

CRIME AND DEVIANCE KNOWLEDGE ORGANISERS

The information contained in this knowledge organiser pack is drawn from regularly-used research in material for AQA A Level Sociology, in the compulsory topic of Crime and Deviance. The studies used in this pack align with the tutor2u Crime and Deviance checklist. This constitutes neither compulsory studies that students must know, nor an exhaustive list: students may wish to use alternative sources that are available in the study of Crime and Deviance.

The knowledge organisers cover material set out in the AQA A Level Sociology specification, that was first used for teaching in 2015, and reflects following specification points:

3.3.1 Crime and Deviance

Students are expected to be familiar with sociological explanations of the following content:

- crime, deviance, social order and social control
- the social distribution of crime and deviance by ethnicity, gender and social class, including recent patterns and trends in crime
- globalisation and crime in contemporary society; the media and crime; green crime; human rights and state crimes
- crime control, surveillance, prevention and punishment, victims, and the role of the criminal justice system and other agencies.

Functionalists see society as based on shared norms and values (a value consensus), which help keep society stable. Crime and deviance, while seen as potentially disruptive, are also seen as having some positive functions.

Key terms associated with functionalism:

Anomie: A state of normlessness where society's norms break down, leading to deviant behaviour.

Collective conscience: Shared values and norms that create social order and unity in society.

Boundary maintenance: The way crime and punishment reinforce what is right and wrong in society.

Adaptations to strain: The different ways people respond to the gap between cultural goals and the means to achieve them, e.g. conformity or innovation.

Strain theory: The idea that crime occurs when individuals can't achieve society's goals through legitimate means.

Status frustration: Feelings of failure and resentment when working-class boys can't achieve success in school, leading to deviant subcultures.

Alternative status hierarchy: A different value system in a subculture where deviant acts gain respect.

Illegitimate opportunity structure: Different types of criminal opportunities available in different areas, such as criminal, conflict, or retreatist subcultures.

Focal concerns: Key values in working-class male culture, like toughness or excitement, that may lead to deviance.

Durkheim – Crime is Inevitable and Functional

Crime is a normal part of society; it exists in every society and serves important functions:

- **Boundary maintenance** - crime reminds us of society's values when people are punished (e.g. through media coverage of court cases).
- **Adaptation and change** - deviance can lead to positive social change (e.g. suffragettes).
- Too much or too little crime is unhealthy - a small amount is necessary.

Polsky – Safety Valve

Crime can be harmlessly expressing desires – e.g. pornography may prevent sexual crimes by providing an outlet.

Davis – Prostitution as a Safety Valve

Like Polsky, argued prostitution acts as a safety valve to prevent breakdown of the nuclear family by providing a sexual outlet.

Miller - Focal Concerns

Working-class boys are socialised into deviant values ("focal concerns") such as toughness, excitement, and trouble. This leads to deviant behaviour without needing to feel strain or status frustration.

Merton – Strain Theory

Crime results from a **strain** between **goals** (e.g. financial success) and the **means** to achieve them.

Not everyone can achieve success through legitimate means – so people respond in different ways (known as deviant adaptation to strain):

- **Conformity** - Conforming to social goals and means of achieving them
- **Innovation** - Adopting illegitimate means to achieve social goals
- **Ritualism** - Maintaining legitimate means, but understanding that they are unable to achieve social goals.
- **Retreatism** - Rejecting both social goals and legitimate means
- **Rebellion** - Replacing social goals with alternatives, adopting whatever means necessary to achieve these new goals.

Innovation can explain working-class crime - turning to crime due to blocked opportunities. It can also explain corporate or white-collar crimes where individuals and companies bend rules to achieve financial success.

Cohen - Status Frustration

Focuses on working-class boys who experience failure in education and **status frustration**. They form delinquent subcultures which reverse mainstream norms (e.g. praise for vandalism), gaining status in their own peer group.

Cloward and Ohlin – Subcultural Strain Theory

Agreed with Merton but argued not everyone has access to the same illegitimate opportunities.

Identified three types of deviant subcultures:

- **Criminal** – organised crime, professional crime
- **Conflict** – gang violence
- **Retreatist** – drugs, alcohol (those who fail in both legitimate and illegitimate opportunities)

Exam Gold: Both Cloward and Ohlin and Cohen draw upon ideas of Merton, showing the effectiveness of Merton's ideas.

Both classic and neo-Marxists see crime as linked to capitalism—either as a product of inequality and exploitation (classic Marxism) or as a form of resistance, identity, and media construction (neo-Marxism). They argue that the law serves ruling-class interests, while the working class is over-policed and criminalised.

Key terms associated with Marxism and Neo-Marxism:

Criminogenic capitalism: The idea that the capitalist system causes crime because it creates inequality, greed, and poverty.

White-collar crime: Crimes committed by the powerful and wealthy, often in business or finance, like fraud or tax evasion.

Selective law enforcement: When the law is applied more harshly to the working class than to the ruling class.

Ideological function of law: Laws that appear to protect everyone but actually serve ruling class interests (e.g. property laws).

False consciousness: When the working class accept the system as fair, not realising it's set up to benefit the rich.

Fully social theory of deviance: A theory that combines structure (like class inequality) and agency (individual choices) to explain crime.

Voluntarism: The view that people choose to commit crime as a meaningful response to their situation, not just because of poverty.

Hegemony: The dominance of ruling class ideas, which shape how we see crime and justice in society.

Gordon - Criminogenic Capitalism

Gordon argues that crime is a natural outcome (or '**criminogenic**') feature of capitalist society. Capitalism's competitive, individualistic, and profit-driven structure creates conditions where people feel pressure to break the law—whether that's working-class theft, middle-class fraud, or corporate crime. He also argues that crime diverts attention from the real problem: capitalism itself.

Chambliss - The Law Protects Capitalist Interests

Chambliss found that **laws are primarily designed to protect private property**, which benefits the capitalist class. His research in Seattle showed that while street-level criminals were heavily punished, wealthy corporate offenders involved in racketeering escaped prosecution due to their connections and resources.

Snider - Selective Law Enforcement

Snider argued that governments are hesitant to pass laws that regulate capitalist enterprises, even when they pollute the environment, exploit workers, or put lives at risk. This is because powerful corporations provide jobs, investment, and taxes - so states are reluctant to offend them.

Box - The Ideological Role of Law

Box extended this idea by showing how many deaths and injuries caused by companies (e.g. unsafe working conditions) are not treated as criminal, but as accidents or civil matters. This means powerful groups avoid the label of 'criminal', while working-class individuals are punished more harshly. He believed that the law functions ideologically presenting capitalism as fair, even though it protects elites and punishes the poor.

Taylor, Walton and Young - Fully Social Theory of Deviance

They criticised traditional Marxism for being too deterministic, suggesting instead that we should analyse the social causes, meanings, and reactions to crime. Their "fully social theory" includes examining the background of the offender, the purpose of the act, and societal reactions (e.g. labelling by police or media).

They saw crime as sometimes a conscious, political response to inequality, such as theft as a rejection of consumer capitalism or gang crime as resistance to marginalisation.

Hall et al. - Moral Panics and Crisis of Capitalism

In *Policing the Crisis* (1978), Hall and colleagues showed how the media created a **moral panic** about black youth 'muggers' in 1970s Britain. This fed public fear and justified more aggressive policing, especially in inner-city areas. They argued that this panic helped distract attention from an economic crisis and divided the working class along racial lines, protecting capitalism during a time of instability.

Gilroy - Myth of Black Criminality

Gilroy claimed that the idea of black people being more criminal is a myth fuelled by racist policing and media stereotypes. He saw some forms of **black youth crime as a political act**, rooted in historical resistance to colonialism and present-day oppression. He argued that criminal justice policies are biased, and that **black resistance is criminalised** rather than understood.

Exam Gold: Marxist and Neo-Marxists explanations can be applied to both social class and ethnic differences in offending and victimisation.

Interactionists focus on the **social construction of deviance**. Rather than assuming that deviance is caused by biology or social background, they argue that deviance is created by labelling, stereotypes and societal reactions. What matters most is who defines an act as deviant, who gets labelled, and how people respond to that label.

Key terms associated with Interactionism and Crime

Labelling: The process by which individuals are identified and named as deviant by society or those in authority.

Deviant career: The progression into further deviance after someone is labelled, often due to exclusion and limited opportunities.

Master status: A label that becomes the main way others see a person, overshadowing all other identities.

Self-fulfilling prophecy: When someone internalises a label and begins to act in the way society expects them to.

Moral entrepreneurs: People or groups who campaign to label certain behaviours as deviant.

Primary deviance: Small acts of deviance that often go unnoticed and don't affect a person's self-image.

Secondary deviance: Deviance that results from being labelled, which may lead to stigma and further criminal behaviour.

Societal reaction: The way society, including police and courts, responds to deviance, often influencing how deviance continues.

Negotiation of justice: The idea that outcomes in the criminal justice system can depend on a person's appearance, class, or manner.

Moral panic: A wave of public concern sparked by media exaggeration, often leading to harsher social control.

Becker – Labelling Theory

Becker argued that no act is inherently deviant—it only becomes deviant when labelled as such by powerful social actors like the police, media, or moral entrepreneurs. Once labelled, individuals may internalise the label and adopt a **deviant master status**. This process can lead to **secondary deviance**, where the label influences how others treat the person, making it harder to live a normal life and pushing them into a deviant career.

Lemert - Primary and Secondary Deviance

Lemert made an important distinction: **primary deviance** refers to small acts of rule-breaking that go unnoticed and aren't labelled - like underage drinking or minor theft. But when deviance is publicly labelled, the person may feel stigmatised, leading to **secondary deviance** where the individual adopts a deviant identity. This helps explain why formal punishment can make deviance worse, by turning casual rule-breakers into committed offenders through **self-fulfilling prophecy**.

Jock Young - Deviancy Amplification

Young applied labelling theory to the 1960s drug-using hippie culture in London. Initially, drug use was a minor part of their identity, but when the media and police cracked down, it led to increased group solidarity, rejection of mainstream society, and more drug use - a process called **deviancy amplification**. His work shows how attempts to control deviance can actually increase it, especially when the media sensationalises a moral panic.

Exam Gold: Interactionist theories can be applied to the role of the media and explain how marginalised groups are more likely to be perceived as deviant in society.

Aaron Cicourel – Negotiation of Justice

Cicourel found that police and probation officers used **typifications** - stereotypes of what a *typical delinquent* looks like - to decide who to stop, charge or release. Working-class and ethnic minority youths were more likely to be arrested and labelled, while middle-class youths could use their language skills and parents' support to negotiate their way out of trouble. This shows that justice is not neutral, but negotiated and class-biased.

Stan Cohen - Folk Devils and Moral Panics (1972)

Cohen studied the 1960s clashes between Mods and Rockers and showed how the media exaggerated these events into a **moral panic**, labelling young people as dangerous "**folk devils**." The public outcry led to increased policing, harsher punishments, and more deviant behaviour - a classic case of **deviancy amplification**. He argued that the media plays a central role in shaping public fear, influencing how society defines deviance, and justifying stronger social control. His work remains relevant in how youth subcultures, ethnic groups, or protesters are represented today.

David Matza - Techniques of Neutralisation and Drift

Matza argued that delinquents are not fully committed to deviant values. Instead, they **drift** between conformity and deviance, often justifying their actions using **techniques of neutralisation**, such as denial of responsibility, denial of injury, or appeal to higher loyalties. This challenges the idea of criminals as wholly different - instead, many people occasionally offend but still see themselves as essentially decent.

Realist theories of crime emerged in the 1980s, with Left Realists focusing on the structural causes of crime, such as inequality, relative deprivation, and marginalisation, and advocating for reforms in policing and social policy to address these issues. In contrast, Right Realists blame crime on individual moral failings, poor socialisation, and weak policing, advocating for tougher punishments and zero-tolerance policies.

Key terms associated with Realism and Crime

Relative deprivation: The feeling of being unfairly disadvantaged compared to others, which can lead to resentment and crime.

Marginalisation: When certain groups are pushed to the edge of society, lacking power and voice, which may lead to deviance.

Subculture: A group with its own norms and values that may encourage or justify criminal behaviour.

Square of crime: A model showing that crime must be understood through interactions between the offender, victim, state, and public.

Community-based policing: Policing strategies that involve working closely with local communities to prevent crime.

Socialisation of the underclass: The belief that poor socialisation, especially in lone-parent families, leads to criminal values.

Rational choice theory: The view that criminals weigh up the risks and rewards before choosing to offend.

Broken windows theory: The idea that ignoring minor signs of disorder leads to more serious crime and antisocial behaviour.

Zero tolerance policing: A strict approach to crime that involves cracking down on all types of deviance, no matter how small.

Lea and Young - The Three Causes of Crime

Left Realists Lea and Young identified three key causes of crime:

1. **Relative Deprivation** - People feel deprived when they compare themselves to others in consumer society, which can create resentment and lead to crime.
2. **Subculture** - Some groups develop deviant values that justify criminal behaviour as a solution to deprivation (e.g. violence, drug use).
3. **Marginalisation** - People without power, voice, or representation (like unemployed youth) are more likely to feel frustration, which may be expressed through criminal acts.

Together, these conditions create social exclusion.

Young - Late Modernity and Crime

Young argues that crime has become worse in late modern societies. Individualism, consumerism, and inequality have grown, increasing feelings of relative deprivation. At the same time, social control has weakened, and the media encourages a culture of envy and greed.

Solutions - Democratic Policing and Social Policy

Left Realists argue that the police are often distrusted by ethnic minorities and the working class, which reduces cooperation. They call for **democratic policing** - making the police more accountable and focused on community needs. They also support wider social policies to tackle unemployment, housing inequality, and poor education - reducing the root causes of crime, not just the symptoms. This is called - social and community prevention

Wilson and Kellings - Broken Windows Theory

They argued that visible signs of disorder, like graffiti or vandalism, send the message that no one cares – encouraging more crime. If minor crime goes unpunished, it leads to more serious offences. They argued for a **zero-tolerance approach**, where even small crimes are dealt with harshly to restore order in communities.

Rational Choice Theory - Cornish and Clarke

Right Realists believe people choose to commit crime when the **rewards outweigh the risks**. If people think they can get away with it, they're more likely to offend. To reduce crime, they argue for harsher penalties, more CCTV, and a visible police presence to deter criminal behaviour.

Murray - Underclass and Welfare Dependency

Murray blamed crime on the rise of a **"new rabble"** underclass, especially lone-parent families and welfare-dependent households. He claimed that poor socialisation, especially a lack of male role models, leads to children growing up without discipline, respect or work ethic. For Murray, the solution is to cut welfare, reduce dependency, and promote traditional family values to improve behaviour.

Wilson and Herrnstein - Biological Factors

Wilson and Herrnstein argue that criminal behaviour is influenced by both biological factors and social environment. They suggest that individuals with low self-control and a tendency towards impulsivity are more likely to engage in criminal activity, emphasizing that crime is often a result of personal choices rather than just social or economic factors.

Social class plays a significant role in both offending and victimisation, with individuals from lower social classes more likely to be both perpetrators and victims of crime. Various sociological theories attempt to explain these patterns, focusing on factors such as economic inequality, cultural attitudes, and the role of law enforcement. Below are some key explanations for these class-based differences.

Key terms associated with social class and crime

Social class - A category of people who share a similar economic and social position, often linked to income, occupation, and education.

Working-class crime - Crimes that are more commonly committed by individuals from working-class backgrounds, often linked to poverty, lack of opportunities, and social strain.

White-collar crime - Crimes committed by individuals from higher social classes, typically in professional settings, such as fraud, embezzlement, or tax evasion.

Street crime - Typically associated with lower social classes, involving crimes like theft, robbery, and violence that occur in public spaces.

Relative deprivation - The feeling of being deprived compared to others, which can lead to criminal behaviour, often linked to lower social classes.

Victimisation - The experience of being harmed, affected, or exploited by a crime. Patterns of victimisation are often influenced by social class.

Fear of crime - The perception that one may become a victim of crime, which is often higher among lower social classes due to higher rates of victimisation.

Social exclusion - When individuals or groups are marginalized, often due to their social class, making them more vulnerable to crime and victimisation.

Subcultural Attitudes (Cohen, Cloward & Ohlin)

Explanation: Working-class youth often experience **status frustration** due to failure in the education system. In response, they form subcultures with values that reject mainstream society's norms, which can lead to deviant behaviour like gang involvement or petty crime. Additionally, areas of deprivation offer **illegitimate opportunities** to obtain status and achieve social goals.

Miller (Focal Concerns)

Explanation: Miller's theory argues that working-class culture has a distinct set of **focal concerns** (e.g. toughness, risk-taking, excitement) that may encourage deviant behaviour. These values are passed down through generations and can lead to criminal activity, especially among young males.

Newburn and Rock

Explanation: Newburn and Rock argue that social class differences in crime are not just a result of individual choices but also due to wider structural factors like social inequality, poverty, and discrimination. They emphasise the role of societal factors in shaping criminal behaviour. Structural inequalities are at the root of class differences in crime, with poorer individuals being more likely to engage in criminal activities to survive.

Strain Theory (Merton)

Explanation: Merton's strain theory suggests that crime is the result of a strain between culturally approved goals (e.g. success, wealth) and the means available to achieve them. Those in lower social classes may resort to deviant or criminal means (like theft) to achieve success when legitimate opportunities are blocked.

Sutherland (Differential Association Theory)

Explanation: Sutherland's differential association theory suggests that criminal behaviour is learned through interactions with others. People, especially from lower social classes, learn values, techniques, and motivations for crime from those around them in their social environment. However, this can also be applied to workplace cultures, where the competitive nature of capitalism can lead to people breaking the rules to maximise profits and improve their status within social class strata.

Relative Deprivation (Lea & Young)

Explanation: Crime occurs when people feel relative deprivation which is the belief that they are unfairly disadvantaged compared to others. Those in lower social classes are more likely to experience relative deprivation, which can lead to frustration and criminal behaviour. Inequality in society increases the likelihood of crime, as people feel deprived of resources, opportunities, or status.

Selective Law Enforcement (Chambliss, Reiman)

Explanation: Law enforcement is often selective, focusing more on street crimes committed by working-class individuals rather than white-collar or corporate crimes. This results in higher rates of arrests and convictions among the lower classes. The criminal justice system disproportionately targets working-class offenders, leading to over-representation in crime statistics.

Exam Gold: Working-class individuals are most likely to be labelled as criminal and can also be used.

Sociologists have long debated the reasons for apparent ethnic differences in rates of offending and victimisation. Some explanations focus on social and economic inequality, cultural differences, and the impact of racism, while others argue that statistics can be misleading or biased due to discriminatory policing and stereotyping. The following explanations highlight key theories, studies, and policies that help us make sense of the complex relationship between ethnicity and crime.

Key terms associated with ethnicity and crime

Institutional Racism: Systematic disadvantage built into the structures and practices of institutions like the police.

Canteen Culture: Informal police culture that includes shared racist and sexist attitudes.

Stop and Search: A policing practice disproportionately used against Black and Asian people.

Myth of Black Criminality: The idea that Black people are unfairly labelled as more criminal than they really are.

Exclusion (School): When students, often from ethnic minorities, are removed from school, increasing risk of criminal involvement.

Over-Policing: Excessive surveillance and intervention by police in certain communities.

Under-Policing: Lack of attention by police to crimes affecting certain groups, such as hate crimes against minorities.

Hate Crime: A crime motivated by hostility towards someone's race, ethnicity, religion, or other identity.

Macpherson Report: A 1999 investigation into the police handling of Stephen Lawrence's murder, identifying institutional racism.

Lammy Review: A 2017 report exposing racial bias in the criminal justice system in England and Wales.

Lea and Young (Left Realism)

Lea and Young argue that higher offending in some ethnic minority groups is linked to **relative deprivation**, **marginalisation**, and **subcultural responses**. These groups often face blocked opportunities, leading to frustration and some turning to crime for status or survival. However, they reject the idea that racism alone explains ethnic differences in crime, noting much crime is intra-ethnic (e.g. against others of same ethnicity).

Hall et al. (Neo-Marxism)

Hall et al. argue that the media portrayal of young Black men as muggers in the 1970s created a **moral panic**. This served to justify tougher policing and distract from the economic crisis, benefiting the state and capitalist system by turning attention away from rising unemployment and inequality.

Gilroy (Neo-Marxism)

Gilroy claims that ethnic minority crime is often a form of **resistance to racism and colonial oppression**, not just deviance. He argues that the idea of Black criminality is a myth, shaped by racist media and police practices that exaggerate the threat from Black communities.

Bowling and Phillips

Bowling and Phillips show that **discriminatory policing** contributes to the over-representation of Black people in crime stats. Black individuals are more likely to be stopped, searched, arrested and charged, though self-report surveys show similar levels of offending across groups.

Samson and Phillips

Samson and Phillips highlight the serious **psychological effects of racist victimisation**, including hate crimes, which are often underreported. Victims may fear they won't be believed or taken seriously, and entire communities can feel the emotional impact.

Macpherson Report (1999)

Following Stephen Lawrence's murder, the report found the police to be **institutionally racist**, with procedures and attitudes that disadvantaged ethnic minorities. It made 70 recommendations for change, including training and better community engagement.

Lammy Review (2017)

This review found clear evidence of racial bias in the justice system, including harsher sentencing and lower trust from minority groups. Labour MP David Lammy called for more fairness, transparency, and better representation to tackle these inequalities.

Waddington et al.

Waddington et al. argue that **stop and search** disproportionality may reflect where police patrol, not intentional racism. Still, the result is unequal treatment, with ethnic minorities more likely to be targeted and criminalised.

Exam Gold: Social class and ethnicity are often **intersectional** - which means that many social class explanations can be applied to ethnic groups that are in the lower social class (e.g. Black Caribbean men) so you can use labelling theory and strain theory as long as they are applied to demands of question.

Gender differences in crime can be explained through a range of sociological theories, including control theory, sex-role socialisation, and ideas around masculinity and femininity. While women are often seen to offend less due to greater social control and lenient treatment by the justice system, some men commit crime as a way of expressing masculinity, especially when legitimate opportunities are blocked.

Key terms associated with gender and crime

Social Control: Women are more tightly controlled by families, schools, and communities, reducing their chances to offend.

Class and Gender Deals: Women avoid crime if they believe they'll gain rewards from work and family; when these are denied, crime becomes more likely.

Chivalry Thesis: The idea that women are treated more leniently by the justice system due to traditional gender stereotypes.

Liberation Thesis: As women gain equality, they also commit more male-type crimes due to increased opportunity and confidence.

Hegemonic Masculinity: A culturally dominant form of masculinity that values toughness and control, which some men express through crime.

Bodily Capital: Using physical strength or appearance as a resource to gain respect or power, especially in male-dominated spaces like security work.

Net Widening: A process where more people are brought under criminal justice control due to expanded definitions of criminal behaviour.

Sex-Role Theory: Gender differences in crime are explained by early childhood socialisation into traditional male and female roles.

Heidensohn - Control Theory

Heidensohn argues that women commit less crime because they are subject to more social control than men at home, in public, and at work. Girls are often supervised more strictly by family and discouraged from risky or criminal behaviour, while adult women may be controlled by responsibilities of domestic life.

Carlen - Gender and Class Deals

Carlen studied working-class women and found they conform to crime-free lives when offered two "deals": the **class deal** (material rewards from working) and the **gender deal** (emotional rewards from family life). When these deals break down, due to poverty, abuse, or exclusion, some women turn to crime.

Pollak - Chivalry Thesis

Pollack argues that the criminal justice system is influenced by chivalrous attitudes, with male police and judges more likely to treat women leniently. Women may receive shorter sentences, be more likely to be cautioned, or have their actions excused due to stereotypes of femininity.

Adler - Liberation Thesis

Adler suggests that as women become more liberated and equal to men in society, they also commit more male-type crime such as violence and white-collar crime. However, critics argue that most female offending is still minor and doesn't reflect true equality.

Messerschmidt - Hegemonic Masculinity

Messerschmidt argues that men commit crime to "do masculinity," especially when legitimate means (like work success) are blocked. Hegemonic masculinity involves being tough, dominant and successful and for some working-class men, crime provides a way to express this identity.

Winlow - Bodily Capital

In post-industrial areas where traditional male jobs have declined, Winlow found that some men turn to night-time economies (e.g. security work) where violence and physical strength become valuable. Here, bodily capital - having a strong, threatening physique - is used to gain respect and status.

Young - Net Widening

Young discusses how changes in policing and social policy have "**widened the net**", meaning more people (especially women and young people) are drawn into the criminal justice system for low-level offences that were previously ignored or informally dealt with.

Parsons - Sex-Role Theory

Parsons argued that boys and girls are socialised differently - girls are taught to be passive and caring, while boys are encouraged to be aggressive and risk-taking. Boys lacking a male role model may turn to gangs or deviance to express masculinity.

Exam Gold: Questions on gender differences can often ask why men commit more crime, why women commit less crime, or why there is a perception of gender differences in criminality.

The media plays a huge role in how we understand crime. It can shape our perceptions, influence public fears, and even affect real-life criminal behaviour. Sociologists have studied both how crime is represented in the media and how media may cause or encourage crime.

Key terms associated with media and crime

News Values: Criteria journalists use to decide what crimes are “newsworthy,” often favouring dramatic, violent, and unusual stories.

Law of Opposites: The idea that media representations of crime are the opposite of real-life crime.

Age Fallacy

The media portrays criminals and victims as older and more middle-class than they actually are in real life.

Dramatic Fallacy: Media exaggerates the excitement and drama of crime, especially violent and sexual crimes, even though they’re statistically rare.

Class Fallacy: Media suggests most crime is committed by working-class people, underrepresenting white-collar and corporate crime.

Moral Panic: An exaggerated media response to a perceived threat to society’s values, leading to fear, overreaction, and often harsher control measures.

Folk Devil: A group labelled by the media as deviant and blamed for society’s problems during a moral panic.

Commodification of Crime

Turning crime and deviance into something marketable and trendy through fashion, media, and branding.

Cyber Crime: Crimes committed using digital technology or the internet, including hacking, online fraud, and cyberbullying.

Fictional Representations of Crime

- Media like TV dramas, films and crime novels often give us unrealistic images of crime.
- Felson talks about the “**age fallacy**” - criminals in the media are usually older, more middle-class, and more violent than real-life offenders.
- Crimes are shown as more dramatic and violent than they are in reality.
- This creates a “**law of opposites**” (**Surette**): media crime is the opposite of official stats—media shows sex and violent crime, but most real crimes are property-related.

Factual Representations of Crime

This refers to how crime is shown in news and true crime content.

- **News values (Galtung and Ruge):** journalists pick crime stories that are dramatic, unusual, involve elite people, or can be simplified.
- These values distort reality, overemphasising violent and sexual crimes, which are rare.
- **Ditton and Duffy** found that 46% of media reports were about violent or sexual crimes, even though they made up only 3% of actual crimes.

Commodification of Crime

Crime has become a product to sell—through films, fashion, music, etc.

- **Fenwick and Hayward:** crime is marketed as cool, exciting, and a source of identity (e.g. gang culture in music videos or branded hoodies glamorising deviance).
- This links to consumer culture—people are encouraged to “buy into” rebellious or deviant identities.

Moral Panics and Folk Devils

Sometimes, media creates moral panics—exaggerated fears about groups seen as a threat to social order.

- **S. Cohen (1972)** studied mods and rockers. The media exaggerated fights between the two youth subcultures, creating “**folk devils**” and **moral panics**.
- The media labels groups as dangerous, which can lead to harsher policing and even self-fulfilling prophecies.
- **S. Cohen and Young** argue that news isn’t just reported - **it’s manufactured**, through selection and framing.

Media as a Cause of Crime

Some sociologists argue the media can directly or indirectly cause crime, especially among young people.

Ways media might encourage crime:

- **Imitation** (copycat behaviour)
- **Desensitisation to violence**
- **Consumerism** and pressure to buy goods—especially when people can’t afford them legally

Gerbner and Gross (Cultivation Theory): heavy exposure to media violence can make people believe the world is more dangerous than it is (**mean world syndrome**).

Cyber Crime

The rise of the internet has created new types of crime.

Wall identifies 4 types of cybercrime:

- **Cyber-trespass (hacking, viruses)**
- **Cyber-deception and theft (fraud, identity theft)**
- **Cyber-pornography**
- **Cyber-violence (bullying, stalking, hate crimes)**

Media and the Construction of Crime

Hall et al: media can serve ruling class interests by creating moral panics to distract from problems like capitalism.

In the modern world, crime goes far beyond street-level offences. Sociologists now study how globalisation, corporate power, environmental issues, and human rights abuses are connected to crime on a much larger scale. These forms of crime often involve powerful institutions and cross national boundaries.

Key terms associated with crime in contemporary society

Globalisation: Growing interconnectedness of the world, impacting crime and law enforcement.

Organised Crime: Crime carried out by structured groups, often across borders.

Corporate Crime: Illegal acts committed by companies or their employees for profit.

TNCs: Transnational corporations that operate in multiple countries, often exploiting weaker laws.

State-Corporate Crime: Crimes committed jointly by governments and businesses.

Glocalisation: Global crime networks that operate through local connections.

Green Criminology: Study of harm to the environment, not limited to legal definitions.

Primary Green Crimes: Direct environmental destruction (e.g. air pollution).

Secondary Green Crimes: Crimes breaking environmental protection laws.

Zemiology: Study of social harm, whether legal or not.

Risk Society: A society increasingly concerned with human-made risks.

Exam Gold: When asked about globalisation and crime, focus on the features of globalisation and how they have led to different forms of crime in the 21st Century.

Globalisation and Crime

Globalisation refers to the growing interconnectedness of the world—economically, politically, and culturally. This has changed the nature of crime.

- **Castells:** Globalisation has led to a global criminal economy—worth over \$1 trillion annually - covering drug trafficking, cybercrime, smuggling, and sex tourism.
- **Glenny:** Highlights organised crime like the Russian Mafia growing after the fall of communism. He uses the term “*McMafia*” to describe capitalist-style organised crime groups.

Glocalisation and Organised Crime

Hobbs and Dunningham found that criminal networks operate locally but are linked globally (e.g. local drug dealers connected to international cartels). This is called **glocalisation**. These networks are flexible and entrepreneurial, often linked to legitimate businesses. This can be linked to **money laundering**.

Corporate Crime and TNCs (Transnational Corporations)

Corporate crimes are crimes committed by businesses or on behalf of businesses.

Tombs (Marxist): Corporate crime causes widespread harm, often more than street crime, but is under-policed and rarely punished.

Taylor (Marxist): Globalisation allows TNCs to exploit workers in developing countries, creating insecurity and encouraging criminal behaviour in both rich and poor nations.

Green Crime and Environmental Harm

Green crime focuses on harm to the environment, whether or not it's illegal under national laws.

- **Green criminology (White):** Crime should be defined as any harm to the environment and all creatures, not just what's legally criminal.
- **South** identifies:
 - **Primary green crimes:** Direct harm to the earth (e.g. deforestation, air pollution).
 - **Secondary green crimes:** Breaking rules meant to protect the environment (e.g. dumping toxic waste illegally).
- **Zemiology:** The study of social harms, not just legal offences—used in green criminology and to look at corporate and state harms.

Risk Society and Environmental Crime

Beck: We live in a risk society, where human-made risks (like climate change, nuclear power) dominate. Science and industry create new dangers that we can't fully control.

Crime and Violence in Contemporary Society

Winlow (Postmodernist): In late modern society, masculinity is expressed through violence and crime, especially in working-class communities. He studied bouncers involved in both legal and illegal activity, finding there were global networks that supplied local networks of criminality.

Invisibility of Corporate Crimes

Nelken: Corporate crime is under-policed and under-punished, often because the elite have the power to define what counts as crime. This includes crimes against the environment and consumers.

Different sociological perspectives offer contrasting views on state crime and human rights violations. Marxists and critical criminologists argue that state crimes often protect elite interests and should be defined by violations of human rights, while realists focus on how states maintain order and security - even if it means using force.

Key terms associated with state crimes and human rights violations.

State Crime: Illegal or deviant acts committed by or with the approval of state agencies.

Human Rights: Basic freedoms and protections that all people are entitled to, such as life, liberty, and education.

Spiral of Denial: A process where states deny, downplay or justify their involvement in human rights abuses.

Neutralisation Techniques:

Justifications used by offenders (including states) to excuse or deny responsibility for their crimes.

Crimes of Obedience: Harmful acts committed by individuals under orders or pressure from authority, often justified as “just following orders.”

State-Corporate Crime: Crime that occurs through the collaboration between governments and businesses to achieve shared goals.

Authoritarian States: Regimes where power is concentrated and political opposition is suppressed, often using violence or censorship.

Bureaucratic Routinisation: The process of turning harmful actions into everyday tasks through rules and procedures, making them seem normal.

Critical Criminology: An approach that focuses on power, inequality, and human rights, arguing that some laws protect the powerful and ignore state harms.

State-Corporate Crime

State-corporate crime refers to illegal or harmful actions that result from the cooperation between government agencies and private businesses. These crimes are often large-scale, involve powerful actors, and cause significant social harm - but they are rarely prosecuted because the state is both the actor and enforcer of the law.

Kramer and Michalowski: Define state-corporate crime as “criminal or deviant acts that result from the cooperation of state and corporate institutions.” This includes both:

- State-initiated corporate crime (when the state encourages or directs corporations to act illegally) and state-facilitated corporate crime (when the state fails to regulate corporate behaviour properly).

Examples:

- The Deepwater Horizon oil spill (2010): BP and the US government were both criticised for cost-cutting and lack of regulation, resulting in 11 deaths and massive environmental damage.

Tombs: Argues that state-corporate crimes are “normalised” and downplayed as accidents or technical failures, even when they are the result of negligence or profit-driven decisions.

The Schwendingers – A Human Rights Approach to State Crime

They argue that state crime should be defined by violations of human rights, not just by whether the act breaks a country’s laws. They propose that criminologists should adopt a universal definition of crime based on human rights standards, which allows scholars to criticise oppressive laws and regimes.

State Crime and Human Rights Violations

State crimes are illegal or deviant acts committed by, or with the approval of, the state. These include abuses of power that violate either national or international laws, often targeting vulnerable populations.

McLaughlin’s Four Categories of State Crime:

1. **Political crimes** – e.g. censorship, rigged elections, corruption.
2. **Crimes by security/police** – e.g. torture, genocide, unlawful killings.
3. **Economic crimes** – e.g. embezzlement, misuse of public funds, unfair contracts.
4. **Social and cultural crimes** – e.g. institutional racism, failure to provide healthcare, or repression of minority groups.

Cohen – Spiral of Denial and Human Rights Discourse

States use “neutralisation techniques” when accused of human rights violations:

1. **Denial:** “It didn’t happen.”
2. **Minimisation:** “It wasn’t that bad.”
3. **Justification:** “It was necessary for national security.”

Cohen borrows from **Sykes and Matza’s techniques of neutralisation**, originally developed to explain how individual offenders deny responsibility. These include:

- Denial of injury or victim
- Appeal to higher loyalties
- Denial of responsibility

He also argues that human rights are socially constructed - what counts as a “violation” can vary by time, culture, and political agenda.

Bauman - Modernity and the Holocaust

Bauman challenges the idea that the Holocaust was a breakdown of civilisation arguing that it was a product of modern society, e.g. industrial methods of extermination.

This section explores how society responds to crime through prevention, punishment, surveillance, and support for victims, and how these responses reflect broader social values, power structures, and inequalities. Below are some of the key studies in this area.

Key terms associated with prevention, punishment and surveillance

Situational Crime Prevention: Reducing crime by making it harder to commit (e.g. CCTV, locks).

Environmental Crime Prevention: Maintaining order to prevent crime (e.g. fixing “broken windows”).

Social and Community Prevention:

Tackling root causes of crime through education and support.

Retributive Justice: Punishment focused on revenge or suffering.

Restitutive Justice: Punishment aimed at repairing damage and restoring order.

Mass Incarceration: A system where large numbers of people are imprisoned, often from marginalised groups.

Restorative Justice: A process where offenders and victims meet to repair harm.

Surveillance: Monitoring individuals to prevent and control behaviour.

Panopticon: A prison design symbolising constant surveillance (Foucault).

Synoptic Surveillance: The idea that the many now watch the few (e.g. public filming police).

Actuarial Justice: Risk-based justice using statistics and profiling.

Synoptic Surveillance

Mathiesen: In the media age, surveillance is two-way- the public can also watch the powerful (e.g. filming police behaviour). The “many watch the few” as well as the “few watch the many”.

Situational Crime Prevention (Right Realist)

Focuses on reducing opportunities for crime through **target hardening** (e.g. locks, CCTV).

Clarke argues SCP is based on a rational choice theory - offenders weigh up risks and rewards.

Felson: The Port Authority Bus Terminal in NYC was redesigned (e.g. better lighting, no hidden areas), which reduced crime by removing opportunities.

Environmental Crime Prevention (Right Realist)

Linked to the **Broken Windows Theory** - small signs of disorder lead to more serious crime.

Wilson and Kelling: Argue visible signs of neglect (graffiti, vandalism) create a sense of lawlessness. Police must tackle minor crimes to prevent serious ones. Emphasises maintaining order and **zero tolerance policing**.

Social and Community Prevention (Left Realist)

Aims to tackle root causes of crime such as poverty, poor education, and lack of support. Invests in early intervention (e.g. Sure Start programmes) and community development. More long-term and social than SCP or ECP.

Functions of Punishment

Durkheim: Punishment reinforces social solidarity by expressing society’s moral outrage.

Two types:

- **Retributive justice** - harsh, vengeful punishment (traditional societies).
- **Restitutive justice** - repairing damage and restoring social order (modern societies).

Ruche and Kircheimer (Marxists)

Argue punishment reflects the economic interests of the ruling class - used to control labour. In capitalist societies, prisons are used to manage and discipline the working class.

Mass Incarceration

Garland: In the US, imprisonment has become political—used to manage poor and ethnic minority groups. Describes a shift towards “punitive” governance, especially post-1970s. Mass incarceration does not effectively reduce crime - it acts as social control.

Restorative Justice

Focuses on repairing harm by bringing victims and offenders together.

Braithwaite: “Reintegrative shaming” encourages offenders to take responsibility and reintegrate into society - less stigmatising than traditional punishment.

Foucault – Panopticism

Pre-modern punishment was public and physical (e.g. executions). Modern punishment involves discipline and surveillance, especially through institutions like prisons.

The Panopticon: A prison design where inmates never know if they are being watched—leads to self-surveillance.

Actuarial Justice

Feeley and Simon: Focus is shifting from punishing individuals to managing risks. Uses algorithms and profiling to predict and prevent crime (e.g. airport security checks). Justice becomes predictive rather than reactive.

The study of victims in sociology explores who is more likely to be victimised and how social factors like class, gender and ethnicity shape their experiences and access to justice. The criminal justice system and other agencies, such as the police and courts, play a key role in responding to crime, but research shows they may also reinforce inequalities through practices like institutional racism and discriminatory sentencing.

Key terms associated with victimology and the role of the CJS

Positivist Victimology:

Focus on victim characteristics and behaviours.

Critical Victimology:

Emphasises structural inequalities and power.

Ideal Victim:

A victim who fits society's idea of innocence and vulnerability.

Agencies of Social Control:

Organisations like police, courts and prisons that maintain order and enforce laws.

CJS Bias:

Evidence of racial disparities in policing and sentencing.

EXAM GOLD:

Both the role of the CJS and the reasons for victimisation can be seen through many other aspects of the crime and deviance specification. For example, the role of the CJS in gender differences is explored through the work of both Heidensohn and Pollak. Similarly the role of the police in zero tolerance policing, and the policies and practices that have led sociologists to conclude that the CJS is institutionally racist. Victims can be seen in many theories, especially those focusing on deprivation or risk-taking behaviours.

Positivist Victimology

- **Miers (1989)** outlines a positivist approach that seeks to identify patterns in victimisation, focusing on characteristics or behaviours that may make individuals more vulnerable (e.g. being out late, drinking, or associating with known offenders).
- This perspective is linked to the **victim precipitation theory**, where victims are seen as partly responsible for the crime against them (e.g. **Wolfgang found that in 26% of homicides, the victim had initiated the violence**).
- It has been heavily criticised for **victim-blaming**, ignoring wider social causes of victimisation such as poverty, domestic abuse, or structural power relations.

Critical Victimology

- **Mawby and Walklate** argue that victimhood should be understood in relation to power and inequality - for example, women, ethnic minorities, and the working class are more likely to suffer crimes but less likely to be recognised or supported as victims.
- It also examines how the **state and institutions can deny victim status**, particularly in cases of state crime or corporate negligence (e.g. **Tombs** highlights how workplace deaths and injuries are often treated as accidents, not crimes).
- Critical victimologists highlight that victimisation is often the result of social injustice, and that the criminal justice system may fail or even re-victimise certain groups.

The "Ideal Victim" – Christie (1986): Nils Christie argues that society holds a stereotype of the **"ideal victim"**- typically someone who is weak, blameless, and vulnerable. Those who do not fit this image (e.g. drug users, sex workers, young Black men) are less likely to be taken seriously, supported, or granted victim status by the media or legal system.

Role of the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and Agencies of Social Control

The CJS includes the police, courts, prisons, and other agencies (e.g. probation, youth offending teams), all responsible for enforcing laws and maintaining social order.

Functionalist view:

These institutions uphold consensus and reinforce social norms.

Marxist view:

They serve the ruling class by criminalising the poor and protecting property.

MacPherson Report (1999):

Found the police were institutionally racist in their handling of Stephen Lawrence's murder.

Lammy Review (2017):

Highlighted racial disparities in sentencing and treatment of Black and ethnic minority defendants.

Bowling and Phillips:

Found that Black people are more likely to be stopped, searched, arrested and harshly sentenced, suggesting systemic bias.

Reiner (2000):

introduced the concept of **canteen culture** to explain how shared norms and values develop among police officers, particularly in informal settings like staff rooms or "canteens." This culture can include elements of suspicion, macho attitudes, racism, and cynicism, which can influence how officers interact with the public - especially marginalised groups - and contribute to institutional bias within the criminal justice system.