

Psychological and psychiatric theories of criminal behaviour emphasise individual propensities and characteristics in explanations of criminality. Whether the emphasis is on conditioned behaviour, the development of parental attachment, or the psychoanalytic structure of the human personality, these approaches see the wellsprings of human motivation, desire, and behavioural choice as being firmly rooted in the personality.

Some of the earliest positivists were convinced that criminal behaviour was a result of genetic abnormality. Lombroso advanced the notion of atavism, which stated criminals represented a savage, earlier form of humankind. Lombroso compiled a list of physical features that were associated with criminals, which included protruding eyes, long arms, tattoos and large jaws. He tested convicts and those who had 5 or more of these atavisms were deemed to be born criminals. However his research was based on male criminals in a Sicilian jail which was inadequate as a control group as it had an overrepresentation of Sicilians who naturally demonstrated several of Lombrosos atavisms.

Sheldons somatic typology theory was based on a large sample of males in rehabilitation institutions. He listed three major somatypes (or body types); endomorphs: obese, soft, and rounded people who were fun loving and sociable; mesomorphs: muscular, athletic people who were assertive, vigorous, and bold; ectomorphs: tall, thin, with a well developed brain who were introverted, sensitive, and nervous. Sheldon thought that mesomorphs were most likely to become criminals. However unrepresentative samples were used and he may have been confusing causation with correlation – just because there is an association between body type and deviant behaviour doesn't mean that the body type/biology caused the deviant behaviour. Also neither of these theories take into account female crime.

Some criminologists believe that criminal behaviour is genetic. There are two types of studies which try to draw the link between inherited traits and criminal behaviour:

1) twin studies which compare the criminal behaviour between identical (monozygotic) twins and fraternal (dizygotic) twins. These studies have found that there is a greater similarity of criminal behaviour between identical twins than between fraternal twins.

As identical twins are genetically identical, and because of their similarity of criminal behaviour, it is suspected that criminal behaviour is genetically linked.

DiLalla and Gorresman (1990) did a metanalysis of 4 decades of twin research into criminality and concluded that the average concordance rate for fraternal twins was 22% and for identical twins, 51%. The influence of heredity is higher for property crime than it is for violent crime. (Cloninger & Gottesman, 1987)

2) adoption studies which look at the criminal behaviour of children that have been adopted. This allows for the separation of biological effects on criminal behaviour from the environmental effects on criminal behaviour. If the behaviour of both the adopted child and the biological parent behaviour is criminal, then there is support for a genetic basis for crime. Studies conducted in Europe show that the criminality of a biological father is a good predictor of criminality in an adopted offspring. The likelihood of criminal behaviour is greatest in an adopted child if both the biological and adoptive parents are criminal. Adoption Study of Cloninger et al (1982) examined children whose biological parents were criminals. The crime rate for

children was 4 times greater if biological parents were criminals, 2 times greater if adopted parents were criminals (12% and 6%, respectively).

Neurotransmitters are chemicals that allow for the transmission of electrical impulses in the brain and are the brain's way of processing information. They are not normally involved with the regulatory nervous system (as hormones are, although some glands trigger neurotransmitters, or neuropeptides, as well as hormones), but with the Central Nervous System and higher-order cognitive functioning. As such, they have become of great interest to criminologists who study things like antisocial personality and psychopathy which are believed to manifest brain systems with neurotransmitter levels "out of balance". It is well documented that alcoholism and drug dependence are associated with differences in neurotransmitter levels. In fact, the biggest research problem in studying neurotransmitters is finding criminal research subjects who aren't already "self-medicated" on alcohol or drugs. Although a person's normal neurotransmitter levels are determined genetically at birth, it is quite easy to manipulate them with drugs (medications for the mentally ill, stop-smoking pills), with diet (sugar, caffeine, chocolate, food additives), with stress (stressful environmental conditions), and with altitude (hypoxia is a condition mimicking the effect of neurotransmitter imbalance at altitudes above 3,800 feet above sea level). There are not that many neurotransmitters within the central nervous system, and the three most commonly studied ones are serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine. Antisocial people have significantly lower levels of serotonin than ordinary people do. Schizophrenics have significantly lower levels of dopamine, and cocaine addicts have higher levels of dopamine. Levels of norepinephrine have also been associated with antisocial behaviour. Serotonin is probably the most important neurotransmitter in criminology. As stated previously, antisocial people have lower levels of serotonin. This may be either genetic or environmental, because neurotransmitter balances are constantly changing as memories are stored in the brain. Every new memory permanently changes the neural pathway structure, thus creating the opportunities for neurotransmitter imbalances. People who are genetically endowed with lower serotonin levels ("born antisocials") may therefore "grow out of it", and likewise, someone who is born with normal serotonin levels may develop an antisocial personality (what is called "reduced serotonergic activity" or a "serotonin uptake problem"). Reduced serotonic activity and crime is one of the strongest connections in biopsychological criminology.

Brain wave activity has been studied, and the general finding is that criminals have slower brain waves, i.e., slower EEG activity. Whether this is an indicator of a central or autonomic nervous system problem depends upon the researcher. The work of criminologist Hans Eysenck points at one of the reasons for why criminals can beat the lie detector is because their slower autonomic nervous system results in their not being easily stimulated, hence they seek out exciting, criminal behaviour in a "stimulus hunger". Mednick, a sociobiologist, points out that criminals have a lower rate of skin conductance response (SCR), the time it takes the skin to conduct electrical current. He argues that this affects the ability of criminals to benefit from negative reinforcement, and since fear is the most powerful reinforcer known to psychology, criminals experience no fear or anxiety. Lobe dysfunction, which can occur with head injury or birth trauma, also has been studied in criminals. Prisoners often report having had a head injury involving loss of consciousness, and 80% of violent criminals had greater than average birth complications. There's evidence to

suggest that frontal lobe dysfunction may characterise violent offenders while temporal lobe dysfunction may characterise sex offenders. Research involving newer imaging techniques e.g. MRI and CT is ongoing.

Freud never really had much to say about crime, other than it was most likely motivated by guilt, committed by people with overdeveloped superegos, and characterised by unconscious errors (Freudian slips) which appeared to represent a desire to get caught and be punished. The inconsistencies in this (is why its often said that there is no purely Freudian theory of crime other than the idea the criminals want to get caught). It was up to the followers of Freud who revised his theories (the Neo-Freudians) to shed light on the psychoanalytic explanation of crime.

One of the first neo-Freudians to do so was August Aichorn, who took the position that it was not overdeveloped superegos but an underdeveloped superego that primarily caused crime. He believed that some criminals, raised as children without loving parents or parents at all, developed unregulated ids. Others were overindulged at the oral stage and required different treatments. In any event, Aichorn's ideas popularised the notion that delinquents needed unconditional love rather than a punitive, institutionalised setting. The ideas of maternal deprivation or love deprivation as a cause of crime are still popular.

Redl & Wineman were another group of neo-Freudians and took on the Freudian notion of Oedipus Complex. According to orthodox Freudian theory, criminals should hate their fathers more than their mothers, but Redl & Wineman found that criminals hate both their parents. In fact, they hadn't gone through a genital stage at all. Their egos were therefore undeveloped, and with nothing to mediate between the id and superego, their personalities were nothing but an endless series of raging conflicts, and this is what they called the "delinquent ego".

However these theories are based on hypothetical constructs and has little if any empirical research to support them.

The social learning theory states that crime is learned behaviour. People learn criminal behaviour through the groups with which they associate. If a person associates with more groups that define criminal behaviour as acceptable than groups that define criminal behaviour as unacceptable, the person will probably engage in criminal behaviour. Just as people must learn through socialisation how to conform to their society's norms, they must also learn how to depart from those norms. In other words, deviance, like conforming behaviour, is a product of socialisation. This theory shows how a juvenile can socially learn deviant behaviour from those around him/her such as family, peers, schoolmates or anyone else that he or she may come in contact with. The parents and peers are probably the most powerful agents in socialisation. For example, a child growing up in a home where the parents routinely engaged in criminal acts would grow up assuming that these acts may not be as wrong as society or the law has defined them.

If a child is around delinquent peers, they can also learn the activities of their peers and be much more prone to engaging in criminal activity.

There is no clear theory of abnormal behaviour in relation to crime as the views on abnormal behaviour are specifically related to schools so in this instance we are simply looking at the overall psychological theories of abnormal behaviour.

Eysenck's (1987) theory of personality and crime is a famous illustration of connecting personality factors with criminal offending. Eysenck holds the view that people are hedonistic animals and that offending is a pleasurable activity. This hedonistic tendency to commit crime, however, is opposed by the development of the conscience. He suggests the conscience is a conditioned fear response and consequently the likelihood that an individual will commit crime depends on the strength of the conscience. Children who do not engage in criminal activity have developed a conscience and hence suffer guilt if they do something wrong. In contrast, children who commit criminal acts have not developed strong consciences. Eysenck contends that criminals have "poor conditionality" as linked to his 3 dimensions of personality, which are: extraversion (E), neuroticism (N), and psychoticism (P).

Extraverted individuals are active, aggressive and impulsive. Neurotic individuals are restless, emotionally volatile, and hypersensitive. Individuals high in psychoticism lack empathy and are insensitive (in a cruel manner). According to Eysenck, individuals high in (E) have low levels of cortical arousal and build up conditioned responses less well. Likewise, individuals high in (N) condition less well because their anxiety interferes with conditioning. Lastly, individuals high in (P) correlate with criminal offending. The latter groups of individuals tend to be emotionally cold, have little empathy, a high rate of hostility, and are inhumane. Generally, Eysenck's theory has shown strong support for a link between impulsivity and criminal behaviour as (E) consists of two semi-independent factors (impulsiveness and sociability).

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