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| 9. Learning table on Left realist explanations of crime & deviance | | | |
| **Key assumptions**   * They largely accept official statistics on crime. They thus seek to explain rising crime levels, committed in the main by working class, young (juvenile), often black males, in urban areas. * They reject approaches that explain crime and deviance away as a social construction (e.g. Interactionist & Marxist). * They offer instead a causal explanation of crime and deviance. * They believe in offering practical solutions to reduce real crime problems. * They favour quantitative local victim surveys when investigating crime and deviance. | | | |
| **Left realism** | **Evaluation - ☺ ☹ (GET SET)** | **Evaluation - in contrast** | **Synoptic links** |
| **Response to official crime statistics**  Left realists recognise that official statistics have problems with underreporting, underrecording, biased policing etc. However, they argue that this should not lead to rejection as they do show the basic reality of crime. They suggest that sociologists should supplement official crime statistics with local victim surveys to gain a more valid measure of crime.  **Causes of crime**  Left realists such as **Young** (1997) attempt to explain the **real** problem of inner city, lower working class, juvenile, male, white and black street crime (crimes of the powerless) in causal terms and not simply as a social construction (the product of police bias etc.) Three interrelated arguments are put forward. 1. Marginalisation Young suggests that fundamental changes have occurred in the social structure since the 1980s. For example, unemployment, economic instability, and cuts in welfare provisions. Young argues that as a consequence a growing number of lower working class and black youths are finding themselves marginalised or socially excluded. For left realists this marginalisation (lack of power, availability of jobs, money etc.) is an underlying pressure for crime and deviance amongst the powerless. However, they stress that marginalisation is not in itself a direct cause of crime - they reject simplistic links between poverty, unemployment and crime. 2. Relative deprivation Young argues that crime is most likely to follow when individuals or groups feel relatively deprived. They maintain when the marginalised feel worse off than comparable groups and feel social injustice then crime and deviance may occur. Young suggests that feelings of relative deprivation have intensified in recent years because expectations regarding consumption (products owned, leisure interests etc.) have increased. 3. Subcultures Left realists claim that criminal and deviant subcultures emerge as response to marginalisation and relative deprivation. Criminal and deviant subcultures allow groups of individuals to feel socially included and serve to facilitate crime and deviance by making such behaviour seem acceptable. Young suggests that an increasing variety of subcultural forms exist (e.g. criminal, conflict and retreatist) and shape the type of deviant activity engaged in. They also claim that subcultures are recreated by each generation according to their own specific situation.  **Practical solutions**  Left realists believe that government intervention and community involvement are necessary to reduce the spread of crime (creating more social order). Polices they favour include:   * Reduce economic inequality. * Create more training and employment opportunities. For example they are supportive of the ‘new deal’. * Closer police and community partnerships. For example neighbourhood watch. * Greater use of community service sentences instead of custodial sentences. | Strengths 1. Left realist theories have served to generate a great deal of subsequent research. For example, left realistideas have helped shape much current **Home Office** research into crime as well as stimulate a range of victim surveys. This suggests that left realist ideas have made a major contribution to the study of crime and deviance.  2. Left realist theories have gained empirical support. **Jones *et al.’s*** (1986) local Islington crime survey shows that crime is real problem for inner city residents. They found that levels of victimisation and fear of crime were high, especially amongst women. This suggests there is some validity in the left realist ideas.  3. Left realist views have gainedtheoretical support. **Postmodern theories**, like left realists appreciate the need to recognise a square of crime (offenders, victims, formal and informal agencies of social control) in the study of deviance. This suggests that the ideas have wider theoretical appeal. Weaknesses 1. Left realist theories too readily accept official statistics (although they do acknowledge they have problems). They thus fail to explain adult white-collar crime and neglect female subcultural delinquency. This suggests that the left realist response to official statistics is not adequate.  2. Left realist theories have been questioned on empiricalgrounds. **Hughes** (1991) suggests that left realists have little empirical research to back up their causal explanations of offending. He argues that they should rely less on victim survey data and more on interviewing young criminals. This suggests that the validity of left realist ideas have to be questioned.  3. Left realist theories have been criticised on atheoreticallevel. Whilst **postmodernists** accept that left realism puts forward a well rounded theory. They criticise their attempt to create a grand totalising theory (meta-narrative) of crime and deviance. They claim that all knowledge is uncertain and therefore no single theory can claim to offer the truth in terms of explanations or solutions to crime. This suggests that left realist theories only offer a partial view on crime and deviance. | **Right realism**  Right realists support left realists in so far as they recognise there are real crime problems to be explained, and that real practical solutions are needed. However, they are critical of left realists for locating the underlying causes of crime in terms of social inequality. They argue that inadequate social control is a more significant factor. They point to the breakdown in the moral fabric of society, a growing underclass, increased opportunity and soft sentencing. | Research methods/methodology  Left realists largely accept official crime statistics and therefore acknowledge the advantages of them. However, they do not deny they have problems. They supplement official crime statistics with local victim surveys and therefore stress the advantages of this quantitative survey technique.  Theories/perspectives  Left realism  Other topics  **Education** Left realists believe education and training has an important role to play in reducing crime by creating social inclusion. They support Labour’s New Deal policy (which gives the unemployed rights to training). **Power & politics**  Explain crimes committed by the powerless. Recognise governments have a role to play in solving crime through social policy. |
| **In conclusion** perhaps the greatest strength of the left realist approach is that it recognises that crime and deviance cannot be explained away as a social construction. They recognise that crime and deviance is a real problem in contemporary society and demands causal explanation.  Moreover, left realists put forward a complete approach to crime and deviance, as they not only consider the offender, but victims and agents of social control. However, left realism can be attacked for neglecting to study white-collar crime. | | | |