

# Juvenile delinquency assignment 6

Sociology



Juvenile Delinquency Introduction Different theories provide explanations for juvenile delinquency and unruly behaviour among individuals, especially among teenagers. The theories seek to relate such behaviour to the personality of the individuals, or to precursors in the individual's immediate environment that promote engagement in unruly behaviour. This essay examines the developmental theory and the latent trait theory, and discusses their emergence in the 1955's film "Blackboard Jungle" directed by Richard Brooks.

#### Application of developmental theory and latent trait theory to juvenile delinquency

The latent trait theory attributes juvenile delinquency to a master trait that controls the actions and behaviour of the individual (Siegel 317). According to the theory, the master trait influences the reactions of an individual to particular situations, and guides the individual's decisions in regard to courses of action to take. In cases when such master traits promote delinquency and unruliness, an individual portrays continuity in this behaviour regardless of efforts to enforce corrective behaviour. As such, the latent trait theory is associated with chronic offending, since the offenders are unable to control their impulses.

The developmental theory focuses on the different stages of human development, from infancy through childhood, adulthood, to old age. All through this process, individuals gain different attributes in relation to their personality and behaviour, and such attributes shape how they conduct themselves. The theory posits that the development of positive or negative personality traits could be influenced by the individual's upbringing, since every stage is essential in instilling desirable traits in a person. For instance,

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the concrete operational stage, which is the elementary and early adolescence stage, is characterized by the development of operational thinking. Juvenile delinquency according to this theory is dependent on different stages of the individual's growth, and every stage is significant in promoting or discouraging development of such delinquency (Siegel and Welsh 226).

In the film "Blackboard Jungle", the behaviour of the boys is portrayed as unruly, uncontrollable, and largely undisciplined (Ford, Francis and Calhern). The students are depicted as having complete disregard for the law in the school, and most of the teachers have given up on them. Specifically, the unruly behaviour by the boys is manifested through their disrespect of Mr Dadier, a new teacher in the school who has to literally force the students to acknowledge his authority. On his first meeting with the principal and other teaching staff, he complains of the discipline problem in the school, but the teachers claim that "There is absolutely no discipline problem here. There is no discipline problem in Alcatraz either" (Ford, Francis and Calhern).

The boys' delinquency, as portrayed in the film, may be related to latent trait theory and developmental theory. In the latent trait theory, such unruliness would result from a master trait of deviance, rebellion, and aggression, forcing the boys to disregard the school system and act uncontrollably. For instance, when Mr Dadier finds a group of boys smoking in the lavatory, some of them seem scared and they flee, but two of them seem unbothered by his presence, prompting him to ask them whether they are "privileged characters" (Ford, Francis and Calhern). Elsewhere throughout the film, the boys portray outright contempt and disrespect for the teacher, and at one time, one of the boys draws a knife and challenges Mr Dadier to a duel.

The developmental theory, on the other hand, argues that the delinquency results from development of such traits during the individual's growing stages. As such, the boys would have developed such rudeness and disrespect in their early stages of growth. For instance, Artie West, a student in Mr Dadier's class asks him, " How do you like to go to hell?" The developmental influence is also evidenced in Miller's conversation with Mr Dadier, in which he attributes his state of life to the environment in which he grew up in. He argues that neither the teachers nor the parents care whether the boys get educated, and such could promote development of undesirable traits leading to delinquency.

#### Conclusion

The developmental theory attributes juvenile delinquency to development of undesirable traits in an individual during the different stages of growing up. The latent trait theory, on the other hand, posits that delinquency is caused by a master trait that controls the decision-making process of an individual, leading to chronic delinquent behaviour. The theories may be used to explain the unruly and uncontrollable behaviour of the boys in the film " Blackboard Jungle".

#### Works Cited

Blackboard Jungle. Dir. Richard Brooks. Perf. Glenn Ford, Anne Francis and Louis Calhern. 1955.

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