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Crime, Popular Mythology, and Personal Responsibility

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CRIME HAS been with us since the dawn of civilization. From the time society first established standards by which to govern behavior, there have been those individuals who have elected to disregard these rules, laws, and dictates; yet, we remain largely ignorant about the causes of norm-violating behavior. It is our intent in writing this article to present a perspective that differs markedly from the majority of approaches traditionally used to explain crime and understand criminals. Our data, as well as our experience, suggest that without a more meaningful, rational approach to understanding serious criminality, any attempts we make to control and remediate criminal behavior will be ineffective, if not counterproductive.

Defining Criminality

Before proceeding it is important that we discuss how criminality will be defined in this article. For the most part we will be focusing on individuals who commit crimes as part of an overall lifestyle. According to our definition, a criminal is someone who has developed a lifestyle characterized by irresponsibility, self-indulgence, interpersonal intrusiveness, and a propensity for social rule-breaking. In this context, a single arrest or conviction, even if serious, is not necessarily viewed as indicative of criminality since it does not reflect a continued pattern of violation. While not minimizing the seriousness of individual crimes or the problems created by individuals who do not exhibit lifestyle criminality, we would like to focus our attention in this article on individuals who commit the types of crimes which are of greatest concern to society (i.e., those in which there is clear victimization of others).

Any individual may exhibit, to a greater or lesser degree, one or several of the characteristics associated with lifestyle criminality (irresponsibility, self-indulgence, interpersonal intrusiveness, social rule-breaking) and, as a result, find himself in a problematic life situation, to include conflict with the criminal justice system. However, when we speak about criminality we are referring to a lifestyle characterized by all four of these factors interacting in a manner which is multiplicative, rather than additive, in nature. The end result is an individual who is qualitatively, not just quantitatively, different from his noncriminal counterpart.

A Survey of Perceptions

It is our view that not only has there been a fundamental misunderstanding about criminals, but that our acceptence of the unverified lore on crime and criminals is preventing us from making much progress in the area. We feel that these erroneous beliefs are rather consistently held by many people, influencing their attitudes about the law-breaking behavior of criminals. To obtain an objective understanding of what people perceive to be the primary causes of crime, we asked university-based criminal justice experts and adults taking a community college psychology course (general population group) to list the factor or factors they viewed as causing criminality. Analyzable responses were received from 27 criminal justice experts and 32 general population adults. Additionally, to provide a base for comparison, 97 consecutively sampled criminal offenders incarcerated in a maximum security Federal prison were asked to describe their views on the cause(s) of criminality in their own lives. Results for all three groups can be found in table 1.

Although several very interesting differences surfaced when these three groups were compared, only two of these differences were statistically significant (i.e., biopsychosocial model differences between experts and subjects in the inmate and general population samples) when the rather conservative Bonferroni procedure (Larzelere and Mulaik, 1977) was used, suggesting, as we suspected, that there is a fair amount of agreement as to the causes of criminal behavior when divergent groups are compared. Of the various explanations, the sociological ones were by far the most popular, with particular emphasis on family and social class variables. This

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TABLE 1.—OPINIONS OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE EXPERTS, INCARCERATED CRIMINAL OFFENDERS, AND GENERAL POPULATION CONTROL SUBJECTS ON THE CAUSES OF CRIME

	Criminal Justice Experts (N = 27)	Incarcerated Offenders (N = 97)	General Population Controls (N = 32)
Biological Causes	(7.5%)	(1.0%)	(1.6%)
Heredity	5.7%	0.0%	1.6%
Neurological	1.8%	1.0%	0.0%
Psychological Causes	(15.4%)	(22.5%)	(19.9%)
Drug & Alcohol Abuse	7.1%	15.1%	0.8%
Mental Illness	0.0%	2.1%	6.9%
Psychological Conflict	8.3%	2.4%	12.2%
Stressful Life Events	0.0%	2.6%	0.0%
Sociological Causes	(48.9%)	(40.5%)	(46.2%)
Family/Socialization/ Social Learning	29.4%	14.0%	31.1%
Lack of Education/Job Skills	0.9%	4.5%	2.9%
Peer Influence	3.9%	17.0%	4.7%
Social Class/Poverty	14.7%	5.0%	7.5%
Interactionalist Causes	(21.6%)	(0.0%)	(0.0%)
Biopsychosocial Model	21.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Other Causes	(6.6%)	(35.9%)	(32.3%)
Avarice	3.8%	25.1%	19.7%
Personal Choice/ Responsibility	0.9%	5.5%	9.4%
Miscellaneous	1.9%	5.2%	3.2%
TOTALS	100.0%	99.9%	100.0%

Note: In cases where respondent answered with more than one cause each factor was weighted as a fraction of 1. Thus, if three causes were mentioned each cause was weighted .33.

Significance was evaluated by means of the phi coefficient, using the Bonferroni procedure to control for experimentwise error (p_{fw} = .05; p_f = .0006). Statistical significance was found for the following comparisons: Experts vs. Offenders on the Biopsychosocial Model, $\emptyset$ = .42; Experts vs. General Population on the Biopsychosocial Model, $\emptyset$ = .36.

finding is not surprising in view of contemporary sociological and psychological theories which emphasize these factors. Unfortunately, as we will show, most of these causal explanations are factually inaccurate and based more on conjecture and myth than fact and objective data. In the next section the 10 most commonly mentioned explanations or myths will be discussed and critically evaluated.

The Ten Myths

Heredity. Several researchers have postulated the existence of a cross-generational link for criminality and antisocial behavior (Mednick, 1985). This relationship has been observed in studies using family (Cloninger, Reich, and Guze, 1975), twin (Christiansen, 1974), and adoptee (Bohman, Cloninger, Sigvardsson, and von Knorring, 1982; Hutchings and Mednick, 1975) methodologies. However, Walters and White (1987) conclude that very little in the way of meaningful information can be derived from this body of research since the studies are so seriously flawed methodologically. These methodological limitations notwithstanding, the data clearly show that the relationship between crime and putative indices of genetic influence is so small as to be of questionable practical significance (see Walters and White, 1987). Our data reveal that while heredity was one of the least popular of our 10 criminologic myths (see table 1), it did attract the attention of nearly 6 percent of our criminal justice experts. Regardless of how popular or unpopular the genetic view may be, however, Walters and White's (1987) critique clearly indicates that there is no evidence to

support the viability of the genetic approach to criminal behavior.

Neurological. Hare (1970) has argued that certain types of crime, particularly that which is committed by the psychopathic personality, can be traced back to a lesion or contusion of the limbic portion of the brain. He theorizes that this damage interferes with the criminal's ability to inhibit certain types of negative behavior. Hare bases his theory on EEG research conducted using criminals and psychopaths (cf. Syndulko, 1978), as well as on experimental investigations of animals whose brains have been lesioned (cf. McCleary, 1966).

While Syndulko (1978) reports that 6 out of 10 EEG studies conducted with adult sociopaths were supportive of Hare's (1970) position (i.e., a significantly greater number of abnormal EEG patterns were found with sociopathic individuals relative to normal controls), the incidence of abnormal EEGs did not exceed that observed in other deviant or psychiatric groups. Furthermore, no clear relationship has been found to exist between neuropsychological indices of frontal lobe dysfunction and psychopathy in either criminal (Hare, 1984) or noncriminal (Hoffman, Hall, and Bartsch, 1987) psychopaths. After reviewing the research in this area there does seem to be a relationship which exists between psychopathy and EEG abnormalities. Unfortunately, the direction of this relationship cannot be determined, for it is just as logical to expostulate that a criminal lifestyle causes later neuropsychological problems as it is to argue that early neurological deficits are the cause of subsequent criminality. Similarly, while animal research clearly indicates that lesions of the limbic system interfere with behavior (McCleary, 1966), the notion that a septally lesioned rat's inability to solve a maze task is even remotely similar to the repetitive antisocial behavior of the lifestyle criminal is preposterous. Thus, despite the relative acceptance of the neurological argument in some circles, it failed to find favor with the vast majority of our respondents (see table 1) and is generally lacking in empirical support.

Drug and Alcohol Abuse. Crime as a consequence of alcohol or drug abuse has always been a well accepted proposition. This probably stems from the fact that criminals often have a history of chemical abuse which seems either directly or indirectly linked to their criminal activity. In a 1983 survey of convicted offenders, for instance, 75 percent of the sample reported having used drugs at some point in their lives (Brown, Flanagan, and McLeod, 1984). Given this fact it is somewhat surprising that less than 1 percent of our general population sample viewed drug and alcohol abuse as a significant cause of norm-violating behavior. However, offenders did give considerably more credence to this explanation (see table 1). The more important question, of course, is whether there is any empirical support for the existence of a causal relationship between crime and alcohol/drug abuse, regardless of its popularity.

Years of research on chemical abuse and crime has firmly established the presence of a strong relationship between these two variables. A 1979 nationwide survey of state prison inmates revealed that nearly one-third of the sample reported having been under the influence of an illegal substance at the time they committed the offense for which they were serving time (BJS, 1983b). It should be noted, however, that marijuana was the intoxicating substance in half these cases. In this same survey 30 percent of the sample reported that they had been drinking heavily prior to committing the instant offense (BJS, 1983a), but these researchers are quick to point out that the majority of alcohol abusing convicts in their sample had been drinking heavily for years. They also emphasized that the offenders' alcohol intake at the time of the offense was not atypical of their usual consumption pattern.

It has been proposed that because some drugs are so expensive and/or require increasingly larger doses to achieve desired results (tolerance), a person may be driven to engage in criminal activity as a means of securing money for the purpose of buying drugs. It has been estimated, for instance, that regular heroin users cost society $32,000 a year (Johnson, Goldstein, Preble, Schmeidler, Lipton, Spunt, and Miller, 1985) and commit hundreds of crimes annually in order to support their heroin habits (Gropper, 1985). Ball, Rosen, Flueck, and Nurco (1981) followed 243 male heroin addicts and found that criminal activity and opiate usage varied directly; i.e., the more involved one was in crime the more involved one was in using heroin.

While these data are certainly impressive in establishing a link between crime and chemical abuse, the greater empirical question is whether these data suggest the presence of a causal connection between these two variables. In a review of the presentence investigative reports of 516 maximum security inmates incarcerated at the United States Penitentiary, Leavenworth we discovered that 37 percent of the sample started using drugs or abusing alcohol before there was any history of documented criminal activity (i.e., arrest). On the other hand, 55 percent of the sample had at least one recorded arrest before they began using drugs or abusing alcohol, and 8 percent of the sample commenced committing crimes

and using drugs/alcohol around the same time (Walters and White, in preparation). Our data fail to support the position that alcohol and drug abuse lead to crime since many of the individuals in our sample (henceforth to be referred to as the Leavenworth 500 sample) were engaged in crime long before they ever started using drugs or abusing alcohol (in some cases the timespan was as long as 20 years). Based on the present results it would seem just as logical to conclude that criminality causes chemical abuse, although it is more likely that factors common to both variables (e.g., irresponsibility and self-indulgence) account for the observed crime-chemical relationship.

In addition to our own research, others have also failed to find a causal connection between crime and chemical abuse. In a sample of 250,000 drug users admitted to federally funded drug abuse programs in 1983, 50 percent had no record of arrest 24 months prior to being admitted into treatment, and only 5 percent had incurred a record of five or more arrests (Brown et al., 1984). The disparity between no arrests and five-or-more arrests increases slightly when we consider heroin users (i.e., 56 percent vs. 4 percent). This finding becomes more understandable when we discover that the majority of crimes committed by heroin addicts involve either petty thievery or small drug sales. It seems that many addicts have learned to "get over," rather than relying on serious crime, as a means of securing funds for drugs (Goldstein, 1981).

While drug and alcohol abuse is more strongly correlated with crime than either heredity or neurological status, a causal connection has clearly not been demonstrated. Part of the problem is that, like the biological research on crime, studies investigating the link between crime and chemical abuse are plagued by serious methodological problems. Greenberg (1981) reports that the research in this area suffers from poorly delineated hypotheses, sample selection problems, use of varying definitions of chemical abuse and criminality, and inadequate statistical treatment of the data. In short, existing evidence does not permit us to make causal statements about the relationship between crime and alcohol (Collins, 1981) or crime and drugs (Gropper, 1985). Thus, while researchers should be encouraged to continue examining the chemical abuse-crime connection, drug and alcohol abuse cannot, at present, be viewed seriously as an explanation for crime.

Mental Illness. The mental illness myth has been popularized by movies, television shows, and the authors of horror novels. The truly unfortunate aspect of these depictions is that television shows and movies are oftentimes the only source of information many people have about these issues and the portrayal is often misleading and inaccurate. Nevertheless, the fact that some people in the general population have come to believe these inaccuracies is verified by the results of our survey which indicate that nearly 7 percent of our general population sample listed mental illness as the primary cause of criminal behavior.

Research investigating the relationship between crime and mental illness has examined two basic types of information: i.e., mental health problems in incarcerated criminals and criminality in current and former mental patients. Studies addressing mental illness in criminal populations have found that between 1 and 10 percent of the individuals in these populations display signs of serious emotional disorder (Brodsky, 1973; Coid, 1984; Good, 1978; Walters, Mann, Miller, Hemphill, and Chlumsky, in press; Walters, Scrapansky, and Marrlow, 1986). This rate of disturbance, however, is no greater than that observed in general population samples of comparable social class (Monahan and Steadman, 1984).

Research examining criminality in current and former mental patients is no more supportive of the mental illness explanation of criminality than is research on the mental health status of criminal offenders. Investigations into the criminal records of released mental patients conducted prior to 1965 indicated that the arrest rates of individuals in this group were lower than the population base rate, while later research studies (i.e., after 1965) revealed the exact opposite (Monahan and Steadman, 1984). Steadman, Cocozza, and Melick (1978), however, report that this increase in the rate of arrest for ex-mental patients is actually due to a rise in the number of patients who have been previously arrested. When we restrict our analyses to patients who have never before been arrested, subsequent arrest is no more likely than it is for persons in the general population (Monahan and Steadman, 1984). Thus, while relying on mental illness to explain criminal behavior may result in interesting fiction, except in rare cases, it is just another example of modern-day mythology.

Psychological Conflict/Stressful Life Events. The mental health profession has been one of the most vocal proponents of the theory that psychological trauma and internal conflict are important in the genesis of criminal behavior. Furthermore, persons in the profession have apparently been successful in selling this idea to the general public (see table 1 for the end results). Menninger (1968), an avid supporter

of the psychological approach to crime, has gone so far as to postulate that since criminals unconsciously want to be punished, placing negative sanctions on their norm-violating behavior serves only to reinforce such behavior. Unfortunately, like many psychodynamically based theories, virtually no empirical data exist on this topic, thereby making meaningful evaluation of this hypothesis impossible.

One of the more popular contemporary psychological explanations of crime postulates that involvement in the Vietnam conflict led numerous individuals to develop symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); some of the correlates of this disorder being a sense of rage, propensity towards violence, and possible legal difficulties (Goodwin, 1980). However, despite the various figures which are often cited in support of this theory linking PTSD and criminality, a nationwide survey of state prison inmates found that only 5 percent were Vietnam era veterans who had actually served in Southeast Asia. In fact, the results suggested that Vietnam veterans were less likely than nonveterans to be incarcerated (BJS, 1981).

A more telling statistic, and one which may help explain the apparent link between incarceration and Vietnam (at least in some social scientists' minds), is the finding that a quarter of all incarcerated Vietnam veterans had served time in a jail or prison prior to entering the military, and fully 36 percent had been on probation before the age of 20 (BJS, 1981). In addition, 45 percent of the Vietnam combat veterans in our Leavenworth 500 sample had been arrested at least once antecedent to entering military service (Walters and White, in preparation). Thus, while there is no doubt that the age, background, and experiences of the Vietnam veteran may have contributed to the development of certain psychological problems, it is misleading to conclude that participation in this conflict accounts for significant levels of criminality. Furthermore, such statements do a disservice to the large number of Vietnam veterans who have never encountered major legal difficulties.

Family/Socialization. One of the oldest approaches to explaining crime has emphasized problems in the pre-delinquent/future criminal's family of origin. Such factors as early separation from one's parents (Peterson and Becker, 1965), poor attachment or bonding (Ainsworth, 1979), parental rejection, inconsistent discipline (Bennett, 1960), and the presence of an unstable home environment (McCord, McCord, and Thurber, 1963) have all been implicated in the development of later delinquency and criminality. It is important to note that this approach was also the most popular causal explanation reported by subjects in two of our survey groups (i.e., experts and general population respondents).

Peterson and Becker (1965) report that one and one-half to two times as many delinquents as nondelinquents come from homes disrupted by divorce, separation, death, or desertion. In our Leavenworth 500 sample we found that 58 percent of our inmates had experienced at least one of these types of losses by the time they were 16 years of age (Walters and White, in preparation). Similarly, Greer (1964) discovered that sociopathic adults had experienced separation from at least one parent within the first 4 years of life and separation from both parents within the first 15 years significantly more often than a group of neurotic patients. McCord, McCord, and Zola (1959), on the other hand, believe that the role of a broken home in the development of later criminality has been overstated and that turmoil and conflict within the home are more important in determining later criminality.

Parental discipline has also been implicated in the development of later legal difficulties. In an early study on this topic, Merrill (1947) found that three-quarters of the delinquent adolescents in her sample had been raised in homes where discipline was too lax, too severe, or highly inconsistent. In a recent review of the literature on delinquency, Loeber and Dishion (1983) compared the ability of such variables as early separation from parents, family management technique (discipline), criminality in other family members, family socioeconomic status, stealing/lying/truancy, and poor educational achievement to predict delinquency. In the final analysis, composite measures of family management technique displayed the best relationship with subsequent delinquency. If we consider Glueck and Glueck's (1950) observation that the parents of delinquent children are more likely to inflict corporal punishment than are the parents of nondelinquent children, it becomes increasingly evident that harsh, inconsistent disciplinary techniques are often used with children who eventually become delinquent.

While a strong relationship appears to exist between certain aspects of a child's early upbringing (i.e., discipline, separation, bonding) and later criminality there are several problems with this research. First, the studies in this area have focused almost exclusively on delinquents, and research suggests that there is less of a relationship between juvenile delinquency and adult criminality than one might at first think (Klein, 1987). Second, this research, like that found in many other fields of endeavor, is largely correlational in nature, thus making causal statements inappropriate. Third, these

data raise an interesting paradox. If, as suggested, the family plays such an important role in the development of criminal behavior, then it should follow that a majority of a criminal's siblings will be similarly affected. However, Kvaraceus (1945) determined that 90 percent of the delinquents in his sample were the only juvenile members of their families with any record of delinquency. Similarly, in our Leavenworth 500 sample the majority of offenders (58 percent) were the only members of their immediate family with any history of legal difficulty (Walters and White, in preparation). Thus, while the socialization process effected by one's family may impact on subsequent delinquent behavior, there is little evidence that it contributes significantly to the development of adult criminality.

Lack of Education/Job Skills. There is overwhelming evidence to suggest that criminals have failed to attain the level of education and job skill achieved by the majority of their noncriminal peers. Schafer and Polk (1967) report that delinquents drop out of high school at a rate 10 times that of nondelinquents, and data from our Leavenworth 500 study reveal a drop-out rate of 84 percent. Interpretation of this data has led researchers to conclude that individuals who lack certain basic educational/occupational skills resort to crime because they are unable to secure legitimate employment. Unfortunately, these conclusions are not at all consistent with reality. In fact, 52 to 70 percent of the jail, state, and Federal prisoners included in several different investigations (i.e., BJS, 1985; Brown et al., 1984; Walters and White, in preparation) reported that they were legitimately employed at the time of the instant offense, and many of those listed as unemployed were not actively seeking legitimate work.

Another assumption behind the education/job skill approach to criminality concerns education. The argument states that if one provides offenders with basic job and educational training, they will be able to find employment and recidivism should drop off. However, research has also failed to bear this out (Martinson, 1974). In fact, frequently the only effect prison education and job training programs have had on crime has been the creation of better educated criminals who can weld or plumb. Rather than turning to crime as a consequence of failing grades or unemployment, most criminals do poorly in school and/or have sporadic work records because school and work are incompatible with their delinquent/criminal lifestyles (Samenow, 1984). Thus, to consider the education/job skills explanation of crime as anything other than fiction is to disregard objective reality.

Peers. Negative peer influence is frequently blamed for behaviors ranging anywhere from bad language to murder. Consequently, it is no wonder that it has also been implicated in the development of criminality. The offenders in our survey certainly viewed negative peer influence as important in their own lives, nearly one in five respondents indicating that "hanging around with the wrong crowd" was what caused them to behave in a criminal manner (see table 1).

While empirical data on the question of peer influence and crime are sparse, the differential association theory of crime (Sutherland, 1939) asserts that people become criminals because they are in close contact with those who regularly engage in norm-violating behavior. Although this theory obviously makes good intuitive sense, it overlooks one very important factor, the reason for being in contact with such individuals in the first place. Simply stated, the developing criminal child overtly seeks out those who are like him or her and actively avoids responsible children (Samenow, 1984). Thus, while peer influence probably plays a role in certain types of juvenile crime, it is altogether inadequate as a causal explanation of adult criminality. Moreover, this approach seems to ignore the fact that despite the impact peers can have on behavior, we are the ones who select our companions.

Social Class/Poverty. Rauma and Berk (1982) assert that "common sense suggests that poverty leads to crime" (p. 318). A review of the sociological literature on crime reveals that this position has been adopted by many social scientists. The notion that people commit crimes because they are poor is deeply engrained in American folklore. However, if we consider the facts, we discover that a crime-class nexus cannot be taken for granted. There were slightly more than 2 million people in the American criminal justice system (prison, jail, halfway houses, parole, probation) as of December 31, 1981 (see Brown et al., 1984). Even if we assume, albeit unrealistically, that each one of these individuals was poor, 2 million is only 12 percent of the 17 million adults who were living in poverty in the United States at the time (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1986). The data also indicate that, just as most poor people are not criminals, most criminals were not brought up in impoverished home environments. Thus, while the majority of subjects in our Leavenworth 500 sample were raised in lower and lower-middle class home environments, only 20 percent can be categorized as having been reared in poverty (Walters and White, in preparation).

In a stratified sample of 28,000 high school

sophomores, students from high ($38,000 or more) and low (less than $7,000) annual income homes barely differed in terms of having been in serious trouble with the law (6.9 percent vs. 8.0 percent, respectively: see Brown et al., 1984). Moreover, in reviewing the literature on crime and social class, Tittle, Villemez, and Smith (1978) conclude that the relationship between the two is very small (gamma= −.09) and practically nonexistent when only recent investigations are considered. Although Tittle et al. have been criticized for being biased in their selection of studies (Braithwaite, 1981), confounding social class with social status (Clelland and Carter, 1980), and relying too heavily upon self-report data (Braithwaite, 1981; Clelland and Carter, 1980), their work is still viewed as having a great deal of relevance by some experts in the field (e.g., Stark, 1979).

Thornberry and Farnworth (1982) conducted a study on social class/status and crime which employed multiple measures of social status as well as several measures of criminality (self-report and official records, adult and juvenile outcomes). They found very little relationship between social status and crime for juvenile outcomes but noted a small, yet significant, relationship in white adults and an even stronger relationship in black adults, particularly when official data were used. However, only current social status measures correlated with criminality (e.g., educational attainment, job stability, occupation), thus raising questions about the direction of the relationship (i.e., which set of variables was the cause and which set was the effect). It is interesting that a subject's social class of origin, as measured by the father's occupation and the socioeconomic status of the area of residence, did not correlate with criminality at all.

Echoing the conclusions of Tittle et al. (1978), the evidence does not support the presence of a meaningful connection, let alone a causal relationship, between crime and social class/poverty. In other words, while "common sense" and conventional sociological theory might suggest that poverty causes crime, the factual data do not support this position. It would seem that until a more data-based assessment is utilized in theory building we will continue to fall short in our efforts to understand and eradicate the actual causes of crime.

Biopsychosocial Model. In our survey the biopsychosocial model was endorsed rather strongly by the experts in our sample (22 percent), but it was not even mentioned by a single subject in either of the other two groups (see table 1). One can only conclude from this finding that the biopsychosocial model, which posits that crime is caused by an interaction involving biological, psychological, and sociological factors, is probably only seen as relevant by academics who take a rather intellectualized approach to the question of crime. While there is little doubt that many behaviors, to include criminality, may be affected by a combination of variables, elevating this awareness to the status of a theory seems superfluous and unnecessary. In short, the biopsychosocial model tells us absolutely nothing about crime, its genesis or its management, since it adopts the essentially untestable position that everything, in various degrees and combinations, causes crime.

Since the biopsychosocial model is based, in part, on the biological, psychological, and sociological myths already discussed, it is clear that it doesn't find much empirical support as an explanation of crime. Moreover, using this approach one tends to get lost in its complexity, and while the world can indeed be a complex place, we often make it more intricate than it needs to be. In the absence of any empirical support, the biopsychosocial model of criminality, the newest of our 10 myths, can be considered nothing more than an over-intellectualized nonanswer to a very real problem.

Conclusion

In ancient Greece people believed deities controlled their every action, in medieval Europe people believed in witches, many of whom were burned at the stake, and in modern America people believe that crime is caused by poverty, poor parenting, drugs, mental illness, and peers. Through the ages, mythology has taken on many different forms, but always towards the same end, to explain that which cannot be explained through conventional knowledge. In the past man legitimized his myths by cloaking them in a shroud of religion, but today we buttress our myths with pseudoscience, unnecessarily technical jargon, and over-intellectualized, oftentimes confusing, theories. In the final analysis we have duped ourselves into believing these criminologic fictions and sidetracked ourselves away from more worthwhile pursuits.

If we turn our attention once again to table 1 we see that approximately 30 percent of the criminal offenders and 29 percent of the general population respondents viewed either avarice/greed or personal choice as the major cause of criminality. These responses clearly indicate that a fairly substantial number of criminals, as well as members of the general public, perceived personal choice and responsibility to be at the heart of criminality. After years of experience working with incarcerated criminal offenders the present authors have come to realize

that the source of crime involves choice not genes, drugs and alcohol, psychological trauma, or poverty. Although this approach may be no more valid than the biologic, psychologic, sociologic, and interactive explanations currently in vogue, the responsibility model appears to warrant further study if for no other reason than that it possesses a fair degree of face validity (see table 1).

This issue of personal responsibility relates directly to the notion of lifestyle criminality discussed earlier in this article. The lifestyle criminal chooses to be irresponsible because it is more satisfying than accounting for his conduct and fulfilling his obligations. Moreover, he lacks self-restraint, often callously encroaches upon the private lives of his victims, and has very little regard for the laws and dictates of society. However, this self-indulgent, interpersonally intrusive, social rule-breaking attitude is fully under his control. It is also important to realize that these lifestyle characteristics not only define criminality, but can also serve as guideposts for subsequent treatment interventions. It is therefore concluded that without a more organized approach to the question of crime, as would be possible through use of this four-factor model of lifestyle criminality (encompassing irresponsibility, self-indulgence, interpersonal intrusiveness, and social rule-breaking), very little progress can be anticipated in our attempts to manage crime.

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