

PSYC3020

APPLICATIONS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE

FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY (week 1-3)

Introduction to Forensic Psychology

- Forensic psychology - the *application* of psychological knowledge and theories to all aspects of the criminal and civil justice systems, including the processes and the people
- No theories can explain all types of crime – therefore, there is no “best” theory. Each theory depends on the crime

Historical Perspectives of Crime

- **Classical** School of Criminology
 - Law-breaking occurs when people freely choose wrong (when they could have chosen right)
 - Punishment should be appropriate to crime committed
- **Positivist** School of Criminology
 - Focuses on factors determining criminal behaviour rather than free choice of the person.
 - Punishment should fit the criminal rather than the crime
 - Understanding crime through scientific method and analysis of empirical method
 - ✦ *Lombroso* – believed criminals were delinquents
 - *Positivist theories not taken seriously today*

Modern Theories of Crime

1. Sociological theories

- Crime as a result of external social forces that exist before the criminal act e.g. class, political, ecological or physical structures affecting a large group of people
 - Minorities
 - Individual differences are deemphasised
- *However*
 - Crimes can be committed by people who have never been denied opportunities
 - Applies only to certain offences
 - Does not explain why some people offend and others do not

a) Structural explanations

- People have similar interests and motivation, but opportunities differ that allow people to use their talents
- Dysfunctional social arrangements and differential opportunity that stop people from succeeding in society (e.g. poor education, economic situation)

- Ways to get from A to B (aspirations i.e. success in society) create strains that could lead to crime

b) Subcultural explanations

- Crime originates when various groups of people endorse cultural values that are against dominant norms and conventional rules of society
 - E.g. gangs forming their own norms on how to behave

2. Biological theories

- Stress, genetic influences, biochemical irregularities, or body type are causes of crime
 - Respect social and environmental influences as well

a) Constitutional theories

- *Sheldon* – 3 somatotypes
 - Endomorph, Ectomorph, Mesomorph
 - Mesomorph more suited to criminal behaviour - believed that mesomorphs exposed to wrong environment would engage in more aggressive crimes
 - However, correlation between physique and behaviour does not mean causation

b) Genetic theories

- Criminal behaviour is inherited
 - Adoption studies showed that men with criminal biological parents were more likely to become criminals
 - However, unclear on what is inherited, can lead to excuses that are not legit – environmental factors can become neglected and the extent to which any behaviour is inheritable in one group cannot explain differences between groups.
 - Some possibilities of what can be inherited: predisposition, neuropsychological abnormalities, physiological differences, and personality and temperament differences.

3. Psychological theories

- Crime is a result of personality, which emphasises individual differences

a) Psychoanalytic theories

- *Freud* – a weak ego and superego that cannot restrain the anti-social instincts of the id i.e. basic needs (id) not satisfied, criminal behaviour gratifies this space (sublimation)
- Thanatos: the desire of animate matters to return to the inanimate, leading to self-destructive behaviours or may result in an unconscious effort to get caught.
 - Most blamed factor is inadequate identification by a child with their parents
 - However, theories no longer supported, cannot be tested therefore not used.

b) Personality traits

- *Eysenck* – 3 major unrelated components of personality: criminals have higher traits of extraversion (active, carefree, sensation-seeking), neuroticism (anxious, depressed, emotional, shy, tense) and psychoticism (impulsive, tough-minded, lacking empathy).

c) Personality disorder

- Antisocial personality disorder: unlawful behaviour, starts in childhood or early adolescence and continues into adulthood.
- Psychopathy: feeling little to no remorse, but don't have to be a criminal to have high psychopathy.

4. Social-Psychological theories

- Bridge between environmental factors and individual differences of personality and biological factors.
 - Crime is learned, but in various ways.

a) Control theories

- People around you can prevent you from taking part in criminal behaviour, but also need strong inner control.
 - Social pressure or laws (external control) can stop you from committing a crime, but internal control stops you from committing a crime when no one is around.

b) Learning theory

- Operant learning: person is positively reinforced when criminal behaviour outweighs punishment e.g. likelihood of getting away with stealing money vs. likelihood of getting caught.
- Social learning theory: behaviour is learned by observation through modelling, e.g. parent-child relationships, child might learn that this is how to behave, friends who are "cool"

c) Social labelling

- Deviance created by labels that society assigns to certain behaviour. Stigma can create *self-fulfilling prophecy* (prediction that comes true)
 - However, little research due to ethical reasons