

Introduction

For two centuries, a central legal fiction has enabled our legal system to target primarily the nation's poorest, most traumatized, badly abused and, in that sense, least autonomous citizens. This legal fiction is what I term the "crime master narrative"—the widely accepted notion that crime is the simple product of equally free and autonomous "bad" choices made by persons who are acting unencumbered by their past experience and present circumstances. Yet, as I argue throughout this book, the crime master narrative is fundamentally flawed. It has produced a basically unfair apportioning of legal punishment, one in which persons with the fewest degrees of freedom are held most accountable, with a correspondingly long-term dispiriting effect. What we now understand to be a largely misguided analysis of the real causes of crime has also thwarted attempts to develop more rational, humane, and effective policies for reducing crime. Because it is largely based on an unsupported fiction, our myopic devotion to the crime master narrative has placed countless numbers of potential crime victims needlessly at risk and placed future generations in harm's way. Thus, worse than misguided and wrong, it is dangerous.

As a result of the widespread acceptance of the crime master narrative, the United States has relied nearly exclusively on imprisonment as its core strategy of crime control, especially in the unprecedented ways it has been embraced during the so-called era of mass incarceration.¹ As I note at several different points in the analysis that follows, prison itself represents a supremely

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Criminality in Context: The Psychological Foundations of Criminal Justice Reform,

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individualistic response to the social problem of crime. The proliferation of this institution more than a century ago was in many ways a tribute to the crime master narrative. It was also a direct outgrowth of a 19th-century model of psychological individualism—the belief that the causal locus of people’s behavior resides exclusively inside them, and the corresponding notion that social problems, such as crime, can and should be addressed primarily by acting directly on those persons who engage in it.² Serving as the core behavioral assumption of the crime master narrative, this form of individualism still guides our nation’s crime-control policies. In this sense, the intellectual justification for these policies stands or falls on the validity of these staunchly individualistic assumptions. Yet the extensive research I review and synthesize in the chapters that follow has rendered these assumptions increasingly outmoded and indefensible.

SOCIAL CONTEXT AND CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

Over the past several decades, a quiet revolution has taken place in the way that criminal behavior is analyzed and understood by the scholars and researchers who systematically study and theorize about it. A more contemporary and sophisticated understanding of criminal behavior carefully analyzes the past social histories and immediate situations or contexts of the persons who engage in it. This new, scientifically grounded approach represents an important, definitive challenge to the antiquated, individualistic notions that have guided our thinking about crime and punishment for such a long time. As this new model of criminal behavior becomes widely recognized and accepted, its implications for legal decisionmaking and criminal justice policymaking will become clearer. I believe it will fundamentally impact our very conceptions of justice and fairness and serve as the basis for new crime-control initiatives that emphasize community-based strategies of prevention. In fact, the perspective on the origins of social and criminal behavior that I discuss and rely on in the following chapters not only raises serious questions about our nation’s unrivaled dependence on imprisonment but also poses parallel and pointed questions about the continued use of capital punishment. Indeed, the death penalty is in many ways the ultimate expression of the crime master narrative, reflecting the belief that the causes of serious violent crime reside so deeply and irredeemably inside some people that they should not be allowed to continue to live.

This book systematically reviews much of the empirical research that directly addresses the developmental, institutional, immediate situational, and structural roots of criminality as the basis for a more scientifically valid and humane counternarrative. To clarify at the outset, the kind of crime or “criminality” that I address throughout this book is what is commonly referred to as “street crime”—criminal behavior that most people think about when they hear that crime rates are “on the rise,” when politicians promise to

“reduce crime,” and the kind of crime that the overwhelming number of men and women who fill our nation’s jails and prisons have been convicted of having committed. It is also the broad category of behavior to which the crime master narrative is routinely applied and also to which the numerous studies I will cite in the pages that follow pertain. I do not assume that literally every kind of crime is subject to or needs to be explained by some kind of elusive unitary theory that encompasses literally every instance of lawbreaking. Thus, I do not attempt to address very different kinds of crimes, especially acts of so-called white collar and corporate criminality.

Another important caveat is also in order. I have made a conscious decision to focus on social history and context and not on individual-level explanations of crime that entail the supposed genetic or biological differences that some have argued distinguish lawbreakers from the rest of us. There are several reasons for this decision. The first is that although biological and genetic determinism—the belief that criminal behavior is caused by the particular biological or genetic makeup of its perpetrators—is a perspective with which our society seems perennially enamored, it represents an especially extreme and potentially pernicious form of the crime master narrative. It is also one that lends itself to misuse. Indeed, genetic explanations for complex human behavior, especially for criminality, have a sordid, racially tainted history that I discuss in several later chapters.

The second reason is that the strong forms of genetic or biological determinism—that some people are born “wired” to commit crime—lack any convincing and sustained scientific support. As several sociological commentators put it: “Genetic determinism has died a quiet death. Evidence is overwhelming that human beings are never simply instructed by their genes to show a particular trait or behavior.”³ My own reading of even the more carefully worded and nuanced contemporary versions of genetic explanations suggests that what we really know about these interconnections is still entirely tentative and very much in flux.⁴ In fact, the most sophisticated interpretations of what were once understood as genetic predispositions now seem to concede that, at most, they seem to reflect differences in sensitivity to those aspects of an environment or context that trigger or activate behavior, in a field that has come to be known as “epigenetics.”⁵ Thus, much like the earlier claims made about the genetic basis of IQ, however, there is reason to believe that whatever individual differences do exist still depend very heavily on substantial environmental influences (such as the ones I discuss in this book) for their expression.⁶

And that leads to my third reason for excluding these theories from discussion in a book about the role of social history and social context in crime causation: There are as yet no practical, positive applications for this kind of knowledge.⁷ Although the challenges of addressing the criminogenic factors and forces I discuss in the chapters that follow are daunting, they are susceptible to feasible social and political interventions and remedies. Notwithstanding their questionable scientific status, the alleged biological and genetic causes of

crime are not. Thus, the impact of social historical and contextual factors is far more scientifically well-documented, they have repeatedly been shown to have a far more important and powerful influence on human behavior (even in emerging epigenetic models), and they are far more within our capacity as a society to control and modify in ways that have important practical implications for meaningful criminal justice reform.

OVERVIEW OF THIS BOOK

To begin telling the story of context and criminality, Chapter 1 summarizes and critically analyzes the traditional individualistic model of criminal behavior—a crime master narrative that conceptualizes the causes of crime exclusively in terms of the blameworthy free choices made by its perpetrators. Although the crime master narrative concedes that those bad choices may stem from various and sundry internal sources—perhaps a profound selfishness, deep-seated immorality, a deranged mind, psychopathic character, fundamental “evil,” or some particularly unsavory and odious combination of them all—those sources are presumed to reside entirely within the perpetrator.

However, as I show in Chapter 2, the 19th-century model of behavior that is at the core of the crime master narrative has not stood up to 21st-century science. It rarely accounts for more than a small part of the real story. Research underscoring the long-lasting influence of early “risk factors”—negative and traumatic experiences—on people’s later life trajectories has radically shifted the way that criminality is empirically studied and understood. So, too, have studies of the immediate power of “criminogenic” or crime-producing life circumstances and external situations to shape adult behavior. Indeed, a massive amount of systematic research conducted over the last several decades has established the causal significance of a wide range of background factors *and* immediate situations in the analysis of delinquency, crime, and violence. For this reason, the model of psychological individualism on which the crime master narrative rests is now an anachronism; exclusively internal or dispositional explanations of crime cannot bear the weight of this new evidence.

The discussion shifts in the next four chapters to a more detailed assessment of the exact role of social history and social context in crime causation. Thus, Chapter 3 summarizes what is now known about the social historical or developmental causes of crime. An extraordinary number of studies have been done that underscore the long-term, life-altering impact of events and experiences that occur early in life, including the powerful criminogenic impact of child maltreatment in all its forms. I review at length the empirical research that clearly documents the way that childhood risks and traumas and adverse experiences can contribute to delinquency and adult criminality.

Chapter 4 continues this discussion by extending it to a set of distinct and seemingly paradoxical criminogenic influences: the potentially destructive effects of harsh institutional interventions and treatment. Among other things,

this chapter examines the psychological consequences of a wide range of institutional responses to juvenile misbehavior and crime, from increasingly harsh disciplinary practices that are directed toward certain public school students, to placement in the nation's historically troubled foster care system, to confinement in what are too often badly deteriorated or seriously underfunded juvenile justice institutions in the United States. I examine the still too-common victimization of children inside institutional settings as well as the fact that many "institutional risk factors" are psychologically analogous to the kinds of traumatic family and community experiences to which they were initially exposed. That is, these are children who were confined in harsh juvenile justice settings where they experienced their institutionalization as a form of "*re-traumatization*," exposing them *again* to forms of maltreatment that are all too familiar.

In Chapter 5, I add to this discussion by integrating research conducted on another critically important component in the scientific analysis of crime causation—the role of *immediate* situational or contextual influences on criminality. Research on the relationship of context to criminality has identified a wide range of precipitating criminogenic and crime-inducing social circumstances that help to provoke and precipitate criminal behavior. Thus, we know that there are specific situational conditions and dynamics that greatly increase the probability that crimes will be committed within them, correspondingly increasing the likelihood that anyone who enters them will succumb to their pervasive and powerful pressures. Here, too, despite extensive scientific research, the implications of what we know about the situational determinants of crime have yet to be widely acknowledged in public or political discourse. These theoretical insights and empirical data about the power of social contexts and circumstances to shape behavior are essential to any comprehensive understanding of the roots of criminal behavior. Yet they not only have had little or no impact in key legal decision-making arenas where the individualistic "free choice" model still reigns, but they also have failed to inspire a more rational and effective strategies of crime control.

In Chapter 6, I examine some of the various ways in which the structural and socioeconomic variable of poverty operates as a central and especially powerful criminogenic risk factor. Among other things, it functions broadly to interconnect and compound the destructive influence of the *multiple* risk factors often associated with it. Although it is a fact so obvious that its significance is often overlooked, the nation's prisons are filled with the nation's poor. Some of the disproportionate number of poor persons who are incarcerated have been erroneously caught up in the wide net of the criminal justice system because they lacked the necessary resources with which to properly defend themselves in or extricate themselves from the legal processes that ensnared them. Many others are imprisoned because they have succumbed to the severe pressures of a life of deprivation and want, the multiple other risk factors and traumas to which such a life commonly exposes them, and the host of criminogenic disadvantages that they continuously confront well into adulthood.

Chapter 7 frankly acknowledges the criminogenic implications of the fact that the United States remains deeply divided by race and ethnicity. The overrepresentation of racial minorities—primarily African Americans—in the criminal justice system can be understood in part through the lens of racial oppression to which many such communities of Color have been historically subjected.⁸ Slavery and colonization produced entrenched structural divisions that still translate into fundamental differences in the day-to-day realities of many Black and, increasingly, Latino Americans. I use the term “biographical racism” to describe the sum total of racialized experiences that accumulate over a person of Color’s entire social history in ways that can and often do adversely shape and undermine their life course and can themselves be criminogenic.

In Chapter 8, I directly examine and confront the various ways in which the broad framework of social contextualism that I have developed up to this point fundamentally complicates and calls into question any simplistic “free choice” model of criminal behavior. As I repeatedly note, this free choice model still dominates virtually all criminal justice settings and legal decision-making circles. Loosening its irrational grip will require us to interrogate and confront the intellectual as well as legal sources of inertia and resistance to change. I explicitly and critically examine some of the ways that the crime master narrative is used to confuse and obfuscate the analysis of criminal behavior, impeding the development of crime control policies that are based on reason rather than emotion.

Chapter 9 shifts focus to examine the direct legal and prison policy implications of the preceding chapters. As our appreciation of the breadth and depth of the social contextual determinants of behavior increases, so too does the urgency of bringing criminal law doctrines, criminal justice practices, and prison policies into line with these more scientifically valid psychological perspectives. This chapter contains the outline of at least some of those much-needed legal reforms, ones premised on an emerging counternarrative that fully acknowledges the critically important role of social history and context. I am not naïve about the difficulty of implementing meaningful change within an overarching legal system whose fundamental assumptions and standard operating procedures are so longstanding and institutionally entrenched, no matter how useful or even seemingly necessary it may be. No student of legal history can reflect seriously on past attempts to use empirical data to transform the law without acknowledging the law’s deep-seated resistance to psychologically inspired change.⁹ And no one can participate in related criminal justice reform-oriented efforts for very long without being forced to concede the monumental obstacles that thwart real change. Yet I also believe that a serious dialogue about these issues is not only long overdue but inevitable. The time has come to use what is known about the social historical and immediate structural determinants of crime to make the criminal justice system’s basic operating assumptions more scientifically valid and its doctrines and procedures more equitable and fair.

In that spirit, Chapter 10 develops another set of broad and badly needed context-based social reforms that stem from the quiet revolution in our understanding the causes of crime. It acknowledges that proposing a series of immediate “fixes” to outdated criminal law doctrines and criminal justice practices that have led to a destructive overdependency on imprisonment still perpetuates a largely self-limiting system. Absent a viable alternative framework, these modest fixes are ultimately counterproductive. Thus, I argue that we must take steps to develop a new and fundamentally different strategy that explicitly acknowledges and then pointedly, proactively, and preventively addresses the social contextual causes of crime that are discussed throughout this book. I suggest a number of ways in which this alternative model can end our current overreliance on prison and better address our nation’s crime problem. It focuses attention and resources on meaningful and effective programs designed to *prevent* criminal behavior rather than merely reacting to it. Although here, too, I recognize the truly daunting practical difficulties and political obstacles that must be overcome in order to mount the kind of structurally oriented program of crime prevention that I describe, I also believe that, in light of what we now know about the roots of criminality, anything less than this simply will not produce substantial, lasting change.

THE POLITICS OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

I should explicitly acknowledge that meaningful criminal law reform and significant changes in crime control policy are especially vulnerable to political resistance and obstruction. Psychiatrist Judith Herman’s caution that “the study of psychological trauma is an inherently political enterprise because it calls attention to the experience of oppressed people” bears repeating here.¹⁰ Focusing on trauma in the lives of people who have committed crime is “political” in the same sense, to be sure. But it also is a topic that is easily “politicized.” The way that a society conceptualizes and responds to wrongdoing connects to core debates about the role of government in controlling citizens’ behavior and the proper targets of state intervention—intervention that, as Robert Cover has reminded us, is often inherently violent in nature.¹¹ At no time has the politicization of these issues been clearer and more sustained than over the last several decades.¹² Unfortunately, that politicization not only became remarkably one-sided during these years but also often diverted the public’s attention from many of the issues that I address in this book.

Concern over potential politicization leads to another issue that bears emphasis. I want to say at the outset and repeat at several junctures along the way that I am well aware of the ease with which a focus on criminogenic traumas and risks lends itself to a painfully stigmatizing form of deficit thinking.¹³ It is my intention to avoid this. The concepts and data presented in this book are not intended to imply that adverse outcomes are inevitable, irreversible, or are caused primarily by the personal deficits or failings of the

persons who succumb to or engage in them. Nor are the analyses that follow intended to depict persons who are adversely affected by the array of criminogenic influences I discuss in detail as passive victims; to the contrary, whether or not they are ultimately successful at pushing back against these influences, their lives have typically been characterized by resistance, striving, and resilience. They want and deserve meaningful opportunities far more than idle sympathy. Moreover, people who have been negatively affected by the risks and traumas that they have experienced should never be blamed for their own victimhood. Yet it is also important to acknowledge and analyze the role of mistreatment and the hurtful and often harmful actions of the larger systems of oppression as well as what we now know are the predictable consequences of these experiences.

Thus, analyzing the problematic outcomes without pathologizing those who engage in them means recognizing that criminal behavior is often an adaptive response to otherwise pathological, destructive past histories and present environments. People can engage in problematic behavior without being problematic people, and the negative consequences of exposure to risk factors and criminogenic conditions are largely learned behaviors that are highly modifiable. Because they were caused by mistreatment, deprivation, and adverse external circumstances, rather than inborn, fixed internal traits or mechanisms, they are subject to being effectively addressed with the appropriate resources and changed circumstances.

Over the years, however, the work I have done studying the lives of capital defendants also has taught me a deeply troubling lesson, one that our society has seemed at many times intent on ignoring. It is that a number of the children and adolescents who have endured the very worst forms early trauma, the most severe kinds of maltreatment, the most egregious institutional neglect and abuse, and who live in the most impoverished and criminogenic neighborhoods simply cannot and do not easily overcome these things, at least not without caring intervention of the sort that is often not forthcoming. There are many remarkable souls who do, to be sure, but they are exceptions to be admired and sometimes marveled at, perhaps precisely because of the long odds they have overcome.

Despite the odds against them, of course, not all of the children who experience even the worst kinds of trauma go on to commit crimes. Aside from those with remarkable resilience and the fortunate others who benefit from the benign intervention of a caring relative or teacher, or an effective educational or a therapeutic program designed to address some of their many unmet needs, there are many other adaptations to trauma that do not involve criminality. But tragically few children who experience the worst to which our society can subject them emerge miraculously unscathed, even if they “just try hard enough,” or draw on their divinely-given inner strength, or summon the will to make it so, or whatever other fiction some commentators engage to ultimately shift blame onto the victims of severe childhood trauma and societal neglect. Instead, the effects of these experiences

are often life-altering, at least when necessary resources and meaningful opportunities to rise above potentially harmful pasts fail to materialize. There are still a daunting number of children in our society who endure these traumatic life histories and confront such destructively harsh life circumstances. For them, the criminogenics of prior abuse and deprivation cannot be simply forgotten, easily transcended, or successfully set aside. This book seeks to explain the paths that some of them have traveled, and the steps that can be taken to minimize the number of lives that are affected in these harmful ways.

The criminal justice system's reliance on the crime master narrative translates the predictable consequences of these experiences into nothing more than a matter of blameworthy free choices, thereby masking the underlying causes, holding the victims of mistreatment and structural injustice accountable for the consequences of social historical events and circumstances over which they often had little or no control. It not only dehumanizes and distances them from the rest of us but also ensures that we will never effectively address these larger social ills. We can and should do better. Truly meaningful and effective criminal justice reform depends on it.

NOTES

1. See, e.g., Hinton, E. (2016). *From the war on poverty to the war on crime: The making of mass incarceration in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4159/9780674969223>; and Kilgore, J. (2015). *Understanding mass incarceration: A people's guide to the civil rights struggle of our time*. New York, NY: The New Press.
2. Haney, C. (1982). Criminal justice and the nineteenth-century paradigm: The triumph of psychological individualism in the "formative era." *Law and Human Behavior*, 6, 191–235. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF01044295>
3. Simons, R. L., Lei, M. K., Beach, S. R. H., Brody, G. H., Philibert, R. A., & Gibbons, F. X. (2011). Social environment, genes, and aggression: Evidence supporting the differential susceptibility perspective. *American Sociological Review*, 76, 883–912, p. 883. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0003122411427580>. The eagerness to uncritically accept the many empirical and theoretical claims that have been made in the past about the alleged genetic and biological causal roots of criminality should not blind us to the lack of solid and consistent evidence establishing any clear causal link between genetic makeup and crime or confirming any meaningful level of actual biological causation.
4. The recent history of an alleged genetic basis for depression is instructive. In 2003, an influential paper was published that purported to find the elusive and long-sought-after genetic basis for depression. See Caspi, A., Sugden, K., Moffitt, T. E., Taylor, A., Craig, I. W., Harrington, H., . . . Poulton, R. (2003). Influence of life stress on depression: Moderation by a polymorphism in the 5-HTT gene. *Science*, 302, 386–389. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1126/science.1083968>. In retrospect, as the press later reported, this initial report of a genetic basis for depression was greeted with much fanfare: "The excitement spread quickly. Newspapers and magazines reported the findings. Columnists, commentators and op-ed writers emphasized its importance." See Carey, B. (2009, June 17). Report on gene for depression is now faulted. *The New York Times*, pp. A1, A13, p. A13. However, a meta-analysis conducted 6 years later provided a definitive challenge to the earlier finding. The

- authors of the later study concluded: "The results of this meta-analysis clearly demonstrate that stressful life events have a potent relationship with the risk of depression, an association that has been one of the most widely studied environmental factors for a range of mental disorders." Risch, N., Herrell, R., Lehner, T., Liang, K.-Y., Eaves, L., Hoh, J., . . . Merikangas, K. R. (2009). Interaction between the serotonin transporter gene (5-*HTTLPR*), stressful life events, and risk of depression: A meta-analysis. *JAMA*, *301*, 2462–2471, p. 2468. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1001/jama.2009.878>
5. See, e.g., Radley, J. J., Kabbaj, M., Jacobson, L., Heydendael, W., Yehuda, R., & Herman, J. P. (2011). Stress risk factors and stress-related pathology: Neuroplasticity, epigenetics and endophenotypes. *Stress: The International Journal on the Biology of Stress*, *14*, 481–497. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3109/10253890.2011.604751>; Yang, B.-Z., Zhang, H., Ge, W., Weder, N., Douglas-Palumberi, H., Perepletchikova, F., . . . Kaufman, J. (2013). Child abuse and epigenetic mechanisms of disease risk. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, *44*, 101–107. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2012.10.012>; Zannas, A. S., & West, A. E. (2014). Epigenetics and the regulation of stress vulnerability. *Neuroscience*, *264*, 157–170. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.neuroscience.2013.12.003>
 6. In addition to Simons et al. (2011), Social environment, genes, and aggression, see, e.g., Belsky, J., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., & van IJzendoorn, M. H. (2007). For better *and* for worse: Differential susceptibility to environmental influences. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *16*, 300–304. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2007.00525.x>; Caspi, A., & Moffitt, T. E. (2006). Gene-environment interactions in psychiatry: Joining forces with neuroscience. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, *7*, 583–590; Ehlert, U. (2013). Enduring psychobiological effects of childhood adversity. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, *38*, 1850–1857. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.psyneuen.2013.06.007>; Rutter, M. (2006). *Genes and behavior: Nature-nurture interplay explained*. London, England: Blackwell; and Shanahan, M. J., & Hofer, S. M. (2005). Social context in gene-environment interactions: Retrospect and prospect. *Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, *60*, 65–76. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/geronb/60.Special_Issue_1.65
 7. For a slightly different perspective on this issue, see Grasso, A. (2017). Broken beyond repair: Rehabilitative penology and American political development. *Political Research Quarterly*, *70*, 394–407. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1065912917695189>
 8. The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* advises authors to capitalize "Black" and "White" when the terms are used to denote race. I, too, believe this is appropriate and will follow this practice. As Catherine McKinnon explained with respect to the capitalization of "Black," the word is "as much socially created as, and at least in the American context no less specifically meaningful or definitive than, any linguistic, tribal, or religious ethnicity, all of which are conventionally recognized by capitalization." McKinnon, C. A. (1982). Feminism, Marxism, method, and the state: An agenda for theory. *Signs*, *7*, 515–544, p. 516. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/493898>. I believe the same logic applies to "Color" when used in this way, and it is capitalized throughout.
 9. Haney, C. (1980). Psychology and legal change: On the limits of a factual jurisprudence. *Law and Human Behavior*, *4*, 147–199. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/bf01040317>. See also Haney, C. (1993). Psychology and legal change: The impact of a decade. *Law and Human Behavior*, *17*, 371–398. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/bf01044374>
 10. Herman, J. (1997). Afterword. In J. Herman (Ed.), *Trauma and recovery* (pp. 236–247). New York, NY: Basic Books.
 11. Cover, R. M. (1986). Violence and the word. *The Yale Law Journal*, *95*, 1601–1629. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/796468>
 12. See, e.g., Haney, C. (1998). Riding the punishment wave: On the origins of our devolving standards of decency. *Hastings Women's Law Journal*, *9*, 27–78; and

- Haney, C. (2012). Politicizing crime and punishment: Redefining “justice” to fight the “war on prisoners.” *West Virginia Law Review*, 114, 373–414.
13. See, e.g., Valencia, R. R. (1997). Conceptualizing the notion of deficit thinking. In R. R. Valencia (Ed.), *The evolution of deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice* (pp. 1–12). Abingdon, England: RoutledgeFalmer. See also John Irwin’s caution about the ease with which this problematic model has been applied in corrections:

Since the appearance of positivism in the social sciences, there has been a persistent effort to conceptualize crime as behavior committed almost entirely by aberrants. This general approach is obviously appealing to the more powerful because it conveniently narrows the definition of crime, draws attention away from their own illegal and immoral activities, and avoids any changes in basic social and economic relations. It demands only some fine tuning of various institutional activities such as those of the “criminal justice system.” Also, it supplies society’s leaders with bogeymen to divert the public’s attention away from pressing problems—such as unemployment—that are more likely to demand structural change.

Irwin, J. (1987). Reflections on ethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 16, 41–48, p. 45.