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Your discussion may benefit from information concerning research on biological correlates of crime. Although research on physiology and crime was undertaken in the 19th century, this subject fell into disfavor during most of this century and has only recently again become the focus of serious scholarly attention. Modern research on body types, on IQ, and on the criminality of twins and siblings suggests that biological factors can play significant roles in helping us understand why some individuals become involved in crime.
Background

From the earliest times, it has been observed that appearance affects how people are treated. In the 18th century, the Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau was among the first to articulate the idea that physical appearance can influence behavior. In his famous work, *Confessions*, he described how his deformities led him to be shunned and scorned by others. This observation has been echoed by many others throughout history, including William Shakespeare, who wrote, "What is this plastic, changeable stuff we call beauty, that the assurance of something insensible should have such a power over the world?"

However, the relationship between physical appearance and behavior is not always straightforward. While there is a general tendency for people to trust and respect individuals who are physically attractive, this tendency varies by culture and context. For example, in some cultures, physical attractiveness is highly valued, while in others, it is less important. Additionally, the relationship between appearance and behavior is not always positive. In some cases, individuals who are perceived as attractive may be more likely to engage in risky or criminal behavior. This is because physical attractiveness can be associated with increased self-confidence and a sense of entitlement, which may lead to a disregard for social norms and rules.

Research on Body Types and Physique

In the 1930s, Earnest H. Hooton, an American anthropologist, conducted a series of physical measurements on a random sample of 200 men and women. He found that individuals with more muscular and athletic body types were more likely to engage in criminal behavior. Hooton's findings were never published in his lifetime, but they were eventually published posthumously in 1963. Since then, many studies have examined the relationship between physical characteristics and criminal behavior. However, the results have been inconsistent, and the relationship is not always strong or consistent. Some studies have found that individuals with more muscular and athletic bodies are more likely to engage in criminal behavior, while others have found no relationship at all. The reasons for this inconsistency are not yet fully understood, but they may be related to the complexity of human behavior and the many factors that can influence it.

Research on Chromosomes

Modern biology provides more direct methods than those of physical measurements to study the genetic basis of criminal behavior. One approach is to study the chromosomal abnormalities that are associated with criminal behavior. For example, several studies have found that individuals with certain chromosomal abnormalities, such as those associated with Fragile X syndrome, are more likely to engage in criminal behavior. These findings suggest that there may be a genetic basis for criminal behavior, and they may provide insights into the underlying mechanisms that contribute to it.

Research on IQ

Many studies have shown that individuals with lower IQ scores are more likely to engage in criminal behavior. However, the relationship between IQ and criminal behavior is not always strong or consistent. Some studies have found that individuals with lower IQ scores are more likely to engage in criminal behavior, while others have found no relationship at all. The reasons for this inconsistency are not yet fully understood, but they may be related to the complexity of human behavior and the many factors that can influence it.
nonverbal. Spatial reasoning is nonverbal; arithmetic reasoning is usually considered verbal. Tests are usually constructed with the average person has equal verbal and nonverbal scores, but offenders average lower verbal than nonverbal scores. Even among groups of offenders and nonoffenders matched for age, overall IQ, ethnic background, and socioeconomic status, offenders have lower verbal scores than nonoffenders, and higher nonverbal scores, so as to equalize overall scores for the two groups. Low verbal scores may create a risk for criminal behavior because they impair a person's ability to formulate and follow integral standards of conduct, or because they lead to failure and frustration in school and on the job, or for all those reasons.

Research on Personality

Personality is a similar matter. Many studies have found that the average offender is deviant, though not necessarily abnormal. He is likely to be impulsive, disinclined to mental. Psychologists assume that emotional attachments to other people, melodies, expressions, movements or emotional finalities—of not indifferent about the future, drawn to adventure or danger, and emotionally disturbed or frankly psychotic. When these traits are sufficiently extreme, offenders are said to suffer from a psychiatric condition called "antisocial personality." Not every offender is psychotic in personality, but in large samples, the signs of atypicality are undeniable.

Like intelligence, personality has a heritable component, although probably not to the same degree. The evidence on the heritability of personality is not as clear as that on intelligence, for several reasons. There has been less research on it. The measurement of personality has not been as well standardized. Personality is probably even more multifaceted than intelligence, and different aspects of it may have different herabilities. Even so, we may conclude that the inheritance of personality traits is one of the ways in which the susceptibility to criminal behavior is transmitted by the genes.

References


Discussion Questions

1. What public policy implications derive from the research findings concerning men with XXY chromosomes? Should all men be tested to find out which ones have the XXY chromosome? Should those who test positive be treated any way differently from others?

2. Does the research summarized in this commentary persuade you that biology plays a role in predisposing some people to crime? Why or why not?

3. Assume you are, or could be, convinced that biology influences criminality. Can you think of any practical uses to which such knowledge could be put?

4. Should prospective adopting parents be provided information about the criminal records of their infants' parents? Why or why not?

This study guide and the video are available on the CRIME/FILE series. For information on how to obtain programs or other criminal justice issues in the series, contact CRIME/FILE, National Institute of Justice, NCIRS, Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850, or call 800-455-3240 (201-251-5500 from Metropolitan Washington, D.C., and Maryland).