

Paper 2



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Paper 2 What are the major assumptions between strain and control theories? How do they differ in their understanding about the nature of man? Both social and control theories are directed towards identifying the reasons that motivate people to commit crime and associate this behavior with conformism, albeit in different and contrasting ways. The control theory differs from the strain theory and says that individuals resort to crime when they get detached from conformism. While both theories have considered the broader society in which these criminals live with others, the strain theory has concentrated only on the negative features of this phenomenon (Tibbetts, 2009). The strain theory assumes that all persons aspire for a similar social status and material needs, although the means available to achieve these desires differs from person to person. Institutions like family, educational system, religion and the economy help the individual in attaining success. However, the theory also believes that issues like family status and wealth play a significant role in determining the level of success attained by the individual even in a highly competitive society (Mednick, 2008). The theory thus contends that strain is felt whenever these support factors do not provide equal opportunity thereby prompting people to adopt illegal ways to achieve these means. Such persons are under pressure from the larger society to conform to specific ideals which ultimately forced them to turn into criminals. On the other hand, the control theory believes that such deviations from conformed norms can be resolved through a good family, parenting and education (Adler, 2009). The control theory relies on the ‘push and pull theory’ to explain the reasons behind crime including social deficiencies and psychological pressures that push the individual towards crime and illegal opportunities that can pull the person towards criminal

activities. Thus while the strain theory is based on the belief that conformism holds people from enjoying equal opportunities, the control theory focuses at the other end of the spectrum by stating that this conformism saves people from resorting to criminal activities (Britt, 2007). 2) Examine how political views of authors are encapsulated in some theories. One of the most prominent political views included by strain theorists is the concept of the ‘ American Dream’, which they attribute for high stress levels among individuals. The American Dream has always been a benchmark for success and achievement for the American people. However, in the case of the poorer sections of the society, the strain theory argues that people are always encouraged to pursue this dream and overcome their limitations through dedication and hard work. The strain theory drives forth the belief that anyone can live a ‘ rags to riches’ story (Miethe, 2008). Such goals put pressure on the poor people because the surrounding social structure restricts access to support factors necessary to realize the American dream. Such restrictions can include a lack of money to fund college education, inability to get employment or a strain in family relationships. The control theory discusses the issue of condemning minor offenders to jail terms and argues that such punishments do not achieve the ultimate purpose of reformation. The control theorists also believe that labeling offenders as criminals has the unintended consequence of inducing the very same behavior that such labeling was meant to prevent in the first place. The control theory recommends that the society must instead forgive the offender and provide a second chance without which the latter would feel entrapped for the rest of his life (Mednick, 2008). Life in prison and the prolonged exposure to abusive and violent criminals can degrade a person’s

character further and eliminate any hesitation that the criminal may have had when committing his first crime (Adler, 2009). Thus, the control theory believes that labeling and condemning an offender will gradually turn them into habitual criminals without repugnance. References 1. Adler (2009), *The Legacy of Anomie Theory*. Transaction Publishers. 2. Britt (2007), *Control theories of crime and delinquency*. Transaction Publishers. 3. Mednick (2008), *Explaining criminal behaviour: interdisciplinary approaches*. BRILL. 4. Miethe (2008), *Crime and its social context: toward an integrated theory of offenders, victims, and situations*. SUNY Press. 5. Tibbetts (2009), *Criminological Theory: A Text/Reader*. New York: SAGE.