**SOC 3290 Deviance**

**Overheads Lecture 11: Social Control Theory**

\* Social control theory:

- assumes people will deviate

- focuses on why people conform to society

- argues deviance results from lack of control

**Theoretical Images:**

**\*** Definitions of social control: (1) Deterrence

(2) Related to socialization

\* Deterrence: formal social control of rationally calculated actions

through punishment. Three components:

(1) Severity

(2) Certainty

(3) Swiftness

\* Two types of deterrence: (1) General (i.e. the public)

(2) Specific (i.e. the offender)

\* Increased questioning of deterrence led to broader focus on

socialization / informal social sanctions rooted in social

disorganization theory

- normative chaos disrupts socialization

- disrupted socialization weakens internal normative constraints

\* Walter Reckless (1973): containment theory: social disorganization mediated by social psychological factors:

(1) Inner containment &

(2) Outer containment.

\* If outer containments are disrupted by disorganization, inner may still

restrain the individual from deviating

\* Ivan Nye (1958): focus on the family as agent of socialization. Basic

animal instincts restrained by:

(1) Internal control

(2) Indirect control

(3) Direct control

(4) Need satisfaction

\* Travis Hirschi (1969): Strong social bonds bearing conformist values

inhibit criminal behavior. Four types:

(1) Attachment

(2) Commitment

(3) Involvement

(4) Belief

\* John Braithewaite (1989): social control may be accomplished through

“reintegrative shaming” / invoking remorse in the wrongdoer while

showing them respect

\* D. Matza (1964): Emphasizes neutralization of delinquent acts through

process of rationalization

\* Gottfredson & Hirshi (1990): General theory of crime focuses on low self control rooted in childhood with inconsistent punishment

\* Sampson & Lamb (1993): Life course theory: trajectories &

transitions

\* All variants of social control theory suggests that some form of control

prevents deviance, & lack of control releases it

**Social Control Theory & Social Policy:**

\* Formal deterrence: increase the severity, certainty & swiftness of

punishment

\* Informal socialization: counseling, education & work projects

**Assessment of Social Control Theory:**

\* Formal Deterrence:

- inconsistent empirical support

- specific deterrence often has opposite effect on recidivism

- not all crimes rationally calculated

- public unaware of penalties for specific crimes

- “real world conditions” where punishments anything but swift,

certain or severe

- general deterrence shows inconsistent support/ varies by crime

- adjusting swiftness/certainty of punishment may be

unconstitutional/violate human rights

\* Informal Socialization:

- vague concepts / overlap conceptually

- relative importance of inner/outer controls little studied

- empirical support for Hirschi’s theory with adolescents/ not

adults (where multiple attachments may be a problem)

- reintegrative shaming may not work in our culture/ with hardened

criminals

-distinction between deviants/conformists an oversimplification

- social control practices may cause of deviance

- more research needed on relative effects of formal/informal

Social controls