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| **6. Learning table on Labelling/interactionist theories of crime & deviance** | | | |
| **Key assumptions**   * They reject official statistics on crime, making them part of their subject of study. * They reject structural causal explanations of crime and deviance (e.g. functionalist and realist). * They look instead 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. | | | |
| **Interactionist/labelling theories** | **Evaluation - ☺ ☹ (GET SET)** | **Evaluation - in contrast** | **Synoptic links** |
| **Response to official crime statistics**  Reject  Interactionists reject official statistics on crime, seeing them as little more than a social construction. They maintain that they vastly underestimate the extent of crime and do not present an accurate picture of the social distribution of criminality. They point out that under-reporting, invisibility of white-collar and cybercrime, under-recording, selective law enforcement and artificial fluctuations in crime rates lead to biased statistics. The nature of deviance is socially constructed **Becker** maintains that what we count as crime and deviance is based on subjective decisions made by ‘moral entrepreneurs’ (agents of social control). Thus he argues that deviance is simply forms of behaviour that powerful agencies of social control define or label as such. For example, doctors label overeating and lack of exercise as deviant. Psychiatrists have medicalised certain unusual behaviours as mental illnesses such as caffeine induced sleep disorder and nightmare disorder. For Becker the socially created (as opposed to objective) nature of crime and deviance means that it varies over time and between cultures. This can be illustrated with laws relating to prostitution. In the UK it is essentially illegal but in Amsterdam legalised brothels exist.  **Ethnomethodologists** support the interactionist/labelling view that deviance is based on subjective decision making, and hence a social construction. They argue that ‘deviance is in the eye of the beholder’. Thus what one person might see as deviant another might not. This can be illustrated with debates about ‘conceptual art’. Some see the work of artists such as Tracey Emin and Webster and Noble as deviant or even sick, whereas others celebrate it as original and inspirational. The extent of deviance is socially constructed 1. Selective labelling - **Becker** claims that the amount and distribution of crime and deviance in society is dependent on processes of social interaction between the deviant and powerful agencies of social control. Becker argues that whether a deviant is labelled depends on who has committed and observed the deviant act, when and where the act was committed and the negotiations that take place between the various ‘social actors’ (people) involved. He suggests that powerless groups are more likely to be labelled than powerful groups. This is supported by research evidence that shows blacks are five times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police than whites and 5 times more likely to be labelled schizophrenic than whites by psychiatrists.  **http://movies.israel.net/girl/poster.jpg**2. Consequences of labelling - **Becker** also claims that the extent of deviance in society is dependent on the effects of labelling by powerful agencies of social control. 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. mental patient, drug addict and that this status/label dominates and shapes how others see the individual. The deviant in effect becomes stigmatised. Eventually a self-fulfilling prophecy is set into motion and a career of deviance is possible. 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.  **Lemert** supports Becker’s ideas on the consequences of labelling. He maintains that primary deviance which has not been labelled has few consequences for the individual concerned. However, he claims that once deviance is labelled it becomes secondary and impacts on the individual, e.g. in terms of gaining a master status and later developing a self fulfilling prophecy.  **Mass media and deviancy amplification**  **Turner prize nominee Tracey Emin**  One agency of social control interactionists consider when looking at societal reactions to deviance is the media. It is argued that the media amplify crime and deviance as they demonise deviants and create moral panics. This has shown to be the case with powerless groups such as mods and rockers, football hooligans, single parents etc.  **Individual meanings of crime**  **Phenomenologists** support the interactionist view in looking at crime and deviance under the ‘microscope’. Phenomenologists focus on the individual motivations behind deviance and its episodic nature. **Katz** (1988) locates key meanings such as the search for excitement and establishing a reputation. **Matza** (1964) stresses how individuals drift in and out of delinquency as they employ techniques of neutralisation (e.g. ‘I was provoked’). | **Strengths**  1. Interactionist theories have served to generate a great deal of subsequent research into the effects of labelling. For example, **Rist** (1970) has shown how negative teacher expectations placed on the working class leads to underachievement and anti-school subcultures. This suggests that interactionist ideas have made a major contribution to the study of crime and deviance.  http://www.arnadal.no/film/images/oneflewo.jpg2. Interactionist theories have gained empirical support. **Goffman** (1968) has shown how the hospitalisation of the mentally ill leads to mortification, self-fulfilling prophecies and in some cases institutionalisation. This suggests there is some validity in the interactionist ideas.  3. Interactionist views have gainedtheoreticalsupport. For example from the ideas of **phenomenologists** and **ethnomethodologists** (as shown above). This suggests that the ideas have wider theoretical appeal.  **Weaknesses**  1. Interactionist theories too readily dismiss official statistics on crime. **Realists** accept that official statistics have imperfections and are subject to bias. However, they argue that they show the basic reality of crime and can be useful for generating explanations of crime and deviance. This suggests that the interactionist response to official statistics is not adequate.  2. Interactionist theories have been questioned on empirical grounds. **Hirschi** (1975) argues that it is debatable whether labelling by the criminal justice system leads to a career of deviance. He feels that other factors such as age are seen to be more important. This suggests that the validity of interactionist ideas have to be questioned.  3. Interactionist theories have been criticised on atheoretical level. Whilst **Marxists** accept that labelling theory raises important questions, they argue that the theory has a weak view of power and social control. For example, the theory fails to explain **why** the nature and extent of crime and deviance is socially constructed. They also argue that interactionists fail to consider the wider structural origins of crime and deviance. This suggests that labelling theory only offers a partial view on crime and deviance. | **Left realism**  In contrast left realists such as **Lea and Young** (1984) attack interactionists for too readily explaining away working class/black crime as a social construction. They argue that such groups docommit more crime and there are real social reasons for it. They therefore call for a return to causal explanations of crime. They suggest that 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. Furthermore it has been suggested that interactionism lacks any practical social policy focus. Left realists put forward realistic solutions to try and reduce crime, especially in inner city areas. | Research Methods/methodology  Using your notes on crime statistics be able to explain why interactionists reject official crime statistics (all the limitations). Using your Theory & Methods notes be able to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of key qualitative/ethnographic methods - especially the theoretical, practical and ethical advantages/disadvantages of participant observation (covert & overt), informal interviews and personal documents.  Theories/perspectives  Interactionist/labelling theories, including the sub-branches of phenomenology and ethnomethodology.  Other topics  **Health**  Doctors and psychiatrists socially construct the nature of deviance. For example, doctors label overeating & lack of exercise as deviant. Psychiatrists have medicalised certain unusual behaviours as mental illnesses e.g. nightmare disorder. Psychiatrists socially construct the extent of deviance. They selectively label groups e.g. blacks 5 times more likely to be labelled schizophrenic than whites, women more likely to be labelled mentally ill than men.  **Education**  Deviant subcultures can arise from the process of labelling. Interactionist research inside of schools (e.g. Rist and Hargreaves) has shown that negative teacher expectations and streaming can result in the development of anti-school cultures, especially amongst the working class and blacks. Anti-school behaviour such as fighting and truancy is by its nature deviant and can result in social exclusion from society, which often leads to crime.  **Power & politics**  Becker looks at the way powerful moral entrepreneurs/agencies of social control make decisions as to what is and what isn’t deviant. He also explains how powerful agencies of social control e.g. the police and psychiatrists selectively label deviants depending on their power - age, social class, ethnicity, sex etc. Becker goes on to suggest that the act of labelling by the powerful can amplify deviance, especially amongst the powerless. |
| **In conclusion** the interactionist approach recognises that crime and deviance is socially constructed by agencies of social control. Moreover, Phenomenologists recognise the need to consider the individual meanings behind crime and deviance. However, the interactionist approach ignores the wider structural and cultural causes of crime and deviance. For example, anomie, marginalisation and subcultures. | | | |