Of all the work being done within the philosophy of science, the one work, which has had the most profound effect on the social sciences, has been Thomas Kuhn’s, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). The impact Kuhn has had can be seen for example in the works of Fredrick’s Sociology of Sociology and Ritzer’s many works on multiple paradigms in Sociology.

By using Kuhn’s conception we can better understand the changes that have taken place in deviance as well as try to understand the changes that are taking place. I will first explain the common explanation of the development of science and then proceed into a description of Kuhn’s analysis of paradigmatic revolutions. Following this brief discussion, I will explain some of the changes that have taken place and are currently taking place within theoretical deviance.

The normal conception of the history and development of science, the basic epistemological concern, in its most simplistic form, is one of a linear building block notion of how knowledge builds on itself. That is, we go out everyday digging around in the empirical world piecing together data. New data leads to new questions, new or more complete answers, constantly progressing upwards. This is added to the research, which has gone on prior, building upon it to produce a more complete and accurate picture of the world in which we live. Thus, we have gone from the simple to the complex in a more or less linear progression, hence, the early emphasis on the positivistic nature of science. There are plenty of examples where this appears to be the case, e.g., Anomie theory as presented by Merton suggests that deviance is a normal response to structurally produce strain. If legitimate ways
of obtaining goals are blocked, individuals adapt by individually selecting alternative ways to confronting the disjuncture between legitimate means and ends. In this building block approach, Cloward and Ohlin’s theory can be seen as an extension and refinement of Merton’s Anomie Theory, even if the name of the theory transforms to Opportunity Theory. They essentially add to anomie in their formulation of alternative subcultures and the contention that not only are there possibilities of blocked legitimate means but also blocked illegitimate means. When the theory is applied to children, we need to alter the original conception of Merton even more.

Kuhn’s conception of the growth of science is somewhat different. He contends that contrary to the linear building block notion most of us operate under, science actually advances in terms of revolutions, paradigmatic revolutions. This would be a complete change in worldviews. The tasks of any science on a regular basis is to conduct research and collect facts according to accepted assumption of the dominant paradigm, or what Alvin Gouldner refers to as background and domain assumptions. Propositions and hypotheses derived from the current paradigm direct the fact-finding procedures. It is this fact gathering based on the accepted assumptions at the time, in the form of a paradigm, that Kuhn refers to as normal science and puzzle solving.

In the process of normal science anomalies occur. Certain questions remain unanswered and certain problems appear unsolvable. A new paradigm arises which appears to answer these questions and problems and offer alternative ways of conceptualizing answers to questions, which had previously been answered. Normal science is again underway, this time based on new domain assumptions (again Gouldner’s terms not Kuhn’s) and directed toward and guided by a different set of questions. There are two major consequences of a paradigmatic shift. First, the very nature of facts and data will change. What scientists look for in terms of facts is given by the types of assumptions they start with
and the nature of the questions they ask. With a paradigm shift, assumptions and questions change – consequently so do the facts themselves. Second, when the old paradigm dies out and the new paradigm takes control of the discipline and scientist who does not make the shift to the new paradigm will no longer be considered a scientist. If I still believe that the world is flat or that Piltdown man existed, I would be a quack, not a scientist.

Without going into anymore depth in Kuhn’s paradigm of science, the implications for deviance is clear. The example cited above of opportunity theory being an extension of anomie theory is indeed the case. The argument would be that both of these theories would be a part of the normal science phase of one paradigm. Changing the basic assumption of deviance being a response to structural conditions to say, an act of free will in the normal process of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain would change completely the questions asked, data collected, and conclusions reached.

The problem within deviance theory as within sociology in general is that no one has been able to say with any assurance that deviance is in the throes of a paradigmatic revolution. A typical conception of paradigms with deviance recently has been to elaborate two major paradigms. The functional paradigm with its focus on consensus has been seen as the dominant paradigm in deviance. The conflict paradigm with its focus on conflict and change is seen as the new kid in town replacing the once pervasive dominant functionalism (see Chambliss and Mankoff, *Who’s Law? What Order?*; also Fredrick’s paper on *Radical Criminology and the Question of Legitimacy: A Critical Assessment*). Fredrick maintains that the paradigm that is now declining is the positivist paradigm with functionalism being only a particular form. He also insists that the Radical paradigm (rather then conflict) is still in its emergent state. (In sociology in general see Horton’s article on order and conflict theories reproduced in Reynolds and Reynolds, *Sociology or Sociology*, Fredrick’s, *The Sociology of Sociology*, and Schwendinger and Schwendinger, *The Sociologists of the Chair.*) The reliance
on the functional paradigm should be disappearing rapidly as the conflict paradigm takes its place. These arguments are still valid for understanding paradigmatic change even though it appears that even though it appears that the radical paradigm has not become dominate. And in fact, positivism serves and classical school has re–emerge under a new guise. Anyway.

Others, like Ritzer, argue that sociology and deviance are actually multiple paradigm sciences. More than one paradigm has always existed within sociology and there is a strong possibility that more than one paradigm will always exist. Perhaps this is traceable to the fact the human behavior with conscious individuals is not and never will be the same as studying rocks.

I would contend that Kuhn’s conception is more accurate and the notion of multiple paradigm science is less accurate. Deviance (and sociology) is in the process of a paradigmatic revolution, which merely gives the appearance of a multiple paradigm science. Kuhn had argued that one paradigm would not be overthrown until a viable paradigm exists. That has yet to happen.

The first major approach to the study of deviance culminated in what we refer to as the classical school of criminology. The basic world–view of the classical school centered on the conception of human beings having free will. Humans freely entered into a social contract only giving up as much liberty to make society a viable entity. Human beings were also considered rational beings. They could choose the end they wished to pursue and the means to reach those ends. People are always making choices bases on the pleasure–pain principle or mini–maxi principle. If being deviant is more pleasurable then that becomes the rational behavior to choose and the individual freely chooses it. The state, because of the contract it has with the individual, steps in to deter deviant behavior from occurring. Making the deviant act less pleasurable does this. By providing the right amount of punishment for a particular act, the rational individual will freely choose some alternative behavior. Consequently the law
must offset pleasure of criminal or deviant behavior by making the punishment enough to offset the pleasure, but cannot be too harsh. Anyone who still chooses to commit deviant behavior would be making an irrational decision.

This classical approach expressing the beliefs of the social contract theory and the ideas that become part of utilitarian theory was replaced in academia by the positivist view of criminology. (This fits with Fredrichs conception of the paradigm as positivist and the form as merely functionalist.) The positivist view was indeed very different. Some force outside of their control determines human beings. People do not possess the free will classical school proponents thought they did. Positivists shifted their focus away from the act that was committed, to the actor. Punishment and deterrence will have no effect on individuals who are forced, one way or another, to become deviant. The point is to treat the individuals not punish them. The individual is not irrational but rather pathological. With this is the belief that deviance can be scientifically studied.

The classical paradigm channels research and explores answers in a completely different direction than the positivist paradigm. The classical school went in the direction of delineating criminal acts and punishments that would correspond to those acts without the state over stepping its contractual bounds. The positivist paradigm sent scientists looking for reasons why individuals commit deviant behavior.

This paradigm (the positivistic) encompasses a number of very different theories from the 1800s to the present. Perhaps one reason it is constantly referred to as functionalist is that a major assumption behind all of the theories in this paradigm is structure somehow determines function. For example, early biological theories like Lomroso’s or Hooton’s or Sheldon’s, maintain that something in the biological makeup or structure of the individual results in a particular function, deviant behavior. For Lombroso it was the atavistic criminal, for Hooton it appears to be more genetic, and for Sheldon it was body type connected to
personality type. Another example of the structure–function nexus in this paradigm is Sutherland’s differential association theory. He maintains that deviant behavior is learned the same way normal behavior is learned. What happens is that we are exposed to an excess of definitions favoring law violation, the faulty structure, leading to deviance, the function. This is true of any theory within the positivist paradigm. Recall our discussion of Anomie theory above and it’s focus on the faulty structure of society leading to deviant behavior.

This paradigmatic revolution took place a long time ago, clearly establishing positivism as the paradigm. The new paradigmatic revolution which makes our discipline appear as a multiple paradigm science is still fundamental and in emergent stages. The first real challenge the positivist paradigm felt came from the interactionist school in the form of labeling theory. The promise labeling theory held out can be seen by its quick assimilation into other approaches, for example Erikson’s combination of labeling with functionalism or Quinney’s combination of labeling with conflict approach. The anti-absolutism of labeling (see Matza) was a refreshing blow against the positivist paradigm. But labeling couldn’t prove it enough to become the leading paradigm in science, although an attempt was made to make it one, see Cullen and Cullen, Toward a Paradigm of Labeling Theory (1979). As Taylor, Walton, and Young pointed out, it is questionable if labeling theory is really a theory. If this is true, labeling could not realistically replace positivism.

The urgency felt by some for a new paradigm may account for why the name conflict paradigm is often applied. Conflict theory was on of the first in academic circles to challenge the positivist paradigm as elaborated by Dahrendorf in sociology and Vold in deviance. The problem is that a single theory cannot successfully topple even an ailing paradigm. The concepts of a single theory can be absorbed into the
more encompassing paradigm and even act as a support (which can clearly be seen in
the case of conflict theory’s absorption into functionalism through the work of Lewis
Coser (1956). Presently, in the past 15 years or so, a number of theories have grown
and developed within a loose and tentative title of the New Criminology. Within this
category we approach we find conflict theory (Turk), radical criminology (Fredricks),
critical criminology (Quinney), and Marxist criminology (Spitzer). Although these are
loosely tied together no all–encompassing world–view has emerged as a clearly
operative paradigm in spite of the fact that they share a set of common assumptions.
Until that happens the old paradigm, regardless of how many anomalies it contains,
cannot and will not disappear. The positivists maintain that the scientific method is
the way to uncover truth and knowledge. Within the New Criminology some reject this
positivistic assumption while others argue it must be retained, how else can theories
be proven or disproved?

While the new paradigm may not be as quick to emerge as some might hope
there has been an incredible amount of work done within the alternative theoretical
approaches. Anthony Platts’, The Child Savers is an excellent example as is, The Iron
Fist and the Velvet Glove, by the Center for Research of criminal justice. Both of these
are representative of the historical work being done. But this is not the only research
under this emergent paradigm (see the Schwendinger’s work on rape for example; or
the work on corporate deviance by Henrey Weinstein; and for government deviance
see Alan Wolfe).

Many of the concepts and assumptions of the New Criminology paradigm are
Marxist, yet there has been to this point in time, a great deal of resistance to Marxism.
This seems to have increased since the 1990s. The questions the Marxist approach leads to are ones of structure rather than looking at the individual. And within the realm of structure it tries to account for the varying levels of class-consciousness. Perhaps that is why it is so hard for even many New Criminologists to accept; solutions would have to come in terms of structural change and for many that seems like a pipe dream.


Spitzer

