

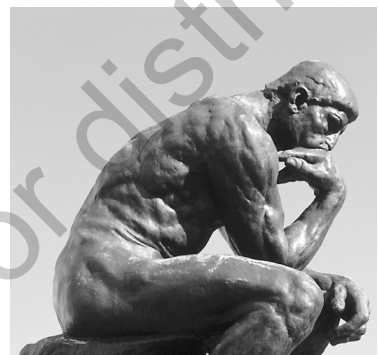
THE CONTEXT AND
CONSEQUENCES OF THEORY

Crime is a complex phenomenon, and it is a demanding, if intriguing, challenge to explain its many sides. Many commentators—some public officials come to mind—often suggest that using good common sense is enough to explain why citizens shoot or rob one another and, in turn, to inform us as to what to do about such lawlessness. Our experience—and, we trust, this book as well—teaches that the search for answers to the crime problem is not so easy. It requires that we reconsider our biases, learn from the insights and mistakes of our predecessors who have risked theorizing about the causes of crime, and consider clearly the implications of what we propose.

But the task—or, as we see it, the adventure—of explaining crime is an important undertaking. To be sure, crime commentary frequently succumbs to the temptation to exaggerate and sensationalize, to suggest that crimes that are exceptionally lurid and injurious compose the bulk of America's lawlessness, or perhaps to suggest that most citizens spend their lives huddled behind barricaded doors and paralyzed by the fear that local thugs will victimize them. There is, of course, an element of truth to these observations, and that is why they have an intuitive appeal. Yet most Americans, particularly those living in more affluent communities, do not have their lives ripped apart by brutal assaults or tragic murders. And although many citizens lock their doors at night, install burglar alarms, and perhaps buy weapons for protection, they typically say that they feel safe in and close to their homes (Cullen, Clark, & Wozniak, 1985; Scheingold, 1984).

But these cautionary remarks do not detract from the reality that crime is a serious matter that, we believe, deserves study and understanding. Most Americans escape the type of victimization that takes their lives or destroys their peace of mind, but too many others do not share this good fortune. Thus, media reports of Americans killing Americans are sufficiently ubiquitous that many of us have become so desensitized to the violence in our communities that we give these accounts scarcely more attention than the scores from the day's sporting events. And it is likely that most of us have friends, or friends of friends, who have been seriously assaulted or perhaps even murdered.

Statistical data paint an equally bleak picture. Each year, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) publishes the *Uniform Crime Reports* in which it lists the numbers of various crimes that have become known (mostly through reports by citizens) to the nation's police departments. According to these statistics, across the past decade, an average of 15,484 U.S. residents were murdered annually. Although there has been an important decline in crime (Latzer, 2016; Tonry, 2014; Zimring, 2007), each year there still are about 1.2 million Americans robbed, raped, or seriously assaulted and nearly 8 million whose houses are burglarized or whose property is damaged or stolen (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2018).



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1840–1917
French artist and sculptor

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It is disturbing that these statistics capture only part of the nation's crime problem. Many citizens, about one in every two serious violent crime victims and two in every three property crime victims, do not report crimes against them to the police (Morgan & Kena, 2017). Thus, these acts do not appear in the *Uniform Crime Reports*. For example, the National Crime Victimization Survey, a study in which citizens are asked whether they have been victimized, estimates that residents over 12 years of age experienced approximately 22.6 million crimes in 2016, about one fourth of which were violent victimizations (Morgan & Kena, 2017).

Furthermore, these FBI statistics do not include drug-related offenses, which are commonplace. Between 1999 and 2016, the rate of drug overdoses increased threefold, taking 63,600 lives in 2016—a toll more than three and a half times higher than the number of murder victims in America (Hedegaard, Warner, & Miniño, 2017). FBI statistics also measure mainly serious street crimes. Yet we know that minor crimes—petty thefts, simple assaults, and so on—are even more widespread. “Self-report” surveys, in which the respondents (typically juveniles) are asked to report how many offenses they have committed, consistently indicate that the vast majority of people have engaged in some degree of illegality. But more important, other realms of criminality—not only quite prevalent but also quite serious—traditionally have not come to the attention of police because they are not committed on the streets. Domestic violence—child abuse, spousal assault, and so on (i.e., the violence that occurs “behind closed doors”)—is one of these areas (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980), as are sexual assaults that occur on dates and against people who know one another (Fisher, Daigle, & Cullen, 2010). The #Me Too movement has brought to light incidents of sexual harassment and assault, exposing malfeasance by powerful members of the nation's corporate, entertainment, and political elites. Another such area is white-collar crime, that is, the crimes committed by professional people in the course of their occupations (Sutherland, 1949). As repeated revelations suggest (recall the massive frauds at Enron and Bernie Madoff's Ponzi scheme), corruption in the business and political communities takes place regularly and has disquieting consequences (Benson & Simpson, 2018; Cullen, Maakestad, & Cavender, 1987; Simon & Eitzen, 1986).

These statistics and observations make the point that crime is a prominent feature of our society. But is the United States more criminogenic than other nations? For most forms of crime (e.g., property, assault), Americans' involvement is similar to that of other industrialized Western societies. But for lethal violence, “the United States is a clear outlier among highly developed nations” (Messner & Rosenfeld, 2013, p. 21; see also Currie, 1985, 2009; Lynch & Pridemore, 2011; Zimring & Hawkins, 1997). Making cross-cultural comparisons is difficult; for example, nations differ in what they consider to be illegal and in their methods of collecting crime data. Even so, Currie's (1985) review of available statistical information revealed that, as of the late 1970s, “about ten American men died by criminal violence for every Japanese, Austrian, West German, or Swedish man; about fifteen American men died for every Swiss or Englishman; and over twenty [American men died] for every Dane” (p. 25). Similar differences remain today (Currie, 1998b; Rosenfeld, 2009). Thus, in a comparison of homicide rates across 16 Western nations, Messner and Rosenfeld (2013) note that the U.S. rate doubles that of the next closest nation (Finland) and “is more than five times the average rate of the other nations” (p. 21). Currie states the issue in more human terms, observing that “in most other affluent industrial societies, the deliberate killing of one person by another is an extremely rare event. . . . Their neighborhoods are not torn by drive-by shootings or by the routine sound of police helicopters in the night. There are no candles at shrines for homicide victims” (p. 3). And as we are all aware, only in the United States do its citizens brandish high-capacity assault weapons and commit mass murder on a regular basis. Names such as Columbine, Virginia Tech, Sandy Hook, Parkland, Las Vegas, and many more are now etched in the nation's consciousness as constant reminders of the carnage perpetrated in what should be safe places devoted to learning and entertainment (Jonson, 2017).

Another important reality is that crime is not evenly distributed within the United States. One report, for example, analyzed 2014 FBI homicide data for cities with a population of more than 250,000 (Johnson, 2015). The murder rate per 100,000 was nearly 50 for St. Louis, over

40 for Detroit, and over 30 for Baltimore, Newark, and New Orleans. By contrast, it was 6.66 for Los Angeles and only 3.93 for New York, a city that has experienced a dramatic decline in crime (Zimring, 2012). As another example, we calculated the distribution of murders across Ohio's 367 cities for 2016 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2018, Table 6). Notably, 298 cities (81.2%) had zero homicides in the year. Six cities accounted for more than 70% of the offenses, and only three cities (Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Columbus) accounted for more than half of the state's homicides. Striking differences in criminality also are found across communities within urban areas (Sampson, 2012) and even across blocks within the same neighborhood (Weisburd, Groff, & Yang, 2012).

But why is crime so prevalent in the United States? Why is it so prevalent in some of our communities but not others? Why do some people break the law, whereas others are law abiding? Why do the affluent, and not just the disadvantaged, commit illegal acts? How can these various phenomena be explained?

Over the years, theorists have endeavored to address one or more of these questions. In this book, we attempt to give an account of their thinking about crime—to examine its context, its content, and its consequences. Before embarking on this story of criminological theorizing, however, it is necessary to discuss the framework that informs our analysis. This approach argues that theories about why crime occurs are not simply invented by isolated scholars sitting in an armchair but are shaped by the social context in which they live. As society changes, it is inevitable that images about crime change (see also Wilcox, Cullen, & Feldmeyer, 2018). This approach also argues that theories matter because they promote or justify the use of some crime-control policies but not others. Note that this book's subtitle—*Context and Consequences*—was chosen as a way of emphasizing the importance of these points.

THEORY IN SOCIAL CONTEXT

Most Americans have little difficulty in identifying the circumstances they believe cause people to engage in wayward conduct. When surveyors ask citizens about the causes of crime, only a small percentage of respondents say that they “have no opinion.” The remainder of those polled usually remark that crime is caused by factors such as unemployment, bad family life, and lenient courts (Flanagan, 1987; see also Roberts & Stalans, 2000; Unnever, Cochran, Cullen, & Applegate, 2010).

Most people, then, have developed views on why crime occurs; that is, they have their “theories” of criminal behavior. But where do such views, or such theories, come from? One possibility is that citizens have taken the time to read extensively on crime, have sifted through existing research studies, and have arrived at informed assessments of why laws are disregarded. But only exceptional citizens develop their views on crime—or on any other social issue—in this way (Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017). Apart from criminologists who study crime for a living, most people have neither the time nor the inclination to investigate the crime problem carefully. Let us give but one example. Over the past decade or so, the nation's rate of serious street crime has trended downward. During this time, however, a majority of Americans—in some years more than 70% of the respondents—have told Gallup pollsters that “there is more crime in the United States than a year ago” (McCarthy, 2015).

This observation might not seem particularly insightful, but it is important in illuminating that most people's opinions about crime are drawn less from sustained thought and more from the implicit understandings—what Haidt (2012, p. 54) calls “intuitions”—that they have come to embrace during their lives. Attitudes about crime, as well as about other social issues, can come from a variety of sources—parents, church sermons, how crime is depicted on television, socially significant events (e.g., a mass school shooting), whether one has had family members or friends who have turned to crime, whether one has experimented with criminal activity oneself or perhaps been victimized, and so on. In short, social experiences shape the ways in which people come to think about crime.

This conclusion allows us to offer three additional points. First, members of the general public are not the only ones whose crime theories are influenced by their life experiences. Academic criminologists and government officials who formulate crime policy have a professional obligation to set aside their personal biases, read the existing research, and endorse the theory that the evidence most supports. To an extent, criminologists and policy makers let the data direct their thinking, but it is equally clear that they do not do so fully. Like the general public, they too live in society and are shaped by it. Before ever entering academia or public service, their personal experiences have provided them with certain assumptions about human nature and about the ways in which the world operates; thus, some will see themselves as liberals and others as conservatives. After studying crime, they often will revise some of their views. Nonetheless, few ever convert to a totally different way of thinking about crime; how they explain crime remains conditioned, if only in part, by their experiences.

Second, if social experiences influence attitudes about criminality, then as society changes—as people come to have different experiences—views about crime will change as well. We illustrate this point throughout this book, but a few brief examples might help to clarify matters for our immediate purposes.

It will not surprise many readers to learn that Americans' views on crime have changed markedly since the settlers first landed on the nation's shores. Indeed, at different times in U.S. history, Americans have attributed the origins of crime to spiritual demons and the inherent sinfulness of humans, to the defective biological constitution of inferior people in our midst, to the denial of equal opportunity, and to the ability of the coldly rational to calculate that crime pays. As we will see, each of these theories of crime, and others as well, became popular only when a particular set of circumstances coalesced to provide people with the experiences that made such reasoning seem logical or believable.

Thus, for colonists living in a confining and highly religious society, it “made sense” for them to attribute crime to the power of demons to control the will of those who fell prey to the temptations of sin. For those of the late 1800s who witnessed the influx of foreigners of all sorts and learned from the social Darwinists that natural selection determined where each individual fell in the social hierarchy, it made sense that people became poor *and* criminal because they were of inferior stock. For those of the 1960s who were informed that systematic barriers had prevented minorities from sharing in the American dream, it made sense that people became criminal *because they were poor*—because they were denied equal opportunity. During more recent times, as society has taken a turn in a conservative direction and it has become fashionable to blame social ills on a permissive society, it has made sense to more and more Americans that people commit crimes because they know that they risk only a “slap on the wrist” if they are caught.

In short, social context plays a critical role in nourishing certain ways of theorizing about crime. If the prevailing social context changes and people begin to experience life differently, then there will be a corresponding shift in the way in which they see their world and the people in it. Previous theories of crime will lose their appeal, and other perspectives will increasingly make sense to larger numbers of people. Note that all of this can take place—and, indeed, usually does take place—without systematic analysis of whether the old theory actually was wrong or whether the new theory represents an improvement.

But does any of this relate to you, the reader? Our third point in this section is that your (and our) thinking about crime undoubtedly has been conditioned by your social experiences. When most of us look to the past, we wonder with a certain smugness how our predecessors could have held such strange and silly views about crime or other things. In making this type of remark, however, we not only fail to appreciate how their thoughts and actions were constrained by the world in which they lived but also implicitly assume that our thoughts and actions are unconstrained by our world. Our arrogance causes us to accept our interpretations—our theories—as “obviously” correct. We forget that future generations will have the luxury of looking at us and assessing where *we* have been strange and silly.

This discussion suggests the wisdom of pausing to contemplate the basis of your beliefs. How have your social experiences shaped the way in which you explain crime? Asking and seeking answers to this question, we believe, opens the possibility of lifting the blinders that past experiences often strap firmly around one's eyes. It creates, in short, the exciting opportunity to think differently about crime.

THEORY AND POLICY: IDEAS HAVE CONSEQUENCES

Theory often is dismissed as mere empty ruminations—fun, perhaps, but not something for which practical men and women have time. But this is a shortsighted view, for as Thomas Szasz (1987) cautioned, *ideas have consequences* (see also Weaver, 1948). Theory matters.

When it comes to making criminal justice policy, there is ample evidence of this maxim (Sherman & Hawkins, 1981). Lawlessness is a costly problem; people lose their property and sometimes their lives. The search for the sources of crime, then, is not done within a vacuum. Even if a theorist wishes only to ruminate about the causes of theft or violence, others will be ready to use these insights to direct efforts to do something about the crime problem. Understanding why crime occurs, then, is a prelude to developing strategies to control the behavior. Stephen Pfohl (1985) captured nicely the inherent relationship between theory and policy:

Theoretical perspectives provide us with an image of what something is and how we might best act toward it. They name something this type of thing and not that. They provide us with the sense of being in a world of relatively fixed forms and content. Theoretical perspectives transform a mass of raw sensory data into understanding, explanations, and recipes for appropriate action. (pp. 9–10)

This discussion also leads to the realization that different theories suggest different ways of reducing crime. Depending on what is proposed as the cause of illegal behavior, certain criminal justice policies and practices will seem reasonable; others will seem irrational and perhaps dangerously irresponsible. Thus, if offenders are viewed as genetically deranged and untrainable—much like wild animals—then caging them would seem to be the only option available. But if offenders are thought to be mentally ill, then the solution to the problem would be to treat them with psychotherapy. Or if one believes that people are moved to crime by the strains of economic deprivation, then providing job training and access to employment opportunities would seem to hold the promise of diminishing their waywardness.

This is not to assert that the relationship between theory and policy is uncomplicated. Sometimes theories emerge, and then the demand to change policy occurs. Sometimes policies are implemented, and then attempts are made to justify the policies by popularizing theories supportive of these reforms. Often, the process is interactive, with the theory and policy legitimating each other. In any case, the important point is that support for criminal justice policies eventually will collapse if the theory on which they are based no longer makes sense.

An important observation follows from this discussion: As theories of crime change, so do criminal justice policies. At the turn of the 20th century, many Americans believed that criminals were “atavistic reversions” to less civilized evolutionary forms or, at the least, feeble-minded. The call to sterilize offenders so that they could not pass criminogenic genes on to their offspring was widely accepted as prudent social action. Within two decades, however, citizens were more convinced that the causes of crime lay not within offenders themselves but rather in the pathology of their environments. The time was ripe to hear suggestions that efforts be made to “save” slum youths by setting up neighborhood delinquency prevention programs or, when necessary, by removing juveniles to reformatories, where they could obtain the supervision and treatment that they desperately needed.

In more recent decades, numerous politicians have jumped onto the bandwagon claiming that crime is caused by the permissiveness that has crept into the nation's families, schools, and correctional system. Not surprisingly, they have urged that efforts be made to "get tough" with offenders—to teach them that crime does not pay by sending them to prison for lengthier stays and in record numbers.

But we must remember not to decontextualize criminological theory. The very changes in theory that undergird changes in policy are themselves a product of transformations in society. As noted earlier, explanations of crime are linked intimately to social context—to the experiences people have that make a given theory seem silly or sensible. Thus, it is only when shifts in societal opinion occur that theoretical models gain or lose credence and, in turn, gain or lose the ability to justify a range of criminal justice policies.

We also hope that you will find the discussion in this book of some personal relevance. We have suggested that thought be given to how your own context may have shaped your thinking. Now we suggest that similar thought be given to how your thinking may have shaped what you have thought should be done about crime. The challenge we are offering is for you to reconsider the basis and consistency of your views on crime and its control—to reconsider which theory you should embrace and the consequences that this idea should have. We hope that this book will aid you as you embark on this adventure.

CONTEXT, THEORY, AND POLICY: PLAN OF THE BOOK

"Perhaps the clearest lesson to be learned from historical research on crime and deviance," Timothy Flanagan (1987) reminded us, "is that the approach to crime control that characterizes any given era in history is inexorably linked to contemporaneous notions about crime causation" (p. 232). This remark is instructive because it captures the central theme of this book—the interconnection among social context, criminological theory, and criminal justice policy making. As we progress through subsequent chapters, this theme forms the framework for our analysis. We discuss not only the content of theoretical perspectives but also their contexts and consequences.

But the scope of the enterprise should be clarified. Our purpose here is to provide a primer in criminological theory—a basic introduction to the social history of attempts, largely by academic scholars, to explain crime. In endeavoring to furnish an accessible and relatively brief guide to such theorizing, we have been forced to leave out historical detail and to omit discussions of the many theoretical variations that each perspective on crime typically has fostered. As a result, this book should be viewed as a first step to understanding the long search for the answer to the riddle of crime. We hope that our account encourages you to take further steps in the time ahead.

Our story of criminological theory commences, as most stories do, at the beginning, with the founding of criminology and early efforts, to use Rennie's (1978) words, "to search for the criminal man." Our story has 15 chapters to come and traces the development of criminological theory up to the present time. These chapters are thus arranged largely in chronological order. Because some theories arose at approximately the same time, the chapters should not be seen as following one another in a rigid, lockstep fashion. Further, inside each chapter, the ideas within a theoretical tradition are often traced from past to present—from the originators of the school of thought to its current advocates. Still, the book is designed to allow readers to take an excursion across time and historical context to see how thinking about crime has evolved.

Table 1.1 provides a handy guide that tells how *Criminological Theory: Context and Consequences* is arranged. This guide, much like a roadmap, is intended to be clear and simple. As readers travel through our volume, they may wish to consult Table 1.1 as a way of knowing where they are. When it comes to theory, the field of criminology has an embarrassment of riches—diverse theories competing to explain crime. The very complexity of human conduct and society perhaps requires numerous theoretical perspectives, with each capturing a part of reality ignored by competing approaches.

Table 1.1 Criminological Theory in Context

Social Context	Criminological Theory	Chapters in This Book
Enlightenment—mid-1700s to late 1700s	Classical school	2
Rise of social Darwinism, science, and medicine—mid-1800s into 1900s	Early positivist school—biological positivism	2
Mass immigration, the Great Depression, and post-World War II stability—1900 to the early 1960s	Chicago school, anomie-strain, control—mainstream criminology	3, 4, 5, and 6
Social turmoil—1965 to late 1970s	Labeling, conflict, Marxist, feminist, white-collar—critical criminology	7, 8, 9, 10, and 11
Conservative era—1980 to the early 1990s, and beyond	Deterrence, rational choice, broken windows, moral poverty, routine activity, environmental—rejecting mainstream and critical criminology	12 and 13
	Peacemaking, left realism, ultra-realism; cultural, convict, green, abolitionism—rejecting conservative theory and policy	9 and 10
The current century—2000 to today	Biosocial, life-course/developmental—becoming a criminal	14, 15, and 16

Regardless, readers have the challenge of keeping all the theories straight in their minds as the story of criminological theory unfolds in the pages ahead. Table 1.1 should help in this important task.

Before commencing with our criminological storytelling, let us preview in some detail what the chapters cover. Table 1.1 presents the outline of how different social contexts are related to the emergence of different theories. The chapters in which these theories are contained also are listed.

Inventing Criminology: Mainstream Theories

Chapter 2 reviews the two theoretical perspectives generally considered to be the foundation of modern criminology. The *classical school* arose in the Enlightenment era. It emphasized the rejection of spiritual or religious explanations of crime in favor of the view that offenders use their reason—the assessment of costs and benefits—in deciding whether a potential criminal act pays and should be pursued. The classical school argued that the criminal law could be reformed so that it would be fair (everyone treated equally) and just punitive enough to dissuade people from breaking the law (the crime would not be profitable). This approach is the forerunner of more contemporary theories of rational choice and deterrence.

Chapter 2 is mainly devoted, however, to the *positivist school*, which emphasized the scientific study of criminals. Led by Cesare Lombroso, positivism flourished in Italy in the late 1800s and into the 1900s. These ideas also were popular in the United States, where a similar tradition arose. These scholars assumed that there was something different about those who offended that distinguished them from those who did not offend. In medicine, we ask what makes someone sick;

similarly, they thought we should ask what makes someone criminal. As in medicine, they felt that the key to unlocking this puzzle was to study offenders scientifically—to probe their bodies and their brains for evidence of individual differences. Influenced by Darwinism and medicine, they largely concluded that the criminally wayward possessed biological traits that determined their behavior. Crime was not due to a sinful soul or chosen freely but rather was predetermined by a person's constitutional makeup.

Starting in the 1930s, however, American criminology embarked on an alternative path. The positivist school's advocacy of using science to study crime continued to be embraced. But scholars increasingly suggested that the answers to crime were to be found not within people but rather in the social circumstances in which people must live. The United States was making its transition to a modern, industrial, urban nation. As waves of immigrants came to our shores and settled in our cities, scholars wondered whether their subsequent experiences might prove criminogenic. The Chicago school of criminology rose to prominence by pioneering the study of urban areas and crime (see Chapter 3).

When scholars peered into impoverished inner-city neighborhoods—buffeted by the misery inflicted by the Great Depression—they saw the breakdown of personal and social controls, the rise of criminal traditions, and barriers to the American dream for success that all were taught to pursue. Scholars of this generation thus developed three core ways of explaining crime: *control theory*, which explored how crime occurs when controls weaken; *differential association theory*, which explored how crime occurs when individuals learn cultural definitions supportive of illegal conduct; and *anomie-strain theory*, which explored how crime occurs when people endure the strain of being thwarted in their efforts to achieve success. The first two of these theories had their origins in the Chicago school of criminology; the third had its origins in the writings of Robert K. Merton. These perspectives are reviewed in Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6.

Taken together, these three theories are sometimes called *mainstream criminology*. For more than 80 years, they have occupied the center of American criminology. In the aftermath of World War II, they were particularly dominant. During this period, the youth population began to expand and youth culture rose in prominence—developments that triggered concerns about juvenile delinquency. These perspectives were used to explain why some youngsters committed crime and others did not and why gangs were found in some neighborhoods and not others. Often, control, differential association, and anomie-strain theories were tested against one another in self-report studies conducted with high school students (see, e.g., Hirschi, 1969). Even today, these early works and their contemporary extensions remain at the core of the discipline (e.g., self-control theory, social learning theory, general strain theory).

The centrality and enduring influence of control, differential association, and anomie-strain theory is one reason why these perspectives are said to constitute mainstream criminology. But the term “mainstream” is used in another sense as well. Developed in a period when the United States was becoming a dominant world power and flourishing in the relative stability of post-World War II America, these perspectives remained in the *political mainstream*. They did not fundamentally challenge the organization of the social order. To be sure, these three theories identified problems in American society and were used to suggest policies that might address them. But for the most part, they stopped short of criticizing the United States as being rotten at its core—of being a society in which inequalities in power, rooted in a crass capitalism, created crimes of the poor that were harshly punished and crimes of the rich that were ignored. In short, control, differential association, and anomie-strain theories were mainstream because they tended to favor reform of the status quo in America rather than its radical transformation.

Social Turmoil and the Rise of Critical Theories

Starting in the mid-1960s, however, scholars increasingly sought to identify how conflict and power were inextricably involved in the production of crime and in the inequities found in the criminal

justice system. They were influenced by the changing context of American society. During the 1960s and into the 1970s, the United States experienced contentious movements to achieve civil rights and women's rights. Americans witnessed riots in the street, major political figures assassinated, widespread protests over the Vietnam War culminating with students shot down at Kent State University, and political corruption highlighted most poignantly by the Watergate scandal. These events sensitized a generation of criminologists to social and criminal injustices that compromised the American dream's promise of equality for all and led to the abuse of state power. Given this jaundiced view of American society, the new brand of theorizing that they developed was called *critical criminology*.

Although not yet fully developed, the seeds of critical criminology can be traced in part to *labeling theory*, which is discussed in Chapter 7. Scholars in this perspective offered the bold argument that the main cause of stable involvement in crime is not society per se but rather the very attempts that are made to reduce crime by stigmatizing offenders and processing them through the criminal justice system. The roots of critical criminology are discussed more deeply in Chapter 8, which reviews theorists called *conflict* or *radical* scholars. These theorists illuminated how power shapes what is considered to be a crime and who is subjected to arrest and imprisonment. They went so far as to suggest that the embrace of capitalism is what induces high rates of lawlessness among both the rich and the poor.

Chapter 10 explores another line of inquiry encouraged by critical criminology: the development of *feminist theory*. This perspective has led to the “gendering of criminology” in North America and Britain. In light of the changing social context surrounding gender, we trace how understandings of female criminality shifted from theories highlighting the individual defects of women to explanations illuminating how gender roles shape men's and women's illegal conduct. An attempt is made to capture the rich diversity of feminist thinking as we examine how scholars have linked crime to such factors as patriarchy; masculinities; male peer support; and the intersection of race, class, and gender.

Finally, in Chapter 11, *theories of white-collar crime* are examined. Although not all of these perspectives are critical in content, the very inquiry into this topic was spurred by critical criminology's concern with inequality and injustice. Thus, theories of white-collar crime illuminate and explain the crimes of the powerful. They are built on the very premise that, although the poor might monopolize prisons, they do not monopolize crime. In fact, scholars have shown the immense cost of white-collar criminality—especially that committed by corporations—and have explored why this injurious conduct occurs.

Criminological Theory in the Conservative Era

Although many criminological theories emerged in response to the social context of the 1960s and 1970s, especially the concern with prevailing inequities in money and power, America turned to the political right during the Reagan and Bush years of the 1980s and beyond. During this time, new criminologies emerged claiming that crime was due not to the faults in society but rather to the faults of individuals. To at least some degree, these explanations may be seen as attempts to revitalize—dressed in new language and with more sophisticated evidence—the models of crime that were popular a century ago. These theories vary in their scientific merit, but they are consistent in suggesting that the answer to crime rests largely in harsher sanctions—especially the expanded use of imprisonment—against offenders. In this sense, these theories are best considered *conservative* explanations of crime. They are reviewed in Chapter 12.

Other theories of this era were not conservative in content or temperament. They did not depict offenders as wicked super-predators who required imprisonment or as crass calculators who required harsh deterrence. However, they were also skeptical both of critical criminology for its utopian and impractical policies (they doubted a socialist revolution was on the horizon) and of mainstream criminology for its exclusive focus on offenders (rather than on the opportunities needed for a crime to take place). They claimed we needed an approach that understood the elements of crime and how to

manipulate them to prevent such acts from occurring. For them, practical thinking that led to effective crime prevention was the only way to stem the conservative call for mass imprisonment.

Thus, Chapter 13 investigates *routine activity theory* or *environmental criminology*, which argues that crime is best understood as an “event” that involves not only a motivated offender but also the “opportunity” to break the law (the presence of a suitable target to victimize and the absence of guardianship to prevent the victimization). Although mainstream criminological theory historically has focused on what motivates people to commit crime, it has not systematically assessed how variations in the opportunity to offend affect the amount and distribution of criminality in American society. Furthermore, this perspective maintains that crime will best be diminished not by efforts to change offenders but rather by making the social and physical environment less hospitable to offending (e.g., installing a burglar alarm in a house, hiring a security guard in a bank, placing a camera to watch a parking lot). This is often called *situational crime prevention* because the focus is on reducing opportunities for crime within a particular situation.

Chapter 13 also explores perspectives that investigate the thinking and decision making of offenders, including *rational choice theory* (an approach that is compatible with the opportunity paradigm and calls for situational crime prevention) and *perceptual deterrence theory*. Given that these perspectives see crime as a choice shaped by objective or perceived costs and benefits, they have elements compatible with conservative theory. However, depending on how they are set forth, they do not necessarily justify harsh criminal justice penalties.

During the 1980s, most criminologists—both in the United States and abroad—opposed conservative criminology and its preference for mass imprisonment as the key weapon in the war on crime (Currie, 1985). They were dismayed as the daily count of Americans behind bars grew from around 200,000 in the early 1970s to more than 2.3 million in 2008 before declining slightly to just under 2.2 million today (Cullen & Jonson, 2017; Kaeble & Glaze, 2016). Although not as dramatic, similar trends occurred in some European nations. Over this 40-year period, the rejection of conservative criminology was voiced perhaps most loudly and consistently by critical criminologists. Critical views have their roots in the 1960s and 1970s, but they were nourished by the need to deconstruct conservative crime ideology and to unmask the harm caused by “get tough” policies. A variety of theories have emerged, including recently, in response to societal developments that scholars see as embracing nationalism, inequality, and racial, ethnic, and religious privilege.

These perspectives are presented in Chapter 9, which builds on the discussions of conflict theory in Chapter 8. The focus here is on *new directions in critical theory*. These contributions, which include the insights of British and other European scholars, enrich our understanding of crime by challenging traditional interpretations of social reality and especially the efficacy and justice of repressive state policies favored by conservatives. This section thus examines the early development and the extension of Britain’s *new criminology* into what is now known as *left realism*. Also discussed are the *new European criminology*, *cultural criminology*, *green criminology*, *convict criminology*, *abolitionism*, and *ultra-realism*.

Criminological Theory in the 21st Century

Contemporary criminological theory is a mixture of old and new ways of thinking. Powerful theoretical traditions may age, but they tend not to die. Once they emerge, these paradigms may fluctuate in the allegiance they inspire, but they often remain integral to the criminological enterprise. Further, their core ideas are at times elaborated into more sophisticated and empirically defensible perspectives (e.g., Sutherland’s differential association theory transformed into Akers’s social learning theory). When this occurs, seemingly dormant perspectives can be revitalized and generate renewed attention (e.g., anomie-strain theory revitalized by Agnew and by Messner and Rosenfeld). Still, ways of thinking emerge that are innovative, rival older ways of thinking, and offer the possibility of renovating how criminological theory and research are undertaken.

In this regard, the final three chapters of the book explore theoretical models that are shaping thinking about crime during the 21st century in important ways. To a degree, these theories lack a clear ideological or political slant, and in this sense they might be considered *new mainstream* criminological perspectives. They reflect a social context in which grand solutions to crime and other social problems are being relinquished in favor of more middle-range or practical efforts to improve the crime problem. These preferences are also reflected in the growing popularity of environmental criminology and its focus on situational crime prevention, a perspective mentioned above.

Thus, Chapters 14 and 15 discuss the resurgence of biological theorizing or, as it is more often called today, the *biosocial perspective*. Although still controversial to a degree, the prevalence of research on brains, genetics, and other biological factors is bringing biological thinking back toward the center of criminology. There is now a renewed search for the “criminal man”—that is, a search for the biological traits that differentiate offenders from nonoffenders. This research often is nuanced and involves explorations of how biological factors interact with social factors to shape behavior. Its policy implications are potentially complex, since they might justify efforts to incapacitate or cure those whose criminality is rooted in their bodies.

Finally, Chapter 16 discusses a paradigm that is increasingly dominating American criminology: *life-course* or *developmental criminology*. This approach focuses its attention on how the roots of crime can be traced to childhood. This perspective also argues that the key to understanding crime is in studying how people develop into offenders and how they escape from their lives of crime. These theories are potentially important in suggesting a progressive policy agenda because they show the complex factors that place youngsters at risk for crime and call for policies aimed not at punishment but at early intervention.

CONCLUSION

With this prelude shared, it is now time to embark on an exploration of criminological theory. We are, in a way, the guides in this intellectual tour across criminology. The core challenge is to reveal the diverse attempts scholars have made to explain the mystery of why crime occurs. We will show that scholars have probed how the causes of criminal conduct might reside in our bodies, minds, and social relationships. And we will illuminate where scholars agree and where they disagree. At the journey’s end, we trust that we will have provided an enriched knowledge of crime’s origins.

Again, the subtitle of *Criminological Theory* was carefully chosen: *Context and Consequences*. As we hope to convey, theory construction is a human enterprise. It reflects not only the detached scientific appraisal of ideas and evidence but also a scholar’s unique biography situated within a unique historical period. Accordingly, understanding the evolution of criminological theory requires us to consider the social context in which ideas are formulated, published, and accepted as viable. Further, theories matter; ideas have consequences. Every effort to control crime is pregnant with an underlying theory. Our explanations of crime thus provide the impetus and justification for the crime control policies that we pursue.

FURTHER READINGS

Note: To provide additional insights on key theoretical topics, each chapter is followed by a section called *Further Readings*. These readings are from the following source: F. T. Cullen, & P. Wilcox (Eds.). (2010). *Encyclopedia of Criminological Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. In this chapter, one reading—listed below—is provided online at www.study.sagepub.com/lilly7e. In all subsequent chapters, four supplementary readings are available.

1. Criminological Time Line: The Top 25 Theoretical Contributions