

St. Augustine High School

Academy of Law and Homeland Security



Chapter Two

Causes of Crime

I. The Role of Theory

2-4

Learning Objective 1: Discuss the difference between a hypothesis and a theory in the context of criminology.

- A. Correlation and cause
- B. Criminological theories
 - 1. The scientific method
 - i. Theory is an explanation of a happening or circumstance that is based on observation, experimentation, and reasoning.
 - ii. Hypothesis is a proposition that can be tested by researchers or observers to determine if it is valid.
 - 2. Theory in action

II. The Brain and the Body

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Learning Objective 2: Contrast positivism with classical criminology

Learning Objective 3: Explain how brain-scanning technology is able to help scientists determine if an individual is at risk for criminal offending

- A. Crime and free will: choice theories of crime
 - 1. Theories of classical criminology
 - i. An emphasis is placed on free will
 - a. Crime is a response to rational decision making
 - b. Weigh benefits of the crime versus the costs of the punishments
 - ii. Cesare Beccaria (1738-1794)
 - a. *Essays on Crime and Punishments*
 - b. Decision to commit crime is rational choice
 - c. Fear of punishment can have a deterrent effect
 - d. Punishments should be swift and certain to control crime
 - 2. Positivism and modern rational theory
 - i. Positivist criminologists superseded classical school by the end of the 1800s
 - a. Believed criminal behavior was biological, psychological, and social forces
 - b. It is beyond the control of the individual
 - ii. Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909)
 - a. Known as the Father of Criminology
 - b. Criminals could be identified by certain physical characteristics
 - c. Crime could be genetically passed down from generation
 - d. Criminality predetermined at birth
 - iii. Positivists lost credibility by the 1970s
 - iv. Rational choice theory was developed as an updated version of classical criminology

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- a. If the benefits are greater than the potential costs, the person is more likely to commit crime
- 3. “Thrill” offenders
- 4. Choice theory and public policy
- B. “Born criminal”: biological and psychological theories of crime
 - 1. Genetics and crime
 - i. Criminologists who study biological theories focus on the effect genes have on human behavior
 - ii. Every person’s genetic makeup is determined by genes inherited from his or her parents
 - iii. Genetics is a branch of biology that deals with traits that are passed from one generation to another
 - 2. Twin studies and adoption studies
 - i. The nature verse nurture debate
 - b. Is it biological or environment?
 - c. Twin studies are difficult to complete so studies comparing criminality of adopted kids with biological parents’ criminal behavior have shown a correlation
 - 3. The “crime gene”
 - i. The warrior gene debate
 - ii. Studies have shown this genetic mutation only leads to increased risk of violence if person was abused as a child
 - 4. Hormones and aggression
 - i. Elevated levels of testosterone in males has been linked to criminal activity
 - ii. Inmates studies have produced results depicting higher levels of testosterone
 - iii. Postpartum psychosis is relatively new hormonal study for the cause of violence in women
 - 5. The brain and crime
 - i. The study of how genetics and brain activity influence criminal behavior is called neurocriminology
 - ii. Neurociminology is based on the theory that criminal behavior is often the result of a combination of biological and environmental risk factors
 - iii. While persons suffering from schizophrenia are at an unusually high risk for committing suicide or harming others, the vast majority of people suffering from that mental illness will never become criminal offenders
 - 6. Psychology and crime: Freud’s psychoanalytic theory
 - i. Believed that on the unconscious level all humans have criminal tendencies
 - ii. Id, ego, and superego
 - 7. Social psychological and “evil” behavior
 - i. Focuses on human behavior in the context of how humans relate to and influence one another
 - ii. Generally, we act in the same manner as those we like or admire because we want them to like or admire use

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- iii. The Zimbardo Experiment
- C. Trait theory and public policy

III. Bad Neighborhoods and Other Economic Disadvantages

Learning Objective 4: List and describe the three theories of social structure that help explain crime

Learning Objective 5: Describe the social conflict theory known as the social reality of crime.

- A. Sociological theories of crime
 - 1. The Chicago School
 - i. Scholars who focused on sociology in the study of criminal behavior
 - ii. Ernest Burgess (1886-1966) & Robert Park (1864-1944)
 - a. Neighborhood conditions of wealth or poverty had greater determinant effect on criminal behavior than ethnicity, race, or religion
 - b. Human are social creatures whose behavior reflects their environment
 - 2. Social disorganization theory
 - i. Neighborhoods with high concentrations of liquor stores and payday lenders tend to have abnormally high levels of crime
 - a. The neighborhoods don't cause crime but reflect other problems within them that have a more direct relationship with crime
 - b. Crime is largely a product of unfavorable conditions in certain communities
 - c. Developed by Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay
 - ii. Disorganized zones
 - a. Certain zones exhibit high rates of crime
 - b. The disorganization reflects a breakdown in traditional sources of social control like family, schools, and businesses
 - 3. The value of role models
 - i. The street versus decent approach
 - a. Residents break themselves into one of the two categories
 - b. Street – lack of consideration for others and poorly discipline their children
 - c. Decent – are community minded, instill values, and have hope for a better future
 - d. When traditional values of a “decent” family are missing, they are replaced with “street” values, which escalates youth violence
- B. Strain theory
 - 1. Strain theories contend that those who are disadvantaged because of poverty or other factors are more likely to commit crimes because other avenues of “success” have been closed off
 - i. Strain theory has its roots in the concept of anomie
 - a. Social change throws behavioral norms into flux
 - b. Has roots in work of Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)
 - ii. General strain theory examines the factors that combine with strain to result in offending

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- a. Robert Agnew
 - b. Very few “strained” individuals turn to crime
- C. Cultural deviance theory
 - 1. Asserts that people adapt to the subculture to which they belong
- D. Social structure theory and public policy
- E. Social conflict theories
 - 1. Marxism versus capitalism
 - i. Karl Marx (1818-1883)
 - a. Believed that capitalist economic systems necessarily produce income inequality and lead to exploitation
 - b. Capitalism is seen as leading to high levels of violence and crime
 - ii. Social reality of crime
 - a. Quinney’s social reality of crime suggests that criminal law is a set of “rules” through which those who hold power can control and subdue those who do not.
 - b. Sees violations of the law not as criminal acts but as political ones
- F. Patterns of social justice
 - 1. About two-thirds of approximately 42,000 Americans arrested for prostitution each year are women.
 - 2. One in every 10 black men in their thirties is in prison or jail and are incarcerated more than six times the rate of white males.
- G. Issues of race and ethnicity
 - 1. Racial threat theory - based on the hypothesis that, as the size of a minority group increases in population and expands geographically, members of the majority group use the criminal justice system to oppress those minority groups.
- H. Social conflict theory and public policy

IV. Life Lessons and Criminal Behavior

Lesson Objective 6: List and briefly explain the three branches of social process theory

Lesson Objective 7: Describe the importance of early childhood behavior for those who subscribe to self-control theory

- A. Family, friends, and the media: social processes of crime
 - 1. Function on the basis that potential for criminal behavior exists in everyone and will be realized depending on the individual’s interaction with various institutions and processes of society
- B. Learning theory
 - 1. Popularized by Edwin Sutherland and his theory of differential association
 - 2. Sees crime as learned behavior, where the “teacher” is usually a family member or a friend who exposes the “student” to criminal behavior
 - 3. Expanded to include growing influence of media, such as violent television programs
- C. Control theory
 - 1. Travis Hirschi’s control theory suggests that social bonds promote conformity to social norms

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2. All people have the potential to commit crimes, most are dissuaded because they care about the opinions of family and peers

D. Labeling theory

1. Contends that if someone is labeled “delinquent” or “criminal” by authority figures, there is a better chance that person will consider himself or herself as such and continue the criminal behavior
2. Society creates crime and criminals by labeling certain behaviors

E. Social process theory and public policy

1. Divert youth from formal juvenile justice process to prevent them from being labeled as “delinquent”
2. Schools implement programs to steer children away from crime by encouraging them to “just say no” to drugs and stay in school

F. Looking back to childhood: life course theories of crime

1. Believe that lying, stealing, bullying, and other conduct problems that occur in childhood are the strongest predictors of future criminal behavior

G. Self-control theory

1. Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi
 - i. Publication *A General Theory of Crime*
 - ii. Believe that criminal behavior is linked to “low self-control,” a personality trait that is formed before a child reaches the age of 10 and can usually be attributed to poor parenting
 - iii. Someone with low self-control is generally impulsive, thrill seeking, and likely to problem solve with violence rather than intellect
 - iv. Both theorists subscribe to the continuity theory of crime, which essentially asserts that once negative behavior patterns have been established, they cannot be changed

H. The possibility of change

1. Can be separated into two groups
 - i. Life-course-persistent offenders
 - a. Biting at five, skipping school at ten, steal cars at sixteen, violent crimes at twenty, fraud and child abuse at thirty
 - ii. Adolescent-limited offenders
 - a. Life of crime is limited to teenage years
 - iii. Turning points
 - a. Can veer off the road from a life of crime
- ### I. Life course theories and public policy

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V. The Link Between Drugs and Crime

Lesson Objective 8: Contrast the medical model of addiction with the criminal model of addiction

- ### A. The criminology of drug use – theories of drug use

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1. Social disorganization theory suggests that rapid social change can cause people to become marginalized and cause them to turn to drugs
 2. Control theory suggests that drug use is the result of a lack of social control
 3. Howard Becker sees drug use as the result of a learning process
 - i. Learn the techniques of drug use
 - ii. Learn to perceive the pleasurable effects of drug use
 - iii. Learn to enjoy the social experience of drug use
- B. Crime and health: the landscape of drug abuse
1. Drug addiction and dependency
 - i. Drug abuse is use of drugs that results in physical or psychological harm to the abuser or third parties
 - ii. Most users of illegal substances are not abusers
- C. Addiction basics
1. Most extreme abusers are addicted to, or physically dependent on, a drug
 2. Brain's dopaminergic system is key to understanding many drugs of abuse
 - i. Dopamine
 - a. A neurotransmitter responsible for delivering pleasure signals to the brain nerve endings in response to behavior
 - b. Drug use physically changes receptors in nerve endings
 - ii. Receptors
 - a. Located in nerve endings in the brain
 - b. Become less sensitive from drug use which requires amounts of drug to create the dopamine release needed to stimulate the nerves
- D. The drug crime relationship
1. Drug-defined offenses – violation of drug laws
 2. Drug-related offenses – crimes motivated by drug abuse
 3. Drug-using lifestyle – rely on crime for means of survival
 4. About 37% of state prisoners and 33% of jail inmates were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the violent crime.
- E. Models of addiction
1. The medical model of addiction states that addicts are not criminals, but mentally and physically ill individuals
 2. Those who believe in the enslavement theory of addiction advocate treating addiction as a disease and hold that society should not punish addicts by rather attempt to rehabilitate them
 3. The criminal model of addiction states that drug abusers endanger society with their behavior and should be treated as any other offender
- F. Marijuana law trends
1. Legalization
 2. Decriminalization

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VI. Criminology from Theory to Practice

Lesson Objective 9: Explain the theory of the chronic offender and its importance for the criminal justice system

A. Criminology and the chronic offender

1. Shows that a small group of offenders (6 percent) are responsible for a disproportionate number of violent crime
2. Further research has supported this claim
3. Has allowed law enforcement agencies and district attorneys' offices to devise specific strategies to apprehend and prosecute repeat offenders

B. Criminology and the criminal justice system

1. James Q. Wilson criticized his peers for trying to understand crime rather than reduce it
 - i. Many CJ practitioners argue too much research is inaccessible
 - ii. Wilson, along with George Kelling, subsequently developed the "broken windows" theory which has proved useful and accessible for practitioners
2. Research has shown productive results and researchers have partnered with law enforcement agencies to put research into practice.

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Key Terms

- anomie (pg. 48) – A condition in which the individual feels a disconnect from society due to the breakdown or absence of social norms.
- biology (pg. 42) – The science of living organisms, including their structure, function, growth, and origin.
- causation (p. 39) – The relationship in which a change in one measurement or behavior creates a recognizable change in another measurement or behavior.
- choice theory (pg. 40) – A school of criminology based on the belief that individuals have free will to engage in any behavior, including criminal behavior.
- chronic offender (pg. 62) – A delinquent or criminal who commits multiple offenses and is considered part of a small group of wrongdoers who are responsible for a majority of the antisocial activity in any given community.
- classical criminology (pg. 40) – A school of criminology that holds that wrongdoers act as if they weigh the possible benefits of criminal or delinquent activity against the expected costs of being apprehended.
- control theory (pg. 52) – A series of theories that assume that all individuals have the potential for criminal behavior, but are restrained by the damage such actions would do to their relationships with family, friends, and members of the community.
- correlation (pg. 39) – The relationship between two measurements or behaviors that tend to move in the same direction.
- criminal model of addiction (pg. 60) – An approach to drug abuse that holds that drug offenders harm society by their actions to the same extent as other criminals and should face the same punitive actions.
- criminology (pg. 39) – The scientific study of crime and the causes of criminal behavior.

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- cultural deviance theory (pg. 49) – A branch of social structure theory based on the assumption that members of certain subcultures reject the values of the dominant culture by exhibiting deviant behavior patterns
- decriminalization (pg. 60) – The removal of criminal penalties associated with a product or act, which then becomes only subject to civil sanctions such as fines and citations.
- drug abuse (pg. 58) – The use of drugs that results in physical or psychological problems for the user, as well as disruption of personal relationships and employment.
- genetics (pg. 42) – The study of how certain traits or qualities are transmitted from parents to their offspring.
- hormone (pg. 43) – A chemical substance, produced in tissue and conveyed in the bloodstream that controls certain cellular and body functions such as growth and reproduction.
- hypothesis (pg. 39) – A possible explanation for an observed occurrence that can be tested by further investigation.
- labeling theory (pg. 54) – The hypothesis that society creates crime and criminals by labeling certain behavior and certain people as deviant.
- learning theory (pg. 52) – The hypothesis that delinquents and criminals must be taught both the practical and emotional skills necessary to participate in illegal activity.
- legalization (pg. 60) – To make a formerly illegal product or action lawful. In the context of marijuana, the process includes strict regulation, including a ban on sale to or use by minors.
- life course criminology (pg. 54) – The study of crime based on the belief that behavioral patterns developed in childhood can predict delinquent and criminal behavior later in life.
- medical model of addiction (pg. 59) – An approach to drug addiction that treats drug abuse as a mental illness and focuses on treating and rehabilitating offenders rather than punishing them.

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- positivism (pg. 41) – A school of the social sciences that sees criminal and delinquent behavior as the result of biological, psychological, and social forces.
- psychoanalytic theory (p. 45) – Sigmund Freud’s theory that attributes our thoughts and actions to unconscious motives.
- psychology (pg. 42) – The scientific study of mental processes and behaviors.
- social conflict theories (pg. 50) – A school of criminology that views criminal behavior as the result of class conflict.
- social disorganization theory (pg. 44) – The theory that deviant behavior is more likely in communities where social institutions such as the family, schools, and the criminal justice system fail to exert control over the population.
- social process theories (pg. 52) – A school of criminology that considers criminal behavior to be the predictable result of a person’s interaction with his or her environment.
- social reality of crime (pg. 50) – The theory that criminal laws are designed by those in power to help them keep power at the expense of those who do not have power.
- sociology (pg. 46) – The study of the development and functioning of groups of people who live together within a society.
- strain theory (pg. 48) – The assumption that crime is the result of frustration felt by individuals who cannot reach their financial and personal goals through legitimate means.
- subculture (pg. 49) – A group exhibiting certain values and behavior patterns that distinguish it from the dominant culture.
- testosterone (pg. 43) – The hormone primarily responsible for the production of sperm and the development of male secondary sex characteristics such as the growth of facial and pubic hair and the change of voice pitch.

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- theory (pg. 39) – An explanation of a happening or circumstance that is based on observations, experimentation, and reasoning.