

The following is a sample lesson plan for a 50-minute period. Assigned reading for the semester was from Adler, Patricia and Peter Adler. 2008. *Constructions of Deviance: Social Power, Context, and Interaction*. Wadsworth Publishing.

Chapter 7: Agnew Strain Theory

Agnew builds from Merton's strain theory and develops a broader theory (he calls it General Strain Theory, or GST) of crime that includes more specific strains and that is more sensitive to the individual level of explanation.

1) What are strains? "Strains refer to events or conditions that are disliked by the individual" (pg. 77). Generally, when there is a disconnect between the culturally valued goals (ends) and the opportunity for the legitimate achievement of these goals (means); strain is introduced. Individuals respond (adapt) differently to strains and will cope with strains in different ways. This theory addresses the question of how individuals respond when they fail to achieve valued social goals.

2) Types of strains

- A) *Objective Strains*: when events or conditions are generally disliked by all the members of a group (e.g. most people don't like being physically assaulted)
- B) *Subjective Strains*: when an event or condition is disliked by a particular person (there is overlap between objective and subjective strains of course)
- C) *Experienced, Vicarious, and Anticipated Strains*: *experienced* refers to the actual person experiencing the strain. *Vicarious* refers to the strains experienced by others around the individual (family members, friends etc.) *Anticipated* means that the individual expects his/her current strains to continue into the future.

3) Characteristics of Strains Most Likely to Cause Crime

- A) *The Strain is seen as High in Magnitude*: this refers to the severity of the strain (e.g. someone calling you out on something in public will likely be more upsetting than someone politely reproving you in private).
- B) *The Strain is seen as Unjust*: The behavior may be the same (e.g. someone knocking you down on the street), but if one was an accident and the other was intentional, the latter will be seen as worse. Someone knocking you down on purpose is more likely to make you angry (more severe strain)
- C) *The Strain is associated with low social control*: there are different types of social control (see chapter), but those who experience lower social control are more likely to commit crime because low social control reduces the costs of crime.
- D) *The strain creates some pressure or incentive for criminal coping*: some strains push people more toward crime than others because of the incentive involved. For example, it is easier to get money through crime than through educational success.

4) The Specific Strains that are Most Likely to Cause Crime

- A) Parental Rejection
- B) Supervision/discipline that is erratic, excessive, and/or harsh
- C) Child abuse and neglect
- D) Negative secondary school experiences

- E) Abusive peer relations
- F) Work in the secondary labor market
- G) Chronic unemployment
- H) Marital problems
- I) The failure to achieve selected goals, including thrill/excitement, high levels of autonomy, masculine status, and the desire for much money in a short period of time
- J) Criminal victimization
- K) Residence in economically deprived communities
- L) Homelessness
- M) Discrimination based on characteristics such as race/ethnicity and gender

5) Three Reasons Strains Increase the Likelihood of Crime:

- A) *Strains lead to Negative Emotions:* individuals are more likely to commit crime when they are angry, hostile, frustrated etc.
- B) *Strains May Reduce Levels of Social Control:* some strains reduce bonds to conventional society, impelling individuals to engage in crime
- C) *Strains May Foster the Social Learning of Crime:* strains increase the likelihood that individuals will join gangs or delinquent groups, thereby increasing the probability they will engage in criminal acts.

6) Why Are Some People More Likely Than Others To Cope With Strains Through Crime?

Three Reasons: Everyone experiences some type of strain at some point. Yet, most people deal with strain in a non-criminal manner. That is, the presence of strain does not mean individuals will automatically engage in crime.

- A) *Individuals lack the ability to cope with strains in a legal manner:* the person lack the skills and resources needed to deal with the strain in a conventional manner
- B) *The costs of criminal coping are low:* what has the person got to lose?
- C) *Individuals are disposed to crime:* individual personality and social environment might dispose someone to crime.

Chapter 8: Sutherland and Cressey Differential Association

The key components that they need to know are: 1, 3, 4, 6, 7.

This is a Micro-level, interactionist perspective, referring to the process by which someone comes to engage in criminal behavior.

LIST: Differential Association

- I. ***Criminal Behavior is Learned:** Not inherited, not invented.
- II. **Criminal behavior is learned in interaction with others in a process of communication:** Verbal or through the communication of gestures.
- III. ***The principal part of the learning of criminal behavior occurs within intimate personal groups:** movies, newspapers are less unimportant than friends and family members.
- IV. ***When criminal behavior is learned, it includes both techniques (How to) and rationalizations (Why to):** These include specific motives, drives, and attitudes.
- V. **The specific direction of motives and drives is learned from law as either favorable or not.** The values of those around you are influential.

- VI. ***A person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favorable to the violation of the law, as opposed to those unfavorable.** When people become criminal, they do so because of contacts with criminal patterns and also because of isolation from anticriminal patterns. More likely to engage in criminal behavior when the bulk of your associations engage in criminal behavior.
- VII. ***Differential associations may vary in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity.** Frequency and duration are obvious. Priority means that deviant behavior developed early on may continue throughout life. Intensity means, whom did they learn it from? What was their relationship and emotional attachment to this person? The longest, most intense associations are the most influential.
- VIII. **The process of learning criminal behavior by association with criminal and anticriminal patterns is the same as any other kind of learning.**
- IX. **While criminal behavior is an expression of general needs and values, it is not explained by them, since noncriminal behavior is an expression of them.** You cannot explain with the same terms, the reason for lawful and unlawful behavior. You can't say that criminals steal because they need money, because others that need money do not steal.