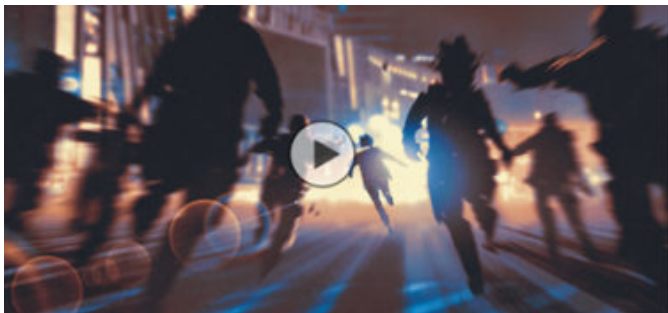


Understanding Criminal Behavior To Stay Safe

If you train to survive confrontations and hostile environments, you should learn that the key principle of fighting effectively is understanding your opponent. In every self-defense or gun-training class I've attended the opinions varied widely when it came to tackling violent crime and criminals.

This mindset is quite common even among the general public since some view violent criminals as victims of an unjust economic system or as individuals struggling with mental illness, while others see them as calculating, rational actors making deliberate choices.

My intention is to provide a quick personal opinion of who criminals are, how they think, how they select their victims, and how to keep yourself safe from them.



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I also have to mention that generalizations always have exceptions and the insights shared here are based on the context of the society we live in which has a relatively stable legal system and where scarcity is not a major issue. As circumstances shift around the world, the advice here may not always apply as directly.

What motivates criminals?

This is the first question we need to ask ourselves. What drives someone to commit a violent crime?

I've talked with a close friend of mine, Robert, who worked in law enforcement for 25 years and he explained that there are two main motivations for violent crimes and a third one that blends the motivations from the first two categories.

Goal-oriented

In these crimes, the criminal's goal is practical and rational. They employ force or the threat of force to take something of value, that they don't necessarily need. In the absence of money, the goal is to obtain valuables that can be then sold or traded for something they truly want, whether that's drugs, groceries, or other goods.

While many do not agree with the methods employed, the desired outcome is something that most people can relate to – the perpetrators secure what they need. Just like you have to go to work to get what you need. A criminal's job is crime and that's why many in law enforcement agree that such a behavior is hard to be corrected.

Emotion-driven

On the other hand, these crimes are driven by emotion, with the crime itself serving as the message. Robert and many of his former colleagues agree that these crimes are scarier because the violence doesn't seem rational and it's often excessive.

In fact, the average person struggles to understand the criminal's motivation or the purpose behind the brutality involved in such crimes. Emotion-driven crimes tend to be more horrific, one example that most readers would understand would

be a terrorist bombing or a mass shooting.

For us, it seems like excessive violence that we cannot comprehend regardless of the explanations being provided, but for the criminals, their actions are often an essential part of their message, reinforcing the point they're trying to make. For example, cartel executions are known for their brutality and they always send the intended message, which is, that you do not mess with the cartel.

Also, emotion-driven crimes are almost never about financial gain. For example, even in cases of street robberies, which police officers agree aren't a great way to make a living since nowadays, most people don't carry much cash, and selling stolen goods doesn't usually bring in much money, there's also an emotional motive behind those acts.

Criminals often seek the thrill of power and they get a rush from seeing people cower and submit to their will. While they'll happily take your wallet or phone, they also get a sick pleasure from asserting dominance.

Mixed motives

The third category, which blends both motivations is somehow a more complex one. Here, the criminal starts with a rational goal, which is usually the intent to obtain financial benefits, but something happens during the crime that triggers an emotional response (the criminal is emotionally provoked).

The victim might resist or say something to enrage the attacker, which turns the situation from a "business transaction" into a personal confrontation. This is how acts of theft become acts of vengeance or dominance where the victim gets hurt or worse.

This is also why law enforcement experts suggest initial compliance is often the best response to avoid violent situations. If you give the criminal what they want—your

valuables and your submissive demeanor, you will go through the experience physically unharmed.

However, if resistance or defiance occurs in such a situation, the entire ordeal can quickly escalate to violence, as the criminal takes your actions personally. It's critical to wait until you're sure of success or have nothing to lose before attempting to take control of the situation.

There are no two criminals alike

To understand criminal behavior, we can explore both motivations and the types of individuals driven by them. While classifying criminals is debated, it helps to view them as influenced by two main factors: culture and brain structure. Criminals typically fall into three categories:

Antisocial: Shaped almost entirely by their environment, these individuals often grow up in violent cultures where deceit and force are normalized for survival. Their behavior reflects adaptation to their world, not necessarily abnormal brain structure.

Sociopathic: A mix of cultural influence and brain wiring. Sociopaths lack empathy but don't necessarily enjoy causing harm. They may engage in violence if it serves their goals, but their actions are practical rather than sadistic.

Psychopathic: Predominantly driven by brain structure differences, psychopaths lack empathy and actively enjoy causing harm. Unlike sociopaths, their violence is often sadistic and not tied to achieving a specific goal.

It's important to note that no two criminals are exactly alike. While these categories offer a general framework, individual behaviors are shaped by unique combinations of experiences, personality traits, and circumstances. A person's background, trauma, and environment all play a role in

creating their specific path toward criminality, making each case distinct.

While culture can push even those with typical brains toward criminality, brain abnormalities increase the likelihood of antisocial behavior, especially when combined with early exposure to violence. However, not everyone with an atypical brain becomes a criminal—it often takes a triggering event to push them over the edge.

How to keep yourself safe

For a crime to occur there are three key elements needed, a criminal, a victim, and an environment that facilitates the crime. We discussed the criminal element so we now need to address the victim element, more precisely how victims are selected and the environment in which a crime occurs.

Regarding victim selection, it's important to specify that one's appearance and how one acts matters the most when being set in an environment prone to criminal activity. In most areas, criminals have plenty of potential targets, so understanding what makes someone more likely to be chosen is crucial.

First of all, criminals evaluate physical fitness to gauge how well a person can resist or escape. In fact, opportunistic criminals almost always go for the easiest target since it makes their life easier. When given the choice, a predator will always choose the weakest prey.

We unconsciously broadcast signals about our vulnerability. For instance, clothing that limits mobility, like skirts or high heels, can increase the likelihood of being targeted. Similarly, appearing distracted (like everyone using their phone in public) not only draws attention to an expensive item but also signals inattention, making you seem like easier prey.

Second, criminals also prefer victims who won't notice or identify them. Simply being alert and aware of your surroundings sends a subtle message that you're not an easy target. Additionally, flaunting wealth, like wearing flashy jewelry or carrying expensive accessories, can make you a high-value target in unfamiliar or risky areas. In situations where safety is a concern, blending in is often the smarter choice.

Also, being intoxicated not only affects your judgment but also draws unwanted attention to yourself. The impaired judgment makes you an easier target so lay off the booze and mind-altering substances when you are in an unfamiliar environment.

Regarding the environment selection for the crime to be committed, criminals will always pick an environment that facilitates their actions. Certain locations make criminal assaults easier, and one example would be poorly lit areas. For example, taking a shortcut through a poorly illuminated alley at 2 a.m. is never ideal, since you never know who might be lurking around the corner. Better yet, plan ahead and call a taxi to avoid going on foot.

While you can't control unfamiliar environments, you can certainly control the environments you frequent on a daily basis, like your home or property. Simple measures like installing good lighting and affordable security cameras can significantly reduce its appeal to criminals.

Concluding

The keynotes to take away are that understanding criminal behavior and the factors that contribute to victimization is key to staying safe. Criminals are shaped by a mix of cultural influences and brain wiring, with their motivations ranging from goal-oriented to emotionally driven, and sometimes a mix of both.



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While categorizing them into antisocial, sociopathic, and psychopathic groups helps explain their behavior, it is also important to understand that no two criminals are alike—each is shaped by a unique blend of experiences and circumstances.

Being mindful of your surroundings, how you present yourself, and the places you frequent is usually all it takes to avoid becoming a victim. Criminals quickly assess targets based on physical vulnerability, awareness, and perceived value.

Ultimately, the best defense is a mix of awareness, preparation, and a proactive approach to minimizing risk. If you acknowledge what motivates a criminal to attack you and why you could be selected in the first place, you can make informed choices to protect yourself and your loved ones.