



THE WESTERN CRIMINOLOGIST

Fall 2002

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTERN SOCIETY OF CRIMINOLOGY

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From the President

Libby Deschenes

Professor and Graduate Advisor
California State University, Long Beach

The academic year has started for many of us, which means it is time to make plans for attending this year's conference. The members of the WSC Executive Board have been working hard all summer to put together this year's program that will be held for the first time in Canada. We hope to see all of you in Vancouver, British Columbia in February 2003. Those who register will get a booklet of local attractions and discount coupons from Tourism Vancouver. You can also visit their website at <http://www.tourismvancouver.com>.

The conference will be held February 21 and 22 at the Sutton Place Hotel in downtown Vancouver. Our local arrangements chair, Neil Boyd, has contracted for extremely reasonable rates for this 5-star resort hotel at \$169 Canadian or \$105 U.S. per night. There will be a variety of accommodations available, including some apartments. The Board members who visited last October 2002 were elated about the food, service, and facilities at Sutton Place.

If you plan to attend the meeting, you will have to go through customs. It is best if you have a U.S. passport; if you don't have one now, you should apply right away as processing can take between 8 and 12 weeks. When making your flight reservations, remember to allow extra time to get through customs. There are many good deals right now on airfare and most of the major carriers (American, Delta, United) as well as Alaska Air and Air Canada, fly out of major U.S. cities to Vancouver. There is information on our website about making hotel reservations and shuttles.

Our program chair, Gisela Bichler-Robertson, has planned an exciting conference. Our theme this year is "Pathways to Partnerships". The conference will start once again with a networking session. Breakout sessions will begin at 10:15 a.m. on Friday and wrap up at 4:45 p.m. There is a President's Reception Friday evening. On Saturday, breakout sessions will start at 8:30 a.m. and will go until 4:45 p.m. The Book Sale will be held at the conclusion of the program session.

Various topics have been proposed, including theories of offending, environmental criminology, race and inequality, gangs and juvenile justice, gender and crime, family and domestic violence, law and courts, corrections, drug policy, terrorism, research, and education. The keynote speaker will be from the Vancouver area. The call for papers is included with this newsletter and is posted on our website.

The most recent issue of *Western Criminology Review*, Volume 3, No. 2, was published online in June 2002. Papers included the following: "Variables Affecting Adolescent Victimization: Findings from a National Youth Survey," by Gideon Fishman, Gustavo S. Mesch & Zvi Eisikovits; "A Topological Representation of the Criminal Event," by Arvind Verma & S.K. Lodha; "Television Network News Coverage of Corporate Crime From 1970-2000," by Brendan Maguire; "Facing Change: New Directions for Critical Criminology in the Early New Millennium?" by Richard Hil; and a research note by Martin A. Monto and Steve Garcia, "Recidivism Among the Customers of Female Street Prostitutes: Do Intervention Programs Help?" Thanks to our outgoing editor Pat Jackson for putting together this interesting volume of the WCR.

We have a new student representative, Melanie Tennant from CSU San Bernardino. Our former student representative, Eric Thompson, is now in a Ph.D. program at University of Illinois Chicago Circle. Students, please let Melanie know what your concerns may be as related to student presentations at the WSC, the student paper competition (deadline is December 15), the June Morrison scholarship, student chapters, or the plans for a student reception at this year's conference. The WSC is very supportive of student participation at conferences. We encourage

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those of you presenting at the conference to submit your application for the June Morrison Scholarship to help defray some of the costs of travel. These applications should be sent to the vice president, Angel Illaraza Fuentes (a.fuentes@tcu.edu). Also, see our website for more information on these student awards.

The site selection committee (David Huizinga and Brenda Vogel) has been gathering information about local hotels in potential sites. We have already narrowed down our selection to two hotels in downtown Long Beach for 2004. Suggestions for the 2005 conference include Las Vegas, San Antonio, Phoenix, Monterey Bay and Waikiki. Please let an Executive Board member or one of the site selection committee members know if you have a preference for any of these locations.

Thank you to those who volunteered to serve on the Executive Board and the members of our nominations committee, Linda Humble and Finn Esbensen. They have put together a fine tentative slate of candidates, including (alphabetically) John Berecochea who recently retired from the California Department of Corrections, Adrienne Freng from the University of Wyoming, Eric Thompson from University of Illinois, John Vivian from Arizona State University, and Brenda Vogel from CSU Long Beach. The candidates for Vice President include Cynthia Burke from the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) and Sue Cote from CSU Sacramento. If you have additional nominees, please contact Mike Day (mday@pdx.edu) within the next two weeks. Mike will send out the final ballot in November.

Questions about membership or serving on the Executive Board? Please contact the membership/publicity co-chairs Sue Cote at scote@csus.edu or Carrie Petrucci at cpetrucc@csulb.edu.



***Elements of Culture in Selected
Prison Facilities for Women in Russia***

Lyudmila Alpern (as translated by Angelia Graf)
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Member, Penal Reform International

Visiting Scholar, John Jay College of Criminal Justice (2002)

Visiting women's prisons always leaves a bitter aftertaste. Prison is no place for a woman, especially a Russian prison where an unbearable, cheerless feeling imbues the whole atmosphere. Yet women are festive creatures; they embellish their surroundings, bring joy, and inspire hope.

Women's prisons are filled with individuals who have been deprived from childhood of love, tenderness, food, or toys. Their psyche is more fragile, their education is limited, and

many do not have families. These women have no place to go after their release from prison, so many soon return, without the possibility of another life. Nobody needs them so prison sometimes beckons them back like a mother, and they latch on like children to their mom. 'Their mom,' however poorly, will feed and clothe them, give them white sheets to sleep in, care for them when ill, and let them earn enough for tobacco and tea. How fully this demonstrates Brodsky's lines about prison: "...As people who have spent time inside return to prison, and doves to the ark...."

The maternal appeal is very strong at the formerly strict and now mixed-regime penal colony for women in Orel. Here one feels a sense of community – not of cops pitted against robbers, but an atmosphere reminiscent of summer camp, with seniors and juniors. Although some are not happy campers to say the least, they have all long since grown used to and tolerant of one another. Life in prison is artificial, as in a hothouse, but that does not mean it is easy. Do tomatoes ripening under wraps feel good? Judging by their taste, not particularly. Such conditions are even harder on people, especially when there is a total lack of air, or spirituality in human terms; when the environment is hostile to the soul, leading to despair, brutalization, and sometimes even madness.

And yet one would think prison is meant not to turn people into brutes but make them come to their senses and realize the error of their ways! Common sense would have it so. But reality is different where prison employees are not the mentors they should be because they too are despairing, unspiritual people. Yet, the strict-regime prison camp for women at Orel is not of this kind. There is space, air, flowers, trees, and human beings. There are beasts too, but not in human form: real live animals, such as cats, or fairy-tale creatures such as mermaids, fantastical lions, eagles, swans, and even angels, the latter all created by human hands.

The proud creator of an angel, herself almost a fairy-tale figure, said to me at one of my visits: "I feel I have enormous talent." And indeed she does. It is not her first stay in this prison. A dangerous recidivist! Repeat offenders are usually serving time for theft. They get out of jail, steal again, are locked up again, and so it goes as long as they live. Some reach a ripe old age and depart this life without ever having known another home, another roof over their heads.

There is not only a fairy-tale quality to the sculptures but also to the stories of Liudmila Anatolievna Kabanova, the colony's head rehabilitator. She has devoted half her life to the camp, and her only daughter works there too. So what are her stories about? About how one of her wards came to complain about a cellmate and was told, "Well, they say you're no angel yourself – you're greedy too." The woman responded that, "Yes, but I celebrate my kitten's birthday every month." What more could one say?

Here's another more extraordinary tale. Upon encountering

one of her charges in the suite of rooms reserved for lengthy visits to prisoners, Liudmila Anatolievna asked, "What are you doing here? Why aren't you at home?" The woman shyly replied: "I'm meeting with my friend for the last time." "What friend is that?" Embarrassed, the woman led her to the room where her friend was waiting – a skinny young woman from her unit who had been her buddy. This story is notable because the prison superintendent did not deny the request for the visit because it is important not to turn away anybody who shows interest in the women, referred to as "special contingent."

In Russia, everything depends upon people, the nature of the person in charge, and not upon the law, duties, or job responsibilities. Vladimir Alekseevich Surovtsev, head of the Orlov prison, cares about his inmates. Another positive feature of the prison includes the good psychiatrist, whom the inmates speak highly of because they can always go to him when they're at the end of their rope and can't stand things anymore; when they're on the brink of a brawl and the ensuing punishment cell, he will send them to the hospital ward for a week, soothe them with pills and kind treatment, until they can continue serving their sentence. This man has apparently also realized that most of his patients are simply ill and neglected women with frayed nerves, who are often not responsible for their actions, and for whom the most important medicine is sensitivity and kindness.

For over a year a talented poet, Liuba Nebrenchna, has been living, or rather confined, in this camp. Still a very young woman, she has an inspired and even otherworldly look. Liuba was actually the beacon that drew us to the Orlov colony. She sent us some of her poetry. Then she had the idea of compiling a collection of prison poetry. She wanted to issue a call to all Russian prisons to send her poems, which she would put together in anthologies, perhaps getting help from someone in her endeavor and in the publication of the poetry.

We decided to help in both respects, just to lend support to a talented and sensitive human being. At the same time, we would take a look at her institution, since that was our field of study anyway. And that is how the mermaid emerged, like a mirage, against a backdrop of barbed wire at 6 a.m. on a hot summer day, and all the other manifestations of camp culture came into view.

Liuba and I had a long, private talk, sharing life experiences and other details. She recited her poetry, and I tried to show her that it was possible to rise above even such a difficult and forced stopping point as she had come to and make it work to one's benefit. All the more so when one had the ideas, talent and strength of character that Liuba exhibited. Naturally, it isn't easy. Life in prison is physically and morally difficult. You have to work hard, even too hard, so that sometimes there is no time even for simple things such as bathing and laundering. But you simply must hold on. The main thing is not to let yourself go, not to lose interest and the will to live.

Otherwise, you are overcome with a wave of prison indifference, not caring where, when and how you live; solely concerned about petty matters such as whether you have tea and smokes and looking to the end of each day. That is when people become stultified and their personality disintegrates. Nothing more lies in store for them but the next prison term, with luck in a facility such as the Orlov camp, though likely one worse, far worse.

Liuba's life fell apart when her parent's split up in the worst possible manner, or so it seems to me: her mother ran off with another man and her father was left all alone. She dropped out of school after junior high and lost all positive role models, working temporary jobs, experimenting with drugs, and leaving her hometown for Moscow. A chain of sad events and missteps brought her to this strict-regime camp. She has a long sentence to serve. I am always surprised by this disparity, although I know that fate does not lie in our hands.

Liuba's poems aren't light, sunny verses about nothing of consequence. They are a portal into a special, closed, fanatical world vaguely reminiscent of Goya's Capriccios. They belong to the culture not of the camp alone, but of all humankind.



Student Corner

Homeostatic Theory of Criminal Behavior: A Brief Integrative Explanation

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Introduction

The complexity of criminal behavior can no more be described by a single theoretical framework, absent of integration, than the human body, with all of its intricacies and connections, can be understood by a solitary examination. Differing sociological, psychological, and biological factors work together to determine such behavior and thereby serve as a type of causation triangle. The result is an increased need for a comprehensive theoretical view addressing the many variables and factors that underpin the diverse activities and behaviors marked as criminal. In an attempt to provide this view, I have formulated a homeostatic theory of criminal behavior, which is based upon the assertion that certain considerations need to be taken into account when determining the causes of crime. These considerations include sociological factors prevalent at a given time and place, interaction of such factors with individual characteristics, and parts played by genetics and/or other biological conditions.

The significance of the interconnectedness of the various factors—sociological, psychological, and biological—cannot be overemphasized. Nor can the impact of these factors upon the motivation underlying criminal activity be ignored. Thus, in order to comprehend the causes of criminal behavior and postulate control actions, it is necessary to examine these factors in their entirety. The following is a discussion of the various factors and how the interrelationships between the sub-units within these factors impact motivational levels associated with crime.

Sociological Forces Influencing Criminality

Erich Fromm (1969) stated that the movement toward democracy and freedom in more modernized nations has led to an increase in the development of personalities immersed in feelings of alienation and insecurity. The dominant systems in such environments thereby produce a mixture effect, where there is acceptance of “pieces” of information and conformity to ideas and behaviors along with increased desires for individuality and independence.

The connection between economic inequality, poverty, opportunity, and crime has been viewed as an area of particular importance. It is important to study the disparity between the number of wealthy in a given environment who gained wealth through illegal means and the number of wealthy in the same environment who gained wealth through conventional means. The focus would therefore not just be on poor versus rich, but on how the rich obtained their wealth. Those who gain wealth through conventional means will most likely change environments as a result of their elevated status, whereas those who gain it through illegal means will keep their wealth. The result will be a kind of social entity separate from the rest, where the viewpoints of the influential criminals will be dominant. In these areas, there will be an increase in those of lower status mimicking the attitudes and behaviors of the powerful.

A homeostatic theory perspective postulates that criminal motivation can be tied to the differentiation in the number of the legally wealthy versus the number of the illegally wealthy in a given area. Motivation to commit crimes will be higher in those areas where there are more people made wealthy, or at least comfortable, through illegal means. It will be lower in those areas where the opposite is true. This is because wealth tends to be tied to power and influence. Moreover, there seems to be an underlying conception that the gaining of power, even through illegal means, reduces negative internal feelings. Such conceptions only increase motivation to engage in criminal behavior.

Psychological Factors Influencing Criminality

Although there are several other sociological forces that impact criminal motivation, time and space restraints prevent further discussions. The focus will now revolve around the role of perceptual differences and the impact of mental illness on criminal motivation. It should be recognized, however, that perceptual and characteristic developments are

intertwined with some of the sociological factors discussed above.

A common question regarding criminal behavior is why one individual in a given environment engages in criminal activity, while another, living in the same type of environment and of similar characteristics, does not. Available research suggests that there are always multiple variables in play that account for these circumstances. One such variable is individual perception. The word perception, as it is considered for this theory, will be defined as the view of self and environment, to include the larger environment, developed through past experiences and exposure to knowledge. A person’s family life, knowledge acquisition, peer relationships, and exposure to societal values therefore shape one’s perception of self and of the world.

A person’s perception impacts his/her emotional state, either validating or refuting feelings of ostracism, powerlessness, and so forth. Whereas one person might construe an interaction between individuals, or between an individual and an organization, as positive, another might construe the same event as negative. One’s perceptions result in emotional states and reactions unique to that individual. Because some of these reactions may be criminal, it is necessary to determine how the perceptual process truly works and then mark the areas impacting its development - family relationships, peer influences, media, biology, etc. This understanding serves a two-fold purpose: the common underlying perceptions associated with criminal behavior allow for more target specific prevention programs; and professionals working with delinquents and criminals get a better idea of how to alter perceptual distortions of those they are trying to rehabilitate.

Biological Factors in Criminality

There is no doubt that the role of genetics and/or other biological conditions with regard to criminal behavior is a controversial one. Juan Williams (1996) described the controversy related to the possibility of prejudicial practices resulting from the research that connects violent behavior to genetics and/or other biological factors. Williams and others are concerned that research will focus primarily upon African Americans because of the disproportionate number of minorities in prison, and the result of that focus would thereby initiate the targeting of young black children.

Despite the controversy, it is important to understand the role of biology with regard to criminal behavior, particularly because of the growing evidence supporting biological theories. Beth Azar (1998: 28) pointed out that, “Studies over the past 20 years on twins and adopted children have firmly established that there is a genetic component to just about every human trait and behavior...” However, genetics alone cannot explain the full panoply of human behavior.

There is strong evidence linking brain damage, hormonal fluctuations, genetics, and neurotransmitter levels with such

tendencies as impulsiveness and destructiveness. As a result, biological factors must also be taken into account when formulating a comprehensive theoretical perspective relating to criminal behavior.

Homeostatic Theory

Sociological, psychological, and biological factors cannot by themselves explain criminal behavior. Human behavior, and especially criminal behavior, is a complex phenomenon that results from the interaction of many variables. My goal is to draw upon the explanatory variables from each theoretical perspective and place them in the context of a homeostatic theory of criminal behavior.

The premise of the homeostatic theory of criminal behavior is that individual choices stem from an emotional need, and that need is the direct result of the interaction between sociological, psychological, and biological forces. Within each of us, there is an emotional comfort level to which we seek equilibrium; that level will vary from person to person due to biological differences and changes in accordance with social and/or psychological experiences.

Thus, one's level of comfort is dependent upon past experiences, knowledge, biological considerations, etc. Two people may feel powerlessness as a result of their environment. They may seek to address the discomfort in order to maintain a sense of emotional equilibrium. However, one might be less capable of dealing with the situation in a socially accepted manner. The reason for the difference might be biological (chemical imbalance), social (peer-pressure), psychological (cognitive), or a combination of any of these factors. Hence, any program designed to address criminal behavior must be multifaceted and directed toward all areas of concern.

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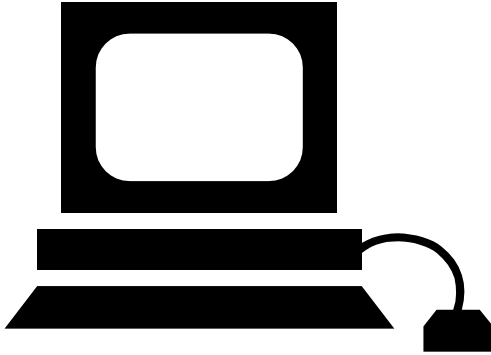
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*See you in
Vancouver, Canada
in February 2003!*

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