CHAPTER 2:

Theory and Criminal Justice Research
Theory and observation go together in science, but sometimes theory precedes observation, and other times observation comes before theory.
• **Theory** – Systematic explanation for the observed facts & laws that relate to a particular aspect of life; propositions explaining why events occur in the manner that they do

• **Concepts** – Abstract elements (e.g., SD, peer group, JD, SES, stable family, etc.)

• **Variables** – Counterpart of concepts, can be observed and take different values

• **Statements** – Theories are comprised of these
TERMS USED IN THEORY CONSTRUCTION

• **Statements** – A theory is comprised of several types

• **Axioms** – Fundamental assumptions taken to be true; an assumption about reality

• **Propositions** – Conclusions drawn about relationships between concepts based on logical interrelationships among axioms
• Objectivity – “independent of mind”; not utilized
  • Rather, we use intersubjective agreement
  • If several of us agree that something exists, we treat it as objective

• Observation – Information gathering of the experience of whatever may or may not exist
**TERMS USED IN THEORY CONSTRUCTION**

- **Hypothesis** – Specific expectations about empirical reality, derived from propositions

- **Paradigm** – Fundamental model or scheme that organizes our view of something; a lens through which we view a certain piece of reality in our world
Three main elements:

- **Theory** – Scientist begins with an interest in some aspect of the real world

- **Operationalization** – Specification of the steps, procedures, operations to identify and measure variables

- **Observation** – Look at the world systematically, develop theoretical expectations, and measure

- **Shaw and McKay** – Crime in Chicago – Concentric Zones
• Deductive (general to specific)
• Inductive (specific to general) – “grounded theory”
• Role of race in police decision making
• Theory → Operationalize our hypotheses (method) → Observation → Empirical Generalizations
• Field research & Survey research – used to develop theories from observations
Crime is a social problem; research driven by theory is linked to public policy.

Theory structures research, which, in turn, is consulted to develop policy.

Research guides the ways in which the government and public respond to crime.

Policies often take the form of if-then statements, and are subject to empirical tests.
• Maintains that behavior is affected by environmental forces
• Explores the link between urban design, human behavior, and crime
• Crime is more common in urban transition zones where the physical environment (crowded housing) is unpleasant and the social environment (poverty) is undesirable
• Based on ideas of Defensible Space and CPTED
• Led to the development of situational crime prevention – as a policy measure
• Directed at highly specific forms of crime
• Involves the management, design, manipulation of immediate environment to increase effort and risk of crime, reduce the perceived reward, and remove excuses and justifications
• Prevention auto theft/vandalism in parking lot?