

Examinable Skills

AO1: Knowledge and Understanding (43% of all marks available)

- Knowledge of the subject or topic must be **accurate**
- Must have sufficient **depth** of knowledge
- To UNDERSTAND the material, you must be able to **select the right knowledge** to answer the question
- Must use **SOCIOLOGICAL** knowledge rather than 'common sense' knowledge

Can you say you know and understand the following?

<u>AO1</u>	<u>Yes I know what they mean</u>	<u>No I don't and therefore need to revise what they mean</u>
(a) Sociological concepts and theory: You must know what the terms mean		
• Social order		
• Social change		
• Conflict		
• Consensus		
• Social structure		
• Social action		
• The role of values		
• Relationship between sociology and social policy		
(b) Methods of sociological enquiry. You must understand the range of methods and sources of data used in studying crime and deviance		
• Primary and secondary data		
• Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data		
• Factors influencing the design and conduct of sociological research		
• Practical, theoretical and ethical issues in sociological research		
(c) Themes: you must understand how these themes apply to each topic and the global context		
• Socialisation		
• Culture		
• Identity		
• Social differentiation (eg age, ethnicity, gender)		
• Power and stratification (eg Social class)		

AO2: Application, interpretation, analysis and evaluation (57% of all marks)

AO2: can I do the following?	<u>Yes I can</u>	<u>No I can not and therefore need to do revision notes on this</u>
Identify the relevant theories that could be applied to each crime and deviance topic		
Select and apply a range of sociological concepts/sociological language		
Select and apply empirical studies to the question asked		
Identify contemporary examples and policies that link to the topic		
Analyse and evaluate the methods used in studies to collect and record evidence		
State the strengths of a sociological theory		
State the weaknesses of a sociological theory		
Organise my answer so that it reads structured and focused		

Trigger evaluation sentence starters

However, another perspective argues.....

Other evidence from research suggests....

A different argument put forward is....

On the other hand.....

A criticism of this is ...

In support of this, __ argues that ...

The Examination Paper

- 2 hour
- Carries a total of 90 marks
- This unit is worth 60% of the total marks available for A2 Sociology (30% of total marks for A level)

Question structure

Question 1 and 2: You are advised to spend approximately **45 minutes** on these questions.

Questions 3, 4 and 5: You are advised to spend approximately **30 minutes** on this question

Question 5 or 6: You are advised to spend approximately **45 minutes** on this question.

YOU WILL BE ANSWERING QUESTIONS 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. DO NOT ANSWER ANY OF THE QUESTIONS ON STRATIFICATION AND DIFFERENTIATION!!!!!!

There will be two items on the paper, you will need to relate to the items and refer to them in essays.

DO NOT START WRITING UNTIL YOU HAVE READ THE ITEMS.

Underline key words and write trigger words around the item to help you.

Questions 1 and 2: Only Crime and Deviance (Spend 45 mins doing)

Question (1)

- 12 marks
- Mini essay type question (looking at a page of writing)
- Usually AO1 based as the question normally says 'examine'

Question (2)

- 21 marks
- More of a detailed essay question.
- The question is AO2 based as it is asking you to 'assess' something.

Questions 3, 4 and 5: Crime and Deviance with Methods (Spend 30 mins on)

Question (3)

- 3 marks
- Normally asks for you to identify a strength/problem of a certain method and explain it.

Question (4)

- 6 marks
- Asks for two problems/strengths and an explanation of it.

Question 3 and 4 could be given as ONE question. If this is the case it will be out of 9, but it will still ask you to talk and explain about the strengths/problems of a method.

Question (4 or 5)

- 15 marks
- Item used in which you must refer to in your essay.
- Asking you to assess something so more marks for AO2
- This question requires you to **apply** your knowledge and understanding of sociological research methods to the study of this **particular** issue in **crime and deviance**.

Question 5 or 6: Theory and Methods: Spend 45 mins on

- 33 marks
- 15 marks for AO1
- 9 marks for AO2 (a) and 9 marks for AO2 (b) = 18 in total
- Must have an introduction, conclusion and follow the PERCL system.
- No need to talk about crime and deviance this is theory and methods ONLY.

Example Exam Questions

Question 1: 12 marks: Crime and Deviance ONLY

- Examine the effectiveness of situational crime prevention as a means of reducing the impact of crime on society.
- Examine the Marxist perspective on crime and deviance.
- Examine the relationship between Globalisation and State Crimes.
- Examine the relationship between age and patterns of crime.
- Examine the Ecological perspective on crime and deviance.
- Examine the relationship between gender and patterns of crime.

Question 2: 21 marks: Crime and Deviance ONLY

- Assess the usefulness of conflict theories for an understanding of crime and deviance in contemporary society.
- "Since the mid-1950s, the number of recorded crimes in England and Wales has risen from about half a million a year to around 5 million today." Assess sociological explanations of the increase in recorded crime in the last 50 years.
- 'Crime and deviance are a result of a strain between the goal of 'money success' and the socially approved means of achieving it.' Assess this view.
- Assess sociological explanations of social class and age differences in crime rates.
- Assess the view that delinquent subcultures are the main cause of crime.
- Assess sociological explanations of gender differences in patterns of offending, victimisation and punishment.
- Assess sociological explanations of ethnic differences in patterns of offending, victimisation and punishment.
- Assess the different approaches to the study of suicide.
- Assess the effectiveness of prisons as a form of punishment.
- Assess the view that we are now living in a big brother society.

Question 3: 3 marks Crime and Deviance and Methods

- Identify and briefly explain **one** problem of using victim surveys to study victims of crime.
- Identify and briefly explain **one** problem of using self report studies to study offending rates.
- Identify and briefly explain **one** problem of using official statistics to study patterns of offending.

Question 4: 6 marks: Crime and Deviance and Methods

- Identify and briefly explain **two** problems of studying crime by interviewing serving prisoners about their behaviour.
- Identify and briefly explain **two** problems of studying crime by observing deviant subcultures.
- Identify and briefly explain **two** strengths of studying domestic and sexual violence by conducting informal interviews.

Question 3 (3 and 4 combined): Crime and Deviance and Methods

- Identify and briefly explain **three** problems of studying crime using participant observation.
- Identify and briefly explain **three** problems of studying crime using structured interviews.
- Identify and briefly explain **three** strengths of studying crime by using victimisation studies.

Question 4 or 5: 15 marks: Crime and Deviance and Methods

- Assess the strengths and limitations of covert participant observation as a means of investigating 'edge work as a motivation for crime'
- Assess the strengths and limitations of using official statistics to study crime rates.
- Assess the strengths and limitations of using unstructured interviews to study domestic violence.
- Assess the strengths and limitations of questionnaires as a means of investigating who commits crime.
- Assess the strengths and limitations of using interviews **or** official statistics when investigating state and war crimes.

Question 5 or 6: Theory and Methods ONLY

- 'If we can agree on what we mean by 'science', then we can begin to assess the extent to which sociology is scientific.' To what extent do sociological arguments and evidence support this view?
- Assess the usefulness of conflict theories in understanding society today.
- Evaluate different views of the relationship between sociology and social policy.
- Assess the view that sociological research cannot and should not be objective and value-free.
- Evaluate the relationship between the theoretical perspective of the sociologist and their choice of research methods.
- Assess the contribution of Functionalist theories and research to our understanding of society today.
- Assess the contribution of feminist perspectives and research to our understanding of society.
- Evaluate how the concepts of modernity and post-modernity have influenced sociologists' understanding of society today.

Methods Key Words

Validity	
Reliability	
Generalisation	
Ethical issues	
Practical issues	
Theoretical issues	
Representative	
Positivism	
Interpretivism	
Bias	
Objectivity	
Hawthorne Effect	
Sampling methods	
Operationalising concepts	
Social Surveys	
Questionnaires	
Interviews	
Experiments	
Observation	
Overt	
Covert	
Secondary data	
Triangulation	
Content Analysis	
Official Statistics	
Quantitative Data	

Qualitative Data	
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Perspectives	Strengths	Weaknesses
Functionalism		
Marxism		
Neo Marxism		
Post Modern		
Social Constructionism		
Subcultural		
Ecological		

Left Realism		
Right Realism		
Positivism		
Interpretivism		
Structure		
Social Action/Agency		
Sociology is a Science		
Sociology is not a science		

Remember:

You have to revise everything, because you have no choice on the exam paper.

The specification

Crime and Deviance

- Different theories of crime, deviance, social order and social control.
- The social distribution of crime and deviance by age, ethnicity, gender, locality and social class, including recent patterns and trends in crime.
- Globalisation and crime in contemporary society; the mass media and crime; green crime; human rights and state crimes.
- Crime control, prevention and punishment, victims, and the role of the criminal justice system and other agencies.
- The sociological study of suicide and its theoretical and methodological implications.
- The connections between sociological theory and methods and the study of crime and deviance

Theory and Methods

Candidates should examine the following areas, which are also studied at AS Level:

- Quantitative and qualitative methods of research; their strengths and limitations; research design.
- Sources of data, including questionnaires, interviews, observation (participant and nonparticipant), experiments, documents, and official statistics; the strengths and limitations of these sources.
- The distinction between primary and secondary data, and between quantitative and qualitative data.
- The relationship between positivism, interpretivism and sociological methods; the nature of 'social facts'.
- The theoretical, practical and ethical considerations influencing choice of topic, choice of method(s) and the conduct of research.

A2 candidates should also:

- Demonstrate a wider range and greater depth of knowledge and understanding than at AS Level.

- Study the nature of sociological thought and methods of sociological enquiry in greater range and depth, and demonstrate more highly developed skills of application, analysis, interpretation and evaluation than at AS Level.

In addition, A2 candidates should examine:

- Consensus, conflict, structural and social action theories.
- The concepts of modernity and post-modernity in relation to sociological theory.
- The nature of science and the extent to which sociology can be regarded as scientific.
- The relationship between theory and methods.
- Debates about subjectivity, objectivity and value freedom.
- The relationship between sociology and social policy.

Specification Paper

01. Explain the effectiveness of situational crime prevention as a means of reducing the impact of crime on society (**Item A**).

(12 marks)

Read **Item A** below and answer the question that follows.

Item A

Situational crime prevention (SCP) involves intervening in the immediate situations in which crime takes place to reduce its likelihood or seriousness. It often involves 'designing crime out' of products, services and environments, for example by use of anti-climb paint, CCTV and security guards in shops, better street lighting, metal detectors at airports, neighbourhood watch schemes and the re-designing of housing estates.

SCP does not rely on intervening in children's socialisation to prevent them becoming criminals later, or on the threat of punishments to deter current criminals. Instead, it makes specific changes aimed at influencing the decision or ability of offenders to commit particular crimes in particular situations. Like rational choice theory, SCP sees criminals as acting rationally. By making certain crimes less rewarding, more risky or needing greater effort, SCP makes criminals less likely to choose to commit them.

02. Assess the usefulness of conflict theories for an understanding of crime and deviance in contemporary society.

(21 marks)

Methods in Context

03. Explain three disadvantages of using interviews to explain corporate crime. (9 marks)

Read **Item B** below and answer the question that follows.

Item B

Some sociologists argue that much youthful criminal activity, such as vandalism, shoplifting, street crime and excessive drug use, can best be understood as motivated by thrill-seeking through risk-taking or 'edge work'. For example, as Katz (1988) argues, shoplifting can be seen as a thrilling and gratifying adventure, whose 'buzz' can be more important than any need by the shoplifter for the item stolen. For some thieves, the stolen item has more of a symbolic than a material value, as a trophy of the 'game'.

Members of educated and privileged groups may also indulge in thrill-seeking crimes, such as computer hacking or illicit stock market manipulation. However, the 'thrills and spills' of edge work as a motivation for crime tend to appeal particularly to young men from marginalised social groups as a way of expressing their masculinity.

04. Using material from **Item B** and elsewhere, assess the strengths and limitations of covert participant observation as a means of investigating 'edge work as a motivation for crime' (**Item B**, line 10). (15 marks)

*This question requires you to **apply** your knowledge and understanding of sociological research methods to the study of this **particular** issue in **crime and deviance**.*

Theory and Methods

05 'Sociology cannot and should not be a science.'

To what extent do sociological arguments and evidence support this view? (33 marks)

Different theories of crime, deviance, social order and social control

1. Functionalist theories of crime and deviance

A. Emile Durkheim

1. Crime & deviance is functional

Durkheim believed that a certain amount of crime and deviance could be seen as positive for society.

- Necessary to generate social change - innovation only comes about if old ideas are challenged.
- Helps to clarify the boundaries of acceptable behaviour following social reactions to deviance.
- Creates social integration as it bonds society together against criminals.

2. Crime & deviance is dysfunctional

Durkheim believed that crime and deviance also acts as a threat to society. This is because the norms and values that 'unite' society are being challenged, thus threatening consensus, social order and stability.

3. Cause of crime & deviance

Durkheim believed that crime & deviance occurred as a result of **anomie** (normlessness).

Durkheim believed that this could occur during periods of rapid social change (e.g. revolutions) when people become unsure of what societies norms and values are.

4. Social order & social control

Durkheim believed that in modern societies there was agreement or consensus over society's norms and values, which resulted in **social order** and stable societies. Durkheim believed this occurred because society's institutions successfully implemented **social control**. For Durkheim social control is positive (unlike interactionist and Marxist views on social control) as it creates social cohesion. Durkheim believes social control is achieved by various agencies of social control socialising individuals into socially agreed norms and values (regulation) and by integrating individuals into social groups. For example, schools bond individuals together into school communities and classes. They instil core norms & values through citizenship programmes. Religion binds people together during times of happiness e.g. weddings and sadness e.g. funerals. Religion regulates behaviour by setting down certain moral standards.

Parsons argued that sickness can be seen as deviant and has the potential for de-stabilising society. Parsons therefore sees the medical profession as performing an important social control function by restricting access to the 'sick role'. In this way illegitimate illness (deviant illness) is minimised and social order and stability is maintained.

Strength

- Durkheim has served to generate a great deal of subsequent research and influence other sociological theories on crime and deviance. For example, **control theories** of crime and deviance. This suggests that Durkheim's ideas have made a major contribution to the study of crime and deviance.

Weaknesses

- It is not clear at what point the "right" amount of crime (necessary and beneficial) becomes "too much" (creating disorder and instability).
- The very idea that crime can be beneficial is questionable; it is hardly likely to seem that way to the victim!
- Perhaps this reflects a more general problem in the functionalist approach, the tendency to assume that if something exists it must serve some purpose (have a function).
- This approach also does not explain why some people commit crimes and others do not, or why they commit particular offences.
- Finally, functionalism assumes that norms and laws reflect the wishes of the population; it does not consider the possibility that a powerful group is imposing its values on the rest of society.

B. Robert Merton and strain theory

Merton maintained that American/British society socialises individuals to:

- meet certain shared **goals** - the 'American Dream'
- to follow approved **means** or ways to achieve the goals e.g. hard work and effort.

Merton argued that capitalist societies suffer from **anomie** - a strain/conflict between the goals set by society and the legitimate (law abiding) means of achieving them. Merton claimed that this strain was a product of an unequal social class structure that blocked many people's attempts to reach the goals set by society through the legitimate opportunity structure.

Merton identified five different responses to anomie. Perhaps the most significant though was **innovation**. He used this concept to explain material crimes amongst the working class. Merton argued that some members of the working class reject the approved means (e.g. working hard in a job) and innovate and turn to illegal means to obtain the cultural goals they still desire e.g. a nice car.

Weaknesses

- Merton then begins to offer a functionalist account of both the **nature and extent** of deviance.
- However, as with Durkheim, **anomie** (though defined differently) is a difficult term to operationalise **how can it be measured?**
- If it is measured by the amount of crime, a circular argument is created. Merton does not explain where the goals and means have come from or whose purpose they serve. To use Laurie Taylor's analogy, it as if everyone is putting money in a giant fruit machine, but no one asks who puts it there or who pockets the profits.
- Why do some people choose the response they do?
- Is deviance just an individual choice?
- Not all crime is for economic gain - how can this form of crime be explained using Merton's framework?

FUNCTIONALISM - AN OVERVIEW

The Marxist critique

- For Marxists, the appearance of consensus is an illusion; it conceals the reality of one class imposing its will on the rest of society.
- Values are manipulated by the ruling class; it is the ruling class which decides which acts should be criminalised and how the laws should be enforced.
- Laws reflect not a shared value system, but the imposition by one class of its ideology. Through socialisation, the majority adopt values which are really against their interests. If, in spite of this, the power of the ruling class is challenged, by, say strikes and protests, the ruling class can use the law to criminalise those posing the threat, and media reporting will be manipulated to give the impression that the ruling class's interests are those of the whole nation.

Other criticisms

- Subcultural approaches have highlighted the group nature of some criminal and deviant behaviour. Functionalist analysis tends to see crime/deviance as an individual-society relationship.
- Interactionists have argued that this approach ignores the processes of negotiation that take place in the creation of deviance and crime.

However...

- Functionalism represents a sociological approach to crime distinct from the biological and psychological approaches which preceded it.
- It is correct to assume that to some extent, for societies to survive there must be some agreement on values, but functionalists tend to focus on this and fail to consider the power of different groups and the existence of contrasting value systems.

2. Sub-cultural theories of crime and deviance

A. Functionalist sub-cultural theories

1. Albert Cohen

1. The structural origins of crime & deviance

Cohen accepts much of what Merton had to say on the structural origins of crime and deviance.

- Working class youths internalise mainstream norms and values through socialisation.
- Working class youths face blocked opportunities (e.g. at school) because of their position in the social class structure.
- Working class youths as a whole (groups not just individuals) suffer from **status frustration** (realise that they can not achieve in middle class terms).
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2. The cultural causes of crime & deviance

Cohen extends Merton's theory by incorporating a strong cultural element in his explanation.

- Some working class youths make a decision to completely reject mainstream norms and values. This is because of the status frustration they feel.
- Mainstream norms and values are replaced with alternative delinquent subcultural norms and values. For Cohen a high value is placed on non-financial negativistic delinquent acts. For example, joy riding, arson and vandalism.
- The delinquent subculture provides an alternative means of gaining status and striking back at an unequal social system that has branded them as 'failures'.

2. Cloward and Ohlin

1. The structural origins of crime & deviance

Cloward and Ohlin accept Cohen's views on the structural origins of crime and deviance.

2. The cultural causes of crime & deviance

However, Cloward and Ohlin criticise Cohen's cultural explanation of crime. In particular, his failure to explain the variety of subcultural forms that emerge out of the social structure.

- Cloward and Ohlin maintain that the form working class delinquent subcultures take depends on access to **illegitimate opportunity structures**, i.e. access to existing adult criminal networks who will take on younger 'apprentice' criminals.
- **Criminal subcultures** emerge when working class youths have access to adult criminal networks. The focus of their deviance is on material crimes such as burglary.

- **Conflict subcultures** emerge when working class youths lack access to adult criminal networks but live in an environment which values defence of territory and violence. The focus of their deviance is gang related 'warfare'.
- **Retreatist subcultures** emerge when working class youths are denied access to criminal or conflict subcultures. The focus of their deviance is on alcohol and drug abuse.

3. Walter Miller and 'focal concerns'

1. The structural origins of crime & deviance

- Miller rejects Cohen and Cloward and Ohlin's views on the structural origins of crime and deviance. He criticises the idea that delinquent subcultures emerge as a reaction to anomie. This is because he believes that lower class youths never accept mainstream norms and values in the first place. He therefore offers an alternative cultural view on crime and deviance.

2. The cultural causes of crime & deviance

- Lower class youths are socialised into a set of lower class values or **focal concerns**. These values include toughness, smartness, excitement and fatalism.
- Some lower class youths over conform to lower class values because of a concern to gain status within their peer group. In this situation crime and deviance follow. Delinquency might include assault.

Evaluation of functionalist sub-cultural theory

Strengths

- Functionalist subcultural theories have served to generate a great deal of subsequent research, for example much research has been carried out into gangs in both the UK and USA. This suggests that subcultural ideas have made a major contribution to the study of crime and deviance.
- Functionalist subcultural theories have gained empirical support. For example, **Willis** (1979) lends some support to Miller. He claims that deviant anti-school cultures are the product of working class youths living up to the working class 'shop floor' culture they have been socialised into. This suggests there is some validity in subcultural ideas.
- Cohen and Cloward & Ohlin have gained recent theoretical support from **postmodernists**. **Morrison** (1995) argues that the underclass are faced with blocked opportunities because of their position in the social structure. He suggests this leads to group feelings of resentment and revenge, and crime and deviance invariably follow. This suggests that the ideas have wider theoretical appeal.

Weaknesses

- Functionalist subcultural theories too readily accept official statistics on crime. They thus fail to explain adult white collar crime and neglect female subcultural delinquency. This suggests that the subcultural response to official statistics is not adequate.

- Functionalist subcultural theories have been questioned on empirical grounds. **Empey** (1982) is critical of Cloward and Ohlin. He argues that delinquent boys tend to cross between the distinct subcultural divides which Cloward and Ohlin identify. This suggests that the validity of subcultural ideas have to be questioned.
- Functionalist subcultural theories have been criticised on a theoretical level. The **phenomenologist Matza** (1964) criticises subcultural theories for over-estimating juvenile delinquency. They do this by assuming that membership of delinquent subcultures is permanent. He argues that individuals drift in and out of delinquency, employing techniques of neutralisation (e.g. they deserved it) as they do so, and therefore crime and deviance is temporary and episodic (every now and again). This suggests that subcultural theories only offer a partial view on crime and deviance.

B. Marxist sub-cultural explanations

- The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies saw youth subcultures within a wider structural context - they were responses to the problems of growing up working class in a capitalist society.
- The subcultures cannot actually change the circumstances the youths find themselves in, they can only provide what Brake calls a "magical" solution.
- The style and content of the subculture - the music, clothes, slang etc. - are seen as important, and differing between groups because each group is responding to a different situation.
- These styles denote resistance to the hegemony of capitalism, and can be "read" by sociologists, as in Phil Cohen's study of skinheads.

Criticisms

- Stanley Cohen, however, argues that this decoding and interpreting of subcultures is flawed by its explicit political intent; it is designed to prove that working class youth subcultures are an aspect of class conflict. The claim to have a special insight into what the style means is dubious, especially if the interpretation is not recognised by members of the subculture; the interpretations probably say more about the sociologists than the subculture.
- This "resistance through rituals" tradition was focused very much on working class boys who joined highly visible subcultures. The majority of young people, who did not join subcultures, attracted little attention. The middle class tended to be ignored, although Jock Young described the hedonism of Notting Hill hippies in '*The Drugtakers*'.
- Feminists criticised the concentration on males, but also used the insights of this approach to study girls, as in McRobbie's work on "bedroom culture" (which offers reasons for the absence of girls from street culture).

C. Left realist sub-cultural theories

- Lea and Young's New Left Realism, applied the concept of subculture to ethnic minorities in particular.
- Ethnic minority subcultures such as Rastafarianism had been studied earlier in the "resistance through rituals" tradition.
- Lea and Young argued that young blacks had values distinct from their parents, based on their aspirations within British society. The barriers to achieving these aspirations leads many young blacks into petty crime. Asian cultures, on the other hand, were seen as providing clear alternatives to mainstream culture and alternative sources of status and reward, leading to lower crime rates.

Criticisms

- The importance of the style of subcultures has been called into question by postmodernist ideas which claim that there is no meaning to be decoded. Redhead, in his study of rave culture, found no underlying meanings of the kind Marxists had claimed for earlier subcultures.

D. New Right sub-cultural theories

- This approach argues that there is an underclass in modern industrial society that has its' origin in a rejection of mainstream norms and values. Welfare systems encourage this subculture which is characterised by single parents, an unwillingness to work and high levels of crime.
- Murray claims that the underclass is responsible for a great deal of recorded crime.
- The only way to change this and to reduce crime is to make criminal activity so 'expensive' for the potential criminal in terms of loss of liberty, financial cost etc. as to deter them. Removal of benefits would also pressurise people into work.

Criticisms

- Taylor has argued that the rise of an underclass is not the result of the growth of a rejectionist subculture, but the product of changes in the economic structure in post-modern societies. The collapse of older industries and the communities they once supported and the decline in demand for unskilled labour have led to a rise in crime. This is nothing to do with norms and values.

E. Overall evaluation of sub-cultural theories

- However it can be argued that the notion of subculture depends on the existence of a dominant culture, and in a fragmented postmodern world it becomes harder to claim one exists. If subcultures have become no more than meaningless fashions, then the concept of subculture, which has proved so flexible in its use by a range of sociologists from different perspectives, may have outlived its usefulness.
- Matza criticises functionalist and subcultural theories as being too deterministic. He rejects the view that deviance and crime result from the direct and unavoidable impact of social forces on groups and individuals.
- Matza points out that most 'criminals' and 'deviants' do in fact conform most of the time to mainstream norms and values. They are not as 'different' to non-criminals as early sociological theories seemed to make out. A lot of crime is casual.
- Matza argues that individuals and groups often neutralise the mainstream norms that influence behaviour. This can be done through processes of denial - of responsibility, effect etc.

Questions that could be asked on this

Short essay questions

Item A

'Strain' theory, first developed by Merton (1938), argues that rule-breaking is the result of a strain between society's culturally approved goals and the legitimate means of achieving them. Deviance occurs if society fails to provide its members with legitimate ways of achieving the goals it sets them, or if it places more emphasis on achieving these goals by any means necessary, rather than 'playing by the rules'.

For example, Merton argued, American society emphasises that its members should strive for the goal of 'money success'. However, the working class in particular are often denied the chance to achieve this goal via the legitimate opportunity structure of educational and career success. Faced with cultural pressure to gain wealth, they therefore 'innovate', adopting illegitimate means such as theft. For Merton, this explains the higher crime rate found in this social class.

01. Assess the effectiveness of Merton's 'strain' theory (**Item A**). (21marks)

02. Assess the view that delinquent subcultures are the main cause of crime. (21 marks)

3. Interactionist theories of crime and deviance

A. Key assumptions

- They reject official statistics on crime, making them part of their subject of study.
- They reject structural causal explanations of crime and deviance (e.g. functionalist and realist).
- They look instead at the way crime and deviance is socially constructed.
- They favour in-depth qualitative approaches when investigating crime and deviance. For example, informal interviews, observation and personal documents.

B. Response to official crime statistics

- Interactionists reject official statistics on crime, seeing them as little more than a social construction. They maintain that they vastly underestimate the extent of crime and do not present an accurate picture of the social distribution of criminality. They point out that under-reporting, invisibility of white-collar and cybercrime, under-recording, selective law enforcement and artificial fluctuations in crime rates lead to biased statistics.

C. The nature of deviance is socially constructed

- Becker maintains that what we count as crime and deviance is based on subjective decisions made by 'moral entrepreneurs' (agents of social control). Thus he argues that deviance is simply forms of behaviour that powerful agencies of social control define or label as such. For example, doctors label overeating and lack of exercise as deviant. Psychiatrists have medicalised certain unusual behaviours as mental illnesses such as caffeine induced sleep disorder and nightmare disorder.
- For Becker the socially created (as opposed to objective) nature of crime and deviance means that it varies over time and between cultures. This can be illustrated with laws relating to prostitution. In the UK it is essentially illegal but in Amsterdam legalised brothels exist.
- **Ethnomethodologists** support the interactionist/labelling view that deviance is based on subjective decision making, and hence a social construction. They argue that 'deviance is in the eye of the beholder'. Thus what one person might see as deviant another might not. This can be illustrated with debates about 'conceptual art'. Some see the work of artists such as Tracey Emin and Webster and Noble as deviant or even sick, whereas others celebrate it as original and inspirational.

D. The extent of deviance is socially constructed

The labeling process

- Becker claims that the amount and distribution of crime and deviance in society is dependent on processes of social interaction between the deviant and powerful agencies of social control. Becker argues that whether a deviant is labelled depends on who has committed and observed the deviant act, when and where the act was committed and the negotiations that take place between the various 'social actors' (people) involved. He suggests that powerless groups are more likely to be labelled than powerful groups.
- This is supported by research evidence that shows blacks are five times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police than whites and 5 times more likely to be labelled schizophrenic than whites by psychiatrists.

The Consequences of labelling

- **Becker** also claims that the extent of deviance in society is dependent on the effects of labelling by powerful agencies of social control. He maintains that deviance can be amplified (increased) by the act of labelling itself. He argues that the labelled gain a master status e.g. mental patient, drug addict and that this status/label dominates and shapes how others see the individual. The deviant in effect becomes stigmatised. Eventually a self-fulfilling prophecy is set into motion and a career of deviance is possible.
- Becker suggests that once the deviant label is accepted, deviants may join or form deviant subcultures where their activities can be justified and supported. In this way deviance can become more frequent and often expanded into new areas.
- Lemert supports Becker's ideas on the consequences of labelling. He maintains that primary deviance which has not been labelled has few consequences for the individual concerned. However, he claims that once deviance is labelled it becomes secondary and impacts on the individual, e.g. in terms of gaining a master status and later developing a self fulfilling prophecy.

E. Mass media and deviancy amplification

One agency of social control interactionists consider when looking at societal reactions to deviance is the media. It is argued that the media amplify crime and deviance as they demonise deviants and create moral panics. Stan Cohen has shown to be the case with powerless groups such as mods and rockers, football hooligans, single parents etc.

- The deviance amplification spiral is similar to Lemert's idea of secondary deviance. In both cases, the social reaction to the deviant act leads not to successful control of the deviance, but to further deviance, which in turn leads to greater reaction and so on.

F. Labelling and criminal justice policy

- Recent studies have shown how increases on the attempt to control and punish young offenders are having the opposite effect. For example, in the USA, Triplett (2000) notes an increasing tendency to see young offenders as evil and to be less tolerant of minor deviance. The criminal justice system has re-labelled status offences such as truancy as more serious offences, resulting in much harsher sentences.
- As predicted by Lemert's secondary deviance theory this has resulted in an increase rather than a decrease in offending with levels of violence amongst the young increasing. De Haan (2000) notes a similar outcome in Holland as a result of the increasing stigmatization of young offenders.

G. Individual meanings of crime

- Phenomenologists support the interactionist view in looking at crime and deviance under the 'microscope'. Phenomenologists focus on the individual motivations behind deviance and its episodic nature. Katz (1988) locates key meanings such as the search for excitement and establishing a reputation. Matza (1964) stresses how individuals drift in and out of delinquency as they employ techniques of neutralisation (e.g. 'I was provoked').

H. Evaluation of interactionist theories

Strengths

- Interactionist theories have served to generate a great deal of subsequent research into the effects of labelling. For example, **Rist** (1970) has shown how negative teacher expectations placed on the working class leads to underachievement and anti-school subcultures. This suggests that interactionist ideas have made a major contribution to the study of crime and deviance.
- Interactionist theories have gained empirical support. **Goffman** (1968) has shown how the hospitalisation of the mentally ill leads to mortification, self-fulfilling prophecies and in some cases institutionalisation. This suggests there is some validity in the interactionist ideas.
- Interactionist views have gained theoretical support. For example from the ideas of **phenomenologists** and **ethnomethodologists** (as shown above). This suggests that the ideas have wider theoretical appeal.

Weaknesses

- Interactionist theories too readily dismiss official statistics on crime. **Realists** accept that official statistics have imperfections and are subject to bias. However, they argue that they show the basic reality of crime and can be useful for generating explanations of crime and deviance. This suggests that the interactionist response to official statistics is not adequate.

- Interactionist theories have been questioned on empirical grounds. **Hirschi (1975)** argues that it is debatable whether labelling by the criminal justice system leads to a career of deviance. He feels that other factors such as age are seen to be more important. This suggests that the validity of interactionist ideas have to be questioned.
- Interactionist theories have been criticised on a theoretical level. Whilst **Marxists** accept that labelling theory raises important questions, they argue that the theory has a weak view of power and social control. For example, the theory fails to explain **why** the nature and extent of crime and deviance is socially constructed. They also argue that interactionists fail to consider the wider structural origins of crime and deviance. This suggests that labelling theory only offers a partial view on crime and deviance.
- In contrast left realists such as **Lea and Young (1984)** attack interactionists for too readily explaining away working class/black crime as a social construction. They argue that such groups do commit more crime and there are real social reasons for it. They therefore call for a return to causal explanations of crime. They suggest that working class/black crime can be understood as a response to marginalisation, relative deprivation and subcultures. Left realists also argue that interactionist approaches side too much with the deviant and neglect the victim. Furthermore it has been suggested that interactionism lacks any practical social policy focus. Left realists put forward realistic solutions to try and reduce crime, especially in inner city areas.

<p>Questions that could be asked on this Short essay questions</p>

Item A

According to a study of anti-social behavior orders (ASBOs) by the Youth Justice Board (2006), some parents and magistrates thought they were in a 'diploma in deviance' and they believed that youths saw them as a 'badge of honour'. Many youths did not regard the threat of custody as a deterrent to breaching their order.

The study also found that the orders were disproportionately used against ethnic minorities: blacks and Asians were about two and a half times more likely than whites to be given an ASBO.

The study found that it was not uncommon for young people to openly flout the prohibitions placed on them by the order. Figures show that by 2008 two-thirds had breached their orders.

Using material from Item A and elsewhere, assess the view that crime and deviance are the product labeling processes. (21 marks)

Examiner's advice:

This question carries 9 AO1 marks(knowledge and understanding) and 12 AO2 marks (interpretation, application, analysis and evaluation).

Start with an account of labeling theory, identifying and explaining its key concepts, such as the social construction of deviance, selective enforcement, primary and secondary deviance, the self-fulfilling prophecy, master status, deviant career and the deviance amplification spiral.

Use studies to illustrate some of these concepts. Make sure you also use the Item - e.g. you could link labeling to the 'badge of honour', the ethnic patterns to police stereotyping of ethnic minorities, and the high rate of breaching of orders to secondary deviance and the self-fulfilling prophecy. You should evaluate the view, e.g. by considering other causes of crime (eg strain, subcultures, poverty) and by examining some of the criticisms of labeling theory.

4. Traditional Marxist theories of crime and deviance

Overview

- Traditional Marxism sees society as a structure in which the **economic base** (the capitalist economy) determines the shape of the **superstructure** (all the other social institutions, including the state, the law and the criminal justice system).
- Capitalist society is divided into **classes**: the ruling capitalist class (or **bourgeoisie**) who own the means of production, and the working class (or **proletariat**), whose alienated labour the bourgeoisie exploit to produce profit.
- Society is based on **conflict**: The inequality of wealth and power that underpins capitalist society and the contradictions and problems inherent within such a system explain crime and deviance (as well as the legal responses to it).
- Laws are **not** an expression of value consensus (as functionalists argue), but a reflection of ruling-class ideology (the values and beliefs of the ruling class). Laws are made by the state acting in the interests of the ruling class.
- The bourgeoisie is able to keep its power partly through its ability to use the law to criminalise working class activities.

Traditional Marxist view of crime

Based on three main elements:

1. Criminogenic Capitalism

- Crime is inevitable because capitalism by its very nature it causes crime. It is based on the exploitation of the working class and this may give rise to crime:
 - Poverty may mean that crime is the only way the working class can survive.
 - Crime may be the only way they can obtain the consumer goods they are encouraged by advertising to buy, resulting in utilitarian crimes such as theft.
 - Alienation and lack of control over their lives may lead to frustration and aggression, resulting in non-utilitarian crimes such as violence and vandalism.
 - Crime is not confined to the working class. Capitalism encourages capitalists to commit **white-collar** and **corporate crimes**.
 - **Gordon (1976)**: Crime is a rational response to the capitalist system and is found in all social classes.

2. The State and Law Making

- Law making and law enforcement only serve the interests of the capitalist class.
- **Chambliss (1975)**: laws to protect private property are the cornerstone of the capitalist economy.

- The ruling class also have the power to prevent the introduction of laws that would threaten their interests.
- **Snider (1993)**: The capitalist state is reluctant to pass laws that regulate the activities of businesses or threaten their profitability.

3. Selective Enforcement

Powerless groups such as the working class and ethnic minorities are criminalized and the police and courts tend to ignore the crimes of the powerful.

- **Reiman (2001)**: that 'street crimes' such as assault and theft are far more likely to be reported and pursued by the police than much 'white collar' crime such as fraud or 'insider trading' in the City. Thus, the more likely a crime is to be committed by higher-class people, the less likely it is to be treated as a criminal offence.
- In addition, certain groups in the population are more likely to be on the receiving end of law enforcement. As crime is regarded as most common among the working class, the young, and blacks, there is a much greater police presence among these populations than elsewhere, and the approach the police adopt towards them is also said to be more confrontational'.
- **Gordon (1976)** argues that the selective enforcement of the law helps to maintain ruling class power and reinforce ruling class ideology. It gives the impression that criminals are located mainly in the working class, This divides the working class by encouraging workers to blame the criminals in their midst for their problems, rather than capitalism.
- The law, crime and criminals also perform an **ideological function** for capitalism. Laws are occasionally passed that appear to be for the benefit of the working class rather than capitalism, such as workplace health and safety laws.
- **Pearce (1976)** argues that such laws often benefit the ruling class too. E.g. by keeping workers fit for work. By giving capitalism a 'caring' face, such laws also create false consciousness among the workers. In any case, such laws are not rigorously enforced.

Evaluation of traditional Marxist theories and explanations of crime

Strengths

- It offers a useful explanation of the relationship between crime and capitalist society.
- It shows the link between law making and enforcement and the interests of the capitalist class (by doing so it also puts into a wider structural context the insights of labelling theory regarding the selective enforcement of the law).
- It casts doubt on the validity of official statistics on crime. Official statistics are of little use if they simply reflect a policy of selective law enforcement and ruling class control.
- Marxists also offer a solution to crime. By replacing capitalist society with an egalitarian Communist society, the root cause of crime would be removed.
- It has also influenced recent approaches to the study of the crimes of the powerful.

Weaknesses

- Not all laws, however, are so clearly in ruling class interests. Many seem to benefit everyone, such as traffic laws.
- It ignores individual motivation. It is highly deterministic, rarely considering notions of individual free-will.
- It largely ignores the relationship between crime and other inequalities that may be unrelated to class, such as ethnicity and gender.
- It over-predicts the amount of crime in the working class: not all poor people commit me, despite the pressures of poverty.
- Not all capitalist societies have high crime rates.
- The criminal justice system does sometimes act against the interests of the capitalist class. For example, prosecutions for corporate crime do occur (however, Marxists argue that such occasional prosecutions perform an ideological function in making the system seem impartial).
- Left realists argue that Marxism focuses largely on the crimes of the powerful and ignores intra-class crimes (where both the criminals and victims are working class) such as burglary and 'mugging', which cause great harm to victims.

5. Neo-Marxist theories of crime and deviance

Neo-Marxists are sociologists who have been influenced by Marxism, but recognise that there are problems with traditional Marxist explanations of crime and deviance. They also seek to combine Marxism with other approaches such as labelling theory.

Taylor et al: 'The New Criminology'

- The starting point of Taylor et al's 'New Criminology' is a rejection of the traditional Marxist view that workers are driven to crime by economic necessity. Instead, they believe that crime is a voluntary act. In particular they argue that crime often has a political motive, for example, to redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor. Criminals are not passive puppets whose behaviour is shaped by the nature of capitalism. Instead they are deliberately striving to change capitalism.
- Taylor et al are trying to create what they call a 'fully social theory of deviance' which has two main sources:
 - Traditional Marxist ideas about the unequal distribution of wealth and who has the power to make and enforce the law.
 - Ideas from Interactionism and labelling theory about the meaning of the deviant act for the deviant, societal reactions to it, and the effects of the deviant label on the individual.
- In their view, a fully social theory of deviance needs to bring together six aspects:
 - The wider origins of the deviant act in the unequal distribution of wealth and power in capitalist society
 - The immediate origins of the deviant act - the particular context in which the act takes place
 - The act itself and its meaning for the individual - e.g. was it a form of rebellion against capitalism ?
 - The immediate origins of the social reaction - the reactions of those around the deviant, such as the police, family and community, to discovering the deviance.
 - The wider origins of the social reaction in the structure of capitalist society - especially the issue of who has the power to define actions as deviant and to label others, and why some acts are treated more harshly than others.
 - The effects of labelling on the deviants future actions - e.g. why does labelling lead to deviance amplification in some cases but not in others ?
- For Taylor et al, these six aspects are interrelated and need to be understood as part of a single theory.

Evaluation

- Feminist criticise Taylor et al's approach for being 'gender blind', focussing excessively on male criminality and at the expense of female criminality.
- Left realists make two related points:
 - Firstly, this approach romanticises working class criminals as 'Robin Hoods' who are fighting capitalism by re-distributing wealth from the rich to the poor. However, in reality these criminals simply prey on the poor.
 - Secondly, Taylor et al do not take such crime seriously and they ignore its effects on working class victims.

Questions that could be asked on this Short essay questions

Examine some of the ways in which Marxists explain crime. (21 marks)

Examiners Advice

You should start with the idea that Marxists see capitalism as criminogenic because it creates the conditions for crime through exploitation and competition. You need to examine both traditional Marxist and neo-Marxist approaches. The key ideas of traditional Marxists include theory of the ruling class to make and selectively enforce the law, the ideological functions of the law, the way criminalisation is used to divide working class, and the idea that capitalism creates crime in all classes but largely only convicts the working class.

You should evaluate this approach e.g. in terms of its determinism, and from this go on to consider neo-Marxism (critical criminology). Key areas to cover include the idea of crime as a political choice or act of rebellion, and the incorporation of ideas from labelling theory. To evaluate you could use left realist criticisms that it ignores the reality of crime.

6. Realist theories of crime and deviance

- Realist approaches to the study of crime emerged in the 1980s as a response to rising crime and to what Rock called a "theory bottleneck".
- Existing approaches seemed unable to generate ideas that could lead to reducing crime. Both Marxist and interactionist theories seemed to excuse criminal behaviour
- Marxists tended to see property crime as a justified attempt to redistribute wealth, Interactionists saw criminals as different from non-criminals only in that they had acquired the label "criminal".
- Realists tried to counter these tendencies by focusing on the reality of crime, its consequences for the victims and the need to do something about it.
- Two versions of realist theory have developed, right realism and left realism, reflecting different political perspectives.

A. Right Realism

- Right realist theories start from the following set of assumptions:
 1. People are naturally selfish
 2. This selfishness must be controlled by laws
 3. People weigh up the costs and benefits of actions
 4. People who choose crime are responsible for their actions
 5. Crime rises because the costs are not high enough to dissuade people
 6. Crime can only be reduced through harsher sentences
- Right realists reject economic factors such as poverty and unemployment as responsible for crime; they point to rising crime during periods of rising living standards as evidence. They look to cultural factors, such as declining morality and respect for authority.
- Murray in the USA blamed the welfare state for creating dependency and for weakening the work ethic. An underclass comprising "fatherless families", with boys growing up without suitable male role models and passing on anti-social behaviour to future generations, is seen as responsible for a lot of crime.
- An important element of the right realist view of crime comes from rational choice theory, which assumes that individuals have free will and the power of reason. Rational choice theorists such as Ron Clarke argue that the decision to commit a crime is a choice based on a rational calculation of the likely consequences. If the perceived rewards of

crime outweigh the perceived costs of crime, or if the rewards of crime appear to be greater than those of non-criminal behaviour, then people will be more likely to offend.

- A similar idea is contained in Marcus Felson's routine activity theory. Felson argues that for a crime to occur, there must be a motivated offender, a suitable target (a victim and/or property) and the absence of a 'capable guardian' (such as the police or neighbours). Offenders are assumed to act rationally, so the presence of a guardian is likely to deter them from offending.
- Felson argues that informal guardians are more effective than formal ones such as the police. For example, in the chaos immediately following Hurricane Andrew in Florida in 1982, patrols by local citizens to protect property during the absence of the police prevented looting, and crime rates actually went down during this period.

Tackling crime

- Crime can be reduced by making it a less attractive choice. Many measures are possible, such as target hardening (e.g. making a house or car more difficult to break into), surveillance (e.g. close circuit television) and Neighbourhood Watch schemes.
- However, the crime prevention 'industry' has arguably only moved the crime elsewhere rather than reduce the total level.
- Wilson has argued that a minor sign of neglect, such as leaving a broken window unrepaired, could lead to a climate of disorder in which ever more serious crime became possible. Zero tolerance is a policing strategy that involves cracking down on minor infringements (graffiti, unlicensed street trading etc) to try to create a situation in which crime is less possible.

Evaluation

- Right realism ignores wider structural cause of crime such as poverty and the unequal distribution of power and wealth.
- It overstates offenders' rationality and how far they make cost-benefit calculations before committing a crime. While it may explain some utilitarian crime for financial reward, it may not explain violent crime.
- Its view that criminals are rational actors freely choosing crime conflicts with their view that behaviour is determined by their biology and socialisation. It also over-emphasises biological factors. For example, Lily et al argue that IQ differences account for less than 3% of differences in offending.
- It is pre-occupied with street crime and ignores corporate crime, which may be more costly and harmful to the public.
- Advocating a zero tolerance policy gives police free rein to discriminate against ethnic minority youth, the homeless etc. It also results in displacement of crime to other areas. Jones points out that right realist policies in the USA failed to prevent the

crime rate rising.

- It overemphasises control of disorder, rather than tackling underlying causes of neighbourhood decline such as a lack of investment.

B. Left Realism

- This view sees the causes of crime in the economic structure of society. It rejects the way earlier Left approaches seemed to almost romanticise crime and emphasises instead how the weakest sections of society bear most of the costs of crime.
- Victim surveys had shown that people in inner city areas, the lower working class, Afro-Caribbeans and Asians were most likely to be victims of "ordinary" crimes such as street crime and burglary.
- Left Realists Lea and Young looked at the impact of crime on the daily lives of vulnerable groups. The offenders were often from these groups too, but their criminality could not be excused or justified politically.
- Lea and Young used the concepts of relative deprivation, marginalisation and subculture to explain crime.
- Relative deprivation refers to the gap between the expectations people have, and the reality of what they can obtain. Afro-Caribbeans often find their paths to status and economic success blocked by discrimination. Crime can thus arise from the experiences of particular groups even if living standards in general are rising.
- Marginalised groups lack both clear goals and organisations to represent their interests. Groups such as workers have clear goals (such as better pay and conditions) and organisations (trade unions) to put pressure on employers and politicians. As such, they have no need to resort to violence to achieve their goals.
- By contrast, unemployed youth are marginalised. They have no organisation to represent them and no clear goals, just a sense of resentment and frustration. Being powerless to use political means to improve their position, they express their frustration through criminal means such as violence and rioting.
- Subcultures arise in response to such problems; they are not completely separate from wider society since they share, for example, a high value placed on material wealth. In these ways crime is related to the economic structure of society.

Tackling crime

Accountable policing

Left realists argue that policing must be made more accountable to local communities and must deal with local concerns. Routine beat patrols are ineffective in detecting or preventing crime, and stop and search tactics cause conflict and resentment.

Tackling the structural causes of crime

However, left realists do not see improved policing and control as the main solution. Levels of offending can only be lowered if differences in levels of income, wealth and powers are reduced. Dealing with inequality of opportunity, tackling discrimination, and providing decent jobs and housing are a far more effective solution to crime than a more community-friendly policing strategy.

Evaluation of left realism

- Left realism does offer ideas about what can be done about crime, which becomes a pressing need when crime is seen as a problem faced by the working class not by capitalists.
- Young advocates a "multi-agency" approach, a coordinated strategy involving greater support for families, employment opportunities, new youth facilities, changes in police practice and so on.
- Hughes has argued that although left realism has stimulated debate it offers few new insights, often drawing heavily on older theories. It has lost sight of the importance of corporate crime's impact on the lives of the working class. By concentrating on ethnic minorities it is also in danger of perpetuating racist stereotypes.
- The strength of realist approaches has been to take crime's impact on our lives seriously, and to offer ways to cut crime. The policies that have been implemented have been mainly from the right - more tough on crime than on the causes of crime- and their success is highly questionable. The valuable refocusing on victims has also been turned by right realism into an insistence that we are ourselves responsible for taking steps not to become victims. The two types of realism have, however, set the ground for debate over the way forward in tackling crime.

7. Feminist explanations of crime and deviance

Overview

- Feminist criminology developed in the late 1960s and into the 1970s, and was closely associated with the emergence of the Second Wave of feminism.
- Feminists argue that male dominance in society is reflected in a male dominance of mainstream theories of crime, which was seen as '**malestream**' sociology (about men, for men and by men).

Why has sociology often ignored women in the study of crime?

- **Heidensohn** suggests several reasons why Functionalist, Marxist, subcultural and interactionist approaches to crime all tended to ignore women:
 1. Sociology was (and to a lesser extent still is) dominated by men, who tended to accept stereotypical ideas about females. They found female crime uninteresting and unimportant.
 2. Those who did try to study it struggled to find useful examples (e.g. female gangs).
 3. Male sociologists were attracted by the apparent glamour of some male deviance, of gangs, drug taking etc, and they would have had difficulty in gaining access to female groups and subcultures even had they been interested.
 4. All these early theories of crime can be undermined by asking how they would account for females. For example, Albert Cohen's work on status frustration among working class adolescent boys failing at school has no account of how girls reacted to similar situations and experiences

How much female crime?

- There have been several attempts to find out whether women really do commit little crime. Official figures show that five times as many crimes are committed by men as by women, with considerable variation between types of crime.
- It has been suggested that this is because women are better at concealing evidence of crimes they have committed.
- Self report studies tend to show that men do commit more crime, but that the ratio is considerably smaller - more like 1.2 male crimes for every female one, rather than 5:1.
- Such studies do have considerable problems; as well as difficulty in knowing whether respondents are telling the truth, the research tends to be done only with teenagers and about trivial offences.
- **Box** suggests that for serious offences the 5:1 ratio suggested by official statistics is accurate.

Treatment by the criminal justice system - harsh or lenient?

- It is possible that the low numbers of women in the official figures may be the result of different treatment by the police and courts.
- It has been suggested that there is a "**chivalry factor**" which leads to leniency towards women; the police may be more likely to caution than to charge, the courts to acquit or impose lesser sentences.
- This can be seen as reflecting the assumption (by men) that females involved in crime are likely to have been "led on" by a male companion.

- On the other hand it has also been claimed that women are sometimes treated more harshly, especially when the offence involves breaking expectations of female behaviour, such as harming children. There may be a double standard, with leniency for lesser offences but harsher treatment when gender role expectations are broken (**doubly deviant**, **Smart 1976**).
- Overall it seems then that females do commit considerably less crime than males, although not to the extent suggested by official statistics.

Why do women commit less crime than men?

- **Heidensohn** has suggested a set of factors relating to **differential social control** explains why women conform more.
 - Females are socialised differently; the roles which girls learn stress caring, softness and attractiveness and are less likely to lead to potentially deviant behaviour than male roles which approve aggression and toughness.
 - The crimes which women commit do seem to be related to female gender roles; shoplifting to the role of mother and provider and prostitution to the role of sex servant.
 - **Heidensohn** argues that women, being subject to greater social control, have fewer opportunities for crime.
 - In the domestic sphere they usually have responsibilities which curtail outside activities.
 - They are less likely to be in occupations where white collar crime is possible, and many public spaces have greater danger and difficulty for women than for men.
- Lees** has shown how what teenage girls can do is constrained by the negative labels they can acquire among peers by transgressing even in small ways.

Why then do some women commit crime?

- **Carlen** carried out research with female offenders. Her respondents had rejected or not entered into the "**gender deal**". Patriarchal ideology promises women a satisfying life through bringing up children and supporting a husband - being a good wife and mother.
- Carlen's women had rejected these roles, sometimes because of very negative experiences of family life as children. In doing so they escaped a powerful area of social control, raising the possibility of offending.

Evaluation Feminist explanations of crime

Strengths

The feminist perspective has contributed a number of points to the study of crime and deviance, including the following:

- A new focus on female offending and the experiences of women in the criminal justice system;
- The application of existing theories, criticisms of them, and the development of new theories, to explain female deviance;
- A new focus on the various types of victimization suffered by women, particularly from male physical and sexual violence, including rape and domestic violence;

- A challenge to the popular misconception that women enjoy 'chivalry' from the criminal justice system, and are treated more leniently than men;
- An important new focus on gender and gender identity issues in explaining deviance, and the adaptation of existing theories to refocus them on gender rather than simply offending — feminists have raised questions in control theory, for example, concerning how men and women experience different levels of control, and in labelling theory concerning why female offending carries higher levels of stigmatization than male offending.

8. Postmodernist explanations of crime and deviance

Overview

- Postmodern theorists argue that we now live in a post modern world characterised by diversity and fragmentation.
- Postmodernists stress that society is changing so rapidly and constantly that it is marked by uncertainty, with society split into a huge variety of groups with different interests and lifestyles.
- Postmodernists view the category 'crime' as simply a social construction, based on a narrow legal definition, reflecting an outdated **meta-narrative** of the law which does not reflect the diversity of postmodern society.
- In postmodern society, people are increasingly freed from the constraints arising from social norms and social bonds to others.
- Crime as presently defined is simply an expression of a particular view of those with power of how people should conduct themselves, and denies people's freedom, self-identity and difference.

A New Definition of Crime

- Postmodernists argue that it is necessary to go beyond narrow legal definitions of crime, and develop a wider conception of crime based on justice and respect for people's chosen identities and lifestyles.
- **Henry and Milovanovic (1996)** suggest that crime should be taken beyond the narrow legal definitions to a wider conception of **social harm**, embracing all threats and risks to people pursuing increasingly diverse lifestyles and identities.
- They suggest that crime should be re-conceptualised not simply as breaking laws, but as people using power to show disrespect for others by causing them harm of some sort.
- They identify two forms of harm: **Harms of reduction** (power is used to cause a victim to experience some immediate loss or injury). **Harms of repression** (power is used to restrict future human development).

- This conception of harm includes actions which are either not illegal or not traditionally taken very seriously or perceived as part of the current crime 'problem'.

The Causes of Crime

- Most sociological theories of crime and deviance explain crime in relation to a **social structure and core values** from which the criminal deviates for some reason.
- For example, explanations that explain crime in relation to marginalization, relative deprivation, strain, inadequate socialisation, subcultural values, weakened social bonds etc.
- For postmodernists, society is characterised by a fragmentation of this social structure: The meta-narratives of social class, work and family, which formed people's identity and gave them their social roles and values, and integrated them into society, have been replaced by **uncertainty and individual choice of identity**.
- Individuals increasingly focus on themselves, often with little regard and respect for others.
- Each crime becomes a one-off event expressing whatever identity an individual chooses, and is motivated by an infinite number of individual causes, including emotional reasons.
- E.g. low individual self-esteem may be overcome by criminal activities designed to earn respect from others by harming them.
- This may include by humiliating, bullying or intimidating victims; hate crimes directed at others simply because of such characteristics as ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability or nationality etc.
- The individualism of identity in postmodern society means that the social causes of crime are undiscoverable.

The Control of Crime

- In the postmodernist view, the fragmentation of society is reflected in a similar fragmentation of organised crime prevention: There is a growing emphasis placed on private crime prevention, rather than reliance on the police etc.
- E.g. Private security firms that control private 'public' places such as shopping complexes.
- In addition, example, policing policies become very localised and community-based, reflecting the fragmentation of society into a diverse range of smaller groupings of localised identities, such as those around ethnic and gender.
- E.g. The voluntary use of Sharia courts, among some sections of the Muslim community to deal with disputes.
- Contemporary societies use surveillance techniques to control everyone, not just offenders.
- **Foucault (1991)** pointed out that surveillance is penetrating more and more into private aspects of our lives, aided by new surveillance technology like CCTV, which monitors the movements of people in every sphere of life.

- This is accompanied by growing control of entry to streets and housing complexes in 'gated communities'.
- In addition, vast amounts of data are collected on individuals through things like consumer tracking.
- In a postmodern society, people are regarded as consumers and customers rather than as citizens with rights.
- They are seduced and co-opted into avoidance of social harm by participation in the consumer society.
- Those who aren't so seduced, or can't afford to participate, face stricter control, for example through heavier and more repressive policing.

Evaluation of Postmodernist Explanations of Crime and Deviance

Strengths

- It can explain contemporary developments like widespread surveillance, for example using CCTV, and consumer tracking;
- It recognizes that there are other dimensions to the causes of crime beyond the more structural theories which have dominated in the sociology of crime and deviance;
- It explains the growing localism attached to policing strategies;
- It offers explanations for non-utilitarian crime, with no material benefit, like hate crimes and anti-social behaviour;
- It provides a fuller picture of the pattern of crime than traditionally provided, as the conception of crime as 'harm' encompasses a range of behaviour that has been largely neglected in the law and in sociological theories.

Weaknesses

- It doesn't explain why most people don't use their power to harm others, and why particular individuals or groups find it necessary to actively engage in acts of harm as a means of asserting their identity;
- It ignores the issues of justice and citizen rights for all, and not just for those who are significant consumers and customers;
- It doesn't recognise that decentralised and more informal arrangements for crime control, like the use of private security firms and localised policing, to respond to local identities are likely to benefit the most well organised and articulate (middle class) groups. The poorest in society, who cannot afford to establish identities by consuming goods, nor are seen as significant customers, are likely to be neglected;
- **Lea** points out that postmodernist theories are not much more than a rediscovery of labelling theory or radical criminology, which concluded long ago that crime was simply a social construction, and that power was a crucial element in that construction.

Exam Questions

Assess the usefulness of conflict theories for an understanding of crime and deviance. (21 marks)

17 - 21 Answers in this band will show a very good knowledge and understanding and will successfully meet the synoptic requirements of the question.

These answers will show a thorough, conceptually detailed and wide-ranging knowledge and understanding of theoretical and empirical material on conflict theories. They will show a clear understanding of the debates surrounding such theories (e.g. about economic determinism, positivism, non-utilitarian crime and deviance, the relation between class, gender and ethnicity, the chivalry thesis, structural versus action understandings of conflict etc) and of how these inform different studies. Answers will be broad ranging, dealing with a range of different conflict theories, such as varieties of Marxism, feminism, NLR, labelling theory etc.

Higher in the band, knowledge will be more comprehensive and detailed, and/or links between theoretical and empirical aspects more explicit and developed, and understanding will be clearer and more complex.

Sources and/or relevant alternative ones: Marx; Hall; Gilroy; Taylor, Walton & Young; Pearce; Chambliss; Sutherland; Gouldner; Becker; Heidensohn; Messerschmidt; Carlen; Smart; Walklate; Box; Campbell; Farrington & Morris; Dobash & Dobash

Assess the view that delinquent subcultures are the main cause of crime. (21 marks)

12 - 16 Answers in this band will show a reasonably good knowledge and understanding and will be reasonably successful in meeting the synoptic requirements of the question.

Higher in the band, there will be knowledge of both theoretical and empirical material on delinquent subcultures and crime, and slightly more breadth or conceptual detail. Material from different perspectives may also feature (eg functionalist, neo-Marxist, interactionist), reflecting a wider understanding, though there may be more concern with reporting findings of studies from such perspectives, than with linking the theoretical and empirical aspects.

17 - 21 Answers in this band will show a very good knowledge and understanding and will successfully meet the synoptic requirements of the question.

These answers will show a thorough, conceptually detailed and wide-ranging knowledge and understanding of theoretical and empirical material on delinquent subcultures and crime.

Answers will be broad ranging and will show a clear understanding of relevant debates and issues. These may include: anomie and blocked opportunity structures; status frustration; cultural deprivation; marginalisation and relative deprivation; the underclass; labelling, self-fulfilling prophecy and deviant career; folk devils, moral panics and deviance amplification; symbolic resistance; gender and subculture; delinquency, leisure and drift; edgework and risk; different typologies of subculture (eg criminal, conflict, retreatist; independent versus reactive) etc. A range of perspectives is likely to feature in relation to the question.

Higher in the band, knowledge will be more comprehensive and detailed, and/or links between theoretical and empirical aspects more explicit and developed, and understanding will be clearer and more complex.

Sources and/or relevant alternative ones: Becker; Brake; Campbell; Cloward and Ohlin; A K Cohen; M Cohen; S Cohen; Hall; Lea and Young; Lyng; Merton; Messerschmidt; W B Miller; Morris; Murray; Young. Crime and deviance are a result of a strain between the goal of money success and the socially approved means of achieving it. Assess this view. (21 marks)

12 - 16 Answers in this band will show reasonably good knowledge and understanding and will be reasonably successful in meeting the synoptic requirements of the question.

Higher in the band, there will be knowledge of both theoretical and empirical material on strain and crime and deviance, and slightly more breadth or conceptual detail.

Material from different perspectives may also feature (eg functionalist or left realist subcultural theories, neo-Marxism, interactionism), reflecting a wider understanding, though there may be more concern with reporting findings of studies from such perspectives, than with linking the theoretical and empirical aspects.

17 - 21 Answers in this band will show a very good knowledge and understanding and will successfully meet the synoptic requirements of the question.

These answers will show a thorough, conceptually detailed and wide-ranging knowledge and understanding of theoretical and empirical material on strain and crime and deviance. Answers will be broad ranging and will show a clear understanding of relevant debates and issues.

These may include: anomie and blocked opportunity structures; Merton's typology; materialism and individualism; utilitarian and non-utilitarian crime; individual and collective deviance; status frustration; cultural deprivation; marginalisation and relative deprivation; the underclass; labelling; cross-cultural comparisons; delinquency and drift; edgework etc. A range of perspectives is likely to feature.

Higher in the band, knowledge will be more comprehensive and detailed, and/or links between theoretical and empirical aspects more explicit and developed, and understanding will be clearer and more complex. Sources and/or relevant alternative ones: Adler; Becker; Cloward and Ohlin; A K Cohen; Durkheim; Gouldner; Heidensohn; Lea and Young; Marx; Merton; W B Miller; Murray; Reiner; Savelsberg; Taylor et al; Young.

The Social Distribution of Crime and Deviance

What you need to know:

- Understand the social distribution of crime by **age**, including recent patterns and trends in crime.
- Understand the social distribution of crime by **ethnicity**, including recent patterns and trends in crime.
- Understand the social distribution of crime by **gender** including recent patterns and trends in crime.
- Understand the social distribution of crime by **locality**, including recent patterns and trends in crime.
- Understand the social distribution of crime by **social class**, including recent patterns and trends in crime.
- Understand sociological explanations for the differences.

Trends in Crime

- Official statistics show that from the 1930s - early 1950s, there was a gradual rise in recorded crime, with a steeper rise between the 1950s and the early 1980s. There was a rapid increase in crime from the 1980s.
- Crime in England and Wales peaked in 1995, since when it has fallen by 48 per cent according to the BCS.
- Although crime remains at a much higher level than in the 1960s and earlier, the crime level now seems to have stabilized.

Age and Crime

Patterns and Trends

- The peak age for offending is between 15 and 18, with young males much more likely to offend than females.
- Young people have always been over-represented in the crime statistics, and in deviant activity in general.
- **Official statistics** show that roughly half of all those convicted are aged 21 or under, and a 2002 **self-report survey** found that almost half of Britain's secondary school students admitted to having broken the law.

Explanations for links between age and crime

Status frustration (Cohen, 1971)

- Young people are frustrated at being caught in the transition between child and adult status / lack of an independent status in society.
- The peer group provides some support for an identity and status that is independent of school or family, and therefore takes on a greater importance among young people.
- The lack of responsibilities and status, and the search for excitement and peer-group status, mean that many young people drift into minor acts of delinquency and clashes with the law.
- Peer-group pressure may also give young people the confidence and encouragement to involve themselves in minor acts of delinquency, which they would not engage in on their own.
- This problem of status frustration affects all young people, and explains why many of them, from all social classes, occasionally get involved in delinquent and deviant activity. However it is a problem

suffered by lower working class young people (the largest group of criminal offenders) than any other group.

Peer-group status and the focal concerns of lower-working-class subculture Miller (1962)

- Lower-working-class young males are more likely to engage in delinquency because their subculture has a number of **focal concerns**, which carry with them the risk of law-breaking.
- The six focal concerns are: **trouble; toughness; smartness; excitement; fatalism; autonomy.**
- These focal concerns are shared by many lower-working-class males of all ages, but they are likely to become exaggerated in the lives of young people as they seek to achieve peer-group status by, for example, constantly demonstrating just how much tougher, more masculine, smarter and willing they are to get into fights than their peers.

Edgework and the peer group

- Writers like **Katz (1988)** and **Lyng (1990)** suggest that much youthful criminal activity is motivated by what is called 'edgework', rather than material gain.
- The pleasures of thrill-seeking and risk-taking, and the 'buzz' generated by the excitement involved in living on the edge in acts like shoplifting, vandalism, doing drugs, fighting etc is a gratifying seductive adventure, and more important than any worry about the risk of being caught or need for items stolen.
- **Peer-group status** can be achieved through such activities, which take on a symbolic value as a trophy of the risk-taking game.
- The peer-group offers support and encouragement for such activities, and group involvement increases the chances of getting away with it.
- This pursuit of excitement and thrills may apply to all young men, and increasingly to young women as well, but are likely to appeal most to those from the lower working class (links to Miller).

The peer group and weakened social bonds

- **Control theory:** Criminal and deviant activity become more likely when individuals' bonds to society and the controls that help to prevent crime and deviance, such as social integration through the family, school, workplace and community, are weakened.
- E.g. The period of status frustration can weaken these bonds, as they are temporarily displaced by the peer group, where deviance may become a means of achieving status and respect from peers.

Delinquency, drift and techniques of neutralization

- **Matza (1964):** Status frustration weakens young people's sense of identity. This, in combination with the weakened bonds of control, means that young people lack a sense of identity and direction.
- In this period of **drift**, the peer group can provide a sense of identity, excitement and status, which again, this makes young people vulnerable to occasional acts of delinquency.
- However, they have no commitment to criminal or deviant values, as occasional acts of delinquency are accompanied by **techniques of neutralization**; justifications used to excuse or neutralize any blame or disapproval associated with deviance.

- **Matza:** Young people recognise wrongdoing and condemn it in others because when they do commit delinquent acts and are caught, they seek to justify or excuse their particular offences in terms of mainstream social values.
- **Matza identifies five techniques of neutralization** used by delinquents when they try to neutralize their guilt:
 - 1 Denial of responsibility:** Claiming that the circumstances were unusual. E.g. Being drunk or on drugs at the time the offence was committed.
 - 2 Denial of injury to the victim:** E.g. In cases of vandalism of rich people's property, for which insurance will pay.
 - 3 Denial of victim:** Denying that the victim was a victim at all. E.g. After beating up a bully in order that he will stop bullying others.
 - 4 Condemnation of condemners:** E.g. claiming that the people who condemn their behaviour had no right to do so, as they were being unfair or unjust, or were just as bad or corrupt themselves.
 - 5 Appeal to higher loyalties:** E.g. Saying that they were only fighting because they had to stop their brother being bullied.
- The period of status frustration generally disappears as people get older, as young people begin to establish clearly defined and independent adult status and are integrated into society as they take on responsibilities like a home, marriage or cohabitation, children, and paid employment. (Links to idea of 'stages of life': Young people have freedoms (including those to commit crime) which disappear with age (financial and personal commitments- 'settling down')
- The peer group subsequently diminishes in significance as a source of status, and most young people consequently give up delinquency in early adulthood.

Police stereotyping

- All the reasons above mean that the police are likely to see young people as the source of problems, and this stereotype involves them in spending more time observing and checking youths. As a result, more get caught, become defined as offenders and appear in the statistics.
- This questions the accuracy of the statistics and focuses on the reasons why the actions of young men are more likely to be treated as crimes.

Ethnicity and crime

Patterns and trends

- In 2008, the Ministry of Justice reported that, compared to white people:
 - **Afro Caribbeans** were: more likely to be arrested for robbery; three times more likely to be cautioned by the police; three and a half times more likely to be arrested; if arrested, more likely to be charged and face court proceedings than to receive a caution; more likely, if found guilty, to receive a custodial (prison) sentence; five times more likely to be in prison.
 - **Asians** were: twice as likely to be stopped and searched (mainly for drugs); more likely to be charged and face court proceedings than to receive a caution; more likely to receive a custodial sentence if found guilty; more likely to be arrested for fraud and forgery.
- In 2007, 26 per cent of male prisoners and 29 per cent of females were from black and minority ethnic groups (they make up about 9 per cent of the general population).

- These patterns, shown in contemporary official statistics, reflect a pattern that first emerged in the 1970s, suggesting what appear to be higher levels of criminality among some minority ethnic groups, particularly the black population.

Explanations for links between ethnicity and crime

- Higher crime rates might reflect that compared to white people, minority ethnic groups tend to have higher proportions of young people, those suffering social deprivation and those living in deprived urban communities, rather than greater criminality arising from ethnicity itself.

Policing The Crisis (Hall et al, 1978)

- Examined the moral panic over "mugging" in the early 1970s, using Marxist insights.
- Selective and stereotypical reporting represented young black men as potential muggers and given the role of folk devils. In fact, mugging (not an official category of crime in any case) was not increasing dramatically.
- Explained the moral panic in terms of a crisis of British capitalism: the state deflected attention on to a small group who could be scapegoated and on whom the state could be portrayed as cracking down firmly, using new repressive policing which would be useful in tackling future unrest.
- Young blacks were suitable for this role because of their visibility and powerlessness in the sense of lacking organisations or representatives to speak on their behalf.

The political nature of black crime (Gilroy):

- A Neo-Marxist who agrees that young blacks are targeted by the media and the police, but argues that black crime is different in that it is a conscious continuation, in a new context, of anti-colonial struggles in the West Indies.
- It is therefore political and potentially revolutionary, a political response to inequality and discrimination.
- Rastafarianism, for example, is not just a religion; it contains a set of revolutionary political ideas about overthrowing white authority ("Babylon"), and tends to bring its followers into confrontation with the police over, for example, marijuana use.

Police racism and discrimination in the criminal justice system

- The over-representation of Afro-Caribbeans in crime statistics is a social construct, created as a result of discrimination towards blacks and Asians by the police and other criminal justice agencies. There is considerable evidence of racist views held by police officers.
- **MacPherson Report** and 'institutional racism'.
- **Reiner (2000): Canteen culture** amongst the police, including: suspicion, macho values and racism, which encourages racist stereotypes and a mistrust of those from non white backgrounds.
- **Bowling and Phillips (2002):** Higher levels of robbery among black people could be the product of labelling that arises from the use of regular stop and search procedures, which in turn leads to the self fulfilling prophecy.

- **Sharp and Budd (2005):** Black offenders were most likely to have contact with the criminal justice system in their lifetime and were more likely to have been arrested, been to court and convicted. This is despite their lower levels of offending compared to white people generally and white youths in particular.
- Black and Asian offenders are more likely to be charged rather than cautioned, remanded rather than bailed, given prison sentences rather than probation/community punishment compared to white people. This suggests that they are treated unfairly by the criminal justice system.

New Left Realists

- **Lea and Young (1984):** High levels of crime really do exist in inner city areas where there are often high numbers of members of ethnic minorities, and draw attention to the fact that those who live here are the main victims of crime as well.
- Their explanation of crime is based on the concepts of **relative deprivation, marginalisation and subculture**. Minorities suffer relative deprivation not only in areas shared with sections of the white working class (high unemployment and poor environment), but also racial discrimination and racially motivated attacks. Young unemployed blacks are marginalised in that they are unorganised and have few pressure groups to lobby on their behalf, so their frustrations are more likely to be expressed in illegal activity.
- Subcultural responses include the hustling subculture described by **Pryce** in his ethnographic study of St Paul's in Bristol, with young blacks involved in petty street crime, drug dealing and prostitution, getting by from day to day.

The British Asian experience

- If police discrimination accounts for the high number of young blacks arrested, then the police must discriminate in favour of Asians, since fewer are arrested, than whites - which seems very unlikely.
- In the past, Asians did fit a police stereotype of a typical offender, the illegal immigrant.
- Explanations for the low levels of Asian criminality have been sought in the often strong and distinct culture, with family and religion providing sources of identity and ability to cope with disadvantage and discrimination. (Afro-Caribbeans, in contrast, are seen as having accepted British materialist values.)

Evaluation

- It has often been claimed that black crime is no higher than crime by the majority, that the official statistics reflect discriminatory practices by the police and courts. Sometimes questioning this claim can be presented as racist.
- On the other hand, however, and sometimes in the same accounts, it is claimed that high rates of some crimes, especially street crimes, are to be expected, part of the survival strategy of a reserve army of labour which finds itself unwanted, an understandable response to disadvantage and discrimination.
- Like other Marxists studying crime, **Gilroy** can be seen as reading meanings which may not be there into the behaviour of young blacks; they are unlikely to agree with his explanation of their behaviour.

Gender and Crime

Patterns and trends

- **Official statistics** show that males in most countries of the world commit far more crime than females. By their 40th birthday, about one in three males have a conviction of some kind, compared to fewer than one in ten females.
- Men are responsible for about four **known** offences for every one committed by women, they are more likely to be repeat offenders, and in general they commit more serious offences.
- **Men are many times more likely to be found guilty or cautioned for offending than women**, for example: about 50 times more likely for sex offences; about 14 times more likely for burglaries; about 8 times more likely for robbery and drug offences; about 7 times more likely for criminal damage; about 5 times more likely for violence against the person (though this is much greater for violence which results in serious injury).

Why do females appear to commit less crime than men?

Sex-role theory and gender socialization

- Gender socialization encourages women to adopt feminine characteristics such as being more emotional, less competitive, less tough and aggressive, and more averse to taking risks than men. Women's traditional roles involve being wives, mothers, housewives (and often workers). These combine to make many women both more afraid of the risk-taking involved in crime, as well as giving them fewer opportunities than men to commit crime.

The gender deal and the class deal

- **Carlen (1988)**: Women are encouraged to conform to:
 1. **The class deal**: The material rewards that arise from working in paid employment, enabling women to purchase things like consumer goods and enjoy a respectable life and home;
 2. **The gender deal**: The rewards that arise from fulfilling their roles in the family and home, with material and emotional support from a male breadwinner.
- Most women accept and achieve these deals and the rewards and security arising from them, and therefore conform and do not commit crime.
- However, the rewards arising from the class or gender deals are not available to some women, due to poverty, unemployment, abusive partners etc.
- Such women may then make a rational decision to choose crime as it offers the possibilities of benefits like money, food and consumer goods which are not otherwise available.

Social control

- **Heidensohn**: Patriarchal society imposes greater control over women, reducing opportunities to offend.
- This patriarchal control operates in:
 1. The **private domestic sphere**: Responsibilities for domestic labour and childcare provide less time and opportunity for crime and women face more serious consequences if they do become involved.

Teenage girls are likely to be more closely supervised by their parents than boys, reducing their chances of getting into trouble.

2. The **public sphere**: Women are faced with controls arising from fear of physical or sexual violence if they go out alone at night. Women also face the threat of losing their reputation of being 'respectable' if they engage in deviance, for example through gossip, the application of labels like 'slag' or 'slapper' by men etc
 3. The **workplace**: Women are often subject to sexual harassment and supervision by male bosses which restricts their opportunities to deviate. Plus, women's subordinate position (e.g. glass ceiling), prevents women from rising to senior positions where there is greater opportunity to commit fraud etc.
- These put greater pressure on women than men to conform, because of their greater risks of losing more than they might gain by law breaking.

The chivalry thesis

- Paternalism and sexism on the part of the criminal justice system, such as the male-dominated police and courts, means that women are treated more leniently than men.
- **Evidence for the chivalry thesis:**
 1. Women are consistently treated more leniently by the law (e.g. first offenders about half as likely to be given a sentence of immediate imprisonment as their male counterparts).
 2. Female offenders are generally regarded by the police as a less serious threat than men, and are therefore more likely to benefit from more informal approaches to their offences, such as cautions or warnings rather than being charged (this is partly because they generally commit more minor offences like shoplifting, and they are more likely to admit their offences, which is necessary before the police can issue a caution).
- **Evidence against the chivalry thesis:**
 1. Although women are far less likely to commit serious offences than men, those who do are likely to face more severe punishment, particularly for violent crime, as it violates socially acceptable patterns of feminine behaviour.
 2. **Carlen (1997)**: Sentences handed out to women by the criminal justice system are partly influenced by the court's assessment of their characters and performance in relation to their traditional roles as wife and mother, rather than simply by the severity of the offence. Consequently, violent women are perceived by the criminal justice system in far worse terms than men—they are seen as 'really bad' because they violate the norms of traditional feminine behavior (**doubly deviant**). Men are in general far more violent than women, but are given comparatively lighter sentences for similar levels of violence because they are perceived as just overstepping the mark of what men are expected to be like anyway.
 3. Women offenders are more likely to be remanded in custody (put in prison) than men while awaiting trial for serious offences, but in three-quarters of cases, women do not actually receive a prison sentence when they come to trial.
 4. Many women in prison appear to have been sentenced more severely than men in similar.

Growing female criminality: Changing gender roles and 'laddette' culture

- There is a growing increase in the proportion of crime committed by females, most noticeably by young women.
- E.G. In 1957, men were responsible for 11 times as many offences as women, but by 2008 that ratio had narrowed to 4:1. The number of crimes committed by girls aged 10–17 in England and Wales went up by 25 per cent between 2004 and 2007, with significant increases in minor assaults, robberies, public order offences and criminal damage.
- **Adler (1975)**: Women in contemporary Britain have more independence than in the past, and they are becoming more successful than men in both education and the labour market.
- At the same time, some of the traditional forms of control on women are weakening, particularly among younger women.
- **Denscombe (2001)**: There has been a rise of the 'laddette' culture, where young women are adopting behaviour traditionally associated with young men, as they assert their identity through binge drinking, gang culture, risk-taking, being hard and in control, and peer-related violence etc.
- There is some evidence that the police are now reacting in a more serious way, taking more action and prosecuting girls involved in such behaviour rather than dealing with it informally by other means, which would increase the statistics for such offences.

Why do males commit more crime than women?

Sex-role theory and gender socialization

- Men's traditional role has been that of family provider/breadwinner, and the types of behaviour they are encouraged to adopt this as the independent, self-confident, tough, competitive, aggressive, dominant and risk-taking.
- The male peer group reinforces these tendencies, particularly among younger men, and this can lead to higher risks of crime and delinquency.
- Men's traditional roles in employment, their lack of responsibility for housework and childcare etc, give men more independence than women, and more opportunities to commit crime.

The assertion of masculinity

- **Connell (1987, 1995)**: There is a **hegemonic masculinity** (a male gender identity that defines what it means to be a 'real man'; men who don't want to be regarded as 'wimps', abnormal or odd are meant to accomplish this masculinity).
- It features such things as toughness, aggression, competitiveness, control, success and power over (and subordination of) women.
- It is the masculinity that was identified earlier by Miller as a focal concern of lower-working-class subculture.
- **Messerschmidt (1993)**: Men sometimes turn to crime and violence as a means of asserting their masculinity when legitimate and traditional means of demonstrating masculinity and being 'real men' (success at school, having a steady, reliable, well-paid job, a stable family life) are blocked.
- Those lacking legitimate masculine- validating resources are most likely to be those from more deprived backgrounds (the most common criminals).
- The nature of hegemonic masculinity might also explain why middle-class men try to assert masculinity through ruthlessness, ambition and thrill-seeking in business, leading to white-collar and corporate crimes.

- The nature of hegemonic masculinity might also explain why men from all social classes commit domestic violence and rape.

Evaluation of the masculinity thesis

- It doesn't explain why most men who don't have access to legitimate means of asserting masculinity don't turn to crime
- Not all male crime can be interpreted as an expression of masculinity.

Postmodernity and male crime.

- De-industrialisation has meant that traditional jobs done by mainly male working class have declined and in some cases disappeared.
- These jobs had provided opportunities for men to express their masculinity through hard physical labour/ being major bread winner.
- In their place many jobs that have been created have been seen as feminine such as office work or in retail sales.
- **Winlow (2001)**: Studied bouncers in pubs and clubs in Sunderland and found this type of job was acceptable to them because of its masculine image.
- The job gave them paid employment as well as a sense of toughness (looking the part- called '**bodily capital**') but it also provided access to various criminal ways of making money via drug dealing, selling goods illegally and protection rackets.
- They were also able to be violent as part of their job even though this often bordered on criminal activity.
- The criminal activities of these men as a way of asserting their masculinity.

Locality and Crime

Patterns and trends

- Official crime statistics show that recorded crime higher in urban areas than in rural areas, and is also higher in particular areas/neighbourhoods of towns and cities.
- The British Crime Survey and police recorded crime show that rural areas, compared to urban areas: have lower rates of all types of crime; have a lower proportion of people with high levels of worry about crime; have lower levels of worry about high levels of anti-social behaviour in their area (e.g. vandalism, graffiti, and using drink or drugs in public places).
- **Marshall and Johnson (2005)**: Anxiety and worry about all crime types is less in rural areas compared to urban and inner-city areas. Rural residents see themselves as less likely to become a victim of crime than those in urban areas.
- Rural areas have a higher risk of burglaries among high-income households than among lower-income ones (a reversal of the pattern found in urban areas).

Explanations for links between locality and crime

The Chicago School and the zone of transition (ecology of crime)

- **Shaw and McKay (1931, 1942):** Certain parts of cities have higher levels of crime than others. These are called zones of transition.
- These are run-down areas, with poor and deteriorating housing, where the poorest people live, and where there is a high turnover of population. There is therefore little social stability, and a concentration of social problems like crime, prostitution, poor health and poverty.
- This 'zonal hypothesis' gave rise to three related concepts, which were used to explain crime and deviance by locality:
 1. **Social disorganization:** The high rates of population turnover prevented the formation of stable communities, and weakened the hold of established values and informal social controls over individuals, which in more stable and established communities discourage deviance and crime.
 2. **Cultural transmission:** In areas of social disorganisation, different delinquent values develop to which children living in such communities are exposed. These delinquent values are passed on from one generation to the next.
 3. **Differential association:** If people associate with others who more commonly support crime over conformity, and live in a situation where it seems that 'everyone' is involved in deviant or criminal behaviour, then they are more likely to commit crime themselves. It is more probable that this will occur in zones of transition.
- Rural communities generally lack the social disorganisation found in zones of transition. Inhabitants change addresses much less frequently than urban-dwellers.
- **Marshall and Johnson (2005):** Rural areas are more 'close knit', with higher levels of social interaction between people in the area, including kin relations. People are likely to know other members of the community through informal knowledge of their family and community history, rather than through their formal positions, like their job.

Evaluation of zones of transition

- **It ignores choice:** Why don't all those in similar positions turn to crime? It doesn't explain why some choose to commit crime while others do not.
- It is unclear how subcultures form and cultural transmission is possible. If zones of transition are so socially disorganized, with a constantly changing population, then it is hard to see how a delinquent subculture develops, and is able to pass its ideas on between generations, as there must be at least some continuity and stability for this to be possible.

More opportunity for crime

- **Brantingham and Brantingham (1995):** Urban areas have more crime generating and crime attracting areas than rural areas (e.g. shopping precincts, warehouses, businesses, leisure facilities, transport hubs, large insecure car parks and areas like red-light districts) that offer more opportunities for crime, and attract offenders who go there in search of crime.

Policing styles

- There is a greater police presence in urban areas, so more crime is likely to be detected. Police in urban areas are less likely to have roots in the community and to know who the offenders are, so they adopt more formal procedures for dealing with offenders, such as arresting and charging them.
- In rural areas, they may be less likely to arrest offenders, especially in the case of more trivial offences, preferring merely to issue informal warnings.

Less chance of being caught

- In the large cities, life is more impersonal. Strangers are more likely to go unrecognised, and are therefore more able to get away with offences.
- In rural communities, there is a higher level of natural surveillance as people recognise each other and strangers are more likely to be noticed, which can discourage offending because of the higher risks of being caught.

Social deprivation

- Social deprivation and social problems, such as poor housing, unemployment and poverty, are at their worst in the inner cities.
- These have been linked to crime, as people try to achieve success by illegal means that others can achieve by approved and legal means.

Social Class and Crime

Patterns and trends

- Official statistics show that working-class people, particularly those from the lower working class, are more highly represented among offenders than those from other social classes.

Explanations for links between social class and crime

Social deprivation

- There is a link between the level of crime and poverty which is a possible explanation for the most common offences of property crime, and would account for the high proportion of criminals coming from deprived backgrounds.

Strain theory and anomie

- **Merton's (1968):** Those living in deprived communities have fewer opportunities to achieve the goals they aspire to. These circumstances push people to 'innovate' and find alternative means reach success goals, such as crime

Marginality, social exclusion and control and rational choice theories

- In the most disadvantaged communities, there are likely to be the highest levels of **marginality** and **social exclusion**.
- In such communities, agencies of socialisation and social control are likely to be less effective in providing the bonds that integrate people into wider mainstream society.
- **Control theory** points to the weakening of these factors as making people more prone to offending,
- When pondering whether or not to choose crime, as **rational choice theory** suggests, potential offenders from poor areas may decide that the benefits of crime, giving them access to money and consumer goods, outweigh the costs and risks of being caught.

Subcultural explanations

- **Cohen:** The **status frustration** that all young people experience is particularly accentuated among working-class youth
- **Miller** and the **focal concerns** of lower-working-class subculture that often carried with them risks of brushes with the law.
- **Cloward and Ohlin (1960):** In some working-class neighbourhoods, legitimate opportunities for achieving success are blocked, criminal subcultures may develop.

Labelling, stereotyping and prejudice

- The poorest sections of the working class and the areas in which they live, fit more closely the stereotypes held in police culture of the 'typical criminal' and criminal neighbourhoods.
- There is therefore a greater police presence in poorer working-class areas than in middle-class areas.
- As a result, there is a greater likelihood of offenders being regarded as acting suspiciously, being stopped and searched, or being arrested by the police when involved in offending. Crime rates will therefore be higher in working-class areas simply because there are more police
- The activities of the working class, and particularly working-class youth, are more likely to be labelled by the police as criminal than the same behaviour in the middle class. The prejudices of middle-class judges and magistrates may mean that, when working-class people appear in court, they are more likely to be seen as fitting the stereotype of typical criminals, and they will therefore face a higher risk of being found guilty.

More detectable offences

- Those in the working class tend to commit more detectable offences than those in the middle class, and so are more likely to get caught.
- The main offences committed by working-class people (burglaries, theft, and vehicle crime) are far more likely to be reported to the police and result in the prosecution of offenders than the types of crime committed by those from other social class backgrounds.

Criticisms of these explanations

- They don't explain why all those in the same circumstances in the poorest sections of the working class do not turn to crime (most don't).
- There is a vast amount of crime that remains undetected and unrecorded, or offenders haven't been caught, so we don't actually know who the offenders are. Official statistics therefore may not provide a representative view of offenders.

White-collar crime

- **Newburn (2007):** The sociology of crime and deviance has tended to focus on the crimes of the powerless rather than the powerful.
- **Sutherland (1949):** Defined white-collar crime as "crime committed by the more affluent in society, who abused their positions within their middle-class occupations for criminal activity for personal benefit" and tried to show that crime was not simply a working-class phenomenon, but was widespread throughout all sections of society.
- White-collar crime includes offences such as bribery and corruption in government and business, fiddling expenses, professional misconduct, fraud and embezzlement.

The under-representation of white-collar crime

- White-collar crimes are substantially under-represented in official statistics, including both police-recorded crime and the British Crime Survey, giving the misleading impression that most crime is committed by the working class, and that the middle class commit fewer offences.
- However, there may be many white-collar criminals who simply don't get caught or ever have their crimes detected.
- There are several reasons why white-collar crimes are under-represented in official statistics:
 - 1 They are hard to detect.
 - 2 They are often without personal or individual victims.
 - 3 The crime may benefit both the parties concerned.
 - 4 They are hard to investigate.
 - 5 There is often a lack of awareness that a crime has been committed
 - 6 Institutional protection means they are often not reported and prosecuted.
 - 7 Even if reported, offenders have a better chance of being found not guilty.

Explaining white-collar crime

- Some white-collar offenders are ordinary people who have got into financial difficulty, and who use their jobs to find a way out of it through fraud and similar offences. Such low-level white-collar crime can probably be explained in much the same way as much working-class crime.

Strain theory, anomie and relative deprivation

- While it is hard to see successful middle-class people as having the means to achieving social goals blocked, it maybe that, despite their success, they still have a sense of relative deprivation, of still lacking things they see others having, so they innovate, and turn to crime.
- This may be fuelled by personal economic difficulties, like large debts generated by living a lifestyle above their means, or quite simply greed

Control theory

- The moral controls on offending may be weakened as there is often no personal, individual victim of white-collar crime, and this may weaken the perception that offenders are doing anything very wrong or harmful.
- Socialisation into self-seeking company business practices encouraging aggressive and ruthless competition with other companies may encourage this, and this may be adapted to bring some personal rewards to employees as well.

Edgework

- **Katz (1988) and Lyng (1990):** Pleasure, thrill-seeking and risk-taking may be motivations for crime rather than simply material gain.

Exam Questions

Assess sociological explanations of social class differences in crime rates (Item A). (21 marks)

17 - 21 Answers in this band will show a very good knowledge and understanding and will successfully meet the synoptic requirements of the question.

These answers will show a thorough, conceptually detailed and wide-ranging knowledge and understanding of theoretical and empirical material on class differences in crime rates. Answers will be broad ranging and will show a clear understanding of relevant debates and issues. These may include: structural versus action or positivist versus interpretivist approaches, rates as social facts or as social constructs, sources of data (official statistics, victim studies, self report studies etc), anomie, subculture, opportunity structures, marginalisation, relative deprivation, poverty, differential association, white-collar and corporate crime, selective enforcement, typifications, etc. A range of perspectives is likely to feature.

Higher in the band, knowledge will be more comprehensive and detailed, and/or links between theoretical and empirical aspects more explicit and developed, and understanding will be clearer and more complex.

In answering this question, candidates may refer to some of the following sources and/or relevant alternative ones: Becker; Bonger; Box; Chambliss; Cicourel; Cloward and Ohlin; A.K. Cohen; Graham & Bowling; Gordon; Lea & Young; Marx; Merton; W.B. Miller; Morris; Murray; Pearce; Snider; Sutherland; Wilson; Young.

Using material from Item A and elsewhere, assess sociological explanations of gender differences in patterns of offending, victimisation and punishment. (21 marks)

17 - 21 Answers in this band will show very good knowledge and understanding and will successfully meet the synoptic requirements of the question.

These answers will show thorough, conceptually detailed and wide-ranging knowledge and understanding of theoretical and empirical material on gender and offending, victimisation and punishment. Answers will be broad ranging and will show clear understanding of relevant debates and issues. These may include patriarchy; gender role socialisation; access to illegitimate opportunity structures; control theory; the relationship between class/ethnicity and gender (eg gender and class .deals.); masculinity and offending; the liberation thesis; the marginalisation thesis; women as victims; differential law enforcement; sentencing policy; the chivalry thesis; official and other sources of data, etc. Varieties of feminism, as well as other perspectives, are likely to feature.

Higher in the band, knowledge will be more comprehensive and detailed, and/or links between theoretical and empirical aspects more explicit and developed, and understanding will be clearer and more complex.

In answering this question, candidates may refer to some of the following sources and/or relevant alternative ones: Adler; Box; The British Crime Survey; Campbell; Carlen; AK Cohen; Dobash and Dobash; Farrington and Morris; Graham and Bowling; Heidensohn; Hirschi; Lea and Young; Lyng; Messerschmidt; Pollak; Smart; Walklate.

Exam Questions: Answer guidance

Item A

The so-called 'chivalry thesis' argues that women are treated more leniently than men by the criminal justice system. As a result, criminal statistics underestimate the true extent of female offending.

For example, Otto Pollak (1961) argued that men - including police officers, for example— are socialised to be protective towards women and thus are less likely to charge them or prosecute them. Similarly, when they appear in court, female defendants are treated more sympathetically by male judges and jurors. Pollak also argues that women are accustomed to deceiving men, for example in faking orgasm during sex. This skill in deceit means that their crimes, such as poisoning and infanticide, are less easily uncovered.

Using material from item A and elsewhere, assess the value of the 'chivalry thesis' in understanding gender differences in crime. (21 marks)

This question carries 9 AO1 (knowledge and understanding) marks and 12 AO2 (interpretation, application, analysis and evaluation) marks.

Start by using the Item to help you outline the chivalry thesis, adding your own examples (e.g. what sorts of offences might policemen let c women but not men for?). You should examine relevant evidence in support of the thesis — e.g. Graham and Bowling's and Flood-Page et al's self-report data, or studies showing a higher rate of cautions or lower rate of imprisonment for women in similar cases.

You also need to evaluate the thesis. Start by presenting evidence arguing that women are not treated more leniently, such as Buckle and Farrington, Farrington and Morris or Box. You can put this material into theoretical context by introducing a feminist perspective to argue that women are often treated more harshly, especially if they deviate from gender norms, whether as defendants or as victims (as in many rape cases).

"The most noticeable thing about women in criminological research is their absence! What explanations can you offer for the, "invisibility" of women? (21 marks)

Examine sociological explanations for the lower rates of recorded crime in rural compared to urban areas. (21 marks)

Globalisation and crime in contemporary society; the mass media and crime; green crime; human rights and state crimes

What you need to know:

- Links between **globalization** and crime: Examples and explanations.
- The role of the **mass media** in the social construction of crime
- Links between the **state** and crime and explanations
- **Green crime** and explanations

Crime and Globalization

- Globalization is the growing interdependence of societies across the world, with the spread of the same culture, consumer goods and economic interests across the globe.
- Corporate crimes are increasingly global and transnational.
- Growing globalization and global communications offer new opportunities for crime and new means of carrying out crimes.
- Local and national crime is increasingly interlinked with crime happening in other countries through global criminal networks.
- This globalization of crime means that a crime committed in one country may have its perpetrators located in another country; without the cooperation of other states, it may be impossible for a police investigation in any one country to track down and convict the offenders.
- **Karofi and Mwanza (2006)** suggest that global crimes include, among others, the international trade in illegal drugs, weapons and human beings; money-laundering; terrorism; and cybercrime.

1. The international illegal drug trade

- The global illegal drug market was estimated by the United Nations at \$321 billion, which was higher than the GDP in 88 per cent of the countries in the world.
- The international drugs trade provides the drugs that are available in local communities in the UK, and drug addiction is responsible for a high proportion of acquisitive crime (theft) as people steal to support their drug habits.
- A report by the Audit Commission in 2002 suggested that half of all recorded crime in England and Wales was drug-related.

2. Human-trafficking

- Human-trafficking is the illegal movement and smuggling of people, for a variety of purposes (prostitution, forced labour, the illegal removal of organs for transplants etc).
- There is also a related global criminal network dealing with the trade in illegal immigrants: smuggling into countries at high costs those people who are unable to legally enter.

3. Money-laundering

- Money-laundering is concerned with making money that has been obtained illegally look like it came from legal sources.

- Money-laundering uses modern communications technology to launder 'dirty money' by moving it around the world electronically through complex financial transactions. This makes it very difficult for law-enforcement agencies to track the sources of money, and hard to identify which country is responsible for law-enforcement.

4. Cybercrime

- Cybercrime refers to a wide range of criminal acts committed with the help of communication and information technology, predominantly the Internet.
- Cybercrimes are global, in the sense that many online frauds, illegal pornography, hacking, identity theft offences and so on in the UK often have their offenders outside the country.
- Examples of cybercrimes include: Internet-based fraud, child pornography and paedophilia; terrorist websites and networking, hacking; phishing, identity theft.

5. Globalisation and Crime

- **Taylor** links global crime to the way the capitalist system has developed.
- Two important features have been the rise of **transnational corporations (TNCs)** which are companies that operate across national borders, and the deregulation of financial and other markets.
- These have produced a number of consequences which are felt by people throughout the world.
- The ability of TNC's to move production to cheap labour areas has produced widespread exploitation in many countries included the use of forced and child labour.
- In Western countries such as Britain it has contributed to deindustrialisation where many manufacturing jobs have disappeared. As a result crime has increased as people seek illegitimate ways of reaching the success goals of society.
- Globalisation has also increased the opportunities for financial fraud on a massive scale as millions of pounds can be moved across the world in a matter of seconds.
- Taylor also links the growth of the drugs trade to globalisation in that it has had an impact on both the supply and the demand for illegal substances.
- On the supply side money raised from the sale of drugs can often be hidden behind legitimate companies set up to allow such funds to be 'laundered'.
- On the demand side many areas of Britain and the U.S.A. have become so deprived that the drugs trade offers not only some form of escape from the effects of poverty but also business opportunities for those wishing to make money in one of the few ways available to them.

Marketisation and Crime

- **Currie** has argued that the way a society reacts to globalisation can affect the levels of crime.
- Countries like the U.S.A. which has removed most government controls on private companies and the economy experience very high levels of inequality.
- Basically the impact of globalisation on national economies is often to make a number of individuals considerably richer whilst forcing large numbers of other people into poverty.
- The impact of this has been to create major areas of concentrated deprivation where crime has flourished partly out of economic necessity but also because there is little in the way of community spirit and informal social control.

- Of course it should be remembered that it is not possible to establish a link which proves that crime levels are directly caused by the economic policies of governments.

Mass media and crime

Introduction

- Many people have little or no direct personal experience of crime. For them the media often represents their point of information about crime.
- Media outlets such as newspapers and television devote a large proportion of their content to the coverage of crime. Other forms of media such as film, novels and video games also have a similar focus.
- **Pearson:** The media has, for many years encouraged a 'fear and fascination' with crime.

News Values

- News does not just happen, it is manufactured. People make decisions on what to report, how to report it and also on what not to report.
- There exists a set of **news values** which are criteria by which editors, reporters and journalists decide if a story is newsworthy i.e. worth reporting.
- Amongst these news values are things like how dramatic they are, how unusual, can they be personalised with an individual and do they involve risk and some form of excitement.
- Crime often meets many of these news values which could explain why it gets so much media coverage.
- Also certain types of crime are more likely to get reported; violence outside a football ground has greater news value than a company which breaks health and safety laws.

The distortion and exaggeration of crime

- **Greer (2005):** All media tend to exaggerate the extent of violent crime.
- Most crime is fairly routine, trivial and non-dramatic. However, TV programmes like Crimewatch often pick up on the more serious and violent offences with reconstructions giving quite frightening, dramatized insights into the crimes committed.
- This focus on the exceptional and the dramatic is a routine feature of crime dramas on TV or film, as well as of news reports, and gives a false and misleading impression of the real extent of such crimes.
- **Williams and Dickinson** found 65% of crime stories in ten national newspapers were about violence. In the same year (1989) the British Crime Survey reported only 6% of crimes involved violence.

Fear of crime

- Media representations of crime tend to create distorted perceptions of crime among the majority of the public, exaggerate the threat of crime, and unnecessarily increase the public's fear of crime.
- The work on moral panics (see below) has shown us that the public can often over-react to what is often sensational media coverage of events.
- Studies have shown that those who watch television for longer report higher levels of fear of crime than less frequent users.
- Surveys conducted over a period when recorded crime had fallen showed between 25% and 38% of respondents felt it had 'risen a lot'.

- Fear of crime is a very important issue because it seems to influence many aspects of people's lives. For example many refuse to walk the streets after dark for fear of becoming a victim of crime yet more people on the streets at this time is likely to reduce the chance of crimes being committed.

Media as a cause of crime

- **Bandura's** laboratory experiments, sought to establish a link between viewing violent images and violent behaviour.
- Others have argued that exposure to violence in the media can cause people to become 'desensitised' so that they lose the self control which stops them from acting in such a way.
- More recently music and videos featuring rap artists have been accused of glamorising crime and presenting it as not only acceptable but desirable as a lifestyle. This has been linked to the rise of a 'gun culture'.
- **Lea and Young** claim that the media bombards people with a consumer orientated lifestyle where success and social acceptability are measured by the material possessions one can accumulate. This can produce a feeling of relative deprivation where many groups cannot achieve the lifestyle portrayed and hence feel socially excluded.
- This can be the trigger which encourages some to turn to crime to gain material success and hence status in society.
- However because this link is indirect it cannot be full tested.
- **Deviancy amplification** or **copycat crime**: Media attention on a particular crime leads to people copying it and thus increasing the amount of it being committed. E.g. Football hooliganism; happy slapping.

Folk devils and Moral Panics

- **Cohen (1972)** and others (especially **Jock Young (1971)**) showed how agents of social control, particularly the police, '**amplified**' deviance. They also demonstrated the media's role in this process.
- Such studies were used to demonstrate how the media helped to avoid wider conflict in society by focusing our attention on the supposedly deviant behaviour of outsider groups, including youth gangs, welfare scroungers, trade union militants and so on.
- Hall argued that the way in which the crime of mugging is reported had a number of important effects for the ruling class: It leads to the **scapegoating** of black people, or immigrants in general could be blamed for society's problems instead of the inequalities of the capitalist system; it distracted attention away from the periodic **crises of capitalism** (as a Marxist Hall argues that capitalism is an unstable system which periodically goes through severe economic and political crises); Hall suggests that media professionals have a shared culture, including elements of racism, and taken for granted assumption that the police are right, capitalism is a good thing and society was 'breaking down'. This has the effect of **legitimizing** (making seem right or fair) the position of the ruling class in capitalist society.

Criticisms

- **Ownership & Control**; it is hard to prove that owners of the mass media are acting in the interests of ruling class.
- Media professionals do not all have a shared world view

- Audience are arguably media literate and able to understand the context and process of these moral panics.

Theoretical explanations of the mass media and crime

Marxists

- The reporting of crime reflects the ideology of the ruling class, meaning:
 1. The crimes of the ruling class or those at the higher end of society are under-reported. The media's emphasis on sexual and violent crime means less importance is attached to some very large and serious **white-collar crimes** and **corporate** crimes, which rarely get reported.
 2. Crimes of the working class are over-reported.
 3. The reporting of crime is used as a way of maintaining control over powerless groups.

Criticisms:

- Marxists ignore the way in which it is poor people who are the victims of much crime committed by poor people.
- Criminal activity of those in the ruling class is reported.
- A range of media exists and it reports what ever crimes make it to court.
- If there is a bias in the media it is more the fault of the legal system than the media.

Feminist

- Crime reporting reinforces the stereotyping and oppression of women.
- Women are portrayed as victims
- Under reporting of violence against women, especially domestic violence.
- They are highly critical of reporting of sex crimes against women as a way to provide entertainment.

Pluralist

- In reporting crime the media helps to keep social solidarity.
- Crimes reported tend to reflect the things people are most concerned about and most want to see reported, thus they create demand which is met by the media.
- Different forms of media report different crimes in different ways, they are not all dominated by a single ideology or small group of owners pushing the same agenda.

Post Modernist

- **Baudriallard**. Media creates reality - people have no understanding of crime only the representations of crime they experience through the mass media.

Media representations of social groups & crime

The Young

- **Pearson 1983** The media look back to a golden age of well behaved youth and contrast that with the behaviour of contemporary young people. In fact youth crime statistics have been largely stable for a long time.
- Hoodies, chavs, gangs, binge drinking, and all the rest of the negative images of the young as deviant groups either waiting to or actually causing trouble.

Social Class

- Moral Panics about 'scroungers', chavs etc
- **Glasgow Media Group** argue that media discourse assumes the working class, especially males, are a source of actual or potential 'trouble' and are always capable of criminal behaviour.
- White collar and corporate crime not covered.

Ethnicity

- **Hall et al. (1978), Alvarado et al. (1987), van Dijk (1991) and Cottle (2000)**: Black and Asian minority ethnic groups are often represented in the media in the context of violence and criminality, as scapegoats on which to blame a range of social problems, and are over-represented in a limited range of degrading, negative and unsympathetic stereotypes.

Gender

- Women as victims.
- Male crimes, especially of violence presented as part of 'natural' male hegemonic masculine identity.
- Crime presents a role model of masculinity which may influence young men. All this can be linked to the audience effects debate.

Sexuality

- **Crichter (2003)**: There had been a moral panic about aids with the media claiming it was a 'natural' consequence of, mainly male, gay sexual behaviour, which they portrayed as deviant.
- Part of the discourse of much of mass media mixes gay identities with child abusers. This is entirely unjustified as sexual identity is no great predictor of the likelihood of an individual to sexually abuse children.

12. Corporate crime

- Corporate crimes are offences committed by or on behalf of large companies and directly profit the company rather than individuals.
- **Slapper and Tombs (1999):** Identified six types of corporate offence:
 1. **Paperwork and non-compliance:** Offences such as where correct permits or licences are not obtained, or companies fail to comply with health and safety and other legal regulations. E.g. The Herald of Free Enterprise
 2. **Environmental (or 'green') crimes:** Damage to the environment caused either deliberately or through negligence, and can cover a wide range of offences. While some of these maybe committed by individuals, and some are not technically illegal, the most serious offences are likely to be those committed by businesses. E.g. Illegal dumping or disposal of toxic/hazardous waste, and waste in general; Discharge or emission of dangerous or toxic substances into the air, soil or water. (Bhopal disaster); The destruction of wide areas, through oil spills or unchecked exploration or development.
 3. **Manufacturing offences:** Offences such as the incorrect labelling or misrepresentation of products and false advertising, producing unsafe or dangerous articles, or producing counterfeit goods. E.g. the Ford Pinto.
 4. **Labour law violations:** Offences such as failing to pay legally required minimum wages, ignoring dangerous working practices, or causing or concealing industrial diseases. E.g. health and safety violations.
 5. **Unfair trade practices:** False advertising and anti-competitive practices, such as price fixing and illegally obtaining information on rival businesses.
 6. **Financial offences:** Tax evasion and concealment of losses and debts.

Explanations for corporate crime

- Marxists like **Box (1983)** argue that the push to corporate crime is driven by the need to maintain profits in an increasingly global market.
- **Control theory** would suggest that the individuals who carry out offences to benefit companies are driven by aggressive management cultures, which see business success in global markets as a key focus.

Why corporate crimes are under-represented in official statistics

- They often involve powerful people, who can persuade the government, the police and the public that their actions are not very serious or even illegal;
- They are often hard to detect.
- Even if these crimes are detected, they are often not prosecuted and dealt with as criminal acts. E.g. violations of health and safety legislation, price-fixing and environmental offences often lead only to a reprimand or a fine rather than to police action and prosecution through the criminal justice system.

13. State Crimes

Introduction

- State crimes are those linked to governments or other agencies involved in the running of countries.
- Whilst states are responsible for making laws they must also act within them and there is also international law on a range of human rights issues.
- However the situation is complicated because states not only make the laws in their country they also enforce them.
- The victims of state crime are often relatively powerless individuals or groups and this makes it even more difficult for them to get justice.

Examples of State Crimes

- The torture and illegal treatment or punishment of citizens;
- Corrupt or criminal policing;
- War crimes, involving illegal acts committed during wars, like the murder, ill-treatment, torture or enslavement of civilian populations or prisoners of war, and the plundering of property;
- Genocide, involving the mass murder of people belonging to a particular ethnic group with the aim of eliminating that group.
- State-sponsored terrorism.
- Violations of human rights.

Understanding State Crimes

- **Cohen:** A concern with human rights and state crimes has been one of the major developments in criminology in recent years.
- This is because criminology has increasingly focused on the victims of crime and organisations such as Amnesty International have raised public awareness of the misuse of power by various states.
- In addition there has been a huge increase in the powers of the state both formally, as they pass more laws, and informally as they use new technology to monitor and control their citizens.
- **Globalisation**, which has increased the inter-connectedness of states, has also made countries more vulnerable to the influence of others.
- **Cohen** has been especially interested in how states attempt to conceal or justify their illegal activities. He argues this often involves a three stage **spiral of denial**:
 - **Stage one:** Complete denial that any crime took place.
 - **Stage two:** An attempt to change how the act or acts are described, for example something was 'an accident'.
 - **Stage three:** involves providing a justification for the actions such as the state was protecting its members.
- In this way states often seek to excuse their crimes once they have failed to cover them up.
- **Chambliss:** State crime is often the result of **strain**, meaning that the state is torn between different sets of objectives. He claims that many of the state crimes carried out by the CIA including torture, kidnapping and executions took place at a time when they felt under extreme pressure to guard against the threat posed to the country by communism.

The individuals who commit state crimes

- **Milgram:** People who inflict pain and suffering might be psychologically normal but be acting out of character because of pressure from the role they are playing.
- **Kelman and Hamilton** support this in their study of **crimes of obedience**: individuals learn to ignore ordinary moral rules when ordered by those in authority. They are able to convince themselves that

such activities are routine. Often they are convinced that those they are fighting are sub-human and therefore normal standards of decency do not apply to them.

Green Crime

Introduction

- The end of the 20th century saw a growing concern about environmental issues and they began to be part of political debates in many countries.
- Globalisation could partly explain this raised awareness. One reason was because it became apparent that actions in one part of the world were having effects across the globe, especially with things like climate change.
- At the same time those most concerned about environment issues were able to organise themselves and campaign across national boundaries due to the developments in new technology (e.g. Internet).

What is Green Crime?

- Green crime is an illegal activity which has an impact on the environment. This can involve the actions of individuals, private companies or even nation states.
- Until quite recently certain events such as flooding, drought or famine were seen as 'natural' disasters which suggested they were events outside the control of people.
- However increasingly scientists and others became aware that many of these events were linked to human activity such as deforestation or the emission of greenhouse gases.
- **Beck** has argued that in developing ways of producing the resources we need the Western world has produced a new set of risks.
- Many of these risks involve threats to the environment and they are global in nature. Taking climate change as an example, Beck argues we have created a '**global risk society**'

Green Criminology

- Traditional criminology has been concerned with studying acts which clearly break a well defined set of laws.
- More radical theorists have argued that this approach is out dated and needs to be widened to study newer issues.
- **Rob White** has argued that criminology should study any action which causes **harm** either to individuals or the environment regardless of whether or not a law has been broken.
- This is important because a considerable amount of harm is done to the environment by actions which do not appear to break any specific law.
- For example hunting and trading in certain animals often only becomes illegal when they become threatened with extinction yet the harm has been done long before laws are passed.
- Also environmental harm crosses national boundaries but often these countries have very different laws.
- Therefore actions within the law in some countries could have serious environmental effects in others.

- Such a radical approach is similar to a Marxist view of 'crimes of the powerful'. They point out that those with power are able to define what is and is not illegal.
- In the same way some of the major perpetrators of green crimes are able to avoid their actions being classed as illegal.
- E.g. The logging companies who destroyed much of the Amazon rainforest. Their 'legal' commercial activities have had a massive impact on not only the native people but also on the environment world wide.

Exam Questions on this topic

Item A: There has long been concern that the mass media have a negative effect on viewers, especially those groups thought to be most easily influenced, such as children and young people. At different times, the cinema, horror comics, 'video nasty's', rap lyrics, computer games and the internet have all been blamed for corrupting youth and encouraging violence and criminality. One fear is that the audience will imitate what they see.

Question: Using material from Item A and elsewhere, assess the view that the mass media are a major cause of crime and deviance in today's society. (21 marks)

Examiners Advice: You need to examine a range of ways in which the media might be responsible for causing crime and deviance. One possible way is outlined in the item, which you should consider whether the media are responsible for 'copy cat' crime. You should evaluate this by assessing the validity of the studies used to investigate it. Consider also other ways in which the media may cause crime, especially the left realist argument about relative deprivation and the media, and the idea of media-inspired moral panics causing deviance amplification. You can also look briefly at how the new media (e.g. the internet) might facilitate both old and new forms of crime.

Item A: Crimes against the environment take many different forms. These include illegal dumping of toxic industrial waste, and illegal logging and destruction of the rainforest. However, many actions that harm the environment are not illegal, at least not in every country. Some sociologists argue that this is irrelevant, since we should study all environmental harms, including ones that are legal.

Question: Using material from Item A and elsewhere, assess sociological contributions to our understanding of the nature of environmental crime. (21 marks)

Examiners Advice: Structure your answer around a debate between traditional and green criminology, focusing on the issue of whether we should study only actions that break the law, or all environmental harms. Use concepts such as transgressive criminology, anthropocentric versus ethnocentric views of harm, global risk society and the global nature of environmental harms. You can also consider the similarities between green criminology and Marxist ideas about crimes of the powerful. You can also look at different types of green crime, e.g. primary and secondary, and examples from the item.

Crime control, prevention and punishment, victims, and the role of the criminal justice system and other agencies.

What you need to know:

- The role of the criminal justice system
- The relationship between the sociological study of crime and deviance and social policy.
- Examples of crime prevention policies from the Left and Right Realist perspectives

The criminal justice system

- The criminal justice system consists of agencies like the police, Crown Prosecution Service, courts, prisons and the probation service.
- These are overseen by the government departments of the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice.
- The Youth Justice Board oversees youth justice, and advises the Ministry of Justice on youth offending.
- These agencies are the main means of identifying, controlling and punishing known offenders.

Does imprisonment prevent crime?

- The prison system is meant to be the ultimate deterrent, both controlling crime and punishing offenders, but it doesn't actually seem to work very well as a crime- prevention measure.
- England and Wales now have the highest imprisonment rate in the European Union.
- There is no convincing evidence that putting more people in prison significantly reduces crime.
- About 65 per cent of former prisoners released in 2004 were reconvicted within two years of being released, and for young men (18–20) it was 75 per cent.
- Imprisonment isn't stopping people from reoffending, nor are high levels of imprisonment making much impact on reducing crime.

Realist theories and social policies for crime prevention

- Realist theories primarily concern themselves with explaining the crimes that matter to people and impact on their daily lives.
- These theories also concern themselves with practical crime prevention through social policy measures:
 - **Left Realism** tends to emphasise the social causes of crime, which might be characterised as tough on the causes of crime.
 - **Right Realism** lays more stress on situational crime prevention and being tough on the criminals.

Left Realism and crime prevention

- Recognise that both the offenders and the victims of the crimes that worry people most are found in those with the highest levels of marginality and social exclusion.
- They emphasise the need to tackle the material and cultural deprivation that are the risk factors for crime, particularly among young people.
- These factors include: poverty, unemployment, poor housing and education, poor parental supervision, and broken families and family conflict

Left realist policies

- Building strong communities to work out local solutions to local problems, and create community cohesion;
- Multi-agency working, involving everyone in the fight against crime, not just the criminal justice agencies;

- Creation of Safer Neighbourhood or Police and Community Together (PACT) groups, where local people can identify the issues that worry them, and get the police and other agencies to deal with them;
- More democratic and community control of policing to win public confidence to tackle the causes of crime, and encourage victims to report crime;
- More time spent by the police in investigating crime;
- Tackling social deprivation and the other risk factors for crime by improving community facilities to divert potential offenders from choosing crime – for example, youth leisure activities – and reducing unemployment and improving housing;
- Intensive parenting support that gets parents and young offenders together to work out solutions, and early intervention through strategies like Sure Start to help get children in the poorest communities.

Criticism of left realist prevention approaches

- They are 'soft' on crime, as they focus too much on the social causes of crime, downplaying the role of the offender in choosing to commit crime. The offender almost becomes a victim him- or herself.
- The explanations are inadequate, as the majority of those in deprived communities do not turn to crime. Social deprivation and other risk factors do not apply equally to all those in similar circumstances.
- They deflect attention away from more practical crime-prevention measures, like the tighter social control and situational crime prevention measures advocated by Right Realists.

Right Realism and crime prevention

- Focuses on individuals rather than on the wider social issues.
- Argue that individuals choose crime and must be dissuaded from committing crime, and, if they can't, must be punished for it.

Right realist policies

1. Situational crime prevention (SCP)

- Derives from **opportunity theories** of crime, like **routine activity theory** and **rational choice theory**:
 - **Routine activity theory**: Suggests that a crime occurs as part of everyday routines, when there are three conditions present: 1. there is a suitable target for the potential offender, which could be a person, a place or an object; 2. there is no 'capable guardian', like a neighbour, police, or CCTV surveillance to protect the target; 3. there is a potential offender present, who thinks the first two conditions are met (suitable target and no guardian), and then chooses whether or not to commit the crime.
 - **Rational choice theory**: Sees offenders as acting rationally, weighing up the benefits and risks when they see an opportunity for crime before choosing whether or not to commit an offence.
- **SCP** aims to make potential targets of crime more difficult and risky for potential offenders by 'designing out crime' in particular locations by 'target-hardening' measures, like post-coding goods, use of anti-climb paint, CCTV, locks, premises and car alarms.
- This both reduces the opportunities for crime in particular locations and poses greater risks for offenders and encourages them not to commit an offence.
- SCP is therefore concerned with preventing crime in particular locations rather than with catching offenders.

2. Increased social control

- Linked to **Hirschi's (1969) control theory**: strong social bonds integrating people into communities encourage individuals to choose conformity over deviance and crime.
- The focus is on tighter control and socialisation, by strengthening social institutions like the traditional family, religion and community, and constraining and isolating deviant individuals through community pressure.
- Policies flowing from this might include the following:
 - Making parents take more responsibility for the supervision of their children, and socialising them more effectively into conformist behaviour. Those who don't may be issued with Parenting Orders..
 - Schemes like Neighbourhood Watch, which involve informal surveillance and 'good neighbourliness', helping to build community controls over crime.
 - Cracking down on anti-social behaviour like graffiti, hoax calls, verbal abuse, noisy neighbours, drug and alcohol abuse in public places, and intimidating behaviour by groups of youths through 'naming and shaming' measures like Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs)
 - Supervision of offenders, for example, electronic tagging to restrict and monitor their movements.
 - Adopting zero tolerance policing, which involves taking steps against all crimes, even low-level offences like graffiti and vandalism, to prevent community breakdown.
 - More policing and more arrests, particularly in high crime areas, to deter potential criminals by increasing their risks of being caught.
 - Fast-track punishment of offenders, with more imprisonment and harsher sentences.

Criticism of policies derived from Right Realism

- They don't address the wider social causes of crime that the Left Realists do.
- They don't allow that some people may be targeted unfairly by police — for example, through stereotyping, labelling and racism, generating resentment and making problems worse.
- They assume that offenders act rationally in choosing crime and derive some benefits from it, but some crimes are impulsive or irrational and do not have any obvious gain, like vandalism or violence.
- SCP tends to be geographically limited and only prevents crime in particular locations
- SCP removes the focus from other forms of crime prevention, such as looking at wider economic and social policies which cause crime;
- SCP doesn't pay enough attention to catching criminals or punishments to deter offenders; it doesn't prevent crime overall, but simply **displaces** crime to softer targets in other areas.

The Sociological Study of Suicide and its Theoretical and Methodological Implications

What you need to know:

- Durkheim's study of suicide.
- Interpretivist responses to Durkheim.
- Realist approaches to suicide
- The key theoretical and methodological implications of the study of suicide

Introduction

- Suicide has received a huge amount of attention from sociologists, the main reason being that **Durkheim** used this topic to illustrate his own **positivist methodological approach**.
- Suicide has become an area in which different methodological approaches have been tested and disputed, with some sociologists supporting Durkheim's approach to explaining suicide; others trying to develop and improve his theory; whilst others have rejected his whole approach.

Durkheim: Positivism and Suicide

- In 1897 Durkheim published his book '**Suicide: A Study in Sociology**' which used a **positivist** approach to study suicide.
- **Positivism**: believes society can be studied scientifically and that sociology should model itself on the logic and methods of the natural sciences. Positivists see human behaviour as formed by social forces external to the individual. Positivists aim to observe patterns in society and related human behavior and develop laws of cause and effect to produce laws to explain these patterns.
- Wanted to show that even a highly individual act like suicide is a product of **social forces** (e.g. demographic characteristics, values, beliefs etc) and that explaining the **suicide rate** in any society did not depend on understanding the consciousness, intention or mental/psychological state of the suicide victim.
- Also chose to study suicide because of the availability of quantitative **suicide statistics** from a number of European countries. These statistics were seen as being **social facts**.
- **Lukes (1992)**: Social facts have three main features: They are external to individuals; they constrain individuals, shaping their behavior; they are greater than individuals: they exist on a different 'level' from the individual.
- Durkheim believed that suicide statistics could be used to find the sociological causes of suicide rates and that he could establish correlations, and, could uncover the patterns that would reveal the **causal relationships** at work in the production of suicide rates.
- Ultimate aim: To demonstrate that sociology was as rigorous a discipline as the natural sciences.
- **Patterns in suicide rates**: Durkheim discovered that the suicide rates of the European societies in question were fairly constant and stable; there were significant differences in the suicide rate between societies; there were consistent variations in the suicide rate between different groups within the same society. He believed it was impossible to explain these patterns if suicide was seen solely as a personal and individual act. Thus, sociology was just as scientific as physics, chemistry or biology.

Causes of suicide: Durkheim suggested that suicide was determined by two social facts:

1. **Social Integration:** The extent that individuals feel a sense of belonging to a social group/society and feel an obligation to its members. Achieved through family, religious institutions etc.
2. **Moral Regulation:** The extent to which individuals actions and desires are kept in check by norms and values. Achieved through social control and socialization.
 - Suicide results from either too much or too little social integration and moral regulation.

Durkheim's four types of suicide

1. **Egoistic Suicide:** The individual is **insufficiently integrated** into the social groups and society to which he or she belonged. E.g. The higher rate of suicide associated with **Protestantism** results from its being a less strongly integrated church than the Catholic church. Also linked to (a lack of) **family relationships**.
2. **Altruistic Suicide:** The individual is **so well integrated** into society that they sacrificed their own life out of a sense of duty to others.
3. **Anomic Suicide** Takes place when society **does not regulate the individual sufficiently**. (there is anomie, or normlessness). E.g. Economic booms/slumps when traditional norms and values are disrupted by rapid social change, producing uncertainty in the minds of individuals as society's guidelines for behaviour became increasingly unclear.
4. **Fatalistic Suicide** occurs when society **restricts the individual too much**. Suicide as an escape from a future of unending despair and hopelessness. E.g. Slaves.

Evaluation

Strengths

- Supported by positivists E.g. **Halbwachs (1930)** claimed Durkheim's work was "in principle...unassailable" and undertook his own research which confirmed Durkheim's findings.

Weaknesses: Positivist criticisms

- **Halbwachs (1930):** Durkheim had overestimated the importance of religion in determining the suicide rate.
- **Gibbs and Martin (1964):** Durkheim was not positivist enough, using concepts that could not be directly observed or measured.
- The four types of suicide are based on assumptions about what group membership means to the individuals concerned. E.g. Durkheim assumes that the Catholic religion is a more integrating religion than Protestantism, but individual Catholics may not see it that way. Thus, he is putting his own subjective interpretations onto the data. This is 'unscientific'.
- Durkheim's work rests on official suicide statistics, which he regards as a true record of the number of suicides. These might actually be social constructions.
- See other theories criticisms below.

Interpretive Theories of Suicide

- Criticise Durkheim's approach and favour qualitative research methods. E.g. **Douglas** and **Atkinson**.

J.D. Douglas' 'The Social Meanings of Suicide' (1967)

- Sees **suicide statistics as the result of negotiations** between the different parties involved, rather than objective facts. The decision as to whether a sudden death is suicide is made by a coroner and is influenced by other people, such as the family and friends of the deceased.
- E.g. When a person is well integrated into a social group, his or her family and friends might be more likely to deny the possibility of suicide, both to themselves and to the coroner. With less well-integrated members of society this is less likely to happen.
- This bias could explain Durkheim's findings: While it might appear that the number of suicides is related to integration, in reality the degree of integration simply affects the chances of sudden death being recorded as suicide.
- Also, **it was ridiculous for Durkheim to treat all suicides as the same type of act** without investigating the meaning attached to the act by those who took their own life.
- Each act has a different motive behind it and a social meaning that is related to the society and context in which it took place.
- In order to categorise suicides according to their social meanings it is necessary to carry out **case studies** (based on interviews with those who knew the person well, analysis of suicide notes and diaries) to discover the meanings of particular suicides.
- There are 4 most common social meanings of suicide in Western industrial society:
 1. **Transformation of the self**: Suicide as a means of getting others to think of you differently / self punishment to show repentance for wrongdoing.
 2. **Transformation of the Soul**: Suicide as a means of escaping the misery of this life/ way of getting to heaven.
 3. **Sympathy Suicide**: Suicide as a cry for help.
 4. **Revenge Suicide**: Suicide as a means of getting revenge by making others feel guilty.

Evaluation

Weaknesses

- **Steve Taylor (1989)**: Douglas fails to recognise the value of Durkheim's work.
- **Sainsbury and Barraclough (1968)**: The rank order of suicides for immigrant groups in the USA correlates closely with that of suicide rates for their countries of origin, despite the fact that a different set of coroners (American rather than those in their home countries) were involved. This suggests that statistics may reflect the real differences between groups, rather than coroners' opinions.
- **Phenomenologists**: There cannot be any objective data on which to base an explanation of suicide.

J. Maxwell Atkinson 'Discovering Suicide' (1978)

- A phenomenologist/ethnomethodologist, who does not accept that a 'real' rate of suicide exists as an objective reality waiting to be discovered.
- Suicide is a construct of social actors: Official statistics on suicide are the interpretations made by officials, of what is seen to be unnatural death.
- Coroners have a 'common-sense theory' of suicide. If information about the deceased fits the theory, they are likely to categorise his or her death as suicide. They consider: 1. whether or not **suicide notes** were left or threats of suicide preceded death; 2 the particular **mode of dying**; 3 the **location and circumstances of death**; 4 the **mental state and social situation** of the victim.

- This view has serious implications for research that treats official statistics on suicide as 'facts' and seeks to explain their cause.

Evaluation

Strengths

- Most phenomenologists accept that their accounts are merely interpretations. Unlike positivists, who claim to produce objective, scientific accounts.

Weaknesses

- **Hindess (1973)**: If suicide statistics can be criticised as being no more than the interpretations of coroners, then studies such as that done by Atkinson can be criticised as being no more than the interpretation of a particular sociologist.
- **Hindess (1973)**: "A manuscript produced by a monkey at a typewriter would be no less valuable"

The Realist Approach to Suicide

- **Taylor (1982, 1989, 1990)** steered a middle way between the other theories.
- Conducted a study of '**persons under trains**', where there were no strong clues as to the reason for the death. However out of 32 cases, 17 resulted in suicide verdicts, 5 were classified as accidental deaths, and the remaining 10 produced open verdicts.
- A number of factors made suicide verdicts more likely:
 1. A history of mental illness / some form of social failure or social disgrace.
 2. When a person who had died had no good reason to be at the tube station.
 3. If witnesses at the inquest were less close to the person, they were less likely to deny suicidal motives. (close friends / family members tended to deny that the person had reason to kill themselves).
- Taylor agrees that suicide statistics are highly unreliable and socially constructed and agrees with Atkinson that specific factors and common sense theories influence the verdicts reached by coroners and distort suicide figures, he thought it was still possible to identify the causes of suicide

Types of Suicide

- Suicides and suicide attempts are either '**Ectopic**' / '**Inner Directed**' (suicide as a private act) or '**Symphysic**' / '**Other Directed**' (They result from a person's relationship with others and communicating some message to them).
- They are also related whether people are **certain** or **uncertain** about themselves or about others.
 1. **Submissive suicide**: Is **inner directed** and occurs when a person is **certain** about themselves and their life; they believe that life is effectively over and see themselves as already dead. E.g a person may have decided that their life is valueless without a loved one who has died.
 2. **Thanatation**: **Inner directed** and occurs when a person is **uncertain** about themselves. The suicide attempt is a gamble which may or may not be survived, according to fate or chance.
 3. **Sacrifice suicides**: **Other directed** and occurs when a person is **certain** that others have made their life unbearable. E.g a man killing himself because his wife because she wants a divorce. Letters are left making it clear that he felt that his wife was responsible for his death.
 4. **Appeal suicides**: **Other directed** resulting from the suicidal person feeling **uncertainty** over the attitudes of others towards them. The suicide attempts are a form of communication in which the victim tries to show how desperate they are, in order to find out how others will respond.

Evaluation

Strengths

- It helps to explain why some suicide victims leave notes and others do not, why some suicide attempts seem more serious than others, and why some take place in isolation and others in more public places.

Weaknesses

- It is based on Taylor's interpretations of the actors' meanings and there is no way of knowing if these are correct, especially in the case of those whose attempts were successful (since they are no longer able to explain their motives).
- Individual suicides may result from a combination of motives, with the result that they do not fit neatly into any one category.
- Taylor's small sample of case studies, whilst useful giving insights into motives, is unlikely to be representative of all suicides.

Conclusion

- Whilst the disputes between positivists and interpretivists are real, even those who have strongly advocated either quantitative or qualitative approaches have not stuck rigidly to their own supposed methodological principles.
- E.g. **Douglas** criticises Durkheim for going beyond the study of social facts and also studying the subjective states of mind of individuals (such as what it felt like to be a Roman Catholic), in order to explain why their suicide rates should be so different.
- E.g. **Cicourel (1976)**, who was strongly critical of quantitative methods, used a lot of use of statistical data in his study of juvenile justice.
- Many sociologists now advocate using a mixture of both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Exam Questions: Answer guidance

Item A

In a comparative study of decision making about suicide conducted by Atkinson, Kessel and Dalgaard, four English coroners and five Danish coroners were given 40 cases and asked to give their verdict on each of them. The Danish coroners were much more likely to give a verdict of suicide compared with the English coroners. For example, out of the 40 cases, the Danes gave on average 29 suicide verdicts, whereas the English averaged only 19.25. The study concludes that the difference is due to the fact that in Denmark, a suicide verdict can be given when suicide seems likely 'on the

Using material from Item A and elsewhere, assess the usefulness of different sociological approaches to suicide. (21 marks)

This question carries 9 AO1 (knowledge and understanding) marks and 12 AO2 (interpretation, application, analysis and evaluation) marks.

You need to examine a number of theories of suicide, but you should avoid lengthy descriptions of the various suicide typologies and focus on the differences in perspective. Start with Durkheim's positivist approach, covering key concepts such as social facts, integration and regulation. You could evaluate this by using Douglas's ideas on the social meanings of suicide.

Make use of the Item to illustrate the idea that suicide verdicts are labels socially constructed by coroners, and that the law is one factor affecting how labels are constructed. You could use this to introduce Atkinson's ethnomethodological approach focusing on coroners' commonsense knowledge and the issue of the 'real rate'. Also

include reference to Taylor's realist approach; for example, you can use it to evaluate both positivist and interpretivist approaches.

Theory and Methods Section

Consensus and Conflict

Functionalism

Key Ideas

- Functionalism is a macro approach - society is seen as a social system consisting of system parts, functionally independent and interrelated.
- Functionalism uses the organic analogy - society is seen as a living organism or mechanism. Change in one part will have the effects elsewhere and a 'diseased' part will contaminate others.
- For Parsons, society has a set of needs or functional imperatives that are met by the four subsystems: economic, political, kinship and cultural.
- Social order is maintained through value consensus, whereby values are internalised through the early socialisation process and individuals learn the social norms and values of their social position. Interdependence is created through the division of labour and the obligations of social relationships.
- Conflict is minimised as individuals accept the inevitability and necessity of social inequalities (individuals have different talents and abilities).
- Society is made up of system parts such as family, education, religion and media, which all reinforce social solidarity.

Durkheim and Functionalism

Durkheim was the most important forerunner of functionalism. He was concerned by rapid social change from a traditional society with a simple social structure to a complex modern society.

- Traditional society was based on mechanical solidarity with little division of labour where its members were all fairly alike. A strong collective conscience bound them so tightly together that individuals in the modern sense did not really exist.
- Modern society: has a complex division of labour, which promotes differences between groups and weakens social solidarity. Greater individual freedom must be regulated to prevent extreme egoism from destroying all bonds.
- Rapid change undermines old norms without creating clear new ones, throwing people into a state of anomie (normlessness) that threatens social cohesion.
- Social facts: Durkheim sees society as a separate entity existing over and above its members - a system of external social facts shaping their behaviour to serve society's needs.

Parsons: Society as a system

The organic analogy - Functionalists see society as like a biological organism. Parsons identifies three similarities between society and an organism:

- **System:** Both are self regulating systems of inter-related, independent parts that fit together in fixed ways. In society, the parts are social institutions, individual roles etc.
- **System needs:** Organisms have needs that must be met if they are to survive; e.g. society's members must be socialised if society is to continue.
- **Functions:** The function of any part of a system is the contribution it makes to meet the system's needs and thus ensuring its survival. For example, the circulatory system of the body carries nutrients to the tissues. Similarly, the economy meets society's need for food and shelter.

Value consensus and social order

Parsons' central question is 'how social order is possible?' How are individuals able to cooperate harmoniously?

- Social order is achieved through a central value system or shared culture: a set of norms, values, beliefs and goals shared by members of a society.
- Parsons calls this value consensus. He sees it as the glue that holds society together.

Integration of the Individual

Value consensus makes social order possible by integrating individuals into the social system and directing them towards meeting the system's needs.

- For Parsons, the system has two mechanisms for ensuring that individuals conform to shared norms and meet the system's needs:
 1. **Socialisation:** Through socialisation in the family, education, work etc, individuals internalise the system's norms and values so that society becomes part of their personality structure.
 2. **Social Control:** Positive sanctions reward conformity, negative ones punish deviance.
- Socialisation and social control ensure that individuals are orientated towards pursuing society's shared goals and meeting its needs.
- By following social norms, each individual's behaviour will be relatively predictable and stable, enabling cooperation to occur.

The parts of the social system

Parsons model of the social system is like a series of building blocks:

- **Norms:** At the bottom of the system specific norms or rules govern individuals' actions.
- **Status-roles:** are 'clusters' or sets of norms that tell us how the occupant of a status (social position) must act; e.g. teachers must not show favouritism.
- **Institutions:** are clusters of status-roles, e.g. the family is an institution made up of the related roles of mother, father, child etc.
- **Sub-systems:** are groups of related institutions. For example, shops, farms. Factories and banks form part of the economic sub-system.
- **The social system:** These sub-systems together make up the social system as a whole.

The system's needs: The AGIL schema

For functionalists, society is therefore a system with its own needs. Parsons identifies four basic needs, summarised as AGIL from their initial letters. Each need is met by a separate sub-system of institutions:

1. Adaptation: of environment to meet people's material needs (e.g. food, shelter). These are met by the economic sub-system.
2. Goal attainment: Society needs to set goal and allocate resources to achieve them. This is the function of the political sub-system.
3. Integration: The different parts of the system must be integrated together to pursue shared goals. This is performed by the sub-system of religion, education and the media.
4. Latency: refers to processes that maintain society over time. The kinship sub-system provides 'pattern maintenance' and 'tension management'; ensuring individuals are motivated to continue performing their roles.

Types of Society

Parsons identifies two types of society, each with its own typical pattern variables or sets of norms.

- Traditional societies: with ascribed status. Relationships are broad and multi-purpose; norms are particularistic (treating different people differently); immediate gratification is emphasised; the group's interests come first - collective orientation.
- Modern societies: with achieved status. Relationships are limited to specific purposes; norms are universalistic (same rules for everyone); deferred gratification is emphasised; individualistic orientation.

Social Change

Change is gradual, evolutionary process of increasing complexity, just like organisms, societies move from simple to complex structures.

- In traditional society, a single institution - kinship - performs many functions, e.g. providing political leadership, socialisation and religious functions.
- As society develops, the kinship system loses these functions, to factories, political parties, schools, churches etc.
- This is structural differentiation - a gradual process in which separate, functionally specialised institutions develop, each meeting a different need.
- Gradual change occurs through moving equilibrium; as a change occurs in one part of the system, it produces compensatory changes in other parts.

Evaluation

Strengths:

- Functionalism was the first major attempt to produce a grand theory of society
- It demonstrates successfully that social institutions are linked together.
- It allows us to understand that functions (manifest and latent) of social rituals and social institutions.
- It examines the importance of primary socialisation for any social order to be possible.

Weaknesses:

- It places too much emphasis on harmony and fails to take into account competing power interests.

- It fails to provide an adequate explanation of social change. All change is seen as evolutionary - which may not be the case.
- It is accused of accepting the status quo and thus taking an inherently conservative view of society.
- It is sometimes seen as teleological, .e. as trying to explain the origins of any social institution by the function it performs for society - for example, the function of religion is seen as reinforcing social solidarity.

Exam Practice

Question: 'Functionalist theories are overly deterministic and ignore the extent of conflict and division in society.' Assess the usefulness of functionalist contributions to our understanding of society (33 marks)

Examiners advice: Within your assessment of different functionalist contributions, you should keep a strong focus on the aspects identified in the question, that is determinism, conflict and division. These are the criticisms made of functionalism by action, conflict and postmodern approaches.

The standard approach to a question on functionalism might be to explain functionalist theories and then offer criticisms and alternatives put forward by other perspectives. This approach can be improved upon by tying in the criticisms from other perspectives to specific aspects of functionalism as you cover them (rather than in a separate section later on in your essay).

Furthermore, you should also try to point out some of the claimed strengths of functionalism - for example, that it is a complete theory of society, that it has a resonance today in New Right ideas and that it provides an analysis to underpin some approaches to social policy. You should use examples of functionalist analysis from areas that you are familiar with, e.g. crime and deviance, education, the family, religion etc.

New Right (Neo-Functionalism)

The ideas of the New Right became popular in the 1980s. They were associated with the work of Charles Murray and adapted by the US President Ronald Regan and the British Prime Minister Margret Thatcher, New Right ideas have been applied in sociology to the family, education and social stratification.

Key Ideas

- New Right thinking is based on nineteenth century liberalism, in which the free market was seen as the key to a successful economy.
- It favours less state intervention because it assumed that state benefits create a dependency culture, which takes away individual motivation to work and achieve.
- Murray maintained that the underclass in the USA was the major cause of criminality and immorality.
- Individual choice in areas such as pensions, education and medicine should be encouraged and people should be helped to buy their own property.
- There was interest in the revival of 'traditional' values and beliefs, especially surrounding the family and the value of hard work. Some lone-parent families were seen as causing major social problems.
- New Right supporters argue that state institutions such as local government, social services, education and the health services would be more efficient if they were run with a market led system.

Evaluation

Strengths:

- The New Right thinking focuses on the importance of the individual's responsibility to the rest of society.
- It attempts to find the causes of social problems
- Public - private partnerships stem from New Right thinking

Weaknesses:

- Although the New Right advocated a rolling back of the state, it actually supported the introduction of harsher measures of social control
- New Right ideas are more a political perspective than a theory of society.

Marxism

There are several forms of Marxism, which have various names: Classical Marxism is sometimes referred to as instrumental Marxism, Neo-Marxism is often called hegemonic Marxism; and the Frankfurt School has a separate set of characteristics. We can see, however, that all forms share several basic assumptions.

Key Ideas

- Marxism is a macro approach where society is seen as a social system based in relationships arising out of conflicts of interest.
- Society is divided between the *infrastructure* (the economic base, made up of the social relations of production and the forces of production) and the *super-structure* (social institutions such as the family, religion, law, education, politics and the mass media, which serve to legitimise the power relations arising from the infrastructure).
- The main focus of Marxism rests on the historical development and social relations of western capitalism. In capitalist society, the owners of private property in the means of production, the bourgeoisie, exploit the labour power of the non-owners the proletariat.
- Social change is inevitable until the achievement of a communist society. Revolution is the outcome of the process by which the subject classes gain awareness of their exploited situation and rise against the bourgeoisie.
- Hegemonic Marxism emphasises the role of ideology in maintaining the rule of the powerful. They keep their position by winning the consent of the subject groups through ideological persuasion.

Gramsci and hegemony

- Gramsci's concept of hegemony, or ideological and moral leadership, explains how the ruling class maintains its position.
- Gramsci sees the ruling class maintaining its dominance in two ways:
 1. Coercion: the army, police, prisons and courts of the capitalist state force other classes to accept its rule.
 2. Consent (hegemony): the ruling class use ideas and values to persuade the subordinate classes that their rule is legitimate.

However, ruling class hegemony is never complete because:

- The ruling class are a minority and have to make ideological compromises with other classes.
- The proletariat have a dual consciousness - the poverty and exploitation they experience means they begin to 'see through' the dominant ideology.
- Gramsci rejects economic determinism as an exploitation of change, even though economic factors such as mass unemployment may create the preconditions for a revolution, ideas are central to whether or not it will actually occur.
- Although ruling-class hegemony may be undermined by an economic crisis, this will only lead to revolution if the proletariat construct a counter-hegemonic bloc to win the leadership of society. The working class can only win the battle for ideas by producing its own organic intellectuals.

Althusser's structuralist Marxism

- For structuralist Marxists such as Althusser, it is not people's actions but social structures that shape history. The task of the sociologist is to reveal how these structures work.
- Althusser's version of Marxism rejects both economic determinism and humanism.

1. Criticisms of the base-superstructure model:

- Marx stated that society's economic base determines its superstructure of institutions, ideologies etc, and that contradictions in the base cause changes in the superstructure.
- Althusser's structural determinism is more complex. In his model, capitalist society has three structures or levels:
 - i. The economic level: comprising all those activities that involve producing something in order to satisfy a need.
 - ii. The political level: comprising all forms of organisation.
 - iii. The ideological level: involving ways that people see themselves and their world.

2. The ideological and repressive state apparatuses

Although the economic level dominates in capitalism, the other two levels perform indispensable functions. The state performs political and ideological functions that ensure the reproduction (continuation) of capitalism.

He divides the state into two 'apparatuses':

1. The repressive state apparatuses (RSAs) or 'armed bodies of men' that coerce the working class into complying with the will of the bourgeoisie. This is how Marxists have traditionally seen the state.
2. The ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) manipulate the working class into accepting capitalism as legitimate. This is a much wider definition of the state than the traditional Marxist view.

3. Althusser's criticisms of humanism

For structuralist Marxists, free will, choice and creativity are an illusion - everything is the product of underlying social structures.

- Humans are merely puppets and these unseen structures are the hidden puppet master, determining all our thoughts and actions.
- For Althusser, socialism will not come about because of a change in consciousness - as humanistic Marxism argues - but because of a crisis of capitalism resulting from what he calls over-determination: the contradictions in the three structures that occur relatively independently of each other.

Evaluation

Strengths:

- Marxism has been a major force in social thought influencing the progress of actual social change.
- It has influenced other critical social thinkers within sociology, such as Weber and feminists.
- Like Functionalism, Marxism attempts to link the individual to the structure of society. Unlike functionalism it emphasises socialisation into a capitalist society for the benefit of the powerful groups.

Weaknesses:

- Classical Marxism is sometimes seen as overly deterministic. The individual is seen mainly as a passive victim of historical circumstance. However, neo-Marxists allow for some relative autonomy in the elements within the superstructure,
- Functionalists criticise the over-emphasis on conflict - they see strengths in the existence of a value consensus.
- Classical Marxism ignored gender relations in society by privileging social class in its analysis.
- Postmodernists have strongly challenged Marxism for its metanarrative - recent social changes in the Eastern Bloc and China have served to undermine Marxism.

Exam Question on this answer

Question: Assess the view that Marxist theories are no longer relevant to our understanding of society (33 marks)

Examiners guidance: The question asks about theories, plural. It is therefore important to go beyond traditional Marxism and to cover both the humanistic and structuralist versions of modern Marxism, such as Gramsci and Althusser. Start by explaining Marx's ideas and how the key concepts in his analysis, such as materialism, exploitation, class conflict, ideology, revolution etc, fit together. Evaluate his ideas as you cover each of them, both making criticisms, e.g. Weber's view that status and power are important as well as class, and pointing out the strengths. In your answer, focus on our understanding of society today. You can link the modern humanistic and structuralist versions of Marxism to the 'structure versus action' debate. You should also use examples of Marxism analysis from different areas of sociology that you are familiar with, e.g. in education, crime, religion, the family etc.

Feminism

There are several branches of feminism - liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, black feminism and postmodern feminism - but they all share some basic assumptions.

Key Ideas

- Gender relations are based on power and economic inequalities.
- Gender roles are socially constructed.
- Gender inequalities are largely social, not based on biological difference.

- Previously sociology was 'malestream' and ignored the social position of women in its theories.
- Liberal Feminism is concerned with gender inequalities within education, the family and the work sphere. It focuses upon equal opportunities and legislation for change.
- Marxist feminism examines gender inequalities as they arise within capitalism. They focus on dual labour theory and the domestic labour debate. Feminist Marxists are particularly interested in the role of ideology within capitalism.
- Radical Feminism emphasises the impact of patriarchy and sexual politics on women and children. Domestic violence is seen as a manifestation of patriarchy, as is pornography and sex-trafficking. Some radical feminists take a lesbian separatist position and advocate separatism between men and women.
- Black Feminism concentrated specifically on the oppression of black women, as other forms of feminism failed to address issues of gender and race.
- Postmodern Feminism challenges the earlier assumptions around gender identity, as it sees individuals benefiting from a range of female and male identities. Gender and sexual identity are seen as fluid.

Evaluation

Strengths:

- Feminism made the role of women and gender relations visible - both in sociology and in society in general.
- Feminists have exposed the dark side of family life, helping to free women and children from domestic violence and abuse.
- Feminists have increased people's awareness of the inequalities created by gender
- They have shown how gender roles are socially constructed
- Black feminists have exposed the colour-blindness of mainstream sociology

Weaknesses:

- Feminists are accused of ignoring the domestic labour of men and the increasing economic and educational achievement of women
- They ignore the element of choice in gender relationships
- Marxist feminists fail to examine the oppression of women under state socialism
- They produce a highly selective view of society

Exam Question on this topic

Question: Assess the usefulness of different feminist approaches to our understanding of society today. (33 marks)

Examiners advice: The question clearly refers to different feminist approaches, so an answer needs to explore the differences - and the similarities - between feminist theories. Your answer should therefore explore liberal, radical, Marxist, dual systems and difference feminisms and the influence of post-structuralism. As well as exploring feminist theories it would be useful to refer to specific feminist studies or areas of particular research interest such as gender roles in the family or the role of political action. Another important area to explore is the way feminism has acted as a counter-balance to 'malestream' sociology.

Social Action Theory/Interpretivism

The Interpretivist approach in sociology has several branches. We are mainly concerned with those known as Weberian sociology (*verstehen*), symbolic Interactionism and ethnomethodology. They share some basic assumptions, but also have specific characteristics.

Key Ideas

- Social reality is constructed through the actions and interaction of individuals.
- Individuals define and interpret situations, negotiate meaning and thus create social reality.
- Sociologists must discover the meanings and interpretations of individuals in social action by placing themselves in the social positions of those individuals and gaining an empathetic understanding.
- Symbolic Interactionism examines the use of 'symbols' such as language and gestures in social action. It uses the concept of the self (the I and the me) to show that individuals are self-reflexive and that, by using their understanding of past experiences, they can modify present action. Use of the dramaturgical metaphor in social roles presents their various selves to the world. Labelling theory emerged from this approach. Labelling theorists emphasize the power of those who label and the effects on those who are labelled - once labelled as 'deviant', it is difficult to lose the label.
- In *verstehen* sociology, Weber uses the ideal types of social action (rational, value-rational, tradition and effectual) to impose meaning on social reality. Only through empathetic interpretation of the meanings and motivations of individuals in social positions is sociology possible.
- Ethnomethodology examines the methods by which individuals make sense of everyday reality. Social reality is seen as precarious and, therefore, as constantly being accomplished by individuals. Social order depends on taken-for-granted assumptions or rules of everyday life; when these are challenged, anxiety is created. Language is indexical - it can change meaning according to the context.

Combining structure and action

- Action theories are micro-level, voluntaristic theories that see society as inter-subjective, constructed through interaction and meaning.
- Subcultural theories by contrast are macro-level theories that see society as objective and external to individuals.

Giddens' Structuration Theory

Giddens seeks to combine the two approaches into a single unified theory of structure and action:

- He argues that there is a duality of structure. Structure and agency (i.e. action) are two sides of the same coin; neither can exist without the other.
- Our actions produce, reproduce and change structures over time and space, while these structures are what make our actions possible in the first place.
- Giddens calls this relationship structuration.

Reproducing structures through agency

For Giddens, structure has two elements:

- Rules: The norms, customs and the laws that govern action
- Resources: both economic resources and power over others.

- Rules and resources can be either reproduced or changed through human action. However, our actions generally tend to reproduce rather than change them. This is because society's rules contain a stock of knowledge about how to live our lives, so our routine activities tend to reproduce the existing structure of society.
- We also reproduce existing structures because we have a deep-seated need for ontological security - a need to feel that the world is orderly, stable and predictable.

Changing structures through agency

Change can happen because:

1. We reflexively monitor (reflect upon) our actions and we can deliberately choose a new course of action. In late modern society, where tradition no longer dictates action, this is even more likely.
2. Our actions may have unintended consequences, producing changes that were not part of our goal.

Evaluation

Strengths:

- These are micro approaches that see the individual as having agency, not simply as a recipient of external social forces.
- Interpretivism enables us to see how social reality is constructed through meanings and negotiations.

Weaknesses:

- Verstehen sociology assumes the individuals engage in rational behaviour and thus are able to understand their own motivations. Ideal types are simply devices to make sense of chaotic reality. Weber's interpretation of the relationship capitalism and Protestantism has been challenged on historical grounds.
- Symbolic Interactionism ignores the impact of structural elements on individuals.
- Labelling assumes that social actors passively accept being labelled and tends to ignore resistance labels.

Exam Question on this topic

Question: Assess the contribution of different 'action' theories to our understanding of society today. (33 marks)

Examiners advice: You should begin by explaining what is meant by 'action' theories, contrasting them with structural approaches. You need to use the appropriate terminology: determinism versus voluntarism, 'top-down' versus 'bottom-up', macro versus micro, objective versus subjective etc. You should refer to all four major theories; social action theory, Interactionism, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology. However, it is reasonable to focus on one - probably Interactionism, ensuring you deal with both labelling theory and Goffman. Refer to the differences between action approaches, especially in relation to how far they give some role to structural factors. A useful way to end is to briefly discuss Giddens' structuration theory - does it bring action and structuralist approach together or is it a weak compromise.

Modernity and Postmodernity

Modernity and Postmodernity are concepts that define particular periods in social history and thought. There is an ongoing debate in sociology as to whether society has moved from modernity to Postmodernity.

Modernity

Key Ideas

- Enlightenment ideas in the eighteenth century influence the social thinkers of the nineteenth century.
- Modernists held a strong belief in progress. In different ways Comte, Durkheim Marx and Weber all saw western societies as moving towards a 'better world'. The application of science, rationality and technology would inevitably produce social progress.
- Objective knowledge became both desirable and possible
- Modernists believed that they could apply scientific methodology to the study of society in order to understand it and bring about desired changes.
- Overall, modernity was an optimistic view of the future of society.

Postmodernism

Key Ideas

- Postmodernists do not accept the ideas of the Enlightenment - they do not believe in the power of science to solve all social and environmental problems. In fact, science and technology can be blamed for destroying the environment. It is a pessimistic approach that sees the future of society as dystopic.
- They have challenged social theorists by maintaining that the metanarrative or 'big stories' of the past, such as Marxism and Functionalism, are insufficient to make sense of our changing world. Knowledge is no longer absolute but dependant and relative.
- The development of the mass media and global communications through computers has encouraged us to define ourselves through cultural and media images. The old certainties of social class, gender and race have been fractured and fragmented and an individual's identity is now more reliant on media imagery.
- Time and space have been compressed through communications and travel - cultures have become hybridised.

Theories of late modernity

Unlike Postmodernism, theories of late modernity (TLM) argue that today's rapid changes are not the dawn of a new postmodern era, but a continuation of modern society.

- We are now in late or high modernity. Key features of modernity have now become intensifies; e.g. change has always been typical of modern society, but now it has gone into overdrive.
- Unlike Postmodernism, TLM subscribe to the Enlightenment project.

Giddens reflexivity and high modernity

High modernity has two key features that encourage globalisation and rapid change:

- Disembedding is the 'lifting out of social relations from local contexts of interaction'. Factors such as credit break down geographical barriers and make interaction more impersonal.
- Reflexivity: Tradition and custom no longer serve as a guide to how we should act.
- We are thus forced to become reflexive - to reflect on and modify our actions in the light of information about risks.
- This means we are continually re-evaluating our ideas. Under these conditions, cultures becomes increasingly unstable.

Late Modernity and risk

- We now face new high consequence risks, e.g. environmental harm. Beck calls these 'manufactured risks' as they result from technology, not nature.
- However, unlike postmodernists, Giddens and Beck believe we can make rational plans based on objective knowledge to reduce these risks and achieve progress.

Evaluation

Strengths:

- Postmodernism has tried to interpret the new social and cultural changes, such as the opening up of the Eastern Bloc.
- It has attempted to analyse the growing impact of mass media on society
- It challenged the absolutist positions of the old metanarrative
- It sees individuals as having choices to create pick and mix identities through consumerism.

Weaknesses:

- Postmodernism is a confusing theoretical approach, as different thinkers emphasise different aspects.
- In challenging the metanarrative, it is in danger of becoming a new theoretical position in itself.
- Postmodernism emphasises the cultural at the expense of the social and economic
- It fails to recognise the constraints on the individuals of the huge social inequalities that still exist based on economics, gender and ethnicity.
- It is seen as overplaying the role of the mass media and taking a relatively passive view of the individual as audience member.

Exam Question is this topic

Question: Assess the usefulness of postmodernism to our understanding of society today. (33 marks)

Examiners advice: You can start by outlining some of the main features of today's society, e.g. by focusing on the impact of globalisation. You should then give an account of postmodernism, using key concepts such as meta-narratives, media-saturated society, hyper-reality, identity, consumption, diversity, instability etc. Examine the criticisms made of postmodernism, e.g. in terms of its pessimism towards the Enlightenment project, its logical flaws, its ignoring of power and inequality etc. Use theories of late modernity and Marxist theories of Postmodernity as more plausible sociological alternatives to the postmodernist view of today's society.

Science and Sociology

The debate about whether sociology can be scientific depends on what definition of science is applied. There is some controversy as to how far natural science follows 'scientific' principles.

Science and the sociological perspectives

Positivism

- Natural science is based on the hypothetico-deductive method and searches for cause and effect relationships between phenomena. The scientist seeks to discover the underlying laws that govern nature.
- It is both possible and necessary for scientists to be objective and value-free.
- Scientific knowledge is both cumulative and falsifiable (Popper).

Interpretivism

- The scientific method is appropriate only to natural phenomena where there is no question of consciousness or reflexivity.
- The scientific method cannot be applied to the understanding of social action.

Kuhn

- As a challenge to Popper, Kuhn maintains that science is not a cumulative body of knowledge.
- Most scientists work within a given academic community using a shared paradigm (a complete theory and framework of methodology within which scientists operate).
- Scientific revolutions occur when the assumptions of normal science are challenged by anomalies that cannot be covered by existing paradigm.

Kaplan

- He distinguishes between reconstructed logic (methods and procedures that scientist claim to use) and logic in use (what actually takes place in scientific research). Phenomena might be dismissed as 'artefacts' if they do not fit the pre-existing theoretical assumptions.

Marxism

- Science is not value-free but responds to demands of capitalism - profit and ideology.
- Scientific research is dominated by competition, the profit motive and ideological justification of the interests of powerful groups.

Feminism

- Science is essentially a patriarchal institution.
- As the majority of scientists have been men, the scientific establishment emphasises malestream values.
- Scientists have attempted to justify the social inferiority of women by ideologically based research.
- Science prioritises aspects of society that are more beneficial to men, such as space exploration.

Realism

- Realists see science as an attempt to explain causal relationships in terms of underlying (unobservable) structure, mechanisms and processes.
- There are differences between open and closed systems in natural science.
- Within closed systems, variables can be controlled and measured, as with chemistry or physics.
- Open systems cannot control all variables and so prediction levels are uncertain. This happens in medicine, meteorology and seismology.

Sociology can be a science (Positivism):

- Subject matter of society is similar to natural science. Therefore they believe that humans like rocks, gases etc. **react** to external forces. Human behaviour like natural matter is therefore seen to be **caused** and predictable. For example structural functionalists claim that kinship and cultural institutions such as religion and education constrain human behaviour through socialisation.
- Sociologists can follow the **logic** of natural science research. Although experimental research is rarely used because of practical (difficulties controlling variables) and ethical issues (potential harm to participants), the logic of natural science research can be followed.
 - Quantitative
 - Standardisation
 - Objective/value free
 - Only look at what is directly observable (no feelings, emotions etc.)
 - Follow the hypothetico deductive model
- This leads positivists to use methods such as statistics and social surveys. For example Durkheim made use of official suicide rates to establish a scientific and causal theory of suicide.

Sociology should be a science:

- Produces knowledge that is certain.
- Can generalise.
- Establish laws of cause and effect.
- Make predictions.
- Can be replicated.
- Gain data that is high in reliability.

For example positivist researchers at the home office claim to be able to generalise about crime trends and make predictions about patterns of victimisation because of their use of large scale social surveys.

Sociology cannot be a science (Interpretivism):

- Subject matter of society is not similar to natural science. Interpretivists claim that humans unlike natural matter do not react in a causal like way to external forces. Instead they claim that humans **act** in terms of feelings, meanings and emotions. Individual social actors are also said to **interpret** events during social interaction and that this gives meaning to actions. For example phenomenologists such as Katz claim that crime is not simply structurally caused but guided by individual meanings such as the search for excitement and establishing a reputation.
- It is not possible to follow scientific methodology. All research is inevitably subjective (value laden). For example the topic that is chosen for research, questions asked in interviews and the way that data is analysed.
- Much of social life or alleged social facts are social constructions. For example it is difficult to get reliable statistics on health and crime because the data is dependant on members of public reporting their illness or crimes they observe (i.e. the statistics are social constructions).

Sociology should not be a science:

- Not desirable to be scientific. Therefore interpretivists favour the use of qualitative methods such as observation and informal interviews to find out about meanings, feelings and actions. Furthermore a non scientific approach generates data that is highly valid, insightful and achieves *verstehen*. For example interpretivist feminists Dobash and Dobash gained a true and detailed understanding of women's experience of domestic violence by carrying out informal interviews which lasted for up to twelve hours.
- A further example is illustrated through McIntyre's journalistic CPO study into football hooliganism. McIntyre managed to build up rapport and consequently achieved *verstehen* with the Chelsea head-hunters.

Critical philosophical points- Is there such a thing as scientific knowledge?

- **Kuhn** - scientific revolutions - Paradigm shifts (new scientific theories replace old ones). Scientific theories change (as shown by the history of science) and hence claims of scientific truth is always uncertain. For example Stephen Hawkin has recently changed his theory of black holes being empty.
- **Postmodernism** - Postmodernism rejects the idea that scientific thought exists. This is because all knowledge is uncertain. No scientific theory can claim truth because all knowledge is open to doubt. Thus they reject meta-narratives (grand theories) and argue instead that we should recognise and tolerate competing explanations of natural and social events.
- **Realism** - (Urry) - Realists re-define what is meant by science. Science can incorporate more subjective analysis, does not have to make firm predictions, legitimate to study social processes which are not immediately observable. In this way positivist and interpretivist sociology can be seen as scientific. Job of scientists (natural and social) is to explain the causes of events in a 'more or less scientific' way.

Exam Questions on this topic

Question: Assess the arguments for and against the view that sociology is not and will never be a scientific discipline. (33 marks)

Examiners advice: There are two issues here: is sociology currently a science, and could it ever become one? It's worth starting at the outset that there are different views of what science is and that this will affect whether we think sociology is or could ever be a science. Then explain how positivists favour the natural sciences as a model and see sociology as scientific, but Interpretivist's reject this because of the nature of sociology's subject matter, as well as postmodernist and feminist criticisms of the positivist choice of natural science as a model. Next explain that the debate so far has assumed that the natural sciences are as the positivists claim, but that there are other views of what science is, such as Popper, Kuhn and realism. Go on to examine these views and the implications of each view for whether sociology is a science currently or what it would need to do to become a science in future.

Sociology and Value-Freedom

Key assumptions:

- Value freedom occurs when sociologists ensure that their own personal views/ideologies do not affect the way research is conducted and research outcomes.
- Key debate is between positivists who believe that value free sociology is possible versus interpretivists who believe it is not possible.

Value free sociology is possible (Positivism):

- Because it is possible for sociologists to follow the **logic** of natural science research. Although experimental research is rarely used because of practical (difficulties controlling variables) and ethical issues (potential harm to participants), the logic of natural science research can be followed (hypothetico deductive model). For example sociologists should only look at what is directly observable (no feelings, emotions etc.).
- Sociologists can be objective:
 - a) They can ensure that their own personal ideologies do not enter into their research-remaining detached and neutral.
 - b) Be using quantitative methods which allow little room for researcher bias.
 - E.g. 1 Official statistics such as death rates are "hard data" (little room for subjectivity). For example Durkheim made use of official suicide rates to establish an objective and scientific theory of suicide.
 - E.g. 2 Structured interviews questions are standardised and allow little room for interviewer involvement. For example the BCS has set questions on victimisation where the interviewer's role is limited to asking questions and recording data on a laptop.
- When analysing data the sociologist merely looks for patterns and deals with facts in an objective way.

Sociology should be value free:

- Produces knowledge that is certain.
- Can generalise.
- Establish laws of cause and effect.
- Make predictions.
- Can be replicated.
- Gain data that is high in reliability.

For example positivistic researchers at the home office claim to be able to generalise about crime trends and make predictions about patterns of victimisation because of their use of large scale social surveys.

Value free sociology is not possible (Interpretive):

- Because it is **not** possible for sociologists to follow the logic of natural science research. This is because the subject matter of the natural and social sciences is fundamentally different.
- Sociologist cannot be objective:
 - a) They cannot ensure their own personal ideologies do not enter into their research. For example the choice of topic and which BSA ethical guidelines to observe involve the personal ideologies of the sociologist. Some sociologists are happy to carry out CPO studies on crime even though it involves deception and exploitation of pps.
 - b) Quantitative inevitably involve bias/values.
 - E.g. 1 Official statistics are social constructions which reflect the values of a range of social actors. For example suicide stats. Are not social facts but data influenced by the decision making of family members and coroners. (N.b. could develop this idea based on suicide notes, plus could also explain why crime stats are social constructions eg under-reporting, under-recording etc.)
 - E.g. 2 Structured interviews involve choosing a set of predetermined questions and bias can be instilled in terms tone of voice when asking questions.
- The analysis of data is subjective because it involves choices of what to include/exclude and involves interpretations.

Sociology should not be value free:

- Not desirable to be value free. Therefore interpretivists favour the use of qualitative methods such as observation and informal interviews to find out about meanings, feelings and actions. Furthermore a non scientific approach generates data that is highly valid, insightful and achieves verstehen. For example interpretivist feminists Dobash and Dobash gained a true and detailed understanding of women's experience of domestic violence by carrying out informal interviews which lasted for up to twelve hours. Oakley argues that only by taking an active part in the research process can the sociologist gain the trust of those they research. She argues that sociologists should be open about their bias (reflexive) as shown through her research into motherhood. She believes feminist methodology should be collaborative and democratic.

- A further example is illustrated through McIntyre's journalistic CPO study into football hooliganism. McIntyre managed to build up rapport and consequently achieved *verstehen* with the Chelsea headhunters.

Critical philosophical points:

- Value free sociology is not possible. This is because even natural science is not value free.
E.g. 1 Funding institutions the way research is done and the outcomes.
E.g. 2 Lynch argues that scientists disregard evidence that goes against their theories.
- Increasingly sociologists triangulate to achieve research outcomes which are both objective and subjective.

Exam Questions on this topic

Question: Assess different sociological views of the role of objectivity and values in sociological research. (33 marks)

Examiners advice: Start by identifying the two key questions of whether it is possible to keep values out of sociological research and thus be objective, and whether it is desirable to do so. Your answer should explore each of these questions, focusing on the positions taken by the classical sociologists (Comte, Durkheim, Marx and Weber), integrationists, Marxists and Postmodernists. Evaluate each as you examine their arguments. Use relevant examples, e.g. of perspectives or funding bodies influencing choice of topic or method, case studies etc.

Social Policy

Key points:

- Sociology is the study of society and of people and their behaviour.
- Social policy refers to the activities of governments and their agents to meet social needs and solve social problems. For example, the government have recently set up, in partnership with business, city academies to raise the educational performance of poor performing inner city schools.

Sociology should be linked to social policy

- **Social democratic** and **left realist** researchers believe that sociologists should be and are actively involved in making social policy recommendations. They believe that their recommendations can help to eradicate the social problems they identify. Such sociologists side with the 'underdog' and believe in offering practical measures to reduce social inequality, social injustice, and social exclusion.

Social democratic research

- **Townsend** identified the extent and causes of poverty in the UK based on surveys of over 2000 households. He used the findings to put forward solutions such as more progressive taxation to fund more welfare for the poor.
- **The Black Report** identified a range of cultural and structural causes of inequalities in health. The Black report strongly argued for structural/material solutions to reduce the health divide. They believed that the top priority of governments should be to tackle poverty and low income.

Left realist research

- **Lea and Young** have used the results of local victim surveys to put forward a range of practical solutions to reduce crime. They claim that state intervention and community involvement are essential to halt the spread in crime. For example, they have encouraged closer partnerships between the police and local communities. They also make a strong case for fewer custodial sentences and more community service orders.
- Sociologists who work for government departments or local government authorities such as police forces are often involved in shaping or evaluating social policy. For example, researchers at the **Home Office** have recently been involved in assessing the successfulness of ASBOs and the electronic tagging of offenders.
- Sociologists often have a more indirect role in shaping social policy by creating a 'climate of opinion' which governments and their agents then act on. For example, evidence of cultural deprivation in Britain and America in the 1960s and 1970s led to a wave of compensatory educational policies, such as Operation Headstart and Educational Priority Areas.

Sociology should not be linked to social policy

Some radical sociological theorists claim that sociologists should not be involved in making social policy solutions. This is either because they believe that sociologists should be independent from government and be critical of their actions or because they are ideologically opposed to policy making.

New Right theorists

The New Right are often against sociologists making social policy recommendations as they believe that the state should have a minimal involvement in social problems. They stress individual responsibility instead. **Murray** maintains that providing generous welfare (as favoured by sociologists such as **Townsend**) as a social policy solution for poverty actually makes the problem worse. This is because he believes it creates a dangerous underclass who become dependent on welfare. However, there is a contradiction in New Right thinking. The New Right believe that governments should intervene when it suits their beliefs. For example, social policy initiatives that prop up the traditional nuclear family and legislation which restricts gypsies rights.

Marxists

Hard line Marxists such as **Westergaard & Resler** are against making social policy recommendations on welfare. They believe that if sociologists such as **Townsend** encourage more benefits this will only serve to reduce class solidarity. This is because they believe that welfare 'buys off' the working class and prevents them from realising their true class interests. For **Westergaard and Resler** the social problems faced by the working class (e.g. poverty) can only be overcome through a proletarian revolution (not social policy), whose end aim would be to create a communist society.

Radical feminists

Radical feminists criticise liberal feminists for advocating anti-discrimination policies to resolve sexual discrimination in society. Radical feminists argue that women's emancipation can only be achieved by dismantling patriarchy.

Postmodernists

Some postmodernists would claim that sociologists are in no position to make social policy recommendations. This is because they argue that it is not possible to objectively identify the truth and therefore all sociological knowledge is 'uncertain'. They thus claim that there is no valid basis for sociological policy intervention. This has led **Bauman** to claim that in 'postmodern times' sociologists should merely take the role of 'interpreters' and can not and should not be seen as 'legislators', as they did in 'modernist times'.

Critical points

- Although centre left sociologists are often keen to make social policy recommendations their views are not always listened to. For example, the government not only ruled out the **Black Reports** recommendations on the ground of cost but restricted the publication of what was seen to be a politically embarrassing report.
- The policies which sociologists may wish to put forward may be compromised by their funding agencies. Some sociologists will not want to threaten or openly challenge the agencies 'that feed them'.
- Some theorists, notably **Giddens**, have had a major effect in shaping government policy. **Giddens** was instrumental in 'third way' policies, which had a big influence on the New Labour governments of the 1990s and early 21st century.

Exam Question on this topic

Question: Assess the different views of relationship between sociology and social policy. (33 marks)

Examiners advice: Start by clearly differentiating between sociological problems and social problems. You can make use of the full range of views of the relationship between sociology and social policy including positivist, functionalist, Marxist, social democratic, feminist, New Right and Postmodernism. Link these perspectives to the key questions such as whether sociology is or should be closely related to social policy. You could also consider some of the factors that might prevent sociology influencing policy, such as cost, the governments political ideology etc.

Methods

Positivist and Interpretivist approaches to research

Positivism:

Positivists assume that sociological explanations should be like those of the natural sciences, and that sociologists should use the logic, methods and procedures of natural science.

Key Ideas

- Social Reality is capable of being measured objectively by using scientific methods
- As with the natural world, social behaviour is governed by underlying casual laws and can, therefore, be predicted.
- By systematic observation of casual relationships between social phenomena, these laws can be revealed.

Evaluation

- + As far as possible, scientists and sociologists must be personally objective in their research. The resulting data would then be reliable and would not be dependent on the subjectivity of the researcher.
- + Positivists see the need to rely on empirical evidence in testing their assumptions. They argue that assuming what people are thinking is both impossible and inappropriate to the scientific endeavour.
- Positivism fails to understand that individuals create social reality through their interactions.
- It assumes that there is only one view of social reality.
- It does not allow us to see the world from the position of a social actor.

Interpretivism:

Unlike Positivism, Interpretivism rejects the idea that social behaviour can be studied using the same methodology as that of the natural science. Interpretivist's do not accept a single social reality but see many realities produced through the interactions of individuals. Weber's **Versethen** sociology emphasised that sociologists had to interpret the meanings of social action as understood by the social actors involved. This meant that sociologists needed to put themselves in the position of the person or group being observed.

Key Ideas

- The subject matter of sociology is fundamentally different from that of the natural sciences
- The subjective consciousness of individuals cannot be quantified.
- There is no possibility of gaining understanding of social action through scientific methods.
- Social meanings are the most important aspect of interaction and these points need to be understood by sociologists using qualitative methods.
- There are no causal laws governing social behaviour.
- An example of this approach can be seen in Goffman's work on total institutions, where he showed how inmates construct practices to 'make out' in the institution.

Evaluation

- + Interpretivism allows us to see that individuals perceive social reality in different ways.
- + Individuals are not passive - they are not seen as simply manipulated by external forces but as active individuals, making choices and acting on social meanings.
- Methods used tend to rely on the subjectivity of the researcher.
- It fails to examine the effects of power differences on social interaction.
- It underestimates the extent and impact of social structure on individuals.

Links to Methods

Positivist: The sociologists see social reality as objective and measurable and tend to favour quantitative methods, such as social surveys, questionnaires and/or structured interviews. They sometimes, but rarely, undertake lab experiments and also make use of official statistics as secondary data. Content analysis of the media is usually quantitative.

Interpretivist: These sociologists see social reality as constructed by social actors (individuals) through the meanings of social action. They tend to favour qualitative methods such as observation, participant observation, unstructured and semi structured interviews and field experiments. Secondary data sources are more likely to be personal documents and descriptive historical documents and also oral histories and self report studies. Content analysis of the media is qualitative and thematic, and semiology (the study of signs) may sometimes be used.

However many sociologists are increasingly making use of **methodological pluralism**, that is using more than one method in one research project. This enhances validity, reliability and generalisability.

Sampling Methods

- A great deal of sociological research makes use of sampling. This is a technique aiming to reduce the number of respondents in a piece of research, whilst retaining - as accurately as possible - the characteristics of the whole group.
- The purpose of taking a sample is to investigate features of the population in greater detail than could be done if the total population was used, and to draw inferences about this population. In addition, at the practical level, a sample is likely to be both cheaper and quicker to investigate.
- All sampling will involve error and sociologists have developed sampling techniques in order to minimize this error. All methods of sampling make use of a sampling frame.

Sampling frame

A sampling frame is the list of members of the total population of interest. From this list a sample to study can be drawn. For example, such a list may be an electoral register, if information about those with voting rights is sought, or the family practitioner committee lists if a health survey is projected, or vehicle registration lists, if car ownership or road transport is under study.

Types of sampling

The random sample

- For inferences about a population to be valid, the sample must be truly representative, the only way to ensure this is to take a Random sample. This involves using either random numbers or systematic sampling. Random numbers are used to ensure that every individual in a sampling frame has an equal chance of being selected as a member of the sample. Systematic sampling involves randomly selecting the first individual from the list, then subsequently individuals at every fixed interval, for example, every tenth person if a 10% sample is desired.

- So the test is, does every person in the group have an equal chance of being selected?
- Examples of random sampling include ERNIE, a telephone directory, out of a hat.
- An example of systematic random sampling is Willmott and Young's sample of Bethnal Green families.
- The technique depends on the mathematical probability that a number of members carefully selected from a larger group will be more or less representative of that group. Of course, the improbable can happen and the sample is unrepresentative of the target population. One way to increase the precision of sampling is through stratification.
- Non-representative sampling also occurs in sociology. The logic of this approach is that a non-representative sample might present a more demanding test of a researcher's hypothesis. For example, Goldthorpe and Lockwood tested the embourgeoisement thesis (the belief that the working class was becoming more like the middle class) with untypical affluent workers. They argued that if the hypothesis was not true among affluent workers, it was not likely to be true with any other workers. In other words they gave the hypothesis the best chance of being proved correct.

Stratified sample

- When the population to be studied is large and the sample relatively small it may be efficient to use stratified sampling. Random sampling assumes that the list of the population involved (sampling frame) has no particular order of characteristics, which could have any bearing on the investigation. But in social research, most sample frames are not of this type, but have a definite order. For example, classroom research - school classes are already stratified and research then often takes a sample from each point on the strata.
- Stratified samples tend to have smaller sampling errors than random samples of the same size. This is because the sample is divided into several groups in proportion to their known prevalence in an attempt to construct a sample that is representative of the whole.

Quota sample

- This is a sampling method in which a sample is selected by quotas from each defined portion of the population. The method does not fulfil the normal requirements of random sampling. It involves breaking down the parent populations into strata according to relevant features and calculating how many individuals to include in each of these categories to reflect the parent population structure. Thus so far this is the same as a stratified sample and randomness can still be achieved.
- However, once the size of each of these groups is decided no attempt at randomness is made. Instead, the interviewers are instructed to achieve appropriate selections (quotas) to fulfill the requirements within each group.
- Contacts are made until a quota is filled. Therefore, non-response cannot occur. The interviewer makes the final choice of sample. However the choice is limited by availability, and the diligence and honesty of the interviewer. The method is much used by market research and opinion pollsters.

Panel sample

This is a form of longitudinal study, but is usually of shorter duration and more focused. It involves questioning the same sample at regular intervals to observe trends of opinion. With this sort of sample, as opposed to cross sectional (one off) studies, change over time can be monitored. A disadvantage is that respondents are lost through death or lack of interest or moving and that those who remain may become atypical through the very experience of being panel members.

Cluster sample

This is a method of sampling which selects from groups (clusters) already existing in the parent population rather than assembling a random sample. This tends to be quicker and cheaper, but may lead to a biased sample if the clusters are not representative of the parent population. For example, polls taken of attitudes to government policy may be carried out in selected areas of the country thought to be representative, but because of local political dynamics this may not be the case.

Snowball sample

This is a method of selecting a sample by starting with a small selected group of respondents and asking them for further contacts. This is not therefore a random sample and no inferences about the characteristics of the parent population can be made from such a study. Its use is primarily in the collection of in depth qualitative data, perhaps on sensitive topics, where an obvious sampling frame does not exist and the best method of selection is through personal contacts. Such a method might be used in an investigation of sexual habits or bereavement experiences.

Conclusions

- To work effectively a representative sample must be an accurate representative cross section.
- If a sample is large enough and properly selected it will increase its representational accuracy. If it fails to do either of the above its results may be less accurate than an educated guess.
- Bias develops in several ways:
- First, through self-selection. This is where respondents select themselves and is particularly true of postal questionnaires, for example, if 100 respondents reply out of a sample of 200, is this 45% or 90% in favour of a particular action if 90 out of the 100 answer yes?
- Second, there will be choice involved at three levels in the sample and all can introduce bias. The choosing of the sample, the choosing of questions, and the choosing of significant responses.
- Finally, there is the judgment of interviewers, especially in quota sampling.
- Generally, sampling seeks to avoid the possibility of 'freaks' occurring and the larger the sample, the less likelihood there is of this happening. The greater the variety of characteristics in the population being measured, the larger and more carefully designed the sample needs to be. Ultimately, the operation of a sample survey comes down to a running battle against sources of bias - a battle, which is never won.

Methods of Sociological Research

Experiments

The experiment is the classic research method of the natural sciences. It is the means by which hypothesis are empirically tested. Experiments involve the manipulation of an independent variable (cause) and the observation of a dependent variable (effect), while controlling extraneous variables to test a hypothesis.

Lab Experiments

Lab experiments are designed to achieve rigorous empirical test in which variables are closely controlled and observations and measurements are accurately recorded so that the effect of changing one or more of the variables can be analysed. By rigorous experimentation the researcher aims to identify cause and effect rather than simply a chance occurrence.

Lab experiments have been widely used in psychology to examine social behaviour in controlled conditions.

Key studies

- In the 'Obedience to Authority' experiment (1974), Milgram found that 65% of his 40 volunteers were willing to inflict apparently dangerous electric shocks of up to 450 volts on people when instructed to do so by individuals in authority.
- Zimbardo's prison study demonstrated the negative effects of allowing students to role-play the prisoners and wardens.
- Mayo believed the Hawthorne studies with an experiment to test the effects of illumination on productivity.

Evaluation

Strengths:

- The experiment is internally valid if it has been conducted in a rigorous manner. It is then possible that the hypothesis has been proven, and cause and effect have been identified.
- Through Milgram's experiment we have learned a great deal about obedience and it is possible to understand how individuals have committed atrocities under orders. Similarly the prison simulation of Zimbardo et al. demonstrated the immediate effects of the prison on inmates and the abuse of power by the guards.

Weaknesses:

- Although experiments are the classical positivist method they have limited application in sociology. They are rarely used.

Social surveys are the most popular social research method because they gather a great deal of data from a large section of the population in a relatively short space of time. They most frequently use pre-coded questionnaires, however some social surveys can also be carried out through interviews.

Ackroyd and Hughes (1981) distinguish three types of survey:

1. Factual - the government census is a factual survey as it collects descriptive data.
2. Attitude - opinion polls come into this category as they collect people's attitudes to events and issues.
3. Explanatory - these are more sociological as they are used to test hypothesis and produce new theories.

Questionnaires

A questionnaire is a pre-set, pre-coded list of standard questions given to a respondent. If an interviewer reads out the questionnaire, it becomes a structured interview. Postal questionnaires are mailed to respondents, usually with a stamped addressed envelope or a small incentive to return the form. Questionnaires produce a large amount of quantitative data and can be given to a widespread target population. For example, the Census is given to every household in the country. Questions can be open ended, which gives the respondents the opportunity to expand on their answers, or, more usually, closed/fixed choice questions where the respondents have limited choices.

Studies using questionnaires

- Peter Townsend (1979) administered questionnaires so that he could measure the extent of poverty in the UK.
- Shere Hite (1988) sent out postal questionnaires to 100,000 women in the USA to question them on their sexual behaviour. Her book is based on 4,500 replies. This low response rate means the replies cannot be taken as representative of the views of all American women.

Evaluation

Strengths:

- Positivist researchers see the data collected as being highly reliable and objective.
- There is little personal involvement on the part of the researcher after the initial construction of the questionnaire, thus limiting researcher bias.
- Large quantities of data can be produced, and quickly and easily analysed by a computer.
- They can be used to test hypothesis, indicate social trends and make predictions of future trends.
- They are regarded as scientific by government agencies and opinion pollsters.
- Postal questionnaires can cover a wide range geographically.

Weaknesses:

- Interpretivist sociologists criticise the use of questionnaires for the 'imposition problem', i.e. where the researcher imposes his or her understandings on the respondent. They argue that questionnaires are not appropriate if we want to find the meanings of and motivations for social behaviour.
- Different answers may not actually reflect real differences, as respondents may be interpreting questions in different ways.
- They can be too inflexible, as respondents are limited to answering only the questions asked.
- There are many problems concerning the language used and the ways in which the questions are worded.

- Operationalizing concepts can involve subjectivity, as Oakley demonstrated with Young and Wilmot's concept of the symmetrical family.
- Validity may be low as a result of misunderstanding, dishonesty or embarrassment.
- Postal questionnaires may have their own problems, such as a low response rate, a possible lack of representativeness between those responding and the inability to check who has completed the form.
- If more qualitative data are collected, the researcher has to create categories in order to analyse them, which again involves constructs produced by the researcher.

Interviews

There are several different types of interviews that are used by sociologists, structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews; group and focus interviews, face to face or phone interviews. Almost all interviews involve a face to face interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee. They range from highly formal to a relaxed conversation. The length of the interview also varies.

Structured Interviews

These are pre-coded questionnaires (using an interview schedule) where standardised closed questions are asked by the interviewer to all the interviewees. The quantitative data produced are easily collated and analysed by means of a computer and displayed in a statistical ways to analyse patterns and trends, and to make comparisons between groups.

Why do Positivists use structured interviews?

Positivists prefer structured interviews because they are reliable (easily replicated by other researchers) and can produce fairly large-scale, representative data. However Interpretivist's reject them because they see them as lacking validity.

Evaluation

Strengths:

- **Reliability:** Because they use a fixed list of questions, with pre-coded response categories, structured interviews produce easily quantifiable data. As every interviewee's response is measured in the same way, structured interviews are a form of standardised measuring instrument. This means that the data from the different interviews is directly comparable. Using the same fixed list of questions and possible answers also means that the structured interview is replicable and can be used to verify the results of earlier interviews or to identify changes over time.
- **Representativeness:** Compared with unstructured interviews, structured interviews are relatively quick to conduct. This means that a larger sample can be interviewed, which is likely to produce more representative results, allowing the researcher to make generalisations. Structured interviews have a higher response rate than mailed questionnaires and this also helps with representativeness.
- **Cost:** Because they are quick to complete, structured interviews are the cheapest form of interview. Interviews also need only a limited amount of training.
- **Interviewer-interviewee contact:** Face-to-face interviews mean a higher response rate is likely, because the researchers presence means that the researcher's purpose and importance can be explained to potential interviewees.
- **Limited 'interviewer effect':** Interviewer effect occurs when the interviewer's responses and reduces validity. However, with structured interviews, interviewer effect will be far less than with

open-ended, free-flowing unstructured interviews. This is because, in structured interviews, contact is limited to asking and responding to a fixed list of questions and possible answers. Some sociologists also try to minimise the interviewer effect by a 'deadpan' delivery. Showing no emotion, not stressing any wording etc.

Weaknesses:

- **Lack of Validity:** Interpretivist's challenge the validity of data produced from structured interviews:
 - Because the researcher decides the questions in advance, and because the interview schedule cannot be altered once it has been finalised, this prevents interviewees from raising new issues. The researcher has limited what the respondent can talk about and this may exclude important aspects of the research issue.
 - Fixed-response questions may prevent the interviewee from saying what they really think - they have to force their responses to fit the researcher's categories. Anything that limits how the interviewee responds reduces the validity of the data generated.
 - The wording of some questions may be open to interpretation and there is a limit to how far the interviewer can explain the meaning to the interviewee.
 - It is difficult to know if the respondent is being truthful. Although this is a problem with all interviews, it is particularly so with structured interviews, since the researcher usually cannot move away from the fixed interview schedule to check the answers they are given.
 - Structured interviews are not completely free from interviewer effect. The interviewee may interpret the interviewer's social characteristics - their age, gender, class etc - in ways that may influence their responses.
- **Reliability:** Interviewer effect may also reduce reliability because, although the same questions may be asked, interviewers are going to have different social characteristics (and the research setting will vary). Thus the interviewer will not be able to replicate.
- **Cost:** employing and training interviewers incurs a cost and even relatively brief structured interviews are not as cheap to carry out as mailed questionnaires.
- **Sensitive issues:** Asking someone a fixed list of questions in a deadpan manner can be quite off-putting and not particularly useful for investigating sensitive issues where a rapport (bond of trust and empathy) is needed.

Unstructured Interviews

In contrast, unstructured interviews are in-depth and non-standardised, where rapport and trust can be built up over a long period of time. This approach is flexible, uses open-ended questions and gives the interviewees more freedom to express their views. Interpretivist and Feminist researcher often adopt this qualitative method because they argue that it is a more democratic way of gaining data.

Evaluation

Strengths:

- **Validity:** Interpretists claim that the main advantage of unstructured interviews is that they create data that is high in validity for several reasons:
 - The informal, conversational nature of unstructured interviews means that trust and support can develop between interviewer and interviewee. The more comfortable an interviewee feels, the more likely they are to open up. This often helps when researching sensitive issues and increases the chances of getting full and honest responses.

- They avoid the danger of the sociologist imposing their ideas onto the interview process. With no set questions or fixed response categories, interviewees have the opportunity to reply in their own words in ways that are meaningful to them. Unlike with structured research techniques, the interviewee has the opportunity to raise issues they think are important.
- The flexibility of unstructured interviews also adds to validity. The interviewer can follow up any issues raised by the interviewee, probing more deeply to get a truer picture.
- Open-ended questioning allows interviewees scope to give detailed, in depth reactions. The more detailed the response, the greater the likelihood of the sociologists understanding the research subject's worldview.

Weaknesses:

- Unstructured interviews may not achieve the validity that they claim to do:
 - The closer the interviewer-interviewee bond may increase the chance of the respondent seeking to please by giving the answer they think the researcher wants to hear.
 - There is also the issue of what to do with the huge amount of data that unstructured interviews produce. The researcher has to interpret it and be selective about what is presented in the final research report. In doing so, the researcher's own perspective may distort the interviewee's original meanings.
- Lack of reliability: Positivists argue that unstructured interviews lack reliability. No fixed list of pre-set questions, plus the ability of interviewees to respond in any way they wish, makes it impossible to classify and count their responses. This means statistical evidence cannot be created from informal interviews, preventing comparisons being drawn or correlations established.
- Lack of representativeness: Unstructured interviews take longer to carry out and this usually limits the size of the research sample. Because it is harder to obtain a representative sample from a small number of respondents, this may limit the ability of the researcher to make generalisations.
- Unsuitability for sensitive issues: When answering questions about sensitive issues, some people may prefer to fill in an anonymous postal questionnaire rather than answering probing questions face to face.
- Cost: Interviewers need to be trained in sensitivity, the purpose of the research, how much to explain to interviewees etc. This adds to the cost, as does the fact that it takes longer to carry them out and to process the data they create. As a result, unstructured interviews are more costly than structured interviews.
- Relevance: The interviewee may wander off into all kinds of areas that are irrelevant to the research. Unless the interviewer is prepared to re-direct the respondent - with a possible loss of validity - a lot of time may be wasted and irrelevant data collected.
- Group interviews: These are usually largely unstructured and involve interviewing a group of people together. This can help jog memories, stimulate answers and suggest lines of enquiry, but there is a danger that individuals will offer conformist answers rather than say what they really think.

Semi-Structured Interviews

This approach combines the advantages of both structured and unstructured interviews. The researcher can access data from standardised questions and the interviewee is able to elaborate where necessary, thus producing both qualitative and quantitative data.

Studies using interviews

- **Unstructured Interviews:** Dobash and Dobash (1980) *Violence against Wives*. The study was based on unstructured interviews with 109 women who had reported domestic violence to the police. Dobash and Dobash argued that their approach was the most appropriate because the subject matter of the research was very sensitive. They wanted to validate the women's experiences and let women speak for themselves. Their research on domestic violence led them to argue that 'the fact is that for most people and especially women and children, the family is the most violent group to which they are likely to belong. Despite fears to the contrary, it is not a stranger but so-called loved one who is most likely to assault, rape or murder us'.
- **Semi-structured interviews:** Charlotte Butler (1995): 'Religion and gender: young women and Islam', *Sociology review*, vol 4, no 3. Butler conducted 30 semi-structured interviews with young Muslim women in Britain to discover their relationships with their faith. Her research showed that Islam was an important and positive force in their lives. Their religion gave them a strong sense of identity and her research contradicted stereotypes about the oppressive nature of religion on young Muslim women.

Participant Observation

All methods involve observation, but P.O. is characterized by the extent to which its advocates insist on observation and interpretation of a situation, informed by an understanding of the situation from the point of view of the participants rather than the observer. An attempt is made to avoid imposing categories from outside.

P.O. is the method of anthropology, although it is used in a wide range of sociological studies when the researcher has 'become part of a daily round, learning languages and meanings, rules of impersonal, relations... and in short, living the life of the people under study.' (Hughes, 1976).

The priorities of P.O.

The emphasis is on qualitative research, where the social meanings of the actors are the basis for explaining their actions. In the past a frequently overlooked method, devalued possibly by concern over its ability to meet strict criteria of scientific adequacy. This resistance to P.O. comes particularly from sociologists who have tended to see the social sciences in a positivist framework.

Kluckholm (1940) defines P.O. as:

'...a conscious and systematic sharing, in so far as circumstances permit, in the life activities, and on occasion, in the interests and effects of a group of persons. Its purpose is to obtain data about behaviour through direct contact and in terms of specific situations, in which, the distortion that results from the investigator being an outside agent is reduced to a minimum.'

What this implies is that a researcher should try to avoid altering the groups direction, although s/he may influence the immediate content. For example, in Parker's study, *View from the Boys* (1974), which was a study of Liverpool adolescents, the researcher persuaded the boys to postpone a theft, but did not try to alter the overall direction of the gang by trying to persuade them not to commit crime. Ideally, P.O. requires sharing without disturbing the sentiments and experiences of people in social situations.

There is, however, a certain vagueness concerning the exact nature of P.O. in terms of the method itself. Fletchernotes that the observer 'does his training in the field.'

Moser claims that 'participant observation is a highly individual technique.'

Patrick, in his study of the Glasgow Gang, expected to have to play it by ear. It is very much a 'suck it and see approach'.

From a positivist point of view, this vagueness in the matter of the method of investigation is seen as a disadvantage. Certainly, reliability would be difficult to claim, but vagueness may also be viewed as an example of the flexibility of P.O. Also, there is the possibility that a research opportunity might just suddenly occur and there is little time to prepare or structure a study.

Mixes of Participation and Observation

The participation and observation elements of P.O. can vary to adapt to the research focus. Gold, Rules in Sociological Field Observation (1958), proposed a four fold classification:

1. The complete observer.
2. The participant as observer.
3. The observer as participant.
4. The complete participant.

The Complete Observer

In this role there is no joining in by the observer. This method is seldom used other than for systematic eavesdropping or gaining an initial grasp of a situation. There is the strong possibility that an adequate basis for understanding is not provided.

The Participant as Observer

- With this role, researcher and informant are aware that theirs is a research relationship and role pretence is minimised. The observer's activities are not wholly concealed, but they are played down while s/he gets on with participating. This situation is facilitated if the researcher has a participant who befriends him/her, and who can therefore support the research.
- A danger with this role is that informants may become so identified with the researcher that they become observers themselves. This may induce changes in the behaviour of the group. Similarly, there is the danger that the researcher may go native - that is to identify with the group so strongly that s/he may cease to function as an observer.

The Observer as Participant

This role is associated mainly with studies involving one-visit interviews when some formal observation may be possible. While this role avoids any problems that may arise from longer involvement, it carries the obvious risk of generating only a superficial understanding.

The Complete Participant

- The true identity and motives of the researcher are not made known to the people with whom they are participating, and who are being observed for research purposes.
- There are two main problems with this approach; that the researcher may be so concerned not to break cover that s/he does not perform convincingly in the assumed role, and that the researcher may

become so involved that they go native. Furthermore, in this role the researcher is not achieving the aim of total neutrality as their membership of the group lends support to that group.

Getting in, staying in, getting out

Getting in

- Participant observers aim to become an unobtrusive part of the scene, non-threatening to the participants, and become 'taken for granted' by the participants. Some researchers emphasise the need to move slowly into the group setting. For example, Liebow spent four weeks hanging about on an irregular basis in the cafes of 'Tally's Corner' in order to penetrate the world of a group of black men who hung about on a street corner.
- Entry is made easier when the researcher has a contact in the group (a *sponsor*), who invites the researcher into the group. Other researchers have used disguise in order to penetrate a group. For example, Festinger equipped four observers with fake stories about psychic experiences in order to join an exclusive cult. Much depends on the researchers personality and the way in which his/her front is acceptable to the group under observation. Parker (*View from the Boys*) found entry easy and rapid, possibly because he was 'young, hairy, boozy, etc, willing to keep long hours.'

Staying in

- The observer has to come to terms with a complete set of norms, relationships and activities, and try to understand the meanings these hold for the people involved. The researcher, therefore, requires skill in questioning, watching, listening. In the early days of the research s/he may not be able to ask too many direct questions. Whyte, in his study of Cornerville, was advised to lay off asking questions and to simply hang around so that, in the long run, he would get answers without even having to ask the questions.
- In some cases, researchers take on a particular role among their subjects, as a vantage point for observation, but this can be limiting, or very uncomfortable if it ties you into the conventions and obligations of the group. When a group's behaviour borders on deviance, it may pose moral problems for the observer. It might be possible to avoid becoming involved in criminal activity of a direct kind yet still retain a contact with criminal groups. For example, Parker would keep dixy (watch) and receive knock off but would not become involved in the act of stealing.
- Failure to accept the group norms can lead to rejection by the group as Patrick discovered when he refused to join in a pub brawl with the rest of the gang he was researching. He was abused by the gang for his lack of support for them.
- A long-term problem with P.O. is observer fatigue. Such research may be physically tiring and mentally exhausting, particularly if you have to keep up a pretence about who you really are.

Getting out

This is always a problem whether the study is overt or covert. Exiting is a neglected area of research reports, although the method, timing, and manner of exiting varies considerably. Patrick left the gang suddenly, no longer being able to accept their violence, whereas Whyte's subjects arrange a farewell party for him.

A more serious consideration is when does research reach a conclusion? The whole essence of P.O. is social life as an ongoing accomplishment, how do you decide that the 'story' has reached an end? P.O. is like 'modern, slice of life' novels; no conclusion, just an exit.

Realistically, the end of research is more likely to be: the finance is about to stop, my PHD has got to be completed, I can't stand any more of this. The ending is fabricated. The researcher imposes an end. These people have got lives, families, careers. The ending has to be fraudulent but understandable.

Evaluation

Strengths:

- Interpretivist's claim that the participant observation produces highly valid data. Social actors are suited in a natural environment and the data is in depth and detailed.
- Unlike survey techniques the participant observer does not impose his/her definition of reality on those studied. Social actors are allowed to speak for themselves and the researcher's aim is to achieve *verstehen* - to see the world from the point of view of others.
- Participant observation may be the only way to gain access to the group. This is likely to be the case with socially deviant groups, who would not be identifiable using a traditional sampling frame.
- Participant observation may provide answers to questions that the researcher had not even considered asking.

Weaknesses:

- Covert participation raises many ethical issues. The group has not given consent to being observed and their trust is broken.
- Participant observation requires the researcher to participate in the groups activities and at the same time remain sufficiently detached to observe and interpret their behaviour. This is not an easy thing to do. Research can become over-involved with the group's activities, stop observing and simply take part. This is known as 'going native'. Data produced are likely to be highly biased a very subjective.
- Positivists reject this qualitative approach because they claim that it is highly unreliable and unscientific. Participant observations studies will inevitable reflect the interests of the researcher and the way she/he has interpreted events and interactions.
- Both joining and leaving a group can be difficult. The researcher is likely to rely on a disguise or story to gain entry to the group and may have to leave suddenly if he/she feels under threat.
- Recording data is difficult for covert researchers.
- It can be a dangerous experience for a sociologist involved in a group's illegal activity.

Case Studies

- A case study is 'a detailed in depth study of one group or event. The group or event is not necessarily representative of others of its kind, and case studies are used as preliminary pieces of research to generate hypothesis for subsequent research'. (Lawson and Garrod, 1996, *The complete A to Z Sociology Handbook*). This approach is sometimes referred to as ethnographic.
- A case study may involve research into a single institution such as a school or factory, a community or even a family. The aim of a case study is to gain a detailed understanding of the way of life of those observed. A sociologist may combine several methods in the case study but, in general, researchers tend to favour qualitative approaches such as participant observation and unstructured interviewing to gain an in-depth understanding of the group.

Evaluation

Strengths:

- Case studies provide the sociologist with detailed and valid data.
- They may serve to challenge and disprove existing assumptions about social groups.
- The research may act as a springboard for further research in the field.

Weaknesses:

- The group or institution under study may be atypical and therefore the results will not be generalisable.
- Case studies are often a highly individual technique and this raises the problem of subjectivity on the part of the researcher.
- The data collected may be valid, but are not reliable.

Studies using case studies

- Paul Willis's study *Learning to Labour* (1977) was based on 12 working class lads and their experience of education and their first year at work.
- Eileen Barker's research for *The Making of a Moonie* (1984) involved the use of surveys, unstructured interviews and participant observation over a number of years, examining recruitment patterns and the experience of life as a member of the sect.

The Comparative Method

- Experiments involve comparing what happens in one situation (**the control group**), with what happens in another (**the experimental group**). It is clear that the experiment is of limited use in sociology because of the difficulty of reproducing social situations in a laboratory, largely because of their scale, but also because they involve the passing of time.
- It is these problems that have led sociologists to use the comparative method. Indeed this method has been referred to as the '**natural**' **experiment**. The sociologist collects evidence about different societies or social contexts as they are found in the real world and then identifies similarities and differences between them. In other words, a situation is not set up, or created, but is already occurring.
- Some early sociologists, such as **Comte**, compared different societies with the intention of showing that all were evolving along a similar path. Comte produced his 'law of the three stages' of societal development, which maintained that all societies, past, present and future, necessarily passed through the same three stages of development. This conclusion was based on extensive, if rather selective, studies of the history of a wide range of societies. **Marx** also drew on comparative material in support of his theory of the inevitable march of history from primitive communism to post revolutionary communism.
- It was however, **Weber** and **Durkheim** who based their work most firmly on the **comparative method**. Weber was interested in the reasons for the emergence of capitalism in Western Europe. *Why did it occur when it did?* Other societies had had similar social and economic systems to that of Europe and had not developed capitalism. Weber studied China and India, in particular, but also ancient Palestine and some Islamic countries. What Weber sought was a factor that was unique to Europe that he could show was logically connected with the emergence of capitalism.
- He found his independent variable in **Calvinism**. Calvinists believed that every person was predestined to go to either heaven or hell. Nothing they could do would affect this destiny. However, rather than simply doing as they pleased because it could make no difference, Calvinists believed that success in work and in trade was a sign of God's favour. They were thus encouraged to work hard. Additionally,

they could not spend any profit on comforts since their religion forbade this. Instead they reinvested their wealth and business flourished even more. It is this principle of reinvestment and growth that is the basis of capitalism.

- Durkheim used the method to study the change from what he called **mechanical to organic solidarity**. He compared the legal systems of different societies, and showed that they varied according to how many laws were based on the principle of repression, and how many were based on the principle of restitution. He took the ratio between repressive law and restitutive law as an index of the type of solidarity of a society. He thought that organic solidarity was associated with restitutive law and the division of labour. In fact, more recent commentators have suggested that Durkheim's distinction makes more sense if reversed, that is, that societies based on mechanical solidarity have more law based on restitution. It is industrialised societies based on organic solidarity that make more use of repressive law.
- Durkheim's most famous use of the comparative method involved the study of **suicide**. In this research, Durkheim collected the statistics of suicide in the various areas of France, and of other European countries. Durkheim claimed to show how suicide rates vary systematically with the rates of other social phenomena, such as religious belief, marital status, urban or rural living, military training.
- More recently, writers interested in social mobility have studied rates of social mobility in different societies. **Lipset and Bendix (1959)**, for example, looked at nine different industrialised countries, and found that rates of mobility were similar in all. This was put down to the fact that there was an increase in the number of high status jobs in industrial societies, and increasing importance attached to 'achieved' rather than 'ascribed' status.
- The **comparative method** lies at the root of any sociological research that goes beyond description. Any sociologist who is trying to identify the causes of social events and behaviour is going to be involved in making comparisons. It is fundamental to causal explanation that comparisons are made between instances where the thing to be explained is present and instances where it is absent.

Secondary Methods

The data used by sociologists may be 'primary' or 'secondary' data. Primary data is that collected by the sociologist herself by experiment, observation or survey method. Secondary data is data collected by other sociologists; Government departments or official bodies; or individuals.

Official Statistics

Official statistics are quantitative data collected by government bodies. They come from two main sources - the day-to-day of government departments, and surveys like the census. We can distinguish between:

- **Hard statistics:** Simple counts that register events such as births and deaths. These are not easily manipulated.
- **Soft statistics:** These are more easily manipulated, e.g. crime statistics.

Most of the strengths and weaknesses of official statistics come from the fact that they are secondary data, so the collection processes are not in the sociologists control.

Why do positivists use official statistics

Positivists start from the assumption that there is a measurable objective social reality. They take a scientific approach using standardised research methods to obtain quantitative data that allows them to produce generalisations and cause - and -effect statements. They prefer official statistics because these deliver large-scale, representative, quantitative data, collected by reliable methods such as

questionnaires. However, interpretivists reject their use because they see them as socially constructed and lacking validity.

Evaluation

Strengths:

- **Availability:** As they are already in existence, they are cheap and readily available in an accessible form. Some statistics are published monthly, most annually, and so can be analysed for trends. The data is already categorised and in immediately usable form.
- **Representativeness:** Official statistics are usually based on a very large sample, so they are often highly representative. The ten-yearly Census gives virtually complete coverage of all households in the UK. Statistics created from government surveys may be somewhat less representative because they use smaller samples, but still much larger ones than sociologists usually obtain.
- **Coverage:** They cover most important aspects of social life, especially those the state is interested in, e.g. education, divorce, crime etc.
- **Prompts to research:** They can provide the starting point for research, e.g. by revealing a new pattern needing further investigation. Boys' educational underachievement was first identified from official statistics.
- **Background data:** They often provide useful background material, e.g. about ethnic, class and gender make-up of a research group.
- **Comparability of data:** Their quantitative nature makes it easy to draw comparisons and identify trends, e.g. the number of divorces, household composition, rates of domestic violence.
- **Reliability:** because the categories and mode of collection are usually used each time the statistics are gathered, the research can be easily replicated by others. The basis on which the statistics have been collected is also usually publicly stated, so sociologists can check whether the same procedures have been followed each time they are gathered.

Weaknesses:

- **Definition and measurement:** Definitions of the concepts used, how they have been operationalized and how the data is presented may differ from those of the sociologist. For example, official statistics measure class in terms of occupation, whereas some sociologists see class as based on ownership of property.
- **Reliability and Validity:** Official Statistics may not be as reliable as positivists claim. Even in the Census, recording errors are made and household missed out, and people may complete forms inaccurately.
- **Social Construction:** Interpretivists argue that social constructs, not objective truth - the result of a social process of negotiation. For example, for a crime to appear in the official statistics, it has to be observed, reported and recorded. Each decision in this process (by victims, police etc.) affects what gets officially included as a crime. Victim surveys reveal the official crime statistics to be an underestimate.
- **Political bias:** Marxists claim that official statistics are not politically neutral, but reflect ruling-class ideology. The definitions used, areas of social life covered and how statistics are presented are all political decisions. For example, the official definition of unemployment altered over thirty times in the 1980s, massaging the total downwards and presenting the government in a more positive light.

- Male bias: Feminists argue official statistics are biased against women, e.g. definitions of 'work' used in the Census exclude unpaid housework. Women are also more likely to be counted out of unemployment figures.

Data from previous research

- Sometimes a researcher will use data from other studies as the basis of her work. For example, Blauner's (1961) study on the impact of technology on alienation and job satisfaction used data on job satisfaction from a number of job-attitude surveys on car workers, printers and chemical workers.
- Halsey et al's (1980) 'Origins and Destinations' used data from the Oxford Mobility Study of Goldthorpe et al. The Health Divide (1987) consists of a series of studies conducted since 1980 on inequalities in health.

Documents

Documents can be of several types:

1. Personal documents- letters, diaries, autobiographies.
2. Public/semi-public documents school records, parish registers, etc.
3. Mass media - TV, newspapers, novels.

Perhaps it is important to remember that documents can be primary or secondary data - it depends on how the material is used.

Personal documents

- Letters, diaries, autobiographies, first person descriptions of social events. This approach to understanding social life is essentially that of the historian but can also be seen in Sociology, for example, Weber in 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism' derives some support from the life and works of Benjamin Franklin, in particular two books: 'Necessary hints to those that would be rich' (1736) and 'Advice to a young tradesman' (1748) containing such advice as 'time is money'. (Although recently it has been suggested that Weber misinterpreted Franklin's ideas.)
- The first researchers to adopt the documentary approach are generally considered to be Thomas and Znaniecki in 'The Polish Peasant in Europe and America' (1919) a study of Polish migration to the USA based on first hand accounts from letters, diaries, etc - letters from Polish peasants to relatives in America; the archives of Polish newspapers; periodicals of Polish emigres - as well as (a few) life-histories obtained through interview. One autobiography running to 300 pages. (Some might suggest that both life-histories and oral histories are examples of the 'documentary method' although dependent on memory rather than documents). The material was analysed to show the social changes in rural Poland, the efforts of the emigrating peasants to retain their cultural identity and their eventual imperfect integration into American society.
- Plummer sees the documentary method as an example of 'humanistic' Sociology a way of being sensitive to the variation of social life rather than looking for abstract generalisations: a way of understanding that although people are constrained by social structure they are not determined by it but are capable of independent action.
- From the mid 1920s to the mid 1950s the document method was seldom used as a consequence of a dramatic shift towards survey methods and statistical approaches - as Brown and Gilmartin note 90% of articles published in the 1960s presented questionnaire data, life histories and personal documents were seldom gathered. Plummer makes the same point, 'From the 1910s, American sociology became

either very abstractly theoretical, as in the work of Parsons, or highly methodologically sophisticated, as with Paul Lazarsfeld.'

Public documents

1. Scarman Report on the Brixton riots 1981.
2. Black Report (1980) on health inequalities.
3. School records, parish/church records (for example, Williams' study of Gosforth).
4. Mass media - TV, newspapers, novels (for example, Akenfeld).

It is suggested that novels can provide vivid illustrations of social life and behaviour, for example, Dickens' novelstell us about 19th century urban life, Hardy's about rural life.

Problems with documents

- Practical - access, time, money: Not all documents are easily available, for example, the Black Report was released in very select circumstances; this is even more true of personal documents. The extraction of data from documents can be very time consuming, especially as data/ideas are not always presented in a useful form (for instance, definitions/categories may be different).
- Theoretical - reliability, validity, generalisation, objectivity: The general argument here is that public documents are likely to be higher in terms of reliability, validity, generalisation and objectivity, than private documents like letters, etc although this may be a questionable assumption (see notes on government manipulation of official statistics).
- Reliability - how accurate are the documents? To what extent have they been influenced by personal biases? **Obviously replication is impossible, all the researcher can do is compare one account with others and try to balance the various accounts.**
- Validity - how truthful are the accounts. Are the documents authentic? (The rotocols of Zion, the Zinoviev Telegram). What was the motivation for the document? Who was it written for? How objective was the observer? All these questions influence the validity of the document. However, Plummer suggests that this method is no less valid than the data obtained from a ten-minute interview.
- Generalisation is difficult since we cannot know how representative the documents are; Plummer argues that, 'any life-history is always representative of a larger group. It always tells you something about more than that one person.' Nevertheless, generalisation is a problem, not least because of the selectivity of the data, here the problem of 'discarded data' becomes more acute.
- All research involves the discarding of data: Sociologists indulge in what Baldamus (1972) call 'double-fitting' altering the theory to fit the facts and selecting the facts to fit the theory - but the problem when using secondary data is that the theory more obviously governs fact selection, sociologists are unlikely to search assiduously for documents that would contradict the ideas they are presenting.

Choice of Methods

Sociologists face various decisions when conducting research. The most important one is which methods to choose, but this decision is also affected by many other factors. We can divide the factors that affect choice into three: practical, ethical and theoretical considerations (PET). Whichever factor is most significant depends upon the nature of the research.

Practical decisions

- **Funding:** this may be the most significant issue for any researcher. So much in research depends on the availability of money - the size of the sample, the time available for the researcher, the number of research assistants etc. A lone researcher may carry out a study involving participant observation where there is likely to be no external funding, but a research department may be dependent on government funding for a large social survey. Funding bodies may have ownership rights over the research data and they may have power of veto on whether the research findings can be published.
- **Time:** this is related to cost and can affect whether several interviews can take place over a period of time or if only one interview is possible.
- **Access:** without acceptance into the institution or group to be studied there will be no research. Researchers may be asked to take on a role in return for access. (For example, Willis helped with the youth wing of the school while doing his research for Learning to Labour.)
- **Danger:** the researcher may be placed at risk of physical harm by certain covert activities.
- **Opportunity:** the researcher needs to have research opportunities in order to undertake the research programme. Often this relies on permission being granted from those in positions of authority, such as school head teachers.

Ethical decisions

- **Moral issues:** sociologists must follow the BSA ethical guidelines. They must also be aware of the sensitivity of some areas and the possible impact of their research on respondents. Research is not usually a two-way process and respondents may feel that their trust and friendship has been betrayed. In using covert observation of any kind, the subjects are always deceived.
- **Illegality:** researchers may be called upon to engage in criminal acts or to witness others doing so.
- **Danger:** in some cases researchers may place their subjects in danger during their study.
- **After effects:** some methods such as experimentation may have short-term or more lasting effects on respondents who might have been misinformed about the nature of the study.
- **Informed consent:** the researcher should try to conduct the research with the consent of the subjects. This gives them the opportunity to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time.

Theoretical Decisions

- The methodological approach to the research is likely to affect the choice of method. Positivists generally choose quantitative methods.
- The theoretical perspective of the researcher - whether he/she is Marxist, Interpretivist's, feminist etc - will affect the choice of method and the nature of the research.