

CHAPTER 7

Contributions from Sociology: 'Environment and Structure'

OVERVIEW

The sociological contributions move beyond the 'kinds-of-people' explanations in previous chapters to factors that are external to individuals and largely beyond their control. Barak reviews the vast amount of sociological research under two headings (crime and social organization; crime and social process) that answer 'why do criminals do it?' and one heading (crime and social structure) that is more keyed to answer 'why do we have the aggregate crime we do?'.

CSO assumes social disorganization promotes crime and deviance; it includes ideas from social ecology, anomie/strain and subcultural theories. CSP views people as more active co-producers of the social world; it includes differential association (including identification and anticipation), labeling, and social constructionism. CSS is interested patterned variables -- race, class, gender -- of social structural analysis; it includes conflict, Marxist and feminist theories.

OUTLINE

I Crime and Social Organization

- A. Common theme: social order, stability and integration conducive to conformity; disorder conducive to crime and deviance
- B. Chicago School/Human Ecology [1920s]
 - 1. Environment is the structuring of space mediated by culture or subculture
 - 2. Crime is the result of disorganization; the patterned distribution of crime corresponds with social disorganization, such as inner city neighborhoods
 - 3. Extended by

* The Instructor's Manual for *Integrating Criminologies* is available as a downloadable Adobe .pdf file by chapter or in complete form through <http://paulsjusticepage.com/IntegratingCrim/index.htm>. The author's website is <http://greggbarak.com>. The website for [Amazon.com](#) has additional information about the book, and the [publisher's website](#) accepts requests for academic desk copies.

- a. Newman's defensible space (physical environment affects crime)
 - b. Cohen and Felson's routine activities (importance of structured life activities)
- C. Anomie/Strain
 - 1. Crime from people trying to fit in and adapt to organization and contradictions of society
 - 2. Tradition traced to Durkheim: social changes (industrialization, urbanization) created anomic conditions -- traditional norms no longer apply and new norms not fully evolved; expectations raised to high, so suicide and crime result
 - 3. Merton argued anomie was part of everyday operation of society that blocks access to cultural goal of material wealth
- D. Subcultural theories
 - 1. Emphasize the importance of social values in informal groups
 - 2. Cohen: delinquency from strain because esteem from peers (not wealth) is blocked
 - 3. Miller: delinquency from values/focal concerns that emphasize 'toughness'
 - 4. Cloward and Ohlin: differential access to legitimate and illegitimate opportunities
 - 5. Wolfgang and Ferracuti: analyze spontaneous killings and find values that favor violence and create a subculture of violence
 - 6. Criticisms
 - a. Do subcultural theories reflect middle-class stereotype of the poor or their actual lifestyle?
 - b. Is there a lower class culture at all?
 - c. Gang members have conservative middle class values
- E. Pre-feminist women's crime [Adler, Simon]: women's lib would affect legitimate and illegitimate opportunities, though Simon thought violent crime would decrease

II Crime and Social Process

- A. Assumption that people are 'active' agents, co-producing their social world (and rendering causality problematic)
- B. Sutherland: differential association through communication and social interaction to learn criminal attitudes, motivations and techniques
- C. Glaser: adds differential identification (modeling and reference group) and differential anticipation (expectation based on learning, opportunities and bonds)
- D. Labeling/social reaction/symbolic interactionism/phenomenology: interest in relativity of the criminalization process and consequences for the construction of self-image (secondary deviance)

- E. Social constructionism: interested in the construction of the larger relations that produce criminals
 - 1. Quinney: social reality of crime: crime is defined and applied by dominant class to further their interests and secured through ideology

III Crime and Social Structure

- A. Not 'why do they do it?' but 'why do we have the criminality we do?'
- B. Messner and Rosenfeld [*Crime and the American Dream*]: crime from normal functioning and related to structural flaws
- C. Non-Marxist conflict/pluralist theories: crime related to differential power, inequality and ongoing struggles for control
- D. Marxist theories: similar to conflict, but more focused on political economy and greed produced by capitalism
 - 1. Instrumental: dominant economic elites use state to secure position
 - 2. Structural: state has semi-autonomous relation to economic interests
- E. Feminist: diverse approaches that remedy exclusive focus on male behavior, viewpoints and experiences; examine issues of female conformity as shaped by relations of production (gender inequality) and reproduction (control of sexuality)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1] Review the contributions that have been the mainstay of 20th Century criminology.
- 2] Help tie the individual to the group and to society.
- 3] Start to raise the question of 'why do we have the crime we do' (rather than 'why do criminals do it?').

IDEAS FOR LECTURES & DISCUSSION

Given the traditional emphasis on sociology within criminology, the material in this chapter should be familiar to most instructors. For those in search of ideas, the content of this chapter would lend itself to a discussion of gangs – a topic in which students have a great deal of interest. Although I am not familiar with the video offerings in this area, I am sure there are some interesting ones that could enhance class and help illustrate aspects of the theories.

Messner and Rosenfeld's *Crime and the American Dream* (1996) is a good read. Their ideas help tie Merton strain to some of the social structure material; it will also help set up the discussion of crime and consumer culture for Chapter 11.

While the overall project of integration may not favor any disciplines, certain sub-questions may be better answered from one discipline than another (at least if we really do keep what is unique to each perspective and not dissolve their differences). Does the question 'why do criminals do it?' benefit any more from sociology than psychology or biology? Is there any way to have this conversation without the either/ or competition that so far has been unproductive? Certainly we need some debate about the relative contributions of various factors, at least in terms of generating public policy based on the comprehensive understanding. Or does that sound too much like the positivist effort to create causal models with all of the paths marked with their relative strength?

REFERENCES

Messner, Steven and Richard Rosenfeld. 1997. *Crime and the American Dream*, 2nd ed. Belmont: Wadsworth.