

LAWS3426 CRIMINOLOGY (SAMPLE)

Seminar 6 Mapping Social Space (inc Strain Theory)

Durkheim

- Born in France (near German border) in 1858 and died in 1917.
- The period in which Durkheim lived was characterised by rapid social change -urbanisation, and industrialization. He witnessed the events of the Paris Commune and the violent repression that followed.
- One of Durkheim's major concerns was social order and disorder and their relationship to crime.
- Like most sociology his task was to map and explain social change and its repercussions. – Durkheim was a positivist in that data was crucial to exploring social 'facts' –i.e. suicide rates.

Sociological Positivism

- Moral and social forces are seen to be external to the individual - and observed and measurable as ***social facts; 'ways of acting, thinking and feeling, external to the individuals, and endowed with a power of coercion, by reason of which they control him'***
- As individuals we are the product of the influence of social forces, i.e. we are determined by them. Individuals in society learn the cultures, values, roles and rules (norms) of society through socialisation in family, school, work and etc.
- Different from classicism, where for sociological positivism, it is the foreshadowing behavior of individuals' intention .

Solidarity and the Division of Labour

- He argued societies are organised and stratified by the division of labour.
- Pre-industrial societies are characterised by **mechanical solidarity** - all members of society share a uniformity of consciousness. This maintains social cohesion through strong moral regulation promoted by bodies like the Church. In these societies the division of labour is simple (at its base level hunter collector and mutual survival).
- Industrial capitalist societies are characterised by **organic solidarity** - the division of labour is more complex and specialised.
- **Collective conscience** - sets of norms and values through which solidarity was to be achieved (influences changes in law, constitution etc....). Thus society was possessed of a collective rationality.

Mechanical	Organic
Simple society	Complex society
Little division of labour	Highly organized
Law is to enforce uniformity and prevent deviation	Law is to regulate the interactions between the different parts of society and between members
Punishment is retributive	Punishment is restitutive

Anomie - Durkheim

- In **Division of Labour in Society** - anomie characterises a society in crisis, where the economy is in an extreme state, collective life is in crisis and 'each individual finds himself in a state of war with every other'.
- In Suicide anomie is also used to characterise the mental state of the individual who is insufficiently regulated by society and suffers from the problem of 'infinite aspiration' driven by desire for more and more.
- Durkheim is at pains to explore how anomic states can be avoided –in this sense he believed that each member of a society was aware of their treatment and would react to this.

Type of Suicide	Degree and nature of solidarity	Example
Egoistic	Lack of integration	Suicides of protestants and single people
Anomic	Lack of regulation	Suicides during economic crisis
Altruistic	Excessive integration	Suicides in primitive societies, military suicides
Fatalistic	Excessive regulation	Suicide of slaves

Crime is a Given Social Fact

- **Crime is normal.** It is present in all societies
- The form of criminality changes according to the social formation therefore criminal acts are not the same everywhere - however some acts always face punishment.
- Using recently developed statistical evidence Durkheim argued that crime was increasing with the change from mechanical to organic solidarity in modern societies

Crime and Deviancy Can be Positive

- Durkheim suggested that the high (and so pathological) levels of crime would recede as modern society gradually sorted out the regulatory institutions and legal boundaries necessary to address individual needs.
- **Crime can also be healthy for a given society** so long as it did not exceed certain limits (when it becomes pathological).
- **Deviancy can be positive as it facilitates social change** (Mandela; Jesus; Gandhi; M. L. King examples).
- Deviant or criminal acts that offend 'collective sentiment' bind society together sharpening sense of moral codes -community comes together against the transgressor.

Critique of Durkheim

- Overly determinist –that is, even though the individual is endowed with 'sentiments' and a 'type' of character, thought processes are very much determined by the collective society. Individuals and groups have little or no agency.
- Never questions that statistics are anything other than stand alone, objective facts – crime was not rising as he suggested.
- Never questions how state institutions might contribute to criminalisation (seen as neutral).

- Modernisation thesis has been challenged. While theft might rise as a product of modernisation, homicide does not appear to (even on the basis of the stats Durkheim used).
- He assumes a largely neutral role for the state, and that the law simply reflects community consensus.
- Tends to neglect the pluralist nature of society.

Social change & the ecology of crime

Chicago School

Context

- Chicago was a rapidly growing city at the turn of the century and in the early 20th century. With migrants from all over the world arriving and settling.
- The Chicago School academics interested in studying social, demographic and geographical change –described the city’s growth as ecological -the ecology of crime.
- For the Chicago School, the city was something of an ‘urban jungle’ equated with crime and other social problems - and with the apprehension that Americans more broadly viewed the expansion of their cities at this time.

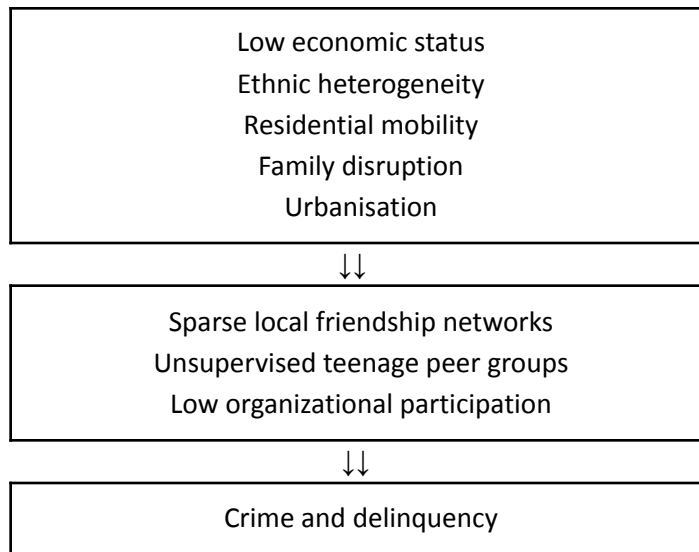
i. The Ecological Perspective

- Conceptualised the city in terms of a grid or web of interdependent relationships. These relationships were created by people as they adapted to their dynamically changing social environment.
- This was seen as an evolutionary process. That is, developments in the city were not conceptualised as random but rather accorded with ‘natural’ social processes.
- Each neighbourhood had its own type of social life. This was a result of their particular ‘evolution’.
- Cities were seen as being in a constant state of flux; market forces –particularly the housing market – and evolutionary processes led people to migrate from one neighbourhood to another.
- Most importantly, the Chicago School thought that as people moved neighbourhoods the crime rates did not change with them. Thus, people were seen as conforming to the norms of their new neighbourhoods. In this way certain neighbourhoods were seen as criminogenic (they caused crime). There were the most deprived areas, characterised by transient populations who were unable to put down root –thus it was the social characteristics of neighbourhoods which they thought led to crime, not the biology or psychology of the individual.
- To this end, when their work did study individual criminality, it did so from the standpoint of investigating how particular area and their social ecology - their disorganization - actually produce delinquent behaviors.

ii. Social Disorganization

- Shaw and McKay mapped rates of delinquency and income using concentric zones developed by Burgess
- This mapping suggested that “... the areas of highest delinquency ... [are] those adjacent to industry and commerce, those areas of lowest income status, and those areas with the highest concentration of European immigrants and Black Americans.

‘Disorganization’ - Transition



Criticisms

- Deterministic
- Consensus view of society
- Does not give reasons for delinquency in the first place
- Ignored crimes of the powerful

Merton's Strain Theory

- Robert K. Merton born (Meyer R. Schkolnick) in Philadelphia in 1910. He died in 2003, having spent 38 years at Columbia University (sociology department). He received 24 honorary doctorate degrees from around the world.
- He attempted to link theory with empirical data. Interested in middle range theories – a rejection of narrow empiricism and abstract theorising.
- American society became Merton's object of analysis. In his book *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1949) Merton sets out to explain deviant behaviour by examining fundamental structure and culture of American society.

Components of Merton's Anomic Strain Theory

A. Cultural Structure

- Appetites of individuals were products of culture.
- American consumer culture was built around the notion of acquiring wealth.
- American public is told the story of and believes in the "American dream" so legitimate opportunities should exist to reach goals. – 'Money success' a cultural goal.

B. Social Structure

- Regulates, defines, classifies moral behaviour; while culture emphasises the goal, social structure makes it unobtainable for many – at least via institutional means.

C. Belief in equality

- The American 'dream' perpetuates the idea that these cultural goals are attainable for all equally

Anomie continued

- **Anomie** (i.e. individual strain) will result if the institutional means to success are not available. That is social problems are likely increase under anomic conditions.
- Infinite aspirations led to 'deregulation' – a break down in regulatory norms.
- Despite the strain to anomie, most of the population, in Merton's view, chose to conform (Downes and Rock 1988).
- Conformity ensured general stability.

Critique

- Merton also took recorded crime statistics to be unproblematic. Led him to the simplistic conclusion that most crime was working class. This meant that within Merton's analysis white collar crime was significantly downplayed.
- Assumes a consensus in American society which down plays the plural nature of American culture. It assumes a general agreement of cultural goals (certainly does not describe postmodern risk society of today).
- Downplays the role of the state in assembling the goals to which Americans might aspire. –
- Deterministic, static and individualistic: the individual making choices vis-à- vis structural impediments. Differing socialisation patterns among different groups etc.
- Crime seen as a result of necessity. What about corporate crime? What about the fun and excitement of crime? (Katz 1988).
- Concepts not clearly defined
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***Agnew: General Strain Theory**

- Agnew extends Merton's Strain theory to what he calls a General strain Theory.
- His aim is to detail typologies and measures of strain in much more detail.
- Attempts to explain why some strains lead to crime while others don't.
- Also attempts to make different types of strain testable and assessable both generalising the theory and opening it up to closer analytical scrutiny.
- Moves away from class associated strain to psychological variables: that is anybody is open to the possibility of strain.
- 'When individuals cannot obtain success goals (e.g., money, status in school), they experience strain or pressure. Under certain conditions, they are likely to respond to this strain through crime. The strains leading to crime, however, may not only be linked to goal blockage (or deprivation of valued stimuli), but also to the presentation of noxious stimuli and the taking away of valued stimuli (Cullen and Agnew 2006:6).

Strains most likely to lead to crime

- Seen as unjust
- High in magnitude
- Associated with low social control
- Create pressure to engage in criminal behaviour