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Juvenile Delinquency

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Chapter 61: Juvenile Delinquency

Juvenile delinquency refers to antisocial and criminal behavior committed by persons under the age of 18. Juvenile delinquency is also simply called *delinquency*, and the two terms are used interchangeably in popular discourse. Once persons reach adulthood, antisocial and criminal behavior is known as crime. In this way, juvenile delinquency is the child and adolescent version of crime. Juvenile delinquency encompasses two general types of behaviors, status and delinquent offenses. Status offenses are behaviors that are considered inappropriate or unhealthy for children and adolescents, and the behaviors are proscribed because of the age of the offender. Such behaviors, if committed by adults, are not illegal. Examples of status offenses include smoking or using tobacco, drinking or possessing alcohol, running away from home, truancy or nonattendance at school, and violating curfew. There are also other status offenses that are essentially labels that parents and the juvenile justice system place on young people. These offenses include waywardness, incorrigibility, idleness, and being ungovernable. Depending on the jurisdiction, the juvenile justice system has devised formal labels for adolescents that are in need. These include CHINS (child in need of supervision), PINS (person in need of supervision), MINS (minor in need of supervision), FINS (family in need of supervision), and YINS (youth in need of supervision).

Delinquent offenses are violations of legal statutes that also apply to adults in the criminal justice system. Delinquent offenses include acts of violence against persons, such as murder, rape, armed robbery, aggravated and simple assault, harassment, stalking, menacing, child abuse, and similar offenses. Delinquent offenses also include acts that are considered property crimes, such as burglary, theft or larceny, motor vehicle theft, arson, damage to property, criminal mischief, vandalism, and others. A variety of miscellaneous crimes sometimes known as public order offenses are also delinquent offenses. These include driving while intoxicated, cruelty to animals, possession and use of a controlled substance, forgery, fraud, disorderly conduct,

weapons violations, prostitution and commercialized vice, vagrancy and loitering, traffic violations, and others.

Juvenile delinquency is important in society for several reasons but for three in particular. First, children and adolescents commit a significant amount of delinquent offenses that result in violent, property, or other forms of victimization. Each year, more than one million children and adolescents are arrested by police for their delinquent acts. Second, juvenile delinquency is itself seen as an indicator of the general health and prosperity of a society. In neighborhoods with high levels of delinquency, the antisocial behavior is seen as part of a larger set of social problems. In this sense, juvenile delinquency is troubling because of the victimizations that are inflicted and the perceptual image of society as unable to adequately control and supervise young people. Third, as this chapter will [p. 525 ↓] explore, juvenile delinquency has different meanings depending on its severity and other factors. For many young people, juvenile delinquency is a fairly normal facet of growing up. For a small group of youths, however, juvenile delinquency is simply the beginning stage of what will become a lifetime of antisocial behavior. This chapter offers a comprehensive look at juvenile delinquency including its historical background, major theories of juvenile delinquency, and types or typologies of juvenile delinquents.

Historical Background

The ways that juvenile delinquency has been defined, perceived, and responded to have changed over time and generally reflect the social conditions of the particular era. During the colonial era of the United States, for example, the conceptualization of juvenile delinquency was heavily influenced by religion. At this time, juvenile delinquency was viewed as not only a legal violation, but also a moral violation. Delinquent acts were viewed as affronts to God and God's law, and as such, wrongdoers were treated in very punitive and vengeful ways.

American colonial society was similarly harsh toward children and the control of children's behavior. Throughout society, there was a general notion that children were particularly susceptible to vice and moral violations. For instance, in 1641, the General Court of Massachusetts Bay Colony passed the Stubborn Child Law, which stated that

children who disobeyed their parents would be put to death. The language and the spirit of the law were drawn from the biblical Book of Deuteronomy. The Stubborn Child Law descended from the Puritans' belief that unacknowledged social evils would bring the wrath of God down upon the entire colony. The Puritans believed they had no choice but to react to juvenile misbehavior in a severe and calculated manner. However, not all colonies adopted the Stubborn Child Law. Outside Massachusetts, children found guilty of a serious crime frequently were punished via corporal punishment, which is the infliction of physical pain such as whipping, mutilating, caning, and other methods.

What would today be considered normal and routine adolescent behavior, such as “hanging out with friends,” was in early eras considered serious delinquent behavior, such as sloth and idleness. Today, the use of a death penalty or beatings for minor types of delinquency seems shocking; however, there are similarities between colonial juvenile justice and contemporary juvenile justice. In both eras, adult society held ambivalent views about children. On one hand, children and adolescents were seen as innocents that were not fully developed and required compassion, patience, and understanding. From this perspective, the response to juvenile delinquents should be tempered, tolerant, and used to teach or discipline. On the other hand, children and adolescents were viewed as disrespectful, annoying, and simply different from adults. It was believed that children were born in sin and should submit to adult authority.

Over time, the puritanical approach to defining, correcting, and punishing juvenile delinquency came under attack. Not only had these severe forms of juvenile justice failed to control juvenile delinquency, but also they were portrayed as primitive and brutal. In 1825, a progressive social movement known as the Child Savers changed the course of the response to juvenile delinquency and made corrections a primary part of it. Rather than framing juvenile delinquency as an issue of sin and morality, the Child Savers attributed it to environmental factors, such as poverty, immigration, poor parenting, and urban environments. Based on the doctrine of *parens patriae*, which means the state is the ultimate guardian of children, the Child Savers sought to remove children from the adverse environments that they felt contributed to children's delinquency.

The Child Savers actively pursued the passage of legislation that would permit placing children in reformatories, especially juvenile paupers. The goal of removing children

from extreme poverty was admirable, but resulted in transforming children into persons without legal rights. Children were placed into factories, poorhouses, and orphanages where they were generally treated poorly and where almost no attention was given to their individual needs. The first and most infamous of these facilities was the New York House of Refuge, which opened in 1825 and served to incarcerate thousands of children and adolescents viewed as threats to public safety and social order.

Another curious response to juvenile delinquency during this era was the use of transport. For example, between the 1850s and the Great Depression, approximately 250,000 abandoned children from New York were placed on orphan trains and relocated to locations in the West where they were adopted by Christian farm families. The process of finding new homes for the children was haphazard. At town meetings across the country, farming families took their pick of the orphan train riders. Children who were not selected got back on board the train and continued to the next town. The children who were selected and those who adopted them had one year to decide whether they would stay together. If either decided against it, the child would be returned, boarded on the next train out of town, and offered to another family.

Progressive reformers continued looking for new solutions to the growing problem of juvenile delinquency. Their most significant remedy was the creation of the juvenile court in Cook County, Illinois, in July 1899 via the passage of the Chicago Juvenile Court Act. The juvenile court attempted to closely supervise problem children, but unlike the houses of refuge, this new form of supervision was to more often occur within the child's own home and community, not in institutions. In the juvenile court, procedures [p. 526 ↓] were civil as opposed to criminal, perhaps because social workers spearheaded the court movement. They thought that children had to be treated, not punished, and the judge was to be a sort of wise and kind parent. The new court segregated juvenile from adult offenders at all procedural stages.

The juvenile court reaffirmed and extended the doctrine of *parens patriae*. This paternalistic philosophy meant that reformers gave more attention to the “needs” of children than to their rights. In their campaign to meet the needs of children, the Child Savers enlarged the role of the state to include the handling of children in the judicial system. Because of its innovative approach, the juvenile court movement spread

quickly, and by 1945, all states had specialized juvenile courts to respond to juvenile delinquency.

As juvenile courts across the United States continued in operation, two concerns emerged that would later motivate additional reforms. First, the informality of juvenile proceedings was seen as good in that justice could be tailored to the needs of individual youth. However, the informality also invited disparate treatment of offenders. The second and related point was that the juvenile court needed to become more formalized to ensure due process rights of delinquents that were comparable to the due process rights of adults in the criminal courts. These rights were established in a series of landmark cases during the 1960s and early 1970s.

An important milestone in the history of juvenile delinquency occurred in 1974 with the passage of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. This act was the most sweeping change in juvenile justice since the founding of the juvenile court. There were five major points of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. First, it mandated the decriminalization of status offenders so that they were not considered delinquent. Second, it mandated the deinstitutionalization of juvenile corrections so that only the most severe juvenile delinquents would be eligible for confinement. In addition, the act mandated that status offenders should not be institutionalized and that juveniles in adult jails and prisons should be separated by sight and sound from adults. Third, it broadened use of diversion as an alternative to formal processing in juvenile court. Fourth, it continued application of due process constitutional rights to juveniles. Fifth, it created the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), which funded research to evaluate juvenile justice programs and disseminated research findings on the juvenile justice system.

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act was modified in 1977, 1980, 1984, 1988, and as recently as 2002. For instance, in 1980 the act specified the jail and lockup removal requirement, which meant that juveniles could not be detained or confined in adult jails or lockups. Adult facilities had a 6-hour grace period to ascertain the age of the offender or transport the youth to a juvenile facility. (Rural jails had up to 48 hours.) In 1988, the act specified the disproportionate minority confinement requirement, which required juvenile corrections to gather data on the racial composition of their population compared to the racial composition of the state.

In 2002, this was changed to disproportionate minority *contact*, whereby racial data were mandated for all aspects of the juvenile justice system. Correctional systems must comply with OJJDP guidelines to remain eligible for federal allocations from the Formula Grants Program.

Beginning in the 1960s and continuing until the early to mid-1990s, the United States experienced dramatic increases in the most serious forms of juvenile delinquency, such as murder, and an increasingly visible juvenile gang problem in major American cities. As a result, states enacted more legislation that targeted youths involved in the most serious types of juvenile delinquency. During the 1990s, 45 states made it easier to transfer juvenile offenders to adult criminal courts. Thirty-one states expanded the sentencing options to include blended sentencing, which allows juvenile courts to combine juvenile and adult punishment that is tailored to the needs of the individual offender. For instance, juvenile courts can combine a juvenile disposition with a criminal sentence that is suspended. If the delinquent complies with the juvenile disposition, the criminal sentence is never imposed. If not, the youth is eligible to receive the adult sentence.

In 34 states, there are “once an adult, always an adult” provisions that specify that once a youth has been tried as an adult, any subsequent offenses must also be waived to criminal court. Laws have been modified to reduce or remove traditional juvenile court confidentiality provisions and make juvenile records more open in 47 states. In 22 states, laws have increased the role of victims of juvenile crimes by allowing them more voice in the juvenile justice process.

Nationwide, adolescents account for about 1% of new court commitments to adult state prisons. This means that more than 4,000 adolescents are in adult prisons because they have been convicted of the most serious forms of delinquency, which includes offenses such as armed robbery, assault, burglary, murder, and sexual assault. More punitive measures such as waivers are justified based on the serious violence and chronic delinquencies of the most serious offenders; however, some of these provisions carry unintended consequences. For example, research suggests that youths who are waived to criminal court and receive adult punishments ultimately have higher recidivism levels than youths that receive juvenile court dispositions.

Over the past 20 years, American society has also struggled to understand the place of capital punishment as a way to punish the most violent juvenile delinquents. In 1988, in *Thompson v. Oklahoma*, the Supreme Court held that imposing the death penalty on a person who was 15 years at the time of his or her crime violated the Eighth Amendment's prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment. One year later, in *Stanford v. Kentucky*, the Supreme Court held that no consensus exists that forbids [p. 527 ↓] the sentencing to death of a person that commits capital murder at age 16 or 17. That changed in 2005 with the landmark case *Roper v. Simmons*, which rendered capital punishment unconstitutional as applied to persons under age 18. The *Roper* decision invalidated the death penalty for juveniles, which is a far different approach from earlier eras. According to the Supreme Court, several factors contributed to a changing consensus about applying the death penalty to juveniles, including the fact that several states had abolished the juvenile death penalty in the intervening years since *Stanford*; most states that retained the juvenile death penalty basically never used it; the juvenile death penalty was not used in most parts of the Western world; and there was greater appreciation for the developmental differences between adolescent and adults in terms of decision making, emotional and behavioral control, and other neurocognitive factors that influence criminal decision making.

It is conventional wisdom within criminology to lament the increasing toughness or punitive stance that society takes toward juvenile delinquents, primarily through the process of transfer to criminal court. But it should be noted that the last 40 years of juvenile justice reflect a profound commitment to due process and the legal rights of adolescents, the abolishment of the juvenile death penalty, and a general hands-off policy stance toward status and low-level delinquents. Indeed, the juvenile justice system and particularly juvenile corrections have noted the diversity of the juvenile delinquent population and have focused resources disproportionately toward the most serious youths.

Major Theories of Juvenile Delinquency

Any idea about the causes, extent, and correlates of juvenile delinquency is essentially a theory, such as equating juvenile delinquency with sin and violating God's law. For more than two centuries, academic criminologists have developed a host of theories to

explain juvenile delinquency. The major difference among them relates to the academic discipline in which the theorist was trained. The various disciplines, such as economics, psychology, and sociology, have differing assumptions about humans and human behavior, and these result in different conceptualizations about what causes juvenile delinquency. This section broadly examines theories of juvenile delinquency from economics, psychology, and—the most common theoretical approach—sociology.

Some of the earliest theories of juvenile delinquency were economic in their perspective. Economic theories are known as classical theories. They generally state that juveniles are rational, intelligent people who have free will, which is the ability to make choices. Young people calculate the costs and benefits of their behavior *before* they act. Delinquency is the result of juveniles imagining greater gains coming from breaking the law than from obeying it. In the same way, children and adolescents that skip school first weigh the likelihood of getting caught against the potential fun they will have. Similarly, juveniles who commit serious crime weigh the pleasure they imagine they will receive against potentially being arrested, prosecuted, convicted, and sent to prison. Since behavior is a conscious decision that youths make, they may be held responsible for their choices and their consequences.

One of the major figures in classical theory is Cesare Beccaria (1764/1963), who formulated his ideas about crime control during the 18th century when the criminal justice systems throughout Europe were cruel and ruthless and exercised a callous indifference toward human rights. People were punished for crimes against religion, such as atheism and witchcraft, and for crimes against the state, such as criticizing political leaders. Worse yet, “offenders” were rarely told why they were punished. No one was exempt. Any person could be hauled off to jail at any time, for any reason. Wealthy persons were generally spared the most torturous and degrading punishments, which were reserved for ordinary citizens who sometimes were burned alive, whipped, mutilated, or branded.

These conditions inspired Beccaria to write an essay titled “On Crimes and Punishments,” where he laid the framework for a new system of justice that emphasized humanity, consistency, and rationality. According to Beccaria, the system would follow these principles:

- 1. Social action should be based on the utilitarian principle of the greatest happiness for the greatest number.
- 2. Crime is an injury to society, and the only rational measure of crime is the extent of the injury.
- 3. Crime prevention is more important than punishment. Laws must be published so that the citizenry can understand and support them.
- 4. In criminal procedure, secret accusations and torture must be abolished. There should be speedy trials, and accused persons should have every right to present evidence in their defense.
- 5. The purpose of punishment is to prevent crime. Punishment must be swift, certain, and severe. Penalties must be based on the social damage caused by the crime. There should be no capital punishment. Life imprisonment is a better deterrent. Capital punishment is irreparable and makes no provision for mistakes.
- 6. Imprisonment should be widely used, but prison conditions should be improved through better physical quarters and by separating and classifying inmates as to age, sex, and criminal histories.

Another important classical theorist was the English economist Jeremy Bentham who, observing that people naturally seek pleasure and avoid pain, believed that the “best” punishment was one that would produce more pain than whatever pleasure the offender would receive from committing the crime. In other words, punishment must “fit the crime,” and no single punishment was always best. Instead, a variety of punishments should be used.

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Today, classical theory is generally known as rational choice theory, which again asserts that people are rational and make calculated choices regarding what they are going to do before they act. Juvenile delinquents collect, process, and evaluate information about the crime and make a decision whether to commit it after they have weighed the costs and benefits of doing so. Juvenile delinquency represents a well-thought-out decision whereby delinquents decide where to commit the crime, who or what to target, and how to execute it.

Psychological theories explain juvenile delinquency with individual-level constructs that exist inside of all people and interact with the social world. For instance, behavioral theory proposes that behavior reflects people's interactions with others throughout their lifetime. A leading behaviorist was the psychologist B. F. Skinner (1953), who theorized that children learn conformity and deviance from the punishments and reinforcements that they receive in response to their behavior. He believed the environment shapes behavior and that children identify those aspects of their environment they find pleasing and which ones are painful; their behavior is the result of the consequences it produces. He concluded that children and adolescents repeat rewarded behavior and terminate punished behavior.

Similarly, Albert Bandura (1977) argues that learning and experiences couple with values and expectations to determine behavior. In his social learning theory, Bandura suggests that children learn by modeling and imitating others. For example, children learn to be aggressive from their life experiences and learn aggression in different ways—for instance, by seeing parents argue, watching their friends fight, viewing violence on television and in movies, and listening to violent music. What children learn is that aggression is sometimes acceptable and can produce the desired outcome. The ideas of Skinner and Bandura would later be adopted by sociologists.

According to psychodynamic theory, unconscious mental processes that developed in early childhood control the personality, and these mental processes influence behavior, including juvenile delinquency. The main author of this theory is Sigmund Freud (1925), who theorized that the personality consists of three parts: the id, ego, and superego. The id, which is present at birth, consists of blind, unreasoning, instinctual desires and motives. The id represents basic biological and psychological drives and does not differentiate between fantasy and reality. The id also is antisocial and knows no rules, boundaries, or limitations. If the id is left unchecked, it will destroy the person. The ego grows from the id and represents the problem-solving dimension of the personality. It deals with reality, differentiates it from fantasy, and teaches children to delay gratification because acting on impulse will get them into trouble. The superego develops from the ego and is the moral code, norms, and values the child has acquired. The superego is responsible for feelings of guilt and shame and is more closely aligned with the conscience. In mentally healthy children, the three parts of the personality work together. When the parts are in conflict, children may become maladjusted and ready

for delinquency. Freud did not write specifically about delinquency. However, he did influence criminologists, who took his ideas and applied them to the study of crime. The lasting importance of Freud and psychodynamic theory is evidenced in the way that early childhood experiences and mental processes have figured prominently in studies of human behavior.

The psychological theory that most explicitly matches the thinking patterns and personality of the individual with his or her subsequent involvement in juvenile delinquency is psychopathy. *Psychopathy* is a clinical construct that is usually referred to as a personality disorder defined by a set of interpersonal, affective, lifestyle, and behavioral characteristics that manifest in wide-ranging antisocial behaviors. The characteristics of psychopathy read like a blueprint for juvenile delinquency. Psychopathic persons are impulsive, grandiose, emotionally cold, manipulative, callous, arrogant, dominant, irresponsible, short-tempered individuals who tend to violate social norms and victimize others without guilt or anxiety.

Psychopathy is a controversial theory, and much disagreement centers on whether the theory should be applied toward children and adolescent delinquents. At the heart of psychopathy is the complete lack of feeling for other people evidenced by callous-unemotional traits, remorselessness, and the absence of empathy. Psychopathic persons do not experience the feelings that naturally inhibit the acting out of violent impulses, and their emotional deficiency is closely related to general under-arousal and the need for sensation seeking. Because of this inability to morally connect to other people, psychopathic persons are distinct from other offender groups. Research has also shown that the callous and unemotional traits that are indicators of psychopathy are present early in life during childhood, and these traits are mostly genetic in origin. In this way, psychopathy does not just implicate the personality and character of a person but also his or her genes.

Sociological theories of juvenile delinquency point to societal factors and social processes that in turn affect human behavior. Unlike other explanations, sociology explains people's behavior using characteristics beyond the individual. Mostly, sociological theories assert that certain negative aspects of neighborhoods and society in general serve as structural inducements for young people to resort to juvenile

delinquency. In this way, sociological theories tend to ignore or deny individual-level psychological differences that might partially explain who engages in delinquency.

One of the most prominent sociological theories is the social disorganization theory developed by Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1942), who suggested that juvenile delinquency was caused by the neighborhood in which a person lived. Instead of focusing on individual traits, Shaw and McKay studied the impact of the kinds of places, such as [p. 529 ↓] as neighborhoods, that created conditions favorable to delinquency. They discovered that delinquency rates declined the farther one moved from the center of the city. They reached this conclusion after dividing Chicago into five concentric circles or zones. At the center was the Loop, the downtown business district where property values were highest (Zone I). Beyond the Loop was the zone of transition (Zone II) containing an inner ring of factories and an outer ring that included places of vice, such as gambling, prostitution, and the like. Zones III and IV were suburban residential areas, and Zone V extended beyond the suburbs. Delinquency rates were highest in the first two zones and declined steadily as one moved farther away from the city center.

Neighboring railroads, stockyards, and industries made Zone II the least desirable residential area, but also the cheapest one. Because of this, people naturally gravitated to this area if they were poor, as many new immigrants to the United States were. What did these findings say about juvenile delinquency? Shaw and McKay interpreted the findings in cultural and environmental terms. The rates of juvenile delinquency remained stable in certain Chicago neighborhoods, regardless of the race or ethnicity of the people who lived there. Areas that were high in juvenile delinquency at the turn of the 20th century were also high in juvenile delinquency several decades later, even though many of the original residents had moved away or died. Shaw and McKay explained juvenile delinquency via the following four points.

First, run-down areas create social disorganization. Cities such as Chicago were expanding industrially, their populations were increasing, and segregation was forcing new immigrants into the slums. These immigrants were not familiar with the city's geography or culture; they arrived with different languages and work experiences; and they immediately faced new and overwhelming problems, including poverty, disease, and confusion.

Second, social disorganization fosters cultural conflicts. In low-delinquency areas of the city, there typically was agreement among parents on which values and attitudes were the “right” ones, with general consensus on the importance of education, constructive leisure, and other child-rearing issues. Local institutions, such as the PTA, churches, and neighborhood centers, reinforced these conventional values. No such consistency prevailed in high-delinquency areas. The norms of a variety of cultures existed side by side, creating a state of normative ambiguity, or anomie (cultural conflict). This condition was aggravated by the presence of individuals who promoted an unconventional lifestyle and defined behaviors such as theft as an acceptable way to acquire wealth. This value system could count on the support of criminal gangs, rackets, and semi-legitimate businesses.

Third, cultural conflict allows delinquency to flourish. Children raised in low-socioeconomic, high-delinquency areas were exposed to both conventional and criminal value systems. They saw criminal activities and organizations in operation daily. Successful criminals passed on their knowledge to younger residents, who then taught it to even younger children. Delinquency became a tradition in certain neighborhoods through the process of cultural transmission, where criminal values are passed from one generation to the next. Fourth, allowed to flourish, delinquency becomes a full-time career. Children in these Chicago neighborhoods dabbled in initially trivial forms of juvenile delinquency, but their acts became increasingly serious and prone to gang delinquency.

Edwin Sutherland (1947) developed differential association theory, which is one of the most popular and enduring theories of juvenile delinquency. The theory consists of nine principles. First, Sutherland asserted that delinquent behavior is learned and not inherited. Biological and hereditary factors are rejected as explanations for the cause of delinquency. Only sociological factors explain why youth commit delinquency. Second, delinquent behavior is learned through interaction with others by way of communication. The communication can be either verbal or nonverbal. Third, learning occurs in intimate groups. It is in small, face-to-face gatherings that children learn to commit delinquency. Fourth, in small, intimate groups, children learn techniques for committing crime, as well as the appropriate motives, attitudes, and rationalizations. The learning process involves exposure not only to the techniques of committing offenses, but also to the attitudes or rationalizations that justify those acts. Fifth, the specific direction of

motives and drives is learned from definitions of the legal code as being favorable or unfavorable. The term *definitions* refers to attitudes.

Sixth, a juvenile becomes delinquent due to an excess of definitions favorable to the violation of law over definitions unfavorable to the violation of law. This sixth principle is the core of the theory. A parent who even hints through words or actions that it is acceptable to fight, treat women as potential conquests, cheat on income tax returns, or lie may promote juvenile delinquency in children unless these statements are outnumbered by definitions or attitudes that favor obeying the law—for example, driving the speed limit. Definitions favorable to the violation of law can be learned from both criminal and noncriminal people.

Seventh, the tendency toward delinquency will be affected by the frequency, duration, priority, and intensity of learning experiences. The longer, earlier, more intensely, and more frequently youths are exposed to attitudes about delinquency, both pro and con, the more likely they will be influenced. Sutherland used the term *intensity* to refer to the degree of respect a person gives to a role model or associate. Thus, correctional officers are not likely to become criminals despite the positive things inmates say about living a life of crime. The reason is that officers do not respect the inmates and therefore do not adopt their beliefs, values, and attitudes.

[p. 530 ↓] Eighth, learning delinquent behavior involves the same mechanisms involved in any other learning. While the content of what is learned is different, the process for learning any behavior is the same. Ninth, criminal behavior and noncriminal behavior are expressions of the same needs and values. In other words, the goals of delinquents and nondelinquents are similar. What is different are the means they use to pursue their goals.

Decades of research supported the general claims of differential association and what is more broadly known as social learning theory. One of the strongest indicators of juvenile delinquency, for example, is the number of delinquent peers that an individual has. Youths that do not have delinquent peer associations tend not to be involved in juvenile delinquency. On the other hand, youths with many delinquent friends, such as adolescents that are involved in delinquent gangs, are significantly likely to commit status and delinquent offenses.

The other major sociological theory of juvenile delinquency is social control theory. This theory can be traced to 17th-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who believed that human beings are naturally aggressive, argumentative, shy creatures in search of glory that would naturally use violence to master other men, their wives, and their children. This profile described all men, not simply criminals. In Hobbes's view, human beings were basically bad and at the very least, self-interested at the expense of others. Because of their fundamentally "bad" nature, a strong state or government was needed to strike fear into their hearts and punish them severely when they broke the law. Twentieth-century criminologists expanded upon Hobbes's ideas and created social control theory. These theorists assumed that without controls, children would break the law. From this perspective, juvenile delinquency was expected behavior. Rather than look for factors that push children into delinquency, the purpose of social control theory is to identify the factors that stop, insulate, or prevent children from participating in delinquency in the first place. In social control theory, what must be explained is why most children conform to society's rules most of the time. It is taken for granted that children break rules. The real question is, why do children *not* commit crime?

Arguably the most important social control theory is Travis Hirschi's (1969) version, which is called social bond theory. A social bond describes a person's connection to society and consists of four elements: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Each component of the social bond forms its own continuum, ranging from low to high. When the continua are merged, they provide a gauge of how strongly a person is tied or bonded to society. The stronger the bond, the less likely the youth will commit juvenile delinquency. Hirschi asserted that the best predictor of delinquent behavior was a youth's attachments to parents, schools, and peers, which are the primary agents of socialization. Decades of criminological research have consistently reported that children who are strongly tied to parents are less likely to become delinquent. In addition, their positive feelings promote acceptance of the parents' values and beliefs. These children avoid juvenile delinquency because such behavior would jeopardize their parents' affection. Belief in the moral validity of law also has been found to reduce the likelihood that a juvenile will commit crime. Hirschi maintains that in the United States, there is one belief system that centers on conventional values. From this perspective, there are no subcultures that regard theft and assault as proper and

permissible, which is contrary to the claims of cultural deviance theories. Belief in the moral validity of law does seem to reduce the likelihood of committing crime.

The commitment component of the social bond is about success, achievement, and ambition. Social bond theory proposes that ambition or motivation to achieve keeps juveniles on the “straight and narrow” path because they know that getting into trouble will hurt their chances of success. In other words, children have a stake in conformity. The more time and energy they have invested in building an education, a career, or a reputation, the less likely they will risk their accomplishments by committing juvenile delinquency. Research examining the importance of commitment has reported that children who are more heavily invested in conventional activities are less likely to be delinquent.

Involvement in conventional activities has been seen as a way of preventing juvenile delinquency as illustrated by the popular phrase “Idle hands are the devil's workshop.” The notion that people need to be involved in society and otherwise kept busy has inspired politicians and city planners to call for more and better playgrounds and afterschool sports programs to keep children off the streets. If these facilities are available, young people will have less time to engage in delinquent behavior. Unfortunately, involvement does not have as much impact on preventing delinquency as other components of the bond to society. This is because delinquency is not a full-time job. It requires so little time that anyone, no matter how involved in conventional activities, can find time for juvenile delinquency if he or she wants to.

There are many other theories of juvenile delinquency stemming from an array of academic disciplines. But the fields of economics, psychology, and sociology have been the most visible disciplinary starting points for understanding why young people commit criminal acts.

Types of Juvenile Delinquents

Juvenile delinquents are a diverse group of young people that varies in terms of the severity of delinquent acts they commit, the frequency with which they commit delinquent acts, how early they begin their delinquent career, and how long they

commit delinquency. For many youths, juvenile delinquency is a short-lived flirtation that goes away as [p. 531 ↓] quickly as it emerges. It is common and even normal for adolescents to engage in trivial forms of misbehavior and delinquency as they mature through adolescence and enter adulthood. However, for some youths, juvenile delinquency has a more troubling meaning. Several decades of research have shown that a small subset of youths—comprising approximately 5% to 10% of the population—constitute serious, violent, and chronic offenders. Although this group is statistically small, they account for more than half of the juvenile delinquency occurring in a population and even greater levels of the most violent offenses, such as murder, rape, and armed robbery. Researchers have provided evidence of this group using samples from across North America, South America, Europe, Asia, and Australia. Because of the empirical consistency with which the small group of serious delinquents appears in crime data, criminologists have developed theories and helped to influence public policies that are tailored to the various needs and risk profiles of different types of juvenile delinquents.

For example, in 1993, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) published the Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders, which is a research-based framework of strategic responses to help local and state juvenile justice systems respond to delinquency. Two years later, the OJJDP conducted a national training and assistance initiative to put the Comprehensive Strategy into place. The Comprehensive Strategy has two main components, prevention and graduated sanctions. Prevention targets youths that are at risk for juvenile delinquency and attempts to enhance their prosocial development by focusing on healthy and nurturing families, safe communities, school attachment, prosocial peer relations, personal development and life skills, and healthy lifestyle choices. In other words, prevention provides education and guidance on the very factors that will insulate youths from selecting a delinquent career. Graduated sanctions, which is the second component of the Comprehensive Strategy, target the same prosocial developmental points but for a different target population of youths—those that have already begun their delinquent career.

The Comprehensive Strategy is multidisciplinary and uses the range or continuum of sanctions that exists in the juvenile justice system to address the needs of the range of youthful offenders, from those first experimenting with problem behaviors to those

with sustained and violent records. It is guided by six principles: (1) strengthening the family in its primary responsibilities to instill moral values and provide support and guidance to children; (2) supporting core social institutions, such as schools, churches, and community organizations, to help develop capable, mature, and responsible youth; (3) promoting delinquency prevention as the most cost-effective approach to reducing juvenile delinquency; (4) intervening immediately and effectively when delinquent behavior first emerges to prevent it from becoming worse; (5) establishing a system of graduated sanctions that holds each juvenile offender accountable, protects public safety, and provides programs and services that meet treatment needs; and (6) identifying and controlling the small percentage of serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders who commit the majority of felony offenses.

What happens if nothing is done to prevent or intervene in delinquent careers once they are under way? A study by Kimberly Kempf-Leonard and her colleagues (Kempf-Leonard, Tracy, & Howell, 2001) is telling. Kempf-Leonard et al. studied more than 27,000 delinquent careers from the 1958 Philadelphia Birth Cohort Study and followed the youths until age 27. Among youth that had been serious delinquents, 48% were arrested as adults. For violent delinquents, 53% were arrested as adults. For chronic delinquents, 59% were arrested during adulthood. For those that were serious and chronic juvenile offenders, 63% were arrested during adulthood. For violent and chronic delinquents, over 63% were arrested as adults. In short, the deeper a youth becomes entrenched in his or her delinquency, the more likely antisocial behavior will be a lifelong problem.

Conclusion

Juvenile delinquency is a tremendous burden on society, and the most antisocial youths impose staggering costs in terms of victimization and correctional fees. A recent study by Brandon Welsh and his colleagues (2008) is illustrative. Welsh and his collaborators estimated the victimization costs created by the self-reported delinquency of 503 boys from the Pittsburgh Youth Study and produced several important findings. The cohort reported 12,514 crimes or about 25 crimes each. These crimes resulted in victimizations that ranged from \$89 million to \$110 million stemming from victims' pain, suffering, and lost quality of life. The 34 chronic offenders averaged 142 crimes,

which was nearly 10 times the criminal activity of other delinquents, and this group imposed 5 to 8 times the victimization costs of nonchronic offenders. Other research has shown that chronic criminal offenders, nearly all of whom began their career as serious juvenile delinquents, cost society more than \$1 million per offender. In this way, juvenile delinquency will continue to be an area of intense criminological study because of the various costs that it imposes, the ways that it is viewed as a social indicator, and its relationship to more serious and violent forms of antisocial behavior.

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