

CMY3701 Summary/Essay of Richard Quinney's conflict theory for 30 Marks

written by

Chanell



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C. Deyzel

Richard Quinney's conflict theory (30 marks)

This is a summary of Richard Quinney's conflict theory, including my own examples, I used these as my own exam preparation and managed to obtain a distinction. Please do not submit this essay as an assignment, there are direct quotes from the study guide. Use these for exam revision ONLY .

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1. Introduction

The ideas that make up the foundation of conflict theory can be traced back to early philosophy. Ancient Chinese philosophers taught that men are naturally lazy and weak. This assumption leads to the obvious conclusion that the only way men can be controlled, then is through punishment. Those who have the power to punish can control society, as the fear of the power of punishment keeps men in place. The conflict model of crime is based on the assumption that differences in race, class, income and age cause groups to fight for power. Groups with the most power pass laws that protect the status quo against resistance by marginalised groups. Definitions of crime depend on who is in power, with less powerful groups characterised and targeted as criminals to keep them in a subordinate position.

2. Definition of a key concept

2.1 Conflict perspective

The conflict perspective maintains that society is composed of diverse groups with conflicting values and interests. In all societies, these groups have differential access to power, prestige and wealth

3. Assumptions of conflict theory

Conflict theories share one fundamental assumption, namely, that societies are characterised by conflict and not by consensus. Consensus is a temporary state of affairs, but the use of power to establish and maintain consensus is the central issue that should be investigated. The main outcome of conflict is that somebody gains power and somebody else loses power *for example if a new political group takes over the current government, the new government will gain all of the power and the previous government will lose the power they had.* The most powerful groups in society control the law and it is the values of these groups that are accepted as the legal standard for behaviour *for example the values that the government will apply will be accepted as the legal standard, so if the government doesn't do much or care about corruption, the these values will become part of our societies.*

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According to Schmallegger the conflict perspective may be described in terms of the following six key elements:

- i. Society is made up of diverse social groups. The distinction between groups is reflected in gender and social class. *For example, the idea that men have full power over women*
- ii. Each group has different definitions of right and wrong. Moral considerations and standards of behaviour vary from one group to the next. *For example one social group might see stealing as an acceptable way of getting what they want, while other social groups will work hard to obtain money in order to buy what they want*
- iii. Conflict between groups is unavoidable and conflict is based on differences that are socially significant. Groups that are distinguished on the basis of these characteristics will compete for power, wealth and other recognition
- iv. The fundamental nature of the group conflict focuses on the exercise of political power. Political power is the key to obtaining wealth and other forms of power. *For example if you are in control politically, you have the power to make rules/laws that will benefit you.*
- v. The law is a tool of power and promotes the interest of the powerful. Laws provide those in control with access to scarce resources and the same laws keep others from gaining access to power.
- vi. Those with power are invariably interested in maintaining such power.

Even if society were to reach consensus about values and goals the existence of resources and their uneven distribution means that one group will benefit to the mistreatment of another.

The struggle for scarce resources usually revolves around three related issues: money, power and influence. Those who have a greater share of the resources strive to maintain the status quo, while those who have less pursue change in order to increase their share in these scarce resources.

The struggle of scarce resources may be blatant, but is often subtle and restrained. Since the dominant group controls the ideas and information, they can promote perceptions and values that support the existing order. The disadvantaged classes thus develop what Marx and Engels referred to as a “false consciousness” – the perception that the prevailing social conditions are in their own interest when, in fact, the opposite is true. People may think that they have had their say in the law and that their opinions are taken into consideration, instead the law is based and decided upon by the ruling class.

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A second way to restrain the struggle for scarce resources is to institutionalise conflict. Special mechanisms such as courts and civil right hearings are introduced to resolve differences.

4. Richard Quinney

In order to gain a better understanding of crime, Quinney formulated the following six propositions:

- i. Societies such as America are based on an advanced capitalist economy. *In other words, the wealth is in the hands of the public. People work and receive payment in return.*
- ii. The state is organised to serve the interest of the dominant economic class, namely the capitalist ruling class.
- iii. Crime control in a capitalist society is brought about by means of a variety of institutions and agencies established and administered by government elite. These elite represent the interests of the ruling class and its aim is to establish internal order.
- iv. Criminal law is an instrument of the state and the ruling class aimed at maintaining the existing social and economic order. *The state can for example make rules/laws to benefit them and to ensure that there is no change in class; they also decide how someone should be punished when breaking a specific rule/law.*
- v. The subservient classes are oppressed in whatever way necessary, but especially by means of coercion and the sheer power of the legal system.
- vi. Only the collapse of capitalist society and the creation of a new society based on socialist principles will provide a solution to the problem. If this should happen, resources will be more equally distributed among the members of society.

Later on, Quinney argued that virtually all crime committed by members of lower classes is essential for the survival of individual members of those classes. He came to the conclusion that crime is unavoidable under capitalist conditions, because crime is the reaction to the material conditions of life. Permanent unemployment and the acceptance of such conditions may lead to a lifestyle where crime is an appropriate response.

5. Conclusion

Please provide own conclusion. Remember to indicate that this is your opinion, for example "this student is of the opinion that..." This is what you think about the theory. This is not a summary of your essay.