

TRADITIONAL THEORIES OF DEVIANCE

NORMATIVE THEORIES

Deviance: behaviour that violates the dominant norms of society - there are degrees of deviance, those deemed as "most deviant" are those with tangible consequences to an individual or group

Central Features of Normative Theories

- Treat deviance and norm violation as synonymous - explanations for the origins of deviance differ
- Conceptualise social control (punishment) as the non-problematic response to rule infractions - social control follows deviance as the way to reinstate the social order
- Classify or identify different types of deviance
- Identify the factors that lead to deviant actions - explain why individuals are motivated to break norms

Durkheim: Functionalist Theory (deviance brings people together)

- **Core argument:** crime has a positive consequence on the social system as it contributes to social cohesion – unites people in shared outrage when valued rules of conduct are violated (common expression of anger increases social solidarity by re-affirming agreement on social norms)
- Criminal tendencies have biological and psychological causes – existence of criminality is normal and universal (all societies contain those individuals motivated to break the law)
- Social control – community boundaries are elastic: at one point in time certain activities fall within those boundaries whilst other times they may not (homosexuality)

Merton: Strain Theory (Anomie)

- Deviant behaviour is the result of the tensions that are caused by the gap between culturally defined goals and the socially structured means available to individuals to achieve these goals - Anomie

Adaptions to Anomie:

- **Conformity:** individuals pursue cultural goals through approved / legitimate means - going to college and getting a decent job
- **Innovation:** individuals lack access to institutional means, so turn to unconventional means to achieve cultural goals - higher rates of crime such as shoplifting, robbery, burglary etc.
- **Ritualism:** when the means are followed but the cultural goals lose their relevance - the bureaucrat who follows organisational rules often loses sight of the purpose of those regulations and the overall goals of the agency
- **Retreatism:** rejection of both culturally prescribed goals and institutional norms by complete withdrawal from society - psychotics, vagabonds, chronic alcoholics and drug addicts
- **Rebellion:** seeking a transformed social structure by replacing existing social goals and means – joining a gang

Sutherland: Differential Association Theory (deviance is learned behaviour)

- Associations explain criminal behaviour as those who associate with “deviants” learn the values, attitudes, techniques and motives for criminal behaviour - the greater the frequency, duration, and intensity of their immersion in deviant environments, the more likely it is that they will become deviant

Hirschi: Social Control Theory (deviance is the weakening of social bonds)

- Deviance occurs when an individual's attachment to social bonds are weakened – an individual's bond to society prevents them from violating social rules

Societal Bond:

- **Attachment:** to others (parents, school, friends) - lacking these attachments frees an actor from moral restraints (assuming those social groups themselves are committed to conformity rather than deviance)
- **Commitment:** to conventional forms such as education and occupational success – aspirations play an important role in producing conformity
- **Involvement:** in conventional activities makes a person too busy to engage in deviant behaviour
- **Belief:** in the norms prohibiting deviant activities

LABELLING PERSPECTIVE (symbolic interactionism)

- Deviance is not the act one commits, but the consequence of how others respond to the act – responses to behaviour initially defined as deviant can change (graffiti now seen as “art” in some areas)
- Those with more power (based on race, class, gender, or social status) apply labels to people and create categories of deviance - reinforcing the power structure and hierarchies of society
- **Primary Deviance:** situational and rational episodes of deviant behaviour that do not affect an individual's self-conception or public identity as a conforming member of society – speeding
- **Secondary Deviance:** an individual continues with this deviant behaviour and is given a negative social label that changes their self-concept and social identity – labelled a “crim” so accepts this social status

POLITICAL ECONOMY THEORIES (conflict/critical)

- Criminalisation of certain types of conduct and the differential enforcement of criminal laws reflect the interests of powerful groups – criminal law doesn't reflect social consensus, but the interests of dominant groups
- Theories are less concerned with why individuals or groups are motivated to be criminally deviant and more concerned with why the behaviour is defined as criminal
- Theories generally present the violator of criminal laws as powerless and a victim of social inequality – downplaying any responsibility on the part of the actor
- **Marx:** laws of capitalist societies favour the interests of the bourgeoisie - rather than resolving disputes (maintaining social order) the law is a source of conflict and repression – crime is associated with the activities of the 'lower class' and these groups are more likely to engage in criminal behaviour
- **Quinney:** criminal definitions result from conflicts and unequal power between different segments of society - powerful groups control activities which threaten their interests by criminalising those activities
- Burglary and drug dealing, crimes against the person, industrial sabotage and other predatory crimes are rational responses to the inequities of capitalist society
- The capitalist class commit many social injuries including price fixing, discrimination, pollution and economic exploitation - these 'crimes of domination' are rarely criminalised

POST MODERNIST APPROACHES

- Generalised explanations to deviance topics such as juvenile delinquency, prostitution, homosexuality, drug use, alcohol consumption etc. can't capture the lived reality, resistance, perspectives or subjectivities of those categorised deviant – general theories do not sufficiently incorporate different cultures, points of view, values and histories which shape the meaning and definition of deviance

Queer Theory

- Views sexuality as socially constructed rather than as given or natural and thus converges with labelling theory - emphasises power and normalisation and examines the constitutive role of discourse in the construction of multiple sexual identities (those who do not identify in either homosexual or heterosexual categories)
- **Foucault:** argues that criminology is a practice that in a sense creates the category of criminality - theory of discipline pays greater attention to people's resistance to their labelling and differential treatment and their denial of a deviant status
- The social world must be examined from the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender, sexuality as well as designations of deviance

FEMINIST THEORIES

- Criticise all theories of deviance for their inattention to women and their assumptions about women's nature (emotionalism, deceit, irrationality, tendency for promiscuity) and their involvement in gender-specific types of deviance (shoplifting, prostitution)
- Concerned with the origins of women's deviance, the structure and content of the criminal law, the activities of official agents of social control, women's experiences as victims of crime and gender inequality in the criminal justice system
- **Pollock:** men's and women's deviance is similar - crime statistics fail to reflect the scale of women's deviation because of the underreporting of their offences, the police and courts' lenient treatment, and women's ability to conceal information through manipulation
- Women's criminality reflects their biological nature in a specific cultural setting which distinguishes their behaviour from that of men – identifying hormones, reproductive roles and capacities as determining their emotionality, impulsiveness, unreliability and deviousness (leading to crime)
- **Schur:** labelling perspective to explain the differential application of norms and definitions of deviance to men and women - the norm is male, to be female is to be deviant (women do not have to engage in specific acts to be labelled deviant as the gender system routinely devalues and subordinates them)
- **Adler:** theory of female crime to account for the increase of serious crimes committed by women - argues that a new breed of women criminals involved in violent offences is emerging
- The narrowing of the gap between male and female criminality is the dark side of the women's liberation movement - to gain status women copy men's pattern of offending, made easier by technological advancement in firearms and electronic devices (rendering physical strength less important). As women enter the paid labour force they experience the same stresses as men (increasing motivation for crime)