**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.