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| Social class and crime | | |
| Newburn (2007) has noted that the sociology of crime and deviance has tended to focus on the crimes of the powerless rather than those of the powerful. This is largely because official statists show that working class people, particularly those with the least power from the lower working class, are the main offenders. It was Sutherland (1949) who first sought to show crime was not simply a working class phenomenon, but was widespread throughout all sections of society. | | |
| **Working class and crime** | **White collar and corporate crimes** | **Explanations for white collar crimes.** |
| **Marxism**  It is predominantly working class young males living in working class neighbourhoods who appear, according to official statistics, to be the main offenders. (See Marxism LT)  **Functionalism**  Functionalism see the law as a reflection of society’s shared values, and crime as the product of inadequate or inappropriate socialisation into these values. Not everyone is equally well socialised into society’s shared culture. In modern societies with their complex division of labour, different groups and classes may develop their own separate subcultures.  For example, Walter B Miller argues that the lower class have developed an independent subculture with its own distinctive norms and values that clash with those of the mainstream culture, and this explains why the lower class have higher crime rate. Conforming to subcultural norms such as toughness and the pursuit of excitement can lead to conflict with the law.(See Functionalism LT) | Timmer and Eitzen (1989) described white collar and corporate crimes committed in the suites of offices and boardrooms of the businesses of the middle classes as ‘crimes in suites’, in contrast to the more familiar and visible everyday ‘crimes in the streets’, such as the violent crime and property crimes more associated with working class offending. Many pf the crimes in this session are called ‘the crimes of the powerful’ and often the amounts of money involved in these crimes are so colossal, and the human misery arising as a consequence so serious, that they dwarf the everyday crimes committed by working class offenders.  White-collar crime: is that committed by middle class individuals who abuse their work positions for personal gain, at the expense of employers, the government or clients.  e.g  - Crimes against NHS committed by doctors, pharmacists and dentists, who falsify prescriptions and patient records to claim millions of pounds more than that to which they are entitled – including one GP who made &700,000 over five years writing fake prescriptions  - The millionaire press baron Lord Conrad Black, former owner of the Daily Mail and Sunday Telegraph, was in 2007 convicted and jailed for six and a half years in the United states for misusing his position as Chair of Hollinger International to defraud shareholders of millions of dollars for private gain.  – Bribery and corruption in government and businesses, fiddling expenses, professional misconduct, fraud,  Corporate crime: Offenses committed by large companies, or individuals acting on behalf of those companies, which directly benefit the company rather than individuals, and involve increased profits or the survival of the organisation.  e.g  -Environmental and green crimes, these involve damage to the environment caused either deliberately or through negligence (1984 Bhopal disaster)  - Paper work and non-compliance, these are offences such as where correct perits or licences are not obtained, or companies fail to comply with health and safety regulations. (Hearld of free enterprise disaster 1987, when cross channel ferry capsized in a calm sea just outside Zeebrugge harbour. Because the rules governing the closing of the bow doors of the ship had not been complied with, 193 people died.  - Manufacturing offences, these involve offences such as the incorrect labelling or misrepresentation of products and false advertising, producing unsafe or dangerous goods. E.g. inadequate testing and government regulation of the morning sickness drug thalidomide in the late 1050’s and early 1960s led to birth defects in thousands of babies.  - Financial offenses, these are offenses like tax evasion and concealment of losses and debts. In 2012, global companies like Amazon and Starbucks came under attack in the UK for failing to pay their fair share of taxes, through using various legal offshore financial centres where taxes were lower than in the UK.  **Under-representation of white collar and corporate crimes**  - They are hidden from view and hard to detect.  - They are often without personal or individual victims.  - Media give limited coverage.  - They are hard to investigate as they are complex.  - There is often a lack of awareness that a crime has been committed and therefore not reported.  - Even if these crimes are detected, they are often not prosecuted and dealt with as criminal acts.  - Even if reported and prosecuted, offenders have a better chance of being found not guilty. | **Strain theory**  Strain theory argues that people engage in deviant behaviour when their opportunities to achieve in legitimate ways are blocked. For example, Merton argues that American society’s class structure denies working class people the opportunity to achieve the ‘money success’ that American culture values so highly.  As the working class are more likely to be denied legitimate opportunities to achieve success (for example, through educational achievement and a good job), so they are more likely to seek illegitimate means of achieving it. Merton calls this ‘innovation’: the use of ‘new’, deviant means such as theft, fraud or other property crime to gain wealth. In Merton’s view, this explains why the working class has a higher rate of utilitarian crime (crime for material gain) than the middle class.  Middel class people may also sense relative deprivation – lacking things they see other have – and want even more than they can achieve by legitimate, approved means, so they innovate, and turn to crime. This may be further fuelled by greed and power – they have a lot, but want more.  **Control theory**  Control theory suggests that the individuals who carry out corporate crimes to benefit companies are driven by socialization into, and conformity to, self-seeking, aggressive monument cultures, which encourage ruthless business practises when competing with other companies. This might well involve taking illegal shortcut which are not regarded as really doing wrong, but simply as extensions of acceptable business practice, and so there are reduced moral controls about doing wrong. This may be extended to bring some personal rewards to employees as well, through white collar offenses such as giving or accepting bribes when negotiating orders.  Nelken (2012) suggests strain and control theories converge in explaining some white collar offenders. He suggest some are successful people who have the material goods associated with success, but may have got into financial difficulties in trying to maintain their lifestyles. They are so strongly tied to the social expectations of an obligations to those in the same social group that they innovate by using illegitimate means to resolve their financial difficulties, and to maintain the lifestyles expected by those around them, through using opportunities proved by their jobs to commit embezzlement, fraud and similar offences. This helps to explain offences that are committed by people who are often quite affluent, and even very rich, and are successful in terms of society’s values and goals.  **Labelling theory**  The functionalist, strain and subcultural theories have been called ‘problem takers’. That is, they take for granted that the official statistics are broadly accurate and that working-class crime is the problem that needs to be explained. They focus their efforts on discovering the cause of the problem, for example in appropriate socialisation or blocked opportunities.  Labelling theorists take a very different approach:  - They reject the view that official statistics are a useful resource for sociologists that give a valid picture of which class commits most crime.  - Instead of seeking the supposed causes of working-class criminality, they focus on how and why working class people come to be labelled as criminal. They emphasise the stereotypes held by law enforcement agencies that see the working class as ‘typical criminals’, and the power of these agencies to successfully label powerless groups such as the working class.  Labelling theory has not had much to say about white collar and corporate crime, but Nelken suggests these offences are more likely to escape labelling as ‘criminal’ because they are often similar to normal business practices. Croall (2007) notes corporate crime is often not accompanied by direct intent to cause harm – for example, breaches of health and safety or the dumping of toxic waste are not deliberately intended to kill or injure people, even if this is the effect, and so they appear to be ;less criminal’ then offences like burglary.  **Differential association**  Sutherland (1949) sees crime as behaviour learned from others in social context. The less we associate with people who hold attitudes favourable to the law and the more we associate with people with criminal attitudes, the ore more likely we are to become deviant ourselves.  Thus, if a company’s culture justifies committing crimes to achieve corporate goal, employees will be socialised into this criminality. For example, Geis (1967) found that individuals joining companies where illegal price-fixing was practised became involved in it as part of their socialisation.  **Marxism**  For Marxists, corporate crime is a result of the normal functioning of capitalism. In this view, because capitalisms goal is to maximise profits, it inevitably causes harm, such as deaths and injuries among employees and consumers.  At the same time, capitalism has successfully created what Box (1983) calls a ‘mystification’. That is, it has spread the ideology that corporate crime is less widespread or harmful than working class crime. Capitalism’s control of the state means that it is able to avoid making or enforcing laws that conflict with its interests. While some corporate crimes prosecuted, this is only ever the tip of the iceberg. As Pearce (1976) argues, this sustains the illusion that it is the exception rather than the norm, and thus avoids causing a crisis of legitimacy for capitalism. (Marxism LT)  **Evaluation**  Both strain theory and Marxism seem to over predict the amount of business crime. As Nelken (2012) argues, it is unrealistic to assume that all businesses would offend were it not for the risk of punishment: for example, marinating the goodwill of other companies they must do business with may also prevent them resorting to crime.  Even if capitalist pursuit of profit is a cause of corporate crime, this doesn’t explain crime in non-profit making state agencies such as police, army or civil service. For example, state agencies in the former communist regimes committed crimes against health and safety, the environment, and consumers  Law abiding may also be more profitable than law breaking. Braithwaite (1984) found that US pharmaceutical companies that complied with Federal Drug Administration regulations to obtain licenses for their products in America were then able to access lucrative markets in poorer countries. These countries couldn’t afford their own drug testing facilities and therefore relied on the FDA’s licencing procedures as a guarantee of quality. |