

Criminology from the chicago school essay

[Profession](#), [Student](#)



Introduction

Theories are used to provide hypothecating explanations to abstract phenomena whose existences do not submit to a common plausible explanatory origin. They are a postulation of the likely causes, origin, or existence of the claimed phenomena. The very existence of any theory is, therefore, hinged on its ability to stand empirical evaluation and constant onslaught of criticism from other competing thoughts.

Crime and deviance is a concept whose existence has attracted a considerable attention from ancient philosophies to modern day academia whose radical brand of criminology seeks to re-evaluate the long standing theories. Yet the field of theoretical criminology is still awash with many theories which draw their continued existence to their scholarly value and to a narrow extent, their ability to help make sense of some crimes; notwithstanding their fallacy, demerits and criticism that inherently abode all theories. Within the last two centuries, the growth of criminology as a field in sociology has been phenomenal. With the continued interest in this field, it can be concluded that the battle of attrition will go on for some time. Some theories will be decimated and dropped from glory, a few will be merged, and new ones will be formulated.

However, all that may not be in the interest of this paper. More strictly, there is a need to provide an evaluation of the most significant contributions from the Chicago School. This was the first significant instance of sociology combining theoretical concepts and empirical data collected from ethnographic field studies. The study leading to this 'school of thought' was mainly conducted within Chicago, hence lending its name to the emerging

urban sociology. Over the course of my examination of this school of thought, I have maintained that a satisfactory picture of both the individual and the collective pathways of contributions will be attested by modern day applications of the same.

Origin of the Chicago School of Sociology

The modern day University of Chicago Department of Sociology was founded in 1892 being the first of its kind in the United States. However the term ‘Chicago School’ refers to a group of sociology scholars from the university who drove the discourse in the early years of the 20th century. The distinct characteristics of these scholars lie in their reliance on qualitative analysis of data to explain social relations, their focus being the city of Chicago. To understand the phenomenal contributions of this specific group of sociologist, it is significant for one to sensitize with the city’s social-historical background. The period that spanned the influence of these scholars came from the turn of the century to the later years of 1950’s. The rapid growth in population led to radical changes in the social organization, as the US went through the First World War, Great Depression, and a later phase of industrialization and economic boom.

The Chicago School made observations of the transitions that went on as the city developed into an industrial metropolis accompanied by the phenomenal growth in population as immigrants sought to take advantage of the metropolis. However, it was not all rosy as there emerged other social ills that had not been witnessed like homelessness and development of informal settlements, where life was tough and crime high. Some of the highlights of their achievements are below analyzed.

The Science of Sociology

The tenets of the Chicago School were a reaction to the established brand of sociology at the time aimed to make the study more objective rather than the subjective nature that prevailed then. They felt that the subjective approach to philosophy by renowned scholars like Sumner and Giddings only served to increase the inconsistency in the developing social policy. There was an urgent need for a paradigm shift in order to realize the formulation of a policy that could be consistent and stand the test of empirical evaluation. The Chicago School in pursuit of this Holy Grail, sought to study different social concerns in America at the time. These include race relations, crime, urban decay, and the influence of the family. In its endeavors, the School maintained a standard of formalism and a systematic approach to field study as used in Germany. This was in an attempt to develop a scientific approach to sociology.

This scientific approach has remained the epicenter of modern day sociology. It is now a common-place to conduct a study to evaluate the most mundane perceptions of the people to the most complex social phenomena.

The Central Themes

The School, in its pursuit of consistency, developed some standard assumptions in their work:

Qualitative Methodology

It was assumed that this was the approach to study any social phenomena. This ethnographic relation to the data made their work rich in depth and facts. The adoption of qualitative analysis later formed the benchmark of future social studies that has now enabled researchers to cross-reference

their work with the existing data, particularly where the needed data would be hard to collect afresh or would require a high amount of expense. It is also essential to point out that whilst qualitative data is significant, its use has to be relevant and reasonably confined qualitative measures.

The Chicago School assumed that a true 'human nature' can only be realized if the subjects of the study are allowed to carry on with their lives in their natural setting. They reasoned that creating an artificial environment or a controlled study environment will inhibit a display of the natural characteristics of the subject. This introduced the notion of 'man in his natural habitat'; a concept that has now received broad acceptance in any social study. This approach has been used to study not only human behavior, but even those of animals. The scholars looked at the society as a complex ecosystem but which could develop a routine if specific parameters were studied. Burgess' geographical zones approach still holding true in modern day cities vis-à-vis crime prevalence.

Relative Comparison

For these pioneer qualitative researchers, any study concept did not exist in isolation. They sought to demonstrate symbiotic and competitive relations. They also pointed out that their models would be in a constant state of flux, dependent on changes that are both anticipated and unanticipated. Reckless in his studies sought to outline the impact of mass transit in promoting both business and vice hotspots.

Study of Specific Groups

This concept, now widely known as Focus Group Discussion, was popularized by the Chicago School. Their construction of groups was wide, ranging from specific urban spots to specific families; closed communities and the homeless. This concept is now widely used as a way of ‘digging deep’ and ‘immersing’ the researcher into the subjects’ experience.

Logical correlation

This concept as employed by the Chicago School involves the use of logic to explain the existence of a phenomenon at the conclusion of a study. In their heydays, sociologists sought to correlate specific thematic studies in unearthing the thread that tied criminal acts to the environment. In doing so, they uncovered some unsettling forces as gender imbalance, mobility, transience, and anonymity as poignant pointers of criminality (Department of Justice). North, in his studies carefully measured the extents of social cohesion in a community to bring about a correlation with the prevalence of particular types of crime.

Conclusion

While I do acknowledge that there have been phenomenal developments in the study of sociology, the Chicago School’s did set numerous precedents in this field. Many of their methods were designed to study the concerns of the days, but their situation still resonates with the modern study sociology and social systems. Many of their methods like Qualitative Methodology, Logical Correlation, and Focus Groups are still relevant in the study of complex social environments that are rapidly evolving. Arguably, the recent

developments in the study of electronic social spaces may be better suited for some areas of research. However, their call for a systematic, careful and sensitive approach; employing the relevant methodology and immersion hold true. The contemporary criminal sociological thought cannot wish away the foundations laid by the Chicago School of Sociology.

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