

Criminals Are Not Born

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Introduction

Although crime has a punitive connotation, it is not universal. An act of crime in the US might not be categorized as a crime in India. Crime is usually punishable and prohibited by the legal system, and crossing those legal boundaries engenders crime if the place where a person lives is considered offensive and criminal. Similarly, crime is not universal or fixed. Therefore, the legal system of countries is based on culturally appropriate concepts of crime and criminology. Regardless, crime and criminality are disliked around the globe due to their negative connotation and harmful impacts. Crime and criminality are mostly undesired behaviors in society, but they persist in every society. The persistence of crime in any society might be due to social, economic, political, or psychophysical reasons, but in history, crime was considered to be inherited behavior. However, the evolution of crime from being inherited to a socio-economic phenomenon has helped to reduce crimes and improve understanding of criminal behavior. The change in the theory of criminals has changed the approaches and responses by society toward criminal behavior. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024)

Biological Explanations of Crime

Cesare Lombroso suggested that crime was hereditary and humans had little control over their behavior. Such a belief related to crime justified the criminal behavior and harsh treatment by the police or law enforcement, detaching all other factors from the equation. But Lombroso's observations of criminals convinced him that the criminals had similar physical features such as "Sloping foreheads, receding chins, and long arms." Based on these features, criminals are categorized into "opportunistic, passionate, and the born criminal" (Walklate, 9). This division and understanding led to prisons and capital punishment as the born criminals had the tendency to create problems for society. The theory of born criminals necessitated prisons. It divides humans between criminals and non-criminals, making criminals undesirable and naturally bad regardless of socioeconomic situations. The criminals become incurable, and crimes make the criminal undesirable in society. They became subject to brutal punishment in society and in jails. Capital punishment was a way to clean society from criminals. (National Institute of Justice, 2022)

Classical Theories and Rational Choice

However, the punishment was not suggested by the Lombroso but by Cesare Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham to prevent the crimes. Both Beccaria and Bentham considered criminals "rational and free-

willed” persons committing crimes to benefit. The criminals commit crimes after good calculations. Hence, they ensured that the punishment for the crimes was more than the benefits from the crimes so that the criminals would rationally analyze the consequences and refrain from committing crimes. However, the Chicago School approached crime using sociology.

The sociologist in the Chicago school came up with a distinct approach using research on the neighborhoods of Chicago to study crime and criminology. The Chicago School mastered urban sociology, and the school used ethnographic methods to approach deviance. It studied gangs, prostitution, and urban crimes to come up with a theory of deviant behavior. For instance, social disorganization, differential association, and social learning based on deviant behavior are studied in urban Chicago in terms of explaining crimes and criminology. It studied immigration. The socioeconomic situation to formulate the theories. (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2022)

Social Disorganization Theory

Social disorganization theory focuses on social and economic problems as it notes that immigration and migration and the influx of people to the inner cities break the socially accepted norms, paving the way for deviance. The theory suggests that in the process of change, pathological and abnormal behavior come into existence, leading to crimes. Hence, the influx of people and instability are the root of crimes and delinquency. Moreover, it focuses on the environment where the person lives. It argues that the place matters and the people living in certain areas are prone to commit crimes as their culture supports it. The theory of disorganization removes the focus on one race, gender, age, or genetics; it says the place where a person lives matters and contributes to deviant behavior. It focuses on the situation and the interactions of a person with society. Unlike Lombroso, the theory takes into account the broader perspective on crime. Considering neighborhoods to study crime tries to unveil the underlying causes of crimes. It suggests criminals are not born. They are made in certain socioeconomic situations. It is sympathetic towards the criminals and considers their living conditions and influences that might have contributed to the delinquent behavior. It focused on studying the problem and trying to understand the urban phenomenon that leads to delinquent behavior in people. Although the theory deviated from the attention of born criminals, it associated crime with the middle class or inner-city communities. The association of crimes with the middle or lower class and a certain group of people with a lack of economic resources exclusively blamed the middle or lower class. The disorganization, instability, and the influx of people from different regions to inner cities implied that the outsiders coming into the cities were the root cause of the crimes. Although it was beneficial as it changed the focus from an individual to a phenomenon, the phenomenon put the blame on the lower class of people, excluding the upper class. It disadvantages the people of the lower class as it homogenizes all the people from the lower classes and criminalizes them. One of the important contributions of the social disorganization theory is that “disorder and poor integration permit and encourage crime” (Treadwell). (Harden, 2026)

Social Learning Theory

Similarly, social learning theory focuses on the learning and transmission of criminal behavior. It argues that deviant behavior is learned through experiences and exposure to the stimulus. It focuses on the expectations of others and responding to those expectations by being involved in deviant behavior. Therefore, delinquency is not an inherited characteristic of a person. It is rather a trait that is learned in society and from socialization. The theory opposes the hereditary basis of crime and presents a learning and transmission-based approach to crime. It focused on the environment and the learning of an individual. It negates the born criminality or invention of crime by the individuals. It rather focuses on the individual's interactions within social groups. Suppose a person is exposed to deviant ideas and attitudes that encourage the violation of laws. It also takes into account the length and amount of exposure. For instance, if a person is exposed to delinquent ideas for a longer period, that person is likely to be attracted to crimes compared to other people who are not exposed most of the time. Thus, the social learning theory is crucial in assessing the environmental and social conditions and interactions to explain the problem instead of focusing on the evolutionary theory of genes and inheritance of crimes. The emphasis on the environment and interaction ignores the hereditary aspects of deviance.

Social Factors and Criminal Behavior

Hence, the socialist theories of crime and criminology are essential in proving that anyone can commit a crime regardless of their genes if the conditions are favorable. These social theories paved the way to consider an individual's socioeconomic conditions, pathology, and exposure to deal with the issue of crime. It protects individuals from being ostracised for committing a crime, providing them with a chance to change and adapt to new environments and conditions. Unlike the heredity basis of crimes, it helps law enforcement to consider the influences of the environment on the person. The theories help to understand humans as learning beings who can be influenced by society and the environment. The sociological theories assist people in understanding that the rationality of humans does not always work, and they succumb to environmental conditions. It helped the law enforcement system to be emphatic toward the crimes and criminals, denying the claims of Lombroso's inherited crimes. It paved the way for me to examine a problem holistically instead of focusing on a single cause of the problem. It showed the complexity of a problem and helped future researchers and criminals change their approach toward crimes. Moreover, it protects the rights of individuals who commit crimes. The concept that people are born criminals and that society and the environment do not impact them makes the criminal evil who cannot help but commit crimes. It scares society to live with the evils that might inflict damage to their property or lives as they cannot be controlled. Such a picture of criminals contributes to unsympathetic responses that are usually inhuman towards crime and criminals, leading to the death of criminals. The harsh treatment is justified due to the evil associated with crime and criminals. However, sociologists' approach to crime helps society understand the problem and its causes.

Conclusion

To conclude, the theories of social disorganization and learning theory of deviance showed a hopeful picture to the people about crimes and criminals as it could be learned. These theories negated the notion that criminals are born and there is no way to cure them other than condemning them to jail or disposing of them to death. By considering urban culture and components and the socialization and interaction of people with their environment, the Chicago school proved delinquency to be a complex problem with many aspects.

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