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Social Control: Genesis, Conceptual, and Theoretical Issues

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Abstract:

This article discusses basic issues in, and of social control. Siding with the impossibility of deviant, and crime free society notion, and the need to have mechanisms in place, for ensuring conformity to norms, and rules - social control-, the paper visited the two processes of social control, (internal, and external), as identified by Clinard, and Meier, (1998). Two broad types of social control viz informal, and formal, have been briefly explained, showing the efficacy of the latter for curtailing crimes in contemporary societies. Upon reviewing Braithwaite's, (1989), shaming theory, where societal shame is the center of activities in controlling deviance, and crime, and Hirschi's, (1969), control theory, in which attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief are critical concerns, the paper remains somehow optimistic, in determined, and sincere application of social control measures for rehabilitating deviants, and criminals, and eventually having, as well as sustaining a largely conforming, and law abiding society.

Keywords: Control, crime, deviance, social, society

1. Introduction

Society is made up of individuals who share common culture, and occupy a particular geographical area, (Zanden, 1996). Notwithstanding the fact that, socialization process is a powerful mechanism, that shapes the behavior of people of, and living in the same society, the distinctive, and unique nature of human personality, make individuals from the same society to behave differently. As a result, some members of one, and the same society conform to the expected patterns of behavior, as dictated by culture of that society whereas, others deviate. Deviation from norms, and rules is what is referred to as deviance, and crime respectively. Conventionally, societies do not allow deviation, and crime unchecked. They do reward conformity for re- enforcement purposes, and condemn deviation for deterrence, and corrective reasons.

According to Clinard and Meier, (1998), The notion of deviance is connected to that of social control, possibly because an act that violates a group's norm is usually followed by the group's reaction or sanction in a negative form. Chukwukere, (undated), argued that, as long as human society comprises individuals, and the relationship between these individuals components is generally guided by cultural norms and rules of behavior, and as long as the cultural norms are never observed by all the people involved in the society, culture must take deep interest in the diverse processes of social control.

Chukwukere's argument is cogent, taking into cognizance the constituted interplay between society and culture and the influence of the culture via socialization especially, culture's tendency to impose social sanctions, by rewarding conformity, and punishing deviance. Tanimu, (2003), maintained the ubiquitous nature of deviance. Thus, it becomes an illusion to anticipate conformity by all members of the society. Having such a conception renders the universal nature of deviance questionable. Decades ago, Durkheim, acknowledged the impossibility of deviance or crime free society, especially in periods of rapid social change, or in his jargon, anomie. Consequently, he suggested a collective response to deviance – social control– to ensure moral bound to boundless desires of individuals. Absence of crime or deviance, implies social solidarity, as there is complete consensus over norms and values. For Durkheim, though, this situation is not only impossible to achieve, but the very idea is not congruent with the values placed on individualism in a modern society. Thus, Durkheim asserted that the existence of crime is unavoidable, and as Roshier, pointed out, responses to it must be collective.

In the specific case discussed by Erikson, it could be asserted that the deviance of the dissenting group was not a necessary precondition for the acceptance of the new moral boundaries. If no split had occurred, then expectedly, the moral boundaries would have been universally agreed upon, anyway. It should be noted that, deviance, crime, and social control or social sanctions are key areas of criminological enterprise. As Jock Young [1998:451] aptly opined, criminology in general has much to offer to social science:

Many of us were attracted to the discipline [criminology] because of its theoretical verve, because of the centrality of the study of disorder to understanding society, because of the flair of its practitioners and the tremendous human interest of the subject. Indeed

many of the major debates in the social sciences in the 1960s and 1970s focused quite naturally around deviance and social control (quoted in Bell, 2010:157).

Similarly, Tierney (2010:1) shared the same view with Young by opening his introductory remark with the following argument:

Since the late 1960s the area of study broadly described as criminology has expanded enormously in Britain. Nowadays all sorts of writers, researchers and teachers make many and varied contributions to issues of crime and social control, and represent various political and theoretical positions.

This paper discusses social control, its genesis, typology, and some of its theoretical explanations. Much of the work has been adapted from Clinard and Meier's, (1998), *Sociology of Deviant Behavior*, but other literature has been reviewed to enrich the paper with adequate insight into the subject of social control, and related concepts.

2. Conceptualizing Social Control

Social control is a widely used, although rather ill-defined concept. O'Brien, and Yar, (2008), gave the term somewhat a wholistic definition, by referring it to those means through which conformity to norms, and rules of the society are actualized. One definition that seems a bit clearer, and more relevant to this paper was that "social control refers to the techniques and strategies for preventing deviant human behavior in any society". Schaefer, (2007:157). The contextual clarity, and relevance of Schaefer's definition to this paper lies in the explicit inclusion of deviance, rather than confining the scope to crime, alone.

Andersen, and Taylor, (2011), defined social control as the process by which groups, and individuals within those groups are brought into conformity with dominant social expectations. Perhaps, Clinard, and Meier, (1998), offered a short, but comprehensive definition of the concept of social control. They saw it as, an intentional attempt to change behavior. Social control can take place simply through socialization, but dominant groups can also control the behavior of others through marking them as deviants. In Nigeria, the means through which society employs decisive social control, apart from socialization, are many. They include, peer-group pressure and formally, the activities and operations of The Police, Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps, Federal Road Safety Corps, Prison Institutions, and remand homes.

3. Genesis of Social Control

The concept of social control was first seen in 1901, as the production, and reproduction of order in the society, by Ross, who admitted that, the term had actually been used by Spencer, earlier. Ross approach was essentially socio-psychological one, comprising twenty three, (23), mechanisms, via which social groups affect human behavior, (Innes, 2009).

The works of Hobbes, Aristotle, and other classical Greek philosophers dwelt largely on politics, and the consideration of safeguarding the lives of people in an organized society, as an essential, and indispensable role of government, in the state. Writings of Simmel, Weber, Durkheim, and Marx centered on the sociability of human beings, as well as the supremacy of groups over individuals in producing, and shaping a particular social structure, and order in the society. Inherent in all the above endeavor is the issue of social control, (ibid).

Apart from examining the intellectual roots of social control, Innes, (2009), also took a look at social control in practice, by indicating, and incorporating the evolution, and relevance of modern day media, police, prison system, and law in social control concretization.

4. Agents of Social Control

For its effective, and timely administration, and implementation, social control measures depend on agents. Social control agents are important players as they do regulate, and administer responses to deviance, and crimes in the society. Peer groups, police, and Road Safety Staff are some of them. More often than not, members of powerless groups may be defined as deviants for even the slightest infraction against social norms, whereas others, (usually economically powerful), may be free to behave in deviant ways without any consequence. Albeit, oppressed groups may actually engage in more deviant behavior, partly due to differential statuses, and access to resources, they have a greater likelihood of being labeled deviants, incarcerated and/or institutionalized, whether or not they have actually committed an offense. This is evidence of the power wielded by social control agents.

When powerful groups hold stereotypes about other groups, the less powerful people are frequently assigned deviant labels. As a consequence, the least powerful groups in society are subject most often to social control. You can see this in the patterns of arrest data of various countries. Poor people are more likely to be considered criminals, and therefore more likely to be arrested, convicted, and imprisoned than middle- and upper-class people, (Andersen and Taylor, 2011). This is visibly evident in the Nigerian prisons. The arrest ratio of the upper-class and the lower class, as well as the victimization, looting and embezzlement of public treasury by the politicians take place with enormous impacts on the fate the nation. However, instead of being punished, this class is rewarded, and applauded, in various forms. But a poor thief that steals a goat, or two thousand naira to solve an immediate domestic issue like foodstuff, tends to receive widespread condemnation among community members, and the formal agencies of social control.

5. Process of Social Control

Basically, two processes of social control have been identified. One: **internalization of group norms** which involves the inculcation of society's cultural expectation through the socialization process. In this process of social control, members of the society are made to know the society's standards of behavior, and are acting in accordance with these standards. Two: **external pressures** or sanctions by others in the event of anticipated or actual non-conformity to norms, (Clinard, and Meier, 1998).

In Suicide, Durkheim, [(1897) 1951], distinguished acute and chronic domestic anomie from acute and chronic economic anomie. Acute domestic anomie is principally a result of relative deprivation, that is, the discrepancy between means and goals, (needs), arising in periods of sudden economic boom or depression. Chronic economic anomie, on the other hand, results from the prominence of economic activity over other areas of social domain, leading to a gradual, yet consistent erosion of the ability of social control agencies to exercise restraint on individual wants. The end result of both forms of anomie is a boundless pursuit of needs, unhappiness, and suicide. Durkheim compared these anomic states to parallel crises in domestic circumstances. Thus acute domestic anomie refers to situations of such sudden changes on the domestic front, as, for example, widowhood, which leaves the surviving spouse unable to cope with the loss of a partner and thus prone to suicide. Chronic domestic anomie results from the increasing inability of such domestic regulatory mechanisms as, for instance, marriage to secure the proper balance between the means and needs of spouses, (Bell, 2010). Thompson (1982) cited in Bell, (2010), postulated that Durkheim, contrary to the utilitarian, economic, and psychological theories of his time, did not ascribe to the view that human needs were determined by a person's psychophysiological makeup. Rather, human needs were culturally relative, socially constructed, and thus potentially endless. An effective external moral authority was required to ensure that these needs or desires remain in check.

Social control is the moral authority for checking individual desire. Box, (1981), cited in Tierney (2010:86) captured this notion, thus Durkheim viewed human aspirations as naturally boundless, and, as he saw it, the trick of social control was not to give people what they want – that would be impossible – but to persuade them that what they have is about all they morally deserve.

6. Types of Social Control

Tanimu, (2003), divided social control agents as operating at three levels: informal group control, secondary group control and formal control agencies. The first group or agents who regulate individual conduct are more or less at the micro-level of social interaction. This consists of primary group members like the family and peer group. At this informal level, social control is made using traditional techniques of ridiculing, and gossiping. At the secondary level of social control, the individual behavior is officially regulated and the members of the group are connected and guided by the organizational codes of behavior. Tanimu, (2003), observed that the formal setting at this level is adhered to by some informal forces such as criticisms, laughter of disgrace and gossip. He pointed to the fact that, formal control of social conduct within a formal group would be more effective when it is reinforced by informal control effects. Social control at the formal level is typically facilitated by the criminal justice system-police, court and correctional institutions such as prisons, mental institutions and borstal homes. The formal control agents, Tanimu, (2003:132) stated, are characteristics of “modern day cities with complex organizations... formalized laws and deviance control agencies”.

As Schaefer, (2010) stated, the sanctions that are imposed on the deviant persons are made through either formal, or informal social control, or both. Hence, unlike Tanimu, who divided social control into three, Schaefer, gave two-formal and informal.

7. Informal Social Controls

As the term implies, people use informal social control casually to enforce norms. Examples of informal social control include smiles, laughter, raising an eyebrow, and ridicule. In Canada, the United States, and many other cultures, one common and yet controversial example of informal social control is parental use of corporal punishment. Adults often view spanking, slapping, or kicking children as a proper and necessary means of maintaining authority. Child development specialists counter that corporal punishment is inappropriate because it teaches children to solve problems through violence. They warn that slapping and spanking can escalate into more serious forms of abuse. Yet, despite the fact that pediatric experts now believe that physical forms of discipline are undesirable and encourage their patients to use nonphysical means of discipline (Tidmarsh 2000). Approximately, 70 percent of Canadian parents have used physical punishment (Durrant, and Rose-Krasnor, 1995).

8. Formal Social Controls

Sometimes informal methods of social control are not adequate to enforce conforming or obedient behavior, especially in modern, and complex societies of today. In such cases, formal social control is carried out by authorized agents, such as police officers, physicians, school administrators, employers, and military officers. It can serve as a last resort when socialization and informal sanctions do not bring about the desired behavior. An increasingly significant means of formal social control in Canada is to jail people. In Nigeria, police is playing significant role in enforcing law. The only weakness is the dubious character of the Nigeria Police. It has now become commonplace to relate police with bribery and corruption, unjustifiable arrest, brutality and abuse of authority.

Singapore deals with serious crimes severely. The death penalty is mandatory for murder, drug trafficking, and crimes committed with firearms. Japan has created a special prison for reckless drivers. While some are imprisoned for vehicular homicide, others serve prison terms for drunken driving and fleeing the scene of an accident, (Elliott, 1994). Inherent in any type of control strategy is the idea of building up ‘social capital’, (Putnam, 2000), in ‘problem’ neighbourhoods or, the society at large. Innes, (2009), buttressed Putnam’s social capital idea. Innes, considered social capital as the ‘social glue’, derivable from residents’ active involvement in local social networks which secures, and adds gains for the entire community, and by extension, making it a better place for living.

9. Theories of Social Control

9.1. Braithwaite's, (1989), *Shaming Theory of Social Control*

In his book *Crime, Shame and Reintegration*, published in 1989, an Australian criminologist John Braithwaite, puts forth a theoretical model for dealing with deviance at the individual and community levels. Braithwaite integrated many traditional sociological theories of crime into a single view explaining why some societies have higher crime rates, why certain people are more likely to commit crime or deviance, and how communities can deal effectively with the disobedience to social norms for the purposes of prevention. Braithwaite brought together the major tenets of five different theoretical traditions in 20th-century criminology into his theory of re-integrative shaming. He explains how labeling, sub-cultural, control, opportunity, and learning theories fit into his work. Crime, shame, and reintegration are not then an attempt, to rewrite criminology, but to synthesize several seemingly different theories into a singular explanatory system.

According to Braithwaite, the high rates of predatory crime in a society are indicative of the failure to shame those acts labeled as deviant, and criminal. To the author, breakdown of community ties in modern urban societies has meant that perpetrators of crime are not made to feel ashamed of their actions, and thus continue victimizing others without remorse. In this regard, Braithwaite is in agreement with Chicago School's analysis on urbanization and social disorganization, but he departed from them by suggesting the rebirth of folk method of social control, that is *shame*.

The concept of shame is the linchpin of this theory. Braithwaite suggested that, if perpetrators were made to feel guilty about their actions, they would be deterred from committing further crime. He based this assumption on the belief that those who are closely tied to family and community anticipate a negative reaction to the violation of community norms. Foreseeing the shame that they would feel, they are deterred from committing crime. However, according to this theory, shaming must be done in such a way as to be re-integrative, bringing the offender back into the community, rather than disintegrative, which would push the individual even farther out of the community. For the leading shaming theorist, re-integrative shaming is the key to effective deterrence and to deviance, and/or crime prevention.

9.2. *Critical Evaluation of the Theory*

As an advocate of informal mechanism of social control and peaceful resolution to deviance, Braithwaite, is placed in the company of restorative justice theorists (Tierney, 2010). At the moment, there is no conclusive evidence on the success of restorative justice programs. Crawford, and Newburn, (2002, cited in Tierney, 2010), have pointed to the contradiction between the principle of restorative justice, and the punitive tone of youth justice policy, as well as the punitive reality of custodial sentences for a large number of young offenders, (restorative justice is reserved for those who commit relatively minor offences).

There have been criticisms of restorative justice and re-integrative shaming arising from concerns regarding the nature of the communitarian ethos inherent in such concepts. Lacey (1998), for example, focused on the notions of inclusion and exclusion and the assumption of a neat, 'good' and 'bad' division between offenders and non-offenders, seen respectively as 'them' and 'us'. There is also critique that restorative justice may lead to a greater intolerance of difference, coupled with an attempt to create conformity by means of coercion. By imposing shaming sanction, it implies that the community does not tolerate the deviant idiosyncrasy and is exerting unlimited force to control deviance.

9.3. *Control Theory*

Control theory lends its origin as far back as to Aristotelian philosophical works. Its modern version emerged in the second half of the 20th Century, and it was identified primarily with the American criminologist, Travis Hirschi. In his book *Causes of Delinquency* (1969) Hirschi observed that, people tend to conform to the societal rules and regulations because of four factors- attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief or respect to societal values. By *attachment*, Hirschi, (1969), referred to the extent to which an individual has strong bond of emotional attachment to others like a spouse. On this ground, one may desist from committing a crime. In *commitment*, Hirschi, (1969) pointed to the fact that, when a person invests in activities which will, more or less, generate cultural capital like education, ultimately, people may refuse to commit crime to retain their dignity and pursue success. *Involvement* is the extent to which individuals' time is taken off with conventional activities (Tierney, 2010).

Lastly, *belief* may also prevent people from involving in criminality. To some degree, society's norms and values are influencing our behaviors by enjoining us to be morally upright. Those who prioritize the societal values become conformists in the society. With reference to this topic (social control), the theory provides not only the name, but it can explain why deviance takes place among some individuals, especially youth and also a remedial to lots of social issues (in the context of deviant or criminal behavior). Some youth gangs in specific areas of Kano city represent the tenet of this theory. Friends influence combined with absence of family members and weakening of moral institution may render such youth hardcore deviants. This is expected in this kind of condition because people-youth and adult alike-can decide to behave the way they wanted because of weak attachment or bond, withering away of belief and little or no regard to the norms.

Downes, and Rock, (2003) cited in Tierney, (2010) identified what they see as possible explanations for control theory's lack of impact:

- It was ignored by many sociologists because its explanation of criminality was seen as too obvious, merely serving to confirm common-sense opinion.

- It gave the appearance of supporting ‘law and order’-style calls for more discipline and punishment, which liberal–radical sociologists found unacceptable.
- In a modified form Hirschi recycled a number of variables linked to delinquency originally introduced by Eleanor and Sheldon Glueck, whose work was heavily criticized for its individualized and pathological approach to criminality.

Unlike traditional criminology, control theory does not seek to discover the impulses that cause people to break the law. Instead of asking, ‘Why do we break the law?’, the theory asks, ‘Why do we *not* break the law?’ It is worth noting that, Hirschi did not develop an entirely unique approach to understanding deviance or crime in the lanes of social control. To some extent, he followed classical schools of criminology. As Tierney, (2010:205), argued

Following the classical school of criminology to some extent, control theory sees human beings as rational decision makers. However, whereas the classical school assumed that these decisions were based upon free will, control theory makes no such assumption; the free will versus determinism debate is left open-ended. Consequently, the question of what causal factors ‘make’ people into law breakers is not posed by the theory. Therefore, as criminal motivations are not relevant to the theory, the ultimate source of those motivations ceases to be an issue. He proposes four bonds: attachment (the extent to which individual have close emotional ties to other people); commitment (the extent to which they see conventional behaviour, for example at school, as offering immediate or long-term rewards); involvement (the extent to which their time is taken up with conventional activities); belief (the extent to which their beliefs about what is permissible or not coincide with conventional ones).

9.4. Criticism of the Theory

Control theories assumed that criminal acts result when an individual’s bond to society is broken and weak. The theory has potential for explaining social control as it aids in citing numerous contextual examples in our present day and immediate society. It is, however, a scientific tradition that a theory is followed by a bombardment of critiques. The major criticism of social control theory is that, it does not tell us why people commit crime, it only explains crime in the absence of controls. Additionally, the theory does not tell us the types of crime committed by individuals such as white-collar crime, (professional crime), (Ortiz, 2011).

Now, technology is complemented in the social control effort. But even when CCTV (Closed Circuit Television), monitors anonymous citizens on the streets, it also transforms our bodies into information, Norris, (2010), noted. The CCTV operatives do not just focus on overt behavior. When we are observed, the information contained on the surface of our bodies is also observed—our age, our gender, our status (as indicated by our dresses), and our demeanor. As studies of the operation of control rooms show, this information is used as the basis of assessment as to whether we are worthy of extended targeting and tracking and, at times, deployment and ejection.

These points taken together, mean that the CCTV gaze creates an asymmetry of power between the watcher and the watched, and therefore, requires the existence of mechanisms in place, to compensate for the imbalance. What should those be? (Norris, 2010:417).

9.5. Conclusion

Social control, the theme of this paper, is not a new concept, neither is it a new social practice. This is because, it is an integral aspect of culture, since norms, and laws violations usually attract collective social condemnation. As society becomes complex, the rates of deviance, and criminality tend to proliferate. Consequently, formal social controls emerged as an alternative to informal social mechanisms that had previously been used to regulate behavior, largely in rural areas. For hundreds of years, various thinkers and writers have spent a great deal of time discussing phenomena of interest to criminologists. Social control has been one.

After all, issues of defined ‘bad’ behavior, immorality, social control, punishment and order, have been central to religious, political and social thought, down through the ages. The problems confronted by those living in such communities are multifarious, and therefore require ‘joined-up’ multiagency interventions. Deviances, and/or crimes themselves, can be linked to poor socialization within the family, and/or the improper school orientation. These, coupled with weak society-based social controls may lead to problems such as drug abuse. Social controls interventions are oriented towards checkmating the activities of deviants, and criminals, thereby rehabilitating them, and by extension creating, and sustaining a largely conforming, and law abiding society.

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