

## SOC 3290 Deviance

### Overheads Lecture 4: The Demonic Perspective:

\*Supernatural explanations of deviance are important because:

- not entirely absent from our society
- other theories emerged in response
- some modern theories may be same thing in new guise

### **Theoretical Images:**

\* Demonic perspective:

- cause/cure of deviance lies in supernatural
- deviance=sin
- our world=battleground for good/evil forces

\* Individuals succumb to evil forces & engage in deviance through:

- temptation (some choice/responsibility)
- possession (no choice/responsibility)

\* Cosmic consequences:

- for individual
- for natural order
- for everybody

## **Identifying Demonic Deviance:**

### \* Methods:

- Spiritual “diviners”
- Trial by ordeal
- Trial by battle

### \* Colonial America: Salem Witch Trials (1692):

- Witchcraft hysteria in community/accusations
- Judicial proceedings followed: many executed
- Evidence included: Mistakes in Lord’s Prayer  
Testimony of aggrieved citizens  
“Marks of the devil”  
Confessions  
“Spectral evidence”

### \* Lateran Council:

- banned ordeal by fire/battle
- introduced sacrament of penance/confession
- encouraged focus on individual responsibility

## **Social Control of Demonic Deviance:**

### \* Little differentiation between types of deviance

### \* Control = religiously administered public punishment:

- purges sinner’s body of devil
- restores body of community to correct relation to God
- administered by Priests/clerics (e.g. burning)
- variations by social rank

## **Public Spectacles:**

\* 3 types:

- public executions
- public shaming
- symbolic rituals of penance

\* Relied on:

- (1) centralized authority
- (2) community control practices

\* Centralized authority:

- emerged as technology permitted economic surplus
- hierarchical organization replaces egalitarian
- religious revelation legitimizes
- laws specify who can/can't do what

\* Community Control:

- deviants dealt with locally/publicly
- rituals restore community to grace

## **Heterosexist Patriarchy & Religious Control:**

\* Western religious ideas favor male/ demonize female

\* 80% of witches burned were women.

\* Paganism driven underground (esp. After 12<sup>th</sup> century)

\* Biblical imagery portrays women as “conduit of evil”

## **The Demonic Perspective Today:**

### \* Still seen in:

- popular culture (horror movies, popular literature, some churches)
- canvassing literature
- the “religious right” lobby
- the controversy over women/gay clergy
- the “Moral Majority”
- televangelism
- Marketing Christian merchandise

### \* Not merely conservative:

- Civil rights movement
- Antiwar movements
- Liberation theology

## **Assessment of the Demonic Perspective:**

### \* Inadequate:

- relies on belief - not observable fact
- not testable
- suspending viewpoint enables other useful questions

## **Naturalistic Observations:**

### \* Some attempt to explain witch trials by substituting modern untestable superstitions (e.g. psychoanalytic theory):

- both avoid responsibility

- both rely on “experts”
- \* Other explanations: social disruptions:
  - British revoking legal charter/economic crisis
  - Religious tolerance confronting orthodoxy
  - Shifts in orthodoxy (from dependence to mastery)
- \* Results: Internal dissention & blaming women/less powerful
- \* Demonic beliefs/actions must be situated in social/historical contexts
  - suspend judgement of validity
  - note influenced by/influencing social/economic/political matters
  - produces useful questions for research

### **Spiritual Observations:**

- \* Naturalistic analyses lack sufficient perspective on evil
- \* Calls to integrate spiritual dimension:
  - Stanford Lyman (evils in “social bedrock”)
  - Richard Quinney (need to integrate “sacred void”)
  - Tifft & Sullivan (control by others denies our “spiritual home”)
  - Pagan revival (Goddess-centered spiritualities)
- \* All call for tempering of naturalistic analyses of deviance:
  - need to incorporate moral/spiritual/cosmic
  - neutral language disguises that deviance about good and evil
  - winners=saints; losers sinners