**SOC 3290 Deviance**

 **Overheads Lecture 10: The Functionalist Perspective**

\* Unlike earlier perspectives, functionalism looks at contribution of deviance to the social order

 **Theoretical Images:**

\* Functionalism divides phenomena into functional/dysfunctional:

 - functional = positive consequences for social organization

 - dysfunctional = negative consequences for social organization

\* Emile Durkheim: focused on “necessary” & “normal” features of any healthy, functioning society

\* Felt that a “pathological society” is one where norms are either too strong or too weak:

 - too strong = overly conformist, unable to flexibly adapt

 - too weak = too loosely defined/unable to complete basic tasks

\* Durkheim argued that a social phenomenon is normal if it is both “universal” & “necessary” (like deviance):

 -universal=must be present in all or majority of societies

 -necessary=a determining condition required for societal existence

\* Deviance contributes to a healthy social order in four ways:

 (1) By setting moral boundaries;

 (2) Strengthening in-group solidarity;

 (3) Allowing for adaptive innovation; &

 (4) Reducing internal societal tensions.

\* Robert Merton: distinction between “manifest” & “latent” functions:

 - manifest= recognized & intended

 - latent= unintended consequences

\* Deviance may be manifestly condemned but latently permitted/useful

\* Examples:

 -Robert Merton on corrupt city politics: maximizing benefits for all

 -Kingsley Davis on prostitution: satisfying needs while

 maintaining marital bonds

 - Denfield & Gordon on “swinging”: releasing sexual fantasies

 while maintaining sentimental bonds of marriage

  **Identifying Functional Deviance:**

\* Common assumptions guide functionalist research:

 - limit researchers to certain images

 - deviance must be seen in relation to whole society

 - organic metaphor: society made up of interrelated parts

\* Durkheim: important to separate causes from consequences (not

 always practicing what he preached)

\* Two logical /conceptual problems result:

 (1) *Circular reasoning* (tautology). “If something is universal, it

 must be functional.” Why is it functional? Because it’s universal.”

(2) *False teleology* (asserting something has a purpose without specifying how this happens, or how caused).

\* Robert Merton’s solution: Avoid all assumptions about:

 (1) The harmonious integration of parts of a system;

 (2) Any relationship between the existence of a phenomena & its

 contribution to the social order; &

 (3) The idea that social needs can only be met by the present

 phenomena.

\* These pave the way for several considerations:

 - deviance may be functional for some; dysfunctional for others

 - the “net balance” of positive/negative consequences

 - manifest & latent functions

 - alternative ways of meeting same social needs

\* Merton: five steps in a proper functionalist analysis:

 (1) Specifically describe deviant phenomena/control patterns;

 (2) Outline range/type of alternatives excluded in present instance;

 (3) Assess their meaning for those involved;

 (4) Discern motives for conforming/not conforming; &

 (5) Describe patterns/latent consequences not recognized by

 participants

\* Avoid above problems better in theory than in practice.

 **Social Control of Functional Deviance:**

\* Relative benefit/harmfulness of deviance a matter of degree: some good for society; too much is pathological

\*Talcott Parsons: healthy society=a stable society where parts coordinated as interrelated parts of an organic system.

\* Parsons: systemic social needs coordinated by:

 (1) Adaptation to external environment;

 (2) Integration of the system’s parts (values, roles, interests,

 & motives);

 (3) Goal attainment;

 (4) Pattern maintenance-tension reduction.

\* Basic social institutions arise to fulfill these basic needs, each governed by internalized norms/expectations (e.g. economic, religious, political, educational, the family).

\* If tension becomes too great & people deviate, tension-reduction institutions are mobilized to back up others:

 (1) Socialization;

 (2) Profit;

 (3) Persuasion; &

 (4) Coercion.

 **The Functionalist Perspective Today:**

\* Functionalism was the dominant perspective in the 1950's/early 1960's

\* Yet, Parsons’ work historically rooted in:

 (1) The Great Depression;

 (2) Wartime thinking (WWII).

\* Both undercut Chicago school/linked U.S. to European unease

\* Marxism not considered, Parsons’ structural approach filled the gap.

\* Provided a politically safe conceptual escape:

 -“system is adaptable/things will work out in time”

 - avoided how system itself induces crises/disorder/unease

\* Parsons himself:

 - stable/sheltered background

 - insulated from Depression at Harvard

 - mixed progressive/reactionary activities

 - enthusiasm for cybernetics/idea of “feedback mechanisms”

 - linked capitalist “management information systems” ideology,

 military “hierarchy of control,” & Pareto’s biological “living

 systems” ideas

\* After WWII: victory & prosperity seemed to prove Parsons right (avoided factor of violent social conflict)

\* 1950's “triumph of sociology as a science”:

 - focus on management/organizational problems

 - high-level conceptualization/attempts at prediction

 - glossed over economic, racial & sexual inequalities

 - 1960's conflict broke “rose-colored glasses”

\* Still, functionalist work is being done:

(1) Dentler & Erikson (Quakers & Army boot camp):

 (i) Groups induce, sustain & permit deviance

 (ii) Deviance functions to induce members to maintain group

 equilibrium;

 (iii) Groups resist trend toward alienation of deviant member.

(2) Erikson (Puritans):

 -Level of charges constant over time

 -Sanctioning increased with threats to religious purity of group

 - “Crime waves” saw group reaffirm values in different ways

 - Questions arise, but still provocative/suggests society needs

 deviance

 **Assessment of the Functionalist Perspective:**

\* Innovates by suggesting possible positive consequences of deviance

\* Disadvantages:

 (1) An overly mechanistic view of social life as a social system;

 (2) Logical problems: (tautology/false teleology);

 (3) Conservative political bias.