



UNDERSTANDING CRIME

A **Multidisciplinary** Approach



Susan Guarino-Ghezzi / A. Javier Treviño

Foreword by Albert K. Cohen

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Susan Guarino-Ghezzi / A. Javier Treviño
Stonehill College Wheaton College

Foreword by Albert K. Cohen
Professor Emeritus, University of Connecticut

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To
Richard Quinney
mentor and friend of a lifetime

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Foreword

Albert K. Cohen

How does one go about learning about crime? Whose business is it to study crime, to pull together what is known about it, to construct theories to account for it, and to answer our questions?

Your questions, whoever you are. Your life is somehow touched by crime. Are you a professor of criminal law who teaches students what you think they need to know in order to convict or acquit a defendant? Are you a police officer trying to decide whether to arrest a disorderly person? Are you that disorderly person, who is wondering whether to offer in some unobtrusive but unmistakable manner a small “monetary donation” to a police officer? Are you the police chief whose job includes badgering the city council for money to maintain its police force? Or perhaps you are a parent who worries about the friends your kids hang with or whether, contrary to your admonitions, they talk to strangers? Maybe you are a legislator working on a bill to protect the environment from industrial waste, or an airline passenger resentful of the security inspection meant to protect you from terrorism?

If you want to know all about crime, then you want to know about the administration of criminal justice. Crime and criminal justice occur in a context that comprehends the whole of society, and they are articulated with that society in ways that are far more complex than are illuminated by any one academic discipline. Within these academic domains we find most of the really systematic, “disciplined” work of studying crime, especially concerning the causes of crime: What makes crime happen?

In the early days of criminological theory, during the nineteenth century, there was great interest in biological theories, including the notion of the “born criminal” and the possibility of recognizing him by the shape of his head and his facial features. These early theories did not stand up to scholarly scrutiny; they survive mostly as historical curiosities. This early experience with the biology of crime should not lead us to dismiss the notion that our bodies may have something to do with criminality and that research into the biology of crime is legitimate. We know—some of us from experience—that the chemical substances we pour, inhale, or inject into our bod-

ies can produce behavior that we may not like to think of as “our true self,” but which nonetheless is clearly criminal. How about the chemical substances produced by the body itself and that we call “hormones”? We know a good deal about the physiological effects of hormones on our moods and emotions. It would certainly be premature to write off the possible effects of human chemistry on our choices and conduct.

To explain differences in conduct generally, and deviant and criminal conduct in particular, one would expect to learn a great deal from psychology and sociology. Both disciplines try to explain behavior by means of theories of learning, of personality, and of motivation. Sociology tends to place more emphasis on the role of the social and cultural environment in the production of learning, personality, and motivation, and psychology tends to place more emphasis on the internal dynamics of personality. But such a description is very crude, and it is not possible, in a few words, to do justice to the richness and variety of thinking going on in both disciplines.

Economics is the social science largely concerned with the world of work, the production and exchange of goods and services, and the distribution of wealth. But underlying it all is a theory of motivation on the individual level; a theory that explains action as largely determined by weighing the costs and benefits of alternative courses of action and choosing the course that promises to maximize the net gain. Economics does not insist that conduct is totally determined by such considerations, but economic reasoning is never absent in the shaping of human conduct. Certainly the system of criminal punishment is largely premised upon the assumption that the state itself is an economic actor, weighing financial costs about such issues as executing a felon versus locking him or her up for life.

Some events seem to challenge economic theory as an explanation of crime. What are we to say of “suicide bombers” who deliberately and knowingly blow themselves up in order to inflict damage upon an enemy? Can economic theory handle the suicide bomber? Probably you have anticipated me; perhaps his or her sacrifice is to be entered into the equations as a *gain* rather than a *cost*. The suicide bomber is a “martyr” who will be honored by those who survive him or her and will be richly rewarded in the world to come. The example of the suicide bomber suggests that assigning values to the variables of economic theory may require entering into the mind of the actor and appreciating the culture that informs his or her values. This begins to sound more like sociology and psychology, and it reminds us that apparently “autonomous” disciplines may interpenetrate and depend upon one another.

Before we drop the subject of terrorism, consider this question: Are we really talking about crime? The U.S. government thinks so, but does the suicide bomber think so? Or is the “martyr” giving his or her life in a noble cause much as a “soldier” fulfills his or her duty? Suddenly we find ourselves questioning what we thought was already settled: the meaning of “crime” and, by extension, of “criminological theory.” Have we stumbled onto the territory

of another, relatively recondite discipline, “game theory,” where the name of the game is everything?

We have used the word “explain” to account for differences among individuals: Why did I lie about my income to the Internal Revenue Service, but you did not? Explaining differences in rates and quantities of crime is another matter. Why are the per capita rates of kidnapping much higher in Mexico and some other Latin American countries than in the United States? Why have rates for crimes of violence increased in England, but declined in the United States? Why does slavery, defined as criminal in all countries, still exist in places like Sudan? Why is political corruption—the buying and selling of the services of governmental employees—enormously variable among countries and among states, provinces, and cities within those countries? Why, for that matter, are some acts that are defined as crimes in one country *not* crimes in another?

Clearly, we are now talking about crimes as properties of social systems rather than of human individuals. In the latter case we were asking: How do differences among individual persons, their personalities, and the situations in which they find themselves, account for differences in the production of criminal behavior? Now we are asking: How do the *rates* for this or that crime vary as they do for men and women, for persons of different ages, for immigrants and natives? Countries are social systems, but there are systems within systems. Why are rates of cheating different across universities and within universities, among males and females, freshmen and seniors, members of fraternities and nonmembers?

The theories that we were considering before do not provide the answers to questions about the criminality of social systems, but they are not irrelevant either. Theories on the individual level claim to identify combinations of variables, characteristics of persons and their situations, that are productive of criminal acts. Let us call these “criminogenic situations.” Now we must ask: What is it about social systems, about their cultures, about how they are put together and how their parts interact, about how people move about within the systems, and about the ways in which resources, opportunities, aspirations, and beliefs are distributed within systems, that explain differences in the ways that criminogenic situations are produced and distributed?

To answer these questions we call upon different bodies of knowledge than we did before. Those that come to mind most readily are political science and organizational sociology. Both are concerned with the study of social systems, how they are organized, how their parts interact, and so on. Both have had some experience with the analysis of such systems, that is, with actually figuring out how the parts interact to produce the behavior that goes on at particular locations within those systems.

We have posed many questions concerning crime and talked about the major disciplines that study crime, do research, lecture, debate, and write about crime. Who else does these things? The answer is: almost everybody.

For example, I wanted to learn more about the Quakers, and so I attended a week-long gathering of the Society of Friends, as the Quakers call themselves. Some of the people in attendance were atheists or agnostics who talked about their shared concerns. The chief of those concerns was the question: What do I say to fellow Quakers who ask me, “If you do not believe in God—a God who knows and cares about you, and wants you to behave, and to love your neighbor and treat him with respect—and if you do not believe that you have an immortal soul, then what is your basis for morality, for disciplining your appetites, for being a good citizen and treating your neighbor as you would like him or her to treat you?” Although I was persuaded that my newfound godless Quaker friends walked as perpendicular in the way of the Lord as anybody else, they didn’t know how to answer this question and it really bothered them, just as for many people the question of the legitimacy of the death penalty is essentially a religious question. Clearly, morality and crime on the part of persons and institutions are central concerns of religious thought and find expression in sermons, social action, everyday conduct, and religious scholarship.

Back to my original question: How do you go about the study of crime? How do you *start*? From what I have said in these pages, it follows that you do *not* start by sitting at the feet of the world’s smartest sociologist or psychologist or biologist or economist or legal scholar, and you may also include in the list, philosopher and religious studies scholar. I have tried to suggest the multitude of ways in which crime touches our lives, the shapes it takes, and the ways we respond to it; the multitude of perspectives from which it can be approached; the different questions that each perspective raises; the interdependencies among the disciplines that study crime; and the importance, but also the limitations, of what each discipline has to tell us. It follows that one should start by wandering though the world of crime accompanied by specialists, each of whom will see things and interconnections that others will not. It is, of course, essential that they talk to one another so that all of us come out with an enriched understanding of what is, after all, the same object. This is what this book, *Understanding Crime: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, does. Actually, it would take a library of big fat books to do it, but let us start one book at a time, and let it be this book.

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Chapter One

Introduction: A Multidisciplined Approach to Crime

Susan Guarino-Ghezzi and A. Javier Treviño

Our attempts at understanding crime are as old as our attempts at understanding the larger subject of human behavior. When Cain murdered Abel, the meaning of the act was dissected for many centuries, for many audiences, and on many levels. Today, crimes of various sorts are predictably frequent subjects in movies, books, in the news, on talk shows, and in the corner pub. Crime is a subject that nearly everyone feels qualified to debate, to have opinions about, to comment on. There are many conflicting views on crime—perhaps because the subject of crime is itself a contradiction. Literary critic Wendy Lesser (1994) has argued that we are drawn to horror films such as *The Silence of the Lambs* because we, the audience, identify with both of the movie’s main characters: the detective and the murderer. Even as the diabolical Hannibal Lecter assists in the investigation of the latest serial killer by putting himself into the killer’s shoes, Lecter’s audience imagines what it is like to be *him*. Contrast that image—of murderous impulses within the investigators—with the criminal justice system. The bureaucratic, “fact-finding” image of police investigation and courtroom trial gives the outward impression of objectivity, of “us” versus “them,” the good and bad, the law-abiders and lawbreakers. Yet, the sorting of individuals into moral and legal categories is far from a precise science.

There are those who believe that the criminal is not a distant “other,” but is lurking within ourselves. Consider the first line of Nick Lowe’s lyrics to “The Beast in Me”: “The beast in me is caged by frail and fragile bars; restless by day and by night rants and rages at the stars; God help the beast in me.” “The Beast in Me” was played on the highly rated television series “The Sopranos,” in which organized crime boss Tony Soprano ruthlessly kills to maintain dominance even as he appears to be living out the “American

dream” in his upscale suburban community. Literature scholar R.A. Foakes (2003) suggests that we are fascinated by violence in the media because it provides us with a safe way to identify with it harmlessly, without acting on it, and to release impulses we normally repress. “The beast in me” may be the subconscious magnet for many talk show audiences, and it is certainly the direct subject of such literary works as Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as well as many Shakespearean tragedies.

If crime is indeed about human weakness, are the causes psychological, biological, or purely moral? Mental pathology or a flawed moral-cognitive development seemed to be at the root of the ruthless murders commissioned by 1960s cult leader Charles Manson in California and the 1978 Florida murders committed by serial killer Ted Bundy. There is evidence of a psychology-crime link in the increased numbers of offenders with mental disorders as well. Biological factors including brain function, genes, male hormones, and the effects of harmful addictions have also been associated with crime. Some people view biological and psychological explanations as mere excuses; what about weak moral character and bad choices? Consider the Menendez brothers, raised in affluence, who in 1996 were convicted of mercilessly slaughtering their parents in cold blood. Although they claimed they were sexually abused, just weeks earlier the brothers were glued to “The Billionaire Boys Club,” a television mini-series based on real-life events in which a group of young men from Beverly Hills premeditated the murder of two people, including the father of one of the young men.

Psychology, biology, and morality help us to understand individual causes of crime, but they do not tell us the full story. Crime is also the result of *societal/cultural weakness*—society’s inability to control individuals, particularly as members of groups or subcultures. Consider the romantic attraction that many Americans have to the “wild, wild west” of defiant gun slingers such as Jesse James, or gangsters such as John Dillinger, whom many rooted for during the 1920s even as the FBI’s “G-men” worked to track him down. The ambiguous corporate culture of greed and selective lawbreaking has been blamed for such notorious white-collar crimes as junk-bond specialist Michael Milken’s multimillion-dollar violations of federal securities and racketeering laws during the 1980s, or Enron’s illegal accounting practices in 2003. Cultures need not be weak enforcers of social control, however. Amish communities in the United States and Canada provide an interesting case of a religious culture with tight-knit families and strong communities that control behavior by separating themselves from the larger society. Similarly, teenagers in Japan have been known for obedience to moral values and internationally low rates of delinquency, although Japan is now experiencing a surge in youth violence (Faiola, 2004). Recently an 11-year-old girl used a box cutter to slit the throat of a classmate and then brutally kicked her as she lay dying. Some Japanese attribute such sudden acts of rage to a long economic slump, soaring rates of divorce, domestic violence, suicide, and violent animated films, comic strips, and video games marketed to children.

As the Japanese example illustrates, crime is a societal tragedy—a failure of social institutions like families or schools to intervene and block the negative influences. *Criminogenic* social conditions, which lead to crime, include urban areas with high rates of unemployment, gun availability, transient communities, and violent media imagery. These conditions of the social environment shape moral choices and, if left unattended, neutralize existing social controls of family, religion, and other societal institutions.

Criminal acts also provide insight into the strong spirit of the human will to overcome social injustice. Certain individuals or groups seeking justice have been labeled “criminal” although they were struggling toward a higher purpose—showing political resistance to arrogant power-holders. Consider the fictional character of Antigone, in Sophocles’ ancient Greek drama bearing her name from around 400 BCE. After the death of Antigone’s brother, her uncle, King Creon, falsely accused the brother of treason and ordered his corpse to be placed on display rather than be given a religious burial. Ignoring the king’s threats, Antigone buried her brother and was subsequently condemned to die of starvation. Antigone committed suicide rather than wait to die, and was vindicated when the king’s son and wife also killed themselves out of grief. Similarly, under China’s strict totalitarian dictatorship, group behaviors that are not approved by the government are banned, with serious consequences for those who persist. Recent reports have described the Chinese rite of Falun Gong, a spiritual practice of group exercise that attracts thousands of adherents, many of whom are mothers and grandmothers. These reports detail how the Chinese government, threatened by any behavior that resembles a religious movement, imposes long-term detention on Falun Gong followers and labels the practice a “dangerous cult,” yet support for Falun Gong remains strong among many people.

For complex reasons, citizens as well as governments may be tempted to spread cultural myths about “bad people.” Cultural critic René Girard (1989) believes that members of every society have a deep-seated fear of danger by their enemies or natural disasters, and comfort themselves by mimicking the very violence they claim to deplore. This contradiction requires a subconscious creation of cultural myths in which innocent targets—the sinner, the witch, the counter-revolutionary, the Jew—become the scapegoat, or surrogate victim, representing all that is wrong. In anticipation of a crisis such as the great plagues of Europe or a military attack, one type of individual is arbitrarily selected as the “real” source of danger and murdered, “sacrificed” in a religious ritual, or expelled. The scapegoat is perceived as both the cause and solution to violence (Girard and Williams, 1996).

The contemporary U.S. criminal justice system, if unchallenged, would place a great deal of unchecked power into the hands of a few, and unjust laws, corrupt police, or prosecutorial malpractice would never be exposed. Once the law defines a behavior as criminal, there is a tendency to unquestioningly accept that definition and probe no further—to let “justice” take its course. Yet, as philosophers and legal activists tell us, we endanger our

liberty if we merely sit back and accept the reach and command of the law. If indeed the criminal law is a way to control the dangerous impulses lurking in many of us, then those same impulses are lurking in lawmakers and enforcers as well.

Consider Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*, on which the film *Apocalypse Now* was based. Conrad tells the story of Mr. Kurtz, an ivory trader who arrived in the heart of the jungle and established a highly successful business. His success was based on his discovery that natives treated him as a supernatural being, a mistaken belief that he exploited to control the natives and amass his wealth. Human heads, of "rebel" natives, were mounted near Kurtz's home to reinforce his power—even though he thought of himself as a benevolent leader. Literary analyst R.A. Foakes (2003:2) observes that "Mr. Kurtz invaded the wilderness, and the wilderness [took] a terrible vengeance on him by invading him." Mr. Kurtz was able to maintain his powerful position by following this sentiment: "Exterminate all of the brutes." Yet Conrad was not only telling a story, but using his twisted character to illustrate the coexisting impulses in all of us. On the one hand, we have a desire to exert benevolence, to achieve the praise of those who look up to us. On the other, we have the desire to exterminate our enemies. Both impulses are prompted by the same "heart of darkness."

If we agree to relax our definitions of "crime," because they may be biased by existing criminal law, and talk instead about "aggression," we see more conflicting points of view. At times aggression is not only acceptable, but encouraged and lauded—as in aggressive sales practices that may at times "fool" or "trick" consumers but are nevertheless legal. Is the law inconsistent? Do most people support aggression as long as it contributes to the functioning of a competitive society, or deals with enemies outside the borders? Perhaps contradictions built into common attitudes about aggression help to explain our fascination with news reports and fictional accounts of criminal or accidental violence.

A Short History of Criminology

Criminologists, as professionals who study crime, discuss, agree, and disagree about different issues than do neighborhood residents kicking back at the pub. While the academic criminologists will study the effect of incarceration on crime rates in society, the neighborhood group might debate how a prison cell could be made more punishing to the individual offender. Removed from the personal and concrete, most criminologists treat the study of crime from a distance, much as chemists might dispassionately write up the implications of a lab experiment.

Generally, criminologists are professionals who study three main areas of crime: (1) why laws are made, (2) why they are broken, and (3) what the societal reaction is, or should be, to the criminal offender. There are two

beginnings to the history of the disciplined study of crime, or *criminology*. The first dates from the mid-eighteenth-century Enlightenment contributions of Italian philosopher Cesare Beccaria (1738-1794) and English philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). In their era, their ideas were revolutionary because they challenged the existing arbitrary and barbaric system of criminal law and proposed a more rational system of laws and punishments that corresponded to rational views of human behavior. Their ideas constitute what is called the “classical school” of criminology, which assumes that individuals have free will and choose their behaviors based on rational calculations of expected gains and losses.

A century later the second main influence of criminology began. This was the “positivist” revolution, most closely associated with the 1876 publication of Cesare Lombroso’s *The Criminal Man*. Lombroso, who was an Italian physician, proposed that the criminal was a biological “atavist”—a throwback of evolution. His claim turned out to be false, but was nonetheless influential because his research applied the scientific method of measurement and experimentation to the study of crime. *Positivism*, or the consideration of observable facts as opposed to philosophical ideals, eventually grew into a mainstream *positivist school*, as criminologists tried to emulate natural scientists by developing and testing hypotheses, measuring levels of criminality, and using their findings to support or refute theories of crime. Unlike the classical school, positivism did not assume rational free will or choice on the part of the individual, but considered how the individual was affected by “determinism,” or biological, psychological, and social factors. The notion of *causality*, or cause-and-effect relationships, was introduced as positivist criminologists tested the effects of multiple factors on criminal behavior by studying and comparing individuals. More than other social science disciplines, positivist criminology became known for its multidisciplinary influences from psychology, sociology, law, and biology.

During the early part of the twentieth century, at the same time as positivist criminologists were testing and formulating theories of criminal behavior, classical criminologists continued the classical school’s tradition of analyzing the state’s response to crime. The most important U.S. figure in this area was August Vollmer, former chief of police in Berkeley, California, whose goal was that police, particularly administrators, “become broadly informed in the entire area of criminology and in the principles of such related areas as public administration, political science, psychology, and sociology” (Morris, 1975:127). Vollmer, in collaboration with law professor Alexander Marsden Kidd, developed a summer session program in criminology at the University of California in Berkeley in 1916. In 1933, the University expanded the program and formed an academic major in criminology, followed in succession by the formation of the Bureau of Criminology in the Department of Political Science (1939), a Master’s program in Criminology (1947), and in 1950 the nation’s first formal “school” of criminology, with police administrator O.W. Wilson as Dean.



August Vollmer. *With permission of the Berkeley Police Department Historical Preservation Society*

Vollmer also paved the way for the first professional organizations of criminologists. The National Association of College Police Officials (NACPO) was founded in 1941 by Vollmer and six other men, mostly former police officers, who taught “police science and administration” at the University of California at Berkeley. Five years later, the NACPO grew into the Society for the Advancement of Criminology, which defined criminology as “the study of the causes, treatment and prevention of crime” and included studies in crime investigation, prevention, and administration (Morris, 1975:128). The Society for the Advancement of Criminology was later renamed the American Society of Criminology (ASC). A series of newsletters and journals made their appearance during the 1950s. In the 1960s,

women began to enter the field. By 1970, an early newsletter eventually grew into the current journal *Criminology*, which was established as the ASC’s official scholarly venue. The journal’s founding editorial policy described *Criminology* as “interdisciplinary,” and that claim remains with the journal today.

While the growing academic discipline of criminology drew from many fields, the meaning and implications of the term “interdisciplinary” were not always consistent. For example, “social work” was one of *Criminology*’s allied disciplines at the time the journal was founded, but it is no longer included in the journal’s editorial policy. Albert Morris’s (1975) history of the ASC suggests that social work’s emphasis on “how-to-do-it” courses meant that the social work discipline was too applied for the ASC’s more lofty vision of “understanding . . . what is fundamental to human experience.” Criminologist Stanley Cohen (1988), however, points out that its separation from social work practice may have cost the discipline of criminology some practical insight.

Morris (1975:162) offers four different approaches on what it means to be interdisciplinary in the study of crime:

1. *Individualistic application*: Scholars trained in different disciplines apply their specialized knowledge to particular aspects and special areas of criminology. For example, sociologist Edwin H. Sutherland, who specialized in how individuals acquire knowledge through social interaction, studied professional fences who first apprenticed and then mastered the skills needed to buy and sell stolen property. Economist Anne Piehl has used economic theories of rational choice and cost-benefit analysis to evaluate the deterrent value of Operation Ceasefire, a program that seeks to control gang violence by escalating police responses to gang behaviors.

2. *Cooperative application:* Scholars trained in different disciplines bring their respective special knowledge and approaches to bear collaboratively on common problems. For instance, in a volume on violence against children, Joy Osofsky (1997) brought together clinical psychologists, neuropsychologists, sociologists, and educators to examine the issues of child victims of violence.
3. *Exchange and assimilation:* Scholars trained in different disciplines interact with one another in an effort to develop an improved body of concepts and principles. The Model Penal Code, written in 1962, was the product of a consortium of philosophers, legal scholars, and criminologists who worked together to develop a principled, systematic approach to sentencing criminal offenders.
4. *Some combination of the above.*

However, this fourfold typology leaves many unanswered questions. Can a Freudian psychologist studying white-collar crime, who believes that human choices are predetermined at a very early age, ever come to terms with a rational choice economist, who perceives few limitations on human choice? How would a philosopher whose main concern is that the state not exceed its proper authority, or a religion scholar whose work involves interpreting sacred admonitions about crime and punishment, deal with a biologist's contention that violent crimes have a genetic component?

Over the last century, the study of crime proved to be a compelling subject that attracted various academic disciplines to its edge, while it brought criminologists into the margins of various other disciplines. Criminologist Stanley Cohen (1988) astutely observed that the field of criminology drew not only methods, such as statistical comparisons of subgroups, and theories such as learning theory, but also academic credibility from the more established disciplines of law, psychology, and sociology. The pattern was a haphazard assimilation of other disciplines' theories or methods. Some of the mid-twentieth-century sociologists, for example, were particularly good at adapting psychological explanations into sociological methods to form new theories of crime. The ultimate goal of criminology, according to most (but not all) criminologists, was to better understand crime from a scientific point of view, in much the same way that sociology and psychology were producing new understandings of social movements and mental illness.

According to historian Michel Foucault (1980), however, the ultimate goal of criminology was not knowledge-building, but really to create a justification for the exercise of power. For Foucault, knowledge was a tool used by people in authority to maintain their power over others. Foucault criticized prison research in particular for substituting purely managerial principles for theoretical reasoning. Indeed, the field of criminology has grown with professionals who work in the criminal justice system and who may have a vested interest in importing their own organizational and professional perspectives. In challenging the hierarchy of power that is the foundation

of criminal justice, “radical criminologists” of the last century, including some of the faculty at the Berkeley School of Criminology who believed that capitalism was the source of social problems such as crime, put themselves in vulnerable positions.

Box 1.1 • Suppression of Free Speech at the Berkeley School of Criminology

The influential Berkeley School of Criminology was closed in the 1970s after losing a political battle with then-California Governor Ronald Reagan, who had campaigned against “campus malcontents and filthy speech advocates” at Berkeley. Members of the University of California Board of Regents closed the school because they had financial interests in corporate and defense contracts and were threatened by the popularity of the “radical perspective” that challenged the Vietnam War and was being taught by some of the criminology faculty (Rosenfeld, 2002; Schwendinger and Schwendinger, n.d.).

Critics of criminology such as Stanley Cohen (1988) and Jock Young (1981) have pointed out that criminologists themselves are actually quite divided on such basic issues as the image of human nature, the basis of social order, the nature and extent of crime, and the understanding of how theory should affect public policy. The diversity of viewpoints among criminologists may not be all that unusual for such a young discipline, particularly given the fact that not only is human *behavior* its main subject, but human behavior that the state is organized to punish (Cohen, 1988). Within the ASC there are several subdivisions that challenge the mainstream: critical criminologists, convict criminologists, feminist criminologists, and peacemaking criminologists, to name a few.

Many *critical criminologists* today contest the traditional assumption that “the criminal” should be criminology’s main subject of study. Instead they examine the making of certain laws in the first place and question whether those laws that protect powerful interests, such as those of large corporations, should exist at all, or whether more laws are needed to control those interests. A subgroup known as *convict criminologists* is composed mostly of offenders who pursued advanced degrees in criminology. Some studied criminology while incarcerated in prison. Convict criminologists examine the entire crime-control system—police, courts, and prisons—from the offender’s perspective. *Feminist criminologists* focus on gender inequality, and argue, for instance, that punishing female prostitutes, but not their clients, creates a double standard, and that domestic violence such as wife battering is not taken seriously by police or courts. Finally, *peacemaking criminologists* endeavor to formulate a criminology, based on religious and philosophical doctrines, that will promote a more peaceful and just society for everyone. Rather than punishing the offender through punitive retribution, peacemaking criminologists seek a peaceful resolution for the victim, offender, and

community through principles of restorative justice. The distinct concerns of these various subgroups indicate one of the major divisions in criminology—who are the “real” criminals? How do we reconcile punishing the lawbreaker with the knowledge that laws are often stacked against those who are less powerful, such as the poor, racial minorities, and women?

Box 1.2 • Peacemaking Criminology

A criminology of peacemaking, the nonviolent criminology of compassion and service, seeks to end suffering and thereby eliminate crime. . . .

[C]rime is suffering and . . . the ending of crime is possible only with the ending of suffering. And the ending both of suffering and of crime, which is the establishing of justice, can come only out of peace, out of a peace that is spiritually grounded in our very being. To eliminate crime—to end the construction and perpetuation of an existence that makes crime possible—requires a transformation of our human being. We as human beings must *be* peace if we are to live in a world free of crime, in a world of peace.

Richard Quinney, “The Way of Peace: On Crime, Suffering, and Service” (1991).

Theory and Methods

Scholars in all disciplines—from physics to philosophy—employ certain tools to analyze the phenomena of interest to them. Some of these tools, particularly in the physical and biological sciences, take the form of technological devices, as in the case of microscopes, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) units, and particle accelerators (atom smashers). There are, however, other, more abstract types of very important “tools” that are widely utilized by scholars in all disciplines. These are *concepts*, or *ideas* that scholars have about some aspect of physical or social reality. Concepts tend to be articulated most often as words, but sometimes as phrases.

In physics, one of the fundamental concepts for understanding the workings of the physical universe is “energy.” Every physicist is thoroughly acquainted with the notion of energy— $E=mc^2$ —what it is and how it works. A physicist who doesn’t know about the concept of energy doesn’t understand how the universe operates. Similarly, the concept of “gravity,” a force of matter between bodies that have mass, is essential to understanding the motions of all physical objects. Thus, concepts like “personality” (in psychology), “social structure” (in sociology), and “evolution” (in biology) are intended to help scholars gain a better understanding of the phenomenon they propose to study, by naming, through the use of words (that is, concepts), important aspects of that phenomenon. Concepts make up a discipline’s vocabulary and are the building blocks of theory.

Theory is an attempt to articulate the relationship between two or more concepts. A sociologist, for example, may want to examine the relationship between certain types of social structure and social behavior. Generally, theory has three aims in regard to a discipline's understanding of its subject matter: (1) explanation, (2) interpretation, and/or (3) critique. While not all disciplines—particularly those that are not sciences, such as philosophy and religious studies—construct theories per se, they all endeavor to explain, interpret, and/or critique aspects of the phenomenon they study in order to achieve a better understanding of it.

Explanation, which is the chief goal of theory in the natural sciences and, frequently, the social sciences, involves explaining why a particular phenomenon occurs under given circumstances. The most common type of theoretical explanation is a “causal” explanation, which has to do with identifying cause-and-effect relationships between phenomena, such as positing that high unemployment leads to crime. *Interpretation*, which has to do with an attempt to understand a phenomenon or object of study by considering it from different subjective points of view, such as female victims' perspectives on crime, is likely to characterize the theories of the social sciences and humanities. *Critique*, or critical analysis, involves understanding a phenomenon, such as the death penalty, by subjecting it to a negative examination aimed at discovering its weaknesses, flaws, and injustices, for the purpose of either strengthening it or proposing an alternative to it. Critical analysis is typically done in the social sciences and humanities.

Theory can take the form of *propositions*, statements (written as sentences) of relationships between concepts, or the form of a *conceptual framework*, a general “road map” that guides the scholar in terms of where to look to better understand the subject matter. Propositions are typically found in biology and other natural sciences and, less frequently, in behavioral and social sciences such as psychology, sociology, and economics. Conceptual frameworks are more likely the provinces of the social sciences and humanities, which includes philosophy and religious studies, and may involve the general theorizing of Marxism (in economics, sociology, philosophy), rational-choice theory (in economics and sociology), and psychoanalysis (in psychology).

Closely related to the abstract thinking found in theory is the empirical data-gathering process that underlies research. Indeed, theory and research are intimately connected in two ways: *deductively*, whereby scholars attempt to test the theory in data, and *inductively*, whereby scholars formulate theory from the data. Either way, in all disciplines, data must be gathered, and research must be done. As such, the various disciplines employ a variety of *research methods*, or specialized techniques and strategies, for obtaining information about their subject of study.

Research methodology can be quantitative or qualitative. *Quantitative research* consists of methods for obtaining statistical or numerical facts from such sources as large-scale surveys conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, official statistical reports prepared by the FBI, or psychological assessment instru-

ments. *Qualitative research* encompasses a variety of research techniques ranging from literary criticism to ethnographic studies/participant observation, analogical reasoning, and in-depth interviews. Quantitative research is the preferred methodology in the natural sciences and sometimes in the social and behavioral sciences, while qualitative methodology is most often used in the humanities and tends to be used in sociology and psychology as well.

What is a “Discipline”?

Criminology generally claims that it is a “discipline.” Let us begin by discussing the meaning of the term. The noun “discipline” has many dictionary definitions, including “controlled behavior resulting from disciplinary training; self-control,” but the academic meaning is usually “a branch of knowledge or teaching.”

Yet these two meanings are related. As any student who has endured tedious lectures would suspect, the academic use of the word “discipline” has much in common with the other definitions that describe the imposition of behavioral control. From the Latin word *discere*, which means “to learn,” came other Latin words including *discipulus*, which gave us the English word “pupil,” and *disciplina* (instruction, knowledge), which came to mean the maintenance of order necessary for giving instruction. *Disciplina* evolved into our current English word *discipline*. Thus, the “discipline” that comes to the learner is the result of imposed study habits. The idea of discipline, originally found in teaching, gave birth to a much wider variety of meanings about behavioral discipline and many forms of self-control.

The word roots are interesting when we consider what an academic discipline is supposed to do. Why study an academic discipline? Many students would probably respond, “Because I want to get a job in that field” or “Because I enjoy it.” The word roots, though, suggest that we need to study academic disciplines because, unlike our buddies at the corner pub who insist that capital punishment has to deter criminals because they “know” it would deter them, academic disciplines provide structured guidelines for how to view the world. When we take a systematic approach to understanding crime by using a discipline’s assumptions, concepts, theories, and methods to question our commonsense notions about crime, we can substitute more rigorously defensible assertions. The more we study a particular discipline, the more we learn how to think about the world using disciplinary assumptions, concepts, theories, and methods such as those described in the six chapters that follow. Over time, students come to “think like psychologists,” or biologists, or philosophers, not only because they emulate the approaches of their professors, but also because they begin to absorb the underlying viewpoints or perspectives of the discipline. What is important to the discipline? What is *not* important? While answers to such questions are not usually presented in an explicit way, students grad-

ually develop a “sense” of them. By the time an M.A. or Ph.D. student chooses a thesis topic, he or she must discern which issues and methods are acceptable (i.e., relevant) to the discipline, and which are not.

If disciplinary knowledge offers a way to think systematically about human behavior, then what about multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary studies? We will again begin with a definition of terms. The knowledge that is accumulated by studying a subject such as crime can vary a great deal depending on which discipline is chosen. The process of knowledge-building is also affected by drawing on several disciplines as opposed to one. Let us now consider the language that describes how the disciplines can be used.

Disciplinary. The simplest and most common approach to understanding crime is using one theory within a single discipline, typically sociology. If two or more theories are used within the same discipline, the term used by criminologists is *integrative*. The term *integrative* would also apply to multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives on crime.

Multidisciplinary. This approach takes a cross-section of disciplines and applies them to a given subject. When the subject is crime, the usual disciplines are sociology, psychology, and biology, but increasingly criminology has considered other subjects, such as economics and philosophy. Each discipline is used for what it might contribute to the understanding of crime. Colleges and universities are traditionally set up as “multidisciplinary” to the extent that a cross-sectional array of disciplines is available to the student, though not usually focused on a single subject (notable exceptions might be professional programs such as business or nursing). If there are faculty from two departments whose expertise happens to overlap on a given subject, it may make note-taking easier, but it is likely to be a pure coincidence. A more deliberate multidisciplinary approach might take different forms. For example, two or more disciplines might focus on one topic while using the concepts, methods, and standards that they share in common. Or two disciplines, such as sociology and psychology, might divide a topic (e.g., studying small-group behavior) into nonoverlapping areas of study.

Interdisciplinary. Interdisciplinary approaches most commonly draw from two or more similar disciplines (such as from the natural sciences, the humanities, or the social sciences), but scholars can cross academic boundaries and draw from disciplines that do not ordinarily intersect, such as biology and sociology. Often there is a hierarchy of disciplines, with one dominating the others. As is discussed in Chapter Two, in criminology, the dominating discipline has tended to be sociology. Yet the ultimate goal of interdisciplinary studies is a balanced treatment of each discipline that leads to a synthesis of new knowledge about a subject. Rather than just picking and choosing one concept, theory, or method from another discipline, the interdisciplinary approach strives for a full understanding of the similarities, differences, strengths, and limitations across the disciplines.

Transdisciplinary. Thinking in this way about the disciplines—examining how interdisciplinary linkages work, the knowledge gaps between disciplines, the types of subjects that lend themselves to interdisciplinary approaches—is known as transdisciplinary analysis.

If disciplines by definition have their own distinct identities with well-defined boundaries, vocabularies, assumptions, values, theories, methods, and so on, will problems of communicating across disciplines discourage interdisciplinary efforts? Do certain subject areas compel the use of interdisciplinary approaches despite the inherent difficulties? In the natural sciences, revolutions in thinking take place by reconstituting our ideas about the natural world. Biochemists studying human cells—who previously joined the disciplines of biology and chemistry—now work with physicists and engineers in addition to chemists and biologists. Scientists are now combining their understanding of their subject matter in ways that simply did not exist in the last century. In chemistry, new subdisciplines and interdisciplinary fields are being generated even now: For example, new fields include geochemistry, astrochemistry, cosmochemistry, and materials science (the study of how electronics interact with other materials, which has become the basis for the electronics industry)—of which the latter is more of an “anti-discipline,” without boundaries, designed to be ever-changing so it can build on the latest knowledge.

Why Take a Multidisciplinary or Interdisciplinary Approach?

Blending disciplines to create new area studies is a growing trend in colleges and universities. Some states have designated one of their public university campuses as an exclusively “liberal arts” college featuring interdisciplinary courses. For example, at Truman State University in Missouri, sociology professor Michael Seipel instructs his students that rural America is best understood by combining and building on the disciplines of geography, sociology, economics, and political science. Or consider Brazilian studies, which is a relatively new interdisciplinary field. The nation of Brazil lends itself to interdisciplinary studies in large part due to its history of military dictatorship, its rich cultural diversity, and wide extremes between the wealthy and poor. The “party atmosphere” that Brazil is superficially known for around the world is deeply complex and relates to geography, military science, sociology, anthropology, economics, and religious studies, among other disciplines. Many colleges now have well established area studies programs such as culture studies, women’s studies, and Latino studies that are interdisciplinary. Recent academic concerns with the problem of terrorism have already stimulated interdisciplinary endeavors.

There are many reasons for taking multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches. In general, the most important rationale for interdisciplinary education is that students need to be prepared to face a world in which boundaries of all sorts—cultural, economic, knowledge—increasingly overlap. They need to be versatile and to learn skills of processing information that will help them to understand and evaluate new developments from fields outside of their own. In addition, studying other disciplinary approaches to a similar problem teaches us the limitations of our own discipline's language, rules, techniques, methods, meanings, and so on.

Contrary to popular belief, most scientific disciplines do not make measured advances in knowledge over time, but instead are characterized by slow progress based on increasingly outdated assumptions. Not surprisingly, this state of affairs eventually leads to an intellectual crisis within the discipline, perhaps because scholars cannot ignore discrepancies between theory and fact, or because changes occur in their area of study that the discipline cannot explain (e.g., why the space shuttle fails). Recently, Cambridge University astrophysicist Stephen Hawking retracted his once-leading theory of black holes because it does not fit into the more widely accepted string theory in physics. The response to such a retraction is what philosopher Thomas Kuhn (1962) called a "scientific revolution," in which the previously closely held assumptions are relaxed and the rules loosened. In some cases the key scholars within the discipline become convinced that a new set of assumptions should replace the old ones.

What can we say about the discipline of criminology, which not only failed to predict the substantial decline in crime during the 1990s, but made headlines predicting the opposite of what really happened: a sharp *increase* in the crime rate for the same time period? The inaccurate predictions were based on a simplistic assumption made by criminologists: that crime rates are directly related to demographics, particularly the number of adolescents and young adults. When the baby boomers' "boomlet" children would hit the streets in the 1990s, blood was expected to flow. Although the number of predicted young people was correct, the surrounding context changed dramatically. During the 1980s, the crack-cocaine "epidemic" spawned a "handgun generation" of urban juveniles who were lured into the drug trade by adult distributors seeking to evade stricter drug sentences themselves. However, despite rising numbers of young people, the drug-related street violence declined steeply during the 1990s and largely disappeared by the end of the decade as demand for crack-cocaine dissipated. After the dramatic downturn in crime occurred, many tried to explain why criminologists had been so wrong in their predictions about the crime rate.

Why did crime, notably street violence by juveniles and young adults, decrease during the 1990s? Was it the result of stepped-up efforts by police to achieve "order maintenance" by removing graffiti and strictly enforcing disorderly conduct statutes against "undesirable" individuals such as the homeless, intoxicated persons, and prostitutes? Was it due to the devel-

opment of computerized mapping systems used to mobilize police forces to “hot spots” or high crime areas? Was the downturn in youth crime court-related—a result of early intervention with first-time offenders, increased incarceration rates, or use of the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization Act (the RICO law) by federal prosecutors against drug gangs? Did it have to do with the increased use of personal electronic protection devices such as home security systems? Was it due to the fact that, while the numbers of young people increased, the number of older adults also increased, thus contributing to more stable neighborhoods? Was it because of a robust economy and growth in jobs? Was it the result of efforts to support youths and families through domestic violence services and after-school programs? Or was the decline in youth crime completely unrelated to any planned intervention, but instead the result of murders of such influential rappers as Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls that changed young people’s attitudes toward violence?

How might a true cross-section of academic disciplines explain the recent and unexpected decline in violent youth crime? How would other disciplines build on existing knowledge to help prevent crime increases such as the one that occurred in the 1980s? Drawing on Thomas Kuhn’s ideas, philosopher Paul Feyerabend (1993) suggests an answer. He argues that new “paradigms,” or general assumptions that direct the discipline, are typically not introduced by scholars with a deep understanding of their own discipline, but by scholars outside of the discipline who are not experts in the subject area itself. This has led some to advocate for scholarship that is unrestricted by disciplinary criteria—essentially having to worry about *no* restrictions on disciplinary thinking. A recent news item about advances in genetic engineering confirms that there may be wisdom to this approach.

Box 1.3 • Physics Professor Surprises Biologists

The natural sciences are characterized by interdisciplinary studies, but this has not been the case until the 1990s. Then, interdisciplinary projects were given a tremendous boost by the Human Genome Project, which mapped the genetic properties of the human body and provided a foundation for new assumptions about chemical and physical properties of cells. For example, a physics professor at Boston University was previously “blown off” by the biology faculty when he first inquired about the possibility of using engineering to address medical issues, but he fortunately persevered. He is now using his in-depth understanding of physics combined with a newly acquired understanding of biology to develop programmable cells that can be turned “on” and “off” by manipulating their genes (Allen, 2004).

Multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches enable students to understand perspectives that might not appeal to them initially. Educational psychologists have demonstrated that there are distinct “learning styles” that

influence how we select and process information. For example, psychologist David Keirse (1998) has identified four such styles, which can be assessed by testing students with a written exam. Some students are drawn to people, others to abstract ideas, some to step-by-step solutions, and others to learning by experience. These differences might affect a student's choice of major, and then the training in the major may entrench, rather than balance out, their learning style, making them even less open to ideas outside of their major. Professionals who work with criminals or victims have not necessarily studied any of the disciplines to be discussed in this book. Although many criminal justice professionals probably have specialized in sociology or psychology, most of them have not ventured deeply into economics, biology, religious studies, or philosophy.

What are the advantages of delving into these disciplines? As we study crime, what do the various disciplines teach that prepares students for the "real world"? Are students prepared for the opposing viewpoints of crime that they must eventually encounter? Nineteenth-century Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky offers a view of the complexity of crime that suggests that while courtroom adjudications may resolve cases legally, they nevertheless leave open compelling questions about the human condition.

Box 1.4 • Crime and Punishment—Fyodor Dostoevsky

Do we always know how to judge good and evil, right and wrong, whom to blame and whom to excuse? What punishment should have been imposed on homemaking guru Martha Stewart for lying to federal investigators? Or on a juvenile who kills his abuser? Are criminals calculating opportunists, or poor and culturally disadvantaged people who end up behind bars because they perceive few options?

In Dostoevsky's famous novel *Crime and Punishment*, a young man named Raskolnikov confesses to robbing two elderly women and then murdering them with an ax. The evidence at the crime scene was muddled, and there was no proof against Raskolnikov other than his confession. He did not permit his attorney to argue that he was temporarily insane, although such a case could have been made. His character, prior to the killings, offered much to be admired. While Raskolnikov was a university student, he had financially supported a dying student and later the student's dying father, leaving himself penniless. He had also rescued two little children from a house on fire and suffered burns in doing so. At the trial for the murders, he did not try to defend himself. When asked about his motive, he cited his poverty and helplessness, and his hope to redirect his life with the stolen money. He noted his shallow and cowardly nature, which was pushed to the limit by deprivation and failure. When asked what led him to confess, Raskolnikov answered that it was his heartfelt repentance. Legally, his case was resolved with a shortened sentence of eight years in prison. Morally, Dostoevsky's novel shows us the loose ends that remain even after such a sentence is imposed.

One compelling reason for the interdisciplinary study of crime is its complexity. Crime is as intricate a phenomenon as the array of human motivations for crime. Moreover, the subject of crime includes considering the punishment response, so crime is further complicated by matters involving authority, organizations, and cultures. Consider what we might call the oversimplified view of crime, the one you might overhear in a bar. Two patrons are arguing furiously. One is convinced that crime is the result of free choice, and that people are responsible for their own actions, while the other attributes criminal acts to circumstances outside of the offender's control, such as one-parent families. If you unpack these assumptions, you may learn that the first person has armed robbers in mind, while the other is talking about juvenile joyriders. But even now the arguments break down. Considering the armed robber, one might demonstrate how "choice occurs within a cage," as Karl Marx put it. Perhaps he is desperate—hungry, drug-addicted, socially or psychologically troubled. And the joyrider, although young and impressionable, nevertheless was not physically forced to take the car.

Criminologist Stanley Cohen (1988) discusses the determinism/free will debate in the context of the infamous My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War, in which most of the U.S. military troops were exonerated despite their deliberate murder of 100 Vietnamese villagers—old men, women, and children. The response of many Americans was to shift the accountability for the soldiers' acts to their superiors in the army. Even though Lt. William Calley gave the order and was prosecuted for his offense, many argued that he was made a scapegoat by the army. His Captain, Ernest Medina, who was not convicted of any crime, was also viewed with sympathy by citizens back home. Rather than blame the individuals who ordered and carried out the killings, many people preferred to blame the war itself, the U.S. culture, or the army's corrupt system. Thirty-six years later, in 2004, the human rights violations of My Lai were on many people's minds when they first saw the photographs of American soldiers humiliating and abusing Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. How institutionally widespread was the practice? Were soldiers too untrained for such assignments? Or did those individuals simply choose to behave sadistically because they were in a position to do so? In this instance, criminal charges against the soldiers were swiftly filed by the army and illustrate an increased emphasis in our nation's thinking about individual responsibility.

Criminologists as professionals have been studying crime for more than a century. However, not every scholar who studies crime or takes an interest in crime is a criminologist. Scholarly disciplines give us a way of examining many parts of the human story by training our minds to be versatile as well as disciplined. Each discipline offers a systematic way of seeing the world, its human inhabitants, and imagining its future. Each discipline has its own history, assumptions, methodologies, and criteria for verifying assertions about the subjects that are studied. Moreover, every discipline creates a particular reality and emphasizes particular values. The

uniqueness of each field of scholarship, its strengths as well as limitations, becomes more evident as we compare disciplines to one another. The common theme of “crime” allows the reader of this book to do that sort of comparison. How does each discipline contribute to our understanding of the criminal and of the society that punishes the criminal? How are crimes influenced by genetics, personality, socialization, government and laws, religious beliefs, morality, and rational choice? If the “universe” is a place where all things come together, the model of the “university” is an evolving mirror of the universe. When we place crime at the center of six academic disciplines, juxtaposed against one another and each dissecting the “real world,” what new questions and understandings can we create?

Organization of the Text: A Multidisciplinary Approach

The purpose of this book is twofold. The primary objective is to examine six disciplines—sociology, economics, psychology, biology, philosophy, and religious studies—and how they deal with the topic of understanding crime. This multidisciplinary point of view is not the standard one used in most criminology texts, which present the assumptions, theories, and research of, say, sociology, psychology, and biology *as criminologists have come to know them and use them*. Rather, this book consists of a series of original chapters, written by experts within each discipline, who describe the current thinking *within the discipline* as it relates to crime. The disciplinary areas were chosen based on their frequency in the primary literature that criminologists read, as defined by the number of entries found in *Criminal Justice Abstracts*, a quarterly journal summarizing all such literature. Although our relative count of the frequency of each discipline in the existing literature provides an indication of criminology’s current incorporation of each discipline, this does not necessarily indicate the actual potential of these disciplines in a multidisciplinary approach.

This book offers a secondary purpose as well, which is to develop an awareness of important strengths and limitations of academic disciplines. With the disciplines laid out “sideways,” so to speak, in their focus on crime, the reader can begin to recognize the boundaries of the disciplines and appreciate the features that make them unique. By “holding constant” the subject matter, one can compare how various forms of academic endeavor contribute to the building of knowledge. The cross-section of disciplines offers an opportunity to examine such fundamental matters collectively as disciplinary assumptions, theories, and methods that hold true regardless of the subject matter.

There are advantages and disadvantages to this multidisciplinary approach. The main advantage is that the information provided about each discipline has not been “filtered” through the perspective of a criminologist. The “filter” has a tendency to condense information, leave out impor-