

# Examining the social structure theories in the economy criminology essay



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“ Social structure theories assert that the disadvantaged economic class position is a primary cause of crime. The theories state that neighborhoods which are “ lower class” force of strain, frustration and disorganization that create crime” (Shanali-Justicia). Social Disorganization, Strain Theory and Culture Deviance are a few of the social structure criminology theories that are used to explain crime. Other social theories that fall into this category are Culture of Poverty and the truly disadvantage theory.

The theory of social disorganization is that crime and delinquency is caused when communities fail. There is a breakdown of families, church, schools and government in the community. Social disorganization theorizes that these relationships “ reinforce positive behavior, a sense of community responsibility and concern for the social network within a close area” (Hardy, 2010). When these relationships breakdown or do not exist the communities and its inhabitants lose its sense of structure and this is believed to be the causation of crime and delinquent behavior. The cycle of Social Disorganization is thought to start with poverty, where there is lack of opportunities and racial discrimination. The lack of opportunities breaks down the social institutions and organizations and this leads to the erosion of traditional values. This breakdown leads juveniles to seek the acceptance from peers and a sense of belonging from gangs. Once these gangs form there is a loss of social control or it becomes less effective. When this control is lost neighborhoods become more prone to crime and this detracts from investors which reduces opportunities in the community. Eventually this becomes the norm and this way of life is passed onto the next generation.

The formation of criminal careers if formed and the cycle continues for some while others grow out of their delinquent phase.

Populace in these disorganized areas can feel neglected, frustrated and ostracized from the economic mainstream, they develop feelings of hopelessness and anger which sociologists state are signs of strain (Siegel & Welsch, 2008, p. 89). This strain develops and theorists state it leads people to commit criminal offenses, because they lack the opportunities for success. The opportunity for a better life seems to be beyond their reach, so people turn to deviant behavior to achieve their goals because they feel that society has let them down. Cultural Deviance Theory is a combination of both the effects of social disorganization and strain. It is thought that the lower socio-economic populaces create an independent subculture where they have their own rules and values. Juveniles in lower class neighborhoods adapt to their environment, they become cynical and have no respect for authority. "Conventional values make little sense to a youth whose role models may include gun runner, drug dealers and pimps" (Siegel & Welsch, 2008, p. 91). Teachers and other authority figures become secondary citizens to these juveniles and they cannot conform to the rules as other members of society do. These juveniles experience a form of culture conflict as a result they never achieve their goals and eventually get caught up in the life of gangs and deviant behavior.

The populace of this poverty culture is marked by frustration of their environment. There is a lack of trust of police and government and this mistrust stalls people from this environment from seeking other

advantageous opportunities or ones that are available to them. The results of <https://assignbuster.com/examining-the-social-structure-theories-in-the-economy-criminology-essay/>

this environment are depression and possibly psychological issues. Inner-cities that suffer from economic changes have an increase of crime; they become ingrained in a cycle of poverty, unemployment and crime. These people are considered the truly disadvantage living in “ communities with poorly organized social networks, alienated populations and high crime” (Siegel & Welsch, 2008, p. 85)

Theorists such as Clifford Shaw, Henry McKay, and Robert Merton have similar views on social structure theories. While Elijah Anderson believed that juveniles committed crimes because of their socio-economic living conditions there were “ rendered incapable of achieving success” (Siegel & Welsch, 2008, p. 92). A juvenile turned to crime because it was their only way of achieving success. They feel that their only option is to join gangs and engage in behavior that is deviant.

Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay believe that delinquency “ is mainly the consequence of a collapse of institutional, community-based controls” (Wong, 2009). Shaw and McKay believed that people that lived in situations such as these responded to the disorganization of their environment. They believe that delinquent behavior was a result of social disorganization, because the neighborhoods they lived in were transitional neighborhoods. This was an area where there was a shift in population; the middle class neighborhood would transition to a mixture of lower class people. When this transition would occur the family would become rooted in the neighborhood and the values that they developed such as belonging to gangs and criminal behavior would be passed onto the next generation.

Similar to Shaw and McKay, Robert Merton believe that society was the cause of deviant behavior, because society put pressure on people to achieve the “ American dream.” Merton believed that society expected an individual to conform or either work within its structure. When a person cannot conform they become members of a deviant subculture. Merton argued that upper class children are less likely to commit delinquent acts because they have the means and ability to obtain an education and stable employment. While lower class juveniles do not have the same means they feel the social and psychological strain or anomie. Merton believed this condition caused juveniles to commit criminal acts to achieve their goals and even if they were offered the means to achieve these goals legally, they would reject those acceptable means of deviant ones (Siegel & Welsch, 2008, p. 89).

The theory that I most associate with my belief that juvenile’s commit crimes is the based Cultural Deviance theory. I think that juveniles conform to their environment and as a result have a lower set of goals and values than those of society. Juveniles that grow up in lower economic levels become hardened in their environment and develop an outer shell that shows no fear and have accepted because they play hard they will probably die young. These juveniles do not hesitate to use violence to get the message across nor do they consider the consequences of their actions. The goals that these juveniles set for themselves are reaching the top level in their gangs and increasing their drug sales. These juveniles cannot understand the concept of hard work and setting realistic goals like other members of society and

because they fail to achieve success in life they are quick to blame the man for their failures.