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Crime and deviance

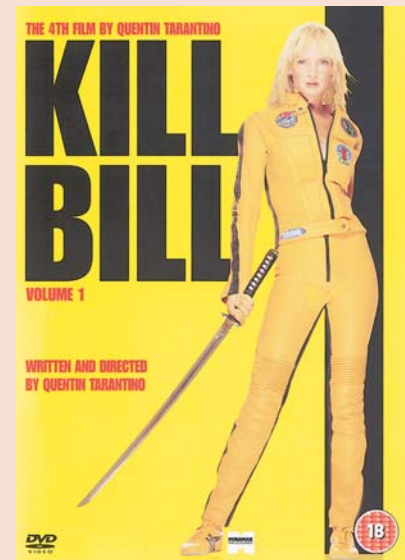
Introduction

We are fascinated by crime and deviance. This is evident from the mass media – from crime series on TV and crime reports in newspapers, from detective novels which are concerned with finding the criminal and explaining the crime, and from movies which often portray the more colourful, lurid and violent aspects of crime.

Why this fascination? Criminal behaviour appears unusual and different. It involves risks which endanger those who commit crimes and their victims. For many people, out-of-the-ordinary behaviour seems much more interesting than their own humdrum activities. And to those of us looking on, the risks and dangers involved are often experienced as exciting and entertaining – from a safe distance!

Crime and deviance break social norms – they deviate or diverge from conventional behaviour. This can be disturbing. We often fear crime and feel worried and anxious when taken-for-granted norms are broken. Why? Because such activities disrupt our sense of social order and threaten our view of the way things should be.

And this adds to our fascination with crime. It should therefore come as no surprise that crime and deviance is one of the most popular topics in sociology.



chaptersummary

- ▶ **Unit 1** looks at the meanings of deviance, crime and social control.
- ▶ **Unit 2** investigates evidence on the extent of crime, trends in the crime rate, and the identity of offenders.
- ▶ **Unit 3** examines media representations of crime and deviance.
- ▶ **Units 4, 5 and 6** outline and evaluate various sociological theories of crime and deviance, including functionalist, interactionist and Marxist approaches.
- ▶ **Units 7 and 8** examine two opposing theories of crime, social order and social control – right realism and left realism.
- ▶ **Unit 9** looks at the relationship between globalisation and crime, focusing on green crime and state crime.
- ▶ **Units 10, 11 and 12** look at the relationship between ethnicity and crime, gender and crime, and age and crime.
- ▶ **Unit 13** examines the spatial distribution of crime.
- ▶ **Unit 14** looks at social control, crime reduction and social policy.
- ▶ **Unit 15** examines sociological studies of suicide, focusing on the methodologies they use.

Unit 1 The nature of crime, deviance and social control

keyissues

- 1 What are crime, deviance and social control?
- 2 What is distinctive about the sociological approach to crime, deviance and social control?

1.1 Defining crime and deviance

Human social life is governed by norms and values – by norms which define appropriate and acceptable behaviour, and by values which define behaviour as right or wrong.

Sociologists have long been concerned with how society's norms and values are maintained.

However, there is another side to the story – how and why are norms broken and values rejected? In other words, how and why does *deviance* occur?

Deviance

Deviance is usually defined as behaviour which goes against conventional norms and generally accepted values. In terms of this definition, deviance is behaviour which most people would regard as inappropriate, or more strongly, as unacceptable and wrong. As a result, deviance

is usually subject to a variety of social controls ranging from mild disapproval to severe punishment.

This view of deviance is reflected in the following definition by Downes and Rock (2003). 'Deviance may be considered as banned or controlled behaviour which is likely to attract punishment or disapproval.' This definition covers acts such as murder and rape which are explicitly banned in most cultures and subject to severe punishment. It also covers relatively trivial acts such as burping and farting in public which usually attract little more than a disapproving glance or a negative comment.

Crime

At first sight, *crime* is a much more specific category than the wide and varied range of activities covered by deviance. Often, crime is simply defined as an infraction of the criminal law – as lawbreaking. Crimes are usually seen as particularly serious and negative forms of deviance – hence laws which ban them and agents of social control such as the police and judges who deal with them. This view of crime is reflected in the following definition. 'Crimes are those actions deemed so disturbing to citizens or disruptive to society as to justify state intervention' (Pease, 2002).

This type of definition has its limitations. We cannot assume that crimes are always more disturbing to citizens

or more disruptive to society than non-criminal behaviour. Think of all the non-criminal behaviour that contributes to global warming, global pollution and the destruction of the world's wildlife. In Muncie's (2001) words, 'Any number of damaging events are far more serious than those that make up the "crime problem" '.

What is more, breaking the criminal law covers a vast array of actions from the trivial to the serious. Crime, like deviance, covers a highly varied range of behaviour. This leads some sociologists to talk about crimes in the plural rather than crime in the singular. In other words, there's 'crime and crime'.

There are many different definitions of deviance and crime. None are without their problems as Activity 1 illustrates. It looks at vandalism which the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines as the wilful or malicious destruction or damage of property. This destruction or damage may or may not be seen as deviant. It may or may not be defined as criminal damage.

key terms

Deviance Actions which deviate from the norms and values of society.

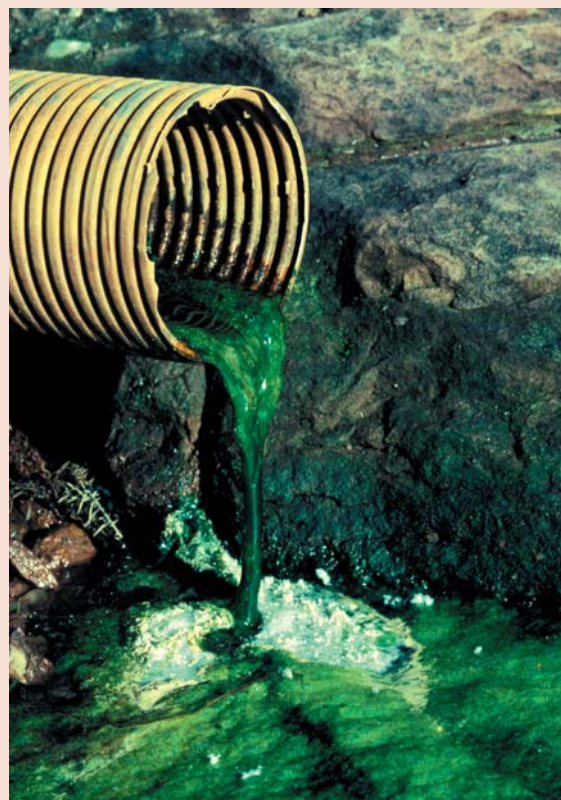
Crime A form of deviance which breaks the law.

activity1 vandalism

Item A



Item B



Item C



Item D



Item E



Item F



questions

- 1 Look at the pictures. Which (if any) would you see as examples of vandalism? Give reasons for your answer.
- 2 Using examples from this activity, briefly discuss the problems of defining crime and deviance.

1.2 The contexts and diversity of deviance

Deviance takes varied forms in society. For example, we can distinguish between secret and private deviance as against open and public deviance, and between individual deviance as against collective deviance.

Secret and private deviance This form of deviance is often concealed – not least due to the heavy personal costs of exposure to the public gaze. It is often undercover and may be hidden in normal settings such as the home or the workplace. Secret deviance may be legal – for example, a group with unusual sexual practices who meet in each other's homes. Or it may be illegal, as in the case of the Gloucester serial killer, Frederick West.

West appeared to be a fairly average family man with a normal occupation as a self-employed builder. Yet, in the privacy of his home, he murdered two members of his family and a number of vulnerable young women. Furthermore, he was able to use his 'normal' skills as a builder to hide the dead bodies in his house and garden.

Open and public deviance This form of deviance often involves conforming to the norms and values of a clearly defined outsider group – norms and values which differ from those of the wider society. Take the example of the so-called New Age Travellers in Britain today. Their lifestyle is very different from that of the mainstream population. They tend to be seen as a deviant group and are viewed with distaste and hostility by some members of society. They are an example of public and collective deviance.

key terms

Secret and private deviance Deviance conducted in private which is often concealed from the wider society.

Open and public deviance Deviance conducted in public which is not concealed from the wider society.

Individual deviance The deviant behaviour of an individual.

Collective deviance The deviant behaviour of a group of people.

1.3 The relativity of crime and deviance

Crime and deviance are relative to time, place and culture. In other words, what counts as crime and deviance varies from time to time, place to place and culture to culture.

Societal and situational deviance Ken Plummer (1979) captures this point in his distinction between societal and situational deviance. Societal deviance refers to behaviour which breaks the law or which is seen as deviant by most members of society. It is judged to be deviant on the basis of their shared values and beliefs and what 'common sense' tells them. There is general agreement about the identification of societal deviance – for example, most people regard armed robbery as wrong, as deviant and as criminal.

Situational deviance refers to the effect of the context or situation on the classification of deviance. In one situation an act may be seen as deviant, in another situation it may not. People interpret what counts as deviance in their personal worlds of friends, colleagues and acquaintances. Plummer accepts that the beliefs and values of the wider

society affect views of situational deviance. However, he argues that in certain contexts people either neutralise or reject the societal version of deviance.

Plummer uses the example of homosexuality to illustrate this point. Homosexuality is societally deviant but not always situationally deviant. In certain contexts, such as gay bars and clubs, homosexuality is no longer deviant – it becomes the norm.

Culture and deviance Crime and deviance are relative to culture. Different cultures have different norms and values. As a result, what is considered normal and deviant will vary from one culture to another. For example, in many non-Western societies marriage is polygynous – a man may have two or more wives. In the West, this is not only deviant, but criminal.

As cultures change, so do definitions of deviance and crime. At certain times in Western societies it was considered deviant for women to use make-up and consume alcoholic drinks in public. Today, this is no longer the case. In the same way, definitions of crime change over time. Sexual relations between men were once a criminal offence in Britain. Since 1969, homosexual acts between consenting adults in private have no longer been illegal.

key terms

Societal deviance Behaviour which is seen as deviant by most members of society.

Situational deviance Behaviour which may be seen as deviant in one situation but not in another.

activity2 deviance is relative

Item A Smoking banned

On Saturday, 29 March 2003, Robert de Niro and Danny de Vito joined 280 guests in the ballroom of the Regent Wall Street Hotel in New York for a \$95-a-head Last Smoke dinner. The prime rib steak smoked in tobacco leaves went down well. De Niro and De Vito lit up their Cuban Montecristo cigars.

When the clock struck midnight, the Last Smoke was over. Smoking was banned in 13,000 New York bars and restaurants which were not covered by an earlier smoking ban.

The city hired an army of inspectors to tour bars and restaurants, confiscating ashtrays and issuing warnings in a 30-day grace period before fines of up to \$3000 start being slapped on owners.

Source: *The Observer*, 30.3.2003



After the ban

Item B Endorsing Camels

How MILD can a Cigarette be?
MAKE THE 30-DAY CAMEL MILDNESS TEST—SEE WHY...
MORE PEOPLE SMOKE CAMELS than any other cigarette!

"The roles I play in movies are far from easy on my voice—I can't risk throat irritation. So I smoke Camels—they're mild!"

John Wayne
POPULAR, HANDSOME HOLLYWOOD STAR

"I've been around movie sets long enough to know how important cigarette mildness is to an actor. So when it came to deciding what cigarette was just right for my throat—I was very particular. I made a sensible test—my own 30-Day Camel Mildness Test! I gave Camels a real tryout for 30 days. The most pleasure I ever had from smoking. My own 'T-Zone' told me just how mild and good tasting a cigarette can be! I found out for myself why more people smoke Camels than any other cigarette!"

Make your own 30-Day Camel MILDNESS Test in your T-Zone (T for Throat, T for Taste)

Not one single case of throat irritation due to smoking CAMELS!

Yes, these were the findings of sound medical specialists after a total of 3,670 weekly examinations of the throats of hundreds of men and women who smoked Camels—nearly every Camel—for 30 consecutive days.

The late American film star John Wayne advertising Camel cigarettes.

questions

- 1 Use information from Items A and B to illustrate the point that deviance is relative to time and place.
- 2 Look at Item B. Why would it be unlikely for a film star today to endorse cigarettes?

1.4 Social control

Every society has methods of making its members toe the line, of making sure that they stick to the straight and narrow. These methods are known as mechanisms or methods of *social control*. They ensure that most of the people, most of the time, conform to society's norms and values. For social order to exist, shared norms and values are necessary and conformity to them must be enforced. Enforcing conformity means discouraging deviant and criminal behaviour – behaviour which breaks social norms and goes against shared values.

Social control takes many forms. Some researchers have distinguished between *formal* and *informal* methods of social control.

Formal methods of social control Formal methods refer to institutions specifically set up to enforce social control. In modern industrial societies, this mainly involves institutions which create and enforce the law – for example, parliament which enacts the law and the police, judiciary

and prison service which enforce the law.

The ultimate and most obvious form of social control is physical force. Under certain circumstances, some have the right to use physical force against others in an attempt to control their behaviour. In modern industrial societies, the police are an obvious example. Other formal methods of social control include judicial punishments such as fines and imprisonment.

Informal methods of social control Informal methods of social control involve institutions and social groups which are not directly concerned with enforcing social control and upholding the law. These groups and institutions include the family, schools, religious organisations and significant others.

The family and the school socialise young people, teaching them the norms and values of the wider society. Conformity to these norms and values is usually rewarded, deviance from them is usually punished.

Religious teachings often reinforce the values of society. For example, the Christian Commandments you shall not kill and you shall not steal reinforce the values placed on human life and private property. And, in turn, they back up secular laws protecting life and property. Religions offer rewards to those who follow their teachings and punishments to those who deviate from them. In this way, religion acts as a mechanism of social control.

Significant others are people who matter to an individual. They usually include his or her immediate family, friends, neighbours and workmates. People are concerned about what significant others think about them. Their approval makes them feel good, their disapproval upsets them. Because the opinion of significant others is held so highly, they can play an important part in controlling the behaviour of an individual. People often conform to social norms in order to gain the approval and acceptance of significant others and to avoid their disapproval and rejection.

Many sociologists see informal social controls as more important and effective than the more obvious formal controls.

key terms

Social control Methods of controlling people's behaviour – encouraging them to conform to society's norms and values and discouraging deviant and criminal behaviour.

Formal methods of social control Institutions specifically set up to enforce social control – in particular, institutions which create and enforce the law.

Informal methods of social control Institutions and groups which are not directly concerned with enforcing social control yet still play an important part in controlling the behaviour of others.

summary

1. The term deviance covers a wide range of behaviour which deviates from the norms and values of society.
2. The term crime also covers a variety of activities – from the trivial to the serious.
3. Crime and deviance may be secret and private or open and public; individual, involving one person, or collective, involving a group of people.
4. Crime and deviance are relative to time, place and culture. What counts as crime and deviance varies from time to time, place to place and culture to culture.
5. Every society has mechanisms of social control which discourage crime and deviance.
6. Formal mechanisms of social control include institutions which create and enforce the law – for example, parliament, the police and the judiciary.
7. Informal mechanisms of social control include the family, schools, religious organisations and significant others. Although not directly concerned with social control, sociologists see them as powerful control mechanisms.

activity3 social control

Item A Police



Item B Family



Item C Friends



Item D Prison



questions

- 1 Which of the items are examples of a) formal social control and b) informal social control?
- 2 Briefly suggest how each item may help to enforce social control.

Unit 2 Crime statistics

key issues

- 1 How are the volume and trends in crime measured?
- 2 How are offenders identified?
- 3 How valid and reliable are data on crime and offenders?

2.1 Measuring crime

The two main measures There are two main measures of crime in Britain. The first, *police recorded crime*, is based on police records – on records kept by the police of crimes which they have recorded. The second, the British Crime Survey (BCS), is based on interviews with a representative sample of adults. It asks whether they have been victims of particular crimes during the previous year.

Sections 2.2 and 2.3 look at the ‘official’ picture of crime presented by police recorded crime. Section 2.4 looks at the picture presented by the British Crime Survey.

The official picture Each year statistics produced from police records provide an official account of the volume of crime and trends in crime. In addition, statistics compiled from court records and police cautioning records give an official picture of those responsible for criminal offences – that is the ‘criminals’. Together, these statistics present a picture of the ‘crime problem’ – a picture interpreted for us by politicians and transmitted to us by the mass media.

But are official statistics a valid measure of crime? Do they provide an accurate measure of the extent of crime and of trends in crime? Do they present a true picture of those who commit crimes? The short answer to all these questions is probably not.

2.2 The volume of crime

According to official statistics based on police records, there were around six million cases of recorded crime in the United Kingdom in 2006/07 (*Social Trends*, 2008). Nearly three quarters (73%) of these were offences against property – theft, handling stolen goods, criminal damage, burglary, fraud and forgery.

These statistics do not represent the total volume of crime. There is a so-called ‘dark figure’ or ‘hidden figure’ of unrecorded crime. There are various reasons why the

official picture is incomplete. And there are reasons why this picture may be systematically biased – for example, it may repeatedly underestimate certain kinds of crime.

Recorded versus known offences Official statistics do not even give a complete record of criminal offences known to the authorities. For example, until 1998 they didn’t cover *summary offences* – those tried in Magistrates Courts as opposed to Crown Courts. Such offences include driving after consuming alcohol over the legal limit. Nor do statistics on recorded crime cover offences dealt with *administratively* by organisations such as the Inland Revenue. Generally speaking, the Inland Revenue negotiate a monetary settlement with people who commit a tax offence – for example, with a business which does not record all its takings and so pays less tax than it should.

There may be some justification for omitting the above offences if they were trivial. But consider this. Over half of crime statistics are made up of criminal damage and theft from a vehicle or from shops. Often such crimes involve small amounts of damage or loss. It is questionable whether they can be seen as more serious than summary offences or offences dealt with administratively.

Police recording practices A further example of known offences not appearing in official statistics is provided by police recording practices. Over 30% of offences reported to the police in 2002/03 were not recorded (Simmons & Dodd, 2003). While the police have a statutory obligation to record crimes, they also have some discretion over whether a crime is serious enough to warrant their attention.

This discretion can be used in different ways by different police forces. For example, in 1981, Nottinghamshire appeared to be the most criminal area in the country. This was largely due to many more crimes involving £10 or less being recorded in Nottinghamshire than in comparable counties such as Leicestershire and Staffordshire (Holdaway, 1988).

The Home Office provides police forces with ‘counting rules’ to calculate the extent of crime. The basic rule is that the statistics should indicate the number of victims rather than the number of criminal acts. For example, if a single victim has been assaulted by the same person on several occasions, only the most serious offence is counted (Maguire, 2002). This can make some crimes appear less serious than they are. For example, it can understate the

extent of domestic violence which often involves numerous assaults over a prolonged period.

Police priorities The number and type of offences discovered by the police in the course of their operations will vary according to their priorities. And this, in turn, will affect crime statistics.

Police priorities are influenced by the concerns of local and national government, pressure groups, public opinion and the media. For example, in recent years, the police have directed more resources to combat paedophilia, due, in part, to increased media concern with this offence.

An ongoing police priority is to improve their clear-up rate – solve more crimes and catch more offenders. With this in mind, resources tend to be targeted at certain crimes. In the words of a retired police officer, ‘If you don’t catch a burglar, he will go out and he will commit a lot of crime which will then be reported and it will damage your detection rate’ (Davies, 1994).

Reporting and non-reporting Over 80% of all recorded crime results from reports by the public (Bottomley & Coleman, 1981). Some types of crime are more likely to be reported than others. For example, 93% of thefts of vehicles were reported to the police in 2007/08, as an official record of the incident is needed for insurance purposes. This compares with estimates which suggest that only around a third of incidents of vandalism and theft from the person are reported (Kershaw *et al.*, 2008).

There are many reasons why crimes are not reported to the police.

- There may be a lack of awareness that a crime has taken place – eg, fraud.
- The victim may be relatively powerless and frightened of the consequences of reporting – eg, child abuse and domestic violence.
- The offence may seem too trivial – eg, vandalism.
- There is no apparent victim – eg, prostitution.
- A view that the police can’t do anything about the incident.
- The matter was dealt with privately.

Crime statistics rely heavily on the public reporting incidents to the police. Since some types of crime are more likely to be reported than others, official statistics will not reflect the overall pattern of crime.

The significance of crime statistics Numbers aren’t everything. For example, violence against the person, sexual offences and fraud may form a relatively small proportion of recorded crime, but there are other ways of measuring their significance.

Violent and sexual offences often have a traumatic effect upon victims and their seriousness is evident from the number and length of prison sentences they bring – around a third of prisoners are serving sentences for violent or sexual offences.

Fraud may only account for 6% of recorded crime but its monetary value is far greater than this suggests. In Mike Maguire’s (2002) words, ‘If one measures the importance of

property offences in terms of the value stolen, rather than the quantity of incidents, fraud comes out as of enormously greater significance than other categories’. If we take any one of the major cases of alleged fraud investigated by the Serious Fraud Office in the early 1990s – Barlow Clowes, Guinness, Maxwell, BCCI, Polly Peck – we find that, by itself, it exceeded the total amount stolen in thefts and burglaries recorded by the police (Levi, 1993).

Conclusion Official statistics on recorded crime are drawn from police records – they are based on data collected by the police. The evidence presented in this section indicates that these statistics fail to provide a reliable and valid measurement of crime. And they may be systematically biased in underestimating the extent of certain crimes.

Official statistics on recorded crime are *not* simple, straightforward facts. Instead, they are a *social construction* – they are constructed during the process of social interaction, they are based on a series of interpretations, definitions and decisions which are influenced by a variety of factors, and vary from situation to situation. In the words of Simon Holdaway (1988), ‘Official statistics of crime are not so much the facts about crime, as the end product of a complex series of decisions. An incident occurs and someone decides that it is a crime. A decision is made to telephone a police officer and the police officer receiving the call decides to regard the incident as a crime. Another officer attends the scene and, hearing the various accounts of the incident, makes a further decision about its being a crime, and so on. The official statistics are socially constructed; they are the end product of a range of decisions.’

key terms

Police recorded crime Crimes recorded by the police from which official statistics on crime are drawn.

Summary offences Crimes dealt with by Magistrates Courts as opposed to Crown Courts. They were not included in official statistics until 1998.

Crime dealt with administratively Crimes which are not prosecuted – not taken to court. They are dealt with by organisations such as the Inland Revenue and do not appear in police recorded crime.

Social construction Definitions and meanings constructed in the course of social interaction.

activity4 domestic violence and fraud

Item A Domestic violence

Domestic violence includes violent incidents which involve partners, ex-partners, household members or other relatives. According to the British Crime Survey, only one in three victims of domestic violence report the incident to the police. Reasons for non-reporting include a desire for privacy, fear of reprisals and of family break-up.

Domestic violence often involves a series of incidents over a period of time – for example, a woman may be assaulted many times by her partner. However, the police only record the most serious incident.

A study conducted jointly by the police and the Crown Prosecution Service investigated 465 incidents of domestic violence to which the police were called. There should have been 260 crime reports, but only 118 incidents were recorded. Only 21% of these resulted in charges and there was a conviction in just 11%. In nearly half the cases received by the Crown Prosecution Service, the victim withdrew the complaint.

Source: Cowan, 2004

A Women's Aid poster – the organisation helps women who have been victims of domestic violence.



Item B Fraud

In June 2002, WorldCom, the second largest long-distance telephone company in the USA, was forced to admit a \$4 billion hole in its accounts. In other words, the company had fraudulently claimed to have \$4 billion more than it actually had. WorldCom shares dropped from a peak of \$64 to a mere 20 cents. Investors lost a fortune because of this accounting fraud.

Fraud is a difficult crime to define. It ranges from avoiding VAT and alcohol and tobacco smuggling – estimated by the Home Office to be worth around £7 billion a year – to credit card fraud which rose in value by 30% between 2000 and 2001 to an estimated £411 million. The value of cases of fraud in the City investigated by the Serious Fraud Office – for example, illegal share dealing – totalled £1.75 billion in 2001/02. Social security fraud is estimated at £2 billion a year. But the above examples are dwarfed by tax fraud. One estimate, by the accountancy firm Deloitte and Touche, puts the cost of 'tax dodging' between 1976 and 1996 at £2000 billion – the equivalent of six years of government expenditure.

Fraud is difficult to detect – the cases uncovered are probably only the tip of the iceberg. Often they involve a large number of fraudulent acts. But, when they are detected, only one or two 'sample' offences are recorded by the police. And many cases of detected fraud never enter police records. Tax, social security and VAT fraud are usually dealt with administratively. The Inland Revenue rarely prosecutes detected offenders, despite the enormous sums involved.

Source: Croall, 2001; Maguire, 2002; *The Guardian*, 12.7.2002



Bernard Ebbers, former WorldCom chief executive officer (centre), escorted by US federal agents after turning himself in to face fraud charges.

question

Police recorded crime statistics present an incomplete picture of crime. They seriously underestimate certain types of crime. They fail to indicate the significance of certain types of crime.

What support do Items A and B provide for these views?

2.3 Trends in crime

Police recorded crime

Each year, when the government publishes statistics on recorded crime, newspapers respond with headlines such as: Violent crime up 20%; Burglary up 10%. These headlines are usually based on a comparison of the present year's figures with those of the previous year. This section looks at trends in crime over longer periods of time.

Official statistics since 1876 show little change in annual crime figures until the 1930s. Then, there is a gradual rise to the early 1950s, followed by a sharp increase until the early 1990s. Since then, the figures have gone up and down, but remained at a high level compared to earlier years – see Activity 5, Item B.

If there are problems with official crime statistics in any one year, these are magnified when we examine trends over time. First, more crimes may be reported as time goes on. Second, new types of crime may be emerging and new opportunities opening up for existing crimes. Third, changes in legislation and law enforcement may result in more crimes being recorded. These are some of the factors which must be considered before drawing any conclusions from trends in crime statistics.

More crimes may be reported Since the mid-1990s, the proportion of crime reported to the police has remained more or less the same – around 44% of all crime. This is significantly higher than in the early 1980s (Simmons & Dodd, 2003). A number of reasons have been suggested for the increase in reporting rate.

- Increased telephone ownership, especially of mobiles, which makes reporting easier.
- The growth of reported burglary between 1981 and 1993 may be related to an increase in valuable goods in the home – for example, TVs and videos – to wider car ownership, and more insurance policies covering house contents and cars. Insurance companies require a police report when a crime has been committed (Mayhew et al., 1994).
- People may be less willing to tolerate certain types of crime. For example, the increase in reported violent crime may, at least in part, be due to less tolerance of violence. Recorded incidents of robbery, rape and theft from the person more than doubled between 1991 and 2000/01 (Maguire, 2002).
- The break-up of traditional, close-knit communities may result in people being more inclined to bring in the police to deal with incidents rather than sorting things out for themselves (Maguire, 2002).

New crimes and new opportunities Trends in crime change. New crimes emerge as do new opportunities to commit existing crimes. The invention of credit and debit cards and computers provides opportunities for theft and fraud which did not exist 50 years ago. Today, thefts of, or from, motor vehicles make up around one fifth of recorded crime. In the 1950s, these offences were relatively rare as there were far fewer cars on the road (Maguire, 2002).

Changes in legislation and law enforcement These changes may result in more crimes being recorded. This can be seen from the following examples.

The decision in 1977 to include offences of criminal damage of £20 or less in police crime statistics raised the annual total by around 7% (Maguire, 2002). And the decision in 1998 to include summary offences, such as common assault, again boosted the total of recorded crime, as well as giving the impression of a major increase in violent crime. It is estimated that this change, plus new counting rules, increased the total number of recorded offences by up to 14% (Maguire, 2002). In 2002, the introduction of a new National Crime Recording Standard, designed to reduce police discretion in recording reports of offences from the public, resulted in the highest proportion of reported crime ever recorded by the police (Simmons & Dodd, 2003).

In the 1970s, the increased use of formal cautions for young people added substantially to the volume of recorded crime. According to one estimate, this change accounted for the whole increase in recorded crime for boys under 14 during the 1970s (Pearson, 1983).

Finally, the increase in the numbers of police officers – an increase of over 50% since the 1980s – coupled with more sophisticated technology, is likely to have resulted in more crimes being recorded.

Conclusion Does the rise in recorded crime mean that more crimes are being committed? The evidence presented in this section suggests that this may not be the case. It shows that at least part of the increase in recorded crime may have nothing to do with changes in the actual volume of crime.

2.4 The British Crime Survey (BCS)

Methodology

The British Crime Survey (BCS) is a *victim study* – it asks people if they have been a victim of particular crimes. The survey was conducted every two years from 1982 to 2000, and since then every year.

The BCS is based on a representative sample of adults (aged 16 and over) living in private households in England and Wales. The response rate – those who agreed to be interviewed – in the 2007/08 survey was 76%. Some 46,983 interviews were conducted. Respondents were asked to recall crimes against themselves or any other member of the household over a 12 month period preceding the interview (Kershaw et al., 2008).

Various crimes are excluded from the BCS – crimes such as murder, where the victim is no longer available for interview, so-called victimless crimes (eg, drug possession or dealing), fraud, and offences against non-domestic targets such as businesses. BCS estimates exclude sexual offences due to the small number reported to the survey and concerns about people's willingness to disclose such offences (Simmons & Dodd, 2003).

BCS Findings

The 2006/07 British Crime Survey provides the following picture of crime in England and Wales.

The volume of crime On the basis of interviews conducted in 2006/07, the BCS estimates that 11.3 million crimes were committed against adults living in private households. Police recorded crime for England and Wales for the same period was just under 5.5 million. The BCS estimate is, therefore, more than double police recorded crime.

Unreported and unrecorded crime Not all BCS crimes can be directly compared with police figures – for example, thefts involving household and personal property are placed by the police in the same category as thefts of business property and shoplifting, crimes which are not included in the BCS. However, just over 9.5 million BCS crimes are comparable with those in police statistics. Of these, 43% were reported to the police, and of those reported, 68% were recorded by the police. This means that only 29% of all BCS crimes were actually recorded by the police and entered the official statistics of police

recorded crime (Simmons & Dodd, 2003).

Since the BCS includes both unreported and unrecorded crime, it gives a more complete estimate of many crimes than police records.

Trends in crime From 1981 to 1995, British Crime Survey estimates show a steady rise in crime. Since then, there has been a steady fall, apart from a slight rise in 2006/07 – see Activity 5, Item C.

In general, the BCS trends in the volume of crime are reflected in the trends in police recorded crime. However, they diverged when a new counting rule for recorded crime was introduced in 1998 and the National Crime Recording Standard came into operation in 2002. These

key term

Victim study/survey A study of the victims of crime. Such studies usually ask people to report the crimes that have been committed against them, or any other member of the household, during the previous year.

activity5 the British Crime Survey

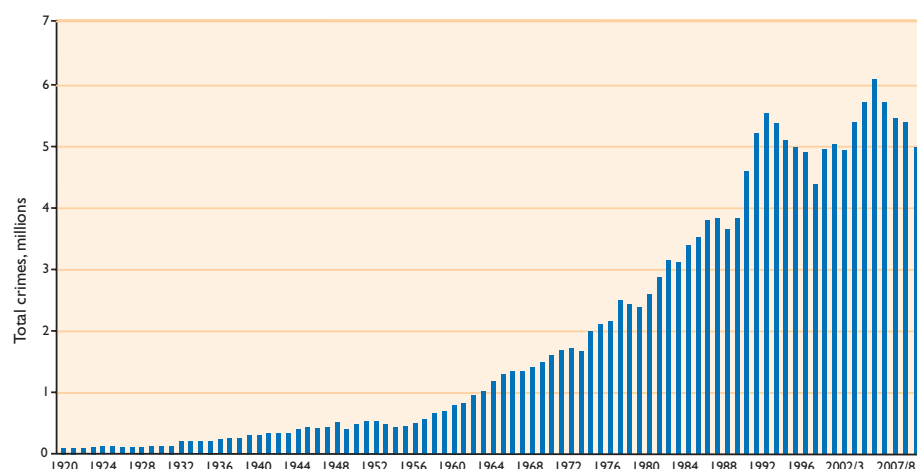
Item A The BCS and police recorded crime

	% BCS crimes reported to the police	% of reported BCS crimes recorded by the police	% of all BCS crimes recorded by the police
Vandalism	31	70	22
PROPERTY CRIME	50	75	38
Burglary	65	71	46
Burglary attempts and no loss	49	42	21
Burglary with loss	87	94	81
All vehicle thefts	50	84	42
Thefts from vehicles	47	75	35
Thefts of vehicles	97	84	81
Attempted vehicle theft	36	100	38
Bicycle theft	50	56	28
Thefts from the person	33	59	19
VIOLENCE	41	52	21
Common assault	34	46	16
Wounding	46	57	26
Robbery	53	54	28
ALL COMPARABLE CRIME	43	68	29

Source: Simmons & Dodd, 2003

Item B Police recorded crime trends

Crimes recorded by the police, England and Wales, 1920–2007/08



New counting rules were introduced in 2002/03

Note: From 1997, the figures are based on the financial year (ie, April to March).

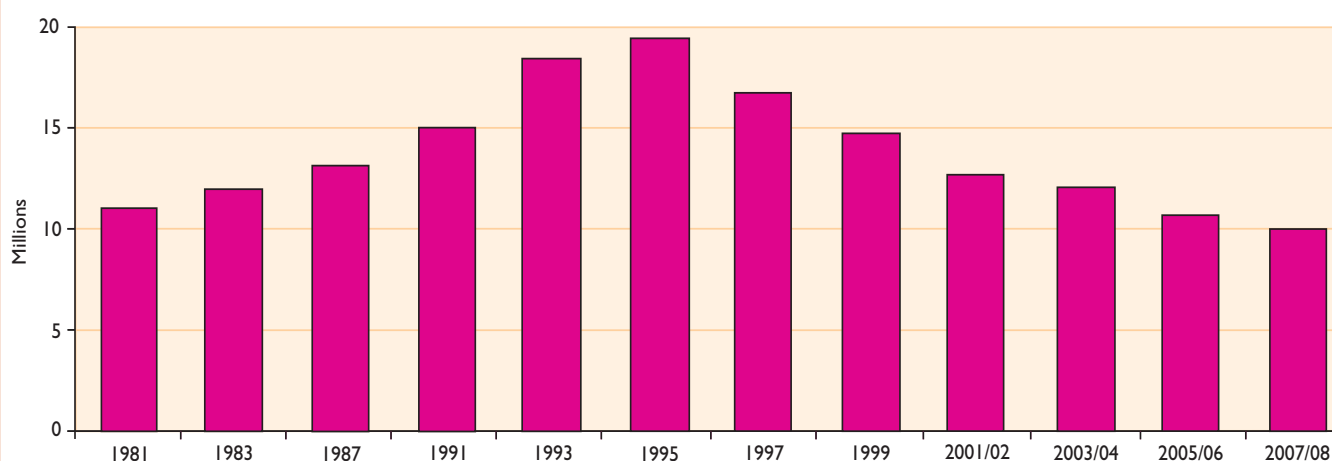
Source: Maguire, 2002 and Kershaw *et al.*, 2008

questions

- 1 a) Briefly summarise the differences between the police and BCS figures in Item A.
- b) Why are some crimes more likely to be reported to the police than others?
- c) Why are some crimes reported to the police more likely to be recorded than others?
- 2 a) Briefly summarise the trends shown in Items B and C.
- b) Suggest reasons for any differences in recent trends between police recorded crime and BCS estimates.

Item C BCS trends

BCS crime estimates, England and Wales, 1981–2007/08



Source: Kershaw *et al.*, 2008

new measures increased the volume of police recorded crime. For example, the National Crime Recording Standard raised the volume of police recorded crime by 10% in 2002/03. This 10% 'increase' was simply due to a change in recording practice, it does not reflect a real increase in crime.

Without these changes in recording practices, the trends in police recorded crime would be similar to the BCS trends – they would show a steady decline in the volume of crime from the mid-1990s (Simmons & Dodd, 2003).

Evaluation of the BCS

Advantages For the crimes it covers, the British Crime

Survey provides a more accurate picture of the extent of crime and of trends in crime than police recorded crime. There are two main reasons for this.

- First, BCS estimates include unreported and unrecorded crime.
- Second, the trends identified by the BCS are not affected by changes in recording practices, unlike the trends identified from police records.

Disadvantages There are a number of disadvantages of the BCS. They include the following.

- Only three-quarters of BCS crimes can be directly compared to police recorded crime.

- Because it is a household survey, the BCS does not cover a range of crimes which appear in police statistics. These include crimes against corporate and commercial organisations – such as fraud and shoplifting – motoring offences and so-called victimless crimes – such as possession or dealing in drugs (Maguire, 2002).
- Locally-based surveys of women indicate that the BCS underestimates assaults committed by people known to the victims – for example, partners.
- The BCS is a national survey. However, crime is not spread evenly across the country. In certain inner-city areas, the risks of serious crime are high. A local victim survey in Islington revealed that one-third of all households reported being a victim of burglary, robbery or sexual assault within the previous year (Jones et al., 1986). This is considerably higher than the national figure.

2.5 The social characteristics of offenders

Sociologists often explain behaviour in terms of people's social characteristics – for example, their social class, ethnicity, gender and age. Sociologists are therefore interested in the social characteristics of offenders. For instance, if offenders are primarily young, male and working class, then these factors may help to explain their criminal behaviour.

There are two main sources for identifying the social characteristics of offenders – official sources and self-report studies.

The official picture

Known offenders Statistics compiled from court records and police cautioning records provide an official picture of offenders. It is important to note that the number of 'known offenders' is small compared to the number of recorded offences. For example, in 2000, some 325,000 people were sentenced in court in England and Wales and 151,000 were cautioned by the police. This compares with over 5 million recorded crimes. The proportion of known offenders becomes even smaller when a comparison is made with BCS data. According to one estimate, only 3 in 100 BCS crimes resulted in an offender being convicted or cautioned (Barclay & Tavares, 1999).

We cannot assume that all offenders are similar to this small proportion of known offenders. In other words, we cannot generalise from such a small, and probably unrepresentative, sample.

Social characteristics Of the 476,000 offenders convicted or cautioned in 2000, 80% were male and 41% under the age of 21. Often gender and age are the only characteristics of offenders available from court and police cautioning records.

A fuller picture is provided by the National Prison Survey which was conducted in England and Wales in 1991

(Walmsley et al., 1992). The main findings were as follows.

- 62% of inmates were under 30 compared with 25% in the population as a whole.
- A disproportionate number were from the lower levels of the class system – 41% of males formerly had unskilled or partly-skilled manual jobs compared with 18% of the population as a whole.
- Given their numbers in the general population, a disproportionate number of prisoners came from ethnic minorities – particularly African Caribbean.

Overall, the findings of the National Prison Survey reveal a very different pattern than that found in the wider population.

Mike Maguire (2002) describes the picture presented by official sources of the social characteristics of offenders. 'There are many more males, young people, Black people, poor people, poorly-educated people, and people with disturbed childhoods than one would find in a random sample.'

Self-report studies

Only some 3% of crimes result in a conviction or caution. What about the other 97%? Do those who committed these offences share the same characteristics as the 3%? *Self-report studies* may help to provide an answer to this question.

Self-report studies of crime ask people whether they have committed a series of offences. They are usually based on a self-completed questionnaire or an interview. Respondents are presented with a list of offences and asked which they have committed over a period of time – for example, during the past 12 months or during their lifetime.

Crime is normal Self-report studies suggest that most of us have committed at least one crime at some stage in our lives. This questions the view that a clear distinction can be made between law-abiding people and offenders. Gabor (1994) argues that many of us have done one or more of the following: 'taken home linens, silverware, art and other "souvenirs" from hotels in which we have stayed; made inflated insurance claims following a fire or theft; illegally copied computer software or videos; used prohibited drugs or abused prescription drugs; exhibited disorderly conduct in public; physically struck another person intentionally'.

It is possible to argue that crime is 'normal'. If this is the case, then there is nothing particularly distinctive about the social characteristics of those who break the law. However, there are problems with this view. What kinds of crime are we talking about? Many of the crimes committed by most people can be seen as fairly trivial. And how many crimes do most people commit? Self-report studies indicate that committing one or two criminal acts is a 'normal' part of growing up for most boys. However, frequent lawbreaking is relatively rare (Hood & Sparks, 1970).

Gender Self-report studies indicate that far more males than females commit crimes. This reflects the picture given by official statistics. In a self-report study conducted by the

Home Office, over 30% of 22-25 year-old males admitted a criminal offence within the previous year, compared with only 4% of females in the same age group (Graham & Bowling, 1995).

Social class Most self-report studies suggest a link between social class and criminal behaviour. They indicate that the lower a person's position in the class system, the more likely they are to commit a crime. Again, this reflects the picture given by official statistics (Coleman & Moynihan, 1996).

This link appears strongest in terms of 'street crime' – burglary, robbery, theft of or from a vehicle – and the so-called *underclass* – those at the base of the class system, the long-term unemployed and those dependent on welfare benefits (Farnworth et al., 1994).

However, there are problems with this apparent link between class and crime. Street crimes are the typical crimes of the poor. They are a police priority and are the types of crime which the police are most likely to deal with. And they are the types of crime which tend to be listed by researchers in self-report questionnaires and structured interviews. Other types of crime, such as fraud, domestic violence and child abuse, are less visible and less likely to appear on a list in self-report studies. In view of this, it is not surprising that the poor appear to commit more crimes than their better-off counterparts (Maguire, 2002).

Age Self-report studies, like official statistics, suggest that crime is a 'young person's game'. However, it is important to note that young people tend to offend in groups and in public – they are more visible and more likely to be apprehended. Also the crimes young people commit are more likely to be listed in self-report studies (Coleman & Moynihan, 1996). And they are more likely to be reported to the police – for example, vehicle theft.

Ethnicity There is little difference between Blacks and Whites in self-reported crime. This is at odds with the picture presented by official statistics which shows a relatively high proportion of Black offenders.

Evaluation and conclusion

Official statistics reveal the social characteristics of those who have been processed by the criminal justice system – that is, those who have been cautioned, those found guilty

by the courts, and those imprisoned. They reflect the priority given by the police to certain kinds of crime and certain types of lawbreakers. As such, they are useful.

However, official statistics are unlikely to present a picture of the social characteristics of lawbreakers in general. They indicate that young, working-class males are a major crime problem. But this may simply reflect the fact that 'most police resources are devoted to uniformed patrol of public space' where most young working-class males are likely to spend their social lives (Reiner, 1994). And police priorities and perceptions might well be the main reason for the apparent class/crime link. According to William Chambliss (1969) 'The lower class person is (i) more likely to be scrutinised and therefore to be observed in any violation of the law, (ii) more likely to be arrested if discovered under suspicious circumstances, (iii) more likely to spend the time between arrest and trial in jail, (iv) more likely to come to trial, (v) more likely to be found guilty, and (vi) if found guilty, more likely to receive harsh punishment than his middle or upper-class counterpart.'

Self-report studies The results of self-report studies must be approached with caution. Traditionally, they have focused on male juvenile delinquency – the criminal behaviour of young men. And the lists of crimes presented in self-report studies tend to reflect those typically committed by young working-class males – in particular 'street crime'. They tend to omit 'hidden crimes' and adult crimes, such as domestic violence and child abuse, crimes which are likely to be spread more evenly across age and class groups. And they are unlikely to include fraud, often committed by middle-class, middle-aged men. As a result, self-report studies provide only a partial view of crime. And this leads to a one-sided picture of the social characteristics of offenders.

key terms

Self-report study A survey in which respondents report on aspects of their behaviour – in the case of crime, the offences they have committed over a period of time.

Underclass Some sociologists claim that an underclass, a class below the working class, has developed in modern societies. Characteristics of the underclass include dependency on welfare benefits and long-term unemployment.

summary

1. There are two main measures of crime in Britain – police recorded crime based on police records, and the British Crime Survey (BCS), a victim study based on a representative sample of adults.
2. Police recorded crime statistics do not represent the total volume of crime. There is a 'dark figure' or 'hidden figure' of unrecorded crime.
3. Certain offences, for example many tax offences, do not enter police records because they are dealt with administratively by organisations such as the Inland Revenue.
4. Many of the offences reported to the police are not recorded – over 30% in 2002/03. Often this is because the offences are seen as too trivial to record.
5. Police priorities affect the crimes they target, the number and

type of offences they discover, and the crime statistics they produce.

6. Some crimes are more likely to be reported to the police than others. For example, vehicle theft is much more likely to be reported than domestic violence.
7. Police recorded crime provides statistics. It has nothing to say about the significance of crime. For example, in monetary terms fraud is much more significant than other property offences.
8. Police recorded crime fails to provide a reliable and valid measure of crime. It may be significantly biased in underestimating certain types of crime – for example, fraud and domestic violence.
9. Police crime statistics are a social construction. They are constructed during the process of social interaction and based on a series of interpretations, definitions and decisions.
10. Police recorded crime provides the following picture of trends in crime. There is little change in the annual crime figures from 1876 until the 1930s. Then, there is a gradual rise to the 1950s, followed by a sharp increase until the early 1990s. Since then, the figures have gone up and down, but remained high compared to earlier years.
11. The following reasons have been given for the increase in police recorded crime.
 - The proportion of crime reported to the police rose significantly between the early 1980s and mid-1990s.
 - New crimes and new opportunities for crime have developed – for example, credit card fraud.
 - Changes in police recording practices have increased the total of recorded crime.
12. The rise in police recorded crime does not necessarily mean that more crimes are being committed. However, evidence from the British Crime Survey indicates an actual rise in crime from the early 1980s until 1995.
13. The British Crime Survey (BCS) is a victim study based on a representative sample of adults in England and Wales.
14. It estimates that the total volume of crime is more than double the total given by police recorded crime.
15. The BCS indicates a steady rise in crime from 1981 to 1995, followed by a steady fall.
16. Differences between BCS and police recorded crime trends since 1995 are probably due to changes in police recording practices. These changes increased the level of recorded crime.
17. Compared to police recorded crime, the BCS has the advantage of including both unreported and unrecorded crime. Also, it is not affected by changes in recording practices.
18. The BCS has a number of disadvantages. They include:
 - The BCS does not cover certain crimes which appear in police statistics – for example, fraud.
 - It underestimates certain crimes – for example, domestic violence.
19. There are two main sources for identifying the social characteristics of offenders – official sources and self-report studies.
20. Statistics from court records and police cautioning records provide an official picture of offenders. However, the number of ‘known offenders’ is small compared with the number of recorded offences.
21. This number becomes even smaller when BCS crimes are taken into account. Only around 3 in 100 BCS crimes result in an offender being convicted or cautioned. We cannot generalise from such a small and probably unrepresentative sample.
22. According to official sources, the typical offender is young, male and working class.
23. Self-report studies indicate that most people have committed at least one crime. In this respect, there is nothing distinctive about people who break the law.
24. Self-report studies give the following picture of the social characteristics of offenders. It reflects the picture provided by official statistics.
 - Significantly more males than females commit crimes.
 - The lower a person’s position in the class system, the more likely they are to commit crimes.
 - Younger people are more likely to commit crimes than older people.
25. The social characteristics of offenders provided by official statistics reflect the priorities given by the police to certain kinds of crime and certain types of lawbreakers.
26. Self-report studies tend to focus on the types of crime committed by young working-class males. They tend to omit adult crimes, such as domestic violence and fraud, which are likely to be spread more evenly across age and social class groups.
27. Both official sources and self-report studies give only a partial view of crime. This leads to a one-sided picture of the social characteristics of offenders.

activity6 your self report

Incident	Offence	Maximum Penalty
1. Have you ever bought goods knowing or believing they may have been stolen?	Handling stolen property	£5,000 and/or 6 months imprisonment
2. Have you taken stationery or anything else from your office/work?	Theft	£5,000 and/or 6 months imprisonment
3. Have you ever used the firm's telephone for personal calls?	Dishonestly abstracting electricity	£5,000 and/or 6 months imprisonment
4. Have you ever kept money if you received too much change?	Theft	£5,000 and/or 6 months imprisonment
5. Have you kept money found in the street?	Theft	£5,000 and/or 6 months imprisonment
6. Have you taken 'souvenirs' from a pub/hotel?	Theft	£5,000 and/or 6 months imprisonment
7. Have you tried to evade customs duty on a small item bought on holiday?	Intending to defraud	Three times value of goods or £5,000 fine, whichever is greater and/or 3 years imprisonment
8. Have you used a TV without buying a licence?	Using a TV without a licence	£400 fine
9. Have you ever fiddled your expenses?	Theft	£5,000 and/or 6 months imprisonment
10. Have you ever driven a car knowing you are 'over the limit'?	Driving with excess alcohol	£5,000 and/or 6 months imprisonment

Source: Munie, 2001

questions

- How many of these offences have you committed?
 - Add up the maximum penalties which you could have received.
 - Compare your answers to a) and b) with those of other students.
- What do your answers to Question 1 suggest about
 - the accuracy of official statistics and
 - the picture of the 'typical criminal' drawn from official statistics?

Unit 3 Media representations of crime

key issues

- What pictures of crime do the media present?
- What factors influence media representations of crime?
- To what extent do the media shape popular perceptions of crime?

3.1 Media images of crime

The previous unit looked at the pictures of crime and the criminal presented by official statistics, victim studies and self-report studies. This unit looks at the pictures presented by the mass media.

Judging by the output of the media, the public have an

enormous appetite for crime. A significant proportion of newspaper articles, broadcast news (TV and radio), films, novels, comics, drama, documentaries and reality TV focuses on crime. And the pictures of crime and the criminal presented by the media are often different from those provided by official statistics, victim studies and self-report studies.

Methodology

Most of the studies of media representations of crime are based on content analysis.

Formal content analysis This method aims to classify and quantify media content in an objective manner. For example, it is used to measure the amount of space devoted to crime and the types of crime covered in newspapers. Researchers usually have a checklist of crimes

which they use to classify and quantify newspaper coverage. Formal content analysis can often effectively measure simple, straightforward aspects of content. However, it says little about the meaning of content to the audience.

Thematic analysis This form of content analysis looks for themes which underlie the content. For example, the police may be regularly presented in a positive light – as sympathetic, honest, just and efficient. This theme may underlie many news reports on crime. However, the themes interpreted by sociologists may have little to do with the interpretations of the audience.

Textual analysis This form of content analysis involves a close examination of the ‘text’ in order to see how it encourages a particular reading and creates a particular impression. Ray Pawson (1995) gives the following example from a newspaper headline, GIRL GUIDE, 14, RAPED AT HELLS ANGELS CONVENTION. This is an example of the ‘innocent victim’/‘wicked perpetrator’ pair which creates the impression of two extremes, one good, the other evil. It is one of the many tricks of the trade used to convey particular messages.

As with thematic analysis, the problem with textual analysis is reading things into the text which may have little or nothing to do with interpretations of the audience.

The extent of crime in the news

Most analyses of crime in the media have focused on the news. The results show that crime forms a significant part of news’ content. For example, a study comparing the coverage of ten national daily newspapers for four weeks in 1989 found that 12.7% of the events reported were about crime. The proportion of space given to crime was greater the more down-market the paper – the *Guardian* containing only 5.1%, the *Sun* 30.4% (Williams & Dickinson, 1993).

Another study found that broadcast news devoted even more attention to crime than the press, with commercial stations containing a higher proportion of crime features than the BBC (Cumberbatch et al., 1995).

Studies indicate that the proportion of news devoted to crime has increased over the past 50 years. For example, one study found that the proportion of space given to crime reports in the *Daily Mirror* and the *Times* from 1945 to 1991 rose from 8% to 21% (Reiner et al., 2000).

The pattern of crime news

Content analysis conducted at different times and places reveals the following patterns in crime news.

Types of crime The coverage of violent and sexual crimes is significantly greater than their incidence as measured by official statistics, victim studies and self-report studies. Homicide accounts for one-third of all crime news. Williams and Dickinson’s (1993) study of ten national newspapers in 1989 found that 64.5% of crime stories dealt with violence against the person. According to British

Crime Survey, only 6% of crimes reported by victims in 1989 were violent.

The proportion of violent and sexual crimes tended to be greater the more down-market the newspaper. Television news coverage is closer to the tabloids (eg, the *Sun*) than the broadsheets (eg, the *Guardian*) (Reiner, 2002).

Social characteristics of offenders Like official statistics and self-report studies, crime news portrays offenders as overwhelmingly male. But here the similarity ends. Offenders in crime news are older and higher status – they are more likely to be middle class. In this respect, the media may present a more accurate picture, since official statistics tend to underestimate the proportion of older, higher status offenders (Reiner, 2002).

Incidents rather than causes Crime news focuses on actual incidents of crime. It tends to describe events and pays little attention to the causes of crime. There are exceptions – broadsheets, such as the *Guardian*, are more likely to contain some analysis of the causes of crime (Carrabine et al., 2002).

The criminal justice system The news media usually present a positive picture of the criminal justice system. For example, the success of the police in detecting crime is often exaggerated. There are stories exposing police corruption and malpractice. However, such wrongdoing tends to be portrayed as the failings of individuals rather than the criminal justice system as a whole (Chibnall, 1977). When the system is clearly to blame, the media usually report that reforms have been made and all is now well. Again, the legitimacy of the criminal justice system is safeguarded.

Crime and reality TV

The emergence of reality TV has blurred the boundaries between news and fiction. *Crimewatch UK* is one of the earliest reality TV programmes – it presents dramatised reconstructions of crime. It aims to both entertain and to help the police solve crimes. And it still continues to attract a far larger audience than the news.

In its portrayal of crime, *Crimewatch UK* is similar to the news – it focuses on murder, armed robbery with violence, and sexual crimes (Dobash et al., 1998). This focus is very different from the picture presented by official statistics, victim studies and self-report studies. In some ways this is nothing new. In Victorian times, today’s reconstructions of crime were matched by the popular *Penny Dreadful* – cheap sensational accounts of recent murders which whetted the Victorian appetite for both blood and indignation in a tantalising cocktail.

More recent reality TV programmes such as *Crime Beat*, *Police Camera Action* and *Car Wars* are different. They use CCTV footage as opposed to dramatised reconstructions and highlight ‘the “everydayness” of the crimes portrayed and the frequency of their occurrence in “everyday life” ’ (Brunsdon et al., 2001). In other words, they portray crime as a routine and regular event and address the viewer ‘as a

threatened consumer' who must take responsibility for crime prevention (Carrabine et al., 2002).

Crime fiction

The extent of crime fiction Crime has always been a staple ingredient of media fiction. One estimate suggests that between a quarter and a third of paperback novels could be categorised as crime stories (Mandel, 1984). Since 1945, around 20% of all films are crime movies and around 50% have a significant crime content (Allen et al., 1997). And, since 1955, some 25% of the most popular British TV programmes have been crime or police series (Reiner et al., 2000).

Crime in fiction In many respects, the picture of crime in media fiction is similar to that presented by crime news. As such, it is very different from the picture given by official statistics, victim studies and self-report studies.

- Media fiction focuses on murder and other violent crimes. Murder was the most frequent offence in crime movies since 1945 (Reiner, 2002).
- Offenders in crime fiction are mainly middle-aged, middle-class males as opposed to the young, working-class males in official statistics and self-report studies (Reiner, 2002).
- The police clear-up rate is very different from the picture given by official statistics. In crime fiction, the police usually 'get their man'. According to official statistics, they usually don't.

The police tend to be presented in a positive light in crime fiction – as protecting citizens from harm. However, in recent years, there has been increasing criticism of the criminal justice system – in terms of both its effectiveness and its honesty (Reiner, 2002).

activity7 media pictures of crime

Item A Newspaper reports

Murdered by a savage out on bail

A drug addict murdered a widow of 82 for her pension money while on bail for another violent crime.

Wayne Franks, 29, was jailed for life yesterday for a savage attack in which he hit Mabel Whitlam over the head with a hammer, strangled her and stabbed her 22 times.

Financial adviser accused of murdering his client

A financial advisor seduced a lonely and vulnerable elderly woman before stealing £280,000 and murdering her in her bed, a court heard yesterday.

Aged 64, married and father of three, he allegedly began an affair with his client after she contacted him for advice on investing her £500,000 savings. He stole her money to help clear his debts and pay for his affluent lifestyle, Chester Crown Court was told.

Terror of 'SAS' rapist

A builder who terrorised a family after convincing them he was a member of the SAS was jailed for 20 years yesterday.

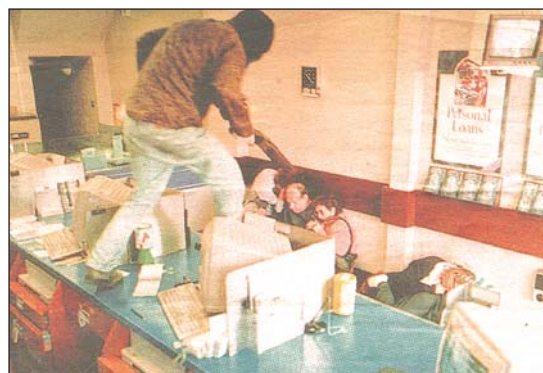
Over 16 months, Nigel Da Costa carried out a series of indecent assaults and rapes and held members of the family prisoner.

The 33-year-old shaven-headed thug subjected them to the degrading attacks, often at gunpoint, telling them they had

The terrifying violence that shames Britain



Mugged, Louisa La Rouche was savagely attacked.



Threatened...Customers cower under a shotgun-wielding raider in a Leeds building society.

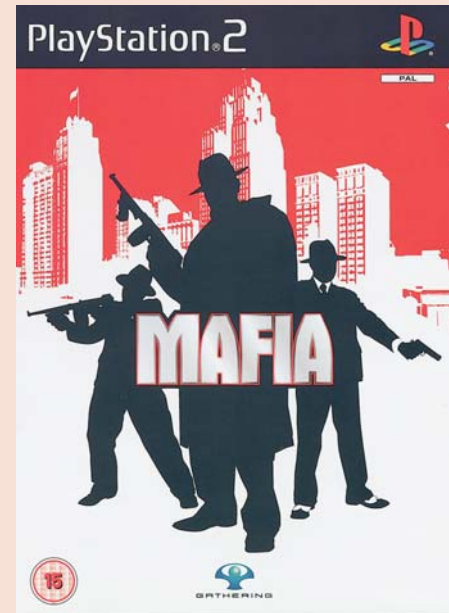
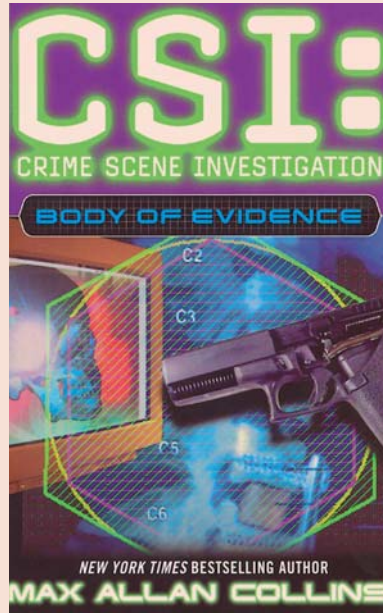
From *Today*, 28.9.1994

threatened national security by searching for his name on the Internet.

He maintained his grip on their lives by threatening to have them killed.

His wife Helen, 29, a former primary school teacher, was jailed for five years for going along with her husband's fantasies. She was present at many of the attacks.

Source: All reports from the *Daily Mail*, May 2004

Item B Crime fiction**questions**

- 1 In what ways are the crime reports in Item A typical of newspaper representations of crime?
- 2 Judging by Item B, how does crime fiction picture crime?
- 3 How do the representations of crime in Items A and B differ from those presented by official statistics, victim studies and self-report studies?

3.2 Explaining media representations of crime

Little is known about the production of representations of crime in media fiction. However, there have been a number of studies of the production of crime news.

News values What makes 'news'? In the course of their professional socialisation, journalists are taught what makes a good news story and what events are newsworthy. In other words, they learn *news values*.

In terms of these values, a good news story should include the following:

- Novelty, freshness and surprise
- Drama and excitement
- Titillation
- A focus on personalities (Chibnall, 1977).

Given these news values, it is not surprising that violent and sexual crimes predominate in the news, that the focus is on criminal incidents rather than an analysis of causes, and that the offenders and victims portrayed tend to be well-known personalities, often celebrities.

Sources of crime news The police and the courts are the main sources of crime news. As a result, journalists are largely dependent on official sources for their information. These sources have become *primary definers* – they define

what counts as crime, what counts as justice, and what crimes are significant. And, in doing so, they reflect the concerns of the powerful – the agents of social control and the state (Hall et al., 1978).

What about alternative ways of defining crime and its significance? Human rights organisations such as Amnesty International identify a variety of 'state crimes' for example, the treatment of so-called asylum seekers and suspected terrorists in Britain. Occasionally, their views are reported. But, for the most part, their voices are drowned out by the primary definers. In view of this, it is not surprising that the criminal justice system tends to be presented in a positive light.

key terms

News values Values which define what is newsworthy.

Primary definers Those who have the power to define the way things are – in this context, what counts as crime and justice.

3.3 The media and perceptions of crime

Do media representations of crime influence people's views of crime? Do they amplify people's fear of crime?

The British Crime Survey includes questions about

perceptions of and concerns about crime. It also asks questions about newspaper readership. Findings from the three surveys from 2001 to 2003 indicate the following.

The crime rate Over the three years in question, an increasing proportion of respondents believed that the national crime rate had risen 'a lot' (25% in 2001, 30% in 2001/02 and 38% in 2002/03). However, the BCS indicated a steady fall in crime over these years.

According to the 2002/03 survey, 43% of those who read a national tabloid newspaper thought that the crime rate had risen 'a lot', compared to 26% of broadsheet readers (Simmons & Dodd, 2003).

Concerns about crime The BCS found that concern about particular types of crime was associated with newspaper readership. Compared to broadsheet readers, readers of tabloids were twice as likely to be 'very worried' about burglary, mugging, physical attack and rape (Simmons & Dodd, 2003).

Newspaper readership and perceptions of crime Is there a causal link between newspaper readership and perceptions

of crime? As noted earlier, tabloids are more likely to report violent and sexual crimes than broadsheets. And they are more likely to headline the more dramatic and negative aspects of official crime statistics – for example, CRIME SOARS – Muggings up by 28% (*Daily Mail*, 12.7.2002). Since tabloid readers are more likely to be concerned about violent crime, and more likely to believe that the crime rate is rising, it is tempting to argue that their perceptions are influenced by the papers they read.

However, there is another view. Tabloid readers tend to be working class and broadsheet readers middle class. The BCS found that people living in inner-city areas and council estates are particularly concerned about crime, especially violent crime. These are the areas where working-class people are likely to live and the areas where violent crime is probably highest. Rather than causing this fear of crime, tabloid newspapers may simply be reflecting it. As Crawford et al., (1990) put it, 'in inner-city areas, mass media coverage of crime tends to reinforce what people already know'.

summary

1. Most of the studies of media representations of crime are based on content analysis.
2. There are three main types of content analysis, each with its strengths and weaknesses.
 - Formal content analysis
 - Thematic analysis
 - Textual analysis.
3. A significant proportion of space in newspapers is devoted to crime news. The more down-market the paper, the greater the proportion of crime news.
4. Broadcast news tends to devote more attention to crime than the press.
5. News coverage of violent and sexual crimes is significantly greater than their incidence as measured by official statistics, victim studies and self-report studies.
6. Offenders in crime news are more likely to be older and middle class than those who appear in official statistics and self-report studies.
7. Reality TV programmes, such as *Crimewatch UK*, focus on murder, armed robbery with violence, and sexual crimes. More recent reality TV programmes tend to focus on routine, 'everyday' crimes.
8. Media fiction concentrates on murder and other violent crimes. Offenders tend to be middle-aged, middle-class males as opposed to the young, working-class males who predominate in official statistics and self-report studies.
9. In both crime news and crime fiction, the police are usually portrayed in a positive light.
10. Media representations of crime are largely shaped by news values and official sources – the police and the courts.
11. Despite a recent decrease in the crime rate, a growing number of BCS respondents believe the rate is increasing. Those who read tabloid newspapers are more likely to take this view.
12. Tabloid readers are twice as likely as broadsheet readers to be very concerned about violent crime.
13. Tabloids are more likely to report violent crime and to headline negative trends in official crime statistics than broadsheet newspapers. This may influence tabloid readers' perceptions of crime.
14. There is an alternative argument. Tabloid readers tend to be working class and to live in areas with a high rate of violent crime. The tabloids may simply reflect their concern with crime rather than shaping it.

activity8 definitions and perceptions of crime

Item A News values



Cilla Black returning home after the burglary

Thugs target the famous

The vicious gang who struck at Cilla Black's home had earlier robbed Tony Blair's friend Lord Levy it emerged last night. Detectives revealed several chilling similarities, including the degree of violence used.

The armed gang held a hunting knife to the throat of Miss Black's youngest son as they stole jewels, cash and gold worth more than £1 million.

Five months earlier, Lord Levy, the Prime Minister's special envoy to the Middle East, and his wife were handcuffed to chairs and beaten after three masked men broke into their £5 million North London mansion. The gang made off with £80,000 in cash and jewellery.

Source: *Daily Mail*, 24.05.2004

Item B Violent crime

Figures show how promise to crack down on thugs is failing

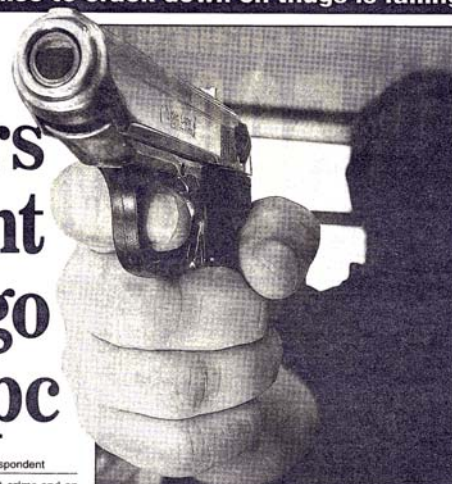
Heat on ministers as violent crimes go up by 20pc

VIOLENT crime has soared by 20 per cent in a year, official figures are expected to show.

Despite the Government's promise to crack down on crime,

By Jo Butler
Home Affairs Correspondent

Increase in violent crime and an overall rise of 8 per cent. But the latest figures still make



Looking down the barrel of a gun: Violent crime is on the increase

Source: *Daily Mail*, 26.5.2003

Item C Concern about crime

Worry about crime and newspaper readership

Percentages

% very worried about:	National tabloids	National broadsheets
Burglary	17	9
Mugging	16	7
Physical attack	17	6
Rape	18	7
Being insulted or pestered in a public place	9	5

Source: Simmons & Dodd, 2003

questions

- 1 What news values are reflected in Item A?
- 2 What impression might readers form from the newspaper report in Item B?
- 3 a) Briefly summarise the table in Item C.
b) Suggest explanations for the apparent link between newspaper readership and concern with crime.

Unit 4 Explaining crime and deviance: Functionalism, strain theory and subcultural theory

key issues

- 1 What is distinctive about the sociological approach to crime and deviance?
- 2 What are the main sociological explanations of crime and deviance that flow from a functionalist perspective?
- 3 What are the strengths and weaknesses of these explanations?

4.1 Normalising the criminal

Sociology is not the only subject concerned with crime and deviance. Cesare Lombroso, the first writer who tried to explain crime scientifically, drew on biology. Writing in the 19th century, he claimed that criminals were biologically distinct from non-criminals and that this difference explained their criminal behaviour. Other researchers have drawn on psychology, arguing that there is a psychological basis for criminal behaviour. What these approaches have in common is a picture of the criminal as somehow different from the rest of us.

For some researchers, this difference is mainly due to heredity – to the inheritance of particular genes which

predispose individuals to criminal behaviour. For others, the difference arises from people's experiences, particularly childhood experiences, which again are seen to predispose them to crime. In both cases, the criminal is seen as abnormal in a normal population.

Sociologists tend to be sceptical of these views. They insist that a satisfactory explanation of crime and deviance must take the social context into account. As noted earlier, crime and deviance are socially constructed. What counts as crime and deviance is based on meanings, definitions and interpretations of behaviour which develop in the context of social interaction. Even crime statistics are socially constructed – based on countless decisions which, in turn, are based on definitions and interpretations which change from time to time and context to context.

Sociologists look to the social situation for explanations of why people commit criminal acts or are defined as criminal. For example, they look at people's position in the class structure, their power and influence in society, their age, gender and ethnic groups, their culture and subculture for these explanations. There is no suggestion of abnormal genes or abnormal personalities. From a sociological viewpoint, the 'criminal' is as normal as the rest of us.

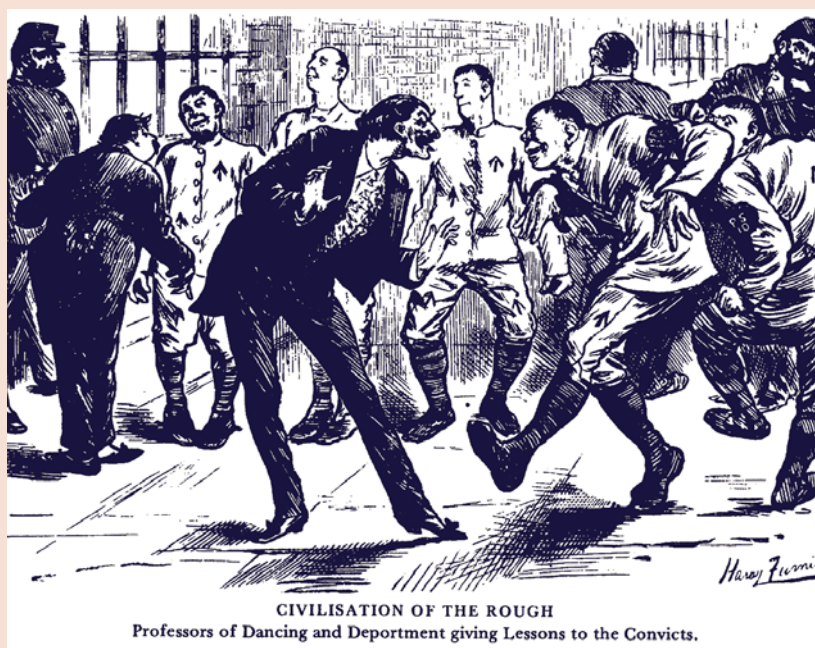
activity9 criminals are different

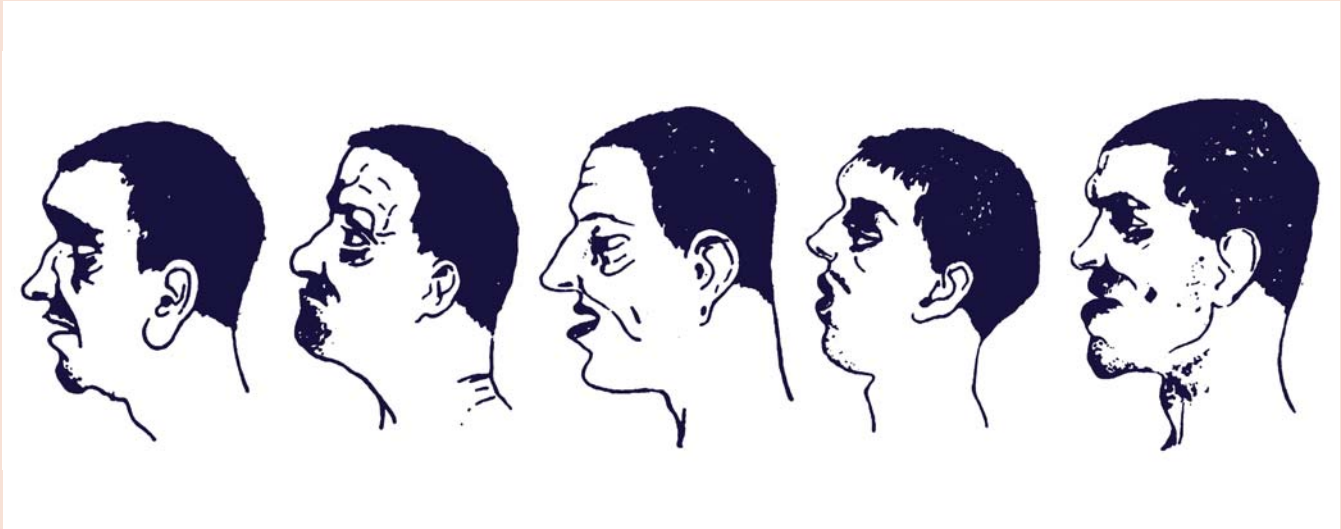
Item A Throwbacks

Cesare Lombroso is credited with being the founding father of criminology, a new discipline which sought to explain crime scientifically. From his studies of convicted criminals he claimed to have discovered biological characteristics which were the outward signs of an inborn criminal nature. These included 'enormous jaws, high cheek bones, prominent superciliary arches (eyebrow ridges), solitary lines on the palms, extreme size of the orbits, handle-shaped or sessile ears found in criminals, savages and apes, insensibility to pain, extremely acute sight, tattooing, excessive idleness, love of orgies and the irresistible craving for evil for its own sake'. Lombroso believed that criminals were a throwback to an earlier and more primitive form of human being.

Source: C. Lombroso, *L'Uomo Delinquente*, first published in 1876

Item B Cartoon from Punch, 1881



Item C Criminal types

Typical 'criminal types' identified by the Victorian criminologist Havelock Ellis.

Item D Personality and crime

Hans Eysenck argues that personality is largely inherited – that is, genetically based. Certain types of personality are more prone to react to particular environmental factors with criminal behaviour. Personality and environment are equally important. It is the interaction between the two which is probably the most important factor.

Eysenck identified a number of dimensions of personality. One dimension ranged from introversion at one end of the scale to extraversion at the other. Introverts learn the norms and values of society more quickly and effectively than extraverts. They are therefore more likely to respond to mechanisms of social control. Introverts are quiet and reserved, they tend to avoid high levels of stimulation. Extraverts, on the other hand, seek stimulation and excitement, they are impulsive and enjoy taking risks.

Eysenck devised a questionnaire to measure extraversion. He claims that those with a high extraversion score are more likely to commit criminal acts. For example, in one study he found that young men who repeatedly offended had high extraversion scores.

Source: Eysenck, 1987

questions

- 1 The criminal types identified by Victorian criminologists were little different from popular stereotypes of the day. Discuss with reference to Items A, B and C.
- 2 What similarities and differences are evident in Lombroso's and Eysenck's explanations of criminal behaviour? (Items A and D).

4.2 Functionalism and crime

Sociological theories of crime and deviance are diverse and often competing. But they share one thing in common – they offer social rather than biological or psychological explanations.

In this and the next two units, these theories are grouped under three major perspectives within sociology – functionalism, interactionism and Marxism. It is important to recognise that these perspectives are broad schools of thought which contain many variations, and that a number of sociological theories of crime and deviance straddle different perspectives. Nonetheless, this approach provides a chronological overview which shows how new theories developed from a critique of earlier work.

Functions of crime and deviance

Crime and deviance as 'normal' Functionalists see shared norms and values as the basis of social order and social solidarity. It is not surprising that they consider crime and deviance, beyond a certain level, to be dysfunctional or harmful to society – a threat to social order and to the survival of the social system. What is perhaps surprising is the view that a certain amount of crime and deviance is not only 'normal' but also 'an integral part of all healthy societies' (Durkheim, 1964).

A crime-free or a deviance-free society is seen as a contradiction in terms. Writing in 1895, the French sociologist Emile Durkheim asked us to 'Imagine a society of saints, a perfect cloister of exemplary individuals. Crimes, properly so called, will there be unknown; but

faults which appear venial (trivial) to the layman will create there the same scandal that the ordinary offence does in ordinary consciousness.'

While too much crime or deviance constitutes a threat to social order, too little crime or deviance is unhealthy. It indicates that the norms and values are so strong and constricting that they prevent the innovation and change necessary for a healthy society.

Crime and deviance as functional How then is a certain amount of crime and deviance functional? For Durkheim, it is functional because of the response such activities draw forth from society. Through *degradation ceremonies* such as criminal trials and public punishment, we are reminded of our shared norms and values. By publicly condemning those who have broken significant rules, not only are norms and values reaffirmed but also we learn the limits of toleration and unite against the condemned. Crime and deviance, or at least the public response to them, are functional because they serve to reinforce social solidarity and integrate society.

Do crime and deviance serve any other functions? Some functionalists believe they do. For example, Kingsley Davis (1961) argued that crime and deviance can act as a 'safety valve'. He claimed that there is a conflict between man's instinctual need for sexual satisfaction and society's need to restrict the legitimate expression of sex to within the family. Prostitution, in this context, is functional because it

provides sexual satisfaction without threatening the family as an institution. Another writer has identified a 'warning function' of crime and deviance. They 'may serve as a signal or warning that there is some defect in the social organisation' which may 'lead to changes that enhance efficiency and morale' (Clinard, 1974). For example, truancy from school may indicate unsuspected causes of discontent and the need for changes in the education system.

Evaluation Suggesting functions for crime and deviance, however, is not the same as finding an explanation for them. To argue that crime and deviance have certain social consequences does not explain their presence in the first place. 'It is one thing to assert that crime can be made to serve some social end or other once it has occurred – for example, to heighten solidarity by uniting against the offender. It is another step altogether to explain crime as promoted in advance by society to bring about that end' (Downes & Rock, 2003).

key terms

Dysfunctional Activities which are harmful to society – for example, they weaken social solidarity and disrupt social order.

Degradation ceremonies Ceremonies which degrade and condemn wrongdoers – for example, public punishment.

activity 10 functions of crime and punishment

Item A Public execution



Hogarth's engraving of a public execution at Tyburn

Item B Prostitution

A prostitute in New York City

Item C Riots

Bradford, 2001

question

Suggest how the activities in Items A, B and C can be seen as functional for society.

4.3 Strain theory

In the 1930s, the American sociologist Robert K. Merton wrote an article entitled *Social Structure and Anomie*. It became one of the most influential explanations of crime and deviance. Merton's theory was sociological – he offered a social rather than a psychological or biological explanation. In particular, it was a *structuralist theory* as it saw the structure of society shaping people's behaviour.

Culture and norms According to Merton, American culture attaches great importance to success – and success is measured in terms of money and material possessions. There are norms which define legitimate means for achieving success. These legitimate means include gaining skills and qualifications and career advancement. The American Dream states that anybody can make it to the top if they try hard enough.

Anomie So much emphasis is placed on material success that many people experience pressure to deviate from accepted norms and values. Deviance occurs when they reject the goal of success and/or the legitimate means of reaching that goal. For example, some people are tempted to use any available means of getting to the top – even if this involves criminal behaviour.

Merton refers to this pressure to deviate as a 'strain to anomie'. *Anomie* means normlessness – it refers to a situation where norms no longer guide behaviour, where 'anything goes'.

Social structure Despite what the American Dream says, not everybody has an equal chance of success. The social structure prevents equal opportunity. In particular, the strain to anomie is most strongly felt by those at the bottom of the

class structure. They are less likely to acquire the skills and qualifications needed to reach the top. As a result, they are more likely to seek alternative routes to success.

Adaptations Merton identifies five possible adaptations or responses to the strain to anomie in American society – see Table 1. The first is conformity – aiming for success and sticking to the rules. The other four are deviant adaptations – they reject the goal of success and/or the norms for achieving it.

Table 1 Goals and means

	Cultural goal	Normative means
Conformity	acceptance	acceptance
Deviant adaptations		
Innovation	acceptance	rejection
Ritualism	rejection	acceptance
Retreatism	rejection	rejection
Rebellion	replacement	replacement

Conformity According to Merton, most people conform despite the strain to anomie. Even if they don't make it, they continue to strive for success and follow the normative means of getting there.

Innovation People who adopt this deviant adaptation accept the goal of success but, in Merton's words, they have 'little access to conventional and legitimate means for

becoming successful'. As a result, some innovate – they turn to illegitimate means, to crime. The pressure to select this adaptation is greatest for those in the lower levels of the class system.

Ritualism People who follow this deviant route abandon the goal of success, but stick rigidly to the rules – for example, people in dead-end, white-collar occupations who follow their job descriptions to the letter.

Retreatism This deviant adaptation involves a rejection of both the goal of success and the normative means of achieving it. It applies to people who 'drop out' – tramps, drug addicts and habitual drunkards.

Rebellion This involves a rejection of conventional goals and means and their replacement with alternatives. The revolutionary who seeks to change society illustrates this type of deviant adaptation.

Evaluation of strain theory

Advantages Merton's strain theory was an early attempt to explain crime and deviance in terms of the culture and structure of society. It provided a sociological alternative to biological and psychological theories. In particular, it offered an explanation for working-class crime. Whatever its weaknesses, Merton's work provided a spur for the development of further sociological theories of crime and deviance.

Disadvantages Merton's theory raises a number of unanswered questions.

- First, why do some people but not others adopt deviant adaptations? For example, why do some people in the lower levels of the class system turn to crime but others do not?
- Second, Merton's theory focuses on individuals rather than groups. Crime and deviance are often collective activities. How can this be explained in terms of strain theory?
- Third, crime and deviance are not always motivated by a desire for monetary gain. How can activities such as vandalism and fighting between rival gangs be explained in terms of Merton's theory?

In search for answers to these questions, subcultural theory was born.

4.4 Subcultural theory

Albert Cohen – status frustration

Albert Cohen (1955) was the first sociologist to develop a subcultural theory of working-class crime and deviance. He examined delinquent gangs in low-income, inner-city areas. Delinquency refers to the criminal and anti-social acts of young people.

Cohen agreed with Merton that the mainstream value of success creates problems for young working-class males. Many do badly at school and fail to acquire the skills and qualifications needed for success.

Status frustration Defined as failures by the wider society, many working-class adolescents experience *status frustration*. They are frustrated with their low status as 'losers' and are given little or no respect.

A subcultural solution Faced by a common 'problem of adjustment' – a problem they share – some working-class adolescents develop a deviant solution. They create their own *subculture* – their own norms and values which differ from those of mainstream society. In Cohen's words, 'the delinquent subculture takes its norms from the larger culture but turns them upside down'.

Anti-social and criminal behaviour, which are condemned by the wider society, are valued by the delinquent subculture. And, most importantly, they provide a means by which 'failed' working-class young people can solve the problem of status frustration. By succeeding in terms of the values of the delinquent subculture, they gain respect and admiration from their peers – those in a similar situation.

This is where *collective* deviant activities come in. Gang members require an audience to gain respect. The 'successful' delinquent gains status in the eyes of his peers.

Non-utilitarian crime If status frustration is the main problem, then criminal activities to achieve monetary success – Merton's 'solution' – may not be necessary. Vandalism, joy-riding, fighting, anti-social behaviour such as giving cheek to teachers and disrupting the classroom, can bring respect. These are examples of *non-utilitarian* crime and deviance – not 'useful', not directed to monetary gain.

Acting in terms of the deviant subculture, young men not only gain status in each other's eyes, they also hit back at a society which has denied them the opportunity to succeed and branded them as failures.

Evaluation Cohen's subcultural theory offered explanations for non-utilitarian crime and collective deviance – explanations which Merton's strain theory failed to provide. However, there are other explanations for working-class delinquency, as the following sections illustrate.

Cloward and Ohlin – opportunity structures

The American sociologists Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin (1961) provide an explanation for different types of working-class delinquency. They argue that both Merton and Cohen fail to explain why delinquent subcultures take different forms. Why, for example, are some gangs mainly concerned with theft while others focus on violence?

Cloward and Ohlin agree with Merton that delinquency results from legitimate opportunity structures being largely closed to many young, working-class males. However, their response to this situation varies depending on the social environment in which they grow up. Different social environments provide different opportunities for crime and deviance which, in turn, encourage the development of different delinquent subcultures. Cloward and Ohlin identify three types of delinquent subculture.

The criminal subculture This type of subculture tends to develop in areas where there is a well-established pattern of adult crime. This provides an illegitimate opportunity structure. Young men are presented with role models from whom they can learn the tricks of the trade. They are given the opportunity to climb the professional criminal hierarchy and to become 'successful' by participating in crime which brings monetary gain.

The conflict subculture This type of subculture tends to develop in areas where an *illegitimate opportunity structure* is absent. These areas usually have a high turnover of population and a low level of social cohesion – this prevents established patterns of adult crime from developing.

With little opportunity to succeed by either legitimate or illegitimate means, young men become frustrated and angry. They often respond to this situation with gang violence which gives them the opportunity to gain status and respect from their fellow gang members.

The retreatist subculture This type of subculture tends to emerge among those who have failed to succeed either by legitimate means or as members of either criminal or conflict subcultures. These 'double failures' sometimes form retreatist subcultures based on illegal drug use.

Evaluation Cloward and Ohlin develop both Merton's strain theory and Cohen's subcultural theory. They show that working-class delinquency is not simply concerned with material gain. And they identify, and provide explanations for, a number of delinquent subcultures.

However, Cloward and Ohlin tend to box off the subcultures they identify and ignore the overlaps between them. For example, gangs involved in the conflict subculture often deal in drugs and make large sums of money in the process. The same applies to members of the retreatist subculture – some addicts also 'successfully' deal in drugs (Winlow, 2001).

key terms

Structuralist theory A theory which sees the structure of society shaping people's behaviour.

Anomie A state of normlessness – where norms no longer direct behaviour.

Delinquency The criminal behaviour of young people.

Status frustration Dissatisfaction and frustration with the status and respect given by others.

Subculture Distinctive norms and values shared by a group within society. These norms and values differ from those of the mainstream culture.

Non-utilitarian crime Crime which is not directed to monetary gain – for example, vandalism.

Illegitimate opportunity structure A structure which provides illegal opportunities for monetary gain.

Lower-class subculture

The theories we've looked at so far present a similar picture of society. They assume that there is a consensus or agreement about values. Members of society are socialised into a common value system and become committed, at least in the USA, to the ideal of success in monetary terms. Criminal and deviant subcultures are seen as reactions by young working-class males to their inability to obtain this goal by legitimate means.

The American sociologist Walter B. Miller (1958) takes a different view. He sees society as consisting of different social classes, each with a distinct set of values. Miller argues that there is a distinctive lower-class subculture which is passed on from generation to generation. It arose partly from the experience of low-skilled labour which involved boring, repetitive, dead-end jobs, interspersed with periods of unemployment. Lower-class subculture provides ways of living with this situation and of finding satisfaction outside of work.

activity 11 hispanic gangs

Item A Hispanic gangs in LA

East Los Angeles is a mainly Hispanic area. Hispanics or Latinos have their origins in Spanish speaking countries in Central and South America. Hispanics in the USA are twice as likely to live in poverty as White Americans.

East LA has at least 800 Hispanic gangs with more than 100,000 members. The level of gang violence is extremely high. LA is known as the murder capital of the USA. Most of these murders are gang-related.

The Hispanic gangs are split into two groups. The *chicanos* are Mexican-Americans born in the USA who often don't speak any Spanish. Their rivals are gangs whose members are recent immigrants from Mexico and other Spanish speaking countries who have evolved a language of their own called *calo*. Older members (*veteranos*) are held in great respect by their 'home boys', having defended the honour of their neighbourhood with fierce urban warfare.

Each gang has its own initiation ceremony. For example, to become a Playboy, a new member has to get 'jumped in' – beaten up – by a minimum of three gang members. While the beating takes place, others look on and count up to 13 slowly. Once initiated, members take on nicknames and adopt the dress codes of their comrades.

Many gang members deal in drugs. At the age of 15, former gang member Luis Rivera was earning 1000 dollars a day selling crack cocaine. 'I had my first car at the age of 16. I had no shortage of money.'

Source: *The Observer*, 6.2.94, 7.7.2002 and Winant, 1994

Item B Hand signals and tattoos

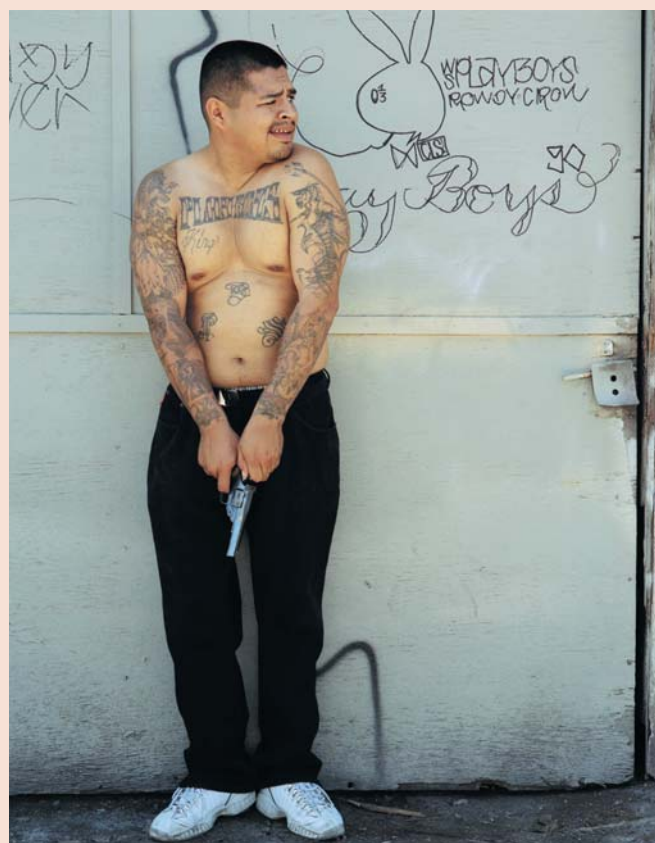


Hand signals representing the Playboys

Hand signals and tattoos are important signifiers of gang loyalties. Tattoos are usually done by *carnals* (fellow gang members) often using home-made instruments. They are a symbol of identity and defiance.

Young men who want to escape from gang life sometimes get their tattoos removed with a laser gun. Jose, a former gang member, states, 'The quicker I get 'em off, the quicker I get out of the gang. If I get them removed, then I'll no longer be a gang member.'

Adapted from the *Observer*, 6.2.1994, 7.7.2002



A member of the Playboys

question

Read Items A and B and look at the pictures.

Explain the behaviour of Hispanic gangs in terms of a) Merton's strain theory, b) Cohen's subcultural theory, and c) Cloward and Ohlin's opportunity structure theory.

Focal concerns According to Miller, lower-class subculture has a number of *focal concerns* – major interests and involvements. They include a desire for excitement and thrills, an emphasis on toughness – on a macho form of masculinity – and a concern with 'smartness' – with conning and outwitting others. These concerns are exaggerated by lower-class young men because of their desire for status in the eyes of their peer group.

Lower-class delinquency results from young men acting out the concerns of lower-class subculture. In doing this, they often break the law. The concern with toughness can lead to fights, the concern with excitement can result in a range of criminal activities from joy-riding to robbery, and the concern with smartness can be seen in the repertoires of the hustler and the con man.

Evaluation Miller pictures lower-class subculture as a 'distinctive tradition, many centuries old'. Lower-class young men are seen to act out this subculture with little reference to mainstream society. They appear to live in a world of their own. While accepting that a lower-class

subculture may well exist, it is unlikely that lower-class young men are as insulated from the wider society and its values as Miller suggests (Bordua, 1962).

4.5 Delinquency and drift – David Matza

The theories examined so far tend to see criminal and deviant behaviour resulting from forces beyond the individual's control. For example, in terms of Merton's strain theory, those at the bottom of the class structure are under considerable pressure to turn to crime. And Cohen's subcultural theory suggests that the deviant behaviour of many young working-class males is directed by a delinquent subculture. To an extent, these theories picture people as prisoners of the social structure, acting out predetermined roles with little or no say in the matter.

David Matza (1964) sees three main problems with this approach.

- First, it tends to make deviants more distinctive than

they really are. For example, the idea of deviant subcultures suggests that those involved are very different from members of mainstream society.

- Second, it 'over-predicts' delinquency – it accounts for more delinquency than there actually is. Why doesn't everybody in a particular position in society become a delinquent?
- Third, it suggests that the deviant has little or no freedom of choice – that their behaviour is determined by social forces beyond their control.

How different are delinquents?

Matza rejects Cohen's view that delinquents are different, that they have a distinctive subculture in opposition to mainstream society.

Subterranean values Matza argues that delinquent behaviour is often directed by *subterranean values* which are found throughout society. These 'underground values' are only expressed in particular situations. They include an emphasis on excitement and toughness. In mainstream society they are expressed in competitive sports – for example, on the football field. If, as Matza claims, they often direct delinquent behaviour, then in this respect, delinquents are little different from other young people (Matza & Sykes, 1961).

Techniques of neutralisation How do young people view their delinquent behaviour? According to Matza, many express guilt and shame for their delinquent acts. This suggests at least some commitment to mainstream norms and values. If this is so, why does delinquent behaviour occur? Part of the answer is *techniques of neutralisation* which open the door to delinquency and provide a justification for it. Matza identifies five techniques which neutralise the blame for delinquent acts and make them acceptable (Sykes & Matza, 1962).

- **Denial of responsibility** This technique states the delinquent was not responsible for his own actions. He got in with a bad crowd and came from a poor neighbourhood. As a result, 'It wasn't my fault'.
- **Denial of injury** Nobody was really hurt. For example, stealing from those who could afford it, 'borrowing' a car for joyriding.
- **Denial of the victim** They had it coming to them – the person concerned was not a victim but someone who deserved to be punished.
- **Condemning the condemners** Those who condemn the delinquent are themselves wrongdoers – for example, the police are corrupt and brutal.
- **Appeal to higher loyalties** Criminal behaviour is justified in terms of mainstream values such as duties and obligations to families and friends – stealing to provide food for their family, fighting to defend their friend.

According to Matza, techniques of neutralisation suggest that delinquents largely accept the values of the wider society. They justify their criminal acts in terms of mainstream values. And there is little evidence for a distinctive delinquent subculture. Delinquents are therefore

similar to young people in general.

Drifting into delinquency Subcultural theory suggests that many young males are committed to a distinctive subculture and a deviant lifestyle. In *Delinquency and Drift*, David Matza (1964) rejects this view. He argues that many young men drift in and out of delinquency. Their delinquent acts are casual and intermittent rather than a way of life. This fits with evidence indicating that most young people have little difficulty giving up delinquent activities as they grow older.

Again, the delinquent is pictured as little different from young people in general.

Evaluation of Matza

Advantages Matza provided a view of delinquency which answers the criticisms of strain theory and subcultural theory. Delinquents are no longer seen as prisoners of the social system directed by their position in the social structure and/or their distinctive subcultures.

According to Downes and Rock (2003), Matza's view describes the criminal behaviour of many young men in Britain. The most frequent reason they give for their delinquency is boredom. And delinquency offers plenty of opportunity for risk, daring and excitement to relieve boredom.

Disadvantages

- In seeking to remedy theories which over-predict delinquency, Matza may have gone too far in the opposite direction – and under-predicted. For example, one in three British men born in a single month in 1953 had a criminal record by the time they reached 30 (Carrabine et al., 2002).
- Matza's picture of young men drifting in and out of delinquency with little commitment to a deviant lifestyle does not fit the highly organised gangs in the USA. The life of the young men in the Hispanic gangs described in Activity 11 shows a real commitment to a deviant subculture. If there are over 100,000 Hispanic gang members in Los Angeles, this is hardly casual and intermittent behaviour.
- According to Stanley Cohen (2003), techniques of neutralisation don't necessarily indicate a commitment to conventional norms and values. They may simply be a public justification and excuse for criminal behaviour. For example, at the Nuremberg trials after World War II, neutralisation techniques were used by Nazis in their defence for the murder of millions of Jews.

key terms

Subterranean values Values which are only expressed in particular situations.

Techniques of neutralisation Techniques which neutralise the blame for actions which are defined as unacceptable or wrong by society's norms and values.

4.6 White-collar crime

The starting point for the theories of crime and deviance examined so far is the social pattern reflected in official statistics – that most offences are committed by young working-class males. As a result, these theories have little to say about *white-collar crime*.

Defining white-collar crime

The American criminologist Edwin Sutherland (1949) defined white-collar crime as ‘a crime committed by a person of respectability and high social status in the course of his occupation’. He challenged the view that crime was mainly a ‘working-class problem’, claiming that the financial cost of white-collar crime was probably several times greater than the cost of working-class crime.

Today, many researchers identify two types of white-collar crime – *occupational crime* and *corporate crime*. Occupational crime refers to crimes committed at the expense of the organisation, for example employees stealing money or goods from their employer. Corporate crime refers to crimes committed on behalf of the organisation, such as non-payment of VAT.

Some researchers identify a third type of white-collar crime – *state crime*. This involves crimes committed by the state or agencies of the state such as the police or the military. Such crimes are committed on behalf of the state. For example, many people regard the treatment of suspected terrorists held by the US government at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba as a criminal offence. State crime will be examined in more detail in Unit 9.4.

Corporate crime

There are many types of corporate crime. They include the following.

Crimes against consumers These include manufacturing or selling food which is unfit for human consumption, manufacturing or selling dangerous goods, and falsely describing the contents of goods – for example, of food.

These crimes can have disastrous consequences. In the 1970s, mechanical defects in the Ford Pinto may have led to between 500 and 900 deaths in the USA. The company was fully aware of these defects (Box, 1983). Again from the 1970s, the deliberate fabrication of test data on the fertility drug thalidomide resulted in the births of thousands of deformed babies.

Many instances of companies harming consumers are not dealt with as a criminal offence. Accidents and ‘disasters’ for which companies are held to be responsible provide an example. In 1987, the capsizing of the cross-Channel ferry *Herald of Free Enterprise* led to the deaths of 154 passengers and 38 crew members. An official inquiry blamed the owners, P&O Ferries, for failing to provide a safe operating system. However, attempts to prosecute the company for ‘corporate manslaughter’ failed (Croall, 2001).

Crimes against employees These include failing to meet health and safety regulations which can lead to the injury or death of employees. Between 1965 and the mid-1990s in the UK, around 25,000 people were killed at work. According to the Health and Safety Executive, 70% of these deaths were due to the failure of management to meet safety regulations (Hughes & Langan, 2001).

Environmental offences These include polluting the environment with toxic waste. For example, ICI was fined £300,000 by the Environment Agency in 1999 for polluting groundwater in Runcorn. However, most fines are much lower, averaging £4300 in 1998 (Croall, 2001). Green crime will be examined in more details in Unit 9.3.

Financial frauds These include false accounting, insurance frauds and the making of false claims by sellers about the benefits of pension schemes and savings plans. Fraud can involve vast sums – over \$4 billion in the case of WorldCom’s false accounting (see Activity 4, Item B). And the consequences can be extremely serious – in WorldCom’s case, 17,000 workers were made redundant and many investors lost their life-savings.

Views of white-collar crime

Compared to more visible and obvious types of crime such as burglary and murder, white-collar crime is often seen and treated differently by the public, police, courts and regulatory bodies. According to Gordon Hughes and Mary Langan (2001), this is due to four main factors.

Low visibility Street crimes and their consequences are highly visible. White-collar crimes are largely hidden from the public gaze. And when they are detected, it is often difficult to pinpoint blame – for example, which individuals were responsible for neglecting health and safety regulations?

Complexity Large-scale frauds are highly complex operations. They are difficult to unravel and it is hard to allocate blame. They involve different companies, various bank accounts, a multitude of transactions, and a variety of individuals who are more, or less, aware of what’s going on. Teams of expert investigators spend years attempting to get to the bottom of large-scale frauds.

Diffusion of responsibility Responsibility for corporate crime is often diffused – widely spread. It is difficult to allocate blame to particular individuals. In the case of the *Herald of Free Enterprise* disaster, a variety of people and organisations were blamed – crew members, their commanding officers, the company and the regulatory authorities.

Diffusion of victimisation Many white-collar crimes are described as ‘crimes without victims’. In many cases, there is no obvious victim as in cases of murder or robbery. However, there are victims but they are spread out or diffused. For example, environmental pollution can affect thousands of people. And we all have to pay for white-collar crime – in higher prices, insurance premiums and taxes (Hughes & Langan, 2001).

Regulating corporate crime

Compared to many other forms of crime, corporate crime has a lower rate of detection and prosecution, and more lenient punishments (Croall, 2001).

Regulatory offences Many corporate offences are dealt with by regulatory bodies rather than the criminal justice system. Bodies such as the Health and Safety Executive, the Environment Agency and the Trading Standards Agency deal with violations of health and safety, environmental health and trading standards regulations. They are more likely to issue 'official warnings' to put matters right rather than pursue prosecutions.

In the case of professionals, such as doctors and lawyers, 'misconduct' is usually dealt with by professional associations such as the British Medical Association. Only the most serious cases result in prosecution.

Many private companies operate a system of self-regulation. For example, the London Stock Exchange and Lloyds attempt to regulate their own affairs, even if this means a certain amount of loss through fraud.

Risk of prosecution Regulatory bodies are primarily concerned with securing compliance with regulations rather than identifying offenders. They advise and warn

rather than punish.

Organisations such as the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise tend to deal with offences administratively rather than prosecute. Their main aim is to recover the money lost from tax evasion and VAT fraud rather than charge the offender with a criminal offence.

Lenient punishment When white-collar offenders are prosecuted and found guilty of a criminal offence, their punishment tends to be lenient. Compared to 'ordinary criminals' such as burglars, they are more likely to be 'punished' with community service, a fine, or a short sentence in an open prison.

Explaining white-collar crime

White-collar crime covers a vast array of offences from petty occupational crime, such as fiddling expenses and stealing small items from employers, to corporate crime such as large-scale frauds. It is difficult to find an explanation for this variety of offences.

Strain theory revisited Merton's strain theory has been developed in an attempt to explain white-collar crime. A typical explanation goes as follows. All members of society face the same success goals – there is pressure on all social

summary

1. Sociologists look to society for an explanation of crime and deviance rather than the biological or psychological makeup of the individual.
2. According to Durkheim, a certain amount of crime is not only 'normal' but also an 'integral part of all healthy societies'. Society's values and norms must not be too strong - this would prevent the innovation and change necessary for a healthy society. Crime can be seen as a byproduct of this necessity.
3. Some crimes can be functional for society - for example, they may indicate that something is wrong with the way society is organised.
4. Merton's strain theory argues there is a 'strain to anomie' when the normative means for attaining cultural goals are blocked. This strain is most strongly felt by those at the bottom of the class structure. Some 'innovate' and turn to crime to attain monetary success.
5. Cohen's subcultural theory argues that many young working-class males experience status frustration. Some respond by developing a delinquent subculture in terms of which they can gain status and respect.
6. Cloward and Ohlin provide an explanation for different types of working-class delinquency. They argue that different social environments provide different opportunities for crime and deviance. This encourages the development of different delinquent subcultures.
7. David Matza argues that many sociological theories picture delinquents as more distinctive than they really are. He sees delinquents responding to subterranean values which are found throughout society. They use techniques of neutralisation which indicates that they largely share the values of the wider society. And they drift in and out of delinquency rather than being committed to a delinquent subculture.
8. Many sociological theories of crime and deviance tend to ignore white-collar crime.
9. There are two main types of white-collar crime - occupational crime and corporate crime.
10. Corporate crime includes crimes against consumers, crimes against employees, environmental offences and fraud.
11. Corporate crime is seen and treated differently from crimes such as burglary and murder. Reasons for this include:
 - Its low visibility
 - Complexity
 - The diffusion of responsibility
 - The diffusion of victimisation.
12. Compared to many other forms of crime, corporate crime has a lower rate of detection and prosecution, and more lenient punishments.
13. Merton's strain theory has been adapted to explain white-collar crime. This version states that some middle-class people experience relative deprivation when they make comparisons with those better off than themselves. In the absence of legal means to reach this level of success, some turn to crime.
14. Subcultural theory has been developed to explain middle-class crime. Many corporations have a subculture which emphasises the pursuit of wealth and profit. For some, the pressure to succeed in terms of this subculture leads to criminal acts.

classes to succeed. When people in white-collar occupations find the routes to pay increases and promotion blocked, they sometimes 'innovate', just like members of the working class. In other words, they turn to illegal means to become successful and attain monetary goals. They experience the same strain to anomie, to normlessness. This weakens the mechanisms of social control – the norms which would otherwise restrain criminal behaviour.

But why should middle-class people experience a strain to anomie when they are better off than those at the bottom of the class structure? One suggestion is that deprivation is relative. Middle-class people may feel deprived relative to, that is in comparison to, others who are considerably better off than themselves. And, given the pressure to succeed, they experience a strain to anomie. As a result, they innovate, just like their working-class counterparts.

In much the same way, corporations may find that legal ways of maintaining or increasing their profits are ineffective. As a result, there is a strain to anomie and pressure to turn to illegal means. The desired result may be obtained by fraud or by ignoring health and safety and environmental regulations (Box, 1983).

key terms

White-collar crime The crimes of people in white-collar occupations. It includes occupational crime and corporate crime.

Occupational crime Crimes committed by employees at the expense of the organisation.

Corporate crime Crimes committed on behalf of and for the benefit of the organisation.

State crime Crimes committed by the state or by agencies of the state on behalf of the state.

Subcultural theory revisited The hero of the film *Wall Street* – the street where the big New York stockbroking firms are located – stated that 'greed is good'. Some sociologists have argued that many corporations, especially financial institutions, have a subculture which emphasises the pursuit of wealth and profit. This so-called enterprise culture places a high value on risk-taking and monetary success. For some, it is a short step to 'success at all costs', even if this means fraud, bribery and corruption.

Further explanations of white-collar crime are examined in Unit 6 which looks at Marxist theories of crime.

activity 12 corporate crime

Item A Enron

Under its president Kenneth Lay, the US company Enron became the world's largest energy trading company. It specialised in contracts to deliver natural gas and electricity to customers at a future date. In December 2001, Enron filed for bankruptcy, billions of dollars in debt.

Investors lost a fortune with Enron shares practically worthless. Enron's 19,000 employees lost both their jobs and their savings because they belonged to a retirement plan based on Enron shares. 20,000 creditors were owed an estimated \$67 billion. Most received less than 20 cents for every dollar they were owed.

Investigations revealed fraud on a vast scale. Top executives lined their pockets while concealing massive debts. False accounting practices boosted reported income and lowered reported debt. As a result, share prices remained high, bearing no relationship to the true value of the company.

Shortly before bankruptcy was declared, the company president Kenneth Lay borrowed \$74 million and repaid it with company shares. And a number of senior executives were given payments totalling \$55 million.

Source: Various issues of *The Guardian*, 2001, 2002, 2003



An effigy of Enron president Kenneth Lay (right) at an anti-capitalist demonstration in New York

Item B The Piper Alpha disaster

On July 6, 1988, there was an explosion on the oil rig Piper Alpha, 100 miles off the east coast of Scotland. It was caused by an escape of flammable gas and resulted in the deaths of 167 workers. The rig was owned by the Occidental Group.

A public enquiry led by Lord Cullen looked into the causes of the disaster. They included:

- An inadequate assessment by the company of the risks involved
- A failure to put right known deficiencies in the system
- Management neglect of safety standards and regulations.

Source: Cullen, 1990



Piper Alpha two days after the explosion

Dear G E Rald,

We should like to take this opportunity to inform you that on 12th of March this year you were seen entering empty handed into the private premises of Ms P C Edwards of Convent St, Folkestone, and leaving shortly afterwards with your hands full.

In our opinion, this constitutes a violation of the Theft Act 1968 subsection 32(c) and we would be grateful if you would consider the following advice: please stop going down Convent St and entering houses without the owners' permission.

We should warn you that next March 12th another police constable will be on foot duty in Convent St, and should he notice a repetition of your behaviour, we shall have to consider the possibility of taking even more stringent action than we have on this occasion.

Item C A warning

Many regulatory bodies inspect companies to check that regulations, for example on health and safety, have been followed. Warnings are issued if any regulations have not been met and companies are revisited to check that matters have been put right. On the left is a spoof letter, using similar procedures, written to a young burglar.

Source: Box, 1983

questions

- 1 The consequences of corporate crime can be extremely serious. Discuss with reference to Item A.
- 2 Would you describe the Piper Alpha disaster (Item B) as a crime? Give reasons for your answer.
- 3 How does Item C illustrate the difference between the way many corporate offences and 'ordinary crimes' are seen?

Unit 5 Interactionism and labelling theory

key issues

- 1 What is distinctive about the interactionist approach to crime and deviance?
- 2 What are the strengths and weaknesses of labelling theory?

5.1 The interactionist approach

To move from functionalism to interactionism is to move to a very different theoretical perspective. Gone are the social systems and social structures which direct behaviour. In their place are small-scale interaction situations in which people act in terms of meanings and definitions of the situation. The interactionist approach to crime and deviance became popular in the 1960s.

The interactionist perspective According to Herbert Blumer (1969) interactionism, or more specifically symbolic interactionism, is based on three central views.

- First, 'human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them'. Human behaviour is not determined by social forces. Rather, people are self-conscious beings who choose what to do on the basis of their subjective perceptions – how they see things.
- Second, 'the meaning of things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows'. Meanings are not fixed but are continually modified as people negotiate with each other.
- Third, 'group action takes the form of a fitting together of individual lines of action'. Society is not so much a determinant of human action as a product of human activity. People make society, rather than society making people.

The challenge to functionalism In terms of its approach to crime and deviance, functionalism was challenged on three grounds.

- First, the assumption that there is agreement about what forms of behaviour constitute crime and deviance. What intrigued interactionists was why the same behaviour is defined as criminal or deviant in some contexts but not others.
- Second, the claim that deviants are somehow distinctive, comprising a specific group of the population. We are asked instead to look at the process of interaction and question why certain individuals or groups are more likely to be defined as deviant.
- Third, the search for the causes of deviance is seen to be fruitless. We all commit acts which break rules. What is more interesting is the way that agencies of social control respond to different individuals and the effects of that response on their future actions.

5.2 Labelling theory

From an interactionist perspective, deviance is an act which is labelled as such. There is nothing essentially or intrinsically deviant about any act. It only becomes deviant when it is seen as such and labelled as such.

The classic statement of this view is given by Howard Becker (1963). In his words, 'social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an "offender". The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label.'

Becker's words are frequently quoted because they represent a new approach within the sociology of crime and deviance. The focus moves away from a concern with

the deviant and the causes of deviance to a concern with the agencies of social control – with the process by which they label certain acts as deviant and the consequences of this labelling. How, then, is deviance created?

Defining deviance Society creates the rules. Deviant behaviour is not a distinctive form of behaviour but behaviour which is seen to contravene these rules. Becker (1963) illustrates this point well. 'The act of injecting heroin into a vein is not inherently deviant. If a nurse gives a patient drugs under a doctor's orders, it is perfectly proper. It is when it is done in a way that is not publicly defined as proper that it becomes deviant.' What applies to the use of drugs also applies to other forms of behaviour. Even the act of taking someone else's life is, in some contexts, considered appropriate. Indeed, in a war it is the refusal to kill which is often seen to be deviant.

Labelling Acts labelled as deviant tend to be committed by certain types of people. For example, the police tend to target specific groups. Studies of policing indicate that 'those who are stopped and searched or questioned in the street, arrested, detailed in the police station, charged, and prosecuted are disproportionately young men who are unemployed or casually employed, and from generally discriminated against ethnic minorities' (Reiner, 1994). For labelling theorists, this is due to the perceptions held by the police of the 'typical criminal'. They are more likely to see the activities of young men from the lower levels of the class structure and from certain ethnic minority groups as suspicious.

Aaron Cicourel's (1976) study of police and juvenile (probation) officers in California illustrates this point. Both groups held a similar picture of the 'typical delinquent' – as 'coming from broken homes, exhibiting "bad attitudes" towards authority, poor school performance, ethnic group membership, low-income families and the like'. As a result, young people who fitted this picture were more likely to be arrested and handed over to the juvenile officers. And, in turn, those who came closest to the picture of the 'typical delinquent' were more likely to be charged with a criminal offence by the juvenile officers. The middle-class minority who were arrested were usually 'counselled, cautioned and released' by the juvenile officers.

In the process, the police and probation officers not only created typical delinquents, they also created the social characteristics of the typical criminal shown in official statistics – young, working class and male.

Primary and secondary deviance

Edwin Lemert (1972) makes a distinction between *primary* and *secondary deviance*. Primary deviance refers to deviant acts which have not been publicly labelled. Most of us have engaged in such acts at one time or another, and for all sorts of reasons. Usually, this has little effect on our identity and status in society, or on our future lives.

Secondary deviance refers to acts which have been publicly labelled as deviant and to the deviance which is generated by this labelling.

Societal reaction The reaction of society – the way others react to someone labelled as deviant – may have a dramatic effect on that person's status and identity and may lead to further deviant acts.

Labelling people as deviant will tend to mark them out. The label may become a *master status* which overrides all other statuses. As a result, the individual is no longer seen as a parent, a friend or a worker but only as a criminal. Rejected by conventional society, they may embark on a deviant career – engage in further deviant acts and ultimately join an organised deviant group. Public labelling may result in a *self-fulfilling prophecy* whereby the person labelled deviant not only commits further deviant acts but also accepts the label.

Jock Young's (1971) study of hippie marihuana users in Notting Hill during the 1960s illustrates this process. The police targeting of a group, whose lifestyle included smoking marihuana, served to widen the differences between the hippies and conventional society. In the process, drug taking, which had been 'essentially a peripheral activity' became 'of greater value to the group as a symbol of their difference and of their defiance against perceived injustices' (Young, 1971). In this context, a deviant subculture developed. Individuals labelled outsiders began to see themselves as different from non-drug takers, all of which made it difficult for them to re-enter the wider society.

Evaluation of labelling theory

Advantages Labelling theory has a number of advantages.

- First, it has drawn attention to the importance of labelling and societal reaction. These processes can, in themselves, generate deviant and criminal behaviour.
- Second, it has shown that certain types of people are singled out for labelling.
- Third, it has shown that this results from the definitions and perceptions of the agents of social control – for example, their perceptions of the 'typical delinquent'.

Disadvantages Critics have pointed to the following weaknesses of labelling theory.

- **Origins of deviance** Labelling theorists see the search for the origin of deviant acts as largely fruitless. But deviance is not simply created by the label. People do not become burglars simply because they are labelled as such. They know that their actions are deviant, they are aware that they are breaking the law. Why do they become burglars? This example suggests that looking for the origins of deviance is an important sociological question.
- **Selection of deviants** Labelling theory fails to explain why certain types of people are selected as likely deviants rather than others. It is not sufficient to say that they fit definitions of likely deviants held by the agents of social control. Where do these definitions come from? They don't appear to be simply created in interaction situations. The picture of the 'typical

delinquent' is common to criminal justice systems in the UK, USA and elsewhere.

- **Who makes the rules?** According to Howard Becker (1963), 'social groups create deviance by making rules whose infraction constitutes deviance'. But who are these people who make the rules? And why do they make these particular rules? For example, are rules made by the powerful for their own benefit? This possibility is examined in the next unit which looks at Marxist approaches to crime and deviance.

key terms

Primary deviance Deviant acts which have not been publicly labelled.

Secondary deviance Acts which have been publicly labelled as deviant and the deviance which is generated by the label.

Societal reaction The reaction of others to an individual. In this case, the reaction of others to someone labelled as deviant.

Master status A status which overrides all other statuses. The status in terms of which a person is seen by others.

Self-fulfilling prophecy A prophecy which comes to pass simply because it has been made. The prophecy therefore fulfils itself.

5.3 Deviancy amplification

A number of sociologists who do not share the same theoretical perspective as the interactionists have also focused on societal reaction. The following study looks at societal reaction to mods and rockers in the mid-1960s.

Mods and rockers Mods and rockers are youth groups who differed from each other in terms of dress, musical tastes and modes of transport – mods rode scooters, rockers rode motor bikes. Stanley Cohen's (1987) study looked at societal reaction to disturbances involving mods and rockers which took place in Clacton over the Easter bank holiday in 1964.

The mass media represented these disturbances as a confrontation between rival gangs 'hell bent on destruction'. On inspection, however, Cohen discovered that the amount of serious violence and vandalism was not great and that most young people who'd gone to the seaside that weekend did not identify with either the mods or the rockers. The mass media had produced a distorted picture of what went on.

Deviancy amplification spiral Media coverage led to considerable public concern with mods and rockers. And this set in motion a *deviancy amplification spiral*. Sensitised to the 'problem', the police made more arrests, the media reported more deviance, and young people were more likely to identify with either mods or rockers. Further disturbances followed on subsequent bank holidays, attracting more police attention, more arrests, increased media interest and more young people reacting to what they saw as heavy-handed and unjustified treatment from the police.

activity13 labelling theory

Item A Defining deviance



Item B Labelling deviance



Item C Secondary deviance



Stop and search

questions

- 1 Which act or acts in Item A might be defined as deviant? Give reasons for your answer.
- 2 If there was trouble at a soccer match, which of the people in Item B would the police be more likely to question and arrest? Give reasons for your answer.
- 3 How might the police activity in Item C lead to secondary deviance?

The reaction to the initial disturbances over the Easter bank holiday not only exaggerated the amount of deviance, it also generated more deviance.

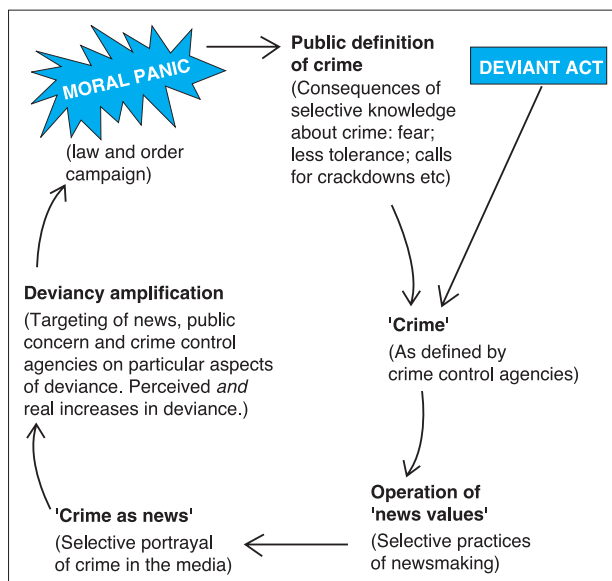
Moral panics

Stanley Cohen claimed that the reaction of the media to events in Clacton generated a *moral panic*. A moral panic occurs when 'a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests' (Cohen, 1987). In the above case, mods and rockers were singled out as 'folk devils' whose behaviour constituted a threat to the social order. The 1960s were a decade of widespread social change, in which cherished norms were challenged. The mods and rockers served as symbols of what was wrong with society. In subsequent decades, young people continued to be the focus of moral panics. The 1970s saw the moral panic of mugging, and the 1980s the moral panic of football hooliganism (see Activity 14).

More recently, moral panics have focused on threats to children with concerns over child abuse, paedophilia and the influence of violent films on young viewers (Critcher, 2003).

The media's reaction to deviance may lead to a deviancy amplification spiral, a moral panic and more authoritarian forms of control. This process is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 A deviancy amplification spiral



Source: Muncie, 1987

Evaluation

There is evidence that societal reaction can amplify deviance. And there is evidence that this reaction can reach the level of a moral panic. When it reaches this level, it is out of proportion to the situation – it is 'over the top'.

But who's to say that a so-called moral panic is unreasonable? Jock Young (1986) criticises the concept of a moral panic because it implies that crime is, in large part, constructed by the media. Young accepts that the media may exaggerate the 'crime problem', but it does not create it. He argues that the reality of crime, and the human suffering it produces, must be taken seriously and not reduced to a media construction.

key terms

Deviancy amplification spiral A process in which deviance is increased by societal reaction.

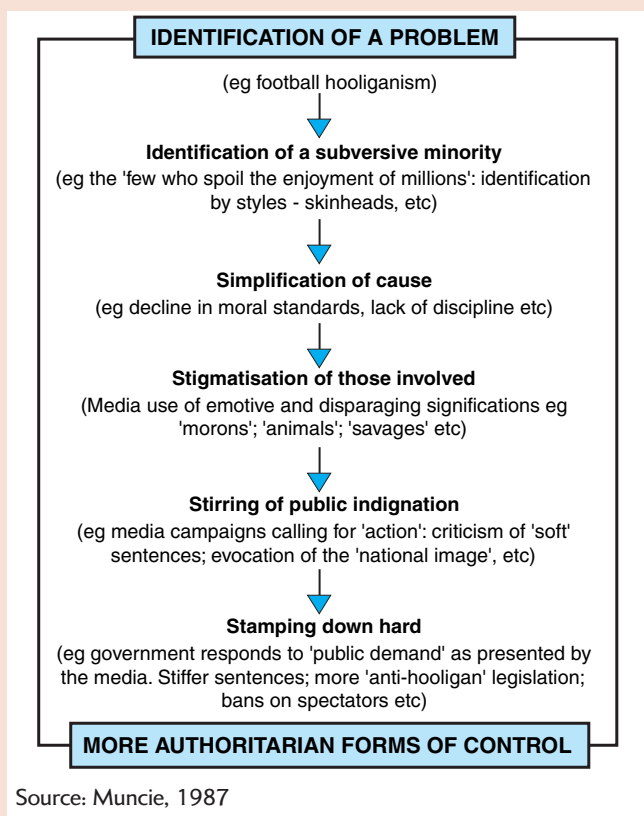
Moral panic According to Cohen (1987), a moral panic occurs when 'a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests'.

summary

1. From an interactionist perspective, people act in terms of meanings and definitions which arise in social interaction. The interactionist approach to crime and deviance became popular in the 1960s.
2. Interactionists challenge the view that deviants are essentially different from non-deviants.
3. In terms of labelling theory, deviance is behaviour which is labelled as such, a deviant is someone to whom a label has successfully been applied.
4. Labelling theory focuses on the agents of social control, on the way they define certain acts and certain kinds of people as deviant, and the consequences of this.
5. Societal reaction to someone labelled as deviant can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Individuals so labelled may be encouraged to commit further deviant acts and may see themselves in terms of the label.
6. Although it has a number of advantages – for example, showing the importance of societal reaction – labelling theory has been criticised for failing to explain:
 - The origins of deviance
 - Why certain types of people are seen as likely deviants
 - Who makes the rules.
7. Societal reaction can lead to a deviancy amplification spiral in which the response to the initial deviance generates further deviance.
8. Societal reaction can take the form of a moral panic.
9. The idea of a moral panic has been criticised because it implies that crime is largely constructed by the media. According to Jock Young, it tends to ignore the reality of crime.

activity14 football hooliganism

Item A Moral panics and social control



Item E The police response

In the last twenty years increasing attempts by police to control football hooliganism have included separating rival groups at matches in pens surrounded by spiked fences; closed circuit television crowd surveillance techniques; the use of identity card schemes; soccer hooligan group infiltration through police undercover operations and the formation of a National Football Intelligence Unit with computerised data banks on known soccer hooligans.

Adapted from Kerr, 1994

Item F A hooligan's view

We just don't have the time we used to have. The moment a fight starts we're immediately surrounded by dogs and horses. That's why everyone has started using knives. I suppose it might sound stupid but, because the policing has got so good, we've got to the point where we have to inflict the greatest possible damage in the least amount of time, and the knife is the most efficient instrument for a quick injury. In fact the knifings – because there is so little time – have been quite symbolic. When someone gets knifed, it amounts to an important victory to the side that has done the knifing. If the policing was not so good, I'm sure the knifings would stop.

Quoted in Kerr, 1994

Item B Newspaper headlines, 1988

Before the European Championship

Sun: Euro hoolies league

Daily Mirror: Plague of the Euro yob: Dutch go top of the Thug's Table

During the European Championship

Sun: World War III

Star: Yobs Plot War

Item C Reaction in Parliament

'We must really eradicate this blot on our reputation. We want those guilty of it caught and convicted, and given a severe sentence as an example to others.'

Margaret Thatcher, 1988, after rowdiness by some English fans at the European championships.

Item D Pictured in the media



Liverpool vs Juventus, European Cup Final, Brussels, 1985

questions

- 1 To what extent does the societal reaction in Items B to E fit the process outlined in Item A?
- 2 How might societal reaction generate further and more serious deviance? Refer to Item F in your answer.

Unit 6 *Marxism and radical criminology*

key issues

- 1 What is distinctive about the Marxist approach to crime, deviance and social control?
- 2 What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?

6.1 Traditional Marxist approaches

This unit examines two Marxist approaches to crime and deviance which emerged in the 1970s. The first is a fairly traditional development of Marxist ideas. The second – radical criminology – incorporates certain aspects of the interactionist approach.

From a Marxist perspective, crime and deviance in Western society can only be understood in terms of capitalism and the class struggle. Coercion and conflict are seen as the key features of capitalist society in contrast to functionalism's emphasis on consensus and integration. However, like functionalism, Marxism sees the structures and institutions of society as largely determining how people behave.

Causes of crime From a Marxist viewpoint, crime is systematically generated by the structure of capitalist society. Capitalism is an economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production and the maximisation of profit. As such, it emphasises individual gain rather than collective wellbeing. Capitalism is a competitive system which encourages aggression and emphasises the importance of winning. It is also an exploitative system in which some gain at the expense of others.

Given these priorities it is a short step to seeing the end as justifying the means – to be so obsessed with personal gain and coming out on top that breaking the law seems a minor barrier to success. Pressures to break the law will affect people across the social spectrum from wealthy business people to the poverty-stricken unemployed. In this respect, fiddling business expenses and fiddling the dole have similar causes.

From a Marxist perspective, capitalism encourages greed and self-interest, it generates frustration and aggression. Breaking the law can be seen as a rational step in order to satisfy these desires and express these feelings. Crimes motivated by financial gain can be seen as a logical outcome of the priorities of profit. Crimes with no apparent financial motive can be seen as an expression of the frustration, aggression and hostility which the system produces.

The law Laws in capitalist society are seen to reflect the interests of the dominant capitalist class. Thus the many laws protecting private property, which have appeared on the statute books over the past 200 years, reflect the growth of industry and the expansion of trade and commerce. In this respect, private property, the essence of capitalism, is protected.

Laws which appear to protect the interests of workers can be seen as concessions to the working class to maintain, if not its loyalty, then its acceptance of the system. For example, health and safety laws protecting workers can be seen in this light – and they have the additional benefit to capitalism of helping to provide a fit and healthy workforce.

Law enforcement 'There is one law for the rich and another for the poor.' This piece of folk wisdom summarises how many Marxists characterise law enforcement in capitalist society. The law is enforced selectively – there is a systematic bias in favour of those at the top. The crimes of the powerful such as corporate crime – for example, failing to pay business taxes and breaking trading laws – if discovered are rarely prosecuted. By comparison, those at the bottom of the class system who are caught breaking the law are regularly prosecuted. Yet in monetary terms their crimes are a drop in the ocean compared to the vast sums involved in the criminal activities of those at the top. Some of the evidence for this claim can be seen in Activity 15.

Evaluation Marxist approaches have the advantage of combining explanations of crime which cover members of all social classes, a wide variety of offences, the nature of law in capitalist society and the selective enforcement of the law. However, these explanations are very general and depend for their force on an acceptance of a Marxist view of capitalism. Many sociologists reject the view that there is a fundamental conflict of interest between the ruling and subject classes in capitalist society and the exploitation of one by the other.

6.2 Radical criminology

Radical criminology is the most influential attempt to apply a Marxist perspective to the study of crime and deviance. It emerged in Britain in the 1970s out of dissatisfaction with existing theories – including the more traditional Marxist approaches.

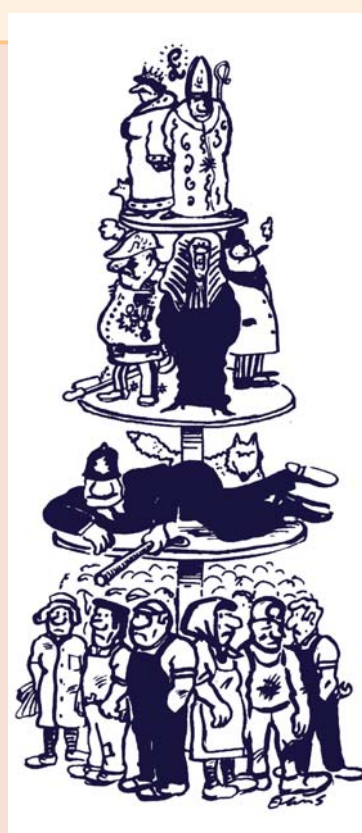
Radical criminology focuses on the process by which the state defines certain activities as criminal and thereby criminalises certain groups, particularly the oppressed and disadvantaged. This stress on the process of criminalisation is reminiscent of labelling theory. While accepting that interaction between lower-level agents of social control, such as the police, and deviants is important, radical

activity15 scrounging

Item A Two views of capitalist society



'I got the loot, Charlie, but after bank costs, services and handling charges, we owe them £6.25p.'



Item B 'The real scroungers'

Cost of dole fraud	£500 million	Cost of tax fraud	£5,000 million
Number of prosecutions	14,000	Number of prosecutions	20

In the eyes of the law, all people may be equal but the government's treatment of tax and social security offenders suggests there is one law for the rich and another for the poor. For every individual who is pursued through the courts for tax fraud, about 700 are prosecuted for welfare offences. This disparity cannot be accounted for by arguing that benefit fiddling is a more serious social menace than tax fraud. Official estimates indicate that losses from benefit abuses are dwarfed by losses from tax evasion. The Inland Revenue sees prosecution as a last resort and seeks to secure 'a reasonable settlement by agreement'. As one tax accountant put it, 'You have to be very unlucky, very stupid and very crooked to be done by the Revenue'.

Source: *Observer*, 23.10.1988

questions

- 1 Using a Marxist perspective, briefly comment on the cartoons in Item A.
- 2 Read Item B. Suggest reasons for the different treatment of tax fraud and welfare fraud.

criminology demands a wider focus. It looks at the process of criminalisation in relation to the state as it seeks to manage the capitalist system.

A 'fully social theory of deviance'

The ambition of radical criminology is evident in the final chapter of *The New Criminology* by Ian Taylor, Paul Walton and Jock Young (1973). There the authors outline a model which they term a 'fully social theory of deviance'. The model has seven dimensions:

1 'The wider origins of the deviant act'

The radical criminologist needs to locate the deviant act within the wider social system – capitalism and its class divisions.

- 2 'The immediate origins of the deviant act'
They then need to look at the immediate social context within which an individual chooses to commit an act of deviance.
- 3 'The actual act'
Attention needs to be given to what the deviant act means to the individual concerned.
- 4 'The immediate origins of social reaction'
They need to look at the immediate response of other people, such as members of the deviant's family and the police, to the discovery of deviance.
- 5 'Wider origins of deviant reaction'
The immediate reaction needs to be located within the wider social system, with particular attention given to

the question of who has the power to define certain activities as deviant.

- 6 'The outcomes of social reaction on the deviant's further action'

While most deviants recognise that there will be a reaction against them, it is important to examine the effects of the labelling process on the deviant.

- 7 'The nature of the deviant process as a whole'

Finally the six aspects of the deviant process need to be connected together for there to be a 'fully social theory of deviance'.

The closest approximation to a 'fully social theory of deviance' is *Policing the Crisis* by Stuart Hall et al. (1978). It is a study of the moral panic which took place in the early 1970s over 'mugging'. In the following summary, particular attention is given to the way this study illustrates a 'fully social theory of deviance'.

Policing the crisis

The wider origins of mugging Mugging is a term imported from America. It refers to the street crime of robbery or theft involving the threat or actual use of violence. During the early 1970s in Britain, a moral panic developed about the dangers of street crime and, in particular, the threat of the young Black mugger. Stuart Hall et al. (1978) argue that this societal reaction to mugging must be seen in the wider context of capitalism and the class system.

Street crime has traditionally been one 'survival strategy' for those at the bottom of the class system, particularly during an economic crisis.

Partly as a result of racism, the first generation of African-Caribbean migrants were the most disadvantaged members of the working class. The majority found low-paid employment and made the best of their situation.

The immediate origins of mugging Acutely aware of the racism of British society, Black youth were less willing than their parents to accept the situation. This sometimes caused conflict between the generations, resulting in some young people leaving home, taking to the streets and drifting into petty crime. In this context, a small minority of Black youngsters adopted the 'mugging solution' as a survival strategy.

The immediate origins of the social reaction to mugging

The media were central in 'orchestrating public opinion' against the Black mugger. Between August 1972 and August 1973, the national daily newspapers reported 60 incidents as 'muggings'. They pictured Black youth creating mindless havoc in the inner cities. Yet mugging was neither a new problem, nor was it growing at an alarming rate – in fact, the rate of growth was less than half the rate in the 1960s. Hall et al. see the societal reaction to mugging as a moral panic.

The wider origins of the social reaction to mugging Hall et al. argue that this moral panic must be seen in the context of the problems that British capitalism was experiencing in the early 1970s.

Since 1945, full employment, rising living standards and the growth of welfare services resulted in the working class accepting the authority of the state. However, an economic crisis in the early 1970s brought rising unemployment, a slowing down of the rise in people's living standards and a halt to the expansion of welfare services. As a result, the authority of the state came under challenge from various groups, especially trade unions. For example, in 1972, there were more workdays lost by strikes than in any year since 1919. (See Chapter 4, Activity 7, pages 178-179.)

The state reacted by presenting this challenge to its authority as a 'law and order' issue. The stability of society was threatened by lawlessness and the state must respond. The focus on the Black mugger served to symbolise this threat to social order. The result was to divide the working class on 'racial' grounds, so weakening any challenge to the state. And, the apparent need to stamp out mugging as quickly as possible justified the state increasing its powers.

The outcome of social reaction Responding to the perceived threat of mugging, the police targeted this crime and Black youth in particular. Increasing numbers of young Black men were randomly stopped, searched and questioned in the street. Many saw this as unjustified and some responded with verbal abuse or violence. This often led to their arrest and appeared to confirm that they were indeed prone to crimes of violence. The result was a process of deviancy amplification. The labelling of Black youth as deviant led to more arrests which, in turn, justified even stronger police measures against so-called Black muggers, all of which provided further headlines for the newspapers.

A fully social theory *Policing the Crisis* looks at the moral panic of mugging from a variety of viewpoints. It analyses the crisis faced by British capitalism in the early 1970s and the resulting threat to the authority of the state. It argues that the state responded to this crisis by mounting a law and order campaign which led to a moral panic over mugging. As a result, Black youth became increasingly criminalised and the state was able to justify its growing powers. This analysis looks at the 'problem of mugging' on various levels – from society as a whole right down to street level.

Evaluation of radical criminology

Advantages Radical criminology combines a number of different perspectives in an attempt to provide a fully social theory of deviance. Within a Marxist framework, *Policing the Crisis* includes labelling theory along with concepts such as societal reaction, moral panics and deviancy amplification. In doing so, it offers a more comprehensive picture than previous perspectives.

Disadvantages In adopting a Marxist framework, radical criminology ultimately explains crime and deviance in terms of the nature of capitalist society, the conflict of interest between social classes and the role of the state in representing the capitalist class. Can all crime and deviance be explained in terms of this framework? Critics

argue that many laws and much police activity cannot simply be seen as an expression of the interests of the capitalist class - for example, traffic laws and their enforcement (Rock, 1979).

According to Lea and Young (1993), radical criminology tends to trivialise and underplay the reality of crime. While moral panics do occur and societal reaction can amplify deviance, crime has risen. And the consequences are serious. Both the victims and the perpetrators of street crime are usually working class and, in many inner-city

areas, this is a major problem. Radical criminology has little to say about the victims of crime.

According to Downes and Rock (2003), *Policing the Crisis* was a brave but unsuccessful attempt to provide a fully social theory of deviance. In particular, the authors failed to demonstrate that the societal reaction to mugging was caused by a crisis of capitalism. At the very least, they needed to show a link between economic crises and moral panics at other times and places. And this was not done.

summary

1. Marxist theories of crime and deviance became popular in the 1970s.
2. Traditional Marxist approaches argued that:
 - Crime is systematically generated by the structure of capitalist society.
 - Laws reflect the interests of the dominant capitalist class.
 - Laws are enforced selectively - there is a systematic bias in favour of those at the top.
3. Radical criminology adopts a Marxist framework but includes other perspectives - for example, interactionism.
4. It focuses on the process by which the state defines certain activities as criminal and thereby criminalises certain groups, particularly the disadvantaged. It looks at the process of criminalisation in relation to the state's management of the capitalist system.
5. Radical criminology aims to provide a 'fully social theory of deviance' - to explain every aspect of deviance from the activity of the state to crime on the streets.
6. Policing the crisis argued that the state manufactures a crime problem in order to justify strengthening its control over the population.
7. Radical criminology has been criticised for:
 - Seeing the actions of the state and the agents of social control as solely serving the interests of the capitalist class.
 - Downplaying the significance of crime and largely ignoring the victims of crime.

Unit 7 Right realism, social order and social control

key issues

- 1 What is distinctive about right realist approaches to crime?
- 2 What are the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches?

7.1 Recent developments in the sociology of crime

New approaches to crime and deviance are partly a reaction to the shortcomings of previous approaches, partly a reflection of changing academic and political priorities, partly a response to changing fashions.

In the 1980s and 90s there was increased concern about law and order in Britain and the USA. This was accompanied by a growing awareness of high levels of unreported victimisation, especially amongst the most vulnerable sections of the population. These concerns were reflected in two new approaches to the study of crime –

right realism and *left realism*. Both see crime as a major problem in society, especially for its victims, and both claim to take crime seriously and to put forward practical proposals to combat it. 'Realist' approaches can be seen as a reaction to both labelling theory and radical criminology. Neither of these perspectives appeared to show much concern for the victims of crime. Indeed, labelling theory implied that in many cases the 'victim' was the person who had been labelled as 'criminal'.

7.2 The right realist approach

Conservative theorists were the first to adopt a realist approach. James Q. Wilson (1975), an American New Right theorist and policy adviser to President Reagan, was one of the earliest authors to question the predominant liberal and left analyses of law and order which prevailed in sociology. What then are the central features of the right realist analysis of crime?

Poverty, unemployment and crime

First and foremost, right realists question the view that

economic factors such as poverty or unemployment are responsible for the rising crime rate. In the following passage, Wilson makes a telling critique of this view by arguing that affluence and prosperity may go hand in hand with rising crime.

'If in 1960 one had been asked what steps society might take to prevent a sharp increase in the crime rate, one might well have answered that crime could best be curtailed by reducing poverty, increasing educational attainment, eliminating dilapidated housing, encouraging community organisation, and providing troubled or delinquent youth with counselling services.

Early in the decade of the 1960s, this country (the USA) began the longest sustained period of prosperity since World War II. A great array of programmes aimed at the young, the poor and the deprived were mounted. Crime soared. It did not just increase a little; it rose at a faster rate and to higher levels than at any time since the 1930s, and, in some categories, to higher levels than any experienced in this century' (Wilson, 1975).

Explaining rising crime

According to James Q. Wilson and Richard Herrnstein (1985), 'crime is an activity disproportionately committed by young men living in large cities'. They explain this in terms of both biological and social factors. In their words,

'It is likely that the effect of maleness and youthfulness on the tendency to commit crime has both constitutional [biological] and social origins: that is, it has something to do with the biological status of being a young male and with how that young man has been treated by family, friends and society.'

Wilson and Herrnstein picture young men as 'temperamentally aggressive'. This aggression is partly biologically based and makes them prone to crime.

An increase in the proportion of young men in the population is therefore likely to increase the crime rate. In the USA and Britain in the 1970s, the proportion of young men in the population and the crime rate both increased. Since the early 1980s, the proportion of young men has decreased but the crime rate has continued to increase. Wilson and Herrnstein offer a social explanation for this increase.

Culture and socialisation Wilson and Herrnstein argue that the way young men are socialised in the family, school and wider community has an important effect on their behaviour. Consistent discipline inside and outside the home encourages individuals to learn and follow society's norms and values and develop self control.

Wilson and Herrnstein see the growth of a culture which emphasises *immediate gratification* – the immediate satisfaction of wants and desires – *low impulse control* – less control over desires and emotions, fewer restraints and checks on behaviour – and *self-expression* – the outward expression of feelings. These aspects of culture have

produced a less effective learning environment for many young men and reduced the restraints on their behaviour. As a result, they are less likely to conform to society's norms and values and more likely to commit crime.

Costs and benefits Wilson and Herrnstein argue that the crime rate will change with changes in the costs and benefits of crime, particularly property crime. The more the benefits rise – for example, the more successful criminals are – and the more the costs fall – for example, the less likely they are to be caught – the more the crime rate will rise.

7.3 Social control

Control theory

Many right realists argue that individuals are more likely to commit crime when the social constraints on their behaviour are weakened. Control theory is mainly concerned with identifying the factors which prevent individuals from committing crimes.

According to the American sociologist Travis Hirschi (1969), none of us is immune from the temptations of crime. What stops most of us from committing crime are strong social bonds which link us together. Social bonds consist of four main elements: attachment, commitment, involvement and belief. The stronger our attachments to key social institutions such as the family and school, the more we develop commitments to those involved – parents and teachers. Such commitments in turn foster involvement in family life and learning, and encourage a belief in conforming to the rules. Effective social bonds mean that we have too much to lose by committing crime. To do so would risk losing the good opinion of significant others – those who matter to us.

In support of his theory, Hirschi reports the findings of a large-scale self-report study of over 4000 young people aged 12-17 in California. Variations in their reported bonds with parents and teachers were much more significant than economic factors in accounting for variations in reported delinquency. Drawing on a range of studies, Hirschi has put forward a general theory of crime. He argues that the primary distinguishing feature of offenders is a lack of self-control. This, in turn, stems from poor socialisation in families and schools (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990).

Social control and the underclass

The American New Right theorist Charles Murray (1990, 1996) claims that an underclass is emerging in modern Western societies. For Murray, an underclass does not simply consist of those with the lowest income at the base of the class system. Instead, it consists of those with low income who behave in a certain way. In Murray's words, 'When I use the term *underclass*, I am indeed focusing on a certain type of poor person defined *not* by his condition, eg long-term unemployed, but by his deplorable behaviour in response to that condition, eg unwilling to take the jobs that are available to him'.

Murray sees births outside marriage 'as the leading indicator of an underclass'. Such births often lead to lone-parent families, the majority of which are headed by women. When lone-parent families become widespread, they form the basis of and the 'breeding ground' for an underclass. And 'proof that an underclass has arrived is that large numbers of young, healthy, low-income males choose not to take jobs'.

Inadequate socialisation Many of these young men have grown up in a family without a father and male wage earner. As a result, they lack the male role models of mainstream society. Within a female-headed family dependent on welfare benefits, the disciplines and responsibilities of mainstream society tend to break down. Murray believes that work must become the 'centre of life' for young men. They must learn the disciplines of work and respect for work. And they must learn to become 'real fathers', accepting the responsibilities of parenthood. However, 'Little boys don't naturally grow up to be responsible fathers and husbands. They don't naturally grow up knowing how to get up every morning at the same time and go to work. They don't naturally grow up thinking that work is not just a way to make money, but a way to hold one's head high in the world.' Murray believes that the socialisation and role models required to develop these attitudes are often lacking in female-headed low-income families.

Crime and the underclass According to Murray (1990), crime is a characteristic of the underclass. He argues that 'men who do not support families find other ways to prove that they are men, which tend to take various destructive forms'. Many turn to crime – particularly violent street crime – and to drug abuse. The high crime rate and high levels of victimisation result in fragmented communities which reinforce already inadequate socialisation.

Welfare benefits and family Although Murray appears to blame members of the underclass for their situation, he places most of the blame on government policy. It is the availability of overgenerous welfare benefits which has allowed the underclass to develop. Members of the underclass have become dependent on the state which has funded their unproductive lifestyles. Murray's solution is a sharp reduction or withdrawal of welfare benefits in order to force people to take responsibility for their own lives. In addition, Murray (1996) recommends penalising births outside marriage and reaffirming 'the value of marriage and the nuclear family'.

Without these changes, Murray believes that the underclass will reproduce itself from generation to generation.

7.4 Social order and crime prevention

Right realists are concerned with practical measures to reduce crime and maintain social order. Some of those measures are based on *rational choice theory*.

Rational choice theory As noted earlier, Wilson and Hernstein (1985) argue that there is an important element of choice when deciding whether or not to commit a crime. They picture the individual weighing up the costs and benefits of criminal activity and coming to a rational decision. In terms of this view, crime reduction means increasing the costs of crime and raising the benefits of conformity.

Two measures which increase the costs of crime are *target hardening* and *surveillance*. Target hardening reduces the physical opportunities for offending. Examples include installing tougher coin boxes in phone kiosks, making it more difficult to break into buildings, and gated communities with security guards. Surveillance refers to systems like CCTV (closed circuit television) which can film criminal activities. These measures increase the costs of crime – the cost of failure and the cost of getting caught.

Informal social controls In James Q. Wilson's view, it is not practical to deal with the fundamental causes of crime – the biological and social factors outlined in Section 7.2. The central concern of the criminal justice system should be the maintenance of social order. Since informal controls are fundamental in preventing crime, the police should seek to prevent further deterioration of communities before it is too late.

In a highly influential article, Wilson and Kelling (2003) argue that crime and social disorder are closely connected. Leaving broken windows unmended and ignoring anti-social behaviour can result in a vicious cycle whereby graffiti proliferates, noise levels increase, vandalism grows and more windows get broken. The consequence of inaction is to tip a neighbourhood into decline – property values spiral downwards, respectable members of the community are afraid to go out, they eventually leave the neighbourhood, and crime and disorder become widespread.

The role of the police is to prevent an area from deteriorating by clamping down on the first signs of petty crime and disorderly behaviour. By working with local residents to deal with undesirable behaviour, the police can help to prevent the deterioration of neighbourhoods and reinvigorate informal social controls. Since the police have limited resources, prioritising areas where there is still a possibility of regenerating communities means that there is little point in wasting valuable resources on the worst inner-city areas. The most that can be done there is to contain the crime problem by adopting more punitive measures – for example, longer prison sentences – to deal with 'wicked people' (Wilson, 1975). The prison population in the US has tripled since the late 1970s (from 500,000 to 1.8 million in 1998) and is now the highest per capita in the world (Carrabine et al., 2002).

7.5 Evaluation of right realism

What's 'real' about right realism? Right realists see the rising crime rate as a real indicator of a *real* social problem

– a problem which must be tackled with practical methods. However, as discussed in Unit 2, at least part of the rise in crime indicated by official statistics may result from changes in recording and reporting crime (Walklate, 2003).

Economic change and crime Right realists make an important point when they argue that economic growth and rising living standards have gone hand in hand with rising crime since the 1960s. However, this does *not* mean that social inequality ceases to be an important factor in generating crime. Despite rising living standards, the gap between top and bottom has widened over the past 25 years. This can result in a sense of relative deprivation which may lead to an increase in crime.

Disorder and community deterioration Do signs of disorder – ‘broken windows’ and anti-social behaviour – lead to a vicious cycle of community deterioration and rising crime? A study of 196 neighbourhoods in Chicago questions this view. It found that economic disadvantage underpinned *both* growing disorder and crime (Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999). Again, this points to the importance of relative deprivation in generating crime.

Young males Right realists focus on young males and street crime. They are the real problem, and the type of crimes they commit are the real threat to social order. This view is questionable. Other types of crime may be equally, if not more harmful – for example, corporate crime and domestic crime.

Right realists assume that young males in inner-city areas are responsible for most crimes. Again, this is questionable. It assumes that official statistics provide a valid picture of the typical offender.

key terms

Immediate gratification The immediate satisfaction of wants and desires.

Low impulse control Little control over emotions, few restraints on behaviour.

Self-expression The outward expression of feelings.

Target hardening Reducing the physical opportunities for offending by ‘hardening’ the targets of crime – for example, more secure buildings.

Surveillance Close observation, particularly of suspected persons.

Crime prevention According to Wilson (1975), ‘wicked people exist’ and the only thing that works is to ‘set them apart from innocent people’. More imprisonment and longer sentences keep wicked people out of circulation and reduce the crime rate. Not only is this a very expensive measure, there is no sound evidence that it works (Walklate, 2003).

Civil liberties The major concern of right realists is to maintain order in society. For some, their prescription for producing order is based on a ‘culture of control’ – social control, situational control and self-control. This has alarmed some sociologists who see it as a threat to civil liberties – for example, the widespread use of surveillance techniques intruding on people’s privacy (Hughes, 2000).

summary

1. Right realists accept the view that the crime rate rose dramatically in the second half of the 20th century.
2. They reject the view that economic factors and social inequality explain this rise.
3. Wilson and Hernstein argue that the rise in crime results from the growth of a culture which emphasises immediate gratification, low impulse control and self-expression. This results in a less effective learning environment for many young men. As a result, they are less likely to conform to society’s norms and values.
4. Control theory states that strong social bonds result in high levels of social control. These are the main factors which prevent criminal behaviour.
5. Charles Murray argues that the underclass is a ‘breeding ground’ for crime. The ‘deplorable behaviour’ of young males results from inadequate socialisation in female-headed families and a lack of mainstream role models. Murray argues that overgenerous welfare benefits have allowed the underclass to develop.
6. Rational choice theory states that individuals weigh up the costs and benefits of criminal activity. Crime reduction therefore means increasing the costs of crime and the benefits of conformity.
7. Target hardening, surveillance, more imprisonment and longer sentences increase the costs of crime.
8. The primary role of the criminal justice system is to maintain public order. According to Wilson, strong informal social controls are the most effective method for maintaining order.
9. Disorder indicates a weakening of informal controls. The police should clamp down on the first signs of disorder to prevent community deterioration and rising crime.
10. Right realism has been criticised for:
 - Accepting the picture of crime presented by official statistics
 - Rejecting the view that economic factors and social inequality can generate crime
 - Focusing on young males and street crime and largely ignoring other types of offenders and crime.
 - Placing too much emphasis on control which some see as a threat to civil liberties.

activity16 controlling crime and anti-social behaviour

Item A Maintaining order

How to sweep these beggars from our streets

by David Marsland

In all of our major cities and larger towns beggars have multiplied over recent years like fungus spreading in a damp cellar. Their aggressive hassling of men, women, and children is an intolerable blot on the complex but orderly copy-book of a modern civilised society.

Their arrogant contempt for the values of most decent, ordinary people - honesty, hard work, and civility foremost among them - is intolerable. Their possessive occupation - like locusts swarming on the harvest - of the most celebrated and attractive streets and squares they can find, is contemptible.

Analysis of historical and international evidence serves to disprove most fashionable explanations of begging. Neither 'capitalism' nor poverty is the cause. Begging on any scale is unheard of in some of the richest countries in the world - such as Switzerland - and some of the poorest - such as Malaysia.

Nor is it unemployment which causes begging. The current scale of begging was unheard of in the

Britain of the 1930s, when unemployment was at much higher levels and much crueller in its impact.

Victorian experience provides the clue to the real explanation. Faced with a problem very like today's, politicians, businessmen and community leaders carefully analysed cause and effect, and rapidly set up a practical system which solved the problem in short order.

The Poor Laws and the work-houses were modernised and toughened up.

Help without a return of effort was outlawed. The values of hard work, self reliance and respectability were reinforced and unapologetically defended by a powerful consensus of public opinion in the schools, the churches, the media and Parliament. Begging



was shamed out of existence.

What is causing the escalation in modern begging is:

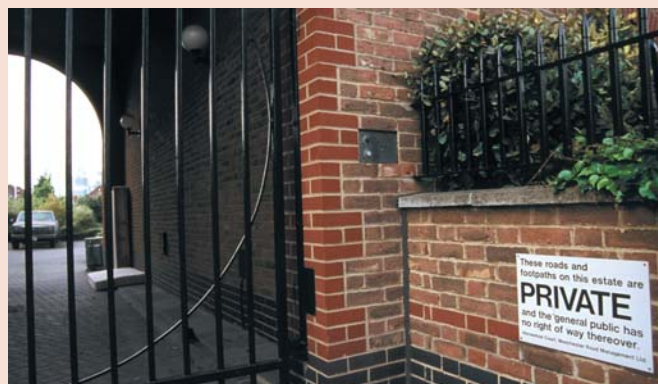
- The hand-out culture of the decaying welfare state.
- The cultivation of tolerance for 'doing nothing' and 'doing your own thing' by teachers, intellectuals and political leaders.
- The impact on established British values of the sloppy, alien thinking of the Sixties.

Source: Daily Mail, 1994

Item B Controlling crime



Closed circuit television



Gated community



questions

- 1 In what ways does Item A reflect the right realist approach?
- 2 How do the pictures in Item B illustrate right realist views on crime control?

Metropolitan Police Chief Sir Paul Condon (centre) promoting the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme

Unit 8 Left realism, social order and social control

keyissues

- 1 What is distinctive about the left realist approach?
- 2 What are its strengths and weaknesses?

8.1 The left realist approach

The emergence of left realism Left realism developed in the early 1980s. It was a reaction to both right realism and radical criminology. It was led by the British sociologist Jock Young.

Left realism accused the right of over-dramatising the crime problem with its picture of crime rates out of control. It rejected right realism's view of moral decay and sick societies. And it accused the right of failing to understand the real causes of crime.

Marxism and radical criminology were criticised for focusing on the crimes of the powerful and for failing to understand working-class crime. In particular, left realism argued that street crime could not simply be dismissed as a moral panic fuelled by a crisis of capitalism. Left realism accused radical criminology of failing to take working-class crime seriously.

Taking crime seriously Left realism, as its name suggests, claims to focus on the reality of crime. Its rallying cry to sociologists is to 'take crime seriously'. And this means starting from 'problems as people experience them' (Young, 1986). Although left realists do not discount the importance of white-collar and corporate crime, they see street crime as 'the most transparent of all injustices' (Lea & Young, 1993). Its effects can be traumatic, it can leave people living in fear, it can impoverish victims. Left realists see crime committed by working-class people against working-class people as a problem of the first order.

Explaining crime Left realists argue that earlier explanations of crime failed to see the whole picture. For example, they looked at offenders and ignored victims, or focused almost exclusively on the criminal justice system. Left realists argue that an understanding of the reality of crime requires an examination of four basic elements and how they interact (Young, 1997).

- The victims – how they see and experience crime
- The offenders – why they commit crime
- The reaction of the formal agencies of the state – for example, the police and the courts
- The response of the public and the nature of informal methods of social control.

8.2 The victims

Left realists see crime as a real problem and the public's

fear of crime as largely rational and justified. And they see the social survey as the main research method for studying the victims of crime.

Victim studies According to Jock Young (1992), victim surveys 'allow us to give voice to the experience of people' and to take their needs seriously. They reveal the extent of victimisation, the concerns and priorities of the victims of crime, and they provide information on which to base policies of crime prevention.

Left realists accept that estimates from national surveys, such as the British Crime Survey, show that the average chance of being a victim of crime is small. However, national surveys underestimate the risks faced by low-income groups in inner-city areas. For example, the Islington Crime Survey found that 36% of local residents saw crime as a major problem, 56% were anxious about being burgled, 46% had been a victim of a street robbery and a third of women avoided going out after dark for fear of sexual harassment (Jones et al., 1986).

In contrast to some earlier approaches, such as labelling theory and radical criminology, left realists highlight the plight of victims. It is disadvantaged groups living in the inner cities who are most at risk from being harmed by street crime. And since these groups are on low incomes, they often suffer more – petty theft is a lot more serious when people are living in poverty.

8.3 The offenders

Left realists largely accept the picture presented by official statistics – that there has been a significant growth in crime, especially working-class crime. They see the increase in working-class crime as a particularly disturbing development – most of the victims are not the rich but the most vulnerable members of society. And most of the offenders come from the same social groups as their victims.

Why do people commit crime? The key concept used by left realists to answer this question is *relative deprivation*.

Relative deprivation Jock Young notes that the rise in crime between 1960 and 1975 occurred at a time of full employment and rising living standards. And since then 'as the West became wealthier, the crime rate rose' (Young, 1999). Deprivation, as such, clearly does not cause a rise in crime. What does, according to left realists, is how people see or perceive deprivation. In other words, what matters is relative deprivation.

People see themselves as deprived in comparison to, or relative to, other people. This comparison may be relative to people in the same social category as themselves – for example, in the same social class or ethnic group – or to people in other social categories – for example, in different social classes or ethnic groups to themselves.

In late modern society – from the 1970s onwards – there has been an increase in relative deprivation. And this increase has been particularly acute for those at the base of the class structure and for those in certain ethnic groups. Reasons for this will be examined shortly.

Relative deprivation does not necessarily lead to crime. It breeds discontent which can be expressed in many different ways – crime is only one of them. It is the combination of relative deprivation and *individualism* that provides a recipe for crime. In Jock Young's (1999) words, 'The lethal combination is relative deprivation and individualism'.

Individualism A number of sociologists see the rise of individualism as one of the main characteristics of late modern society. Individualism refers to a focus on and concern with the self, to a demand for individual freedom and autonomy. It is partly responsible for, and partly a result of, the breakdown of close-knit communities and the break-up of families. It undermines the relationships and values necessary for social order and weakens the informal mechanisms of social control in the community. And it often results in the pursuit of selfish interests.

According to Jock Young (1999), the combination of relative deprivation and individualism is the main cause of crime in late modern society. As a result of this combination, 'the working-class area implodes upon itself', anti-social behaviour is widespread, 'neighbours burglarise neighbours' and 'aggression is widespread'.

Late modern society and rising crime

What are the changes in late modern society that have led to the disintegration of community, the increase in relative deprivation and rising crime rates? Left realists provide the following picture with particular reference to the lower working class.

Changes in the economy There has been a rapid decline in manufacturing and manual jobs, particularly unskilled and semi-skilled occupations. Lower working-class males have been particularly hard hit, as have African Caribbeans in Britain and African Americans and Hispanics in the USA. And within these groups, the young are most likely to experience unemployment – many have never had full-time work. This has led to acute feelings of relative deprivation because of a lack of fit between their situation and what they see as reasonable expectations in terms of jobs and material rewards.

Changes in the economy have led to the disintegration of many lower working-class families and communities, and the informal social controls they provided.

Government policy has not helped. Most Western governments have adopted free-market policies which discourage state intervention in the economy to provide jobs. Alongside this, many governments have reduced welfare benefits.

Exclusion Those at the base of the class structure are increasingly excluded from mainstream society.

- They are largely excluded from the labour market.
- They face increasing social exclusion as the middle classes flee from the inner city to areas where the poor cannot afford to live and, in some cases, cannot enter as the rich increasingly live in gated communities with security guards at the entrance.
- And they are excluded from society, as prison populations increase dramatically. For example, in the USA, 1 in 9 Black males in their 20s are in prison compared to 1 in 135 of the total population (Mauer, 1997).

The mass media and inclusion There is one area where those at the base of the class structure are included – the mass media, especially television. Living in a world which excludes them, they remain 'glued to the television sets which alluringly portray the glittering prizes of a wealthy society' (Young, 1999). And, sharing the materialistic values of the mainstream culture, they are faced every day with comparisons which fuel relative deprivation.

Jock Young (2002) argues that the lower working class live in a *bulimic society* – a society constantly exposed to the material goods taken for granted by most of the population, but unable to consume them. In this sense, they are starving. In Young's words, 'The process is not that of a society of simple exclusion. Rather it is one where both inclusion and exclusion occur simultaneously – a *bulimic society* where massive cultural inclusion is accompanied by systematic structural exclusion.'

8.4 Dealing with crime

The public and informal control

Left realists agree with the right realists that the police and other criminal justice agencies can only play a limited role in preventing crime. Far more important are the forces of informal control. 'It is not the "Thin Blue Line" but the social bricks and mortar of civil society which are the major bulwarks against crime. Good jobs with a discernible future, housing estates that tenants can be proud of, community facilities which enhance a sense of cohesion and belonging, a reduction in unfair inequalities, all create a society that is more cohesive and less criminogenic' (Young, 1992).

On the local level, what's needed is a concerted effort by all the agencies which may have an impact on crime. Left realists refer to this as *multi-agency intervention*. Local authorities must coordinate their various departments – for example, housing, education, social services and planning – in order to rebuild disintegrating communities. On the national level, the state must reduce economic inequalities and create a more just society.

The police and formal control

Left realism accepts that good policing can play an important part in reducing crime. But, low clear-up rates and a decline in public confidence have made members of some communities reluctant to help the police. Where the

activity 17 Life at the bottom

Item A Watching TV

A study of a low-income Black ghetto in Philadelphia found that African Americans watch TV half as much again as whites – in the average Black household TV is on for 11 hours a day. By the age of five and six, children are familiar with adult luxury – from Gucci, Evan Piccone and Pierre Cardin, to Mercedes and BMW. By the age of ten they are thoroughly engrossed in Nike's and Reebok's cult of the sneaker.

Source: Nightingale, 1993

Item B Dealing in drugs

A study of Puerto Rican immigrants in East Harlem drew the following conclusion.

I want to place drug dealers and street level criminals into their rightful position within the mainstream of US society. They are not 'exotic others' operating in an irrational netherworld. On the contrary they are 'made in America'. Like most other people in the United States, drug dealers and street criminals are scrambling to obtain their piece of the pie as fast as possible. They are aggressively pursuing careers as private entrepreneurs: they take risks, work hard, and pray for good luck. They are the ultimate rugged individualists, braving an unpredictable frontier where fortune, fame, and destruction are all just around the corner, and where the enemy is ruthlessly hunted down and shot.

Source: Bourgois, 1995

Item C Riots

Two youths stole a police BMW motorbike in Hartcliffe, Bristol. In the police chase which followed, they crashed and were killed. Trouble ensued – crowds of young people, White and Black, set fire to the local library and community centre, and looted shops. The following night, there were more riots. It is a familiar pattern, repeating what has occurred in depressed estates from Teeside to Salford.

The affluent societies of the West have fostered new expectations. Advertising and the rules of an economy based on mass consumption teach us that if we are truly to belong to our society, we must possess its glittering prizes. Hunger no longer propels riots – in its place are the DVD player, the mobile phone and the BMW.

Source: Young, 1992



Looting during a riot in Miami, Florida 1990

Item D Exclusion

US population in prison, on parole or on probation, 1995

	In prison	In prison, on parole or on probation
Total population	1 in 135	1 in 37
Black males	1 in 24	1 in 13
Black males in 20s	1 in 9	1 in 3

Source: Mauer, 1997



Inmates from a maximum security prison, Miami

questions

- 1 In what way does Item A illustrate Young's view of the bulimic society?
- 2 How does Item B indicate that those at the bottom share the values of mainstream society?
- 3 Use the concept of relative deprivation to explain the behaviour outlined in Items B and C.
- 4 How can Item D be seen as the ultimate form of exclusion?

flow of information from the public – which is crucial to the solution of many crimes – has ground to a halt, the police have responded with more direct methods such as stopping and searching large numbers of people.

This can lead to ‘a drift towards military policing’ which can make it well nigh impossible to police with the consent of the community (Lea & Young, 1982). In some Black low-income inner-city areas, the police are regarded by some as an army of occupation. And in Brixton in 1981, a police operation, which swamped an area with officers on a stop and search mission, triggered riots.

In line with its concern about what is to be done about law and order, left realism calls for greater democratic control of the police. A genuinely accountable police force will be more efficient since it will restore the flow of information from the public. And it will reflect the concerns and priorities of the community.

In addition, left realism urges the state to decriminalise minor offences such as the possession of cannabis, find more alternatives to imprisonment, and develop multi-agency and community-based forms of crime prevention.

8.5 Evaluation of left realism

Left realism is a genuine attempt to take crime seriously. And it is a comprehensive approach which looks at both victims and offenders, and informal and formal methods of social control. Despite these advantages, it has been criticised in various ways.

Focus on street crime While left realists accept that crime takes place across the class structure, their primary focus is

on street crime and lower working-class offenders and victims. In their defence, such crimes loom large in victim surveys and are particularly harmful to victims. However, some sociologists criticise left realists for neglecting white-collar and corporate crime – which may be even more harmful (Walklate, 2003).

Over-predicting crime The view that relative deprivation plus individualism and economic inequality generate crime ‘over-predicts the level of crime’ (Jones, 1998). Since this explanation appears to fit most people, why isn’t there more crime?

A trend towards inclusion Some sociologists question whether the trends identified by left realists are as serious and permanent as they suggest. According to the British Crime Survey, crime rates have been falling since the mid-1990s. And so have unemployment rates.

It is possible to detect trends towards inclusion as well as exclusion in late modern societies (Downes & Rock, 2003). For example, the Labour government in Britain has introduced the minimum wage, raised child benefits, set up the New Deal to help the unemployed return to work, and created the Social Exclusion Unit with the aim of bringing the excluded into mainstream society.

Victim surveys Left realists rely heavily on victim surveys to measure the type, extent and fear of crime in low-income inner-city areas. As outlined earlier, victim studies have their limitations (see pages 212–123). Certain types of crime are under-reported or not reported – for example, domestic violence and child abuse. And victim studies do not capture how people define and experience criminal victimisation – for example, do women define domestic

summary

1. Left realism aims to ‘take crime seriously’. It sees street crime as particularly damaging to victims.
2. Understanding crime requires an examination of four basic elements and how they interact – victims, offenders, the police and the criminal justice system, and the public and informal control.
3. Local victim studies reveal the type and extent of crime in low-income, inner-city areas. They present a disturbing picture.
4. Relative deprivation is the key concept used by left realists to explain crime. Relative deprivation is felt most acutely by those at the base of the class structure.
5. In late modern society, the combination of relative deprivation and individualism is the main driving-force generating crime.
6. Changes in late modern society have led to the disintegration of community and informal social controls, an increase in relative deprivation, and rising crime rates. These changes include:
 - Economic change and the loss of many unskilled and semi-skilled jobs
 - The growing exclusion of those at the base of the class structure from mainstream society.
7. One area where those at the bottom are included is the mass media. They are presented daily with expensive goods and lifestyles but are unable to consume them. In Jock Young’s words, they live in a ‘bulimic society’. The media fuels relative deprivation.
8. Left realists argue that the criminal justice system has only a limited role in preventing crime. Informal mechanisms of social control are far more important.
9. Left realists argue that multi-agency intervention on the local level can help to reduce crime rates.
10. The police have an important part to play but they need the support of the public. This requires an accountable police force under local democratic control.
11. Left realism has been criticised for:
 - Paying too much attention to street crime and largely ignoring white-collar and corporation crime
 - ‘Over-predicting’ the level of crime
 - Ignoring trends towards inclusion in late modern society
 - Relying too heavily on victim studies as a source for information.

violence by their partner as a crime and, if so, what level of violence? In-depth interviews rather than survey questionnaires are more likely to answer this and similar questions.

key terms

Individualism A focus on the self, an emphasis on the freedom and autonomy of the individual.

Bulimic society A society constantly exposed to expensive material goods and lifestyles, but unable to consume them.

Multi-agency intervention A number of agencies cooperating to focus on the solution to a social problem.

Unit 9 Globalisation and crime

key issues

- 1 What impact does globalisation have on crime?
- 2 How significant is green crime?
- 3 Do states commit human rights crimes?

9.1 Globalisation and transnational crime

Globalisation refers to the process by which societies become increasingly interconnected. Many sociologists believe that in the last few decades we have entered a new phase of globalisation. This new phase has meant that globalisation has speeded up to such an extent that it is no longer possible for a society to remain insulated from significant events across the globe. In 2008, for example, the collapse of some financial institutions in the US triggered a worldwide 'credit crunch' as banks grew increasingly reluctant to lend money. This in turn led to a recession, with societies across the world experiencing a contraction in their economies and a rise in unemployment.

A key factor in globalisation has been the development of information and communications technology. For example, the computerisation of financial markets enables vast amounts of capital to be transferred each day from one side of the world to the other, with sometimes devastating effects on national economies. And the advent of satellite communication makes it possible for there to be instantaneous communication across the globe and for national boundaries to be crossed with ease. The result is that events occurring thousands of miles away can now have an almost immediate impact on us.

Transnational crime Globalisation entails not only a considerable movement of money and information across national boundaries, but also facilitates increasing flows of people between countries. For many countries, tourism is now therefore their most important source of revenue. While globalisation has had a significant impact on legitimate enterprises, it also has created new opportunities for transnational organised and corporate crime - 'opportunities that territorially bound state criminal justice

agencies are poorly placed to stem'. *Transnational crime* - crime that crosses national boundaries - includes the following: 'cross-border smuggling of drugs, weapons, radioactive materials, information, art, cars, and other stolen goods; trafficking in illegal immigrants, women and children (often to work in the sex industry), and body parts; counterfeiting, international fraud and other financial crime, and espionage, terrorism, extortion, and kidnapping - modes of illicit action that depend crucially upon money laundering by the hundreds of billions of dollars' (Loader & Sparks, 2007: 89).

Transnational organised crime Globalisation provides new opportunities for organised crime to engage in criminal activities across national boundaries. Such activities are often referred to as *transnational organised crime*.

When we think of organised crime, it is likely that images of American gangsters come to mind - the Corleone family, the subject matter of *The Godfather* film trilogy or Tony Soprano, the hero of *The Sopranos* television series. Here, organised crime conjures up images of a 'monolithic, hierarchically structured, ethnic Italian Mafia' (Rawlinson, 2005: 302). Such images can be very misleading. While definitions of organised crime differ, criminologists usually use the term in contexts where people come together in a criminal enterprise to exploit opportunities, including illegitimate ones, for economic gain. This definition leaves open the question whether people come together as a hierarchically structured group or as a flexible network. It also leaves open the question whether people who come together do or do not share a particular ethnicity.

Organisational structure So far as the question of organisational structure is concerned, criminological research indicates that 'there is no Blofeld figure or SMERSH collective organising "crime" or "terrorism" worldwide. Rather there are layers of different forms of enterprise criminal, some undertaking wholly illegal activities and others mixing the legal and illegal' (Levi, 2007: 799). There is little doubt, however, that monolithic, hierarchically structured organisations, a description of used to characterise the Mafia, are less likely to survive. They tend over time to be replaced by more flexible networks.

In an ethnographic study of organised crime in Britain,

Hobbs and Dunningham (1998) argue that organised crime increasingly entails individuals coming together in loose-knit networks to exploit any entrepreneurial opportunities. In Downtown, a locality which had experienced deindustrialisation, the authors did not discover a large criminal organisation, like that of the Krays in London in the 1960s. Instead they discovered individuals with extensive criminal contacts who played key roles in putting together people with the appropriate skills for particular illegal activities.

Ethnicity In a similar vein, Levi challenges the notion that individuals involved in organised crime in America share a common ethnicity: 'Rather than being viewed as an alien group of outsiders coming in and perverting society, organised crime in America is best viewed as a set of shifting coalitions between groups of gangsters, business people, politicians, and union leaders' (Levi, 2007: 783). The new opportunities for crime provided by globalisation not only involve a wide range of ethnic groups, but also help to break down ethnic boundaries. In the case of drug trafficking, for example, there has been increased communication between different traffickers and this has facilitated the formation of multi-ethnic teams (Dorn et al. 2005).

Glocal contexts While organised crime increasingly entails international collaboration and operations in different countries, we must remember that 'organised crime is local

at all points' (Hobbs & Dunningham, 1998: 299). While organised crime increasingly seeks to exploit the new opportunities generated by globalisation, and can thus be characterised as transnational, activities such as drugs and human trafficking 'and the actors involved are locally based and will be affected by local conditions' (Rawlinson, 2005: 296). Hobbs and Dunningham demonstrate, for example, how criminal entrepreneurs initially rely on local networks of contacts. While some may become involved in wider networks and operate across national boundaries, they usually retain strong local links. Transnational organised crime in this view is not typically committed by large centrally organised, global organisations but instead operates as a glocal system. In other words, it 'is able to occupy both a local and global context'. It remains locally based but has global connections.

key terms

Transnational crime Criminal activity which crosses national boundaries.

Transnational organised crime Transnational crime that involves an organised group.

Glocal system A context in which a group operates at both local and global levels.

activity18 transnational organised crime

Item A Media images



Donald Pleasence as Blofeld in the Bond movie *You Only Live Twice*.



Marlon Brando as *The Godfather* in the film of the same name.



James Gandolfini as Tony Soprano in the TV series *The Sopranos*.

Item B The Mafia

On 20 December 1946, Colonel Garland Williams of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics gave Americans a new way of understanding organised crime. He announced that the Mafia 'is a very dangerous criminal organisation that is being used to undermine the principles of American ideals of law enforcement'. He then elaborated: 'The organisation is national in scope. Its leaders meet annually, usually in Florida, and there agree upon policies for the control and correlation of their various criminal enterprises (Woodiwiss, 1993). This idea gained in momentum in subsequent decades, eventually dominating not just American but also international perceptions of organised crime. The basis of the idea was that of an alien, implanted conspiracy (of Sicilian origins) which was centrally organised and also dominated organised crime'.

Source: Hughes & Langan, 2001

questions

- 1 What are the common features of organised crime suggested by Items A and B?
- 2 In what ways may these items provide a misleading image of transnational organised crime?

9.2 Critical criminology, globalisation and crime

Critical criminologists have sought to identify changes in the structure of advanced societies that have shaped criminal activity. In Britain, Taylor (1997) and in America, Currie (1997;2003), for example, point to the effects that changes in the political economy have had on crime. In particular, they highlight the way changes in the global economy and the response of governments to these changes have generated increasing criminality.

The political economy of crime in a global age

Taylor (1997) identifies a number of significant changes in the political economy that he believes have increased criminal behaviour. These include:

- The development of a global economy The economies of different countries have been interdependent for a long time. Taylor argues that they have become more interdependent in the last three decades as a result of the growth of transnational corporations (TNCs) and, until 2008, deregulation of financial markets. TNCs operate in different countries and increasingly move their businesses from country to country in search of profits. At the same time, 'financial institutions move enormous sums of money, sometimes in excess of one nation's gross national product, around the international stock exchange in the search for increasingly competitive advantage' (Taylor, 1997: 287). These developments make it increasingly difficult for

governments to control their own economies and have in turn entailed increased economic insecurity.

- The decline of mass manufacturing The shift from manufacturing to services in advanced societies has been accompanied by a decline in mass production. This in turn led to a significant rise in unemployment in the 1970s and 1980s.
- Free market policies Accompanying these changes in the 1980s and 1990s was a growing commitment of governments, especially in Britain and America, to free market economic policies and the reduction of public expenditure on welfare services. The destructive effects of economic insecurity and unemployment were 'magnified, rather than modified by such policies' (Taylor, 1997: 284).

The above changes have entailed a significant extension in market forces and these in turn have resulted in increasing inequality. In a similar manner to the left realist perspective of Young, Taylor argues that the growth of such inequality at a time when the good life is increasingly portrayed in terms of the consumption of fashionable consumer goods generates increased crime among the disadvantaged. At the same time, Taylor emphasises the need to focus 'on the powerful corporate institutions and individuals at the core of the major crimes in the new international markets' (Taylor, 1997: 290). Examples include the use of tax havens to launder 'hot' money gained through the international drugs trade and other criminal activities, and insider trading where people make profits by trading in stocks and shares on information gained from insiders in the company.

activity19 transnational corporate crime

Item A A thin line

The line between what is unethical and what is illegal in politics, and what is reckless and what is fraudulent in finance, has become increasingly blurred.

In 2008, the American financier Bernard Madoff was arrested after he confessed to defrauding investors of some 50 billion in an elaborate global fraud. Madoff was a highly respected pillar of the community. In Palm Beach, Florida, people joined the country club and the golf club just to meet him. They virtually begged him to invest their money.

In Illinois, the state governor Rod Blagojevich had the right to appoint a successor to the Senate seat left vacant by Barack Obama. He was arrested after wiretaps allegedly revealed that he was about to sell the seat to the highest bidder.

The actions of these two men reflect the blurring of right and wrong in finance and politics in American society. Power, politics and financial gain often go hand in hand. And a blind eye is often turned to fraudulent activity conducted by highly respected operators in the financial world. The opportunity for, and magnitude of, such frauds are multiplied in a global economic system.

Source: Younge, 2008



Bernard Madoff leaving the US District Court in Manhattan.

Item B Financial fraud

In 1991, in one of the biggest scandals of recent banking history, BCCI (Bank of Credit and Commerce International), with a large branch outside the super-respectable Dorchester hotel in London's Park Lane went 'belly up'. Investigations by the US Senate found that it had engaged in 'illicit financial services for varied groups of clients, including Columbian narco-traffickers, Middle East terrorists and Latin American revolutionary groups, as well as tax evaders, corrupt politicians and several multinational companies' (Strange 1996: 118).

Source: Cohen & Kennedy, 2007

questions

- 1 How do Items A and B suggest that there is a thin line separating legitimate and illegitimate corporate practices?
- 2 How do they indicate that financial fraud is often transnational?

The political economy of the drugs trade in a global age

An analysis of the drugs trade helps to illustrate how the social changes identified by Taylor impact on crime. Drawing on a study of Los Angeles by Mike Davis (1990), Taylor argues that the 1980s saw a decline in manufacturing and the relocation of service industries to the suburbs. This resulted in high unemployment for many African Americans. Confronted by racism and frustrated by a lack of opportunity for gainful employment in the legitimate business sector, many young Blacks became

entrepreneurs in the illegitimate business sector, notably the drugs trade.

The opportunity to enter this sector arose from the re-routing of the cocaine trail during this period from Florida to California. With the increasing popularity of crack cocaine, crack houses were set up for distilling and cutting crack cocaine. The development of this lucrative trade entailed significant competition as gangs fought for control of the trade. By 1988, it is estimated that the membership of gangs amounted to approximately 15,000, with 'gang-related killings running at one a day' (Taylor, 1997: 291).

It is not possible to gain a full understanding of the drugs

trade without taking account of changes in the global economy. The decline in manufacturing in Los Angeles was partly due to the fact that corporations found it more profitable to locate plants in low wage economies overseas. What is more, the production of the coca plant in particular countries such as Columbia and Bolivia is not an accident. The countries that continue to produce the plant are the ones 'that have been disadvantaged in the new international global political economy' and are thus reliant on an agricultural product that needs little investment and can command high prices' (Taylor, 1997: 291).

National governments in global society

So far, this section has focused on globalisation and crime. It has not considered how the policies of national governments may affect criminal activity within their national boundaries. This section closes by looking at this issue. It concludes that national governments can make a real difference even if they do operate in a global context.

Marketisation, crime and punishment While the development of a global economy and the decline in mass manufacturing may have been accompanied by a rise in the crime rate, we should not assume that such economic changes inevitably generate more crime. As Taylor recognises, we also need to take account of the policies of national governments. Currie (1997; 2003) takes up this theme and argues that in the US the advent of governments in the 1980s and 1990s committed to the extension of market mechanisms and the reduction of public expenditure on welfare services resulted in marketisation, the creation of a market society. In a fully-fledged market society, market forces become the central mechanism for allocating goods and services. In addition, market values, in particular 'the pursuit of private gain become the organising principles for all areas of social life' (Currie, 2003: 369).

For Currie, five interrelated mechanisms link a market society and crime: 'market society promotes crime by increasing inequality and concentrated economic deprivation...market society promotes crime by weakening the capacity of local communities for informal support, mutual provision and socialisation of the young...market society promotes crime by stressing and fragmenting the family...market society promotes crime by withdrawing public provision of basic services for those it has already stripped of livelihoods, economic security and informal communal support...market society promotes crime by magnifying a culture of Darwinian competition for status and dwindling resources and by urging a level of consumption that it cannot fulfil for everyone through legitimate channels' (Currie, 1996: 344-347).

Marketisation and violent crime Although no society can be said to be a fully-fledged market society, Currie argues that the US comes closest and that this 'helps explain why homicide is so startlingly high in one advanced industrial society - the US'. While advanced societies may all experience a similar process of globalisation, there remain significant differences in the political economies of

different countries. Currie argues that societies where marketisation has gone furthest are the ones that 'are especially likely to breed high levels of violent crime' (Currie, 1997: 147). In these societies, such as the US, individuals are least protected from the inequities of the market and are most likely to resort to violence. By contrast, paternalistic societies like Japan and compassionate societies like those in Scandinavia are more egalitarian and individuals are much less likely to resort to violence.

9.3 Green crimes

We noted in Unit 1 that crimes in the sense of breaking the criminal law are not necessarily as damaging as certain 'non-criminal' activities. Examples were given of global warming, global pollution and the destruction of the world's wildlife. While these examples of green issues may not always be subject to the criminal law, they are all arguably extremely damaging. Awareness of this has prompted some criminologists 'to place "crime" within a broader context of social harm', to note the partial nature of a legal concept of crime and acknowledge that a range of harmful practices may be supported by the law (Muncie, 2001: 20).

Globalisation and green issues

Let us briefly look at two cases which illustrate green issues. The first concerns a major industrial disaster at Bhopal in India in 1984. Here a poisonous gas, methyl isocyanate, leaked from the Union Carbide plant, with dire health consequences for local people. At least 20,000 people were injured and 10,000 may have died as a direct result of exposure to the fumes. The parent company in the US blamed its Indian subsidiary and escaped prosecution after persuading the Indian government to accept a very low settlement of \$470 million for all victims. Whether this case illustrates a green crime or corporate negligence is debateable. What is not debateable, however, is that the disaster entailed massive social and environmental harm.

The second case does concern a crime, in this case an infraction of a regulation relating to protected species. Here, expensive shoes and handbags made from the skins of the caiman alligator were illegally produced and imported to Italy. 'Overall, the illegal trade in caiman alligators results in an estimated one million animals being killed each year for the shoes and bags of affluent, fashion-conscious Westerners' (Hughes & Langan 2001: 272).

Both these cases serve to illustrate how green issues (and crimes) do not respect national boundaries. This is indeed typically the case. For, to give two further examples, 'polluted air-currents know no boundaries and smugglers of toxic waste respect none' (South, 1998: 444). Green issues have global implications.

Green issues and criminology

Green issues have only recently gained a place on the

criminological agenda. Their arrival arises from our greater sensitivity to the fact that 'negligence, violations and crimes for which corporations and states are responsible have led to great increases in pollution-related health harms as well as threats to the very sustainability of the planet' (South, 1998: 444). As the examples of the disaster in Bhopal and the destruction of caiman alligators illustrate, corporations often act irresponsibly and/or criminally towards the environment.

The same is true of governments. Indeed in some cases governments may resort to 'terrorist methods' when confronted by environmental groups. A notorious case was the sinking of the Greenpeace flag ship in Auckland harbour. The explosion, which was carried out by the French secret service, killed a member of the crew. Authorised by the French government, this action was provoked by the use of the ship in protests against French nuclear tests in the Pacific. This is by no means an exceptional case 'of state-sponsored acts of violence and intimidation against environmental activists or groups' (South, 1998: 447).

Despite the complicity of government in environmentally damaging acts and the vested interests of corporations to exploit natural resources, there has over the last two decades been a proliferation of environmental legislation and more resources put into regulation. This leads some to seek to break the law and circumvent the regulations. Here is an example.

Toxic waste The tightening of regulations in relation to the disposal of toxic waste has generated a profitable trade in the disposal and dumping of hazardous waste. This trade has taken different forms. In the first case it has taken a global form. Here, toxic waste considered unsuitable for landfill in western countries is shipped to poor countries that do not have such tight regulations and need the foreign currency. In one example, toxic waste was illegally moved from the US to Northern Europe and then shipped on to Benin in West Africa, where it was unloaded by soldiers before being driven north and dumped on the border. The second case also entails cross-border dumping but this time between neighbouring countries in Europe. Here, some Dutch entrepreneurs used fake documentation

activity20 green crime

Item A EU green crime proposals

In 2007, the European Commission published proposals to combat environmental crime - from casual fly-tipping by individuals to crimes committed by nation states. The proposals are mainly concerned with the enforcement of existing laws - providing standard guidelines across the European Union and encouraging cooperation across national borders. At first, member states resisted these proposals, but eventually agreed to them.

The Commission wants more prosecutions for green crimes, higher fines and more prison sentences. At present, says Samantha Jayaram of the UK Environment Agency, it is 'rare for councils to prosecute' and prison sentences are 'very rare'.

According to the EU justice commissioner Franco Frattini, rules on corporate liability are necessary because companies commit '73% of green crime cases. It is not enough to prosecute managers; it is very important that companies pay fines'.

Source: www.euro-correspondent.com, 06.12.2008

question

How do Items A and B illustrate the problems of combating green crime?

Item B Fighting green crime



Deforestation by soybean farmers in the Amazon rain forest in Brazil.

According to a report by Brazil's Catholic Land Commission, at least 260 environmental activists face the threat of murder because of their fight against a coalition of loggers, farmers and cattle ranchers. In September 2008, government figures showed that deforestation in the Amazon (most of it illegal) had risen by 64% over the previous 12 months. Opposing illegal logging is extremely dangerous - environmental activists attempting to protect the rainforest have been killed by gunmen employed by the loggers, farmers and ranchers who are rapidly deforesting the Amazon.

Source: Phillips, 2008

to cross the border and dump toxic waste on a Belgian dumping site with the connivance of the corrupt executive manager of the site. The third case is more local – in a particular town – and relied on bribing security guards. Here, a landfill site designated for non-toxic waste was being used for more dangerous waste. The dumping took place at night while the security guards 'looked the other way' (South, 1998).

9.4 State and human rights crimes

While states define what counts as crime within their own territories, they are also subject to international laws and conventions covering, for example, torture. They can thus be said to commit crimes when they break these laws and conventions. In Unit 4.6, we distinguished two types of white collar crime: occupational crime, committed by individuals at the expense of the organisation and corporate crime, committed by individuals on behalf of the organisation. In a similar way, we can distinguish offences, such as bribery, committed by politicians and state officials for their own advantage and offences, such as torture, committed by politicians and state officials on behalf of the state. While in practice it may be difficult to distinguish these two types, the focus in this section will be on the latter. What is noticeable, however, is that in both cases there is often a reluctance to characterise the activities of politicians and state officials as crimes. Bribery is often depicted as an issue involving the standards of public life, while torture is often seen as a human rights issue.

State crime and criminology

Is it appropriate for criminologists to see so-called state crimes as criminal activity? To address this question, we shall focus in particular on the state's use of force. The state claims a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. State agencies such as the police and military can thus legitimately use force when it is defined by politicians and state officials as being in the public interest. This applies, for example, in wars and situations where public order needs to be maintained. The use of force, however, is viewed very differently when it is perpetrated by individuals who are seen as terrorists. In both cases violence is being used, but in one case the violence is seen as legitimate and in the other case as illegitimate (McLaughlin, 2001).

The above account assumes that the violence exerted by state officials is legitimate and that of so-called terrorists illegitimate. The definition of what is legitimate and illegitimate violence, however, is hotly contested. Those labelled terrorists may see themselves as freedom fighters and indeed consider the state to be engaged in terrorism. While, therefore, the Israeli state may see those resisting their occupation of Gaza as terrorists, many of the Arab people who live in Gaza see Israel as a terrorist state. What is more, these labels may shift over time, with people labelled at one time as terrorists later forming internationally recognised legitimate governments. The

clearest example is the transformation in South Africa of the African National Congress from terrorist group to legitimate government and Nelson Mandela from dangerous terrorist to a highly respected statesman (Croal, 1998).

It is sometimes argued that the behaviour of terrorists is distinct from that of (most) states since terrorists use terror for political ends and often target innocent civilians. The attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington on September 11, 2001 and the subsequent London bombings on July 7, 2005, for example, are cases in point. This behaviour is often seen as typical of 'terrorist groups' and 'rogue states'. However, states with which we identify and to which we belong sometimes engage in similar behaviour. The British state, for example, used saturation bombing during the second world war on the German city of Dresden. This is by no means a unique case, with atom bombs being used by the allies during the second world war on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and saturation bombing being used later by the US in the Vietnam and Gulf Wars. In all these examples innocent civilians were targeted. As such, under international laws and conventions, they constituted war crimes. We are deluding ourselves if we assume that terrorism and war crimes are only committed by others. While we may not have been tried for war crimes, that reflects the fact that we were on the victorious side rather than the fact that we did not commit such crimes.

War crimes, along with other violent state activities – including torture and genocide – have only recently appeared on the criminological agenda. What has placed them on the agenda are two factors. First, the growth of the international human rights movement has sensitised us to such gross violations of human rights. Second, the growth of victimology within criminology has sensitised us to the plight of victims (Cohen, 1996).

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations in 1948, the use of force by states has been covered by international laws and conventions. Such statutes define war crimes and outlaw the use of torture and genocide in no uncertain terms. While states have a vested interest in not defining their own actions as criminal, that is not a good reason to exclude state crimes from our agenda. This point is reinforced when we place the study of crime within a wider context of social harm. The extent of victimisation from state violence is extensive and in many cases far outweighs much of what is normally considered to be crime. Even crimes such as bribery committed by politicians and state officials for their own personal gain may entail widespread victimisation since they can erode trust in the democratic process (Cohen, 1996).

Extent of state and human rights crimes

Since state crimes are not normally seen as crimes, there are no official statistics or victim surveys that enable us to estimate how extensive they are. Like white collar crimes,

they are often invisible and indeed they are often deliberately hidden from public scrutiny. While it is impossible to provide a reliable estimate of the extent of state crimes, reports such as those of Amnesty International and Liberty reveal massive human rights abuses across the world.

In the 20th century genocides and mass political killings include: 'The Turkish genocide of at least a million Armenians; the Holocaust against six million Jews and hundreds of thousands of political opponents, gypsies and others; the millions killed under Stalin's regime; the tribal and religious massacres in Burundi, Benal and Paraguay; the mass political killings in East Timor and Uganda; the "autogenocide" in Cambodia; the "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia; the death squads and disappearances in Argentina, Guatemala and El Salvador' (Cohen, 1996: 492).

While genocides and mass political killings are clearly more characteristic of some regimes than others, we should not assume that the British state is immune from gross human rights violations. Torture has been used by the army in the current war in Iraq, as it was earlier in Northern Ireland, and the British state has colluded with the US in 'extraordinary rendition', whereby suspected terrorists are transferred from one country to another country where torture is practiced.

The arms industry Since state crimes are often deliberately hidden, we often only hear about them through particular scandals that come to light. A case in point is the Matrix Churchill case in 1992. Three executives from the firm were prosecuted for illegally exporting arms-making equipment to Iraq, a country which had been subject to an arms embargo. The destination for the export was falsely documented as Jordan and the declared purpose of the equipment was misrepresented. The case collapsed when it emerged that one of the executives had been working for the intelligence services and that government ministers had encouraged the export. Although the official guidelines which expressly discouraged such exports had not changed, the rules had been 'quietly' relaxed. This emerged in spite of the fact that Ministers tried to hush things up by refusing to release essential papers for the defence through the issue of public immunity certificates. In this particular case, 'no government Ministers were prosecuted' and indeed 'none resigned' (Croal, 1998:303).

Understanding state crimes

While it is tempting to believe that those state officials who commit the most extreme violence, such as war crimes and genocide, are psychologically disordered – sadists or psychopaths – we need to place their activities in context. Individuals are trained to play particular roles, and in the case of the police and the military to obey orders and, if necessary, inflict pain or even kill with professional detachment. 'To many torturers, terrorists or war criminals, horrific acts become accepted as an almost routine part of their role, as necessary to defeat an assumed enemy'

(Croal, 1998: 304). Countering terrorism and fighting wars often entails learning to see the enemy as barely human. In addition, when individuals are ordered to commit horrific acts, they often put normal principles on hold and see it as their duty to obey.

Spiral of denial All too often people are reluctant to admit that horrific acts are being committed. Cohen explains this in terms of a *spiral of denial*. Initially the state denies that torture is taking place or that there was a massacre ('It doesn't happen here'). Confronted, however, by photographic evidence and mass graves, the government changes tack and uses a series of euphemisms to re-describe what is/was happening as 'self-defence' and 'collateral damage' ('If it does, it's something else'). The final step in the spiral is to justify what happened in terms of protecting national security or as part of the war against terrorism ('Even if it's what you say it is, it is justified') (Cohen, 1998: 494).

Techniques of neutralisation In Unit 4.5, we identified five *techniques of neutralisation* that young people may use to justify committing delinquent acts. These techniques are also employed by people when they acknowledge that something serious happened but refuse to characterise it as a war crime or as a massacre or as morally wrong.

- *Denial of injury* – They exaggerate, they don't feel it.
- *Denial of victim* – They started it, they are terrorists.
- *Denial of responsibility* – I was following orders, only doing my duty, just a cog in the machine.
- *Condemnation of the condemners* – The whole world is picking on us, it's worse elsewhere, they are condemning us only because of their anti-semitism/their hostility to Islam/their racism.
- *Appeal to higher loyalty* – The appeal to the nation, the sacred mission, the higher cause, whether the purity of Islam, Zionism, or the defence of the free world (Cohen, 1996: 500).

Finally, it is helpful to note the contribution that strain theory, outlined in Unit 4.3, can make to an understanding of many forms of state crime. State agencies often experience conflicting goals. Chamblis (1995), for example, points out that the activities of the Central Intelligence Agency often broke international laws and conventions because of the priority given to ridding the world of communism. And earlier we demonstrated how the British government's wish to protect the arms industry and maximise export revenues entailed flouting any human rights concerns and indeed its own official guidance (Croal, 1998).

key terms

Spiral of denial A series of denials about the occurrence and/or seriousness of immoral acts, ending with a justification for such acts.

Techniques of neutralisation A series of denials of and justifications for immoral acts which seek to neutralise the harm caused by such acts.

summary

1. Globalisation provides new opportunities for organised crime and corporate crime.
2. Transnational criminals usually form loose-knit, flexible networks rather than hierarchically structured organisations.
3. Transnational criminals tend to operate in a glocal system - they maintain strong local links while operating in a global context.
4. Critical criminologists identify the following changes in advanced society which they see as shaping crime in recent years.
 - The development of a global economy
 - The decline of mass manufacturing
 - Free market policies
5. Although a strong case can be made for the influence of globalisation on crime, the policies of national governments also affect criminal activity within their national boundaries.
6. Damaging the environment is increasingly seen as criminal behaviour even if it does not break the criminal law.
7. Green crimes often have global consequences.
8. Over the past 20 years, there has been a rapid increase in laws designed to protect the environment.
9. In recent years, increasing attention has been given to state crimes, particularly human rights abuses.
10. It is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of state crimes.
11. The lines between terrorists and freedom fighters and between legitimate state violence and state human rights crimes are becoming increasingly blurred.
12. State crimes are often justified by a spiral of denial and techniques of neutralisation.

activity21 a state human rights crime

Jimmy Carter, a former US president, accuses the state of Israel of human rights crimes in Gaza.

The world is witnessing a terrible human rights crime in Gaza, where a million and a half human beings are being imprisoned with almost no access to the outside world. An entire population is being brutally punished.

This gross mistreatment of the Palestinians in Gaza was escalated dramatically by Israel, with United States backing, after political candidates representing Hamas won a majority of seats in the Palestinian Authority parliament in 2006. The election was unanimously judged to be honest and fair by all international observers.

Economic sanctions and restrictions on the supply of water, food, electricity and fuel are causing extreme hardship among the innocent people in Gaza, about one million of whom are refugees. Israeli bombs and missiles periodically strike the area, causing high casualties among both militants and innocent women and children. I condemn the firing of rockets into Israel by Hamas militants in Gaza as abominable acts of terrorism. Despite this, it is time for strong voices in Europe, the US, Israel and elsewhere to speak out and condemn the human rights tragedy that has befallen the Palestinian people.

Source: Carter, 2008



A Palestinian woman is helped from her house after an Israeli air strike on Gaza City, January 2, 2009.

question

- 1 On the basis of Jimmy Carter's statement, is Israel guilty of state human rights crimes in Gaza?
- 2 Are Hamas militants guilty of human rights crimes for firing rockets into Israel?

Unit 10 *Ethnicity and crime*

key issues

- 1 Are some ethnic groups more likely to commit crimes than others?
- 2 Are some ethnic groups more likely to be victims than other groups?
- 3 Is the criminal justice system biased?

10.1 The ethnicity and crime debate

Questions of ethnicity and gender were barely looked at by sociologists of crime and deviance until the 1970s. The primary focus was on class. Since the 1970s, sociologists have recognised the need to examine ethnicity and gender. This unit focuses on the ethnicity and crime debate. Issues relating to gender and crime are examined in the following unit.

In the early phase of post-war migration, there was a widespread assumption that members of ethnic minority groups were no more likely to be offenders or victims than the majority White group. It was also assumed that the criminal justice system treated all ethnic groups fairly. Indeed, according to a major investigation into police-immigrant relations in 1972, 'Black people were more law abiding than the general population' and there was little evidence of racist attacks against Black and Asian immigrants (Layton-Henry, 1992). During the following ten years, however, relations between the police and the Black community deteriorated and evidence mounted of increasing racist attacks.

Two reports published in November 1981 signalled the onset of official concerns. The Scarman Report (1981) into the Brixton disorders emphasised how the riots were essentially an outburst of anger and resentment by young African Caribbeans against perceived harassment by the police. And a Home Office report into racial attacks revealed that South Asians were 50 times, and African-Caribbeans 36 times, more likely to be the victims of racially motivated attacks than Whites. There was growing evidence that Black and Asian people were increasingly involved with the criminal justice system.

Two issues in particular have given rise to concern – the racist violence and harassment experienced by ethnic minority groups and the criminalisation of Black people.

Criminalisation The issue which initially attracted most attention concerned the criminalisation of Black people. At the end of the criminal justice process, 'Black people are about six times as likely to be in prison as White people or South Asians' (Smith, 1997). Two broad explanations have been put forward for this. The first sees Black people as disproportionately criminal. This explanation tended to be

adopted by the police and other criminal justice agencies and reproduced in the media (Hall et al., 1978). The second sees the criminal justice system as inherently racist and discriminating against Black people. This explanation has received some support from radical sociologists (Gilroy, 1983). Until the 1990s, the ethnicity and crime debate was primarily concerned with this issue.

Victimisation More recently, attention has turned to another question. The murder of Stephen Lawrence, a Black teenager, and the failure of the criminal justice system to convict those responsible, led to an official inquiry, the Macpherson Report in 1999. The report found serious failings with the police investigation into this racially motivated murder. It not only challenged the dominant picture of the criminal justice system as unbiased, but also raised the profile of another question. Are ethnic minority groups more likely to be victimised than the White majority ethnic group?

10.2 Ethnicity and offending

To discover whether there are differences between ethnic groups in rates of offending, we can turn to three sources – official statistics, victim surveys, and self-report studies.

Official statistics

Table 2 presents the official statistics detailing the ethnic groups at different stages of the criminal justice system.

The table indicates that in 2006/07, Black ethnic groups were particularly over-represented at different stages of the criminal justice system. While they comprised only 2.8% of the population, they made up 9.6% of arrests, 6.4% of cautions and 11.0% of the prison population. Asian groups, by comparison, were slightly over-represented. Comprising 4.7% of the population, they made up 5.3% of arrests, 4.4% of cautions and 2.8% of the prison population. In contrast to these ethnic minority groups, White ethnic groups were under-represented – they were less likely to be arrested, cautioned or sent to prison.

While the official statistics point to ethnic differences at different stages of the criminal justice system, they do not demonstrate that there are ethnic differences in rates of offending. The higher arrest rate of Black ethnic groups could reflect the fact that these groups are more likely to be targeted by the police. Similarly, the higher rate of imprisonment could reflect the fact that these groups are more severely sentenced by the courts.

Victim surveys

At first sight victim studies, such as the British Crime Survey, provide a more effective way of discovering whether there are ethnic differences in rates of offending, since they include questions asking victims about the

Table 2 Ethnic groups at different stages of the criminal justice process, England and Wales, 2006/07

	Ethnicity					Total
	White	Black	Asian	Other	Not known	
Population (aged 10 and over)	91.3%	2.8%	4.7%	1.2%	0.0%	100.0%
Stops and searches	72.3%	15.9%	8.1%	1.5%	2.1%	100.0%
Arrests	83.1%	9.6%	5.3%	1.3%	0.7%	100.0%
Cautions	81.3%	6.4%	4.4%	1.2%	6.6%	100.0%
Youth offenders	87.6%	6.2%	3.2%	0.3%	2.7%	100.0%
Tried at Crown Court	75.2%	13.2%	7.7%	3.9%	*	100.0%
Prison population	81.5%	11.0%	6.0%	1.1%	0.4%	100.0%

Source: Ministry of Justice, 2008

ethnic identity of offenders. Unfortunately, victims are usually only aware of offenders when it comes to personal crimes, which account for only 20% of all crimes. These surveys show that, in many cases, both offenders and victims come from the same ethnic group. An analysis of the 1988 and 1992 British Crime Surveys (Mayhew et al., 1993) revealed that 88% of White victims of violence identified the offenders as White. In the majority of violent offences against ethnic minority groups, the offenders were also identified as White (51% in the case of Black victims and 62% in the case of Asian victims). This is to be expected since the general population is overwhelmingly White. Once account has been taken of White offenders, a majority of Black victims of violence identified Black offenders (42%) and the majority of Asian victims identified Asian offenders (19%).

Mugging The offence that has given rise to most controversy has been 'mugging'. Although this term is a criminal label that has no formal legal standing, it has been taken up widely since its arrival from the USA in 1972. It has been used by the police and the BCS to refer to robbery and some thefts from the person. Victim surveys suggest that Black ethnic groups are significantly more likely to commit this offence than other ethnic groups. Mayhew et al. (1993) point to 42% of muggings being committed by Black offenders in the early 1990s, while Clancy et al. (2001) point to a slightly lower figure of 31% in the late 1990s. BCS figures are similar to police data on the ethnicity of those arrested for robbery and therefore suggest that the Black over-representation amongst muggers indicates a higher Black offending rate (Clancy et al., 2001).

A word of caution is in order, however. 'The effects of stereotyping and prejudice may lead White victims sometimes to say that offences committed against them have been committed by Black people, even when they are not sure who was involved' (Bowling & Phillips, 2002). What is more, mugging constitutes only a small proportion of crime – only 2.8% of offences recorded by the BCS. While Black ethnic groups may have a higher offending rate for this crime, victim surveys do not point to significant

over-representation of Black or other ethnic minority groups among offenders for other crimes.

Self-report studies

In contrast to both the official statistics, which measure the outcomes of the actions of criminal justice agencies, and victim surveys, which are only able to reveal the ethnic identity of offenders for a small proportion of crime, self-report studies address the question of offending directly. Self-report studies ask people whether they have been engaged in criminal and disorderly behaviour.

The major study conducted in Britain which expressly pays attention to the question of ethnicity is the Home Office study, *Young People and Crime* (Graham & Bowling, 1995). Based on a large sample of young people, 'this study found that White and Black respondents had very similar rates of offending (44% and 43% respectively), while Asian respondents – Indians (30%), Pakistanis (28%) and Bangladeshis (13%) – had significantly lower rates' (Phillips & Bowling, 2002).

This study challenges the widespread view that the rate of offending of Black ethnic groups is higher than that of White ethnic groups. And it supports the suggestion that the rate of offending of Asian groups is somewhat lower. However, we cannot infer that this study reveals the true rate of offending. Self-report studies rely on the honesty of respondents and exclude from their sample people in institutions who may be more involved in offending. They also underplay the more serious offences.

Evaluation

The evidence from the three sources on the extent and nature of offending by different ethnic groups is inconclusive. The sources of data are all flawed in some way, with self-report studies pointing in one direction and arrest data in the other (Bowling & Phillips, 2002).

However, there are two exceptions to this. Homicide statistics, which are more reliable than other official statistics, do 'indicate that a disproportionate number of

homicides involve people from ethnic minorities [especially African Caribbeans] as both victims and suspects' (Bowling & Phillips, 2002). And victim reports do point to the greater involvement of African Caribbeans in robbery. While homicide and robbery represent only a small proportion of recorded crime, the data for these offences suggests somewhat higher rates of offending by African Caribbeans (Phillips & Bowling, 2002).

10.3 Racism and the criminal justice system

Some researchers argue that the greater likelihood for ethnic minority groups, particularly Black ethnic groups, to be criminalised (arrested and imprisoned, for example) reflects their greater involvement in crime. Other researchers argue that ethnic differences in criminalisation stem from institutional racism within the criminal justice system. This view received support from the Macpherson Report.

The Macpherson Report

Institutional racism The 1999 Macpherson Report on the police investigation into the murder of Stephen Lawrence concluded that 'institutional racism' in the police force was widespread. The Macpherson Report agreed with the earlier Report of Lord Scarman into the 1981 Brixton disorders that the police do not 'knowingly as a matter of policy, discriminate against Black people' (Scarman, 1981). However, it did not accept Scarman's view that 'institutional racism does not exist in Britain' (Scarman, 1981).

For Macpherson, the concept of institutional racism does not imply that the policies of organisations are racist. The term instead is defined as: 'the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping' (Macpherson, 1999, para 6.34).

The Macpherson Report gives official recognition to the fact that the police in particular, and the criminal justice system in general, are biased against ethnic minority groups.

Policing For Macpherson, the failure of the police investigation into the murder of Stephen Lawrence was not due to acts of discrimination by individual officers acting out their personal prejudices. Instead, it stemmed from the occupational culture of the police. In an occupation that may entail danger, great emphasis is placed on teamwork, with jokes and banter being used to cement solidarity. A number of studies have discovered that derogatory stereotypes about ethnic minority groups are prevalent among police officers, the vast majority of whom are White (Smith & Gray, 1995, Holdaway, 1996, Graef, 1990). Jokes and banter often take a racist form and reinforce a negative

perception of Black and Asian people.

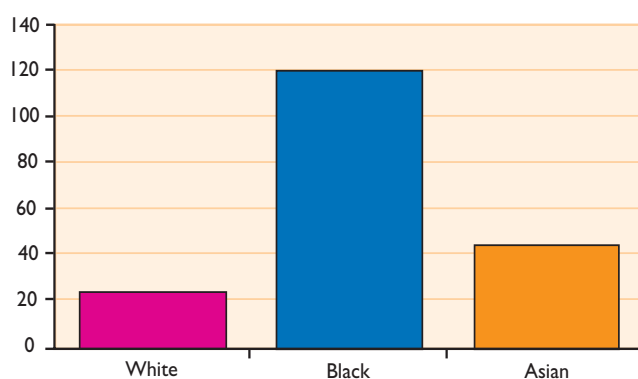
While we cannot assume that such racism leads to discriminatory policing, it can do so. A case in point is Dwayne Brooks, Stephen Lawrence's companion on the night of his murder. As a Black young man at the scene of a knifing, he was regarded by the police as a suspect rather than a witness. In seeking to protect society from crime and disorder, the police identify certain groups as more likely to mean 'trouble'. Black young men and, more recently, Muslim young men are often viewed in this way. As a result, their actions are more likely to be regarded with suspicion (Kalra, 2003).

Stop and search The Macpherson Report identified the use of stop and search powers by the police as a key factor in contributing to poor relations between the police and ethnic minority groups. In 1998/99, Black people were six times and Asians twice as likely to be stopped and searched as Whites. The police have considerable discretion in the use of these powers, which can be used on the basis of 'reasonable suspicion'. At the time of the inquiry, the BCS revealed that ethnic differences in the likelihood of being stopped and searched could not be accounted for by other factors such as age or social class. This suggests that discrimination may be responsible.

The Macpherson Report's judgement on the use of stop and search powers by the police states: 'we are clear that the perception and experience of the minority communities that discrimination is a major element in the stop and search problem is correct' (Macpherson, 1999). In the immediate aftermath of the report, the use of stop and search powers fell and, at the same time, the ethnic differences declined. In addition, the 2000 BCS indicates that the ethnic differences in foot stops, as opposed to car stops, could now be accounted for by factors other than ethnicity – for example, by social class (Clancy et al., 2001). While this suggests that ethnic discrimination may have fallen, the official statistics in Activity 18 indicate that the fall may have been short-lived.

Arrests Figure 2 shows ethnic differences in arrest rates. Black people are approximately six times and Asians approximately twice as likely to be arrested as Whites.

Figure 2 Arrests per 1,000 population



Source: Home Office, 2002

Most arrests result from the police responding to reports from the public. However, a significant minority are due to the police targeting particular ethnic minority groups through their use of stop and search powers (Phillips & Bowling, 2002).

Once arrested, and in contrast to other ethnic groups, Blacks are less likely to admit the offence. As a result, they

are less likely to escape with a caution and more likely to face formal action (Home Office, 2002). Black juveniles are less likely than other groups to have their cases referred to multi-agency panels and thus more likely to go to court. This holds true even when 'admission of the offence' has been taken into account (Phillips & Bowling, 2002).

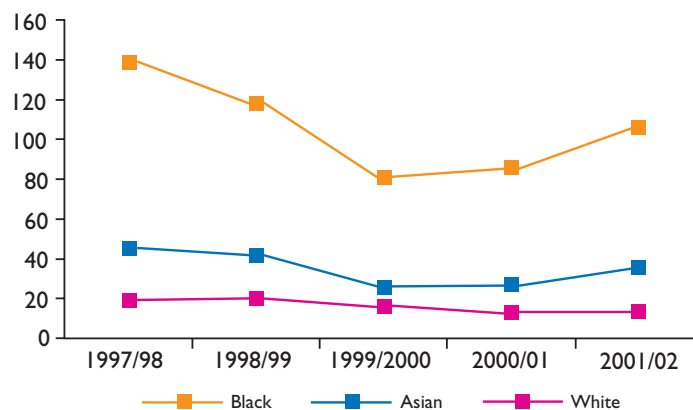
activity22 stop and search

Item A Stop and search statistics



Stop and search in Brixton, South London

Stops and searches per 1,000 population



Source: Home Office, 2002

Item B 'It makes you feel stigmatised.'

Wesley Walters-Stephenson is a race relations trainer for the police. He is an African Caribbean.

'How many times have I been stopped and searched? It happens so often. I become defensive when I am stopped because I am weary of being pulled up and it makes you feel stigmatised, it makes you feel like a criminal. It can happen any time and I try to stay off the streets as much as possible.'

My worst experience was when I got my shoulder busted and went unconscious for a short while after I was stopped and searched. I was 26. It is no wonder they have problems with youth culture when the police have criminalised two generations of Black people.'

Source: *The Guardian*, 8.11.2002



Wesley Walters-Stephenson

questions

- 1 Summarise the trends in Item A.
- 2 Read Item B. What are the likely effects of being regularly stopped and searched?

Prosecution Before a case goes to court, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) decides whether to proceed with a prosecution. It does so when it believes that there is a 'realistic prospect of conviction' and that it is in the public interest to do so. The CPS is more likely to terminate cases that involve ethnic minority groups. This suggests that the police may, as a result of holding negative stereotypes, put forward cases against ethnic minorities where the evidence is weak (Phillips & Bowling, 2002).

Once the decision to prosecute has been made, the next step is to decide whether to remand a defendant in custody or grant bail. Ethnic minorities are more likely to be remanded before and during a trial 'partly because they have an increased risk of being "of no fixed abode", a key criterion on which courts refuse bail' (Phillips & Bowling, 2002). Those remanded in custody are more likely to be given a custodial sentence if found guilty.

There is a greater likelihood of defendants from ethnic minority groups pleading not guilty and electing for trial in a Crown Court rather than a Magistrate's Court. If found guilty, they are likely to face a more serious sentence than they would if they had entered a guilty plea or opted for trial in a Magistrate's Court.

Ethnic minority defendants are more likely to be acquitted than White defendants (Home Office, 2002). This finding reinforces the suggestion above that cases involving ethnic minorities are more likely to be brought forward by the police where the evidence is weak. It also suggests that the CPS still allows 'a disproportionate number of weak cases against ethnic minorities to go to trial' (Denman, 2001).

Sentencing and imprisonment

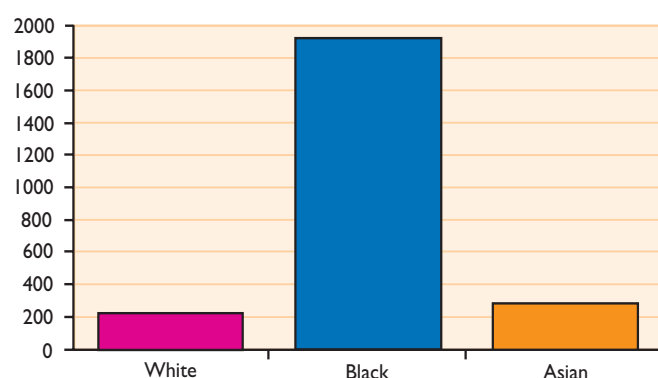
Sentencing The most significant study on ethnic differences in sentencing was conducted in five Crown Courts in the West Midlands in 1989. All male ethnic minority defendants found guilty were compared to an equivalent sample of male White defendants. After taking the seriousness of the offence and previous convictions into account, the study revealed that Black men were 5% more likely to be given a custodial sentence. What is more, for defendants who pleaded not guilty and were sent to prison, Asian men were given sentences 9 months longer and Black men 3 months longer than Whites (Hood, 1992). Sentencing is a clear example of discrimination against ethnic minority groups.

Imprisonment In comparison with other ethnic groups, Black people have significantly higher rates of imprisonment. This is illustrated in Figure 3. Some of the reasons for this difference have already been mentioned. Further reasons are given in the following section.

Evaluation

The evidence clearly points to racial discrimination in the criminal justice system. However, an important question still remains. Does discrimination wholly account for the greater criminalisation of ethnic minority groups? The two

Figure 3 Male prison population per 100,000 population



Source: Home Office, 2002

most recent overviews that have looked at this question reach somewhat different conclusions.

Evidence of bias The first review acknowledges 'evidence of bias' against Black people at various stages of the criminal justice system – in the use of stop and search powers, in the decision to prosecute juvenile offenders, and in sentencing by the Crown Courts (Smith, 1997). Such bias does not demonstrate, however, that the criminal justice system is institutionally racist. For bias is not evident at all stages in the criminal justice system. What is more, if the criminal justice system were institutionally racist, it is difficult to understand why Black people are much more likely to be criminalised than Asians. The extent of the disproportionate imprisonment of Black people is, in this view, too great to be explained by racial discrimination in the criminal justice system.

Discrimination A more recent review is more sympathetic to the view that discrimination in the criminal justice system has a cumulative effect on Black people and helps to explain their over-representation in the prison population. 'It is not necessary for there to be discrimination at each and every stage in the process in order for the over-representation of Black people in prison to be the result of cumulative discrimination' (Bowling & Phillips, 2002).

The criminal justice system can still be racist even though Black people are treated more harshly than Asians. This may reflect the fact that Black people are more likely to be viewed with suspicion, itself a result of contrasting stereotypes held of Black (violent and dangerous) and Asian people (passive and traditional).

Despite the fact that the two most recent overviews reach somewhat different conclusions, they agree that the available evidence is not able to demonstrate whether the over-representation of Black people in prison is better explained in terms of their higher rate of offending or discrimination by the criminal justice system. There is now widespread agreement among sociologists that we need to move beyond the 'either/or of racist criminal justice vs

Black criminality' (Reiner, 1993). While acknowledging bias at various stages of the criminal justice system, Smith emphasises that 'in large part the difference in rate of arrest and imprisonment between Black and White people arises from a difference in the rate of offending' (Smith, 1997). Similarly, Phillips and Bowling (2002) – after highlighting the discriminatory nature of the criminal justice system – acknowledge 'somewhat "elevated" rates of offending by African Caribbeans'.

Discrimination and criminalisation In short, both discrimination in the criminal justice system and the greater involvement of young Black men in street crime contribute to the criminalisation of Black people (Hudson, 1993). The two are linked – 'discrimination on the one hand, and Black crime on the other, reinforce and feed off one another in a vicious cycle of amplification' (Reiner, 1993).

Lea and Young (1982) illustrate how this vicious circle develops. For there to be policing by consent, a community must act as a source of information to the police so that they can 'catch and/or deter individual lawbreakers'. As unemployment generates an increasing crime rate in inner cities, however, the police begin to adopt a more aggressive policing policy and turn to operations which involve the random stopping of 'suspicious' youth. This inevitably results in large numbers of innocent people being stopped and searched. Once this happens, the community 'begins to become alienated from the police'. It 'comes to see any attempt at an arrest by officers as a symbolic attack on the community' and ceases to provide the police with any information which can help them identify individual offenders. Faced with this situation, the police adopt an even more aggressive policing policy and so the vicious circle continues. In this context, 'whatever racist sentiments exist within the police force are reinforced' (Lea & Young, 1982; Pilkington, 2003).

10.4 Ethnicity and victimisation

Racist incidents

Although racist violence and harassment is by no means new, mounting evidence indicates the scale of the problem in Britain. The police recorded 23,049 racist incidents in 1998/9, a massive increase since 1988 (4,383 incidents) when records of such incidents were first collected. The police statistics – though they cover the majority of the most serious cases – represent the tip of an iceberg if we include all racially motivated crimes. The 2000 British Crime Survey discovered, for example, 280,000 racially motivated offences in 1999. If we also include 'forms of racially insulting and threatening behaviour which are not seen as criminal events in themselves', the extent of racist victimisation becomes even more evident (Modood et al., 1997). The Policy Studies Institute Survey provides an estimate of such low-level racist harassment in 1994. It concludes 'that over a quarter of a million people were

subjected to some form of racial harassment in a 12-month period' (Modood et al., 1997).

While all ethnic groups face the risk of being the victim of racist harassment, the risk is significantly greater for members of ethnic minority groups. In 1999, for example, 'the annual risk of being the victim of a racially motivated offence was 0.3% for White respondents, 2.2% for Black groups, 3.6% for Indians and 4.2% for Bangladeshis and Pakistanis' (Clancy et al., 2001). The consequences of such racist harassment are extremely damaging. A range of studies confirms how they can create a climate of continual insecurity for victims and their families (Chahal & Julienne, 1999). Such everyday harassment provides the backdrop to racist violence. The murder of Black teenager Stephen Lawrence at a bus stop by five White youths in 1993 is the most notorious example.

The Macpherson Report considered the reluctance of the police to acknowledge the existence of racially motivated offences and to protect ethnic minority groups from victimisation to be a serious failing. Its conclusion outlined a series of recommendations related to the handling of racist incidents. A plethora of activity has followed. A code of practice on the reporting and recording of racist incidents has been produced by the Home Office (2000); the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO, 2000) has produced a guide to identifying and combating hate crime; and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary has produced a succession of reports on community and race relations (HMIC, 2001). Whether significant progress has been made in the handling of racist incidents remains to be seen.

Victimisation and fear of crime

Ethnic minority groups also face a higher risk of a range of 'household crimes' such as burglary and theft (Clancy et al., 2001). The same applies to violent crime, although in this case, ethnic minority groups are much more likely to see these incidents as racially motivated.

The 2000 British Crime Survey points out that a significant proportion of the increased risk of victimisation faced by ethnic minority groups is due to factors such as area of residence and age. However, even with regard to these factors, racial discrimination may still play a part in increasing the risk of victimisation – it can influence the area in which people choose to live. And finally, the increased victimisation faced by ethnic minorities is reflected in their increased fear of crime.

summary

1. The ethnicity and crime debate has addressed two key questions:
 - Why are some ethnic groups, especially Black groups, more likely to be criminalised?
 - Are some ethnic groups more likely to be victimised than others?
2. We cannot reach a definite conclusion as to whether there are ethnic differences in the rate of offending. For specific offences, such as mugging, there is some evidence of a higher rate of offending by Black ethnic groups.
3. There is clear evidence of racial discrimination at various stages of the criminal justice system.
4. It is likely that ethnic differences in rates of offending and a discriminatory criminal justice system combine to produce ethnic differences in criminalisation.
5. Ethnic minority groups face a higher risk of victimisation and suffer disproportionately from racially motivated offences. As a result, they are more likely to express fear of crime than other groups.

Unit 11 Gender and crime

key issues

- 1 Why are there gender differences in crime?
- 2 Is there a gender bias in the criminal justice system?

11.1 The gender and crime debate

Official statistics indicate that men are much more likely to commit crime than women. For example, in 2002, over 80% of known offenders were men (Home Office, 2003). This ratio is found in other Western countries and has remained remarkably similar over time.

In the past, sociologists paid little attention to these marked gender differences. They tended to take them for granted. Instead, they focused on why some men rather than other men were more likely to commit crime or become labelled as criminals.

Things began to change in the 1970s. Feminists, such as Carol Smart (1977), as challenged what they saw as the male dominance of the subject. They opened up new lines of inquiry into women and crime and asked a new set of questions.

- Why do women commit fewer crimes than men?
- Why are women more likely to conform to social norms than men?
- Is there anything distinctive about women's experience as offenders and as victims of crime?
- Are women treated differently than men by the criminal justice system?

Today, there is widespread agreement that the sociology of crime and deviance must take account of gender. This means examining both women and crime *and* men and crime. And this also means asking a new set of questions about men – for example, what is the relationship between crime and masculinity?

11.2 Gender and offending

In 2002, over 481,000 people in England and Wales were cautioned for, or found guilty of, criminal offences. Just over four-fifths were men (Social Trends, 2004). These figures are drawn from official statistics based on police and court records. As outlined in Unit 2, there are a number of problems with the reliability and validity of official statistics (see pages 207–214).

Self-report studies provide an alternative source of information for gender differences in offending. For example, the 1998/9 Youth Lifestyles Survey, based on 4,849 12 to 30-year-olds, found that males were two-and-a-half times more likely to have offended in the last year than females (Home Office, 2003). However, there are also problems with self-report studies (see pages 213–214).

Despite these problems, all sources of data point in the same direction. As a result, there is now general agreement that:

- Significantly more men than women commit crime.
- Men are more likely to commit serious offences.
- Men are more likely to re-offend (Heidensohn, 2002).

Sex role theory

Sex role theory argues that boys and girls are socialised differently and, as a result, boys are more likely to become delinquent. There are a number of versions of this theory.

Edwin Sutherland According to Sutherland (1949), there are two main gender differences in the socialisation process. First, girls are more closely supervised and more strictly controlled. Second, boys are more likely to be encouraged to take risks and to be tough and aggressive. As a result, boys have more opportunity and more inclination to commit crime.

Talcott Parsons According to Parsons (1955), there are clearly defined gender roles in the modern nuclear family. The father performs the instrumental role of leader and provider, the mother performs the expressive role of giving

activity23 gender and offending

Offenders found guilty or cautioned, 2002

England & Wales	Rates per 10,000 population				
	10-15	16-24	25-34	35 and over	All aged 10 and over (thousands)
Males					
Theft and handling stolen goods	86	183	104	17	131.5
Drug offences	18	159	62	9	84.1
Violence against the person	31	77	32	9	51.8
Burglary	29	49	21	2	30.4
Criminal damage	13	18	7	2	12.5
Robbery	6	14	4	0	7.2
Sexual offences	3	4	3	2	5.0
Other offences	11	102	59	12	69.0
All offences	196	606	292	53	391.5
Females					
Theft and handling stolen goods	51	67	32	6	50.1
Drug offences	2	15	9	1	9.8
Violence against the person	11	12	5	1	9.5
Burglary	3	3	1	0	2.1
Criminal damage	2	2	1	0	1.6
Robbery	1	1	0	0	0.9
Sexual offences	0	0	0	0	0.1
Other offences	3	20	13	2	14.4
All offences	74	119	61	12	88.6

Source: *Social Trends*, 2004



Shoplifting – according to official statistics, a typical female offence

questions

- 1 Summarise the data in the table.
- 2 Briefly outline the problems with official crime statistics.

emotional support and socialising children. These gender roles are rooted in biology since women give birth to and nurse children.

While girls usually have a readily available female role model at home – their mother – boys have less access to a male role model. Largely socialised by their mother, they tend to reject any behaviour seen as feminine and to compulsively pursue masculinity. There is an emphasis on toughness and aggression which can encourage anti-social behaviour and delinquency.

Albert Cohen According to Cohen (1955), socialisation can be a difficult process for boys. Without a readily available male role model, they can experience anxiety about their identity as young *men*. One solution to this is the all-male peer group or street gang. In these social contexts, aspects of masculinity can be expressed and rewarded. Being tough, taking risks and breaking rules can help to confirm a masculine identity. But, they can also encourage delinquent behaviour.

Evaluation Sex role theory is an early sociological theory which attempted to explain gender differences in crime. It

has the advantage of explaining these differences in terms of learned behaviour rather than earlier theories which looked for explanations in biological differences between males and females. However, something of this earlier approach remains in the work of Talcott Parsons. He sees women as biologically adapted to a nurturing and caring role. As a result, they are mainly responsible for socialising children.

Feminist writers criticise sex role theory for failing to consider gender differences in power – in particular, the power that men have over women. This view is considered in the following section.

11.3 Feminist perspectives

Feminist perspectives start from the view that society is patriarchal. It follows that the behaviour of women can only be understood in the context of male dominance. In terms of women and crime, this viewpoint leads to new questions and new answers. The research examined in this section combines feminist insights with control theory.

Female crime as rational

Pat Carlen (1990) argues that women's crimes are largely 'the crimes of the powerless'. Many women who commit crimes are powerless in various ways. They often live in poverty with little power to change their situation. As children, many have been harshly supervised, and sometimes abused by their fathers. And as adults, they have often lived under the dominance of male partners who, in some cases, used violence in an attempt to assert control.

Carlen (1988) conducted in-depth interviews with 39 working-class women aged 15-46 convicted of a range of offences. She draws on control theory, arguing that people turn to crime if the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. For the women Carlen interviewed, crime appeared as a rational choice. Their experience of low-paid work and unemployment had not led to the standard of living and lifestyle they had hoped for. And their experience of family life, both as children and adults, had been unhappy and unfulfilling.

Unrewarded in the family and in the workplace and with little power to change their situation by legitimate means, they saw crime as a rational alternative. And the crimes they typically committed were seen as a rational choice. In Carlen's words, 'Property crime was *chosen* because certain types (eg, shoplifting and cheque fraud) were seen to be "easy" '.

Evaluation Carlen's sample of 39 women is too small to generalise from. However, her research suggests that conformity to social norms tends to break down when the rewards for doing so are largely absent. But, as the next section indicates, it may be much more difficult for women than men to deviate from society's norms.

Conformity and control

According to Frances Heidensohn (1996, 2002), the most striking thing about women's behaviour is their conformity to social norms. Drawing on control theory, she argues that women have more to lose than men if they deviate from norms. And drawing on feminism, she argues that in a male-dominated society, the control of women by men discourages deviance from norms.

Home and family Women still have the primary responsibility for raising children and domestic work. Their commitment to raising children and to family life also involves a commitment to conformity – to the traditional mother-housewife role and to socialising children in terms of society's norms and values. From the point of view of control theory, women have more to lose than men by deviating from social norms.

Women have been socialised to conform. Girls are more strictly supervised than boys, given less freedom and expected to perform more household duties. And these controls, duties and expectations continue into adult life. As adults, women are not only controlled by their childhood socialisation but also by their male partners. Women who challenge their traditional roles are often

brought into line by men's financial and physical power. According to Heidensohn, wife-battering is an 'assertion of patriarchal authority'.

Women's socialisation and domestic responsibilities plus the controls imposed on them by men discourage deviance from social norms. Their lives are centred on the private sphere of the home and they have less freedom to go out. As a result, they have less inclination, less time and fewer opportunities to commit crime.

Beyond the home Outside the home, women's freedom to come and go as they please and to deviate from social norms is limited in various ways. For example, women are often reluctant to go out after dark, particularly in inner-city areas, for fear of attack or rape by men. And they are less likely to deviate from norms of respectability for fear of being labelled a slag or a bitch.

At work, men are more likely than women to be in control – in managerial and supervisory roles. And surveys indicate that sexual harassment is common in the workplace. This is a further indication of male power and control as it is often experienced as intimidating by women.

Both inside and outside the home, there is pressure for women to conform – pressure which is reinforced by male power.

Evaluation Heidensohn's combination of a feminist perspective with control theory provides an explanation for women's conformity to social norms and for their low crime rate. However, critics have made the following points. First, it presents women as passive, as simply accepting their situation (Naffine, 1987). The feminist movement from the 1960s onwards suggests a rather different picture. Second, Heidensohn makes sweeping generalisations about women and men. In doing so, she fails to recognise the differences between women, and the differences between men (Walklate, 2003).

11.4 Crime and masculinities

Research into gender and crime over the last 25 years has been mainly concerned with women and crime. Feminists focused on women, and men enter the picture in terms of their control over women.

Researchers now recognise that there is another side to the gender issue – men and masculinity. Why are men more likely to commit crime than women? Is there a relationship between male crime and masculinity?

Men, masculinities and crime

James Messerschmidt (1993) has presented the most influential and comprehensive view of the relationship between masculinity and crime.

Accomplishing masculinity Messerschmidt starts from the position that gender identity is a vital part of the individual's sense of self. It is something that people accomplish – they are continuously constructing,

expressing and presenting themselves as masculine or feminine. And, in the case of males, crime can be a resource for accomplishing masculinity. It can be used in the construction of masculinity so that men can express their masculinity both to themselves and to others.

Masculinities Messerschmidt identifies a number of different masculinities which are shaped by social class, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation. Men's position in society provides differential access to power and resources which leads to different constructions and expressions of masculinity. And this, in turn, leads to different types of crime.

Messerschmidt refers to the dominant form of masculinity as *hegemonic masculinity*. It is the 'idealised' form which is 'defined through work in the paid-labour market, the subordination of women, heterosexism and the driven and uncontrollable sexuality of men'. This is the form of masculinity that most men seek to accomplish. However, for various reasons, some men are unable to, or do not wish to, accomplish this dominant form.

Messerschmidt calls the alternatives to hegemonic masculinity *subordinated masculinities*. They include masculinities which develop in some ethnic minority and lower-class groups, and homosexual masculinity.

Crime, masculinities and youth Young middle-class White males are usually able to demonstrate some of the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity through success at school and college. However, this comes at a price – subordination to teachers. Some assert their masculinity outside school through vandalism, petty theft and heavy drinking.

White working-class young men are less likely to be successful in education. They sometimes resist school and construct their masculinity around physical aggression, anti-social behaviour, delinquency and, in some cases, violence towards gays and members of ethnic minority groups.

Lower working-class young men from ethnic minority groups with little expectation of educational success or secure employment sometimes assert their masculinity in street gangs. With little chance of accomplishing hegemonic masculinity by legitimate means, they are more likely to turn to robbery and serious property crime.

Social class and masculinities Even middle-class males who have the resources to accomplish hegemonic masculinity use crime to express masculinity. Messerschmidt argues that white-collar and corporate crime are not simply a means for profiting the individual or the organisation. They are also a means of accomplishing hegemonic masculinity – as a successful breadwinner and as an aggressive, risk-taking male.

Working-class crime in the workplace can also be seen as a means of accomplishing masculinity. Workers sometimes resist the authority of management by theft and industrial sabotage.

Ethnicity and masculinities Messerschmidt uses the example of African Americans to illustrate a subordinated masculinity. Lower-class African-American males often lack the resources to accomplish hegemonic masculinity. The pimp and the hustler – long-established roles in African-American subculture – offer an alternative subordinate masculinity.

The pimp dominates a string of prostitutes and lives off their earnings. With his 'pimp walk', soft-top Cadillac, diamond rings, gold chains, and prowess with and power over women, the pimp demonstrates a highly visible alternative masculinity to himself and others.

Evaluation Messerschmidt has provided a sophisticated analysis of the relationship between masculinities, age, class, ethnicity and crime. His focus on accomplishing masculinity is an original explanation of the high level of male crime. However, there are a number of criticisms of his research.

- First, it over-predicts crime (Jones, 1998). For example, pimps are the exception rather than the rule in low-income African-American areas. And why do only a minority of men from all social classes and ethnic groups feel the need to assert their masculinity through crime?
- Second, the claim that hegemonic masculinity is the ideal which all men aspire to is questionable. It can be seen as little more than a popular stereotype. Masculinities may be considerably more complex and diverse than Messerschmidt claims.
- Third, Messerschmidt uses the idea of masculinity to explain practically every crime that men commit – theft, burglary, rape, domestic violence, joy-riding, white-collar and corporate crime. According to Richard Collier (1998), this stretches the explanatory power of the concept of masculinity much too far.
- Fourth, there is an element of tautology in Messerschmidt's argument – in other words, his argument tends to be circular. Masculinity explains male crimes. How do we know? Because males have committed those crimes.

key terms

Hegemonic masculinity The dominant and ideal form of masculinity which most men seek to accomplish.

Subordinated masculinities Less desirable forms of masculinity which some men seek to accomplish because they lack the resources required for hegemonic masculinity.

Masculinity and crime in late modern society

A crisis of masculinity Late modern societies have seen an economic transformation. There has been a rapid decline in manufacturing industry and a rise in service industries. This has resulted in a fall in unskilled and semi-skilled manual jobs and a rise in working-class male unemployment.

These changes have been particularly unsettling for men who, in the past, were able to express their masculinity through physical labour. In addition, unemployment and intermittent employment mean they can no longer accomplish their masculinity through full-time work and support for their families. This can lead to a *crisis of masculinity* (Campbell, 1993).

According to Jock Young (1999), this crisis is particularly acute for young men who have never had a job and have little prospect of getting one. They are 'cast adrift' and are not even suitable marriage material.

Some respond by creating subcultures of machismo which glorify an exaggerated form of masculinity – toughness, aggression, sexual prowess, and respect for manhood backed up by physical strength and, in some cases, by guns. This can be seen in gangsta rap where women are portrayed as whores, bitches and sex objects to be exploited, where pimping, hustling and gun law are expressions of masculinity, and men earn respect by defending their reputation with violence.

The night-time economy In recent years there has been a massive expansion in the night-time leisure economies of many towns and cities in Britain. Local authorities, anxious to regenerate their communities through attracting private investment to the inner cities, have adopted increasingly liberal attitudes towards alcohol and entertainment licensing. Night clubs have mushroomed, with large numbers of young people flocking to them.

A two year research project studied this development (Hobbs et al., 2003). The researchers used both participant observation and interviews with bouncers, police, council staff, night-club managers, licensees and other key players in order to understand how the night-club economy worked. To facilitate access, three of the project team trained as bouncers and one of the research assistants worked underground as a bouncer.

According to Dick Hobbs, 'The night time economy is currently an unplanned largely unregulated zone where alcohol-related violence and disorder is rife'. Any control that does exist is mainly in the hands of bouncers who fill the void left by the police. The activities of these men (only 7% are women) are not effectively regulated and order is maintained by frequent threat or use of violence. While being a hard man has always been a source of status in many working-class communities, in the night-time economy it becomes a means of earning a living as a bouncer. What is more, being a bouncer provides opportunities for engaging in lucrative criminal activities. These include protection rackets, drug dealing, and importing duty-free cigarettes and alcohol and selling them at cut-price to clubs and pubs. With the loss of many working-class jobs, these men assert their masculinity through being hard, working as bouncers and, in many cases, getting involved in criminal activities.

Joy-riding A study of crime and riots in the early 1990s on two deprived council estates in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Oxford points to the pleasures gained by working-class

young men asserting their masculinity through joy-riding (Campbell, 1993). High unemployment on these estates meant that many young men could not look forward to a secure job that would enable them to support a family. They asserted their masculinity by manufacturing excitement through joy-riding and ram raiding. Brought up in a consumer society where high performance cars are associated with power and status, they drove stolen cars at speed around local estates and in some cases smashed them into shops to gain entry. This often led to a car chase with the police which added to the excitement.

Evaluation The case studies examined above relate to specific contexts. As a result, we cannot generalise from these studies. However, they do suggest that some working-class men turn to crime to accomplish masculinity. While research on masculinities and crime indicates there is a link between the two, it has yet to demonstrate that most, let alone all, male crime can be explained in these terms.

11.5 Gender and the criminal justice system

Is there a gender bias in the criminal justice system? Are women and men treated differently by the police and the courts? There are two schools of thought on this issue.

The chivalry thesis Chivalry means treating others, especially women, with courtesy, sympathy and respect. The *chivalry thesis* states that women are treated more leniently than men by the criminal justice system. Male chivalry means that the police are less likely to charge women and the courts will tend to give women lighter sentences, even when they have committed the same offences as men.

Double deviance This argument states that women are treated more harshly by the criminal justice system. This is because they are doubly deviant – they have deviated from social norms by breaking the law and deviated from gender norms which state how women should behave.

Many women feel they have been treated harshly by the criminal justice system. They see it as a male-dominated institution and feel their treatment has been unsympathetic and unjust (Heidensohn, 2002).

The evidence

Official statistics reveal the following.

- After arrest, women are more likely than men to be cautioned rather than charged.
- They are less likely than men to be remanded in custody or committed for trial.
- Women offenders are more likely than men to be discharged or given a community sentence and less likely to be fined or sentenced to prison.
- Women sent to prison receive shorter sentences than men (Home Office, 2003).

At first sight, these figures suggest that the criminal justice system treats women more leniently. They appear to

activity²⁴ subordinated masculinities

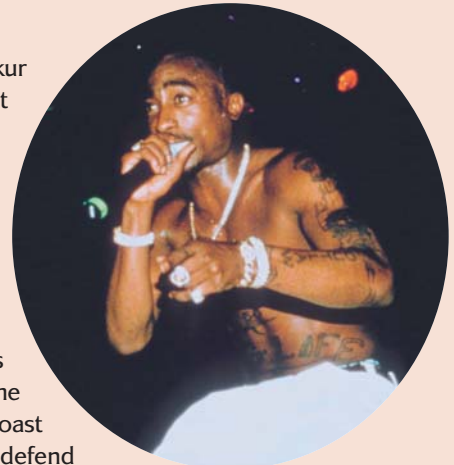
Item A Gangsta rap



Gang members in Los Angeles

The rapper Tupac Shakur died from gunshot wounds at the age of 25. He now sells more CDs dead than alive. He often used to pose with guns and had THUG LIFE tattooed on his stomach.

Gangsta rap reflects the violence of low-income ghetto areas. Rappers boast about using guns to defend their reputation, to settle scores and to avenge murdered 'homies'



Tupac Shakur

(friends from the neighbourhood). In one rap, Ice Cube refers to himself as a 'natural born killer' and states:

'When I grab my sawnoff (shotgun)
Niggas get hauled off.'

Women are often referred to as 'hoes' (whores) and bitches. Rappers boast about their sexual exploits and their prowess with women.

When work is mentioned, it is usually pimping, hustling, dealing in dope and the rewards they bring.

Source: in part from Light, 1998

Item B Bouncers

Bouncers need to present themselves as hyper-masculine. This form of masculinity has the following characteristics: toughness, autonomy, vitality, power, dominance, respect, honour, pride, and of course violence. Body size and shape are accentuated, and stance, clothing, facial expression and general demeanour are often tailored to display the mental and physical toughness required.

A licensee of a pub gives the following description of a bouncer. 'I already knew Jimmy for a few years. I knew he did the doors at some of the pubs in town so I just asked him to call in. I just picked a time when I knew some of the local lads would be in. We talked for about five minutes and you can hear them go quiet then start talking about him. After a few minutes, he just walked over and said 'all right' to them, and that he was working here now. They didn't say a fucking word. They knew who he was obviously, everyone knows Jimmy don't they? It's not like you can miss him. And that's it. I gave him twenty quid that first time, and fifteen quid a week after that. He gave me his mobile number to "phone if there's any bother" and he comes in every now and then. With someone like Jimmy doing that, I don't need a bouncer on at all really. I'm still here all the time and I keep a pickaxe handle behind the bar.'

Source: Hobbs et al., 2003



Bouncer outside the Chunnel club in London

questions

- 1 How do Items A and B illustrate subordinate masculinities?
- 2 Suggest reasons why these masculinities are developed by men from particular social groups.

provide support for the chivalry thesis. Matters are not that simple, however. To compare like with like, we need to take into account the seriousness of the offence and differences in offending history. The higher cautioning rate for women and the lower likelihood of being remanded in

custody or sent for trial mainly reflect differences in the type of offence and past offences (Home Office, 2003). Women's offences tend to be less serious and women are less likely to have a criminal record. This suggests that there is no systematic bias for or against women.

Sentencing The evidence on sentencing is conflicting. Farrington and Morris (1983) examined sentencing in Cambridge City Magistrates Court over a one year period. They found that men and women received similar sentences, once relevant factors such as the seriousness of the offence and the offender's previous record were taken into account. By contrast, Hood's (1992) study of sentencing in Crown Courts in the West Midlands found that women were treated much more leniently, even when relevant factors were taken into account. A review of a range of studies on sentencing found that, on the whole, women and men received similar treatment. However, there is some evidence of women being treated more leniently, including avoiding imprisonment where men would not (Cavadino & Dignan, 2002).

There is evidence that courts treat some women differently than other women. This appears to be based on the view that the primary role of women is as a mother. On the basis of interviews with Scottish sheriffs (judges), Carlen (1983) concludes that women who are considered good mothers are unlikely to be imprisoned. Such leniency towards some women was accompanied by harshness towards others. Women who were not considered good mothers and whose children were in care received harsher sentences, including imprisonment.

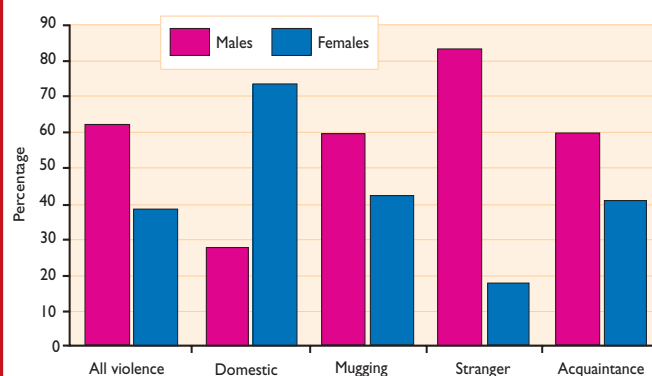
Evaluation It is not possible to reach a definite conclusion about gender bias in the criminal justice system. There are clearly differences in the likelihood of men and women being sent for trial and placed in custody. However, many but not all of these differences disappear when the severity of the offence and the offender's record are taken into

account. In addition, there is evidence that some women are treated more harshly than others on the basis of how well they are judged to have performed their role as mothers.

11.6 Gender and victimisation

Victim surveys consistently show that men are more likely to be the victim of violent crime than women. The British Crime Survey 2002/03 reveals that 5.3% of adult males and 2.9% of adult females had been the victim of at least one violent crime in the preceding twelve months (Home Office, 2003). The type of violent crime men and women experience tends to differ. Men are more likely to be the victims of violent attacks by strangers and other men in

Figure 4 Gender and victims of violent crimes



Source: Home Office, 2003

summary

- Available sources of data indicate that:
 - Significantly more men than women commit crime.
 - Men are more likely to commit serious offences.
 - Men are more likely to re-offend.
- Sex role theory argues that boys and girls are socialised differently and, as a result, boys are more likely to become delinquent.
- Feminists argue that the behaviour of women can only be understood in the context of male dominance.
- Pat Carlen argues that women's crimes are largely 'crimes of the powerless'. She draws on control theory, arguing that working-class women turn to crime when the advantages appear to outweigh the disadvantages.
- According to Frances Heidensohn, the most striking thing about women's behaviour is their conformity to social norms. She explains this in terms of their socialisation and control over their behaviour by men. As a result, women have less inclination, time and opportunity for crime.
- James Messerschmidt argues that male crime can be seen as an expression and assertion of masculinity.
- He distinguishes between hegemonic masculinity – the ideal which most men strive for – and subordinate masculinities – constructed by men who lack the resources to accomplish the dominant form.
- Masculinities are shaped by class, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation. Different masculinities lead to different forms of crime.
- A number of researchers argue that there is a 'crisis of masculinity' in late modern society. This is due to the decline in manufacturing and the resulting loss of many unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. As a result, some men have turned to crime in order to assert their masculinity.
- At first sight, it appears that men and women are treated differently by the criminal justice system. However, when the seriousness of offences and the history of offending are taken into account, most of these differences disappear.
- There is evidence that some women are treated more leniently than others on the basis of how well they are judged to have performed their role as mothers.
- Men are more likely to be the victims of violent crime. Women are more likely to be the victims of domestic violence and sexual violence.
- Women tend to express more fear of violent crime than men. This places constraints on their behaviour.

public spaces. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to know their attacker and to be victimised at home. The British Crime Survey 2002/03 reveals that 73% of domestic violence incidents were against women. In the case of homicide, 46% of female victims were killed by current or former partners compared to only 5% of males. Women are also more likely to be the victims of sexual violence. According to the British Crime Survey 2000, around one woman in 20 has been raped since the age of 16, with strangers accounting for only 8% of those rapes (Home Office, 2003).

Feminism and women's victimisation Feminists have highlighted the extent and seriousness of crimes such as

rape and domestic violence. These crimes, which usually involve women as victims, are seen to reflect male power in a patriarchal society. They differ from most other crimes since they often continue over long periods of time. Male violence against women is not limited to the home – it also occurs at work and in public places.

Women tend to express more fear of violent crime than men, despite the fact that they are less likely to be victims. This can place constraints on women's lives. They may avoid going out after dark for fear of being attacked. And they may take measures to dress and behave in ways that prevent them being seen as provocative by men (Stanko, 1994).

Unit 12 Age and crime

key issues

- 1 What is the relationship between age and offending?
- 2 What explanations have been given for this relationship?

12.1 Sources of data

Data from official statistics and self-report studies indicates that most offences are committed by young people – by teenagers and by adults in their early 20s. This section looks at the evidence.

Official statistics In 2002, over 481,000 people in England and Wales were sentenced in court or cautioned by the police for an offence. Compared to other age groups, young people offended most – the highest rate for males was at age 19, for females at age 15. Theft was the most common crime committed by young people, followed by drug offences, violence against the person and burglary (*Social Trends*, 2004).

Official statistics from various Western societies show a similar age-crime curve. Offending rises steeply from ages 10 to 18, declines sharply to around age 24, followed by a long, slow decline through the remaining age groups. This

generalisation applies to different historical periods and different social groups – for example, males, females and ethnic minorities (Smith, 2002). Table 3 shows the age-crime curve for England and Wales in 2002.

Self-report studies Self-report studies of crime ask people whether they have committed a series of offences. They are usually based on a self-completed questionnaire or an interview. Respondents are presented with a list of offences and asked which they have committed over a period of time – for example, during the past 12 months or during their lifetime.

Self-report studies present a similar picture to official statistics of the relationship between age and offending. They mirror the age-crime curve shown by convictions and cautions.

Evaluation – official statistics As outlined in Unit 2, official statistics provide information on only a small proportion of offenders. For example, there were nearly 5.9 million recorded crimes in England and Wales in 2002/03. This compares with only 481,000 people convicted or cautioned. The proportion of known offenders becomes even smaller when a comparison is made with British Crime Survey data. According to one estimate, only 3% of BCS crimes resulted in an offender being convicted or cautioned (Barclay & Tavares, 1999).

We cannot assume that all offenders are similar to this small proportion of known offenders. In other words, we cannot generalise from such a small, and probably unrepresentative, sample.

The information provided by official statistics may exaggerate the proportion of young offenders. Young people are more likely to offend in groups and in public – they are more visible and more likely to be apprehended. And the crimes they tend to commit – for example, vehicle theft – are more likely to be reported to the police. By comparison, white-collar crimes, which a higher proportion of older people may well commit, are less visible and less likely to be reported.

Table 3 Offenders found guilty or cautioned

England and Wales		Rates per 10,000 population			
Age group	10-15	16-24	25-35	35 and over	All aged 10 and over (thousands)
Males	196	606	292	53	391.5
Females	74	119	61	12	88.6

Source: *Social Trends*, 2004

Evaluation – self-report studies Research indicates that most people are prepared to admit to offences – even serious ones – when asked to take part in a confidential self-report study. And, in direct comparisons with individuals' official records, self-report studies reveal far more offences (Smith, 2002).

However, the results of self-report studies must be approached with caution. Traditionally, they have focused on male juvenile delinquency – the criminal behaviour of young men. And the lists of crimes presented in self-report studies tend to reflect those typically committed by young males – in particular, 'street crime'. They tend to omit 'hidden crimes' and adult crimes, such as domestic violence and child abuse, crimes which are likely to be spread more evenly across age groups. And they are unlikely to include fraud, often committed by middle-aged men. As a result, self-report studies provide only a partial view of crime. And this may lead to a distorted picture of the age-crime curve.

key term

Age-crime curve A curve showing the relationship between age and offending.

12.2 Explaining the age-crime curve

Control theory

Control theory – sometimes known as social control theory – has been used to explain the age-crime curve. It was outlined on page 46-47. To recap, control theory argues that what stops people from committing crime are the strong social bonds which join us together – for example, the bonds with family, friends and work colleagues. Effective social bonds mean that we have too much to lose by committing crime. To do so would risk losing the good opinion of significant others – those who matter to us (Hirschi, 1969).

Control theory provides the following explanation for the age-crime curve. Most children have strong bonds with their parents. Most adults have strong bonds with their partners, children, friends and work colleagues. However, many adolescents and young adults loosen the bonds with their parents and have yet to form relatively permanent adult relationships and commitments. As a result, their behaviour is less likely to be constrained by social bonds and they are more likely to deviate from conventional norms and values and become involved in crime (Sampson & Laub, 1990).

Evaluation There is evidence to support this view. Regular offenders who formed a stable relationship with a partner in young adulthood were more likely to stop offending than those who did not (Quinton et al., 1993). Similarly, offenders who found a steady job were more likely to stop offending (Sampson & Laub, 1990). In both cases, the

former offenders were making commitments and establishing bonds.

Judging from both police recorded crime figures and from victim studies, the crime rate rose significantly for most of the second half of the 20th century. During this time, the gap between childhood and adulthood widened. The period of compulsory education lengthened and growing numbers of young people continued their education beyond the minimum school leaving age. Full-time employment was postponed and people married at a later age. As a result, the traditional bonds created by marriage and work were not established until later in life. This may help to explain the rising crime rate from the 1950s to the mid-1990s (Rutter & Smith, 1995). However, it fails to explain the apparent decline in the crime rate indicated by the British Crime Survey from the mid-1990s onwards.

According to control theory, adolescence and young adulthood provide a window of opportunity for many young people to turn to crime. During this period, they are largely free from the constraints of both childhood and adulthood. But, why should they express this freedom in crime rather than other activities? Control theory fails to provide a satisfactory answer.

Independence and status

Adolescence is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. It is a time when young people seek independence from their parents and look for status and respect as developing adults. Often, both independence and respect are in short supply – in many ways, young people remain dependent on their parents and they are not yet able to claim the status of fully-fledged adults.

A solution to the dependency problem is to seek out or create situations in which to express independence, freedom and autonomy. A solution to the status problem is to seek respect in the eyes of the peer group – those in a similar situation to themselves.

But, how does this argument help to explain the age-crime curve? Independence can be seen as freedom from constraints. In this respect, deviant and criminal activities – which reject the constraints of conventional society – can be seen as an expression and indication of independence. And, in the context of the peer group, these activities can bring the status and respect which the adult world largely denies young people (Caspi & Moffitt, 1995).

Albert Cohen's (1955) subcultural theory of working-class delinquency provides an extreme example of this process (see page 29). Many of these young men do badly at school and fail to acquire the skills and qualifications needed for success. Defined as failures by the wider society, they experience status frustration – they are frustrated with their low status as 'losers'. Add this to the problems of young people in general, and their sense of status frustration is particularly acute.

According to Cohen, their creation of a delinquent

subculture can be seen as a solution to the problems they share. The 'successful' delinquent gains respect and admiration from his peers. And it allows him to hit back at a society which has denied him the opportunity to succeed and branded him as a failure.

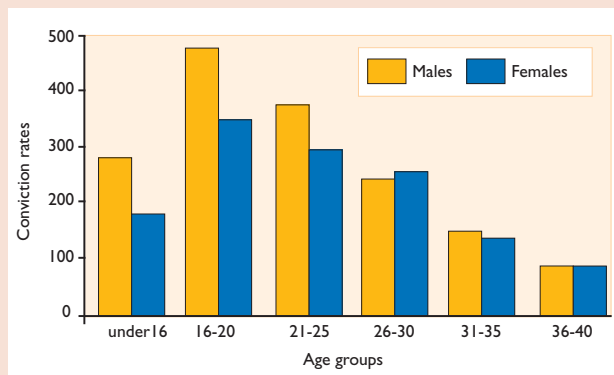
summary

1. Data from official statistics and self-report studies indicates that most offences are committed by young people. There are problems with both sources of data.
2. Official statistics provide information on only a small proportion of offenders. And the crimes young people typically commit are more likely to be reported to the police.
3. Self-report studies reveal far more offences when compared to an individual's police record. However, they tend to list offences typically committed by young people and omit those which are likely to be spread more evenly across the age group.
4. Control theory argues that young people are more likely to offend because they have loosened the bonds with their parents and have yet to form relatively permanent adult relationships and commitments. Without strong bonds to constrain their behaviour, they are more likely to deviate from conventional norms and values.
5. Some researchers have seen young people's high rate of offending as a response to their desire for independence and status.

As the age-crime curve shows, most young offenders stop their criminal activity as they grow older. When they really become independent and adopt adult status, they no longer need the 'gestures of independence' of their youth (Smith, 2002).

activity25 the age-crime curve

Conviction rates for different age groups



questions

- 1 What does the bar chart show?
- 2 Why is this pattern called the age-crime curve?

Unit 13 Location

keyissues

- 1 What is the spatial distribution of offenders?
- 2 What is the spatial distribution of offences?
- 3 What explanations have been given for these distributions?

Offenders tend to be concentrated in particular areas. They are likely to live in particular places in towns and cities. In other words, the spatial distribution of offenders is not random.

The same applies to offences. Crimes tend to occur in particular areas. Again, the spatial distribution of offences is not random.

This unit looks at environmental criminology. It is concerned with mapping the spatial distribution of offenders and offences, and with explanations for these distributions.

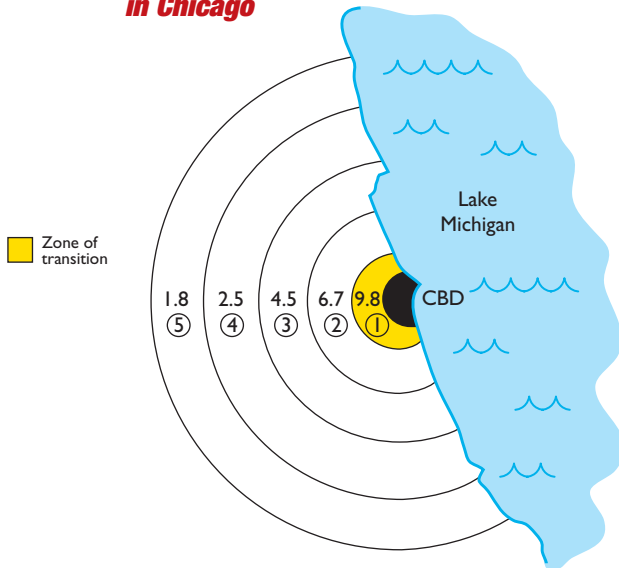
13.1 The Chicago School

During the 1920s, a group of sociologists based in Chicago, who later became known as the Chicago School, argued that the growth of cities produced distinctive neighbourhoods, each with its own characteristic lifestyle. Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1942) applied this perspective to the study of delinquency.

They divided the city of Chicago into five zones, drawn at two mile intervals, radiating outwards in concentric circles from the central business district (CBD). They then mapped the residences of male delinquents. Figure 5 shows the delinquency rates for boys aged 10 to 16 living in each zone from 1927 to 1933. For example, 9.8% of boys in zone 1 were charged with criminal offences during this period. The rates steadily declined from zone 1 to zone 5. Shaw and McKay found similar patterns in Chicago from 1900 to 1906 and from 1917 to 1923.

Zone 1 has the highest rate of delinquents. It is characterised by a high population turnover and *cultural heterogeneity* – a mixture of different cultures. Newcomers

Figure 5 Spatial distribution of delinquents in Chicago



Source: Shaw & McKay, 1942

to the city usually begin their urban life in zone 1 – they often have little money and zone 1 provides the cheapest accommodation. And they come from a variety of cultural backgrounds – in the case of Chicago, Black and White rural migrants from the southern states and immigrants from various European countries such as Ireland, Italy, Greece and Poland. Zone 1 is a *zone of transition* – many migrants move out to higher income areas once they have become established, so making room for new arrivals. As a result, zone 1 has a shifting population.

Social disorganisation A high rate of population turnover plus cultural heterogeneity result in *social disorganisation*. There is a lack of social cohesion, little sense of community and weak social controls. Controls such as gossip, public disapproval and public surveillance are not strong enough to prevent the development of deviant norms and criminal behaviour.

Evaluation Shaw and McKay's methods were applied to a number of American cities and produced largely similar results. Where results were different, they tended to confirm Shaw and McKay's conclusions. For example, Bernard Lander's (1962) study of Baltimore found a high proportion of offenders in areas of shifting population in zone 1. However, there were also areas of stable population within zone 1 where the proportion of offenders was relatively low. Since both types of area were low income, this suggests that the level of population stability was a major factor accounting for the level of offenders.

Shaw and McKay note that the rate of delinquents corresponds closely to economic factors. Income rises steadily from zone 1 to zone 5. Rates of delinquents decline steadily from the inner-city slums to the tree-lined suburbs. A part of their explanation echoes Merton's views.

Shaw and McKay argue that crime in low-income areas 'may be regarded as one of the means employed by people to acquire, or attempt to acquire, the economic and social values generally idealised in our culture, which persons in other circumstances acquire by conventional means'.

key terms

Zone of transition An area with a shifting population – people moving in and out.

Cultural heterogeneity An area with people from a number of different cultural backgrounds.

Social disorganisation A low level of social cohesion and weak social controls.

13.2 Area offender rates in Britain

Croydon Research on area offender rates in Britain has not supported the neat and tidy zonal pattern found in many American cities. For example, a study of Croydon by Terence Morris (1957) suggested that area offender rates reflected local authority housing policies. Concentrations of delinquents were found on estates where the local council had housed high numbers of so-called 'problem families', some of whom already had members with a history of delinquent behaviour.

Sheffield Research in Sheffield also failed to reflect American findings. A study by Bottoms, Mawby and Xanthos (1989) looked at two council estates – Stonewall and Gardenia – separated by a main road. Recorded offender rates for Gardenia were 300% higher than those for Stonewall. Both estates were built in the 1920s. Each had a stable population of 2500 to 3000, with 60% of adults in both areas having lived in the same residence for 10 years or more. And there was little or no difference between the estates in terms of social factors such as class, ethnicity, age, gender, income and employment levels.

The researchers offered the following explanation for the differences in offender rates between Stonewall and Gardenia. Sometime in the 1940s, Gardenia 'tipped' – started a downward spiral towards a high crime area. This appears to have influenced the council's housing policy. Those with severe housing needs and various other social problems were allocated to Gardenia – the very people most at risk of crime. Gardenia developed a negative reputation which resulted in some residents leaving and others refusing to move on to the estate.

Evaluation The Sheffield study is important for three main reasons (Bottoms & Wiles, 2002).

- Since the two estates are almost identical in terms of social class, it challenges those who argue that offender rates on the local level simply reflect the link between class and offending on the national level.
- Shaw and McKay's explanation based on high population turnover and cultural heterogeneity does not apply to the Sheffield estates.

- The operation of the local housing market is a key factor in explaining area offender rates in Sheffield.

13.3 Area offence rates

So far this unit has focused on area offender rates – the rate of *offenders* living in a particular area. This section looks at area offence rates – the rate of *offences* in a particular area.

In traditional cities, offences tend to be clustered in and around the city centre. For example, in Sheffield in 1966, 24% of offences occurred within a half mile radius of the city centre – which made up only 3% of the city's total land area. Typical city-centre offences include theft of and from cars, theft from the person and violence and vandalism in public places. This pattern can change with the development of shopping malls and entertainment complexes away from the city centre. For example, the building of the Meadowhall shopping mall on the outskirts of Sheffield was a factor in reducing city-centre offences from 24% in 1966 to 10% in 1995 (Wiles & Costello, 2000).

In residential districts, offence rates tend to be highest in low-income, inner-city areas and in high-income neighbourhoods in cities which are close to areas with high offending rates. According to the 2002/03 British Crime Survey, the highest levels of burglary, vehicle-related crime and violent crime occur in low-income council estates with a high proportion of elderly, lone parent and unemployed residents; in multi-ethnic, low-income areas; and in town and city areas which house well-off professional singles and couples.

The following explanations have been suggested for the spatial distribution of offences.

Opportunity theory

Opportunity theory, as its name suggests, is concerned with the opportunities for crime. It focuses on *target attractiveness* and *accessibility* (Clarke, 1995).

Target attractiveness In terms of property, a target is attractive if its monetary value is high and if it can be easily transported and sold. Obviously, a laptop in the back seat of a car is a more attractive target than a bag of groceries.

Accessibility A target is accessible if it can be seen, if physical access is easy and the chances of being observed are low.

On its own, opportunity theory cannot account for the spatial distribution of offences. For example, the highest level of vehicle-related crime is in low-income multi-ethnic neighbourhoods where 21% of vehicle-owning households are victims of this crime. The rate for professionals living in towns and cities is 16%, while the rate for wealthy home-owning areas is only 8% (British Crime Survey, 2002/03). In terms of target attractiveness,

vehicles and their contents in low-income multi-ethnic areas would be less attractive than those in the other areas. Despite this, they have the highest level of vehicle-related crime.

Routine activities theory

Because of the shortcomings of opportunity theory, it is often combined with routine activities theory to explain the spatial distribution of offences. Routine activities theory states that crimes are likely to occur in particular places because three things tend to come together in those places:

- Likely offenders
- Attractive targets
- An absence of 'capable guardians' – for example, the property owners (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

Routine activities theory, as its name suggests, is concerned with the routine, everyday activities of those who may be involved with crimes – the possible offenders, the possible victims and the possible observers. For example, studies of convicted burglars show that they weigh up the opportunities for a successful crime. But, they also base their decisions on their routine activities and the knowledge they gain from those activities.

For example, their everyday movements are centred on their residential area, place of work, the shopping and entertainment centres they frequent and the routes they travel to and from these places. These are the places offenders are familiar with *and* the places where they tend to commit offences (Wright & Decker, 1994). This brings together explanations of the spatial distribution of offences and offenders.

key terms

Target attractiveness The attractiveness of a possible target for crime – for example, its monetary value.

Target accessibility A target is accessible if it can be seen, access to it is easy and the chances of being observed are low.

Routine activities A person's normal, everyday activities.

13.4 Explaining the spatial distribution of offenders and offences

So far, the spatial distributions of offenders and offences have been examined separately. This section looks at the relationship between them.

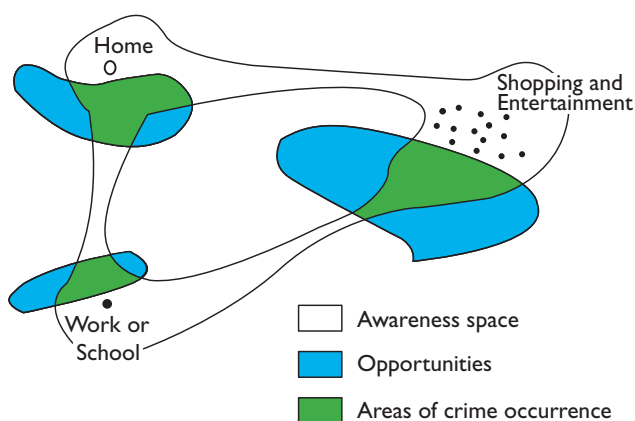
Most offences occur within a short distance from the offender's home. For example, a study in Sheffield found that, on average, offenders travelled only 1.93 miles from their home to commit a crime (Wiles & Costello, 2000). A number of studies suggest that this is related to offenders' routine activities and their normal use of space.

Cognitive maps

Patricia and Paul Brantingham (1984) argue that we have *cognitive maps* inside our heads which outline our perception of the geography of our local area. These maps contain the places we are familiar with – for example, home, work or school, shops and places of entertainment. They also include our routes to and from these places.

The Brantinghams suggest that most offenders will commit crimes in areas they are familiar with – that is, in areas which are clearly shown on their cognitive maps. Figure 6 illustrates this idea. It shows the suggested relationship between offenders' awareness of space, opportunities for crime, and areas where offences occur.

Figure 6 Cognitive maps and crime



Source: Brantingham & Brantingham, 1984

Evidence There is some evidence to support the connection between familiarity, cognitive maps and offence location. A study of convicted burglars in Pennsylvania showed that most of their offences were committed near their regular routes to work and recreation (Rengert & Wasilchick, 2000). Research in Oklahoma City, which is divided into Black and White areas, showed that most offenders committed their crimes within their own ethnic group area – that is, in places they were familiar with (Carter & Hill, 1979).

A study in Sheffield by Wiles and Costello (2000) categorised neighbourhoods in terms of high, medium or low offence rates and offender rates. High offender and high offence rates were found in the same area – there were no cases of high offender rates and low offence rates in the same neighbourhood. This can be explained in terms of the routine activities of the offenders and their familiarity with their own neighbourhoods.

There were a few cases of low offender rates and high offence rates. This usually occurred in high-income neighbourhoods close to areas regularly used by offenders – for example, adjacent to their own neighbourhood, shopping or entertainment area.

13.5 Further explanations

Why do some areas have high offender and offence rates? Part of the explanation has been given in the previous section. Offenders tend to commit crimes in areas with which they are familiar. But why are offenders often clustered in the same area? Many of these areas are low-income, inner-city neighbourhoods. The common-sense answer is poverty breeds crime. But, as the Sheffield study of Stonewall and Gardenia indicates, this is not necessarily so. Both were low-income council estates, but the recorded offender rates for Gardenia were 300% higher than those of Stonewall. The reason given earlier was the council's policy of housing so-called 'problem families' in Gardenia. But how does a neighbourhood 'tip' into an area with high levels of offenders and offences?

Social disorganisation One explanation has already been examined – Shaw and McKay's theory of social disorganisation. To briefly recap – high population turnover and cultural heterogeneity lead to social disorganisation which results in weak social controls. These controls are not strong enough to prevent the development of criminal behaviour. This explanation may fit the development of certain American cities but does not fit British examples. As noted earlier, it does not explain the difference in offender rates between Stonewall and Gardenia in Sheffield. Both estates had both stable populations and culturally homogeneous populations.

'Broken windows' As noted in an earlier unit (see page XX), Wilson and Kelling (2003) provide the following explanation for *tipping* – the downward spiral of certain neighbourhoods. Informal social controls are essential for crime prevention. They are likely to break down when buildings are left in a state of disrepair – for example, with broken windows – and when disorderly and anti-social behaviour is left unchallenged. In this situation, graffiti spreads, noise levels increase, vandalism grows and more windows get broken. Failure to do anything about these developments tips a neighbourhood into decline – property values plummet, law-abiding members of the community are afraid to go out, many leave the neighbourhood, informal social controls break down and crime and disorder become widespread. (For further discussion of Wilson and Kelling, see pages 47-48).

Spiral decay Wesley Skogan's (1990) analysis of the 'spiral decay of American neighbourhoods' echoes many of the points made by Wilson and Kelling. Skogan identifies two types of disorder – physical disorder, such as dilapidated buildings, broken streetlights and litter, and social disorder such as drinking on the street and prostitution. These two types of disorder tend to occur together. They have the following effects.

- Undermining neighbourliness – residents were less willing to help each other and take part in activities which reduce crime, such as keeping a watch on each other's houses when they were on holiday.
- Increasing concerns about safety – people were fearful

of going out, especially at night. This weakens social controls such as public surveillance.

- The area becomes stigmatised as a 'bad neighbourhood', property values decline, and those who can afford to do so move out.
- As a result of the 'spiral of decay' produced by disorder, the informal social controls which tend to prevent crime are weakened.

Evaluation The processes described by the 'broken windows' and 'spiral decay' arguments may well be an important part of tipping a neighbourhood into a high-crime area. But how do they begin in the first place? For example, how does the disorder which generates the spiral of decay start? The following study provides possible answers.

A three-stage process A study of juvenile offender rates in different areas of Los Angeles from 1950-1970 examined the changes that occurred in low-rate offender areas which later became high-rate offender areas (Schuerman & Kobrin, 1986). This study is important because it looks at changes over time – this may help to establish what causes what.

The researchers identified a three-stage process which, they argue, led to the development of high-rate offender areas.

- First, there were changes in land-use – for example, an increase in apartment buildings and in renting as opposed to owner occupation.
- Second, there were changes in the size and make-up of the population – for example, a decline in population size and an increase in the proportion of unrelated individuals – more single people and fewer families.
- Third, there were changes in the economic status of the

population – for example, an increase in the proportion of unskilled and unemployed workers.

Conclusion

Local, national and global Location studies of offender and offence rates are based on local areas. As such, they take little account of wider social and economic changes. Although they add to our understanding of crime, they are limited. Clearly, national and global changes will impact on local areas. A fuller understanding of local areas therefore requires an analysis which incorporates these wider changes. For example, the decline in manufacturing in Western societies has led to a reduction in the demand for manual labour and to high unemployment rates in certain urban areas (Bottoms & Wiles, 2002).

Methodology Studies of the distribution of offender and offence rates are based on data from police recorded crime and victim studies conducted in local areas. The validity of both types of data is questionable. As outlined earlier, police recording practices and priorities for investigation vary from area to area (see pages 10-12). For example, burglary may be a priority in one area, drug dealing in another. Similarly, the willingness of the public to report crimes to the police or to participate in victim surveys may also vary from one area to another.

key term

Tipping The process by which an area moves from a low to a high offender and offence rate.

summary

1. Environmental criminology looks at the spatial distribution of offences and offenders.
2. Shaw and McKay claimed that delinquents were concentrated in zones of transition in American cities. They argued that this was due to high population turnover and cultural heterogeneity which led to social disorganisation. This, in turn, weakened informal social controls.
3. Area offender rates in British cities do not reflect the American pattern. Research indicates that the housing of so-called 'problem families' on particular estates by local councils can result in a concentration of offenders.
4. In traditional cities, offences tend to be clustered in and around the city centre. 'Out-of-town' shopping malls and entertainment centres can change this pattern.
5. In residential districts, offences tend to be highest in low-income, inner-city areas, and in high-income neighbourhoods close to areas with high offending rates.
6. Opportunity theory states that targets with high attractiveness and high accessibility are likely to be selected by offenders.
7. Routine activity theory states that the spatial distribution of offences is linked to the routine activities of offenders.

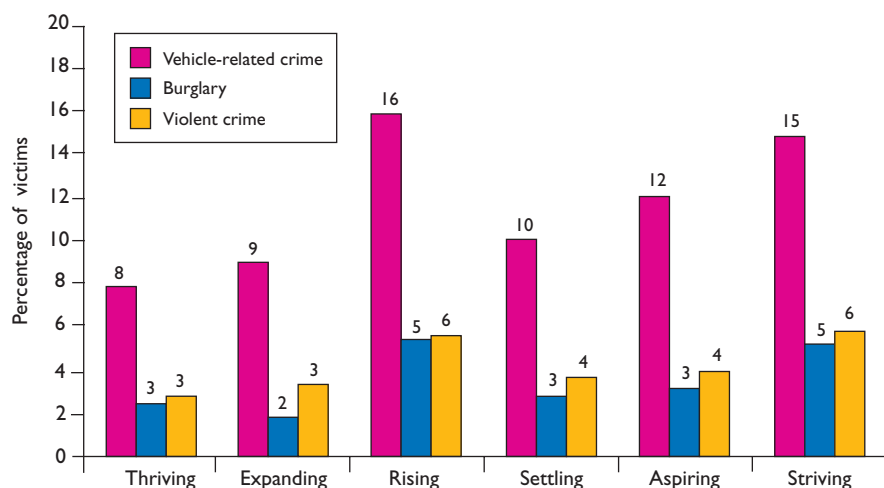
Offenders tend to commit crimes in areas they are familiar with.

8. The Brantingham's argue that we have cognitive maps of the areas we are familiar with. To some extent, these maps guide offenders' selection of places to commit offences.
9. Wilson and Kelling argue that a neighbourhood 'tips' when buildings are left in disrepair and anti-social behaviour is unchallenged. Informal social controls break down and crime becomes widespread.
10. Skogan argues that physical and social disorder undermine neighbourliness, increase concerns about safety and stigmatise the neighbourhood. This weakens informal social controls.
11. A longitudinal study in Los Angeles suggests a three-stage process leading to tipping.
 - A change in land-use
 - A change in the size and make-up of the population
 - A change in the economic status of the population.
12. Critics argue that location studies of offender and offence rates should incorporate wider social and economic factors.
13. The validity of the data on which location studies are based is questionable.

activity26 neighbourhoods and crime

Item A Neighbourhoods and offence rates

The bar chart looks at the percentage of household victims of burglary, vehicle-related crime and violent crime in different types of residential neighbourhoods in England and Wales. The data is drawn from the 2002/03 British Crime Survey. The types of neighbourhood are defined in the box on the right.



Source: Simmons & Dodd, 2003

Item B Type of neighbourhood

Thriving – wealthy, affluent home-owning areas. Commuters and prosperous older people.

Expanding – affluent working couples and families with mortgages, plus homeowners.

Rising – well-off professional singles and couples, living in town and city areas.

Settling – established home-owning areas, skilled workers.

Aspiring – mature communities, new homeowners and multi-ethnic areas.

Striving – council estates with elderly, lone parent or unemployed residents. Multi-ethnic, low-income areas.

questions

- 1 Briefly summarise the data in the bar chart.
- 2 Suggest reasons why different types of neighbourhood have different offence rates.

Unit 14 Social control, crime reduction and social policy

keyissues

- 1 What are the main approaches to crime reduction?
- 2 What are the crime policies of British governments since 1945?

The idea of social control was introduced on page X. Various aspects of social control have been examined throughout this chapter in the context of theories of crime and deviance – for example, in terms of right realism (see pages XX-XX). This unit looks at methods of social control with specific reference to crime reduction.

The terms crime reduction and crime prevention are often used interchangeably. However, the term crime reduction is now more popular and will be used in this unit.

14.1 Approaches to crime reduction

There are three main approaches to crime reduction – 1) structural or societal 2) individual 3) situational (Pease, 2002).

Structural/societal approaches These approaches see the basic causes of crime in society. For example, crime is generated by inequalities in income and wealth, or by inequalities of opportunity. Crime reduction therefore involves changes in society.

Individual approaches These approaches see particular individuals as prone to crime. Crime reduction therefore involves changing the behaviour of those at risk of starting a criminal career, or ending the criminal career of those with a history of lawbreaking.

Situational approaches These approaches seek to reduce the opportunities for crime by changing the settings in which crime occurs. Examples include surveillance – for

instance, CCTV – and target hardening – for instance, steering locks on cars.

Evaluation No one approach provides a solution to the ‘crime problem’. Crime is extremely varied – it ranges from vandalism to fraud, from domestic violence to street robbery. It is unlikely that one approach will provide an across-the-board reduction in this variety of crime (Pease, 2002).

A number of researchers recognise this point. For example, Jock Young (1992) argues for both a reduction in social inequality on a national level, and intervention on the local level by various agencies in order to reduce crime.

Finally, classifications of approaches to crime reduction provide only a rough framework. Some approaches don’t fit neatly into a particular category, others overlap two or three categories.

14.2 Structural/societal approaches

Many of the sociological theories of crime examined in this chapter suggest that crime reduction involves major changes in society. The following examples illustrate this approach.

Strain theory Robert K. Merton’s strain theory argues that the social structure prevents equal opportunity (see pages 28-29). It states that those at the bottom of the class structure are less likely to acquire the skills and qualifications needed to reach the top. As a result, some turn to crime in order to obtain the material rewards which are highly valued in Western society. The solution suggested by strain theory is the removal of barriers which prevent equal opportunity.

Subcultural theory Albert Cohen’s subcultural theory starts from a similar position (see page 29). As a result of their position in society, many young working-class males do badly at school and fail to acquire the skills and qualifications needed for success. As a result of this failure, they experience status frustration. One way out of this situation is to develop a delinquent subculture in terms of which they can gain status and respect. As with Merton, the solution suggested by subcultural theory is the removal of barriers which prevent equal opportunity.

Marxist approaches From a traditional Marxist perspective, crime is systematically generated by the structure of capitalist society. The solution to crime is a classless society – communism – free from exploitation, oppression, conflicts of interest and inequalities of income and wealth. In terms of Marxist theory, people would then work for the common good, and crime as we know it would largely disappear.

Evaluation Apart from general statements about reducing social inequality and increasing equality of opportunity, strain theory and subcultural theory offer few if any practical proposals for achieving these aims. And, apart from predicting the eventual overthrow of capitalism,

traditional Marxism offers little in the way of practical solutions to the reduction of crime.

Left realism Unlike the theories outlined so far, left realism argues for both change on the societal level and for practical steps to reduce crime. In this respect, it claims to ‘take crime seriously’ (Young, 1986).

Jock Young (1999) sees relative deprivation as the major cause of crime in late modern society (see pages 50-51). Relative deprivation is generated by a society which is seen as blatantly unfair and unjust, in which inequalities of income and wealth are becoming greater, and in which equality of opportunity is blocked by barriers of class, race, gender and age. Young calls for a society in which rewards are based on talent and merit, and in which citizens become increasingly involved in the democratic process on both national and local levels. He hopes that this will lead to a society which will be seen as just and fair. If so, this will result in a reduction in relative deprivation, and to a reduction in the crime which relative deprivation generates.

Evaluation Jock Young provides a general outline of the way forward for late modern society, but gives little indication of how to get there. However, left realism does suggest practical solutions for crime reduction for the here and now (see pages 51-53).

14.3 Individual approaches

A variety of different approaches are examined under this broad heading. Their aim is to change the behaviour of individuals who are seen to be particularly at risk of crime. Although these have been termed individual approaches, they also refer to the groups to which at-risk individuals belong – for example, low-income groups in inner-city areas.

Early intervention

Early intervention programmes intervene in the lives of children, particularly children from disadvantaged groups. Their aim is to improve children’s chances of success. The programmes assume that if children are caught young enough, then their chances of success at school and in later life can be improved. And their risks of turning to crime can be reduced.

There is some evidence that early intervention programmes can help to reduce the crime rate. The following programmes appear to have been particularly successful.

Pregnant mothers were seen in their homes by health visitors during their pregnancy and for two years after the birth of their child. Fifteen years later, their children had less than half the number of arrests compared with the children of a comparable sample of mothers who received no visits (Olds et al., 1997).

The Perry pre-school enrichment programme aimed to

give children from low-income families a head start when they began school. Parents were encouraged to 'enrich' their children's lives with books, toys and educational activities. By the age of 27, the children who participated in the programme had been arrested only half as often as a sample of similar age and background (Schweinhart et al., 1993).

Evaluation There is evidence that some early intervention programmes appear to reduce crime. However, there is evidence that others appear to have little or no effect. In the USA in the 1960s, there was a massive programme of early intervention in low-income, inner-city areas. Known as Operation Head Start, it was designed to provide pre-school children with the skills, aptitudes and motivation to succeed in the school system.

Head Start assumed that enrichment in the early years would open doors and provide greater opportunities in the later years. Although crime reduction was not the major aim, it was assumed that young people who went through the programme would have less reason to turn to crime.

In terms of improving educational performance, Operation Head Start appeared to have, at best, short-term and limited success. Children in the programme sometimes made short-term gains when they began school but soon fell back to the level of their peers (Jensen, 1973). In terms of crime reduction, it is difficult to estimate the programme's effect. However, James Q. Wilson (1975) believes it had little or no effect. He notes that in the USA during the early 1960s:

A great array of programmes aimed at the young, the poor and the deprived were mounted. Crime soared. It did not just increase a little; it rose at a faster rate and to higher levels than at any time since the 1930s, and, in some categories, to higher levels than any experienced in this century (Wilson, 1975).

Wilson also applies his comments to later intervention – programmes designed for older people. For example, Operation Head Start was accompanied by programmes for unemployed young people which attempted to provide 'work experience' and instil 'work habits' and 'work incentives'. In general, the evidence suggests that the later in life the intervention, the less likely it is to produce the desired effects (Pease, 2002).

Imprisonment

The responses of the criminal justice system to people who have broken the law can be seen as an attempt to change individual behaviour. Prison and the various alternatives to prison are obvious examples. Prison provides *incapacitation* – it prevents those inside from committing crimes on the outside. So, as long as habitual criminals remain behind bars, the crimes they would probably commit on the outside will be halted.

Apart from incapacitation, do prisons deter those who have already embarked on a career of crime? In other words, does the threat of future imprisonment make them

change their behaviour and stop committing crimes? Or, do prisons *reform* those inside? One of the stated aims of the Prison Service is to rehabilitate offenders – to change them into law-abiding citizens who are ready to take up a normal life on release. Many prisons have programmes which seek to improve educational and work skills and promote law-abiding behaviour after release (Prison Service, 2001).

Available evidence suggests that imprisonment neither deters nor rehabilitates many of those who have broken the law. In Britain during the early 1980s, prison expenditure rose by 85% and courts were encouraged to hand out longer sentences. By the late 1980s, Britain's rate of imprisonment was the highest in Europe. Yet the rate of recorded crime continued to grow rapidly. And nearly half of adult prisoners and around two-thirds of young prisoners were re-convicted within two years of release (McLaughlin & Muncie, 2001).

Prisons do not appear to be effective in terms of either deterrence or rehabilitation. Programmes designed to rehabilitate prisoners seem to have little or no effect. Those who participate in these programmes usually re-offend as often as those who do not participate (von Hirsch, 1976).

In view of this, some researchers argue that the main contribution of prison to crime reduction is incapacitation. For example, James Q. Wilson (1983) argues that the most active criminals should be removed from circulation and given long sentences. In his view, this will have a major impact on crime reduction.

The evidence suggests that incapacitation is not particularly effective. From 1987 to 1995, the USA increased its prison population by 124% and during that time there was a 2% increase in crime. Over the same period, Denmark increased its prison population by 7% and had a 3% increase in crime. As frequently noted in this chapter, any measurement of crime must be treated with extreme caution. However, available evidence suggests that the use of imprisonment to reduce the crime rate has not been very successful (Young, 1999).

key terms

Incapacitation Making someone incapable of doing something. In this case, using imprisonment to prevent offenders from committing crimes during their length of stay.

Deterrence Discouraging or preventing a person from doing something for fear of the consequences. In this case, using prison as a deterrent for lawbreaking.

Rehabilitation Restoring someone to a normal life. In this case, restoring offenders to law-abiding citizens.

Community sentences

In recent years there have been growing demands for alternatives to prison. This has been accompanied by a rise in *community sentencing* which involves the punishment, rehabilitation, treatment or supervision of offenders in the

community (Hughes, 2001). Community sentences include:

- Community rehabilitation orders – the offender is supervised by a probation officer and may be required to take part in various programmes.
- Community punishment order – the offender is required to perform unpaid work for the benefit of the community under the supervision of a probation officer.
- Curfew orders – the offender is required to remain at a particular location during fixed times for up to six months (Raynor, 2002).

By the end of the 1990s, around 50% of all youth sentences in England and Wales were community-based. In 2002, 33% of all offenders were given community sentences and 25% were given prison sentences (*Social Trends*, 2004).

How effective are community sentences in reducing crime? In particular, how do they compare with prisons in terms of re-offending? A review of the evidence indicates that they are at least as effective as imprisonment (Brownlee, 1998). Although this isn't particularly impressive, some researchers argue that, given the dehumanising effects of prison, community sentencing is much more preferable.

It would be wrong to dismiss community sentencing on the basis of the overall re-offending rate. Research indicates that certain types of community-based programmes can reduce re-offending by up to 20%. The more effective programmes are 'highly structured, they make clear and explicit demands' on the offender, they are well resourced and supervised by trained staff (Raynor, 2002).

14.4 Situational approaches

Situational approaches to crime reduction are concerned with changing aspects of the environment to:

- increase the chances of detection when committing a crime
- increase the chances of failure when committing a crime.

Together, these measures increase the risks and reduce the rewards of crime. In theory, this should deter people from breaking the law.

Many offences are 'crimes of opportunity'. For example, if a car is left unlocked, it presents a far better opportunity for theft than a locked car with a steering column lock. Situational approaches to crime reduction seek to reduce the opportunities for crime.

Examples of situational approaches

Target hardening This refers to reducing the physical opportunities for crime. Examples include more secure doors and windows, toughened-glass screens in banks and building societies separating staff and customers, steering column locks on vehicles, entryphones to buildings, and gated communities which provide barriers to outsiders.

Surveillance This refers to various means of observing

people's behaviour. It ranges from closed circuit television (CCTV) whereby cameras keep watch on city streets, malls and shops, to improvements in street lighting which increase the chance of people being seen in the dark.

The effectiveness of situational approaches

There have been many evaluations of situational approaches. Most techniques appear to result in crime reduction. The following examples indicate the effect of surveillance (Clarke, 2003).

- Vandalism is considerably reduced on buses with conductors.
- Public telephones in pubs and launderettes suffer almost no vandalism compared to those in kiosks.
- Car parks with attendants have lower rates of auto-crime.
- Apartment blocks with CCTV or doormen have fewer burglaries.

Informal social control At first sight, it seems obvious why situational approaches often work. However, a closer look suggests that the reasons are not so obvious. For example, gated communities appear to reduce crime because they present barriers to entry. But they also make residents feel safer and encourage a sense of community. Because of this, people tend to spend more time on the street, and are more likely to get to know each other. As a result, they are more likely to identify strangers and question their presence on the estate. Informal social controls such as gossip, public opinion, parental control and public surveillance tend to develop. And these controls can lead to a reduction in crime.

Similarly, street lighting appears to work because it increases surveillance in the dark. *But* it also reduces the amount of crime in daylight. Again, this suggests an increase in community solidarity and informal social control (Painter & Farrington, 1999).

Evaluation Situational approaches to crime reduction may not be as successful as they appear. In particular, they may result in *displacement* in the place, type, method and time of the offence. For example, target hardening and surveillance may simply move crime from one area to another, or from a protected to an unprotected building. Offenders may select alternative types of crime, use different methods and/or choose different times.

Research indicates that if displacement does occur, it is fairly limited. And some studies suggest the opposite of displacement – that crime reduction sometimes extends beyond the area where situational measures have been introduced (Pease, 2002).

key terms

Displacement Removing something from one place to another. In this case, changing the place, type, method and/or type of crime without changing the extent of crime.

activity27 situational approaches

Item A Gated communities

This picture shows the entrance to a gated community in Memphis, Tennessee. The houses and apartments are rented. Residents use a swipe card to enter the estate. The owners have an office at the entrance which arranges access for visitors. The office provides a number of facilities for residents – computers, faxes and a library of DVDs and videos, all at no charge. Alongside the office are tennis courts, an outdoor swimming pool and a gym – all available free to residents and their friends.



Item B Decoy vehicles

Vehicles can be adapted in various ways to detect anyone entering them illegally. Methods include tracking or camera systems, or physical restraints which prevent intruders from leaving the vehicle.

Specially adapted decoy vehicles were used in Stockton-on-Tees in an attempt to reduce vehicle theft. The result was a small reduction. The vehicles were then withdrawn. However, it was widely publicised that the initiative was still in operation. This time the reduction in vehicle theft was much greater.

Source: Sallybanks, 2000

questions

- 1 In what ways might gated communities reduce crime?
- 2 Use the idea of informal social control to explain the results of the decoy vehicle initiative in Item B.

Broken windows and informal social control

In a famous article entitled 'Broken windows: The police and neighbourhood safety' first published in 1982, James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling (2003) argue that informal social control is the key to crime reduction. They claim that disorder and anti-social behaviour – 'incivility' – are closely linked to crime. For example, if a window is broken and left unrepaired, the remaining windows in the building will soon be broken. If nothing is done, it appears that nobody cares, and 'untended property becomes fair game for fun and plunder'. Similarly, 'untended behaviour' – that is behaviour which is not checked, challenged and controlled – can become increasingly anti-social. Incivilities such as rudeness, excessive noise and vandalism become common. This leads to a breakdown in community controls and produces a situation in which crime can flourish.

According to Wilson and Kelling, the main job of the police is to halt this downward spiral of disorder and maintain informal social controls in communities. In other words, their main job is to maintain order. This involves enforcing rules of orderly behaviour and doing this in partnership with people in the neighbourhood. For

example, noisy teenagers should be told to keep quiet, begging should be forbidden, and drunks and addicts should be prevented from sleeping or lying down on the street.

James Q. Wilson (1983) argues that most police work occurs after crime has been committed and reported. Reducing crime therefore involves preventing crime in the first place. And this means maintaining 'orderly neighbourhoods'. Some neighbourhoods are beyond repair – the best the police can do is attempt to deal with crimes which have been committed by responding to calls and trying to catch offenders. They are not very good at this – most crimes remain unsolved. Other neighbourhoods are 'stable and serene' – they do not even need foot patrols. Where the police can make a difference is in neighbourhoods at the 'tipping point' – where public order is deteriorating but can be restored (see also pages 47-49).

Evaluation Wilson and Kelling's argument is based on evidence which indicates that policing has only limited effects on the crime rate. Rather than concentrate on crimes which have already occurred, the police should focus on strengthening the informal social controls which prevent disorder.

But do disorder and incivility lead to rising crime? As noted earlier (see page 48), a study of 196 neighbourhoods in Chicago suggests that as neighbourhoods became poorer there was an increase in both disorder and crime. In other words, it was economic disadvantage rather than disorder as such which led to a rise in crime (Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999).

Zero-tolerance policing

Wilson and Kelling's views suggest that the police should clamp down on a wide range of behaviour which is not necessarily criminal and take so-called 'petty offences' seriously. In other words, there should be zero-tolerance of all anti-social behaviour.

In 1994, William J. Bratton was appointed police commissioner for New York City. He introduced a policy of zero-tolerance policing. This meant that the police clamped down on all types of crime, however petty and insignificant. No longer did they turn a blind eye to people riding bikes on the sidewalk, urinating in public, small-time drug dealers, graffiti, beggars and street prostitution. In Bratton's words, 'If you don't stop the small offenders, it emboldens the really bad guys. It creates an atmosphere of lawlessness.' Within two years of the introduction of zero-tolerance, homicides in New York City were halved and robberies dropped by a third (Chaudhary & Walker, 1996).

So-called zero-tolerance policing in New York was not a get-tough policy imposed by the police on unsuspecting neighbourhoods. According to Commissioner Bratton, it involved a partnership with local communities and took account of their concerns and priorities (Young, 1999).

Evaluation Does zero-tolerance policing work? Certainly the results from New York City are impressive. But were they due to zero-tolerance policing or to other factors?

From 1993 to 1996 the crime rate declined in 17 out of the 25 largest cities in the USA. In some of these cities there had been no change in policing policy and in some cases there had been a reduction in the number of police officers. Some cities specifically adopted a less aggressive policing policy – for example, Los Angeles after the riots – and they too saw a reduction in crime. In addition, the crime rate in New York had started to decline before the appointment of Commissioner Bratton and zero-tolerance policing (Young, 1999).

At a minimum, this suggests that differing police methods do not necessarily have a marked effect on the crime rate. If this is the case, how else can the overall reduction in crime during this period be explained?

From 1990 to 1993, there was a crime wave in the USA. This coincided with an economic recession and high unemployment. From 1994 to 1996, 10.5 million new jobs were created in the USA. In addition, there was a marked decline in the crack-cocaine epidemic. Factors such as these, rather than zero-tolerance policing, may provide a better explanation for the decline in crime in New York City (Chaudhary & Walker, 1996).

Conclusion

It is difficult to evaluate the various approaches and strategies to crime reduction. First, the reliability and validity of crime statistics are questionable. As a result, any measurement of the effectiveness of crime reduction strategies must also be questionable. Second, many of the approaches to crime reduction are directed towards particular crimes – for example, street crime – and particular groups, for example, the working class. In view of the variety of both crime and of groups in society, it is unlikely that any single approach can provide a solution to the 'problem of crime'. Third, there are many factors which affect the crime rate. It is extremely difficult to isolate a particular factor and say with any degree of certainty that it is responsible for a reduction in crime.

14.5 Social policy and crime

Social policy refers to government policy on a range of social issues – for example, education, the family and health. This section looks at the crime policies of British governments from 1945 onwards. It also considers their relationship to sociological theories of crime.

1945-1979

Elected in 1945, the Labour Party set the early post-war agenda for dealing with crime. Crime reduction meant the reduction of social inequality. In this respect, Labour policy reflected sociological theories which see the roots of crime within the structure of society – the structural/societal approaches outlined in Section 12.2. In practice, this meant dealing with poverty, unemployment and educational failure, and reducing inequalities in income, wealth and opportunity. In terms of offenders, the focus was on treatment and rehabilitation rather than imprisonment and punishment (McLaughlin & Muncie, 2001).

From 1945-1959, crime was not a major political issue. It was hardly mentioned in the manifestos or election campaigns of the main political parties (Downes & Morgan, 2002).

Things started to change in the 1960s. The recorded crime rate rose rapidly during these years, particularly the rate for young offenders. Crime was becoming a political issue. So much so that by 1979, the Conservatives were talking about a 'law and order crisis'.

Conservative policy, 1979-1997

The Conservative Party won the 1979 election and remained in power for the next 18 years. Crime was a major issue in the election campaign. Labour maintained its traditional policy of dealing with 'the social deprivation which allows crime to flourish'. The Conservatives rejected this approach. They promised to restore the 'rule of law' with a 'war on crime'. Criminals rather than society were

to blame for the rocketing crime rate. And they had been allowed to get away with it because of the 'soft' policies of Labour governments.

The emphasis now was on apprehending and punishing criminals. Muggers, burglars and hooligans were to blame for rising crime. They, not society, were responsible for their criminal behaviour. As a result, they deserved to be punished. Money was pumped into the criminal justice system. During the first half of the 1980s, expenditure on the police force rose by 40%. Courts were encouraged to give tougher sentences in an effort to deter offenders. Expenditure on prisons rose by 85% in the first half of the 1980s. And by 1988, the rate of imprisonment in Britain was the highest in Europe. Despite the Conservative policy of getting tough on crime, the rate of recorded crime continued to grow rapidly (McLaughlin & Muncie, 2001).

In line with their rejection of structural/societal approaches to crime reduction, the Conservatives looked to situational approaches such as target hardening and surveillance. Crime control was not just the responsibility of government – it was also the duty of every citizen and local community. Individuals must make their homes more secure and take action to protect their neighbourhoods with schemes like Neighbourhood Watch.

Labour policy, 1997-2008

In the 1980s, the Conservative's catch-phrase was 'Labour's soft on crime'. In the 1990s, the soundbite of Tony Blair's Labour Party was 'Tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime'.

Tough on crime Labour, like the Conservatives before them, argued that offenders should be held responsible for their criminal acts and be given their just deserts – that is be punished in relation to the seriousness of their crimes. The criminal justice system should 'come down hard' on persistent offenders. One of the results of this policy has been a further increase in the prison population. In Great Britain in 2007, there were nearly 87,000 people in prison, 82% higher than in 1980 (*Social Trends*, 2008).

In 2001, Tony Blair set out Labour's crime policy for his second term in office. 'We will take further action to focus on the 100,000 most persistent offenders. They are responsible for half of all crime.' As part of this response, Labour has favoured a zero-tolerance policy – clamping down on petty criminals, drunkenness, vandalism and a range of anti-social behaviour in order to prevent the development of environments in which more serious crime can flourish. This can be seen from the introduction of ASBOs – Anti-social Behaviour Orders – which can result in curfews for young people and banning them from certain areas. Failure to comply with an ASBO is a criminal offence.

To a large extent, Labour has seen crime reduction as 'a local problem requiring local solutions' (Cook, 2001). A *multi-agency approach* has been encouraged. This involves various local authority agencies – for example, social

services, health, housing and criminal justice agencies – working together to combat crime. Wherever possible, local people should participate in this process (Cook, 2001).

Tough on the causes of crime When Labour came to power in 1997, they offered a 'Third Way' in politics – neither the traditional left-wing policies of 'old' Labour, nor the right-wing policies of the Conservatives. The Third Way sought new directions and new solutions to old and new problems.

Much of this was influenced by one of Britain's leading sociologists, Anthony Giddens, who has been described as Tony Blair's favourite guru. Giddens' *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* was published in 1998.

Giddens saw *social exclusion* as the main threat to social order and social solidarity. Society would tend to fracture and disintegrate if groups became excluded from the mainstream. For example, if the poor or ethnic minorities were detached from the wider society, they would not feel part of the national community.

Social Exclusion Unit Giddens' Third Way is reflected in Labour's social policy. In their first year of government, Labour set up the Social Exclusion Unit to find solutions to the problem of exclusion. The Unit is directly responsible to the Cabinet and it attempts to ensure that all policies – health, education, poverty, crime, urban renewal – are part of a coordinated strategy to deal with social exclusion (MacGregor, 2001).

Poverty Living in poverty means exclusion from many of the activities that most people take for granted. The largest group in poverty are low-paid workers and their dependent children. Labour's policy to reduce poverty has focused on this group. It has introduced the following:

- A minimum wage
- The Working Families Tax Credit to top up the wages of low-paid workers
- A significant increase in Child Benefit allowances
- The National Childcare Strategy which provides money for the development of childcare centres
- The Sure Start programme which provides health and support services for low-income families with children under four (Donnison, 2001; Page, 2002).

Unemployment Labour's New Deal, introduced in 1998, was part of their programme for social inclusion. The New Deal offered education and training for young people between the ages of 18 and 24 who had been out of work for more than six months. It was later extended to older people.

The New Deal provided personal advisors who offered direction and support to the unemployed, guiding them through the various options – academic courses, vocational training, self-employment, or voluntary work.

The New Deal emphasised the duties of citizenship. It was the duty of unemployed people to take up work and training opportunities. If they didn't, their benefits might be

withheld until they did.

Education Shortly after their election in 1997, Labour promised to 'overcome economic and social disadvantage and make equality of opportunity a reality' (DfEE, 1997).

The focus was reaching out to the excluded and providing them with opportunities to enter mainstream society. This involved finding new ways of motivating young people in deprived inner-city areas and of improving 'underachieving schools'. For example, Education Action Zones were set up in urban areas which had low levels of educational attainment.

Crime and social exclusion In terms of Labour's policy, crime is generated by social exclusion. Crime reduction in the long term can only result from policies of social inclusion. This means opening doors and providing opportunities, particularly for those at the bottom of the class system. In practice, this means reducing poverty, reducing unemployment and reducing educational failure. The aim is to give the excluded opportunities to enter mainstream society and to encourage them to do so.

Labour's assessment and future policy In 2007, the Home Office published *Cutting Crime: A new partnership 2008-11* in which it assessed progress in the fight against crime and outlined policy proposals for the future. It gave Labour an excellent report noting that crime had fallen by around a third since they came to power in 1997. It then outlined Labour's policy proposals for further crime reduction. They include the following.

- An 'end-to-end approach' to crime reduction which involves 1) 'early intervention' at a young age to prevent offending as soon as possible 2) 'situational prevention' to reduce opportunities for committing crime 3) 'enforcement' - ensuring that crime is detected and that the penalty is appropriate to both the offender and the offence 4) 'reducing re-offending' - managing known offenders to prevent future re-offending.
- A focus on organised crime. In 2006, the Serious Organised Crime Agency was launched to combat organised crime.
- 'Reaching out' to the 2-3% of the population in 'deep and persistent exclusion' in order to bring them into the mainstream.

In 2009, the Labour Party prioritised the fight against violent crime with the following proposals.

- Tougher sentences for knife crime
- New controls on deactivated firearms
- Portable weapon scanners for police
- Targeted action to tackle gang crime
- Education to turn young people away from crime (www.labour.org.uk/crime, 06.01.2009).

Evaluation In terms of crime reduction, has Labour's policy worked? According to the British Crime Survey, crime in England and Wales has been steadily falling since 1995. Whether this has anything to do with Labour's policies of crime reduction and social inclusion is difficult to say.

summary

1. There are three main approaches to crime reduction – a) structural/societal, b) individual, c) situational.
2. Structural/societal approaches see the basic causes of crime in society – for example, crime is generated by social inequality. Crime reduction therefore involves changes in society.
3. Individual approaches aim to change the behaviour of those seen to be at risk of crime.
4. There is some evidence that early intervention can reduce the risk of crime in later life. However, there is also evidence that it has little or no effect.
5. Evidence indicates that prison as a means of rehabilitation or deterrence has little effect. Some argue that the main value of prison is incapacitation. However, this appears to have little effect on the crime rate.
6. In terms of re-offending, community sentences are little different from imprisonment. However, certain types of community-based programmes can reduce re-offending by up to 20%.
7. Situational approaches seek to reduce the opportunities for crime by changing the settings in which crime occurs. Examples include target hardening and surveillance.
8. There is evidence that most situational approaches have some success, particularly if they lead to the strengthening of informal social control.
9. Wilson and Kelling see informal social control as the key to crime reduction. Disorder and anti-social behaviour lead to a breakdown in informal controls which allows crime to flourish. The main job of the police is to maintain order.
10. Zero-tolerance policing may be a successful method of crime reduction. However, the evidence is not clear-cut. Many other factors may account for a reduction in crime.
11. After 1945, crime reduction for the Labour Party meant a reduction in social inequality.
12. Conservative policy from 1979 to 1997 tended to blame the offender rather than society. Offenders must be given the punishment they deserve. Despite a rapidly growing prison population, the crime rate grew rapidly.
13. Like the Conservatives, Labour claimed to be 'tough on crime'. They favoured a zero-tolerance policy and argued that offenders should be punished in relation to the seriousness of their crime.
14. Labour saw social exclusion as the main cause of crime. Their policies were designed to reduce exclusion, provide equality of opportunity, and so reduce crime.
15. This view has been criticised. For example, some sociologists argue that inequality of opportunity cannot be significantly reduced until economic inequalities are reduced.

Traditional Labour policy for tackling the causes of crime was based on a structural/societal approach. It was concerned with reducing social inequalities by redistributing income and wealth from the top to the bottom. More recently, Labour has been primarily concerned with reducing inequality of opportunity rather than redistribution. Many sociologists argue that inequality of opportunity cannot be significantly reduced unless economic inequalities are reduced. And this is particularly true when the gap in wealth and income between top and bottom is widening as it has under New Labour (Paxton & Dixon, 2004).

Labour's emphasis on social inclusion and increasing

opportunity as a means for dealing with the causes of crime has been strongly criticised. For many sociologists, the target should be economic inequalities. In David Marquand's (1998) words, 'No project for social inclusion will work unless it captures some of the winners' gains and redirects them to the losers'.

Can social exclusion be seen as *the* cause of crime? What about the white-collar crimes of the socially included? In Dee Cook's (2001) words, 'It is unclear how tackling social exclusion would reduce racially motivated crime, domestic violence or white-collar crimes such as embezzlement, fraud, pollution and tax evasion'.

activity28 Labour and crime

Item A Tony Blair



Tony Blair in the House of Commons

'If you are tolerant of small crimes, and I mean vandalism and the graffiti at the end of the street, you create an environment in which pretty soon the drug dealers move in, and then after that the violent people with their knives and their guns and all the rest of it, and the community is wrecked.'

Item B A critical view

In 2001, Tony Blair outlined Labour's crime policy for his second term in office.

'We will take further action to focus on the 100,000 most persistent offenders. They are responsible for half of all crime. They are the core of the crime problem in this country. Half are under 21, nearly two-thirds are hard drug users, three quarters are out of work and more than a third were in care as children. Half have no qualifications at all and 45% are excluded from school.'

Jock Young makes the following comments on this statement.

'Let us note that these figures are as hypothetical as they are politically convenient. They ignore the fact that a large proportion of young people commit crime, that only a few are caught, and that generalisation about their background from these few is grossly unreliable. Further, that the number of crimes committed is based on police interviews with apprehended young offenders, who are encouraged to exaggerate in order to boost the clear-up figures; and that even given this, only one-quarter of offences are cleared up, so that for four million uncleared offences we do not have the faintest idea of the identity of the offenders. Furthermore, that for youth offences such as burglary and robbery the clear-up rate is even lower, 18% and 13% respectively, and the culprits even more unknown and indescribable.'

Source: Young, 2002

questions

- 1 Critically assess Tony Blair's claim in Item A.
- 2 One of the main problems with developing policies to fight crime is that governments know very little about the majority of lawbreakers. Discuss with reference to Item B.

Unit 15 Suicide

key issues

- 1 What are the main sociological studies of suicide?
- 2 What methodologies do they use?
- 3 What are the strengths and weaknesses of each methodological approach?

Suicide has already been examined to illustrate various methodological approaches in Chapter 3 (see pages XXX-XXX and XXX-XXX). This unit looks at suicide in more detail. For convenience, some of the material in Chapter 3 will also be covered here.

15.1 Durkheim's study of suicide

Published in 1897, Emile Durkheim's *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* was the first major sociological study of suicide. Keen to establish the value of a sociological approach, Durkheim chose suicide, a highly personal act, which seemed more suited to a psychological rather than a sociological explanation. If he could show that suicide was linked to society, rather than simply to individual psychology, then the value of sociology would be established.

The suicide rate

The *suicide rate* is the number of people who kill themselves in a particular society, or in a group within a society, in a given period of time. Durkheim based his research on the rate of suicide per million inhabitants in different European countries. The statistics revealed a number of patterns.

- First, suicide rates varied between different countries (see Table 4). For example, they were generally higher in Protestant countries than Catholic countries.
- Second, when suicide rates across Europe rose and fell, the differences between countries generally remained (see Table 4).
- Third, the rise and fall in suicide rates appeared to be

Table 4 Rates of suicide per million inhabitants in European countries

Country	1866-70	1871-75	1874-78
Italy	30	35	38
Austria	78	94	130
Saxony	293	267	334

Source: Durkheim, 1970

related to social factors. For example, the rates rose during periods of economic recession and, more surprisingly, during periods of economic prosperity. And they fell during times of war and political upheaval.

- Fourth, there were variations in the suicide rate between different groups within the same society. For example, the unmarried and the childless had higher rates than the married and those with children.

Explaining suicide rates

Suicide and society According to Durkheim, patterns in suicide rates could not be explained in terms of the psychology of individuals. Instead, the answer lay in society – in the relationship *between* individuals and society and, in particular, the degree to which they were integrated into social groups and the degree to which they were regulated by society.

Integration In a strongly integrated society, individuals are bound together by shared norms and values. The level of integration can be measured by the strength and number of relationships between individuals. In a strongly integrated society, people have powerful duties and obligations to each other. Levels of integration vary between societies and between groups within society.

Regulation Similarly, regulation varies between societies and groups within society. Regulation refers to the control which society has over its members – to the degree to which society regulates their behaviour.

Without regulation, people's desires are limitless. Society places limits on their desires by defining specific goals and the means of obtaining them.

Social order Durkheim, like all functionalists, was concerned with the following questions. How was society held together? How was social order maintained? What constituted a 'healthy' society? Durkheim's answer was appropriate levels of integration and regulation.

Too little integration and regulation would result in social disorder. The norms and values which bound individuals together and the regulations which controlled their behaviour would be weakened. Society would become unbalanced. The results would be 'pathological' or harmful to society.

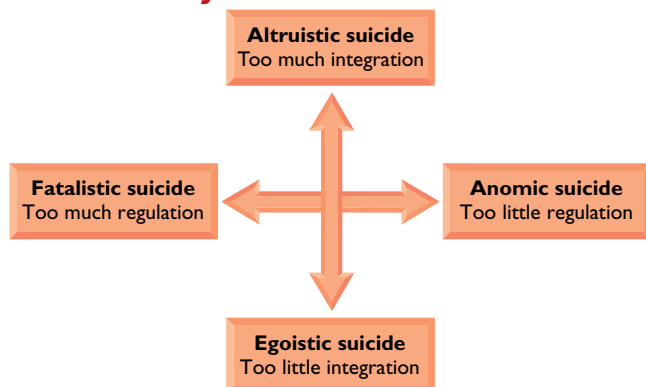
Durkheim believed that this was happening in modern society. And the rise in suicide rates in European countries was one indication of this trend.

Too much integration and regulation was also harmful to society. If norms and values are too strong, they would prevent the innovation and change necessary for a healthy society.

Types of suicide

Durkheim identified four types of suicide, each of which is

Figure 7 Types of suicide and the balance of society



Source: Lee & Newby, 1983

related to the level of integration or the level of regulation in society.

- Altruistic suicide occurs when the level of integration is too strong.
- Egoistic suicide occurs when the level of integration is too weak.
- Fatalistic suicide occurs when the level of regulation is too strong.
- Anomic suicide occurs when the level of regulation is too weak.

The relationship between types of suicide and levels of integration and regulation is illustrated in Figure 5.

Altruistic suicide Altruism means acting unselfishly, directed by a concern for others even if this is harmful to oneself. Altruistic suicide occurs when individuals are so strongly integrated into society that they take their own lives out of a sense of duty. They are so powerfully committed to the norms and values of society that they make the ultimate sacrifice.

Altruistic suicide can be seen in traditional Hindu India where a wife would throw herself on to her husband's funeral pyre and burn to death. It can also be seen in some nomadic hunting and gathering bands who followed the seasonal movements of game. Those who were too old and frail to travel stayed behind and died for the benefit of the group. In traditional Inuit (Eskimo) society, the elderly died in the snow as the band moved on in order to survive.

According to Durkheim, altruistic suicide is rare in modern societies. However, it does occur. For example, in World War II, Japanese kamikaze pilots flew planes packed with explosives on to the decks of American warships. They committed suicide for the benefit of their countrymen.

Fatalistic suicide Fatalism is a belief that nothing can be done to change the situation. Fatalistic suicide is characteristic of societies where there is too much regulation, too much control of individuals. Slavery is an example of excessive regulation – often there was little or nothing slaves could do to change their situation. Suicide

offered an escape. Durkheim argued that this accounts for the high rate of suicide which occurred when people's hopes and desires were crushed by 'oppressive discipline'.

Egoistic suicide The word ego refers to the self. Egoistic suicide occurs when there is too little integration, when the individual increasingly stands alone. It results from a weakening of the ties which bind individuals to social groups.

Durkheim saw egoistic suicide as characteristic of societies which were making the transition to modernity. These societies have an 'excess of individualism' – people tend to think primarily of themselves, they are less concerned with their duties and obligations to others, and with the opinions of others. The lower their level of integration with social groups, the more likely they will be to commit suicide. They have fewer obligations to others. And there is less moral pressure from others to prevent them from taking their own life.

Durkheim provides the following evidence to support his views. Unmarried people have the highest rate of suicide, followed by married people without children. And the more children married people have, the less likely they are to commit suicide. Thus, the larger the family group, the higher the level of social integration and the less vulnerable people are to suicide.

Protestant countries have a higher rate of suicide than Catholic countries. According to Durkheim, the Catholic religion integrates its members more strongly into a religious community.

The suicide rate falls during times of war and political upheaval. At times like these, the level of integration in society increases as people draw together to focus on a common cause.

In Durkheim's words, when the level of integration is low, 'The individual yields to the slightest shock of circumstances because the state of society has made him ready prey to suicide'.

Anomic suicide Like egoistic suicide, anomic suicide mainly occurs in modern societies. It results from a lack of regulation of people's desires and expectations.

Modern societies are characterised by rapid social change which disrupts the norms governing behaviour. The result is a situation of anomie or normlessness. There is no ceiling on people's desires, no limits to their expectations. Without norms to govern what people can reasonably expect from life, desires are uncontrolled and can never be satisfied. Living in a moral vacuum without sufficient regulation, people are more vulnerable to suicide.

Anomie is particularly acute in times of rapid economic change – in times of 'boom' and 'bust', prosperity and recession. This leads to changes in people's circumstances which further disrupt the norms governing their behaviour. Durkheim found that suicide rates rose with rapid upturns and downturns in the economy.

Conclusion Durkheim claimed that both suicide rates and types of suicide were shaped by social factors – by the

levels of integration and regulation in society. He concluded that, 'There is therefore, for each people [society], a collective force of a definite amount of energy, impelling men to self-destruction'.

key terms

Altruistic suicide A type of suicide that occurs when individuals are so strongly integrated into society that they take their own lives out of a sense of duty.

Fatalistic suicide A type of suicide that occurs when individuals are so strongly regulated that they can see no way out of their situation other than suicide.

Egoistic suicide A type of suicide that occurs when there is little integration in society, when the ties that bind individuals into social groups are very weak.

Anomic suicide A type of suicide that results from a lack of regulation of people's desires and expectations.

Durkheim's methodology

Social facts In *The Rules of the Sociological Method*, Durkheim outlined the rules that sociologists should follow in order for sociology to become a science. In his words, 'The first and most fundamental rule is: Consider social facts as things'. Social facts include the norms, values and institutions of society (see pages 165-166).

Social facts exist outside individuals – they are over and above them. However, they become part of them via the socialisation process during which they learn society's norms and values. Norms and values are shared, they are

not simply personal beliefs. Because of this, Durkheim argued that 'collective ways of acting and thinking have a reality outside the individuals'. As such, they are social facts and can be studied 'objectively as external things'.

Just as the behaviour of matter is directed by external forces, so the behaviour of human beings is directed by external forces – by social facts. In view of this, human behaviour can be studied using the methodology of natural sciences. And in this way, sociology can become a science.

The social facts of suicide Suicide rates are social facts. And they are determined by other social facts – by levels of integration and regulation in society. These are 'real, living, active forces which, because of the way they determine the individual, prove their independence from him'.

Durkheim found correlations between suicide rates and a range of social facts. He claimed that these correlations indicated causal relationships. For example, an individual's religion, marital status, family size and age can all be used as measures of their level of integration in society. And in each case, the lower the level of integration, the higher the rate of suicide. In Durkheim's words, 'suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of the social groups of which the individual is a part'.

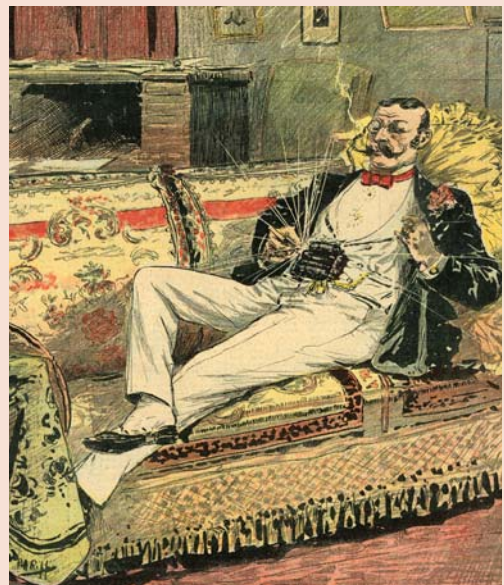
Durkheim then provided an explanation for this relationship. People are social beings – they have been socialised to participate in society. The lower their level of integration, the less they can do this. Isolated from others, their lives lack meaning and purpose. In Durkheim's words, 'The individual alone is not a sufficient end for his activity. He is too little'. As a result, the individual is

activity29 classifying suicide

Item A Types of suicide



Death from poison – living alone in a one-room attic



A Baltimore banker who has lost all his money in a recession blows himself up.



A Japanese servant, pretending to be his master, cuts out his entrails and throws them at the enemy, so allowing his master to escape.



Haitians kill themselves and their children to escape from the cruelty of their Spanish masters.

Item B Problems of classification

Suicide bombings can be categorised as an extreme form of political protest. They appear to fit into Durkheim's category of *altruistic* suicide – acts by people who are so highly integrated into a group that they are prepared to sacrifice their own lives to further its cause. The hopelessness experienced by some might also give ground for interpreting these suicides as *fatalistic* – the actions of people who feel trapped in a repressive regime, which is how Palestinians would undoubtedly describe the state of Israel. Alternatively, their suicides could also be described as *anomic* – the result of living in a society undergoing dramatic and disorientating social change. They could be *egoistic*, if the desire for reward in Paradise is the bombers' highest motivation.

Source: Swale, 2004



A Palestinian suicide bomber

questions

- 1 a) Match each of the pictures in Item A with one of Durkheim's four types of suicide – altruistic, egoistic, fatalistic and anomic.
- b) Give reasons for your answers.
- 2 a) How does Item B challenge Durkheim's classification of suicide?
- b) Choose one of the pictures from Item A and suggest how it might fit into more than one of Durkheim's suicide types.

vulnerable to suicide.

A science of society Durkheim believed that his research on suicide showed that scientific methodology was appropriate for the study of human society. In his view, he had followed the procedures of the natural sciences and his results showed that 'real laws are discoverable' in the social world, just as they are in the natural world.

Realism or positivism Durkheim's methodology is sometimes described as positivist. Positivists believe that

sociology should adopt the methodology of the natural sciences and focus only on directly observable facts. At first sight, this is exactly what Durkheim does. He identifies observable social facts and correlates them with other observable social facts.

However, Durkheim goes further. He identifies other social facts which cannot be directly observed. He refers to these as *social currents*. They cannot be observed and measured in the same way as social facts such as family

size and religious beliefs. But they are just as real and they have just as much power over people's behaviour.

Social currents flow through society. In his study of suicide, Durkheim identified four social currents – altruism, fatalism, egoism and anomie. Durkheim's methodology 'involved searching for the invisible underlying causes of the relationships between things that are observed' (Taylor, 1988). In terms of his study of suicide, this meant identifying social currents which were the underlying causes of various types of suicide.

This is a realist rather than a positivist approach. Realists argue that the causes of many of the things we observe lie in underlying structures and processes which cannot be directly observed. From a realist viewpoint, both the natural and social sciences operate in much the same way. In this sense, Durkheim's methodology can be seen as scientific.

Evaluation of Durkheim's research

Many sociologists have enormous respect for Durkheim's study of suicide. However, both his general approach and specific aspects of his research have been criticised.

Suicide statistics Durkheim's study was based on official statistics of suicide. Critics argue that he paid insufficient attention to both their reliability and validity.

Suicide statistics are reliable if coroners – the officials who decide the cause of death – reach the same conclusions. However, one coroner might give a verdict of suicide when the evidence suggests that a person probably took their own life. Another coroner might want more conclusive evidence – for example, a suicide note. Differences in suicide rates between two towns may simply reflect the views of different coroners. The reliability of suicide statistics is therefore questionable (Taylor, 1988).

Statistics are valid if they represent a true and accurate measurement. Coroners have to decide whether a death is a suicide, an accident, or due to natural causes. This can be a difficult judgement. If coroners cannot reach a decision, they give an 'open verdict'. Such verdicts do not form part of the suicide statistics. For these reasons, the validity of suicide statistics is questionable.

The positivist response Positivists accept that much of Durkheim's work is scientific. He quantified a number of social facts. His statistical analysis revealed correlations between them and indicated cause and effect relationships. However, they part company with Durkheim on two main counts.

First, Durkheim sometimes failed to provide an operational definition of social facts – that is a definition which could provide quantifiable data. For example, without an operational definition of social integration, this aspect of Durkheim's theory could not be tested and shown to be true or false (Gibbs & Martin, 1964).

Second, positivists reject Durkheim's realist approach. In particular, they reject his view that causes can be found in underlying structures and processes that cannot be directly

observed and measured. From a positivist viewpoint, Durkheim's use of unobservable social currents to explain suicide rates is unacceptable and unscientific.

Further criticisms of Durkheim's methodology are examined in the following sections.

15.2 Suicide – an interpretivist view

The meanings of suicide

From an interpretivist perspective, people act in terms of meanings. Sociologists must therefore interpret the meanings which direct action in order to understand human behaviour.

In *The Social Meanings of Suicide* (1967), Jack Douglas argues that the first step in studying suicide is to interpret how individuals who commit suicide define and give meaning to their action.

Step 1 Douglas admits that this is easier said than done. He suggests the following ways of discovering the meanings which victims give to acts of suicide.

- An analysis of suicide notes if available
- An examination of diaries if kept
- Interviews with those who knew the victim – for example, family and friends
- Building up a biography of the victim
- Analysing the events which immediately preceded the suicide
- Interviews with those who have survived suicide attempts.

According to Douglas, this first step is essential in order to classify suicides into types. He rejects Durkheim's approach, arguing that he imposes definitions on suicides. The resulting classification into types may have little or nothing to do with the meanings that suicide victims give to their actions.

Step 2 The next step is to look for patterns of meaning which are common to a number of suicides. Only if these are found is it possible to classify suicides into different types. Using this method, Douglas claims that the most common types of suicide include the following. In each case, he argues that this is how victims give meaning to their action.

- **Revenge Suicide** is seen as an act of revenge against those who have wronged the victim – for example, to make a former lover feel guilty.
- **A Search for Help Suicide** is seen as a 'cry for help' when all else has failed.
- **Escape Suicide** is seen as an escape from a life which has become unbearable.
- **Repentance Suicide** is seen as an act of repentance, a means of expressing sorrow for wrongdoing and an attempt to put it right.
- **Self-punishment Suicide** is seen as a way of punishing oneself for misdeeds – a self-imposed penalty.

Step 3 The third step is to link these patterns of meaning with the wider beliefs of the culture. For example, in Western culture, suicide is seen as an act of desperation when all else fails. In other cultures it is expected and accepted in certain situations – for example, the suicide of the elderly in nomadic hunting and gathering bands.

Apart from making a few suggestions, Douglas doesn't take Step 3 any further.

Suicide statistics Douglas criticises Durkheim for largely accepting the reliability and validity of official statistics on suicide. He argues that suicide statistics are the result of negotiated meanings and a complex series of social interactions. For example, the family and friends of the victim may do their best to conceal his or her death as suicide. And this, in turn, may influence the coroner to deliver a verdict of accidental death or death by natural causes.

Successful concealment is most likely when the suicide victim is highly integrated into a social group. Friends and family will be concerned to protect the deceased's reputation and standing in the community. As a result, correlations which indicate a relationship between low suicide rates and high integration may simply reflect a link between successful concealment and high integration.

Douglas maintains that an examination of the negotiated meanings which accompany a suicide death are essential for an understanding of suicide statistics. And this, he argues, is what Durkheim failed to do.

Evaluation Jack Douglas offers an alternative view of suicide. It is an act which is defined and given meaning by the victim, their family, friends and acquaintances, and the officials whose job it is to make a judgement on the cause of death. And suicide statistics are socially constructed from these definitions and meanings, and from the negotiations of those involved.

However, as Steve Taylor (1988) argues, there is a contradiction in Douglas's work. At times, Douglas suggests that it is possible for the researcher to discover whether a death really was suicide. If so, it should be possible to produce valid suicide statistics and a valid suicide rate. And from this, it should be possible to discover the causes of suicide.

At other times, Douglas implies that suicide is nothing more than the meanings given to particular deaths. If so, there are no such things as real, objective suicide acts or suicide rates. The job of the sociologist is simply to discover the meanings which people use to define suicide. And there is no reality beyond these meanings.

Discovering suicide

In *Discovering Suicide* (1978), J. Maxwell Atkinson takes the interpretivist position to its extreme. He states quite categorically that suicide is simply a meaning and there is no reality beyond that meaning. This is sometimes known as a *phenomenological* approach. It argues that the phenomenon, the 'thing' being studied, must be studied in

its own right. In this case, suicide is nothing more than a meaning and must be treated as such. Suicide statistics are not right or wrong, they simply are. And the job of the sociologist is to discover the meanings used to define suicide and to find out how those meanings are constructed. In Atkinson's words, the question which should direct a sociological investigation of suicide is 'How do deaths get categorised as suicide?'

Research methods Atkinson's research examined the ways in which coroners and coroner's officers classified deaths. It was based on observations of inquests, interviews with coroners in three different towns, an examination of a coroner's records and observations of a coroner's officer at work. Atkinson claims that his findings show that coroners have a 'common-sense theory' of suicide. If the facts fit the theory, then a verdict of suicide is likely.

Primary cues According to Atkinson, coroners begin by looking for 'primary cues' which appear to indicate suicide. They include the following.

- The existence of suicide notes and/or reports of threats of suicide.
- The type of death – 'typical suicide deaths' include gassing, hanging, drowning and drug overdose. Road deaths are unlikely to be seen as suicides.
- The place and circumstances of death – an individual found shot to death in a car parked on a deserted country lane is more likely to be seen as a suicide victim than somebody who shot themselves while climbing over a fence on a pheasant shoot. And gassing is more likely to be seen as suicide if windows and doors have been sealed.

Secondary cues These include the life history of the deceased. According to Atkinson, coroners have a picture of a 'typical suicide biography'. It includes the following.

- A history of mental illness, particularly of depression
- A disturbed childhood
- A recent loss – a divorce or death of a loved one
- Few if any friends
- Financial difficulties
- Problems at work.

Categorising suicide According to Atkinson, if the circumstances of death and the life history of the deceased fit the 'typical suicide death' and the 'typical suicide biography' then a verdict of suicide is likely.

Coroners' common-sense theory of suicide contains an explanation of suicide. For example, if the deceased is friendless, has a history of depression and financial difficulties, then they may feel that life is not worth living and commit suicide. In some respects, this is similar to the theories of suicide put forward by sociologists. For example, Durkheim's socially isolated individual fits neatly into the coroners' theory.

According to Atkinson, this comes as no surprise. Sociologists are simply uncovering the meanings used by coroners to reach a verdict of suicide. Since social isolation

is seen by coroners as a reason for suicide, then suicide statistics will contain a high proportion of socially isolated individuals.

Evaluation Atkinson's work is a valuable contribution to the study of suicide. He has indicated how coroners see and define particular deaths as suicide. And he has provided evidence to support his claims. However, there are two main criticisms of his research.

First, how come coroners appear to share the same common-sense theories of suicide? Where do the meanings they use to define suicide come from? Atkinson fails to answer these questions. For example, it could be argued that coroners' theories are derived from ideas about suicide in the wider culture.

Second, as Barry Hindess (1973) argues, if suicide statistics are simply based on the interpretations of coroners, then research findings are simply based on the interpretations of sociologists. In terms of Atkinson's logic, the interpretations of coroners are neither right nor wrong, they just are, and the same applies to the interpretations of sociologists.

According to Hindess, this means that there is no 'possibility of an objective knowledge of society'. If this is the case, sociologists may as well pack up and go home.

15.3 Suicide – a realist approach

This section looks at the work of the British sociologist Steve Taylor (1982, 1988). Taylor draws on both Durkheim's realist perspective and the interpretivist approaches of Douglas and Atkinson.

Like Durkheim, Taylor adopts a realist perspective. He argues that sociologists should look for the 'underlying, unobservable structures and causal processes' which lie behind suicide acts. However, he parts company from Durkheim, claiming that 'official suicide rates are a most inappropriate source of data for sociological research'.

Taylor agrees with Douglas that the case study – studies of particular suicide acts – is the most appropriate research method for studying suicide. He argues that suicide cannot be understood 'without reference to the actor's intentions' and their immediate social situations. And this means examining individual cases. However, he parts company with Douglas's implication and Atkinson's claim that suicide is simply a social construction – a meaning which develops from social interaction. People do kill themselves. And it is the sociologist's job to explain their actions.

Persons under trains

Around five people a month die under London Transport

activity30 interpreting suicide

Item A Terminal illness



A young man jumps to his death suffering from an incurable disease.

Item B Salvation

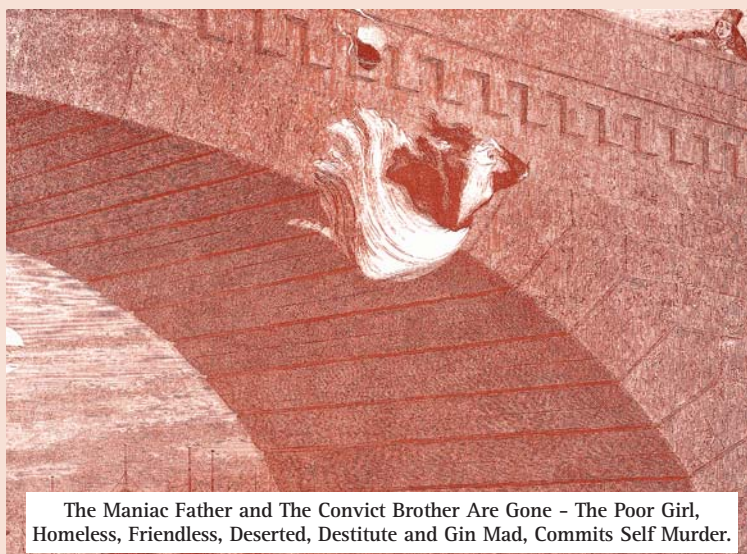


A young woman burns to death praying for forgiveness for her sins.

Item C Reasons for suicide

A young man killed himself because his bride of four months wanted a divorce so she could marry his brother. He left a message to his wife which began, 'I used to love you, but I die hating you and my brother too'. The day before he died, he said to his wife and brother, 'I can do you more harm dead than alive'.

Source: Douglas, 1967

Item D Contemplating suicide**Item E Homeless, friendless, deserted**

The Maniac Father and The Convict Brother Are Gone - The Poor Girl, Homeless, Friendless, Deserted, Destitute and Gin Mad, Commits Self Murder.

questions

- 1 Which of Douglas's types of suicide do Items A, B and C illustrate?
- 2 How does Item D illustrate 'typical suicide deaths'?
- 3 How does Item E indicate a 'typical suicide biography'?

trains. London Transport keeps records of each case and files them under 'People under Trains'. Taylor (1982) studied 32 cases, 17 of which resulted in a verdict of suicide. He attended inquests in coroner's courts in order to discover how these verdicts were reached. His evidence shows that coroners focused on the following aspects of the deceased.

State of mind Coroners call one or two witnesses who knew the dead person. If they indicate that the deceased was depressed, anxious or withdrawn, this was seen as a possible reason for suicide. In general, the closer the witness to the deceased, the more likely they were to resist a suggestion of suicide. For example, one witness insisted that his brother had nothing 'preying on his mind'.

Mental and physical health Coroners tend to see suicide as a result of mental or physical illness. There were eight cases where people had been patients in mental hospitals – seven were recorded as suicides. There were two cases of severe physical illness – both were recorded as suicides.

Social problems Coroners looked for social problems – marital difficulties, failing careers, financial problems. On their own, these were not seen as sufficient causes for suicide. However, combined with negative states of mind

or serious illness, they may well be seen as a reason for suicide.

Life history Coroners looked for evidence of a broken home, a failure to form lasting relationships, drug taking and crime. Again, on their own, these were not sufficient for a suicide verdict.

Conclusion Taylor argues that coroners attempt to reconstruct a suicide biography on the basis of their beliefs about the likely causes of suicide. If the deceased fits, then a verdict of suicide is likely.

However, Taylor rejects Atkinson's view that suicide is nothing more than a social construction based on coroners' definitions and meanings. Instead, he argues that these meanings produce a systematic bias in official statistics. As a result, deaths officially defined as suicides are an unrepresentative sample. We should therefore be highly sceptical of the reliability and validity of suicide rates. In view of this, sociologists should look to alternative sources of data for studying suicide.

A realist theory of suicide

Steve Taylor (1982) developed a theory of suicide based on case studies. Using a range of specific cases from a variety

of sources, he attempted to discover the underlying causes of suicide.

Defining suicide acts The main sociological studies of suicide have focused on ‘genuine’ and ‘successful’ suicides – on people who actually killed themselves. Taylor argues for a broader definition. He notes that the vast majority of suicides fall between two extremes.

- At one extreme are people who are determined to die and make every effort to kill themselves.
- At the other extreme are those who make suicidal gestures and ensure there is little chance of death.

Suicide acts are not simply aimed at death. For example, they may be designed to communicate the person’s feelings to others with a real possibility of survival.

Taylor argues that a wider definition of suicide is needed in order to explain the broad spectrum of suicidal behaviour. He therefore defines a suicide act as ‘any deliberate act of self-damage, or potential self-damage, where the individual cannot be sure of survival’ (Taylor, 1988).

Taylor’s realist theory argues that the *underlying* motivation for suicidal behaviour arises from imbalances in individuals’ sense of their own identity and in their relationships with others.

Certainty and uncertainty Taylor argues that for an individual to lead a normal life – that is without thoughts of suicide – they require a balance between certainty and uncertainty about themselves and the world around them. Certainty is about stability and the predictability of events, uncertainty is about change and the unexpected. Taylor hypothesises that suicide is more likely in situations of complete certainty and complete uncertainty.

Submissive suicides/certainty suicides Taylor uses the term *submissive suicide* to refer to suicide acts where the individual feels they know everything worth knowing. They are *certain* about the future – there is no hope, no light at the end of the tunnel. In one sense they are already dead, life is already over.

Suicide acts which stem from certainty are wholehearted, determined attempts to die. The individual is ‘embracing death from a firm conviction that nothing further remains in life’. For example, a 62-year-old woman with a terminal illness said, ‘I’m through, I’m whipped. I can’t take it any longer. I will not die a lingering death’. And an elderly widower who committed suicide to rejoin his dead wife felt that without her he was dead.

Thanatation/uncertainty suicide Uncertainty suicides, which Taylor calls Thanatation, are the opposite end of the spectrum from submissive suicides. The individual is tortured by uncertainty – about themselves, their identity, what others think about them and the meaning of their existence. They feel that it’s impossible to go on living until this uncertainty is resolved. The individual demands an answer from suicide to reveal whether they are intended to go on living.

Suicide acts which stem from complete uncertainty are a gamble with life. For example, the poet Sylvia Plath

deliberately drove her car off the road knowing it *might* kill her. She survived and felt validated, qualified to live – she felt really alive. Similarly, the novelist Graham Greene felt exhilarated when he survived a game of Russian roulette – ‘I remember an extraordinary sense of jubilation, as if carnival lights had been switched on in a dark drab street’.

Ectopia and inner-directed suicides Thanatation and submissive suicide result from a state of mind which Taylor calls ectopic. It involves a psychological detachment or moral insulation from the feelings, opinions and actions of others. Sylvia Plath described her sense of detachment as being trapped in a bell jar. In a famous case study of suicide, Ellen West says, ‘I feel excluded from all real life. I sit in a glass ball’.

In cases of submissive suicide, this detachment means that others cannot dissuade the individual from what they already know – they cannot shake their certainty. And in Thanatation, detachment means that others cannot tell the individual what they want to know – they cannot remove their uncertainty. Detachment means that Thanatation and submissive suicide are inner-directed acts. They are private and self-contained since those concerned have no sense of attachment to others.

Taylor argues that suicide acts result from ‘a *combination* of detachment from others *and* uncertainty about one’s existence, *or* a certainty that one’s life is over’.

Symphysis and other-directed suicides In situations which Taylor calls symphysic, suicide acts are directed by an overriding attachment to others. The individual has no real existence apart from others, requiring their love and respect as a basis for their sense of self.

Suicide acts directed by symphysic situations are other-directed – they are a communication to somebody. There are two types – appeal suicides and sacrifice suicides.

Appeal suicides These are a cry for help to those to whom they are strongly attached. Appeal suicides are accompanied by considerable uncertainty – the individual has serious doubts about the significance of their existence to others. Appeal suicides are often preceded by warnings, threats and pleas. To end the uncertainty, the individual gambles with their life.

Appeal suicide is illustrated by the following case study. A 19-year-old girl was having an affair with a married man. When he returned to his pregnant wife, she became very distressed and took an overdose of barbiturates. She wandered out on to the street and was taken to hospital. Later, when asked if she intended to kill herself, she said, ‘I don’t know. Not really I suppose, but I couldn’t see any other way of getting through to him.’

Sacrifice suicides Like appeal suicides, sacrifice suicides are directed by a powerful attachment to others. However in this case, there is no uncertainty. The individual is certain that they have no alternative to suicide – they are therefore determined to kill themselves. They have either done something which makes it impossible to live with a person to whom they are deeply attached. Or, the other

person has done something to them which completely destroys the relationship.

Taylor illustrates sacrifice suicide with the example, given in Activity 31, of the young man whose wife of four months wanted a divorce so that she could marry his brother. He loved and trusted both his wife and his brother. He saw no way of repairing his relationships with either of them. In his words, left in a note, 'I sentence myself to die for having been fool enough to ever have loved anyone as contemptible as my wife has proven to be'.

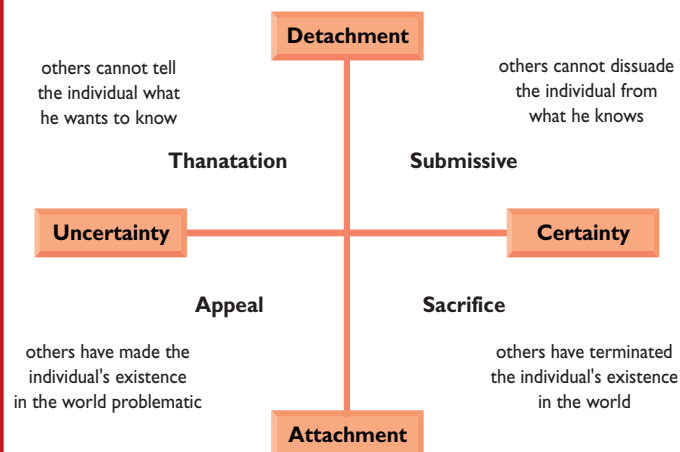
Conclusion and evaluation

Steve Taylor has taken a realist approach which seeks to reveal the 'underlying rules of suicidal action'. He tries to show how a wide and complex variety of suicide acts result from four 'general states of meaning' – a sense of certainty or uncertainty and a sense of attachment to others or detachment from others. The four possible combinations of these states of meaning result in four types of suicide – Thanatation, submissive, appeal and sacrifice. This is shown in Figure 8.

Evaluation Taylor's theory has the advantage of covering both completed and attempted suicide. It includes the contribution of others to the suicide act and the communication to others of the intention to commit suicide. His theory is comprehensive in the sense that it claims to cover all types of suicide.

Taylor identifies two main problems with his research (Taylor, personal communication, 2004). First, case studies do not provide a representative sample of suicide acts. Second, he fails to develop his theory to include the wider society. To move to the societal level of causality, Taylor needs to ask what kinds of society produce high levels of certainty and uncertainty, attachment and detachment. Including the wider society would complete his theoretical model.

Figure 8 Taylor's theory of suicide



Source: Taylor, 1982

Despite these problems, Taylor has produced an elegant and original theory.

key terms

Submissive suicide A type of suicide that arises from certainty and detachment. The individual is certain that there is no hope for the future.

Thanatation A type of suicide that arises from uncertainty and detachment. The individual demands an answer from suicide to resolve their uncertainty.

Appeal suicide A type of suicide that arises from uncertainty and attachment. The individual has serious doubts about the significance of their life to others.

Sacrifice suicide A type of suicide that arises from certainty and attachment. A deep attachment has been broken and the individual is certain that they cannot live with this situation.

summary

1. On the basis of official statistics, Emile Durkheim found that suicide rates varied between different countries, between different groups within the same country and over time.
2. Durkheim identified four types of suicide, each of which is related to the level of integration or the level of regulation in society.
 - Altruistic suicide occurs when the level of integration is too strong.
 - Egoistic suicide occurs when the level of integration is too weak.
 - Fatalistic suicide occurs when the level of regulation is too strong.
 - Anomic suicide occurs when the level of regulation is too weak.
3. Durkheim claimed that both suicide rates and types of suicide were shaped by social facts – by the levels of integration and regulation in society.
4. Durkheim's methodology is usually seen as a realist approach. He looked for the invisible underlying causes of the relationships between the things he observed.
5. Critics argue that Durkheim paid insufficient attention to the validity and reliability of official statistics.
6. Positivists reject the realist view that causes can be found in underlying structures and processes that cannot be directly observed and measured.
7. From an interpretivist viewpoint, Jack Douglas argues that the first step in studying suicide is to interpret how individuals who commit suicide define and give meaning to their action.
8. Douglas argues that this is essential in order to classify suicides into types.
9. Douglas sees suicide statistics as the result of negotiated meanings within a complex series of social interactions.
10. J. Maxwell Atkinson states that suicide is simply a meaning and there is no reality beyond that meaning.
11. His research indicates that coroners have pictures of a 'typical suicide death' and a 'typical suicide biography'. The closer the death and the life history of the deceased to these pictures, the greater the likelihood of a suicide verdict.
12. Barry Hindess argues that the logic of Atkinson's methodology means that there is no 'possibility of an objective knowledge of society'.
13. Steve Taylor adopts a realist perspective, arguing that sociologists should look for the 'underlying, unobservable structures and causal processes' which lie behind suicide acts.
14. Taylor agrees with Douglas that the case study is the most appropriate research method for studying suicide.
15. Taylor's theory argues that the underlying motivation for suicide acts arises from imbalances in individuals' sense of their own identity (too much certainty or too much uncertainty) and in their relationships with other (too much attachment to, or too much detachment from, others).
16. Taylor identifies two main problems with his research.
 - Case studies do not provide a representative sample of suicide acts.
 - He fails to develop his theory to include the wider society – for example, what kinds of society produce high levels of certainty or uncertainty.