CHAPTER II

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The study of juvenile delinquency has generated a rich body of theory and it has strong theoretical orientation offering many competing and at times conflicting perspectives on delinquency which made the study of deviance one of the most interesting and exciting area.

Wheeler in presidential address to twenty fourth annual meeting of the society for the study of social problems claimed that "our understanding of the conditions and situations that precipitate delinquency has advanced very little over past quarter of century".¹

The trend which limited theoretical development over the last two decades was the increasing awareness that delinquency was not uniquely or even primarily, a lower class phenomenon. Prior to 1960, the development and testing of delinquency theory was depending almost exclusively on official delinquency statistics. More recently, however, the limitations and biases inherent
The concern is to consider etiology of delinquent behaviour as a guide to understanding. The focus is on the offender and the social processes and features of social contexts which both generate and maintain delinquent patterns of behaviour.

2.1 The Anomie/Strain Perspective:

The term "Anomie" was coined by the French Sociologist Emile Durkheim, who argued that under certain social conditions, traditional societal norms and rules lose their authority over behaviour, resulting in a state of normlessness, which Durkheim called anomie. During periods of social change, traditional norms may be viewed as no longer applicable to behaviour, leaving people free to pursue any ends by any means.
Merton was the first to elaborate Durkheim's concept of Anomie. The basic premise of all theoretical statements in their tradition is that delinquent behaviour is a result of socially induced pressures to delinquency, rather than pathological impulses of individuals. This general body of theory is thus referred to as Strain Theory, since it assumes that man is basically a conforming being who violates normative expectations only as a result of external social pressures or socially induced stress. While different theories specify different social processes and organizational structures which generate particular forms of deviance, virtually all concur with Merton's view that the structure of contemporary society has generated anomie in specific social institutions and that deviance is, in part, a response to or result of this condition. Strain theory has become the most influential and widely used contemporary formulation in the area of delinquent behaviour.

A specific application of strain theory to delinquency has been proposed by Cloward and Ohlin and more recently by Elliott & Voss. Cloward and Ohlin's work is of particular interest to us because their formulation, like that proposed here, represents an attempt
to integrate and extend current theoretical positions. Although their theory has been viewed primarily as an extension of the earlier work of Durkheim & Merton, it is equally an extension of the differential association perspective and the prior work of Sutherland. Indeed, much of its significance lies in the fact that it successfully integrated these two traditional perspectives on the etiology of delinquent behaviour. Cloward and Ohlin maintain that limited opportunity for achieving conventional goals is the motivational stimulus for delinquent behaviour. The specific form and pattern of delinquent behaviour are acquired through normal learning processes within delinquent groups. Experiences of limited or blocked opportunities (a result of structural limitations on success) thus lead to alternation (perceived anomie) and an active seeking out of alternative groups and settings in which particular patterns of delinquent behaviour are acquired and reinforced (social learning).

Following Merton, Cloward and Ohlin have conceptualized the conditions leading to anomie in terms of differential opportunities for achieving socially valued goals. Differential access to opportunity creates strain. This is postulated to occur primarily among
disadvantaged, low socio-economic status youths, resulting in the concentration of delinquent sub-cultures in low socio-economic-status neighbourhoods. It is important to note, however, that Cloward and Ohlin have changed the level of explanation from the macrosociological level which characterized Durkheim’s work to an individual level. It is the perception of limited access to conventional goals that motivates the individual to explore deviant means. This change in level of explanation was essential for the integration of strain and learning perspectives.

Elliott and Voss's more recent work has attempted to deal with the class bound assumptions inherent in strain theory. Their formulation extends Cloward and Ohlin's classic statement in the following three ways:

(1) The focus on limited opportunities was extended to a wider range of conventional goals.

(2) The goal means disjunction was modified to be logically independent of social class.
The role of social learning in the development of delinquent behaviour was further emphasized.

Elliott and Voss have proposed a sequential or developmental, model of delinquency:

1. Limited opportunities or failure to achieve conventional goals serves to attenuate one's initial commitment to the normative order and
2. results in a particular form of alienation (normlessness), which serves as a 'permitter' for delinquency and
3. exposure to delinquent groups which provide learning and rewards for delinquent behaviour for those whose bonds have undergone the attenuation process.

From this perspective, aspiration - opportunity disjunctions provide motivation for delinquent behaviour. As compared with Merton, Cloward and Ohlin, Elliott and Voss view both goals and opportunities as variables. They postulate that middle class youths are just as likely to
aspire beyond their means as are low socio-economic status youths. While absolute levels of aspirations and opportunities may vary by class, the discrepancies between personal goals and opportunities for realizing these goals need not vary systematically by class. Given Durkheim's view that poverty restricts aspirations, Elliott and Voss have postulated that aspirations-opportunity disjunctions would be at least as great, if not greater among middle class youths. In any case, the motivational stimulus for delinquent behaviour in the form of aspiration-opportunity discrepancies or goal failure is viewed as logically independent of social class. More recently, Simon and Gagnon have suggested a similar modification of traditional anomie theory. They postulate that:

"The disjunction between cultural goals and social means in an affluent society is a function of differential commitments to the approved cultural goals under conditions in which most persons have reasonable access to social means for achieving them. The disjunction resulting from differential opportunities for achieving common cultural goals as described by Merton is postulated to be characteristic of societies during periods
of scarcity. Simon and Gagnon suggest that varying commitment to traditional cultural goals might be useful in understanding deviance among those from higher socio-economic levels in our society and like Elliott and Voss, they have changed the conceptualization of the cultural goals/social means disjunction from that in the earlier statements of anomie theory.  

However, the Elliott and Voss formulation remains the most general formulation to date, viewing as variables both commitment to conventional cultural goals and access to conventional social means for achieving these goals.

Normlessness, the expectation that one must employ illegitimate means to achieve socially valued goals is postulated to result from perceived aspiration-opportunity disjunctions. When a person cannot reach his or her goals by conventional means, deviant or illegitimate means become rational and functional alternatives. When the source of failure or blockage is perceived as external - resulting from institutional practices and policies, the individual has some justification for withdrawing his or her moral commitment to these conventional norms. In this manner
a sense of injustice mitigates lies to conventional norms and generate normlessness.

Once at this point in the developmental sequence the relative presence or absence of specific delinquent learning and performance structures accounts for the likelihood of one's behaviour. The time ordering of the exposure to delinquency variable is not explicit. It may predate failure or it may be the result of seeking a social context in which one can achieve some success. While the exposure may result in the acquisition of delinquent behaviour patterns, actual delinquent behaviour (Performance) will not result until one's attachment to the social order is neutralized through real or anticipated failure, and the delinquent behaviour has been reinforced.

The results of research relative to this set of propositions have been generally encouraging using a predictive design which allowed for establishing the correct temporal sequences. Elliott and Voss found that this set of variables did, in fact, account for 31% of the variance in self-reported delinquency frequency scores across time. Jessor et al. also found good support for a similar set of predictor variables on a general measure
While considerable empirical support for an integrated strain learning approach to delinquency has been amassed, most of the variance in delinquency remains unexplained. If the power of this theoretical formulation is to be improved, some basic modification is required. One avenue is suggested by the weak predictive power of the aspiration-opportunity-discrepancy variables. In both the Elliott and Voss and Brennan and Huzinga studies, for example anticipated failure to achieve occupational or educational goals was not predictively associated with changes in levels of delinquency. Limited academic success at school and failure in one's relationship with parents were predictive, but only weakly. To some extent, the low strength of these predictors might be anticipated, since they are the initial variables in the causal sequence and are tied to delinquency only through a set of other conditional variables. On the other hand, the strong emphasis placed on these specific variables in strain theories seems questionable, given the available data.

It might be argued that the difficulty lies in the operationalisation or measurement of the relevant goal opportunity disjunctions. However, this position is to be rejected because previous findings as to this postulated relationship have been generally weak and inconclusive.
Further more there is substantial evidence in the above mentioned Studies that many adolescents engaging in significant amount of delinquent behaviour experience no discrepancies between aspirations and perceived opportunities. The lack of consistent support for this relationship suggests that failure of anticipated failure constitutes only one possible path to an involvement in delinquency.

2.2 The Control Perspective:

The different assumptions of strain and control theories are significant. Strain formulations assume a positively socialized individual who violates conventional norms only when his or her attachment and commitment are attenuated. Norm violation occurs only after the individual perceives the opportunities for socially valued goals are blocked. Strain theory focuses on this attenuation process. Control theories, on the other hand, treat the socialization process and commitment to conventional norms and values as problematic persons differ with respect to their commitment to and integration into the conventional social order. As Reiss put it:

"Delinquency results when there is a relative absence of internalized norms"
and rules governing behaviour in conformity with the norms of the social system to which legal penalties are attached, a breakdown in previously established controls and/or a relative absence of or conflict in social rules or techniques for enforcing such behaviour in the social groups or institutions of which the person is a member. Hence delinquency may be seen as a functional consequence of this type of relationship established among the personal and social controls. 

From a control perspective, delinquency is viewed as a consequence of (1) internalised normative controls (2) Breakdown in previously established controls, and/or Conflict or inconsistency in rules or social controls. Strain formulations of delinquency appear to be focussing on these variables and processes which account for the second condition identified by Reiss is attenuation or breakdown in previously established controls. On the other hand, most control theorists direct their attention to the just and third conditions, exploring such variables as inadequate socialization (failure to internalise conventional norms) and integration into conventional groups or institutions which provide strong external or
social controls on behaviour. From our perspective these need not be viewed as contradictory explanation. On the contrary, they may be viewed as alternative processes, depending on the outcome of one's early socialization experience.

For example, Hirschi has argued that high aspirations involve a commitment to conventional lines of action that functions as a positive control or bond to the social order. Strain theories, on the other hand, view high aspirations (in the face of limited opportunities) as a source of attenuation of attachment to the conventional order. Recognising this difference, Hirschi suggested that examination of this relationship would constitute a crucial test of the two theories. Empirically, the evidence is inconsistent and far from conclusive. One possible interpretation is that both hypotheses are correct and are part of different etiological sequences leading to delinquent behaviour.

Empirical studies using the control perspective have focussed almost exclusively on the static relation of weak internal and external controls to delinquency without considering the longer developmental process.
These processes may involve an initially strong commitment to and integration into society which becomes attenuated over time, with the attenuation eventually resulting in delinquency. The source of this difficulty may lie in the infrequent use of longitudinal designs. Without a repeated measure design, youths with strong bonds which subsequently become attenuated may be indistinguishable from those who never developed strong bonds.

2.3 **An Integrated Strain-Control Perspective:**

The integrated Strain-control perspective begins with the assumption that different youths have different early socialization experiences, which result in variable degrees of commitment to and integration with conventional social groups. The effect of failure to achieve conventional goals on subsequent delinquency is related to the strength of one's initial bonds. Limited opportunities to achieve conventional goals constitute a source of strain and thus a motivational stimulus for delinquency only if one is committed to these goals. In contrast limited opportunities to achieve such goals should have little or no impact on those with weak ties and commitments to the conventional social order.
Limited opportunities to achieve conventional goals are not the only experiences which weaken or break initially strong ties to the social order. Labelling theorists have argued that the experience of being apprehended and publicly labelled a delinquent initiates social processes which limit one's access to conventional social roles and statuses, isolating one from participation in these activities and relationships and forcing one to assume a delinquent role. It has also been argued that the effects of social disorganization or crisis in the home (divorce, parental discard, death of a parent) and/or community (high rates of mobility, economic depression, unemployment) attenuates or break one's ties to society.

In sum, the limited opportunities, failure to achieve valued goals, negative labelling experience and social disorganization at home and in the community are all experiences which may attenuate one's ties to the conventional social orders and may thus be caused factors in the developmental sequence leading to delinquent behaviour, for those whose early socialization experiences produced strong bonds to society. For those whose attachments to the conventional social order are already
weak, such factors may further weaken ties to society but are not necessary factors in etiological sequence leading to delinquency.

2.4 Conclusion:

An integrated strain-control perspective provides a fundamental conceptual framework in which traditional strain perspective and social control perspective are integrated into single explanatory perspective which avoids the class bias inherent in traditional (previous) theories and which account for multiple etiologies of sustained patterns of delinquent behaviour.
FOOT NOTES


