

Biological and Psychological Theories

Theories based on Positivism

- Positivism in criminology is characterized by;
 - 1. A deterministic perspective
 - 2. A belief in rehabilitation of “sick” offenders rather than punishment of “rational” actors
 - 3. A focus on the criminal actor rather than the criminal act
- Theories based on positivism emphasize;
 - 1. Application of the scientific method
 - 2. Discovery and diagnosis of “sickness”
 - 3. Therapy or correction

Early Biological Theories

- Lombroso (1835 ~ 1909)
 - Called “the father of criminology”
 - Influenced by Darwin’s theory of evolution
 - “Someone is born as criminal”
 - They could be identified by certain physical characteristics
 - Based on his observation during an autopsy of criminals (Positivism?)
 - E.g., heavy jaw, heavy cheekbone, eye defects, large or small ears, strange nose shape



Illustrations from Lombroso's L'uomo Delinquente, showing some of the 'physical defects' that the author believed to be distinguishing marks of criminals.



PHYSIOGNOMY OF RUSSIAN FEMALE OFFENDERS[©]



PLATE I.

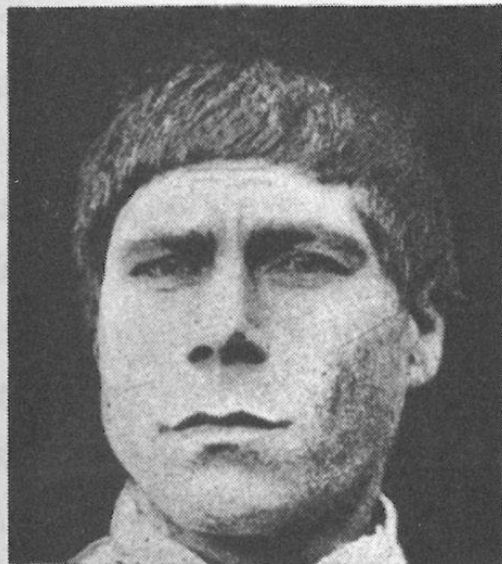


Fig. 20. Tipo di razza inferiore - Ladro abituale.

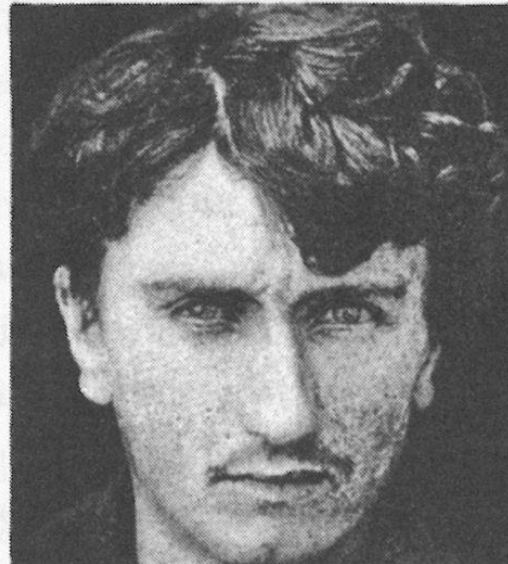


Fig. 23. Tipo comune di ladro - Ladro abituale.

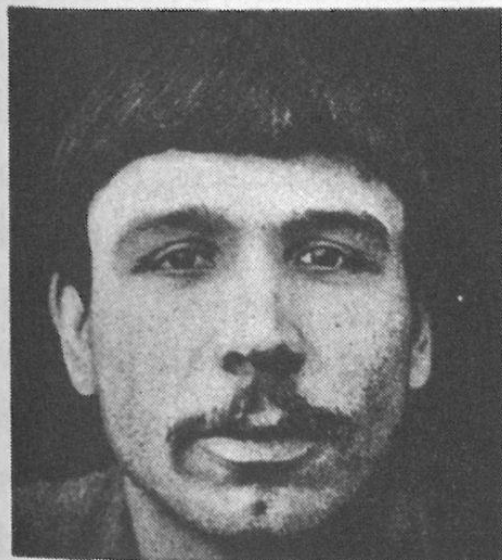


Fig. 21. Tipo di razza inferiore - Ladro abituale e forgiere.



Fig. 24. Tipo comune di ladro (degenerato) - Borsariuolo.



Early Biological Theories (cont.)

- Early bio-positivism:

- Criminals is a separate group of people who were defective and biologically inferior
- Corresponding to Social Darwinism
 - “survival of the fittest”

- Problems of Lombroso

- Poor sampling technique
- Ignoring the fact that the physical characteristics were more likely to be caused by environmental defects (e.g., poverty, malnutrition)

Early Biological Theories (cont.)

● Other early biological theories

- Charles Goring: Refuting Lombroso's theory of physical characteristic → They are mentally defective
 - “Theory of feeble-mindedness”
- Other scholars emphasized “inherited criminality”
 - “Feeble-mindedness is an inherited condition”
 - Observing that a son of a criminal becomes a criminal
- Arguing significant relationship between body type and criminality
- “Elimination of crime can be effected only by the eradication of the physically, mentally unfit”
 - Of course, there were other people supporting “treatment” as a way of correction

Early Biological Theories (cont.)

- Problems of early bio-positivism
 - Unquestioned acceptance of official definitions of criminality
 - Assuming the mutual exclusivity of criminals and non-criminals
 - “prisoners vs. non-prisoner” distinction is not enough
(Please remind the problem of crime statistics)
 - Plagued by weak operationalization
 - What is “feeble-mindedness”?
 - Compatibility with the authoritarianism at that time

Early Biological Theories (cont.)

- Contributions of early bio-positivism
 - Emphasizing the importance of data collecting, observation, experiment, statistics ... (“scientific” approach)
 - Beyond the simple punishment model of the classical theory
 - Attempting “cure” for correction
 - Opening the way for biomedical approach
 - How about chemical castration in these days?

Recent Biological Theories

- Pursuing biosocial theories, not a simple biological theory
 - “No one argues that there is a gene leading directly to crime”
 - Acknowledging interactions between biological factors and environment
 - “Some” biological factors “partially” account for “some” crime in “some” type of offenders
- Nature vs. Nurture debate

Recent Biological Theories (cont.)

● Twin Studies

- A criminal who have a twin
- Find the other twin and then examine his/her criminal records
 - Findings are mixed (No clear evidence for heredity)

● Adoption Studies

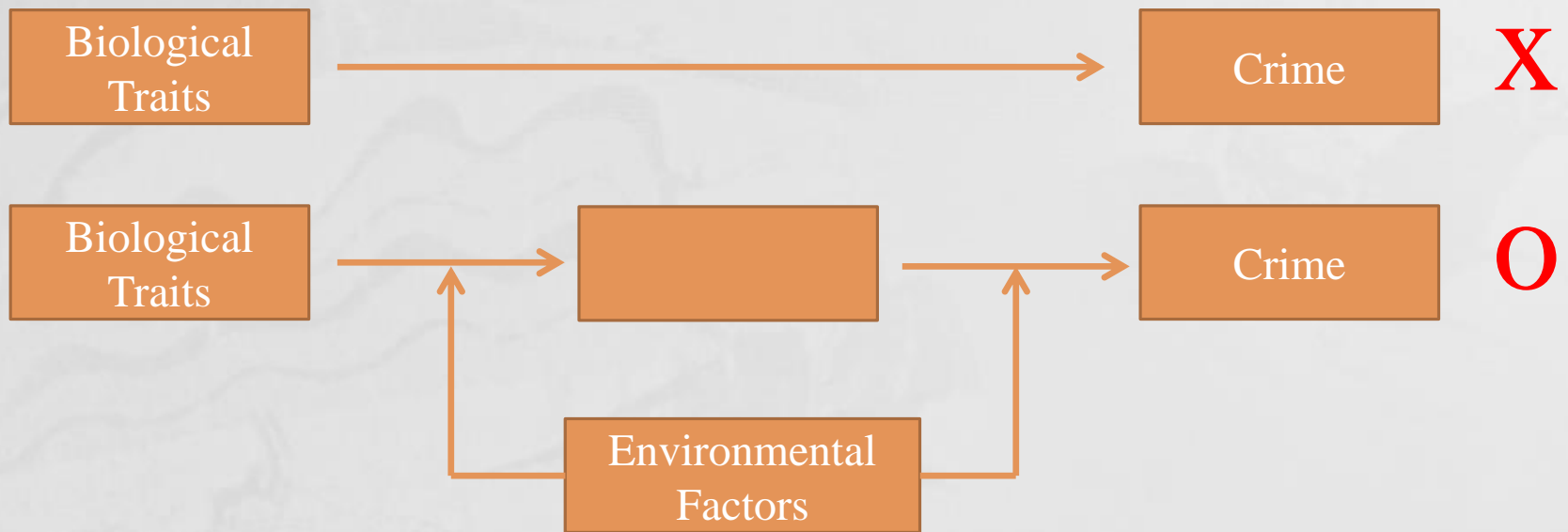
- Assumption: If the behavior of children more closely matches that of their biological parents than that of their adoptive parents, this finding would support the argument for a biological base of human behavior
 - Investigating adopted children whose parents have criminal records
 - Findings are still unclear

Recent Biological Theories (cont.)

- Fundamental question: Biology doesn't matter?
 - How about the consistent relationship between gender and crime?
 - Males are always much higher than females in crime records. Is this a effect of biology or not?
 - PMS (premenstrual syndrome) and crime
- It is important that criminologists keep an open mind to biological studies and not regarding them as taboo

Recent Biological Theories (cont.)

● New Models



“Although not directly causing a crime, some genetic factors lead to individuals’ particular traits like low empathy, impulsiveness, aggression, and so on

Recent Biological Theories (cont.)

- Critique of recent biological approaches
 - Limited case studies (small sample size)
 - They should clarify causal relationships, not a simple association
 - Findings of a biological cause of crimes support a political climate where the blame for crime, poverty, and other social ills is placed solely on the individual and not on national social policies
 - They must not forget that criminal behavior varies from one society to the next
 - They cannot explain a certain type of crime (e.g., white-collar crime)
 - May be useful to explain alcoholism, violence, and others

Psychological Theories

- Psychological theories...
 - Try to find “the criminal personality”
 - Some individual traits that enable to distinguish criminals from non-criminals
 - Take for granted the existing social order and definition on crime
 - Are more interested in therapy and rehabilitation of criminals, not theoretical explanations of crime causation
 - Basically, similar with the biological approach

Recent Psychological Theories

- Yochelson and Samenow
 - They argue “Individuals with crime personality freely choose to become criminal” and ...
 - Socio-environmental constraints on criminality are irrelevant
 - The criminal personality is imprinted at birth
 - Criminal personalities seek the excitement of crime
 - They are amoral, intolerant of others, manipulative, and lack empathy
- Q) “Crime personality”, Nature or Nurture?

Recent Psychological Theories (cont.)

● Psychopath

- Psychopath is a personality disorder identified by characteristics such as a lack of empathy and remorse, criminality, antisocial behavior, etc.
- Biological factors
 - Traumatic brain injury such as damage to the prefrontal cortex
 - Never fully develop social or moral reasoning →
Characterized by high levels of aggression and antisocial behavior performed without guilt or empathy for their victims
- Environmental factors
 - Having a convicted parent, being physically neglected, low involvement of the father with the boy, poor supervision, harsh discipline, and coming from a disrupted family

Recent Psychological Theories (cont.)

● Psychopath

● Psychopathy Checklist

Psychopathy Checklist-Revised: Factors, Facets, and Items^[2]

Factor 1	Factor 2	Other items
<i>Facet 1: Interpersonal</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Glibness/superficial charm• Grandiose sense of self-worth• Pathological lying• Cunning/manipulative	<i>Facet 3: Lifestyle</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need for stimulation/proneness to boredom• Parasitic lifestyle• Lack of realistic, long-term goals• Impulsiveness• Irresponsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Many short-term marital relationships• Promiscuous sexual behavior
<i>Facet 2: Affective</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of remorse or guilt• Emotionally shallow• Callous/lack of empathy• Failure to accept responsibility for own actions	<i>Facet 4: Antisocial</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poor behavioral controls• Early behavioral problems• Juvenile delinquency• Revocation of conditional release• Criminal versatility	

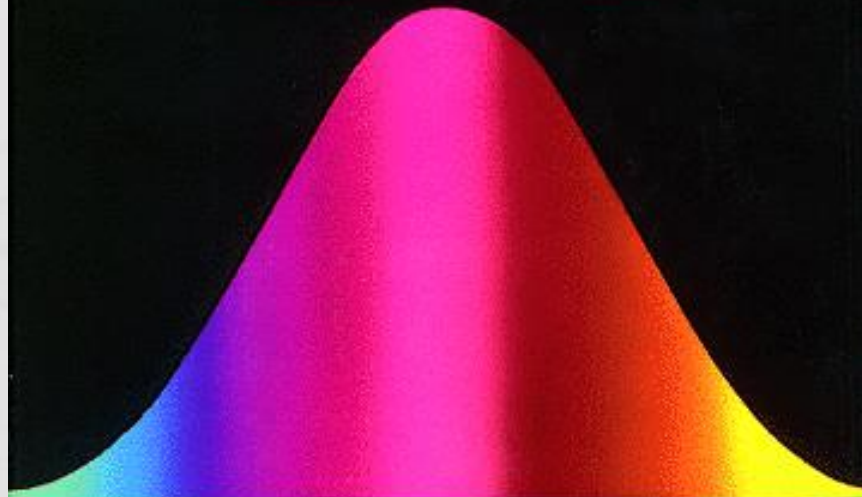
Recent Psychological Theories (cont.)

- Intelligence and Crime

- Herrnstein and Murray (1994) *The Bell Curve*

THE BELL CURVE

Intelligence and Class Structure
in American Life



RICHARD J. HERRNSTEIN
CHARLES MURRAY

Recent Psychological Theories (cont.)

● Intelligence and Crime

- Herrnstein and Murray (1994) *The Bell Curve*
 - Human intelligence (IQ) is predominantly determined by genetic factors
 - Human intelligence (IQ) is a better predictor of many personal dynamics, including income, job performance, and involvement in crime than are an individual's parental socio-economic status or education level

- Relationship between IQ and crime



Recent Psychological Theories (cont.)

- *The Bell Curve* : Low IQ → More Crimes
 - Agree or disagree?
- Why are psychological (and biological) theories still persistent?
 - People couldn't provide an answer to the question, "why do some individuals respond to the same environment differently than do others?"
- Responses of Sociologists
 - Simply denying the biological and psychological theories
 - Accepting them, and then investigating interaction patterns among sociological, biological, and psychological factors to explain deviant behaviors