Searching for Causes

• Why do people commit crime?
• Why do some commit more crime than others?
• What causes crime?
Understanding Deviance

• Deviance is a violation of social norms that define appropriate behavior under a particular set of circumstances.
  – Not all deviance is criminal
  – Criminal behavior is generally considered as deviant
Theory

• There is no single cause of crime.
• Crime is a by-product of human behavior.
• There are a variety of causal factors that can and will contribute to criminal behavior.
• To better understand human behavior in general, and crime in particular, it is necessary to posit relationships, often causal, between events and things under study.
  – This is the how and why theories are developed.
• Theories rooted in the social sciences, theories that seek to explain human behavior, consist of a series of interrelated propositions that attempt to describe, explain, predict, and ultimately control some class of events.

• Theories are strengthened by logic and tested to determine how well it describes and predicts reality.
Theory testing

• Hypothesis – an explanation that accounts for a set of facts that can be tested by further investigation.

• Research – the use of standardized, systematic procedures in the search for knowledge.
Explaining Criminal Behavior

• Eight general categories:
  – Classical
  – Biological
  – Psychobiological
  – Psychological
  – Sociological
  – Social Process
  – Conflict
  – Emergent

Table 3-1
The Classical School

• Dominated criminological thought for much of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

• Based on assumptions that
  – Crime is caused by the individual exercise of free will
  – Pain & pleasure are the two central determinants of human behavior
  – Crime erodes the bond between individuals and society.
  – Punishment is a necessary evil
  – Crime prevention is possible through swift and certain punishment.
• Cesare Beccaria – late eighteenth century theorist, considered by many to be the founder of the Classical School of criminology.
  – Called for the abolition of physical punishment and an end to the death penalty.
  – Recommended that punishment should be just sufficient to deter criminal behavior, but should never be excessive.

• Jeremy Bentham – influenced by Beccaria
  – Devised *hedonistic calculus* – punishment outweighs the benefits of committing crime.
• Neoclassical criminology – a contemporary theory that places emphasis on rationality and cognition.
  – Rational choice theory – a perspective that holds that criminality is the result of conscious thought.
    • Predicts that individuals will choose to commit crime when the benefits outweigh the punishment.
  – Routine activity theory – suggests that lifestyles contribute to the amount and type of crime found in society.
Biological theory

• Based on the belief that inherited or bodily characteristics and features contribute to criminal behavior.
  – Basic determinants of human behavior, including criminal tendencies are constitutionally or genetically based.
  – Basic determinants are passed from generation to generation
  – Some human behavior is inherited from more primitive developmental stages in the evolutionary process.
• Franz Gall—Phrenology
  – The study of the shape of the human head to determine anatomical correlates of behavior.

• Cesare Lombroso—Atavism – The *Born Criminal*
  – A condition characterized by the existence of features thought to be common in earlier stages of human development.

• Positivism – The Positivist School
  – Founded by Lombroso
  – Lombroso is considered the “father” of modern criminology.
  – Atavistic traits
    • Long arms
    • Large lips
    • Crooked noses
    • Excessive body hair
    • Prominent cheekbones
    • Abnormally large/small ears
    • High foreheads
• William Sheldon-Somatotypes
  – Constitutional theory related to body type
    • Mesomorph - muscular
    • Endomorph – soft, round
    • Ectomorph – thin, frail.
• Psychobiological theory
  – A contemporary biochemical and physiological perspective.
  – Supermale XYY
    • More common in prisons than traditional XY males.

• Biochemical factors and other imbalances.
  – Food allergies have been linked to violent and homicidal behavior.
    • Swelling in the brain and brain stem
      – Milk
      – Citrus
      – Chocolate
      – Corn
  – Male hormones
    • Testosterone – linked to aggressiveness in males

• Heredity – Wilson & Herrnstein’s *Crime and Human Nature* examined inherited traits
  – Aggressiveness
  – Somatotype
  – Low intelligence
  – Social environment
Psychological Theories

- The individual is the primary unit of analysis
- Personality is the major motivational element within individuals
- Crime results from inappropriately conditioned behavior
- Defective or abnormal behavior may result from a disease mind or inappropriate learning or conditioning
• Psychopathology – the study of mental illness
• Psychopath – a person with a personality disorder, especially one manifested in aggressively antisocial behavior.
• Psychosis – a form of mental illness in which the offender is believed to out of touch with reality.
• Schizophrenia – a mental disorder involving disjointed thinking, possibly with delusions and hallucinations.
Sociological Theory

• Largely an American contribution
• The *Chicago School* (1920s – 1930s)
  – Fundamentally assumes
    • Social groups, institutions, the arrangements of society, and social roles provide the proper focus for study.
    • Group dynamics, organization, and subgroup relationships form the casual nexus (link)
    • The structure of society and the relative degree of social organization or *disorganization* are important factors
• Social ecology – Shaw & McKay developed the *Concentric Zone Theory*
• Anomie – a socially pervasive condition of normlessness. A disjunction between approved goals and means.
• Subcultural theory – the existence of group values that support criminal and deviant behavior.
  – Subculture of violence accepts violence as an accepted method of dispute resolution.
• Differential Association – explains crime as a natural consequence of the interaction with criminal lifestyles.
Zone 1 – Factories, central business district.

Zone 2 – Oldest area of city, invaded by business as Z1 expands.

Zone 3 – Working people’s homes.

Zone 4 – Residential areas.

Zone 5 – Commuter zone, suburbs.
• Defensible Space Theory – the belief that an area’s physical features may be modified and structured to reduce crime.

• Broken Windows – a perspective that holds that the physical deterioration of an area leads to higher crime.
Restraint Theories

- Containment Theory
  - Inner and Outer
  - The aspect of social bond and personality that act to preventing individuals from committing crime and engaging in deviance.

- Social Control Theory
  - is rooted in the bond between the individual and society.
  - Emotional attachment to others
  - Commitment to appropriate lifestyle
  - Involvement in conventional values
  - Belief in correctness
• Labeling – A social process perspective that defines an individual based on behavior.

• Life Course – An approach that explains behavior based on developments and turning points in a person’s life.

• Conflict Theory – Holds that crime is a natural consequence of economic and social inequalities.

• Radical Criminology – Sees crime as engendered by the unequal distribution of wealth and power in society.
• Feminist Criminology
  – Emphasizes gender issues.
  – Looks toward causation and the role of women in crime control.