

INTRODUCTION TO CRIMINOLOGY CRM1300F

Winter 2013

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Week 3 Introduction to Criminological
Theory

THEORY

- A series of interrelated propositions that attempt to describe, explain, predict, and ultimately to control some class of events. A theory gains explanatory power from inherent logical consistency and is "tested" by how well it describes and predicts reality.
- Unicausal theory

WHAT IS A THEORY?

- **Theory:** Set of logically interconnected propositions explaining how phenomena are related, and from which a number of hypotheses can be derived and tested.
- **Hypotheses:** Statements about relationships between and among factors we expect to find based on the logic of our theories.
- **Criteria for judging the merits of a theory:**
- Predictive accuracy: A theory has merit and is useful to the extent that it accurately predicts what is observed.

WHAT IS A THEORY?

- Predictive scope: Refers to the scope or range of the theory and thus the scope or range of the hypotheses that can be derived from it.
- Simplicity: If two competing theories are essentially equal in terms of the first two criteria, then the less complicated one is considered more 'elegant.'
- Falsifiability: A theory is never proven true, but it must have the quality of being falsifiable or disprovable.

THEORY

- General Theory
 - One that attempt to explain all (or at least most) forms of criminal conduct through a single, overarching approach.
- Integrated Theory
 - An explanatory perspective that merges (or attempts to merge) concepts drawn from different sources.

THE ROLE OF THEORY IN CRIMINOLOGY

- Theory Making: Trying to grasp how all the known correlates of a phenomenon are linked together in non-coincidental ways to produce an effect.
- Criminologists are interested in finding out factors that cause crime and criminality.

THE ROLE OF THEORY IN CRIMINOLOGY

- **Correlates:** factors that are linked or related to the phenomenon a scientist is interested in.
- **Necessary cause:** a factor that must be present for behavior to occur
- **Sufficient cause:** a factor that is able to produce criminal behavior without having been augmented by some other factor.

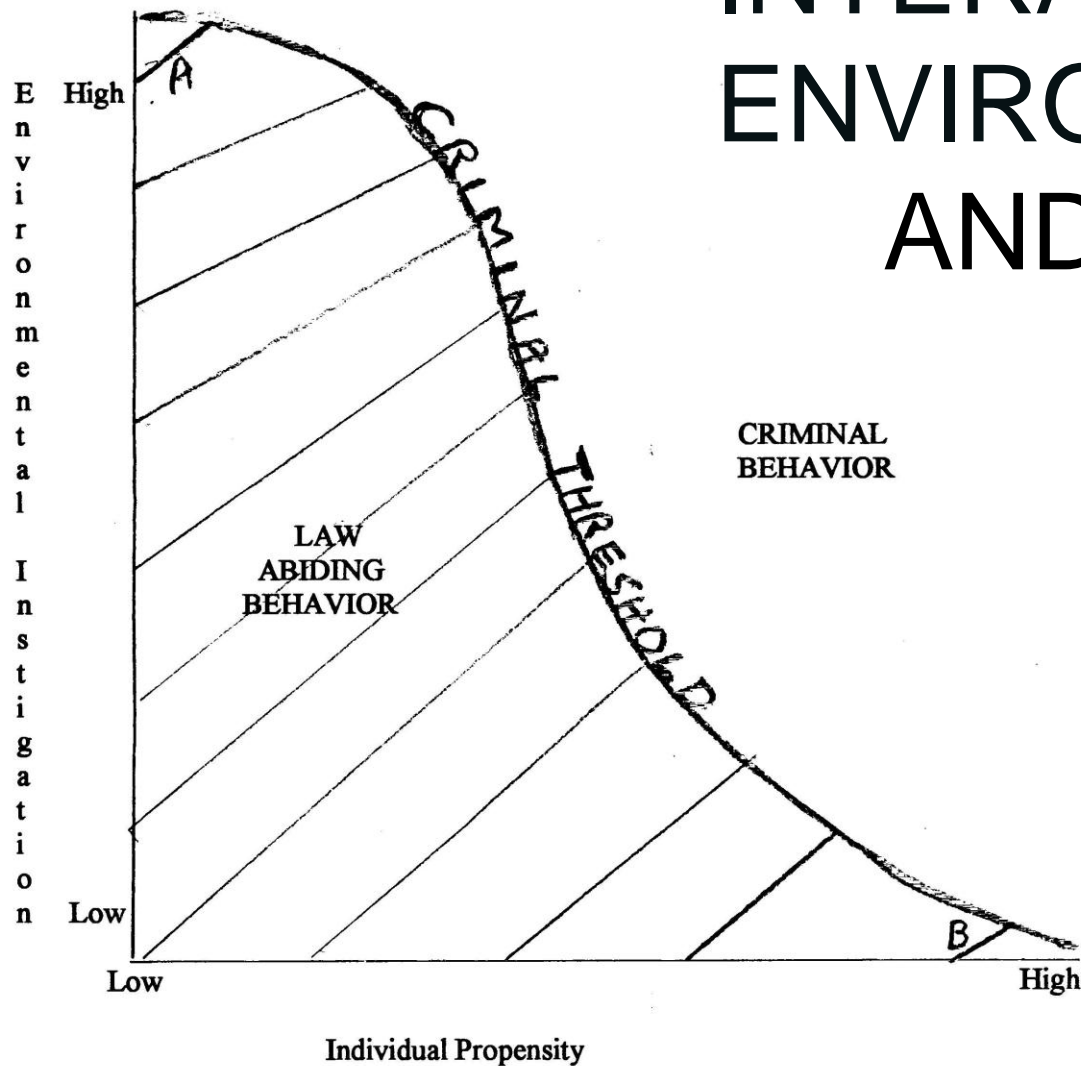
THE ROLE OF THEORY IN CRIMINOLOGY

- Theories help us to make sense of a diversity of seemingly unrelated facts and propositions, and they even tell us where to look for more facts.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THEORIES

- **levels of analysis:** that segment of the phenomenon of interest that is measured and analyzed.
- Questions of **cause and effect** must be answered at the same level of analysis at which they were posed.
- Theory testing looks for causal explanations rather than simple descriptions.
- Causal explanations are offered at different temporal levels: *Ultimate* (distant in time) and *proximate* (close in time).

INTERACTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND INDIVIDUAL FACTORS



MAJOR CRIMINOLOGY PERSPECTIVES

CLASSICAL/ CHOICE

Situation forces

Crime is a function of free will and personal choice. Punishment is a deterrent to crime.

BIOLOGICAL/ PSYCHOLOGICAL

Internal forces

Crime is a function of chemical, neurological, genetic, personality, intelligence, or mental traits.

STRUCTURAL

Ecological forces

Crime rates are a function of neighborhood conditions, cultural forces, and norm conflict.

PROCESS

Socialization forces

Crime is a function of upbringing, learning, and control. Peers, parents, and teachers influence behavior.

CONFLICT

Economic and Political forces

Crime is a function of competition for limited resources and power. Class conflict produces crime.

INTEGRATED

Multiple force

Biological, social-psychological, economic and political forces may combine to produce crime.

CAUSES AND CONTROLS OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

Consensus View

- The law defines crime.
- Agreement exists on outlawed behavior.
- Laws apply to all citizens equally.

CAUSES AND CONTROLS OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

Conflict view

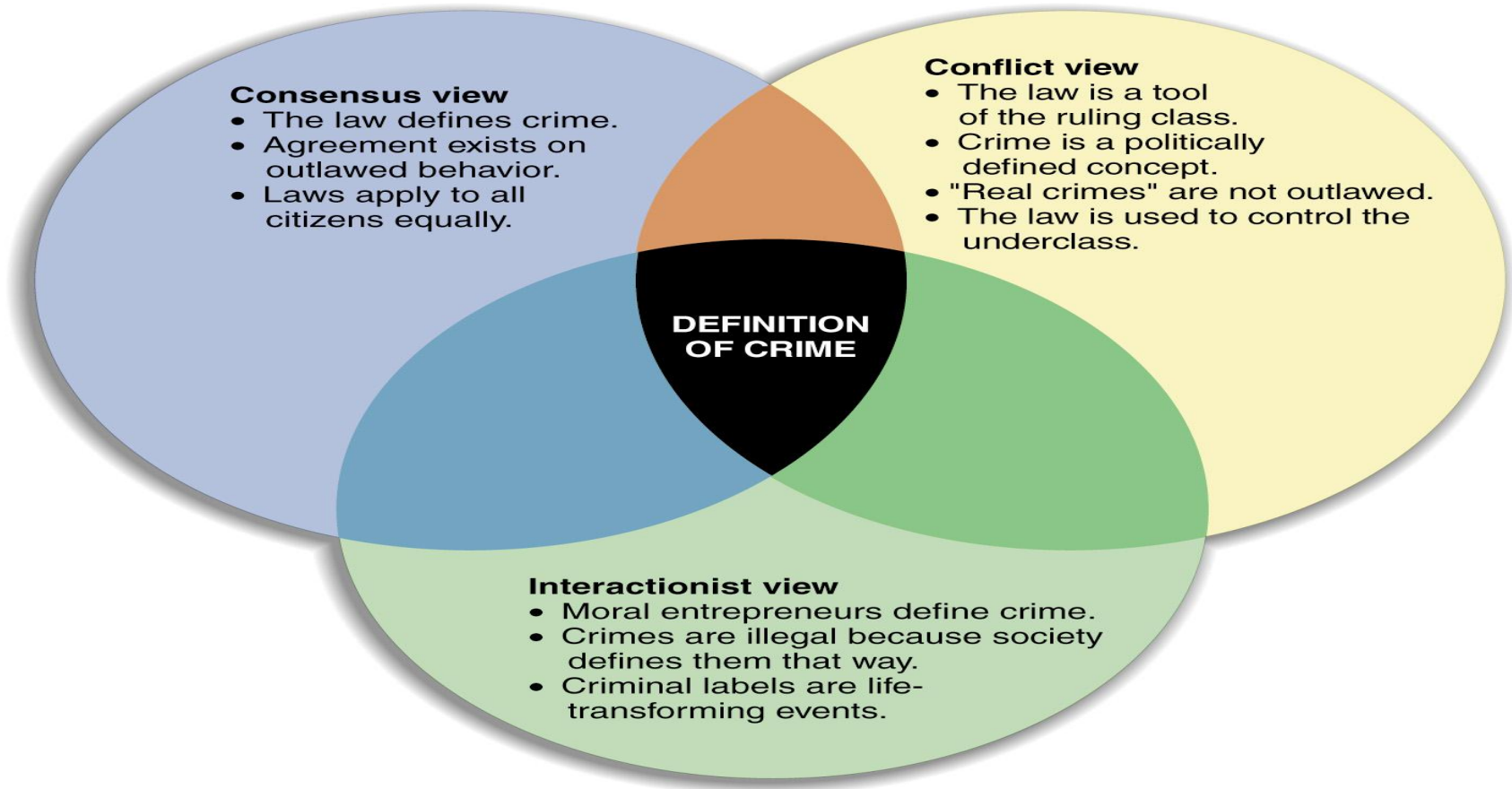
- The law is a tool of the ruling class.
- Crime is a politically defined concept.
 - “Real crimes” are not outlawed.
- The Law is used to control the underclass.

CAUSES AND CONTROLS OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

Interactionist view

- Moral entrepreneurs define crime.
- Acts become crimes because society defines them that way.
- Criminal labels are life-transforming events.

Crime and Multiple Perspectives



Larry J. Siegel - Criminology, 9th edition 2005

Chapter 1 Crime and Criminology and The Criminal Law

AN INTEGRATED DEFINITION OF CRIME

Crime is a violation of societal rules of behavior as interpreted and expressed by the criminal law, which reflects public opinion, traditional values and the viewpoint of people currently holding social and political power. Individuals who violate these rules are subject to sanctions by state authority, social stigma, and loss of status.

VIDEO

- “Cognitive Dissonance“

Insight Media 2008

NEXT CLASS READINGS

Textbook Chapter 9
Summary and
Conclusions
Future Directions in
Criminology
How Should Crime Be
Responded to in
Canada?

