians have been criticized as "saying what each constituency wants to hear" in order to be accepted by those people. Actually, we all do that to some degree.

> **If men define situations as real, they become real in their consequences."**

The third leg of the stool that forms the basis for labelling is the proposition by W.I. Thomas, a social psychologist, that "If men define situations as real, they become real in their consequences." If we believe we are something socially, we act as if we are that thing. If we define ourselves as witty, we act witty. If we define ourselves as bright, we try to impress others with our intellect. In effect, we accept the label we have applied to ourselves.

The labelling process, according to symbolic interaction, involves:

- seeing oneself through the eyes of others

- looking at the image objectively and defining it in social terms

- accepting the social definition as fact. Society or "others" assign the labels which youth then accept and perpetuate.

## Labelling

The key to the labelling perspective is the self-concept of youth. If a youth sees himself as a delinquent, he will associate with other delinquents and act consistently with his self-image. The youth goes from social-labelling to self-labelling.

Research in schools, developed in opposition to educational "levels," formed some of the early support for labelling. It was believed that labelling a child as an "underachiever" or "basic" level student created a self-fulfilling prophecy and the child would use the label as a measure of "self." Recent research fails to support that premise.

Labelling theorists maintain that juvenile justice is most often distributed to the poor or socially disadvantaged and that the label placed on the delinquent will be accepted and perpetuate a life of crime.

> **The key to the labelling perspective is the self-concept of youth.**

Justice systems, juvenile and adult, have been criticized as discriminatory and biased. The juvenile justice movement has been described as an effort by the middle and upper classes to remove lower-class urchins from the street because they clutter neighborhoods. There is, however, little evidence that the juvenile justice system discriminates against classes of youth. T. Edwin Black and Charles P. Smith, writing in 1981, said there was little or no evidence of racial or sexual discrimination in detention, juvenile court process or corrections.

Another recent study by Merry Morash showed that police actions reflect little or no racial or economic bias in dealing with youth. There is little research support for this major element of labelling theory. The type and level of offense remains the major variable in official actions regarding an offender.

## Self-Image

Some studies have shown that youth who have been arrested are more likely to have a negative self-image. Gary Jensen found this to be true, but he also found that the delinquent self-image did not increase after arrest. According to labelling theorists, arrest begins the stigmatizing process. Jensen's research does not support that proposition.

> **Labelling condemns the social system and the justice system.**

Labelling holds that while arrest begins the labelling process, the rest of the juvenile justice system cements the delinquent self-image. Richard Anson and Carol Eason recently studied male delinquents committed to the Georgia Department of Human Resources. They found that com-

mitment did not significantly increase delinquent self-image. Other studies have supported their findings.

An extensive study in Virginia, conducted by Charles Thomas and Donna Bishop and involving surveys of 2,147 youth, showed that formal actions by the juvenile justice system had little effect on a youth's self-image.

## Conclusion

Despite the appeal of labelling theory in the 1960's and 1970's, research fails to support its major propositions. It is still an attractive, common sense theory but has no empirical or objective support.

Labelling condemns the social system and the justice system. As Ronald Akers said,

*One sometimes gets the impression from reading this literature that people go about minding their own business, and then-- "wham"--bad society comes along and slaps them with a stigmatized label. Forced into the role of deviant the individual has little choice but to be deviant.*

The evidence does not support labelling theory.

# XII. Political and Conflict Explanations of Delinquency

Perspectives and Theories
Discussed in This Section:

**Conflict Theory**

**Conflict and Delinquency**

**Instrumental Theory**

**Power Control Theory**

**Power Authority Approach**

"To think critically and radically today is to be revolutionary. To do otherwise is to concede to oppression," said Richard Quinney, a conflict criminologist. The "new criminology" is a perspective that emerged in 1969, therefore is not so new. It is based on the belief that there is evidence of social conflict. Criminals and delinquents are sometimes considered frustrated members of an "underclass" striking out at oppression and at other times are considered "good soldiers fighting for a cause." There are many subsets of the social conflict perspective. The more radical belief that criminals are modern Robin Hoods who steal from the rich so the poor can survive is not highly regarded by criminologists today. It does not take us long to recognize that more televisions are stolen than loaves of bread or cans of beans. There are, however, some insightful propositions within this perspective which help us understand delinquency.

## Conflict Theory

The basis of the new criminology or social conflict school is conflict theory. This perspective maintains that members of the social system can be divided into the "have's" and the "have not's," with the two groups constantly fighting over scarce resources. These "resources" may be economic, as in the Marxist view, or they may be power and authority.

The "new criminology...is based on the belief that there is evidence of social conflict.

Marx maintained that those who control the economy control every aspect of the social system, including the working class. Marxist theory sees the law and the justice system as an instrument of domination, used by the ruling class to control the working class. The ruling class would prefer that laws concerning "street crime" which is more often committed by working class delinquents be enforced rather than those laws covering white collar crimes or "upperworld" crime. Further, those who control the economy, the rich, control the judges as well as the police. If the rich are caught, or if their children are arrested, the presump-

tion is that they will be "slapped on the hand" and released while the poor will suffer the full impact of the law.

The non-Marxist conflict perspective is similar except the basis of power is not necessarily the economy. Power is a function of authority which may or may not be based on money. A gang leader may be in the same social class but he is a person with power. If he uses that power to 'dominate" others, the non-Marxist conflict approach is useful in explaining that relationship.

> **Conflict theory proposes that the weak and the poor suffer at the hands of the justice system.**

In sum, conflict theory proposes that the weak and the poor suffer at the hands of the justice system. The law is constructed to benefit the powerful and oppress the weak. The poor may not commit more crimes than the rich but, they are arrested more often and receive harsher convictions. The poor may, on the other hand, commit more crimes than the rich but that is because they are frustrated with their lot in life and because the laws and law enforcement are biased against the types of crimes committed by the working class. Local police never investigate price fixing among major oil companies or monopolies among major industries. Those investigations are "controlled" by agencies "influenced" by politicians who are "supported" by major donors.

## Conflict and Delinquency

According to one conflict criminologist, Anthony Platt, the juvenile justice move-ment was born in class-consciousness. He said:

*The child-saving movement tried to do for the criminal justice system what industrialists and corporate leaders were trying to do for the economy--that is, achieve order, stability and control while preserving the existing class system and distribution of the wealth.*

The rich were ostensibly trying to "save the children" but actually were trying to get the little urchins off the streets and control their behavior. The authority of the courts to "control" implies the conflict approach, according to its supporters.

Some conflict theorists see other indications of bias and discrimination based on class. Youth who are characterized as "debs," "frats," "socialites," and "elites" are just as surely "gang" members as "greasers," "hoods," and "bloods." One set may be considered superior while another is inferior.

> **It has generally been held that most delinquent acts are purposeless and without direction.**

William Chambliss did extensive research in a high school and found that there were two identifiable groups of young men--the "saints" and the "roughnecks." No matter what the saints did, and much of it was delinquent (drinking, truancy, vandalism, threats, extortion), they were considered "good boys, sowing wild oats" and were never arrested or thought to be bad. The roughnecks, however, were those boys from socially or financially deprived homes, and whatever they did, even though minor, was considered bad. More recent research fails to support a finding of economic or class bias in treatment by police and courts.

## Instrumental Theory

It has generally been held that most delinquent acts are purposeless and without direction. Herman and Julia Schwendinger have recently proposed an approach that tries to make sense of the levels and types of delinquency while pointing out that much of this behavior is in-strumental and has a purpose.

To understand this approach, one must first understand the types of groups involved. Adolescents group together in what the Schwendingers call stratum for-mations. These are social groups distinguished by language, interests, dress or some crusading issue. Adolescent groups appear as early as the sixth grade but are well formed by high school. The stratum formations are primarily based on economic class but that relationship is fuzzy.

> According to instrumental theory, youth who are members of stratum formations are engaged in delinquent behavior more often than those who are not members of the groups.

Middle-class youth may be considered members of stratum formations or groups known as "elites," "socialites," "frats" or "colleges". These middle-class youth are seeking to imitate upper-class, more affluent youth. Lower-class youth or "street-corner" youth group together and call themselves "greasers," "hoods," "homeboys," "hodads" or other similar names. Between these two strata are groups such as "hot rodders," "surfers" and "gremmies." Not all youth are members of these groups. Some are given derogatory labels such as "nerds," but that serves to distinguish the youth from groups rather than include them in groups. According to instrumental theory, youth who are members of stratum formations are engaged in delinquent behavior more often than those who are not members of the groups. The group not only influences the amount of delinquency, it also determines its purpose or direction.

There are several stages or levels of delinquency in the stratum formations. Often, the type of delinquency is based on the maturity of the members. The Schwindingers call the first type of delinquency ethnocentric delinquency where the youth are concerned with the dominance of their group. Group rivalries including vandalism of property or territory of other groups, fighting and the like are evidence of this level. Finally, delinquency comes to the informal economic stage. These delinquent acts are committed primarily by economically deprived youth whose acts are intended to enhance their economic position. These acts are the most instrumental and directed. The offenses include burglary, robbery, auto theft, drug sales and larceny. The group supports violence to maintain its dominance.

Group members are more likely to engage in delinquency than non-group members, and certain mature and economically deprived groups are likely to engage in the most serious delinquencies. Instrumental theory seems plausible, but it would be difficult to construct a rigorous test of this theory because many of its assumptions and labels are difficult to define in a research sense. This approach is helpful though in understanding motivations and development of groups as well as delinquency.

## Power-Control Theory

A rather recent explanation of delinquency, power-control theory, considers two variables as most important: social class and family structure. These two variables are both influenced by the economic status of the person or family.

The family life of an adolescent is influenced directly by the person who manages the family. This, in turn, is determined by social class. If the father assumes the role of breadwinner and the mother has menial jobs or stays home to supervise the home, the control will be greatest over the daughters and least over the sons. Daughters will be socialized into a "cult of domesticity" while sons will be granted more freedom. Daughters will be less likely than sons to engage in delinquency.

> The power-authority approach views the behavior as an indication of the desire for power and domination by the male.

In homes where the mothers and fathers share in the managerial roles, daughters are not over-controlled and their violent behavior is similar to that of their brothers. The researchers, John Hagan, John Simpson and A.R. Gillis, found a strong similarity in the behavior of sons and daughters in families where both parents manage the household. This relationship was also true in households where the mother was the breadwinner and manager and the father was absent.

This theoretical approach, supported by research, helps us understand some of the dynamics of the family structure that influence delinquency.

## Power-Authority Approach

One of the earliest and still most respected of the social conflict theories was proposed by George Vold. He said, "Groups come into conflict with one another as the interests and purposes they serve tend to overlap, encroach on one another and become competitive." We see this reflected in everything from legislative lobbyists' activities to husband/wife relations.

At the grand level, this approach has been used to "explain" the structure of law and policy as definite typical behaviors of the powerless as criminal therefore controlling the powerless and perpetuating powerlessness.

In another application, the power-authority approach can be used to explain violence within the family. Most spousal violence and parental violence is committed by the male. The power-authority approach views the behavior as an indication of the desire for power and domination by the male. Violence becomes a means of control, just as the law is a control in the social system. The powerful use violence to maintain or establish authority over the less powerful.

Combining this approach with social learning theory, we see that youth who are exposed to or experience violence used to control and establish power/authority, if the violence succeeds in its goal, will view this as an appropriate way to deal with others. This perspective helps us understand many violent offenses such as sex crimes, including date-rape, and others intended to estab-

lish dominance, show authority or use power to gain submission.

## Conclusion

Conflict theories, both Marxist and non-Marxist, include propositions that are useful in the explanation of delinquency and some that are questionable. The goal of the conflict theorist and especially the Marxist is to demystify the criminal law and the justice system. This involves exposing the system and those who control it.

Generally, conflict theory is a condemnation of the system which is controlled by the rich and powerful. The offender sometimes becomes a "good soldier, fighting for a cause" against the powerful and coercive system. This is not a theory of delinquency but an explanation of why some are labelled delinquent.

Some of the perspectives, however, do focus on the family or the social network as a microcosm of society and explain the power-control-authority relationships, based on conflict theory. These approaches help us understand behavior, not just the system.

This perspective is very difficult to test because its concepts are difficult to define and some are inflammatory. Attempts to test parts of the theory have been successful, but the major propositions that the system is economically and class-biased have generally failed to find research support. On a smaller scale--social group conflict and within-family conflict--the research supports some of the contentions.

The goal of the conflict theorist and especially the Marxist is to demystify the criminal law and the justice system.

In sum, parts of this approach are intended to explain the system's behavior, and parts are helpful in explaining the individual's behavior.

# XIII. Conclusion

It would be very difficult to synopsize an already condensed version of this discussion of the causes of delinquency. A more productive approach is to capsulize each theory or perspective and comment on the influence of some of the major social institutions--the individual, the family, the school, the community, the social system and the criminal justice system--on delinquency, according to each perspective. Remember the example at the beginning of the booklet? Various people were trying to understand how they could have understood or prevented a youth's delinquency. Each of these people represented an "institution" that might have influenced the youth--positively or negatively.

> **No one perspective or theory can be considered the explanation of delinquency.**

We hope that this brief overview has been interesting and helpful in better understanding the causes of delinquency. A bibliography is included for those who want a more in-depth discussion of the perspectives presented here. The purpose of this booklet was to provide a general overview of the theories of delinquency and to whet the interest of readers so they will delve deeper into those theories that seem to fit. In Alice in Wonderland, when Alice approached a fork in the road, she asked the Cheshire Cat which route she should take. "Where are you going?" the cat asked. "I don't know,"replied Alice. "Then it doesn't much matter,"said the cat. This brief treatment of the causes of delinquency should give the reader some ideas as to where they are going.

The matrix following the selected bibliography should be considered a summary of the major criminological perspectives. The matrix also includes comments on the adequacy of each perspective. The explanatory "power" of the perspectives varies from case to case. No one perspective or theory can be considered the explanation of delinquency. Some theories have withstood the tests of research better than others. The more modern biological theories and social-learning theories are examples. This is what is meant by "adequacy."

# XIV. Explanations of Delinquency: Fact and Fiction

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*These citations are annotated in "Serious Habitual Offender Comprehensive Action Program (SHOCAP) Annotated Bibliography," prepared for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, by Public Administration Service, 1987.*

# Influence of Certain
# Institutions on Delinquency

Appendix A

# INFLUENCE OF CERTAIN INSTITUTIONS ON DELINQUENCY

| Perspective | Causes of Delinquency | Individual | Family | Community | School | Social System | C. J. System | Adequacy |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Classical school of criminology | People possess the ability to choose freely to do right or wrong--Free Will. They choose to do delinquent acts because the pleasure of the act outweighs the pain of punishment. | Sole factor in considering delinquency and crime is free will. | No influence | No influence | No influence | No influence | Purpose of punishment is deterrence. Makes pain of punishment stronger than pleasure of act. | A philosophy rather than a theory so cannot be determined to be adequate. |
| Positive school of criminology | A variety of factors influence or cause one to be delinquent. Since these factors cause delinquency, there is no free will. In most cases, the person has little or no control over the influence of these factors. | Biological and some psychological theories view the individual as the focal point. Causes of delinquency are within the individual or the environment acting on the person. | Control and learning theories recognize the positive influence of family on definitions of delinquency. | Learning and cultural deviance theories include or focus on the community, neighborhood or gang. They define the subculture | Bonding and other control theories view school as one of the elements binding the person to the correct value system. | Culture sets goals and means of attaining the goals. Strain occurs if the means are not available. | System represents outer control. System is at fault because it labels delinquent who lives up to the label. | See individual perspectives. |
| Biological • Early Theories | Criminals are atavists or biological throwbacks to a primitive state. Criminals are born, not developed. | Sole factor in causing delinquency. Individual is biologically defective. | "Criminal families" are evidence of inherited criminal behavior. | No influence | No influence | No influence | Delinquents should be quarantined. | Inadequate |
| • Inherited Crime | Children inherit a predisposition to violence or a central nervous system that predisposes the person to crime. | Genetic pre-disposition of individual causes delinquency. | Chromosomal complement is inherited. | No influence | No influence | No influence | No influence | Moderate to weak |

# INFLUENCE OF CERTAIN INSTITUTIONS ON DELINQUENCY

| Perspective | Causes of Delinquency | Individual | Family | Community | School | Social System | C. J. System | Adequacy |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Biological**<br>• Neuro-<br> logical<br> dysfunction | Central nervous system is defective. Delinquents, as a result, are callous, hostile, destructive, hyperactive and have poor impulse control. Cortical arousal level may be low <u>causing</u> the person to stimulate the environment through over-activity. | Failure of brain functions to "mature." Arousal levels, head injuries, epilepsy, or tumors drive the individual to delinquent behavior. | Central nervous system traits may be inherited. | No influence | No influence | No influence | No influence | Moderate to strong |
| • Chemistry<br> and Crime | Chemical imbalances, generally in the brain, result in the person being agitated, aggressive, hyperactive or unable to learn from mistakes and avoid punish-ment. Similar to allergic reaction to certain chemicals. | Absence of neurotrans-mitters, high concentra-tions of sweets, car-bohydrates and certain vitamins cause an individual to be uncaring or over-active. | Diet and other ingested materials may be influenced by family and life style. | No influence | No influence | No influence | No influence | Moderate |
| **Psychological** | The offender is mentally ill or the emotional development of the child has been faulty. | Individual is not the cause of deficiency. Influences <u>on</u> the individual cause the defects which cause the delinquency. | Many of the psychological difficulties experienced by the child are a result of family and parenting problems. | | | | Criminal Justice system seems <u>obligated</u> to attribute difficulties to psychological problems. | Weak |

# INFLUENCE OF CERTAIN INSTITUTIONS ON DELINQUENCY

| Perspective | Causes of Delinquency | Individual | Family | Community | School | Social System | C. J. System | Adequacy |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Psychological**<br>• Psycho-analytical | Delinquents act out inner conflicts which result from pressure caused by failing to find appropriate releases. The psychic pressure is caused by poor or faulty child rearing. | Child did not develop properly through the infantile, latency and puberty periods. | Causes feelings of insecurity, rigidity, hostililty or rebellion due to deficiencies in love, attention, and child-rearing. | | Fails to recognize and deal with problems and to develop appropriate releases of pressure. | | | Weak |
| • Frustration-Aggression | Certain stimulli--weapons, pain, noise, temperature, odors--may cause aggression. | Influenced or acted upon by outside forces. | Failed to establish tolerance or controls to counterbalance frustrations. | Stimuli may be a function of community-- overcrowding. | | Economic status of child/family may require that they live in certain areas where stimuli are more plentiful. | | Weak to inadequate |
| • Learning Theory | Based on models for the youth's behavior, he learns "appropriate" ways of reacting to situations. Delinquents learn that aggressive, violent, hostile reactions are successful, therefore appropriate. | The person is a blank slate then learns the means of dealing with difficult, hostile, and frustrating situations. | Serves as a strong model for behavior--bad and good. | Serves as a stronger model for behavior during adolescence. | Provides environment for modeling and reinforcing of bad behavior. | | | Strong, especially when social factors are considered. |
| • Psycho-logical/En-vironmental Factors (similar to frustration-aggression) | Urban crowding and ambient temperature cause irritability, frustration and violence. | Individual is unwittingly acted upon by environ-mental factors. | | Population density is a function of community. | | Social class restricts one's ability to live in less populated, more comfortable environments. | | Weak to inadequate |

# INFLUENCE OF CERTAIN INSTITUTIONS ON DELINQUENCY

| Perspective | Causes of Delinquency | Individual | Family | Community | School | Social System | C. J. System | Adequacy |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Psychological** • IQ and Delinquency | Feeblemindedness and low IQ cause frustration with system or cause one to seek successes elsewhere. This results in an association with deviant groups, often delinquent. | IQ is an uncontrollable factor which, if low, impels the person toward delinquency because of the lack of alternative routes to success. | May stress goals inconsistent with ability of child. | Fails to establish alternate means of success other than school performance. | IQ/delinquency relationship may be indirect with school performance an intermediate step. | Established standards implying that above-average IQ is good while below-average is bad. Few opportunities for success. | Equates poor IQ with troublemaker in deviant. | Weak direct link, strong indirect link. |
| **Sociological Causes** | Social institutions influence the behavior--good and bad--of youth. | Individual behavior is determined by social factors. | The family either controls deviant tendencies or fails to do so. Family also serves to teach child ways to behave, sometimes inappropriately. | Community or subculture value system may vary from that of the social system thereby causing its members to be deviants. | One of the major institutions in bonding the child to the value system and providing means to success. | May label behavior as deviant even though it is a reasonable and conforming behavior within the community. | Serves as an outer control mechanism. Also may label delinquent. | Moderate |
| **Control Theories** | Delinquency occurs when the youth's behavior is not controlled properly. | If allowed, will seek pleasures without considering others. | One of the strongest agents of control. | A strong agent of control. | A strong agent of control | Establishes the norms and values. | A controlling factor. | Generally strong |

# INFLUENCE OF CERTAIN INSTITUTIONS ON DELINQUENCY

| Perspective | Causes of Delinquency | Individual | Family | Community | School | Social System | C. J. System | Adequacy |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Control Perspective** • **Social Bond Theory** | Delinquency occurs when the youth's bond to society is weak or broken. | Bonded to society through : -attachment -commitment -involvement -belief. | Strong family relations bond youth to appropriate others. | Appropriate peer group strong bonding factor. | Attachment, commitment, involvement and belief in school as means of success a strong consideration. | Defines "conformity." | | Strong |
| • **Self-Concept** | Delinquents are deficient in their inner or psychological restraints when faced with pushes and pulls toward delinquency. | Strong self-concept controls against falling into delinquent behavior. | Helps establish a strong self-concept and, through consistent reward and punishment, establishes inner containment. | Helps establish inner control or containment. Also may pull youth toward delinquency. | Helps establish inner control or containment. also may pull youth toward delinquency. | Defines "conformity." | An external controlling factor. | Weak |
| • **Neutralization Theory** | Delinquents are able to neutralize their guilt or rationalize their behavior by denying responsibility, injury or victim, condemning the system or appealing to the higher loyalties of the gang, group or neighborhoood. | Delinquents "drift " from law-abiding behavior because they can neutralize their guilt or responsibility. | Denial of responsibility may be learned within the family. | Motivation and techniques of neutralization come from peers. | Insulates delinquent from responsibility-inducing behaviors. | | Allows neutralization if there is inconsistent enforcement. | Moderate |
| **Strain Theories** | The culture prescribes the standards for success and the means to attain those goals. The delinquent lacks the means but still aspires to the goals. He adapts by finding other, illegitimate means to attain the goals. | People are innately good but the inability to attain the goals using acceptable means creates a "strain." | Families stress goals and success but may not provide the acceptable means to attain them. | Alternate means to success are defined in and supported by the community. | Represents the legitimate means to success for middle-class but a frustration for lower class. | Makes no differentiation between those who have and those who do not have means to succeed in social system. | Applies the standards, regardless of social strata. | Moderately strong |

# INFLUENCE OF CERTAIN INSTITUTIONS ON DELINQUENCY

| Perspective | Causes of Delinquency | Individual | Family | Community | School | Social System | C. J. System | Adequacy |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Strain Theory**<br>• Modes of Adaptation | People accept the goals and adapt to the means by conforming, innovating, ritualistically accepting the means, retreating from goals and means or rebelling. Some of the adaptations produce delinquency. | Individuals take the "acceptable" alternative to means they do not or cannot possess. | Teaches the "appropriate" or acceptable means, alternatives and goals. | Limits the means available, especially to youth. | Represents legitimate means, but "success" in school is not available to or valued by many youth. | Makes youth class-conscious. Defines goals and means. | | Moderately strong |
| • Opportunity Theory | Because of limited opportunities, gangs develop to provide lower-class youth with upward mobility, recognition and "success." | Strives to succeed but lacks legitimate means. | Fails to provide support and bonding. | Strong influence on development of gangs because of few alternatives or opportunities. | Fails to combat the creation of gangs and fails to provide alternative means for success. | Defines goals but means are not consistently provided. | Ignores differences in opportunities. | Moderate |
| • Middle-class Measuring Rod | Lower-class crime is due to middle-class standards being applied to other youth. Lower-class youth cannot satisfy this standard so they adopt a set of norms, goals and means in opposition to middle class. | Desires to succeed but lacks middle-class means so finds it difficult to attain middle-class goals. | Fails to instill middle-class values in lower-class youth. | Supports norms opposed to middle-class values. | Imposes materialistic, middle-class focus on lower-class youth. | Perpetuates middle-class standards because institutions, schools, justice, businesses, are controlled by middle-class. | Imposes middle-class standards on lower-class youth. | Weak--difficult to test. |

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| Perspective | Causes of Delinquency | Individual | Family | Community | School | Social System | C. J. System | Adequacy |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cultural Deviance Theories | Each culture and subculture creates a set of norms and expectations. Sometimes these are contrary to those of the dominant culture and are labelled delinquent. | A person is not capable of violating his standards but sometimes the culture requires that he violate the standards of the larger society | Perpetuates and instills the community's value system, but this system is wrong according to the larger society. | Reinforces its own norms, values and goals which become the individual's standards. | Fails to counter-balance the subculture's influence. Neighborhood schools may reinforce this influence. | Establishes autonomous, identifiable cultures and subcultures but builds in inconsistent norms | | Moderate but may be indirect. |
| • Ecology and Delinquency | Decaying areas of cities produce social values consistent with crime and delinquency. | Relative deprivation provokes the person to delinquency. | Perpetuates or fails to mitigate influence of neighborhood. | Develops a counter-culture which continues to exist. | Perpetuates or fails to mitigate influence of neighborhood. | Fails to incorporate certain segments into the whole. | | Moderate but direct |
| • Lower-class Culture Generates Delinquency | Slum areas have a cultural climate that creates focal concerns contrary to those of middle class. | Acceptance of lower-class focal concerns places youth in conflict with the larger culture. | Redefines and supports lower-class definitions of fate, excitement and smartness. | Redefines and supports lower-class definitions of trouble, toughness, excitement and autonomy. | Fails to counter definitions contrary to those of middle-class society. | Fails to incorporate certain segments of the population into the whole. | | Moderate |
| • Subculture of Violence | Certain subcultures define violence as acceptable and "normal." | Through learning, the individual develops a favorable definition of violence. | Fails to mitigate the acceptability of violence. | Supports the normalcy of violence. | Perpetuates or fails to mitigate the acceptability of violence. | Fails to incorporate certain segments of the population into the whole. | | Moderate |

# INFLUENCE OF CERTAIN INSTITUTIONS ON DELINQUENCY

| Perspective | Causes of Delinquency | Individual | Family | Community | School | Social System | C. J. System | Adequacy |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Learning Theories** | Crime is learned in interaction with others. | A person is neither good nor bad but learns behavior which then directs him to certain acts or associates. | One of the primary social units where learning occurs. | Peers represent strong "significant others" from whom the person learns delinquency during adolescence and young adulthood. | Fails to reinforce definitions unfavorable to the violation of the law. | | | Strong |
| • **Differential Association** | Criminal behavior is learned in interaction with those with whom delinquents associate and from whom they define law as favorable or unfavorable. | Learns behavior from others with whom he differentially associates. | One of the intimate personal groups in which delinquent definitions are formed. | Fails to counter the delinquent associations and definitions. Also, peers represent community. | Fails to counter the definitions and associations. | Defines the needs and values that give rise to criminal (and) non-criminal behavior. | | Moderate |
| • **Social Learning Theory** | Deviant behavior is learned and reinforced through social and non-social reinforcers. | Influenced through operant conditioning. | Provides rewards and punishments for behavior; therefore may reinforce delinquency. | Provides rewards and punishments for behavior; therefore may reinforce delinquency. | Helps or fails to reinforce conventional behavior. | | | Strong |
| • **Labelling Theory** | A youth is viewed as delinquent therefore he sees himself as a delinquent and acts according to this social- and self-concept. | Unwittingly labelled and then perpetuates the label. | May influence the labelling process. | May influence the labelling process. | May influence the labelling process. | Acts toward the youth based on the label. | Justice system discriminates and labels underprivileged youth as "delinquent." | Inadequate |
| **Conflict Theory** | Social conflict, based on authority, power and economy results in the weak suffering at the hands of the justice system, while the rich and powerful can violate the law with impunity. | Everyone conforms and everyone deviates so it is unfair to categorize as good and bad. Categories based on status, not behavior. | No influence except as an example of the power/authority dynamic. | No influence | No influence | A classed society with the poor discriminated against in every way. | Pawns of the powerful and tools of the state. | A philosophy rather than a behavioral theory. |