|  |
| --- |
| 8. Learning table on Marxist theories of crime & deviance |
| **Key assumptions** * They largely reject official statistics on crime, making them part of their subject of study.
* They believe that crime and deviance is structurally caused (caused by society) and socially constructed.
* They link crime and deviance strongly to the concept of power and social control.
* Qualitative secondary case studies are the favoured methodology.
 |
| **Classical Marxism** | **New Criminology** | **Evaluation - ☺ ☹** | **Evaluation**  | **Synoptic links** |
| Response to official crime statisticsLike interactionists, classical Marxists reject official statistics on crime, seeing them little more than a social construction. They are particularly concerned that they do not present an accurate picture of the social distribution of criminality. They point out that the invisibility of white-collar and selective law enforcement leads to biased statistics.RejectStructural causes of crime & deviance1. Economic inequality**Chambliss** (1976) argues that capitalism gives rise to huge economic inequalities as the powerless (wc) are exploited by the powerful ruling minority (ruling class). He maintains that it is the poverty and unemployment experienced by the working class that explains their criminality. 2. Capitalist valuesChambliss (1976) also argues that the values transmitted by capitalism such as profit, wealth creation, competition, self-interest, and power creates pressures on both the middle and working class to commit crime. The powerful tend to be drawn to white-collar crime and the powerless to street crimes. One example of a white collar crime driven by the desire to make money is Nick Leeson’s fraudulent stock market trading which lead to loses of £80m and the eventual collapse of Barings bank. Another example is the Bhopal Gas disaster. Union Carbide’s concern for profitability meant that profits were put before safety, resulting in a gas explosion in Bhopal killing over 5000 people. Social construction of crime & devianceThe nature of deviance is socially constructedLike interactionists classical Marxists such as **Pearce** (1976) suggest that what counts as crime and deviance is based on subjective decision making by the powerful. However unlike interactionists, classical Marxists seek to explain law creation, and in doing so have a stronger view on the links between deviance and power. They maintain that most (although not all) laws are largely created by the state to protect the interests of the powerful ruling class. This can be illustrated with recent employment and trade union laws that control the activities of the powerless. Laws implemented by Mrs Thatcher in the 1980s undermined trade union power by limiting numbers on picket lines and requiring secret ballots before strikes. **The extent of deviance is socially constructed**Like interactionists **Pearce** (1976) suggests that the extent and distribution of crime and deviance is socially constructed. He maintains that the law is selectively enforced so that powerless groups are more likely to be policed, arrested, and prosecuted than powerful groups. This can be illustrated with a comparison of social security and tax fraud. The cost of tax fraud is 4x the cost of dole fraud, yet there are 56x more prosecutions for dole fraud than tax fraud.Unlike interactionists, classical Marxists go on to explain **why** the law is selectively enforced, again giving it a stronger view on the link between deviance and power. They argue that selective law enforcement serves to create the belief that crime is a working class problem and therefore directs attention away from crimes committed by powerful groups. It is also said to reduce working class solidarity (togetherness) by creating the belief that working class criminals are the ‘enemy’ rather than the bourgeoisie who exploit them on a daily basis. **Social order and social control** - (only use this section for a specialist social order or social control question)Marxists argue that social order is maintained principally through ideological social control. Marxists argue that institutions such as education, health care and religion are part of the superstructure or ideological state apparatus which transmit ruling class ideologies (ideas). These ideologies ensure that the working class are kept in a state of false class-consciousness which prevents revolutionary thoughts, and hence why a capitalist social order is maintained. **Education****Bowles & Gintis** (1976) argue that through the hidden curriculum attitudes and values such as obedience and punctuality are instilled. They also argue that acceptance of hierarchy, income inequality and power differences are achieved through the correspondences between schools and capitalist business organisations. **Health**Like education medicine has a social control function. Marxists argue that it maintains a healthy workforce and so increases productivity and profits, directs attention away from the social causes of illness such as industrial pollution, labels those who are seen as a threat to the capitalist social order and limits access to sick leave and therefore enforces work discipline. **Religion**Marxists believe that region acts as ‘0pium of the people’. It achieves this by helping the working class escape alienating (boring work with lack of control) work by the promise of the idyll of heaven. Religion also diminishes the chance of revolution through creating working class fear of hell.  | **Taylor, Walton and Young** (1973) criticise classical Marxist approaches for ignoring the individual meanings behind crime.Taylor *et al.* suggest that a **fully social theory** of deviance will recognise:1. The wider structural origins of deviant acts. 2. The immediate origins of deviant acts. 3. The deviant act itself and the meanings it offers.4. The immediate social reactions to acts of deviance. 5. The wider social reactions to acts of deviance. 6. The effects of deviant labels.T**oxteth riots**This theoretical proposal explains the Toxteth riots well. These were the result of:1. Long term unemployment amongst Toxteth residents, especially blacks.2. Racist policing strategies.3. The riots were political protest against economic inequality and discrimination.4. The media coverage was biased, the police response was confrontational and Mrs Thatcher refused to accept allegations of police racism.5. Inappropriate regeneration schemes were created.6. Blacks remained under police suspicion and were more likely to be stopped and searched than whites. | Strengths 1. Marxist theories have served to generate a great deal of subsequent research. For example, **Bennett’s** (1979) research into selective law enforcement. He found that middle class offenders were more likely to be cautioned than working class offenders for the same kind of offence. This suggests that Marxist ideas have made a major contribution to the study of crime and deviance.2. Marxist theories have gained empirical support. **Sampson** (1986) provides evidence that the powerless are more likely to be policed. He found that the police tend to concentrate their patrols in poorer localities because of the belief that more crime takes place in such areas. This suggests there is some validity in the Marxist ideas.3. Marxist views have gainedtheoretical support. Those who favour a **structuration** approach are sympathetic to the Marxist views as they successfully integrate structural and action based ideas. This suggests that the ideas have wider theoretical appeal.Weaknesses1. Marxist 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 Marxist response to official statistics is not adequate.2. Marxist theories have been questioned on empiricalgrounds. **Hirschi** (1975) argues that it is debatable how far the criminal justice system has an effect on whether the labelled continue in their criminal careers. He feels that other factors such as age are seen to be more important. This suggests that the validity of Marxist ideas have to be questioned.3. Marxist theories have been criticised on atheoreticallevel. F**eminists** criticise the theory for failing to consider issues surrounding gender and crime. For example, the way in which patriarchy may limit female deviancy and create many female victims of domestic violence. This suggests that Marxist theories only offer a partial view on crime and deviance.  | Left realismIn contrast Left realists such as **Lea and Young** (1984) attack Marxists for too readily explaining away working class/black crime as a social construction. They argue that such groups docommit 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 Marxist approaches side too much with the deviant and neglect the victim. Furthermore it has been suggested that Marxism lacks any practical social policy focus. Left realists put forward realistic solutions to try and reduce crime, especially in inner city areas.  | **Research methods/methodology**Marxists reject official statistics on crime. They therefore stress the limitations of them, especially the invisibility of white-collar crime and selective law enforcement. **Theories/perspectives**Classical Marxism and the new criminology. **Other topics****Education**Through social control social order maintained – via hidden curriculum. **Health**Through social control social order maintained – via health care system.**Religion**Through social control social order maintained – religion acts as opium of the people.**Power & politics**Explain crimes of the powerful and powerless.Explains how laws are created by the **state** to maintain and protect the interests of the powerful ruling class.Explains how powerful agencies of social control selectively enforce the law against powerless groups. |
| **In conclusion** perhaps the greatest strength of the Marxist approach is that it recognises that crime and deviance is socially constructed by the agencies of social control and structurally caused. Moreover, the new criminology recognises the need to consider the individual meanings behind crime and deviance. However, the Marxist approach ignores gender issues, as it focuses on social class. |