

Basic principles
behind control theory
and criminal acts
criminology essay



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Compare and contrast the basic principles behind social control theory, social learning perspectives and strain theory in explaining criminality. Identify the similarities and differences in their theoretical positions, analyses and illustrate with case studies. What the criticisms of their theories?

Outline:

Introduction:

Introduce the topic. – State 3 different perspectives/theories

The structure of this essay

(1st: Social control theory + examples + criticisms)

(2nd: Social learning perspectives + examples + criticisms)

(3rd: Strain theory + examples + criticisms)

(4th: Similarity of these three perspectives)

(5th: Differences between them) f Using drug taking as an example???

(6th: Conclusion+ Implications)

Body:

1. Social Control Theories: f Juvenile delinquency

– Early Control Theories (from Reiss to Reckless)

- 1951: Albert J. Reiss; 1957: Jackson Toby; 1958: F. Ivan Nye; 1961: Walter C. Reckless

- Later development

- 1964: David Matza; 19xx: Travis Hirschi

- Criticisms of Social Control Theories

2. Social Learning Perspectives:

- 1947: Edwin H. Sutherland f Differential Association Theory

f Cultural and Subcultural Theory

- 1956: Daniel Glaser f Differential Anticipation Theory

- Criticisms of Social Learning Perspectives

3. Strain Theory: f Gang Delinquency

- 1968: Merton's Strain Theory

- 19xx: Durkheim's Anomie concept

- Criticisms of Strain Theory

4. Similarity 5. Differences 6. Conclusion

Introduction

Body:

Social Control Theories.

Many criminological theories always explain why do people commit crime, or to find out what are the most influential factors motivate people commit crime and violate the social norms. Instead, social control theories have been already assumed humans are potentially committing crime. Moreover, the social control or social bond theory is emphasizing why a person do not be a criminal. In social control theorists' assumptions, individuals have the capacity to violate the laws rather than obey the laws. Law-abiding behaviors are not the nature of human beings. People choose to commit crime because the forces or constrains of society is not strongest enough. It portrays people are standing in the dilemma between deviance and conformity. It shows the tension of everyone either commit deviant act or accepts the norms.

Therefore, social control theorists propose a few elements to pull people back from the side of deviance, especially relationship, commitments, values, norms, and beliefs. Family and peer group become a crucial agencies that affect people's conduct.

Albert J Reiss

The understanding of those early control theorist's arguments are very important because they presented a framework or some basic propositions within the many theories of delinquency and crime. Each social control theorist had also been done an empirical study of their findings to support their point of views. Starting from an article wrote by Albert J Reiss (1951), his argument might be reproduced from Freud's concept of ego or superego mainly. He aims at noticing the prediction of probation revocation among juvenile offenders. He thought youths have a lower personal controls that <https://assignbuster.com/basic-principles-behind-control-theory-and-criminal-acts-criminology-essay/>

might more likely to become juvenile delinquency. That is, those younger people lack of ability to refrain from desiring their needs when having conflict with the rules or norms of the society. Nevertheless, his explanation of juvenile delinquency is weak when discussing the relationship between probation revocation and school performance as truancy.

Jackson Toby

In 1957, Jackson Toby, a second social control theorist, offered a new concept called “ stake in conformity” which as the fundamental mechanism to affect delinquent’s comporment. He also agreed that people are intrinsically and temptingly rupturing the laws, especially all youths. Some of them are having a high risk of the violation of laws due to this temptation. He believes students perform well in school not only they are being punished by school, but also endanger their future chances of success. Under the special academic-oriented circumstance, if the society allows students having a better career path when they got an excellent school result; therefore, some students who do poorly in school might have a great chance of committing crime because they seems lose lesser things than others. Apart from the academic result of an individual is an influential factor, peer support for deviant act could lead those youths with low stakes in conformity as well. However, even youths have low stake in conformity, they are not become delinquents when lacking of peer support.

F. Ivan Nye

In 1958, Nye then concentrated on the issue of family relationship. He

though that family is a single most crucial root of social control for
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adolescents. He divided different forms of control such as direct control, internal control, and indirect control. Direct control means the obvious restriction or punishments of a person. Internal control referred to a inward monitor or consciences. Indirect control linked to affectional or emotional identification with parents, noncriminals or legal codes. He stated that if all the above controls are sufficient, then those adolescents are more conform the rules of society. Nye's study had been tested by an empirical experiment. However, his experiment had been challenged by Toby already. First, although Nye called the sample group as 'most delinquent', but many criminologist called them 'nondelinquents'. Due to the sample group was selected in high school which was not included any youths age 15 or younger, and any youths age 16 with dropped out of school. Furthermore, the questions being asked in questionnaires were too trivial such as taking things worth less than \$2, and damaging public or private property. Therefore, Nye cannot recognize the strongly relationship between family bonding and serious delinquent behaviours.

Walter C. Reckless

In 1961, another social control theorist called Reckless, who proposed a containment theory. The main concept is that all individuals are influenced by different forces such as social pressure, social pulls, biological/psychological pushes. Those forces are driving people to commit deviant act. However, these forces are againsted by both external and inner containments. For instance, social pressure can be defined as living conditions, family conflict, minority group, status, and lack of opportunities.

Then the term 'social pulls' is referred to the accepted norm of all individuals
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from their companions, criminal subculture, mass media and so on. Biological or psychological pushes can be easily linked to how those biological and psychological factors affect people fail to conform the norms of society, such as restlessness, inner tension, aggressiveness and so on. On the contrary, external containment is talking about the surroundings of a person. For instance, how parents or support groups promote right moral values, discipline, enforce the sense of identity and so on. Moreover, inner containment are those invisible stuffs which internalized our self-control; that related to how the goals/ abilities of a person against to commit crime.

David Matza & Travis Hirschi

Matza's *Delinquency and Drift* (1964) and Hirschi's *Causes of Delinquency* (1969) also advocated two famous concepts in the later development of control theories. Alternatively, Matza has been already portrayed the image of 'drifter'. Emphasizing how social conditions shape people become a drifter. (However, he did not mention about what kinds of constraints and control that keep youngsters from drifting.) In Hirschi's theory, he proposed four main 'social bonds' that could determine one's involvement in delinquency, namely attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Attachment contains the interpersonal and emotional bonds among others, especially parents and teachers. Commitment refers to how youths make use of the time, energy, effort expended in traditional path of success, such as saving money for the future and obtaining a high academic qualification. Involvement means the degree of one's involvement in those conventional activities, such as school, recreation, and family. Due to society will share common moral values normally, therefore, beliefs of a person are very

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important. People might more easily commit criminal act if these moral values are absent or weakened. In short, Hirschi's social bond theory emphasized all people are potential criminals, however, people will conform the norm or obey the law because they do not want to destroy the bondings with others.

Criticisms

There are few criticisms on social control theory. First, according to the assumption of it, social control theorists assumed human are potential law-violators. What if the youths commit crime just because they are 'fun'? Another issue is that such theories cannot be explained the causes of gang delinquency and adult criminality. Furthermore, most studies were referring the involvement of trivial offenses of nondelinquent youths. Hirschi also confessed that delinquents actually active in conventional events, which rejected his original theory (Vold & Bernard, 1986).

Social Learning perspectives

Edwin Sutherland

Differential Association Theory was the most direct and clear theory that proposed by Edwin Sutherland in 1947 from social learning perspectives. In 1978, Sutherland and Cressey consisted nine propositions of Differential Association Theory:

" 1. Criminal behaviour is learned...

2. Criminal behaviour is learned in interaction with other persons in a process...
3. The principal part of the learning of criminal behaviour occurs within intimate personal groups...
4. When criminal behaviour is learned, the learning includes techniques of committing the crime, which are sometimes very complicated, sometimes very simple; the specific direction of the motives, drives, rationalization, and attitudes...
5. The specific directions of motives and drives is learned from definitions of the legal codes as favourable or unfavourable...
6. The person becomes delinquent because of an excess of favourable definitions to violation of law over unfavourable definitions to law-violation...
7. Differential association may vary in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity.
8. Process of learning criminal behaviour by association with criminal and anti-criminal patterns involves all of the mechanisms involved in any other learning...
9. While criminal act is an expression of general needs and values, it is not explained by those general needs and values..." (Sutherland & Cressey, 1978, pp. 80-82.)

Here will be discussed each propositions respectively. First, it is clearly stated that criminal act is not inborn which is learned. Then, Sutherland provided how people learned to become delinquent which is learned in interaction with others, especially family, friends, and colleagues. Also, techniques of committing crime are needed which are sometimes quite complicated/simple such as how to unlock a safe or steal a car on the street. Moral justifications also crucial that make people think their acts are reasonable. For example, a poor person steal foods in supermarket because they do not have money to buy enough foods to their sons. Therefore, they will justify they act as make sense. Fifth, it refers to the views of legal codes from an individuals. The person may not want to obey the law because such laws are just controlling him/her, and killing his/her free will. The favourable definitions of law violation and the unfavourable definitions of law violation are two sides on the balance that lead a person commit crime if the favourable definitions of law violation is excess. Moreover, how often are criminal contacts made, how long do the contacts last, and how significant to the individual are the criminal contacts are always being considered. Sutherland (1978) also though that there will be greater the chance to commit crime if people have been contacted criminals since early childhood. Role modeling or direct teaching is another way to learn the criminal acts. In chinese words, that means “ one who mixes with vermilion will turn red, one who touches pitch shall be defiled therewith”; which implies good companions have good influence while bad ones have bad influence. Law-violation behaviours cannot be explained by fulfilling those general needs because those criminal acts are illogical. In brief, he emphasized the the significance of personal contact, and all individuals are follower.

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Criticisms

There will be discussed a few main critiques of this theory. Differential association theory neglected that why some youths seems exposed to delinquent definitions, but finally they choose to stop the delinquent acts. Another major criticism is the problem of the principle differential association, which assumes criminal behaviours to be rational and systematics. However, this theory is very hard to illustrate the acts of those psychopathic killing or serial rapists (Sigel, 2009). Also, delinquents might seek like-minded peers rather than follow others which drafted another relationship between deviant peers and criminality.