

Criminality

Is Criminality Caused by Environmental or Biological Factors?

In this paper, I argue that criminality is caused by environmental factors. Crime, as defined by Gottfredson and Hirschi, is the “acts of force or fraud undertaken in pursuit of self-interest.” (Akers, 1991, p. 202). Environmental factors include childhood and upbringing, traumatic experiences, abuse, and bullying whereas biological factors include genetics, hormonal imbalances, gender, and brain chemistry. Over the years, there has been conflicting opinions regarding the causes of criminality.

I support my position with the following three arguments. First, I explain how behavioral psychology has revealed that children learn correct behavior from a young age through reinforcement and imitation (Mcleod, 2016). Haapasalo and Pokela (1999) show that those who are exposed to negative child rearing practices, also tend to imitate those practices onto their own families. Second, I argue that traumatic experiences, cause an increased probability in the engagement of criminal behavior. Traynham et al., (2019) found a correlation between PTSD symptomatic soldiers and their likelihood of incarceration. Third, I demonstrate how the exposure to abuse influences criminal behavior. Haapasalo and Tokela (1999) explain that experiencing child abuse causes people to behave in antisocial ways, which contributes to criminal behavior as well.

I also consider that there have been opposing arguments in this phenomenon. I consider the argument that genes play a significant role in criminal behavior. However, an article by Tabb et al. (2018), explains that there is no consistent research to support the argument of genetics being involved in criminal behavior. I also consider that biological disorders, such as ADHD, are attributed with criminal behavior. Interestingly, research from Cussen et al. (2011) show an environmental basis for ADHD. The last argument I consider is that neural imbalances can cause criminality (Ward et al., 2018). The limitations of the research associated with this explanation make the argument difficult to consider and rely on.

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This paper is important because with the knowledge of why people become criminal's, criminality can be reduced quicker. My paper will help forensic psychologists and criminology experts understand why criminals commit such acts. This paper will also help mental health specialists who deal with inmates. With the knowledge of what caused criminal behavior, specialists can aid inmates in making better decisions for the future.

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Effect of Social Learning and Operant Conditioning in Childhood

From a young age, we are taught that hitting someone or being violent is inappropriate and are punished for it. Those teachings should be considered when evaluating the causing factors of criminality as it explains where inappropriate behavior in our adult life may stem from. In his famous study, B.F Skinner demonstrated operant conditioning, which is the process of learning through positive or negative consequences (Mcleod, 2018). For example, when a mother tells her son to clean his room and she will give him candy at the end of this task, the son will likely learn to repeat the action (cleaning his room) to receive the reward (candy). Similarly, if the mother threatens that she will take her sons phone away if he does not clean his room, the son will learn to repeat the action to avoid the punishment. In both instances, the son will learn behavior through reinforcement.

One of the most evident way we learn behavior is through those around us. Our parents, friends, and role models, growing up, have taught us a lot. Albert Bandura demonstrated this form of learning through his study of the bobo doll experiment (ref). This experiment observed the reaction of children to a video of either a woman or a man being violent to a bobo doll. Interestingly, they found that female children imitated the behavior of the female adult in the video and male children imitated behavior of the male in the video. The author explained that this result is because the female and male children were able to identify with the woman or man in the video and this made them perceive them as role models. The children imitated the behavior of their 'role models'. This form of learning can be lethal as it shows that our role models and those who we grow up around have an inevitable effect on our later behaviors.

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The two approaches to learning mentioned above, both emphasize an importance in child rearing practices. Parents play a significant role in the development of their child's future tendencies. Haapasalo and Pokela (1999) explore the roll of negative child rearing practices in later relationships. The authors, using several studies, note that people are more likely to imitate the behavior of their own parents. The studies explain that people who experience negative child rearing practices in their own family households growing up, are more likely to imitate those practices onto their own families. This paper confirms the social learning theory, and we can generalize the results to criminals who are abusive offenders.

Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in Criminality

Trauma has become inevitable in today's world. From mental and physical to emotional trauma, these instances can have a significant impact on our behavior. Some common forms of trauma include witnessing wars, car accidents, terrorist attacks, different forms of abuse, and sexual violence. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder in which those who experienced trauma also experience stress after the traumatic instance those include intense and disturbing thoughts as well as flashbacks and nightmares ("What is PTSD?," n.d.). Research has demonstrated the correlations between PTSD and criminality.

Traynham et al., (2019) acknowledge that previous research already found a correlation between PTSD and criminal behavior. The authors decided to investigate the underlying associations that drive this correlation. The paper explains that those who experience war and/or are in service, are exposed to many forms of violence and this could eventually lead to trauma and PTSD. Traynham et al., collected data from 310 incarcerated U.S army men as oppose to 310 nonincarcerated men currently in service. They found that there is a significant difference in incarceration rates between those who show PTSD symptoms and those who do not. This paper showcases the importance of considering PTSD as a contributory factor when explaining criminality.

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Substance abuse and addiction has been one of the contributing factors in explaining the evolution of criminals. Generally, drug use may start as a coping mechanism to environmental stressors such as family dysfunction, poverty, mental and/or physical abuse and trauma. With the excessive use of drugs and alcohol, people fall into the trap of substance abuse and addiction. Holloway and Bennett (2009) conducted significant research that highlighted the connection between drug and alcohol abuse and criminal offenses amongst prisoners. The authors interviewed prisoners and asked them what they thought the correlation between several listed drugs is to their reasons for serving time. Interestingly, one of the prisoners, mentions that he felt that alcohol abuse ‘fueled’ his anger and lead to his arrest on assault charges. These findings showcase the significance of drug abuse on criminal behavior and since drug abuse stems from environmental factors, the findings show an underlying effect of the environment on criminal behavior.

Exposure to Abuse in Contributing to Criminal Behavior

Abuse comes in many forms, **as previously stated,** drug abuse contributes to our understanding on the factors that may be involved in developing criminal behavior. As we develop into adults, we are exposed to different people who contribute to our development in different ways. Unfortunately, people may experience abuse growing up. Abuse can occur in different forms such as physical, emotional, and/or verbal and can be experienced from parents, peers, family relatives and/or strangers.

Antisocial behavior, sometimes called sociopathy, occurs when a person lacks a sense of empathy and moral compass. One of the problems associated with this behavior is that it is affiliated with a lack of consideration for right or wrong when making decisions. People who develop antisocial personality disorder often treat others in a harsh or violent way that may well lead into criminality (“Antisocial Personality Disorder,” 2019).

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Herrenkohl and Jung (2016) used participants from a previously conducted longitudinal study to examine how their exposure to abuse links to their later criminal

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behavior. Herrenkohl and Jung assessed participants on various factors such as child abuse, adolescent violence victimization, adolescent violence penetration, pro-violence attitudes, peer approval of violence and adult intimate partner violence (IPV). The authors found that participants who experienced childhood violence were more likely to be involved in childhood crime because of the fueling of antisocial behaviors as a child. When children developed antisocial tendencies as children, the exposure to abuse reinforced those tendencies and even lead to them forming relationships with fellow antisocial partners and peers in adulthood. This research is significant as it explains the correlation between antisocial behaviors, developed in childhood, with the likelihood of becoming a criminal in adulthood.

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Are Genetics Really the Center of It All?

Many specialists have argued that at the center of many of our traits and behaviors, is our genetics, and that it contributes to criminality. Genetics may be an underlying drive that contributes to our decision making and sense of moral responsibility (ref). Although this argument is presented by specialists such as... There have been inconsistencies in the evidence presented in such arguments (will complete later).

When declaring genetics as a cause of criminality, it essentially implies that we believe that there exists a single genome that is involved with crime. However, no such evidence has proved this. Instead, specialists suggest that there may exist a genetic predisposition that is otherwise irrelevant without environmental factors (ref).

Tabb et al., (2018) presented a paper that evaluates the correlation between genetics and moral responsibility using a meta-analysis of existing data. The paper explained that in recent years, when genetic explanations of criminal behavior is given to judges in court, they may be likely to reduce jail time for offenders and possibly send them to get treatment.

However, in one of the studies examined in this paper, Appelbaum et al. (2015) found that there is no effect on judge's verdicts in court when presented with genetic explanations. The

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authors concluded that, there is inconsistent research for this explanation and that generally, genetic explanations are associated with health conditions rather than moral and criminal responsibility.

The United States Courts publishes frequent reports and articles regarding criminology in the U.S. In one of their recent issues, the influence of genetic factors in criminal behavior was addressed. Tehrani and Mednick (2000) evaluated existing research involving genetic factors and violent behavior. The authors explain that regardless of the evidence that shows that there is a correlation between genetics and criminal behavior, the studies remain deterministic. Genetic determinism, as explained by Tabb et al., (2018), is the belief that genetic explanations alone determine our free will and choice. Genetic determinism is a limitation because taken alone, it shows that genetics are not enough to predict criminal behavior. Instead, we should take environmental explanations into consideration to establish a holistic approach to understanding criminality.

Biological Disorders in Correlation to Criminality

In psychology, there are theories that multiple disorders stem from biological factors such as suppression of neurotransmitters in depression. Recently, biological disorders such as Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) have been found to contribute to the risk of criminality. ADHD is thought to usually develop from biological issues such as premature birth, brain damage and epilepsy (ref). [This has led people to confirm that criminality is caused by biological factors.

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Lundström et al., (2013) explored the correlation between developmental disorders such as, ADHD, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and violent crime. The authors found that patients with ADHD were more likely to commit violent crimes in comparison to other developmental disorders.

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Although many people, including professionals, believe that ADHD is caused through biological factors, research has contradicted this belief. As discussed so far in this paper,

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childhood experiences contribute significantly to the likelihood of become a criminal. In conclusion, family dysfunction is at the core of childhood and adolescent experiences.

Cussen et al., (2011) studied the phenomenon of ADHD and its explanations.

Contrary to common beliefs, the authors found that there is a strong correlation between poor family dysfunction and ADHD symptoms (will develop later). This result is quite significant because it showcases that since there is a correlation between ADHD and criminality, this can now be explained through family dysfunction since it is found to be a cause of developing ADHD.

The Effect of the Development of Neuroscience in Forensic Psychology

With the development of neural examination technology, there has been an increasing interest in the effect of neural imbalances on criminal behavior. Neuroscience studies the brain and central nervous system it also explores explanations of the relationship between neural processes and behaviors and emotions. Methodologies such as electroencephalography (EEG)'s and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI)'s have been used to investigate those correlations in recent studies. In psychology, neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine have been found to contribute to the development of disorders such as depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). The increased biological explanations of such disorders cause people to question the effect of neural explanations in criminality.

Ward et al., (2018) argue that neuroscience and its testing technology can give beneficial information about the correlations between neural explanations and criminal behavior. The authors explain that neuroscience can help us identify correlations between neurotransmitters such as adrenaline and crime, and with this finding, forensic psychologists can develop well suited interventions with criminals. They also mention that neuroscientific evidence lack social desirability as would the general forensic psychology self-report methods do. In addition, a significant example of the role of the amygdala was discussed in this paper. The amygdala has been found, through previous research to contribute to our

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general feelings of empathy. The authors express that forensic psychologists can now use neuroscientific evidence to examine whether criminals have a sense of empathy.

Gillespie et al., (2018) used neuroscientific methods to find correlations between neural explanations and violent offenders. Gillespie et al., categorized the offenders into either reactive or proactive subtypes. Reactive subtypes are described to have poor self-control of behavior whereas proactive offenders have a sense of self control and are showing good performance on control tasks. The authors were able to find low heart rates and abnormally reduced prefrontal cortex activity, in reactive as oppose to proactive offenders, on cognitive tasks that require a sense of self-regulation and control. These findings showcase the relevance of neuroscientific evidence in determining differences between offenders.

Although neuroscientific research helps in determining some crucial factors in forensic psychology, there lies inevitable limitations of this research approach. First, there is a tendency for confirmation bias to play a role in the interpretation of results. Researchers may be tempted to draw illusory correlations between results of EEGs or fMRIs to confirm their hypothesis (Ward et al., 2018). Second, EEGs are not very accurate as it is difficult to pinpoint exact areas of production in the brain, fMRIs also have a high likelihood of producing misinterpreted information (ref). (will develop later)

Conclusion

With the range of explanations for criminality, it is evident that environmental factors play a more dominant role in identifying the causes. Imitation and reinforcement of behaviors in childhood showcase the importance of positive influences from people when growing up in preventing criminal behavior. Trauma, whether in childhood or as adults, leads people to expressing their stress in criminal-like ways. Abuse can also be a form of trauma that has a significant effect on our behavior as we develop into adults. Combined, those factors are seen to be the underlying mechanisms to developing criminal behavior. Although genetics play a role in factors such as our traits, there is contrary evidence that suggests that genetic explanations are difficult to correlate with criminal behavior. ADHD, which is seen by many

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as a biological disorder and contributes to criminality, has environmental factors contributing to its development in early childhood such as family dysfunction. Neuroscience is an emerging field that many are interested in its relevance to explaining criminology however, there are limitations that limit the reliability of such methods.

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An EXCELLENT 'working draft.'

You have established your ideas VERY well.
Nice use of sources (for the most part!)

Although there are comments - none "significantly" affect grading FOR THIS STAGE OF THE WRITING PROCESS.

You will - however - have to address all those comments for the 'Final Draft' to maintain the grade.

Read Ch 13 and 14 very carefully – their application will be critical to a successful grade for the Final Draft. (Although – to be fair – your paper is in remarkably good shape already)

You have followed the advice very well – and you have produced a very good draft for this stage. Hope you can continue to follow the guides.

Thank you for being your amazing self! ☺

Nicely done!

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