



Policing Models, Powers and Society:

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Theories of Criminology:

Criminological theories arose in modern society in the mid 18th century, where the philosophy of Cesare Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham placed emphasis on the rational decision making of human beings. This study aims to apply constructionist theories to analyse and evaluate the aspects of policing, crime, and deviance of the Kray twins, starting with a thorough explanation of several theories of crime, such as the rational choice theory, the labelling theory and social learning theory, along with their historical context and central ideas related to each theory. During the history before theories of crime were established, human behaviour was thought to be the result of demon possession or other supernatural forces, (Burke, 2018). The Period of Enlightenment, also referred to as the age of reason, saw an intellectual and philosophical transformation and scientific advancements, (Bruinsma, 2018). In accordance with Bruinsma (2018), Walters (2023) give illustration to the rational approaches to the understanding of human behaviour that moves away from the religious explanations of sin founded during the Middle Ages. Similarly, theorists during the period of enlightenment decided to address human rights and propose a new concept of proportional punishment, arguing that the harsh penalties of crime were not suitable chastisement and punishment should be proportionate to the crime, (Jouet, 2023), therefore supporting the notion that it was right to abolish hanging for petty crimes. Two key theorists during this time were Cesare Beccaria (1738-1794) and Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), both contributed to the development of classical criminology where together their ideas significantly influencing criminal

justice systems worldwide, shaping the understanding of crime and punishment, (Judge, 2024).

During the Enlightenment, Beccaria was the founder of the classical school of criminology, he identified the pleasure/pain principle as the cause of many human behaviours, including that of a criminal nature, (Sassi, 2024). Both Sassi (2024) and Schofield (2019) mention that Beccaria advocated for a more equitable penal system that should include a clear and speedy legal process with non-excessive punishment. His work placed emphasis on the need for clear public laws, and punishment that should serve as a deterrent for crime rather than a means of revenge like the torture and death used before. Likewise, Bentham agreed that punishment should be used as a deterrent, Quinn (2021) declares that ideas set out by Bentham laid the groundwork for modern legal systems, much of his work argued the rationality of criminal behaviour and his principle of utilitarianism suggested the best approach is one too maximise happiness. Classicism, the theoretical perspective, highlights the notion that individuals have free will and therefore rational choice is a large part of committing crime, Kim and Allen (2021) posit that criminals weigh the benefits against the consequences of their actions before engaging in criminal behaviour. As a result, it may overlook the complex social, cultural, and contextual factors that influence human behaviour and the construction of legal norms. The key objective of the theory was initially to reform the legal system, focusing on the crime rather than the offender. However, one criticism is that early classicism was not supported by empirical evidence, and the theory does not explain the different gender groups. Shor, Cattaneo and Alexander (2019) argue that the prevalent focus on the pleasure/pain principle as a basis of human nature leads to an uncritical acceptance

of how crime and deviance are legally defined. Therefore, suggesting that people tend to accept legal definitions of deviant behaviour without questioning their validity or origins, meaning that our understanding of crime can be limited, as the theory fails to consider how these concepts are socially constructed and vary across different societies, cultures, and eras. Brownfield (2018) suggests that a more critical approach would involve examining the underlying assumptions behind norms of society and criminal law, in addition to the consideration of alternative perspectives on social control and the links to criminal deviance. Contemporary classicism, developed in the late 20th century, builds on to the groundwork established by Bentham and Beccaria, (Friedrichs, 2018). Churchill, Yeomans and Channing (2021) implies that the more modern approach, often called neo-classicism, refines, and broadens classical concepts to tackle current challenges in the criminal justice system, preserving the fundamental ideas of rational choice and deterrence of crime while also interfering fresh perspectives on human behaviour and the societal factors that influence crime. The rational choice theorists Clarke and Cornish conducted several studies (1985, 1986 and 2006), that proclaimed that although crime is the product of rational decision making, there are several other factors that restrict offenders' ability to fully utilise their rationality. For example, the emotional state of an individual, strong emotions such as anger or fear can cloud judgement and lead to impulsive decision making, (Pogarsky, Roche and Pickett, 2018). Clarke and Cornish (2018) also put forth that crime prevention strategies that enhance the effort required to commit crimes should motivate offenders to refrain from deviant behaviours as these strategies can also reduce opportunities for crime; additionally, increasing the costs associated with criminal behaviour can further contribute to crime reduction.

Contemporary classicism encompasses several theories that integrate modern principles of rational choice and crime deterrence with insights into human behaviour and the effects of social influences on crime, (Loughran, 2019). Another theory that has derived from the rational choice theory is the routine activity theory, the primary argument being almost identical, criminality is the product of rational choice, however, Schaefer (2021) explains that the focus is on analysing the crime, rather than the offender. The main emphasis on the routine activity theory is that lifestyles and routines create opportunities for criminal behaviour. Henson (2020) highlights that several factors create opportunity, those being the presence of a likely offender and the presence of a suitable target (both offender and target could be anyone), when both factors are available, an opportunity for criminal deviance arises. Both theories resemble one another in several ways, each providing the idea that crime is a product of rational choice, the opportunity for crime and the cost/benefit analysis, (Wilcox and Cullen, 2018). Moreover, another similarity between the theories are the criticisms they receive, each theory tends to ignore the analysis of causal factors of deviant behaviour and focus on crime prevention, oversimplifying the complexity of human behaviour, (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 2019). To date, the research on the rational choice theory has tended to focus on the assumption that individuals always make decisions based on logic, consequently ignoring any emotional and psychological factors that have been known to influence behaviour. In a like manner, Weaver (2019) elucidates that existing accounts fail to adequately consider the social and economic contexts that have clear effects on crime rates, this is a result of the primary focus on opportunity for crime rather than examining the underlying causes. While classical criminology accentuates rational choice and deterrence, sociological

criminology such as Positivism, developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, redirects the attention to biological, social, and psychological factors of deviant criminal behaviour, (DeKeseredy, 2021). Both Farrington (2018) and Cohen (2018) notify us that these approaches aimed to uncover the underlying causes of crime by analysing the traits of individuals who engage in criminal behaviour and social circumstances surrounding them, rather than just merely linking deviant actions to free will. Positivism has raised awareness that criminals are contrasting to non-criminals, and the focus should surround the offender not the crime, unlike classicism. Blevins (2018) says that early positivist theorists asserted that they were able to identify causes of crime and prescribe “appropriate treatment”, this perspective considered the most effective response to crime to be treatment not punishment. Positivism believes that biology has more to do with deviant behaviour than social factors, indicating that criminals are born and not made. Theorist, Cesare Lombroso conducted experiments to analyse and identify whether offenders shared the same characteristics, Bass (2019) explains that in one of Lombroso’s experiments, he compared the physical features of Italian prisoners, which he then compared to Italian soldiers. From this experiment, he formed the hypothesis that criminals shared certain traits and therefore a ‘criminal type’ existed. However, many scholars determine his argument to be powerful for the time but render it powerless today, (Carrabine et al, 2009:86). Research on the subject of ‘born criminals’ was restricted to prisoners and therefore saw limitations to the argument; most of the traits were shared by prisoners as they are with much of the population, and they had nothing to do with criminality, (Knepper, 2021). According to Rafter (2018), Lombroso’s concept of the atavist suggested that some criminals were evolutionary

throwbacks, possessing physical traits that were indicative of earlier stages of human development, which made him believe that individuals with these characteristics were more prone to deviant behaviour. Laws (2020) explain that characteristics such as large sloping foreheads, high cheekbones and a prominent jawline were among the traits that Lombroso associated with primitive or unevolved individuals that he called atavists. Another limitation of his theory is that while he analysed male prisoners, he applied male-centric criteria to assess their criminality leading to biased conclusions. Gibson (2019) highlights how he tended to overlook the social and cultural factors that influenced the behaviour of women and primarily focused on their physical attributes, which does not accurately reflect the complexities of female criminality. Control theory, derived from Positivism, posits that individuals are not born, but made criminals by influences from social structures and relationships that either encourage or inhibit behaviour of a deviant nature, (Kempf, 2023). The theory suggests that some desires are satisfied by criminality, leading individuals to engage in non-conforming behaviour that society views as abhorrent, (Burt, 2020). Lilly, Cullen, and Ball (2018) attest that this creates social pressure to conform to criminal groups, where often influences operate at a micro level, with crime rates varying significantly based on locality. Kubin and Tublitz (2023) convey that social disorganisation theory highlights how certain areas, often referred to as “hot spots”, experience higher levels of crime due to a lack of social cohesion and support systems, for example areas in London experiencing many gang-based criminal activities., (Weisburd et al., 2023). Some limitations of the control theory include the tendency to oversimplify the motivations behind deviant behaviour by putting focus primarily on social bonds and conformity, while neglecting individual psychological

factors and broader structural issues such as poverty and inequality. In addition to this, Gottfredson and Hirschi (2019) convey that the control theory may not adequately account for the complexity of human behaviour, as the assumption lies on the strong social ties that lead to conformity, ignoring cases where individuals or groups may still choose to engage in deviant behaviour despite having supportive relationships around them. Furthermore, the theory struggles to explain why some individuals with weak social bonds do not commit criminal activity, indicating that there are other influences that are also at play. While the control theory focuses on the role of social bonds and connections to support networks along with rational decision making in the understanding of criminal behaviour, psychological approaches take a closer look at individual mental processes, (Bonta and Andrews, 2023). Psychological approaches, like the strain theory and the social learning theory, investigate how aspects such as personality traits, emotional influences and thought patterns can influence criminal tendencies. Bonta and Andrews (2023) inform us that these psychological theories, that include behavioural, cognitive perspectives and psychodynamic, provide additional insights into the intricate reasoning behind criminal actions, considering elements such as unconscious conflicts, learned behaviours, and flawed thinking. Behavioural psychology, such as the social learning theory became prominent in the 1960s, primarily through the work of Albert Bandura. Rumjaun and Narod (2020) express that Bandura's research, his Bobo doll experiments of 1975 and 1977, demonstrated how individuals can learn behaviours through observation and imitation of others, therefore highlighting the importance of social context in the learning process. Within his experience, his research involved young children observing an interaction between the doll and an

adult, in the first phase, Bandura had some of the children witness a non-aggressive interaction or no interaction at all, while others began to observe an adult behaving rather aggressively toward the inflatable doll, (Galanaki and Malafantis, 2022). In the second phase, he allowed the children to play in a room with various toys, the bobo doll included, the results showed that those who had observed aggressive behaviour were more likely to imitate it, demonstrating that children do in fact learn and reciprocate the behaviours they witness from adults around them. The experiment highlighted the role of observational learning in shaping behaviour. However, despite this, Bandura's experiments do have their limitations, for instance, the artificial setting used within them may not accurately represent reality, as the children were in a controlled environment rather than being in their natural environment, if the research had been done in their natural setting the results may have varied. Secondly, the experiment focused on short – term imitations of aggression, leaving it unclear whether the children would exhibit the same behaviours over time or whether the behaviours that were observed would influence future interactions in a different context. Moreover, Khadka (2024) imparts that the study was relatively small with a limited sample size and did not account for individual differences between the children, this means that Bandura failed to take into account the differences in personalities and the family backgrounds of the children involved, which of course could have had an impact on the way they observed and imitated the behaviour in the experiment. Lastly, critics have argued that instead of a bobo doll, that was designed to bounce back once hit, Bandura should have used a different object to portray a person, the doll bouncing back may have influenced the children's aggressiveness as they may have perceived it to be an appropriate target for their

behaviour. Building on the insights gained from the Bobo doll experiment, which highlighted the impact of observational learning behaviour, the case of the Kray Twins further exemplifies how social influences, familial ties, and rational decision making can shape criminal activities in real life contexts. Serving as a compelling case study for the social learning theory, the social bond theory and rational choice theory, Hobbs (2019) illustrates how their criminal behaviour was influenced by their environment, the strength of their social connections, and the calculated decisions they made in their criminal enterprises. Ronnie and Reggie Kray were infamous gangsters from London during the 1950s and 1960s, they led a gang named after themselves which was known for their involvement in various criminal activities such as extortion, racketeering and armed robbery, (Velich, 2024). The Krays were well known for their violent methods and maintained a stronghold over the East End of London, often using control tactics like intimidation to keep their territory in check. Velich (2024) says that they gained notoriety for their connections to politicians and celebrities, adding to their public image. Their criminal activities caught up with them eventually, leading to their arrest in 1968 where the pair were each sentenced to life imprisonment for several offences, including murder. Campbell (2019) shares that the story of the Krays has since become a significant part of British criminal history, with books, movies, shows and even copycat crimes. To begin, the social learning theory is the first to be applied to the Krays as they exemplified how exposure to criminal behaviour in their environment led them to initially imitate and adopt similar violent and unlawful actions, reinforcing their identity as notorious gangsters, (Ncube, 2018). The link between the theory and the case study is the upbringing and the influences that surrounded the Krays; growing up in a tough London environment

they were exposed to criminal behaviour from an early age, therefore imitated the behaviour they had observed as children. There were other criminal members of the Kray family, and this is where the behaviour was learned, the twins shaped their own behaviour to fit in with older gang members. Velich (2024) talks about the theory suggesting that behaviour is learned, and in the case of the Krays, this would be right, not only did they learn violent and criminal behaviours, but they also adopted the attitudes and values that are associated with gang life. The ability they had for mimicking delinquent behaviours gained them social approval only reinforcing their criminal activities and connections. Likewise, the social bond they maintained with their family, friends and community provided them with a sense of belonging and loyalty, (Tomsen and Hobbs, 2024). Velich (2024) elaborates that not only did the Kray twins have a very close-knit bond with one another, but they were also remarkably close with their mother, creating a bond that reinforced their criminality as they felt committed to support and protect themselves and her in their gang lifestyle. This bond and loyalty often outweighed the potential consequences of their delinquency, illustrating how strong social ties can lead to individuals, or groups in their case, to engage in deviant behaviour rather than conforming to societal norms, (Tomsen and Hobbs, 2024). Furthermore, another theory that applied to the case of the Kray twins is the rational choice theory, the London gangsters often made calculated decisions that led to their engagement in criminal activity based on the perceived benefits and risks. Like many offenders, they assessed the potential rewards of their delinquency, such as financial gain and a powerful reputation, against the likelihood of consequences, like getting caught. Shore (2018) explains that their strategic planning in committing acts of criminal behaviour, like extortion

and robbery, reflect a rational evaluation process, meaning that they held the belief that the advantages of financial gain outweighed the risks, leading to the pursuit of an organised crime lifestyle. Overall, the links between the Krays and the application of the various theories highlight the complexity of their criminal lifestyle. Social learning theory reveals how the environment they were brought up in influenced their role models and shaped their behaviour in adulthood, while social bond theory emphasised the importance of their strong familial and community ties that only reinforced their loyalty to a criminal lifestyle for a long time. Additionally, the rational choice theory further explained how they calculated their decision-making carefully weighing up the risks and rewards. Together, the theories can provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contributed to their criminal careers.

To conclude, the classism theory illustrates how an individual's social class impacts their experiences with crime and justice. In modern society, classicism is evident in the disproportionate rates of crime among groups of a lower socioeconomic class, for example, individuals from impoverished backgrounds often face systemic barriers, such as limited access to education and support, which scholars clearly state leads to higher crime rates, (Weisburd, et al., 2023). Despite this, it is critical to reiterate that the theory oversimplifies the relationship between criminal behaviour and social class by neglecting to account for intersecting factors such as race and gender, (Walters, 2023). To improve this theory, future research should adopt a larger intersectional lens to recognise the various identities and systemic inequalities that interact with social class. Policies aimed at reducing economic disparities, such as increasing access to quality education and job training programs in disadvantaged

societies could also mitigate the effects of classism on crime. Furthermore, the positivism theory posits that criminal behaviour is influenced by biological, social, and psychological factors rather than free will. In contemporary cases, positivism theories hold much relevance within the discussions around mental health and addiction as underlying causes of criminal behaviour, (Pogarsky, Roche and Pickett, 2018). For instance, a large spike in drug related offences could be better understood through these theories as addiction is known to often stem from psychological issues.

However, positivist theories often face criticism for the predetermined outlook, which leads to the stigmatisation of individuals with mental health issues. Thomas, Baumer and Loughran (2022) suggest that to enhance the theory, it would be essential to integrate a more comprehensive approach considering personal agency alongside environmental and biological factors. To do, the investment in mental health resources and rehabilitation programs would be a necessity, with hopes that supported individuals would make positive choices. Moreover, theories like social learning emphasise the significance of observational behaviour, especially at an early age, and in a more modern context, is particularly relevant in understanding the involvement of gang life in youth, where behaviours are often mimicked. Although, one limitation is the insufficient focus on resilience, and to improve, researchers should explore protective factors that help individuals resist negative influences.

Lastly, personality traits and mental processes are explored by the psychological theories to further understand the deviant behaviour of offenders. Cohen (2018) reveals that understanding the psychological factors that influence crime is crucial, especially in our modern society where there are ever-growing crime rates regarding substance abuse and violent behaviour. Despite their relevance, psychological

theories rely too heavily on the mental process of individuals and ignore broader social contexts, this approach would be much improved with the incorporation social and environmental factors into psychological assessments, (Kubin and Tublitz, 2023). Overall, criminological theories are still relevant in modern society because they provide the essential frameworks for understanding the complex factors that contribute to deviant behaviour, thereby informing effective prevention and intervention strategies.

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