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Theories of Crime Causation

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What do the major theories of crime causation reveal about crime in your country and the rest of the world? How can they contribute to an understanding of crime patterns? Crime is a very complex phenomenon; it cannot be explained in a single theory that neatly ties together all nuances. Since crime can involve savage violence (Charles Manson, The BTK Killer, etc.) as well as highly sophisticated white collar crimes (Tyco, World Com, Enron, etc.), and can be committed by the lone disturbed offender (Jeffrey Dahmer the Cannibal, Timothy McVeigh, etc.) or highly organized criminal syndicates (Mafia, Yakuza, Triads, Mexican/Colombian Drug Cartels, etc.), it seems unlikely that a single theory will ever have the scope and power of all facets of illegal behavior.

Even the most sophisticated attempts fail to account for the great variety of criminal behavior that exists. Nonetheless, many criminologists would debate the wisdom of this analysis because it does not give any direction for crime prevention efforts. Should programs be based on punishment or treatment? Should efforts be directed at the school, family, neighborhood, jobs, the criminal justice system, or all of these?

Advocates of the different criminal justice perspectives embrace the various criminological theories as evidence of the validity for their policies. Think about these theories then ask yourself if they apply to your community or society: **Classical theory**, which stresses punishment and deterrence, is the basis for the crime control perspective. In contrast, **Sociological theories** are used to substantiate the rehabilitation view of justice. If people are controlled by their environment and by their relationship with significant others, then it follows that their behavior can be changed by improving the quality of their social world. Similarly, the radical view of justice is supported by **Social conflict theory**, which states that people commit crimes when the law, controlled by the rich and powerful, defines their behavior as illegal, while **Labeling theory** provides the underpinning for the noninterventionist perspective. This theory maintains that people enter into law-violating careers when they are labeled for their acts and organize their personalities around such labels. In essence, if you continuously told a person that he/she was a “worthless soul on the road to perdition,” that person may just end up in prison on their way to hell.

Biological and Psychological theories serve a mixed perspective. On the one hand, they seem to justify a rehabilitation orientation since they put the blame for criminal behavior on physical or mental conditions that can be treated; on the other hand, they can also be used to support a policy of incapacitation if the personal problems that causes crime are found to be immune to any form of known treatment. **Biological theory** states that people commit crimes because of genetic, biochemical, or neurological deficiencies. There was such a time that a person whom society deemed as *ugly*, was considered a potential criminal and was locked-up for the betterment of society. **Psychological theory** states that people commit crimes because of personality imbalances developed early in childhood. How many of these theories do you subscribe to? How many do you see affecting your community or society?

In sum, there is a close relationship between theoretical views of crime causation and the policies being devised to control antisocial activities. Keeping these issues in mind, criminologists have continued to develop data for understanding the nature of criminal activity. Whether the data can be used to reduce the incidence of crime depends on the resources your government and your society is willing to devote to the matter. What say you?

REMEMBER, CRIME IS LIKE CANCER; IF NOT TREATED QUICKLY (*SWIFT, CERTAIN, AND SEVERELY*), IT WILL GET YOU...SOON.