

SOCIAL THEORY COMING TO LIFE

To complete my independent study I spent around 50 hours as an Office Advocate with the Unified Police Department. In this position, I contacted victims of domestic violence to ensure they knew of court dates for their abuser, ensured their safety as well as provided resource information. In addition, I did a ride-along with Sandy City Police Department, Utah Highway Patrol and Salt Lake City Police Department. Through my experiences, the majority of social theories were found during ride-alongs because that's where I saw and participated in the most face-to-face interactions. To make sense of where I saw theories, I have organized this paper theory by theory.

Modern/Humanist Perspective on Deviance - Defining Deviance Down:

Marijuana has largely been viewed as a "bad" drug in recent Utah history. During all of my pre-college experience, I was warned how "bad" it was by authorities over me. However, I was with SLCPD officers that had stopped two women shoplifting. One woman had a marijuana pipe with residue in it. These police officers viewed marijuana as nothing major and it seemed they weren't going to cite her. Instead, one officer said "Eh, we'll mark it as medicinal." In reality, the law books probably say she should be cited for it but it sounded like she wasn't. This reminded me of Chambliss' Theory of the Reality of Law in that the law in the books was not the law in reality in this situation.

Cultural Transmission Perspective - Propositions of Differential Association:

With the parents being criminals, the kids often become criminals; this is an example of how sometimes the most important social circle to someone is deviant which can shape that person's behavior. This topic was discussed with an officer of the Sandy City Police Department. He stated that, in his opinion, crime comes down to the family. If the parents are criminals, it's likely the kids will follow in their steps.

In addition, I think this can be seen with the Victim Advocacy as well. My supervisor, an 18 year veteran of victim advocacy, stated that there have been times where she's worked with a specific couple and then later worked with their kids in similar domestic violence situations. This isn't it to say it happens every time but is prevalent. The learning of criminal behavior also includes the learning of techniques and the motives. For these kids that witness domestic violence, some of them learn that it's the only way to put forth their opinion or their needs, also argued by my supervisor.

Braithwaite - Shaming

When I was with Salt Lake City Police we went on a retail theft call at a department store. The thieves were two women, one with a self-declared drug addiction. At first, I saw disintegrative shaming on the part of the loss prevention officer. He was instilling guilt by saying, "Well now we're going to be here forever because you removed the tags." To explain this, the loss prevention officer had to have all the tags to find out what the total value of stolen goods was.

The officers on the other hand used a little bit of disintegrative shaming at first by asking, "Come on, why are you doing this? You see these monitors? That means big brother is always watching you. It's stupid to try to steal with all these cameras." This nearly direct

quote came from the officer I was with for the ride-along. On the other hand, the assisting officer used more of a re-integrative shaming method by addressing the crime as bad but also making sure the suspects were comfortable and cared for. This assisting officer addressed one of the women that was having a panic attack making sure she didn't need medical attention and ultimately, she didn't. Eventually, with five to six of us in this little tiny room, the SLCPD officers and Loss Prevention Officer invited the women to join their conversation about vacations. The one suspect actually joined the conversations, which helped calm her panic attacks. At this point, this became more re-integrative shaming because they hated the sin, "Come on, why are you doing this? This wasn't good on your parts," but then turned to loving the sinner, "So have you been on any vacations lately?" "If you need anything, just let us know." In addition, when the one suspect notified the officer that someone close to her died and that this pushed her to use drugs, my ride-along officer said,, "Oh, I'm sorry to hear that."

Theories on Deviance - Humanist/Modern

Labeling Theory:

This theory is an interesting one for being a victim advocate and doing ride-alongs with officers; I got two different perspectives on this theory.

When I was working as an office advocate, there was only a little bit of labeling of suspects. For example, we wouldn't often label a suspect as an asshole for his/her actions. However, what I did notice is that my supervisor was more willing to label male suspects rather than female suspects. These labels were kept out of follow up reports to ensure that it wouldn't cause an issue in court. However, I think we also rarely labeled people because we

interacted with victims rather than the suspects. Yes there were victims with mental illness or drug addictions, but we never labeled them as “druggies” or “mental cases.”

When it came to ride-alongs however, the labeling game was very different and it depended on the officer as well as the situation. For example, a Sandy City officer and I responded to a mental illness call where people were claiming they were hearing voices. The officer I was with dutifully took notes on what the people were hearing and was very respectful of their experiences. The officer never called them anything derogatory and just filled out his report. However, for the Salt Lake City Police Officer as well as the Utah Highway Patrol (powerful), they both labeled transients (powerless) that panhandled as scammers, thieves or drug addicts. They clarified that they aren’t ALL bad but most of them are criminals in their perspectives.

What was interesting was when I was with the SLCPD Officer; he was perfectly willing to label someone with a history of drug abuse as an addict. From that point on, that’s what we knew the suspect as; just a drug addict. When we were with the female shoplifter with a self-declared drug problem however, she was treated as an individual rather than a label. This interaction reminded me of symbolic interactionism: I saw the first suspect that we didn’t actually interact with, as a drug addict stealing from friends to feed a habit. Actually interacting with the other suspect made me see a more human side to these women with addictions and I don’t think the officers or I viewed the one we actually interacted with as negatively as the first example.

Conflict Perspective

Turk - Elements of Criminalization

Being on ride-alongs with officers, the topics of the latest shootings of African American men by police as well as police militarization was discussed. Being that mostly African Americans are killed by police, it's safe to assume that the application of law, in these cases lethal force, is arbitrary, inaccurate and unfair. This being discussed, the Sandy officer was quick to state that in Ferguson, he believed the officer was perfectly justified in his action because the victim was going to attack the officer with his boom box. The Utah Highway Patrolman held this opinion as well and he referenced another case to reinforce his position. In this case, a trooper was being attacked with a shovel and the fear was that if he fell, the suspect would try to take his gun to kill the trooper. I think this is a prime example of the conflict between the authorities and subjects and their norms. The officers perceived these incidents as self-defense, as I'm sure some people do, while others view them as racist police brutality.

Feminist Theory

This theory came to life for me because the majority of domestic violence victims were women. There were certainly male victims but the majority I attempted to contact were women. In addition, during my ride-along with Utah Highway Patrol, there was a call of a rolling domestic where again, a woman was the victim. In addition, I saw an example of the theory that women commit non-violent crime. This was shown at the theft call with SLCPD. When I heard calls over the radio about violent crime however, it was always a male suspect.

Power-Integrated Theory

This theory definitely came to life both during ride-alongs as well as when I was working with Unified Police. When I was a victim advocate at the Kearns precinct there were often reminders that the officers in that city are always busy. I'd hear the radio going non-stop and was once at the station while they waited for an officer to respond to a potential domestic at the station; it took 20 minutes for an officer to respond.

In Sandy on the other hand, there wasn't such a sense of rushing call to call. When I was with SLCPD, and we were patrolling the Sugarhouse area, officers in that area were called out to calls in the Glendale and Poplar Grove areas. When the calls started to pour in for SLCPD, the majority of them were coming from the Glendale and Poplar Grove areas as well as downtown Salt Lake where there is a lot of homeless people. These calls weren't white-collar crimes either; when I did hear the radio it was mainly violent crime, stealing and suspicious persons.

This here shows that deviance by the powerless influences deviance by the powerful in that it deflects police attention from crimes committed by people with more power. Where the median household income was above the median income across the state (Sandy and Sugarhouse) there were fewer calls. Where the income was lower or equal to the median value, or there were more transients, there was more crime being reported (Glendale, Poplar Grove, Kearns and Downtown) (NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® and Move, Inc.). However, I do keep in mind that there are several other factors that go into when and where crimes take place.

Cycle Theory of Battering by Leonore Walker

As a victim advocate, my supervisor reinforced this theory as a normal part of domestic violence. As I contacted victims of domestic violence, I would read about what occurred during the Acute Battering Phase and would sometimes talk to people in the Honeymoon Phase. There were times when a victim was originally going to get a protective order against his/her abuser but would back out of doing it saying, "Everything is better now, I won't be pursuing a protective order." I think some victims knew there was this cycle happening but was just grateful for the Honeymoon Phase as was discussed in Social Control/Deviant Behavior. However a rarity, I did see cases where the abused was finally pursuing protective orders and had fled from the abuser. Although I wasn't an advocate long enough to observe victims going back to their abusers several times, my supervisor would often remark that she's been working with a specific victim for years and that this couple would break-up and make-up over and over.

What Was Learned?

Mainly, a lot of social stereotypes were disproven: both men and women are the abuser in domestic violence. Drug addicts aren't scum; they're people with feelings and needs that sometimes turn to illegal means to support an addiction. Not all police officers are brutal assholes (there's definitely some social prejudice for SOME officers, but they aren't all brutal killers or bigots as some people seem to argue). Basically we're all just people trying to live under different stresses and against different barriers creating differing levels of difficulty in daily life.

Works Cited

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® and Move, Inc. Local. 2015. 30 August 2015 <<http://www.realtor.com/local/Utah/lifestyle>>.