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Crime & Criminology

Week 1 - Introduction

- What is criminology?
 - A science
 - A multi-disciplinary field spanning sociology, psychology, law, politics, economics, and more
 - The study of criminal law characteristics, extent and effects of crime, attributes of criminals, methods of crime prevention, and the characteristics of the criminal justice system
- Facts and fallacies about crime
 - Crime is a social construct - what constitutes crime changes over time and place
 - Most crime is non-violent and/or petty
 - Most crime doesn't get reported at all, and if it does, there is a very low rate of conviction
- The criminal justice system
 - Three arms: Police, courts, corrections
 - Separation of powers avoids a monopoly
 - "The state of nature is a 'war of all against all' and, thus, individuals give up their liberty to aggress against others in return for safety... law is a contract - each individual gives up some liberties and, in return, is protected from others who have their liberties restricted as well." (Pollock 2007, p. 132) (From textbook, p. 256)
 - Ethical formalism
 - Retribution
 - Proportional punishment directed at criminal
 - Restitution
 - Payback to victim, or to society as a proxy for victim
 - Utilitarian philosophy
 - Deterrence
 - Specific: Desistance following previous punishment
 - General: Perception of likely consequences
 - Incapacitation
 - Restricting access through things like intervention orders or prison
 - Rehabilitation

- Therapeutic programs such as employment skills
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Week 2 - Perceptions, facts & fallacies

Crime News

The way it's reported, types of media, social effects (perceptions), volume of crime news, "agenda setting", "moral panics", emotive/shocking/entertaining, not relying on data

- Functionalist perspective:
 - The news media serves to inform society. Investigative and challenges the powers that be.
 - Focussing on violent crime to educate the public on how to protect themselves and stay informed of how it's being dealt with.
- Critical perspective:
 - Media supports the wealthiest, most socially dominant groups and people
 - Shifting the focus away from white collar crimes (financial, property-related) so as to protect those groups when they commit it. Creating the perspective that violent crime is rife and therefore, punitive justice is the right way to focus the system.
- "Since the 1980s, ownership of media has become concentrated in a dwindling number of huge global corporations" (Textbook, p. 7)
- About 65% of Australians get most of their news from television (Textbook, p. 8). Over the last 30 years print media such as newspapers has steadily decreased.
- "Moral panic" is when "a condition, episode, person or group emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values".

Determining newsworthiness

- Prominence - involving famous people or organisations
- Timeliness - recent
- Impact - size of audience or likely impact

- Proximity - of news event to audience (geographically or emotionally), example of emotional would be abduction of a child which would be emotionally significant to parents
- Novelty - bizarre stories
- Conflict - between two or more parties
- Contemporaneousness - fits in with current events or other news, or public interests
- Human interest - highlight a positive (or negative) aspect of human behaviour, examples might be saving a dog in flood conditions, domestic violence, anything that makes you reflect on “how people are”
- “Ideal victims” are people such as children and the elderly because they appear defenceless, blameless and most worthy of sympathy whilst outrage is felt against the offender

Media crime frames

- Frames: ways of organising stories, presents a particular point of view
- Frames present a problem, diagnose the cause, make moral judgements, suggests solutions
- 5 crime frame types:
 - Faulty criminal justice: The system is ineffective and is essentially allowing crime to occur. Stories will often feature repeat offenders or recently bailed offenders. Excessive due process procedures.
 - Blocked opportunities: People who cannot participate in society, causing them to commit crimes. Examples could be victims of racial discrimination, the poor, etc. Unjustly having opportunities withheld from offender.
 - Social breakdown: People commit crimes due to the breakdown of classic societal values. Christian values and morality. Stories might feature things like an elderly person being assaulted. Traditional family structure deteriorating.
 - Racist system: Disproportionate numbers of racial minorities are caught and punished for crimes, versus the criminal members of the racial majority. Can also be used to show wrongly convicted racial minorities.
 - Violent media: Increased exposure to violent media causing crime. Usually presented with at least one other frame to avoid showing media as the only cause. Often presenting violent youth crime or apparently senseless violent crimes.