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Final

Key Takeaways

This semester I have learned a lot about criminological theories and how they can be applied to our everyday media. I have learned a great deal from this class, especially on how we can apply these theories to other aspects of our lives. My top three takeaways from this class would have to be routine activity, deterrence, and labeling theory. These theories helped me gain new insights on why crime is committed and how we can try to prevent these crimes from taking place. Through the rest of this essay, I will be talking about what I have learned from each key takeaway.

One of my key takeaways from the class was the significance of routine activity theory. It highlights that crime does not exclusively come from social, economic, and psychological factors, but can also arise due to the availability of opportunities. This approach emphasizes the need of routine change and avoiding conditions where crime is more likely to occur if we are to successfully prevent crime. We can better defend ourselves and decrease the possibility of becoming a target for motivated offenders by familiarizing ourselves with routine activity theory.

To understand how and why crime occurs, it's important to recognize the three essential components needed for crime events to take place: a motivated criminal, an appropriate victim, and the lack of a capable guardian (Routine Activities Theory). Crime incidents are most probable when all three factors are present at the same time and place. However, the routine activity theory asserts that the absence of any one of these components can stop crime from occurring, highlighting the need of situational preventive strategies. In class, there were clips from the movie “The Bling Ring” that showed these celebrities posting their whereabouts online only to be robbed by teens who followed their socials when they were out of the house. The group of teens would also stalk certain celebrities or manage to get invited to the parties in their homes. This was a great example of how the three factors were all in place and therefore, a crime was committed.

Routine activity theory has challenged the popular stance that crime is only brought on by social, economic, and psychological factors. Other criminological theories concentrate on the offender's motives. They argue that issues like poverty, unemployment, and a lack of social control are causes of crime. On the other hand, the routine activity theory claims that criminal behavior is more likely to take place when there are opportunities for it, such as when people are vulnerable, or when there is little to no security, aka a capable guardian. An article stated that, “if an offender is motivated to commit crime, he or she might not do it if there are many people around,” (Routine Activities Theory: Definition and Meaning, 2022). Those who live in your immediate vicinity serve as guards in a sense just by being there since they might take action if they observe a crime in progress. On the other side, a crime is more likely to happen when guardians are not present.

Altogether, understanding Routine Activity Theory is a vital takeaway from our class as it challenges the traditional views of crime causation. This approach highlights how certain circumstances must be present for a crime to happen. To lessen the likelihood of becoming a target for motivated criminals, the theory also emphasizes the significance of regular change in routine and situational preventative measures. Recognizing the importance of situational elements in preventing crime will enable us to take action to lessen the likelihood of crime. Routine activity theory is a crucial tool for completely confronting the complex nature of crime and a useful foundation for creating effective crime prevention programs.

Another key takeaway from our criminology course for me is labeling theory because it challenges conventional ideas about crime and deviance. It shows the possible drawbacks of labeling people as criminals and emphasizes the significance of social context in understanding criminal behavior. We can have a greater grasp of how society builds ideas of deviance and normality and how these ideas influence criminal justice practice by looking at the labeling process.

Labeling theory questions the idea that crime is purely the outcome of an individual's actions. This idea highlights the significance of society responses and contends that the labeling process may have a significant effect on those who have been categorized as criminals. An interesting point was made in an article when it stated, “It recognized that labeling was a political act and that ‘what rules are to be enforced, what behavior regarded as deviant and which people labeled as outsiders must be regarded as political questions,’ ” (Plummer). The article highlights that decisions regarding what constitutes crime and deviance are not simply objective but rather influenced by social, cultural, and historical aspects by recognizing that labeling is a political act. Understanding the workings of the criminal justice system and its effects on people and society is necessary for having this perspective.

Labeling theory suggests that societal and cultural influences can shape perceptions of crime, resulting in certain individuals or groups being more susceptible to being labeled as criminals. This may involve the use of racial profiling and prejudices, which can lead to a disproportionate representation of specific groups within the criminal justice system. (Chavez and Rocheleau, 2017). For instance, people from low-income or communities of color may have a higher likelihood of being categorized as criminals due to the negative stigmas that associate poverty or race with delinquent conduct. Consequently, these communities may be subject to increased policing, resulting in higher arrest and conviction rates, even for minor infractions. Labeling can have severe consequences, such as social exclusion, discrimination, and limited opportunities for those who are deemed criminals. This, in turn, can create a cycle of criminal behavior as marginalized individuals may feel compelled to engage in illegal activities.

Ultimately, labelling theory was a key takeaway for me because it gave me valuable insight on how we treat others based on labels. By examining the standards for categorizing individuals as "criminal" and the consequences of this classification, we can have a deeper understanding of the functioning of the criminal justice system and its impact on individuals and communities. Labeling theory gives insights into the ways that criminal justice policy and practice may maintain inequality and social exclusion as well as alternative strategies that put a priority restoration by emphasizing the significance of social context.

The last key takeaway from class I took this semester is deterrence theory. Deterrence theory defines the purpose of punishment in connection to criminal behavior (Tomlinson, 2016). It is an important lesson to learn in criminology since it explains how punishment may deter crime and help reduce it. It has always been interesting to me how the severity of a punishment and the swiftness of it can affect how much a crime is committed.

Deterrence theory looks at the effectiveness of punishment in preventing criminal behavior as well as the swiftness of the punishment after one has been caught. One important element that affects criminal conduct is the harshness of the penalty. Milder punishments may not be as effective in discouraging criminal conduct as harsher ones. For example, an individual may be less likely to commit theft if they know that it will result in a prison sentence, compared to only receiving a fine. In addition to the swiftness of punishments affecting criminal behavior, a journal stated that, “Any delay between the commission of an offense and commencement of its associated punishment is postulated to reduce the deterrent effect of the sanction,” (Tomlinson, 2016). This shows how not only the severity of a punishment matters, but also how quickly it is carried out toward the one being punished.

It is important to think about whether these punishments result in learning while trying to better understand criminal behavior and lower crime rates. According to deterrence theory, people are less likely to commit crimes if they believe the repercussions would be worse than the advantages of the crime if the penalty is severe enough. However, studies show that increasing the severity of the punishment alone does not always reduce the likelihood of criminal activity in the future (Tomlinson, 2016). In addition to harsher penalties, other factors, such as the probability of being caught, societal norms, and personal beliefs, also impact an individual's decision to engage in illegal activities, despite the possibility of more severe consequences. Furthermore, certain crimes or criminals may respond better to specific kinds of sanctions than others. This emphasizes the significance of customizing punishments to particular people and crimes rather than relying on harsher punishments universally. This was shown when I did my expert learner presentation on deterrence theory. I used clips from the TV show “Loki” to show how he was not deterred from committing crime by anything other than himself finally realizing that is not who he wants to be anymore, his personal values had changed.

In summary, deterrence theory is a critical criminological concept that I found to be a key takeaway due to its potential for preventing and reducing criminal behavior by utilizing punishment. Understanding the relationship between punishment and crime, as well as the promptness of the penalty's implementation, can help inform decisions on how to develop effective crime prevention measures in our communities. Consequently, deterrence theory holds significant implications for public policy and the criminal justice system, making it a vital takeaway from any criminology course.

The idea that I find most valuable for my future career would have to be deterrence theory. Right now, I am working towards two degrees, one in criminology and one in cybersecurity. In the future I plan on having a career in cyber-security/cyber-forensics. Deterrence theory comes into play because in cybersecurity, there are a lot of crimes including hacking, cyberstalking, and identity fraud. That being said, there are not a lot of repercussions for cybercrimes besides a fine and or jail time, hence why these types of crimes are committed so often. On the other hand, it is a lot harder to detect cybercrimes and pinpoint who committed them which could be why so many are committed. Our criminal justice system also needs better security measures and ways of locking down who are committing these crimes. Looking at criminology and cybersecurity, I believe it would be beneficial to apply deterrence theory to cybersecurity crimes.

For example, in an article on cybercrime statistics it states, “Around 2328 cyber crimes are thought to occur each day. Over the last 21 years from 2001 to 2021, cyber crime has claimed at least[6.5 million victims](https://www.thenationalnews.com/business/technology/2022/05/08/cyber-crime-rate-in-the-uk-higher-last-year-than-in-other-developed-nations/) with an estimated loss of nearly $26 billion over the same period,” (James, 2023). This alarming data shows that cybercrime is a serious and expanding issue, emphasizing the need for strong deterrence strategies to reduce the harm it causes. In a research journal tying together cybercrimes and deterrence it states, “It is relatively cheap for malicious actors to acquire the knowledge and tools necessary to conduct cyberattacks so there are many potential adversaries, and there is ambiguity around retaliatory consequences for cyberattacks,” (Jaikaran, 2022). This emphasizes the difficulties deterrence theory faces in the context of cybercrime, where it is challenging to deter potential attackers by the possibility of punishment due to the cheap cost of conducting cyberattacks and the issue of identifying and prosecuting cybercriminals.

The alarming cybercrime statistics and the difficulties deterrence theory faces in the context of cybercrime show the urgent need for efficient and innovative methods to stop and lessen the damage brought on by cyberattacks. Although punishment as a form of deterrent is still a crucial component of any cybersecurity plan, it is obvious that additional measures are also required to combat this expanding danger, including technical advancements, international collaboration, education, and awareness campaigns.

The idea that I believe will have the most effect on how I interact with others and think about myself would have to be labelling theory. Labeling theory can significantly alter our social interactions and self-perception. Particularly, the belief that societal responses have a significant role in establishing who is classified as a criminal and how they are handled can alter how we see both other people and ourselves. We may be less quick to judge people based on their looks, history, or circumstances if we recognize the concept that labeling is a social construct rather than a true depiction of criminal activity. Additionally, we can be more conscious of the ways in which our own behaviors and attitudes influence labeling and actively combat negative preconceptions and prejudices.

The notion that labeling is a social construct might help those who have been stigmatized as criminals in realizing that their identity is not simply based on their previous actions or errors in terms of self-concept. As a result, they may feel more empowered and more in control of their lives, and they may also realize how much outside forces—like societal injustice and systematic bias—may have contributed to their categorization.

Overall, having a better knowledge of labeling theory can improve our interactions with others and self-perception by promoting more empathy and critical reflection. It may challenge us to reconsider the assumptions we make, confront damaging biases and stereotypes, and seek to build a more fair society.

In conclusion, this criminology course has provided me with a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding crime and criminal behavior. My three takeaways this semester, labelling, deterrence, and routine activities theory, have really provided me with a deeper understanding of why crimes are committed. The ability to examine complicated societal issues and think through potential solutions to lower crime and advance social justice is an additional skill I have developed. Overall, as I continue learning about the complexity of the world around me in a criminological lens, the information, and abilities I have learned from this course will surely be useful in both my personal and professional life.

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