

# SOCI 446

# PENOLOGY

## SESSION 2 – Theories of Social Control

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# Course Information

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# Session Overview

- Generally, theories explain and predict behavior. Social control theories focus on techniques and strategies that regulate human behavior and lead to conformity or obedience to society's rules.
- Social control theories originated around the turn of the twentieth century in the writings of Ross (1921) one of the founders of American sociology. As discussed earlier, Ross believed that **belief systems** rather than specific laws guide what people do, and universally serve to control behavior.
- Since Ross's time, several other theories emerged based on a wide variety of meanings given to the concept – namely, social control has been conceptualized as representing practically any phenomenon that leads to conformity.



# Session Overview cont.

- In other words, the value of social control lies in the capacity of its mechanisms to regulate the behavior of its members. Based on this view, social control defines what is considered deviant behavior, what is right or wrong and what a violation of the law is.
- Broadly speaking, there are two categories of social control theories – the macro and micro-social theories . **The macro-social theories explain the formal mechanisms** that society as a whole puts in place to ensure conformity and solidarity of its people in order to ensure its continuity.
- **The micro-sociological theories focus on the informal mechanisms** that induce conformity.

# Session Outline.

The main topics to be covered in this session are as follows:

- Topic one:           The macro-social theories of social control;
- Topic Two:           The micro-sociological (Social Bonding Theory )
- Topic Three:        The Containment Theory

# Objectives/Expected outcomes for the session

On the completion of this session, you should be able to –

- Identify and explain how the mechanisms established by different types of states to ensure conformity, function to bring this about.
- Identify and explain the different mechanisms that function informally at the smaller social unit levels (such as the family) prevent juveniles from becoming delinquent.
- Explain how the individuals inner self and his perception of the rules of society operate to deter him/her from wrongdoing.

# Topic One

## The macro-social theories of social control

- If you would recall, Roucek (1947) suggested in a definition provided earlier that social control is the collective term for those processes planned or unplanned by which individuals are taught, persuaded or coerced to conform to the usages and life values of groups.
- The planned and unplanned processes represent the formal and informal mechanisms of control. The macro-sociological theories explore the formal mechanisms which ensure that people in the larger (the whole) society obey the laws of the land, while the micro-sociological theories explore the informal mechanisms which regulate behavior of people at the smaller social units like the family or organizations. :



# The macro-sociological theories cont.

The macro-social theories explore the formalized or institutionalized systems for the control of groups through

- a. **The legal system**, namely, through the laws enacted and codified by the collective conscience – that is by parliament, with the main emphasis on conformity to the laws, that is, law enforcement;
- b. **Powerful groups** in society – identifiable groups which perform social structural functions, without whose services the society might grind to a halt. Some of these groups include, in Ghana, the Bar Association (political functions) the Medical Association (health delivery functions) University Teachers Association of Ghana (educational functions) etc
- c. **‘Social’ and economic directives of governmental or private groups** which are often discriminatory or coercive in nature

# The Legal System – the role of power

- **Law Enforcement**
- Law enforcement basically connotes the implementation of decisions, laws or regulations, enacted by government or a legislative authority. To be able to carry out these decisions requires the ability to do so. This ability resides in power. Power is therefore defined as **the ability to attain one's will or goals even against the resistance of others**, in the words of Max Weber (1997)
- Power can be exercised at two levels: at the micro and macro levels. Micro-politics refers to the exercise of power at every day level, as an employer might do over his employees, or as a father might exercise over his children. Macro-politics refers to the exercise of large scale power over a large group such as a government (the state) does over its people.

# Law enforcement

## The role of power cont.

- Power could be exercised either legitimately or illegitimately.
- The exercise of legitimate power is known as authority. While **authority is the legitimate power that people accept as right,**
- **Coercion is the illegitimate exercise of power.** (An armed robber can use the power of his gun to force a victim to give something away. This is power, but it is illegitimate and its exercise is thus punishable.

# Law enforcement

## The role of the State

- **The state**
- At the macro-political level it is the state which is the source of legitimate force or violence. The state is definable as that total organization of society which is concerned with the establishment and maintenance of social order within a territorial framework by the organized exercise of coercive authority through the use, or the possibility of the use of physical force.
- **Types of states**
- Law enforcement is brought about under three different categories of states, namely, monarchies, democracies, and dictatorships.

# The monarchy

- **Monarchies, democracies and dictatorships, use the police as the legal law enforcement agency but they vary in the amount of control they exert over their people.**
- **A monarchy** is a government headed by a king or a queen who's right to rule is considered hereditary. Monarchies originated in city states which expanded into nations as a result of conquests and expansions.
- **Law enforcement in a monarchy** can be either **democratic** (in the sense that elected representatives of the people participate in the enactment of the laws to be enforced) or **dictatorial** (where the government exerts almost total control over the people – usually through the use of a ruthless secret police, usually in times of crises)

# Democracy

- A **democracy** is a government whose authority derives from the people. It is a government of the people, by the people for the people.
- A democracy can be **direct** or **representative**. A direct democracy is one in which all eligible voters meet together, express their opinion and vote publicly. This was possible only in city states where populations were smaller - and all the eligible voters could meet, as in a town hall, and take relevant decisions.
- But as populations increase, direct democracies were no longer feasible and were replaced by representative Democracy which involved the election of representatives to make decisions and govern on behalf of those who elected them.

# Dictatorships

- **Dictatorships** often occur in countries where a single individual or small group seizes power usually through a coup d'état and then imposes his/their will on the people. Usually, a government run by a single person who has seized power is known as a dictatorship. **If such power was seized by a small group it is known as an oligarchy.**
- Nazi Germany represents an example of a dictatorship where Hitler kept the populace under a very tight control through the use of a ruthless secret police – the Gestapo - and a network of spies who even watched how moviegoers reacted to newsreels (documented news events usually played before the main film began) and arrested those who did not react appropriately.

## Topic Two

# The micro-sociological (Social Bonding) Theories

- **Introduction**
- The micro-sociological theories focus on the informal mechanisms that induce conformity.
- Travis Hirschi (1969) has been the spokesperson for the micro-sociological perspective since the publication of his **Causes of Delinquency** in 1969. He is not, however, the first scholar to examine the extent of individual social control and its relationship to delinquency. Toby (1957) and Reckless (1961) also discussed informal mechanisms that regulate the individual's behavior.
- In this section, we discuss Hirschi's social bonds theory.



# Hirschi – social bonding theory

- Hirschi (1969) proposed four social bonds that promote socialization and conformity.
- These are **attachment, commitment, involvement and belief.**
- The stronger these bonds are, the less likely the occurrence of delinquency.
- In a study of 4,077 Junior and Senior High School students in California, Hirschi found that any weakness in any of the bonds brought about delinquent behaviour.

# Hirschi - Attachment

- **Attachment**
- The first bond, **attachment** takes three forms: attachment to parents, to school (teachers), and to peers.
- According to Hirschi, young men who have formed a significant attachment to a parent refrain from delinquency because the bond of relationship between parent and children thus becomes a primary deterrent to criminal activities. The parent child bond is greatly enhanced by
- A. The amount of **time** the child spends with the parents, particularly the presence of a parent at times when a child is tempted to engage in criminal activity. **The amount of time involved refers not to the duration but rather the quality of the time spent.**

# Hirschi – Attachment cont.

- Quality time involves a deliberate attempt by parents – father or mother to identify with their children by getting involved in their work activities (studies) and leisure activities {play}. This way children find it easier to relate to their parents – recognizing that their parents are interested in what they do.
- **B. The intimacy of the communication between parent and child.** Intimacy involves encouraging children to discuss issues which they may consider private with their parents. This is made easier if parents sometimes share personal issues with their children, encouraging them to do likewise.

# Attachment - school

- C. The affectional identification (that is, the ultimate **friendship**) between parent and child. Parents should constantly encourage their children to regard them (parents) as friends, particularly as they attempt often to spend quality time with the children and to encourage them to discuss their personal issues with them.
- With reference to school, Hirschi linked the **student's inability to perform well in school** to delinquency through the following chain of events: Academic incompetence leads to poor school performance, poor school performed results in a dislike of school, the dislike of school leads to the rejection of teachers and administrators as authorities. The result is delinquency.

# Attachment - peers

- **Hirschi found that the attachment of children to their parents and to school overshadows the bond that these children form with their peers.**
- **In other words, although children who are most closely attached to, or respectful of their friends, are least likely to commit delinquent acts, his findings do not suggest that these children are likely to sacrifice their relationship with their parents and or school or teachers, if the peer group were to prevail on them to deviate.**



# Hirschi - Commitment

- Hirschi discovered in his study that the commitment of children to - or their investment in - conventional lines of action, that is, supporting and participating in social activities that tie the individual to the society's moral or ethnical code, promotes conformity.
- **These include commitment to educational excellence, or to vocational aspirations and expectations. Hirschi provided empirical support for the notion that the greater the aspiration and the expectation, the more unlikely the delinquency becomes.**
- Further, students who smoke, those who drink and those who date are more likely to commit delinquent acts. The more the boy is involved in adult activities the greater his involvement in delinquency.

# Hirschi - Involvement

- Hirschi's third bond of **involvement** refers to the **preoccupation of individuals with activities that promote personal interests and the interests of society.**
- This bond is derived from involvement in school related activities such as homework rather than in working class adult activities – such as smoking or drinking.
- **The logic of this argument is that a person who is doing conventional things has little or no time for deviant activities.**

# Hirschi - Belief

- The last of the bonds, belief, involves **the ability of the individual to identify (that is , agree) with the society's value system.**
- The value system of any society entails respect for its laws and for the people and institutions that enforce them.
- The results of Hirschi's survey led to the conclusion that, **if young people no longer believe that laws are fair, their bond to society weakens, and the probability that they will commit delinquent acts increases.**





# Topic Three

## The Containment Theory -Reckless

- **Introduction**
- The Containment theory assumes that for every individual, there exists a containing external structure and a protective internal structure both of which provide a defense protection or insulation against delinquency. **These are referred to as inner and outer containment .**
- How does this theory explain the occurrence or prevention of delinquency?

# Inner Containment

## the impact of guilt feeling

- Walter Reckless (1962) suggests that everyone has the predisposition to be deviant, but two informal control systems influence their behavior positively, namely **Inner containment** (personal control) and **Outer Containment** (social control).
- According to Reckless, the inner containment or control mechanism is based on the fact that members of society have a natural desire to conform to the norms and values of the society, **because they have internalized these norms and values and feel very uncomfortable and guilty when they violate the norms.**
- This means that most people obey regulations **because they are fearful or cannot cope with the guilt feeling aroused in their conscience after they have violated any of the norms.** Inner containment or personal control is ensured by

# Factors which predispose to inner control

Inner containment or personal control is ensured by;

- A good self concept
- Self control
- A strong ego
- A well developed conscience
- A high frustration tolerance, and
- A high sense of responsibility.

# Outer containment

- Reckless suggests that **outer containment** constitutes the structural buffer that holds the person in bounds, and is based on the fact that people form expectations of each other's behavior and when these expectations are not fulfilled there is an expression of disapproval; or there is approval when people perform their duties as expected.
- Thus the fear of punishment or a desire for societal rewards influences the behavior of people. The outer containment mechanism can be found in the following components:

# Outer containment – the factors

- A role that provides a guide for a person's activities;
- A set of reasonable limits and responsibilities;
- An opportunity for the individual to attain goals;
- Existence of alternative ways and means of satisfying needs
- Reckless suggested that the probability of deviance is directly related to the extent to which internal drives (such as the need for immediate gratification, restlessness and hostility) external pressures (such as poverty, unemployment and blocked opportunities), and external pulls are controlled by one's inner or outer containment.

# Factors cont.

- The primary containment factor is found in self-concept or the way one views oneself in relation to others and to the world as well.
- A strong self-concept, coupled with some additional inner controls (such as a strong conscience and a sense of responsibility, plus the outer controls – (the anticipated negative reaction of society) makes delinquency highly unlikely.

# Verification of the Containment theory

- The containment theory, like Hirschi's social control theory has been subjected to a number reviews.
- The main question investigated was, **how can a child living in a criminogenic environment grow up to be a good law abiding person? How is he or she protected against the crime producing influences lurking around?**
- To answer these questions, Reckless and his associated had high school teachers in a high crime neighbourhood nominate boys they believe would neither commit delinquent acts nor come into contact with the police or juvenile courts..

# Verification cont.

- The 125 'good boys' scored high on a social responsibility test and low on a delinquency – proneness test. These boys avoided trouble, had good relations with parents and teachers and had a good self-concept. They thought of themselves as obedient.
- Reckless concluded that non-delinquent boys follow conventional values even in bad neighborhoods if they maintain a positive self-image.
- It is this positive self image that protects them



# Verification cont.

- In a follow up study, the research team compared ‘good boys with those nominated by their teachers as ‘bad boys’’ (those they believe are headed for trouble. The good boys scored better on parental; relation, self image and social responsibility tests.
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- The most damaging of the reviews of the containment theory came however from Schrag (1971) who contends that the terminology used is vague and poorly defined, that the theory is difficult to test empirically and that it fails to consider why some poorly contained youths commit violent crimes while others commit property crimes. T

# Verification cont.

- These criticisms are not easy to answer, according to Adler, Mueller and Laufer (1998)
- And because little empirical work has been done to verify the findings of Reckless and his colleagues over the intervening years there is little evidence of the validity of the containment theory.



# Summary

- The micro-social theory suggests according to Hirschi that there are four social bonds that promote socialization and conformity according to Hirschi. These are **attachment, commitment, involvement and belief**.
- Attachment takes three forms: attachment to parents, to school (teachers) and to peers. According to Hirschi, young men who have formed a significant attachment to a parent refrain from delinquency because the bond of relationship between parent and children becomes a primary deterrent to criminal activities.

# Summary contd

- Commitment refers to the interest taken by young men in conventional lines of action. This promotes conformity.
- Involvement refers to the preoccupation of individuals with activities that promote personal interests and the interests of society.
- While belief involves the ability of the individual to identify with their society's value system. The stronger these four bonds, the less likely the occurrence of delinquency.

# Summary cont.

- The containment theory suggests that everyone has the predisposition to be deviant, but two informal control systems influence their behavior positively, namely Inner containment (personal control based on a strong conscience) and Outer Containment (social control based on severe punishments held out by society against law breakers).

# Assignment

- How does Hirschi explain why juveniles do not become delinquent in his Social bonding theory? How applicable is this theory to the prevention of juvenile delinquency?



# Reading List

## REQUIRED TEXT

Chris Abotchie (2011)

Distance

Abotchie, C., (2018)

*Crime Prevention*

Publishing

*Penology, Accra,*

Institute of Continuing and

Education

*Treatment of Criminals and*

Accra, Olive Tree Printing and

Chapter One pp 1-12