An Introduction to Criminology

Day 1: Intro and Micro-Level Theories

Poll Question: Have you heard of criminology before signing up for this course?
(Use Yes/No in the participants window)

Syllabus Highlights

- There is no required homework for this class!
  - Though the homework is usually short and can only benefit you
  - All readings will be provided or can be found with a quick Google search
- The first three classes focus on criminological theories; The last three classes focus on applications (subject to change depending on how fast/slow we go)
- Emails and questions
  - There are ~160 of you! (which is amazing)
  - I will create a weekly compilation of your questions with answers to send out to everyone
  - (refer to the syllabus if you do not wish to have your questions in the compilation)
- Slides will be sent out in Powerpoint/PDF format the next day
  - Feel free to ask questions about what you have missed
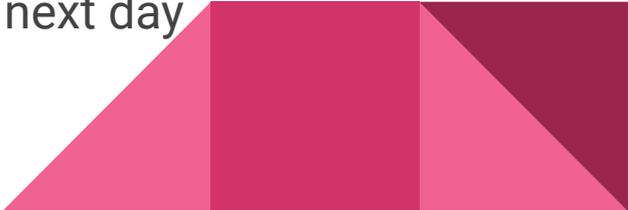
Some important notes

- As you might have guessed, criminology is all about criminal behavior, which has ties with law enforcement, the law in general, and politics…
  - In this class, we will be focusing on criminological theories and observations, but one of the goals of criminology is to figure out how to reduce crime
  - You are more than welcome to propose various solutions on how to reduce crime
- One of the skills that you may be learning in school is how to write a counterargument
  - This involves looking at both sides of an argument
  - This also involves creating claims with good evidence and analysis
  - Please be respectful when listening to views that may oppose (or even support) you own views
- Want to bring in the concepts of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
  - Playlist of Middle Ground: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SjuC0PYscU&list=PLBVNJo7nhINSjBZdNezW15PzOTCc-10m9

Question 1

Which question do criminologists try to answer?

a. How can someone be convicted of a crime?
b. What does the evidence from the crime scene tell us?
c. What is the "perfect" crime?
d. Why do people do crime?
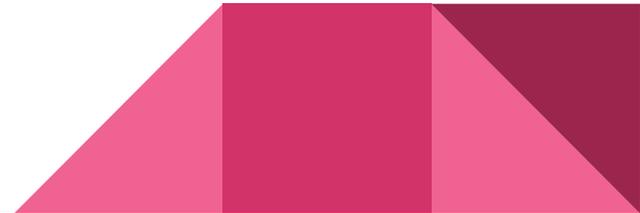
Question 1(Answer)

Which question do criminologists try to answer?

a. How can someone be convicted of a crime? (more for lawyers)
b. What does the evidence from the crime scene tell us? (more for forensics)
c. What is the "perfect" crime? (more of a thought experiment)
d. **Why do people do crime?**

What is Criminology?

- If you look up the definition…
  - According to Google, "The scientific study of crime and criminals"
  - According to Wikipedia, "The study of crime and deviant behavior"
- What do criminologists do?
  - Why do people do crime?
  - Mindset and motivations
  - Figure out how to reduce/prevent crime
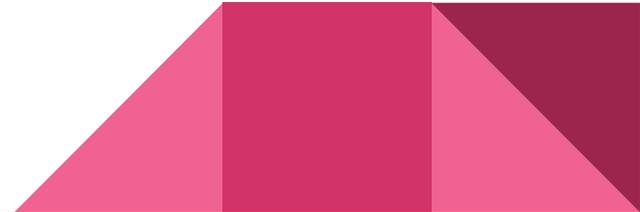
Fun Slide

- Besides Tom Cruise, what do these two movies have in common?
- Both involve the prediction of the future (though *The Minority Report* is about pre-crime)
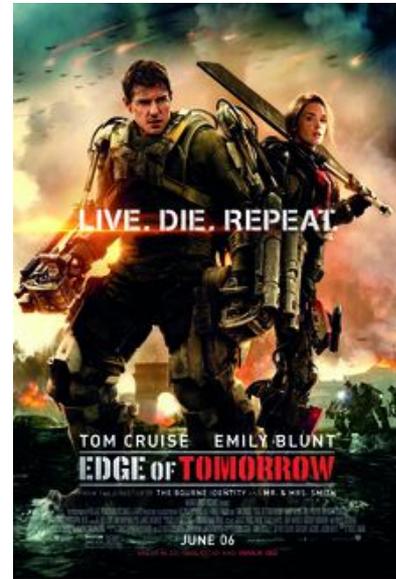
Criminological Theories Overview

Dividing Up Criminological Theories

Micro (today and next week):

- Individual
  - Rational Choice
  - Routine Activities
  - Biological/Biosocial
  - Psychological
- Social Process
  - Differential Association
  - Social Learning
  - Self-Control
- These theories are more about the criminals themselves

Macro (two weeks from now):

- Structural
  - Social Disorganization
  - Anomie/Strain
- Critical
  - Critical
  - Radical
  - Feminist
  - Postmodernism
  - Cultural
  - Peacemaking
  - Restorative Justice
- These theories are more about the "system"

Micro-Level Theories

Rational Choice Theory

- Let's consider the benefits and downsides of robbing a bank…
- What are some of the benefits? (Type in the chat)
  - Quick money
  - Thrill
  - Something to brag about
- What are some of the downsides?
  - Getting caught by police
  - Criminal record
  - Hurting other people
- If the benefits of undertaking deviant behavior outweigh the downsides, then the crime will be committed

Rational Choice Theory

- Advantages
  - Relatively intuitive and straightforward
  - Easy to apply
  - Similar line of logic found in economics, other areas of psychology, etc.

- Disadvantages
  - Assumption that everyone is rational…
    - Influence of alcohol or drugs?
    - Criminal behavior is stressful
  - Benefits/Downsides hold different values between different people
 - Limited information to make decisions
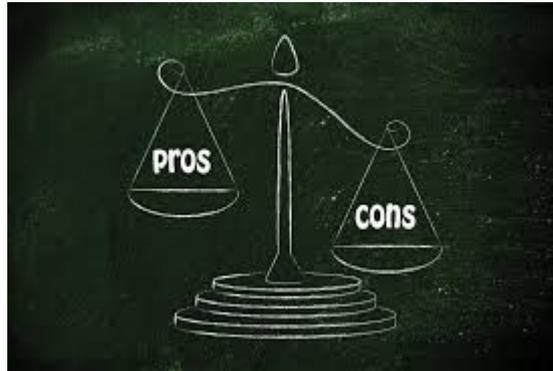
Question 2

Let's try to rob a bank again. Under which conditions do you think a crime is most likely to occur (assume the only crime possible is robbing a bank)?

a. A potential offender knows that there is no money to steal in the bank, but there is plenty of security
b. A regular person knows that there is $1 million to steal in the bank, and there is plenty of security
c. A potential offender knows that there is $1 million to steal in the bank, and there is no security
d. A potential offender knows that there is $1 million to steal in the bank, and there is plenty of security
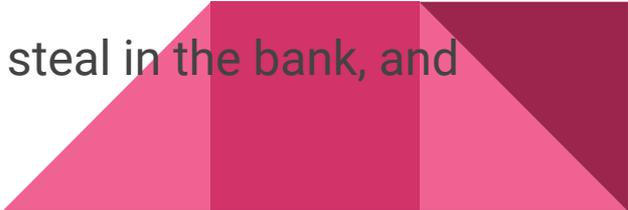
Question 2 (answer)

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c. **A potential offender knows that there is $1 million to steal in the bank, and there is no security**

d. A potential offender knows that there is $1 million to steal in the bank, and there is plenty of security

Routine Activities Theory


ROUTINE ACTIVITY THEORY

A likely offender

CRIME

A suitable target   The absence of a capable guardian

Physical convergence in time and space
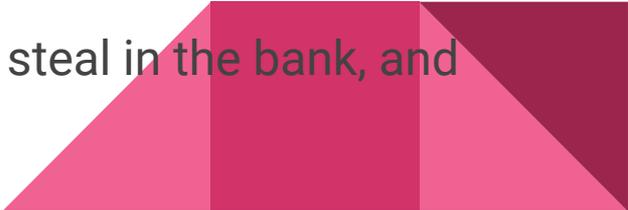
- There are 3 parts to Routine Activities theory…
- Willing offender
  - Absence of a willing offender means that nothing happens
- Suitable target
  - Without a target/goal, there is no purpose in doing the crime
- Absence of a guardian
  - Examples: Police officers, Security officers, security cameras, alarms, etc.
  - Without a guardian, there is less resistance
- All 3 parts must be fulfilled for crime to occur (according to the theory)

Question 3

In the late 20th century, the number of TVs in American households has dramatically increased. What effect did the increase in number of TVs have on the crime rate for home burglaries?

a. The crime rate went up
b. The crime rate went down
c. The crime rate remained the same (only applies to home burglaries)

Question 3 (answer)

In the late 20th century, the number of TVs in American households has dramatically increased. What effect did the increase in number of TVs have on the crime rate for home burglaries?

a. **The crime rate went up**
b. **The crime rate went down**
c. The crime rate remained the same (only applies to home burglaries)

Explanation: It depends on how you see it (both trends observed)

- More TVs → more targets
- More TVs → people staying at home (guardian)

Property Crime Rate since 1960

- **Higher crime rates in 80s**
  - Rise of crack-cocaine market
- **Increase from 60s to 80s**
- **Decline from 90s to present**
- (Property crime also includes commercial areas)

		Crime rate per 100,000 population			
		Property crime			
Year	Population	Property crime rate	Burglary rate	Larceny-theft rate	Motor vehicle theft rate
1960	179,323,175	1,726.3	508.6	1,034.7	183.0
1961	182,992,000	1,747.9	518.9	1,045.4	183.6
1962	185,771,000	1,857.5	535.2	1,124.8	197.4
1963	188,483,000	2,012.1	576.4	1,219.1	216.6
1964	191,141,000	2,197.5	634.7	1,315.5	247.4
1965	193,526,000	2,248.8	662.7	1,329.3	256.8
1966	195,576,000	2,450.9	721.0	1,442.9	286.9
1967	197,457,000	2,736.5	826.6	1,575.8	334.1
1968	199,399,000	3,071.8	932.3	1,746.6	393.0
1969	201,385,000	3,351.3	984.1	1,930.9	436.2
1970	203,235,298	3,621.0	1,084.9	2,079.3	456.8
1971	206,212,000	3,768.8	1,163.5	2,145.5	459.8
1972	208,230,000	3,560.4	1,140.8	1,993.6	426.1
1973	209,851,000	3,737.0	1,222.5	2,071.9	442.6
1974	211,392,000	4,389.3	1,437.7	2,489.5	462.2
1975	213,124,000	4,810.7	1,532.1	2,804.8	473.7
1976	214,659,000	4,819.5	1,448.2	2,921.3	450.0
1977	216,332,000	4,601.7	1,419.8	2,729.9	451.9
1978	218,059,000	4,642.5	1,434.6	2,747.4	460.5
1979	220,099,000	5,016.6	1,511.9	2,999.1	505.6
1980	225,349,264	5,353.3	1,684.1	3,167.0	502.2
1981	229,465,714	5,256.5	1,647.2	3,135.3	474.1
1982	231,664,458	5,029.7	1,488.0	3,083.1	458.6
1983	233,791,994	4,641.1	1,338.7	2,871.3	431.1
1984	235,824,902	4,498.5	1,265.5	2,795.2	437.7
1985	237,923,795	4,666.4	1,291.7	2,911.2	463.5
1986	240,132,887	4,881.8	1,349.8	3,022.1	509.8
1987	242,288,918	4,963.0	1,335.7	3,095.4	531.9
1988	244,498,982	5,054.0	1,316.2	3,151.7	586.1
1989	246,819,230	5,107.1	1,283.6	3,189.6	634.0
1990	249,464,396	5,073.1	1,232.2	3,185.1	655.8
1991	252,153,092	5,140.2	1,252.1	3,229.1	659.0
1992	255,029,699	4,903.7	1,168.4	3,103.6	631.6
1993	257,782,608	4,740.0	1,099.7	3,033.9	606.3
1994	260,327,021	4,660.2	1,042.1	3,026.9	591.3
1995	262,803,276	4,590.5	987.0	3,043.2	560.3
1996	265,228,572	4,451.0	945.0	2,980.3	525.7
1997	267,783,607	4,316.3	918.8	2,891.8	505.7
1998	270,248,003	4,052.5	863.2	2,729.5	459.9
1999	272,690,813	3,743.6	770.4	2,550.7	422.5
2000	281,421,906	3,618.3	728.8	2,477.3	412.2
2001	285,317,559	3,658.1	741.8	2,485.7	430.5
2002	287,973,924	3,630.6	747.0	2,450.7	432.9
2003	290,788,976	3,591.2	741.0	2,416.5	433.7
2004	293,656,842	3,514.1	730.3	2,362.3	421.5
2005	296,507,061	3,431.5	726.9	2,287.8	416.8
2006	299,398,484	3,346.6	733.1	2,213.2	400.2
2007	301,621,157	3,276.4	726.1	2,185.4	364.9
2008	304,059,724	3,214.6	733.0	2,166.1	315.4
2009	307,006,550	3,041.3	717.7	2,064.5	259.2
2010	309,330,219	2,945.9	701.0	2,005.8	239.1
2011	311,587,816	2,905.4	701.3	1,974.1	230.0
2012	313,873,685	2,868.0	672.2	1,965.4	230.4
2013	316,497,531	2,733.3	610.4	1,901.6	221.3
2014	318,857,056	2,596.1	542.5	1,837.3	216.2

Routine Activities Theory

- Advantages
  - Relatively intuitive
  - Easy to apply
  - Proposes solutions (e.g. increase security)
  - Applications in forensic accounting
    - Unshareable problem (similar to willing offender)
    - Access to resources (similar to suitable target)
    - Trust within ranks (similar to absence of guardian)

- Disadvantages
  - Can lead to conflicting conclusions
  - Oversimplified?
    - Certainly, crime is more complicated than just 3 things

Question 4

Freud developed interesting theories in the field of psychology, one of which is the psychodynamic theory. Listed are three crucial components (in letters) and their associated "terms" (in numbers).

- A. Id
- B. Ego
- C. Superego

- 1. Mediator
- 2. Primitive/Instincts
- 3. Morals

In the chat, type out which component matches which term. An example response would be "A=2,B=1,C=3"

Question 4 (answer)

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- 1. Mediator
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- 3. Morals

In the chat, type out which component matches which term. An example response would be "**A=2,B=1,C=3**" ← This was the answer!

Psychological Theories

- Psychodynamic theory
  - Id: Primitive/Instincts
    - Pleasure principle (i.e. gratification)
    - Criminals having no concern for anyone but themselves
  - Superego: Morals
    - Moral standards and values from community, parents, friends, etc.
  - Ego: Mediates between Id and Superego
    - Reality principle
    - Following rules/boundaries (e.g. not crying while waiting in line)
  - Theory suggests criminal offenders are frustrated and aggravated (why might this be the case?)
    - Underdeveloped superego
    - Weak ego

Psychological Theories

Cognitive Behavior
Thoughts create feelings
Behavior reinforces thoughts
Feelings create behavior
Photo courtesy of www.leonardcltron.com
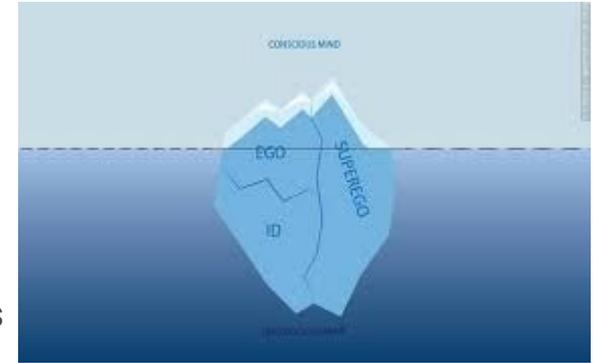
- Behavioral Theory
  - Human behavior is learned
  - Social learning theory (Bandura)
    - Humans are not born bad
    - Learn through family, experiences (such as living in a crime prone areas), media (violence, desensitization)
- Cognitive Theory
  - Individual's perception of the world and how this perception is developed
  - Moral development → how to develop morals and reason
  - Information processing → acquiring, retaining, and retrieving information
- Nature vs. Nurture debate

Psychological Theories

Advantages:

- Points out to specific areas of concern
    - Ex: For behavior theory, place a child in a safe learning environment
- Can support rational choice theory
    - How does one view something as good/bad?

Disadvantages

- Nature vs. Nurture debate
    - More likely that both have some effect on behavior
    - Question is how much of an impact does nature have relative to nurture?
- Contradictions between theories
    - Ex: Freud's Id suggests that some behavior is innate while Bandura's behavior theory does not allow this
- Complex
    - Could be a good thing in better understanding behavior
    - More difficult to propose solutions to prevent crime

Optional: Biological Theory

- Theory suggests that one's phenotype can act as a predictor of crime
  - Deterministic (i.e. already determined to do crime)
- Largely debunked
  - Seems ridiculous how the shape of your nose or forehead could be an accurate predictor of crime
- Gave way to studying neurotransmitters, which do have psychological effects
  - Consider effects of drugs
- Important idea to consider: Correlation =/= Causation
  - In 19th and early 20th centuries, people were finding correlations between phenotypes and crime rates
  - But no scientific basis

Differential Association Theory (If time...)

- (continuation of social learning theory)
- There are ~9 statements, but we will focus on only 2
- Criminal behavior is learned
- A person is delinquent if they have more definitions that favor criminal behavior over lawful behavior
  - In other words, a person's overall beliefs tend to favor criminal behavior

- Advantages
  - Aligns with social learning theories (behavior is learned)
  - 9 statements specifically point to origins of criminal behavior → possibly easier to enact policies to fix these issues
- Disadvantages
  - Assumes that people are not inherently bad/unlawful (on the flipside, good/lawful)
  - Contradicts deterministic theories (i.e. your behavior is already predetermined; fate)

Sutherland's Differential Association Theory

Presented by: Sarah Brach, Meghan Peter, Edie Wheeler, Jake Morris

Main principle
Main Principles (continued)
Where is it?
Cartoon
Examples
Criticisms
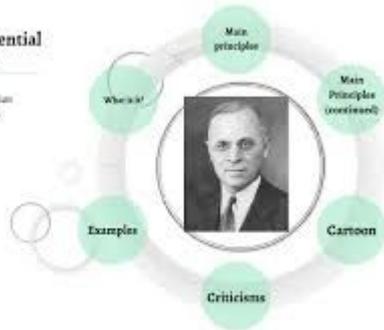
Final Poll Questions

Of all the theories we've covered so far, which do you think is the most intuitive or understand the most? Which do you think needs more explanation?

A. Rational choice theory (weighing pros and cons)
B. Routine activities theory (willing offender, suitable target, absent guardian)
C. Psychodynamic theory (Id, Ego, Superego)
D. Behavioral Theory (behavior is learned)
E. Cognitive Theory (processing information)
F. Biological Theory (phenotypes and neurotransmitters)
G. Differential Association Theory (learned behavior and definitions)

(Don't include G if we have not covered it…)
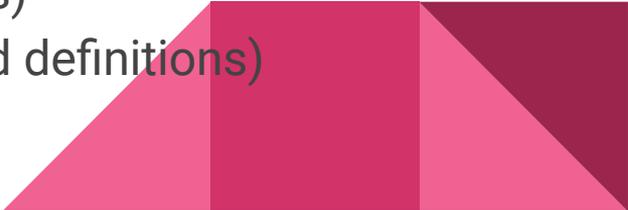
Final Poll Question Prediction

My guesses for responses to the final poll question.

Most intuitive: Rational choice or Routine activities

Needs more explanation: Cognitive
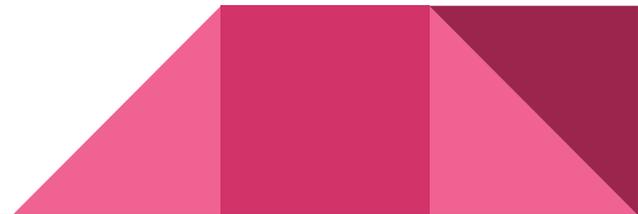
"Homework"

- Read a little bit about biological and biosocial theories…
- Ask questions via email (will be compiled into a big email unless you otherwise specify)
  - Remember that all correspondence will be recorded
- See you next week!