

Social construction of crime



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The essay focuses on the social construction of crime, and the possible reasons for these social constructions. In the first section, the essay explains what crime is, and the constructionist perspective theory. In the Second section my essay focuses on the crime as socially constructed and why it is socially constructed. In the third section essay explains, three levels of explanation in the study of deviant and criminal behaviour. In the final section, it focuses on the historical theoretical periods, which plays an important role in revitalising past discoveries.

Crime is a term that refers to many types of misconduct that is forbidden by law. There are a number of different reasons as to why crime can be viewed as a social construction. There cannot be 'social problems' that are not the product of social construction - naming, labelling, defining and mapping them into place - through which we can 'make sense' of them' (Clarke, 2001). In this essay I will explain what is social construction, also what crime is, and why we think, that crime is socially constructed. Furthermore, I will explain how media construct crime and the stigma of black crime. In the last paragraph I will explore the importance of Marxist and Durkheim's theories on the emergence of crime.

There is no doubt that crime is socially constructed. The constructionist perspective draws on a very different sociological inheritance, one that treats society as a matrix of meaning. It accords a central role to the processes of constructing, producing and circulating meanings. Within this perspective, we cannot grasp reality in a direct and unmediated way Reality is always mediated by meaning (John Clarke p. 6). Indeed, some of its proponents argue that what we experience is 'the social construction of

reality' (Berger, 1967). How something or someone is named, identified and placed within a map of the social orders has profound consequences for how we act towards it or them (Becker, 1963).

Public concern over crime relates mainly to theft and violence, which are regarded as being serious enough to warrant sustained attention from the police. This concern, reflected in periodic moral panics, tends to ensure that many of those who are involved in theft and criminal violence do so as a form of secondary deviation. As a result, many of them develop a criminal identity (Becker, H. S, 1963).

The national British crime survey (BCS) reports showed that the risk of being victims of crime is shaped by locality, lifestyle, age, gender and ethnicity. BCS confirm that the risk of being a victim of contact crime are highest for men those aged under 30, those living in intercity areas and those living in privately rented accommodation. Not the less according to the BCS it is frequently those who are least at risk of crime who are most anxious about it, notably older people and women (May et al, 2009).

The very good example of how crime can be socially constructed is 'Black Crime' (McLaughlin, 264). During the early 1970s indicated, that the media has continued to project an image of Britain as a white society (Hartman 1974). Crime and criminality came to be the central motif that constructed black people as a problem presence, and also signifying that they were not really British (McLaughlin, 264). Gilroy (1987) has added to this by analysing discourses on race, crime and nations. Perceptions of the 'weakness' of black culture and family life, sometimes explained by absence of a father or

authority figure, or more crudely, by a lack of respect for the Law and British tradition of civility, served to define black people as 'lesser breeds without the Law', as 'the others' who stands outside what is meant to be British (Gilroy, 1987). However the significance of the prolonged campaign that led to the inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence cannot be overstated. Dominant representations of black people as a 'problem' for white British society have been successfully challenged (Murji, 274).

The media is the most powerful organisation which does a big impact on social construction of the crime. The importance of the news media in framing the public understanding of social problems is widely recognized (McLaughlin, 263). Research in many countries confirms that crime reports are among the most headlines catching of news commodities. It is also suggested that there is broad correspondence between the images of criminality articulated in the news media and the interpretation for this (Murji, 264). Such as media presentation of the information reinforces social construction of the crime (McLaughlin et al, 264).

There are three levels of explanation in the study of deviant and criminal behaviour. A first level of explanation is concerned with the existence of the many different forms of human behaviour that occur in any society (Becker, 1963). Biology may contribute towards an explanation of this diversity, but it can never provide the whole explanation. It is always necessary to take account of processes of socialization (Becker, 1963). Biological theory of crime, arguing that any association between physical characteristics and their behaviour can be explained (Young 1999). According to Young, lower working class children who are more likely to be involved, in the crime, are

<https://assignbuster.com/social-construction-of-crime/>

also by virtue of diet, continual manual labour, physical fitness and strength, more likely to be mesomorphic (Young 1999, 387). Young claims that males chromosome could lead to behaviour that to others it would look odd, and this differences may exclude them from normal social life, which in turn may lead them to crime. However according to Kelly, behaviour attributed to biological causes may not necessary lead to crime. The biochemistry of the body may affect behaviour as he points out for example A Diabetic person, without recent insulin injection may become tense, short tempered, but his behaviour does not constitute a criminal act(Haralambos 1999). A second level of explanation is concerned with the variation in norms between social groups, as manifested particularly in cultural and subculture differences (Becker, 1963). Lea and Young stress out that crime is only one aspect, though generally a small one, of the process of cultural adaptation to oppression. Unlike Gilroy, they see West Indian crime as a response to condition in Britain rather than as a continuation of traditions from the West Indies (Lea et al. 1999, 428). Socialization takes place within particular social groups, and it is the norms of these groups that provide the standards for the identification of particular kinds of behaviour as criminal (Becker, 1963). The third, and final, level of explanation is concerned with the ways in which particular individuals are identified as criminals by others and so come to develop a criminal identity. This is a matter of social reaction and control (Becker, H, 1963).

In addition to understand social construction of crime, it is very important to look back at historical theoretical periods, which plays an important roles in

revitalising past discoveries, putting new stress on the interpretation of events and relating these to current happenings(Jock Young, 307).

First of all I would like to look at Marxist theory, where he sees crime being endemic in the social order. According to Marxism, men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please: they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directed encountered, given and transmitted from the past (Marx, 1969, p. 360). Marxist frameworks have developed a Marxist theory of crime. From Marx perspectives crime is seen largely as the product of capitalism, with criminal and antisocial behaviour indicative of the contradictions and problems inherent in the capitalist system (Marsh, 1997, 519). The basic motivation of capitalism, such as emphasis on materialism and self-enrichment, encourage self-interested, anti-social and, by implication, criminal behaviour (Marsh, 1997, 519). Marxist s argues that business crime is largely ignored by the legal system. There are some well publicized exceptions, but these tend just to reinforce the impression that criminals are mainly from the working classes and that business criminals are not 'real' criminals - they are just doing what everyone else does (Marsh, 1997, 519). Marxist arguments suggest that capitalism produces the conditions that generate criminal behaviour. According to him, crime occurs because of economic deprivation and because of the contradictions that are apparent in capitalist society. Working-class crime is a rebellion against inequality and against the system that uses the legal process- including the Law, the police, courts and prison as weapons in a class war(Marsh, 1997, 522).

According to Durkheim's crime theory, he points out two arguments on crime growth. The first argument is, that modern industrial urban societies encourage a state of 'egoism' which is contrary to the maintenance of social solidarity and to conformity to Law, and second is, that in periods of rapid social change 'anomie' occurs. By this he meant an 'anomic' disordered society lacking effective forms of social control, and thereby leading to a state of individually perceived formlessness (Frank Heathcote, 347).

Durkheim's argument that crime is inevitable and functional does not explain the causes of crime or why certain people are more likely to engage in, criminal activities than others (Frank Heathcote, 348). Regarding to Durkheim, crime is present in all types of societies, and that crime is higher in more industrialised countries (Haralambos 1999, 389). Durkheim explains why he sees crime inevitable, he explains that it is inevitable because not every member of society can be equally committed to the collective sentiments, and that it is impossible for all to be alike (Holborn 1999, 389). He also explains crime as being functional, and that its function is not to remove crime in society, but to maintain the collective sentiments at their necessary level of strength. Durkheim believed that without punishment the collective sentiments would lose their force to control behaviour and crime rate would become dysfunctional. Durkheim views that a healthy society requires both crime and punishment (Haralambos, 1999, 390). More recently functionalist theories, based on the notion of there being a general consensus of values and norms, have focused on causes of criminal behaviour.

Functionalist theories of crime tend to assume that there is general consensus within society over what is right and wrong behaviour. The interactionist approach questions this assumption; it does not see criminals as essentially different from so called 'normal' people. Many people commit criminal action and it is therefore not easy to maintain a clear distinction between the criminal in terms of particular personal characteristics (Marsh, 1997, 517).

To summary, in my essay firstly I discussed that, crime has been seen as a response to the frustration felt by those who cannot achieve the norms or goals of society. Secondly, how dominant representations of black people as problems for white people society have been successfully challenged. Thirdly, that the media is the most powerful organisation which does a big impact on social construction of the crime, and finally I argued two most important theories, which are still in use.

References:

Becker. H. S. (1963), *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Free Press).

Fitzgerald. M. el at (1990). Social Disorganisation theories. Heathcote F (1990). Crime and Society. London: The Open University Press.

Haralambos, M. el at (1999). Themes and Perspectives. Fourth Edition. London: Harper Collins.

May. M. el at (2009). Crime Disorders and Community Safety. Dee Cook. (2009) Understanding Social Problems, Australia: Blackwell.

Marsh. I. el at (2009). Making Sense of Society. Fourth Edition. London:
Longman.