

CHAPTER 6

Contributions from Psychology: 'Mind and Nature'

OVERVIEW

Psychology occupies the middle range between biology and sociology, so this chapter reviews contributions that are more focused on 'mind' than body. They include social-psychological explanations that are often discussed as sociology, but are put in this chapter because they are mechanisms that are found across socio-historical contexts. Although these theories are more basic than sociological or structural explanations, Barak eschews the notion of 'sick criminals' and a 'criminal personality' in favor of thinking about conscious and unconscious mental adaptations.

The biopsychological explanations tie in with the previous chapter by examining neuropsychological deficits and low arousal interfere with the development of moral reasoning. This perspective also includes evolutionary psychology, which is extended in this chapter to examine male violence against women. Psychoanalytic perspectives see crime as linked to tensions or conflicts, often brought about by emotional disturbances, that prevent normal/healthy development.

Antisocial personality approaches examine the progression from childhood problem behaviors to antisocial adults, especially those whose personality/conscience is least subject to conditioning. The social psychological views, or the psychology of criminal conduct, emphasizes the importance of family influences; they include social learning and control theories. Humanistic psychology sees crime as an adaptation to meet needs outlined by Maslow or as a response to helplessness and alienation.

* The Instructor's Manual for *Integrating Criminologies* is available as a downloadable Adobe .pdf file by chapter or in complete form through <http://paulsjusticepage.com/IntegratingCrim/index.htm>. The author's website is <http://greggbarak.com>. The website for [Amazon.com](#) has additional information about the book, and the [publisher's website](#) accepts requests for academic desk copies.

OUTLINE

I Introduction

- A. Interest is in basic components of human nature -- appetites, aversions, motives and emotion
- B. Problem with validation when focus is on the 'mind', but this chapter reviews conscious and unconscious components
- C. No 'sick criminal' theories, but interested in psychology of criminal conduct and processes of mental adaptation

II Contextualizing Psychological Contributions

- A. Included are theories that are normally considered sociological (social control and social learning)
- B. Social Control
 - 1. Sociological meaning: institutions engaged in preserving the social order
 - 2. Social psychology: socialization by significant others
- C. Behaviorism/social learning: reciprocal interactions of personality and environment; crime from conditioning history and reinforcement
- D. Freud/humanistic psychology: people essentially good, but commit crimes to satisfy basic needs or adapt to feeling of helplessness
- E. Evolutionary psychology: natural selection includes infrastructure for reciprocal altruism (perhaps frustrated by modern society)
- F. Perspective
 - 1. Early familiar nurturing important
 - 2. Notion of 'criminal personalities' and 'mental defectives' problematic [Dahmer example]
 - 3. Interest in how mind and nurture interact at crucial developmental phases

III Biopsychological Approaches to Criminal Behavior

- A. IQ and crime: inferiority not significant or helpful in causal explanations of white collar crime
- B. Cognitive or neuropsychological deficits
 - 1. Interest in frontal lobes of brain responsible for executive functions (attention, concept formation, planning, self-monitoring and inhibition)
 - 2. Such deficits conducive to low measured intelligence and offending
 - 3. Deficits also related to inability to reach higher levels of moral reasoning [Kohlberg] that include empathy and anticipation of consequences
 - a. Supportive research may change if white collar crime included
- C. HIA (hyperactivity-impulsivity-attention deficit)

1. Related to delinquency through sensation seeking, poor concentration in school, and risk-taking
 2. HIA might be related to low levels of arousal (Ch 5)
- D. Evolutionary Psychology
1. Not study of 'invariant innate', but based on persistent essential features of past environments + adaptive abilities
 2. Aggression as evolved adaptation
 3. Male sexual violence as evolved adaptation
 - a. Violence is found cross-culturally, but specific to situations involving infidelity or reproductive access/fitness

IV Psychoanalytic Views of Criminal Behavior

- A. Crime is the expression of tension and conflicts in individual, probably related to emotional disturbances that inhibit development
- B. Based largely on Freudian theory
 1. Id: instinctual and unconscious drives; pleasure principle
 2. Ego: develops out of id by age 3, is the set of consciousness, and mediates id with reality principle and social conventions
 3. Superego: develops by age 5; conscience that sublimates unacceptable desires and uses identification to incorporate parents' standards
 4. Stages of psychosexual development: oral, anal, phallic, latent and genital
- C. Four psychoanalytical approaches
 1. Crime maintains psychic balance (may stem from unconscious desire for punishment)
 2. Crime as psychosis
 3. Crime is a gratification that substitutes for blocked needs
 4. Crime compensates for repressed feelings of inadequacy
- D. Other theories that do not fit into categories above
 1. Psychopath/sociopath/anti-social personality: weak superego from improper resolution of monopoly feeling for opposite-sexed parent (Oedipal and Electra complexes)
 2. Psychic need theories: denial of love from parents and esteem from peers results in anxiety; excitement seeking mutates anxiety, delinquency gets attention from parents, bravado compensates for inferiority
 3. Techniques of neutralization [Sykes and Matza]: delinquency as extension of Freudian defense mechanisms
 - a. denial of responsibility (didn't mean to do it)
 - b. denial of injury
 - c. denial of victim (they had it coming)
 - d. condemnation of condemners (everybody does it; they don't know what they're talking about)

e. appeal to higher loyalties (did it for the gang)

E. Neo-Freudians

1. Less patriarchal
2. More humanistic and phenomenological
3. Claims that people are social beings motivated to participate in groups
4. People overcompensate for feelings of insecurity, inferiority isolation an helplessness in potentially hostile world

V Antisocial Personality Approaches to Criminal Behavior

- A. Assumption that childhood problem behavior develops into antisocial adult behavior
- B. Development
 1. Risk factors for antisocial personality overlap significantly with those for juvenile delinquency and violent crime
 2. Learning and rewards may encourage development of antisocial personality
- C. Contributions of Eysenck
 1. Crime part of hedonistic tendency conscience, which is conditioned fear response
 2. Poor conditionability linked to: high Extraversion (low arousal), high Neuroticism (interference of anxiety) and high Psychoticism (emotionally cold, low empathy)

VI Social Psychological Views of Criminal Behavior

- A. Focus on individuals -- human development, sensation/perception, motivation/emotion, learning/cognition, memory/information processing and personality
 1. Same principles may explain criminal behavior, noncriminal antisocial behavior and even prosocial behavior
- B. Importance of family -- poor parental supervision, erratic or harsh discipline, discord, abuse or neglect, large families and antisocial parents
- C. Social learning theories
 1. Hedonistic children learn inhibitions through socialization
 2. Use of description of moral development by Piaget or Kohlberg
 3. Tarde's [1890] theory of imitation is the earliest of learning theories
 - a. Recidivism from self-imitation and reactions of external world
 - b. Imitation also on social level and across socio-historical contexts
 4. Recent social learning theory includes Jeffery's 'differential reinforcement'; Burgess and Akers' theory that blends differential reinforcement with differential association
- D. Social control theories: Crime when individual's social bond to society weakened

1. Containment theory [Reckless]: rates of offending related to ability of groups to contain norm-violating behavior
 - a. Inner containments: individual consciousness
 - b. Outer containments: functional families and supportive groups
2. Control/Bonding theory [Hirschi]: need to look at causes of conformity rather than delinquency; antisocial tendencies materialize when social control relaxed
 - a. Bond: attachment, commitment, involvement, belief

VII Humanistic Psychological Approaches to Criminal Behavior

- A. Influences by neo-Freudians and assumes people are essentially good
- B. Maslow (as applied to crime): crime is the means people use to satisfy blocked basic needs
 1. Physiological: food, shelter and sex
 2. Safety: security and stability
 - 3/4. Belonging/Respect: need to belong and be loved/need for esteem from self and others
 5. Self-actualization
- C. Halleck: crime provides opportunities for creativity and autonomy that are denied by conventional society
 1. Experience of (real or imagined) oppression is helplessness that people adapt to through: conformity, pro- or anti- social activism, conformity + activism, mental illness or crime

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1] Review range of explanations between biology's focus on body and genes and sociology's focus on organization and process
- 2] Introduce students to ideas about the 'mind' -- from unconscious drives and adaptations to conscious mechanisms and learning/development processes
- 3] Help students integrate contributions from biology with psychology to show continuity and complementarity of theories

IDEAS FOR LECTURES & DISCUSSION

While books of necessity must have chapters to divide up the material and make topics manageable, instructors can start integrating ideas across chapters. Many of the ideas about the neuropsychological deficits can be integrated into explanations based on learning and development. Evolutionary psychology seems consistent with

many patterns of violence (especially homicides in families), and can easily be integrated with socialization, learning, support, and punishment.

The material on moral development can be used to teach several points. First, it relates to the idea of how factors impeding moral development are related to criminality. Second, Kohlberg's specific scale of moral development raises some questions about values and power/knowledge. A student of his noted that the scale consistently scored men higher and as being more developed than women, which Gilligan (1982) argued was an artifact of using a male sample as a basis for the scale and not a reflection of reality. Her work reported some alternative ideas about moral development and conceptions of justice that were in turn criticized for inscribing class and race biases because of her white sample from an elite school.

As this chapter notes, the family is an important focus for theories relating to nurture, development, learning and socialization. Currie, in his excellent work *Confronting Crime*, argues that liberals have denied the importance of 'under the roof culture' while conservatives play it to the hilt for ideological reasons (1983: Ch 6)*. He criticizes writers like Wilson for committing "the *fallacy of autonomy*—the belief that what goes on outside the family can usefully be separated from the forces that affect it from the outside: the larger social context within which families are embedded for better or worse" (1983: 185). In his reckoning, family experiences and the labor market are not competing explanations, but "closely related parts of a larger set of interlocking circumstances" (ibid). The review of the literature in this chapter is insightful at untangling the ideological values and examining the effects single moms, broken families, violence and adequate resources to support a child. At the same time, Currie sets the stage for integrating various factors in a way that helps promote rational public policy.

As with the last chapter, keep asking and reviewing epistemological questions. What are Barak's criteria for selecting theories? Do students agree that they have 'stood the test of time'? Does any of this material strike them as pseudoscience?

REFERENCES

- Gilligan, Carol. 1982. *In a different Voice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Currie, Elliott. 1983. *Confronting Crime: An American Challenge*. N.Y.: Pantheon.