

## Chapter 2

# Causes of Crime

# Learning Objective 1

- Discuss the difference between a hypothesis and a theory in the context of criminology.

# The Role of Theory

- Theory
  - An explanation of a happening or circumstance that is based on observation, experimentation, and reasoning
- Hypothesis
  - A possible explanation for an observed occurrence that can be tested by further investigation
  - Tested using the scientific method

# The Role of Theory



**Observation:** I left my home at 7:00 this morning, and I was on time for class.



**Hypothesis:** If I leave home at 7:00 every morning, then I will never be late for class.  
(Hypotheses are often presented in this “If . . . , then . . .” format.)



**Test:** For three straight weeks, I left home at 7:00 every morning. Not one time was I late for class.



**Verification:** Four of my neighbors have the same morning class. They agree that they are never late if they leave by 7:00 A.M.



**Theory:** As long as I leave home at 7:00 A.M., I don't have to worry about being late for class.



**Prediction:** Tomorrow morning I'll leave at 7:00, and I will be on time for my class.

Note that even a sound theory supported by the scientific method, such as this one, does not *prove* that the prediction will be correct. Other factors not accounted for in the test and verification stages, such as an unexpected traffic accident, may disprove the theory. Predictions based on complex theories, such as the criminological ones we will be discussing in this chapter, are often challenged in such a manner.

# Learning Objective 2

- Contrast positivism with classical criminology.



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# The Brain and The Body

- Choice theory
  - Offenders make a rational choice to commit crime.
  - Defendant may not be punished as harshly if it can be proven that she or he lacked the ability to make a rational choice.

# The Brain and The Body

- Classical criminology
  - Before committing a crime, a person weighs the benefits of the crime against the costs of being apprehended.
  - Cesare Beccaria: *Essays on Crime and Punishments*
    - Decisions are a result of rational choices.
    - Fear of punishment has a deterrent effect.
    - Swift and certain punishment is the most powerful deterrent to criminal offending.



# The Brain and The Body

- Positivism
  - Criminal behavior is determined by biological, psychological, and social forces beyond the control of the individual.
  - Cesare Lombroso is the “Father of Criminology.”

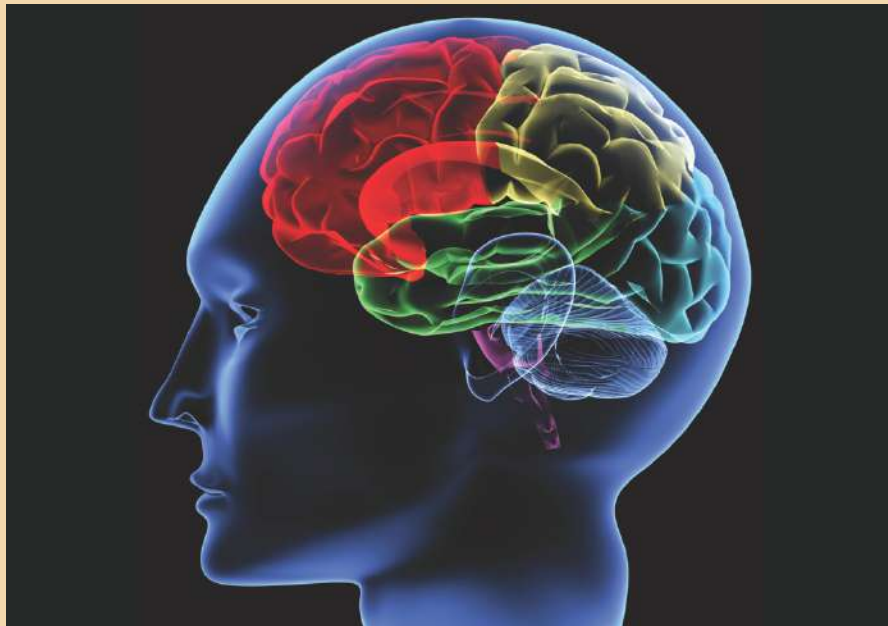


# The Brain and The Body

- Rational choice theory
  - Before committing a crime, a person acts as if he/she is weighing the benefits against the costs.
  - If the perceived benefits are greater than the potential costs, the person is more likely to commit the crime.

# Learning Objective 3

- Explain how brain-scanning technology is able to help scientists determine if an individual is at risk for criminal offending.



Yakobchuk Vasyl/Shutterstock.com

# The Brain and The Body

- Genetics: a branch of biology that deals with traits that are passed through generations
- When the warrior gene is combined with history of abuse as child, there is an increased risk for violence.
- Criminal activity in males is linked to elevated levels of testosterone.
- Neurocriminology is the study of how genetics and brain activity influence criminal behavior.
- While there may be a correlation between mental illness and violence, such illnesses cannot be said to cause violent behavior.

# The Brain and The Body

- Freud's psychoanalytic theory
  - The id, ego, and superego
- Social psychology
  - How humans relate to and influence one another
- Trait theory
  - Biological and psychological views of criminality that suggest antisocial behavior should be identified and treated before it manifests itself

# Learning Objective 4

- List and describe the three theories of social structure that help explain crime.



Scott Olson/ Getty Images

# Bad Neighborhoods and Other Economic Disadvantages

- Sociological theories
  - The Chicago School
  - Social disorganization theory
  - Strain theory
  - Cultural deviance theory



# Bad Neighborhoods and Other Economic Disadvantages



Source: Adapted from Larry J. Siegal, *Criminology*, 10th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2009), 180.



# Learning Objective 5

- Describe the social conflict theory known as the social reality of crime.



Michael DeMocker/The Times-Picayune/Landov

# Bad Neighborhoods and Other Economic Disadvantages

- Social conflict theories
  - Marxism vs. capitalism
    - Marx believed that capitalist economic systems necessarily produce income inequality and lead to exploitation
  - Patterns of social justice
  - Issues of race and ethnicity
    - Racial threat theory: based on the hypothesis that, as the size of a minority group increases in population and expands geographically, members of the majority group use the criminal justice system to oppress those minority groups
  - Implications for public policy

# Learning Objective 6

- List and briefly explain the three branches of social process theory.

# Life Lessons & Criminal Behavior

- Social process theories
  - Learning theory
  - Control theory
  - Labeling theory
- Social process theory and public policy
  - Crime prevention focuses on juvenile offenders and steering them away from offending and the system.

# Learning Objective 7

- Describe the importance of early childhood behavior for those who subscribe to self-control theory.

# Life Lessons & Criminal Behavior

- Life course theories
  - Self-control theory
  - Possibility of change
    - Life-course-persistent offenders
    - Adolescent-limited offenders
    - Turning points
  - Life course theories relate to public policy

# Learning Objective 8

- Contrast the medical model of addiction with the criminal model of addiction.



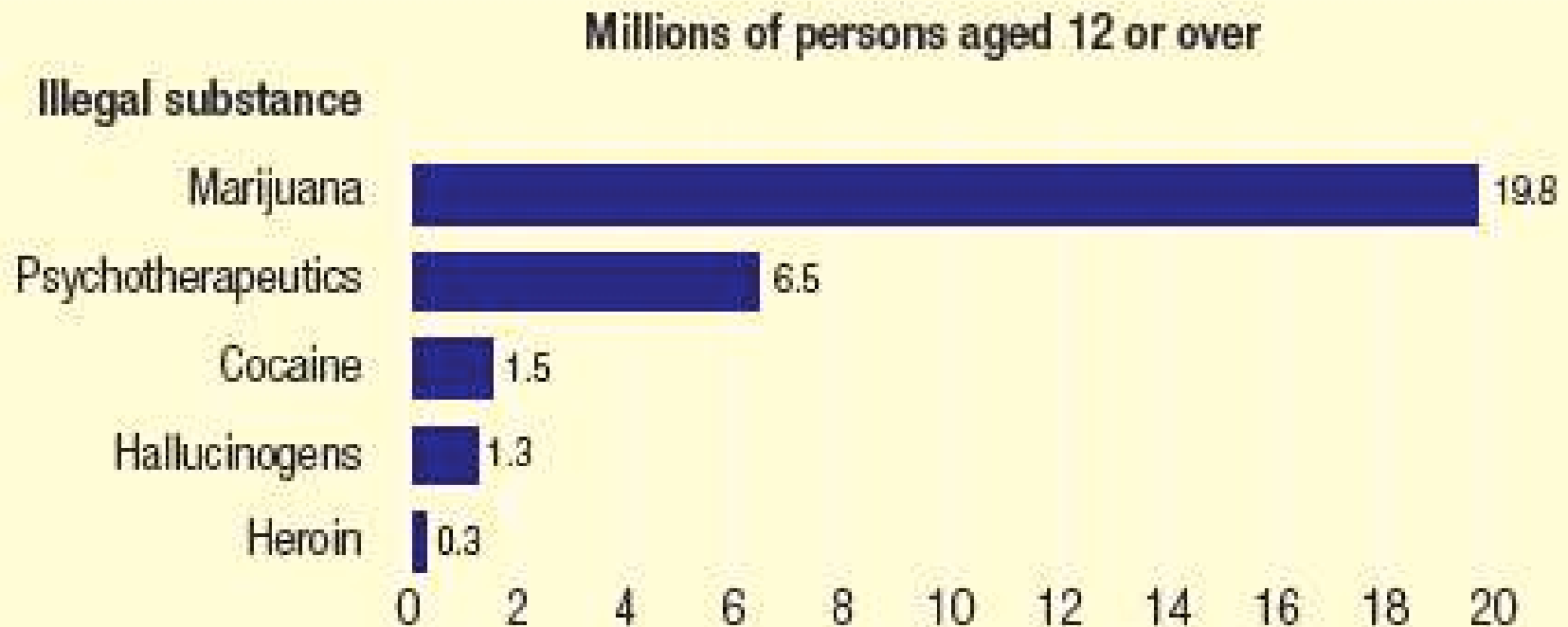
Cheryl Senter/The New York Times/Redux



# Link between Drugs & Crime

- Social disorganization theory
- Control theory
- Learning process
  - Techniques of drug use
  - Perception of effects of drug use
  - Enjoy the social experience of drug use

# Link between Drugs & Crime



# Link between Drugs & Crime

- Drug addiction and dependency
  - Drug abuse is the use of drugs that results in physical or psychological harm to the abuser or third parties
  - The brain's dopaminergic system is the key to understanding many drugs of abuse
- The drug-crime relationship
  - Drug-defined offenses – violation of drug laws
  - Drug-related offenses – crimes motivated by drug abuse
  - Drug-using lifestyle – rely on crime for means of survival

# Link between Drugs & Crime

- Models of addiction
  - The medical model of addiction
    - Addicts are not criminals, but mentally or physically ill individuals who are forced into acts of petty crime to “feed their habit.”
    - Under the enslavement theory, addicts should be treated for their addiction as a disease and not be punished as criminals.
  - The criminal model of addiction
    - Illegal drug abusers and addicts endanger society with their behavior and should be punished the same as persons who commit non drug-related crimes.

# Link between Drugs & Crime

- Marijuana law trends
  - Legalization
  - Decriminalization
  - Issues
    - Edibles
    - Diversion

# Learning Objective 9

- Explain the theory of the chronic offender and its importance for the criminal justice system.

# From Theory to Practice

- Chronic offender
  - Career criminal
  - A small group of offenders (6%) are responsible for a disproportionate amount of crime.
  - Habitual offenders laws provide harsher sentences for repeat offenders.