

A. The Genetic Factor

"At best, the complex actions and reactions known as human behaviour can be seen as an unholy mixture: bits and pieces of experience, a few inborn inclinations, and a whole pot of circumstance, all thrown together into a simmering behavioral stew. Sorting out the genetic meat from the environmental potatoes — without discarding the rich human gravy — seems an impossible task."²

6. What role does genetic inheritance play as a cause of criminal behaviour? Are there "born criminals"? These questions which have puzzled generations of scholars cannot be ignored in a study such as ours. Early theorists who attempted to link criminality with inherited genes identified by certain physical characteristics have been discredited. However, there is evidence that genetic factors do have some impact on criminal behaviour. The genetic constitution plays a role, if indirectly, in anti-social development.³ Research has shown that having a criminal father significantly increases the chances of becoming criminal.⁴ In addition, it has been found that this likelihood is increased by the fact of parental criminality regardless of social status.⁵ Genetic influences are considered to be of minor importance in relation to most juvenile delinquency, but "are much more influential in the case of severe and persistent criminality in adults, especially when this is associated with abnormalities in personality."⁶ There is nothing absolute about this relationship. Environmental factors are very important. But the role of the genetic endowment must be recognized in the development of personality insofar as it, along with any deviations of brain structure, sets the limits within which environment and experience can affect behaviour.⁷

7. The extent to which individuals are likely to be damaged by stressful experiences is determined in part by genetic factors which influence how they adapt and respond to their environment.⁸ Such environmental stresses "appear to be most damaging to children who are genetically vulnerable. This would indicate that the presence of a hereditary predisposition would make it important to do everything possible to improve environment and to limit sources of possible damaging stress."⁹ Specific research on the children of psychotic parents has shown that although "there is a genetic involvement that causes a varied range of psychopathology in the children", a hostile environment contributes to the breakdown of these genetically susceptible people.¹⁰

8. In searching for a possible genetic link relating to criminal behaviour, other interconnecting factors have come to light. For example, there seems to be a genetic factor involved in alcoholism.¹¹ There may also be "a genetic link between alcoholic parents and delinquent children. For instance, the genes that put one at risk for certain types of alcoholism may express themselves in childhood by promoting lack of