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Contributions of sociological theories in understanding the social dimensions of crime - with an emphasis on violence

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Social order, crime and deviance

- Social life is always marked by "tensions" between those who seek to prevent violations of the norms of the existing social order and those who violate them.
- However, it is questionable whether the forces of social control are necessarily "correct" and whether "deviant" actors are necessarily directed towards selfish and „bad“ goals.
- Therefore, the determination of the "desirable" form of organization of the social order and the determination of "undesirable" forms of action largely depend on the prevailing social values, interests, worldviews and ideologies.



Anomie and crime

- Crime as a result of „strains" within social structures or social disorganization.
- A state of anomie occurs when society does not have or provide clear or adequate normative framework that will govern the behavior of individuals and allowed them to realize their goals in a socially acceptable.
- Anomie can generate an increase in deviant motivations and behaviors in some people.



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Culture and crime

- Individuals can learn deviant norms and behaviors through processes of socialization or interaction with holders of such norms.
- Some social groups accept values, norms, and worldviews that encourage and reward criminal behavior.
- A deviant subculture can be a reaction to the material and status frustration of a social group
- Leaning on their worldviews, people in certain situations can apply “techniques” that can temporarily neutralize the moral discipline of society, and rationalize to themselves why it is “justifiable” to commit a crime.



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Social interaction, meanings and crime

- To understand the relationship between society and crime, it is important to explore the process of interaction between offenders and actors of social control and the meaning that actors bring and develop in the process.
- Predominate meanings or notions of what is “suspicious, strange, unusual, or bad,” or which groups or areas are typical bearers of such characteristics, can have a significant impact on police and judges’ decisions to „label” or convict a person.
- Process of “labeling” a behavior as deviant can lead to an amplification of deviance.



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Power, interests, ideology and crime

- Elites can use social control mechanisms to create rules, practices, and discourses that will maintain a social order and serve their interests.
- Elites can make laws according to their interests and prevent those who harm those interests from reaching.
- Laws can be enforced selectively.
- An ideology that imposes the notion that crimes in society are mostly the fault of socially maladapted and failed individuals, can direct the work of social control institutions towards protection of interests of powerful groups rather than solving the real problems of crime in society.



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Social control and crime

- Crime is the result of imbalance between propensity to criminal activities and the effectiveness of social control mechanisms to curb such motives.
- Crime is the result of rational calculations and that people will commit a crime more often when they estimate that the probable benefits of such an act outweigh the probable costs.
- Harsh legal penalties per se will not reduce crime rates unless the police and judiciary do their work quickly and efficiently
- Serious crimes can be prevented by maintaining the "spirit of community" and by preventing crimes of lower intensity on a daily basis.



Concluding remarks

- To understand how social order determines what is violence, what causes it and how it should be solved, one should always consider how the prevailing social values, worldviews, interests, ideologies and distribution of power affect
 - the ways existing formal and informal rules define different types of violence,
 - reasons that motivate offenders to commit violence,
 - the reasons why victims decide to report it
 - and the ways social institutions react and sanction different types of violence.

Thank you for your attention!

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