



SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES OF CRIME

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Abstract:

Social structure theories assert that the disadvantaged economic class position is a primary cause of crime. The theories state that neighborhoods which are "lower class" create forces of strain, frustration and disorganization that create crime.

When you look at the theory, the strains might not necessarily come from people's frustrations with acquiring The American Dream, but rather a mixture in strains such as homelessness, abuse and neglect, subcultures, deviant values and frustrations about poverty. Meaning, there might be more than one factor in play when a person is "influenced" to commit a crime by interacting within an imposed economic class. A person might encounter one of these factors by themselves and not decide to succumb to peer pressure or let his/her abuse trauma lead them to a life of crime. A person might face poverty but have enough resilience through family values to make a choice of lawful actions.

Some aspects of these theories seem a bit outdated because there have been many community initiatives that promote culture pride and community involvement in the "disadvantage" neighborhoods which are not being accounted for in the theories.

KEYWORDS:

Sociological, Theory, Crime, Strain Theory, Social Learning, Self Control.

.INTRODUCTION

Social learning theory is a theory that attempts to explain socialization and its effect of the development of the self. There are many different theories that explain how people become socialized, including psychoanalytic theory, functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interaction theory. Social learning theory, like these others, looks at the individual learning process, the formation of self, and the influence of society in socializing individuals.

Social learning theory considers the formation of one's identity to be a learned response to social stimuli. It emphasizes the societal context of socialization rather than the individual mind. This theory postulates that an individual's identity is not the product of the unconscious (such as the belief of psychoanalytic theorists), but instead is the result of modeling oneself in response to the expectations of others. Behaviors and attitudes develop in response to reinforcement and encouragement from the people around us. While social learning theorists acknowledge that childhood experience is important, they also believe that the identity people acquire is formed more by the behaviors and attitudes of others.

Social learning theory has its roots in psychology and was shaped greatly by psychologist Albert Bandura. Sociologists most often use social learning theory to understand crime and deviance.

Sociological criminology is the practice of examining crime from a sociological point of view. Specifically, sociologists see crime as an individual and social problem and believe that it cannot be

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properly understood without examining the surrounding social, political and economical context. People in this field attempt to understand why people commit crimes and what can be done about it, with a focus on the offender as an individual.

Three main sociological theories of crime are: the strain, social learning and self control theories. Each of these theories can benefit from cognitive restructuring to assist in changing the way criminals think, as well as paving the way for preventing future criminal activity.

The Strain Theory

The strain theory suggest that people engage in criminal activity as a means to escape for the strain of a bad experience one may be experiencing. For example, a person who is having financial difficulty may engage in stealing to reduce their financial problems. Another example is one who engages in the use of illegal drugs. This person will take drugs simply to make themselves feel better, giving them a means to escape the daily pressures of life. Both of these examples can contribute to an individual committing criminal activity. Failure to achieve certain goals such as respect, money and self-sufficiency can all lead to criminal behavior. When a person is in a position that is causing them strain, they will tend to feel bad, which in turn will generate anxiety for corrective action. This will then cause a response that will result in criminal behavior. (Net Industries, 2009). Utilizing cognitive restructuring as a tool to changing criminal thinking would definitely be beneficial in this area. Cognitive restructuring will allow room for 'replacement thinking.' Practicing a different thinking pattern can be a way of relief from the strain of bad experiences.

In sociology and criminology, strain theory states that social structures within society may pressure citizens to commit crime. Following on the work of Émile Durkheim, Strain Theories have been advanced by Robert King Merton (1957), Albert K. Cohen (1955), Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin (1960), Neil Smelser (1963), Robert Agnew (1992), and Steven Messner and Richard Rosenfeld (1994). Strain may be either:

Structural: this refers to the processes at the societal level which filter down and affect how the individual perceives his or her needs, i.e. if particular social structures are inherently inadequate or there is inadequate regulation, this may change the individual's perceptions as to means and opportunities; or

Individual: this refers to the frictions and pains experienced by an individual as he or she looks for ways to satisfy his or her needs, i.e. if the goals of a society become significant to an individual, actually achieving them may become more important than the means adopted.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory simply states people learn through the observation of others. These observations can be through other's attitudes and behavior. Criminals learn to engage in crime, simply from learning such behavior from associating with other criminals. Individuals in this category began to believe crime is favorable, from being exposed to crime through criminal role models. When individuals began to associating and expose themselves to other criminals, they themselves are likely to begin committing crime themselves. There are three methods in which an individual discover criminal behavior; beliefs, modeling, and differential reinforcement (Law Rank, 2009). A good example of such behavior would be a juvenile in a poverty stricken neighborhood in which he is exposed to drug dealing activities. He sees the drug dealers flashing a lot of money, driving fine cars and wearing the latest gear. Selling drugs becomes desirable to him. He began to sell drugs himself, which is obviously criminal activity. Cognitive restructuring would be beneficial to reducing criminal thinking and behavior in this area because it would help the offender to recognize his own thoughts, feelings, attitudes, behavior and beliefs. In doing so, the offender will begin to realize that he/she must be their own role model and not engage in criminal activity.

Self Control Theory

Last but not least, the self control theory. This theory basically states that people will engage in any self-indulgent behavior simply because it gratifies them. Engaging in such behavior can result into criminal activity. An example would be a person who decides to steal a car to joy ride in. This person is considered to be selfish and steals simply for the sake of his/her own pleasure. Individuals who lack self-control will generally be insensitive, impulsive, nonverbal risk-takers. Cognitive restructuring is the perfect tool to use when working with offenders who have poor self-control. Criminals can become productive members of society, if taught restraint and self-control. Cognitive restructuring can instruct offenders on understanding how their selfish behavior can be harmful to others (Cunningham, 2006).

In conclusion, all of the three theories mentioned above are capable of utilizing cognitive restructuring as a means to changing criminal thinking and preventing future crimes. Cognitive

restructuring is a confirmed method that can help correct criminal thinking, leading to low recidivism rates. Using this method, criminals can change their maladaptive, unreasonable thoughts into a more practical thought process (Minnesota Cognitive Behavioral Network, 2002).

Labeling theory

Labeling theory is concerned with how the self-identity and behavior of individuals may be determined or influenced by the terms used to describe or classify them. It is associated with the concepts of self-fulfilling prophecy and stereotyping. Labeling theory holds that deviance is not inherent to an act, but instead focuses on the tendency of majorities to negatively label minorities or those seen as deviant from standard cultural norms. The theory was prominent during the 1960s and 1970s, and some modified versions of the theory have developed and are still currently popular. Unwanted descriptors or categorizations - including terms related to deviance, disability or diagnosis of a mental disorder - may be rejected on the basis that they are merely "labels", often with attempts to adopt a more constructive language in its place. A stigma is defined as a powerfully negative label that changes a person's self-concept and social identity.

Labeling theory is closely related to social-construction and symbolic-interaction analysis. Labeling theory was developed by sociologists during the 1960s. Howard Saul Becker's book *Outsiders* was extremely influential in the development of this theory and its rise to popularity

SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION THEORY

In sociology, the Social disorganization theory was one of the most important theories developed by the Chicago School, related to ecological theories. Social disorganization theory: linking (directly) low crime rates to neighborhood ecological characteristics, youths from disadvantaged neighborhoods were participants in a subculture in which delinquency was approved behavior and that criminality was acquired in social and cultural settings through a process of interaction. A core principle of social disorganization theory is that place matters—i.e., one's residential location—as much or more than one's individual characteristics (age, gender, race) in shaping the likelihood that a person will become involved in illegal activities. Larry Gaines and Roger Miller state in their book, *Criminal Justice in Action*, that "...crime is largely a product of unfavorable conditions in certain communities." According to the Social Disorganization Theory there are ecological factors that lead to high rates of crime in these communities, and these factors linked to constantly elevated levels of "high school dropouts, unemployment, deteriorating infrastructures, and single-parent homes" (Gaines and Miller). The theory is not intended to apply to all types of crime, but instead to street crime at the neighborhood level. The theory has not been used to explain organized crime, corporate crime, or deviant behavior that takes place outside neighborhood settings. Up to the beginning of seventies, this theory took a back seat to the psychological explanation of crime. A recent overview of social disorganization theory, including suggestions for refining and extending the theory, is a journal article by Kubrin and Weitzer (2003).

Critical theory

Critical theory is a school of thought that stresses the reflective assessment and critique of society and culture by applying knowledge from the social sciences and the humanities. As a term, critical theory has two meanings with different origins and histories: the first originated in sociology and the second originated in literary criticism, whereby it is used and applied as an umbrella term that can describe a theory founded upon critique; thus, the theorist Max Horkheimer described a theory as critical insofar as it seeks "to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them."

In philosophy, the term critical theory describes the neo-Marxist philosophy of the Frankfurt School, which was developed in Germany in the 1930s. Frankfurt theorists drew on the critical methods of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. Critical theory maintains that ideology is the principal obstacle to human liberation. Critical theory was established as a school of thought primarily by five Frankfurt School theoreticians: Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, and Erich Fromm. Modern critical theory has been influenced by György Lukács and Antonio Gramsci as well as the second generation Frankfurt School scholars, including Jürgen Habermas. In Habermas's work, critical theory transcended its theoretic roots in German idealism, and progressed closer to American pragmatism. Concern for social "base and superstructure" is one of the remaining Marxist philosophic concepts in much of the contemporary critical theory.

While critical theorists have been frequently defined as Marxist intellectuals their tendency to denounce some Marxist concepts and to combine Marxian analysis with other sociologic and philosophic

traditions has been labeled as revisionism by Classical, Orthodox, and Analytical Marxists, and by Marxist-Leninist philosophers. Martin Jay has stated that the first generation of critical theory is best understood as not promoting a specific philosophical agenda or a specific ideology, but as "a gadfly of other systems".

SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY AND CRIME/DEVIANCE

According to social learning theory, people engage in crime because of their association with others who engage in crime. Their criminal behavior is reinforced and they learn beliefs that are favorable to crime. They essentially have criminal models that they associate with. As a consequence, these individuals come to view crime as something that is desirable, or at least justifiable in certain situations. Learning criminal or deviant behavior is the same as learning to engage in conforming behavior: it is done through association with or exposure to others. In fact, association with delinquent friends is the best predictor of delinquent behavior other than prior delinquency.

Social learning theory postulates that there are three mechanisms by which individuals learn to engage in crime: differential reinforcement, beliefs, and modeling.

Differential reinforcement of crime. Differential reinforcement of crime means that individuals can teach others to engage in crime by reinforcing and punishing certain behaviors. Crime is more likely to occur when it 1. Is frequently reinforced and infrequently punished; 2. Results in large amounts of reinforcement (such as money, social approval, or pleasure) and little punishment; and 3. Is more likely to be reinforced than alternative behaviors. Studies show that individuals who are reinforced for their crime are more likely to engage in subsequent crime, especially when they are in situations similar to those that were previously reinforced.

Beliefs favorable to crime. On top of reinforcing criminal behavior, other individuals can also teach a person beliefs that are favorable to crime. Surveys and interviews with criminals suggest that beliefs favoring crime fall into three categories. First is the approval of certain minor forms of crime, such as gambling, "soft" drug use, and for adolescents, alcohol use and curfew violation. Second is the approval of or justification of certain forms of crime, including some serious crimes. These people believe that crime is generally wrong, but that some criminal acts are justifiable or even desirable in certain situations. For example, many people will say that fighting is wrong, however that it is justified if the individual has been insulted or provoked. Third, some people hold certain general values that are more conducive to crime and make crime appear as a more attractive alternative to other behaviors. For example, individuals who have a large desire for excitement or thrills, those who have a disdain for hard work and a desire for quick and easy success, or those who wish to be seen as "tough" or "macho" might view crime in a more favorable light than others.

The imitation of criminal models. Behavior is not only a product of beliefs and reinforcements or punishments that individuals receive. It is also a product of the behavior of those around us. Individuals often model or imitate the behavior of others, especially if it is someone that individual looks up to or admires. For example, an individual who witnesses someone they respect committing a crime, who is then reinforced for that crime, is then more likely to commit a crime themselves.

CONCLUSION:

Family and community distance has a distinct expression in the Latino community. "We think everything and still have no choice but to leave", would be a more appropriate choice of words in this particular scenario.

The theories are addressing factors and events in our neighborhoods that need constant attention, such as the choice to form gangs, drug trafficking (to a certain extent) and counter-cultures. However, there are as many forces that counter these crime inspiring situations as there are ones who may potentially foster it. The conditions of lower class neighborhoods are more diverse and in the gray area than some of the theories vocabulary have taken into account

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