

formed, assuming as it does that failure to document a strong effect of legal sanctions is evidence that sanctions in general do not operate to restrict criminal behavior. As we will describe in detail, the evidence is fully consistent with the view that criminal, deviant, sinful, and reckless behavior flourish in the absence of negative consequences or in the absence of social control.

It is not hard to show that these predictions about the properties of criminal acts are confirmed by research. We defer this demonstration to Chapter 2, where a variety of specific criminal acts are described in these terms.

Conclusions

Criminology once had an idea of crime, an idea it lost with the development of the scientific perspective. This idea of crime derived from the classical theory of human behavior, which asserted that people pursue self-interest by avoiding pain and seeking pleasure. In this conception, crimes too are events that satisfy self-interest. Criminal events can be explained using principles that explain all other human conduct. Moreover, the classical conception of crime dictated the properties of criminal as opposed to noncriminal acts. Criminal acts will tend to be short lived, immediately gratifying, easy, simple, and exciting. In subsequent chapters it will become clear that the properties of criminal acts are closely connected to the characteristics of people likely to engage in them—that is, the description of crimes cannot be separated from the description of criminals.

In current criminology, the idea of crime survives only as an event, a count of acts that may be used to estimate the propensities of the offender. Different acts and different constellations of acts are thought to imply different propensities. Virtually no attention is paid to the general qualities of criminal acts, to their connection to analogous noncriminal acts, or to the qualities of the targets involved in them.⁸ Instead, attention focuses almost entirely on offenders, ironically even within those disciplines that derive from the classical school. In the chapter to follow, we attempt to correct this imbalance by paying specific attention to the nature of crime.

⁸Significant exceptions to this generalization involve the various criminal-opportunity perspectives (Mayhew et al. 1976; Sparks, Genn, and Dodd 1977; Clarke 1983; Cornish and Clarke 1986). David Matza (1964) also called attention to the tendency of positivistic criminology to abandon crime in favor of focusing on the criminal.

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2

A General Theory of
Crime

The Nature of Crime

We have defined crimes as acts of force or fraud undertaken in pursuit of self-interest. Because a definition of crime automatically undermines theories inconsistent with it, theorists typically avoid prior definitions in favor of definitions derived from their theories of crime. The usual approach in contemporary criminology begins with the background or motives of the offender, asking in effect what causes him or her to commit criminal acts. The nature of crime is thus inferred from the characteristics of offenders or from a theory of crime causation.

Every intellectual enterprise must start somewhere, and in principle we are free to begin by explaining or by defining crime. We are also obligated, however, to reconsider and modify our starting point in light of its consistency with fact and its consequences for research and policy. Such reconsideration and modification of theories is rarely seen. Theories of crime typically start from the presuppositions of disciplines and are often in effect tested by their consistency with these presuppositions rather than by the phenomenon they were ostensibly designed to explain. Put another way, modern criminology pays little attention to the nature of crime and rarely modifies its theories of crime as a result of observation or analysis of the phenomenon that is its object.

We wish to reverse this tendency; we want to understand and appreciate the nature of crime. Such a task is not easy.¹ Many of our

¹Note the inability to focus on crime in a recent, thoughtful work on the topic: "A crime is any act committed in violation of a law that prohibits it and authorizes punishment for its commission. If we propose to confine our attention chiefly to persons who

questions will tend to lead us down the path of explanation and theory. Because our ultimate purpose is a theory- and policy-relevant description of crime, such a temptation must be temporarily resisted in favor of such questions as: What are the formal properties of crimes? What are the conditions necessary for their occurrence? What happens when people attempt to pursue their self-interest through the use of force or fraud? What pleasures and gratifications are achieved through crime? What is the proper conceptualization of crime—that is, what does crime tell us about the criminal? And, what distinctions, if any, ought to be made among crimes?

The Characteristics of Ordinary Crime

It is easy to be misled about the nature of crime in American society. All one has to do is read the newspaper, where the unusual, bizarre, or uncharacteristic crime is routinely portrayed. The fact of the matter is that the vast majority of criminal acts are trivial and mundane affairs that result in little loss and less gain. These are events whose temporal and spatial distributions are highly predictable, that require little preparation, leave few lasting consequences, and often do not produce the result intended by the offender. We begin by summarizing the space and time dimensions of common offenses.

Spatial and Temporal Correlates of Crime

According to police records and victim survey data, crimes of personal violence, such as rape, assault, and robbery, occur disproportionately late at night and early in the morning (i.e., between 1:00 and 2:00 A.M.). Automobiles tend to be stolen at night as well, whereas personal larceny (taking property without force or threat of force) tends to happen during the day. Burglary occurs about half the time during the day and about half the time at night (Hindelang 1976; Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo 1978; Rand, Klaus, and Taylor 1983).

Violent crimes generally take place outside the home. According to victim data, 70 percent of robberies and 50 percent of assaults occur in the streets or in other public places. Official data on robbery, assault, and rape also indicate that the great portion of these events occur

commit serious crimes at high rates, then we must specify what we mean by 'serious.' The arguments we shall make and the evidence we shall cite in this book will chiefly refer to aggressive, violent, or larcenous behavior" (Wilson and Herrnstein 1985: 22; emphasis added).

away from the home, particularly on the street (Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo 1978).

In both official and victim survey data, most violent crimes (except homicide) are committed by strangers and only rarely by relatives (7 percent of nonhomicide violent crime is committed by relatives). According to victim survey data, 80 percent of all personal crimes involve strangers. For theft, the proportion is higher yet (Hindelang 1976).

All crime data, whether for victims or offenders, consistently show high crime rates for large cities and much variation across areas of cities. As household income goes up, the rate of crime in an area declines (Gottfredson 1986).

The victims of personal crime tend overwhelmingly to be male, young, disproportionately minority, and of low income. It turns out that victims and offenders tend to share all or nearly all social and personal characteristics. Indeed, the correlation between self-reported offending and self-reported victimization is, by social science standards, very high.

These characteristics of crime have significance for etiological questions. They show a pattern of crime consistent with the recreational patterns of youth and inconsistent with the vocational patterns of adults; they show a disinclination to expend effort in pursuit of crime; they show that accessibility increases the risk of potential victims; and they show that avoiding detection is part of the calculation of the offender.

The Requirements of a Criminal Act

Available data are consistent with the view that ordinary crime requires little in the way of effort, planning, preparation, or skill. Most crime in fact occurs in close proximity to the offender's residence (Suttles 1968; Turner 1969; Reiss 1976): the burglar typically walks to the scene of the crime; the robber victimizes available targets on the street; the embezzler steals from his own cash register; and the car thief drives away cars with keys left in the ignition.

What planning does take place in burglary, for example, seems designed to minimize the momentary probability of detection and to minimize the effort required to complete the crime. Thus the burglar searches for an unlocked door or an open window in an unoccupied, single-story house. Once inside, he concentrates on easily portable goods of interest to himself without concern for potential value in a larger market.

The robber prefers to avoid direct confrontation with the victim and, when confrontation cannot be avoided, tends to select targets incapable of, or unlikely to offer, resistance. The occasional use of weapons is designed to minimize the likelihood of resistance. Commercial targets, too, are selected largely on the basis of accessibility. It is no accident that "convenience" stores and gas stations are common targets or that businesses located along major thoroughfares and at freeway offramps are especially attractive.

The skill required to complete the general run of crime is minimal. Consider crimes of personal violence, assault, rape, and homicide. The major requirement for successful completion of these crimes is the appearance of superior strength or the command of instruments of force. A gun, a club, or a knife is often sufficient. Property crimes may require physical strength or dexterity, but in most cases no more than is necessary for the ordinary activities of life.

The Benefits of Crime to the Offender

Many crimes do not produce the results intended by those committing them. One reason for this high rate of failure is that crimes are, by definition, opposed by their would-be victims. Potential victims seek to protect themselves from the inclinations of others. They therefore lock doors, hide valuables, watch strangers, move in groups, carry weapons, travel during the day, avoid provocation, and resist assaults. As a result, the intention to commit a crime does not in itself assure a successful result. Indeed, according to victim surveys, most crimes are attempts to commit crime (Flindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo 1978; Hough 1987). Because these reported crimes are by definition known to the potential victims, we must assume that many more attempted crimes are known only to the would-be offender. For example, would-be burglars may try many doors before finding one that is unlocked.

Among crimes completed, the average loss is remarkably small. For example, according to victim reports, the median loss for robbery is less than \$50, whereas the median loss for burglary is something like \$100 (McGarrell and Flanagan 1985: 312). Trustworthy figures are not available, but the average shoplifting appears to involve items of trivial value, items whose loss must be discounted by the items often purchased to cover the crime. Even fraud does not typically involve large sums, and embezzlements rarely make the offender wealthy (it is hard to get rich stealing from the till of a fast-food restaurant or service station). Auto theft would appear to be an exception, but most

stolen automobiles are soon abandoned, and the ratio of attempted to completed auto thefts is very large indeed.

Of course the ramifications of crime must include not only the money and goods for the offender but also the personal suffering and physical injury of the victim. Here too, however, it is easy to be misled by popular accounts about the true level of loss. According to the National Crime Survey—a large, nationally representative sample of adults—many victims elect not to inform the police of criminal events because they consider those events to be too trivial or to be an inappropriate concern of the criminal justice system. And this is true even for offenses that bear such labels as rape, aggravated assault, robbery, and burglary. Indeed, in 1982 (National Crime Survey results are remarkably consistent from one year to the next), 39 percent of aggravated assaults, 42 percent of robberies, 45 percent of rapes, and 49 percent of burglaries were not reported to the police (McGarrell and Flanagan 1985: 273).

Most assaults result in little if any physical injury to the victim. Many assaults and homicides involve disputes between people previously known to each other where it is difficult to distinguish victim from offender in terms of provocation or responsibility. (Although the consequences of such ambiguous events may be serious, it remains true that the benefits to the offender from such acts have little or no connection to their "seriousness" and are in any event typically difficult to ascertain.)

Large exceptions to these generalizations are sometimes inferred from disciplinary paradigms. Organized crime, for example, and white-collar crime, in particular, are said by sociologists and economists to cost the nation billions of dollars annually, to undermine the normative foundations of civilization, and to produce huge profits for those involved. The credible evidence on these issues appears to suggest otherwise. For example, Peter Reuter (1983) shows that illegal gambling, loan-sharking, and prostitution tend to be local affairs with limited profits, largely because they are illegal activities operated by people with few business skills and strong tendencies to engage in activities detrimental to the long-term profitability of their own enterprises. The same can be said for drug-dealing, where the popular (law enforcement) conception is especially misleading.

None of this is to deny that offenders occasionally make big scores, that purses sometimes contain large amounts of money, that the burgled house or business may have a large amount of cash, jewelry, or precious metals, that a corporate executive may embezzle a significant

sum of money, or that victims are sometimes killed. Rather, it is to stress that such events are exceptional and that the image of crime created by them is grossly misleading. Even such apparent "successes" do not necessarily ultimately produce large benefit to the offender. The ordinary offender has little use for expensive jewelry or even for expensive cars, and he has little knowledge of how to dispose of them to obtain their true value. The benefits of murder are notoriously difficult to detect. (The next morning the offender is often unable to recall what prompted the act.)

Even crimes producing relatively large sums of cash turn out to provide the offender only short-term benefits as compared to alternative sources of cash income. Consider, for example, the benefit of what by any estimate would be a "successful" robbery (\$500) as compared with the gains from a minimum-wage job. The robbery cannot be repeated for any period of time with reasonable expectation of success, whereas the minimum-wage job can be a continuous source of income. Seen in this context, even the extremely rare big scores of criminal activity are at best only supplemental sources of income and must therefore be interpreted as sources of short-term gratification only.

The white-collar offender is not exempt from this problem. Embezzlement and fraud are difficult to carry out successfully over a long period. The larger the embezzlement or fraud, the more remote the likelihood of long-term success. As a result, white-collar crime too tends to provide relatively small or short-term benefit as compared to stable and honest employment.

On inspection, crimes of personal violence, such as rape, assault, and homicide, are by their nature incapable of providing more than short-term gratification for the offender. The homicide-for-hire career may seem to be an exception. However, it too is consistent with our view of crimes as short-term, limited-benefit activities rather than realistic long-term alternatives to stable employment. Hired killers, it turns out, can be had for not much money, a fact suggesting that the alternative criminal careers available to this segment of the labor force are not all that lucrative. When the hired killer takes the money and does not make the hit, his behavior is consistent with the nature of criminal employment. One such "score" would be possible, but two would be difficult, and it would be extremely difficult to make a career of failing to fulfill one's contractual obligations.

Obviously, the long-term or lasting benefits of crime are profoundly limited. As a result, the volume of crime is heavily con-

strained by the nature of criminal activities, by the hazards they entail, by the effort they require, and by the limited gains they produce.

Political sanctions are also a constituent element of crime. In principle, political sanctions work to reduce further the net benefits of criminal activities. Given the features of crime thus far discussed, how effective would we expect political sanctions to be? The risk of apprehension and punishment should effectively interfere with projects involving long-term planning and a considerable commitment. After all, such projects presuppose a reasonable expectation of success. What effect would we expect the risk of apprehension and punishment to have on projects where little objective gain can be established and no planning or commitment is in evidence? Obviously, very little. The evidence, however charitably it may be construed (see, e.g., Blumstein, Cohen, and Nagin 1978), is consistent with this expectation. The criminal justice system has little effect on the volume of crime (see Chapter 12).

Although it may be more glamorous and profitable for law enforcement to portray an image of crime as a highly profitable alternative to legal work, a valid theory of crime must see it as it is: largely petty, typically not completed, and usually of little lasting or substantial benefit to the offender.

Connections Among Crimes

Recall the classical definition of crime as an event involving force or fraud that satisfies self-interest. This tradition evinces little interest in connections among crimes. Whatever connections exist are merely definitional. However, the classical view would certainly assume that acts promoting self-interest in some meaningful or substantial way would tend to be repeated. And this, of course, is the basic, straightforward, and eminently reasonable assumption of modern learning theories of crime. Nevertheless, the evidence shows that specific crimes, regardless of their outcome, do not tend to be repeated. That is, burglary, even "successful" burglary, does not tend to be followed by burglary, even in the short run. Robbery is not followed by robbery with any more likelihood than by some other short-term pleasure, a pleasure that may well be inconsistent with another robbery (such as rape, drug use, or assault).

The reason for all of this interchangeability among crimes must be that these diverse events provide benefits with similar qualities, such qualities as immediacy, brevity of obligation, and effortlessness. (By definition, it is possible to engage in large numbers of such events in

a short period of time. Given such potential frequencies, there are many possible counts of crime, and exclusive reliance on any one of them may be highly problematic.)

Many other benefits of particular criminal acts are not essential parts of the definition of crime. As a result, pursuit of such benefits is not predictive of subsequent criminal activity. For example, pecuniary gain is not essential to crime and cannot therefore be used to predict the nature of subsequent activity. (The burglary that produces pecuniary gain may be followed by drug use that entails considerable pecuniary loss.) Thus distinctions among crimes based on the mixture of pecuniary and nonpecuniary gains they produce are likely to be of little value. The same is true of distinctions between serious and petty offenses, between instrumental and expressive crimes, between person and property crimes, between crimes of passion and crimes of premeditation, between crimes *mala prohibita* and crimes *mala in se*, between status offenses and delinquent acts, between vice or victimless crimes and crimes with victims, and so on. All of these distinctions are without import. In fact, such distinctions mislead more than they inform, create needless analytical difficulties, and invite questions (such as, does shoplifting lead to burglary?)—the pursuit of which is a waste of time. The evidence is clear that the offender by his behavior and by his reports recognizes none of these distinctions; his behavior is governed by properties of crime not included in statutory distinctions, in developmental theories of crime, or, indeed, in any of the many distinctions among crimes found in positive criminology.

Conditions Necessary for Criminal Acts to Occur

Recent years have seen several attempts to specify the conditions necessary for crimes to occur. These efforts go under such names as the "routine activity approach" (Cohen and Felson 1979), the "opportunity perspective" (Cornish and Clarke 1986; Mayhew et al. 1976), and the "lifestyle opportunity" perspective (Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo 1978). In all cases, the authors attempt to specify the minimal elements necessary (and collectively sufficient) for a crime to occur and to focus research attention on elements of crime independent of the offender, elements such as characteristics of situations, targets, or victims.

At first glance, this "necessary conditions" approach to crime appears to represent a return to classical thought. For one thing, it focuses on the crime and tries to ignore the criminal; for another, it

seems to deny the idea that the actions of the offender are determined by prior events, appearing instead to envision a rational, calculating actor; further, it appears to emphasize or embrace the rational, deductive approach to explanation that was replaced by the empirical, inductive approaches favored by positivists. In our view, such apparent contrast actually reveals the basic potential complementarity of the classical and positivist traditions (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1987a). On inspection, the two approaches turn out to contain no inherently contradictory assumptions. In fact, assertions that crimes are a product of the criminality of the actor and assertions that environmental conditions are necessary for crimes to occur are not necessarily inconsistent.²

There is every reason to believe that the necessary conditions strategy of opportunity theory is compatible with the idea of criminality, although the connection between the two is far from straightforward and has been largely neglected by both sides. As a result, one of our major initial tasks is to spell out the implications of opportunity theory for the concept of criminality, and vice versa. Our approach involves a detailed examination of the idea of crime, from which we are able to deduce the nature of individuals or the specific properties of individuals who are likely to fit the opportunity model of crime—that is, who are likely to engage in the crimes that the model describes. It is important to take this step for several reasons. First, we take it as axiomatic that theories of crime and theories of criminality must be consistent. Second, no theory of criminality has taken as its starting point a thorough examination of the concept of crime. Third, because existing theories of criminality rarely attend to this issue, they can be tested by their compatibility with the idea of crime. In other words, our approach allows us to judge the validity of theories of criminality

²Nor, for that matter, do these assertions differ in methodological assumption to the degree historically suggested by disputes between their advocates. Search for the necessary conditions for crime is perfectly compatible with search for the causes of crime. The causes of crime may be seen as operational indicators of the necessary conditions for crime (or the necessary conditions may be seen as abstract [theoretical] summaries of the causes of crime). For example, the number of cars in a community is predictive of the volume of auto theft. "Number of cars" is then a *cause* of crime. At the same time, the presence of automobiles in a community is a necessary condition for auto theft. These two facts, one empirical and one logical, can presumably be inferred from one another. The traditional positivistic empiricist searched for correlates or causes of crime and rarely, if ever, stopped to conceptualize them—that is, to translate them into necessary conditions. Opportunity theorists sometimes start from an examination of the correlates of crime or victimization (see, e.g., Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo 1978), but they as often start from an *a priori* or deductive list of conditions necessary for crime and go on to examine trends in the crime rates or correlates of crime consistent with these lists (Cohen and Felson 1979).

based on the consistency between their notions of criminality and opportunity theories of crime.³

The following chapters will thus address the concept of criminality, taking as their point of departure the features of crime described in this and the preceding chapter. For now, we extend the necessary conditions approach to common crimes, where its value in revealing the necessary characteristics of the offender can be readily seen.

To begin, we take the conditions necessary for crimes in general as commonly stated in opportunity theory. For example, in the version advanced by Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson (1979), crime requires a motivated offender, the absence of a capable guardian, and a suitable target. Extension or modification of definitions of crime must begin with one or another of these three elements. Normally, one would think that theories interested in the offender would concentrate on the first element. Indeed, most theories of criminality take the second and third elements as irrelevant and develop accounts of offender motivation. In fact, in our view, this is the fundamental mistake of modern theory. If we begin to construct our picture of the offender after first understanding the role of guardians and targets, he does not resemble the picture painted by current theories of criminality.

A good example is provided by Michael Hough (1987), who extends and refines the concept of a suitable target by noting that burglars base their judgment of suitability on proximity, accessibility, and reward. Hough's concept of accessibility includes ideas of defense against victimization, and his concept of reward incorporates the idea of potential yield (i.e., return for effort expended).

Hough's extension of the opportunity perspective shows that greater precision and hence predictability may be achieved by incorporating notions of offender characteristics into the definition of the criminal act, characteristics originally inferred from the nature of the act itself. Here, the burglar is seen to prefer easily available targets that offer prospects for success. Expansion of this insight leads directly to difficulty for some theories of criminality, since many would require burglary by people who tend toward criminality regardless of their assessment of the target.

A good place to look for the nature of criminality is in crimes actually committed. With this thought in mind, let us review the

³Ironically, one of the etiological theories most incompatible with opportunity explanations of crime is that of Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin (1960). Because it is sometimes called an "opportunity" theory, some scholars put these oppositional perspectives in the same class. For an excellent discussion of the compatibility of choice and opportunity perspectives, see Philip Cook (1986).

fundamental characteristics and general patterns of common crimes. Our list of crimes is based on considerations of structure, data availability, and relevance to the criminality issue.

Burglary

Burglary is the crime most often described (implicitly or explicitly) by opportunity theorists. The reasons are not hard to find. In burglary, the "target" is, in effect, a physical object that plays no active role in its own victimization; in burglary, the offender is clearly where he should not be doing something he should not be doing. There is thus little question about whether his or her behavior is criminal. Burglary involves a physical structure or access to a physical space, all of which suggests the ability to control the crime by modification of the environment. Finally, burglary is one of the most common felonies. In fact, according to the National Crime Survey, about 7-8 percent of the households in the United States are victimized annually. According to the same survey, about half of these burglaries are reported to the police.

Pat Mayhew (1987) reports that about half of burglaries occur during the daytime, when houses are empty. Michael Hindelang (1976: 292) has shown that vacant or unoccupied houses are at greater risk than occupied houses. Lawrence Cohen and David Cantor (1981) indirectly illustrate the impact of occupancy by establishing a correlation between burglary rates and female labor force participation. Others have done so directly: Stuart Winchester and Hilary Jackson (1982: 16) report that "the most striking characteristic of burglary is that it usually takes place in houses that have been left unoccupied. . . . 80% took place in dwellings where there was nobody in the house at the time."

According to Hough (1987), the majority of *successful* burglaries are carried out in empty homes, whereas a high proportion of *attempted* burglaries take place when victims are present. Physical accessibility is also a predictor of burglary risk. Houses at the ends of rows of houses, which have greater access from the street, have higher burglary rates. Hough shows that, in England, physical accessibility to the rear of property is also important.

According to police records and the reports of those arrested for burglary (Repetto 1974), burglars use unsophisticated methods to gain entry. If the door or window is locked, the term "break in" is apt; police reports indicate that more than half of burglaries involve forcible entry. However, according to the National Crime Survey (based

on the reports of victims whether or not they called the police), less than one-third of burglaries actually involve forcible entry.

Items most frequently stolen are relatively light electronic goods. Cash is of course taken, if it is present, but credit cards and check books are typically ignored (Reppetto 1974). The National Crime Survey reveals that, in 1983, two-thirds of the burglaries resulted in less than a \$250 loss, a figure that includes damages to doors, windows, and the like. Hough and Mayhew (1985: 28) report from the 1984 British Crime Survey that the value of theft losses in Britain for burglaries was less than £100 in 65 percent of the cases.

The net income to offenders from burglaries is much less than the losses to victims, since offenders gain no pecuniary benefit from damaged doors or broken windows and since they must sell the goods they steal for much less than the value their owners place on them.⁴ In many cases, offenders may intend simply to appropriate the property for their own use, an intention consistent with the theft of items of recreational value to young people. Such use of stolen items is, however, inconsistent with the notion that burglary is a source of employment-like income, since offenders cannot make a living on portable radios or VCRs.

According to interviews with offenders, the major deterrents are "a house being occupied, dogs, poor back access, visibility to neighbors and passers-by, and poor escape routes; conventional security is claimed by [incarcerated] burglars to be of little importance" (Mayhew 1984: 34). Research has also shown that burglars do not travel far to offend. Paul and Patricia Brantingham say that "burglars [select] their targets from within a narrow personal 'activity space,' that is, from areas they pass through in daily journeys from home to work or school and to the principal social and shopping locations they [frequent] in the evenings or on weekends" (1984: 79). Put another way, offenders burglarize "in areas close to major activity areas and along major traffic arteries" (*ibid.*).

People arrested for burglary tend to be male (about 95 percent), young (median age about 17), and disproportionately nonwhite (about one-third). Although young, they are likely to have prior records of offending (for a variety of offenses). They are also highly likely to be arrested subsequently, again for a variety of offenses.

⁴The cash value of stolen goods varies from 100 percent (for cash) of original cost to practically zero. Police sting operators report being able to buy stolen goods for seven cents on the dollar, but this is considered by some scholars to be more than the goods are worth (see Klockars 1988). An average of ten cents on the dollar is also frequently reported (see, e.g., Hindelang 1976: 312).

The Typical or Standard Burglary

In the standard burglary, a young male (or group of males; see Reiss 1988) knocks on a door not far from where he lives. Finding no one home, he tests the door to see if it is open. If it is open (as it often is), he walks in and looks to see if the dwelling contains anything of interest that he can quickly consume or easily haul away. In most cases, the only items that appeal to these mid-teen boys are cash, booze, and entertainment equipment. In most cases, the proceeds of the burglary are quickly consumed, used up, given away, or discarded. The crime provides, then, immediate, easy, short-term gratification. And nothing more. Obviously, not all burglaries fit this pattern. The police and the media portray an image of burglary that makes it more exotic, more worthwhile, more difficult, and more taxing of police skills in its detection. The events that seem to fit the police/media image are so rare that the same ones must be used repeatedly; they are also sufficiently rare that they are strongly misleading about the causes and control of burglary.

The Logical Structure of Burglary

For burglary to occur, several conditions must be present. There must be, first of all, a building or dwelling. This building or dwelling must be capable of entry by someone who does not have permission to do so. Second, the building or dwelling must have contents that are apparently attractive to the offender and capable of being removed from the premises. Third, the building or dwelling must not be monitored by someone able to observe the burglary and interfere with its completion. Finally, burglary requires an actor insufficiently restrained from taking advantage of these conditions.

Burglary can therefore be prevented in a variety of ways. In principle, buildings and dwellings could be constructed such that they cannot be entered by persons who do not have permission to do so.⁵ The value or portability of the contents of buildings and dwellings can be reduced below the point of attractiveness to the offender. Buildings can be monitored by those interested and capable of intervening in the act. And, burglary can be prevented by putting sufficient restraints on people who encounter attractive opportunities for burglary.

⁵This discussion is predicated on the technical definition of burglary. As will be described in subsequent chapters, we are aware that a considerable amount of theft that takes place within buildings or dwellings is performed by people who have permission to be there. Our notion of criminality does not preclude the possibility that likely offenders are willing to victimize people close to them.

Such an analysis has obvious implications for the relative merits of various explanations of crime and notions of criminality. If criminality is as we will describe it (see Chapter 5), burglary can be efficiently prevented by several of the devices listed. (According to our scheme, other devices will be relatively less efficient.) Recall that crime implies interest in immediate, easy gratification of short-term desires. If this view of crime is correct, nearly any obstacle placed in the path of the offender is likely to have some consequence for the likelihood that a given dwelling will be burglarized and for the likelihood that a burglary will take place at all. Thus a locked door will prevent some burglary. A locked door that cannot be smashed without mechanical aid will prevent more. A residence that appears to be observed by neighbors will be less vulnerable than a residence that cannot be seen by people living in the area.

On the other hand, given the immediate, easy, short-term needs that most offenders seek to gratify, the prevention benefits of reducing target attractiveness are extremely limited. When a few coins and a bottle of liquor are the attractive objects, the burglary rate cannot be controlled by greater use of safety deposit boxes and credit cards. (The loss from any given burglary can, however, be reduced by such means.) Given the large number of potential targets that satisfy the attractiveness threshold of people who tend toward criminality, marked reduction of the burglary rate by intentional efforts to increase the monitoring of interested parties is unlikely. Finally, given the temporary nature of the burglar's interest in burglary and the concentration of these interests in the mid-teen years (see the age distribution of burglary in Chapter 6), greater restraint on potential burglars is likely to produce a lower burglary rate than greater restraint on those already convicted of burglary. Finally, of course, long-term reductions in burglary rates might be effected by reduction in the level of criminality in the population. Since this approach would have an impact on all forms of crime, we will treat it at some length in Chapter 12.

In all of these respects, our scheme has empirical implications very different from those derived from standard criminological theories or from atheoretical policy advice based on the assumption of an "active offender" or a "criminal career" (Blumstein et al. 1986). Fortunately for our scheme, its empirical implications seem to be borne out by the research on burglary.

Robbery

Robbery is defined by the FBI as taking or attempting to take something from someone by the use of force or the threat of force. Rates of

robbery in the United States are high as compared to those in other countries, with seven people per thousand aged twelve or older reporting being victimized in any given year (according to the National Crime Survey). This rate is more than three times the rate in England and Wales (Hough and Mayhew 1985: 62). The U.S. rate is much higher in central cities than in other regions of the country. In fact, Wesley Skogan (1979) reports that two-thirds of the reported robberies in the United States in 1970 were concentrated in 32 cities that housed only 16 percent of the nation's population.

In popular conception, robbery is the ultimate street crime. About seven in ten personal robberies take place on the street (Reiss 1967: 22; Conklin 1972: 81; Hindelang 1976: 206). Losses from robbery tend to be modest. According to victim estimates derived from the National Crime Survey for 1982, 55 percent of robberies resulted in less than a \$50 loss; 80 percent resulted in losses of less than \$250. About half of robberies involve weapons, with guns appearing about one-fifth of the time (Hindelang 1976: 213). The presence of a gun reduces the likelihood of injury to the victim (Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo 1978). Hindelang (1976) has shown that about 95 percent of personal theft crimes involve a lone victim. In contrast, in more than 60 percent of such incidents there are multiple offenders; in fact, there are three or more offenders in 33 percent of all robberies.

Robbers, like burglars, tend to be young; in recent years the median age has been nineteen. The robbers tend to be male (about 95 percent) and disproportionately nonwhite (a majority). Arrestees tend to have prior records, with no evidence of specialization; they are also highly likely to be arrested again, for a variety of offenses.

Interviews with offenders incarcerated for robbery document the fact that they do not specialize in robbery (Petersilia 1980; Feeney 1986). Data confirm the conclusion that persons reporting robbery are more likely to report all other offenses as well (see, e.g., Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis 1981). Although robbers tend to claim a monetary motive for their acts, many robberies seem to be incidental to other activities (Feeney 1986). High proportions of robbers report alcohol and drug use prior to or during the offense (Petersilia 1980; Feeney 1986), and there is little evidence of advance planning or fear of apprehension. Indeed, planning appears to be more a matter of convenience than anything else. Floyd Feeney's Oakland, California, robbers explain their choice of targets: "Just where we happened to be, I guess"; "Nothing else open at 2:00 A.M. Had been there before"; "We thought it would be quickest, you know, it's a small donut shop" (1986: 62). Feeney summarizes the issue:

The impulsive, spur-of-the-moment nature of many of these robberies is well illustrated by two adult robbers who said they had passengers in their cars who had no idea that they planned a robbery. One passenger, who thought his friend was buying root beer and cigars, found out the hard way what had happened. A clerk chased his robber-friend out the door and fired a shotgun blast through the windshield of the passenger's car. [Ibid.: 60]

There is substantial evidence that most robbers attack victims close to where they live. Andre Normandeau (1968) reports that in Philadelphia the median distance from the residence of the offender to the robbery was about one mile (see also Feeney 1986). In fact, the age-race-gender profile of victims of robbery closely parallels the profile of offenders—indicating a strong tendency for robbers to rob people like themselves.

The Typical or Standard Robbery

In the ordinary robbery, a young male in his late teens or a group of young males in their middle teens approaches a solitary person on the street and, either through stealth (purse snatching) or intimidation gained by size or numerical advantage (but sometimes with a weapon), demands valuables. Once the transaction is completed, the offender runs from the scene and the victim begins to search for means of calling the police.

The ordinary commercial robbery also involves a young man, sometimes two young men, also in possession of an advantage gained through possession of a weapon (or the claim of such possession), who demands cash from the register of a convenience store or gas station. Once the transaction is completed, the offender runs from the store and the clerk calls the police.

The Logical Structure of Robbery

The structure of robbery differs from the structure of burglary in several important respects. For one thing, there is a direct confrontation between the victim and the offender. For another, in a robbery the offender typically has the "right" to be where he is, and there is no physical device that can stop him from being there. But let us describe the necessary elements of robbery. First, there must be an attractive target, such as a person with goods potentially attractive to the offender (a purse, a wallet, a lunch pail or lunch money) or a commercial establishment that deals in cash or that carries expensive portable goods (e.g., jewelry). Second, the offender must have an advantage over the target in terms of power or apparent force. And

third, the offender must be a person insufficiently restrained from taking advantage of the opportunity.

Robbery can be prevented by eliminating interaction between potential robbers and potential victims and by increasing the apparent power of targets relative to that of potential offenders. It can also be reduced, in principle, by reducing the attractiveness of potential targets. Finally, of course, robbery can be reduced by increasing the restraints on people who tend toward criminality.

Again, in our view, not all of these logical possibilities are equally likely to be effective in preventing robbery. Altering the attractiveness of potential targets can have some impact (witness the effectiveness of "we carry no cash" programs), but the gratifications the offender seeks are often so modest that many limitations become impractical. Altering the balance of power can be effective, but given the offender's probable lack of attention to subtle clues and abstract probabilities, such power must be readily visible. So far as preventing robbery is concerned, moving in groups is therefore more effective than carrying a concealed weapon, and not carrying a purse is more effective than carrying a purse containing mace.

Mechanical devices may prevent robbery by separating potential victims from potential robbers such that the physical control over the victim necessary to complete the robbery is impossible to obtain. Partitions in taxis, cages in liquor stores, and locked doors in automobiles are examples of such devices.

Given the age distribution of offending (see Chapter 6) and the temporal and spatial characteristics of robbery, an effective curfew would do much to restrain potential offenders and eliminate potential targets; so too would greater supervision of young people going to and from school. By the same token, it is unlikely that any conceivable increase in police patrolling could have an impact on the robbery rate.

Homicide

Despite popular and scholarly opinion to the contrary, homicide is perhaps the most mundane and, in our view, most easily explainable crime. First, some facts. The homicide rate in the United States in 1987 was about eight per 100,000 people per year, though it was as high as ten in 1980 and as low as five in the early 1960's. Nearly 60 percent of murders are committed with firearms. Poisoning is extremely rare, and about 20 percent of murders are committed with a knife. About 15 percent of the time, the offender beats the victim to death.

About 20 percent of homicides in which the relationship between the victim and the offender is known involve family members. About the same proportion involve strangers. The remainder involve people known to each other with a degree of intimacy ranging from recognition (such as a fellow patron of a bar) to boyfriend or girlfriend. Seventy-five percent of the victims of homicide are males. Forty percent of the victims are black.

Homicides involving family members or acquaintances may appear to be crimes of passion, but they occur with considerable predictability and regularity. They most often take place on weekends, at night, indoors, and in front of an audience. Frequently, the victim, the offender, or both are using alcohol or drugs at the time of the offense. James Wilson and Richard Herrnstein report that "there have, in fact, been at least 28 separate studies of alcohol involvement in murder; fourteen of these found alcohol present in at least 60 percent of the cases, and the great majority found it present in a third or more of the cases" (1985: 356). As is widely reported, there is often difficulty in establishing the distinction between victim and offender—that is, in knowing where the primary blame for the offense resides. Furthermore, both victim and offender tend to have relatively high rates of prior involvement in crimes and delinquencies.

A second common pattern of homicide involves the so-called felony homicides, in which a victim is killed in the course of a lesser crime such as burglary, robbery, or rape. These events tend to occur among strangers and tend not to take place inside residences. Indeed, in these respects they generally follow the pattern of the lesser crimes from which they derive.

Again, offenders and victims bear remarkable similarity to each other. Offenders tend overwhelmingly to be young (in 1983 the peak age of homicide arrestees was nineteen), male (87 percent), and disproportionately nonwhite (about 51 percent). Homicide arrestees have records similar to those of other offenders—that is, there is considerable versatility in the types of offenses. The recidivism records of persons arrested for murder tend to show fewer subsequent arrests than ordinary offenders, but these differences are attributable to differences in length of imprisonment. (Murderers are not the "good risks" sometimes claimed.)

Homicide is the classic example given by opponents of hedonistic explanations of crime. By definition, they say, crimes of passion are not crimes of rational gain. Impulse, the argument goes, cannot be reasoned, cannot be governed by considerations of costs and benefits. Such an argument is not germane to a theory built on the idea

that crime is governed by its short-term, immediate benefits, without consideration of long-term cost. In this view, homicide is precisely the kind of behavior produced by high levels of criminality, where serious crimes are committed for trivial reasons. Many homicides in fact seem to have little to do with "pleasure" and much to do with the reduction of "pain." The pain suffered by the offender is not great by usual standards; often the only benefit to the offender is the removal of a temporary source of irritation or an obstacle to the achievement of some immediate end, such as a successful burglary. In other words, the benefits of homicide are not large, profound, or serious. They are, on the contrary, benefits of the moment, and the effect of alcohol or drugs may be found precisely in their tendency to reduce the time-horizon of the offender to the here and now. A consideration of the logical structure of homicide will make this clear.

The Typical or Standard Homicide

Homicide comes in two basic varieties. In one version, people who are known to one another argue over some trivial matter, as they have argued frequently in the past. In fact, in the past their argument has on occasion led to physical violence, sometimes on the part of the offender, sometimes on the part of the victim. In the present instance, one of them decides that he has had enough, and he hits a little harder or with what turns out to be a lethal instrument. Often, of course, the offender simply ends the dispute with a gun.

In the other version, the standard robbery described above becomes a homicide when for some reason (sometimes because the victim resists, sometimes for no apparent reason at all) the offender fires his gun at the clerk or store owner. Or, occasionally, there is a miscalculation during a burglary and the house turns out to be occupied. Again sometimes because the victim resists and sometimes for no apparent reason the offender clubs, knives, or shoots the resident.

The Logical Structure of Homicide

In law, criminal homicide is the willful killing of one human being by another without excuse or defense. In order for criminal homicide to occur: there must be an offender and a victim in interaction with each other; the offender must possess the means of taking the life of another; the offender must be insufficiently restrained to prevent the crime; the victim must lack the opportunity or inclination to remove himself from the threat posed by the offender; and no life-saving third-party intervention is available to the victim.

Criminal homicide differs from other crimes more in the complexity of its structure than in the depth or seriousness of its motives. The difference between homicide and assault may simply be the intervention of a bystander, the accuracy of a gun, the weight of a frying pan, the speed of an ambulance, or the availability of a trauma center. The difference between robbery and felony murder may simply be the resistance offered by a store clerk. The difference between burglary and felony murder may be whether the occupant of the dwelling returns home during the crime.

Complex crimes are more easily controlled than simple crimes because interference with any of the necessary elements is sufficient to prevent the crime. So, for example, homicide may be prevented by eliminating interaction between victims and offenders, by removing lethal weapons from offenders, by increasing the availability of bystanders and the probability of their intervention, by decreasing the resistance of victims of lesser crimes, and by decreasing the use of alcohol and drugs. Homicide can also be prevented by reducing the number of people who tend toward criminality.

Evidence for the short-term, immediate nature of the motive for homicide is found in the fact that victims of attempted homicide or aggravated assault rarely require police protection following the crime. In fact, the evidence suggests that most victims of such acts resume their prior relation with the offender or their prior activity pattern (Sherman and Berk 1984).

Auto Theft

Auto theft is theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle. Rates of auto theft in the United States in 1985 ranged from about eight to twenty thefts per 1,000 vehicles per year. There is considerable variability in the risk of automobile theft depending on the brand of car, its age, and its accessibility. Thus, for example, station wagons are less likely to be stolen than two-door coupes. New cars are at greater risk than old cars; cars parked in public places and cars driven frequently are more likely to be stolen. Cars with antitheft devices, such as steering-column locks, are relatively unlikely to be stolen (Mayhew et al. 1976). Unlocked cars, cars with keys in the ignition, and cars left unattended with the motor running are especially vulnerable to theft.

About 70 percent of car thefts occur at night, and about 80 percent of stolen cars are recovered (Hindelang 1976: 302, 308). The common police assertion that cars are stolen for parts is discredited by Carl

Klockars (1988), who notes that the market for used auto parts is not sufficiently active to sustain auto theft. The auto junk yards surrounding U.S. cities provide an ample supply of cheap carburetors and used wheels. The fact that the owners of such yards do not disassemble wrecked vehicles until a specific part is requested suggests that auto thieves would also find prior disassembly unprofitable. The age of the typical auto thief (the age of arrestees peaks at age sixteen, and over half of arrestees are under eighteen) also casts doubt on the auto-theft-ring explanation of this offense. Once again the field of criminology (and the public) has been misled by rare but highly publicized events.

For the record, persons arrested for auto theft tend to be young (16-18), male (over 90 percent), and disproportionately nonwhite (about 33 percent).

The Typical or Standard Auto Theft

In the typical auto theft, a car left unlocked on a public street or in a public parking lot with the keys in the ignition or in plain view is entered by a sixteen-year-old male or group of males and is driven until it runs out of gas or until the offenders must attend to other obligations.

The Logical Structure of Auto Theft

Auto theft is an especially complex crime. In order for a car theft to occur, there must be an automobile that is accessible, drivable, and attractive. There must also be an offender who is both capable of driving and insufficiently restrained. For auto theft, as opposed to joyriding, it is also necessary that the offender possess the means to maintain and store the vehicle. As a result of this last condition, joyriding is much more common than other forms of auto theft, and thus the recovery rate for stolen vehicles is high and the thief is rarely caught. In recent years, undercover police officers have acted as potential buyers of stolen vehicles, but these sting operations, ironically, may well have increased the rate of auto theft (see Chapters 10 and 12).

Auto theft can therefore be prevented by reduction in the number of automobiles, by making access to automobiles more difficult, by making them more difficult to drive, and by making them less attractive to offenders. Auto theft can also be reduced by increasing restraints on people who tend toward criminality, perhaps by making eighteen the minimum age for a driver's license.

Rape

According to the National Crime Survey, there are about 140 rapes or attempted rapes per 100,000 females age twelve and older per year. According to the *Uniform Crime Reports* (U.S. Department of Justice 1985), about 70 rapes and attempted rapes per 100,000 females were reported to the police in 1983. According to victim surveys and police data, rapes occur disproportionately in the evening or at night and on weekends (see Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo 1978). According to victim survey data, most rapes do not occur in the home of the victim, and fewer than 20 percent involve weapons. About 60 percent of rapes reported in victim surveys involve strangers (the proportion of strangers in rapes reported to the police is slightly lower than in victim surveys).

Persons arrested for rape tend to be young (the peak age of arrest is 21) and disproportionately nonwhite (about 51 percent in 1983). They tend to have prior records of arrest for a variety of crimes, and their recidivism records resemble those of offenders arrested for burglary or robbery—that is, they are generalists, likely to be arrested again for a crime other than rape. Victims of rape also tend to be young (the peak age of victimization was 16–19 in 1982) and members of minority groups.

The Standard or Typical Rape

Few crimes are as misunderstood in the popular conception as forcible rape. The common contemporary image, influenced by media depictions of atypical events, involves one of the following scenarios: (1) A family member or close personal friend forces himself on the victim. The victim reacts to the violence and humiliation without invoking the criminal justice system. This scenario is variously labeled, in the popular literature, "family violence" or "date rape." (2) A woman is attacked by a group of males, in a public place, and suffers serious physical injuries in addition to those inflicted by the rape itself. Such "gang" rapes evoke an official response.

According to the data, both of these scenarios are relatively rare. Family members and close friends apparently rarely jeopardize long-term relations by committing or reporting rape. And single offenders overwhelmingly predominate in rape statistics.

A statistically more common scenario begins with a public encounter at night between strangers. The woman is alone and out of public view. A lone offender either lies in wait or follows and attacks her.

The attack may take place on the spot or after the victim has been forced to a more remote setting.

In nonstranger victimizations, the contemporary literature overstates the extent of prior relationship between the rape victim and her attacker. In the typical "nonstranger" rape, the offender and the victim, who know one another only slightly, are in a vulnerable setting by mutual consent, such as in a car or an apartment, and the offender forces the victim to submit. In this situation, the victim often does not call the police.

One final scenario involves a woman asleep alone in her home who is awakened by a lone offender who has entered through an unlocked door or open window. After he leaves she calls the police.

The Logical Structure of Rape

More so than for any other form of crime, it is difficult to discuss objectively the properties of rape. The crime, and the criminal justice system response to it, are so emotionally charged that objective descriptions are often seen as reflecting a lack of sensitivity. Nevertheless, much of the contemporary image of rape is erroneous and misleading, and it should be evaluated through careful assessment of the best available data and careful attention to the logical structure of the crime.

In order for rape to occur, several conditions are necessary. First, there must be a victim who is attractive to an offender, available to the offender, unwilling to engage in sexual activity, and unable to resist the offender's advances. Second, there must be an offender who is insufficiently restrained.

For almost every crime, sensible prevention methods can be designed around the concept of target hardening. Thus, we can make cars less vulnerable with locks and homes less vulnerable with good lighting. Such prevention measures take advantage of the logical structure of the crime and of the characteristics of the target that make it attractive to potential offenders. The emotions evoked by rape, by the trauma suffered by its victims, and by the inadequacy of the criminal justice system response make efforts to offer similar suggestions vulnerable to the charge of blaming the victim. Offering advice to car owners not to leave keys in the ignition because it makes the car more attractive on opportunity grounds is widely seen as sensible advice; however, offering advice to young women not to travel alone at night in public places, particularly near bars or other places where alcohol is consumed, is seen by many as insensitive because it limits

the freedom of women. Obviously, and regrettably, good advice in the crime area often reduces the liberty of potential victims.

Nevertheless, the logical structure of a crime produces recommendations for prevention and predicts the variables that cause the crime. According to the data, rape is more likely when young men and women can encounter each other alone in public places, particularly at night. Reduction of such opportunities would be expected to reduce the incidence of rape. Rape can also be prevented by exercising caution in entering vulnerable settings with strangers (including casual acquaintances). Rape can also be prevented by locking doors and windows, especially for women who live alone. Rape can be prevented by increasing the ability of women to resist (such as by providing companions, visible weapons, and whistles). Finally, of course, rape can also be prevented by reducing the number of men who tend toward criminality.

White-Collar Crime

The concept of white-collar crime raises difficult theoretical issues that have not been given sufficient attention by academicians or criminal justice functionaries. However, as it turns out, the white-collar crime area provides a useful explication of the central ideas of this book. This explication is only suggested here. We reserve full treatment of the topic to Chapter 9.

There is no legal definition of white-collar crime because there is no crime that goes by that name. In fact, the term white-collar crime was invented by the sociologist Edwin Sutherland to refer to crimes committed by people of respectability and high standing in the community. The idea that such people have crimes unique to them is directly contrary to the idea of crime used throughout this book. If crime involves immediate, easy gratification of short-term desires, it seems unlikely that crime would appeal to persons of high social status who must, by definition, attend to the long-term consequences of their acts. The existence of white-collar crimes in fact turns out to support rather than to undermine our conception of the nature of criminal acts, as the following discussion of a specific crime associated with white-collar employment will demonstrate.

Embezzlement

Embezzlement is the misappropriation or misapplication of money or property entrusted to one's care, custody, or control. Arrest rates

for embezzlement are low. In 1983, there were 7,600 arrests for embezzlement in the United States, as compared to 400,000 for burglary, 30,000 for forcible rape, and 18,000 for murder. Contrary to the popular image, the rate of embezzlement is highest among young people, males, and minority groups.

The Standard or Ordinary Embezzlement

As the demographic profile suggests, in the ordinary embezzlement a young man recently hired steals money from his employer's cash register or goods from the store. Little or no skill is required, the benefits are obvious and immediate, and the opportunity is given in the position itself. Clearly there are embezzlements of large amounts by older employees in trusted positions, but the rarity of these acts is an important datum in itself and should not be allowed to obscure the unremarkable nature of most embezzlements.

The Logical Structure of Embezzlement

In an influential study devoted exclusively to embezzlement, Donald Cressey argues that three conditions are necessary for embezzlement:

1. The feeling that a personal financial problem is unshareable.
2. Knowledge of how to solve the problem in secret, by violating a position of financial trust.
3. Ability to find a formula that describes the act of embezzling in words that do not conflict with the image of oneself as a trusted person. [1986: 199]

In our terminology, the conditions necessary for embezzlement are as follows: there must be (1) money or goods that are attractive to the offender, available to the offender, and not rightfully the property of the offender, and (2) an offender insufficiently restrained.

The contrast between the logical structure of embezzlement we present and Cressey's differential association version of the same offense illustrates the contrast between theories that start from a concept of crime and those that start from a concept of the offender. Cressey obviously begins with a concept of the offender that makes the fruits of embezzlement appealing only to a select group of people and that makes embezzlement difficult to accomplish and hard to justify. We begin with a concept of the offense that makes the fruits of the crime attractive to everyone and that makes the crime easy to do, without the need for special justification. Both views predict a relatively low rate of embezzlement (see Chapter 9), but they have rather different views of causation and of effective prevention.

In Cressey's version, embezzlement can be prevented by removing the motive to offend, by reducing the opportunity to do so, and by changing the values of the business world. In our version, embezzlement can be prevented by reducing opportunity and by hiring employees or managers who have been adequately socialized to generally accepted values both inside and outside the business world that forbid stealing. A major difference in the theories is found in their assumptions about the nature of white-collar offenders: Cressey's theory assumes that embezzlers are a representative sample of white-collar workers; our theory assumes that embezzlers will turn out to have been involved in other crimes as well. Full explication of this issue must await our discussion of low self-control in Chapter 5.

Drugs and Alcohol

The correlation between the use of drugs, alcohol, or tobacco and the commission of delinquent and criminal acts is well established. According to Ronald Akers, "compared to the abstaining teenager, the drinking, smoking, and drug taking teen is much more likely to be getting into fights, stealing, hurting other people, and committing other delinquencies" (1984: 41; see also Hirschi 1969; Kandel 1978; Johnston, Bachman, and O'Malley 1978; Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis 1981). It is also established that national trends in drug use parallel those for all other crimes. Thus rates of drug use peaked in about 1980 and have held steady or declined subsequently, a pattern describing the crime rate as well.

Despite this decline, the use of some drugs remains widespread in American society. For example, among high school seniors of both sexes graduating in 1983, 69 percent reported using alcohol in the previous 30 days; 30 percent reported having smoked cigarettes; 27 percent reported using marijuana; and 5 percent reported using cocaine (Johnston, O'Malley, and Bachman 1984).

Drug and alcohol use account for much of the activity of the criminal justice system. In the early 1980's, there were annually more than one million arrests for drunkenness, one and a half million arrests for driving under the influence, half a million arrests for drug abuse, and nearly half a million arrests for liquor law violations. Not included in this compilation are arrests for more serious offenses where the offender had been consuming drugs or alcohol prior to or during the offense.

Drug and alcohol use peaks in the early twenties and then declines. Rates of drug use are higher among males than females, but

there has been a tendency toward convergence in recent years, and the differences in use (as opposed to abuse) by gender are not large.

Drug and alcohol use are not universally proscribed by law. Some drugs are, however, proscribed for everyone, and all drugs are proscribed for some people, such as children. The proscription of drugs, it is generally agreed, drives up their price and reduces the rate at which they are consumed. The increase in price that comes with proscription is generally thought to make the sale of drugs an attractive source of income for offenders, and it is thought to cause income-producing crimes by addicts otherwise unable to support their drug habits. Thus the general view in the field has come to be that drugs and crime are related through some economic or cash nexus: because of their high price, drugs cause criminal acts by addicts and are themselves a direct cause of crime as an attractive source of (illegal) income. An additional source of the connection between drugs and crimes alleged in current criminology is found in the idea that they have a common cause in peer pressure or adolescent values.

In the first view, the connection between drugs and crime would disappear were drugs legal and (therefore) cheap. In the second view, there is also no *inherent* connection between drugs and crime; in fact, this relation may in some circumstances be positive and in others negative—for example, some criminal subcultures may forbid drug use (compare Cloward and Ohlin 1960 with Elliott, Huizinga, and Ageton 1985). In our view, both of these perspectives are wrong. Crime and drug use are connected because they share features that satisfy the tendencies of criminality. Both provide immediate, easy, and certain short-term pleasure. An additional source of the connection may well be the immediate effect of alcohol on inhibitions that control responses to momentary irritation (Aschaffenberg 1913: 85-86).

Evidence to support our contention is found in the correlation between the use of cheap drugs, such as alcohol and tobacco, and crime (Schoff 1915; Hirschi 1969; Ferri 1897: 117). Our view is also supported by the connection between crime and drugs that do not affect mood or behavior sufficient to cause crime (such as tobacco).

Typical Drug Offenses

In one typical drug offense, a young man consumes a large quantity of alcohol at a friend's house and is stopped on the way home for erratic driving. He is cited for driving under the influence. Typical drug use is, however, a different matter. Some drugs are used repeat-

edly on a daily basis. For example, it is not unusual for smokers to consume 40 or more cigarettes a day, and alcohol and marijuana consumption can occur on a daily basis for heavy users. *Abuse* that occasions calls for wars on drugs is yet another matter. In this context, the drug problem centers on addiction to "hard" drugs by people who must steal or sell drugs to novice users to support their habit.

The Logical Structure of Drug Use

The necessary conditions for drug use are easily identified. There must be a drug that is both attractive and available to the offender, and there must be an offender who is insufficiently restrained. In order to prevent the use of a particular drug, it is necessary to reduce its attractiveness by increasing its economic cost, by reducing its quality, or by increasing awareness of its impact on health. Alternatively, the availability of the drug may be affected by interfering with its production, sale, or distribution. Finally, drug use may be prevented by reducing the number of people who tend toward criminality.

Events Theoretically Equivalent to Crime

Crimes result from the pursuit of immediate, certain, easy benefits. Some noncriminal events appear to result from pursuit of the same kinds of benefits. As a result, these noncriminal events are correlated with crime, and examination of them can help elucidate the nature of crime and criminality.

One class of events analogous to crimes is accidents. Accidents are not ordinarily seen as producing benefits. On the contrary, they are by definition costly, and their long-term costs may be substantial. However, examination of the correlates of accidents and the circumstances under which they occur suggests that they have much in common with crimes. For example, motor vehicle accidents tend to be associated with speed, drinking, tail-gating, inattention, risk-taking, defective equipment, and young males. House fires tend to be associated with smoking, drinking, number of children, and defective equipment.

Distinctions Among Crimes

There is nothing more deeply ingrained in the common sense of criminology than the idea that not all crimes are alike. This common-sense criminology distinguishes between trivial and serious crimes

(e.g., Elliott, Huizinga, and Ageton 1985; Wilson and Herrnstein 1985), between instrumental and expressive crimes (Chambliss 1969), between status offenses and delinquency, between victim and victimless crimes (Morris and Hawkins 1970), between crimes *mala in se* and crimes *mala prohibita*, and, most important, between person and property crimes. As should be clear by now, our theory regards all of these distinctions as irrelevant or misleading. Let us briefly examine trivial versus serious crimes here.

Criminologists operate as though there must be a difference in etiology between trivial crimes and serious crimes, but drawing the distinction between these events (and/or people) is difficult, as the following quotation illustrates:

By looking mainly at serious crimes, we escape the problem of comparing persons who park by a fire hydrant to persons who rob banks. . . . If we propose to confine our attention to persons who commit serious crimes at high rates, then we must specify what we mean by 'serious.' . . . [T]his book will chiefly refer to aggressive, violent, or larcenous behavior; [the arguments] will be, for the most part, about persons who hit, rape, murder, steal, and threaten. . . . But there is an advantage to this emphasis on predatory crime. Such behavior . . . is condemned, in all societies and in all historical periods, by ancient tradition, moral sentiments, and formal law. . . . By drawing on empirical studies of behaviors that are universally regarded as wrong . . . we can be confident that we are in fact theorizing about *crime* and human nature and not about actions that people may or may not think are wrong. [Wilson and Herrnstein 1985: 21-23]

Inspection of this statement reveals that it does several things. First, it implies that it is somehow useful to study bank robbers separately from parking violators, a theoretical assertion that is problematic and empirically doubtful. (After all, it is at least arguable that persons who park illegally in front of fire hydrants may share characteristics with people who rob banks, such as a lack of concern for the interest of others and a disregard for the consequences of one's acts.)

Second, it implies that serious criminal acts somehow require causes of commensurate seriousness, that dastardly acts tell us more about human nature (or, for other theorists, about the structure of society) than acts of little consequence. As we have shown, there is no justification for this assumption in logic or fact. Murder may be among the least motivated, least deliberate, and least consequential (for the offender) crime. Shoplifting may be among the most.

Third, it implies specialization among offenders that does not exist. The idea of specialization in serious or petty crime is perhaps the least defensible of all specialization theories.

Fourth, it implies that there is something of etiological significance in the distinction between crimes that are fully executed and those that are not. Reasons that serious crimes go awry include poor aim (of the gun meant to kill the clerk), mistaking baking soda for cocaine, being beaten up by the person assaulted, stealing \$49 instead of \$51, and so on.

These distinctions are of obvious importance for the criminal law, which must draw the line between a sheep and a lamb in order to promote marginal deterrence, but they are of little importance to a theory of etiology. That is, the law seeks to persuade would-be armed robbers not to carry a gun by reducing penalties for unarmed robbery. But the criminal law assumes that the same theory (deterrence) applies equally to armed and unarmed robbery. Put another way, the law does not see different causes operating on events depending on their legal seriousness. In this respect, the criminal law is far ahead of crime theories that classify criminal events in terms of adventitious or extraneous properties.

On reflection, all of the distinctions between crimes listed above have been covered in our discussion of specific crimes recognized by the criminal law. We have examined person and property crimes, crimes *mala in se* and *mala prohibita*, victim and victimless crimes, status offenses and delinquencies, and instrumental and expressive crimes. In no case have we found it theoretically necessary or useful to classify a particular criminal event in these terms. As will be evident, these distinctions fare even worse when we focus on the offender rather than on the offense.

II

CRIMINALITY

tant to stress that the disciplinary source of such causes is irrelevant to the explanatory scheme and that there is in this scheme no distinction between choice theories and theories that rely on scientific notions of causal analysis. Indeed, the methods of positivism are fully applicable to such theories. All that is missing from them is the misguided notion that science favors particular substantive theories of human behavior and the equally misguided notion that specific causes belong to specific disciplines.

5

The Nature of Criminality: Low Self-Control

Theories of crime lead naturally to interest in the propensities of individuals committing criminal acts. These propensities are often labeled "criminality." In pure classical theory, people committing criminal acts had no special propensities. They merely followed the universal tendency to enhance their own pleasure. If they differed from noncriminals, it was with respect to their location in or comprehension of relevant sanction systems. For example, the individual cut off from the community will suffer less than others from the ostracism that follows crime; the individual unaware of the natural or legal consequences of criminal behavior cannot be controlled by these consequences to the degree that people aware of them are controlled; the atheist will not be as concerned as the believer about penalties to be exacted in a life beyond death. Classical theories on the whole, then, are today called *control* theories, theories emphasizing the prevention of crime through consequences painful to the individual.

Although, for policy purposes, classical theorists emphasized legal consequences, the importance to them of moral sanctions is so obvious that their theories might well be called underdeveloped *social control* theories. In fact, Bentham's list of the major restraining motives—motives acting to prevent mischievous acts—begins with goodwill, love of reputation, and the desire for amity (1970: 134–36). He goes on to say that fear of detection prevents crime in large part because of detection's consequences for "reputation, and the desire for amity" (p. 138). Put another way, in Bentham's view, the restraining power of legal sanctions in large part stems from their connection to social sanctions.

If crime is evidence of the weakness of social motives, it follows that criminals are less social than noncriminals and that the extent of their asociality may be determined by the nature and number of their crimes. Calculation of the extent of an individual's mischievousness is a complex affair, but in general the more mischievous or depraved the offenses, and the greater their number, the more mischievous or depraved the offender (Bentham 1970: 134-42). (Classical theorists thus had reason to be interested in the seriousness of the offense. The relevance of seriousness to current theories of crime is not so clear.)

Because classical or control theories infer that offenders are not restrained by social motives, it is common to think of them as emphasizing an asocial human nature. Actually, such theories make people only as asocial as their acts require. Pure or consistent control theories do not add criminality (i.e., personality concepts or attributes such as "aggressiveness" or "extraversion") to individuals beyond that found in their criminal acts. As a result, control theories are suspicious of images of an antisocial, psychopathic, or career offender, or of an offender whose motives to crime are somehow larger than those given in the crimes themselves. Indeed, control theories are compatible with the view that the balance of the total control structure favors conformity, even among offenders:

For in every man, be his disposition ever so depraved, the social motives are those which . . . regulate and determine the general tenor of his life. . . . The general and standing bias of every man's nature is, therefore, towards that side to which the force of the social motives would determine him to adhere. This being the case, the force of the social motives tends continually to put an end to that of the dissocial ones; as, in natural bodies, the force of friction tends to put an end to that which is generated by impulse. Time, then, which wears away the force of the dissocial motives, adds to that of the social. [Bentham 1970: 141]

Positivism brought with it the idea that criminals differ from noncriminals in ways more radical than this, the idea that criminals carry within themselves properties peculiarly and positively conducive to crime. In Chapters 3 and 4, we examined the efforts of the major disciplines to identify these properties. Being friendly to both the classical and positivist traditions, we expected to end up with a list of individual properties reliably identified by competent research as useful in the description of "criminality"—such properties as aggressiveness, body build, activity level, and intelligence. We further expected that we would be able to connect these individual-level correlates of criminality directly to the classical idea of crime. As our review progressed, however, we were forced to conclude that we had overesti-

mated the success of positivism in establishing important differences between "criminals" and "noncriminals" beyond their tendency to commit criminal acts. Stable individual differences in the tendency to commit criminal acts were clearly evident, but many or even most of the other differences between offenders and nonoffenders were not as clear or pronounced as our reading of the literature had led us to expect.¹

If individual differences in the tendency to commit criminal acts (within an overall tendency for crime to decline with age) are at least potentially explicable within classical theory by reference to the social location of individuals and their comprehension of how the world works, the fact remains that classical theory cannot shed much light on the positivistic finding (denied by most positivistic theories, as pointed out in Chapters 3 and 4) that these differences *remain reasonably stable with change in the social location of individuals and change in their knowledge of the operation of sanction systems*. This is the problem of self-control, the differential tendency of people to avoid criminal acts whatever the circumstances in which they find themselves. Since this difference among people has attracted a variety of names, we begin by arguing the merits of the concept of self-control.

Self-Control and Alternative Concepts

Our decision to ascribe stable individual differences in criminal behavior to self-control was made only after considering several alternatives, one of which (criminality) we had used before (Hirschi and Gottfredson 1986). A major consideration was consistency between the classical conception of crime and our conception of the criminal. It seemed unwise to try to integrate a choice theory of crime with a deterministic image of the offender, especially when such integration was unnecessary. In fact, the compatibility of the classical view of crime and the idea that people differ in self-control is, in our view, remarkable. As we have seen, classical theory is a theory of social or external control, a theory based on the idea that the costs of crime depend on the individual's current location in or bond to society. What classical theory lacks is an explicit idea of self-control, the idea that people also differ in the extent to which they are vulnerable to the temptations of the moment. Combining the two ideas thus

¹We do not mean to imply that stable individual differences between offenders and nonoffenders are nonexistent. The fact of the matter is, however, that substantial evidence documenting individual differences is not as clear to us as it appears to be to others. The evidence on intelligence is an exception. Here differences favoring nonoffenders have been abundantly documented (cf. Wilson and Herrnstein 1985).

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generally recognizes the simultaneous existence of social and individual restraints on behavior.

An obvious alternative is the concept of criminality. The disadvantages of that concept, however, are numerous. First, it connotes causation or determinism, a positive tendency to crime that is contrary to the classical model and, in our view, contrary to the facts. Whereas self-control suggests that people differ in the extent to which they are restrained from criminal acts, criminality suggests that people differ in the extent to which they are compelled to crime. The concept of self-control is thus consistent with the observation that criminals do not require or need crime, and the concept of criminality is inconsistent with this observation. By the same token, the idea of low self-control is compatible with the observation that criminal acts require no special capabilities, needs, or motivation; they are, in this sense, available to everyone. In contrast, the idea of criminality as a special tendency suggests that criminal acts require special people for their performance and enjoyment. Finally, lack of restraint or low self-control allows almost any deviant, criminal, exciting, or dangerous act; in contrast, the idea of criminality covers only a narrow portion of the apparently diverse acts engaged in by people at one end of the dimension we are now discussing.

The concept of conscience comes closer than criminality to self-control, and is harder to distinguish from it. Unfortunately, that concept has connotations of compulsion (to conformity) not, strictly speaking, consistent with a choice model (or with the operation of conscience). It does not seem to cover the behaviors analogous to crime that appear to be controlled by natural sanctions rather than social or moral sanctions, and in the end it typically refers to how people feel about their acts rather than to the likelihood that they will or will not commit them. Thus accidents and employment instability are not usually seen as produced by failures of conscience, and writers in the conscience tradition do not typically make the connection between moral and prudent behavior. Finally, conscience is used primarily to summarize the results of learning via negative reinforcement, and even those favorably disposed to its use have little more to say about it (see, e.g., Eysenck 1977; Wilson and Herrnstein 1985).

We are now in position to describe the nature of self-control, the individual characteristic relevant to the commission of criminal acts. We assume that the nature of this characteristic can be derived directly from the nature of criminal acts. We thus infer from the nature of crime what people who refrain from criminal acts are like before

they reach the age at which crime becomes a logical possibility. We then work back further to the factors producing their restraint, back to the causes of self-control. In our view, lack of self-control does not require crime and can be counteracted by situational conditions or other properties of the individual. At the same time, we suggest that high self-control effectively reduces the possibility of crime—that is, those possessing it will be substantially less likely at all periods of life to engage in criminal acts.

The Elements of Self-Control

Criminal acts provide *immediate* gratification of desires. A major characteristic of people with low self-control is therefore a tendency to respond to tangible stimuli in the immediate environment, to have a concrete "here and now" orientation. People with high self-control, in contrast, tend to defer gratification.

Criminal acts provide *easy or simple* gratification of desires. They provide money without work, sex without courtship, revenge without court delays. People lacking self-control also tend to lack diligence, tenacity, or persistence in a course of action.

Criminal acts are *exciting, risky, or thrilling*. They involve stealth, danger, speed, agility, deception, or power. People lacking self-control therefore tend to be adventuresome, active, and physical. Those with high levels of self-control tend to be cautious, cognitive, and verbal.

Crimes provide *few or meager long-term benefits*. They are not equivalent to a job or a career. On the contrary, crimes interfere with long-term commitments to jobs, marriages, family, or friends. People with low self-control thus tend to have unstable marriages, friendships, and job profiles. They tend to be little interested in and unprepared for long-term occupational pursuits.

Crimes require *little skill or planning*. The cognitive requirements for most crimes are minimal. It follows that people lacking self-control need not possess or value cognitive or academic skills. The manual skills required for most crimes are minimal. It follows that people lacking self-control need not possess manual skills that require training or apprenticeship.

Crimes often result in *pain or discomfort for the victim*. Property is lost, bodies are injured, privacy is violated, trust is broken. It follows that people with low self-control tend to be self-centered, indifferent, or insensitive to the suffering and needs of others. It does not follow, however, that people with low self-control are routinely unkind or

onset, persistence, and desistance in the career of offenses or offenders. These efforts survive largely because their proponents fail to consider or acknowledge the clear evidence to the contrary. Other reasons for survival of such ideas may be found in the interest of politicians and members of the law enforcement community who see policy potential in criminal careers or "career criminals" (see, e.g., Blumstein et al. 1986).

Occasional reports of specialization seem to contradict this point, as do everyday observations of repetitive misbehavior by particular offenders. Some offenders rob the same store repeatedly over a period of years, or an offender commits several rapes over a (brief) period of time. Such offenders may be called "robbers" or "rapists." However, it should be noted that such labels are retrospective rather than predictive and that they typically ignore a large amount of delinquent or criminal behavior by the same offenders that is inconsistent with their alleged specialty. Thus, for example, the "rapist" will tend also to use drugs, to commit robberies and burglaries (often in concert with the rape), and to have a record for violent offenses other than rape. There is a perhaps natural tendency on the part of observers (and in official accounts) to focus on the most serious crimes in a series of events, but this tendency should not be confused with a tendency on the part of the offender to specialize in one kind of crime.

Recall that one of the defining features of crime is that it is simple and easy. Some apparent specialization will therefore occur because obvious opportunities for an easy score will tend to repeat themselves. An offender who lives next to a shopping area that is approached by pedestrians will have repeat opportunities for purse snatching, and this may show in his arrest record. But even here the specific "criminal career" will tend to quickly run its course and to be followed by offenses whose content and character is likewise determined by convenience and opportunity (which is the reason why some form of theft is always the best bet about what a person is likely to do next).

The evidence that offenders are likely to engage in noncriminal acts psychologically or theoretically equivalent to crime is, because of the relatively high rates of these "noncriminal" acts, even easier to document. Thieves are likely to smoke, drink, and skip school at considerably higher rates than nonthieves. Offenders are considerably more likely than nonoffenders to be involved in most types of accidents, including household fires, auto crashes, and unwanted pregnancies. They are also considerably more likely to die at an early age (see, e.g., Robins 1966; Eysenck 1977; Gottfredson 1984).

Good research on drug use and abuse routinely reveals that the correlates of delinquency and drug use are the same. As Akers (1984) has noted, "compared to the abstaining teenager, the drinking, smoking, and drug-taking teen is much more likely to be getting into fights, stealing, hurting other people, and committing other delinquencies." Akers goes on to say, "but the variation in the order in which they take up these things leaves little basis for proposing the causation of one by the other." In our view, the relation between drug use and delinquency is not a causal question. The correlates are the same because drug use and delinquency are both manifestations of an underlying tendency to pursue short-term, immediate pleasure. This underlying tendency (i.e., lack of self-control) has many manifestations, as listed by Harrison Gough (1948):

unconcern over the rights and privileges of others when recognizing them would interfere with personal satisfaction in any way; impulsive behavior, or apparent incongruity between the strength of the stimulus and the magnitude of the behavioral response; inability to form deep or persistent attachments to other persons or to identify in interpersonal relationships; poor judgment and planning in attaining defined goals; apparent lack of anxiety and distress over social maladjustment and unwillingness or inability to consider maladjustment qua maladjustment; a tendency to project blame onto others and to take no responsibility for failures; meaningless prevarication, often about trivial matters in situations where detection is inevitable; almost complete lack of dependability . . . and willingness to assume responsibility; and, finally, emotional poverty. [p. 362]

This combination of characteristics has been revealed in the life histories of the subjects in the famous studies by Lee Robins. Robins is one of the few researchers to focus on the varieties of deviance and the way they tend to go together in the lives of those she designates as having "antisocial personalities." In her words: "We refer to someone who fails to maintain close personal relationships with anyone else, [who] performs poorly on the job, who is involved in illegal behaviors (whether or not apprehended), who fails to support himself and his dependents without outside aid, and who is given to sudden changes of plan and loss of temper in response to what appear to others as minor frustrations" (1978: 255).

For 30 years Robins traced 524 children referred to a guidance clinic in St. Louis, Missouri, and she compared them to a control group matched on IQ, age, sex, and area of the city. She discovered that, in comparison to the control group, those people referred at an early age were more likely to be arrested as adults (for a wide variety of offenses), were less likely to get married, were more likely to be divorced, were more likely to marry a spouse with a behavior problem,

were less likely to have children (but if they had children were likely to have more children), were more likely to have children with behavior problems, were more likely to be unemployed, had considerably more frequent job changes, were more likely to be on welfare, had fewer contacts with relatives, had fewer friends, were substantially less likely to attend church, were less likely to serve in the armed forces and more likely to be dishonorably discharged if they did serve, were more likely to exhibit physical evidence of excessive alcohol use, and were more likely to be hospitalized for psychiatric problems (1966: 42-73).

Note that these outcomes are consistent with four general elements of our notion of low self-control: basic stability of individual differences over a long period of time; great variability in the kinds of criminal acts engaged in; conceptual or causal equivalence of criminal and non-criminal acts; and inability to predict the specific forms of deviance engaged in, whether criminal or noncriminal. In our view, the idea of an antisocial personality defined by certain behavioral consequences is too positivistic or deterministic, suggesting that the offender must do certain things given his antisocial personality. Thus we would say only that the subjects in question are *more likely* to commit criminal acts (as the data indicate they are). We do not make commission of criminal acts part of the definition of the individual with low self-control.

Be this as it may, Robins's retrospective research shows that predictions derived from a concept of antisocial personality are highly consistent with the results of prospective longitudinal and cross-sectional research: offenders do not specialize; they tend to be involved in accidents, illness, and death at higher rates than the general population; they tend to have difficulty persisting in a job regardless of the particular characteristics of the job (no job will turn out to be a good job); they have difficulty acquiring and retaining friends; and they have difficulty meeting the demands of long-term financial commitments (such as mortgages or car payments) and the demands of parenting.

Seen in this light, the "costs" of low self-control for the individual may far exceed the costs of his criminal acts. In fact, it appears that crime is often among the least serious consequences of a lack of self-control in terms of the quality of life of those lacking it.

The Causes of Self-Control

We know better what deficiencies in self-control lead to than where they come from. One thing is, however, clear: low self-control is not

produced by training, tutelage, or socialization. As a matter of fact, all of the characteristics associated with low self-control tend to show themselves in the absence of nurturance, discipline, or training. Given the classical appreciation of the causes of human behavior, the implications of this fact are straightforward: the causes of low self-control are negative rather than positive; self-control is unlikely in the absence of effort, intended or unintended, to create it. (This assumption separates the present theory from most modern theories of crime, where the offender is automatically seen as a product of positive forces, a creature of learning, particular pressures, or specific defect. We will return to this comparison once our theory has been fully explicated.)

At this point it would be easy to construct a theory of crime causation, according to which characteristics of potential offenders lead them ineluctably to the commission of criminal acts. Our task at this point would simply be to identify the likely sources of impulsiveness, intelligence, risk-taking, and the like. But to do so would be to follow the path that has proven so unproductive in the past, the path according to which criminals commit crimes irrespective of the characteristics of the setting or situation.

We can avoid this pitfall by recalling the elements inherent in the decision to commit a criminal act. The object of the offense is clearly pleasurable, and universally so. Engaging in the act, however, entails some risk of social, legal, and/or natural sanctions. Whereas the pleasure attained by the act is direct, obvious, and immediate, the pains risked by it are not obvious, or direct, and are in any event at greater remove from it. It follows that, though there will be little variability among people in their ability to see the pleasures of crime, there will be considerable variability in their ability to calculate potential pains. But the problem goes further than this: whereas the pleasures of crime are reasonably equally distributed over the population, this is not true for the pains. Everyone appreciates money; not everyone dreads parental anger or disappointment upon learning that the money was stolen.

So, the dimensions of self-control are, in our view, factors affecting calculation of the consequences of one's acts. The impulsive or short-sighted person fails to consider the negative or painful consequences of his acts; the insensitive person has fewer negative consequences to consider; the less intelligent person also has fewer negative consequences to consider (has less to lose).

No known social group, whether criminal or noncriminal, actively or purposefully attempts to reduce the self-control of its members.

Social life is not enhanced by low self-control and its consequences. On the contrary, the exhibition of these tendencies undermines harmonious group relations and the ability to achieve collective ends. These facts explicitly deny that a tendency to crime is a product of socialization, culture, or positive learning of any sort.

The traits composing low self-control are also not conducive to the achievement of long-term individual goals. On the contrary, they impede educational and occupational achievement, destroy interpersonal relations, and undermine physical health and economic well-being. Such facts explicitly deny the notion that criminality is an alternative route to the goals otherwise obtainable through legitimate avenues. It follows that people who care about the interpersonal skill, educational and occupational achievement, and physical and economic well-being of those in their care will seek to rid them of these traits.

Two general sources of variation are immediately apparent in this scheme. The first is the variation among children in the degree to which they manifest such traits to begin with. The second is the variation among caretakers in the degree to which they recognize low self-control and its consequences and the degree to which they are willing and able to correct it. Obviously, therefore, even at this threshold level the sources of low self-control are complex.

There is good evidence that some of the traits predicting subsequent involvement in crime appear as early as they can be reliably measured, including low intelligence, high activity level, physical strength, and adventuresomeness (Glueck and Glueck 1950; West and Farrington 1973). The evidence suggests that the connection between these traits and commission of criminal acts ranges from weak to moderate. Obviously, we do not suggest that people are born criminals, inherit a gene for criminality, or anything of the sort. In fact, we explicitly deny such notions (see Chapter 3). What we do suggest is that individual differences may have an impact on the prospects for effective socialization (or adequate control). Effective socialization is, however, always possible whatever the configuration of individual traits.

Other traits affecting crime appear later and seem to be largely products of ineffective or incomplete socialization. For example, differences in impulsivity and insensitivity become noticeable later in childhood when they are no longer common to all children. The ability and willingness to delay immediate gratification for some larger purpose may therefore be assumed to be a consequence of training. Much parental action is in fact geared toward suppression of impulsive behavior, toward making the child consider the long-range

consequences of acts. Consistent sensitivity to the needs and feelings of others may also be assumed to be a consequence of training. Indeed, much parental behavior is directed toward teaching the child about the rights and feelings of others, and of how these rights and feelings ought to constrain the child's behavior. All of these points focus our attention on child-rearing.

Child-Rearing and Self-Control: The Family

The major "cause" of low self-control thus appears to be ineffective child-rearing. Put in positive terms, several conditions appear necessary to produce a socialized child. Perhaps the place to begin looking for these conditions is the research literature on the relation between family conditions and delinquency. This research (e.g., Glueck and Glueck 1950; McCord and McCord 1959) has examined the connection between many family factors and delinquency. It reports that discipline, supervision, and affection tend to be missing in the homes of delinquents, that the behavior of the parents is often "poor" (e.g., excessive drinking and poor supervision [Glueck and Glueck 1950: 110-11]); and that the parents of delinquents are unusually likely to have criminal records themselves. Indeed, according to Michael Rutter and Henri Giller, "of the parental characteristics associated with delinquency, criminality is the most striking and most consistent" (1984: 182).

Such information undermines the many explanations of crime that ignore the family, but in this form it does not represent much of an advance over the belief of the general public (and those who deal with offenders in the criminal justice system) that "defective upbringing" or "neglect" in the home is the primary cause of crime.

To put these standard research findings in perspective, we think it necessary to define the conditions necessary for adequate child-rearing to occur. The minimum conditions seem to be these: in order to teach the child self-control, someone must (1) monitor the child's behavior; (2) recognize deviant behavior when it occurs; and (3) punish such behavior. This seems simple and obvious enough. All that is required to activate the system is affection for or investment in the child. The person who cares for the child will watch his behavior, see him doing things he should not do, and correct him. The result may be a child more capable of delaying gratification, more sensitive to the interests and desires of others, more independent, more willing to accept restraints on his activity, and more unlikely to use force or violence to attain his ends.

When we seek the causes of low self-control, we ask where this system can go wrong. Obviously, parents do not prefer their children to be unsocialized in the terms described. We can therefore rule out in advance the possibility of positive socialization to unsocialized behavior (as cultural or subcultural deviance theories suggest). Still, the system can go wrong at any one of four places. First, the parents may not care for the child (in which case none of the other conditions would be met); second, the parents, even if they care, may not have the time or energy to monitor the child's behavior; third, the parents, even if they care and monitor, may not see anything wrong with the child's behavior; finally, even if everything else is in place, the parents may not have the inclination or the means to punish the child. So, what may appear at first glance to be nonproblematic turns out to be problematic indeed. Many things can go wrong. According to much research in crime and delinquency, in the homes of problem children many things have gone wrong: "Parents of stealers do not track ([they] do not interpret stealing . . . as 'deviant'); they do not punish; and they do not care" (Patterson 1980: 88-89; see also Glueck and Glueck 1950; McCord and McCord 1959; West and Farrington 1977).

Let us apply this scheme to some of the facts about the connection between child socialization and crime, beginning with the elements of the child-rearing model.

The Attachment of the Parent to the Child

Our model states that parental concern for the welfare or behavior of the child is a necessary condition for successful child-rearing. Because it is too often assumed that all parents are alike in their love for their children, the evidence directly on this point is not as good or extensive as it could be. However, what exists is clearly consistent with the model. Glueck and Glueck (1950: 125-28) report that, compared to the fathers of delinquents, fathers of nondelinquents were twice as likely to be warmly disposed toward their sons and one-fifth as likely to be hostile toward them. In the same sample, 28 percent of the mothers of delinquents were characterized as "indifferent or hostile" toward the child as compared to 4 percent of the mothers of nondelinquents. The evidence suggests that stepparents are especially unlikely to have feelings of affection toward their stepchildren (Burgess 1980), adding in contemporary society to the likelihood that children will be "reared" by people who do not especially care for them.

Parental Supervision

The connection between social control and self-control could not be more direct than in the case of parental supervision of the child. Such supervision presumably prevents criminal or analogous acts and at the same time trains the child to avoid them on his own. Consistent with this assumption, supervision tends to be a major predictor of delinquency, however supervision or delinquency is measured (Glueck and Glueck 1950; Hirschi 1969; West and Farrington 1977; Riley and Shaw 1985).

Our general theory in principle provides a method of separating supervision as external control from supervision as internal control. For one thing, offenses differ in the degree to which they can be prevented through monitoring; children at one age are monitored much more closely than children at other ages; girls are supervised more closely than boys. In some situations, monitoring is universal or nearly constant; in other situations monitoring for some offenses is virtually absent. In the present context, however, the concern is with the connection between supervision and self-control, a connection established by the stronger tendency of those poorly supervised when young to commit crimes as adults (McCord 1979).

Recognition of Deviant Behavior

In order for supervision to have an impact on self-control, the supervisor must perceive deviant behavior when it occurs. Remarkably, not all parents are adept at recognizing lack of self-control. Some parents allow the child to do pretty much as he pleases without interference. Extensive television-viewing is one modern example, as is the failure to require completion of homework, to prohibit smoking, to curtail the use of physical force, or to see to it that the child actually attends school. (As noted, truancy among second-graders presumably reflects on the adequacy of parental awareness of the child's misbehavior.) Again, the research is not as good as it should be, but evidence of "poor conduct standards" in the homes of delinquents is common.

Punishment of Deviant Acts

Control theories explicitly acknowledge the necessity of sanctions in preventing criminal behavior. They do not suggest that the major sanctions are legal or corporal. On the contrary, as we have seen, they suggest that disapproval by people one cares about is the most pow-

erful of sanctions. Effective punishment by the parent or major caretaker therefore usually entails nothing more than explicit disapproval of unwanted behavior. The criticism of control theories that dwells on their alleged cruelty is therefore simply misguided or ill informed (see, e.g., Currie 1985).

Not all caretakers punish effectively. In fact, some are too harsh and some are too lenient (Glueck and Glueck 1950; McCord and McCord 1959; West and Farrington 1977; see generally Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber 1986). Given our model, however, rewarding good behavior cannot compensate for failure to correct deviant behavior. (Recall that, in our view, deviant acts carry with them their own rewards [see Chapter 2].)

Given the consistency of the child-rearing model with our general theory and with the research literature, it should be possible to use it to explain other family correlates of criminal and otherwise deviant behavior.

Parental Criminality

Our theory focuses on the connection between the self-control of the parent and the subsequent self-control of the child. There is good reason to expect, and the data confirm, that people lacking self-control do not socialize their children well. According to Donald West and David Farrington, "the fact that delinquency is transmitted from one generation to the next is indisputable" (1977: 109; see also Robins 1966). Of course our theory does not allow transmission of criminality, genetic or otherwise. However, it does allow us to predict that some people are more likely than others to fail to socialize their children and that this will be a consequence of their own inadequate socialization. The extent of this connection between parent and child socialization is revealed by the fact that in the West and Farrington study fewer than 5 percent of the families accounted for almost half of the criminal convictions in the entire sample. (In our view, this finding is more important for the theory of crime, and for public policy, than the much better-known finding of Wolfgang and his colleagues [1972] that something like 6 percent of *individual* offenders account for about half of all criminal acts.) In order to achieve such concentration of crime in a small number of families, it is necessary that the parents and the brothers and sisters of offenders also be unusually likely to commit criminal acts.²

²It is commonly observed (in an unsystematic way) that in an otherwise law-abiding family individual children are seriously delinquent. This observation is taken as evi-

Why should the children of offenders be unusually vulnerable to crime? Recall that our theory assumes that criminality is not something the parents have to work to produce; on the contrary, it assumes that criminality is something they have to work to avoid. Consistent with this view, parents with criminal records do *not* encourage crime in their children and are in fact as disapproving of it as parents with no record of criminal involvement (West and Farrington 1977). Of course, not wanting criminal behavior in one's children and being upset when it occurs do not necessarily imply that great effort has been expended to prevent it. If criminal behavior is oriented toward short-term rewards, and if child-rearing is oriented toward long-term rewards, there is little reason to expect parents themselves lacking self-control to be particularly adept at instilling self-control in their children.

Consistent with this expectation, research consistently indicates that the supervision of delinquents in families where parents have criminal records tends to be "lax," "inadequate," or "poor." Punishment in these families also tends to be easy, short-term, and insensitive—that is, yelling and screaming, slapping and hitting, with threats that are not carried out.

Such facts do not, however, completely account for the concentration of criminality among some families. A major reason for this failure is probably that the most subtle element of child-rearing is not included in the analysis. This is the element of *recognition* of deviant behavior. According to Gerald Patterson (1980), many parents do not even recognize *criminal* behavior in their children, let alone the minor forms of deviance whose punishment is necessary for effective child-rearing. For example, when children steal outside the home, some parents discount reports that they have done so on the grounds that the charges are unproved and cannot therefore be used to justify punishment. By the same token, when children are suspended for misbehavior at school, some parents side with the child and blame the episode on prejudicial mistreatment by teachers. Obviously, parents who cannot see the misbehavior of their children are in no position to correct it, even if they are inclined to do so.

Given that recognition of deviant acts is a necessary component of the child-rearing model, research is needed on the question of what

dence against family or child-rearing explanations of crime. (If the parents reared most of their children properly, how can their child-rearing practices be responsible for their delinquent children as well?) Such observations do not dispute the strong tendencies toward consistency within families mentioned in the text. They do suggest that family child-rearing practices are not the only causes of crime.

parents should and should not recognize as deviant behavior if they are to prevent criminality. To the extent our theory is correct, parents need to know behaviors that reflect low self-control. That many parents are not now attentive to such behaviors should come as no surprise. The idea that criminal behavior is the product of deprivation or positive learning dominates modern theory. As a consequence, most influential social scientific theories of crime and delinquency ignore or deny the connection between crime and talking back, yelling, pushing and shoving, insisting on getting one's way, trouble in school, and poor school performance. Little wonder, then, that some parents do not see the significance of such acts. Research now makes it clear that parents differ in their reaction to these behaviors, with some parents attempting to correct behaviors that others ignore or even defend (Patterson 1980). Because social science in general sees little connection between these acts and crime, there has been little systematic integration of the child development and criminological literatures. Furthermore, because the conventional wisdom disputes the connection between child training and crime, public policy has not focused on it. We do not argue that crime is caused by these early misbehaviors. Instead, we argue that such behaviors indicate the presence of the major individual-level cause of crime, a cause that in principle may be attacked by punishing these early manifestations. Nor do we argue that criminal acts automatically follow early evidence of low self-control. Because crime requires more than low self-control, some parents are lucky and have children with low self-control who still manage to avoid acts that would bring them to the attention of the criminal justice system. It is less likely (in fact unlikely), however, that such children will avoid altogether behavior indicative of low self-control. Put another way, low self-control predicts low self-control better than it predicts any of its specific manifestations, such as crime.

Family Size

One of the most consistent findings of delinquency research is that the larger the number of children in the family, the greater the likelihood that each of them will be delinquent. This finding, too, is perfectly explicable from a child-rearing model. Affection for the individual child may be unaffected by numbers, and parents with large families may be as able as anyone else to recognize deviant behavior, but monitoring and punishment are probably more difficult the greater the number of children in the family. Greater numbers strain

parental resources of time and energy. For this reason, the child in the large family is likely to spend more time with other children and less time with adults. Children are not as likely as adults to be effective trainers. They have less investment in the outcome, are more likely to be tolerant of deviant behavior, and do not have the power to enforce their edicts.

If the analysis of criminality of parents and size of family is sufficient to establish the plausibility of our child-rearing explanation, we can now attempt to apply it to some of the more problematic issues in the connection between the family and crime.

The Single-Parent Family

Such family measures as the percentage of the population divorced, the percentage of households headed by women, and the percentage of unattached individuals in the community are among the most powerful predictors of crime rates (Sampson 1987). Consistent with these findings, in most (but not all) studies that directly compare children living with both biological parents with children living in "broken" or reconstituted homes, the children from intact homes have lower rates of crime.

If the fact of a difference between single- and two-parent families is reasonably well established, the mechanisms by which it is produced are not adequately understood. It was once common in the delinquency literature to distinguish between homes broken by divorce and those broken by death. This distinction recognized the difficulty of separating the effects of the people involved in divorce from the effects of divorce itself. Indeed, it is common to find that involuntarily broken homes are less conducive to delinquency than homes in which the parent was a party to the decision to separate.

With the continued popularity of marriage, a possible complication enters the picture. The missing biological parent (in the overwhelming majority of cases, the father) is often replaced at some point by a stepparent. Is the child better or worse off as a result of the presence of an "unrelated" adult in the house?

The model we are using suggests that, *all else being equal*, one parent is sufficient. We could substitute "mother" or "father" for "parents" without any obvious loss in child-rearing ability. Husbands and wives tend to be sufficiently alike on such things as values, attitudes, and skills that for many purposes they may be treated as a unit. For that matter, our scheme does not even require that the adult involved in training the child be his or her guardian, let alone a

biological parent. Proper training can be accomplished outside the confines of the two-parent home.

But all else is rarely equal. The single parent (usually a woman) must devote a good deal to support and maintenance activities that are at least to some extent shared in the two-parent family. Further, she must often do so in the absence of psychological or social support. As a result, she is less able to devote time to monitoring and punishment and is more likely to be involved in negative, abusive contacts with her children.

Remarriage is by no means a complete solution to these problems. As compared to natural parents, stepparents are likely to report that they have no "parental feelings" toward their stepchildren, and they are unusually likely to be involved in cases of child abuse (Burgess 1980). The other side of the coin is the affection of the child for the parent. Such affection is conducive to nondelinquency in its own right and clearly eases the task of child-rearing. Affection is, for obvious reasons, less likely to be felt toward the new parent in a reconstituted family than toward a biological parent in a continuously intact family.

The Mother Who Works Outside the Home

The increase in the number of women in the labor force has several implications for the crime rate. To the extent this increase contributes to the instability of marriage, it will have the consequences for crime just discussed. Traditionally, however, the major concern was that the mother working outside the home would be unable to supervise or effectively rear her children. Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (1950) found that the children of women who work, especially the children of those who work "occasionally" or "sporadically," were more likely to be delinquent. They also showed that the effect on delinquency of the mother's working was completely accounted for by the quality of supervision provided by the mother. (Such complete explanations of one factor by another are extremely rare in social science.) When the mother was able to arrange supervision for the child, her employment had no effect on the likelihood of delinquency. In fact, in this particular study, the children of regularly employed women were least likely to be delinquent when supervision was taken into account. This does not mean, however, that the employment of the mother had no effect. It did have an effect, at least among those in relatively deprived circumstances: the children of employed women were more likely to be delinquent.

More commonly, research reports a small effect of mother's employment that it is unable to explain. The advantage of the nonemployed mother over the employed mother in child-rearing remains when supervision and other characteristics of the mother, the family, and the child are taken into account. One possible implication of this explanatory failure is that the effects of employment influence children in ways not measurable except through their delinquency. One way of addressing this question would be to examine the effect of mother's employment on measures of inadequate self-control other than the commission of criminal acts—such as on accidents or school failure. If we are dealing with a social-control effect rather than a socialization effect, it should be possible to find a subset of deviant behaviors that are more affected than others by mother's employment. Although our scheme does not allow us *a priori* to separate the enduring effects of child "rearing" from the temporary effects of child "control," it alerts us to the fact that self-control and supervision can be the result of a single parental act.

Another consequence of female labor-force participation is that it leaves the house unguarded for large portions of the day. The unoccupied house is less attractive to adolescent members of the family and more attractive to other adolescents interested only in its contents. As we indicated earlier, research shows that the absence of guardians in the home is a good predictor of residential burglary.

Child Rearing and Self-Control: The School

Most people are sufficiently socialized by familial institutions to avoid involvement in criminal acts. Those not socialized sufficiently by the family may eventually learn self-control through the operation of other sanctioning systems or institutions. The institution given principal responsibility for this task in modern society is the school. As compared to the family, the school has several advantages as a socializing institution. First, it can more effectively monitor behavior than the family, with one teacher overseeing many children at a time. Second, as compared to most parents, teachers generally have no difficulty recognizing deviant or disruptive behavior. Third, as compared to the family, the school has such a clear interest in maintaining order and discipline that it can be expected to do what it can to control disruptive behavior. Finally, like the family, the school in theory has the authority and the means to punish lapses in self-control.

All else being equal, it would appear that the school could be an effective socializing agency. The evidence suggests, however, that in

contemporary American society the school has a difficult time teaching self-control. A major reason for this limited success of the modern school appears to stem from the lack of cooperation and support it receives from families that have already failed in the socialization task. When the family does not see to it that the child is in school doing what he or she should be doing, the child's problems in school are often directly traceable to the parents. For example, according to Robins (1966), truancy begins in the first and second grades (and is not, as some assume, solely an adolescent problem). Truancy or absence in the first and second grades can hardly be attributed to the child alone. Whatever the source of such truancy, it is highly predictive of low self-control later in life.

The question, then, is whether inadequate socialization by the family could be corrected by the school if it were given the chance—that is, if the family were cooperative. Robins, whose analyses of the stability of the antisocial personality are not ordinarily optimistic, notes that the school could be used to locate preadolescents with low self-control and that it might be effective in doing what the family has failed to do: "Since truancy and poor school performance are nearly universally present in pre-sociopaths, it should be possible to identify children requiring treatment through their school records. . . . [T]he fact that a gross lack of discipline in the home predicted long-term difficulties suggests trying a program in which the schools attempt to substitute for the missing parental discipline in acting to prevent truancy and school failures" (1966: 306-7).³

Even without parental support, in our view, the net effect of the school must be positive. As a result of the school experience, some students learn better to appreciate the advantages and opportunities associated with self-control and are thus effectively socialized regardless of their familial experiences. One of the major school correlates of crime has always been the mundane homework. Those who do it are by definition thinking about tomorrow. Those who do not do it have a shorter time frame. One mark of socialization is considering the consequences of today's activities for tomorrow. Homework thus indexes and perhaps contributes to socialization.

Another major predictor of crime is not liking school. This connec-

³In subsequent chapters we emphasize the limited power of institutions to create self-control later in life when it has been theretofore lacking. Our theory clearly argues, however, that it is easier to develop self-control among people lacking it than to undermine or destroy self-control among those possessing it. Consistent with this position, the data routinely show that preadolescents without behavior problems rarely end up with significant problems as adults (see, e.g., Robins 1966; Glueck and Glueck 1968).

tion is so strong that the statement "delinquents do not like school" does not require much in the way of qualification (Glueck and Glueck 1950: 144). The connection speaks well for the school as a socializing institution. Socializing institutions impose restraints; they do not allow unfettered pursuit of self-interest; they require accomplishment. Lack of self-control activates external controls, controls that are not applied to or felt by everyone, thus resulting in differences in attitude toward the school.

School performance also strongly predicts involvement in delinquent and criminal activities. Those who do well in school are unlikely to get into trouble with the law. This, too, supports the view of the school as a potentially successful training ground for the development of self-control. Students who like school and do well in it are likely to perceive a successful future and are thus susceptible to school sanctions (Stinchcombe 1964).

The crime and low self-control perspective organizes and explains most facts about the relation between schooling and crime, one of the staples of delinquency research. We will have more to say about the school and crime in later chapters, especially Chapter 6. For now, suffice it to say that self-control differences seem primarily attributable to family socialization practices. It is difficult for subsequent institutions to make up for deficiencies, but socialization is a task that, once successfully accomplished, appears to be largely irreversible.

The Stability Problem

Competent research regularly shows that the best predictor of crime is prior criminal behavior. In other words, research shows that differences between people in the likelihood that they will commit criminal acts persist over time.⁴ This fact is central to our conception of criminality. In the next chapter we show how it calls into question the many theories of crime that depend on social institutions to create criminals from previously law-abiding citizens. For now, we briefly reconcile the fact of stability with the idea that desocialization is rare.

Combining little or no movement from high self-control to low self-control with the fact that socialization continues to occur throughout life produces the conclusion that the proportion of the population in the potential offender pool should tend to decline as cohorts age. This conclusion is consistent with research. Even the most active offenders burn out with time, and the documented number of "late-

⁴We described the research documenting the stability of "aggression" in Chapter 3, and the research documenting the stability of "criminality" is discussed at length in Chapter 11 in reference to methodologies for studying crime and criminality.

comers" to crime, or "good boys gone bad," is sufficiently small to suggest that they may be accounted for in large part by misidentification or measurement error. (This result is also consistent with Bentham's theory in that all sanction systems work against the possibility of lengthy careers in crime.) Put another way, the low self-control group continues over time to exhibit low self-control. Its size, however, declines.

Such stability of criminality is a staple of pragmatic criminology. The criminal justice system uses this fact in much the same way that educational institutions use prior academic performance to sort students and select personnel—that is, without much concern for the meaning of the variable. (A variant of the pragmatic response seeks to identify career criminals or high-rate offenders and thereby refine selection decisions, but here too nothing is usually said about what it is that produces long-standing differences in the level of involvement in crime [Blumstein et al. 1986].)

The traditional theoretical response denies stability and constructs theories that do not deal with "individual-level" variables. These theories automatically suggest that the causes of the "onset" of crime are not the same as the causes of "persistence" in crime. They also suggest that "desistance" from crime has unique causes. On analysis, however, most criminological theories appear to deal with onset and remain agnostic or silent on the persistence and desistance issues.

Thus no currently popular criminological theory attends to the stability of differences in offending over the life course. We are left with a paradoxical situation: a major finding of criminological research is routinely ignored or denied by criminological theory. After a century of research, crime theories remain inattentive to the fact that people differ in the likelihood that they will commit crimes and that these differences appear early and remain stable over much of the life course. Perhaps a major reason for ignoring the stability of low self-control is the assumption that other individual traits are stable and thereby account for apparently stable differences in criminal behavior. These are the so-called personality explanations of crime.

Personality and Criminality

Sociological criminology takes the position that no trait of personality has been shown to characterize criminals more than noncriminals (Sutherland and Cressey 1978: ch. 8). Psychological criminology takes the position that many personality traits have been shown to characterize criminals more than noncriminals (Wilson and Herr-

stein 1985: ch. 7). We take the position that both views are wrong. The level of self-control, or criminality, distinguishes offenders from nonoffenders, and the degree of its presence or absence can be established before (and after) criminal acts have been committed. This enduring tendency is well within the meaning of "personality trait" and is thus contrary to the sociological view. Contrary to the psychological view, the evidence for personality differences between offenders and nonoffenders beyond self-control is, at best, unimpressive. Most of this evidence is produced by attaching personality labels to differences in rates of offending between offenders and nonoffenders—that is, by turning one difference into many.

For example, Wilson and Herrnstein (1985: ch. 7) report that delinquents score higher than nondelinquents on the following dimensions of personality (see also Herrnstein 1983):

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| 1. "Q" scores on the Porteus Maze Tests. | 8. Psychopathy. |
| 2. Assertiveness. | 9. Schizophrenia. |
| 3. Fearlessness. | 10. Hypomania. |
| 4. Aggressiveness. | 11. Hyperactivity. |
| 5. Unconventionality. | 12. Poor conditionability. |
| 6. Extroversion. | 13. Impulsiveness. |
| 7. Poor socialization. | 14. Lefthandedness. |

All of these "personality" traits can be explained without abandoning the conclusion that offenders differ from nonoffenders only in their tendency to offend. One problem that has historically plagued personality research is the failure of its practitioners to report the content of their measuring instruments. This failure may be justified by the fact that the tests have commercial value, but the scientific result is the reporting of what are rightly considered "empirical tautologies," the discovery that two measures of the same thing are correlated with each other. In the present case, it seems fair to say that no one has found an independently measured personality trait substantially correlated with criminality. For example, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory has three subscales said to distinguish between delinquents and nondelinquents. The major discriminator is the Psychopathic Deviate subscale. As Wilson and Herrnstein note, this subscale includes "questions about a respondent's past criminal behavior" (1985: 187). But if this is so, then scale scores obviously cannot be used to establish the existence of a trait of personality independent of the tendency to commit criminal acts.

The situation is the same with the socialization subscale of the

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California Personality Inventory. This subscale contains items indistinguishable from standard self-report delinquency items. That it is correlated with other measures of delinquency supports the unremarkable conclusion that measures of delinquency tend to correlate with one another. By the same token, a high score on the Q scale of the Porteus Maze Tests indicates subjects who frequently "break the rules by lifting his or her pencil from the paper, by cutting corners, or by allowing the pencil to drift out of the maze channels" (Wilson and Herrnstein 1985: 174). This measure is reminiscent of the measure of cheating developed by Hugh Hartshorne and Mark May (1928). That people who lie, cheat, and steal are more likely to cheat is not particularly instructive.

Earlier we examined the misleading suggestion that offenders can be usefully characterized as highly aggressive. Because measures of aggressiveness include many criminal acts, it is impossible to distinguish aggressiveness from criminality (see Chapter 3). And so on through the list above. The measures of personality are either direct indicators of crime or conceptually indistinguishable from low self-control. Some, of course, are simply not supported by credible research (such as lefthandedness), and their continual reappearance should by now begin to undermine the credibility of psychological positivism.

The limited life of personality-based theories of crime is illustrated by the work of Hans Eysenck. He concluded that "persons with strong antisocial inclinations [should] have high P, high E, and high N scores," where P is psychoticism, E is extraversion, and N is neuroticism (1964: 58). Eysenck provided detailed descriptions of persons scoring high on extraversion and psychoticism. For example, the extravert is "sociable, likes parties, has many friends, needs to have people to talk to, and does not like reading and studying by himself. . . . He prefers to keep moving and doing things, tends to be aggressive and loses his temper quickly; his feelings are not kept under tight control and he is not always a reliable person" (pp. 50-51). In contrast, the person scoring high on the P factor is "(1) solitary, not caring for other people; (2) troublesome, not fitting in; (3) cruel, inhumane; (4) lack of feeling, insensitive; (5) lacking in empathy; (6) sensation-seeking, avid for strong sensory stimuli; (7) hostile to others, aggressive; (8) [has a] liking for odd and unusual things; (9) disregard for dangers, foolhardy; (10) likes to make fools of other people and to upset them" (p. 58).

Although Eysenck is satisfied that research supports the existence of these dimensions and the tendency of offenders to score high on

them (Eysenck 1989), many scholars (e.g., Rutter and Giller 1984) have not been convinced of the utility of Eysenck's personality scheme. (Wilson and Herrnstein do not include Eysenck's dimensions among the many personality traits they list.) In the current context, this scheme epitomizes the difficulties of the personality perspective (whatever the assumed source of personality differences) when applied to criminal behavior. In Eysenck's case, these difficulties are manifest in the obvious conceptual overlap of the personality dimensions and in the inability to measure them independently of the acts they are meant to produce.

The search for personality characteristics common to offenders has thus produced nothing contrary to the use of low self-control as the primary individual characteristic causing criminal behavior. People who develop strong self-control are unlikely to commit criminal acts throughout their lives, regardless of their other personality characteristics. In this sense, self-control is the only enduring personal characteristic predictive of criminal (and related) behavior. People who do not develop strong self-control are more likely to commit criminal acts, whatever the other dimensions of their personality. As people with low self-control age, they tend less and less to commit crimes; this decline is probably not entirely due to increasing self-control, but to age as well (see Chapter 6).

Although the facts about individual differences in crime are consistent with our theory, they are also consistent with theories designed explicitly to account for them. Differences between these theories, and our own should therefore be specifically discussed.

Alternative Theories of Criminality

It is common to say that there are multitudes of theories of criminality. In fact, however, the number of truly distinct explanations is small. One reason the number is limited is that the assumptions underlying theories are themselves limited and tend to cluster logically. Some theories assume that humans are naturally inclined to law-abiding or social behavior; others assume that humans are naturally inclined to criminal or antisocial behavior; still others try to make neither of these assumptions. Some assume that the motivation to commit crime is different from the motivation for lawful activities; others make no such assumption. Some assume that human behavior is governed by forces in the immediate situation or environment; others assume that stable personality characteristics govern conduct. Some assume that each item of behavior has unique determinants;

How can you say this?

others assume that many items of behavior may have causes in common. In subsequent chapters, our theory will be frequently distinguished from other theories by the position it produces on various empirical and policy issues. Here we want to locate the theory along methodological dimensions as a means of exposing in some systematic way opportunities for further development.

One way to look at theories of crime is in terms of their assumptions about human nature and society. Another is to examine their intended scope, the range of deviant acts they encompass. Still another is to contrast the empirical tests that may be derived from them. Finally, one may ask where the theories are located in the temporal sequence leading to a particular criminal act. Taking the last first, it is relatively easy to describe current theories in terms of the proximity of their causal forces to the actual behavior they attempt to explain.

The Temporal Position of Criminality vis-à-vis Crime

Some theories (e.g., Becker 1974; Wilson and Herrnstein 1985; Cornish and Clark 1986) focus on decisionmaking in the immediate situation in which the offense is or is not committed. At an intermediate remove, other theories (e.g., Merton 1938; Cloward and Ohlin 1960) focus on the forces in adolescence that produce offenders—that is, people embarked on a course of life that ultimately leads to the commission of criminal acts. Still other theories (e.g., Mednick 1977; Colvin and Pauly 1983) focus on hereditary or class factors present at or before birth, factors that operate at great distance from the events they cause.

Traditionally, the more distant the causes from the criminal act, the harder it is to construct a plausible theory using them. As a result, "distant" theories tend to exaggerate differences between offenders and nonoffenders, or to suggest causes that eventually require criminal acts. The model for such explanations is Lombroso's born criminal, a person destined to commit criminal acts from the point of conception. Only slightly less deterministic is the predispositional theory of the biologist or psychologist. These theories, too, suggest that once people have developed their respective dispositions the criminal behavior of some of them is a foregone conclusion.

Even temporally intermediate theories tend to divide the population into sharply distinct categories and to suggest that those in the potential offender category must go on to commit their quota of criminal acts. For example, once the lower-class boy has adapted to strain by giving up allegiance to the legitimate means to wealth, criminal acts ineluctably follow; once the person has learned an excess of

definitions favorable to the violation of law, the outcome in criminal behavior is fixed. (The labeling theory saves itself from this problem by retaining the proviso that labels do not always "stick." Fair enough. But if they do stick, delinquency is inevitable.)

Theories that focus on the immediate decisionmaking situation are accordingly least concerned about differences between offenders and nonoffenders. In fact, since they do not require differential tendencies to commit crime, these theories are inclined to suggest that such differences are trivial or nonexistent. Theories that combine distant and proximate causes, such as our own, thus combine opposing tendencies, and risk inconsistency.

In principle, distant and proximate theories should be consistent. On inspection, however, they are usually inconsistent. The marked differences that in distant theories require crime do not permit unrestricted decisionmaking from moment to moment depending on the situation. For example, Wilson and Herrnstein advance a theory in which the offender chooses between crime and noncrime on the basis of the costs and benefits accruing to both lines of action:

The larger the ratio of the rewards (material and nonmaterial) of noncrime to the rewards (material and nonmaterial) of crime, the weaker the tendency to commit crimes. The bite of conscience, the approval of peers, and any sense of inequity will increase or decrease the total value of crime; the opinions of family, friends, and employers are important benefits of noncrime, as is the desire to avoid the penalties that can be imposed by the criminal justice system. The strength of any reward declines with time, but people differ in the rate at which they discount the future. The strength of a given reward is also affected by the total supply of reinforcers. [1985: 61]

The criminal described by Wilson and Herrnstein is a person without a conscience who cares about the approval of his friends and has a strong sense that he has not been treated fairly. Those knowledgeable about basic criminological theories will see the resemblance between these characteristics of the offender and those described by control theory, cultural deviance theory, and strain theory—in that order—and will be troubled by the contradictory images these theories have always projected (Kornhauser 1978). For present purposes, the problem is that cultural deviance theory and strain theory do not take approval of one's friends or a sense of inequity as momentary decisionmaking criteria. On the contrary, these theories suggest that such considerations override concerns for legitimate employment, the opinion of family and friends, and the desire to avoid the penalties of the criminal law. If so, the decision to commit a criminal act is no decision at all.

Wilson and Herrnstein argue that delinquents discount future consequences more than nondelinquents do. This is inconsistent with strain theory. In the Merton and the Cloward and Ohlin versions of this theory, the potential delinquent looks into the future and sees dismal prospects. As a consequence, he turns to a life of crime designed to brighten these prospects. In other words, in strain theory the delinquent is especially future-oriented as compared to the nondelinquent. (We believe Wilson and Herrnstein may be correct about the decisionmaking [crime] portion of their theory. The point is that the crime portion of their theory cannot be squared with its criminal portion.) The idea that offenders are likely to be concerned with equity is also contrary to the notion that they more heavily discount time: equity concerns, as described by Wilson and Herrnstein, require that the person compare his effort/reward ratio with the effort/reward ratios of others. Such calculations obviously require rather broad perspectives on the social order, but for present purposes the important point is that people who feel inequitably treated must have put forth the effort that justifies their feelings (otherwise we would be talking about envy). But people who discount the future do not exert themselves for uncertain future benefits, and the notion of inequity at the point of crime is therefore incompatible with the image of the offender at the point of criminality.

The problems encountered by Wilson and Herrnstein are endemic to social learning theories, theories that also attempt to consider crime and criminality simultaneously. Social learning theories suggest that people learn to commit criminal acts because they provide benefits from valued groups in excess of their costs from neutral or disvalued groups (and apart from any benefits obtained from the criminal act itself). To the extent this is so, the idea that criminals differ from noncriminals in such things as time-discounting, aggressiveness, or impulsiveness is hard to sustain. On the contrary, such theories suggest that if there are differences between criminals and noncriminals, they are opposite to those usually suggested by theories of criminality. Such inconsistencies between the demands of theories of choice and theories of criminality are hard to ignore. Since data bearing on both theories are abundantly available, they are even harder to ignore. In our view, they survive only because of the disciplinary interests they appear to serve.

Our theory was in part devised by working back and forth between an image of crime and an image of criminality. Because crimes tend to combine immediate benefit and long-term cost, we are careful to avoid the image of an offender pursuing distant goals. Because crimes

tend to be quick and easy to accomplish, we are careful to avoid the image of an offender driven by deep resentment or long-term social purposes. Because crimes tend to involve as victim and offender people with similar characteristics, we are careful to avoid the image of an offender striking *out* against class or race enemies.

Because lack of self-control is not conducive to hard work, delayed gratification, or persistence in a course of action, we are careful to avoid an image of crime as a long-term, difficult, or drawn-out endeavor. Because lack of self-control is conducive to unpredictability or unreliability in behavior, we are careful to avoid an image of crime as an organized activity. And, because lack of self-control shows itself in many noncriminal as well as in criminal acts, we are careful to avoid an image of deviance as exclusively illegal behavior.

Our theory applies across the life course, and it applies from the point of decisionmaking back to the origins of differences in degree of self-control. In infancy and preadolescence it is a theory of socialization and social control, accounting for a variety of deviant acts—defiance, truancy, school failure—and constructing people unlikely in future years to commit criminal acts. In adolescence and the early adult years, the socialization component declines and the theory focuses largely on social control, accounting for an even greater variety of deviant and criminal acts: truancy, dropout, drug use, theft, assault, accidents, pregnancy. As adulthood approaches, natural (i.e., biological and physical) controls play an increasingly larger part, and there is a tendency for the rate of deviant behavior to decline. As a result of declining rates, the diversity of offenses committed by individual offenders tends to decline, but differences established earlier continue to explain the whole set of offenses, along with other manifestations of low social control.

The Scope of Theory

In principle, theorists must choose between broad theories roughly applicable to a wide variety of vaguely defined conduct and narrow theories directly applicable to specific, precisely defined acts. This choice is often seen as being broad, important, and wrong versus being narrow, trivial, and correct. Positivists have historically chosen the latter position. Unfortunately, the positivist assumption that the correctness of their theories compensates for their limitations is called into question by the frequency with which positivistic research disputes the correctness of positivistic explanations.

Theories that focus on decisionmaking have traditionally sought to

explain all behavior with a single principle. This principle tends to be complicated beyond recognition the moment it confronts individual differences that transcend properties of the immediate environment.

Previous efforts at compromise have not been particularly successful. Wilson and Herrnstein take the novel approach of using their general theory to explain a *narrowly* described set of acts:

The word "crime" can be applied to such varied behavior that it is not clear that it is a meaningful category of analysis. Stealing a comic book, punching a friend, cheating on a tax return, murdering a wife, robbing a bank, bribing a politician, hijacking an airplane—these and countless other acts are all crimes. Crime is as broad a category as disease, and perhaps as useless. [1985: 21]

These considerations lead Wilson and Herrnstein to concentrate on those persons who "commit serious crimes at a high rate." By doing so, they argue, they "escape the problem of comparing persons who park by a fire hydrant to persons who rob banks" (1985: 21). By "serious crimes," Wilson and Herrnstein mean "predatory street crimes," those acts "regarded as wrong by every society, preiterate as well as literate; . . . among these 'universal crimes' are murder, theft, robbery, and incest" (*ibid.*, p. 22).

One question that arises is why Wilson and Herrnstein would wish to restrict the range of their dependent variable without clear evidence that such restriction is necessary. What evidence do they use to justify dividing the domain of crime into serious street crime and other crime? For one thing, they are skeptical of the view that a general theory can explain crime across cultures or that it can explain all of the myriad crimes within a given culture. Clearly, the *a priori* conclusion that a theory should set its boundaries narrowly need not be taken to mean that the boundaries have been accurately described. The boundaries of a theory require theoretical justification. In its absence, concern for boundaries rightly suggests the operation of non-theoretical criteria.

The seriousness of crime is, in our view, a nontheoretical criterion. It is of course no accident that theorists prefer to limit their interests to "serious" matters—in the mistaken belief that the importance of the phenomenon has something to say about the importance of the theory. The fact of the matter is that the importance or seriousness of a phenomenon is often hard to assess anyway. Individually, serious crimes may tend to produce more injury or loss, but collectively they may produce much less injury or loss than less serious crimes. By the same token, hard drugs such as heroin may produce less harm in the

aggregate than drugs such as tobacco or alcohol. Arguably, reducing the rate of cigarette smoking would be a greater contribution to the resolution of a serious problem than would reducing the rate of drug addiction.

In any event, we do not share Wilson and Herrnstein's skepticism about the possibility of a general theory of crime, and we note that limits on the range of a theory should not be taken too seriously unless those stating the limits provide evidence that it will not work outside the narrow domain they specify. (Put another way, modesty *per se* is not a virtue of a theory.)

Tests of generality or scope are, in our view, easy to devise. In criminology it is often argued that special theories are required to explain female and male crime, crime in one culture rather than another, crime committed in the course of an occupation as distinct from street crime, or crime committed by children as distinct from crime committed by adults. As subsequent chapters will show, we intend our theory to apply to all of these cases, and more. It is meant to explain all crime, at all times, and, for that matter, many forms of behavior that are not sanctioned by the state.

Human Nature and Society

Useful theories of crime make assumptions about human nature. The range of possible assumptions is limited. A theory can assume, as ours does, that people naturally pursue their own interests and unless socialized to the contrary will use whatever means are available to them for such purposes. In this view, people are neither naturally "good" nor naturally "evil." They are, however, expected to behave in predictable ways. The standard social-contract assumption thus has useful properties, properties described throughout this book.

In contrast, a theory can assume, as nearly all sociological theories do, that people naturally tend to pursue group interests and will continue to do so unless forced to do otherwise—that is, that people are naturally good or social. Such theories also have useful properties. They make possible specific predictions about the causes or correlates of crime, predictions that tend to conflict with the predictions derived from theories that do not share their assumptions about human nature. Throughout the book we take advantage of this fact by comparing the adequacy of the hypotheses derived from these distinct perspectives.

Some theorists argue either explicitly (Elliott, Huizinga, and Ageton 1985) or implicitly (Wilson and Herrnstein 1985) that these various

perspectives can be usefully combined without fear of contradiction or ambiguity. In fact, however, as is easily shown, theorists arguing for "integration" of these divergent views usually simply adopt one set of assumptions at the expense of the other or refuse to make assumptions and thus weaken what claims to theory they may have had. In the first case, most sociological integrationists simply adopt "social behavior" assumptions about crime and reject "individual interest" assumptions on the grounds that the assumptions favored by their discipline are correct (Johnson 1979; Elliott, Huizinga, and Ageton 1985; see also Hirschi 1979). In the second case, some psychologists think the assumption issue can be finessed by adopting an assumption-free psychological learning theory. Unfortunately, the idea that all views (strain, cultural deviance, social control, and rational choice) can be subsumed under a single learning theory abrogates the responsibility of the theorist to theorize about the sources of crime. For example, Wilson and Herrnstein advance the proposition that, in a situation of choice, people select the outcome they prefer (1985: 43). It is possible to make a theory from this statement by introducing bias into preference, by asserting or believing that some tendency acts on choice in the first instance; for example, one could say that, other things being equal, people will prefer outcomes that reduce their wealth and happiness (hard to believe, but at least testable). In the absence of such a bias, all preferences are possible and the theory asserts nothing. Evidence that it asserts nothing comes from the fact that it is said to *subsume* strain, cultural deviance, and social control theories, theories often used to illustrate conflicting assumptions and predictions. (In Chapter 4, we demonstrated the incompatibility of the strain and cultural deviance components in the Wilson-Herrnstein theory; see also Kornhauser 1978.)

Empirical Tests of the Crime and Criminality Perspective

Our stability postulate asserts that people with high self-control are less likely under all circumstances throughout life to commit crime. Our stability notion denies the ability of institutions to undo previously successful efforts at socialization, an ability other theories take as central to their position.

Similarly, our versatility construct suggests that one avenue available for the identification of persons with low self-control is via its noncriminal outlets. Other theories predict no correlation or even negative correlation between the various forms of deviance. Our conception of versatility also predicts that one can study crime by study-

ing other noncriminal manifestations of low self-control without being misled by the results.

Our idea of crime asserts that complex, difficult crimes are so rare that they are an inadequate basis for theory and policy. Other perspectives suggest that exotic crimes are as theoretically useful as mundane crimes and just as likely to occur. Our idea of crime predicts that the vast majority of crimes will be characterized by simplicity, proximity of offender and target, and failure to gain the desired objective. Other theories make no room for failure, assuming that crime satisfies strong forces and desires and thus reinforces itself. Our perspective asserts that crime can be predicted from evidence of low self-control at any earlier stage of life. No sociological or economic theory allows such predictions. Our perspective also asserts that low self-control can be predicted from crime at any earlier stage of life; most sociological theories do not allow such a prediction.

Our perspective asserts that many of the traditional causes of crime are in fact consequences of low self-control—that is, people with low self-control sort themselves and are sorted into a variety of circumstances that are *as a result* correlated with crime. Our theory predicts that prevention of one form of deviant behavior will not lead to compensating forms of behavior, but will reduce the total amount of deviant behavior engaged in by the population in question. Other theories predict displacement and suggest constant levels of deviance in a constantly "predisposed" population. We address these and other differences between our theory and rival perspectives in the pages that follow.

Conclusions

Theories that cannot incorporate or account for the stability of differences in offending over time are seriously at variance with good evidence. Theories that assume specialization in particular forms of crime or deviant behavior are seriously at odds with good evidence. Theories that propose to examine the parameters of criminal careers (such as onset, persistence, and desistance) or the characteristics of career criminals are at odds with the nature of crime. Theories that assume that criminal acts are means to long-term or altruistic goals are at odds with the facts.

Our theory explicitly addresses the stability and versatility findings. It accounts for them with the concept of self-control: with deferred gratification at one extreme and immediate gratification at the other, with caution at one extreme and risk-taking at the other. The

mechanism producing these differences has been described as differences in child-rearing practices, with close attention to the behavior of the child at one extreme and neglect of the behavior of the child at the other.

The theory incorporates individual properties insofar as they have an impact on crime or on self-control. These properties are elucidated in subsequent chapters, where we apply our model to the facts about crime and deviant behavior. For now, we note that the theory is a direct response to analysis of the concept of crime and to our analysis of the failings of the theories of the positivistic disciplines. It incorporates a classical view of the role of choice and a positivistic view of the role of causation in the explanation of behavior. It produces a general explanatory concept that can be measured independently of the phenomenon it is alleged to cause, and it is thus directly testable.

We turn now to application of the theory to various topics in crime causation, research methods, and public policy.

III

APPLICATIONS OF THE THEORY

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Criminal Events and Individual Propensities: Age, Gender, and Race

After sociological positivism replaced biological positivism as the dominant force in criminology, individual correlates of crime were generally ignored in favor of social variables such as urbanization, class, and culture. Theorists set out to explain the delinquency of the urban, lower-class, gang boy, a boy explicitly lacking such individual attributes as race or IQ. Thus sociology handled sex, race, age, IQ, and physique by holding them constant, by ignoring variation in crime rates across their categories.

Once these biology- and psychology-free theories had been developed, sociologists simply applied them to the differences they had initially ignored. For example, the theory of differential association was applied to the crime differences between blacks and whites via the simple (and erroneous) assertion that black culture values violence more than white culture (Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967; Curtis 1974). Perhaps more commonly, ethnic differences were explained by making nonwhite racial status equivalent to membership in the lower class identified by social theories. This device was applied to age differences as well, with adolescence interpreted as equivalent to a lower class or deprived status (Greenberg 1979). Gender differences were explained by application of a form of labeling theory, according to which the female "script" differs from that offered males (Harris 1977). Such traditional, individual-level variables as intelligence and physique were ignored, denied, or explained by strain or, more frequently, labeling concepts.

With the failure of sociological theories to explain the variables

they were initially designed to explain (Kornhauser 1978), their utility as explanations of the large correlates of crime—age, gender, and race—were no longer plausible. In fact, the evidence suggests that no current theory of crime can accommodate what are perhaps the largest correlates of crime.

In this chapter we review the evidence about age, gender, and race, and we show how the crime and self-control perspective is useful in interpreting these differences in crime rates. Our first awareness of the inadequacy of contemporary theories and of the need for a new perspective was generated by examining the research literature on the relation between age and crime. This examination led us to the tentative conclusion that the age effect is everywhere and at all times the same. This invariance thesis has far-reaching implications and therefore deserves detailed discussion.

Invariance of the Age Effect

Theoretical and textbook discussions of the age effect usually assume variation in this effect over time, place, demographic group, and type of crime (Einpey 1982; Glaser 1978; Wilson and Herrnstein 1985: 126-47; Farrington 1986a). Typically, the current age distribution of crime in the United States as revealed by the *Uniform Crime Reports* (e.g., U.S. Department of Justice 1985) is shown and the reader is left with the impression that this distribution is only one of many such distributions revealed by research.

Figures 2, 3, and 4 show three age distributions of crime: one from England and Wales in 1842-44 (Neison 1857), another from England in 1908 (Goring 1913), and another from contemporary U.S. data (U.S. Department of Justice 1979). Goring concluded that the age distribution of crime conformed to a "law of nature." The similarity between the three distributions is sufficient to suggest that little or nothing has happened to Goring's law of nature since he discovered it—in fact, the shape or form of the distribution has remained virtually unchanged for about 150 years. Recent data, the basis for many assertions of variability in the age distribution, force the same conclusion: "While population arrest rates have changed in absolute magnitude over time (almost doubling between 1965 and 1976), the same pattern has persisted for the relative magnitudes of the different age groups, with fifteen- to seventeen-year-olds having the highest arrest rates per population of any age group" (Blumstein and Cohen 1979: 562).

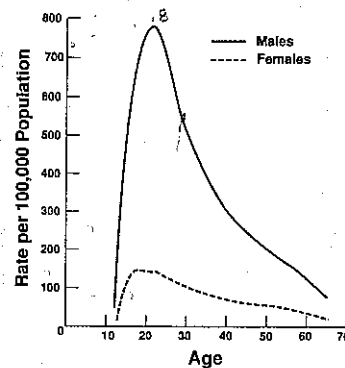


Fig. 2. Age and Sex Distribution of Criminal Offenders in England and Wales, 1842-44. Adapted from Neison 1857: 303-4.

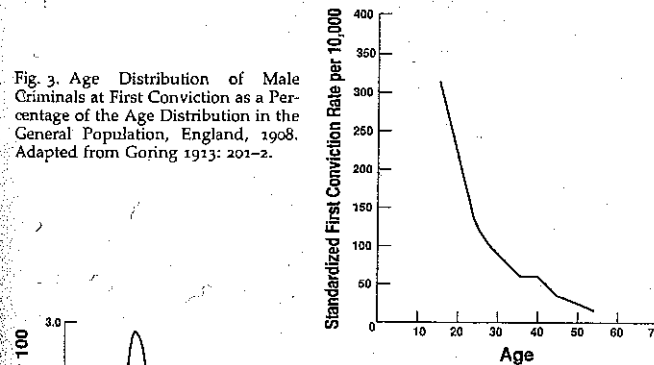


Fig. 3. Age Distribution of Male Criminals at First Conviction as a Percentage of the Age Distribution in the General Population, England, 1908. Adapted from Goring 1913: 201-2.

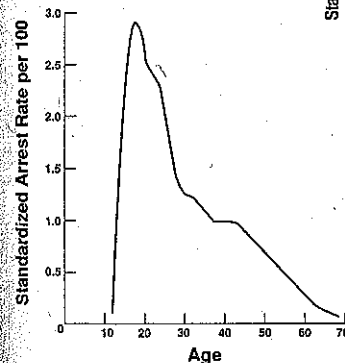


Fig. 4. Age Distribution of People Arrested for All Offenses, Standardized for Their Representation in the General Population, United States, 1977. Adapted from U.S. Department of Justice 1979: 171. Note That Data Are Approximate.

We do not know all of the ways that England and Wales in the 1840's differed from the United States in the 1970's. Presumably the differences are large across a variety of relevant dimensions. We do know, however, that in the 1960's the age distribution of delinquency in Argentina (DeFleur 1970: 131) was indistinguishable from the age distribution in the United States, which was in turn indistinguishable from the age distribution of delinquency in England and Wales at the same time (McClintock and Avison 1968).

Demographic Groups

Most discussions of the age distribution in a theoretical context assume important differences for demographic subgroups. Textbooks often compare rates of increase in crime for boys and girls for particular offenses, thus suggesting considerable flexibility in the age distribution by sex. "Age-of-onset" studies note that, for example, black offenders appear to "start earlier" than white offenders; such a suggestion gives the impression that the age distribution of crime varies across ethnic or racial groups (see, e.g., Wolfgang, Figlio, and Sellin 1972: 131). Figures 5 and 6 (delinquency rates by sex and race, respectively) show that such suggestions tend to obscure a basic and persistent fact: available data suggest that the age-crime relation is *invariant* across sex and race.

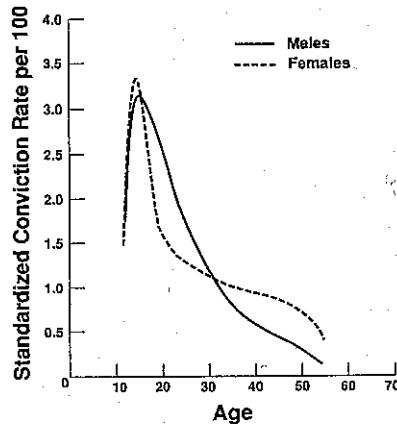


Fig. 5. Age Distribution of Males and Females Found Guilty of Indictable Offenses, Standardized for Their Representation in the General Population, England and Wales, 1965. Adapted from McClintock and Avison 1968: 170.

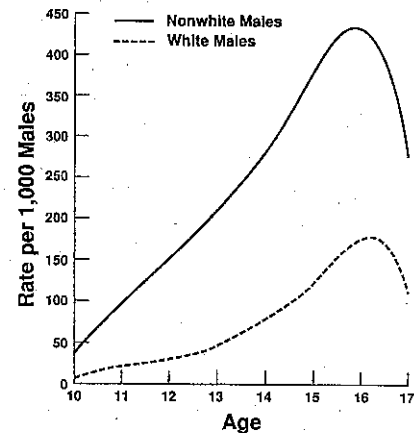


Fig. 6. Delinquency Rates of Males Born in 1945 in Philadelphia, by Race and Age. Adapted from Wolfgang, Figlio, and Sellin 1972: 109.

Types of Crime

As we have noted, positivistic research routinely assumes causal differences across types of crime. In fact, the principal data for criminology, the "official" statistics provided by the *Uniform Crime Reports*, distinguishes dozens of offenses, categorizes acts into "Part I" and "Part II" crimes depending on their "seriousness," and reports "variability" in these categories by such things as age, gender, and race. When positivistic criminologists encounter this variability, they automatically see it as requiring a substantive explanation. As we have indicated, specific crimes have causes distinct from properties of offenders; they require victims, opportunity, substances, and the like. These crime properties may obviously account for variation in specific offenses from time to time and place to place. Yet it is hard to disentangle the properties of offenses from the properties of offenders, many of which may be more readily available and easily measured (such as age). As a result, it is not surprising that data reflecting variation in age distributions for various crimes have been available for quite some time. For example, a consistent difference in the age distributions for person and property offenses appears to be well established, at least for official data. In such data, person crimes peak later than property crimes, and the rate declines more slowly with age. The significance of this fact for theories of criminality is, how-

ever, problematic. We cannot assume that such variability is attributable to the properties of offenders, something that virtually all positivists have assumed. In fact, since offenders commit all types of crimes at all ages, and since the "seriousness" of offending does not increase with age, there is strong reason to doubt that differences in the age distributions for crimes are attributable to variations in the criminality of the offenders by age. In addition, self-report data do not support the age difference between person and property offenses; they show instead that both types of offenses peak at the same time (see, e.g., Elliott, Ageton, and Huizinga 1978) and decline at the same rate with age (Tittle 1980). Consistent with this position, the slower decline of person offenses in official data may simply reflect the fact that a greater portion of such offenses involve primary-group (i.e., immediate-family) conflicts. Primary-group conflicts may be assumed to be relatively constant over the age span and to produce a relatively stable number of assaultive offenses during the period of capability (i.e., among those neither very young nor very old). If these offenses were subtracted from the total number of person offenses, the form of the curve for person offenses would approximate more closely that for property offenses. Such speculations are consistent with the self-report finding of no difference between person and property crimes with respect to the long-term effects of an offender's age (Tittle 1980: 92).

Since our thesis is that the age effect is invariant across social and cultural conditions, it may appear that our explanation of the apparent difference in person and property crimes requires modification of our thesis. Actually, in some conditions, the effects of age may be muted. For example, as people retreat into the primary-group context with increasing age, the relatively rare criminal events that occur in this context may continue to occur. Outside of the primary-group context, the effects of age on person offenses show themselves even more clearly. So, although we may find conditions in which age does not have as strong an effect as usual, the isolation of such conditions does not lead to the conclusion that age effects may be accounted for by such conditions. On the contrary, it leads to the conclusion that in particular cases the age effect may be to some extent obscured by countervailing crime factors.

Artificial Conditions and Behavior Analogous to Crime

As indicated in Chapter 5, our theory can be tested by using non-criminal events defined by it as equivalent to crime. We can, if nec-

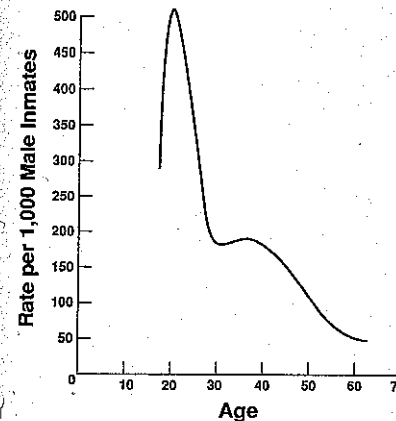


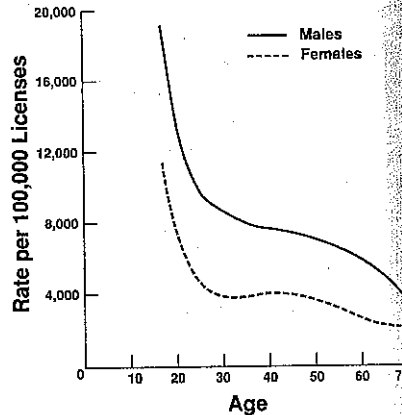
Fig. 7. Prison Infractions per 1,000 Male Inmates, New York State, 1975. Analysis of Raw Data from Flanagan 1979 and New York State 1976.

essary, study criminality among children too young to attract the attention of officials, and, if necessary, we can study criminality among those incapable of committing offense because of their incapacitation by the state. We can even study criminality by examining behavior that is nowhere considered criminal (such as accidents). This allows us to examine the effects of age (or any other variable) under conditions that eliminate competing explanations of the effect.

Explanations of age effects typically focus on the social position of youth vis-à-vis adults, suggesting that if their situations were identical, the differences in their crime rates would disappear. One way to test such theories would be to construct an environment in which age varies and the forces said to create the age relation are held constant. For example, if differential labor-force participation is said to account for the age effect, we could test this thesis by creating an environment in which no one participates in the labor force. Such an environment is approximated in prisons. Prison populations have the advantage of being relatively homogeneous on many crime causal variables, since they are relatively homogeneous on crime. As shown in Figure 7, which presents prison infraction rates by age, when "practically everything" is held relatively constant, the age effect is much like the age effect in the free world (see also Zink 1958; Wolfgang 1961; Ellis, Grasmick, and Gilman 1974; Flanagan 1979, 1981; Mabli et al. 1979).

Another way to approach the problem of the confounding of age

Fig. 8. Motor Vehicle Accidents by Age and Sex, New York State, 1977. Adapted from New York State 1979.



with other causal variables is to isolate an item of behavior analogous to crime, such as automobile accidents. Figure 8 shows the motor vehicle accident rate in New York state among those eligible to drive, by age. As is evident, these data closely parallel those for crime. Obviously, standard theories of crime cannot explain this similarity. Indeed, most of them are falsified by it (a subculture of accidents?)

The Age Critique of Theories of Criminality

Most current theories of crime concentrate on the adolescent and late teen years, when the rate of crime is at or approaching its maximum level. The general strategy is to identify or construct high- and low-rate groups, to differentiate between delinquents and nondelinquents. However differentiation is accomplished—whether by labeling, exposure to definitions favorable to delinquency, lack of legitimate opportunity, reinforcement of incipient delinquent conduct, or lack of social restraint—the result is identification of groups unusually likely to commit criminal acts.

Standard research procedure in testing such theories is to compare the actual crime rates of the groups they identify. Although in practice the theories may be difficult to test because of ambiguity or inconsistency, there is in principle little disagreement about how they should be tested. If differential opportunity is said to be the key to delinquency, one defines opportunity operationally and compares

the rate of those having more with those having less. Up to the actual initiation of tests, there appears to be no necessary empirical defect in such theories. And since they are, at least in principle, testable, there would appear to be no necessary logical defect in them either.

Enter the brute fact, the age distribution of those who commit crime. Just at the point where the criminal group has been created, it begins to decline in size. "Maturational reform" or some equivalent, unexplained process takes over. The theory is then said to be able to explain the onset of crime but unable to explain desistance from crime. Since "desistance" is equal in theoretical significance to "onset," this failing of the theory is considered to be a failing sufficiently serious to bring its explanation of the onset of crime under a cloud of suspicion: "Since most delinquents do not become adult criminals, can we assume that somehow their social bonds eventually are strengthened? How is this possible? Control theory does not adequately answer these and similar questions" (Siegel and Senna 1981: 139). And: "Social process theories do not account for the 'aging out' factor in delinquency. This is a fault of the . . . social structure approach as well" (*ibid.*, p. 147).

This traditional criticism should be understood for what it is: a theoretical argument dressed as a logical and empirical argument. The empirical fact of a decline in the crime rate with age is beyond dispute. The requirement that theories account for facts is also beyond controversy. But it does not follow that a theory that adequately differentiates criminals from noncriminals will also account for the effects of age. What makes the argument theoretical is that it *requires* that the age distribution of crime be accounted for by the variables explaining crime-rate differences at a given time. This amounts to an assertion that the age effect on crime cannot be independent of the variables employed by an accurate theory of crime. Yet it could be that a given theory, in which the rate for the low-rate group is simply a constant proportion of that for the high-rate group, holds true at all age levels. Figure 9 illustrates this possibility. It shows a true theory unaffected by "maturational reform." This theory differentiates offenders from nonoffenders throughout the life cycle. Its failure to account for the "aging-out" factor in crime cannot therefore be taken as a "fault" of the theory, since the aging-out effect occurs constantly in each group. Clearly, until evidence against this plausible hypothesis has been located, there is no justification for using age as a critical weapon against any current theory of crime.

This point may be illustrated by applying the logic of age-based

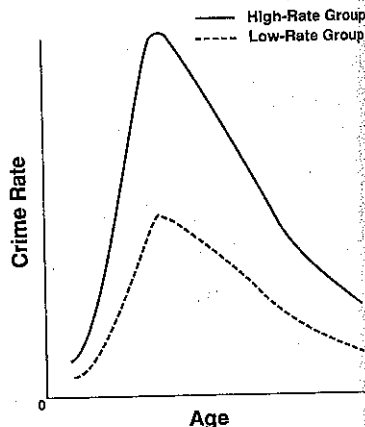


Fig. 9. True Theory Unaffected by Age.

critiques of social theories of crime to the motor vehicle accident data displayed in Figure 8. No one would argue that the impact of driver training on accidents is inadequate as an explanation of variation among drivers because it fails to account for the age effect. Indeed, insurance companies that routinely give premium discounts for persons with driver training do not neglect the age variable. More generally, it is beyond question that age affects the likelihood of motor vehicle accidents regardless of the social characteristics of drivers. It should be mentioned also that the physical costs of accidents are usually far greater than the social costs and/or legal penalties. There is, therefore, no reason to believe that social control can account for the shape of the age distribution of accidents.

Thus, if the possibility depicted in Figure 9 describes the actual situation, efforts to bring theories into line with the age distribution, to encompass the effects of age, may lead the theorist into assertions contrary to fact. For example, Edwin Sutherland and Donald Cressey (1978: 130) argue that the theory of differential association can account for the apparent effects of age. Presumably this means that age is correlated with exposure to particular constellations of definitions favorable to the violation of law and that, in groups where there is no change in definition, there will be no change in the likelihood of crime over the life course. Yet research shows that, in accord with our thesis, "even with equal exposure to criminal influences, propensity

toward crime tends to diminish as one grows older" (Rowe and Tittle 1977: 229).

Again, this fact does not invalidate the theory of differential association. On the contrary, it is exactly what we would expect were the theory true *and* independent of age. The reader will note that Figure 9, though hypothetical, closely approximates actual subgroup differences reported earlier. It therefore seems safe to say that (1) the argument that theories of crime must take age into account is itself a theory of crime, and (2) the theory underlying this argument is contrary to fact.

These hypotheses about age have proven to be controversial (Greenberg 1985; Farrington 1986a; Blumstein, Cohen, and Farrington 1988a, 1988b; Tittle 1988). The empirical challenge to our invariance thesis has boiled down to a search for statistical variation in the age distribution of crime with respect to such things as mode, level, or skew (Steffensmeier et al. 1989). Often (e.g., Farrington 1986a) this search is unguided by theoretical purpose. As a result, it tends to lead to the improper conclusion that nonsubstantive and unexplained variations in the age distribution of crime bear on the invariance thesis. As indicated above, it is a caricature of our position to suggest that it denies the possibility of change in the level of crime over time (such as between 1965 and 1980) or the possibility of trivial shifts in the modal age for a particular "crime type."

Still, it is clear that many researchers do not share our perceptions of similarity and difference. Positivists tend to see difference where we see similarity. We believe our bias can be justified by its consequences. For example, the conclusion that the age distribution of crime is substantially invariant leads directly to several propositions about crime that can themselves be validated (see Hirschi and Gottfredson 1983, 1986, 1987), as indicated by the discussion below. The contrary and standard conclusion is that the age distribution of crime varies from year to year, place to place, crime type to crime type, and group to group (see Sutherland and Cressey 1978: ch. 6; Wilson and Herrnstein 1985: ch. 5). As we have seen, such observation of statistical variation absent theoretical interest is a fundamental liability of positivism, leading as it does to further observation of ever more detailed and meaningless variation. Certainly science does not require the conclusion that trivial variation is more meaningful than the fundamental similarity in the distributions at issue.

Three-quarters of a century ago, Goring (1913) found statistically significant differences in age distributions and concluded that such differences were scientifically trivial. Farrington (1986a) replicated

Goring's results but reached the opposite conclusion. We agree with Goring and with Louis Guttman, who notes that "a test of statistical significance is not a test of scientific importance. . . . No one has yet published a scientific law in the social sciences which was developed, sharpened, or effectively substantiated on the basis of tests of significance. The basic laws of physics were not facilitated this way. Estimation and approximation may be more fruitful than significance in developing science, never forgetting replication" (1977: 92).

In our view, the question for criminology is whether the glass is 97 percent full or 3 percent empty—that is, whether to pursue the important implications of a remarkably robust age effect or to continue to revel in the statistical noise generated by atheoretical research. Given the clear inconsistency between traditional criminology theories and the age-crime relation, let us invoke the distinction between crime and criminality as a mechanism for resolving this theoretical impasse.

Age and the Distinction between Crime and Criminality

In *Delinquency and Drift* (1964), David Matza argued that a basic defect in positivistic explanations of crime is that they are incapable of explaining maturational reform, the tendency for delinquency to decline from its peak level in the middle teens. According to Matza, positivistic theories create a criminal required by the laws of determinism to do as he does (that is, commit criminal acts). Alas for such theories, at the moment the offender is fully created, at the moment he is complete, he begins to do what he does less and less frequently, and the theory that created him cannot explain why he no longer does what he was designed to do. Matza's solution to this problem was to resurrect the notion of "will," to make a delinquent, if not totally free of deterministic constraints, at least freer than he is normally pictured in positivistic accounts of his behavior. Matza's specific solution is not often encountered today, but the idea that theory must be able to deal with change in the offender's behavior over time has become part of the common sense of criminology, and those solutions now offered to Matza's problem retain much of the flavor of the original.

In one of the more remarkable statements in the delinquency literature, Matza tells us that "biological theories are hardest hit by the frequency of maturational reform if only because the compulsion of biological constraint has a more literal meaning than psychic or social constraint and has been so taken" (1964: 22). Maturational reform is of course another word for change in behavior over time, for change

in behavior with advancing age. Change in behavior with age would normally lead one to suspect that age might be in some way responsible for the change in behavior (since change in behavior cannot be responsible for advancing age). But age suggests biology, and in criminology biology connotes fixation, immutability, or even destiny, and Matza is thus able to say that an obviously biological correlate of crime poses a direct threat to the ability of the biological perspective to explain criminality.

Matza is not alone in this logic. In a thoughtful piece written some years later, Gordon Trasler addresses the issues posed by "spontaneous desistance" for conscience theories of crime:

The significance of [spontaneous desistance] escaped us, or rather we misinterpreted it, because we still clung to the belief that criminality was primarily a characteristic of persons, a disposition to dishonesty or violence which was rooted in some abnormality or developmental deficit, and which, therefore, would persist unless it was modified or restrained by treatment or deterrence. . . . [Spontaneous desistance] poses problems for those (such as Eysenck, Mednick, and myself) who have regarded conscience as the key mechanism in restraining people from behavior which is contrary to laws . . . and have explained criminality mainly in terms of inadequacies in the functioning of conscience. For the essential characteristic of conscience is that it is largely or entirely situation independent. [1980: 10, 12; see also Trasler 1987]

Trasler's problem is identical to Matza's: how can change in behavior be explained by a person's characteristics—characteristics that, once attained, are relatively fixed? Trasler's solution to his problem comes very close to Matza's:

The simplest and (in my view) the most satisfactory explanation of spontaneous desistance from adolescent crime is one which concentrates upon the satisfactions of delinquent conduct—as Skinner would put it, the reinforcers which maintain such behavior during adolescence, but cease to do so when the individual becomes an adult. I suggested earlier that much teenage crime is fun. . . . But as they grow older most young men gain access to other sources of achievement and social satisfaction—a job, a girlfriend, a wife, a home, and eventually children—and in doing so become gradually less dependent upon peer-group support. What is more to the point, these new life-patterns are inconsistent with delinquent activities. [Trasler 1980: 11-12]

Trasler concludes that so-called spontaneous desistance is produced by change in the situation of youth—in other words, that desistance is situation-dependent. He then draws the same moral drawn by Matza: If change in crime is situation-dependent, then criminality too is situation-dependent. If this is so, then a situation-independent construct like conscience (which is, after all, "an internalized system of values and proscriptions") must be reconsidered as an

explanation of criminality. Matza and Trasler come to the problem of maturational reform or spontaneous desistance from markedly different backgrounds and perspectives. Yet both follow the same path to essentially the same conclusion. Crime declines with age; this decline may be explained by change in a person's social situation; if the social situation of the person can explain the decline in crime with age, it can also explain differences at any given age; therefore, explanations of crime that focus on a person's characteristics, whether these characteristics be biological, psychological, or, for that matter, sociological are (at best) suspect and (at worst) wrong.

An alternative interpretation of maturational reform or spontaneous desistance is that crime declines with age (Hirschi and Gottfredson 1983). This explanation suggests that maturational reform is just that, change in behavior that comes with maturation; it suggests that spontaneous desistance is just that, change in behavior that cannot be explained and change that occurs regardless of what else happens. We believe this interpretation is consistent with the evidence. We also believe it requires more careful specification of such terms as delinquency and crime.

The literature on maturational reform typically focuses on the decline in crime among those with high rates ("delinquents") and ignores a possibly similar decline in crime among those with low rates ("nondelinquents"). This oversight leads to the suggestion that delinquents tend over time to become nondelinquents—that the two groups, if they do not actually trade places, are at least eventually intermingled. This leads, as we have seen, to the conclusion that delinquency is unstable over time and that it therefore cannot be explained by characteristics that are stable over time. In fact, however, as we have shown, delinquency is relatively stable over time, and it is reasonably stable during the years of decline in the crime rate. For example, Lyle Shannon reports a correlation of .52 between the number of police contacts through age eighteen and the number of police contacts after age eighteen (1978: table 4). More concretely, Shannon's data show that 5 percent of people with no police contacts through age eighteen have five or more police contacts by the time they are 32, whereas 64 percent of people with five or more police contacts through age eighteen have five or more police contacts by the time they are 32 (1978: table 2).

Obviously, if crime declines and delinquency remains stable, we need more than one concept to account for this result. The theory we have described was in fact built in part on this necessity. It provides the two concepts necessary for reconciliation of these seemingly

contradictory results, "crime" and "criminality" (self-control). As we have defined these terms, crimes are short-term, circumscribed events that presuppose a peculiar set of necessary conditions (e.g., activity, opportunity, adversaries, victims, goods). Self-control, in contrast, refers to relatively stable differences across individuals in the propensity to commit criminal (or equivalent) acts. Accordingly, self-control is only one element in the causal configuration leading to a criminal act, and criminal acts are, at best, imperfect measures of self-control. It follows that the frequency with which individuals participate in criminal events may vary over time and place without implying change in their self-control. It follows further that differences in propensity within groups may remain in the face of change in the group's overall rate of crime. Finally, it follows that low self-control can exist without crime (both before it begins and after it ends). Seen in the light of this distinction, those concerned with maturational reform appear to confuse change in crime (which declines) with change in tendency to commit crime (which may not change at all). Part of the reason for this confusion is that we tend to use the same indicator for both concepts. We allow a count of criminal acts to serve as a measure of crime and as a measure of criminality. It appears that this count is factorially complex in ways that we do not normally acknowledge, that criminality is only one of several factors accounting for its variation. With this problem in mind, it may be useful to apply the substantive distinction between crime and criminality to the facts about the age distribution of crime.

With the concept of crime and the concept of low self-control, we can distinguish between traditional "desistance" theory and an "age" theory of the same phenomenon. The desistance theory asserts that crime declines with age because of factors associated with age that reduce or change the criminality of the actor. The age theory asserts that crime, independent of criminality, declines with age. The evidence, in our view, clearly favors the age explanation. Let us briefly explore some of this evidence.

Situational and Age Explanations of Maturational Reform

Trasler argues that the decline in crime that begins in the late teens is accounted for by change in the social situation of youth. Trasler's theory is unusually explicit: he lists "sources of achievement and social satisfaction" that lead to decline. This list includes "a job, a girl friend, a wife, a home, and eventually children" (1980: 11-12). As stated by Trasler, situational theory has no characteristic of persons it

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may use to predict institutional involvement or to condition its predictions of the impact of such involvement. As a result, it must assume that everyone, delinquent and nondelinquent, is equally likely to end up in and be influenced by the conventional institutions of society. Our theory, in contrast, assumes that a stable personal characteristic—self-control—is obviously relevant to institutional involvement and impact. In fact, it assumes that since conventional institutions almost by definition constrain behavior, those with little self-control are unlikely to be attracted to or influenced by them. Consequently, our theory is suspicious of the idea that such institutions change people in the ways suggested by situational explanations. Let us look at the evidence on jobs, girlfriends, wives, and children.

Employment. If rates of crime decline with age, one reason almost invariably mentioned is that at the peak age of committing crime, young people begin to enter the labor force. The job, with its regular hours, its restrictions, and its compensation, settles the adolescent down and satisfies his previously unsatisfied wants. If work is the curse of the drinking man, it is also the curse of all who would engage in other unconventional or illegitimate pleasures. Or, so the story goes, as it is endlessly repeated in the crime literature. Job theories are easy to state, but they are hard to test. They appear to imply, at least in the context of arguments against person-oriented explanations of crime, that jobs somehow attach themselves to persons and proceed to modify their behavior. If this were so, we could merely compare persons with jobs to persons without them and expect to find that those without jobs are more likely to be delinquent. When we try such passive observation under natural conditions, at least in the late teens when employment is increasing and delinquency declining, we find that persons with jobs attached to them are *more* rather than less likely to be delinquent (Hirschi 1969: 188; West and Farrington 1977).

This finding requires that we modify job theory in fundamental ways. We do so by qualifying the idea of a job, or by restating the connection between jobs and people, or some combination of the two. Once we do begin to talk about "meaningful" work or about personal characteristics that lead people to seek or maintain jobs, we create a complex model whose significance for the age question is no longer clear. One thing is clear: once a situational variable has been contaminated by the characteristics of persons, it is no longer legitimate to use its effects as an argument against person-oriented explanations of crime. The modified job theory, recognizing that jobs do not exist in a vacuum, would probably state that, other things being

equal, those with jobs are less likely to be delinquent than those without them. To test this theory, we assign some people jobs and withhold jobs from others. When this is done, it seems fair to say that the results are not those "job theory" has led us to expect. Differences in rates of crime are small, nonexistent, or even in the wrong direction (Berk, Lenihan, and Rossi 1980). When, in contrast, everyone is assigned the same job regardless of past history of delinquency, as happened in World War II, differences in delinquency persist and the gradual decline in crime with age continues (Glueck and Glueck 1968). We therefore conclude that employment does not explain, or help to explain, the reduction in crime with age, and that it is not relevant to theories that differentiate between offenders and non-offenders.

A girlfriend. The plausibility of the girlfriend or wife as a reason for the decline in crime with age stems from several sources. As Franklin Zimring notes, "adolescents commit crimes, as they live their lives, in groups" (1981: 867). The evidence Zimring presents in favor of this statement is overwhelming. If we add one qualification to his statement, its implications for the age question are apparent: "adolescents commit crimes, as they live their lives, in groups homogeneous on sex." If this is so, breaking up the single-sex group should lead to a reduction in crime, whether the reduction is real or apparent. In this view, one shared by Trasler and by Wilson and Herrnstein (1985: 147), the girlfriend functions to keep the boyfriend away from his peers, to shield him from the temptations of gang life. Since girlfriends, like jobs, appear more frequently as boys grow into men, they could account for the decline in crime that occurs as boys grow into men. Do they? Once again, the evidence is distressingly in the wrong direction: boys with girlfriends appear more likely to commit delinquent acts than boys without them. In fact, this tendency is so strong that dating can be equated with smoking and drinking in terms of its connection with delinquency. This equation, by the way, is commonly encountered in the delinquency literature (Hirschi 1969: 163-70; Wiatrowski, Griswold, and Roberts 1981). Apparently, girlfriends, like jobs, do not simply attach themselves to boys. Instead, there is some sort of self-selection to the treatment condition. If this "treatment" is conducive to nondelinquency, we are forced once again to the strange conclusion that delinquents are peculiarly attracted to situations inconsistent with their delinquent behavior. It seems more reasonable, and certainly more consistent with what we know about self-selection, to assume that delinquents will be attracted to situations or activities consistent with their delinquent behavior.

Since we have introduced such activities, it may be worthwhile to explore their implications for the question at hand. The use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs increases through the adolescent years. In other words, its tendency is in the direction opposite to other forms of delinquent behavior. Given this familiar pattern, we could suggest the possibility that alcohol acts as a substitute for other forms of delinquency, that its pleasures make at least some other pleasures unnecessary. Given this logic (which is of course identical to situational explanations of the decline in crime with age), we would predict that those who use alcohol will be less likely to commit criminal acts. But we know that this is not true; on the contrary, alcohol and delinquency tend to go together. The reason they go together is that they both reflect a characteristic of the person: low self-control, the tendency to pursue short-term, immediate pleasures. Apparently, such pleasures do not preclude one another. Apparently, too, change in the frequency with which one of them is pursued does not necessarily imply change in the frequency with which others are pursued; nor does change in the frequency with which one of these pleasures is pursued necessarily imply change in the general propensity of the person to pursue such pleasures as a whole. In this regard, the Gluecks' longitudinal studies of delinquents consistently show that increases in arrests for drunkenness almost make up for decreases in arrests in other crime categories. The McCords' follow-up data show strong trends in the same direction (see Cline 1980: 658-61). Pursuit of this line of thought leads to the conclusion that a girlfriend, at least in the teen years, does not so much restrain the delinquent as she reflects and even encourages his short-term orientation to life. This conclusion has the virtue that it is consistent with the data as well as with a general conception of delinquency, a conception consistent with the decline in some kinds of pleasure-seeking with age.

Wives, home, and children. Wives and homes raise the same problems as jobs and girlfriends. They sound nice, and they are almost by definition inconsistent with crime, but they too may be abandoned if they prove inconvenient or overly restrictive. As a consequence, they do not seem to have an impact on the likelihood of crime. More to the point, they do not account for the decline in crime with age (Farington 1979; Tittle 1980). Children are an even more interesting case. It is generally reported that people with criminal records do not want their children to be delinquent. It seems to follow that children would therefore have an inhibiting effect on a parent's behavior: the parent interested in his or her children will try to provide a proper model for them and be willing to devote the immense amount of time and

energy necessary to train them. But as we noted in Chapter 5, many parents do not behave as expected. The training of children requires self-denial and a willingness to sacrifice immediate pleasure for long-term, uncertain benefit, characteristics offenders are likely to lack in the first place. The fact that their children are unusually likely to become offenders is consistent with the conclusion that offenders do not change their own behavior in the way the children hypothesis would suggest; instead, as parents, they maintain the short-term orientation of their youth.

In summary, the life-course or situational explanation of the decline in crime with age says that a person gains sources of satisfaction inconsistent with crime as he or she grows older. If one set of satisfactions is inconsistent with another, there is good reason to conclude that the person switching from one set to another has changed: he or she has given up something and accepted something rather different in its place. Put in bald form, the irresponsible, thoughtless offender has become the responsible, thoughtful law-abiding citizen. The data, however, do not conform to this picture. The institutions thought to restrain the offender do not produce the expected results. On the contrary, the offender tends to convert these institutions into sources of satisfaction consistent with his previous criminal behavior. As a result, individual differences in the likelihood of crime tend to persist across the life course; there is no drastic reshuffling of the criminal and noncriminal populations based on unpredictable, situational events.

There is, however, a decline in crime with age. Since this decline cannot be explained by change in the person or by his exposure to anticriminal institutions, we are left with the conclusion that it is due to the inexorable aging of the organism. We are also left with the conclusion that change in crime with age is not the problem for individual-level explanations it is usually taken to be; on the contrary, the theories that appear to be jeopardized by change are those theories used unsuccessfully to explain it, theories that focus on the controlling influence or deterrent effects of participation in conventional institutions.

Social Theories of Crime and the Age Effect

To this point, we have focused on the decline in crime with age, taking "remission" as the problem of interest. In this respect, we have merely followed tradition. The other side of the age curve is of at least equal theoretical interest. Why is it generally ignored? One reason seems to be that we think it is not ignored, that theory deals with the

increase in crime with age up to the middle teens, and that it therefore has no difficulty with *change* in criminal behavior until decline begins. Inspection of the major theories of delinquency reveals, however, that they do not really attend to either side of the age distribution, or, if they focus on one side, they ignore the other. Matza's discussion, focusing on remission, makes no mention of age of onset or analogous concepts. In fact, Matza's theory begins where delinquency is at its peak. Matza, then, takes delinquency as given: he begins and ends with the idea that the behavior of the delinquent must be explained, telling us nothing about how or when the delinquent came to be delinquent in the first place.

Cloward and Ohlin (1960) devote several brief sections of their book to the integration of age levels in the delinquent subculture, but it is not clear how the system of recruitment and training they describe squares with the age distribution of crime, since, as far as we can determine, they do not mention the specific ages of any of the people they describe. It seems fair to say, however, that Cloward and Ohlin describe a process through which people formerly nondelinquent are transformed into delinquents, and that this process involves participation in the conventional institutions of society—in particular, of course, the school. There is good reason to believe, then, that the Cloward and Ohlin theory stems ultimately from an image of the age distribution of crime, the image in which it starts from nowhere and rises to its peak in the middle teens. There is good reason, too, to believe that this theory is unlikely to be correct, since it mistakes the age distribution of crime for the age distribution of criminality, asking us to believe that criminality also comes from nowhere or, worse, to believe that good boys are transformed into bad boys by good institutions, a sequence we have learned to doubt from our experience with desistance theory.

Albert Cohen (1955) also does not mention specific age periods when the events he describes are supposed to occur, but these events can be located with reasonable precision in the life course. For example, Cohen spends a good deal of time describing what boys are like when they are turned over to the school by the family. We may not know exactly when this happens, but we do know it happens before officially noticed delinquency begins. Cohen describes in some detail two polar types of boys received by the school: boys who accept and boys who reject the following set of standards or values:

1. Ambition is a virtue: its absence is a defect. . . . Ambition means a high level of aspiration, aspiration for goals difficult of achievement. It means also

an orientation to long-run goals and long-deferred rewards. 2. Individual responsibility [is applauded]. . . . 3. [T]here is special emphasis on academic achievement and the acquisition of skills of *potential* economic and occupational value. 4. [G]reat value [is placed] on . . . a readiness and an ability to postpone and to subordinate the temptations of immediate satisfactions and self-indulgence in the interest of the achievement of long-run goals. . . . 5. Rationality is highly valued, in the sense of the exercise of fore-thought, conscious planning, and budgeting of time. . . . 6. [M]anners, courtesy, and personability [are valued]. . . . 7. The . . . ethic emphasizes the control of physical aggression and violence. . . . 8. [R]ecreation should be wholesome. . . . 9. Lastly, [these] values emphasize "respect for property" . . . [which] includes . . . the *right* of the owner to do as he wishes with his belongings. [1955: 88-91; first emphasis added]

Cohen's description of middle-class values is quoted at length because it is a detailed conceptualization of what we mean by self-control. In fact, just as we suggest that crime is a by-product of a tendency to seek immediate pleasure, Cohen suggests that those untrained to postpone pleasure are also untrained to avoid theft and violence. If so, it seems fair to say that in Cohen's theory marked differences in criminality have been produced by the time the family turns the child over to the school.

If differences in *criminality* appear early in life, there are two ways to handle the fact that crime does not appear until adolescence. One is to let age fill the gap, to assume that differences in crime potential, at whatever age they are established, will show themselves when the passage of time makes crime possible. The way adopted by Cohen is to fill the intervening period with theory; he gives boys who are untrained to postpone pleasure, to avoid violence, or to respect property one antidelinquent trait: concern for the opinion of middle-class people. Cohen then needs time, and an institutional experience, to get rid of this trait. Once again, then, an institution is required to transform the individual, in this case to turn a hypersensitive kid into a malicious offender. The theoretical effort required to produce this transformation is prodigious. Even though Cohen begins with a child who, if left alone, would almost certainly get into trouble eventually, that part of his theory most often cited and tested deals with the transformation question. We are forced to conclude that Cohen's theory, too, has been influenced by disciplinary preconceptions and an image of the age distribution of crime, the same image held by Cloward and Ohlin, according to which delinquency appears suddenly in early adolescence. These explanations of delinquency are thus mirror images of explanations of nondelinquency one finds on the down side of the age distribution: on the down side, a delinquent enters

conventional institutions and is transformed into a nondelinquent; on the up side, a nondelinquent enters a conventional institution and is transformed into a delinquent. In both sets of theory, the outcome is inconsistent with at least some of the initial properties of the person. In the up-side theory, the outcome is inconsistent with initial properties of the person and with the thrust of the institution he enters. If age is allowed to account for change in crime over time, many of the complications of transformation theory are avoided.

The distinction between crime and self-control thus provides a device for solving one of the major empirical dilemmas of criminology: the fact that crime everywhere declines with age while differences in "crime" tendency across individuals remain relatively stable over the life course. Once this distinction between propensities and events has been made, it is hard to return to crime theories that operate without it. Theories that fail to make this distinction were identified in Chapters 3 and 4 as representing the various brands of disciplinary positivism. Because the positive disciplines do not have a concept of crime, their theories focus on the criminal. At the same time, they are reluctant to acknowledge the idea of a stable characteristic of the individual bearing on his criminal behavior—that is, criminality. As a consequence, positive criminology has no clear conception of its primary dependent variable; it has no way to integrate findings about characteristics of people with those about characteristics of situations; and it has no way of permitting choice and causation to coexist in a single act.

Let us take these notions to two additional correlates of crime that have been extremely difficult for other schemes to deal with: gender and race.

Gender and Crime

Most scholars agree that gender is a major, persistent correlate to crime:

None of these studies quarrels with the invariant findings that males commit more offenses than females, and that male offenses are in general more serious than those of females. [Warren 1981: 8]

Such differences are striking indeed: sex appears to explain more variance in crime across cultures than any other variable. This appears so *regardless* of whether officially known or hidden ("true") rates of crime are indexed. [Harris 1977: 4]

Given's 1977 careful analysis of historical documents notes that homicide in 13th-century England "was an overwhelmingly male phenomenon" . . . and surveys of research worldwide confirm this kind of finding. [Nettler 1982: 16; Nettler's citations omitted]

The relation between gender and criminality is strong and is likely to remain so. Women have traditionally been much less likely than men to commit violent crimes and that pattern persists today. . . . While the relative increase in women's property crime involvements is significant, female participation even in these crimes remains far less than that of men. [Nagel and Hagan 1983: 91]

Our review of the data on gender and crime can be brief because of these recent extended treatments of the subject in the literature. For crimes involving force and fraud, male arrests account for 60–99 percent of those arrested. This disproportionality characterizes all official data since the FBI began collecting statistics in the 1930's in the United States. Similar differences have been documented for England (Douglas et al. 1966; Wadsworth 1979; Farrington 1986a), Sweden (Jonsson 1967), and Denmark (Christiansen and Jensen 1972), as well as for many other countries (see Adler 1981).

Unofficial statistics, it is now agreed, confirm the official portrait. Large differences between boys and girls are a persistent feature of self-report data. For example, Table 5 shows that male-female self-report differences from many studies consistently reveal a substantial disproportionality for serious offenses, and these differences are in all cases consistent with official data. According to the National Academy of Sciences: "The most consistent pattern with respect to gender is the extent to which male criminal participation in serious crimes at any age greatly exceeds that of females, regardless of source of data, crime type, level of involvement, or measure of participation" (Blumstein et al. 1986).

The Stability of the Gender Effect

As was true of age, gender differences appear to be invariant over time and space. Men are always and everywhere more likely than women to commit criminal acts. As was also true of age, this fact is often obscured by the tendency to emphasize "recent" trends toward similarity, or theories that predict eventual similarity. Thus, for example, it was for a long time routinely assumed that with greater equality of status between men and women there would be greater equality in their crime rates (Simon 1975; Nettler 1984). However, the persistence of large differences within class and ethnic groups during a period of increase in the labor-force participation of women in the

TABLE 5
*Male-to-Female Sex Ratios for Commonly Used Self-Report Items,
 Ranked by Magnitude of Median Sex Ratio*

Item	Range of sex ratios	Median sex ratio	Number of samples
Run away	.35-2.31	1.00	13
Hit parents	.79-1.09	1.00	4
Defy parents	.67-1.20	1.02	5
Smoke marijuana	.68-4.40	1.08	9
Drink alcohol	.85-1.75	1.28	20
Be truant	1.06-1.91	1.28	12
Drive without license	1.08-3.32	1.50	8
Steal less than \$2	1.16-2.02	1.75	12
Steal \$2-\$50	1.48-5.03	2.70	12
Have sexual relations	1.51-83.86	2.86	8
Commit robbery	1.00-8.00	2.87	10
Damage/destroy property	1.17-5.15	2.92	14
Participate in gang fight	2.50-4.60	3.28	11
Take car	1.48-13.26	3.37	15
Beat up/assault	1.17-6.50	3.61	10
Steal more than \$50	1.75-6.60	3.68	11

SOURCE: Adapted from Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis (1981: 140). The data are derived from samples constructed from thirteen studies.

United States suggests that the equality thesis or role theory is incorrect.

But the major device for questioning the universality of the gender effect is to cite variation in the magnitude of the difference across conditions. This suggests that there *could be* conditions under which no difference would be found. In fact, however, these conditions have not been empirically discovered (Jensen and Eve 1976). In the United States, for example, the convergence of arrests for white-collar crimes does not falsify the idea that men are more likely than women to commit such crimes. It reflects, instead, the fact that women are greatly overrepresented in occupations where such offenses are possible (e.g., women outnumber men in many white-collar occupations, such as bank tellers and clerical workers). When opportunity is controlled, the traditionally higher rate of fraud among males is again revealed (Hirschi and Gottfredson 1987).

Even if role or opportunity-based explanations of gender differences in crime could account for property-crime differences and their

purported convergence, such explanations lack credibility when applied to violent conduct. The opportunities for women to commit assault or homicide are equivalent to those available to men. In fact, women spend much more time in unsupervised interaction with children, and the amount of time they spend in contact with other people is as large or larger than that of men.

Another common explanation of gender differences in sociology is labeling theory, according to which women are less likely to be defined as deviant and therefore less likely to behave in a deviant way. However, as Rutter and Giller (1984: 121) point out, the evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that girls have been more harshly treated than boys by the criminal justice system. They are more likely to be taken into custody for offenses that would not involve custody for adults. Indeed, several recent reviews suggest insufficient bias in processing to produce the large gender differences in crime—a research outcome that is consistent with the official/self-report comparisons mentioned earlier (Hindelang 1981; Warren 1981; Empey 1982; Nagel and Hagan 1983).

Gender differences in behavior analogous to crime are similar to those found for crime, further serving to question the idea that role differences account for behavioral differences. For example, Figure 8 (p. 130) revealed consistent and large differences in motor vehicle accident rates for males and females regardless of age. Differences of the same magnitude are reported for most accidents, including drowning, burning, and falling. Alcohol and drug abuse are also more common among men than women (Miller 1982).

What does the crime and criminality distinction say about gender differences in crime? Note first that gender differences for all types of crime are established early in life and that they persist throughout life. This fact implies a substantial self-control difference between the sexes. Note second that there are obvious crime differences between men and women, such as rape and prostitution, and equally obvious differences between them in the sanctioning of deviant behaviors, such as the differential consequences for boys and girls of premarital pregnancy. This fact suggests that gender differences may be due to differences in crime rather than criminality, and that differences in opportunity may account for much of the male-female difference in crime rates. The latter hypothesis is the more prevalent in the literature. The theory we offer provides the means for beginning to resolve the question of the extent to which gender differences are crime or criminality related. Let us briefly illustrate how the perspective can be applied to this dispute.

At first glance, the gender difference in crime appears to be largely a result of opportunity variables or supervision. Historically, girls and women have been more closely supervised than boys and men. Parents tended to watch their daughters more closely than their sons, a tendency that persists at the present time, albeit at a somewhat diminished level (Felson and Gottfredson 1984). Schools and other community institutions followed parental practice in exercising tighter control over their female charges, a tendency that presumably also persists to the present day. The reason for greater control was not the presumption that girls are more criminally inclined than boys; it was the fact that most forms of delinquency are more costly to females than to males. In the extreme case, sexual misbehavior could result in pregnancy and reduced opportunities for a successful marriage. In general, the connection between good behavior and life chances was so much stronger for females than for males that their life chances could be damaged by all sorts of misbehavior that would have little impact on the life chances of males. Because most delinquency takes place in the absence of direct parental supervision, the tighter control on girls in and of itself could translate into lower rates of delinquency.

As a complete explanation, the direct-supervision thesis runs into trouble with the facts almost from the beginning. The male-female difference remains among adolescents who are equally supervised by their parents (Table 6). Boys have greater misconduct rates in school, where the sexes are comparably supervised. As a matter of fact, male-female differences in the use of force and fraud emerge early in life, well before differences in opportunity are possible, and persist into adulthood, where differences in supervision by agents of social control are minimal.

All of this suggests that social control and self-control have independent effects on the likelihood of criminal acts—that supervision and socialization are not synonymous. Indeed, parents do not appear to assume that supervision of their children is a necessary or sufficient means of socialization. Instead, they act as though their children are not sufficiently socialized to resist temptation in the absence of direct control. They therefore seek to minimize opportunities for crime, especially for daughters. But because supervision is not socialization, parents who supervise their sons and daughters differently may in fact socialize them similarly. Support for this idea is provided by the consistent finding that variables related to differences in criminality among boys are the same as those for girls (Glueck and Glueck 1934, 1950; Hindelang 1973; Jensen and Eve 1976; Warren 1981). Thus, for example, lack of attachment to parents is related to delinquency

TABLE 6
Self-Reported Delinquency by Parental Supervision and Gender (in percent)

Number of self-reported acts	Supervision, females			Supervision, males		
	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
0	31	51	65	16	27	38
1	28	33	25	20	32	29
2	23	10	8	23	21	17
3+	18	6	2	41	21	16
TOTALS	100	100	100	100	101	100
(N)	(65)	(134)	(394)	(334)	(537)	(663)

SOURCE: Richmond Youth Project data (Hirschi 1969).

NOTE: Supervision is measured by the items "Does your mother (father) know where you are when you are away from home?" and "Does your mother (father) know who you are with when you are away from home?" In the table, those scoring high on supervision answered "usually" to all four questions.

among both boys and girls. Likewise, academic ambition, good scholarly performance, and the belief that crime is wrong inhibit delinquency for both sexes. Clearly, parents may foster the same antidelinquent attitudes and behaviors in their children even as they supervise them differentially.

It seems to us to follow that the impact of gender on crime is largely a result of crime differences *and* differences in self-control that are not produced by direct external control. Given our discussion of the causes of self-control, this is not an altogether surprising conclusion. Direct supervision is only one of the elements necessary for the production of self-control. Other elements include the recognition of deviant behavior and the willingness to expend the effort necessary to correct it. Beyond these elements is the socializability of the individual. It is beyond the scope of this work (and beyond the reach of any available set of empirical data) to attempt to identify all of the elements responsible for gender differences in crime. However, by conceptualizing the problem as crime and criminality, available data may be examined in a new light.

Race, Ethnicity, and Crime

As with gender differences, there is substantial agreement that there are large, relatively stable differences in crime and delinquency rates across race and ethnic groups. In fact, John Laub (1983) has shown that the race differences in offending account for most of the

apparent effect of urbanization on U.S. crime rates. Such differences are not unique to American society:

In virtually every society, there are differences in crime rates among some racial and ethnic groups. Americans of Chinese and Japanese origin have significantly lower crime rates than other Americans. . . . Even allowing for the existence of discrimination in the criminal justice system, the higher rates of crime among black Americans cannot be denied. . . . Every study of crime using official data shows blacks to be overrepresented among persons arrested, convicted, and imprisoned for street crimes. Blacks are about one-eighth of the population but accounted in 1980 for about one-half of all those arrested for murder, rape, and robbery, and for between one-fourth and one-third of all those arrested for burglary, larceny, auto theft, and aggravated assault. [Wilson and Herrnstein 1985: 459-61]

According to the National Academy of Sciences, "combining data from several studies with criminal participation broadly defined as nontraffic offenses, the black/white ratio averages 1.8:1; for index offenses, the ratio averages 3.1:1" (Blumstein et al. 1986: 41).

As John Conklin summarizes the data on this question:

Crime rates for Jews, Japanese-Americans, and Chinese-Americans are lower than rates for the total population, and . . . crime rates for blacks and Mexican-Americans are higher than rates for the total population. . . . In 1983 blacks constituted 12 percent of the population of the United States, but they accounted for 35.7 percent of the arrests for index crimes. Blacks comprised 47.5 percent of arrests for crimes of violence, and 32.7 percent of arrests for property crimes. [1986: 123]

The picture in official data of clear race-ethnic differences in crime rates is often ascribed to system bias against racial minorities, but this explanation is disconfirmed by victimization data, where victims report on the characteristics of those victimizing them. These victim surveys show differences in offending nearly identical to those revealed by official data (Hindelang 1978, 1981; Wilbanks 1986). The self-report method does not reveal differences of the magnitude shown in official and victim data, but this appears to be due to the differential validity of the method by race (Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis 1981).

In Great Britain, Rutter and Giller report that "the findings of these various studies are quite clear-cut. Firstly, the delinquency rate for Asians has been equal to or lower than that for the white population at all times when it has been studied. Secondly, in sharp contrast to the situation in the 1950's and 1960's, the arrest rate for blacks is now substantially above that for whites, especially for violent crimes" (1984: 160-61).

The most popular explanation of racial variation in crime focuses on the American black-white rate difference and invokes a "subculture of violence" to explain it. According to subculture-of-violence theory, the deprivation of blacks leads to the development of values that condone or justify the use of violence in interpersonal disputes. Once developed, these values are passed on from generation to generation, even in the absence of the deprivation that stimulated their development in the first place (Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967; Curtis 1974).

Such cultural models of what we call criminality are fully general: given that cultures can be assigned to racial or ethnic groups, and given that cultures can differ in the extent to which they permit or inhibit the development of the tendency to commit crime, any and all observed differences in crime rates among racial or ethnic groups may be "explained" by differences in racial culture.

Unfortunately for the cultural view of criminality, the empirical evidence supports virtually none of its assumptions. Social scientists have searched in vain for group differences in attitudes and values about the use of violence. First, all groups, whatever their racial or ethnic composition, condemn the use of force or fraud in human interaction (see, generally, Short and Strodtbeck 1965; Suttles 1968; Rossi et al. 1974; Newman 1976; Kornhauser 1978; Nettler 1984). Second, all groups, whatever their racial or ethnic composition, endorse values contrary to crime, values such as long-range planning, selflessness, and fair play. Third, offenders themselves, whatever their racial group or ethnic affiliation, do not endorse criminal acts, even those they commit (Matza 1964). Fourth, the characteristics of offenders tend to be the antithesis of those characteristics necessary for the intimate group participation necessary to full socialization, whatever the culture. That is, the characteristics of offenders suggest that they are less rather than more reflective of the cultural values of their groups (see Chapter 5). Fifth, the structure of criminal "organizations" is inconsistent with the premises of the cultural argument. Rather than highly organized, stable units capable of transmitting culture, organizations composed of people who tend toward criminality are likely to be ephemeral and inefficient (Yablonsky 1962; Suttles 1968; Reuter 1983; see also Chapter 10). Sixth, and perhaps most important, the cultural view misconstrues the nature of the criminal act. There is nothing in crime that requires the transmission of values or the support of other people. There is nothing in crime that requires the transmission of skills, or techniques, or knowledge from other people. On the contrary, it is in the nature of crime that it can be invented instantly, on the spot, by almost anyone, and its own reward is its justification.

Another explanation of race and ethnic differences is provided by strain theory. This explanation may focus on deprivation or poverty, suggesting that members of some racial groups are objectively deprived. Such deprivation theories find little support in criminological research. As Jackson Toby points out, "in point of fact, one thief in a thousand in urban industrial societies steals because he is hungry or cold; color television sets and automobiles are stolen more often than food and blankets" (1979b: 516).

More often, strain theory focuses on relative rather than absolute deprivation (for a recent revival, see Blau and Blau 1982). For example, black-white differences in crime may be explained by income inequality between blacks and whites. As Reid Golden and Steven Messner summarize the Blau thesis: "The ascribed nature of racial inequality renders it illegitimate and makes it a source of pervasive conflict. Furthermore, because opportunities for effective political action are in large measure restricted for the disadvantaged, the 'pervasive conflict' engendered by racial inequality tends to be expressed in diffuse forms of aggression, such as criminal violence" (1987: 525).

No good evidence exists for the inequality thesis. In fact, apart from the ecological correlations between race, poverty, and violent-crime rates provided by Judith and Peter Blau (1982), correlations subject to widely varying interpretations, the results of research run contrary to the inequality thesis (Sampson 1985; Golden and Messner 1987; see also Kornhauser 1978: 253, where the author concludes that "strain models are disconfirmed").

Our crime and criminality distinction is also contrary to strain models and can be used to expose their logical deficiencies as explanations of race differences in criminal behavior. For one thing, strain theorists misconstrue the nature of the criminal act, supplying it with virtues it does not possess. Strain theorists suggest that compelling social or psychological purposes govern the commission of criminal acts; in fact, they are governed by the proximity, ease, and convenience of their rewards. Strain theorists suggest that offenders tend to strike out against their class enemies or people more fortunate than themselves; in fact, offenders tend to victimize people who share their unfortunate circumstances (whether individuals or commercial establishments). In short, crime is an ill-conceived mechanism for the redistribution of wealth or for the extraction of revenge on one's oppressors, and no racial or ethnic group believes otherwise. As Kornhauser (1978) remarks, it is implausible to argue or to believe that the pain of inequality may be alleviated by assaulting, robbing, or stealing from similarly situated people.

In the more general versions of strain theory, offenders "turn to crime" as a device for alleviating the frustrations generated by a disjunction between democratically induced aspirations and realistic expectations of their achievement (Merton 1938; Cloward and Ohlin 1960). These versions were developed using "social class" as the element of stratification relevant to crime, but they have always been a major explanation of race differences as well (Silberman 1978).

In these versions of strain theory, crime is seen as an alternative route to material success, as a substitute for legitimate work. To the extent these versions are accurate, black offenders (and, for that matter, all offenders) should treat crime as an important source of livelihood, as an occupation or career that is pursued with long-term advantage in mind. None of these features can be reconciled with the nature of crime, which provides only uncertain, short-term benefits, as we have repeatedly shown. Furthermore, this image is inconsistent with known patterns of offending, where behavior contrary to the requirements of an occupation or career is commonplace (e.g., excessive drug use) and there is no tendency to specialize in a particular criminal act or to improve one's skill in any of them.

Given the inability of existing sociological theories to account for race or ethnic differences in crime, how can the crime and criminality perspective be applied?

Partitioning race or ethnic differences into their crime and self-control components is not possible with currently available data. Nearly all theories explain these differences as due to differences in levels of self-control or criminality rather than differences in opportunity or crime. In our view, the emphasis on self-control is appropriate. There seems little reason to believe that opportunity factors alone can account for the relationship. There are differences among racial and ethnic groups (as there are between the sexes) in levels of direct supervision by family, and thus there is a "crime" component to racial differences in crime rates, but, as with gender, differences in self-control probably far outweigh differences in supervision in accounting for racial or ethnic variations. Given the potentially large differences among racial groups in the United States in the elements of child-rearing discussed in Chapter 5 (monitoring, recognizing, and correcting evidence of antisocial behavior), it seems to us that research on racial differences should focus on differential child-rearing practices and abandon the fruitless effort to ascribe such differences to culture or strain. We return to the problem of ethnic differences in Chapter 8.

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