

ADVANCES IN CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORY

William S. Laufer
and
Freda Adler
Editors

Volume 1

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Edited by

**William S. Laufer
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Freda Adler**



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Preface

Marvin E. Wolfgang

Criminology—or, if you wish, criminal justice as well as criminology—has become a separate scientific discipline. The canons of the scientific method form the belief system of this discipline. The methods of science from Aristotle to Bacon, Newton to Comte and Durkheim—to move from physical to social science—involve the building of theory from postulates to hypotheses, testing, analyses, interpretations, including inferences and implications. These are golden terms, often abused, in scientific writing.

What has happened in criminology and criminal justice in the United States since World War II has been a rushing but welcome thrust toward more and more hard-core, quantitatively empirical research that has moved from simple bivariate to multivariate regression models and path, logit, and survival analyses. These have been healthy movements that have put United States criminology in the vanguard of research methodology. European and Asian scholars come to the United States to study and to emulate our efforts to improve the scientificity of the discipline.

What about the development of theory? Criminology, for thirty years at least, has been mostly descriptive and internally analytical, that is, analytical within the confines of the data observed and described. There is nothing wrong with that process, but it has produced no new, fascinatingly provocative (whether wrong or correct) theory. Yes, we have strain and stress theory, social control theory, due process legal theory, social conflict theory, some labeling that never achieved theory status, new radical and critical criminology, and subcultural theory. Nothing so significant has emerged since World War II as Sutherland's differential association or Sellin's culture conflict and crime.

In *Evaluating Criminology* (Elsevier, 1979), I and my colleagues Robert Figlio and Terence Thornberry reviewed the development of methodological and theoretical works, in criminology over twenty-eight years, from 1945 to 1972. The quality of works, as judged by the citation index, peer evaluations, and our own content analysis, did improve slightly. But there was no significant new theoretical development.

There is a new journal concerned with quantitative criminology. My former student James A. Fox launched it as chief editor. I am on the Board of Editors and obviously applaud it. I am now equally pleased to applaud a new serial on theory in criminology, launched by William Laufer and by one of my former students, Freda Adler, who was also a student of Thorsten Sellin's.

There is a need for a theory serial. Our major journals—the *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* and *Criminology*—can, of course, entertain theoretical manuscripts. But such manuscripts compete with the chi-squares and logit models of quantitative research, and the "hard" science commonly wins out over the "soft" science. However, let us not demur on that often false dichotomy. The theory this serial intends to publish will be as hard—meaning a logically structured, sound, and sophisticated "grand" or Mertonian "middle-range" theory—as authors can present. Rich heurism is invited, but rhetoric and speculation not rooted in empirical observations, or theory not inductively derived, will receive no notice.

This serial is launched with the intention to encourage innovative thinking from scholars anywhere in the world. Theory in criminology has been stagnant for decades. Criminology has always borrowed theory from sociology, psychology, economics, and other disciplines. Is there a special theory of crime, criminality, and society's response? Let us see. Let us look forward to the seminal submissions from new and young scholars with fresh ideas, and from elder statesmen who can reflect on years of accumulated erudition.

The dedication of this first volume to Thorsten Sellin is a dedication to his relatively youthful contribution in 1938 of *Culture Conflict and Crime*, as well as a dedication to his continued contributions, through his ninetieth birthday, such as the translation of Mark Ancel's book *Social Defense*. With this first volume we hail Thorsten Sellin and all future writings in criminological theory.

Introduction: The Challenges of Advances in Criminological Theory

William S. Laufer and Freda Adler

Over the past several decades there has been a strong movement in criminology to ensure a methodological thoroughness and technical exactness that resembles, in many respects, that which is found in the repertoire of the physical sciences. Few would deny the importance of this trend, given the evolution of the “scientific” study of crime. Unfortunately, though, no parallel movement has been at work to encourage good theory. Moreover, the strong mandate to “do science” has invited a risk that the exchange of ideas or hypotheses—often the building blocks of theory—will be demeaned or stripped of status. Some would argue that this already has happened.

At the very least it is apparent that the current emphasis on matters of design, methods, and data analysis can foster an inhibition of creative intuition. Even a casual reading of our journals is sufficient testimonial to this assertion. Thus, the primary reason for creating *Advances* is to encourage the exchange of ideas in a forum that is both receptive to, and yet appropriately critical of, educated speculation and innovation. Contributions will appear in the form of theoretical deliberations, theory construction, and efforts to test the validity and reliability of extant theories of crime and criminality.

Four Challenges of Advancing Criminological Theory

It is natural to react with both excitement and skepticism when a new social science periodical is announced. There are already many publications supporting the relatively small interdisciplinary field of criminology. It is therefore entirely fair to question why yet another is needed. The answer is straightforward. *Advances* may be justified in the context of a number of challenges to the field of criminology. It would be impossible to

do justice to all of these challenges in this brief introduction, but it is important to note a few of the more potent ones.

Levels of Analysis

Historically, it has been acceptable and customary to design and conduct theoretically relevant research with one of two goals in mind: explanation of the existence of crime or criminal behavior. The focus was squarely on the explicandum. Little effort was expended to acknowledge the level of analysis adopted or the appropriateness of the design to the level of analysis offered. For example, criminologists popularized Hirschi's (1969) notion of social control as an explanation of conformity on an individual *and* group level without much concern for the uniqueness of its application or utility to either. Sutherland's theory of differential association has been interpreted in much the same manner (Sutherland and Cressey, 1974).

We have continually disregarded or confused levels of analysis when dismissing the relative strengths of individual explanations of criminality, and likewise are all too often blind to macrolevel theory, when discussing individual-level correlates of behavior. All of this might have been tolerable at a time when the orientations of psychologists and sociologists were easily discernible and their numbers were small. Our field, however, has grown and so, too, has the number of scholars with bidisciplinary training and generalist criminal justice backgrounds, many of whom have an interest in integrative study. In short, it is no longer fruitful to search for explanations without reflecting on the level of analysis employed. Without such reflection there is danger because we risk and often invite confusion. This confusion can take the form of dismissing the importance of a variable such as social class when engaged in a microlevel investigation, or the dismissal of certain personality correlates when involved in a macrolevel study. Both may have explanatory power, but only at a certain level of analysis. Consider, for example, Rodney Stark's (1987) recent revelations surrounding his effort to demonstrate the insulating effect of religious commitment on deviance.

Stark conducted some of the early work on religiosity and delinquency in the late 1960s, and had hoped that his data would demonstrate a negative relation. Despite a large sample, acceptable measures of pertinent variables, and "considerable statistical manipulation," he and his colleagues failed to find a significant effect (Hirschi and Stark, 1969; Stark and Glock, 1968). Stark was not alone in his inability to demonstrate a relation between religion and criminality. It is notable that subsequent efforts were nothing short of equivocal (Stark, 1987). After some time Stark raised the issue once again, and it is now apparent that the problem was not one of

original intuition, but rather a matter of failing to consider the level of analysis. As Stark admits,

I soon discovered that so long as religion is conceived of as an individual trait, as a set of personal beliefs and practices, we can never know when and where religion will influence conformity, for research will continue to produce contradictory findings. But, if we move from a psychological to a sociological conception of religion, clarity leaps from chaos. I am prepared to argue theoretically and to demonstrate empirically that religion affects conformity, not through producing guilt or fear of hellfire in the individual, but that religion gains its power to shape the individual only as an aspect of groups [1987, p. 112].

Stark's experience provides a simple yet powerful illustration of the importance of knowing not only the *explicandum*, or what it is that is being explained (e.g. crime or delinquency) but at what level the explanation is taking place (e.g. individual or group behavior). This simple caveat is not new or novel. Stark's journey might have been far less exhausting if Emile Durkheim had been along. At the turn of the century, Durkheim had wisely derived the following principle and revelation:

The determining cause of a social fact must be sought among antecedent social facts and not among states of individual consciousness. . . . The function of a social fact must always be sought in its relation to some social end. . . . It is because sociologists have often misunderstood this rule and have considered social phenomena from too psychological a point of view that many of their theories seem too vague, imprecise, and far removed from the specific character of the things they are intended to explain [p. 74].

It seems clear, then, that maintaining an awareness of levels of analysis is important while formulating research questions and deliberating over questions of design and method. It is of particular concern in the conceptualization of integrative and interdisciplinary studies, in which researchers tend to join or merge micro and macro levels of explanation. But perhaps it is most crucial in constructing interventions based upon the theoretical revelations derived from a particular study or series of studies. It is worth wondering about the prognosis for crime control and prevention programs that derive from theoretically rich investigations that neglect consideration of levels of analysis. Therefore, the first challenge posed by *Advances* is to encourage efforts that maintain an awareness of the level of analysis of a theoretical premise, proposition, or study.

Explanas-Explicandum Congruence

A second challenge is related to the first but is more general. This challenge calls for a heightened awareness of the relation between a theory and

what a theory explains. Theories of crime, criminal behavior, deviance, and conformity, for example, are often constructed and validated with a specific and clearly articulated *explicandum*. The general propositions that make up a theory, or that which explains (*Explanas*), should bear a logical and demonstrable relation to the explicandum (Hempel, 1965; Walker, 1975). In other words, a theory of gang delinquency may be inappropriate as an explanation of embezzlement; a crime-specific theory may fail as a general theory of deviance; and a general theory of criminal behavior may be inadequate as explanatory of certain criminal acts. Although this seems quite obvious, too frequently the attraction or allegiance to a particular theoretical orientation seems to result in applications for which there is little justification. Therefore, the second challenge is to attend to the logic of this explicandum-explanas consistency.

Grand Theory versus Incremental Disciplinary Explanations

For some, wrestling with criminological theory seems to hold appeal because it forces attention to some of the most revered and ultimate questions in criminology, such as, What causes crime? This understandable attraction has tempted many to derive grand theories that, allegedly, account for all criminal behavior.

One such brand of grand theory is derived from combining a number of often conflicting theories (Elliot, Ageton, and Cantor, 1979). A related but different approach seeks to explain crime or deviance from a collection of selected variables taken from different theoretical perspectives (e.g. Johnson, 1979). A third and final response to temptation has been to suggest a grand theory from within one particular discipline (e.g. psychoanalytic theory has been credited with final "answers" as to why crime occurs) (cf. Hirschi, 1969).

Before commenting on the integrity of these three approaches, it is only fair to air some concerns that have been raised about integrative and interdisciplinary efforts. It can be argued that the fundamental limitation of each of these three grand approaches is their prematurity. Too little appears to be known about each disciplinary perspective, and far too few perspectives are known, for there to be much gained from such global integrations. Interpreting the puzzle of crime becomes that much more difficult when some of the pieces either are absent, incomplete, or in an inexact form. One might argue that this is what we have settled for. If so, then there should be more support for the notion that the body of theoretical literature will benefit most from incremental disciplinary investigations.

More specifically, the first approach, which combines a group of theories in order to explain crime, suffers from the limitations of each theory—as

Hirschi (1969) has noted—and also is limited by the theories not considered. It may be, for example, that personological or situational perspectives would have accounted for far more variance in Elliot's integration than the traditional sociological propositions employed. Does this mean that each and every theory of crime causation must be incorporated into such an integration? Do we know enough about the explanatory power of situational variables to dismiss them in such a global integration? And finally, are we comfortable with the notion that microlevel theory and macrolevel theory can coexist in an integration? Perhaps we should consider their differing level of analysis.

There is a similar problem where criminologists have sought to explain deviance, delinquency, or criminality by selecting preferred variables from a number of different theories. The validity of the integration and the amount of variance that can be explained are actually a product of the investigator's judgment in selecting variables for inclusion in a particular model. This judgment is limited further by what is known or hypothesized about the power of each variable. All too often variables are chosen for reasons that appear arbitrary or artificial: dismissing the power of variables for reasons found in disciplinary bias, or budgetary limitations. An example of the former may be seen in the work of Johnson (1979), who dismisses psychological and biological factors from his model of the origins of juvenile delinquency because they lack empirical support as general explanations.

Finally, there is the infrequent assertion that a singular theory derived from one discipline accounts for all crime. It may be said that the assertion's infrequency is evidence of its soundness. There are many good reasons for criminology's evolution into an interdisciplinary field, however, and its being so illustrates the limitations of such an assertion.

On the other hand, in an effort to increase the sophistication of bivariate or univariate models, some researchers, it seems, are too quick to point out the limitations of such an approach to the study of crime causation. For example, the crime-personality relation has met with some disfavor over the past decade as situationalists have noted person-situation interactions, as well as equivocal evidence for the consistency of personality over time (e.g. Pervin, 1987). Assuming the validity of the situationalist claims—as most do—should these revelations inhibit efforts, for instance, to test the power of personality measures to predict delinquency without considering situations? If there is *any* power in a personological variable, must it be studied in context of the situation to advance our understanding of criminological theory?

Our criticism of these approaches suggests that a renewed focus on increasing the power of our disciplinary explanations of criminality may be

indicated, with the long-range goal of perfecting interdisciplinary integration. The next challenge, therefore, is simply to bolster the validity of the pieces in the puzzle while trying to resist inappropriate integrative temptation.

The Criminology of Criminal Justice

There are three common replies to the question, Are there any meaningful differences between criminology and criminal justice? First, the traditional response suggests the obvious: the former is an ancient import that has been refined by modern sociology; the latter was born within the last several decades and is a marriage of many disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, biology, law, geography, and education. Beyond these often artificial disciplinary divisions, it is said that criminology generally concerns itself with the scientific study of crime and criminals, and that criminal justice is strictly a systems-based discipline, focused by its very definition on process and justice-related questions.

A second response is that there is no meaningful difference between the two endeavors, or that the differences are more apparent than real. Proponents of this view generally are graduates of an eclectic criminal justice education, who have been trained in a melange of psychology, sociology, biology, and related social sciences, and who have a devotion or commitment to planned change. More than likely, they perceive the criminal justice system as a complex environment requiring scientific study as a basis for any intervention.

A third response is a variant of the second; it acknowledges the differences between criminology and criminal justice but maintains that the latter is founded upon the precepts of the former. Although this contention runs counter to conventional wisdom, it seems most plausible.

Disciplinary partisanship and educational orientation often support an unfortunate notion that theories of crime causation and criminality are the fixtures of tired academicians in university clubs. Some grant-giving foundations and institutions have helped this notion along by frowning at the sight of a theory-laden proposal—why fund such an effort, given its limited or nonexistent applicability? One might fairly conclude that (a) our criminal justice system is atheoretical, (b) the theories that provide a basis for the criminal justice system have been received critically, or (c) theory in its present form has little utility.

Quite obviously, even a superficial exposure to the nature of each successive process in the criminal justice system suggests a reliance on criminological theory, whether born from intuition or derived from empirical study. The most apparent reliance may be seen in programmatic efforts to

prevent and control juvenile delinquency, but clearly the system is graced with theory at the time of law enforcement, in deliberations over the granting of bail, as well as at sentencing.

We are left with the unfortunate reality that the popular dichotomy of theory/system or criminology/criminal justice is likely prompted by the inadequacy of extant theory. How inadequate are existing conceptions of crime and criminality? For the purposes of providing a context and justification for system processes and policies, theoreticians have only to reflect on the success rate of most correctional interventions, or prison recidivism rates, to see a few of the many challenges that remain. Thus, the service that criminology may bring to the criminal justice system forms the fourth and final challenge.

Concluding Thoughts

Advances is published at a time of significant growth, as well as a disturbing level of insulation, in criminology. It would be only a slight exaggeration to say that a new and impressive language of criminology has emerged, along with a handful of sophisticated theories that, for a variety of reasons, are familiar only to criminologists. Compounding this "separate" identity are increased numbers of criminal justice scholars and equivalent "generalists" who maintain a fluency solely in the dialect of criminology.

As a result, there is an even greater need now than ever before to remain current with, and well versed in, the advance of allied disciplines. We tend to borrow from them years later, often inattentive to the birth of new trends, innovations, and subtle ideological movements. This is unfortunate because we do have a convenient window through which we can view their work, whether or not they view ours. It is our hope (albeit an ambitious one) that *Advances* will find a cross-disciplinary audience as well as track relevant movements and advances in allied fields.

Finally, few would argue with the idea that the evolution of criminological theory has been determined, or at least molded, by a greater worldview. Whom criminologists study, the behaviors chosen for examination, and the extent to which society is credited with some responsibility in determining the actions of an offender appear to reflect a broad vision of criminology. This vision can easily be blurred by a compelling philosophical allegiance to positivist teachings, or simply by a distaste for the rhetoric that can, and often does, accompany critical, new, or Marxist expositions. For this reason, the editors of *Advances* will maintain an awareness of, and an openness to, the multiple roles that theoreticians of crime can play in

defining appropriate objects of study and in constructing resulting explanations.

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Criminological Theories: The Truth as Told by Mark Twain

Don M. Gottfredson

Theories in criminology tend to be unclear and lacking in justifiable generality. The lack of clarity results in apparent inconsistencies, although more attention to the structure of a scientific theory and its requirements might reveal more agreement among theorists than now recognized. Or, it might reveal sharp disagreements, helping to identify conflicts among theories in such a way that they could be decided by critical tests. Science usually progresses by such competition when the debate can be decided empirically. Now, when an author chooses among theories as may seem suitable to the argument made, it is politely called eclecticism, but its probably true name is incoherence.

Rarely do available theories offer practical guidance that does not require heroic leaps of conjecture. Practicality is not a requisite of a valid theory (a theory might be true yet void of utility), but a good theory may be required for practicality. Kurt Lewin's often quoted remark that "nothing is as practical as a good theory" may be correct, but perhaps it may be said also that nothing is so impractical as a poor one. Now, weak or poorly defined concepts steer major criminal justice policy decisions. This may be due to the same lack of attention to the fundamental requirements associated with the various parts of a theory and its development.

Criminologists should pay increased attention to some fundamental tenets of scientific theory building. These are not new (I have not invented them), and they are accepted widely. Certain critical choices must be made, and they should be made explicitly. The purpose of this paper is to offer a set of concerns that may be useful in evaluation of any theory.

Fortunately, to make my points I need not embarrass either my crimi-