

Introduction to Criminological Theory

- Chapter 1
- Most theories of crime are based on which branch of study? Psychology, Biology, Economics, or Sociology.
- True or False: Most theories of crime have a high degree of empirical validity.
- Chapter 1
- Which major classification approach suggests that theories can be divided by those who believe in societal agreement and those who believe in societal disagreement?

A. consensus versus conflict

B. structure versus process

C. classical versus positive

D. social versus intellectual

- Chapter 1
- Which of the following statements is most accurate with respect to a “good theory”?

1. A good theory uses a single approach to measure theoretical concepts.
2. A good theory is one that can be tested and that best fits the evidence of research.
3. A good theory uses quantitative validation rather than qualitative validation.
4. A good theory is one that is most popular among criminologists.

- Brief History of Criminology
- 1800s: Some publications (Sociology)
- 1890s: College courses in Sociology
- 1895: Books/crime & delinquency (biological theories)
- Brief History of Criminology
- Early 1900s: Progressive Era
 - Concern over harsh social consequences of industrialization and urbanization.
 - Need rehabilitation of criminals, assist the poor, humane treatment of the insane.
- Brief History of Criminology
- 1918: First true Criminology textbook

- Criminality is an abnormal/pathological form of behavior (psychology).
- 1924: Sutherland, Criminology
- Critique of biological/psychological theories; focus on social conditions.
- Brief History of Criminology
- 1930-1945: Criminology/sociological analysis in the U.S.
- 1950s: Movement to separate Criminology from Sociology.
- Brief History of Criminology
- 1945-1970
- WWII ended; students on GI Bill; rise in sociology/criminology courses.
- Focus on mainstream criminality; simplistic observations.
- Took for granted that there is a stable reality that can be directly observed, described, and theorized about...
- Belief that our social structure is fine (consensus), just need to mend a few rips and tears, a little reform, no big deal.
- Brief History of Criminology
- Since 1970s
- Growth of negativity/political unrest (conflict).
- Persistence of racial discrimination, economic inequality.
- Mainstream ideology (micro) persists but has been challenged.
- Brief History of Criminology
- Criminology is highly fragmented today.
- Mainstream theories and attitude that crime is the result of the failure of individuals.
- However, radical, critical, Marxist, and feminist theories are widely studied today.
- Theory
- There are thousands upon thousands of theories!
- What is the cause of illness?
- Some theories make sense, others seem absolutely ridiculous.
- Is the Earth round or flat?
- What is Theory?

- Varying definitions
- A theory is an explanation, which provides grounds for predictions that must be TESTABLE.

- What is Theory?

1. Begins with a set of concepts (with definitions)

- These concepts are defined nominally (dictionary definition) and operationally (more technical/how will the concepts be measured)
- Example: Violence

- Nominal definition/operational definition

- What is Theory?

2. Consists of a set of propositions or theoretical statements, which must state a relationship between two or more variables.

- What is Theory?

3. Causality (3 criteria)

- Correlation/Association: concepts or variables must be related to one another.
- Time order sequence: the cause must precede the effect in time.
- Lack of spuriousness: no fact other than the variable must affect the relationship between the cause and the effect.

- Paradigms vs. Theory

- Paradigms are schools of thought.
- Usually one paradigm dominates a discipline at one time.
- After scrutiny and testing, it fades and a new paradigm emerges.

- Paradigms vs. Theory

- Not all researchers and practitioners in a discipline adopt the dominant paradigm to guide their work; there are always competing paradigms.

- Examples of paradigms within Criminology

- Policing: reactionary vs. community policing/prevention
- Courts: leniency/probation vs. get tough on crime.
- Corrections: rehabilitation vs. retribution

- Where do theories come from?

- Personal experience/observation