

5th Edition

CRIMINOLOGICAL CONTEXT AND CONSEQUENCES THEORY

J. Robert Lilly
Francis T. Cullen
Richard A. Ball



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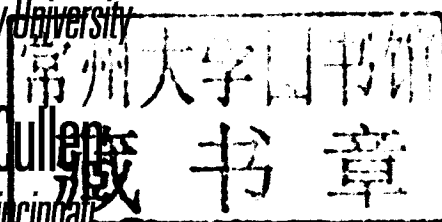
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Preface

The idea for this book was birthed during the mid-1970s when the United States and criminology on both sides of the Atlantic were experiencing immense changes. Between that time and the appearance of the first edition of the book in 1989, much of our individual energies were devoted to establishing and maintaining our careers and to our changing family responsibilities. At times, it seemed as though the circumstances needed to sustain the type of collective effort required for *Criminological Theory* were so elusive as to prevent the book from ever being written. Yet, the idea of a book that went beyond explaining criminological theory—one that used a sociology of knowledge perspective to explain the origins, developments, and consequences of criminological theory—remained very much alive. We were certain that few works like it in criminology had been written before. Then and now, we were committed to demonstrating that ideas about the causes of crime have consequences.

Criminological Theory has now been an ongoing project for two decades. During this time, the book has nearly doubled in size—a fact that reflects both the increasing richness of theorizing about crime and our efforts to add substantive value as we authored each new edition. Thus, the second edition in 1995 included empirical updates, substantial rewriting, and a new chapter devoted to fresh directions in critical thinking about crime. The emphasis on a sociology of knowledge perspective remained the same. The third edition, which appeared in 2002, attempted to capture novel theoretical developments that had occurred within both mainstream and critical theoretical paradigms. The fourth edition, published in 2006, expanded the book from 9 to 14 chapters and identified new theoretical trends in the United States and in Europe.

As we crafted this fifth edition, we remained excited to have the opportunity to chronicle the major advances within criminological theory, ranging from biosocial to cultural criminology. As with each previous revision, we updated materials and sought to make the book more informative, interesting, and accessible. Here are the most important changes that we have included in the fifth edition:

- A new chapter that reviews theories of white-collar crime, from the writings of Edwin Sutherland to more contemporary developments.
- A substantially revised chapter on biosocial criminology that includes the latest research in this growing area.

- Seven new tables that summarize theoretical developments and that can serve as useful study guides.
- A new discussion in Chapter 1, to help guide readers through the book, that gives an overview of the main changes in American society and their relationship to theoretical developments.
- More biographical information, drawn from new sources, on theorists so as to show how context influenced their theorizing.
- Discussions of new theoretical developments, ranging from Hirschi's control theory and behavioral economics to critical and feminist perspectives.
- New sources that assess the empirical status of the major theories.
- Updates of crime control policies and their connection to criminological theory.

Because criminology is an evolving field of study, we are convinced that the contents of the shifting contexts of the social world from which criminology comes will continue to influence its theoretical explanations for crime and the policy responses to it. It is our hope, however, that criminology never will be a mere reflection of the world around it.

There are far too many people to whom we owe debts for the success of *Criminological Theory* to be properly thanked here. For this reason, we mention only two. First, the late James A. Inciardi, who gave us the opportunity to write for Sage Publications, deserves our gratitude for his faith in our efforts and patience when it seemed as though the first edition never would see the light of day. Second, Jerry Westby, the current Sage editor, has shown unwavering confidence in our project across multiple editions, always providing just the right dollop of enthusiasm and wise advice to enable us to bring our work to fruition.

Finally, we want to express our appreciation to the many criminologists—and their students—who have embraced our efforts to tell the story of the development of criminological theory. Without your continued support, *Criminological Theory* would not be in its fifth edition. It has been a privilege to share our ideas with you.

J. Robert Lilly

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Contents

Preface	xii
Acknowledgments	xiv
1. The Context and Consequences of Theory	1
Theory in Social Context	3
Theory and Policy: Ideas Have Consequences	5
Context, Theory, and Policy: Plan of the Book	7
Inventing Criminology: Mainstream Theories	8
Social Turmoil and the Rise of Critical Theories	10
Criminological Theory in the Conservative Era	11
Criminological Theory in the 21st Century	12
Conclusion	13
2. The Search for the “Criminal Man”	15
Spiritualism	17
The Classical School: Criminal as Calculator	20
The Positivist School: Criminal as Determined	22
The Birth of the Positivist School: Lombroso’s	
Theory of the Criminal Man	23
Lombroso’s Legacy: The Italian Criminological Tradition	25
The Continuing Search for the Individual Roots of Crime	29
The Consequence of Theory: Policy Implications	33
The Positivist School and the Control of the Biological Criminal	33
The Positivist School and Criminal Justice Reform	35
Conclusion	37
3. Rejecting Individualism: The Chicago School	39
The Chicago School of Criminology: Theory in Context	40
Shaw and McKay’s Theory of Juvenile Delinquency	42
Burgess’s Concentric Zone Theory	42
Disorganization and Delinquency	44
Transmission of Criminal Values	45
The Empirical Status of Social Disorganization Theory	45
Summary	46
Sutherland’s Theory of Differential Association	47
Differential Social Organization	47
Differential Association	48
Theoretical Applications	49

The Chicago School's Criminological Legacy	50
Collective Efficacy	51
Cultural Deviance Theory	53
Akers's Social Learning Theory	56
The Consequences of Theory: Policy Implications	58
Change the Individual	58
Change the Community	58
Conclusion	59
4. Crime in American Society: Anomie and Strain Theories	61
Merton's Strain Theory	63
America as a Criminogenic Society	63
Strain Theory in Context	67
Status Discontent and Delinquency	69
Delinquent Boys	69
Delinquency and Opportunity	70
The Criminological Legacy of Strain Theory	72
Assessing Strain Theory	72
Agnew's General Strain Theory	74
Crime and the American Dream: Institutional-Anomie Theory	78
The Future of Strain Theory	82
The Consequences of Theory: Policy Implications	83
Expand Opportunities	83
Taming the American Dream	85
Conclusion	86
5. Society as Insulation: The Origins of Control Theory	88
Forerunners of Control Theory	90
Durkheim's Anomie Theory	90
The Influence of the Chicago School	92
Early Control Theories	93
Reiss's Theory of Personal and Social Controls	94
Nye's Family-Focused Theory of Social Controls	95
Reckless's Containment Theory	96
The Social Psychology of the Self	97
Pushes and Pulls	98
Factors in Outer Containment	99
Factors in Inner Containment	99
Summary	101
Sykes and Matza: Neutralization and Drift Theory	102
Techniques of Neutralization	103
Drift Theory	105
Control Theory in Context	106
The Context of the 1950s	106
The Context of the 1960s	107
6. The Complexity of Control: Hirschi's Two Theories and Beyond	109
Hirschi's First Theory: Social Bonds and Delinquency	110
Hirschi's Forerunners	111
Hirschi's Sociological Perspective	112
Why Social Control Matters	114

The Four Social Bonds	115
Assessing Social Bond Theory	119
Hirschi's Second Theory: Self-Control and Crime	121
Self-Control and Crime	121
Assessing Self-Control Theory	122
Self-Control and Social Bonds	125
Hirschi's Revised Social Control Theory	126
The Complexity of Control	128
Hagan's Power-Control Theory	129
Tittle's Control Balance Theory	130
Colvin's Differential Coercion Theory	133
The Consequences of Theory: Policy Implications	135
Conclusion	137
7. The Irony of State Intervention: Labeling Theory	139
The Social Construction of Crime	140
Labeling as Criminogenic: Creating Career Criminals	143
Early Statements of Labeling Theory	143
Labeling as a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy	145
Assessing Labeling Theory	147
Labeling Theory in Context	152
The Consequences of Theory: Policy Implications	153
Decriminalization	153
Diversion	154
Due Process	155
Deinstitutionalization	156
Extending Labeling Theory	156
Braithwaite's Theory of Shaming and Crime	157
Sherman's Defiance Theory	158
Rose and Clear's Coerced Mobility Theory	159
Policy Implications: Restorative Justice and Prisoner Reentry	161
Conclusion	165
8. Social Power and the Construction of Crime: Conflict Theory	166
Forerunners of Conflict Theory	167
Marx and Engels: Capitalism and Crime	167
Simmel: Forms of Conflict	168
Bonger: Capitalism and Crime	169
Sutherland and Sellin: Culture Conflict and Crime	170
Vold: Conflict and Crime	171
Theory in Context: The Turmoil of the 1960s	172
Varieties of Conflict Theory	173
Turk: The Criminalization Process	174
Chambliss: Crime, Power, and Legal Process	179
Quinney: Social Reality, Capitalism, and Crime	185
Conflict Theory and the Causes of Crime	192
Consequences of Conflict Theory	193
Marxist Approach	195
Peacemaking Criminology	197
Conclusion	198

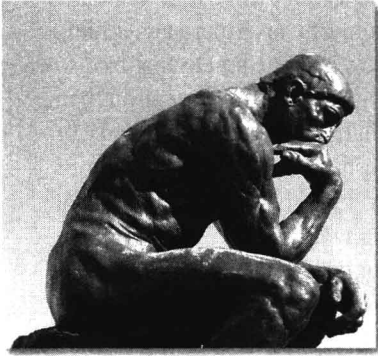
9. New Directions in Critical Theory	199
Modernity and Postmodernity	200
Postmodern Criminological Thought: The End of Grand Narratives?	202
Looking Back at Early British and European Influences	204
Background: The New Criminology	204
Theoretical Arguments	205
Critique of the New Criminology	206
Early Left Realism	207
The Theory	207
Consequences of New Criminology/Left Realism	209
The New Criminology Revisited	210
Left Realism Today	213
The New European Criminology	217
Contributions and Context	217
Abolitionism	218
Consequences of Abolitionism	220
The Importance of Other Voices: Jock Young	220
Cultural Criminology	221
Late Modernity and Globalization: Contextual Changes	221
Consequences of Cultural Criminology	223
Convict Criminology	226
Background: Primarily an American Contribution	226
Consequences of the “New School of Convict Criminology”	227
Conclusion	229
10. The Gendering of Criminology: Feminist Theory	230
Background	231
Prefeminist Pioneers and Themes	232
Cesare Lombroso	233
W. I. Thomas	233
Sigmund Freud	235
Otto Pollak	236
The Emergence of New Questions: Bringing Women In	236
The Second Wave: From Women’s Emancipation to Patriarchy	238
Women’s Emancipation and Crime	238
Patriarchy and Crime	240
Varieties of Feminist Thought	240
Early Feminist Perspectives	240
Contemporary Feminist Perspectives	242
The Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender	242
Masculinities and Crime: Doing Gender	247
Gendering Criminology	249
Gendered Pathways to Lawbreaking	249
Gendered Crime	249
Gendered Lives	250
Postmodernist Feminism and the Third Wave	251
Consequences of the Diversity of Feminist Perspectives	253
Some Implications of Feminist Criminology for Corrections	256
Conclusion	259

11. Crimes of the Powerful: Theories of White-Collar Crime	260
The Discovery of White-Collar Crime: Edwin H. Sutherland	264
The Philadelphia Address	265
Becoming the Father of White-Collar Crime	268
Defining White-Collar Crime	270
Explaining White-Collar Crime	274
Organizational Culture	277
Unethical Cultures	277
Oppositional Cultures	279
The Normalization of Deviance	280
Organizational Strain and Opportunity	282
Strain and Anomie	283
Criminogenic Opportunities	284
Deciding to Offend	285
Denying the Guilty Mind	286
White-Collar Crime as a Rational Choice	288
State-Corporate Crime	290
Consequences of White-Collar Crime Theory: Policy Implications	291
Conclusion	293
12. Bringing Punishment Back In: Conservative Criminology	295
Context: The United States of the 1980s and Early 1990s	297
The Economic Decline of the United States	297
The Persistence of Inequality in the United States	298
The Rhetoric of Stability	300
The Legacy of the Conservative Political Agenda	304
Varieties of Conservative Theory	306
Crime and Human Nature: Wilson and Herrnstein	307
The Theory	307
Assessing Crime and Human Nature	309
Crime and <i>The Bell Curve</i> : Herrnstein and Murray	311
The Criminal Mind	313
Choosing to Be Criminal: Crime Pays	315
Crime and Moral Poverty	316
Broken Windows: The Tolerance of Public Disorganization	319
Consequences of Conservative Theory: Policy Implications	322
Conclusion	326
13. Choosing Crime in Everyday Life: Routine Activity and Rational Choice Theories	328
Routine Activity Theory: Opportunities and Crime	329
The Chemistry for Crime: Offenders, Targets, and Guardians	332
View of Offenders	335
Policy Implications: Reducing Opportunities for Crime	336
Rational Choice Theory	341
Rational Choice and Crime	341
Are Offenders' Choices Rational?	343
Perceptual Deterrence Theory	346
Conclusion	350

14. The Search for the “Criminal Man” Revisited: Biosocial Theories	351
Evolutionary Psychology: Darwin Revisited	355
Theoretical Diversity	355
Assessment	356
Neuroscience: Neurological and Biochemical Theories	357
Mednick’s Biosocial Theory	358
Brain Development and Crime	359
Biochemical Theories	361
Genetics	364
Behavior Genetics	365
Molecular Genetics	365
Epigenetics	367
Biological Risk and Protective Factors	368
Risk Factors	368
Protective Factors	371
Environmental Toxins	372
The Consequences of Biological Theories: Policy Implications	374
An Agenda for Research and Policy	374
Prevention and Treatment	376
The Construction of Crime	377
Challenges Ahead	380
Conclusion	382
15. The Development of Criminals: Life-Course Theories	384
Integrated Theories of Crime	387
Integrated Theorizing	388
Elliott and Colleagues’ Integrated Strain-Control Paradigm	388
Thornberry’s Interactional Theory	390
Policy Implications	393
Life-Course Criminology: Continuity and Change	393
Criminology in Crisis: Gottfredson and Hirschi Revisited	394
Patterson’s Social-Interactional Developmental Model	396
Early-Onset Delinquency	396
Late-Onset Delinquency	397
Intervening With Families	398
Moffitt’s Life-Course-Persistent/Adolescence-Limited Theory	398
Life-Course-Persistent Antisocial Behavior	400
Adolescence-Limited Antisocial Behavior	401
Assessing Moffitt’s Theory	402
Sampson and Laub: Social Bond Theory Revisited	403
An Age-Graded Theory of Informal Social Control	404
Assessing Sampson and Laub’s Life-Course Theory	406
Revising the Age-Graded Theory of Crime	407
Rethinking Crime: Cognitive Theories of Desistance	409
Maruna’s Theory of Redemption Scripts	410
Giordano et al.’s Theory of Cognitive Transformation	411
The Consequences of Theory: Policy Implications	413
Conclusion	415

References	417
Photo Credits	463
Name Index	464
Subject Index	475
About the Authors	488

1



The Thinker

by Auguste Rodin

1840–1917

French artist and sculptor

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, since the year 2000, an average of more than 16,300 U.S. residents were murdered annually. Although there has been a recent decline in crime, each year there still are about 1.4 million Americans robbed, raped, or seriously assaulted and nearly 10 million whose houses are burglarized or whose property is damaged or stolen (Blumstein & Wallman, 2000; Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2010).

It is disturbing that these statistics capture only part of the nation's crime problem. Many citizens, perhaps one in every two or three who are victimized, do not report crimes against them to the police; 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 21.3 million crimes in 2008, more than one fifth of which were violent victimizations (Rand, 2009).

Furthermore, these FBI statistics do not include drug-related offenses, which are commonplace. They 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, there are other realms of criminality—not only quite prevalent but also quite serious—that 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). Another such area is white-collar crime, that is, the crimes committed by professional people in the course of their occupations (Sutherland, 1949). As recent revelations suggest (recall the massive frauds at Enron and WorldCom), corruption in the business and political communities takes place regularly and has disquieting consequences (Cullen, Maakestad, & Cavender, 1987; Simon & Eitzen, 1986).

More statistics and observations could be added here, but this would only belabor the point that crime is a prominent feature of our society. Indeed, lawlessness—particularly lethal violence—in the United States rivals or surpasses that in other industrialized Western nations (Currie, 1985, 2009; Lynch, 2002; Messner & Rosenfeld, 2001; 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). According to Currie (2009), "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). Furthermore, crime is not evenly distributed within the United States. As Blumstein (2000) noted, in 1996 only "ten cities (New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit, Philadelphia, Washington, New Orleans, Baltimore, Houston, [and] Dallas, in order of decreasing numbers of homicides) accounted for fully one quarter of all the nation's homicides" (p. 36). Striking differences in criminality also are found within communities.

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 will inform our analysis.

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 the 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. Apart from criminologists who study crime for a living, most people have neither the time nor the inclination to investigate the crime problem carefully.

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 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, 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 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.