Measuring and Labeling Deviance

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http://www.iastate.edu/~soc.134

Key points about crime trends

✔ People most fear “random crime”
  • Patternless: It can happen to anyone
  • Increasing: Crime is getting worse
  • Pointless: Criminal motives make no sense

✔ But none of these claims are true
  • Crime is not random: It is stratified by gender, race, class and age
  • Official crime is currently declining
  • Criminals have reasons for committing crimes

Homicide rates for 20th Century

Homicide victimization by gender & race, 2002 (UCR)

Homicide victimization by age, 2002 (UCR)

Homicides by gender & race of victim & offender, 2002
Labeling theory

- Labeling theory: theory which states that deviance is the consequence of the application of rules and sanctions to an offender; a deviant is an individual to whom the identity “deviant” has been successfully applied.
- Two types of deviance:
  - Primary deviance: routine instances of norm violation that may or may not result in labeling.
  - Secondary deviance: deviance following and resulting from the label.
- Reasons why label may lead to deviance:
  1. Cut off from participation in conventional groups.
  2. Treatment may produce increasing deviance.
  3. Labeled person may believe the label.

Deviance by sociology 134 students

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The Saints and the Roughnecks

- Participant observation study by William Chambliss.
- Shows role of class in labeling.
- Saints:
  - Eight white, upper-middle class boys.
  - Constantly occupied with truancy, drinking, theft & vandalism.
  - Never arrested.
- Roughnecks:
  - Six white, lower class boys.
  - Engaged in fighting, drinking and theft; less delinquent overall.
  - Constantly in trouble with police & community.

Why were the Saints and Roughnecks treated differently?

- Visibility: Saints owned their own cars and were able to leave town.
- Demeanor: Saints were apologetic and penitent; Roughnecks hostile and disdainful.
- Bias: Community is biased against type of delinquency committed by Roughnecks.

The delinquent label reinforced the Roughneck’s delinquency.

Predictions about boys’ futures were correct.