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RESEARCH NOTE

PUBLIC OPINION ON CRIMINAL LAW AND LEGAL SANCTIONS: AN EXAMINATION OF TWO CONCEPTUAL MODELS*

CHARLES W. THOMAS,** ROBIN J. CAGE*** AND SAMUEL C. FOSTER†

Two basic perspectives have been advanced to explain how criminal laws are created, legitimated, and applied.¹ One, the "consensus model," suggests that criminal law is essentially a codification of the values of a people that may be viewed as legitimate because it reflects high levels of agreement on both what constitutes a criminal offense and the magnitude of formal legal sanctions that may be imposed on those who violate the law. Further, the application of criminal codes by the state is viewed as proper by virtue of the assumption that the state exercises its power in a neutral manner; this allows conflicts of interest to be resolved without the normative foundations of the system being challenged.

An alternative perspective, the "conflict model," places far greater emphasis on the political process by means of which criminal laws are drafted, enacted, interpreted and enforced. This is a process that is viewed as being grounded in the on-going struggle between vested interest groups which seek to have their particular values legitimated and supported by the coercive power of the state. Thus, the conflict model asserts that criminal law is an oppressive entity because it supports the values of the powerful to the detriment and, not infrequently, the criminalization of those without power. A basic

distinction between these two positions has been aptly noted by Chambliss and Seidman:

The one assumes that at the bottom there is a fundamental value-consensus in society which is reflected in the law-making, law-applying, and adjudicating machinery of the State. The other proposes that control of the State and its awesome machinery of compulsion is itself the prize for which antagonistic interests struggle.²

The importance of these two paradigms would lead one to expect numerous empirical assessments of their viability, but this is not the case. True, several studies have examined the influence of special interest groups on the formulation of legislation on such topics as sex offenses,³ theft,⁴ antitrust legislation,⁵ drug offenses,⁶ prohibition,⁷ vagrancy,⁸ prostitution,⁹ and "blue laws."¹⁰ Other analyses have focused on the congruity between public opinion, statutory provisions, and the application of criminal law.¹¹ Still, the importance of these studies notwithstanding, they have not provided answers to ques-

² W. CHAMBLISS & R. SEIDMAN, *supra* note 1, at 17.

³ Sutherland, *The Sexual Psychopath Laws*, 40 J. CRIM. L.C. & P.S. 543 (1950); Sutherland, *The Diffusion of Sexual Psychopath Laws*, 56 AM. J. SOCIOLOGY 142 (1950).

⁴ J. HALL, *THEFT, LAW AND SOCIETY* (1952).

⁵ See generally H. THORELLI, *THE FEDERAL ANTITRUST POLICY: ORIGIN AND AMERICAN TRADITION* (1955).

⁶ H. S. BECKER, *OUTSIDERS* 137-46 (1963); LINDESMITH, *Federal Law and Drug Addiction*, 7 SOCIAL PROBLEMS 48 (1959). Cf. T. DUSTER, *THE LEGISLATION OF MORALITY* (1970).

⁷ J. GUSFIELD, *SYMBOLIC CRUSADE* (1963).

⁸ Chambliss, *A Sociological Analysis of the Law of Vagrancy*, 12 SOCIAL PROBLEMS 67 (1964).

⁹ An excellent treatment of this topic is found in Roby, *Politics and Criminal Law: Revision of New York State Penal Law on Prostitution*, 17 SOCIAL PROBLEMS 83 (1969).

¹⁰ R. QUINNEY, *supra* note 1.

¹¹ There are a number of stimulating articles in this area. See, e.g., Boydell & Grindstaff, *Public Opinion Toward Legal Sanctions of Crimes of Violence*, 65 J. CRIM. L.C. &

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¹ Cf. W. CHAMBLISS & R. SEIDMAN, *LAW, ORDER, AND POWER* 16-74 (1974); C. HARTJEN, *CRIME AND CRIMINALIZATION* 16-39 (1974); R. QUINNEY, *THE SOCIAL REALITY OF CRIME* 29-100 (1970); E. SUTHERLAND & D. CRESSEY, *CRIMINOLOGY* 8-12 (9th ed. 1974).

tions about whether public evaluations of appropriate legal sanctions reflect the level of agreement implied by the consensus model, or the dissension predicted by the conflict model.

Despite the absence of adequate research, it seems clear that the consensus paradigm implies that public opinion will consistently support the prohibition of some types of behavior and that there will be considerable agreement on the level of sanctions that are appropriate for those who engage in these types of behavior. The conflict model, on the other hand, appears to predict that consensus does not exist and that, to the contrary, different social groupings subscribe to quite different evaluations of what constitutes a criminal act and what types of sanctions are appropriate for violators. The purpose of this research is to evaluate which of the two perspectives provides the best predictions of how private citizens evaluate the relative seriousness of a variety of acts and what types of sanctions they feel are appropriate

P.S. 113 (1974), which studied public attitudes toward the severity of the penalty to be imposed for several categories of offenses. The extent to which the general public is ignorant of the details of criminal procedure—as opposed to the dramatic aspects of law enforcement—was highlighted by analyzing interview responses of a few hundred laymen. Gibbons, *Who Knows What About Correction*, 9 *CRIME & DELINQUENCY* 137 (1963). Another researcher examined the tendency of individuals to approve or at least be indifferent toward “chiseling” on unemployment compensation, finding it to be greater as the individual becomes nearer to the situation. Smigel, *Public Attitudes Toward ‘Chiseling’ with Reference to Unemployment Compensation*, 18 *AM. SOCIOLOGICAL REV.* 59 (1953). The permissiveness of public attitudes toward cheating on unemployment compensation seems to carry over into the area of gambling. Interviews of 180 persons in a medium-size city in the eastern United States lend credence to the conclusion that public attitudes toward gambling are much more permissive than the statutes which are common in the United States. Gardiner, *Public Attitudes toward Gambling and Corruption*, 374 *ANNALS* 123 (1967). See also Boydell & Grindstaff, *Public Attitude toward Legal Sanctions: A Pilot Study*, in *SOCIAL PROCESS AND INSTITUTION: THE CANADIAN CASE* 306 (J. Gallagher & D. Lambert eds. 1971); Parker, *Juvenile Court Actions and Public Response*, in *BECOMING DELINQUENT* 252 (P. Garabedian & D. Gibbons eds. 1970); Boydell & Grindstaff, *Public Attitudes and Court Dispositions: A Comparative Analysis*, 58 *SOCIOLOGY & SOCIAL RES.* 417 (1974); Gibbons, *Crime and Punishment: A Study in Social Attitudes*, 47 *SOCIAL FORCES* 391 (1969); Makela, *Public Sense of Justice and Judicial Practice*, 10 *ACTA SOC.* 42 (1966); Newman, *Public Attitudes Toward a Form of White Collar Crime*, 4 *SOCIAL PROBLEMS* 228 (1957); Rooney & Gibbons, *Social Reactions to Crimes Without Victims*, 13 *SOCIAL PROBLEMS* 400 (1966); Rose & Prell, *Does the Punishment Fit the Crime?*, 61 *AM. J. SOCIOLOGY* 247 (1955); Smigel, *Public Attitudes Toward Stealing as Related to Size of Victim Organization*, 21 *AM. SOCIOLOGICAL REV.* 320 (1956).

for those who engage in these types of behavior. Simply put, if there is consensus on these two dimensions across social groupings, a basic expectation of the consensus model would be supported; if there is a marked lack of agreement, the implications of the conflict model would be supported.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data required to address these issues were collected in 1973 during the course of a larger project that was conducted in a southeastern Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area which had a population of over 680,000. A brief letter in which the general purpose of the study was described was mailed to a systematic random sample of 9,178 households drawn from telephone listings late in 1973.¹² Shortly thereafter each household received a rather lengthy questionnaire. Those who did not respond promptly received a reminder letter and, if they still failed to respond, a second questionnaire.¹³ A sizeable number of households that were initially selected could not be reached at the addresses we obtained from our directories because they had moved out of the area, were seriously ill, had died or because of other reasons. These cases were deleted

¹²A number between one and eighteen was selected at random. From that starting point every eighteenth residence listing in the directory was chosen for inclusion in the sample. All business listings were omitted from the study. As has been frequently noted in methodological literature (cf. Fletcher & Thompson, *Telephone Directory Samples and Random Telephone Number Generation*, 18 *J. BROADCASTING* 178 (1974); Leuthold & Scheele, *Patterns of Bias in Samples Based on Telephone Directories*, 35 *PUB. OPIN. Q.* 249 (1971); Roslow & Roslow, *Unlisted Phone Subscribers Are Different*, 12 *J. ADVERTISING RES.* 35 (1972)), the use of telephone directories may introduce systematic bias into the sample given the fact that all homes do not have phones, directories quickly become dated, some residents have unlisted numbers, newly arrived residents may be excluded, and so on. On the other hand, we could locate no alternative listings which were not even more inaccurate.

¹³The use of mailed questionnaires raises a substantial number of methodological issues regarding such considerations as whether addresses and cover letters should be personalized, type of postage (business return rather than stamped or metered return envelopes), number and type of follow-ups and so on. For examinations of many of the issues as well as reviews of previous research see Carpenter, *Personalizing Mail Surveys: A Replication and Reassessment*, 38 *PUB. OPIN. Q.* 614 (1974); Etzel & Walker, *Effects of Alternative Follow-Up Procedures on Mail Survey Response Rates*, 59 *J. APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY* 219 (1974); Veiga, *Getting the Mail Questionnaire Returned: Some Practical Research Considerations*, 59 *J. APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY* 217 (1974). Our technique follows the suggestions contained in evaluational studies to the extent possible, given the pressure of time and our large sample.

from the sample. Of the several reasons that can be offered for this sample shrinkage, migration out of the area was by far the most frequently encountered. This problem was anticipated given the heavy concentration of military personnel who reside in the area.

Of the 7,229 households which we were able to contact, properly completed questionnaires were returned by 46.1 per cent ($N = 3,334$).¹⁴ A comparison of the social and demographic characteristics of our sample with the statistical information provided in the 1970 census report on this SMSA shows that those who were older, white, well-educated, higher in occupational prestige and relatively affluent were more likely to return completed questionnaires than were others in the population. This selectivity in our returns is at least partially balanced by the fact that these variables are held constant in the analysis which follows.

Information on public attitudes toward a variety of offenses was obtained in the following manner. First, the respondents were asked to consider what they felt would be "a fair sentence" for each of seventeen offenses. The only additional information they were given was that the hypothetical individual was (1) guilty, (2) an adult and (3) a first offender. Possible sentencing alternatives that were provided included "no punishment or a minor fine," "probation," "less than a year in jail," an exact sentence in years, "life imprisonment," and "the death penalty." No sentence, or a minor fine and probation were assigned a numeric value of zero years; less than a year in jail was defined as .5 years; and sentences of more than forty-five years, life imprisonment, and death were assigned a value of forty-five years. Exact sentences of between one year and forty-five years were not altered. The net effect of this treatment of the data was to deflate artificially the estimates of sentence lengths, particularly in the case of serious crimes against person for which life imprisonment or the death penalty were frequently favored. Because our analysis focuses on relative sentence lengths rather than their absolute value, this is not a significant limitation of the study.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

We were able to obtain a considerable volume of data on the social background characteristics of those

¹⁴Given the frequency of 10 to 30 per cent return rates that are noted in the literature (*cf.* H. BOYD & R. WESTFALL, *MARKETING RESEARCH* (3d ed. 1972); D. LUCK, H. WALES, & D. TAYLOR, *MARKETING RESEARCH* (3d ed. 1970)) and the rather lengthy questionnaire employed in the present study, this return rate appears quite acceptable.

in our sample as well as an expression of their minimum, average, and maximum sentence preferences for each of the seventeen types of offenses under consideration. Limitations of space clearly preclude the presentation of more than a portion of our findings in this brief report. The basic objective of our analysis, however, is fairly specific. Initially, we wished to identify any variations in perception of the relative seriousness of the set of offenses as we moved from one cohort of our sample to another. The consensus model implies that such rank-orderings will be quite similar; the conflict model posits considerable variation. Further, it is important that we determine the extent of variation in the severity of sanctions which various social categories view as appropriate. Again, the consensus model implies agreement on levels of sanctions that are viewed as proper; the conflict model implies considerable variance in sentence lengths, particularly variance of a class-based nature.

In order to examine potential differences in the rank-ordering of offenses, we ranked the perceived seriousness of seventeen types of behavior from most to least serious on the basis of the mean sentence length assigned to each type of behavior by each cohort in the sample. The race and sex dichotomies are self-explanatory; the age, education, income, and occupational prestige variables were dichotomized at the median of their respective distributions. (The occupational prestige variable was measured by assigning weights to self-reported occupations on the basis of Hodge-Siegel-Rossi Prestige Scores.) The rankings of the seventeen offenses which we obtained are reported in Table I.

The agreement between each component of the six dichotomized social background and demographic characteristics was determined by computing Spearman's rho coefficients for each of the six pairs of ranks. This information was supplemented by computing rank-order correlations between each of the twelve orderings of the offenses and the general rankings obtained from the overall mean sentences assigned to each of the offenses by the total sample. Both sets of correlations are reported in Table I.

As can readily be seen from an examination of these coefficients, the consistency of the rankings is quite high. The lowest correlation we obtained, for example, was the .917 coefficient yielded by a comparison of the rankings of our black and white respondents. The average correlation¹⁵ was .977 for the six social background variables and .989 for the twelve comparisons involving the social background

¹⁵See J. MUELLER, K. SCHUESSLER & H. COSTNER, *STATISTICAL REASONING IN SOCIOLOGY* 267-78 (1970).

TABLE I
RANK-ORDERING OF OFFENSES BY RELEVANT SOCIAL CATEGORIES

Total Sample	Sex		Race			Age		Income			Occ. Prestige			Education		
	Male	Female	Black	White	18-44	45 & over	Below Median	Above Median	Below Median	Above Median	Below Median	Above Median	Below Median	Above Median	Below Median	Above Median
Murder	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Rape	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Scal drugs to minors	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Armed robbery	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Sentence for any use of weapons	5	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Assault & battery w/weapon	6	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Burglary	7	7	7	7	8	7	8	8	8	8	7	8	8	8	7	7
Public official asking bribe	8	8	8	8	7	8	7	7	7	7	8	7	8	7	8	8
Assault & battery	9	9	10	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
Grand larceny	10	11	12	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	11	10
Tax fraud	11	12	15	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	12	11
Possession of marijuana	12	10	9	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	10	13
Car theft	13	15	16	13	13	15	14	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	15	12
Prostitution	14	14	13	14	14	13	13	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	13	14
Gambling	15	14	14	15	15	14	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	14	15
Homosexual act w/adult	16	16	11	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16
Drunk in public	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17
Correlations within categories	.983		.917			.990		.998			.998			.973		
Correlations with total sample ranks	1.00	.983	.920	1.00	.998	.993	.996	.998	.998	1.00	.985	.998	.985	.998	.985	.998

characteristics and the total sample ranking. All thirteen rankings consistently show that crimes against person are perceived to be quite serious and that victimless crimes are viewed as relatively minor offenses.

These findings raise serious questions with regard to the empirical adequacy of the conflict model. Were the conflict interpretation valid, we would expect pronounced differences in the rankings assigned to these offenses, particularly when the seriousness rankings of those from lower socioeconomic strata are compared with those from higher socioeconomic brackets. This expectation finds virtually no support. This is illustrated by the remarkable similarity in offense rankings for those from above and below the median sample income ($r = .998$), the median occupational prestige level ($r = .998$), and the median educational level ($r = .973$). On the other hand, the consensus model, although presently under considerable attack from a variety of quarters, predicts exactly what we found in our analysis: a very high level of agreement on the relative seriousness of a variety of crimes against person, crimes against property, and victimless crimes. Thus, we conclude that the consensus model provides more accurate predictions of perceptions of the seriousness of this set of offenses than does the conflict model.

Similarities in how the several cohorts in our sample perceive the seriousness of the seventeen offenses is certainly not conclusive evidence. While the high correlations noted between the several sets of rankings may be a necessary condition for agreement on the exact magnitude of the sanctions which these social groupings feel are appropriate, it is certainly not sufficient to substantiate our tentative conclusion. Indeed, it is equally important to compare the actual sentence lengths that were assigned to each of the offenses by the twelve subgroups being considered. The mean average sentence lengths for each category of the sample as well as the overall means for the total sample are reported in Table II.

As might be anticipated from the high level of agreement between the rankings reported in Table I, there is a very high degree of agreement on the lengths of sentences assigned to the set of possible offenses. Despite the findings discussed earlier, this consistency is surprising for at least two reasons. First, evaluated purely in terms of the relative plausibility of the consensus and conflict models, we find the basic perspective provided by the conflict orientation quite appealing. This led us to expect a far greater number of significant differences in sentencing patterns between the several sub-groups

in our sample than those which are reported in Tables I and II. Second, because few citizens have access to or knowledge of either judicial sentencing patterns or the statutory provisions of criminal law, we would certainly not have anticipated the uniform pattern of sentence lengths which are obvious when one examines any of the seventeen row entries in Table II. Nevertheless, of 102 separate comparisons which were made on average sentence lengths (seventeen offenses X six dichotomized social and demographic characteristics), only twenty-eight reveal mean differences which are significant at a level equal to or less than the .05 significance level, and in only one case (the variation in sentences assigned for murder by our black and white respondents) is the actual magnitude of the difference greater than five years.¹⁶ Indeed, when the absolute values of the sentence lengths of the twenty-eight significantly different pairs are averaged, the mean variation is only 2.15 years.

Apart from the fact that the number and magnitude of differences in average sentences is far less than what might be implied by some advocates of the conflict perspective, it is instructive to note which variables yield a substantial proportion of the differences that were observed, and the pattern into which these discrepancies fall. The several social and demographic characteristics, for example, do not appear to be equally important. When evaluated in terms of the number of offenses for which mean sentence lengths were significantly different, educational attainment was the most discriminating variable (accounting for nine of the twenty-eight statistically different sentence assignments) followed by race (seven of the differences), sex (four differences), income and occupational prestige (three differences on each variable), and age (two differences). Where there were significant differences, the data presented in Table II show that those with greater than median levels of educational attainment, occupational prestige, and income, and males were consistently less severe in their choice of an appropriate sentence than were those with whom they were compared. Older respondents were typically more harsh in their sentencing than were their younger counterparts. Finally, we observed only one group in which the

¹⁶We are well aware of the statistical problems described by Selvin, *A Critique of Tests of Significance in Survey Research*, 22 AM. SOCIOLOGICAL REV. 519 (1957) and others with regard to computing such a large number of "t" tests, but this difficulty implies that there may be an even smaller number of true significant differences than what we have noted. Were this to be the case, the relative degree of support would be even stronger.

TABLE II
 MEAN SENTENCE LENGTHS (IN YEARS) BY RELEVANT SOCIAL CATEGORIES

	Total Sample	Sex		Race		Age		Income			Occ. Prestige			Education		
		Male	Female	Black	White	18-44	45 & over	Below	Median	Above	Below	Median	Above	Below	Median	Above
Murder	37.62	37.69	37.14	30.24***	38.18	37.90	37.36	37.67	37.14	37.98	37.69	38.17	37.20			
Rape	25.51	25.64	25.06	21.54*	25.92	25.24	26.17	26.05	25.12	26.68**	24.03	27.72***	23.76			
Sell drugs to minors	16.31	16.41	15.73	13.47*	16.48	15.70	17.23	15.98	16.42	17.53**	15.10	17.78**	15.05			
Armed robbery	13.52	13.48	13.49	14.36	13.38	13.05	14.15	13.44	13.42	13.34	13.71	14.44*	12.62			
Sentence for any use of weapons	11.67	11.63	12.02	12.38	11.60	11.15	12.56	12.05	11.43	11.76	11.13	12.67*	10.95			
Assault & battery	11.00	10.64*	12.90	9.34	11.04	10.80	11.36	11.48	10.94	10.69	10.63	11.86	10.29			
Burglary	5.91	5.85	6.22	8.94*	5.64	5.46*	6.62	5.97	5.71	5.98	5.75	6.37	5.47			
Public official taking bribe	5.70	5.70	5.78	6.27	5.30	5.70	5.78	6.01	5.41	6.00	5.16	6.27*	5.30			
Assault & battery	3.44	3.20*	4.56	4.54	3.40	3.41	3.51	3.82	3.14	3.20	3.58	3.31	3.55			
Grand larceny	3.02	2.93	3.57	3.61	3.00	3.22	2.77	3.17	2.83	2.92	3.19	2.91	3.10			
Tax fraud	2.51	2.43	3.01	2.71	2.45	2.48	2.58	2.74	2.28	2.73	2.29	2.74	2.35			
Possession of marijuana	2.18	1.92**	3.68	5.75***	1.91	2.08	2.21	2.48	1.91	2.43*	1.69	3.03***	1.49			
Car theft	1.60	1.59	1.63	2.16	1.57	1.79*	1.33	1.78	1.45	1.74	1.51	1.64	1.56			
Prostitution	1.57	1.36**	2.84	3.29	1.41	1.40	1.84	2.07**	1.11	1.38	1.49	2.26***	1.00			
Gambling	1.22	1.11	1.66	3.05*	1.09	1.01	1.49	1.57*	0.88	1.09	1.16	1.79***	0.75			
Homosexual act w/adult	0.93	0.85	1.47	3.63**	0.72	0.71	1.22	1.27*	0.62	1.09	0.63	1.59***	0.38			
Drunk in public	0.18	0.16	0.24	0.82	0.13	0.17	0.17	0.22	0.15	0.15	0.19	0.18	0.17			

* indicates mean differences significant at the .05 significance level.

** indicates mean differences significant at the .01 significance level.

*** indicates mean differences significant at the .001 significance level.

observed differences were in inconsistent directions; the black respondents were more lenient in the sentences they assigned for homicide, rape, and the sale of drugs to minors, but they were more severe in the sanctions they felt appropriate for possession of marijuana, gambling, and prostitution.

DISCUSSION

Particularly in recent years, many criminologists have argued that the heavy emphasis on a consensually validated normative system in some criminological theory is inapplicable to the situation that is typically confronted in contemporary urbanized and industrialized nations. Instead, they have convincingly argued for more dynamic and processual models that focus on conflict, competition, and the exercise of power. Unfortunately, advocates of both consensus and conflict theory have often fallen victim to the temptation to support their positions with arguments based more on speculation and isolated examples than on systematic empirical research. Indeed, their respective assumptions of pervasive consensus and conflict are far too frequently treated as self-evident facts that require no empirical verification.

Our analysis has focused attention on a variety of types of offenses. Some, like homicide, or rape, are obviously examples of criminal acts that do not adequately reflect the central concerns of many conflict theorists; but the same cannot be said of many other types of behavior, such as public officials taking a bribe, tax fraud, and the several victimless offenses. Our findings, regardless of the type or category of offense examined, are not supportive of any prediction that suggests variations between different categories of the population in either perceptions of relative seriousness of these offenses, or the level of sanctions that are viewed as appropriate.

Instead, we find evidence of a remarkable level of consensus, even after separating the sample on the basis of their sex, race, age, income, occupational prestige, and educational attainment.

As with any study in which highly polarized positions are directly compared with one another, we fully expect our findings to be subjected to unusually careful scrutiny and, quite probably, more than a few direct attacks. We will only attempt to comment on the specious logic inherent in the most obvious criticism. Specifically, there are many who feel that cross-sectional survey data provide a wholly inappropriate means of testing the implications of a conflict model which, particularly in its more Marxian forms, emphasizes the historical evolution of a form of political domination that now includes the political socialization of people at all levels of the stratification system. Among other things, scholars of this persuasion argue that we have demonstrated the validity of the conflict perspective rather than identifying a basic weakness. The premise would be that we have only measured the consequences of political socialization, or a "false consciousness."

We can respond to this quite simply. First, how a system emerges and how it is perpetuated do not necessarily call for a reliance on comparable explanatory models or variables. Whatever the "causes" may be for the consensus that we have identified, it clearly exists; and because it does, interpretations for the manner in which it may be transmitted from one generation to another may call for different conceptual tools than those required to account for its emergence. Second, the notion of a "false consciousness" is, practically speaking, tautological: had we detected class-based differences, they would have been accepted as support for a conflict interpretation; the fact that no such differences were found cannot, therefore, also be interpreted as supportive.