

# **Anthropological Theories of Crime and Delinquency**

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*Anthropological perspectives on crime and delinquency reflect historical contexts and the increasing complexity of societies over time. For most of anthropology's history, field researchers studied small societies in an attempt to decipher the rules that governed behavior. By the middle of the twentieth century, anthropologists turned to class and power differentials related to resource access to explain crime and delinquency in social groups that were part of larger societies. Economic and political motives for defining criminality have since become central to the ethnographies of contemporary anthropologists. Twenty-first-century anthropological studies encompass both local and global contexts, and continue to draw upon the cornerstone concepts and ethnographic methods of their predecessors.*

*KEYWORDS Anthropological theories, crime theories, delinquency, deviance, cultural norms*

## INTRODUCTION

The anthropological theories of crime and delinquency reflect the historical contexts in which they were developed and the increasing complexity of societies through time. The earliest theories focused on the physiology and genetics of the individual to explain criminal behavior. These theories were followed by the sociocultural tradition based on the study of vanishing cultures. This tradition had a lasting influence on anthropologists, including

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those interested in crime who turned their attention to peasant, colonized, and urban societies. Their studies of crime led them to global criminal issues that affect populations around the world. Contemporary anthropological studies of crime remain faithful to cornerstone concepts and ethnographic methods of their predecessors.

Within this historic framework, this review of the literature describes anthropological theories relevant to the study of crime and delinquency as a foundation for including theories related to specific populations. The population studies begin with the study of a small society, followed by examinations of urban youth gangs, the Sicilian mafia, colonized peoples, and contemporary criminal activity on a global scale. The review concludes with a conceptual map that summarizes the contributions of anthropology to the study of crime and delinquency along with suggestions for future research.

## METHODS

The literature review is based on an electronic database search using the resources of the University of California, Berkeley library system (Melvyl Pilot and Pathfinder) and focused on the anthropological databases of AnthroPlus and AnthroSource along with Google. The keywords included *crime*, *theory*, *delinquency*, *anthropology*, and *criminal anthropology*.

Suggestions for additional sources were provided by staff at the Institute for the Study of Social Change and faculty in the department of anthropology at the University of California–Berkeley. Much of the information concerning prominent anthropological theories was derived from *Visions of Culture* by Moore (2009). Sources for many of the recent studies presented in this literature review were found in the reference section of *The Anthropology of Crime and Criminalization* by Schneider and Schneider (2008).

### A Genetic Theory of “Criminal Man”

In the wake of Darwin’s theory of natural selection, early theories of crime emphasized genetic and physiological explanations of human defects. The Italian School of Criminal Anthropology was one of the earliest academic institutions to focus on crime and was established with the publication in 1876 of Lombroso’s *L’uomo Delinquente* (Criminal Man). This school of thought spread to France and Germany and led to the publication of criminology periodicals in Italian, French, Spanish, and Russian (Fletcher, 1891).

Lombroso was professor of medical jurisprudence in the University of Turin. As “chief” of the Italian School, he attempted to develop an anatomical profile of “criminal man” to support the notion that every criminal was a

born criminal by documenting the sizes, shapes, and weight of crania, ears, eyes, noses, and jaws of persons accused of crimes. According to Lombroso and other proponents of the Italian school, a criminal was conceived as an atavistic subhuman type that was not amenable to treatment (Fletcher, 1891). Lombroso's theory was used to discredit southern Italians who had immigrated to northern Italy.

Anatomical theories about the origin of crime held sway until the 1880s, when Lombroso's approach was discredited (Schneider & Schneider, 2008). However, genetic explanations of criminal behavior were later used by Starr in 1897 and Harvard anthropologist Hooten in 1927 to account for the disproportionate incarceration of Blacks (Schneider & Schneider). Subsequently Starr's and Hooten's theories were also discredited (Schneider & Schneider; Cohen, 1966, in Edgerton, 1973).

### Theories of Sociocultural Anthropology

To understand how anthropologists have viewed crime since the early days of the discipline, it is important to describe some of the major theories that inform subsequent anthropological studies of law and crime. One of anthropology's pioneers is Boas (1858–1942), who advanced the “four fields approach” that included sociocultural anthropology, physical anthropology, archaeology, and linguistics (Moore, 2009). Of these four sub-fields of anthropology, anthropologists have relied primarily on the sociocultural perspective to explain crime and deviance. Boas also established twin tenets of anthropology: the interaction between the individual and society. These tenets are reflected in the concepts of *anthropological holism* and *cultural particularism* in which culture is understood as an integrated whole that is created through an historical progression, rather than as a marker of a particular universal evolutionary stage (Moore, 2009). According to Boas, studies of particular cultures should include the full range of cultural behavior.

Pioneering sociologist Durkheim (1858–1917) was a contemporary of Boas and sought to build a theory of society by studying the dynamics of social integration and the evolution of social complexity (Moore, 2009). Durkheim's ideas provided substantial contributions to the anthropological study of crime. Starting with the assumption that social behavior was learned (Layton, 1997), Durkheim developed the concept of *conscience collective*, which referred to internalized sanctions, awareness, and perceptions of the culture among its inhabitants that articulate values, worldview, and beliefs. This notion was significant in that it connected the societal formation of social solidarity with the individual processes of enculturation (Moore).

The methodology of *participant observation* was also promoted by Durkheim and still remains a cornerstone of anthropological research (Layton, 1997). Durkheim advocated that social scientists need to engage in fieldwork to discover how a society conceives of its own institutions, particularly

with respect to contract law and the types of acts that a society identifies as crimes (Layton, 1997). Durkheim also advocated for the importance of the *comparative method* in order to identify how dimensions of social integration differed among societies (Moore, 2009).

Among his many contributions, Durkheim developed the social strain theory of deviance that was further expanded by sociologist Merton (Edgerton, 1973). Durkheim noted that human beings engage in moral and virtuous behaviors because they are self-rewarding. However, when there is a major disruption of the social fabric and people cannot achieve their goals by legitimate means, they become “frustrated,” “alienated,” “deprived,” or “discontented” and may resort to criminal behavior (Edgerton). Durkheim also believed that people evolved into different social groups to find economic niches in response to scarcities of resources, an idea that Moore (2009) claims was borrowed “directly from Darwin.” These ideas are still relevant to contemporary studies of criminal behavior as they relate to differences in social class and levels of empowerment.

Durkheim posited that the manner in which deviance was punished served to distinguish “compound” from “complex” societies (Layton, 1997). Durkheim defined compound societies as those in which each social unit is responsible for its own subsistence, performing identical functions, whereas complex societies featured a division of labor whereby units performed complementary functions.

Another contemporary of Boas was Benedict (1887–1948), whose seminal work, *Patterns of Culture* (1934), set forth her thesis that cultural differences were multifaceted expressions of a society’s most basic core values (Moore, 2009). According to Benedict, every culture permits only a limited number of temperaments to flourish. The accepted temperaments are the ones that fit within the dominant *configuration* of societal core values. Benedict determined that human adaptability made it possible for most members of a society to conform sufficiently to established norms. Those who could not conform were identified as deviants (Edgerton, 1973).

Another pioneer in anthropology was Malinowski (1884–1942), who developed a set of “first principles” (Horowitz, 1962). One of his principles was *functionalism*, which was employed as a scientific term for explaining cultural phenomena. Functionalism was a way to view a culture as an organized whole in which disparate elements are integrated (Hoebel, 1961). Malinowski’s interpretation of functionalism is based on the idea that every custom or set of beliefs is fulfilling a significant societal need (Horowitz). Based on his field research, he linked “primitive societies” to “modern societies” by noting that people, regardless of their societies, shared the same qualities of humanity (Horowitz).

Hoebel (1961) pays tribute to Malinowski for advancing “an anthropological definition of law.” Malinowski claimed that the study of more comprehensive problems of culture, such as primitive jurisprudence, was

a sign of the growing worthiness of the field of anthropology. In a 1925 address, Malinowski also criticized the field of anthropology for assuming that members of simple societies were enslaved by their customs, fully obedient and subservient to cultural norms. In subsequent writing, he admonished the American, German, and French schools of anthropology for seeing the individual as completely dominated by the group (Malinowski, 1926/1932). To the contrary, Malinowski espoused that only certain rules of custom are truly binding and deserve to be called laws (Malinowski, 1925). Malinowski adamantly held that members of simple societies are not blind conformists, as he decoupled “custom” from “law.” Additionally, Malinowski cautioned anthropologists against focusing on the sensational and noted that his interest in primitive jurisprudence was about “the law obeyed” and not “the law broken” (Malinowski, 1926/1932). “The true problem,” Malinowski wrote, “is not to study how human life submits to rules—it simply does not; the real problem is how the rules become adapted to life” (Malinowski, 1926/1932).

In his study of the Trobriand Islanders, Malinowski found that they were neither “collectivists” nor “intransigent individualists” but, instead, displayed elements of both (Malinowski, 1926/1932). He observed that the rule of law was experienced as an obligation of one person and the rightful claim of another, reflecting mutual dependence and reciprocity. The ceremonial nature of certain transactions among the Trobriand Islanders further strengthened their binding legal force. Even so, Malinowski dispelled the myth of slavish adherence to tradition by finding that laws were elastic and could be circumvented by accepted means. Malinowski also perceived that laws are embedded in a chain of social transactions “in which they are but a link” (Malinowski, 1926/1932). His observation figures prominently in the analyses of subsequent studies of criminal behavior.

## Contemporary Anthropological Studies of Crime

This section highlights some classic contemporary anthropological studies of crime and delinquency by focusing on the populations studied by anthropologists: youth gangs and the mafia. Studies of the cultures of youth gangs and the mafia focused on the relationship of each of these groups to the larger societies in which they were embedded.

### YOUTH GANGS

Bloch and Niederhofer (1958) applied a functional analysis to the study of American gangs in the 1950s to discover the underlying social purpose and characteristics of the adolescent groups. Using comparative cross-cultural studies of adolescent rites of passage, they sought to document the universal need for all societies to induct their adolescent youths into the adult role along with the variations in the emphases and particularity of rituals (e.g.,

self-decoration, separation from the mother, hazing ordeals, and educational processes). By noting these activities and rituals in American youth gangs, Bloch and Niederhofer contrasted the spontaneity of American youths with the institutionalized patterns of other less-complex cultures.

Bloch and Niederhofer (1958) found that the confluence of rapid social changes in American society resulted in the loss of a clear demarcation for boys to transition to manhood (e.g., advances in the technology of communication and transportation, changes in the role of women and the roles of the family, and a shift from rural to urban lifestyles). In the absence of formal rites of passage, Bloch and Niederhofer observed that American male youth invented their own rites and rituals, responding to the universal impulse to demonstrate to themselves and to society that they have achieved manhood.

Bloch and Niederhofer (1958) were able to suspend the negative value judgments of American teen behavior, by viewing teen activity as serving a universal function and recognizing that class differences and patterns of behavior structured much gang life. Their focus on the fundamental cultural and psychological needs for preparing youth for adult roles clearly laid the foundation for future anthropological studies of youth gangs.

#### THE RISE OF THE SICILIAN MAFIA

In contrast to searching for an understanding of delinquent youth behavior, Blok in 1974 focused on adult criminal behavior in his classic account of the mafia (*The Mafia of a Sicilian village, 1860–1960: a study of violent peasant entrepreneurs*). The complexity of Blok's analysis marked a significant advancement in anthropological research beyond earlier theoretical formulations by providing a holistic treatment of economic, political, historical, and social relationships in the analysis of crime. Blok builds upon the work of anthropologist Wolf (1923–1999), who noted that peasant communities existed in relationship to larger social systems (national and global) and must not be viewed in isolation because of the differential access to power afforded to different social groups (Moore, 2009). Blok's treatise on the Sicilian mafia and Wolf's concepts were precursors to post-modern crime analyses and are prevalent in the analysis of crime by contemporary anthropologists.

Blok (1974) describes how the superimposition of a modern central government upon the feudal hinterland of Sicily in 1861 resulted in a power vacuum that was filled by entrepreneurial peasants. This new class of peasants, the *mafiosi*, served as a bridge between the local landowners and the state on one hand and the landowners and the peasantry on the other. The central government could not reach into the rural areas of Sicily and had to depend upon the mafiosi to exercise control over the region, thereby embedding itself in the structure of local government. As Italy industrialized, the peasants left the land for the cities, and the mafiosi lost much of their

power base. Younger descendants of the original mafiosi migrated to the cities, joining the ranks of governmental agencies. The mafiosi also made inroads into political parties, transitioning from violent means of social control to legitimate positions of political power. Blok's comprehensive analysis demonstrated how the rise of the Sicilian mafia paralleled and was integral to the development of Italy.

### Post-Modern Anthropological Studies of Crime

This section builds upon Wolf's theoretical connection of the "local" to the "global" that was applied in Blok's mafia research. In addition to Wolf's notions about the relationship between peasant societies and larger social systems (and the importance of power differentials among social groups), Wolf was also interested in the convergence of ideas about the nature of power, especially as they relate to the local and global linkages to crime in the post-modern era (Moore, 2009). Based on these linkages, anthropologists in the 1980s and 1990s displayed a growing interest in the impact of colonialization on criminal behavior.

#### THE CRIMINALIZATION OF COLONIAL PEOPLES

Writing in 1985, Stoler used a political and economic power analysis (in the tradition of Wolf) to examine the determinants of crime and criminal acts in the colonial world of Sumatra from the late 1800s through the 1920s. Stoler focused on the relationships between the Dutch colonial administration, the Dutch rubber plantation owners, and the colonized Asian plantation workers. Stoler described how the Dutch planters used their political power to protect their economic interests and maintain control over their Asian laborers. When the wife and children of a Dutch planter were murdered on a plantation in 1876, the event went unreported. At that time, plantation owners found advantage in avoiding interference from state authorities by minimizing unrest and maintaining an image of control. Discipline and punishment were viewed as internal estate issues. Stoler determined that crimes against plantation owners were construed in the late nineteenth century as private, individual, and isolated acts. Plantation owners benefited from lack of state oversight by employing practices that kept workers indebted and indentured, such as setting inflated prices for provisions and making available large advances, gambling, and prostitution (Stoler, 1985).

In the early 1900s, as the Dutch rubber plantations responded to the demand for tires in the growing American automobile industry, resistance by plantation workers increased. Assaults and collective labor dissention were then recast as political resistance in the communist mold, and the colonial state was called upon to root out "agitators." Crime was redefined as a disruptive act that threatened the social order, ostensibly making way for

communist infiltrators to overthrow the economic structure of the plantation. Stoler (1985) determined that rhetoric of the Dutch plantation owners depicting certain workers as “dangerous elements” served as a pretense to maintain social order when the real purpose served by this criminal characterization was the assurance of labor discipline.

Also utilizing constructs of political and economic power, Tolen (1991) examined how the criminalization of colonized Indian tribes and castes of India by the British served to induct Indian peoples into the colonial labor force. Similar to Stoler’s examination of colonial domination in Sumatra, Tolen focused on the subjugation of the body to serve the needs of the market under British rule by selling “bodily activity” in exchange for a wage. The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 (extended in 1911) defined certain tribes and castes in specified provinces of India as “criminal” and made possible the registration, surveillance, and control of the affected tribes and castes. Tolen explains that public acceptance of the notion of a “criminal caste” resulted from the confluence of mid-nineteenth-century depictions of caste stereotypes with the concept of the so-called dangerous classes of vagrants, the poor, criminals, drunkards, the unemployed, and prostitutes in British society.

With the agreement of government authorities in 1908, The Salvation Army established administration of reformatories in Indian provinces to provide spiritual rescue and Eurocentric cultural training to the criminal tribes (Tolen, 1991). The training was designed to breed ‘worthy citizens’ through instruction about time-discipline, labor-discipline, purchasing commodities, and studying the Bible (Tolen). By criminalizing selected tribes and castes of India, Britain was able to extend its political and economic dominion to control resources and engage a new labor force.

Writing in 2001, Comaroff criticized the field of anthropology for its historical failure to address the dynamics of political domination of the colonial period by focusing only on the “cultural encounter” rather than the economic and political nature of the relationship between the colonized and ruling nations. Comaroff found that enforcement of European law resulted in the transformation of the social and economic relations of colonized peoples in a manner beneficial to the dominating colonizer. He begins with the nineteenth-century observation by Tswana-speaking peoples in South Africa that labels English courts, papers, contracts, and agents as “the English mode of warfare.” According to Comaroff, the Europeans used law in the name of universal progress to justify subordination to a supposedly superior European legal order. This was sometimes achieved by criminalizing local cultural practices and defining them as “primitive” or “dangerous.” Comaroff also observes that European law was self-justifying. For example, property rights were formulated in places wherein private property was not even a concept to justify confiscation by the colonizers. He also notes that the colonized territories were used as social control laboratories to learn what ruled people would or would not tolerate.

## YOUTH GANGS REVISITED

Bourgois's (1995) ethnographic study of crack dealers in New York extended the political and economic analysis beyond the theoretical by encouraging anthropologists to assume the role of social change agent. Bourgois wrote, "I have written this in the hope that anthropological writing can be a site of resistance." Using participant-observation methods, Bourgois "became acutely aware of the contradictory collaborative nature of [his] research strategy" (Bourgois). Bourgois describes the plight of the crack dealer as one of social marginalization, drawing attention to the "interface between structural oppression and individual action" (Bourgois).

Similar to Bourgois's analysis of marginality, Vigil (2003) relied on a "multiple marginality" framework to examine urban street gangs, particularly with respect to the immigrant experience. Through this holistic multi-factor framework, Vigil was able to examine interrelationships between neighborhood effects, poverty, culture conflict, sociocultural marginalization, and social control. He was particularly interested in analyzing street socialization and individual states of mind in conjunction with an ecological point of view. Vigil determined that the source of gang aggression was often due to the marginal social status of gang members that, for example, prevented them from obtaining entry-level jobs and often resulted in harsh treatment by law enforcement.

## Global Studies of Crime

The interests of anthropologists in the global nature of crime grew substantially in the 1990s and continues to the present. Post-modern anthropologists are less interested in the relationship of laws to crime and more interested in crime's relationship to the structures of local and global societies. Anthropologists are researching how people in developing countries or marginalized groups in post-industrial nations find ways to survive in a globalized economy. They are also investigating corporate crime and the criminal actions of nation states. The nature of their inquiries reflects a highly political and economic perspective of power differentials that contemporary anthropologists combine with examinations of social relationships, symbolic meanings, and mental representations of crime.

In her exploration of the worldwide trade in body organs and tissues, Scheper-Hughes (2000) offers an ecopolitical analysis that takes into account social stratification across countries and conceptions rooted in histories of cultural beliefs. Claiming that affluent countries have manufactured the need for organ transplants, illegal entrepreneurs (sometimes in conjunction with corrupt governments) have preyed upon the poor and marginalized in their countries by buying or stealing their body parts and stealing from the dead. Within the change-agent perspective, Scheper-Hughes encourages

anthropologists to take a stand on the ethical issues involved in the body trade. In circumstances wherein the sale of body organs is viewed as legal, voluntary, and a question of individual rights, Scheper-Hughes challenges anthropologists to “intrude” upon the unethical exploitation of the powerless and hungry.

Scheper-Hughes (2000) emphasized power differentials between the state, affluent Western medical establishments, and donor recipients. She determined that the trade in body organs linked the “upper strata of biomedical practice to the lowest reaches of the criminal world.” Scheper-Hughes describes how “the flow of organs follows the modern routes of capital: from South to North, from Third to First World, from poor to rich, from black and brown to white, and from male to female.” Scheper-Hughes also examines how transplant surgery and the need for body organs “challenges customary laws and traditional local practices bearing on the body, death, and social relations.” Adding cultural factors to the economic analysis, Scheper-Hughes addresses rumors and fears that surround organ stealing in Brazil, Argentina, Guatemala, and South Africa, sometimes connecting their associations with human rights violations of abusive governments or with the international adoption market.

Scheper-Hughes (2000) describes a new widespread view in the interior of Northeast Brazil that finds redundancy in matched body organs and eminent practicality in selling the “extra” organ to feed one’s family. In the same area, one sugar plantation worker remarked, “We are not even the owners of our own bodies” (Scheper-Hughes, 1992 in Scheper-Hughes, 2000). Scheper-Hughes cautions, “. . . where class, race, and cast ideologies cause certain kinds of bodies—whether women, common criminals, paupers, or street children—to be treated as ‘waste,’ these sentiments will corrupt medical practices concerning brain death, organ harvesting, and distribution.”

Extra-legal activities are a significant part of the world economy. Beginning with the question, “Who are the contemporary criminals?” Nordstrom (2007) spent 3 years exploring global crime across several continents, seeking an understanding of the trillions of dollars that circulate the world outside of legal channels. Nordstrom’s view is one of global connectedness, linking the economic activities of indigenous peoples in developing nations with the demands of capitalist markets. She explores the global arena through the specific commodities that are illegally traded, such as “blood” diamonds, weapons, narcotics, food, cigarettes, pharmaceuticals, electronics, and oil.

Nordstrom (2007) documents how “the powerful confluence of the extra-legal and 21st century globalization and advanced technology” reaches “across multinational empires and into everyday lives,” linking the local to the transnational. She noted that illegal trade works because it arises from “mutual necessity” when the need to survive in developing countries renders “legality [as] a fluid concept.” Locals do not think of themselves as

criminals or lawbreakers. For them, the extra-state networks are equally or more important than the state (Nordstrom).

Nader (2003) examines how corporate crime restricts access to knowledge to perpetrate crimes such as toxic pollution without retribution. She determines that the corporate strategy hinders the ability of victims to locate responsibility and seek redress for the crimes committed against them. In a similar way, Kane (2003) warns against a "... global addiction to crime [that] engenders a reactionary and delusional political discourse on justice." She cites the U.S. prison population, the largest in the world, as a primary example of a government that must be "fortified by militarization." She comments on the shift of resources from educational institutions to prisons and jails and the right to vote being stripped from felons. "In this way," Kane (2003) states, "fascism can replace democracy without anyone having to stage a coup."

Using cultural criminology analysis linked to contemporary ethnography venues Kane (2004) notes that crime is not easily observed and, therefore, participant observation is essential. She claims that it is no longer possible to maintain the same type of distance from subjects that previously provided comfort for ethnographers of the past. She acknowledges the urban ethnographer's difficulty in conducting participant observation when constrained by the challenge of large populations and the flow of urban life wherein "city blocks ravaged by poverty, poor health and crime" replace "the far-away village" (Kane, 2004). Echoing the earlier concepts of Malinowski, Kane (2004) states that alternative economies, often criminal, arise because traditional means of social reproduction and work is no longer possible and the media heightens concern with these crimes.

Kane notes that the methodology of the contemporary cultural criminologist needs to (1) provide rich descriptions of everyday life in selected locations, (2) incorporate in the analysis the paradigms of institutional power, (3) develop a full explanation of the insider/outsider position of the ethnographer, (4) establish trusting, ethical relationships with the people who are a focus of study, and (5) provide an interpretive range of quality insight assisted by qualitative data that elevates ethnographic narrative to social reality (Kane, 2004).

### Synthesizing and Conceptualizing

The conceptual map reflects the historical evolution of anthropological theories related to crime and delinquency, beginning with pioneering theories of the founding intellectuals of modern anthropology followed by the modernists who focused on understanding particular populations (gangs and mafia) and concluding with the post-modernists who emphasized the historical impact of colonialism and the contemporary dynamics of globalized crime.

The three eras of anthropological research and theory development reflect the concepts of major theorists and their objects of study: the pioneers of the late 1800s–1940s; the modernists of the 1950s–1970s, and the postmodernists in the era of globalization from the 1980s to the present. The pioneering anthropological theories focused primarily on vanishing peoples and small societies wherein the study of crime emphasized cultural group norms or their transgression. The modernists directed their attention to understanding social groups within a larger society, emphasizing social relationships, social stratification, and differential access to resources. The post-modernists gave higher priority to political and economic analysis along with the importance of social relationships and mental and symbolic constructs. Using this perspective, they revisited colonized societies to understand criminality on a global scale. They also developed a self-reflexiveness in relationship to the social responsibility of making criminality more public and in need of redress.

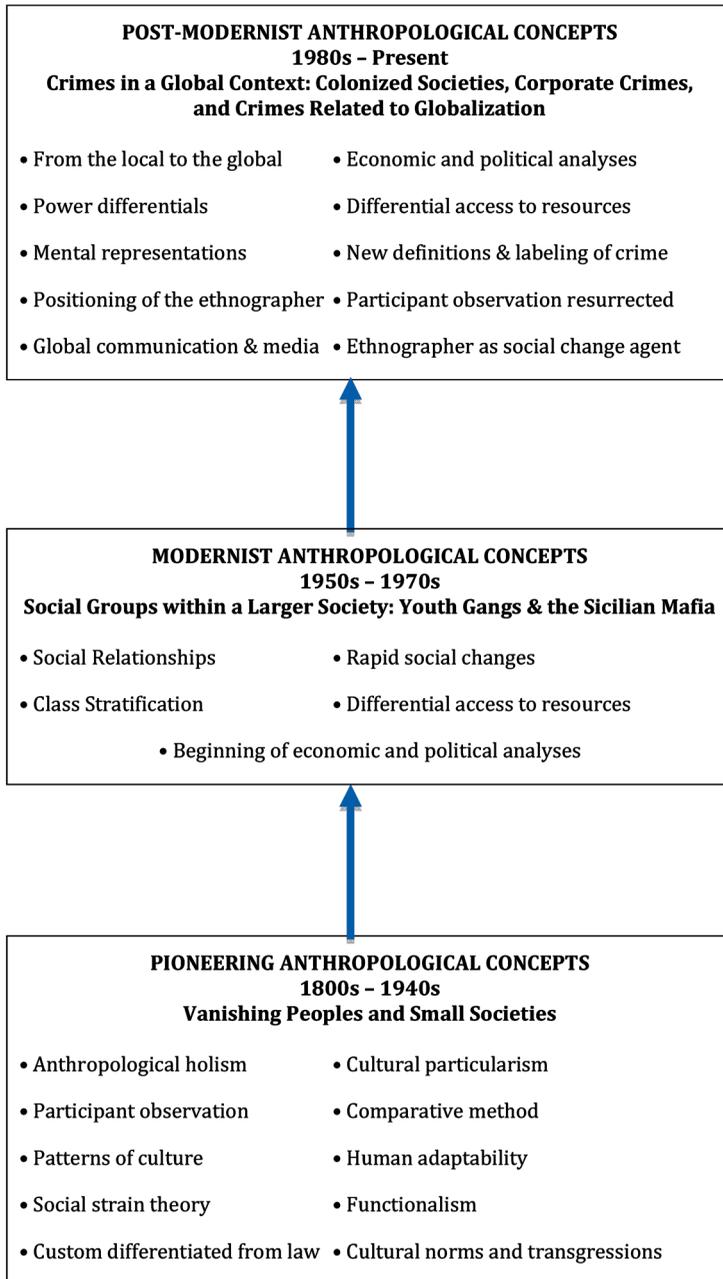
### Anthropology's Contributions and Areas for Future Research

Vigil (2003) notes that anthropology's unique social science method of qualitative ethnographic research makes room for a complex and nuanced understanding of the web of social relationships and mental constructs involved in understanding crime and criminalization. Today, the complexity of the anthropological perspective requires immersion in the participant-observation method. In addition, anthropological study can yield conceptual tools that in themselves become powerful instruments for achieving social justice and reducing inequalities (Nordstrom, 2007).

Marginalized peoples around the world seeking economic survival amid globalization will continue to offer research possibilities for anthropologists interested in studying crime and delinquency. In addition, the recent "call to action" expressed by post-modern anthropologists who study crime could help to focus international attention on evolving a more humane social order that remedies the conditions that give rise to crime.

## CONCLUSION

The pioneering theories of sociocultural anthropology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have formed the foundation for understanding crime and delinquency from an anthropological perspective. As noted in Figure 1, the foundational concepts of holism, cultural particularism, functionalism, and cultural patterns form the theoretical bases for later inquiry. In the modern and post-modern eras, these concepts evolved to include social stratification and globalism, further expanding our understanding of crime and criminalization.



**FIGURE 1** Anthropological perspectives on crime and delinquency.

For most of anthropology's history, field researchers armed with their own theories or those of others studied small societies in an attempt to decipher the rules that governed behavior and how these rules were understood, enforced, or evaded by members of the society. Early anthropologists were concerned with the regularities of a culture, so much so that they ignored rule violations that did not comport with their theories of cultural unity or failed to see or document transgressions of cultural values (Edgerton, 1973).

In more recent times, anthropologists have turned increasingly to explanations of class and power differentials and the disparate access to economic resources to explain the purpose of crime and delinquency, especially in colonized societies (Stoler, 1985; Tolen, 1991; Comaroff, 2001; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1998). The roots of this line of analysis can be found in Malinowski's appeal to the British elite to use anthropological perspectives on colonized peoples to govern them more effectively, manage an indigenous labor force, and develop the economic resources that their land and efforts could offer (Malinowski, 1925, 1926/1932).

Contemporary, post-modern anthropologists have focused on the motives for how criminality is defined and on the labeling of criminals. Class, power, and resource access differentials have served to shape analyses of contemporary societies in the developing world, especially in places wherein the marginalization of people external to the global economy creates a vacuum in which crime can fester. Post-modern anthropologists have also turned their attention to other powerful sources of behavior, such as the world of ideas, global media, and global communication.

Anthropologists have studied unwritten laws, transgressions of laws, deviance from norms, and class and power differentials in their ethnographic research of vanishing peoples, during the colonial and industrial periods and in the current era of globalization. Though early anthropologists began their studies with small, deceptively simple societies, they now study cultures that are so complex as to require, ironically, the examination of small sectors of larger social groups. Nevertheless, contemporary anthropologists who simultaneously address the small local group and its global context continue to build upon Boas's original ideas of holism and cultural particularism in search of a unified field theory that combines the very small with the very large.

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