

SOC 3290 Deviance
Overheads Lecture 3: An Overview of Social Theory

(1) Components of Social Theory:

Explanatory Framework:

Identifies mechanisms behind norm violation/ deviance designations

(a) Differences between sociology/other perspectives:

- biology/psychology have individual focus/assume objective norms
- sociology has micro /meso /macro focus/questions designations

(b) Structure vs. process:

- some theories view structure as determinative
- others focus on how one becomes deviant/develop deviant identities
- recent trend toward integrated approaches combining both

(c) Sociological assumptions:

- human nature (inherently good vs. evil)
- social order vs. conflict (is order consensual or imposed?)
- individual & society (passivity & determinism vs. human agency)

Empirical Assessment:

- Explanations must be supported by evidence (observable/measurable)
- Quantitative vs. qualitative data
- Without evidence, logical explanations = ideology

Social Policy:

- Theories suggest social policies to deal with deviance

- Approaches vary depending on definition of deviance as norm violation vs. social definition (e.g. punishment vs. legislative change)
- Many impediments stand in way of policy implementation

(2) A Critical Approach to Deviance Theory:

* Each theoretical perspective on deviance exhibits:

- Dominant theoretical imagery (“explanation”)
- Research strategies
- Suggested control policies

* Each represents historically specific standpoints related to:

- Academic disciplines
- Social Power

Disciplinary Images:

* Many specialists view deviance differently (e.g. sociologists vs. psychiatrists, biologists)

* Yet most insights generated in interdisciplinary work

Social Power:

* Discussion of theory guided by power-reflexive perspective:

- (1) any approach highlights some things/ backgrounds others
- (2) related to theorists’ social positioning in social hierarchy

* We must question:

- our own views of socio-political order
- those of our colleagues/professors

* We may only partially theorize problems:

- objectivity (as detachment) is impossible
- recognize that “objective standards” are historically situated
- be aware of how our own attachments filter perceptions
- recognize political nature of investigations unavoidable
- remain open to revision

Substantive and Personal Concerns:

* Questions about deviance/social control are difficult:

- (A) - multiple views of Causation/appropriate policies (which correct?)
 - how is correctness measured?
 - how related to social-political-economic context?
- (B) - re: personal choices, feelings, and political commitments
 - need to delve beneath surface, become critical
 - ask tough questions
 - will this upset us, or awaken understanding/responsibility?

Conceiving and Controlling Deviance:

* Conceptions/theoretical perspectives determine actions:

- define what something is (and is not)
- provide explanations
- suggest appropriate actions
- provide sense of control
- we would be lost without

* Deviants have been historically subject to many images:

- explaining deviation
- suggesting control policies

* Commonsense vs. formal theoretical perspectives:

- former: simple/unreflective/vary by situation
- latter: elaborate/explicit/refined by study across situations
- interrelated in particular historical contexts

Formal Theories of Deviance in the West:

- *Deviance/social control can be conceptualized in multiple ways
- * We will consider Western society's most important perspectives
- * Each:
 - offers a distinct theoretical image of deviance
 - suggests how it may best be studied
 - suggests how it may best be controlled
- * We will deal with these historically and chronologically
- * For each theory, we will:
 - (1) Describe basic imagery, research strategies, and control policies
 - (2) Situate it in its socio-historical framework
 - (3) Outline its strengths and weaknesses
- * Ultimately, these are important matters requiring your critical thought
- * In the next class, we will begin with the demonic perspective.