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English 1102 Paper

Crime has been part of daily life as long as humanity has existed. What constitutes criminal behavior may be universal or may vary depending on different countries, societies, religions, and norms. For example, acts such as murder, robbery, and rape are considered criminal in all countries of the world and by all religions. Acts such as smoking or dealing with marijuana are considered criminal in some societies and countries while others permit them. Society has always tried to understand why people are involved in crime and what causative factors drive people to crimes. Several schools of thought have come up with various theories that explain how people get into crime, but there has never been a consensus amongst these disciplines. Strain, Social Learning, and Control are some of the sociological theories that best explain why people involve themselves in crime because people learn crime by watching others and modeling from others and it can be learned at a young age as explained by the Bobo Doll experiment conducted on children.

Criminology is an intriguing field, including a wide assortment of subjects that have both viable application and hypothetical significance: How can drug dealing and abuse rates be diminished? Does the media portrayal of violence cause people to commit crimes? Can incarceration decrease crime? Criminologists contribute to their field a broader range of skills,

education, and encounters that improve their essential professional role: applying the logical strategy to the study and examination of crime and criminal behavior. In identifying the causes of crime various studies have been deployed. For instance, the psychological standpoint sees crime as a function of personality, development, or cognition (Siegel, 5). Biologists who have taken interest in the origin of crime tend to explain it as a function of genetics, biochemical and neurological networks to crime. Sociologists think that crime is a function of social factors leading to criminal tendencies including neighborhood influence, destitution, and other peer related influences.

According to criminologists, crime is described as a behavior that deviates from the social norm and is viewed as dangerous and harmful and is punishable under criminal law (Siegel, p14). Criminology has interested many researchers, including theologians, behavioral psychologists, and biologists who have come up with various theories that have tried to explain why people involve themselves with a crime. One of the earliest was the Natural-law theory by philosopher and priest Thomas Aquinas in the 13th Century. According to Aquinas, people are, by nature, rational creatures. In this manner, it gets to be morally fitting that they act in a way that acclimates to their rational nature. Hence, to be valid, any law must adjust to the natural law, and coercing them to comply with that law is morally satisfactory (Elders, p20).

Sociological theories explain crime in the context of the social environment, including the family setting, school, neighborhood, and society at large. However, these theories contrast in their focus of the features in the social environment and offer distinct accounts of why the social environment influence crime, and some offer in clarifying individual differences in crime whereas others endeavor to clarify the group differences in crime (why some neighborhoods record higher crime rates than others). Strain theory, Social Learning Theory, and Control

Theory are some of the sociological theories that try to explain the factors that motivate people to crimes.

According to Robert Merton's strain theory, people engage in crime because of stress or strain. The strain may be in the form of harassment from others or financial problems. The theory was further modified by Robert Agnew to reinforce earlier proposals by Robert Merton, Lloyd Ohlin, and David Greenberg, among others. He further categorized strains that lead to crime into two types. One is a strain that prevents people from achieving their goals. The goals may be money, or status, and respect. Poor people have many restraints making a living from honest means, and this may force them into criminal acts such as theft, drug dealing, and prostitution. Criminals have often attested that they find occupation in crime because they find it hard to legally earn money. Crime is rampant amongst people dissatisfied with their financial situation. An example is people of low economic status and those who treasure too much wealth. Some people desire social status and respect, and more precisely, the desire for "masculine status." This is mostly associated with young males from low-class minority groups who are often disregarded by society (Barbieri et al., 1). The second type of strain occurs when people take something they treasure or something instigating negative stimuli, and this may prompt them to react criminally. Such instigators include child abuse and neglect, bad experiences in school, bullying in school or the neighborhood, and separation or divorce in families, amongst others.

The strain theory has several limitations that have been evidenced by its weak empirical review. The theory mainly focuses on people of lower economic status, thereby excluding the middle class who are able to achieve money in legal means but can still commit a crime (white-collar crime). The theory is also limited in the explanation of gender-based crime. Furthermore, several studies done on the strain theory have produced mixed results. For instance, a study done

by sociologist Travis Hirschi in 1969 around California on delinquency did not rear result to support the theory.

When it comes to Social Learning, people engage in crime due to their close association with criminals. People with criminal tendencies may teach others to engage in crime through reinforcements and punishments they provide for such conduct. Crime may probably occur when there is large reinforcement (money or pleasure) and little punishment. According to the theory, some people are in an environment where crime is likely to be reinforced as opposed to being punished. For example, parents are less likely to look the other way rather than admonish their children when they misbehave at home. Another factor is the adoption of beliefs that are favorable to crime. The belief may be an approving some minor offenses such as abuse of soft drugs, vandalism, or consensual sex. According to sociologists, other beliefs may be the justification for criminal activities. For instance, most people believing that fighting is not such bad when insulted or provoked (Bloomberg et al., p132). Also, criminal behavior may be modeled from influential criminal figures that are around and have succeeded in crime.

One of the criticisms of the social learning theory relates to its major concept affiliation with deviant peers promotes the probability that someone will adopt demeanors and values that lean towards criminal conduct through the instrument of rewards and punishments. The critique centers on the transient ordering of the adoption of deviant demeanor and conducts and affiliation with deviant peers. The theory is prefaced on the thought that it is affiliation with others that promotes the learning and consequent acceptance of deviant conduct. Opposing suggestions states the youth may develop misdemeanors without previous exposure and then look for peers with similar states of mind or conduct.

Control Theory is more concerned with conformity and takes crime for granted. It suggests that people have needs that can be easily satisfied by crime as opposed to honest work but want to know why they do not choose crime. According to the theory, people have controls or restraints that prevent them from crimes, i.e., direct Control, stake in conformity, and Internal Control. Direct controls are those that set rules, monitor behaviors, or sanction and punish crimes, e.g., parents, police, school teachers, or superior authorities at workplaces. A stake in conformity is where one does a personal assessment of what they will lose if they chose crime. This may be social status, time invested in education and work, or trust from family and friends, amongst others.

In 1961, psychologist Albert Bandura conducted an experiment to find out if social behaviors like aggression can be learned by observation and imitation. For the study, Bandura and his team used 36 boys and 36 girls aged between 3-6 years. They were separated into three groups of 24 children each. The first group of 24 children was shown the aggressive model, the second group of 24 was shown the non-aggressive model, and the last group of 24 children was the control group and was not shown any model. The experiment was conducted in 3 stages.

Bandura and team found out those children observing the aggressive model were more prone to aggressive response than those who observed the non-aggressive model and the control group. Girls in the aggressive who observed aggressive models were more likely to be physically aggressive if the models they observed were male but verbally aggressive if the models were female. The boys had a high probability of imitating the model of the same gender than the girls. They also found out that boys had a high probability of imitating physically aggressive behavior than girls (Lansford, 3). The team concluded that children could learn social behaviors such as

aggression through observation and imitation of others. The study had a greater implication on the influence of Television and adults on children.

Crime can be explained by various disciplines from biology, psychology, religion, but theories of sociology tend to present a clearer picture of how crime is caused in society. Strain theory, Social learning, and Control theory are the most eminent theories that have been used by sociologists and criminologists to explain crime causation and why people are drawn to criminal tendencies. These theories are not without their limitations, as most studies conducted on them tend to produce contradicting conclusions. Of these theories, Social learning has been the one with the most conclusive outcome as witnessed by the Bobo Doll Experiment conducted by psychologist Albert Bandura and his team on 72 children in 1961. The field of sociology opens more ground for further studies of understanding crime and what factors contribute to crime. More research needs to be done to improve on the theory so as to improve the criminal justice system.

Works Cited

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