

## Social Control Theories

### Background Information

- Influenced by the Classical school (free will), Chicago School, Durkheim (anomie), and psychological school (Freud), etc.
- Developed in the 1950s, most influential in the 1960s, receded into the background until Gottfredson and Hirschi's General Theory of Crime (1990).

### Background Information

- 1950s and 1960s were times of great social change and political change in the US.
- The popular media portrayed life in the 1950s as idyllic: fashionable suburban homes, father in suit traveling to the city for work, the mother remaining at home to cook good meals and raise the children.

### Background Information

- Some truth but not ALL true!
- Yes, suburbia was born (causing the decay of some urban areas).
- Yes, men went to work but not all were happy with their jobs.
- Yes, women stayed at home but not all were happy about it; first rumblings of the feminist movement.

### Background Information

- According to control theorists, the major problem with preceding theories was not that they didn't explain why crime occurred but rather they seemed to OVER-EXPLAIN it.
- Opposite approach from other theories of crime.
- "Why do people NOT commit crimes?" or "Why do people obey the rules of their society?"

### Background Information

- We should have no problem explaining why people commit crime: all humans suffer from innate human weaknesses which make them unable to resist temptation.
- The main reason why people do not become deviant or criminal is due to SELF-CONTROL (the ability to restrain one's self from illegal or deviant actions).

### Background Information

- Restraining and controlling factors are broken or missing inside the personalities of criminals.
- Crime and deviance are NORMAL behaviors.
- Macro and micro level
- Reiss and Nye: Theories of Internal and External Controls*

- One of the earliest applications of self-control (1951).
- Reiss: social control problems measured as to the degree to which school authorities labeled juveniles as behavior problems.
- Reiss and Nye: Theories of Internal and External Controls*
- Nye (1958): published a study claiming the family was the single most important source of social control.
- Delinquents more likely to come from families with complete freedom or no freedom at all.
- Internal and External Controls*
- Delinquency is caused by the failure of personal (internal) and social (external) controls.
- Three main categories of social control that prevent delinquency:
- Internal and External Controls*

1. Direct control (punishment/rewards by parents).

2. Indirect control (youth refrains because it would cause pain and disappointment to parents and others).

3. Internal control (conscience/sense of guilt).

- Criticisms
- Many of the associations were weak due to poor conceptualization and operationalization.
- Did not mention social class, gender, or race differences
- Research
  - Nye pioneered the use of self-report data.
  - Used questionnaires to ask delinquents what behaviors they had engaged in.
- Reckless: Containment Theory (1956,1973)*
- PhD from University of Chicago
- Studied male delinquents in Ohio.
- Containment Theory*
- The individual confronted by choices of action feels a variety of "pulls" and "pushes".
- Pulls: environmental factors such as adverse living conditions, poverty, lack of legitimate opportunities, abundance of illegitimate opportunities, family problems, etc.
- Pushes: internal pressures such as hostility, aggressiveness, drives, wishes, etc.
- Containment Theory*

Not all people with the same pushes and pulls become delinquent.

Two kinds of containment:

1. Inner (strongest): self components such as ego strength, self-control, high tolerance for frustration, goal orientation, etc.

2. Outer: structural buffers in immediate social world that hold a person within bounds such as institutional reinforcement, norms, goals, effective supervision, discipline, etc.

Important Observations

Brings together psychological and sociological principles.

Explains why some people are able to resist the strongest pressures to commit crime.

A positive self-image that is a product of encouragement and support from significant adults.

Research and Criticisms

- Contribution to the development of control theory.
- Concepts are not operationally well-defined and very difficult to test.
- Most research only on male delinquents.
- Not much research since the theory was first developed.

*Sykes and Matza: Techniques of Neutralization and Drift (1957; 1964)*

Individuals are rarely committed to or compelled to perform delinquent/criminal behavior.

They drift in and out of it, retaining a commitment neither to convention or crime.

Delinquents are never totally immune to the demands of conformity made by the dominant social order; they feel some guilt and shame.

*Techniques of Neutralization and Drift*

Delinquents redefine their contemplated actions to make it "acceptable" if not "right".

Five techniques of "neutralization" that facilitate "drift" into delinquency.

- denial of responsibility
- denial of injury
- denial of the victim
- condemnation of the condemners
- appeal to higher loyalties

Important Observations

Direct opposition to subcultural theory (Cohen).