

# Introduction to the Book

## An Overview of Issues in Criminological Theory

**W**elcome 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?

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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.<sup>1</sup> 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?

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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

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

discussed, which in this case is criminal behavior. Sometimes, perhaps quite often, theories are simply wrong, even if the predictions they give are highly accurate.

For example, in the early Middle Ages, most people, including expert scientists, believed the Earth was the center of the universe because everything seemed to rotate and revolve around our home planet. If we wake up day after day and see the sun (or moon) rise and set in close to the same place, it appears that these celestial bodies are revolving around the Earth, especially considering the fact that we don't feel the world around us moving. Furthermore, calendars predicting the change of seasons, as well as the location and phases of these celestial bodies (such as the moon), were quite accurate. However, although the experts were able to predict the movements of celestial objects quite well and develop extremely accurate calendars, they had absolutely no understanding of what was actually happening. Later, when some individuals tried to convince the majority that they were wrong, specifically that the Earth was not the center of the universe, they were condemned as heretics and persecuted, even though their theoretical models were correct.

The same type of argument could be made about the Earth being flat; at one time, observations and all existing models seemed to claim it as proven and true. Some disagreed and decided to test their own predictions, which is how America was discovered by European explorers. Still, many who believed the Earth was round were persecuted or outcast from mainstream society in Europe at the time.

Two things should be clear: Theories can be erroneous, and accurate predictions can be made (e.g., early calendars and moon and star charts) using them, even though there is no true understanding of what is actually happening. One way to address both of these issues is to base knowledge and theories on scientific observation and testing. All respected theories of crime in the modern era are based on science; thus, we try to avoid buying into and applying theories that are inaccurate, and we continuously refine and improve our theories (based on findings from scientific testing) to gain a better understanding of what causes people to commit crime. Criminology, as a science, always allows and even welcomes criticism to its existing theoretical models. There is no emphasis on authority but rather on the scientific method and the quality of the observations that take place in testing the predictions. All scientific theories can be improved, and they are improved only through observation and empirical testing.



▲ **Image 1.1** Theories of the Earth as the center of the universe were dominant for many centuries, and scientists who proposed that the Earth was not the center of the universe were often persecuted. Over time, the theory was proved false.

## What Is Crime?

Definitions of crime vary drastically. For example, some take a **legalistic approach** toward defining crime, including only acts that are specifically prohibited in the legal codes of a given jurisdiction. The problem with such a definition is that what is a crime in one jurisdiction is not necessarily a crime in other jurisdictions. To clarify, some acts, such as murder and armed robbery, are against the law in virtually all

countries and all regions of the United States, across time and culture. These are known as acts of *mala in se*, literally meaning *evil in itself*.<sup>2</sup> Typically, these crimes involve serious violence and shock the society in which they occur.

Other crimes are known as acts of *mala prohibita*, which has the literal meaning of *evil because prohibited*. This acknowledges that these are not inherently evil acts; they are bad only because the law says so.<sup>3</sup> A good example is prostitution, which is illegal in most of the United States but is quite legal and even licensed in most counties of Nevada. The same can be said about gambling and drug possession or use. These are just some examples of acts that are criminal in certain places or at certain times and thus are not agreed upon by most members of a given community.

This book examines both *mala in se* and *mala prohibita* types of offenses, as well as other acts of **deviance**, which are not against the law in many places but are statistically atypical and may be considered more immoral than illegal. For example, in Nevada in the 1990s, a young man watched his friend (who was later criminally prosecuted) kill a young girl in the bathroom at a casino, but he told no one. Although most people would claim that this was highly immoral, at that time, the Nevada state laws did not require people who witnessed a killing to report it to authorities. (Note: As a result of this event, Nevada made withholding such information a criminal act.) Therefore, this act was deviant because most people would find it immoral, but it was not criminal because it was not technically against the laws in the jurisdiction at that time.

Other acts of deviance are not necessarily immoral but are certainly statistically unusual and violate social norms, such as purposely farting at a formal dinner. Such activities are relevant for our discussion, even if they are not defined as criminal by the law, because they show a disposition toward antisocial behavior often found in individuals who are likely to become criminal offenders. Furthermore, some acts are moving from deviant to illegal all the time, such as the use of cell phones while driving or smoking cigarettes in public; many jurisdictions are moving to have these behaviors made illegal and have been quite successful to date, especially in New York and California.

Most *mala in se* activities (e.g., murder) are highly deviant, too, meaning they are not typically found in society, but many, if not most, *mala prohibita* acts—say, speeding on a highway—are not deviant because they are committed by most people at some point. This is a good example of a *mala prohibita* act that is illegal but not deviant. This book will examine theories for all of these types of activities, even those that do not violate the law at the present time in a given jurisdiction.

## How Are Criminological Theories Classified? The Major Theoretical Paradigms

Scientific theories of crime can be categorized based on several important concepts, assumptions, and characteristics. To begin, most criminological theories are classified by the paradigm they emphasize. Paradigms are distinctive theoretical models or perspectives; in the case of crime, they vary based largely on opposing assumptions of human behavior. There are four major paradigms.<sup>4</sup>

The first of these, deterrence or rational choice theories, commonly referred to as the **Classical School** perspective, will be discussed at length later in this book. It assumes that individuals have free will and

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>George Vold, Thomas Bernard, and Jeffrey Snipes. *Theoretical Criminology*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

choose to commit crimes based on rational, hedonistic decisions; they weigh out the potential costs and benefits of offending and then choose what will maximize their pleasure and minimize their pain. The distinguishing characteristic of these theories is that they emphasize the free choice individuals have in committing crime. The other paradigms are based on the influence of factors other than free will or rational decision making—for example, biology, culture, parenting, and economics.

Another category of theories is positivism, which is somewhat the opposite of rational choice theories. These theories argue that individuals do not have free will or rationality in making decisions to commit crime. Rather, the **Positive School** perspective assumes that individuals are passive subjects of determinism, which means that people do not freely choose their behavior. Instead, their behavior is determined by factors outside of their free will, such as genetics, IQ, education, employment, peer influences, parenting, and economics.<sup>5</sup> Most of the highly respected and scientifically validated criminological theories of the modern era fall into this category.<sup>6</sup>

Another group of criminological theories belong to the conflict or critical perspective, which emphasizes the use of law as a reaction or tool to enforce restraint on others by those in power or authority; it also involves how society reacts when a person (often a juvenile) is caught doing something wrong. These theories emphasize group behavior over individual behavior: Groups that are in power use the criminal codes as a tool in keeping people who have limited power restrained or confined.

Finally, over the last few decades, a new category has emerged, namely the integrated theoretical models, which attempt to combine the best aspects of explanatory models into a single, better theoretical framework for understanding crime. These models tend to suffer from the logical inconsistencies of integrating theoretical models that have opposing assumptions or propositions. All of these categories will become clearer as we progress through this book.



## Additional Ways to Classify Criminological Theories

Although the major paradigms are the primary way that criminological theories are classified, there are several other ways that they can be categorized. Specifically, theoretical models can be classified based on whether they focus on individuals or groups as their primary units of examination. For instance, some theories emphasize why certain individuals do or do not commit crime. This level of investigation, in which the focus is on the individual, is often referred to as the **microlevel of analysis**, much as microeconomics is the study of economics on the individual (person) level. When your instructors score each student on an exam, this is a microlevel analysis.

On the other hand, many theories emphasize primarily the group or **macrolevel of analysis**, much as macroeconomics is the study of economic principles at the aggregate or group level. In this book, some sections are separated by whether the individual or group level of analysis is emphasized. For example, social process theories tend to be more microlevel oriented, whereas social structure theories are more macrolevel oriented. Here's a good example. If instructors compare the mean score (or average) of one class to the mean score in another, this is a comparison of group rates, regardless of the performance of any individual in either class. Ultimately, a great theory would explain both the micro- and macrolevels of analysis, but we will see that very few attempt to explain or account for both levels.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Lee Ellis and Anthony Walsh, "Criminologists' Opinions about Causes and Theories of Crime and Delinquency," *The Criminologist* 24 (1999):1–4.

Criminological theories can also be classified by the way they view the general perspective of how laws are made. Some theories assume that laws are made to define acts as criminal to the extent that they violate rights of individuals, and thus, virtually everyone agrees that such acts are immoral. This type of perspective is considered a **consensual perspective** (or nonconflict model). On the other hand, many modern forms of criminological theories fall into an opposite type of theory, commonly known as the **conflict perspective**, which assumes that different groups disagree about the fairness of laws and that laws are used as a tool by those in power to keep down other lower-power groups. There are many forms of both of these types of consensual and conflict theoretical models, and both will be specifically noted as we progress through the book.

A final, but perhaps most important, way to classify theories is in terms of their assumptions regarding human nature. Some theories assume that people are born good (e.g., giving, benevolent, etc.) and are corrupted by social or other developmental influences that lead them to crime. A good example is **strain theory**, which claims that people are born innocent and with good intentions but that society causes them to commit crime. On the other hand, many of the most popular current theories claim that virtually all individuals are born with a disposition toward being bad (e.g., selfish, greedy, etc.) and must be socialized or restrained from following their inherent propensities for engaging in crime.<sup>7</sup> A good example of this is **control theory**, which assumes that all individuals have a predisposition to be greedy, selfish, violent, and so on (i.e., they are criminally disposed), and therefore, people need to be controlled or prevented from acting on their natural, inherent disposition toward selfish and aggressive behaviors.

Another variation on this issue involves theories that are often referred to as *tabula rasa*, literally translated as *blank slate*. This assumes that people are born with no leaning toward good or bad but are simply influenced by the balance of positive or negative influences that are introduced socially during their development. A good example is **differential association** or reinforcement theory, which assumes that all individuals are born with a blank slate and that they learn whether to be good or bad based on what they experience. Although the dominant assumption tends to vary across these three models from time to time, the most popular theories today (which are self- and social-control theories) seem to imply the second option, specifically that people are born selfish and greedy and must be socialized and trained to be good and conforming.<sup>8</sup> There are other ways that criminological theories can be classified, but the various characteristics that we have discussed in this section summarize the most important factors.

## Characteristics of Good Theories

Respected scientific theories in all fields, whether it be chemistry, physics, or criminology, tend to have the same characteristics. After all, the same scientific review process (i.e., blind peer review by experts) is used in all sciences to determine which studies and theoretical works are of high quality. The criteria that characterize a good theory in chemistry are the same ones used to judge what makes a good criminological theory. Such characteristics include: parsimony, scope, logical consistency, testability, empirical validity, and policy implications.<sup>9</sup> Each of these characteristics is examined here. (It should be noted that our discussion and many of the examples provided for the characteristics are taken from Akers & Sellers, 2004).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ronald Akers and Christine Sellers, *Criminological Theories*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: Roxbury, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 5–12.



**Parsimony** is achieved by explaining a given phenomenon, in our case criminal activity, in the simplest way possible. Other characteristics being equal, the simpler a theory, the better. The problem with criminal behavior is that it is highly complex. However, that has not stopped some criminologists from attempting to explain this convoluted phenomenon in highly simple ways. For example, one of the most recent and popular theories (at least regarding the amount of related research and what theories the experts believe are the most important) is the **theory of low self-control** (which we discuss later in this book). This very simple model holds that one personality factor—low self-control—is responsible for all criminal activity. The originators of this theory, Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi, assert that every single act of crime and deviance is caused by this same factor: low self-control<sup>11</sup>—everything from speeding, smoking tobacco, not wearing a seat belt while driving, and having numerous sex partners to serious crimes, such as murder and armed robbery, are caused by low self-control.

Although this theory has been disputed by much of the subsequent research on this model, it remains one of the most popular and accepted models of the modern era.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, despite the criticisms of this theory, many notable criminologists still believe that this is the best single model of offending that has been presented to date. In addition, there is little doubt that this model has become the most researched theoretical model over the last two decades.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps the most important reason why so much attention has been given to this theory is its simplicity, putting all of the focus on a single factor. Virtually all other theoretical models have specified multiple factors that are proposed to play major parts in determining processes that explain why individuals commit crime. After all, how can low self-control explain white-collar crime? Some self-control is required to obtain a white-collar position of employment. Regardless, it is true that a simple theory is better than a more complex one, as long as other characteristics are equivalent. However, given a complex behavior like criminal behavior, it is likely that a simple explanation, such as naming one factor to explain everything, is unlikely to be adequate.

**Scope** is the characteristic that indicates how much of a given phenomenon the theory seeks to explain. Other characteristics being equal, the larger the scope, the better the theory. This is somewhat related to parsimony in the sense that some theories, like the theory of low self-control, seek to explain all crimes and all deviant acts as well. So, the theory of low self-control has a very wide scope. Other theories of crime may seek to explain only property crime, such as some versions of strain theory or drug usage. However, the wider the scope of what a theory can explain, the better the theory, assuming other characteristics are equal.

**Logical consistency** is the extent to which a theory makes sense in terms of its concepts and propositions. It is easier to see what is meant by logical consistency by showing examples of what does not fit this criterion. Some theories simply don't make sense because of the face value of its propositions. For example, Cesare Lombroso, called the father of criminology, claimed that the most serious offenders are “born criminals,” biological throwbacks to an earlier stage of evolutionary development who can be identified by their physical features.<sup>14</sup> Lombroso, who is discussed at more length later in this book, claimed that tattoos were one of the physical features that identified these born criminals. This doesn't make sense, however, because tattoos are not biological physical features—no baby has ever been born with a tattoo. This criticism will make even more sense when we discuss the criteria for determining causality later in this chapter.

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<sup>11</sup>Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi, *A General Theory of Crime* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1990).

<sup>12</sup>Ellis and Walsh, “Criminologists' Opinions,” 3–4.

<sup>13</sup>Anthony Walsh and Lee Ellis, “Political Ideology and American Criminologists' Explanations for Criminal Behavior,” *The Criminologist* 24 (1999): 1, 14.

<sup>14</sup>Cesare Lombroso, *The Criminal Man* (Milan: Hoepli, 1876).

Another prominent example of theories that lack logical consistency is the work of early feminist theorists, such as Freda Adler, who argued that, as females gain educational and employment opportunities, they will be more likely to converge with males on crime rates.<sup>15</sup> Such hypotheses were logically inconsistent with the data available at the time they were presented and even more today; the facts show that females who are given the most opportunities commit the fewest crimes. On the contrary, females who have not been given these benefits commit the most crimes. These are just two examples of how past theories were not logically consistent with the data at the time they were created, not to mention future research findings, which have completely dismissed their hypotheses.

**Testability** is the extent to which a theory can be put to empirical, scientific testing. Some theories simply cannot be tested. A good example is Freud's theory of the psyche. Freud described three domains of the psyche—the conscious ego, the subconscious id, and the superego—but none of these domains can be observed or tested.<sup>16</sup> Although some theories can be quite influential without being testable (as was Freud's theory), other things being equal, it is a considerable disadvantage for a theoretical model to be untestable and unobservable. Fortunately, most established criminological theories can be examined through empirical testing.

**Empirical validity** is the extent to which a theoretical model is supported by scientific research. Obviously, this is highly related to the previous characteristic of being testable. Virtually all accepted modern criminological theories are testable, but that does not mean they are equal in terms of empirical validity. Although some **integrated models** (meaning two or more traditional theories being merged together, which will be examined later in this book) have gained a large amount of empirical validity, these models sort of cheat because they merge the best of two or more models, even when the assumptions of these models are not compatible. Therefore, the best empirical validity from an independent theoretical model, by itself, has been found for **differential reinforcement theory**, which has been strongly supported for various crime types (ranging from tobacco usage to violence) among a wide variety of populations (ranging from young children to elderly subjects).<sup>17</sup>

Ultimately, assuming other characteristics being equal, empirical validity is perhaps one of the most important characteristics used in determining how good a theory is at explaining a given phenomenon or behavior. If a theory has good empirical validity, it is an accurate explanation of behavior; if it does not have good empirical validity, it should be revised or dismissed because it is simply not true.

**Policy implications** is the extent to which a theory can create realistic and useful guidance for changing the way that society deals with a given phenomena. In our case, this means providing a useful model for informing authorities of how to deal with crime. An example is the broken windows theory, which says that, to reduce serious crimes, authorities should focus on the minor incivilities that occur in a given area. This theory has been used successfully by many police agencies (most notably by New York City police, who

<sup>15</sup>Freda Adler, *Sisters in Crime* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1975).

<sup>16</sup>See Stephen G. Tibbetts and Craig Hemmens, *Criminological Theory: A Text Reader* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2010), 9.

<sup>17</sup>See studies including Ronald Akers and Gang Lee, "A Longitudinal Test of Social Learning Theory: Adolescent Smoking," *Journal of Drug Issues* 26 (1996): 317–343; Ronald Akers and Gang Lee, "Age, Social Learning, and Social Bonding in Adolescent Substance Abuse," *Deviant Behavior* 19 (1999): 1–25; Ronald Akers and Anthony J. La Greca, "Alcohol Use Among the Elderly: Social Learning, Community Context, and Life Events," in *Society, Culture, and Drinking Patterns Re-examined*, ed. David J. Pittman and Helene Raskin White (New Brunswick: Rutgers Center of Alcohol Studies, 1991), 242–62; Sunghyun Hwang, *Substance Use in a Sample of South Korean Adolescents: A Test of Alternative Theories* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 2000); Sunghyun Hwang and Ronald Akers, "Adolescent Substance Use in South Korea: A Cross-Cultural Test of Three Theories," in *Social Learning Theory and the Explanation of Crime: A Guide for the New Century*, ed. Ronald Akers and Gary F. Jensen (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003).



reduced their homicide rate by more than 75% in the last decade). Other theories may not be as useful in terms of reducing crime because they are too abstract or propose changes that are far too costly or impossible to implement, such as theories that emphasize changing family structure or the chromosomal makeup of individuals. So, other things being equal, a theory that has readily available policy implications would be advantageous as compared to theories that do not.

## ✎ Criteria for Determining Causality

There are several criteria for determining whether a certain variable causes another variable to change—in other words, causality. For this discussion, we will be using the commonly used scientific notation of a predictor variable—called *X*—as causing an explanatory variable—called *Y*; such variables are also commonly referred to as an independent or predictor variable (*X*) and a dependent or explanatory (*Y*) variable. Such criteria are used for all scientific disciplines, whether chemistry, physics, biology, or criminology. In this book, we are discussing crime, so we will concentrate on examples that relate to this goal, but some examples will be given that are not crime related. Unfortunately, we will also see that, given the nature of our field, there are some important problems with determining causality, largely because we are dealing with human beings as opposed to a chemical element or biological molecule.

The three criteria that are needed to show causality are: temporal ordering, covariation or correlation, and accounting for spuriousness.

**Temporal ordering** requires that the predictor variable (*X*) must precede the explanatory variable (*Y*) if we are to determine that *X* causes *Y*. Although this seems like a no-brainer, it is sometimes violated in criminological theories. For example, you'll remember that Lombroso claimed born criminals could be identified by tattoos, which obviously goes against this principle.

A more recent scientific debate has focused on whether delinquency is an outcome variable (*Y*) due to associations with delinquent peers and associates (*X*) or whether delinquency (*X*) causes associations with delinquent peers and associates (*Y*), which then leads to even more delinquency. This can be seen as the argument of which came first, the chicken or the egg. Studies show that



▲ **Image 1.2** Early theories identified criminals by whether they had tattoos; at that time, this might have been true. In contemporary times, many individuals have tattoos, so this would not apply.

both processes are often taking place, meaning that delinquency and associations with delinquent peers are likely to be both predictor and explanatory variables in most cases, and this forms a reciprocal or feedback loop that encourages both causal paths.<sup>18</sup> Thus, temporal ordering is an important question, and often, it is quite complex and must be examined to fully understand causal order.

**Correlation, or covariation,** is the extent to which a change in the predictor (X) is associated with a change (either higher or lower) in the explanatory variable (Y). In other words, a change in X leads to a change in Y. For example, a rise in unemployment (X) someplace is likely to lead to a rise in crime rates (Y) in the same area; this would be a positive association because both increased. Similarly, an increase in employment (X) is likely to lead to a decrease in crime rates (Y) in that area; this would be a negative, or inverse, association, because one decreased and the other increased. The criterion of covariance is not met when a change in X does not produce any change in Y. Thus, if a significant change in X does not lead to a significant change in Y, then this criterion is not met.

However, correlation alone does not mean that X causes Y. For example, ice cream sales (X) tend to be highly associated with crime rates (Y). However, this does not mean that ice cream sales cause higher crime rates. Rather, other factors, in this case, warm weather, lead to increases in both sales of ice cream and the number of people who are outdoors in public areas and interacting, which naturally leads to greater opportunities and tendencies to engage in criminal activity. This leads to the final criterion for determining causality.

Accounting for **spuriousness** is a complicated way of saying that, to determine that X causes Y, other factors (typically called Z factors) that could be causing the observed association must be accounted for before one is sure that it is actually X that is causing Y. In other words, these other Z factors may account for the observed association between X and Y. What often happens is that a third factor (Z) causes two events to occur together in time and place.

A good example is the observation that a greater number of fire officers showing up at a fire is correlated with more damage. If only the first two criteria of causality were followed, this would lead to the conclusion that the increased number of fire officers (X) causes the heavier fire damage (Y). This conclusion meets the temporal ordering and covariance criteria. However, a third Z variable or factor is causing both X and Y to appear together. This Z variable is the size of the fire, which is causing more officers to show up and also causing more damage. Once this Z factor is accounted for, the effect of X on Y becomes nonexistent.

Using the Lombroso example, tattoos may have predicted criminality at the time he wrote (although criminals weren't born with them). However, Lombroso did not account for an important Z factor, namely associates or friends who also had tattoos. This Z factor caused the simultaneous occurrence of both other factors. To clarify, individuals who had friends or associates with tattoos tended to get tattoos, and (especially at that time in the 1800s) friends or associates who had tattoos also tended to commit more crime. In that era, pirates and incarcerated individuals were most likely to get tattoos. Therefore, had Lombroso controlled for the number of tattooed associates of the criminals he studied, he likely would have found no causal effect on crime from body art.

Ultimately, researchers in criminology are fairly good at determining the first two criteria of causality, temporal ordering and covariance or correlation. Most scientists can perform classical experiments that randomly assign subjects either to receive or not to receive the experimental manipulation to examine the effect on outcomes. However, the dilemma for criminologists is that the factors that appear to be important (according to police officers, parole agents, or corrections officers) are family variables, personality traits, employment variables, intelligence, and other similar characteristics that cannot be experimentally manipulated to control

<sup>18</sup>Terence Thornberry, "Toward an Interactional Theory of Delinquency," *Criminology* 25 (1987): 863–887.

for possible Z factors. After all, how can we randomly assign certain people or groups to bad parents or bad educations, no jobs, low IQs, bad genetics, or delinquent peers? Even if we could manage such manipulations, ethical constraints would prohibit them.

Thus, as criminologists, we may never be able to meet all the criteria of causality, so we are essentially stuck with building a case for the factors we think are causing crime by amassing as much support as we can regarding temporal ordering and covariance or correlation, and perhaps accounting for other factors in advanced statistical models. Ultimately, social science, especially criminology, is a difficult field in terms of establishing causality, and we shall see that the empirical validity of various criminological theories is hindered by such issues.

## Measures of Crime

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Crime can be measured in an infinite number of ways. To some extent, readers have measured crime by observing what has been happening in their own neighborhoods or reading or watching the news every day. However, some measures of crime go beyond these anecdotal or personal experiences, and these more exacting measures are what criminologists commonly use to gauge rates of crime across time and place.

Specifically, three major categories of crime measures are used by social scientists to examine crime. The first and most used measure is the **Uniform Crime Report (UCR)**. Police send reports about certain crimes and arrests to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which combines the many thousands they receive from across the nation and publishes the UCR annually.

The second measure is the **National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)**; prior to the early 1990s, it was known as the National Crime Survey [NCS]). Like the UCR, the report is issued by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), but the data are collected in an entirely different way. Specifically, interviews are conducted with a large, random sample of U.S. households asking how much crime they have experienced in half-year intervals. The NCVS is collected by the research branch of the DOJ called the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) in conjunction with the U.S. Bureau of the Census, which is one of the earliest agencies to collect information about citizens and thus the most experienced at such endeavors.

The third measure, which is perhaps the most important for purposes of this book, is **self-report data (SRD)**, which are primarily collected by independent academic scientists or think tank agencies, such as RAND Corporation. Participating in surveys or interviews, individuals report crimes against themselves or crimes they have committed. This measure is the most important for the purposes of this book because the UCR and NCVS do not provide in-depth information on the offenders or the victims, such as personality, biology or physiology, family life, and economic information. These factors are of the utmost importance for our purposes because there is a broad consensus that they cause people to commit crime, and yet, they are missing from the most commonly used measures of crime. Self-report data are the best, and in most cases the only, measure that can be used to figure out why some people offend and others do not. However, like the other measures, self-reports have numerous weaknesses (and strengths).

Each of these three measures is briefly examined here. Although the measures are not the primary emphasis of this book, it is important to understand their strengths and weaknesses.

## The Uniform Crime Report

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The UCR is the oldest and most used measure of crime rates in the United States for purposes of examining trends and distribution of crime. It began in the early 1930s, and although changes have been made along

the way, it is relatively stable in terms of comparing various years and decades. As mentioned before, it is collected by many thousands of independent police agencies at federal, state, and local levels. These thousands of agencies send their reports of crimes and arrests to their respective state capitals, which then forward their synthesized reports to FBI headquarters, where all reports are combined to provide an overview of crime in the nation.

The FBI definitions of crimes often differ from state categorizations, and the way that they differentiate crimes are important in terms of future discussions in this chapter. The FBI concentrates on eight (four violent and four property) **index offenses**, or Part I offenses. The four violent crimes are murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape (not statutory), robbery, and aggravated assault (which involves intentions of serious injury to the victim). The four property offenses are burglary (which includes a breaking and entering or trespass), motor vehicle theft, larceny (which does not involve a trespass, for example, shoplifting), and arson (which was added to the crime index count in the late 1970s). All reports to police for these eight offenses are included in the crime index, whether or not they resulted in an arrest. This information is often referred to as crimes known to police (CKP).



▲ **Image 1.3** The annual UCRs are produced by the FBI. Local, county, and state criminal justice agencies send their annual crime data to the J. Edgar Hoover Building in Washington, DC. UCR data are, by their nature, incomplete, as many crimes are never reported to the police at all. This **dark figure** of crime might be as high as 90% of all crime incidents.

The UCR also includes about two dozen other offenses known as **nonindex offenses**, or Part II offenses, which are reported only if an arrest is made in a case. These offenses range from violent crimes (such as simple assault), to embezzlement and fraud, to offenses that are considered violations of the law only if an individual is under 18 years of age (such as running away from home). The major problem with the estimates of these nonindex offenses is that the likelihood of arresting someone for such crimes is less than 10% of the actual occurrence, so the data regarding non-index offenses are highly inaccurate. The official

count from the FBI is missing at least 90% of the actual offenses that take place in the United States. Therefore, we will primarily concentrate on the index offenses for the purposes of our discussion.

Even the count of index offenses has numerous problems. The most important and chronic problem with using the UCR as a measure of crime is that, most of the time, victims fail to report crimes—yes, even aggravated assault, forcible rape, robbery, burglary, and larceny. Recent studies estimate that about 70% to 80% of these serious crimes are not reported to police. Criminologists call this missing amount of crime the **dark figure** because it never shows up in the police reports that get sent to the FBI.

There are many reasons why victims do not report these serious crimes to the police. One of the most important is that they consider it a personal matter. Many times, the offense is committed by a family member, a close friend, or an acquaintance. For instance, police are rarely informed about aggravated assaults among siblings. Rape victims are often assaulted on a date or by someone they know; they may feel that they contributed to their attack by choosing to go out with the offender, or they may believe that police won't take such a claim seriously. Regardless of the case, many crime victims prefer to handle it informally and not involve the police.

Another major reason why police are not called is that victims don't feel the crime is important enough to report. For example, thieves may steal a small item that the victim won't miss, so they don't see the need to report what the police or FBI would consider a serious crime. This is likely related to another major reason why people do not report crime to the police: They have no confidence that reporting the case to law enforcement will do any good. Many people, often residents of the neighborhoods that are most crime ridden, are likely to feel that the police are not competent or will not seriously investigate their charges.

There are many other reasons why people do not report their victimizations to police. Some may fear retaliation, for example, in cases involving gang activity; many cities, especially those with many gangs, have seen this occur even more in recent years. The victims may also fail to report a crime for fear that their own illegal activities will be exposed; an example is a prostitute who has been brutally beaten by her pimp. In U.S. society, much crime is committed against businesses, but they are very reluctant to report crimes because they do not want a reputation for being a hot spot for criminal activity. Sometimes, victims call the police or 911, but they leave the scene if the police fail to show up in a reasonable amount of time. This has become a chronic problem despite efforts by police departments to prioritize calls.

Perhaps the most chronic, most important, and often ignored failure to report crimes can be traced to U.S. school systems. Most studies of crime and victimization in schools show that much and maybe even most juvenile crimes occur in schools, but these offenses almost never get reported to police, even when school resource officers (SROs) are assigned to the school. Schools—and especially private schools—have a vested interest in not reporting crimes that occur on their premises to the police. After all, no school (or school system) wants to become known as crime-ridden.

Schools are predisposed to being crime ridden because the most likely offenders and the most likely victims—young people—interact there in close quarters for most of the day. The school is much happier, however, if teachers and administrators deal informally with the parties involved in an on-campus fight; the school does not want these activities reported to and by the media. In addition, the student parties involved in the fight do not want to be formally arrested and charged with the offense, so they are also happy with the case being handled informally. Finally, the parents of the students are also generally pleased with the informal process because they do not want their children involved with a formal legal case.

Even universities and colleges follow this model of not reporting crimes when they occur on campus. A good example can be seen on most of the websites of virtually all major colleges, which are required by federal law to report crimes on campus. Official reports of crimes, ranging from rapes to liquor law violations, are often in the single digits each year for campuses housing many thousands of students. Of course, some crimes may not be reported to the school, and others may be dealt with administratively rather than calling police. The absence of school data is a big weakness of the UCR.

Besides the dark figure, there are many other criticisms of the UCR as a measure of crime. For example, the way that crimes are counted can be misleading. Specifically, the UCR counts only the most serious crime that is committed in a given incident. For example, if a person or persons rob, rape, and murder a victim, only the murder would show up in the UCR; the robbery and rape would not be recorded. Furthermore, there are inconsistencies in how the UCR counts the incidents; for example, if a person walks into a bar and assaults eight people there, it would be counted as eight assaults, but if the same person walks into the bar and robs every person of wallets and purses, it is counted as one robbery. This makes little sense, but it is the official count policy traditionally used by the UCR.

Some other more important criticisms of the UCR involve political considerations, such as the fact that many police departments (such as in Philadelphia and New York City) have systematically altered the way that crimes are defined, for example, by manipulating the way that classifications and counts of crimes are recorded (e.g., the difference between aggravated assault [an index crime] and simple assault [a nonindex



crime]), so that official estimates make it seem that major crimes have decreased in the city when, in fact, they may have actually increased.

It is important also to note the strengths of the UCR measure. First, it was started in 1930, making it the longest systematic measure of crime in the United States. This is a very important advantage if one wants to examine crime over most of the 20th century. We will see later that there have been extremely high crime rates at certain times (such as during the 1930s and the 1970s to 1980) and very low crime rates at other points (such as the early 1940s and recent years [late 1990s-present]). Other measures, such as the NCVS and national self-report data, did not come into use until much later, so the UCR is important for the fact that it started so early.

Another important strength of this measure is that two of the offenses that the UCR concentrates on are almost always reported and therefore overcome the weakness of the dark figure or lack of reporting to police. These two offenses are murder and non-negligent manslaughter and motor vehicle theft. Murder is almost always reported because a dead body is found; very few murders go unreported to authorities. Although a few may elude official recording, for example, if the body is transported elsewhere or carefully hidden, almost all murders are recorded. Similarly, motor vehicle thefts, a property crime, are almost always reported because any insurance claims must provide a police report. Most cars are worth thousands (or at least many hundreds) of dollars, so victims tend to report when their vehicle(s) have been stolen; this provides a rather valid estimate of property crime in specific areas. The rest of the offenses (yes, even the other index crimes) counted by the UCR are far less reliable. If someone is doing a study on homicide or motor vehicle theft, the UCR is likely the best source of data, but for any other crime, researchers should probably look elsewhere.

This is even further advised for studies examining nonindex offenses, which the UCR counts only when someone is arrested for a given offense. The vast majority of nonindex offenses do not result in an arrest. To shed some light on how much actual nonindex crime is not reported to police, it is useful to examine the **clearance rate** of the index offenses in the UCR, our best indicator of solving crimes. Even for the crimes that the FBI considers most serious, the clearance rate is about 21% of crimes reported to police, meaning that they took a report for a crime. Of course, the more violent offenses have higher clearance rates because (outside of murder) they inherently have a witness, namely the victim, and because police place a higher priority on solving violent crimes. However, for some of the index crimes, especially serious property offenses, the clearance rates are very low. Furthermore, it should be noted that the clearance rate of serious index crimes has not improved at all over the last few decades despite much more advanced resources and technology, such as DNA, fingerprints, and faster cars. These data on the clearance rates are only for the most serious, or index, crimes; thus, the reporting of the UCR regarding nonindex crimes is even more inaccurate because there is even less reporting (i.e., the dark figure) and less clearance of these less serious offenses. In other words, the data provided by the UCR regarding nonindex offenses are totally invalid and for the most part completely worthless.

Ultimately, the UCR is a good measure for (1) measuring the overall crime rate in the United States over time, (2) examining what crime was like prior to the 1970s, and (3) investigating murder and motor vehicle theft because they are almost always reported. Outside of these offenses, the UCR has serious problems, and fortunately, we have better measures to use for examining crime rates in the United States.

## The National Crime Victimization Survey

Another commonly used measure of crime is the NCVS (the NCS until the early 1990s), which is distinguished from other key measures of crime because it concentrates on the victims of crime, whereas



other measures tend to emphasize the offenders. In fact, that is the key reason why this measure was started in 1973 after several years of preparation and pretesting. To clarify, one of the key recommendations of Lyndon Johnson's President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice in the late 1960s was to learn more about the characteristics of victims of crime; at that time, virtually no studies had been done on the subject, whereas much research had been done on criminal offenders. So, the efforts of this commission set into motion the creation of the NCVS.

Since it began, the NCVS has been designed and collected by two agencies: the U.S. Bureau of the Census and the BJS, which is one of the key research branches of the U.S. DOJ. The NCVS is collected in a completely different way from the other commonly used measures of crimes; the researchers select tens of thousands of U.S. households, and each member over 12 years of age in these households is interviewed every 6 months about crime that occurred in that previous 6-month period (each selected household remains in the survey for 3 years, resulting in seven collection periods, which includes the initial interview). Although the selection of households is to some extent random, the way this sampling is designed guarantees that a certain proportion of houses selected have certain characteristics. For example, before the households are selected, they are first categorized according to factors such as region of the country, type of area (urban, suburban, rural), income level, and racial or ethnic composition. This type of sampling, called a multistage, stratified cluster sampling design, ensures that enough households are included in the survey to make conclusions regarding these important characteristics. As you will see later in this chapter, some of the most victimized groups (by rate) in the United States do not make up a large portion of the population or households. So, if the sampling design was not set up to select a certain number of people from certain groups, it is quite likely the researchers would not obtain enough cases to draw conclusions about them.

The data gathered from this sample are then adjusted, and statistical estimates are made about crime across the United States, with the NCVS estimates showing about three times more crime than the UCR rates. Some may doubt the ability of this selected sample to represent crime in the nation, but most studies find that its estimates are far more accurate than those provided by the UCR (with the exception of homicide and maybe motor vehicle theft). This is largely due to the expertise and professionalism of the agencies that collect and analyze the data, as well as the carefully thought out and well-administered survey design, which is indicated by the interview completion rates (typically more than 90%, higher than virtually all other crime and victimization surveys).

One of the biggest strengths of the NCVS is that it directly addresses the worst problem with the previously discussed measure, the UCR. Specifically, the greatest weakness of the UCR is the dark figure, or the crimes that victims fail to report, which happens most of the time (except in cases of homicide or motor vehicle theft). The NCVS interviews victims about crimes that happened to them, even those that were not reported to police. Thus, the NCVS captures far more crime events than the UCR, especially crimes that are highly personal (such as rape). So, the extent to which the NCVS captures much of this dark figure of crime is its greatest strength.

Despite this important strength, the NCVS, like the other measures of crime, has numerous weaknesses. Probably the biggest problem is that two of the most victimized groups in U.S. society are systematically not included in the NCVS. Specifically, homeless people are completely left out because they do not have a home and the participants are contacted through households; yet, they remain one of the most victimized groups per capita in our society.

Another highly victimized group in our society that is systematically not included in the NCVS is young children. Studies consistently show that the younger a person, the more likely he or she is to be victimized. Infants, in particular, especially in their first hours or days of life, face great risk of death or other sort of

victimization, typically from parents or caregivers. This is not very surprising, especially in light of the fact that very young children cannot defend themselves or run away. They can't even tell anyone until they are old enough to speak, and then most are too afraid to do so or are not given an opportunity. Although, to some extent, it is understandable to exempt young children from such sensitive questions, the loss of this group is huge in terms of estimating victimization in the United States.

The NCVS also misses the crimes suffered by American businesses, which cumulatively is an enormous amount. In the early years of the NCVS, businesses were also sampled, but that was discontinued in the late 1970s. Had it continued, it would be invaluable information for social scientists and policy makers, not to mention the businesses that are losing billions of dollars each year as a result of crimes committed against them.

Many find it surprising that the NCVS does not collect data on homicide, which most people and agencies consider the most serious and important crime. Researchers studying murder cannot get information from the NCVS but must rely on the UCR, which is most accurate in its reporting for this crime type.

The NCVS also has issues with people accurately reporting the victimization that has occurred to them in the previous 6 months. However, studies show that their reports are surprisingly accurate most of the time. Often when participants report incidents inaccurately, they make unknowing mistakes rather than intentionally lying. Obviously, victims sometimes forget incidents that occur to them, probably because, most of the time, they know or are related to the person offending against them, so they never think of it as a crime *per se* but rather as a personal disagreement. When asked if they were victims of theft, they may not think to report the time that a brother or uncle borrowed a tool without asking and never returned it.

Although the NCVS researchers go to great lengths to prevent it, a common phenomenon known as **telescoping** tends to occur, which leads to overreporting of incidents. Telescoping is the human tendency to perceive events as having occurred more recently than they actually did. This is one of the key reasons why NCVS researchers interview the household subjects every 6 months, but telescoping still happens. For instance, a larceny may have occurred 8 months ago, but it seems like it happened just a few months ago to the participant, so it is reported to the researchers as occurring in the last 6 months when it really didn't. Thus, this inflates the estimates for that crime interval for the nation.

As mentioned before, an additional weakness is that the NCVS did not start until 1973, so it cannot provide any estimates of victimization prior to that time. A study of national crime rates prior to the 1970s has little choice but to use the UCR. Still, for most crimes, the NCVS has provided a more accurate estimate over the past three decades. Since the NCVS was created, the crime trends it reveals tend to be highly consistent with those shown by the UCR. For example, both measures show violent crime rates peaking at the same time (about 1980), and both agree on when the rates increased (the 1970s) and decreased (the last decade [late 1990s to present]) the most. This is very good, because if they did not agree, that would mean at least one (or both) were wrong. Before we discuss the national trends in crime rates, however, we will examine the strengths and weaknesses of a third measure of crime.

## Self-Report Studies of Crime

The final measure of crime consists of various self-report studies of crime, in which individuals report (either in a written survey or interview) the extent of their own past criminal offending or victimization and other information. There is no one systematic study providing a yearly estimate of crime in the United States; rather, self-report studies tend to be conducted by independent researchers or institutes. Even when they do involve a national sample (such as the National Youth Survey), they almost never use such data to make estimates of the extent of crime or victimization across the nation.

This lack of a long-term, systematic study that can be used to estimate national crime rates may be the greatest weakness of self-report studies; however, this very weakness—not having a universal consistency in collection—is also its greatest strength. To clarify, researchers can develop their questionnaires to best fit the exact purposes of their study. For example, if researchers are doing a study on the relationship between a given personality trait (e.g., narcissism) and criminal offending, they can simply give participants a questionnaire that contains a narcissism scale and items that ask about past criminal behavior. Of course, these scales and items must be checked for their reliability and validity, but it is a relatively easy way to directly measure and test the hypotheses with which the researcher is most concerned.

Some question the accuracy of the self-report data because they believe participants typically lie, but most studies have concluded that participants generally tell the truth. Specifically, researchers have compared self-reported offenses to lie detector machine results, giving the same survey to the same individuals to see if they answer the same each time (called test-retest reliability) and cross-checking their self-reported arrests to police arrest data. All of these methods showed that most people tend to be quite truthful when answering surveys.<sup>19</sup>

The most important aspect of self-report surveys is that they are the only available source of data for determining the social and psychological reasons for why people commit crime. The UCR and NCVS have virtually no data on the personality, family life, biological development, or other characteristics of criminal offenders, which are generally considered key factors in the development of criminality. Therefore, although we examine the findings of all three measures in the next section, the vast majority of the content we cover in this book will be based on findings from self-report studies.

## What Do the Measures of Crime Show Regarding the Distribution of Crime?

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It is important to examine the most aggregated trends of crime, namely the ups and downs of overall crime rates in the United States across different decades. We will start with crime in the early 1900s, largely because the best data started being collected during this era and also because the 20th century (especially the most recent decades) is most relevant to our understanding of the reasons for our current crime rates. However, most experts believe that the U.S. crime rate, whether in terms of violent or property offending, used to be far higher prior to the 20th century; this historians have concluded based on sporadic, poorly recorded documentation in the 18th and 19th centuries. By virtually all accounts, crime per capita (especially homicide) was far higher in the 1700s and 1800s than at any point after 1900, which is likely due to many factors, but perhaps most importantly because formal agencies of justice, such as police and corrections (i.e., prisons, parole, etc.), did not exist in most of the United States until the middle or end of the 1800s. Up to that time, it was up to individual communities or vigilantes to deal with offenders.

Therefore, there was little ability to investigate or apprehend criminals or a means to imprison them. But, as industrialization increased, the need to establish formal police agencies and correctional facilities evolved as a way to deal with people who offended in modern cities. By 1900, most existing states had formed police and prison systems, which is where our discussion will begin.

The level of crime in the United States, particularly homicide, was relatively low at the beginning of the 20th century, perhaps because of the formal justice agencies that had been created during the 19th century. For example, the first metropolitan U.S. police departments were formed in Boston and then New York

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<sup>19</sup>Michael Hindelang, Travis Hirschi, and J. Weis, *Measuring Delinquency* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1981).

during the 1830s; in the same decade but a bit earlier, the first state police department, the Texas Rangers, was established, and the federal marshals were founded still earlier. Although prisons started in the late 1790s, they did not begin to resemble their modern form or proliferate rapidly until the mid-1800s. The first juvenile court was formed in the Chicago area in 1899. The development of these formal law enforcement and justice agencies may have contributed to the low level of crime and homicide in the very early 1900s. (Note: our discussion of the crime rate in the early 1900s will primarily deal with homicide because it is the only valid record of crime at that time; UCR did not start until the 1930s. Most people consider this the most serious crime, and its frequency typically reflects the overall crime rate.)

The effect of the creation of these formal agencies did not persist long into the 20th century. Looking at the level of homicides that occurred in the United States, it is obvious that large increases took place between 1910 and 1920, which is likely due to extremely high increases in industrialization, as the U.S. economy moved from an agricultural to industrial emphasis. More important, population growth was rapid as a result of urbanization. Whenever high numbers of people move into an area (in this case, cities) and form a far more dense population (think of New York City at that time or Las Vegas in current times), it creates a crime problem. This is likely due to more opportunity for crime against others; after all, when people are crammed together, it creates a situation in which there are far more potential offenders in close proximity with far more potential victims. A good modern example of this is high schools, which studies show have higher crime rates than city subways or other crime-ridden areas, largely because they densely pack people together, and in such conditions, opportunities for crime are readily available. Thus, the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the early 1900s probably are the most important reasons for the increase in homicide and crime in general at that time in the United States.

The largest increases in U.S. homicide in the early 1900s occurred during the 1920s and early 1930s, with the peak level of homicide coming in the early 1930s. Criminologists and historians have concluded that this huge increase in the homicide rate was primarily due to two factors beyond the industrialization and urbanization that explained the increase prior to the 1920s. First, the U.S. Congress passed a constitu-

tional amendment that banned the distribution and consumption of alcohol beginning in 1920. The period that followed is known as Prohibition. This legal action proved to be a disaster, at least in terms of crime, and Congress later agreed—but not until the 1930s—by passing another amendment to do away with the previous amendment that banned alcohol. For about 14 years, which notably recorded the highest U.S. rates of homicide and crime before 1950, the government attempted to stop people from drinking. Prior to Prohibition, gangsters were relatively passive and did not hold much power.

This political mandate gave the black market a lot of potential in terms of monetary profit and reasons for killing off competition. Some of the greatest massacres of rival gangs of organized crime syndicates (e.g., Italian Mafia) occurred during the Prohibition era. The impact on crime



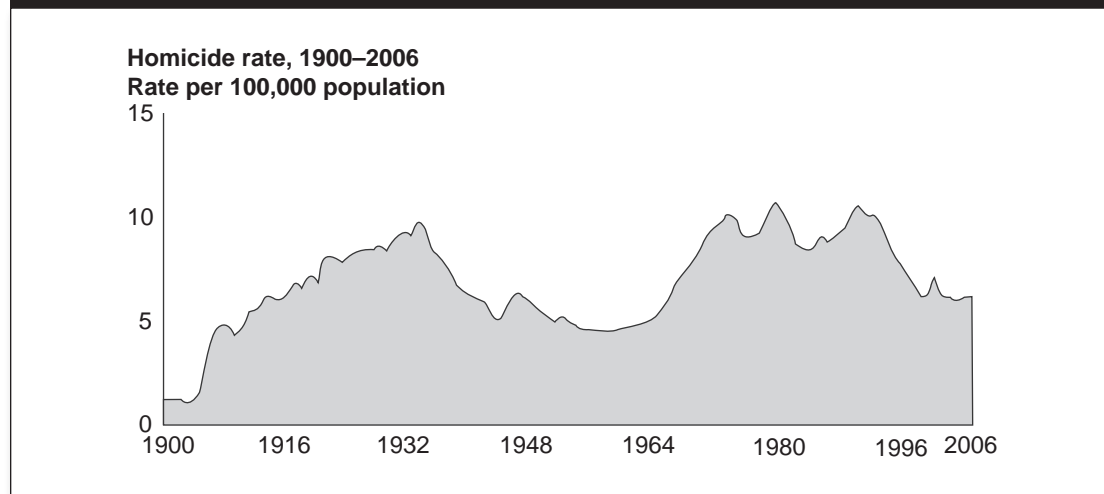
▲ **Image 1.4** Group portrait of a police department liquor squad posing with cases of confiscated alcohol and distilling equipment during Prohibition.

was likely only one of the many problems with Prohibition, but it was a very important and deadly one for our purposes. Once Prohibition ended in the early 1930s, the homicide and crime rates decreased significantly, which may have implications regarding modern drug policies. According to studies, many banned substances today are less violence producing than alcohol, which studies show is the most violence-causing substance. For example, most criminologists believe that the current War on Drugs may actually be causing far more crime than it seeks to prevent (even if it may be lowering the number of drug addicts), due to the black market it creates for drugs that are in demand, much like the case with alcohol during Prohibition.

Another major reason why the homicide rate and overall crime levels increased so much during the early 1930s was the Great Depression, which sent the United States into an unprecedented state of economic upheaval. Most historians and criminologists agree that the stock market crash of the late 1920s was a primary contributor to the large levels of homicide in the early 1930s. We will return to this subject later when we examine the strain theory of crime, which places an emphasis on economic structure and poverty as the primary causes of crime.

Although the homicide and crime rate experienced a significant drop after Prohibition was eliminated, another reason for this decrease likely was due to social policies of the New Deal, which was implemented by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Such policies included creating new jobs for people hit hardest by the Depression through programs such as Job Corps and the Tennessee Valley Authority, both of which still exist today. Although such programs likely aided the economic (and thus crime) recovery for the United States, world events of the early 1940s provided the greatest reasons for the huge decreases that were seen at that time.

**Figure 1.1** Homicide Rates in the United States in the 20th Century



SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, Vital Statistics. Available from Bureau of Justice Statistics, [http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/hmrt.gif&imgrefurl=http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/hmrt.cfm&usq=\\_\\_AE1aBbgO72i4-jm8uUrCYdt7X6U=&h=314&w=372&sz=5&hl=en&start=0&zoom=1&tbnid=kLHaWLtLP8nPaM:&tbnh=143&tbnw=170&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dvital%2Bstatistics%2Bhomicide%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26client%3Dfirefox-a%26sa%3Dn%26rls%3Dorg.mozilla:en-US:official%26channel%3Ds%26biw%3D1280%26bih%3D607%26tbs%3Disch:1&um=1&itbs=1&iact=rc&dur=443&ei=UfnJTOMlG4-4sAOOirWPDg&oei=UfnJTOMlG4-4sAOOirWPDg&esq=1&page=1&ndsp=17&ved=1t:429,r:1,s:0&tx=96&ty=110](http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/hmrt.gif&imgrefurl=http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/hmrt.cfm&usq=__AE1aBbgO72i4-jm8uUrCYdt7X6U=&h=314&w=372&sz=5&hl=en&start=0&zoom=1&tbnid=kLHaWLtLP8nPaM:&tbnh=143&tbnw=170&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dvital%2Bstatistics%2Bhomicide%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26client%3Dfirefox-a%26sa%3Dn%26rls%3Dorg.mozilla:en-US:official%26channel%3Ds%26biw%3D1280%26bih%3D607%26tbs%3Disch:1&um=1&itbs=1&iact=rc&dur=443&ei=UfnJTOMlG4-4sAOOirWPDg&oei=UfnJTOMlG4-4sAOOirWPDg&esq=1&page=1&ndsp=17&ved=1t:429,r:1,s:0&tx=96&ty=110). For related data about homicide trends, see *Homicide Trends in the U.S.*

NOTE: The 2001 rate includes deaths attributed to the 9/11 terrorist attacks.



The entry of the United States into World War II was probably the biggest contributor to decreasing U.S. crime in the early 20th century. As you will notice, the homicides decreased dramatically in the 4 years (1941–1945) that hundreds of thousands of young men (the most likely offenders and victims) were sent overseas to fight on two fronts, Europe and the South Pacific. Any time a society loses a huge portion of the most common offenders, namely young (teenage to twenties) males, they can expect a drop in crime like the one the United States experienced while these giant portions of men were elsewhere. However, at the end of 1945, most of these men returned and began making babies, which triggered the greatest increase in babies that U.S. society had ever seen. This generation of babies started what historians call the baby boom, which would have the greatest impact on crime levels that has ever been recorded in U.S. history.

Although crime rates increased after soldiers returned home from overseas in the late 1940s, they did not rise to anywhere near the levels of Prohibition and the Great Depression. Alcohol was legal, and the economy was doing relatively well after World War II. During the 1950s, the crime level remained relatively low and stable until the early 1960s, when the impact of the baby boom emerged in terms of the crime rate. If a very large share of the population is made up of young people, particularly teenage or early-20s males, the crime rate will almost inevitably go up. This is exactly what occurred in the United States, starting in the early 1960s, and it led to the largest 10-year increase in crime that the country has ever seen.

## The Baby-Boom Effect

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The UCR shows that the greatest single-decade increase in the crime rate occurred between 1965 and 1975. In that time, the overall crime rate more than doubled, an increase that was unprecedented. Notably, this increase occurred during the War on Poverty, which was set into motion by President Lyndon B. Johnson in a program he termed the Great Society; it turned many people and policy makers against having the government address economic issues for bettering society. However, the demographic factor that they did not take into account was that this was the era in which most people in society were in young age groups, which predisposed the nation for the high crime rates experienced at this time. In contrast, the following generation, called Generation X, which includes those individuals born between 1965 and 1978, had a very low birthrate, which may have contributed to the low crime rates observed in recent years.

The high level of young people in society was not the only societal trend going on during the late 1960s and early 1970s that would lead to higher crime rates. For example, a large number of people were being arrested as a result of their participation in the civil rights movement, the women's rights movement, and anti-Vietnam War activities. Perhaps most important, the 1970s had the highest levels of drug usage and favorable attitudes toward drugs since accurate national studies have been conducted. Virtually all measures of drug usage peaked during the 1970s or early 1980s.

So, ultimately, many things came together between the mid-1960s and the late 1970s that predisposed this generation of baby boomers to lead to the greatest increase in the crime rate that the United States has ever seen, culminating in the peak of crime and homicide in 1980. All of our measures agree that crime, especially homicide, reached their highest level about that year. Although other periods, such as the early 1990s, showed similar increases in crime, largely due to juvenile offending, no other period was higher than the 1980 period, and it was most likely due to the many baby boomers coming of age and high drug usage.

Crime levels declined somewhat in the early 1980s and then rose again in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but the crime and homicide rate never exceeded the 1980 peak. Furthermore, after 1994, the crime rate dropped drastically every year for about a decade to the point where it was as low as it had been in the early 1960s. Thus, the U.S. crime rate is currently about where it was about 40 years ago.



There are many reasons for this huge decrease over the last decade and a half. One of the biggest reasons is that the population has a relatively smaller proportion of young people than during the 1960s and 1970s, but obviously, there is more to the picture. Drug usage, as well as attitudes favorable toward drugs, has dropped a lot in recent years. Furthermore, the incarceration rate of prisoners is about 400% to 500% what it was in the early 1970s. Although many experts have claimed that locking up criminals does not reduce crime levels in a society, it is hard to deny that imprisoning five times more people will not result in catching many, if not most, of the habitual offenders. It makes sense: By rate, the United States currently locks up more citizens in prison than virtually any other developed country.

Almost all crime tends to be nonrandom. Consistent with this, the crime measures show a number of trends in which crime occurs among certain types of people, in certain places, at certain times, and so on. We turn to an examination of such concentrations of crime, starting with large, macro differences in crime rates across regions of the United States.

## Regional and City Differences in Rates of Crime

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Crime tends to be higher in certain regions of the country. According to the UCR, the United States is separated into four regions: Northeast, Midwest, South, and West. For the last few decades, crime rates (based on crime per capita) have been significantly higher in two of these regions: the South and the West. These two regions consistently have higher rates than the other regions, with one or the other having the highest rates for violence or property offenses or both each year. Some studies have found that, when poverty levels are accounted for, much of the regional differences are explained away. Although this is a very simple conclusion, the studies seem to be consistent in tying regional differences to variations in social factors, notably socioeconomic levels.

Regardless of the region, there seems to be extreme variation from high to low crime rates across states and cities within each of these large regions. For example, crime measures consistently show that certain U.S. states and jurisdictions have consistently high crime rates. The two standouts are Louisiana and the District of Columbia, with the latter having an extremely high rate, typically more than eight times the national average for homicide. It is quite ironic that arguably the most powerful city in the world has an extremely serious crime problem, certainly one of the worst in our nation.

Another question is why do crime rates in states or jurisdictions, or in cities and counties, vary drastically from one region to the next. For instance, Camden, New Jersey, one of the cities in the lower-rate Northeast region according to the UCR, had the highest rate of crime among all U.S. cities in the years 2004 and 2005. Detroit, Michigan, was second worst for both of these years; it used to be number one before Camden outdid it. At the same time, however, it is important to note that New Jersey also had some of the safest cities in the nation for these years—2 of the 10 safest cities are in New Jersey, which shows how much crime can vary from place to place, even those in relatively close proximity. Notably, in the most recent estimates from the FBI, the cities of St. Louis and New Orleans exhibited the highest rates of serious violent crimes in 2006 and 2007, respectively. An important factor regarding New Orleans was the devastation of the city's infrastructure after Hurricane Katrina, which essentially wiped out the city's criminal justice system and resources.

Crime has also been found to cluster within a given city, whether the overall city is relatively low crime or high crime. Virtually every area (whether urban, suburban, or rural) has what are known as **hot spots** or places that have high levels of crime activity. Such places are often bars or liquor stores or other types of businesses, such as bus stops and depots, convenience stores, shopping malls, motels and hotels, fast-food restaurants, check-cashing businesses, tattoo parlors, discount stores (such as dollar stores), and so on. However, hot

spots can also be residential places, such as a home that police are constantly called to for domestic violence or certain apartment complexes that are crime ridden, something often seen in subsidized housing areas.

Even the nicest of cities or areas have hot spots, and even the worst cities or areas also tend to have most of their police calls coming from specific addresses or businesses. This is one of the best examples of how crime does not tend to be random. Many police agencies have begun using spatial software on computer systems to analyze where the hot spots in a given city are and to predict where certain crimes are likely to occur in the future. This allows more preventive patrols and proactive strategies in such zones. One criminological theory, **routine activities theory**, is largely based on explaining why hot spots exist.

Another way that crime is known to cluster is time of day. This varies greatly depending on the type of group one is examining. For example, juvenile delinquency and victimization, especially for violence, tends to peak sharply at 3:00 p.m. on school days (about half of the days of the year for children), which is the time that youths are most likely to lack supervision (i.e., children are let out of school and are often not supervised by adults until they get home). On the other hand, adult crime and victimization, especially for violence, tends to peak much later on, almost all days at about 11:00 p.m., which is a sharp contrast from the juvenile peak in midafternoon. These estimates are primarily based on FBI and UCR data.

To some extent, the peak hour for juveniles is misleading; other nonpolice-based estimates show that just as much crime is going on during school, but schools tend to not report it. This widespread lack of reporting by schools occurs because none of the parties involved want a formal police report taken. Typically, the youth doesn't want to be arrested, the child's parents do not want their son or daughter to be formally processed by police, and most importantly, no school wants to become known as a dangerous place. So, the police are typically called only in extreme cases, for example, if a student pulls a gun on another student or actually uses a weapon.

This also occurs in colleges and universities because such institutions largely depend on tuition for funding, and this goes down if enrollment levels decline. After all, no parents want to send their teenagers to a college that is high in crime. Federal law now requires virtually all colleges to report to the public their crime levels, so there is a lot at stake if police take formal reports on crime events. Thus, most colleges, like the K–12 school systems, have an informal process in place in which even violent crimes are often handled informally.

Crimes tend to peak significantly during the summer. Studies show that criminals tend to be highly opportunistic, meaning that they happen to be going about their normal activities when they see an opportunity to commit a crime, as compared to a more hydraulic model, in which an offender actually goes out looking to commit a crime. Because criminals are like everyone else in most ways, they tend to be out and about more in the summer, so they are more likely to see opportunities at that time. Furthermore, youths are typically out of school during the summer, so they are often bored and not supervised by adults as much as during the traditional school year. Burglary tends to rise 300% during the summer, an increase that may be linked to the fact that people go on vacation and leave their home vacant for weeks or months at a time. All of the factors come together to produce much higher rates in the summer than in any other season.

A couple of crimes, such as murder and robbery, tend to have a second peak in the winter, which most experts believe is due to high emotions during the holidays, additional social interaction (and often the drinking of alcohol) during the holidays, and an increase in wanting money or goods for gift giving, which would explain robbery increases at that time. These offenses are the exception, however, not the rule. Most offenses, including murder and robbery, tend to have their highest peaks during warmer summer months.

Age is perhaps the most important way that crime and victimization tend to cluster in certain groups. Almost no individuals get arrested before the age of 10; if they do, it is a huge predictor that the child is likely going to become a habitual, chronic offender. However, from the age of 10 to 17, the offending rate for all

serious street crimes (i.e., FBI index crimes) goes up drastically, peaking at an average age of 17. Then, the offending rates begin decreasing significantly, such that by the time people reach the age of 20, the likelihood of being arrested has fallen in half as compared to the midteenage years. This offending level continues to decline throughout life for all of the serious index crimes, although other crimes are likely to be committed more often at later ages, such as white-collar crimes, tax evasion, and gambling.

The extraordinarily high levels of offending in the teenage years have implications for how we prevent and deal with juvenile delinquents and for why we are so bad at preventing habitual offenders from committing so many crimes. We are often good at predicting who the most chronic, serious offenders are by the time they are in their 20s, but that does little good because most offenders have committed most of their crimes before they hit 20 years old.

Another characteristic important in the way crime clusters is gender. In every society, at every time in recorded history, males commit far more serious street crimes (both violent and property) than do females. It appears there is almost no closing of this gap in offending, at least for FBI index crimes. Even in the most recent years, males are the offenders in 80% to 98% of all serious violent crimes (murder, robbery, aggravated assault, forcible rape) and make up the vast majority of offenders in property index crimes (burglary, motor vehicle theft, arson, and larceny). The last offense is often surprising to people because the most common type of larceny is shoplifting, which people often perceive as being done mostly by women. All studies show that men commit most of the larcenies in the United States. It is important to realize that males in all societies throughout the world commit the vast majority of offenses, and the more violent and serious the crimes, the more men are represented in such offenses.

However, there are a few nonindex crimes that females commit as much as, or more than, males. Specifically, in terms of property crimes, embezzlement and fraud are two offenses that females commit at comparable rates to men, which likely has to do with enhanced opportunities to commit such crimes. Most of the workforce is now female, which wasn't true in past decades, and many women work in banking and other businesses that tempt employees by having large amounts of money available for embezzling. In terms of public disorder, prostitution arrests tend to be mostly female, which is not too surprising.

The only other offense in which females are well represented is running away from home, which is a status offense (illegal for juveniles only). However, virtually all other sources and studies of offending rates (e.g., self-report studies) show that male juveniles run away far more than females, but because of societal norms and values, females get arrested far more than males. Feminist theories of the patriarchal model (in short, men are in charge and dominate or control females) and the chivalry model (simply, females are treated differently because they are seen as more innocent) argue that females are protected as a type of property. This may be important in light of the contrasting findings regarding female and male rates of running away, as compared to the opposite trends regarding female and male rates of being arrested for running away. The bottom line is that families are more likely to report the missing child and to press law enforcement agencies to pursue girls rather than boys who have run away. We will explore explanations for such differences in later chapters, particularly in the section in which we cover conflict and feminist theories of crime.

Victimization and offending rates are also clustered according to the density of a given area. All sources of crime data show that rates of offending and victimization are far higher per capita in urban areas than in suburban and rural regions. Furthermore, this trend is linear: The more rural an area, the lower the rates for crime and victimization. To clarify, urban areas have, by far, the highest rates for offending, followed by suburban areas; the least amount of crime and victimization is found in rural (e.g., farming) areas. This trend has been shown for many decades and is undisputed. Keep in mind that such rates are based on population in such areas, so even per capita of citizens in a given region, this trend holds true. This is likely

due to enhanced opportunities to commit crime in urban and even suburban areas, as well as the fact that rural communities tend to have stronger **informal controls**, such as family, church, and community ties. Studies consistently show that informal controls are far more effective in preventing and solving crimes than are the **formal controls** of justice, which include all official aspects of law enforcement and justice, such as police, courts, and corrections (i.e., prisons, probation, parole).

A good example of the effectiveness of informal sanctions can be seen in the early formation of the U.S. colonies, such as the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In the early 1600s, crime per capita was at an all-time low in what would become the United States. It may surprise many that police and prisons did not exist then; rather, the low crime rate was due to high levels of informal controls: When people committed crimes, they were banished from the society or were shunned.

As in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter*, even for what would now be considered a relatively minor offense (adultery), a person was forced to wear a large letter (such as an A for adultery or a T for theft), and they were shunned by all others in their social world. Such punishments were (and still are) highly effective punishments and deterrents for offenders, but they work only in communities with high levels of informal controls. Studies have shown that, in such societies, crime tends to be extremely low, in fact, so low that such communities may "invent" serious crimes so that they can have an identifiable group on which to blame societal problems. We see this occur in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, with the creation of a new offense, witchcraft, for which hundreds of people were put on trial and many were executed.

Such issues will be raised again later when we discuss the sociological theories of Emile Durkheim. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that some judges and communities have gone back to such public shaming punishments, such as making people carry signs of their offenses and putting the names of offenders in the local newspapers. But, the ultimate conclusion at this point is that rural communities tend to have far higher informal controls, which keep their crime rates low. On the other hand, urban (especially inner-city) areas tend to have very low levels of informal controls, which lead to few attempts by the community to police itself.

Crime also tends to cluster according to social class, with the lower classes experiencing far more violent offending and victimization. This is now undisputed and consistently shown across all sources of data regarding criminal offending. Interestingly, the characteristics thus far examined for offending rates tend to be a mirror image for victimization rates. To clarify, young, poor urban males tend to have the highest rates of criminal offending—and this group also has the highest rates of victimization as a result of violent offending. This mirror image phenomenon is often referred to as the **equivalency hypothesis**. However, this equivalency hypothesis is not true regarding the relationship of social class and property crimes.

Specifically, members of middle- to upper-class households tend to experience more victimization for property crimes than do lower-class households, but the most likely offenders in most property crimes are from the lower class. This makes sense; offenders will tend to steal from the people and places that have the most property or money to steal. This tendency has been found since criminological data have been collected, even back to the early 1800s, and it is often found in present times, although not consistently shown each year (such as in the NCVS data). Nevertheless, the equivalency hypothesis still holds true for violent crimes: Lower-class individuals commit more violent crimes, and they are victimized more as a result of such violent crimes.

## Race and Ethnicity Rates of Crime

Another important characteristic for how crimes are clustered in U.S. society is race or ethnicity. Regarding most violent crimes, the most victimized group by far in the United States is Native Americans or American Indians. According to NCVS data, Native Americans are victimized at almost twice the rate of any other

racial or ethnic group. This is likely due to the extreme levels of poverty, unemployment, and so on, that exist on virtually all American Indian reservations. Although some Indian tribes have recently gained profits from operating gaming casinos on their lands, the vast majority of tribes in most states are not involved in such endeavors, so deprivation and poverty are still the norm.

Although there is little offending data regarding this group (the UCR does not adequately measure this group in their arrest data), it is generally assumed that Native Americans have the highest rates of offending as well. This is a fairly safe assumption because research has clearly shown that the vast majority of criminal offending or victimization is **intra-racial**. This means that crime tends to occur within a race or ethnicity (e.g., Whites offending against Whites) as opposed to being **inter-racial**, or across race or ethnicity (e.g., Whites offending against Blacks).

Another major group that experiences an extremely high rate of victimization, particularly for homicide, is Blacks. (The term *Black* is used here, as opposed to African American because that is what most measures [UCR/NCVS] use and because many African Americans are not Black, for example, many citizens from Egypt or South Africa). According to UCR data for homicide, which the NCVS does not report, Blacks have by far the highest rates of victimization and offending. Again, this is likely due to the extreme levels of poverty experienced by this group, as well as the high levels of single-headed households among this population (which likely explains much of the poverty).

A good example of the extent of the high levels of homicide rates among Blacks, in terms of both offending and victimization, can be seen in previously examined rates of certain U.S. cities. Washington, DC, New Orleans, St. Louis, and Detroit are some U.S. cities with the highest murder rates. They also have some of the highest proportions of Black residents as compared to other U.S. cities. Notably, studies have shown that, when researchers control for poverty rates and single-headed households, the racial and ethnicity effects seem to be explained away.

For example, data show that Washington, DC, and the state of Louisiana are the top two jurisdictions for high rates of poverty, with most of the poor being children or teenagers, who are most prone to commit crimes, especially violent offenses (such as murder). Thus, the two highest racial and ethnic groups for violent crime—Native Americans and Blacks—both as victims and offenders, also tend to have the highest rates in the nation for poverty and broken families. It should also be noted that Hispanics, a common ethnic group in the United States, also have relatively high offending and victimization rates as compared to Whites and other minorities, such as Asians, who tend to experience low rates.

Although there are numerous other ways that crime tends to be clustered in our society, we have covered most of the major variables in this chapter. The rest of this book will now deal with examining the various theories for why crime tends to occur in such groups and individuals, and the way that we determine how accurate these theories are will directly relate to how well they explain the high rates of the groups that we have discussed.

## Policy Implications

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One of the key elements of a good theory is that it can help inform policy makers in making decisions about how to reduce crime. This is a theme that will be reviewed at the end of each chapter in this book. After all, a criminological theory is only truly useful in the real world if it helps to reduce criminal offending there. Many theories have been used as the basis of such changes in policy, and we will present examples of how theories of crime discussed in each chapter have guided policy making. We will also present empirical evidence for such policies, specifically whether or not such policies were successful (and many are not).

## Chapter Summary

- Criminology is the scientific study of crime, which involves the use of the scientific method and testing hypotheses and distinguishes it from other perspectives of crime (e.g., journalism, religious, legal) because these fields are not based on science.
- Criminological theory seeks to do more than simply predict criminal behavior; rather, the goal is to more fully understand the reasons why certain individuals offend or do not.
- Definitions of crime vary drastically across time and place; most criminologists tend to focus on deviant behaviors whether or not they violate the criminal codes.
- There are various paradigms or unique perspectives of crime, which have contrasting assumptions and propositions. The Classical School of criminological theory assumes free will and choice among individuals, whereas the Positive School rejects the notion of free will and focuses on biological, social, and psychological factors that negate the notion of choice among criminal offenders. Other theoretical paradigms, such as conflict and critical offending and integrated models, also exist.
- Criminological theories can be classified by their fundamental assumptions as well as other factors, such as the unit of measure on which they focus—the individual or the group, micro or macro, respectively—or the assumptions they make regarding basic human nature: good, bad, or blank slate.
- There are more than a handful of characteristics that good criminological theories should have and that bad criminological theories do not have.
- Three criteria are required for determining causality, which is essential in determining whether or not an independent (predictive) variable (X) actually affects a dependent (consequent) variable (Y).
- This introduction also discussed the primary measures that are used for estimating the crime committed in the United States; these primary measures are police reports (e.g., the UCR), victimization surveys (e.g., NCVS), and offenders' self-reports of the crimes they have committed.
- We also discussed in this section what the measures of crime have shown regarding the distribution of criminal offending in terms of region, race and ethnicity, time of day, gender, and socioeconomic status. It is important to note that various theories presented in this book will be tested on the extent to which they can explain the clustering of crime among certain individuals and groups.

### KEY TERMS

Classical School	Equivalency hypothesis	Logical consistency
Clearance rate	Formal controls	Macrolevel of analysis
Conflict perspective	Hot spots	<i>Mala in se</i>
Consensual perspective	Hypotheses	<i>Mala prohibita</i>
Correlation or covariation	Index offenses	Microlevel of analysis
Criminology	Informal controls	National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)
Dark figure	Interracial	Nonindex offenses
Deviance	Intraracial	Paradigm
Empirical validity	Legalistic approach	Parsimony



Policy implications	Self-report data (SRD)	Temporal ordering
Positive School	Social sciences	Testability
Scientific method	Spuriousness	Theory
Scope	Telescoping	Uniform Crime Report (UCR)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does criminology differ from other perspectives of crime?
2. How does a good theoretical explanation of crime go beyond simply predicting crime?
3. Should criminologists emphasize only crimes made illegal by law, or should they also study acts that are deviant but not illegal? Explain why you feel this way.
4. Even though you haven't been exposed to all the theories in this book, do you favor the classical or positive assumptions regarding criminal behavior? Explain why.
5. Which types of theories do you think are most important, those that explain individual behavior (micro) or those that explain criminality among groups (macro)? Explain your decision.
6. Do you tend to favor the idea that human beings are born bad, good, or blank slate? Discuss your decision and provide an example.
7. Which characteristics of a good theory do you find most important? Which are least important? Make sure to explain why you feel that way.
8. Of the three criteria for determining causality between a predictor variable and a consequent variable, which do you think is easiest to show, and which is hardest to show? Why?
9. Which of the measures of crime do you think is the best estimate of crime in the United States? Why? Also, which measure is the best to use for determining associations between crime and personality traits? Why?
10. Looking at what the measures of crime show, which finding surprises you the most? Explain why.
11. What types of policies do you feel reduce crime the most? Which do you think have little or no effect in reducing crime?

## WEB RESOURCES

### *Measures of Crime*

Overview of Criminological Theory (by Dr. Cecil Greek at Florida State University): <http://www.criminology.fsu.edu/crimtheory/>

FBI's UCR: <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm>

NCVS: <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=dcdetail&iid=245>