

The Marxist Approach to Crime and Deviance

Use this sheet in conjunction with the presentation to develop a basic understanding on the Marxist approach to Crime and Deviance.

There are four basic elements to the Marxist Approach to Crime and Deviance:

1. **Manipulation of values:** *Ensure support for the ruling class*
2. **Law creation:** *Reflect the interests of the ruling class*
3. **Law enforcement:** *Is applied differently to different groups of people*
4. **Individual motivation:** *Explains how crime is a response to capitalism*

Section 1: Manipulation of values:

What capitalist values are taught via socialisation?	When socialisation fails, what groups present a threat to social order?
How could causing someone's death be criminal for some but not for others?	
When the law is unequally applied, which groups are most likely to be arrested and convicted?	
What effect does this have on statistics? And what are the consequences of this effect?	
What are the consequences for Policing if there is widespread belief that most criminals are working class?	

Section 2: Law creation:

Give examples of Laws that exist which benefit the ruling class:	
What considerations might be used when creating laws?	What sort of groups might be representing economic and political interests of the ruling class?

Section 3: Law Enforcement

What crimes are likely to be dealt with harshly?	What crimes are likely to be dealt with leniently, or even ignored?
Why are certain crimes less likely to be reported to the Police?	
What differences might there be in Sentencing?	

Section 4: Individual Motivation

How do the following features of Capitalist society explain crime?

Competition, and the acquisition of wealth:	The inability of some people to achieve those goals:
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Marxists make three key arguments about crime and deviance:

1. Rules are made by the bourgeoisie largely to protect their own interests.
2. Attempts by the working class to gain a fairer share of goods are called property crimes.
3. Capitalism breeds competitiveness and commodity fetishism, a situation where material possessions are held in high esteem. Wealthy owners of business, who lack the justification of the poor, commit corporate crime or white-collar crime to increase their wealth even more. Despite the huge illegal financial gain this type of criminal activity often goes undetected, unreported and unpunished.

Why from a Marxist perspective, might white collar/corporate crime, largely be ignored by the media?

David Gordon (1976) ‘Criminogenic Capitalism’.

For Marxists, crime is inevitable in capitalism because capitalism is criminogenic– by its very nature it causes crime. Gordon claims

Task: Explain each point, and think of one criticism for each point.

	Explanation	Criticism
Poverty may mean that crime is the only way the working class can survive.		

<p>Crime may be the only way that the working class can obtain the consumer goods encouraged by capitalist advertising, resulting in utilitarian crimes such as theft.</p>		
<p>Alienation and lack of control over their lives may lead to frustration and aggression, resulting in non-utilitarian crimes such as violence and vandalism.</p>		
<p>Crime is not confined to the working class, as capitalism encourages greed and self-interest it encourages capitalists to commit white collar and corporate crime.</p>		

Who does the law benefit?

Chambliss (1975) argues that all laws created ultimately benefit the ruling class, for example the protection of private property is the cornerstone of capitalist society.

“The heart of a capitalist economic system is the protection of private property, which is, by definition, the cornerstone upon which capitalist economies function. It is not surprising then to find that criminal laws reflect this basic concern” (Chambliss 1976)

1) Interpret the above quote.

2) From the above quote, how can you tell Chambliss is a Marxist?