

Journal of

Theoretical & Philosophical Criminology

ISSN: 2166-8094

Jtpcrim January/February 2024: 16-31

Tracing Proactive and Reactive Criminal Thinking Back to their Historical Roots: A “History of the Present” Analysis

Glenn Walters, Kutztown University

Abstract

The objective of this “history of the present” analysis was to illustrate how historical trends from the past may have shaped modern conceptualizations of proactive and reactive criminal thinking; not just in terms of how these criminal thinking dimensions relate to criminal behavior but also in terms of how they relate to each other. Using social cognitive and social-cognitive-developmental theories as a conceptual framework, it is argued that reactive criminal thinking has its roots in crimes of desperation as committed by the poor and destitute during the Middle Ages and Industrial Revolution, whereas proactive criminal thinking has its roots in crimes of opportunity as committed by the rich and powerful, during these same two historical periods, with perception serving as a link between certain social-environmental realities and these two criminal thinking styles. Despite divergent historical origins, the proactive and reactive dimensions of antisocial cognition overlap extensively: first, because of economic and political changes occurring during the Middle Ages which eventually led to cross-involvement in crimes of desperation and opportunity, and second, because these two dimensions of antisocial cognition contain styles of thought (superoptimism in the case of proactive criminal thinking and cognitive indolence in the case of reactive criminal thinking) are strongly aroused by a person’s involvement in criminal activity. These styles of criminal cognition, along with their overarching dimensions, rose significantly during the Industrial Revolution with the loss of informal social control that accompanied movement into the city. Implications for modern-day criminological research, theory, and practice are discussed.

Key Words: historical analysis; Middle Ages; Industrial Revolution; criminal thinking

Theoretical Underpinnings

The historical study of crime has the power to inject as much confusion as it does insight into scholarship in criminology and criminal justice. To minimize confusion and maximize insight it is imperative that investigators employ as disciplined an approach as possible when examining criminological issues from an historical perspective. Foucault's (1979) philosophically based "history of the present" method is an example of one such approach with the capacity to shed light on important criminological constructs and relationships. In comparison to the more frequently encountered past-oriented historicist method where the past is studied as an end unto itself, the "history of the present" line of investigation concerns itself with the study of the present in light of the past. According to the "history of the present" approach, one way to clarify and expand on current knowledge is to examine the past. Although this approach has its shortcomings (Catello, 2022), it does provide an avenue by which scholars might learn more about the present state of a field than can ordinarily be obtained through historicism. This was the path forged by Impara (2016) in an analysis that used medieval violence to explain contemporary "motiveless" crime. The topic that I have selected for the current "history of the present" analysis is the evolution of antisocial cognition in criminal populations as portrayed by two overlapping dimensions of criminal thought process (i.e., proactive, and reactive criminal thinking) both in terms of their overlap and in the unique contributions each makes to criminology and criminal justice.

Social learning theory maintains that people learn by observing and modeling the behavior of others (Bandura, 1971; Sutherland, 1947). Over the next decade and a half, social learning theory led to Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory in which the social learning process was held to be mediated by such cognitive variables as outcome expectancies, efficacy expectancies, and attributions, all of which derive from a person's capacity for self-regulation. The social cognitive model emphasizes reciprocal determinism whereby the person enters into a dynamic and reciprocal relationship with the environment and their own behavior, and a large portion of the person variance being cognitive in nature. Building on the framework provided by social cognitive theory, Walters (2022) constructed social-cognitive-developmental theory in which social-environmental factors were believed to give rise to cognitive variables that both shaped behavior and provided feedback that helped mold a person's perceptions of the original eliciting social stimuli, a relationship that is depicted in Figure 1. The third part of this model, development, reminds us that these reciprocal interactions and relationships exist within a development context. Both of these factors, the intervening role of perception and the importance of the developmental context, figure prominently in the current historical analysis.

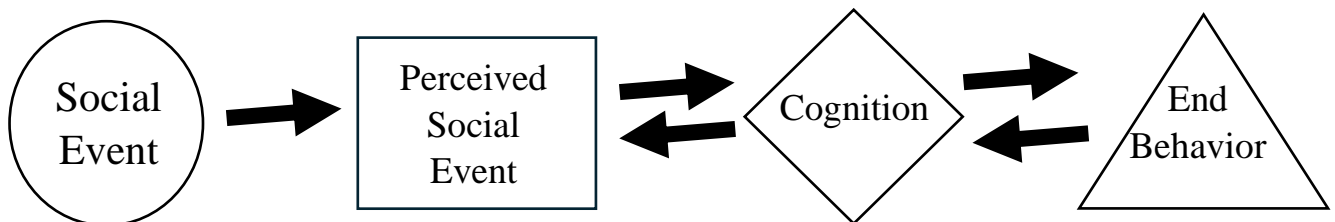


Figure 1. Relationship believed to exist between social events, perception, cognition, and behavior by social-cognitive-developmental theory.

There are two features of the social-cognitive-developmental model that are especially important in explaining the historical roots of antisocial cognition. These two features are mediating perceptions and aggregated development. As illustrated in Figure 1, a social event such as family conflict is perceived by the individual, this perception then shapes and influences the individual's cognitive processes, and these changes in cognition eventually lead to a specific behavioral outcome

like delinquency, labeled as end behavior in Figure 1. Perception is thus believed to mediate the association between social events and cognition as well as the association between social events and behavior, with the perception-cognition and cognition-behavioral relationships being reciprocal or bidirectional in nature. In partial support of this sequential model, Walters (2024a) determined that child-perceived parental competence mediated the relationship between parent-reported parental support and child delinquency, whereas parental support failed to mediate the relationship between perceived parental competence and delinquency. In another study using a different group of youthful respondents, most of whom had previously engaged in serious delinquent behavior, Walters (2023a) observed cognitive-behavioral reciprocity such that antisocial behavior predicted antisocial cognition just as antisocial cognition predicted antisocial behavior.

Developmental context is another feature of the social-cognitive-developmental model that is central to the current paper. By stating that crime is a developmental process that begins months if not years before a person's first official arrest, the social-cognitive-developmental model holds that the seeds of an individual's criminality are planted long before the person comes into contact with law enforcement. It is a well-known fact that official arrest records underestimate the number of crimes a person commits (Coleman & Moynihan, 1996). As a result, the developmental origins of individual criminal behavior may have been ignored by some criminological theories. I would add that while developmental context may begin with the individual, it does not end there. That is because criminal and delinquent development also exists on a larger or aggregate scale. Starting with the family and moving up through the neighborhood, school, and community, we can see that crime and delinquency develop over time and across situations. Neighborhoods, as a case in point, not only display differing levels of crime, but they also exhibit differing attitudes toward offending. Thus, in one study a neighborhood culture of high perceived disorder and low perceived social capital produced a stronger association between delinquency and antisocial cognition than neighborhoods low in perceived disorder and high in perceived social capital (Walters, 2024b). Historical change may further create a developmental-historical context capable of explaining the evolution of antisocial cognition, our next topic of discussion.

Proactive and Reactive Criminal Thinking

Operating on the basis of interviews and studies conducted on incarcerated offenders, Walters (1995, 2022) developed models of criminal thought content and process over a period of 30 years. Whereas criminal thought content reflects *what* an offender thinks, criminal thought process denotes *how* an offender thinks. Common forms of criminal thought content include positive attitudes toward deviance, negative attitudes toward authority, and a criminal identity. Criminal thought processes, on the other hand, can be broken down into two dimensions: proactive and reactive. These two dimensions represent either the planned, calculated, and amoral aspects of criminal thought process (proactive criminal thinking) or the impulsive, irresponsible, and emotional aspects (reactive criminal thinking). Both dimensions have developmental precursors or antecedents—moral neutralization (Ribeaud & Eisner, 2010) in the case of proactive criminal thinking and cognitive impulsivity (Menting et al., 2016) in the case of reactive criminal thinking—given that antisocial thinking is held to evolve in concert with antisocial behavior and often precedes actual criminal or delinquent behavior. In this way, criminal thinking and criminal behavior are both a cause and effect of each other (Walters, 2023a).

A unique aspect of the proactive-reactive criminal thinking breakdown is that despite a moderate to high degree of inter-correlation between these two dimensions of criminal thought process (i.e., $r = .40$ to $.75$; Walters, 2022), the dimensions normally exhibit divergent patterns of correlation with outside criteria. Hence, while proactive criminal thinking correlates with positive outcome expectancies for crime and prior arrests for instrumental offenses but not with hostile attribution biases or prior arrests for expressive offenses, reactive criminal thinking does just the opposite, correlating with hostile attribution biases and arrests for expressive offenses but not with positive outcome expectancies for crime or arrests for instrumental offenses (Walters, 2007; Walters

et al., 2007). One plausible explanation for these results is the divergent origins of these two dimensions of criminal thought process. It has been argued that proactive criminal thinking is learned in association with delinquent peers and those already involved in crime, whereas reactive criminal thinking is an innate response that most individuals learn to control as they mature (Walters, 2022). Thus, while proactive criminal thinking occurs as a result of learning something negative, reactive criminal thinking occurs as a result of not learning something positive.

The divergent developmental origins of proactive and reactive criminal thinking may be complemented by the divergent historical roots of these two cognitive processes. Before moving into a discussion of the historical origins of proactive and reactive criminal thinking and how this may explain the seeming contradiction of divergent outside correlates despite moderate to high overlap, we need to discuss the individual thinking styles that contribute to the proactive and reactive dimensions of criminal thought process. I begin with the eight individual thinking styles that Walters (1995) developed from his analysis of Yochelson and Samenow's (1976) work on what they termed the criminal personality (see Table 1). Several factor analyses indicated that four out of the eight thinking styles (i.e., mollification, entitlement, power orientation, and superoptimism) loaded onto a proactive factor, whereas three other styles (i.e., cutoff, cognitive indolence, and discontinuity) loaded onto a reactive factor. The eighth thinking style (sentimentality) did not load onto either factor but is considered a cognition supportive of a criminal lifestyle, nonetheless. Thus far, I have focused on the individual-level origins of proactive and reactive criminal thinking. The next order of business is to discuss the historically based group-level origins of these two thinking style dimensions.

Crime and Cognition in Feudal Europe

Given serious limitations in the historical record between the years 500 and 1500 AD, the period referred to by many historians as the Middle Ages, and the various ways in which crime was defined during these years, it is difficult to discern whether crime in Europe actually increased during this period, and if so, exactly when over the course of this thousand year epoch the increase took place (Sharpe, 1982). Of greater importance for the purposes of the present paper is the use of this era to distinguish between patterns of criminal offending. The two patterns that are of principal interest in the present paper are crimes of desperation and crimes of opportunity. Whereas crimes of desperation are violent and property offenses committed out of a sense of desperation or impulse that, in turn, stem from such adverse personal and environmental conditions as poverty, emotional distress, alcohol abuse, and mental illness, crimes of opportunity are violent and property crimes committed out of opportunity or calculation and which are thus traceable to privilege, greed, power, and weak moral values. These divergent patterns of crime may relate differentially to the criminal thinking dimensions described in the previous section, with reactive patterns of criminal thought (cutoff, cognitive indolence, and discontinuity) being more readily associated with crimes of desperation and proactive patterns of criminal thought process (mollification, entitlement, power orientation, and superoptimism) being more closely tied to crimes of opportunity.

Table 1

Definitions and Sample Items for the Eight Criminal Thinking (Walters, 1995)

Thinking Style	Definition	Sample Item
Mollification	Making excuses and offering rationalizations for one's norm-violating behavior by minimizing the severity of one's crimes or by projecting blame onto law enforcement or the victims of one's crimes	"I have told myself that I would never have had to engaged in crime if I had had a good job"
Cutoff	Rapid elimination of deterrents to crime, either through the use of a drug or a simple phrase ("fuck it") accompanied by strong negative emotion (anger, frustration)	"I have used alcohol or drugs to eliminate fear or apprehension before committing a crime"
Entitlement	Giving oneself permission to commit a crime out of a sense of privilege, ownership, or necessity, often to the point of misidentifying wants as needs	"The way I look at it, I've paid my dues and am therefore justified in taking what I want"
Power Orientation	Achieving a sense of power or control over others as compensation for a personal sense of weakness or ineffectiveness	"When not in control of a situation I feel weak and helpless and experience a desire to exert power over others"
Sentimentality	Engaging in a seemingly positive behavior as a means of justifying one's involvement in a negative behavior	"As I look back on it now, I was a pretty good guy even though I was involved in crime"
Superoptimism	Belief that one will be able to indefinitely avoid the negative consequences of antisocial behaviors that others typically experience	"The more I got away with crime the more I thought there was no way the police or authorities would ever catch up with me"
Cognitive Indolence	Failure to critically evaluate one's thoughts, plans, and beliefs, accompanied by short-cut problem solving and a tendency toward lazy thinking	"I tend to put off until tomorrow what should have been done today"
Discontinuity	Lack of self-discipline and tendency to be easily side-tracked by events going around one such that the individual has trouble following through on initially good intentions	"There have been times when I have made plans to do something with my family and then cancelled these plans so that I could hang out with my friends, use drugs, or commit crime"

Peasants were responsible for the vast majority of crimes of desperation committed during the Middle Ages. Ordinarily, peasants worked on farms or served as unskilled laborers in the villages (Dean, 2001). Many, in fact, were classified as serfs, living, and working on an estate controlled by a lord. More often than not, they had to get the lord's permission to join the military, get married, or leave the estate. Serfs were similar to slaves except that they could not be sold or bought except as part of a deal involving the land on which they worked (Hayek, 2001). Conditions that made peasants prone to crimes of desperation included not only their extreme poverty and fact that they were frequently required to pay taxes they could not afford, but also famines, plagues, and wars (Hay, 1990). Because peasants comprised over 90% of the medieval population of Europe (Freedman, 1999), they had a disproportionate impact on crime patterns during this period. Most offenses were thus impulse crimes like petty theft, property damage, disorderly conduct, and fighting. Murder may also have been more common than it is today, although these murders were usually unplanned and impulsive, the result of intoxication, mental disorder, or an expression of anger or frustration on the part of the perpetrator, the victim, or both (Hanawalt, 1976).

Although crimes of desperation and impulse were quite common during the Middle Ages given the predominance of peasants in the population, this was not the only major crime pattern to period during this time. A second crime pattern involved crimes of opportunity or calculation. In the highly stratified medieval society, these crimes were more likely to be committed by persons higher up in the social hierarchy: namely, nobles, bishops, and royals. Unencumbered by the harsh realities of living in extreme poverty and often having more education and training than those in the lower classes, those fortunate enough to find themselves at the upper crust of society were better able to plan their crimes. Driven by a sense of entitlement that convinced them that they were anointed by God to rule over the less fortunate (as seen most clearly in the "Divine Right of Kings": Burgess, 1992), these individuals were able to plan, calculate, and carry out their crimes to maximize the personal benefit while minimizing the personal risk (Dean, 2001). It was not rape, assault, or even murder if the perpetrator was a lord and the victim a peasant or female, particularly if those deciding guilt or innocence identified more with the perpetrator than with the victim (Lett, 2020). Hence, crime was distributed across all walks of life in medieval Europe, it was just that the crimes of the wealthy, by their very nature, were much less likely to be punished, than the crimes of the poor.

The point that I am trying to make here is that social-environmental effects like plagues, famines, and poverty and cognitive variables like proactive and reactive criminal thinking do not exist independent of one another. Instead, they are connected by the individual's perceptual processes. The external event is internalized using the individual's perceptual filters which then help form a cognitive process related to each particular set of crimes. With respect to crimes of desperation, the social-environmental conditions created by plagues, famines, and poverty were interpreted by the individual in a manner that led to the formation of reactive-type criminal thinking which, in turn, led to a propensity for reactive-type criminal behavior in the form of crimes of desperation. In the case of crimes of opportunity, the social-environmental conditions involving privilege and opportunity were perceived by the individual in a manner that led to the formation of proactive criminal thinking which, in turn, led to a propensity for proactive-like criminal behavior in the form of crimes of opportunity. Hence, as depicted in Figure 1, perception played an indispensable role as a first-stage mediator linking aspects of the external social environment with the internal cognitive processes of medieval peasants and gentry which, in turn, led to their differential involvement in crimes of desperation and crimes of opportunity via the second-stage mediators of reactive and proactive criminal thinking, respectively.

The role of development in this whole process is based on the understanding that these patterns evolved gradually over time. The relations and changes described in the previous paragraph did not occur in the space of a single generation but grew over time in a series of small steps rather than in one giant leap. These small and, in many cases, tiny steps accumulated over time to bring about major changes in people's attitudes and behavior. This is the nature of the historical-developmental changes that social-cognitive-developmental theory proposes for the evolution of the

criminal thinking-criminal behavior connection, with the thinking and behavior (reactive criminal thinking and crimes of desperation; proactive criminal thinking and crimes of opportunity) entering into a bidirectional or reciprocal effect. The gradual development over time of these patterns is consistent with Popper's (1959) views on philosophy of science in which knowledge accumulates gradually over time as patterns are replicated, falsified, modified, and integrated as we gradually move toward a better understanding of the subject at hand. Of equal importance is acknowledging how individual and aggregate patterns, whether based on location (e.g., neighborhoods or communities) or history, form fractals of self-similarity (Aguirre et al., 2009); namely, smaller individual patterns within larger aggregate patterns.

There are two theses that I have introduced into this paper, and which will continue to be developed over the course of this paper. The first is that the class structure of medieval Europe and the corresponding differences in motives and opportunities for crime that these differences represent helped shape reactive and proactive criminal thinking, with reactive criminal thinking evolving in support of the impulse crimes committed by the peasantry and proactive criminal thinking evolving in support of the calculated crimes committed by royals, nobles, and others in positions of power, with perception serving as the link between social-environmental conditions and cognition. The second thesis is that changes taking place in medieval society also contributed to the overlap between the proactive and reactive dimensions of criminal thought process. As the economic system became more centralized and trading between villages and towns became more commonplace, opportunities for crime increased in the lower classes. One of the more popular crimes committed during the later years of the medieval period was highway robbery of goods being transferred from one place to another (Riley & Byrom, 2016). The impulse crimes that were the staple of lower class criminality during the early Middle Ages were complemented by the increased planning and calculation that crimes like robbery and felony theft required. The crimes of desperation that arose from the impoverished conditions of the peasant population gradually became confounded with crimes of opportunities that had not previously been available to this segment of medieval society, although most of these individuals were still rather easily caught given the inherent impulsivity of their thinking (i.e., predominance of cognitive indolence in reactive criminal thinking).

Changes in medieval society also appear to have contributed to changes in the crimes committed by the gentry, making the crimes of the powerful elite more impulsive and less calculated as the Middle Ages progressed. Throughout Europe, but in Spain, France, and northern Italy, in particular, governmental control by a central authority like a King weakened over time. This was particularly true of the latter half of the Middle Ages (Ocran, 2019). Nobles went about constructing their own castles and claiming their individual fiefdoms, something that had previously been reserved for royalty (Gies & Gies, 2015). This led to increased competition and violence between nobles, some of whom, despite pretensions of chivalry, operated more like small-time mob bosses (Caravaggi, 2024). The crimes of opportunity that defined how knights and nobles conducted themselves during the early and middle years of the medieval period were confounded with the more impulsive and violent crimes that were normally reserved for the masses but were made possible by increasingly decentralized governments, more advanced weaponry, and a belief that nothing bad could happen to them (i.e., superoptimism). Regarding this last point, it should be noted that knights and nobles wore heavy armor, usually fought on horseback, and were armed with more advanced and deadly weaponry than many of the foot soldiers they confronted in combat (Cartwright, 2018). It was therefore unusual for them to lose unless they were up against another knight, or it was after metal-piercing arrows and swords had been introduced.

Crime and Cognition During the Industrial Revolution

Bypassing the latter years of the Renaissance and the early and middle years of the Age of Enlightenment, we come to the next period of importance for a discussion on the origins of proactive and reactive criminal thinking. What I am referring to here are the early years of the Modern era during which the Industrial Revolution took place. The Industrial Revolution began around 1760 in Europe and in the early to mid-1800s in the United States. It was during this period in human history

that manufacturing jobs began replacing agricultural jobs as the main source of income for those living in Europe and North America. As people began moving into the cities to support the expanding industrial complex, the informal social control of the village was, to a large extent, lost (Philips, 2010). Before the Industrial Revolution, European nations and the United States were comprised of a few moderately sized cities, but most people lived in small villages or towns, as had been the case for centuries. During the Industrial Revolution, there was a shift in the population because most of the higher paying jobs were located in the cities and urban areas. These locations rapidly became home to a growing number of people. Residence was also more transient during this period than it had been previously. Unlike the village, where people knew and looked out for each other, people in the city often viewed their neighbors as strangers and anonymity was the norm (Sampson, 1986).

Just as economic and political change brought about alterations in crime and criminal thinking near the end of the medieval period, so too did economic and political change bring about alterations in crime and criminal thinking during the Industrial Revolution. Given the increased anonymity and loss of informal social control that arose when people started moving into the cities and urban areas, there was a need for greater formal social control (Sampson, 1995). This led to the creation of professional police departments and expanded the role of the courts in legal disputes (Hostettler, 2009). Unfortunately, formal social control is no substitute for informal social control and so the crime rate increased significantly during this period. A study by Walters (2023a) demonstrates that as crime increases, so does criminal thinking. The rise in crime in this case gave birth to increased crime motives and opportunities. The breakdown in informal social control enhanced the incentive for crime, particularly greed, as people were less inclined to view taking from those they didn't know well a crime, compared to taking from those they did know and who knew them (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Hirschi, 1969). The loss of informal social control also grew opportunities for crime because not only were people less likely to be at home and serving as guardians of their property (Cohen & Felson, 1979), but they were also less likely to report crimes being committed against their neighbors with whom they felt little to no bond.

The perceptual element of the social-cognitive-developmental model is just as relevant to crime during the Industrial Revolution as it was to crime during the Middle Ages. With people moving into the cities there was a corresponding shift in population to where many people migrated from rural areas to the urban centers where the pay was better. This not only created a sense of anomie in the population (Merton, 1968), it also lent itself to a significant shift in social control whereby informal social control was largely replaced by formal social control as evidenced by the increased professionalism of law enforcement, courts, and corrections. As internal and external migration increased, the populations of Europe in the late 1700s and of the population of the United States in the early to mid-1800s became more transient (Kim, 2009). Transience, in turn, led to increased anonymity, alienation, and perceptions of having little in common with one's neighbors. Perceptions of alienation and normlessness contributed to crimes of impulse and desperation by straining people's ties to everyday routines and disrupting their sense of reality (Smith & Bohm, 2008). Movement toward a more formal system of criminal justice, by contrast, directed those with an interest in violating the law toward crimes of opportunity wherein they planned and calculated their crimes so as to circumvent the increased risk posed by improved criminal justice technology and professionalism.

The developmental features of social-cognitive-developmental theory also help explain how crime and criminal thinking evolved during the Industrial Revolution period. Starting in the mid-1800s, immigration changed the size and composition of the U.S. population. Cities of the time reflected this influence. The Chicago school of criminology, for instance, studied changes in the population of Chicago from the early days of the city and discovered that most crime occurred in the central portion of the city, commonly referred to as Zones I and II. Thus, when Western European immigrants inhabited Zones I and II their crime rates were the highest in the city. After being displaced by Eastern European immigrants in Zones 1 and II, they moved to Zone III and their crime rate went down. It was the Eastern European immigrants that now had the highest crime rates (Park,

1952). This same scenario played out when Black migrants from the south replaced Eastern European immigrants in Zones I and II, which led Eastern European immigrants to move to Zone III and Western European immigrants and their descendants to Zones IV and V. What this demonstrates is that crime is more a function of location than group. This has given rise to a theory of crime known as the criminology of place (Weisburd et al., 2012). From an historical-developmental standpoint, the deteriorating conditions of the inner city are more congruent with crimes of desperation and reactive criminal thinking, whereas the more affluent trapping of the outer city and suburbs are more consistent with the greed and planning that goes into crimes of opportunity and proactive criminal thinking.

The first thesis explored in this paper sets out to demonstrate how societal change has the capacity to define proactive and reactive forms of criminal thought process. The stratification of European society into the royal/noble class and the much larger peasant class was previously described as a factor contributing to the rise of proactive and reactive criminal thinking in medieval society. A different but similar form of stratification may have been operating during the Industrial Revolution: namely, the contrast between a small group of individuals who owned and controlled the means of production (Bourgeoisie) and a much larger group of individuals who provided the labor and were exploited by the smaller group (proletariat). Marx (1859) argued that the capitalistic system upon which this relationship is based cannot survive indefinitely and must ultimately give way to socialism and perhaps then communism. The focus of the present paper, however, is on how the Bourgeoisie (upper middle class) and proletariat (working class) carried out the crime patterns previously described as part and parcel of the differences between the royal/noble and peasant classes during feudal times. While the crimes of the Bourgeoisie, like those of the nobles and royals from feudal times, were calculated in an effort to maximize profits and take advantage of criminal opportunities, the crimes of the proletariat, like the crimes of the peasants during the Middle Ages, were desperate and impulsive acts designed to achieve immediate gratification or relief as reflected in Marx's views on demoralization in the ranks of the lumpenproletariat (Barrow, 2020).

The second thesis explored in this paper examined societal explanations of the overlap between proactive and reactive criminal thinking. In relating this thesis to medieval times, it was shown that for both economic (rise of proactive criminal thinking in the peasant class) and political (rise of reactive criminal thinking in the noble/royal class) reasons there was a cross-transfer of thinking styles between the two groups. A similar pattern can be observed during the Industrial Revolution, but this time it is the rise in criminal offending brought about by urbanization and the loss of informal social control that may have been the driving force behind the pattern. As previously noted, criminal thinking can be considered both a cause and effect of criminal behavior (Walters, 2023a). Consequently, as crime grew over the course of the Industrial Revolution so did criminal thinking. Crime-related increases in two individual criminal thinking styles in particular may have been instrumental in promoting overlap between proactive and reactive criminal thinking. The fact of the matter is that people normally get away with the majority of crimes they commit (Gramlich, 2020). This encourages two thinking styles in particular: the proactive thinking style of superoptimism where the individual believes they will be able to continue committing crime without getting caught and the reactive thinking style of cognitive impulsivity in which the individual becomes increasingly less cautious and vigilant, the more they get away with crime. The cross-transfer of these two thinking styles could explain how the overlap between proactive and reactive criminal thinking grows over time at the individual level and how this cross-transfer of criminal thinking styles accelerated over the course of the Industrial Revolution.

Implications for Modern-Day Society

There are several implications to an historical analysis that cross individual-level phenomenon with larger cultural, economic, and political change, such as when the historical roots of criminal thinking are traced back to the Middle Ages and Industrial Revolution. The interaction between individual-level criminal thought processes and aggregate-level societal attitudes and practices is just one implication of examining the present in light of the past. Using multilevel analysis, Walters (2023b) determined that the nexuses between individual-level measures of proactive, reactive, and general criminal thinking, on the one hand, and delinquency, on the other hand, were moderated by aggregate-level differences in the free market cultural ethos of 28 countries. These results showed that there was a significantly stronger association between criminal thinking and delinquency in countries rated higher on the index of economic freedom than in countries rated lower on this index. Just as economic and political change during the Middle Ages and Industrial Revolution may have shaped individual expressions of criminal thought process in relation to crime, so too did the free market cultural ethos of various countries shape the individual expressions of proactive and reactive criminal thinking in relation to their connection with delinquency.

Beyond the research implications of exploring the interaction between individual-level characteristics like criminal thought process and antisocial behavior and group-level phenomena like culture assessed at the school, neighborhood, or national level, there is the theoretical implication of using the past to broaden, inform, and enlighten modern-day theories of crime and delinquency. Demonstrating that thought processes predictive of crime can be traced to historical trends occurring hundreds of years ago may provide clues as to how criminal thought processes evolve in modern-day society and the directions they could potentially take in the future. The supposition that reactive criminal thinking has its foundation in crimes of desperation committed primarily by the poor and vulnerable, whereas proactive criminal thinking has its roots in crimes of opportunity committed primarily by the rich and powerful, parallels the belief that the reason why the developmental antecedent of reactive criminal thinking (i.e., cognitive impulsivity) precedes the developmental antecedent of proactive criminal thinking (i.e., moral neutralization) in human development is that it requires fewer resources. In the Middle Ages it was how much money and power you had; in modern-day society it is a person's level of cognitive skill that is the determining factor, seeing as proactive criminal thinking requires much greater planning and calculation than reactive criminal thinking.

The conceptual approach that served as a guide for the current historical analysis was the social-cognitive-developmental model, which evolved from the social learning and social cognitive theories that preceded it. Of particular interest in the present paper was the perceptual and developmental elements of social-cognitive-developmental theory. In fact, the ability of perception to link social-environmental influences and effects to cognition made the present historical analysis possible. Yet, we should not lose sight of the fact that cognition colors perception just as much as perception shapes cognition (Tacca, 2011). This is represented in Figure 1 by the double arrows pointing in opposite directions that connect perception to cognition. The bidirectional connection between perception and cognition reminds us that the two variables are locked in a reciprocal cause-and effect relationship, in a manner similar to cognition and behavior (Walters, 2023a). Because the association between social-environmental factors and cognition is mediated by perception, it is perception, colored by external events, on the one hand, and by one's own thinking, on the other hand, that drives the current "history of the present" analysis. Foucault's (1979) argument, as I understand it, is that we examine the history of the present in order to make the present the past which then allows us to move beyond the present into the future (Roth, 1981). Perception is an ideal vehicle for such a journey because it is more transient than either the social events or cognitive processes it seeks to explain; it is also more transcendental in a Kantian sense given that it represents a person's reality at a specific point in time.

The notion that perception provides a transition between the outer (social) and inner (psychological) worlds bears repeating for it reflects another vital feature of social-cognitive-developmental theory—namely, the developmental context of criminal thinking and behavior. Assessing the historical-developmental context of proactive and reactive criminal thinking means investigating those aspects of the external environment that encourage instrumental (crimes of opportunity) and expressive (crimes of desperation) offending. As previously mentioned with respect to the second thesis examined in this paper, instrumental and expressive offending became increasingly interwoven over time as a consequence of historical influences and trends. These historical influences and trends then lead to a cross-transfer of criminal behaviors and a corollary cross-transfer of criminal thinking styles. The cross-transfer of criminal behaviors is referred to as criminal versatility, which is now universally recognized as the pattern found in most career and habitual offenders, the vast majority of whom do not specialize in any one particular type of crime (Wiesner et al., 2018). As a consequence, the cross-transfer of criminal thinking styles and the cross-transfer of criminal behaviors are not only routine, but they may also be tied to certain historical trends. This occurs at both the individual and aggregate-historical levels and requires additional study to determine which came first, the cross-transfer of criminal behaviors or the cross-transfer of criminal thinking patterns.

Although the conceptual archetype that served as a guide for the current paper was based on social cognitive theory and the social-cognitive-developmental model of crime, other conceptual paradigms also contributed to the final product. These contributing models included routine activities theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979), Marxist theory (Marx, 1859), social ecological theory (Park, 1952), and the criminology of place (Weisburd et al., 2012). Strain theory was also used to arrange and organize the arguments and assumptions for this paper. According to classic strain theory (Merton, 1968), American society creates strain in some groups by establishing goals for success that cannot be reasonably achieved by many of those in these groups through conventional means. Merton argued that in America people are judged by their level of material success but that those in the lower classes are often blocked in the attainment of this goal by factors imposed by the social structure of American society. He further maintained that because American society emphasizes the goal of material success over the proper means of achieving this goal some in the lower classes feel free to resort to illicit means (i.e., crime) to achieve this goal. Agnew (1992) constructed an individual-level strain model that he refers to as general strain theory that examines the personal strains that lead to crime. Combining the two models provides an additional example of the dual systems approach to understanding how individual and aggregate influences may support an historical analysis that could be of use in furthering our understanding of the present in light of the past.

There are practical and policy implications to the current analysis that also require our attention. Given the reciprocal association that appears to exist between criminal thinking and criminal behavior we could approach these issues in one of two ways. One way would be to reduce criminal thinking by reducing criminal behavior. The other would be to reduce criminal behavior by reducing criminal thinking. Reducing criminal thinking by reducing criminal behavior borrows heavily from Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory of human behavior wherein having a person engage in an action that runs counter to their belief system creates dissonance that the person then seeks to reduce by changing their attitude in favor of the action they have just performed. Advanced police technology such as DNA analysis may dissuade some offenders from committing crime but not nearly as many as could be deterred through informal social control. As the reader may recall, informal social control fell dramatically during the Industrial Revolution as people began moving into the cities. Wholesale movement back to the villages of yesteryear would be impractical, but some of the factors that support informal social control in urban neighborhoods, like systemic ties/attitudinal attachment (Burchfield, 2009) and enhanced surveillance from properly implemented neighborhood watch programs (Holloway et al., 2013) have been found to reduce crime through increased informal social control.

An alternate approach would be to manage criminal behavior by reducing antisocial cognition. This is the approach employed by practitioners of cognitive-behavioral therapy whereby a therapist attempts to alter a client's behavior by helping them change their attitudes, beliefs, and cognitions. Cognitive behavioral therapy, in fact, is one of the more effective forms of interventions for both adult and youthful offenders (Feucht & Holt, 2016; Lipsey et al., 2007; Özabachi, 2011; Wilson et al., 2005). An historical analysis of the relationship between criminal thinking and antisocial conduct may help explain why addressing cognitive factors like criminal thinking can help reduce behavioral outcomes like crime and delinquency. The thinking that co-evolved with crimes of desperation during the Middle Ages was imbued with emotion and had as its goal immediate relief or gratification. Whether one was angry because of a perceived insult, irritated as a result of being drunk, or hungry by virtue of being poor, their most important consideration was finding a way to relieve the negative affect (Agnew, 1992), something that was often accomplished through crime. The thinking that co-evolved with crimes of opportunity during the Middle Ages and Industrial Revolution was contrived and amoral. Justification of negative behavior rather than relief from negation emotion was therefore the driving force behind crimes of opportunity. Extending this to modern-day concerns, self-control training and moral instruction if conducted early enough might prevent the rise of reactive and proactive criminal thinking, respectively, which could then lead to reduced levels of delinquency and crime.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to demonstrate how an analysis of past patterns from the Middle Ages and Industrial Revolution using a social-cognitive-developmental approach can help explain the evolution of criminal thinking as it currently exists in modern-day society. Given the preliminary nature of this paper, additional qualitative and quantitative analysis is required. Qualitative studies designed to accrue a range of opinions from historical scholars, particularly those with interest in the history of crime and criminology would be extremely helpful. Quantitative studies using a multilevel modeling approach similar to Walters' (2023b) cross-national study on criminal thinking and cultural ethos but with historical data replacing the cultural ethos data as the aggregate variable, with a particular focus on offender perceptions, could go a long ways towards shedding light on the issues described in this paper. In conclusion, the "history of the present" approach originally presented by Foucault (1979) and discussed more recently by Catello (2022) might be a good place to start when investigating the conceptual roots of such criminological phenomena as criminal thinking.

References

- Agnew, R. (1992). Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency. *Criminology*, 30(1), 47-87.
- Aguirre, J., Viana, R., & Sanjuán, M. A. F. (2009). Factor structures in nonlinear dynamics. *Review of Modern Physics*, 81(1), 333-386.
- Bandura, A. (1971). *Social learning theory*. General Learning Press.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Prentice Hall.
- Barrow, C. W. (2020). *The dangerous class: The concept of the lumpenproletariat*. University of Michigan Press.
- Burchfield, K. B. (2009). Attachment as a source of informal social control in urban neighborhoods. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 37(1), 45-54.
- Burgess, G. (1992). The divine right of kings reconsidered. *The English Historical Review*, 107(425), 837-861.
- Caravaggi, L. (2024). Noble violence and civic justice: Rural lords under trial in the Italian city communes 1276-1322. *Journal of Medieval History*, 50(1), 47-68.
- Cartwright, M. (2018, June 13). The armour of an English medieval knight. *World History Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1244/the-armour-of-an-english-medieval-knight/>
- Catello, R. (2022). The historicist objection to historical criminology. *Law, Crime, and History*, 10(1), 25-56.
- Cohen, L., & Felson, M. (1979). Social change and crime rate trends: A routine activity approach. *American Sociological Review*, 44(4), 588-608.
- Coleman, C., & Moynihan, J. (1996). *Understanding crime data: Haunted by the dark figure*. Open University Press.
- Dean, T. (2001). *Crime in medieval Europe 1200-1550*. Routledge.

- Feucht, T., & Holt, T. (2016). Does cognitive behavioral therapy work in criminal justice? A new analysis from CrimeSolutions.gov. *NIJ Journal*, 277, 10-17.
- Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (Trans. A. Sheridan). Vintage Books.
- Freedman, P. (1999). *Images of the medieval peasant*. Stanford University Press.
- Gies, F., & Gies, J. (2015) *Life in a medieval castle*. Harper.
- Gottfredson, M. R., & Hirschi, T. (1990). *A general theory of crime*. Stanford University Press.
- Gramlich, J. (2020, November 20). *What the data says (and doesn't say) about crime in the United States*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/11/20/facts-about-crime-in-the-u-s/>
- Hanawalt, B. A. (1976). Violent death in fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century England. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 18(3), 297-320.
- Hay, D. (1990). *Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Hayek, F. A. von. (2001). *The road to serfdom*. Routledge.
- Hirschi, T. (1969). *Causes of delinquency*. University of California Press.
- Holloway, K., Bennett, T., & Farrington, D. P. (2013). Crime prevention research review: Does neighborhood watch reduce crime? No. 3 of *Crime Prevention Research Review*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.
- Hostettler, J. (2009). *A history of criminal justice in England and Wales*. Waterside Press.
- Impara, E. (2016). Medieval violence and criminology: Using the Middle Ages to understand contemporary 'motiveless' crime. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Criminology*, 8(1), 26-36.
- Kim, S. (2009, February). *Immigration, Industrial Revolution and urban growth in the United States, 1820-1920: Factor endowments, technology and geography* [Working Paper 12900]. National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://10.3386/w12900>

Lett, D. (2020). Women victims of sexual assault and rape (Trans. M. Rothstein). *Clio. Women, Gender, History*, 52, 45-70.

Lipsey, M. W., Landenberger, N. A., & Wilson, S. J. (2007). Effects of cognitive-behavioral programs for criminal offenders. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*. 20076.

Marx, K. (1859). *Critique of political economy*. International Library.

Menting, B., Van Lier, P. A. C., Koot, H. M., Pardini, D., & Loeber, R. (2016). Cognitive impulsivity and the development of delinquency from late childhood to early adulthood: Moderating effects of parenting behavior and peer relationships. *Development and Psychopathology*, 28(1), 167-183.

Merton, R. K. (1968). *Social theory and social structure*. Free Press.

Ocran, M. (2019). Medieval European economies, AD 400-1500. In Palgrave Studies in Economic History, *Economic development in the twenty-first century*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Özabaci, N. (2011). Cognitive behavioural therapy for violent behaviour in children and adolescents: A meta-analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(10), 1989-1993.

Park, R. E. (1952). *Human communities*. Free Press.

Philips, D. (2012). Crime, law and punishment in the Industrial Revolution. In P. O'Brien & R. Quinault (Eds.), *The Industrial Revolution and British society* (pp. 156-182). Cambridge University Press.

Popper, K. R. (1959). *The logic of scientific discovery*. University Press.

Ribeaud, D., & Eisner, M. (2010). Are moral disengagement, neutralization techniques, and self-serving cognitive distortions the same? Developing a unified scale of moral neutralization of aggression. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 4(2), 298-315.

Riley, M., & Byrom, J. (2016). *OCR GCSE History SHP: Crime and punishment C. 1250 to present*. Hodder Education Group.

Roth, M. S. (1981). Foucault's "history of the present." *History and Theory*, 20(1), 32-46.

- Sampson, R. J. (1986). Crime in cities: The effects of formal and informal social control. *Crime and Justice*, 8, 271-311.
- Sampson, R. J. (1995). The community. In J. Q. Wilson & J. Petersilia (Eds.), *Crime* (pp. 193-216). ICS Press.
- Sharpe, J. A. (1982). The history of crime in late medieval and early modern England: A review of the field. *Social History*, 7(2), 187-203.
- Smith, H. P., & Bohm, R. M. (2008). Beyond anomie: Alienation and crime. *Critical Criminology*, 16(1), 1-15.
- Sutherland, E. H. (1947). *Principles of criminology* (4th ed.). J.B. Lippincott.
- Tacca, M. C. (2011). Commonalities between perception and cognition. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2, Article 358.
- Walters, G. D. (1995). The Psychological Inventory of Criminal Thinking Styles: Part 1: Reliability and preliminary validity. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 22(3), 307-325.
- Walters, G. D. (2007). Measuring proactive and reactive criminal thinking with the PICTS: Correlations with outcome expectancies and hostile attribution biases. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 22(4), 371-385.
- Walters, G. D. (2022). *Criminality and crime: A social-cognitive-developmental theory of delinquent and criminal behavior*. Lexington Books.
- Walters, G. D. (2023a). Cognitive-behavioral reciprocity: Testing the bidirectional relationship between antisocial cognition and delinquency. *Law and Human Behavior*, 47(6), 654-665.
- Walters, G. D. (2023b). Moderating the criminal thinking-delinquency relationship with a free market cultural ethos: Integrating micro- and macro-level concepts in criminology. *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, 29(1), 127-145.
- Walters, G. D. (2024a). From context to perception to behavior: Predicting delinquency with the parental support-perceived parental competence cross-lag. *Youth & Society*, 56(1), 3-23.

- Walters, G. D. (2024b). Moderation of the antisocial cognition-offending relationship by neighborhood disorder: A multilevel analysis of adolescents from eight Western European countries. *Criminal Justice Review*. Online first, <https://doi.org/10.1177/07340168241230078>
- Walters, G. D., Frederick, A. A., & Schlauch, C. (2007). Postdicting arrests for proactive and reactive aggression with the PICTS Proactive and Reactive composite scales. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 22(11), 1415-1430.
- Weisburd, D., Groff, E. R., & Yang, S.-M. (2012). *The criminology of place: Street segments and our understanding of the crime problem*. Oxford University Press.
- Wiesner, M., Yoerger, K., & Capaldi, D. M. (2018). Patterns and correlates of offender versatility and specialization across a 23-year span for at-risk young men. *Victims and Offenders*, 13(1), 28-47.
- Wilson, D. B., Bouffard, L. A., & MacKenzie, D. L. (2005). A quantitative review of structured, group-oriented, cognitive-behavioral programs for offenders. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 32(2), 172-204.
- Yochelson, S., & Samenow, S. E. (1976). *The criminal personality: Vol. 1. A profile for change*. Aronson.