

3.1: Theories

Chapter 3 - Theories of Criminology

Theories

Punishments (like imprisonment, fines, infliction of pain, or death) are imposed by authorities when criminal laws or regulations are broken. These punishments are called criminal sanctions. Views on criminal sanctions vary widely, but what people believe to be appropriate is largely determined by the theory of punishment to which they subscribe. That is, people tend to agree with the theory of punishment that is most likely to generate the outcome they believe is the correct one. This system of beliefs about the purposes of punishment often spills over into the political arena. Politics and correctional policy are intricately related. Many of the changes seen in corrections policy in the United States during this time were a reflection of the political climate of the day. During the more liberal times of the 1960s and 1970s, criminal sentences were largely the domain of the judicial and executive branches of government. The role of the legislatures during this period was to design sentencing laws with rehabilitation as the primary goal. During the politically conservative era of the 1980s and 1990s, lawmakers took much of that power away from the judicial and executive branches. Much of the political rhetoric of this time was about “getting tough on crime.” The correctional goals of retribution, incapacitation, and deterrence became dominant, and rehabilitation was shifted to a distant position.

Rational Choice Theory ^[43]

It has been a popular notion throughout the ages that fear of punishment can reduce or eliminate undesirable behavior. This notion has always been popular among criminal justice thinkers. These ideas have been formalized in several different ways. The Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham is credited with articulating the three elements that must be present if deterrence is to work: The punishment must be administered with celerity, certainty, and appropriate severity. These elements are applied under a type rational choice theory. Rational choice theory is the simple idea that people think about committing a crime before they do it. If the rewards of the crime outweigh the punishment, then they do the prohibited act. If the punishment is seen as outweighing the rewards, then they do not do it. Sometimes criminologists borrow the phrase cost-benefit analysis from economists to describe this sort of decision-making process.

When evaluating whether deterrence works or not, it is important to differentiate between general deterrence and specific deterrence. General deterrence is the idea that every person punished by the law serves as an example to others contemplating the same unlawful act. Specific deterrence is the idea that the individuals punished by the law will not commit their crimes again because they “learned a lesson.”

Critics of deterrence theory point to high recidivism rates as proof that the theory does not work. Recidivism means a relapse into crime. In other words, those who are punished by the criminal justice system tend to reoffend at a very high rate. Some critics also argue that rational choice theory does not work. They argue that such things as crimes of passion and crimes committed by those under the influence of drugs and alcohol are not the product of a rational cost-benefit analysis.

As unpopular as rational choice theories may be with particular schools of modern academic criminology, they are critically important to understanding how the criminal justice system works. This is because nearly the entire criminal justice system is based on rational choice theory. The idea that people commit crimes because they decide to do so is the very foundation of criminal law in the United States. In fact, the intent element must be proven beyond a reasonable doubt in almost every felony known to American criminal law before a conviction can be secured. Without a culpable mental state, there is no crime (with very few exceptions).

Incapacitation

Incapacitation is a very pragmatic goal of criminal justice. The idea is that if criminals are locked up in a secure environment, they cannot go around victimizing everyday citizens. The weakness of incapacitation is that it works only as long as the offender is locked up. There is no real question that incapacitation reduces crime by some degree. The biggest problem with incapacitation is the cost. There are high social and moral costs when the criminal justice system takes people out of their homes, away from their families, and out of the workforce and lock them up for a protracted period. In addition, there are very heavy financial costs with this model. Very long prison sentences result in very large prison populations which require a very large prison industrial complex. These expenses have placed a crippling financial burden on many states.

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation is a noble goal of punishment by the state that seeks to help the offender become a productive, noncriminal member of society. Throughout history, there have been several different notions as to how this help should be administered. When our modern correctional system was forming, this was the dominate model. We can see by the very name corrections that the idea was to help the offender become a non-offender. Education programs, faith-based programs, drug treatment programs, anger management programs, and many others are aimed at helping the offender “get better.”

Overall, rehabilitation efforts have had poor results when measured by looking at recidivism rates. Those that the criminal justice system tried to help tend to reoffend at about the same rate as those who serve prison time without any kind of treatment. Advocates of rehabilitation point out that past efforts failed because they were underfunded, ill-conceived, or poorly executed. Today’s drug courts are an example of how we may be moving back toward a more rehabilitative model, especially with first time and nonviolent offenders.

Retribution

Retribution means giving offenders the punishment they deserve. Most adherents to this idea believe that the punishment should fit the offense. This idea is known as the doctrine of proportionality . Such a doctrine was advocated by early Italian criminologist Cesare Beccaria who viewed the harsh punishments of his day as being disproportionate to many of the crimes committed. The term just desert is often used to describe a deserved punishment that is proportionate to the crime committed.

In reality, the doctrine of proportionality is difficult to achieve. There is no way that the various legislatures can go about objectively measuring criminal culpability. The process is one of legislative consensus and is imprecise at best.

A Racist System?

The United States today can be described as both multiracial and multiethnic. This has led to racism . Racism is the belief that members of one race are inferior to members of another race. Because white Americans of European heritage are the majority, racism in America usually takes on the character of whites against racial and ethnic minorities. Historically, these ethnic minorities have not been given equal footing on such important aspects of life as employment, housing, education, healthcare, and criminal justice. When this unequal treatment is willful, it can be referred to as racial discrimination . The law forbids racial discrimination in the criminal justice system, just as it does in the workplace.

Disproportionate minority contact refers to the disproportionate number of minorities who come into contact with the criminal justice system. Disproportionate minority contact is a problem in both the adult and juvenile systems at every level of those systems. As the gatekeepers of the criminal justice system, the police are often accused of discriminatory practices.

Courts are not immune to cries of racism from individuals and politically active groups. The American Civil Liberties Union (2014), for example, states, “African-Americans are incarcerated for drug offenses at a rate that is 10 times greater than that of whites.”

The literature on disproportionate minority sentencing distinguishes between legal and extralegal factors . Legal factors are those things that we accept as legitimately, as a matter of law, mitigating or aggravating criminal sentences. Such things as the seriousness of the offense and the defendant’s prior criminal record fall into this category. Extralegal factors include things like class, race, and gender. These are regarded as illegitimate factors in determining criminal sentences. They have nothing to do with the defendant’s criminal behavior, and everything to do with the defendant’s status as a member of a particular group.

One way to measure racial disparity is to compare the proportion of people that are members of a particular group (their proportion in the general population) with the proportion or that group at a particular stage in the criminal justice system. In 2013, the Bureau of the Census (Bureau of the Census, 2014) estimated that African Americans made up 13.2% of the population of the United States. According to the FBI, 28.4% of all arrestees were African American. From this information we can see that the proportion of African Americans arrested was just over double what one would expect.

The disparity is more pronounced when it comes to drug crime. According to the NAACP (2014), “African Americans represent 12% of the total population of drug users, but 38% of those arrested for drug offenses, and 59% of those in state prison for a drug offense.”

There are three basic explanations for these disparities in the criminal justice system. The first is individual racism . Individual racism refers to a particular person’s beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors. This type of racism manifests itself when the individual police officer, defense attorney, prosecutor, judge, parole board member, or parole officer is bigoted. Another explanation of racial disparities in the criminal justice system is institutional racism . Institutional racism manifests itself when departmental policies (both formal and informal), regulations, and laws result in unfair treatment of a particular group. A third (and controversial)

explanation is differential involvement in crime. The basic idea is that African Americans and Hispanics are involved in more criminal activity. Often this is tied to social problems such as poor education, poverty, and unemployment.

While it does not seem that bigotry is present in every facet of the criminal and juvenile justice systems, it does appear that there are pockets of prejudice within both systems. It is difficult to deny the data: Discrimination does take place in such areas as use of force by police and the imposition of the death penalty. Historically, nowhere was the disparity more discussed and debated than in federal drug policy. While much has recently changed with the passage of the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010, federal drug law was a prime example of institutional racism at work.

Under former law, crimes involving crack cocaine were punished much, much more severely than powder cocaine. The law had certain harsh penalties that were triggered by weight, and a provision that required one hundred times more powder than crack. Many deemed the law racist because the majority of arrests for crack cocaine were of African Americans, and the majority of arrests for powder cocaine were white. African American defendants have appealed their sentences based on Fourteenth Amendment equal protection claims.

Biosocial Theory ^[44]

A biological theory of deviance proposes that an individual deviates from social norms largely because of their biological makeup.

Learning Objective

- Outline the main assumptions of three biological theories of deviance.

Key Points

- A biological interpretation of formal deviance was first advanced by the Italian School of Criminology, a school of thought originating from Italy during the mid-nineteenth century.
- The school was headed by medical criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who argued that criminality was a biological trait found in some human beings. The term Lombroso used to describe the appearance of organisms resembling ancestral forms of life is atavism.
- The idea of atavism drew a connection between an individual's appearance and their biological propensity to deviate from social norms.
- Enrico Ferri took this idea farther, arguing that anyone convicted of a crime should be detained for as long as possible. According to Ferri's line of thought, if individuals committed crimes because of their biological constitution, what was the point of deterrence or rehabilitation?
- Garofalo is perhaps best known for his efforts to formulate a "natural" definition of crime. According to his view, those who violate human universal laws are themselves "unnatural".

Key Terms

- penology : The processes devised and adopted for the punishment and prevention of crime.
- atavism : The reappearance of an ancestral characteristic in an organism after several generations of absence.
- Italian School of Criminology : The Italian school of criminology was founded at the end of the 19th century by Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909) and two of his Italian disciples, Enrico Ferri (1856–1929) and Raffaele Garofalo (1851–1934).

A biological theory of deviance proposes that an individual deviates from social norms largely because of their biological makeup. The theory primarily pertains to formal deviance, using biological reasons to explain criminality, though it can certainly extend to informal deviance.

Cesare Lombroso

A biological interpretation of formal deviance was first advanced by the Italian School of Criminology, a school of thought originating from Italy during the mid-nineteenth century. The school was headed by medical criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who argued that criminality was a biological trait found in some human beings. Enrico Ferri and Raffaele Garofalo continued the Italian School as Lombroso's predecessors. The Italian School was interested in why some individuals engaged in criminal behavior and others did not. Their explanation was that some individuals had a biological propensity for crime.

The term Lombroso used to describe the appearance of organisms resembling ancestral forms of life is atavism. He believed that atavism was a sign of inherent criminalities, and thus he viewed born criminals as a form of human sub-species. Lombroso believed

that atavism could be identified by a number of measurable physical stigmata - protruding jaw, drooping eyes, large ears, twisted and flattish nose, long arms relative to the lower limbs, sloping shoulders, and a coccyx that resembled “the stump of a tail. ” The concept of atavism was glaringly wrong, but like so many others of his time, Lombroso sought to understand behavioral phenomena with reference to the principles of evolution as they were understood at the time.

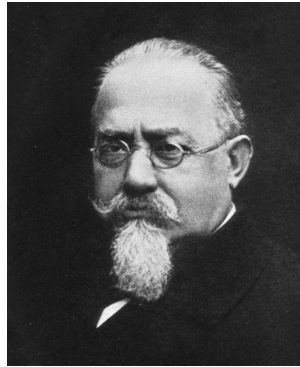


Figure 3.1 Cesare Lombroso: Cesare Lombroso argued that criminality was a biological trait found in some human beings ^[45]

Enrico Ferri

Lombroso’s work was continued by Enrico Ferri’s study of penology, the section of criminology that is concerned with the philosophy and practice of various societies in their attempt to repress criminal activities. Ferri’s work on penology was instrumental in developing the “social defense” justification for the detention of individuals convicted of crimes. Ferri argued that anyone convicted of a crime should be detained for as long as possible. According to Ferri’s line of thought, if individuals committed crimes because of their biological constitution, what was the point of deterrence or rehabilitation? For Ferri, none of these therapeutic interventions could change the offender’s biology, making them pointless. After an individual had been convicted of a crime, the state’s responsibility was to protect the community and prevent the criminal from doing more harm—as his biology determined he would do.

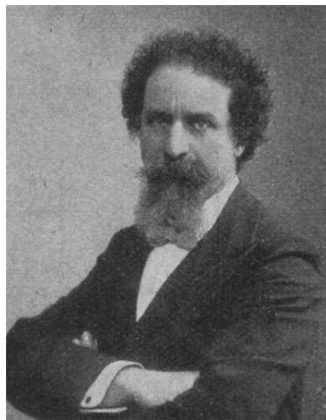


Figure 3.2 Enrico Ferri: Lombroso’s work was continued by Enrico Ferri’s study of penology, the section of criminology that is concerned with the philosophy and practice of various societies in their attempt to repress criminal activities ^[46].

Raffaello Garofalo

Garofalo is perhaps best known for his efforts to formulate a “natural” definition of crime. Classical thinkers accepted the legal definition of crime uncritically; crime is what the law says it is. This appeared to be rather arbitrary and “unscientific” to Garofalo, who wanted to anchor the definition of crime in something natural. Most significant was Garofalo’s reformulation of classical notions of crime and his redefinition of crime as a violation of natural law, or a human universal.

A human universal is a trait, characteristic, or behavior that exists across cultures, regardless of the nuances of a given context. A famous example of a universal is the incest taboo. Exempting a very small number of small communities, all human cultures have a taboo against incest in some form. Garofalo’s presentation of crime as a violation of a human universal allows for one to characterize criminals as unnatural. As soon as criminals are marked as inhuman or unnatural, the public has license to think of an individual convicted of a crime as completely unlike the rest of society; a whole new range of punishments are authorized, including serious social stigmatization.

Biological Theories Today

Italian School biological explanations have not resonated in criminal justice systems in America. However, some traces still exist. Now, the conversation about crime and biological explanations focuses more on the relationship between genetics and crime than the relationship between phenotypic features and crime. Because the modern emphasis is on actual genetics rather than phenotypic expressions of genes, stereotyping of individuals with “criminal” traits or propensities is more difficult. For example, when walking down the street, you can tell who has a protruding jaw, but you can’t tell who has the genetic combination that increases one’s propensity for aggression. Though the debate has mutated, a biological explanation for deviance and crime is still commonplace.

Psychological Theories

Psychodynamic Theory ^[47]

Learning Objectives

- Describe the assumptions of the psychodynamic perspective on personality development.
- Define and describe the nature and function of the id, ego, and superego.
- Define and describe the defense mechanisms.
- Define and describe the psychosexual stages of personality development.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) is probably the most controversial and misunderstood psychological theorist. When reading Freud’s theories, it is important to remember that he was a medical doctor, not a psychologist. There was no such thing as a degree in psychology at the time that he received his education, which can help us understand some of the controversy over his theories today. However, Freud was the first to systematically study and theorize the workings of the unconscious mind in the manner that we associate with modern psychology.

In the early years of his career, Freud worked with Josef Breuer, a Viennese physician. During this time, Freud became intrigued by the story of one of Breuer’s patients, Bertha Pappenheim, who was referred to by the pseudonym Anna O. (Launer, 2005). Anna O. had been caring for her dying father when she began to experience symptoms such as partial paralysis, headaches, blurred vision, amnesia, and hallucinations (Launer, 2005). In Freud’s day, these symptoms were commonly referred to as hysteria. Anna O. turned to Breuer for help. He spent 2 years (1880–1882) treating Anna O. and discovered that allowing her to talk about her experiences seemed to bring some relief of her symptoms. Anna O. called his treatment the “talking cure” (Launer, 2005). Despite the fact the Freud never met Anna O., her story served as the basis for the 1895 book, *Studies on Hysteria*, which he co-authored with Breuer. Based on Breuer’s description of Anna O.’s treatment, Freud concluded that hysteria was the result of sexual abuse in childhood and that these traumatic experiences had been hidden from consciousness. Breuer disagreed with Freud, which soon ended their work together. However, Freud continued to work to refine talk therapy and build his theory on personality.

Levels of Consciousness

To explain the concept of conscious versus unconscious experience, Freud compared the mind to an iceberg. He said that only about one-tenth of our mind is conscious, and the rest of our mind is unconscious. Our unconscious refers to that mental activity of which we are unaware and are unable to access (Freud, 1923). According to Freud, unacceptable urges and desires are kept in our unconscious through a process called repression. For example, we sometimes say things that we don’t intend to say by unintentionally substituting another word for the one we meant. You’ve probably heard of a Freudian slip, the term used to describe this. Freud suggested that slips of the tongue are actually sexual or aggressive urges, accidentally slipping out of our unconscious. Speech errors such as this are quite common. Seeing them as a reflection of unconscious desires, linguists today have found that slips of the tongue tend to occur when we are tired, nervous, or not at our optimal level of cognitive functioning (Motley, 2002).

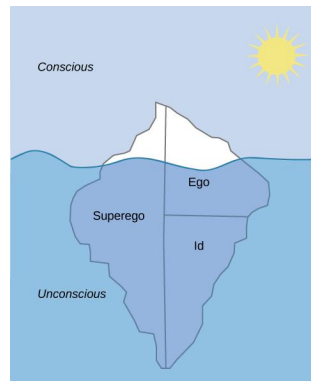


Figure 3.3 Freud believed that we are only aware of a small amount of our mind's activities and that most of it remains hidden from us in our unconscious. The information in our unconscious affects our behavior, although we are unaware of it. ^[48]

According to Freud, our personality develops from a conflict between two forces: our biological aggressive and pleasure-seeking drives versus our internal (socialized) control over these drives. Our personality is the result of our efforts to balance these two competing forces. Freud suggested that we can understand this by imagining three interacting systems within our minds. He called them the id, ego, and superego ([link](#)).

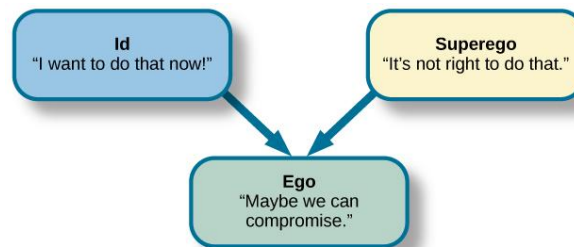


Figure 3.4 The job of the ego, or self, is to balance the aggressive/pleasure-seeking drives of the id with the moral control of the superego. ^[49]

The unconscious id contains our most primitive drives or urges and is present from birth. It directs impulses for hunger, thirst, and sex. Freud believed that the id operates on what he called the “pleasure principle,” in which the id seeks immediate gratification. Through social interactions with parents and others in a child’s environment, the ego and superego develop to help control the id. The superego develops as a child interacts with others, learning the social rules for right and wrong. The superego acts as our conscience; it is our moral compass that tells us how we should behave. It strives for perfection and judges our behavior, leading to feelings of pride or—when we fall short of the ideal—feelings of guilt. In contrast to the instinctual id and the rule-based superego, the ego is the rational part of our personality. It’s what Freud considered to be the self, and it is the part of our personality that is seen by others. Its job is to balance the demands of the id and superego in the context of reality; thus, it operates on what Freud called the “reality principle.” The ego helps the id satisfy its desires in a realistic way.

The id and superego are in constant conflict, because the id wants instant gratification regardless of the consequences, but the superego tells us that we must behave in socially acceptable ways. Thus, the ego’s job is to find the middle ground. It helps satisfy the id’s desires in a rational way that will not lead us to feelings of guilt. According to Freud, a person who has a strong ego, which can balance the demands of the id and the superego, has a healthy personality. Freud maintained that imbalances in the system can lead to neurosis (a tendency to experience negative emotions), anxiety disorders, or unhealthy behaviors. For example, a person who is dominated by their id might be narcissistic and impulsive. A person with a dominant superego might be controlled by feelings of guilt and deny themselves even socially acceptable pleasures; conversely, if the superego is weak or absent, a person might become a psychopath. An overly dominant superego might be seen in an over-controlled individual whose rational grasp on reality is so strong that they are unaware of their emotional needs, or, in a neurotic who is overly defensive (overusing ego defense mechanisms).

Defense Mechanisms

Freud believed that feelings of anxiety result from the ego’s inability to mediate the conflict between the id and superego. When this happens, Freud believed that the ego seeks to restore balance through various protective measures known as defense mechanisms (learn more about [Freud's ego defense mechanisms](#)). When certain events, feelings, or yearnings cause an individual

anxiety, the individual wishes to reduce that anxiety. To do that, the individual's unconscious mind uses ego defense mechanisms, unconscious protective behaviors that aim to reduce anxiety. The ego, usually conscious, resorts to unconscious strivings to protect the ego from being overwhelmed by anxiety. When we use defense mechanisms, we are unaware that we are using them. Further, they operate in various ways that distort reality. According to Freud, we all use ego defense mechanisms.

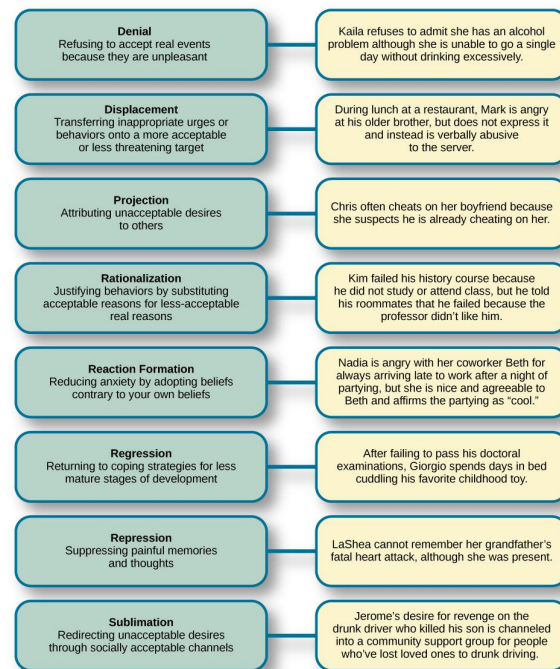


Figure 3.4 Defense mechanisms are unconscious protective behaviors that work to reduce anxiety. [50]

While everyone uses defense mechanisms, Freud believed that overuse of them may be problematic. For example, let's say Joe Smith is a high school football player. Deep down, Joe feels sexually attracted to males. His conscious belief is that being gay is immoral and that if he were gay, his family would disown him, and he would be ostracized by his peers. Therefore, there is a conflict between his conscious beliefs (being gay is wrong and will result in being ostracized) and his unconscious urges (attraction to males). The idea that he might be gay causes Joe to have feelings of anxiety. How can he decrease his anxiety? Joe may find himself acting very "macho," making gay jokes, and picking on a school peer who is gay. This way, Joe's unconscious impulses are further submerged.

There are several different types of defense mechanisms. For instance, in repression, anxiety-causing memories from consciousness are blocked. As an analogy, let's say your car is making a strange noise, but because you do not have the money to get it fixed, you just turn up the radio so that you no longer hear the strange noise. Eventually you forget about it. Similarly, in the human psyche, if a memory is too overwhelming to deal with, it might be repressed and thus removed from conscious awareness (Freud, 1920). This repressed memory might cause symptoms in other areas.

Another defense mechanism is reaction formation, in which someone expresses feelings, thoughts, and behaviors opposite to their inclinations. In the above example, Joe made fun of a homosexual peer while himself being attracted to males. In regression, an individual acts much younger than their age. For example, a four-year-old child who resents the arrival of a newborn sibling may act like a baby and revert to drinking out of a bottle. In projection, a person refuses to acknowledge her own unconscious feelings and instead sees those feelings in someone else. Other defense mechanisms include rationalization, displacement, and sublimation.

Stages of Psychosexual Development

Freud believed that personality develops during early childhood: Childhood experiences shape our personalities as well as our behavior as adults. He asserted that we develop via a series of stages during childhood. Each of us must pass through these childhood stages, and if we do not have the proper nurturing and parenting during a stage, we will be stuck, or fixated, in that stage, even as adults.

In each psychosexual stage of development, the child's pleasure-seeking urges, coming from the id, are focused on a different area of the body, called an erogenous zone. The stages are oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital (learn more about [psychosexual stages](#)

of development).

Freud's psychosexual development theory is quite controversial. To understand the origins of the theory, it is helpful to be familiar with the political, social, and cultural influences of Freud's day in Vienna at the turn of the 20th century. During this era, a climate of sexual repression, combined with limited understanding and education surrounding human sexuality, heavily influenced Freud's perspective. Given that sex was a taboo topic, Freud assumed that negative emotional states (neuroses) stemmed from suppression of unconscious sexual and aggressive urges. For Freud, his own recollections and interpretations of patients' experiences and dreams were sufficient proof that psychosexual stages were universal events in early childhood.

Table 3.1 Freud's Stages of Psychosexual Development

Stage	Age (years)	Erogenous Zone	Major Conflict	Adult Fixation Example
Oral	0–1	Mouth	Weaning off breast or bottle	Smoking, overeating
Anal	1–3	Anus	Toilet training	Neatness, messiness
Phallic	3–6	Genitals	Oedipus/Electra complex	Vanity, overambition
Latency	6–12	None	None	None
Genital	12+	Genitals	None	None

Oral Stage

In the oral stage (birth to 1 year), pleasure is focused on the mouth. Eating and the pleasure derived from sucking (nipples, pacifiers, and thumbs) play a large part in a baby's first year of life. At around 1 year of age, babies are weaned from the bottle or breast, and this process can create conflict if not handled properly by caregivers. According to Freud, an adult who smokes, drinks, overeats, or bites her nails is fixated in the oral stage of her psychosexual development; she may have been weaned too early or too late, resulting in these fixation tendencies, all of which seek to ease anxiety.

Anal Stage

After passing through the oral stage, children enter what Freud termed the anal stage (1–3 years). In this stage, children experience pleasure in their bowel and bladder movements, so it makes sense that the conflict in this stage is over toilet training. Freud suggested that success at the anal stage depended on how parents handled toilet training. Parents who offer praise and rewards encourage positive results and can help children feel competent. Parents who are harsh in toilet training can cause a child to become fixated at the anal stage, leading to the development of an anal-retentive personality. The anal-retentive personality is stingy and stubborn, has a compulsive need for order and neatness, and might be considered a perfectionist. If parents are too lenient in toilet training, the child might also become fixated and display an anal-expulsive personality. The anal-expulsive personality is messy, careless, disorganized, and prone to emotional outbursts.

Phallic Stage

Freud's third stage of psychosexual development is the phallic stage (3–6 years), corresponding to the age when children become aware of their bodies and recognize the differences between boys and girls. The erogenous zone in this stage is the genitals. Conflict arises when the child feels a desire for the opposite-sex parent, and jealousy and hatred toward the same-sex parent. For boys, this is called the Oedipus complex, involving a boy's desire for his mother and his urge to replace his father who is seen as a rival for the mother's attention. At the same time, the boy is afraid his father will punish him for his feelings, so he experiences castration anxiety . The Oedipus complex is successfully resolved when the boy begins to identify with his father as an indirect way to have the mother. Failure to resolve the Oedipus complex may result in fixation and development of a personality that might be described as vain and overly ambitious.

Girls experience a comparable conflict in the phallic stage—the Electra complex. The Electra complex, while often attributed to Freud, was actually proposed by Freud's protégé, Carl Jung (Jung & Kerenyi, 1963). A girl desires the attention of her father and wishes to take her mother's place. Jung also said that girls are angry with the mother for not providing them with a penis—hence the term penis envy . While Freud initially embraced the Electra complex as a parallel to the Oedipus complex, he later rejected it, yet it remains as a cornerstone of Freudian theory, thanks in part to academics in the field (Freud, 1931/1968; Scott, 2005).

Following the phallic stage of psychosexual development is a period known as the latency period (6 years to puberty). This period is not considered a stage, because sexual feelings are dormant as children focus on other pursuits, such as school, friendships, hobbies, and sports. Children generally engage in activities with peers of the same sex, which serves to consolidate a child's gender-role identity.

Genital Stage

The final stage is the genital stage (from puberty on). In this stage, there is a sexual reawakening as the incestuous urges resurface. The young person redirects these urges to other, more socially acceptable partners (who often resemble the other-sex parent). People in this stage have mature sexual interests, which for Freud meant a strong desire for the opposite sex. Individuals who successfully completed the previous stages, reaching the genital stage with no fixations, are said to be well-balanced, healthy adults.

While most of Freud's ideas have not found support in modern research, we cannot discount the contributions that Freud has made to the field of psychology. It was Freud who pointed out that a large part of our mental life is influenced by the experiences of early childhood and takes place outside of our conscious awareness; his theories paved the way for others.

Summary

Sigmund Freud presented the first comprehensive theory of personality. He was also the first to recognize that much of our mental life takes place outside of our conscious awareness. Freud also proposed three components to our personality: the id, ego, and superego. The job of the ego is to balance the sexual and aggressive drives of the id with the moral ideal of the superego. Freud also said that personality develops through a series of psychosexual stages. In each stage, pleasure focuses on a specific erogenous zone. Failure to resolve a stage can lead one to become fixated in that stage, leading to unhealthy personality traits. Successful resolution of the stages leads to a healthy adult.

SELF CHECK QUESTIONS

Critical Thinking Questions:

- How might the common expression "daddy's girl" be rooted in the idea of the Electra complex?
- Describe the personality of someone who is fixated at the anal stage.

Personal Application Questions:

- What are some examples of defense mechanisms that you have used yourself or have witnessed others using?

Answers:

- 1. Since the idea behind the Electra complex is that the daughter competes with her same-sex parent for the attention of her opposite-sex parent, the term "daddy's girl" might suggest that the daughter has an overly close relationship with her father and a more distant—or even antagonistic—relationship with her mother.
- 2. If parents are too harsh during potty training, a person could become fixated at this stage and would be called anal retentive. The anal-retentive personality is stingy, stubborn, has a compulsive need for order and neatness, and might be considered a perfectionist. On the other hand, some parents may be too soft when it comes to potty training. In this case, Freud said that children could also become fixated and display an anal-expulsive personality. As an adult, an anal-expulsive personality is messy, careless, disorganized, and prone to emotional outbursts.

GLOSSARY

- anal stage: psychosexual stage in which children experience pleasure in their bowel and bladder movements
- conscious: mental activity (thoughts, feelings, and memories) that we can access at any time
- defense mechanism: unconscious protective behaviors designed to reduce ego anxiety
- displacement: ego defense mechanism in which a person transfers inappropriate urges or behaviors toward a more acceptable or less threatening target
- ego: aspect of personality that represents the self, or the part of one's personality that is visible to others
- genital stage: psychosexual stage in which the focus is on mature sexual interests
- id: a spect of personality that consists of our most primitive drives or urges, including impulses for hunger, thirst, and sex
- latency period: psychosexual stage in which sexual feelings are dormant
- neurosis: tendency to experience negative emotions
- oral stage: psychosexual stage in which an infant's pleasure is focused on the mouth
- phallic stage: psychosexual stage in which the focus is on the genitals
- projection: ego defense mechanism in which a person confronted with anxiety disguises their unacceptable urges or behaviors by attributing them to other people
- psychosexual stages of development: stages of child development in which a child's pleasure-seeking urges are focused on specific areas of the body called erogenous zones
- rationalization: ego defense mechanism in which a person confronted with anxiety makes excuses to justify behavior
- reaction formation: ego defense mechanism in which a person confronted with anxiety swaps unacceptable urges or behaviors for their opposites
- regression: ego defense mechanism in which a person confronted with anxiety returns to a more immature behavioral state
- repression: ego defense mechanism in which anxiety-related thoughts and memories are kept in the unconscious
- sublimation: ego defense mechanism in which unacceptable urges are channeled into more appropriate activities
- superego: aspect of the personality that serves as one's moral compass, or conscience
- unconscious: mental activity of which we are unaware and unable to access

Behavioral/Social Learning Theory ^[51]

Behavioral Learning Theory

Operant Conditioning and Repeating Actions

Operant Conditioning is another learning theory that emphasizes a more conscious type of learning than that of classical conditioning. A person (or animal) does something (operates something) to see what effect it might bring. Simply said, operant conditioning describes how we repeat behaviors because they pay off for us. It is based on a principle authored by a psychologist named Thorndike (1874–1949) called the law of effect. The law of effect suggests that we will repeat an action if it is followed by a good effect.

Skinner and Reinforcement

B.F. Skinner (1904–1990) expanded on Thorndike's principle and outlined the principles of operant conditioning. Skinner believed that we learn best when our actions are reinforced. For example, a child who cleans his room and is reinforced (rewarded) with a big hug and words of praise is more likely to clean it again than a child whose deed goes unnoticed. Skinner believed that almost anything could be reinforced. A reinforcer is anything following a behavior that makes it more likely to occur again. It can be something intrinsically rewarding (called intrinsic or primary reinforcers), such as food or praise, or it can be something that is rewarding because it can be exchanged for what one really wants (such as money to buy a cookie). Such reinforcers are referred to as secondary reinforcers or extrinsic reinforcers.

Positive and Negative Reinforcement

Sometimes, adding something to the situation is reinforcing as in the cases we described previously with cookies, praise, and money. Positive reinforcement involves adding something to the situation in order to encourage a behavior. Other times, taking something away from a situation can be reinforcing. For example, the loud, annoying buzzer on your alarm clock encourages you to get up so that you can turn it off and get rid of the noise. Children whine in order to get their parents to do something and often, parents give in just to stop the whining. In these instances, negative reinforcement has been used.

Operant conditioning tends to work best if you focus on trying to encourage a behavior or move a person into the direction you want them to go rather than telling them what not to do. Reinforcers are used to encourage a behavior; punishers are used to stop

behavior. A punisher is anything that follows an act and decreases the chance it will reoccur. But often a punished behavior doesn't really go away. It is just suppressed and may reoccur whenever the threat of punishment is removed. For example, a motorist may only slow down when the highway patrol is on the side of the freeway. Another problem with punishment is that when a person focuses on punishment, they may find it hard to see what the other does right or well. And punishment is stigmatizing; when punished, some start to see themselves as bad and give up trying to change.

Reinforcement can occur in a predictable way, such as after every desired action is performed, or intermittently, after the behavior is performed a number of times or the first time it is performed after a certain amount of time. The schedule of reinforcement has an impact on how long a behavior continues after reinforcement is discontinued. So, a parent who has rewarded a child's actions each time may find that the child gives up very quickly if a reward is not immediately forthcoming. Think about the kinds of behaviors you may have learned through classical and operant conditioning. You may have learned many things in this way. But sometimes we learn very complex behaviors quickly and without direct reinforcement. Bandura explains how. (6)

Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura is a leading contributor to social learning theory. He calls our attention to the ways in which many of our actions are not learned through conditioning; rather, they are learned by watching others (1977). Young children frequently learn behaviors through imitation. Sometimes, particularly when we do not know what else to do, we learn by modeling or copying the behavior of others. An employee on his or her first day of a new job might eagerly look at how others are acting and try to act the same way to fit in more quickly. Adolescents struggling with their identity rely heavily on their peers to act as role models. Newly married couples often rely on roles they may have learned from their parents and begin to act in ways they did not while dating and then wonder why their relationship has changed. Sometimes we do things because we've seen it pay off for someone else. They were operantly conditioned, but we engage in the behavior because we hope it will pay off for us as well. This is referred to as vicarious reinforcement (Bandura, Ross and Ross, 1963).

Do Parents Socialize Children or Do Children Socialize Parents?

Bandura (1986) suggests that there is interplay between the environment and the individual. We are not just the product of our surroundings; rather, we influence our surroundings. There is interplay between our personality and the way we interpret events and how they influence us. This concept is called reciprocal determinism. An example of this might be the interplay between parents and children. Parents not only influence their child's environment, perhaps intentionally through the use of reinforcement, etc., but children influence parents as well. Parents may respond differently with their first child than with their fourth. Perhaps they try to be the perfect parents with their firstborn, but by the time their last child comes along they have very different expectations both of themselves and their child. Our environment creates us, and we create our environment.

Other social influences: TV or not TV? Bandura (et al. 1963) began a series of studies to look at the impact of television commercials on the behavior of children. Are children more likely to act out aggressively when they see this behavior modeled? What if they see it being reinforced? Bandura began by conducting an experiment in which he showed children a film of a woman hitting an inflatable clown or "bobo" doll. Then the children were allowed in the room where they found the doll and immediately began to hit it. This was without any reinforcement whatsoever. Later children viewed a woman hitting a real clown and sure enough, when allowed in the room, they too began to hit the clown! Not only that, but they found new ways to behave aggressively. It's as if they learned an aggressive role. (6)

Strictly speaking, behavioral theories are not developmental theories. Both Freud and Erikson were interested in developmental stages and how we change across time. Behavioral theories believe that reinforcers and punishers function the same regardless of age or stage of development, which is why they are psychological theories, but not developmental theories. (1)

Cognitive Theory ^[52]

When applied to explaining why people commit crimes, cognitive psychology focuses on how people learn to solve social problems.

Piaget (1932) was the first cognitive psychologist to argue that people's reasoning abilities develop in a predictable, orderly way. He believed that during the first stage of development (what he called the "sensor-motor stage"), children respond to their social environment in a simple way by focusing their attention on interesting objects and developing motor skills. By the final stage of the development (what he called the "formal operations stage"), children have developed into mature adults who are capable of complex reasoning and abstract thought.

Kohlberg

In 1969, Kohlberg applied this concept of moral development to criminal behavior. According to his work, there are six fundamental stages in moral development. The most basic type of moral development is avoiding the prohibited behavior out of fear of punishment. By the time the person reaches the sixth and final stage, universal principles such as justice, concern for others, and a sense of equity motivate behavior. According to Kohlberg's research findings, violent youth had stunted moral development when compared to nonviolent youth. This relationship held even when the social background of participants was controlled statistically. Simply put, people who have empathy and concern for others are much less likely to commit crimes of violence than those who avoid violence merely because they fear punishment.

This in essence holds that the criminal calculus of the Utilitarians actually does play a role in criminal behavior, but it is the simplest and least dependable behavioral drive when it comes to criminality. Kohlberg's research also connected higher levels of moral development to prosocial behaviors such as altruism and generosity. Such individuals can be counted on to act according to social norms regardless of what formal social controls are in place. Those with lower levels of moral reasoning will act more in accordance with perceived self-interest, and formal social controls will play a much larger role in predicting their behavior. They are likely to engage in crime when they calculate that they can "get away with it." Society can depend on those with high levels of moral development to do the right thing simply because it is the right thing to do.

Other researchers from the field of cognitive psychology have considered the role of information processing in criminality. A large body of research in this field suggests that when people make decisions, they engage in a series of complex thought processes. The basic model of behavior from this perspective is that a stimulus occurs in the person's environment; the person then decodes and interprets the stimuli. They then must search for a proper reaction to the stimuli, and when one is decided upon, the person acts on the decision. Some researchers in this field have hypothesized that violent behavior may be the result of the individual using information incorrectly to make decisions. A person with a history of violence, for example, may tend to see others as more aggressive or more dangerous than is appropriate. This may in turn evoke a violent response with only minimal provocation. An aggressive person, the theory suggest, would tend toward hypervigilance and suspicion of others. This in turn would increase the occurrence of violent behavior. Very few individual self-report violence against another person merely out of spite or rage; while this does happen, the majority of violent individuals explain that their actions were taken in self-defense. A more rational analysis of the circumstances preceding the act of violence may reveal that the level of threat was grossly exaggerated in the mind of the actor. It has been further suggested that many violent, predatory criminals fail to realize—because of information processing errors—that their behavior is as harmful as it is to victims. They simply do not recognize the harm that they are causing.

Personality Theory ^[53]

In personality theory, the problem lies not in unconscious motivation, but in the content of the person's personality. The basic proposition here is that criminals have abnormal, inadequate personality traits that differentiate them from law-abiding people.

One version Explains criminal behavior as an expression of such deviant personality traits as impulsiveness, aggressiveness, sensation seeking, rebelliousness, hostility, and so on.

Another Version Claims that criminals differ from law-abiding persons in basic personality type. Conformity reflects a normal personality. Serious criminal violations spring from an aberrant personality, variously labeled as psychopathic, antisocial, or sociopath personality. These labels are applied to self-centered persons who have not been properly socialized into prosocial attitudes and values, which have developed no sense of right and wrong, and no empathy with others, no remorse for wrongs committed.

Evaluation is problematic: The concept is so broad that it can be applied to anyone who violates the law. Estimates range from 10% to 80% of offenders, depending on the definition. Some definitions use measures of criminal activity to determine personality disorders—creating a tautology.

The research using personality inventories and other methods of measuring personality characteristics have not been able to produce findings to support personality variables as major causes of criminal and delinquent behavior.

According to this perspective, criminals should be treated as sick people who are not responsible in any rational sense. Punishment will not help; only create more guilt and make things worse. Once underlying emotional problems are fixed criminality will go away.

Psychoanalytic treatment: The criminal must undergo psychoanalytic treatment to help him uncover the repressed causes of the behavior, which lies hidden in the unconscious. The objective is to reveal to the person's conscious mind the deep-seated unconscious motivations driving criminality—then it can be handled by the conscious mind.

Social Structure Theories ^[54]

Social structure theories all stress that crime results from the breakdown of society's norms and social organization. They trace the roots of crime to problems in the society itself rather than to biological or psychological problems inside individuals. By doing so, they suggest the need to address society's social structure in order to reduce crime. Several social structure theories exist.

Strain Theory ^[55]

Strain theories assume people will commit crime because of strain, stress, or pressure. Depending on the version of strain theory, strain can come from a variety of origins. Strain theories also assume that human beings are naturally good; bad things happen, which "push" people into criminal activity.

Emile Durkheim viewed economic or social inequality as natural and inevitable. Furthermore, inequality and crime were not correlated unless there was also a breakdown of social norms. According to Durkheim, when there is rapid social change (like moving from an agrarian society to an industrial society) social norms breakdown. There is too much too fast, and society needs to reevaluate normative behaviors. He referred to the decline of social norms, or "normlessness," as "anomie." Moreover, social forces have a role in dictating human thought and behaviors. He thought anomie was an inability of societies to control or regulate individuals' appetites. Although Durkheim was interested in looking at how societies change, other researchers adapted his idea of anomie. In the previous section, Shaw and McKay retained the spirit of Durkheim's anomie but focused on neighborhoods instead of societies at large. Robert K. Merton also utilized Durkheimian anomie.

Merton (1938) thought many human appetites originated in the culture of American society rather than naturally. ^[1] Moreover, the "social structure" of American society restricts some citizens from attaining it. Most, if not all, Americans know of the "American Dream." No matter how you conceptualize the dream, most people would define the American dream as achieving economic success in some form. The culturally approved method of obtaining the American dream is through hard work, innovation, and education. However, some people and groups are not given the same opportunities to achieve the cultural goal. When there is a disjunction between the goals of a society and the appropriate means to achieve that goal, a person may feel pressure or strain. Everyone is aware of the definition and promotion of the American dream. When someone does not achieve this goal, he or she may feel strain or pressure. A person could be rejected or blocked from achieving a cultural goal. Merton claimed there were five personality adaptations between the goals of a society and the means to achieve them.

Table 3.2 Personality Adaptations

Personality Adaptation	Cultural Goals	Institutionalized Means
I. Conformity	+	+
II. Innovation	+	–
III. Ritualism	–	+
IV. Retreatism	–	–
V. Rebellion	+ / –	+ / –

Conformists are the most common adaptation. Without it, societal norms and values would undermine the cultural goals. Conformists accept the goals and legitimate means to achieve the goal. Innovators accept the goal, but they reject the means or have their means blocked. Thus, they innovate ways to meet society's goal. Ritualists conform to the predominant means of achieving wealth and success through hard work, but they may be blocked from achieving success, or they drop the social goal. For example, some people work hard for the sake of working hard. They want their children to see the significance of work ethic above all else, including monetary achievement. Retreatists do not share the shared values of society. Thus, they adjust by dropping out of conventional society. Drug addicts, alcoholics, and vagrants are just some examples who select this adjustment. Finally, rebels reject the current goals and means of society, but they want to replace them with new goals and standards. They seek to establish a new social order.

Even though Merton's theory could explain any strain, he emphasized economic strains. Cohen (1955) claimed stress could come from a lack of status. ^[2] Cohen wanted to know why most juvenile crimes occurred in groups. He explained that many youths, especially those in lower class families, rejected education and other middle-class values. Instead, many teenagers would seek status and self-worth as a new value system. When teens have no status, reputation, or self-worth, it led to severe strain. To achieve status, youths commit a crime to gain status among their peer group. Cloward and Ohlin (1960) claimed more serious delinquents

sought “fast cars, fancy clothes, and well dames” (p. 97). [3] Assuming youths had no legitimate opportunities to improve their economic position, youths would join gangs to pursue illegitimate opportunities to achieve financial success. Criminal gangs provided youths illicit opportunities to gain money, conflict gangs permitted youths to vent their frustrations, and retreatist gangs were double failures; they had no legitimate or illegitimate means to increase income.

The general strain theory, by Robert Agnew, claimed strains come from myriad sources. Agnew defined strain as any event that a person would rather avoid. Three types of strains include the failure to achieve a positively valued stimulus, the removal of a positively valued stimulus, and the confrontation of negative stimuli. Examples include parental rejection, child abuse, bullying, loss of job, loss of a loved one, discrimination, and criminal victimization. However, the characteristics of some strains are more likely to lead to crime. When a person views a strain as high in magnitude and unjust, and the pressure promotes criminal coping mechanism, people with minimal social control are more likely to commit a crime. Strains lead to negative emotions such as anger, depression, and fear. Some people without prosocial coping mechanisms may commit a crime to vent, which can create social control issues (trouble in school, parents, employers) as well as facilitate social learning (joining peers who also need to vent their frustration). Overall, criminal behavior serves a purpose – to escape strain, stress, or pressure.



Think About It... Coping Mechanisms

Every-one feels stress and each of us copes with stress, pressure, or shame differently. Shame can motivate us to change for the better. For example, if you did poorly on an exam, you may start to study better. When you feel stress, what do you do? When I ask students how they deal with stress, many go for a run or a walk, lift weights, cry, talk, or eat ice cream. These are normal and generally pro-social coping mechanism. When I feel stress, I write. Sometimes, I write angry emails and then delete them. Fortunately, I have never accidentally sent one.

Cultural Deviance Theory ^[56]

Cultural deviance theory suggests that conformity to the prevailing cultural norms of lower-class society causes crime. Researchers Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1942) studied crime patterns in Chicago in the early 1900s. They found that violence and crime were at their worst in the middle of the city and gradually decreased the farther someone traveled from the urban center toward the suburbs. Shaw and McKay noticed that this pattern matched the migration patterns of Chicago citizens. New immigrants, many of them poor and lacking knowledge of the English language, lived in neighborhoods inside the city. As the urban population expanded, wealthier people moved to the suburbs and left behind the less privileged.

Shaw and McKay concluded that socioeconomic status correlated to race and ethnicity resulted in a higher crime rate. The mix of cultures and values created a smaller society with different ideas of deviance, and those values and ideas were transferred from generation to generation.

The theory of Shaw and McKay has been further tested and expounded upon by Robert Sampson and Byron Groves (1989). They found that poverty, ethnic diversity, and family disruption in given localities had a strong positive correlation with social disorganization. They also determined that social disorganization was, in turn, associated with high rates of crime and delinquency—or deviance. Recent studies Sampson conducted with Lydia Bean (2006) revealed similar findings. High rates of poverty and single-parent homes correlated with high rates of juvenile violence.

Social Process Theories

Social Conflict Theory ^[57]

Conflict theory sees society as a dynamic entity constantly undergoing change as a result of competition over scarce resources.

Learning Objective

- Identify the tenets of and contributors to conflict theory, as well as the criticisms made against it

Key Points

- Conflict theory sees social life as a competition, and focuses on the distribution of resources, power, and inequality.
- Unlike functionalist theory, conflict theory is better at explaining social change, and weaker at explaining social stability.
- Conflict theory has been critiqued for its inability to explain social stability and incremental change.
- Conflict theory derives from the ideas of Karl Marx.

Key Terms

- conflict theory : A social science perspective that holds that stratification is dysfunctional and harmful in society, with inequality perpetuated because it benefits the rich and powerful at the expense of the poor.
- functionalism : Structural functionalism, or simply functionalism, is a framework for building theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability.

The conflict perspective, or conflict theory, derives from the ideas of Karl Marx, who believed society is a dynamic entity constantly undergoing change driven by class conflict. Whereas functionalism understands society as a complex system striving for equilibrium, the conflict perspective views social life as competition. According to the conflict perspective, society is made up of individuals competing for limited resources (e.g., money, leisure, sexual partners, etc.). Competition over scarce resources is at the heart of all social relationships. Competition, rather than consensus, is characteristic of human relationships. Broader social structures and organizations (e.g., religions, government, etc.) reflect the competition for resources and the inherent inequality competition entails; some people and organizations have more resources (i.e., power and influence), and use those resources to maintain their positions of power in society.

C. Wright Mills is known as the founder of modern conflict theory. In his work, he believes social structures are created because of conflict between differing interests. People are then impacted by the creation of social structures, and the usual result is a differential of power between the "elite" and the "others". Examples of the "elite" would be government and large corporations. G. William Domhoff believes in a similar philosophy as Mills and has written about the "power elite of America".

Sociologists who work from the conflict perspective study the distribution of resources, power, and inequality. When studying a social institution or phenomenon, they ask, "Who benefits from this element of society?"

Conflict Theory and Change

While functionalism emphasizes stability, conflict theory emphasizes change. According to the conflict perspective, society is constantly in conflict over resources, and that conflict drives social change. For example, conflict theorists might explain the civil rights movements of the 1960s by studying how activists challenged the racially unequal distribution of political power and economic resources. As in this example, conflict theorists generally see social change as abrupt, even revolutionary, rather than incremental. In the conflict perspective, change comes about through conflict between competing interests, not consensus or adaptation. Conflict theory, therefore, gives sociologists a framework for explaining social change, thereby addressing one of the problems with the functionalist perspective.

Criticism of Conflict Theory

Predictably, conflict theory has been criticized for its focus on change and neglect of social stability. Some critics acknowledge that societies are in a constant state of change but point out that much of the change is minor or incremental, not revolutionary. For example, many modern capitalist states have avoided a communist revolution, and have instead instituted elaborate social service programs. Although conflict theorists often focus on social change, they have, in fact, also developed a theory to explain social stability. According to the conflict perspective, inequalities in power and reward are built into all social structures. Individuals and groups who benefit from any particular structure strive to see it maintained. For example, the wealthy may fight to maintain their privileged access to higher education by opposing measures that would broaden access, such as affirmative action or public funding.

Developmental Theory ^[58]

The defining feature of developmental theory is its focus on offending in relation to changes over time in individuals and their life circumstances, with most research being focused in practice on childhood and adolescence.

As you probably realize by now, most theories and discussions of socialization concern childhood. However, socialization continues throughout the several stages of the life course, most commonly categorized as childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and

old age. Within each of these categories, scholars further recognize subcategories, such as early adolescence and late adolescence, early adulthood and middle adulthood, and so forth. This section sketches some important aspects of the major life course stages.

Childhood

Despite increasing recognition of the entire life course, childhood (including infancy) certainly remains the most important stage of most people's lives for socialization and for the cognitive, emotional, and physiological development that is so crucial during the early years of anyone's life. We have already discussed what can happen if an infant does not receive "normal" socialization from at least one adult, and feral children are a sad reminder that socialization is necessary to produce an entity that not only looks human but really is human in the larger sense of the word.

Beyond this basic importance of childhood, however, lies an ugly truth. In regard to education, health, and other outcomes, many children do not fare well during childhood. Moreover, how well they do fare often depends on their social location—their social class, their race and ethnicity, and their gender. The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics regularly publishes a report called *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being* (including a shorter version in some years). This report provides an annual update of how children are faring on more than three dozen measures. The Forum's latest report, published in July 2010, provided some disturbing facts about children's well-being, and it also showed the difference that social location makes for their well-being (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2010).

In one important finding, only about 55% of children aged 3–5 and not in kindergarten had a family member read to them daily. This figure varied by income level. Only 40% of children in families below the poverty level profited in this way, compared to 64% of children whose families' incomes were at least twice as high as the poverty level.



Figure 3.1 About 55% of children aged 3–5 who are not in kindergarten have a family member read to them every day. Social class affects the likelihood of reading to children: only 40% of children in families below the poverty level are read to daily, compared to 64% of children in families with incomes twice the poverty level or higher. ^[59]

In other important findings, about one-fifth of U.S. children lived in poverty in 2008, a figure that rose to more than 30% of African American and Latino children. As well, slightly more than one-fifth of children were in families that sometimes were "food insecure," meaning they had trouble providing food for at least one family member. More than 40% of households with children in 2007 were characterized by crowded or physically inadequate conditions.

What happens during childhood can have lifelong consequences. Traumatic experiences during childhood—being neglected or abused, witnessing violence, being seriously injured, and so forth—put youngsters at much greater risk for many negative outcomes. They are more likely to commit serious delinquency during adolescence, and, throughout the life course, they are more likely to experience various psychiatric problems, learning disorders, and substance abuse. They are also less likely to graduate high school or attend college, to get married or avoid divorce if they do marry, and to gain and keep a job (Adams, 2010). The separate stages of the life course are really not that separate after all.

Adolescence

As many readers may remember, adolescence can be a very challenging time. Teenagers are no longer mere children, but they are not yet full adults. They want their independence, but parents and teachers keep telling them what to do. Peer pressure during adolescence can be enormous, and tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use become a serious problem for many teens.

These are all social aspects of adolescence, but adolescence also is a time of great biological change—namely, puberty. Puberty obviously has noticeable physiological consequences and, for many adolescents, at least one very important behavioral consequence—sexual activity. But early puberty also seems to have two additional effects: among both boys and girls, it increases the likelihood of delinquency and also the likelihood of becoming a victim of violence (Schreck, Burek, Stewart, & Miller, 2007). These twin consequences are thought to happen for at least two reasons. First, early puberty leads to stress, and stress leads to

antisocial behavior (which can also result in violence against the teen committing the behavior). Second, teens experiencing early puberty (early maturers) are more likely to hang out with older teens, who tend to be more delinquent because they are older. Because their influence “rubs off,” early maturers get into trouble more often and are again more likely to also become victims of violence.

Romantic relationships, including the desire to be in such a relationship, also matter greatly during adolescence. Wishful thinking, unrequited love, and broken hearts are common. Dating multiple partners is thought to contribute to delinquency and substance abuse, in part because dating occurs at parties and in other unsupervised settings where delinquency and drug use can occur, and in part because the emotional problems sometimes accompanying dating may result in delinquency, drug use, or both (Seffrin, Giordano, Manning, & Longmore, 2009).

As the discussion on childhood suggested, social class, race and ethnicity, and gender continue to affect the experiences of individuals during adolescence. Adolescence can certainly be an interesting stage of the life course, but how we fare during adolescence is often heavily influenced by these three fundamental aspects of our social location.

Emerging Adulthood

2008 was a year of financial upheaval in the United States. Rampant foreclosures and bank failures set off a chain of events sparking government distrust, loan defaults, and large-scale unemployment. How has this affected the United States’ young adults?



Figure 3.2 Young Adults [60]

Millennials, sometimes also called Gen Y, is a term that describes the generation born during the early eighties to early nineties. While the recession was in full swing, many were in the process of entering, attending, or graduating from high school and college. With employment prospects at historical lows, large numbers of graduates were unable to find work, sometimes moving back in with their parents and struggling to pay back student loans.

According to the New York Times, this economic stall is causing the Millennials to postpone what most Americans consider to be adulthood: “The traditional cycle seems to have gone off course, as young people remain untethered to romantic partners or to permanent homes, going back to school for lack of better options, traveling, avoiding commitments, competing ferociously for unpaid internships or temporary (and often grueling) Teach for America jobs, forestalling the beginning of adult life” (Henig 2010). The term Boomerang Generation describes recent college graduates, for whom lack of adequate employment upon college graduation often leads to a return to the parental home (Davidson, 2014).

Emerging adulthood, as exemplified by the experience of many Millennials, is a relatively recent phase of the life span located between the adolescence and full-fledged adulthood. The term describes young adults who do not have children, do not live in their own home, or do not have sufficient income to become fully independent. Jeffrey Arnett (2000) suggests emerging adulthood is the distinct period between 18 and 25 years of age where adolescents become more independent and explore various life possibilities. Arnett argues that this developmental period can be isolated from adolescence and young adulthood. Emerging adulthood is proposed as a new developmental stage centered on “identity exploration, instability, self-focus, and feeling in-between”. Arnett called this period “roleless role” because emerging adults do a wide variety of activities but are not constrained by any sort of “role requirements”.

The five milestones that define adulthood, Henig writes, are “completing school, leaving home, becoming financially independent, marrying, and having a child” (Henig 2010). These social milestones are taking longer for Millennials to attain, if they’re attained at all. Sociologists wonder what long-term impact this generation’s situation may have on society as a whole.

Adulthood

Adulthood is usually defined as the 18–64 age span. Obviously, 18-year-olds are very different from 64-year-olds, which is why scholars often distinguish young adults from middle-age adults. In a way, many young adults, including most readers of this book, delay entrance into “full” adulthood by going to college after high school and, for some, then continuing to be a student in graduate or professional school. By the time the latter obtain their advanced degree, many are well into their 30s, and they finally enter the labor force full time perhaps a dozen years after people who graduate high school but do not go on to college. These latter individuals may well marry, have children, or both by the time they are 18 or 19, while those who go to college and especially those who get an advanced degree may wait until their late 20s or early to mid-30s to take these significant steps.



Figure 3.3 Marriage and parenthood are “turning points” in many young adults’ lives that help them to become more settled and to behave better than they might have behaved during adolescence.^[61]

One thing is clear from studies of young adulthood: people begin to “settle down” as they leave their teenage years, and their behavior generally improves. At least two reasons account for this improvement. First, as scientists are increasingly recognizing, the teenaged brain is not yet fully mature physiologically. For example, the frontal lobe, the region of the brain that governs reasoning and the ability to consider the consequences of one’s actions, is not yet fully formed, leaving teenagers more impulsive. As the brain matures into the mid- and late 20s, impulsiveness declines and behavior improves (Ruder, 2008).

Second, as sociologists recognize, young adulthood is a time when people’s “stakes” in society and conformity become stronger. Many get married, some have children, and most obtain their first full-time job. These “turning points,” as they are called, instill a sense of responsibility and also increase the costs of misbehavior. If you are married, your spouse might not be very happy to have you go barhopping every weekend night or even more often; if you are employed full time, your employer might not be very happy to have you show up hung over. Marriage and employment as turning points thus help account for the general improvement in behavior that occurs after people reach adulthood (Laub, Sampson, & Sweeten, 2006).

Social class, race and ethnicity, and gender continue to affect how people fare during adulthood.

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