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| **4. Labelling/ interactionist (action) theories of crime & deviance** | |
| **Introduction/key assumptions**   * They reject official statistics on crime, making them part of their subject of study. They see them as a social construction (underreporting etc) and so underestimate crime (especially middle class crime). * They reject structural causal explanations of crime and deviance (e.g. functionalist and realist). Instead they look at the way crime and deviance is socially constructed. * They favour in-depth qualitative approaches when investigating crime and deviance. For example, informal interviews, observation and personal documents. | |
| **Labelling/interactionist theories** | **Evaluation of interactionist/labelling theories** |
| The Nature of Deviance is Socially Constructed  * **Becker (1963)** argues that what we count as crime and deviance is based on **subjective decisions** made by **moral entrepreneurs** (agents of social control) – leading a moral crusade to change the law * This change in law has two effects however: * The creation of a new group of ‘outsiders’ – outlaws or deviants who break the new rule * The creation or expansion of a social control agency (e.g. police, courts, probation officers etc) * Crime and deviance is **socially constructed**, so it varies over time and between cultures… * ***Platt (1969)*** argues that the idea of juvenile delinquency was created as a result of a campaign by upper-class Victorian moral entrepreneurs, aimed at protecting young people at risk * This established ‘juveniles’ as a separate category of offender, with their own courts * ***Becker*** claims social control agents themselves may also campaign for change of laws e.g. US Federal Bureau of Narcotics successfully campaigned for the passing of the Marijuana Tax Act in 1937 to outlaw marijuana use – perhaps to limit effects on juveniles, perhaps to increase the range of control the bureau had * At each stage of the criminal justice system, agents of social control e.g. police officers or prosectors) make decisions about whether or not to proceed to the next stage * The outcome depends on the label they attach to the individual suspect or defendant * This label is likely to be affected by the typifications or stereotypes they hold about him or her * The statistics produced by the criminal justice system only tell us about the activities of the police and prosecutors, rather than about the amount of crime outr there in society or who commits it * Control agents will make decisions at each ‘decision gate’ (i.e. a stage in the justice system) * **The dark figure of crime:** the differenc between the Os and the ‘real’ rate of crime is sometimes called the dark figure, because we do not know for certain how much crime goes undetected, unreported and unrecorded * **Alternative statistics:** some socioligsts use victim surveys (where people are asked what crimes they have been victims of) or self-report studies (where they are asked what crimes they have commited) to gain a more accurate view of the amount of crime. These can add to our picture of crime, but they have several limitations e.g. people may forget, conceal or exaggerate when asked if they have commited a crime or been the victim of one, in addition, surveys only usually include a selectrion of generally less serious offences.   **Who Gets Labelled?**   * Not everyone who commits and offence is punished for it. Whether a person is arrested, charged and convicted depends on factors such as: * Their interactions with agencies of social control * Their appearance, background and personal biography * The situation and cicrumstances of the offence * This leads labelling theorists to look at hoe the laws are applied and enforced * Their studies show that agencies of social control are more likely to label certain groups of people as deviant or criminal * E.g. **Piliavin and Briar (1964)** found that police decisions to arrest youth were mainly based on physical cues (such as manner and dress) from which they made judgements about the youth’s character * Officers’ decisions were also infleucned by the suspect’s gender, class and ethnicity, as well as by time and place e.g. those stopped late at night in high crime areas ran a greater risk of arrest * Similarly, a study of anti-social behaviour orders found they were disproportionately used against ethnic minorities   **Cicourel: The Negotiation of Justice**   * Officers’ decisions to arrest are influenced by their stereotypes about offenders. * Cicourel (1968) found that officers’ typifications – their commonsense theories or stereotypes of what the delinquent is like – led them to concentrate on certain ‘types’. * This resulted in law enforcement showing a class-bias, in that working-class areas and people fitted the police typifications most closely. * In turn, this led police to control working-class areas more intensively, resulting in more arrests and confirming their sterotype. * Cicourel also found that other agents of social control within the criminal justice system reinforced this bias e.g. probation officers held the commonsense theory that juvenile delinquency was caused by broken homes, poverty and lax parenting. * They tended to see youths from such backgrounds as likely to offend in the future and were less likely to support non-custodial sentences for them.   **Effects of labelling**   * **Becker** (1963) claims that the extent of deviance is affected by labelling by powerful agencies of social control (societal reaction to deviance). * He maintains that deviance can be **amplified** (increased) by the act of labelling itself. * He argues that the labelled gain a **master status** e.g. drug addict and that this status/label dominates and shapes how others see the individual (they become **stigmatised/’outsiders’**). * Eventually a **self-fulfilling prophecy** is set into motion. * Becker suggests that once the deviant label is accepted, deviants may join or form deviant **subcultures** where their activities can be justified and supported. In this way deviance can become more frequent and often expanded into new areas (a career of deviance). * **Young (1971)** found that once hippies in Notting Hill had been labelled for their primary deviance (e.g. occasional marijuana use) they saw themselves as outsiders and developed a deviant subculture that involved wearing more ‘way out’ clothes and longer hair, with drug taking becoming a central activity (deviancy amplification). Police attention increased and self-fulfilling prophecies developed.   **Lemert** (1951)   * Lemert supports Becker’s ideas on the consequences of labelling. * Primary deviance which has not been labelled has few consequences for the individual concerned e.g. fare dodging. * Once deviance is labelled it becomes secondary and affects the individual. Societal reaction leads to stigmatisation, a master status, a self fulfilling prophecy and further deviance.   **Deviancy Amplification**   * The term ‘deviancy amplification spiral’ refers to the attempt to control deviance which only results in an increase in deviance * It is argued that the media amplify crime and deviance as they demonise deviants, create **moral panics**, resulting in increased social control and then deviance (e.g. Stanley Cohen’s 1971 Folk Devils and Moral Panic, a study into the ‘mods and rockers’ disturbances involving groups of youths at seaside resorts)   **Labelling and Criminal Justice Policy**   * Studies have shown how increases in the attempt to control and punish young offenders can have the opposite effect * ☺ Triplett (2000) notes an increasing tendency to see young offenders as evil and to be less tolerant of minor deviance * The criminal justice system has re-labelled status offences such as truancy as more serious offences, resulting in much harsher sentences * This has resulted in an increase rather than a decrease in offending (as predicted by Lemert) * De Haan (2000) notes a similar outcome in Holland as a result of the ioncreasing stigmatisiation of young offenders   iamathiefen5**Braithewaite: Positive role of labelling process**   * **Braithewaite (1989)** identifies a more positive role for the labelling process * He distinguishes between two types of shaming (negative labelling): * ***Disintegrative shaming***: where not only the crime, but also the criminal is labelled as bad and the offender is excluded from society (see image on right) * ***Reintegrative shaming***: labels the act, but not the actor – as if to say ‘he has done a bad thing’, rather than ‘he is a bad person’ * Reintegrative shaming avoids stigmatising the offender as evil while at the same time making them aware of the negative impact of their actions upon others, and then encourages others to forgive them * This makes it easier for society and the offender to remove the offence from the offender and put the individual back into mainstream society * Braithewaite argues crime rates tend to be lower in societies where reintegrative rather than disintegrative shaming is the dominant way of dealing with offenders   **Suicide**   * Suicide has been an important topic in the development of sociology * Durkheim (1897) studied it with the aim of showing that sociology is a science * Using OS he claimed to have discovered the causes of suicide in how effectively society integrated individuals and regulated their behaviour * However, interactionists reject Durkheim’s positivist approach and his reliance on OS * They argue that to understand suicide, we must study its meanings for those who kill themselves * As with Crime and Suicide, interactionists reject OS on mental illness because they regard these as social constructs * i.e. they are simply a record of the activities of those with the power e.g. psychiatrists to attach labels such as ‘schizophrenic’ or ‘paranoid’ to others * Crime, suicide and mental illness statistics are just artefacts (made my humans), not objective social fact   Douglas (1967)   * Takes an interactionist approach * Critical of the use of suicide statistics – too socially constructed * Whether a death comes to be officially labelled as suicide rather than an accident or homicide depends on the interactions and negotiations between social actors such a s the coroner, relatives friends, doctors etc – these statistics therefore tell us nothing about the meanings behind an individual’s decision to commit suicide * If we want to understand the meanings, we must use qualitative methods instead e.g. analysis of sucidie notes/unstructured interviews – this would allow us to get behind the labels coroners attach to deaths to discover their true meaning   Atkinson (1978)   * Agrees OS are merely a record of the labels coroners attach * Focuses instead on the taken-for-granted assumptions that coroners make when reaching a verdict * Their ideas about a ‘typical suicide’ were important; certain modes of death (e.g. hanging), location and circumstance of death, and life history (e.g. a recent bereavement) were seen as typical of suicides * One coroner said that if the deceased had taken more than ten sleeping pills, ‘I can be almost sure it was a suicide’ * However, Atkinson’s approach can be used against him – if all we have are interpretations of the social world, rather than real facts about it (e.g. how many deaths are really suicides), then his account is no more than an interpretation and there is no good reason to accept it. | **Empirical evaluation**  http://www.arnadal.no/film/images/oneflewo.jpg  ☺ Interactionist theories have empirical support. **Goffman** (1961) classic study *Asylums* has shown how the hospitalisation of the mentally ill (societal reaction) leads to mortification, labelling, master status, self-fulfilling prophecies, institutionalisation, amplification and stigma. This suggests there is some validity in the interactionist ideas.  ☹Subcultural theories have been questioned on empirical grounds. **Fuller** (1984) has found evidence that labelling theory is too deterministic (assumes things automatically happen). She found negative teacher labelling amongst year 11 black girls. However, she found little evidence of a self-fulfilling prophecy effect. On the contrary the ‘non-conformist’ girls rejected the labelling and used it as a motivator to achieve educational success. This suggests that the validity of subcultural ideas have to be questioned. Linking to this topic, it implies that once someone is labelled, a deviant career is inevitable.  **Further Evaluation**  ☹ It’s emphasis on the negative effects of labelling gives the offender a kind of victim status. Realist sociologists argue that this ignores the real victims of crime.  ☹ It tends to focus on less serious crime such as drug-taking  ☹ By assuming the offenders are passive victims of labelling, it ignores the fact that individuals may actively choose deviance  ☹ It fails to explain why people commit primary deviance in the first place, before they are labelled  ☹ It implies that without labelling, deviance exist. This leads to the strange conclusion that someone who commits a crime but is not labelled has not deviated. It also implies that deviants are unaware they are deviant until labelled. Yet most are well aware that they are going against social norms.  ☹ It recognises the tole of power in creating deviance, but it fails to analyse the source of this power. As a result, it focuses on ‘middle range officials’ such as policemen who apply the labels, rather than on the capitalist class who (in the view of Marxists) make the rules in the first place. It also fails to explain the orgin of the labels, or why they are applied to certain groups, such as the working class.  ☹ Interactionist theories too readily dismiss official statistics on crime. **Realists** accept that official statistics have problems and are subject to bias (e.g. under-recording). However, they argue that they show the basic reality of crime and can be useful for generating causal explanations of crime and deviance. This suggests that the interactionist response to official statistics is not adequate.  ☹ **Theoretical evaluation (minimum of 1)**  **Marxists**   * Marxists accept that labelling theory raises important questions; however, they argue that the theory has a weak view of **power and social control**. * They argue labelling theory fails to explain **why** the nature and extent of crime and deviance is socially constructed. * Marxists argue law creation and selective law enforcement protects the interests of the ruling class. * For example, Trade Union laws (e.g. secret ballots before strikes) undermine Trade Union power. * Selective law enforcement against the powerless working class directs attention away from crimes committed by the powerful middle class. * Marxists also argue that interactionists fail to consider the wider structural **origins and causes** of (primary) crime and deviance. Marxists argue that the causes of crime are due to economic inequality and capitalist values.   **Left realism**   * Left realistsattack interactionists for too readily explaining away young, male, working class, black crime as a social construction. * They argue that such groups docommit more crime and there are real wider external social/structural **causes** for it. * They suggest that young, male, working class, black crime can be understood as a response to marginalisation, relative deprivation and subcultures. * Left realists also argue that interactionist approaches side too much with the deviant and neglect the victim.   **Functionalism**   * Functionalists attack interactionists for too readily explaining away young, male, working class, black crime as a social construction. * They argue that such groups docommit more crime and there are real wider external social/ structural **causes** for it. * They suggest that young, male, working class, black crime can be understood as a wider response to anomie/blocked opportunities and subcultures. |
| **In conclusion** the interactionist approach recognises that crime and deviance is socially constructed and that social patterns of crime are not what seem. However, in starting at the point of labelling the interactionist approach ignores the wider structural and cultural causes of crime and deviance. For example, anomie/blocked opportunities, marginalisation, inequality and subcultures. | |