

# Similarities and differences in sociological theories of crime

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Sociological theories of crime contain a great deal of useful information in the understanding of criminal behavior. Sociological theories are very useful in the study of criminal behavior because unlike psychological and biological theories they are mostly macro level theories which attempt to explain rates of crime for a group or an area rather than explaining why an individual committed a crime. (Kubrin, 2012). There is however some micro level sociological theories of crime that attempts to explain the individual's motivation for criminal behavior (Kubrin, 2012).

Of the contemporary sociological theories there are three which come to the forefront and which we will examine, social conflict theory, social disorganization theory, and rational choice theory. Social Conflict Theory As the name suggests, social conflict theory is a conflict based perspective. Conflict based perspectives assert that laws that govern what behaviors are criminal and what are not come from a conflict between those in power and those who aren't (Kubrin, 2012).

Social conflict theory basically says that crime is born out of this conflict between those that have power within a society and those that don't. Those that have the power in a society are the ones that make the laws and therefore make laws which will benefit them and forward their goals and ideals often at the expense of those without power. It is this conflict and the resulting laws regulating what is criminal and what is not that is ultimately the cause of crime. Social Disorganization Theory Unlike social conflict theory, social disorganization theory is based on the consensus perspective.

The consensus perspective believes that laws are born out of a consensus of members of a society seeking order within that society (Kubrin, 2012). Social disorganization theory views crime as a result of a breakdown of organization and culture within a society (Warner, 2003). This breakdown of organization and culture within a community leads to a lack of informal social control which in turn leads to higher crime rates especially in the juvenile population (Simons, Simons, Burt, Brody, & Cutrona, 2005).

Social disorganization theory asserts that strong levels of connection within a community along with a sense of civic pride motivate individuals to take a more active role in the community therefore acting as a deterrent to crime. Rational Choice Theory The third of the contemporary sociological theories is rational choice theory. In stark contrast to social conflict theory and social disorganization theory which are macro level theories, rational choice theory is a micro level theory (Kubrin, 2012). Rational choice theory focuses on the individual motivation behind criminal behavior.

Specifically the idea that the choice to commit criminal behavior is a choice based on a type of risk reward scenario. The person contemplating a criminal act consciously weighs the risk associated with the crime against the reward they stand to gain from the crime. Similarities and Differences Each of these three contemporary sociological theories of crime are similar in that they focus mainly on crime in poor or disadvantaged areas. This focus is obvious with social conflict theory and social disorganization theory but not as much with rational choice theory although it is there.

With rational choice theory the concept of what is to be gained from the criminal activity in itself implies that the person is most likely poor or disadvantaged in some way necessitating crime to obtain the things they need or desire. Where these theories differ is their basic concepts of what the actual cause of crime is. Where social conflict theory and social disorganization theory view the causes of crime on a group level, rational choice theory says that crime is caused on an individual level.

Likewise, on an even more fundamental level, social conflict theory and social disorganization theory differ in that social conflict theory believes laws regulating criminal behavior are formed out of conflict within a society where social disorganization theory believes laws are formed from a consensus within society. Conclusions Sociological theories of crime are very useful, especially in the prediction and prevention of crime. One of their greatest strengths is their ability to explain crime within a certain group or community.

However, the fact that the group or area they most often focus on is poor or disadvantages is one of their greatest weaknesses. Sociological theories fail to account for so called white collar crimes and other types of crimes that occur mainly among more wealthy individuals and in more well off neighborhoods. As with psychological and biological theories, sociological theories have their strengths and weaknesses. To truly understand the nature and causes of crime and to be able to prevent it will take an understanding and blending of many different theories.