

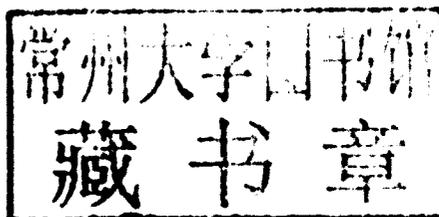
CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORY

THE ESSENTIALS

STEPHEN G. TIBBETTS



CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORY



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Preface

This textbook is intended to cover the essential topics of criminological theory in a more brief and efficient manner than other larger, more comprehensive texts on this topic. *Criminological Theories: The Essentials* presents a comprehensive overview of the major concepts and perspectives of virtually all major theories in the evolution of criminological theory, reviewing some of the most recent empirical research on each theory that is currently available. Furthermore, in each chapter, as well as an entire concluding chapter, this book examines the various policy implications that can be derived from each type of criminological theory, as well as what can possibly be done but has not yet been tested.

A number of excellent criminology theory textbooks are available to students and professors, so why this one? This book can serve as the primary text for an introductory undergraduate course in criminological theory or as the primary text for a graduate course, given the depth and comprehensive nature of the discussion of virtually all theories in the historic and modern criminological literature. It is important to note that the book provides a comprehensive, yet concise, survey of the current state of existing scientific literature in virtually all areas of criminological theory, as well as giving a history of how we got to this point regarding each theoretical model and topic area. A key feature of this text is an added section for each chapter that examines various policy implications that have resulted from most of the dominant theories in the discipline, as well as results from empirical evaluation studies of programs based on theories presented in each section.

Structure of the Book

This book uses a rather typical outline for a criminological theory textbook, beginning with an introduction of the definitions of crime and criminology and measuring crime, as well as what such measures of crime reveal regarding the various characteristics that are most associated with higher offending rates. This is a very important aspect of the book because each theory or model must be judged by how well it explains the distribution of crime rates among these various characteristics. In the Introduction, the criteria that are required for determining causality are also discussed, including an examination of how extremely difficult (often impossible) this is to do in criminological research because we can't randomly assign individuals to bad parenting, unemployment, low IQ, and so on.

This book presents 12 chapters that chronologically trace the history and development of criminological theory with an emphasis on when such perspectives became popular among theorists and mainstream society. Thus, we will start with the earliest models (Preclassical and Classical School) of criminal theorizing in the 18th century. Then, we will examine the evolution of the Positive School perspective of the 19th century,

which began with biological theories of crime. Next, the book will present the various other positive theories that were proposed in the early 20th century, which include social structure models and social process theories that were presented in the early or mid-1900s. Then, we will explore theoretical models that were presented in the latter 20th century, such as social conflict and Marxist and feminist models of criminality. Chapter 10 then presents the more contemporary theoretical explanations of criminality, which include developmental and life-course models and integrated theories of crime. Finally, although policy implications are discussed at the end of each chapter introduction, we finish with a summary chapter that specifies the types of policies suggested by the various paradigms and recent scientific findings regarding each of the major theoretical models presented throughout the book.

This book is divided into 12 chapters that mirror the sections in a typical criminology textbook, each dealing with a particular type or category of theories in criminology. Thus, each of the chapters concludes with an evaluation of the empirical support for the theories and policy implications derivable. These sections are as follows:

1. Introduction to the Book: An Overview of Issues in Criminological Theory

First, this book provides an introductory chapter dealing with what criminological theory is, as well as examining the concepts of crime and the criteria used to determine whether a theory is adequate for explaining behavior. This section introduces the facts and risk factors by which all of the theoretical models presented in the following sections will be evaluated. Also included is a discussion of the criteria involved in determining whether a given factor or variable actually causes criminal behavior.

2. Preclassical and Classical Theories of Crime

In this section, we will examine the types of theories that were dominant before logical theories of crime were presented, namely supernatural or demonic theories of crime. Then, we will examine how the Age of Enlightenment led to more rational approaches for explaining criminal behavior, such as that of the Classical School and neoclassical theory. We will also explore the major model that evolved from the Classical School, deterrence theory, as well as policy implications and applications that stem from this theory.

3. Modern Applications of the Classical Perspective: Deterrence, Rational Choice, and Routine Activities or Lifestyle Theories of Crime

In this section, we will review more contemporary theoretical models and empirical findings regarding explanations of crime, which focus on deterrence, and other recent perspectives—such as rational choice theory, routine activities theory, and the lifestyle perspective—which are based on the assumption of individuals choosing their behavior or targets based on rational decisions. Some of these perspectives focus more on the individual's choice of the perceived costs or benefits of a given act, whereas other models focus on the type of location chosen to commit crime or daily activities or lifestyles that predispose a person to certain criminal behavior. This section concludes with a discussion of policy implications that relate to this theory.

4. Early Positive School Perspectives of Criminality

This section will examine the early development of theoretical models that proposed that certain individuals or groups were predisposed to criminal offending. The earliest theories in the 19th century proposed that certain physical traits were associated with criminal behavior, whereas perspectives in the early 20th

century proposed that such criminality was due to intelligence. This section also examines body type theory, which proposes that the physical body type of an individual has an effect on criminality. This section will also examine modern applications of this perspective and review the empirical support such theoretical models have received in modern times.

5. Modern Biosocial Perspectives of Criminal Behavior

In this section, we will review modern studies regarding the link between physiology and criminality. Such theoretical models include family studies, twin and adoption studies, cytogenetic studies, and studies on hormones and neurotransmitters. We will examine some of the primary methods used to examine this link as well as more rational and recent empirical studies, which show a relatively consistent link between physiological factors and criminal behavior.

6. Early Social Structure and Strain Theories of Crime

This section reviews the development of the social structure perspective starting in the 19th century and culminating with Merton's theory of strain in the early 20th century. A variety of perspectives based on Merton's strain theory will be examined, but all of these models have a primary emphasis on how social structure produces criminal behavior. We will examine some empirical studies that have tested the validity of these early social structure theories, as well as discussing policy implications that these models suggest.

7. The Chicago School and Cultural and Subcultural Theories of Crime

In this section, we examine the evolution and propositions of the scholars at the University of Chicago, who produced the most advanced form of criminological theorizing in the early 20th century. In addition to the evolution of the Chicago School and its application of ecological theory to criminal behavior, we will also examine the more modern applications of this theoretical framework for explaining criminal behavior among residents of certain neighborhoods. We will discuss several theoretical models that examine cultural or subcultural groups that differ drastically from conventional norms. Finally, we will examine the various policy implications and policies that can be derived from the theoretical perspectives presented in this section.

8. Social Process and Learning Theories of Crime

This section examines the many perspectives that have proposed that criminal behavior is the result of being taught by significant others to commit crime. When it was first presented, it was considered quite novel. We will examine the evolution of various theories of social learning, starting with the earliest, which were based on somewhat outdated forms of learning theory, and then, we will progress to more modern theories that incorporate contemporary learning models. We will also examine the most recent versions of this type of theoretical perspective, which incorporate all forms of social learning in explaining criminal behavior. Finally, we will discuss the various policies that have been based on the social learning models presented in this section.

9. Social Reaction, Critical, and Feminist Models of Crime

In this section, we examine a large range of theories with the common assumption that the reasons for criminal behavior lie outside the traditional criminal justice system. Many social reaction theories, for

example, are based on labeling theory, which proposes that it is not the individual offender who is to blame but rather the societal reaction to early antisocial behavior. Furthermore, this section will examine the critical perspective, which blames the existing legal and economical structure for most of the assigned “criminal” labels that are used against most offenders. Also, we will discuss the major perspectives of criminal offending regarding females as compared to males, as well as their differential treatment by the formal criminal justice system. Finally, we look at how explaining low levels of female offending might be important for policies regarding males, as well as policy implications regarding the other theoretical perspectives presented in this section.

10. Life-Course Perspectives of Criminality

This section will examine the various theoretical perspectives that emphasize the predisposition and influences that are present among individuals who begin committing crime at early ages versus later ages. We also examine the various stages of life that tend to have a high influence on an individual’s state of criminality (e.g., marriage), as well as the empirical studies that have examined these types of transitions in life. Finally, we examine the various types of offenders and the types of transitions and trajectories that tend to influence their future behavior, along with various policy implications that can be suggested by such models of criminality.

11. Integrated Theoretical Models and New Perspectives of Crime

In this section, we present the general theoretical framework for integrated models. Then, we introduce some criticisms of this integration of traditional theoretical models. In addition, we present several integrated models of criminality, some of which are based on microlevel factors and others that are based on macrolevel factors. Finally, we examine the weaknesses and strengths of these various models based on empirical studies that have tested their validity, as well as some policy implications that can be derived from such integrated theories of criminality.

12. Applying Criminological Theory to Policy

This final section will review the most recent empirical evidence regarding how various theoretical models and findings reviewed in this book can be used (or have been used) to inform policies to reduce criminal behavior among offenders. These studies show that many theoretical perspectives suggest some effective policy recommendations, whereas other theoretical frameworks have been shown to be less effective. It should be noted that there are many more modern policy applications than the theories presented in this book, but this section emphasizes the most notable. Furthermore, there are many implications that have not yet been attempted but likely will be based on the policies attributed to theories we cover in this book. Whether they will be successful is an issue to be covered by empirical evaluation studies and will warrant another book entirely.

Instructor Teaching Website. A variety of instructor’s materials are available. For each chapter, this includes summaries, PowerPoint slides, chapter activities, web resources, and a complete set of test questions.

Student Study Site. This comprehensive student study site features chapter outlines students can print for class; flash cards; self-quizzes; web exercises; links to journal articles, online videos, and NPR program archives; and more.

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to my parents, Jane and Steve, who have provided the kind of support and love throughout my life that enabled me to follow my dreams and actually acquire them. They are the best parents anyone could ever ask for, and I will forever appreciate their inspiration in both my work and life overall. I can't thank you two enough for everything you have done for me.

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Introduction to the Book

An Overview of Issues in Criminological Theory

Welcome to the world of criminological theory! It is an exciting and complex endeavor that explains why certain individuals and groups commit crimes and why other people do not. This book will explore the conceptual history of this endeavor as well as current theories. Most of us can relate directly to many of these theories; we may know friends or family members who fit dominant models of criminal behavior.

This introduction begins by describing what **criminology** is; what distinguishes it from other perspectives of crime, such as religion, journalism, or philosophy; and how definitions of crime vary across time and place. Then, it examines some of the major issues used to classify different theories of criminology. After exploring the various **paradigms** and categories of criminological **theory**, we discuss what characteristics help to make a theory a good one—in criminology or in any scientific field. In addition, we review the specific criteria for proving causality—for showing what predictors or variables actually cause criminal behavior. We also explain why—for logistic and ethical reasons—few theories in criminology will ever meet the strict criteria required to prove that key factors actually cause criminal behavior. Finally, we look at the strengths and weaknesses of the various measures of crime, which are used to test the validity of all criminological theories, and what those measures reveal about how crime is distributed across various individuals and groups. Although the discussion of crime distribution, as shown by various measures of criminality, may seem removed from our primary discussion regarding theories of why certain individuals and groups commit more crime than others, nothing could be further from the truth. Ultimately, all theories of criminal behavior will be judged based on how much each theory can explain the observed rates of crime shown by the measures of criminality among individuals and groups.

What Is Criminology, and How Does It Differ From Other Examinations of Crime?

Criminology is the scientific study of crime, especially why people commit crime. Although many textbooks have more complex definitions of crime, the word *scientific* separates our definition from other perspectives and examinations of crime.¹ Philosophical and legal examinations of crime are based on logic and deductive reasoning, for example, by developing propositions for what makes logical sense. Journalists play a vital role in examinations of crime by exploring what is happening in criminal justice and revealing injustices and new forms of crime; however, they tend to examine anecdotes or examples of crime as opposed to examining objective measures of criminality.

Taken together, philosophical, legal, and journalistic perspectives of crime are not scientific because they do not involve the use of the **scientific method**. Specifically, they do not develop specific predictions, known scientifically as **hypotheses**, which are based on prior knowledge and studies, and then go out and test such predictions through observation. Criminology is based on this scientific method, whereas other examinations of crime are not.

Instead, philosophers and journalists tend to examine a specific case, make conclusions based on that one example of a crime incident, and then leave it at that. Experts in these nonscientific disciplines do not typically examine a multitude of stories similar to the one they are considering, nor do they apply the elements of their story to an existing theoretical framework that offers specific predictions or hypotheses. Further, they do not test those predictions by observation. The method of testing predictions through observation and then applying the findings to a larger body of knowledge, as established by theoretical models, is solely the domain of criminologists, and it separates criminology from other fields. The use of the scientific method is a distinguishing criterion for many studies of human behavior, such as psychology, economics, sociology, and anthropology, which is why these disciplines are generally classified as **social sciences**; criminology is one.

To look at another perspective on crime, religious accounts are almost entirely based on dogmatic, authoritarian, or reasoning principles, meaning that they are typically based on what some authority (e.g., the Pope, the Bible, the Torah, or the Koran) has to say about the primary causes of crime and the best ways to deal with such violations. These ideas are not based on observations. A science like criminology is based not on authority or anecdotes but on empirical research, even if that research is conducted by a 15-year-old who performs a methodologically sound study. In other words, the authority of the scientist performing the study does not matter; rather, the observed evidence and the soundness of the methodology of how the study was performed are of utmost importance. Criminology is based on science, and its work is accomplished through direct observation and testing of hypotheses, even if those findings do not fit neatly into logical principles or the general feelings of the public.

What Is Theory?

Theory can be defined as a set of concepts linked together by a series of statements to explain why an event or phenomenon occurs. A simple way of thinking about theories is that they provide explanations of why the world works the way it does. In other words, a theory is a model of the phenomenon that is being

¹Stephen Brown, Finn Esbensen, and Gilbert Geis, *Criminology*, 6th ed. (Cincinnati: LexisNexis, 2007).