REVIEW QUESTIONS

What does the author have to say about the impact of firearms in causing injury or death among juveniles and the existing research regarding this phenomenon? Do these statistics and findings convince you that this is a major problem in U.S. society? State your reasons.

How important do you feel the fear of victimization is among public high school students? How important do you feel it is for other individuals in U.S. society? Do you feel it justifies carrying weapons, even if it is illegal to do so?

How does fear of crime affect your daily life? For example, do you lock your doors and windows at home when you are, or do you lock your car doors, or do you avoid going to certain places at certain times? If not, why don't you take any of these precautions against crime?

According to the findings of the study, to what extent do the two theories (Sutherland's and Hirschi's) appear to have importance in explaining why high school students carry firearms to school? What does the author propose as policy applications? Do you agree with these recommendations? Explain your reasoning.

Social Reaction, Critical, and Feminist Models of Crime

This section will discuss the evolution of social reaction and labeling theory, reviewing contributions made by early theorists as well as modern developments in this area. We will then discuss social conflict and reaction models of criminal behavior, emphasizing the foundational assumptions and principles of Marx as well as the more criminological applications of Marxist and conflict theory by Brogier, Turk, Void, and others. We'll also review modern applications of various forms of feminist theory.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, social reaction and labeling theories, as well as various critical, conflict, and feminist theories, became popular. At the time, society was looking for theories that placed the blame for criminal offending on government authorities—either the police or societal institutions like economic or class structures. Here we explore these various theories with a special emphasis on how they radically altered the way that crime and law were viewed, as well as how these perspectives highly represented the overall climate in the United States at that time. Specifically, many groups of people—particularly the lower class, minorities, and women—were fighting for their rights during this period, and this manifested itself in criminological theory and research.

Labeling and Social Reaction Theory

Social reaction theory, otherwise referred to as labeling theory, is primarily concerned with how individuals' personal identities are highly influenced by the way that society or authorities tend to categorize them as offenders. With such categorization or labeling, an offender becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, from this perspective, and results in individuals confirming their status as criminals or delinquents by increasing the frequency or
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4. According to the findings of the study, to what extent do the two theories (Sutherland’s and Hirschi’s) appear to have importance in explaining why high school students carry firearms to school? What does the author propose as policy implications? Do you agree with these recommendations? Explain your reasoning.

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seriousness of their illegal activity. Furthermore, this perspective assumes that there is a tendency to put negative labels on lower-class individuals or minorities who offend significantly more often than on middle- or upper-class White people.

This perspective assumes that people who are labeled offenders have virtually no choice but to conform to the role that they have been "assigned" by society. Thus, social reaction theory claims that recidivism can be reduced by limiting stigmatization by authorities (e.g., law enforcement) and society. This is referred to as the hands-off policy, and it became very popular in the 1960s and early 1970s. Policies that became popular during this period were diversion, decriminalization, and deinstitutionalization (known as Dj3). (See Section XII for a discussion of these policies.) All of these attempts to get nonviolent or first-time offenders out of the formal justice system as soon as possible to avoid stigmatizing or labeling them as offenders. Today, these very policies have led critics to dismiss labeling theory by claiming that it promotes lenient and ineffective sentencing.

Labeling theory was based on seminal work by George Mead and Charles Cooley, which emphasized the importance of the extreme ways that individuals react to and are influenced by the social reaction to their role and behavior. George Herbert Mead, who was a member of the Chicago School (see Section V), said that a person's sense of self is constantly constructed and reconstructed through the various social interactions a person has on a daily basis. Every person is constantly aware of how she or he is judged by others through social interactions.

Readers can probably relate to this in the sense that they have experienced how differently they are treated in stores or restaurants if they are dressed nicely as opposed to being less well dressed; as you have observed, there is a significant difference in the way one is treated. Also, when growing up, you probably heard your parents or guardians warn that you should not hang out with Johnny or Sally because they were "bad" kids. Or perhaps you were a Johnny or Sally at some point. Either way, you can see how certain individuals can be labeled by authorities or society and then ostracized by mainstream groups. This can lead to isolation and typically results in a person having only other "bad" kids or adults to hang out with. This results in a type of feedback system, in which the person begins associating with others who will only increase their propensity for illegal activity. Many strain theorists claim that certain demographic factors, such as social class or the neighborhood where a certain offense took place, may make it more likely that the offender will be caught and labeled by authorities. This claim is quite likely to be true, especially given recent policing strategies that target areas or neighborhoods that have high rates of crime. This is the side of social reaction and labeling theory that deals with the disproportionate rate at which members of the lower class and minorities are labeled as offenders.

Some of the earliest labeling theorists laid the groundwork for this perspective long before it became popular in the 1960s. For example, in the 1930s, Frank Taxas said the dramatization of evil that occurred when youth were arrested and charged with their first offense. Later, other theorists such as Edwin Lemert contributed a highly important causal sequence to how labeling affects criminality among those who are labeled. Lemert said that individuals, typically youths, commit primary deviance, which is not serious (i.e., it is nonviolent) and not frequent, but they happen to be caught by police and are subsequently labeled. The stigma of the label makes them think of themselves as offenders and forces them to associate only with other offenders. This results in what Lemert referred to as secondary deviance, in which offending is more serious (often violent) and far more frequent. Thus, the causal model that Lemert describes is illustrated as

According to Lemert's model, if the label or stigma is not placed on a young or first-time offender, then the more serious and more frequent offending of secondary deviance will not take place. Therefore, Lemert's model is highly consistent with the labeling approach's hands-off policies, such as diversion, decriminalization, and deinstitutionalization. If you ignore such behavior, Lemert reasons, it will tend to go away. However, since the mid-1970s, the tough approach has become highly dominant, so such policies are not emphasized by society or policy makers today.

Research on labeling theory suffered a significant blow in the 1970s and 1980s when empirical findings consistently showed that formal arrests and sanctions did not tend to have results that supported traditional labeling theory. In fact, most people who are arrested once are never arrested again, which tends to support deterrence theory and does not support labeling theory. In addition, some experts have concluded that "the preponderance of research finds no or very weak evidence of [formal] labeling effects. . . . The soundest conclusion is that official sanctions by themselves have neither strong deterrent nor a substantial labeling effect." Furthermore, some theorists have questioned the basic assumptions of labeling theory, pointing out that the label does not cause the initial (or primary) offending and that labeling theorists largely ignore the issue of what is causing individuals to engage in illegal activity in the first place. Also, labeling theorists do not recognize the fact that offenders who are caught tend to be the ones who are committing more crimes in those who are not caught; in fact, there tends to be a strong relationship between being caught and committing multiple offenses.

However, more contemporary research and theorizing have emphasized more informal forms of labeling, such as labeling by the community, parents, or friends. Studies have shown more support for the influence of this informal labeling on individuals' behavior. After all, it only makes sense that informal labeling by people with whom you interact on a daily basis (i.e., friends, neighbors, employers, etc.) will have more impact in terms of how you feel about yourself than labeling by police or other authorities, which tends to be temporary or situational.

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Marxist Theories of Crime

Based on the writings of Karl Marx, Marxist theories of crime focus on the fact that people from the lower classes (i.e., the poor) are arrested and charged with crimes at a disproportionate rate. Like conflict criminology, Marxist theories emphasize the effects of a capitalist society on how justice is administered, describing how society is divided by money and power. Marx said the law is the tool by which the bourgeoisie (the ruling class in a country without a ruling aristocracy, e.g., industrialists and financiers in Western industrialized countries) controls the lower classes (the proletariat and the lowest group, the lumpenproletariat) and keeps them in a disadvantaged position. In other words, the law is used as a mechanism by which the middle or upper class maintains its dominance over the lower classes. More specifically, Marx claimed that law is used as a tool to protect the economic interests and holdings of the bourgeoisie, as well as to prevent the lower classes from gaining access to financial resources. Thus, Marxist theories propose that economic power can be translated into legal or political power and substantially accounts for the general disempowerment of the majority.

Willem Bonger

One early key theorist who applied Marxist theory to crime was Willem Bonger, who emphasized the relationship between economy and crime but did not believe simply being poor would cause criminal activity. Rather, he thought crime came about because capitalism caused a difference in the way individuals felt about society and their place in it. In the early 1900s, Bonger said that the contemporary economic structure, particularly capitalism, was the cause of crime in the sense that it promoted a system based on selfishness and greed. Such selfishness manifests itself in competition among individuals, which is obvious in interactions and dealings carried out for the purpose of obtaining goods and resources. This competition and selfishness lead to isolation, individualism, and egoistic tendencies, which promote a strong focus on self-interests at the expense of communitarianism and societal well-being. Bonger believed that this strong focus on the individual leads to criminal behavior. He also stressed the association between social conditions (largely the result of economic systems) and criminal offending; because of cultural differences, crime can be a normal, adaptive response to social and economic problems, he argued. The poor often develop a strong feeling of injustice, which also contributes to their entering into illegal activity.

Richard Quinney

Although Bonger's theory did not become popular in the early 1900s when his book was originally published, his ideas received a lot of attention when a neo-Marxist period began in the early 1970s. This renewed interest in Marxist theory was coupled with harsh criticisms leveled at the existing theoretical frameworks, which is why these Neo-Marxist theories are often referred to as critical theories. This time, Marxist theories of crime became quite popular, largely because the social climate desired such perspectives. Whereas notable European theorists in the vein include Ian Taylor, Paul Walton, and Jock Young, one of the key figures in this neo-Marxist perspective in the United States was Richard Quinney.  

Evidence regarding Marxist Theories of Crime

Many critics noted that these seminal Marxist theories of crime were too simplistic, as well as somewhat naive in the sense that they seemed to claim that the capitalist economic system was the only reason for crime and that socialism or communism was the only sure way to reduce crime in the United States. New, even most Marxist theorists reject this proposition. Thus, more modern frameworks have been presented that place more emphasis on factors that stem from capitalism. For example, Covalin and Paulson presented a theoretical model that claims that delinquency and crime are the result of problematic parenting, which results from the degrading and manipulative treatment that parents of lower-class children get in the workplace. However, the empirical tests of this more modern Marxist theory have demonstrated rather weak effects regarding the importance of capitalism on parenting practices resulting from employment positions or social class. Thus, there does not seem to be much empirical support for Marxist or neo-Marxist theories of crime, which is perhaps why this theoretical framework is not one of the primary models currently accepted by most criminologists.  

Conflict Theories of Crime

Conflict theories of crime assume that all societies are in a process of constant change and that this dynamic process inevitably creates conflicts among various groups. Much of the conflict is due to the competition to have each group's interests promoted, protected, and often put into law. If all groups were equally powerful and had the same amount of resources, such battles would involve mutual negotiation and compromise; however, groups tend to differ significantly in the amount of power or resources that they have. Thus, laws can be created and enforced such that powerful groups can exert dominance over the weaker groups. So, like Marxist theories, law is seen as a tool by which some groups gain and maintain dominance over less powerful groups. Furthermore, this state of inequality and resulting oppression creates a sense of injustice and unfairness among members of the less powerful groups, and such feelings are a primary cause of crime.  

There are several types of conflict theories, and fittingly for this framework (as well as inherently supportive of the model), theorists of varying types often give scathing reviews of the other types of conflict theory: Marxist...
theories are one example. Critics have noted that many communist countries (e.g., Cuba, Russia) have high rates of crime, whereas some countries that have capitalist economic structures have very low crime rates, such as Sweden.

Another type of conflict theory is referred to as pluralistic; it argues that, instead of one or a few groups holding power over all the other groups, a multitude of groups must compete on a relatively fair playing field. However, this type of conflict is not one of the more popular versions among critical theorists because it is often seen as rather naive and idealistic. Some of the key theorists in the pluralistic (conflict) perspective are Thorsten Sellin, George Vold, and Austin Turk.

**Thorsten Sellin**

Thorsten Sellin applied Marxist and conflict perspectives, as well as numerous other types of models, to studying the state of cultural diversity in industrial societies. Sellin claimed that separate cultures will diverge from a unitary, mainstream set of norms and values held by the dominant group in society. Thus, these minority groups that break off from the mainstream will establish their own norms. Furthermore, when laws are enacted, they will reflect only the values and interests of the dominant group, which causes what Sellin referred to as a border culture conflict. This conflict of values, which manifests itself when different cultures interact, can cause a backlash by the weaker groups, which tend to react defiantly or defensively. According to Sellin, the more unequal the balance of power, the worse the conflict tends to be.

**George Vold**

Another key conflict theorist was George Vold, who presented his model in his widely used textbook, *Theoretical Criminology*. Vold claimed that people are naturally social and inevitably form groups out of shared needs, values, and interests. Because various groups compete with each other for power and to promote their values and interests, each group competes for control of political processes, including the power to create and enforce laws that can suppress the other groups. Some critics have argued that Vold put too much emphasis on the battle for creation of laws as opposed to the power to enforce laws.

**Austin Turk**

Like the other conflict theorists, Austin Turk assumed that the competition for power among various groups in society is the primary cause of crime. Turk emphasized the idea that a certain level of conflict among groups can be very beneficial because it reminds citizens to consider whether the status quo or conventional standards can be improved. This type of idea is very similar to Durkheim’s proposition that a certain level of crime is healthy for society because it defines moral boundaries and sometimes leads to progress (see Section VI). Another aspect of Turk’s theorizing, which separates him from other conflict theorists, is that he saw conflict among the various components of the criminal justice system. For example, the police are at odds with the courts and district attorney’s office. Such tension or conflict among formal agencies that should be on the same side of the playing field leads to even more frustration and inefficiency when it comes to fighting crime and ensuring that justice is served.

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28Akers and Sellin, *Criminological Theories*.
29Quinney, *Critique of Legal Order*.
31Ibid.
33Akers and Sellers, *Criminological Theories*.
35Evidence regarding Conflict Theories of Crime

Empirical tests of conflict theories are rare, likely because of the nature of the framework, which lends itself to a global view of societal structure and a perhaps infinite number of interest groups who are constantly in play for power.

However, one notable study found evidence of a relationship between U.S. states that had large numbers of interest groups and violent crime but not property crime. The authors concluded that these findings demonstrated the need for more discussion about how competitiveness in the United States affects criminal behavior, but other studies have examined the influence of political interest groups on criminal behavior. It is rather difficult to test conflict theory in other ways. Perhaps conflict theory researchers should build an agenda of more rigorous ways to test the propositions of their theoretical perspective; as it stands, it remains quite vague. The few studies there are do not seem rigorous enough to persuade other criminologists or readers toward accepting the validity of this model.

Despite the lack of empirical research supporting the conflict (and Marxist or critical) theories of crime, there is little doubt that such perspectives have contributed much to the theorizing and empirical studies of criminologists regarding this framework. In fact, the American Society of Criminology (ASC)—which is probably the largest and best-known professional society in the discipline—has a special division made up of experts devoted to this area of study. Thus, it is likely that theorizing and empirical research will be greatly enhanced in the near future. Furthermore, it is clear that criminologists have acknowledged the need to explore the various issues presented by the conflict and Marxist perspectives in research in criminal justice and offending.

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36See discussion by Akers and Sellers, *Criminological Theories*, 210–12.
38Wilks and Walsh, "Criminologist’s Opinions."
41Tibbetts and Herr, "Gender Differences."
Another important issue in feminist research on crime is that women today have more freedom and rights than those in past generations. Seminal theories of female crime in the 1970s predicted that this would result in higher offending rates for women. However, this has not been seen in serious violent crimes. Rather, increases have been observed in property and public order crimes, typically committed by girls or women who have not benefited from such freedoms and rights—for example, those who do not have much education or lack strong employment records.

Also, there are numerous forms of feminism and, thus, many types of feminist theories of crime, as pointed out by Daly and Chesney-Lind. One of the earliest was liberal feminism, which assumed that differences between males and females in offending were due to the lack of opportunities for females in education and employment and that, as more females were given such opportunities, they would come to resemble males in terms of offending.

Another major feminist perspective of crime is critical feminism or radical feminism, which emphasizes the idea that many societies (such as the United States) are based on a structure of patriarchy, in which males dominate virtually every aspect of society, including politics, family structure, and the economy. It is hard to control the power of such a society because the fact that more women than ever hold professional, white-collar jobs and still get paid a significant amount more than women for the same positions, on average. Furthermore, the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives—and other high political offices, such as president, vice president, cabinet posts, U.S. Supreme Court justices—are still held primarily (or exclusively) by men. So the United States, like most other countries in the world, appears to be based in patriarchy.

The extent to which this model explains female criminality, however, remains to be seen. Regarding serious crimes, it is not clear why this perspective would expect higher or lower rates of female criminal behavior. Regarding some delinquent offenses, it may partially explain the greater tendency to arrest females. For example, virtually every self-report study ever conducted shows that males run away far more than females; however, FBI data show that when female juveniles are arrested for running away far more often than males. Critical feminism may provide the best explanation for this difference. Females are more protected—that is, reported and arrested for running away because they are considered to be more like property in our patriarchal society. This is just one explanation, but it appears to be somewhat valid.

Similar to critical or radical feminism is Marxist feminism, which emphasizes men’s ownership and control of the means of economic production, thus focusing solely on the economic structure. Marxist feminists point out that men control economic success in our country, as well as in virtually every country in the world, and that this flows from capitalism. One of the primary assumptions of capitalism is survival of the fittest or the best person for the job, which would seem to favor women. Studies have found that women in the United States do far better, despite our capitalist system, than those in most other countries. Furthermore, women in countries based on Marxism have a less favorable lifestyle and are no better off economically than those in the United States. Whether or not one believes in a Marxist economic structure, it does not readily explain female criminality.

Another feminist perspective is that of socialist feminism, which moved away from focusing on economic structure (e.g., Marxism) as the primary detriment for women and instead emphasized control of reproductive systems. This model believes that women should take control of their own bodies and their reproductive functions to control their criminality. It is not entirely clear how females’ taking charge of their reproductive destinies can increase or reduce their crime rates. Although no one can deny that data show that females who reproduce frequently, especially in inner-city, poor environments, tend to offend more often than other females, it appears that other factors mediate these effects. Women who want good futures tend to take more precautions against becoming pregnant; on the other hand, the very females who most need to take precautions against getting pregnant are the least likely to do so, despite the availability of numerous forms of contraception. This is one of the many paradoxes in our field. It is unclear how much socialist feminism has contributed to an understanding of female criminality.

An additional perspective of feminist criminology is that of postmodern feminism, which holds that an understanding of women as a group, even by other women, is impossible because every person’s experience is unique. If this is true, we should give up discussing female criminal theory and theories of criminality in general—along with all studies of medicine, astronomy, psychology, and so on—because every person interprets each observation subjectively. According to postmodern feminists, there is no point in measuring anything. Thus, this model is based on anti-science and has contributed nothing to the study of female criminality.

In all these variations of feminist perspectives, little emphasis is placed on parental differences in how children are disciplined and raised. Studies have clearly shown that parents, often without realizing it, tend to globally reward young boys for completing a task (e.g., “You are such a good boy”), whereas they tend to tell a young girl that she did a good job. On the other hand, when young boys do not successfully complete a task, most parents tend to excuse the failure (e.g., “it was a hard thing to do; don’t worry”), whereas for young girls, parents will often globally evaluate them for the task (e.g., “Why couldn’t you do it?”). Although numerous psychological studies have found this tendency, it has yet to make it into the mainstream criminological theories of crime.

**Evidence regarding Feminist Theories of Crime**

As discussed above, there is no doubt that female offenders were highly neglected by traditional models of criminological theory, and given that they make up at least 50% of the population of the world, it is important that they be covered in modern and expanding theories. Furthermore, we also discussed the fact that we knew why females everywhere commit far less violence than men, it would likely go a long way toward devising policies to reduce the extremely higher rates of violence among males. However, in other ways, the feminist theories of crime have not been supported.

For instance, as noted above, the seminal feminist crime theories specifically proposed that, as women became liberated, their rates of crime would become consistent with the rates of male offending. Not only did this fail to occur, but the evidence actually supports the opposite trend; specifically, the females who were given the most opportunities (e.g., education, employment, status) were the least likely to offend, whereas the women who were not liberated or given such opportunities were the most likely to engage in criminal behavior.

On the other hand, one major strength of feminist theories of crime is that they have led to a number of studies showing that the factors causing crime in males are different than those for females. For example, females appear to be far more influenced by internal, emotional factors; they are more inhibited by moral emotions, such as shame, guilt, and embarrassment. Ultimately, there is no doubt that feminist theories of crime have contributed much to the discourse and empirical research regarding why females (as well as males) commit crime. In fact, some highly

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32See, for example, Zinsser and Hare, "Gender Differences."
Policy Implications

A variety of policy implications have come from the theoretical perspectives reviewed in this section. Regarding social reaction and labeling theory, several policies have evolved, known as the Dr. diversion, decriminalization, and deinstitutionalization. Diversion, which is now commonly used, involves trying to get cases out of the formal justice system as soon as possible. Courts try to get many juvenile cases and, in recent times, drug possession cases diverted to a less formal, more administrative process (e.g., drug courts, youth accountability boards or teams). Such diversion programs appear to have saved many billions of dollars, since the offenders would otherwise have been incarcerated, while providing a way for first-time or relatively nonserious offenders not to experience the stigmatizing effects of being incarcerated. Although empirical evaluations of such diversion programs are mixed and suffer from methodological problems (i.e., the individuals who volunteer or qualify for such programs are likely the better cases among the sample population), some studies have shown their potential promise.46

There have also been numerous examples of decriminalization, which refers to reducing the criminality of certain illegal activities. A good example is the legal approach to marijuana possession in California. Unlike other jurisdictions, California does not incarcerate individuals for possessing less than an ounce of marijuana; rather, they are punished from law enforcement, which makes an act completely legal and not subject to legal sanction. The purpose of decriminalization is to de-emphasize less dangerous crimes and decrease the resources devoted to offenders who pose less danger to society. In terms of social reaction and labeling theory, decriminalization also reduces the stigmatization of individuals who are relatively minor offenders but would likely become more serious offenders if they were incarcerated with more chronic offenders.

Another policy implication of this section is deinstitutionalization. In the early 1970s, federal laws were passed that ordered all youth status offenders to be removed from incarceration facilities. This has not been accomplished; some are still being placed in such facilities. However, the number and rate of status offenders being placed in incarceration facilities has declined, avoiding any further stigmatization and integration into further criminality. Overall, this deinstitutionalization has kept relatively minor, often first-time offenders from experiencing the ordeals of incarceration.

Additional policy implications that can be inferred from this section involve providing more economic and employment opportunities to those who do not typically have access to such options. From a historical perspective, such as the New Deal, which was meant to deal with the effects of the Great Depression of the 1930s, providing more employment opportunities can greatly enhance the well-being of the population, and in that period, there was a very significant decrease in crime and homicide rates (see Section I). Today, perhaps nothing could be more important in our nation than creating jobs; the ability to do this will largely determine future crime rates.

Finally, there are numerous policy implications regarding feminist theory and feminist perspectives of crime. It is of primary importance to include such perspectives in future research and theoretical developments. Further, it is important to realize that females offend far less than males; if criminologists could figure out why, this resources given to disenfranchised groups (e.g., youth, minorities, women), the lower the likelihood that they will offend, and the better we will understand the reasons why they offend.

6. What are the key assumptions and features of the various feminist perspectives?
7. Which type of feminist theory do you believe is the most helpful for explaining crime?

WEB RESOURCES

Conflict Theories
http://www.criminology.fsu.edu/crimtheory/conflict.htm

Feminist Theories of Crime
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vd2zD8kpYek

Labeling Theory
http://www.criminology.fsu.edu/crimtheory/week_10.htm

Marxist Theory
www.sociology.org.uk/pd.csv

Reading 23: Informal Reactions and Delinquency

In this selection, Lening Zhang provides a brief review of the history of labeling theory, discussing its prominence in the 1960s and the declaration in 1985 that labeling theory was "dead," largely because the tests of the theory up to that time had been based solely on formal labeling, such as that given by law enforcement, courts, or corrections, which showed little or no effect for the labeling perspective. Then Zhang reviews the various studies and perspectives that revitalized labeling theory in the 1990s, largely by introducing the informal labeling process by significant others (peers, parents, employers, etc.), in other words, the labeling that takes place during interactions with people or agencies who are not part of the formal justice system (i.e., police, courts, and corrections).

Zhang then presents a test of this informal labeling process. Specifically, Zhang uses a national sample of youths, called the National Youth Survey (NYS), to test his predictions that delinquency produces informal labelings that such informal labeling by parents produces social isolation; and that this social isolation increases the likelihood of recidivism or subsequent delinquency.

While reading this selection, readers are encouraged to think about when they were a teenager and their parents may have told them to stay away or not hang out with certain youths in their neighborhood or school. Readers are also encouraged to consider what types of effects this had on such people, who were likely socially isolated and in many cases had only other "bad" kids to hang out with, which likely increased their delinquent activity. Perhaps you have siblings or cousins who experienced such informal labeling, or maybe you actually experienced this type of labeling personally.

Informal Reactions and Delinquency

Lening Zhang

In formulating a symbolic interaction theory of delinquency, Matsueda (1992) recently developed a model of reflected appraisals and behavior based on Felson's (1980, 1989) and Kim's (1983) work. A reflected appraisal is how one perceives the way others see one. Matsueda's model predicts that actual delinquent acts affect both actual and reflected appraisals by significant others. In turn, both actual and reflected appraisals influence subsequent delinquent behavior. Also, actual appraisals by significant others have an effect on reflected appraisals of others, and prior delinquent behavior directly affects subsequent delinquency. Drawing on labeling theory, Matsueda also argued that these predictions derived from the model implied the role of informal labeling in accounting for subsequent delinquency. Youths who have engaged in delinquent behavior should be more likely to be labeled delinquent by significant others. Significant others' labeling increases the probability of further delinquency. Although his study shed light on the relationship between informal labeling processes and subsequent life and behavioral adjustments, Matsueda did not fully address the issue because the focus of his study was not on this issue. Using Matsueda's basic framework, the present research specified a comprehensive theoretical model of the informal labeling