

Sociological theories of crime and youth criminals criminology essay



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Sociology, along with certain other multidisciplinary focuses, provides a number of reasons for why young people commit crimes. Chief amongst these is a lack of employment, the breakdown of the family, urban decay, social disenchantment, social alienation, drug abuse, and a host of others. For example, it had been proposed ' that integration be viewed through patterns of role relationships'[1]however on the other hand it had been argued that ' new legal powers essentially comprise an extension of punitiveness underpinned by stigmatising and pathologies constructions of working class families.'[2]In both cases, separated by a number of years, a number of factors are to blame - the state, parents, and so on - but little if any answers are proposed. Sociology in its broadest forms offers a prescriptive view of the world and this can leave it lacking when tasked with answering questions that arise out of its interests but which its interests cannot qualify. As a 2006 study on youth crime in nova Scotia put it, ' youth crime is multifaceted. On the one hand, most youth commit crime, and most typically grow out of crime as they age. Longitudinal studies further suggest there are several risk factors that place certain youth at increased risk of offending. At the same time, there are youth with many risk factors who never participate in offending behaviour while there are youth with few risk factors who have established criminal careers.'[3]It is here that sociology comes unstuck, unable to handle the sheer multi affectedness of youth crime with an academic outlook that seeks to place youth into easily identifiable boxes. It is here

That criminology, psychology, psychiatry, and social policy step in to try and make sense of this multiplicity and advise on policies which can both

decrease the number of youths committing crimes, whilst encouraging those already in such a position to leave it behind. According to most commentators, growing out of crime is on the increase. Furthermore, a lot of youth crime is to a certain extent, to be expected, quite aside for reasons of social delinquency. The establishment of the new youth justices system was a reaction to this fact. As sociologists noted that certain levels of delinquency were normal, a new policy entered in the UK that sought to treat all crimes as punishable by a formal criminal justice sanction. The effects of this have been to label a young offender as an offender from an early age. On youths, this has a number of effects. The first is to further entrench criminality into the culprit, whilst the other aims to encourage the youth of the pointlessness of crime, providing punishments that equal the crime, but that also aim to dissuade against further criminal acts.

Questions also arise about how to differentiate between males and females. Goldson and Muncie[4]note that women tend to grow out of crime earlier than boys. Whilst a sociological approach to this seeks to question why this may be, the criminological approach must make do with knowing that after the age of 18, youth offending begins to fall, particularly self-reported offending. As youths mature, they tend to swap certain crimes for others. Thus shoplifting and burglary decrease whilst fraud and workplace theft increase as they enter the labour market. These are questions best answered by the statistician than the sociologist.

Theories that rely on concepts of individual pathology are redundant in the light of sociological developments in criminology.

In recent years, there has been a wholesale turning away from concepts of individual pathology in sociology, necessitated by advancements in criminology which place a greater social burden on the reasons for crime. Haines draws a contrast ' between individualised explanations of criminal behaviour and approaches which seek to place crime in its situational and social context.' [5] However, the positivist view that Darwinian notions of physiognomy may in some way be responsible for defining characteristics of a " criminal" are by now very outdated. More modern theories of criminality, derived in part from sociological studies, but also from the dismantling of the Darwinian myth of universal positivism, have led researchers to take the view that criminals are made, rather than born. That means that they are socialized in a society that views criminal behaviour as entirely rational and in keeping with the social and cultural norms of that milieu. Whilst exceptions still abound, particularly in the case of the clinically, ill, this view informs much policy thinking and policies aimed at reducing youth crime. There are of course exceptions to this, but they remain very much the exception. Individual pathology is so closely linked with the notion of pathology that it is too universal, cutting across all classes, as to be specific enough to the rigours of criminological profiling. Criminology in its current incarnation looks at why crime exists in society and in order to do that, it needs to look at the ills of society. Taking their cues from Marx and Engels, the modern idea of criminology seeks to give answers that look at social questions as much as pathological ones. Accordingly, the " individual pathology' model is a control oriented ideology which serves to locate the causes of ' problems' in specific individuals and which supplies the relevant knowledge and understanding to develop the appropriate technologies and <https://assignbuster.com/sociological-theories-of-crime-and-youth-criminals-criminology-essay/>

social policies for controlling deviant members. Criminological theorizing thereby becomes a means of providing...a means of legitimating current policies which become justified as forms of treatment rather than punishment.'[6]In this argument, the archaic individual pathology view becomes not only outdated, but also unfairly punitive, prescribing a series of judgments upon a larger, unclassifiable group. It strips the moral imperative from those enlisted to uphold it, and takes an awkwardly narrow view of society as a whole.