CRIMINOLOGY TODAY
AN INTEGRATIVE INTRODUCTION
sixth edition
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Chapter 1
What is Criminology?
What is Crime?

• Four definitional perspectives
  – Legalistic
  – Political
  – Sociological
  – Psychological

• Perspective is important because it determines the assumptions we make and the questions we ask

• This book uses the legalistic perspective
Legalistic Perspective

- **Crime** is defined as:

  Human conduct in violation of the criminal laws of a state, the federal government, or a local jurisdiction that has the power to make such laws
Shortcomings of the Legalistic Perspective

- Yields moral high ground to powerful individuals who can influence lawmaking

- Insists that the nature of crime and the nature of law cannot be separated – not all immoral acts are contravened by statute

- Fails to recognize that formal law did not always exist
Political Perspective

• **Crime** - the result of criteria that have been built into the law by powerful groups and are then used to label selected undesirable forms of behavior as illegal

• Laws serve the interests of the politically powerful

• Crimes are behaviors those in power perceive as threats to their interests
Sociological (Sociolegal) Perspective

- **Crime** – an antisocial act of such a nature that its repression is necessary or is supposed to be necessary to the preservation of the existing system of society

- Crime is an offense against human relationships first, a violation of law second
Psychological (Maladaptive) Perspective

- **Crime** - problem behavior, especially human activity that contravenes the criminal law and results in difficulties in living within a framework of generally acceptable social arrangements

- Includes any harmful or potentially harmful behaviors
Crime and Deviance

- **Deviant behavior** – any activity that violates social norms

- Deviance and crime overlap – not identical
What Should be Criminal?

• Lack agreement about appropriate legal status of many behaviors

• Question answered differently by two contrasting perspectives
  – Consensus
  – Pluralist
## What Should be Criminal?

### Consensus
- Laws are enacted to criminalize given forms of behavior when agreed upon by members of society
- Most applicable to homogeneous societies

### Pluralist
- Behaviors typically criminalized through a political process, after debate over appropriate course of action
- Legislation, appellate court action
- Most applicable to diverse societies
What Do Criminologists Do?

- **Criminologist** – studies crime, criminals and criminal behavior

- **Criminalist** – a specialist in the collection and examination of the physical evidence of crime

- **Criminal Justice Professionals** – do the day-to-day work of the criminal justice system
What Do Criminologists Do?

Characteristics of academic and research criminologists:

- Ph.D. in criminology, criminal justice, or related field
- Teach in colleges and universities
- Most conduct research designed to advance criminological knowledge
- Most write for publication in journals
What is Criminology?

• Many difficulties in defining subject

• Text’s definition of **criminology**: An interdisciplinary profession built around the scientific study of crime and criminal behavior, including their manifestations, causes, legal aspects, and control

• Focus on causes of criminality
What is Criminology?

Social scientific discipline Interdisciplinary
What is Criminology?

• **Criminal justice:**
  – Application of the criminal law and study of the components of the justice system
  – Police, courts, corrections

• Focus on control of lawbreaking
Theoretical Criminology

• Subfield of general criminology

• Primarily found in colleges and universities

• Posits explanations for criminal behavior
Theoretical Criminology

• **Theory**

  Made up of clearly stated propositions that posit relationships, often of a causal sort, between events and things under study

• Criminologists have developed many theories to explain and understand crime
Theoretical Criminology

- **General theory** – tries to explain all/most forms of crime through a single overarching approach

- **Unicausal** – approaches that posit a single identifiable source for all serious deviant and criminal behavior

- **Integrated theory** – tries to explain crime by merging concepts from different sources

- **Experimental criminology** – uses social scientific techniques to test the accuracy of theories about crime
Formulation of Social Policy

- Social policies based on research findings are of potentially broader importance than theory testing

- **Social policy** includes government initiatives, programs, plans to address problems in society

- Should be linked to objective findings of well-conducted criminological research
Social Policy and Public Crime Concerns

• Concern about crime not always related to actual incidence of crime

• Concern about crime an important factor in determining public policy – political agendas focusing on reducing crime well-received
The Theme of This Book

Social Problems

• Crime a manifestation of social problems

• Public health model to deal with crime
  – Large-scale government expenditures
  – Social programs addressing roots of crime

• Macro approach

Social Responsibility

• People responsible for own behavior, choose crime over other legitimate options

• Personalized crime reduction strategies

• Micro approach
The Social Context of Crime

• Crime does not occur in a vacuum – every crime has a unique set of
  – Causes
  – Consequences
  – Participants

• Crime provokes reactions from many sources

• Reactions to crime may affect future criminal events
Causes and Consequences of Crime

• Crime is a social event, not an isolated individual activity

• Crime has many different kinds of meanings

• Crime is *socially relative*:
  Social events are interpreted differently according to the cultural experiences and personal interests of the initiator, observer, or recipient of the behavior

• Crime means different things to different people
Causes and Consequences of Crime
Causes and Consequences of Crime

- Crime results from the coming together of inputs provided by the offender, the victim, the criminal justice system, and society.

- Foreground – features that immediately determine the nature of the crime.

- Background causes – generic contributions to the crime.
Crime and the Offender

- Background features
  - Life experiences
  - Biology and personality
  - Values/beliefs
  - Skills/knowledge

- Foreground contributions
  - Motivation
  - Specific Intent
  - State of mind (drug-induced)
Crime and the Criminal Justice System

- Background contributions - failure to:
  - Prevent crime
  - Identify/inhibit specific offenders
  - Prevent release of recidivists

- Immediate contributions – features of situation
  - Presence/absence of police officers
  - Availability of official assistance
  - Willingness of officers to intervene pre-crime
  - Response time
Crime and the Victim

• Background contributions
  – Passive presence
  – Active contributions through lifestyle

• Victim precipitation
  – Active victim participation in initial stages of criminal event
  – Victim instigates chain of events resulting in victimization
Crime and Society

• Background contributions
  – Generic social practices and conditions
  – Socialization process

• Foreground contributions
  – Distribution of resources
  – Accessibility of services
Immediate Effects of Crime

• Outputs affect all parties involved

• Impact affected by perceptual filters
  – Results in ongoing interpretations before, during, after crime
  – Everyone associated with a crime engages in interpretations
Integrative Approach to Crime

• Attempt to identify and understand multiple causes of crime

• Highlight the processes involved in the criminal event as it unfolds

• Analyze the interpretation of the crime phenomenon
Integrative Approach to Crime

Crime as an emergent activity that:

• Arises out of past complex causes

• Assumes a course that builds upon immediate interrelationships among everyone involved

• Elicits a formal response from the justice system, shapes public perceptions, and may give rise to changes in social policy
The Primacy of Sociology?

- Many disciplines have made important contributions to criminology
- Many criminologists today operate primarily from a sociological perspective
- Many modern theories of criminal behavior based in sociology
The Primacy of Sociology?

• Advantages
  – Crime is a social phenomenon
  – Much contemporary criminology rests on tradition of social scientific investigation

• Problems
  – Reluctant to accept findings from other disciplines
  – Frequently unable to integrate these findings into existing sociological understandings of crime
  – Unable to show effective ways to control crime