

# Examination of the theories to the causes of committing hate crime

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



## **Introduction**

Criminological theories are valuable mechanisms that help us to understand and explain the world around us and help us recognize theoretical framework of an individual (micro) and societal (macro) behavior. Psychological and interactional forces represent the individual-level of criminological theories while modernization or economic conditions represent the macro-level. Although sociological structures appear to be the most compelling reason causing the perpetuation of hate crimes, there are broad social, economical, and structure-based factors that may lead to an increase in crime. What may prove to be problematic to understanding criminological theories meant to bring awareness to understanding the individual is that empirical studies do not examine the individual, but adopt the societal level of analysis.

### **Why Do People Do Hate Crime?**

Emile Durkheim's modernization theory offers a sociological explanation of hate crime accounts, first from an anomic outburst of socially disintegrated individuals or from a solidaristic response of a group or community that feels, or is, threatened (Green, McFalls, Smith, 2001). As sociologists deal with social structure, hate crime accounts typically indicate transformations in societal structure's features, including economic slumps, sudden social transformation, societal disorganization, or some form of social threats that, in general, result in violence, and, in particular, bring about bias-driven violence (Jenness, 2015).

In actuarial as well as symbolic crimes, the discriminatory selection of victims is often by a certain imagined or actual group membership and

societal characteristic (Perry, 2003). Motives for actuarial and symbolic crimes differ, for example, symbolic crimes; the basis of victim selection is a wish to convey a message, stemming from prejudice. By contrast, offenses of an actuarial nature entail the employment of societal categories as the grounds for selecting victims, to serve a non-symbolic purpose.

The emphasis of racial animus theory is the reason behind discriminatory victim selection (Jenness, 2015). Concerning status provisions, each of hate crime's conceptualizations invokes decisions regarding those who count and those who don't. Color, race, nationality and religion make up the key status cluster, and are identified as axes for occurrence of hate-driven offenses. The next status cluster is gender, disability status, and sexual orientation; these elements are increasingly being identified as axes for occurrence of hate-driven crimes.

### **Theories of Hate Crime**

There is six hate crime theories that help explain the hate phenomenon: (a) psychological, (b) social-psychological, (c) historical-cultural, (d) sociological, (e) economic, and (f) political. A majority of abstract hate crime accounts assume a compulsory psychological motive, as prominent hate crime definitions presume hostility of the offender towards the social group their victim belongs to. Individual psychological hate crime accounts concentrate on affective and cognitive processes by which perpetrators identify their victims, generate hostility, and become disposed to aggression and violence. Clearly, then, this approach explains hate crime as a form of prejudice (Jenness, 2015). Greg Herek, the author of " Psychological Heterosexism and

Anti-Gay Violence: The Social Psychology of Bigotry and Bashing,” raises the question of why certain heterosexuals have strong feelings of hostility towards homosexuals, while others accept them. Herek also gives an answer to this question, in his writings, by providing a functional perspective to attitude formation and maintenance (Herek, 1992).

In the name of Hate: Understanding Hate Crimes, Barbara Perry explains that hate crimes are committed by individuals who do not suffer from economic strain thus, do not provide social scientists with an explanation as to the influence of structural theories, dealing with one’s poor economic status play into racial violence. Sanford Cloud Jr., president of the National Conference for Community and Justice, argues that hate violence appeals to those individuals during times of economic insecurity. Such as corporate downsizing, restructuring, re-engineering, rising costs, diminishing quality of life and threat of lost jobs stir anxieties (Cloud in Roleff, 2001, p. 74). Cloud vehemently argues that during these dangerous times, moral entrepreneurs use the platform of free speech to raise awareness to other like-minded individuals. Hate crime theories appear to be all inter-related to one another, social change relates to sociological theories of hate crime and stress, produced by “ social disintegration, and economic theories are the roots of hate crime in displaced frustration and competition for material resources” (Green, McFalls, & Smith, 2001, p. 34).

To arrive at the reason underlying hate crime, one must look beyond the bases of possibly prejudicial orientations and motives and investigate the conditions or circumstances wherein such biases will be manifested as

violence. The emphasis, here, is placed on dynamics of small groups, which can contrive to drive an individual to commit a violent deed. Other approaches of social psychology deal with the interplay of psychological orientations with broader social forces (Jenness, 2015). Some, for instance, have contended that media is capable of activating hate crime, through the creation, propagation, and legitimation of stereotypes, regarding potential target groups. Interactional hate crime theories revolve around the content, process, and structure of all forms of societal interaction. Interactional Theories of hate crime, such as, social control theory; strain theory; labeling theory, and critical criminology all play a role in explaining the human process of hate crime perpetration.

### **Assessment of theories discussed in class allowing for the comprehension of the empirical contours of hates crime**

Many discussions in class focused on the importance of examining a social issue through empirical lens. However, the underlining emphasis allowed students to recognize the limitations of data collection and that “ empirical investigation of the causes of hate crime remains a science in its infancy” (Green, McFalls, Smith, 2001). Further, in time, as sources become creditable, we will begin to see a systematic collection of useful data to examine. Problems with current research: (1) it fails to allow the inclusion of the victims that are unlikely to report the occurrence to law enforcement; (2) we must be mindful not to draw inferences from hate crimes that fall under the criteria of assault, vandalism, or threats, because those crimes have a greater likelihood to be reported, and (3) drawing comparisons between hate crime and conventional crime is problematic as different types of victims

tend to report crime in different mannerisms to police (Green, McFalls, Smith, 2001).

### **What Theory is most Convincing?**

The sociological theory appears to be most compelling. The key element of theories based on social psychology is suggesting that attitudes don't suffice. While several people have attitudes that are consistent with the perpetration of hate crime, they don't commit it (Jenness, 2015). By contrast, others engage in violent behaviors, using aggressive actions as avenues through which they may convey their beliefs and views. In their article, Donald Green and his colleagues, argued in "The Distinctive Political Worldview of Hate Crime Perpetrators and White Supremacists", the role played by social psychological hate crime factors, through a comparison of the opinions of perpetrators of hate crime, the general public, and white supremacists (Jenness, 2015). The sociological theory seems to delve deeper into what the driving force behind hate crime is, and thus, is critical theory in understanding hate crime.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has discussed a building block of criminological theories to help explain why hate crimes occur and the causes that attribute to the perpetration of hate crimes. Although my belief focused on the sociological theory of hate crime, I do not believe that just one theory completes the picture necessary to understand such bias-driven violence. The need for continued empirical research is necessary for the social science field to grow alongside society that is ever-changing. The importance of scholarly material

cannot be denied; however, in order to change the future of bias-related crimes, we must reach out to those individuals and groups who perpetuate crime to deal with this issue at ground level.