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A2 Sociology for AQA

Chris Livesey & Tony Lawson

Hodder Arnold

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library

ISBN-10: 0 340 912 553

ISBN-13: 978 0 340 912 553

Published 2006

Impression number 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Year 2010 2009 2008 2007 2006

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Typeset by Fakenham Photosetting Ltd, Fakenham, Norfolk

Printed in Spain for Hodder Arnold, an imprint of Hodder Education, a member of the Hodder Headline Group, 338 Euston Road, London NW1 3BH

Acknowledgements

While writing can, at the best of times, be a solitary experience, a number of people have helped me through the long, dark, winter months.

On a personal level, I want to recognise the help and support of:

Julia, my wife.

Anne and John, my parents.

Keith and Kevin, my brothers.

On a professional level I'd like to thank everyone at Hodder who's been involved in some way in the production of the text. In particular, I'd like to acknowledge the help (and patience) of Colin Goodlad, Matthew Sullivan and Matthew Smith (the person responsible for originally getting this show on the road).

On both a personal and professional level I'd also like to acknowledge (and thank) Tony Lawson for his contribution to the text. I'd like to think it's a much better effort for his able assistance.

Finally, to paraphrase the mighty Arcade Fire:

Consider this text a tunnel.

Yeah, a tunnel – From my window to yours.

Meet me in the middle, the empty middle ground.

And since there's no one else around,

We'll let our time grow long,

And remember everything we've come to know.

Chris Livesey

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About This Book

About This Book

In writing this book we have tried to satisfy two main aims:

First, we wanted to retain a sense of continuity between this and our previous (AS) text in terms of both overall structure and scope, mainly for the benefit of those students and teachers who've used the AS text in their first year of the A-level course. In terms of structural continuity, therefore, the general layout will be familiar to anyone who has used **AS Sociology for AQA** (although it's not, of course, necessary to have used this AS text to get the most from the A2 text). More specifically, we've once again chosen to tie the text closely to the **AQA Specification** (highlighting, where appropriate, **synoptic links** within and between the A2 and AS Modules) and we've retained the basic structure of the AS text by dividing the sections into two parts: introductory material ('**Preparing the Ground**') provides a general overview of a section and is broadly aimed at students of all abilities, while more challenging material ('**Digging Deeper**') is included to both develop the initial material and stretch the more able student.

In addition, we've retained a couple of features we believe worked well in the AS text:

The **Key Word** focus, whereby the text is structured around significant concepts – a system designed to both help students to

focus on the most important ideas in a particular area and encourage planned examination answers.

Integrated exercises designed to achieve a variety of aims (mainly relating to the development of the interpretation, analysis and evaluative skills required at A2). These exercises involve three main types:

- **Warm-up** exercises appear at the start of a section and are designed to ease students into a topic by getting them to think about it in a way that builds on their existing knowledge. The basic idea here is to identify the knowledge students already possess about a topic or issue, something that provides a foundation for building a more sociological level of understanding. This type of exercise also serves as a whole-class ice-breaker for each new section of the course.
- **Growing It Yourself** exercises are more focused and, in general, they're designed for small group work. They usually require students to generate and discuss information, although, reflecting the increased demand for evaluative skills at this level, many of these exercises require students to make decisions about the information generated through discussion. This type of exercise is normally closely integrated with the surrounding text and is designed to complement student reading and note-taking by requiring

them to reflect on – and expand – the information presented through the text. Each exercise has been designed to flow naturally from the text and generally requires little or no prior preparation by students or teachers. Having said this, some of the exercises take the form of **simulations** that require students to take on various roles as part of the overall discussion process; these, reflecting the fact they are slightly more complex than the standard exercises, require a relatively simple level of prior organisation and preparation.

- **Discussion Points** provide opportunities for students to discuss or debate different ideas – something we felt would be useful to build into the overall design to help students clarify and express their thinking in a relatively structured way. Some of the discussion points are tightly-constructed around a particular issue, while others are more loosely constructed to allow students greater scope for discussion and debate.

In terms of our **second** aim, although structural continuity was important when designing this text, we also wanted to reflect the fact that A2 study involves both greater theoretical and evaluative depth.

In relation to the former we were conscious of the need to strike a balance between classical (Marx, Durkheim, Weber and the like) and contemporary sociological theory (writers such as Luhmann, Baudrillard and Foucault), on the basis that, while it's important for students and teachers to have access to contemporary material, we shouldn't lose sight of the classical origins of sociology (something we

feel is generally reflected in the structure of AQA A2 examination questions).

In terms of the latter we decided to add a couple of extra features to the A2 text.



The Potting Shed involves questions that reflect the structure of the smaller-mark exam questions (requiring students to 'identify and explain' something, for example). These short, relatively simple, questions have also been designed to help students make **synoptic links** between, for example, A2 and AS modules (once again reflecting the general structure of the smaller-mark AQA exam questions).



Weeding the Path: The most significant change between the A2 and AS text, reflecting the fact that A2 study requires students to use evaluation skills more rigorously than at AS, is the addition of clearly-signposted evaluation material. Although such material runs throughout the text (at its most basic, of course, being by juxtaposition) we felt it would be helpful to draw students' attention more specifically to this type of information.

Finally, although this A2 text, like its AS counterpart, is focused around helping students work their way successfully through the AQA A-level Sociology course, we hope we've managed to produce a text that, while informative and challenging to all abilities and interests, is one you will enjoy reading – not only because (we trust) it will help you achieve the best possible grade in your examination but also, more importantly perhaps, because we firmly believe that Sociology is a fascinating subject to study in its own right.

Crime and deviance

This chapter examines concepts of crime and deviance by applying them to issues (such as criminal and non-criminal deviance) and *situations* (how deviance occurs in areas such as family life and the like).

1. Different explanations of crime, deviance, social order and social control



Preparing the ground: Defining deviance

The concept of deviance, at its most basic, refers to ‘rule-breaking’ behaviour; actions, in other words, that violate (or ‘deviate from’) a *social norm* or rule, of which we can identify two main types.

- **Formal norms** include *laws* and *organisational rules* and they represent



A ‘No Smoking’ policy in a workplace is an example of a formal organisational rule

official standards that apply in a given situation. Punishment (‘negative sanction’) for deviance is specified as part of the rule.

- **Informal norms** vary from group to group and there are no formal punishments for deviation – smoking with a group of friends, for example, may be considered deviant or non-deviant depending on their particular attitudes towards such behaviour.

WARM-UP: IDENTIFYING AND EVALUATING DEVIANCE

In small groups, choose an example of ‘deviant behaviour’ from any area of the Specification (each group should choose a different area) and briefly discuss:

- How is it deviant? (What rules are broken?)
- Why is it deviant? (Who makes the rules?)
- Has it always been deviant in our society?
- Is it deviant in other societies/cultures?

Combine your observations with those of

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the other groups (briefly discussing anything that needs clarification).

What does this work tell us about deviance and deviant behaviour? Think about:

- Who makes rules (and why)?
- Are rules selectively policed and punished?
- If the same behaviour can be seen as both deviant and non-deviant, what does this tell us?

In everyday use, 'deviance' has certain *pejorative* (negative) overtones, but sociologically we can think about different types of deviance as involving ideas such as:

- 'good' (admired) behaviour, such as heroism (or *altruistic* behaviour – putting the needs of others before your own)
- 'odd' behaviour, such as eccentricity – the person who shares their house with 50 cats, for example
- 'bad' behaviour, examples of which range from a misbehaving child to murder.

These general behavioural categories give us a flavour of the complexity of deviance, but they're not very useful in terms of thinking about deviance 'in the real world', mainly because of the relationship they presuppose between:

Interpretation and classification: To classify behaviour as 'good' or 'bad' involves taking a *moral* standpoint – to judge, in other words, different forms of behaviour *before* classifying them. This means deviance has two important characteristics:

- **Subjectivity:** If decisions about deviance are based on judgements about behavioural norms, all behavioural

classifications are based on subjective understandings and interpretations – an idea that raises questions about whether any behaviour can be 'inherently' (always) deviant (in all societies and at all times). It also raises questions about 'who decides' whether behaviour is classified as deviant or non-deviant – something that involves:

- **Power:** This relates not only to how deviance is defined by social groups, but also to how it's explained. We can, for example, explain deviance in terms of ideas such as the qualities possessed by the deviant, the social processes by which rules are created (as **Becker**, 1963, puts it: 'Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance'), or a combination of the two.

The potting shed

Identify and briefly explain one example of behaviour that is deviant but not criminal, and one example of criminal behaviour that's not always seen as particularly deviant.

Digging deeper: Defining deviance

Deviance has some further dimensions we need to note.

- **Absolute** conceptions have two main dimensions. First, the idea that some forms of behaviour are *proscribed* (considered deviant) and negatively *sanctioned* in all known societies at all times. Second, particular types of individual are inherently (genetically, socially or psychologically) predisposed to



Growing it yourself: Definitely deviant?

In small groups, identify as many examples as possible of behaviour that:

- is deviant in our society now but wasn't deviant in the past
- is not deviant in our society now but was deviant in the past
- is deviant in our society but not in other societies
- is deviant in another society but not in our society.

As a class, consider what these examples tell us about deviance as an absolute or relative concept.

deviance – in other words, they can't help breaking social rules.

* SYNOPTIC LINK

Think about how the examples you've identified in the 'Definitely deviant' exercise can be related to different areas of the Specification.

- **Relative** concepts also have two dimensions. First, the idea that *no* behaviour has always been considered deviant in all societies (a *cross-cultural* dimension) and at all times (a *historical* dimension). Second, that deviance, according to **Becker** (1963), is not a quality of what someone does but rather a quality of how someone *reacts* to that behaviour; the relative dimension here is the idea that the same behaviour can, for example, be seen as deviant in some societies but not in others.

The previous exercise suggests two further ideas – what **Plummer** (1979) considers to be the distinction between:

- **Societal** deviance, where there's a broad consensus in a society that behaviour is morally wrong, illegal, and so forth, and

- **Situational** deviance, where a group defines its behaviour as non-deviant, even though such behaviour is considered societally deviant.

Roberts (2003), for example, argues that 'swinging' ('an increasingly popular leisure choice for married and courting couples') fits this particular category – an idea that suggests deviance can be a matter of personal choice (if I don't want to 'swing' then I don't go to swinger parties).

In this respect, deviant behaviour carried out with an *awareness* of its deviant nature is:

- **Culpable** deviance – behaviour for which the offender is held personally accountable, something that differentiates it from
- **Non-culpable** deviance – acts for which the offender is *not* held personally accountable (such as crimes committed by the mentally ill, for example).



The potting shed

Identify and briefly explain one example of societal, situational, culpable and non-culpable deviance from any area of the Specification.

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In terms of the above, therefore, deviance is not necessarily as clear-cut and straightforward as we initially suggested – an idea reflected in the range of sociological explanations for deviant behaviour.



Preparing the ground: Functionalist perspectives

Functionalist perspectives involve the explanation of crime and deviance in terms of three basic ideas:

- **Consensus:** A basic level of general agreement exists in any society over shared norms and values.
- **Conformity** to social norms is not automatic (people are not naturally law-abiding or naturally deviant). Social controls exist to promote normative conformity.
- **Control:** Deviant behaviour is explained in terms of the breakdown (for a variety of reasons) of social controls.

Functionalist explanations, therefore, share the common theme that by discovering the *characteristics of conformity* we can also discover the *causes of deviance*. The classical expression of this perspective is the work of writers such as **Durkheim** (1895), who argued that all societies faced two major problems – how to achieve:

- **Social order** and maintain:
- **Social stability** in a situation (a vast range of possible individual beliefs, behaviours and actions) that appeared inherently unstable and disorderly.

The answer, **Durkheim** suggested, could be found in the concept of a:

Collective consciousness: society, from this position, is an *emergent entity* (it emerges from – and reflects back on – the behaviour of individuals) and social interaction is possible only if it's based on shared understandings and meanings; once these are established they 'take on a life of their own', existing outside the consciousness of *individual* actors (but deeply embedded in each individual through primary and secondary socialisation processes).

The collective consciousness is a mental construct and, as such, has no physical form; it needs, therefore, to be consistently reinforced if order and stability are to be maintained. For **Durkheim**, one way to reinforce the collective conscience was to repeatedly challenge and test its most fundamental beliefs through deviant behaviour. Deviance, therefore, was:

- **Normal** – it represents a mechanism through which the collective conscience is both recognised and affirmed – and
- **Functional** because it serves such essential purposes as:
 - **boundary setting:** as societies become more complex in their range of social relationships, *control mechanisms*, such as a legal system, must develop (society as a self-regulating (*autopoietic*) mechanism) to codify moral behaviour in terms of laws marking the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour
 - **public boundary marking:** legal boundaries are 'given substance' by 'ceremonies' such as public courts and media reporting of crimes.

* SYNOPTIC LINK

Religion: Note the similarity between this 'public function' of crime and law and the distinction Durkheim makes between 'the sacred' and 'the profane'. In this instance, the collective conscience parallels the sacred – it is something special that requires veneration and respect and is separated from the profane through public markers and ceremonies.

- **social change:** deviant behaviour is a functional mechanism for change because it tests the boundaries of public tolerance and morality. It is a *social dynamic* that forces people to assess and reassess the nature of *social statics* (such as written laws). Laws banning male homosexuality in our society, for example, have gradually been abandoned as public tolerance has grown – an example of what **Durkheim** argued was the role of deviance in promoting things like freedom of thought and intellectual development. Challenges to the prevailing orthodoxy, he argued, are signs of a healthy society.
- **social solidarity:** deviance promotes *integration* and solidarity through its 'public naming and shaming' function. Popular alarm and outrage at criminal acts, for example, serve to draw people closer together 'against a common enemy'.



Weeding the path

This type of traditional functionalist perspective has been subjected to a number of significant criticisms:

- **Collective conscience:** Conflict theorists,

among others, have challenged the idea that social behaviour is based on a broad social consensus. They argue such 'consensus' is manufactured by powerful interest groups (such as the media).

- **Social dynamics:** Powerful groups in society can use the existence of deviance (such as *terrorism* in recent times) to curtail civil liberties and freedoms, thereby inhibiting social change.
- **Anomie:** Not all crime is functional. Although **Durkheim** noted that 'too much crime' damaged the collective conscience (by creating 'normative confusion' or *anomie*), we have no *objective* way of knowing when crime might become *dysfunctional*.



Digging deeper: Strain theory

This development in functionalist theory was pioneered by **Merton** (1938) when he used the concept of anomie to explain crime and deviance as an *individual response* to problems at the *structural level* of society – an explanation, as **Featherstone** and **Deflem** (2003) note, based around two concepts:

- **Structural tensions:** For societies to function, people have to be given incentives to perform certain roles (the *cultural goals* – or *ends* – of *social action*). **Merton** argued that, for societies like Britain and America, a fundamental goal was 'success' and, as part of the *collective consciousness*, such goals become incorporated into the general socialisation process – people are encouraged to want success. However, when societies set *goals* they must also set the *structural means* towards their

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achievement and the blocking or unavailability of the means to achieve desired goals results in:

- **Anomie:** For **Merton**, this represented a situation in which, although behavioural norms existed, people were unable – or unwilling – to obey them, a situation that would result in a (psychological) *confusion* over how they were expected, by others, to behave. If societies failed to provide the means towards desired ends, people would resolve the resulting *anomic situation* by developing new and different norms to guide them towards these ends. A classic expression of this idea is that:

Success (however it may actually be defined) is a universal goal in our society, learnt through the:

Socialisation process: As **Akers** and **Sellers** (2004) put it: ‘Everyone is socialised to aspire toward high achievement and success. Competitiveness and success are ... taught in schools, glamorised in the media, and encouraged by the values passed from

generation to generation. Worth is judged by material and monetary success.’

Socialisation, therefore, stresses:

Socially approved (legitimate) means to achieve this goal. As **Akers** and **Sellers** suggest: ‘Success is supposed to be achieved by an honest effort in legitimate educational, occupational, and economic endeavors. Societal norms regulate the approved ways of attaining this success, distinguishing them from illegitimate avenues to the same goal.’ However:

Strains occur at the *structural level* when people are denied opportunities to realise their success goal through legitimate means (such as work). Thus, although everyone ‘wants success’, only a limited number can actually achieve it through legitimate means. The *tension* between ‘socialised desires’ and society’s inability to satisfy those desires through legitimate means results, for **Merton**, in anomie – something, in turn, manifested in a number of general individual responses, as shown in the table below.

Responses to strain: Merton (1938)			
	Structural means	Cultural ends	Example
Conformity (law-abiding)	✓	✓	Shop assistant
Innovation	×	✓	Entrepreneur Bank robber
Ritualism	✓	×	Bureaucrat
Retreatism	×	×	Drug addict
Rebellion	Deny legitimacy of both ends and means		Terrorist
✓ = accepts and × = rejects			



Weeding the path

Strain theory combines *macro* theories of structure (tensions) and *micro* theories of action (how individuals respond to anomie) to produce a *reactive theory* of deviance that has been criticised in terms of:

- **Scope:** Although the theory may, arguably, explain ‘purposeful crime’ (such as theft, an ‘alternative’ way of achieving economic success), it’s less convincing when dealing with what **Cohen** (1955) calls ‘purposeless crime’ (such as juvenile delinquency).
- **Cultural values:** The idea of ‘shared values’ is difficult to demonstrate empirically in culturally diverse societies such as Britain in the twenty-first century – ‘success’, for example, may mean different things to different people. In addition, cultural diversity exposes people to different, frequently contradictory, socialising influences. If goal diversity exists, then how are people socialised into the same general kind of ‘success values’?
- **Choice:** There is little or no conception of people making rational decisions about whether to conform or deviate.
- **Conformity:** People are either conformists or deviants, but the question here is the extent to which there is always an easy distinction between ‘deviants’ and ‘non-deviants’. **Clarke** (1980) argues that even those heavily involved in criminal behaviour actually spend a large proportion of their time conforming to conventional (non-criminal) social norms and values.
- **Operationalisation:** **Agnew** (2000) has noted the difficulties involved in measuring concepts such as social strain, cultural goals and individual aspirations, whether using *subjective* measures (exploring how respondents feel about how they have been treated by society), or *objective* approaches that involve identifying causes of strain (such as divorce or unemployment) and measuring their relationship to criminal involvement.

Discussion point: A virtue of vileness

Imagine a society consisting of three groups which vary in their susceptibility to social pressures:

- The Virtuous – a minority who never do anything bad.
- The Vile – a minority who never do anything good.
- The Vacillators – a majority who are neither of the above.

A change in society initiated by The Vile – an increase in unemployment and poverty, for example – results in greater numbers of Vacillators becoming Vile. Who is responsible for this ‘decline in virtue’?

- The individual Vacillator who chooses to become vile?
- The Vile who created the change in society?
- The Virtuous who did nothing to prevent the change?



Preparing the ground: Ecological theories

The main focus of ecological theories is the relationship between the individual and their physical and social ('demographic') environment. As **Wilcox** and **Augustine** (2001) note, *human ecologists* examine how the '... social and physical characteristics of a community affect crime by altering the administration of resident-based social control'. In other words, this perspective examines how (mainly) informal social controls are enhanced or disrupted by the way a community is *physically* and *socially* organised.

Physical environments, for example, affect the conditions under which informal social controls apply and **Wilcox** and **Augustine** suggest a number of factors affecting the way people think about and relate to their physical environment:

- **Territoriality:** who 'owns and controls' physical and social space?
- **Surveillance:** the extent to which offenders move freely and unseen through a community.
- **Milieu:** the level of 'civic pride and possession' people feel about where they live, for example.

These ideas are, in turn, affected by aspects of the physical environment. Poor street lighting, for instance, may make community surveillance difficult and consequently make it easier for offenders to control certain social spaces (the classic 'street-corner gangs of youths', for example).



The potting shed

Are you aware of areas controlled by 'deviant groups'? If so, how do you feel when you have to pass through such spaces?

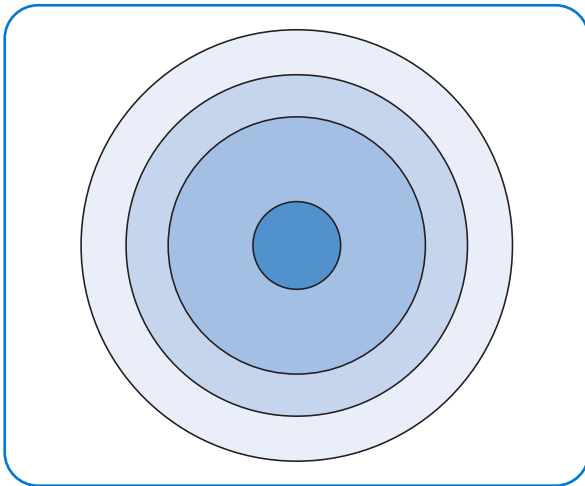
Social environments and organisations relate, **Wilcox** and **Augustine** note, to questions about 'poverty, ethnic heterogeneity ... and residential mobility' in terms of how these 'enhance or diminish the cohesiveness among neighbours, thereby affecting their supervision and intervention behaviour'. Social environments, in other words, relate to the development – or otherwise – of community bonds, a theme previously noted by **Shaw** and **McKay** (1932) in terms of:

Social disorganisation theory, based on the idea that if people develop a sense of communal living, rights and responsibilities, they also develop attachments to an area and its members (they care, in other words, about what happens in that area).

Concentric zones

From this initial proposition **Shaw** and **McKay** sought to explain how and why some areas of a city (in this instance, Chicago in the USA) had higher levels of crime than others. In particular they noted that *inner-city areas* consistently had the highest rates of crime, an observation they developed into a:

Concentric zone theory (based on the work of **Park** and **Burgess** that linked physical environments to social environments). The basic idea here is that every city consists of *zones*, radiating from



The 'central business district' is in the centre, surrounded by the inner-city 'zone of transition' or 'interstitial zone'

the centre (think about an archery target, with the bullseye being Zone 1 – the central business district – and each radiating ring being named successively).

Zone 2 (the 'zone of transition' or inner-city area) – characterised by cheap housing that attracted successive waves of immigrants – had a consistently higher rate of crime than any other zone, regardless of which ethnic group dominated the cultural life of the area. This led **Shaw and McKay** to argue that high crime rates were *not* a consequence of the behaviour of any particular group. Rather, the *transient* nature of people's lives meant that no settled community developed in the inner-city zone. Immigrants, for example, who initially settled there, moved to the outer residential areas as they became established in the city, to be replaced by a further wave of immigrants. High population turnover (including people temporarily entering the transition zone from the outer, residential zones, looking for excitement and entertainment) resulted in a 'socially

disorganised area' where informal social controls were either absent or ineffective.

* SYNOPTIC LINK

Wealth, poverty and welfare: Bottoms and Wiles (1992) note how the idea of 'social disorganisation' has re-emerged in contemporary New Right theories of the underclass. 'Welfare dependency', for example, is blamed on the disorganised behaviour of this 'class'.



Weeding the path

Although the empirical demonstration of the relationship between conformity and the development of strong communal relationships is impressive, a major problem with this particular theory derives from the idea of:

Disorganised behaviour: Although this has echoes of *anomie theory* (subsequently developed to greater effect by **Merton**), it is theoretically inadequate because no form of social behaviour is ever 'disorganised' (in the sense of *chaotic*), although it may *appear* to have such characteristics to the outsider.

Tautology: 'Social disorganisation' is both a cause and an effect of crime – disorganisation creates high crime rates which, in turn, create disorganisation. The problem here, of course, is that we have no logical way of knowing which is the cause and which the effect.

A response to such criticism saw the development of:

Cultural transmission theory, where the focus moved from disorganisation to how groups became *criminally organised* in the zone of transition (where opportunities for crime were greater and criminals could move

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‘anonymously’). When criminal behaviour becomes established it represents ‘normal behaviour’ for some groups and, once this occurs, criminal norms and values (culture) are transmitted, through the socialisation process, from one generation to the next.



Weeding the path

Although cultural transmission is a logical development in ecological theory, a major problem remains: if cultural transmission is such a powerful form of socialisation for some people, why doesn't it apply to others in similar social positions? Why do some people commit crime because they have been socialised to see it as normal, while others do not? Statistically, for example, young males are far more heavily involved in crime than older males or females, yet each group would, presumably, have been subject to similar socialising tendencies when living in the interstitial zone.

Differential association

One way of resolving this problem is to adopt **Sutherland** and **Cressey's** (1939) theory of:

Differential association: This holds that an individual is likely to develop criminal tendencies if they ‘... receive an excess of definitions favourable to violation of the law over definitions unfavourable to violation’. Differential association, therefore, uses concepts of *socialisation* and *social learning* to locate behaviour within a cultural framework of rules and responsibilities – who you associate with influences the likelihood of conforming or deviant behaviour.

However, this wasn't simply a case of ‘if you associate with criminals you will become a criminal’, since it was possible for individuals to receive:

Contradictory socialisation: An individual's family, for example, might stress non-criminal behaviour whereas the peer group sends out another message entirely. **Sutherland** and **Cressey** suggested, therefore, that *four main variables* influenced individual decisions about behaviour:

- **Frequency:** The number of times criminal definitions occur (for example, the belief that crime is acceptable) influences how people see deviant behaviour.
- **Length:** The longer the exposure to definitions (criminal or conforming), the more likely they are to be accepted and acted on.
- **Intensity:** The prestige/status of the person making the definition is important; we are more receptive to the ideas of people we respect.
- **Priority:** The importance we attach to socialising messages from different sources. A child, for example, may prioritise the views of their parents as more important than the views received from television programmes.



The potting shed

Identify and briefly explain two examples, from different areas of the Specification, of contradictory socialisation.



Weeding the path

A major advantage of this analysis is that it isn't:

Culture or class specific: Anyone, from any social background, is liable to offend if

sufficient definitions encourage such behaviour, an idea that encouraged the recognition and study of middle-class forms of criminality ('*white-collar crime*'). However, potential problems relate to:

- **Operationalisation:** The complex relationship between the variables (how does *priority* relate empirically to *frequency*, for example) and the difficulty of actually measuring ideas like 'frequency of definitions' make it a difficult theory to test.
- **Differential involvement:** Crime data suggest some groups are more involved in crime than others. If differential association is significant, why don't those close to offenders (such as marriage partners) display similar levels of criminality?
- **Distinctions:** There is, once again, a separation between 'criminals' and 'non-criminals', something that, as **Clarke** (1980) has argued, may not be as clear-cut as this theory suggests.

Subcultures

We can develop these general ideas by noting ecological analyses have been influential in relation to:

Functionalist subcultural theories, which distinguish between two basic forms of subculture.

Reactive (or oppositional) subcultures: These involve group members developing norms and values as a *response* to and *opposition* against the prevailing norms and values of a wider culture. **Cohen** (1955) argued that male delinquent subcultures developed on the basis of:

Status deprivation/frustration: People joined subcultural groups to achieve a

desired social commodity (status or respect) denied to them by wider society (note how this develops **Merton's** strain theory).

Hargreaves (1967) showed how status denial in school led the boys he studied to develop oppositional subcultures.

Cloward and **Ohlin** (1960) also noted a different form of reactive subculture that developed in terms of:

Opportunity structures: Like **Merton**, they noted the significance of 'legitimate opportunity structures' (such as work) as a way of achieving success. However, these were paralleled by 'illegitimate opportunity structures' that provided an 'alternative career structure' for deviants. They suggested three types of subcultural development:

- **Criminal**, that developed in stable (usually working-class) communities with successful criminal *role models* ('crime pays') and a *career structure* for aspiring criminals.
- **Conflict:** Without (structural) community support mechanisms, self-contained *gang cultures* developed by providing 'services', such as prostitution and drug dealing.
- **Retreatist:** Those unable to join criminal or conflict subcultures (failures, as it were, in both legitimate and illegitimate structures) retreated into 'individualistic' subcultures based around drug abuse, alcoholism, vagrancy, and so forth.

Independent subcultures: The second basic form identified by functionalist subcultural theorists involves individuals holding norms and values that developed out of their experiences within a particular cultural setting. Subcultural development is an 'independent' product of – and solution to – the problems faced by people in their

A2 Sociology for AQA

everyday lives. A classic example here is provided by **Miller** (1958) in his analysis of gang development in the USA, when he argues that the:

Focal concerns of lower-class subcultures (acting tough, being prepared for 'trouble', a desire for fun and excitement) bring such groups into conflict with the values of wider culture, leading to their perception and labelling as deviant. In a British context, **Parker** (1974) observed the same phenomenon in his study of Liverpool gang behaviour.



Weeding the path

Although these subcultural theories identify the ways membership is functional to its participants (reflecting **Plummer's** (1979) notion of *situational deviance*), this general theory is not without its critics. **Costello** (1997), for example, suggests that two crucial problems are left unanswered by subcultural theories (including those based around differential association):

- **Existence:** Are subcultures simply an assumption that similar behaviour patterns are indicative of some form of organised group? **Cohen** (1971) suggests a similar criticism when he argues that 'subcultural groups' represent a *labelling process* by outside groups (especially the media) which impose a sense of organisation and meaning on behaviour that has little or no collective meaning for those involved.

* SYNOPTIC LINK

Mass media: Examples of media labelling can be found in areas like sexuality and disability.

- **Cultural transmission:** Subcultural groups lack mechanisms for cultural transmission (socialising new and potential members, for example). This suggests they are not particularly coherent social groups.

Neo-tribes: **Bennett** (1999) has argued that the concept of subculture has become a 'catch-all' category that has outlived whatever sociological use it may once have had. He suggests, instead, that the concept of neo-tribes has more meaning and use in the analysis of subcultural behaviour, since it reflects a (postmodern) emphasis on the way cultural identities are 'constructed rather than given' and 'fluid rather than fixed'.



Preparing the ground: Critical theories

This section explores critical perspectives (in the Marxist tradition) that focus on the various ways deviant behaviour is constructed and criminalised in capitalist societies. In this respect, we can start by outlining some of the basic ideas underpinning:

Orthodox Marxist theories of crime: These take as their starting point the standard sociological line (from *functionalism* through *action theory*) that no form of human behaviour is inherently deviant – behaviour becomes deviant only through the creation and application of rules.

In this respect, therefore:

Rule creation is a function of capitalist economic organisation and behaviour. In other words, to understand how and why criminal forms of deviance occur we must study the social and economic conditions that give rise to certain types of rule. In this respect, rule creation at the structural level (*laws*) reflects two things:

- **Power:** Laws are created by the powerful and reflect their basic interests, either in a *relatively simple* way for instrumental Marxists like **Milliband** (1973), or in a more complex way for hegemonic Marxists like **Gramsci** (Hoare and Nowell-Smith, 1971) or **Poulantzas** (1975). In terms of the latter, all societies require laws governing:
 - **Social order** – relating to things like the legality or otherwise of killing people, violent behaviour and the like. On the other hand, laws of:
 - **Property/contract** are structurally related to the requirements of capitalism and include areas such as private property ownership, theft, inheritance rules and the like.
- **Social inequality:** Decision-making processes are dominated by those who hold economic and political power, and the exact form of law creation reflects the interests of those with the most to lose if the social and economic order is threatened. If the *economic* dimension sets the underlying parameters of social control and the *political* dimension specifies the shape and policing of legal rules, a third cultural dimension is important in terms of ‘selling’ these ideas to the wider population.

For powerful social classes, the problem of how to control the behaviour of other classes has two basic dimensions:

- **Force** – considered in terms of *hard policing* (the police and armed forces as *agents* of social control) and *soft policing* (social workers and welfare agencies ‘policing’ the behaviour of the lower classes) – may be effective in the *short*

term, but it also creates *conflicts* between the policed and those doing the policing.

- **Socialisation** – a form of ideological manipulation (in terms of values, norms and so forth) that seeks to either convince people that the interests of the ruling class are really the interests of everyone or to present society as ‘impossible for the individual to influence or change’ (except through legitimate means such as the ballot box, where, for orthodox Marxists, political representatives of the ruling class achieve legitimacy for their political power). Socialisation may be more effective in the *long term* because people incorporate the basic ideology of capitalism into their personal value system, but it also involves making economic and political concessions to the lower classes to ensure their cooperation.

The potting shed

You can apply these ideas by thinking about how education involves a mix of force and socialisation. What is the role played by each in controlling behaviour and how effective – in the short and long term – are these strategies?

We can examine various ways these ideas relate to crime and deviance by looking at:

Critical subcultural perspectives that link orthodox Marxist preoccupations with law creation and, as we will examine in a moment, a *radical criminology* that explores structural and (sub)cultural relationships. For Marxists, the development of subcultures is initially explained in terms of:

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Meaningful behaviour: Although not a particularly novel observation, **Downes** (1966) argues that deviant behaviour, from a subcultural perspective, involves groups and individuals attempting to solve particular social problems in meaningful ways.

Marxist subcultural perspectives have chiselled out a unique take on deviant subcultural development by focusing on two ideas:

- **Hegemony** – considered in terms of how a ruling class exercises its leadership (*hegemony*) through cultural values. Although *cultural hegemony* is an effective long-term control strategy, it also involves the idea of:
- **Relative autonomy:** People enjoy a level of freedom (*autonomy*) to make decisions about their behaviour, albeit heavily influenced by structural factors (wealth, power, and so forth). Although the vast majority choose broadly conformist behaviour (partly because they're 'locked in' to capitalist society through, for example, family and work responsibilities), others (mainly young, working-class males) resist 'bourgeois hegemony'. The focus on *youth subcultures* develops from preoccupations with:

Social change, especially at the economic and political level of society.

Cultural resistance as 'pre-revolutionary consciousness' and behaviour. Youth subcultures demonstrate how social groups in capitalist society can both absorb and counteract bourgeois hegemony and the various ways the lower classes develop cultural styles as 'alternatives to capitalist forms of control and domination' (think, for example, about the 'counter-culture' lives of

travellers, environmentalist groups, peace-camp protesters and the like).

Youth and resistance

Historically, critical subcultural theorists have interpreted the *resistance* of subcultural groups in terms of two 'solutions' (*real* and *symbolic*) to problems.

Real solutions: This approach is characterised by the **Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS)**, with research focused on how working-class subcultures develop as a response to – and attempt to resist – economic and political change. For example, we can note how deviant subcultures developed as a reaction to changes in areas like:

Social space: This refers to both:

- **Literal space** – the 'loss of community' thesis put forward by writers such as **Cohen** (1972), where urban renewal in working-class communities created a subcultural (frequently violent and ill-directed) reaction among young, working-class males, and
- **Symbolic space** – a 'loss of identity' thesis to explain the emergence and behaviour of skinhead subcultures (**Cohen**, 1972), with their violent response to the loss of a traditional 'British' identity – anger directed towards immigrants ('Paki-bashing') and 'deviant sexualities' ('queer-bashing').

Subcultural behaviour, therefore, represents a collective attempt to both deal with a sense of loss and, in some respects, reclaim spaces through the fear and revulsion of 'normal society'.

Writers such as **Hall et al.** (1978) linked subcultural theory to structural tension and upheaval by suggesting that increases in

deviant behaviour (real or imaginary) were linked to periodic 'crises in capitalism' (high levels of unemployment, poverty and social unrest, for example).

Classical studies of white, working-class male education from writers like **Willis** (1977) and **Corrigan** (1979) transfer the focus of 'class struggle' away from the streets and into the classroom. **Young** (2001) notes how, in the case of the former, subcultural development among lower-stream, lower-class 'lads' was an attempt to 'solve the problem of failure' (in the middle-class terms perpetuated through the school) by 'playing up in the classroom, rejecting the teacher's discipline' and giving 'high status to manliness and physical toughness' (ideas that have echoes of **Cohen's** (1955) concept of *status frustration*).

Symbolic solutions: Although all forms of subcultural behaviour have symbolic elements (the skinhead 'uniform' of bovver boots and Ben Sherman shirts ape 'respectable', working-class work clothing), the emphasis is shifted further into the cultural realm by focusing on how subcultures represent *symbolic* forms of *resistance* to bourgeois hegemony. **Hall** and **Jefferson** (1976) and **Hebdidge** (1979) characterised youth subcultures as ritualistic or 'magical' attempts at resistance by consciously adopting behaviour that appeared threatening to the 'establishment', thereby giving the powerless a feeling of power. This behaviour is, however, 'symbolic' because it doesn't address or resolve the problems that bring subcultures into existence in the first place.



Weeding the path

Although this type of subcultural theorising avoids reducing complex forms of group interaction to individual *pathologies* (such as predispositions to 'bad' behaviour), this doesn't mean they are without their problems (and the observations we made about functionalist subcultural theories can also be applied here).

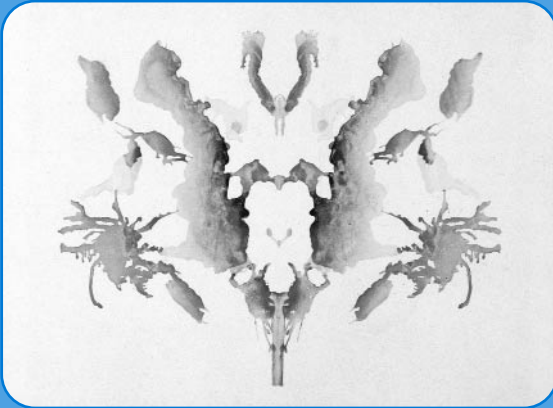
Spectacular subcultures: In the 1960s and 1970s a number of highly visible, deviant subcultures developed (such as mods, skinheads, punks and hippies) that have not been replicated over the past 20 or so years. If subcultures are symptomatic of 'structural problems', why has their visibility declined? At best we can suggest some form of evolution in subcultural behaviour (using concepts like *subcultural capital*, proposed by writers like **Thornton** (1996), for example); at worst we may have to discard the notion of subculture as a useful concept.

Symbolism: One problem with ideas like 'symbolic resistance' is a reliance on *semiological analysis* for their explanatory power. Although semiology can reveal underlying (hidden) patterns in people's behaviour, the danger is that such analyses lack supporting evidence.

When **Hebdidge**, for example, writes about 'the meaning of style', the problem is that it's *his* meaning filtered through *his* perception. As **Young** (2001) points out, **Hebdidge's** assertion that some punks wore Nazi swastikas in an 'ironic way' is unsupported by any evidence (not the least from the people who wore them).

The potting shed: Rorschach testing

What do you see in the picture?



Semiological analysis

'There is a danger groups become sub-cultural Rorschach blobs onto which the theorist projects his or her own private definitions' (Young, 2001)

'**The Other**': Stahl (1999) argues that Marxist subcultural theory implicitly sets up 'the subculture' in opposition to some real or imagined 'outside group or agency' (the school, media, and so forth); however, by so doing they neglect 'the role each plays in the sub-culture's own *internal* construction'. That is, they neglect the idea that subcultures may simply be a reflection of how they are seen by such agencies – as social constructions of the media, for example. Grossberg (1997) also argues that 'oppositional influences' (such as 'loss of community'), against which subcultures supposedly develop, are little more than convenient *ciphers* that stand for whatever a

theorist claims they stand for in order to substantiate their theories.

Identities: The focus on *class* as the key explanatory concept neglects a range of other possible factors (gender and ethnicity in particular – the majority of subcultural studies, both functionalist and Marxist, focus on the behaviour of white, working-class men).



Digging deeper: Critical criminology

The final theory in this section is one that represents a major development in terms of explanations for deviance.

Critical (or, as it's sometimes known, the **New/Radical**) criminology builds on concepts of hegemony and subculture (especially the idea of *resistance*) to develop what Taylor, Walton and Young (1973, 1975) term a:

Fully social theory of deviance:

- **Methodologically** critical criminology was based around a Marxist *realist methodology*. This involved thinking about all possible inputs into the creation of criminal behaviour (*structural* as well as *action based*).
- **Critically, Taylor, Walton and Young** identified the main strengths and weaknesses of both conventional and interactionist forms of criminology. Both, they argued, represented entrenched ideological positions that suffered from the problem of:
- **Overidentification:** Conventional (*correctional*) criminology was seen to identify too closely with the aims and objectives of *control agencies* such as the police (how to catch and process

The Seven Dimensions of a ‘Fully Social Theory of Deviance’: Taylor, Walton and Young (1973)	
Wider Origins of the Deviant Act (A theory of culture)	<p>To understand deviance we must understand how structures of inequality, power and ideology operate in capitalist society, whereby concepts of deviance are shaped at a very general level. For example, 250 years ago to own black slaves in England was a sign of success; in contemporary Britain slave ownership is illegal.</p>
Immediate Origins of the Deviant Act (A sense of subculture)	<p>This involves understanding the specific relationship between the people involved in a particular act. An individual’s cultural background is, for example, a significant factor in explaining their conformity or deviance. We must, therefore, understand how people are socialised – someone whose family background is steeped in racist ideology may be more likely to commit race-hate crimes than someone who has no such family background.</p>
The Actual Act	<p>What people do is as important as what they believe. It’s possible, for example, to believe in white racial superiority without ever committing an act of racial violence. We need, therefore, to understand the factors surrounding any decision to deviate, which involves understanding the rational choices an offender makes.</p>
Immediate Origins of a Social Reaction (Subcultural reactions)	<p>How people react to what someone does is crucial, both in terms of physical reaction (revulsion, disgust, congratulation) and how they label the behaviour (deviant or non-deviant) in terms of particular (sub-cultural) standards. The reaction of control agencies such as the media and the police will also be significant.</p>
Wider Origins of the Deviant Reaction (Society’s reaction)	<p>This examines how the (labelled) deviant ‘reacts to the reaction of others’. Do they accept or reject the deviant label? Do they have the power to deflect any social reaction (something related to the individual’s structural location in society, conditioned by factors such as class, gender, age and mental competence)?</p>
Outcome of the Social Reaction to a Deviant’s Further Action	<p>How the deviant ‘reacts to the social reaction’ is significant on both a psychological (contempt, remorse and so forth) and a social level, such as the ability or otherwise to mobilise forces (like favourable articles in the press or the best lawyers) to defend/rationalise the original behaviour.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">The Nature of the Deviant Process as a Whole</p> <p>We must look at the ‘process as a whole’ (as outlined above) and the connections between each of the dimensions.</p>	

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criminals more efficiently – the ‘official’ view of crime as a ‘social problem’), while interactionist theories were criticised for their overidentification with the ‘victims’ of labelling processes.

Structure and action

Essentially, critical criminology located deviance in a:

Structural setting – deviance is not random or arbitrary. On the contrary, critical criminology argued concepts of crime and law were based on the ability of powerful classes to impose their definitions of normality on all other classes. Crime and deviance, therefore, had to ultimately be understood in terms of *power relationships* that derived from ownership/non-ownership of the means of production in capitalist society. As **Scaton** and **Chadwick** (1991) argue, criminologists need to understand both how some acts come to be labelled criminal, and the power relationships that underpin such labelling processes.

Critical criminologists argued, however, that it was not just a matter of looking at class positions and relationships and ‘reading off’ criminal/conforming behaviour (the working classes are ‘more criminal’ than the middle classes, for example) for the deceptively simple reason (informed by interactionist sociology) that:

Decisions about deviance/conformity were played out at the individual level of *social interaction*. Critical criminology, therefore, wanted to understand not just *why* some forms of behaviour and groups (but not others) were criminalised and *why* some people (but not others) chose crime over conformity; it also added a political dimension by seeing crime as having wider significance for both capitalist society and

the relationship between different social classes.

Although critical criminology is *suggestive* of what needs to be done to understand deviance – rather than a theory of deviance that can be operationalised – we can note a couple of studies ‘in the critical tradition’ that give a flavour of the general approach.

Hall et al. (1978) explain the ‘moral panic’ surrounding ‘black muggers’ in the early 1970s as a way of *scapegoating* a section of society (young black males) and, by so doing, deflecting attention and criticism away from the political and economic crises of this period.

Schwendinger and **Schwendinger** (1975) questioned the role of the state in criminal activity and characterised government in capitalist society as *agents of a ruling class*. A contemporary equivalent might be to question the role of government in promoting genetically modified crops, the curtailment of civil liberties and the like.

In addition, **Chambliss’** (1974) observational study demonstrated a *symbiotic* (mutually beneficial) relationship between law enforcement agencies (police, judiciary and politicians) and the criminals controlling gambling and prostitution in Seattle, USA.



Weeding the path

The New Criminology, as originally formulated by **Taylor, Walton** and **Young**, represented less a ‘theory of deviance’ as such (as we’ve suggested, it cannot be tested empirically in the conventional sense) and more a way of thinking about how any sociology of deviance should be constructed. Much of *The New Criminology*, for example, focuses on ‘reassessing’ (to put it politely) previous theories of deviance – only 8 out of

282 pages actually discussed this new formulation.

Critical reactions: This technique drew a strong reaction from defenders of these positions. **Cohen** (1977), from an interactionist position, suggested critical criminology was neither ‘new’ nor, in an important respect, ‘critical’ (in that, he argued, it romanticised criminals as somehow being at the vanguard of ‘opposition to capitalism’).

Hirst (1975), from an orthodox Marxist position, criticised the whole ‘new criminology’ project, both in terms of ‘romanticising criminals’ (the *lumpenproletariat*, or ‘social scum’, as **Marx** described them) and for its application of a Marxist methodology which, he claimed, could not be applied to ‘sociologies of ...’ anything.

Left idealism: Later, in the development of *New Left realism*, **Young** was to argue along the same lines in terms of critical criminology being both *idealistic* in its representation of crime and criminals (the latter being considered in almost ‘Robin Hood’ terms) and a form of ‘left functionalism’, where the interests of a ‘ruling class’ replaced the ‘interests of society as a whole’.

Moving on

Despite the heavy criticism of critical criminology, one point in its favour, perhaps, was the idea that some form of theoretical:

Synthesis – between looking at the *structural* aspects of crime (who makes rules) and the *action* aspects that have traditionally focused on ideas about labelling and social reaction – was required in order to fully understand deviant behaviour.

Having looked in the main at structural

theories, the next section focuses on exploring *social constructionist* explanations.

2. The social construction of and social reactions to crime and deviance, including the role of the mass media

In the previous section we examined a number of structuralist explanations for crime and deviance, so, to redress the balance somewhat, this section focuses on both interactionist and postmodern forms of explanation.



Preparing the ground: Interactionist perspectives

At the start of this chapter we made a distinction between *absolute* and *relative* concepts of deviance and, in so doing, left open the question of whether some people may be inherently deviant (predisposed, for whatever reason, to deviance). Interactionist sociology answers this question by arguing that deviance is:

Socially constructed, a concept that has two main dimensions:

- **Deviance:** Every society makes rules governing deviant behaviour and applies them in different ways.
- **Deviants:** If the same behaviour can be deviant in one context (or society) but non-deviant in another, it suggests, as **Becker** (1963) puts it, ‘... deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the

A2 Sociology for AQA

application by others of rules and sanctions to an “offender”.

WARM-UP: IT'S CRIMINAL ...

Imagine (it's easy if you try) you are walking in a forest and you chance upon a large, recently uprooted tree. If nobody heard it, what sort of sound did it make as it fell to the ground?

Now, imagine you have committed a crime – but nobody saw you do it. Identify, explain and discuss some arguments for and against the idea that you are ‘a criminal’.

From this position, therefore, deviance is ‘behaviour that people so label’, and although this *relative concept of deviance* is not unique (**Durkheim** (1895), for example, noted: ‘What confers (criminal) character ... is not some intrinsic quality of a given act but the definition which the collective conscience lends it’), a further dimension does confer this quality.

Social reaction: The quality of deviance is not found, to paraphrase **Becker**, in some kinds of behaviour and not others, just as it doesn't reside in different *types* of people (those supposedly ‘predisposed to crime’). Rather, the *essence of deviance* is in the *interaction process*; only when people interact – to make and break rules, to name and shame (maybe) offenders – does deviance arise as a quality of how people *react* to what someone does.

If people don't react to criminal behaviour – no one is pursued, processed or punished – the offender is, to all intents and purposes, law-abiding. ‘Criminals’, therefore, are different to ‘non-criminals’ only when they are *publicly labelled* as such by a control agency, an idea that leads into:

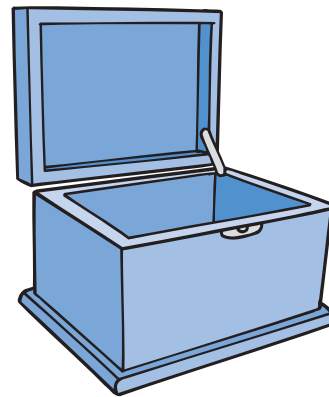
Labelling theory: ‘Labels’ are names we give to phenomena (‘football’, for example) that identify what we're seeing. Labels, however, aren't *just* names – they have further, important, qualities:

- **Meanings** – what we understand something to be.
- **Interpretations** – how we are encouraged (through socialisation processes) to understand meanings based on:
- **Characteristics** attached to the label.

Think of a label attached to a closed box. Inside the box are different (personal and social) characteristics associated with the label. If we understand the meaning of the label, we also understand the characteristics associated with the label.



The potting shed



What characteristics are associated with the label ‘student’:

- In our culture?
- By you personally?

For labelling theorists, the application of labels to human behaviour is significant because they impact on:

Identity (how we see ourselves and our relationship to others). Labels, here, have two main dimensions:

- **Social identities** relate to the general characteristics assigned to a label by a particular culture. Think about the different characteristics our society assigns to the label 'man' or 'woman' (how each is supposed to behave, for example).
- **Personal identities** relate to the different ways individuals (with their different cultural histories) *interpret* a label. For example, when I think about myself as 'a man' this label carries certain cultural characteristics, some of which I may include as part of my personal identity, others of which I may (perhaps) reject, something **Thomas** (1923) relates to '... the ability to make decisions from *within* instead of having them imposed from *without*'.

Master labels

These ideas are significant for labelling theories of deviance because they suggest two things:

Cultural expectations: When a deviant label is successfully applied to someone, their subsequent behaviour may be interpreted in the light of this label – depending, of course, on the nature of the deviance. If you are given the label 'murderer' or 'paedophile', this is likely to have more serious consequences than if you attract the label 'speeding motorist', an idea related to:

Master labels. **Becker** (1963) suggests these are such powerful labels that

everything about a person is interpreted in the light of the label.

Individual behaviours: The outcome of a labelling process is not certain. Just because someone tries to label you in some way doesn't necessarily mean they will be successful. You may, for example:

- **Reject** the label by demonstrating you do not deserve it.
- **Negate** the label by, for example, questioning their right (or ability) to impose it.

Interactionism questions the assumption that ideas such as 'crime' and 'deviance' are clear and unambiguous (many of us 'break the rules' but suffer no consequences for our offending because no one reacts to our behaviour). Instead, it stresses that any explanation of deviance must consider:

- **power** and **social control** in terms of the ability to make rules and apply them to people's behaviour, and
- **ideology** in terms of decisions about what forms of behaviour (and why) are considered deviant, criminal, both or neither.

Social contexts

Labelling theory, therefore, switches the focus away from searching for the 'causes of crime' in people's social/psychological background, to understanding how 'deviant situations' are created. This involves understanding how behaviour is put into *social contexts* – both deviant/non-deviant – through a:

Definition of a situation: In terms of crime, **Thomas** (1923) argues that societies provide 'ready-made' *definitions of situations* that allow people to both 'understand what's

A2 Sociology for AQA

going on' and, more significantly, know how to respond to this behaviour.

Interpretations within situations can, of course, be subtle – making behavioural distinctions between, for example, a private motorist running through a red traffic light and a fire engine doing the same. Both are 'deviant' (illegal), but the reaction to the latter is mitigated and transformed by knowledge of a 'higher moral purpose' (the law is being broken in order to save lives).

* SYNOPTIC LINK

We can apply the idea that others 'define situations' for us to a range of Specification areas, such as education (where the meaning of education is defined by governments, teachers, and so forth) and family life (where the meaning of different types of family is socially defined).

An example of an interactionist explanation for deviance is represented by the concept of a:

Deviancy Amplification Spiral: As originally formulated by **Wilkins** (1964), deviancy amplification (or a 'positive feedback loop') built on ideas developed by **Lemert** (1951) based on the distinction between two types of deviation:

- **Primary deviation** is deviant behaviour in its 'pure form'; it represents some form of rule breaking (real or imagined). **Lemert**, however, argued that unless and until attention is drawn – and *sanctions* applied – to primary deviation, it has little or no impact on the 'psychological structure of the individual' (they may not, for example, see themselves as deviant).
- **Secondary deviation** refers to how someone responds to being labelled as

'deviant'. For **Lemert**, this involves the offender interpreting their behaviour in the light of the labelling process, where repeated deviance becomes 'a means of defence, attack or adaptation' to the problems created by being so labelled.



The potting shed

Identify and briefly explain one example of your own primary deviation in the family, school or workplace.

We can outline the amplification process diagrammatically (including some indication of the role of the mass media in this general process).

The basic idea here is that deviancy amplification represents a:

Positive feedback loop involving a number of ideas.

Primary deviance is identified and condemned, which leads to the deviant group becoming:

Socially isolated and resentful of the attention they're receiving. This behaviour leads, through a general labelling process, to an:

Increased social reaction on the part of the media, politicians and formal control agencies (less toleration of deviant behaviour, for example).

This develops into:

Secondary deviation if the deviant group recreates itself in the image portrayed by these agencies. Once this happens the:

Reaction from 'the authorities' is likely to increase, leading to new laws (criminalisation of deviants) or increased police resources to deal with 'the problem'.

The Deviancy Amplification Spiral: Wilkins (1964)	
Spiral	Media interventions
<p>Primary Deviance</p> <p>Isolation And Alienation</p> <p>Increased Social Reaction</p> <p>Secondary Deviance</p> <p>Social Reaction</p> <p>Increased Deviance</p>	<p>Identification [Labelling] Moral Entrepreneurs</p> <p>Folk Devils [Labelling]</p> <p>Deviant self-images Deviant career</p> <p>Moral Panic / Clampdown / Crusade</p>

In other words, after the initial identification and condemnation of deviant behaviour, each group – deviant and control – feeds off the actions of the other to create a ‘spiral of deviance’.

Role of the media

In complex modern societies where people rely, to some extent, on the media for information about their world, its role in any amplification spiral can be crucial. We can identify the various points the media may intervene in the process in the following way.

Identification involves bringing primary deviance to the attention of a wider audience through:

Moral entrepreneurs – people who take it upon themselves to patrol society’s ‘moral standards’. They may be individuals (politicians, for example) or organisations (such as newspapers). Entrepreneurs add a *moral* dimension to primary deviance by

reacting to and condemning behaviour, something that’s part of a wider labelling process.

Folk devils: If entrepreneurial activity is successful (and there’s no guarantee it will be), the media may create what **Cohen** (1972) calls *folk devils* – people who, in **Fowler’s** (1991) words, are ‘outside the pale of consensus’ and can be:

- **represented** – as threats to ‘decent society’, for example
- **labelled** – as ‘subversive’, ‘perverted’ and the like
- **scapegoated** (blamed for social problems).

The media have the opportunity and the power to represent groups in this way and may also have a significant role to play in:

Deviant self-image. This refers to how the deviant group, as part of secondary deviation, comes to define itself in

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reasonably coherent terms (they may, for example, accept the ‘deviant label’ as a form of *resistance*). A possible role for the media here is in areas like:

- **Publicising** deviant behaviour to a wider audience (some of whom may, ironically, decide they want to participate in the ‘deviant subculture’).
- **Labelling** deviant groups (‘chavs’, ‘goths’, ‘predatory paedophiles’) and suggesting they represent a coherent social grouping (rather than, perhaps, a disparate group of individuals).

Moral panic: Cohen (1972) suggests that this is a situation where a group is ‘defined as a threat to societal values’ and is presented in a ‘stereotypical fashion by the mass media’ as a prelude to the demand for ‘something to be done’ about their behaviour. Moral panics have attendant attributes of a:

Moral crusade, where ‘the media’ take up arms against a particular type of offender – paedophiles being an obvious example – and demand a:

Moral clampdown on the deviant and their behaviour.

These ideas and processes, Miller and Reilly (1994) argue, reflect *ideological social control* as a prelude to political action. In other words, a moral panic represents a way of ‘softening up’ public opinion so that people are prepared to accept repressive social controls (new laws, for example) as ‘solutions to a particular problem’.

The potting shed

Identify further examples of the way public opinion has been ‘ideologically softened up’ through the media in recent times.

Finally, an idea that arises from the above discussion, and has implications for *social policies* designed to limit and control deviance, is a:

Deviant career: Becker (1963) argued that the successful application of a label

Growing it yourself: Subcultures or media creations?

Media student ‘expert on chavs’

Alison Smith, news.bbc.co.uk 14/06/05

‘Verity Jennings considered two theories – that *chav* is a subculture which differentiates itself from the rest of society and that it is a term describing undesirable features picked upon by the media . . . [She] looked at 890 newspaper stories featuring the word “chav” . . . the label “chav” was in part a product of media concerns about anti-social behaviour.’

If ‘chavs’ are not a **subculture** (something you could check against your knowledge of functionalist and Marxist subcultural theory), identify and explain some of the ways the media might ‘socially produce chavs’.

frequently has the effect of ‘confirming the individual’ as deviant, both to themselves and others around them (teachers, employers and the like). This may block off participation in ‘normal society’ (a criminal, for example, may be unable to find work), which, in turn, means the deviant seeks out the company of similar deviants, resulting in increased involvement in deviant behaviour. The public *stigmatisation* (‘naming and shaming’) of paedophiles in the UK media, for example, may illustrate this process; paedophiles are shunned by ‘normal society’ and so start to move in organised groups whose development, arguably, increases the likelihood of deviance.



Weeding the path

Although *deviancy amplification* demonstrates how the behaviour of control agencies may have ‘unintended consequences’ in terms of creating a class of deviant behaviour (such as crime) out of a situation that was only a minor social problem, it’s not without its problems or critics.

- **Prediction:** Although the concept uses a range of constructionist ideas (labelling, for example), it was originally presented by **Wilkins** (1964) as a model for *predicting* the development of social behaviour. However, the general *unpredictability* of the amplification process – sometimes a spiral develops, but at other times it doesn’t – means its strength is in *descriptive* analyses of behaviour ‘after the event’. **Young’s** (1971) classic analysis of drug takers is a case in point, as is **Critcher’s** (2000) explanation for the development of moral panics surrounding ‘rave culture’ and its use of Ecstasy.

- **Moral panics: McRobbie** (1994) argues that this concept has become such *common currency* in our society that its meaning and use have changed in ways that reflect a certain ‘knowingness’ on the part of the media and, in some respects, well-organised political targets (such as environmentalist groups). In this respect, **McRobbie** suggests we should neither automatically assume ‘the media’, in every instance, is part of the overall control structure in society (slavishly following whatever moral line the political authorities would like people to believe), nor should we ignore the ability of some groups to use the media to defuse moral crusades.

McRobbie and **Thornton** (1995) also contend that the media has become so sophisticated in its understanding of how amplification and moral panics work that ‘moral panics, once the unintended outcome of journalistic practice, seem to have become a goal’. **Miller** and **Reilly** (1994) also point out the problem of understanding how and why moral panics ever end.

Power: Although interactionist sociology clearly sees power as a significant variable in the creation (and possible negation) of labels, there’s no clear idea about where such power may originate. In addition, the power of:

The state to commit various forms of crime (against humanity, for example) doesn’t fit easily into constructionist concepts of deviance.



Digging deeper: Postmodern criminology

So far we've looked at 'classic constructionist' ways of seeing crime and deviance and we can bring these ideas up to date by focusing on some postmodern-influenced ideas about the nature of crime and control in contemporary societies. Given that postmodernism gives media analysis a central role, we can begin by exploring the concept of:

Discourse: The role of the media here is twofold. First, media are important because they propagate and, in some senses, control, organise, criticise, promote and demote (marginalise) a variety of competing *narratives*. Second, none of these is especially important *in itself* (teachers and students, for example, probably do most of these things); they become important, however, in the context of *power* and the ability to represent the interests of powerful voices in society.

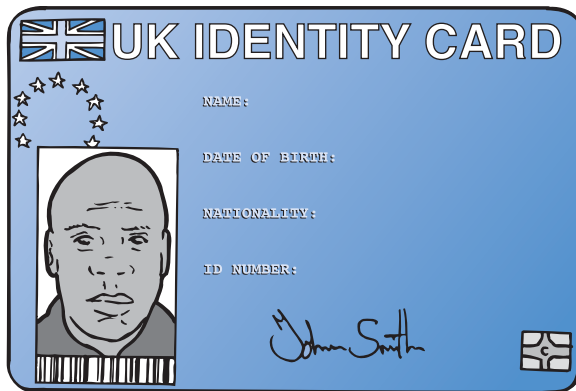
In a situation where knowledge, as Sarup (1989) argues, is 'fragmented, partial and contingent' ('relative' or dependent on your particular viewpoint), and Milovanovic (1997) contends 'there are many truths and no over-encompassing Truth is possible', the role of the media assumes crucial significance in relation to perceptions of crime and deviance in contemporary societies. In this respect, media organisation takes two forms:

- **Media discourses** (generalised characterisations such as crime as 'a social problem') and
- **Media narratives** – particular 'supporting stories' that contribute to the overall construction of a 'deviance discourse' – instances, for example, where deviance is portrayed in terms of how it represents a 'social problem'.

Perceptions

The main point here is not whether media discourses are 'true or false', nor whether they 'accurately or inaccurately' reflect the 'reality of crime'; rather, it's how media discourses affect our *perception* of these things. The difference is subtle but significant since it changes the way we understand and explain concepts like 'crime' and 'deviance'. Examples of media deviance discourses take a number of forms:

- **Domination discourses** involve the media mapping out its role as part of the overall 'locus of social control' in society. In other words, the 'media machine' is closely and tightly integrated into society's overall mechanisms of formal and informal social control. In this respect, the media is both a witting and unwitting mouthpiece for control expression, in both calling for new, *tougher* punishments and criticising 'soft on crime, soft on the causes of crime' approaches. This particular discourse weaves a variety of narratives that draw on both traditional forms of punishment (prisons, for example) and newer forms of technological surveillance (CCTV, biometric identity cards and the like) to create a discourse that locates 'criminals' and 'non-criminals' in different physical and moral universes.
- **Democratic discourses** involve the media acting as a *watchdog* on the activities of the powerful – the ability to expose political and economic corruption, for example, or, as in the case of the Iraq war in 2003, to act as a focal point for oppositional ideas.
- **Danger discourses:** However we view the



Biometric identity cards can store personal details (medical and criminal history, for example) and can be set up for fingerprint, facial and iris recognition

role of the media, a range of narratives are woven into the general fabric of media presentation and representation of crime. In particular, two main themes are evident within this type of discourse:

- **Fear:** Crime and deviance are represented in terms of *threat* – ‘the criminal’, for example, as a cultural icon of fear (both in personal terms and more general social terms). Part of this narrative involves:
- **Warnings** about behaviour, the extent of crime, its consequences and
- **Risk** assessments, in terms of the likelihood of becoming a victim of crime, for example.
- **Fascination:** Crime and deviance represent ‘media staples’ used to sell newspapers, encourage us to watch TV programmes (factual and fictional), and so forth.

Postmodern spectacle

These two narratives (*fear* and *fascination*) come together when postmodernists such as

Kidd-Hewitt and Osborne (1995) discuss deviance in terms of:

Spectacle – crime is interesting (and sells media products) because of the powerful combination of fear and fascination. An example of ‘postmodern spectacle’ is the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001, not only because of the ‘fear aspect’, but also because of the way the attack seemed to key into – and mimic – a Hollywood disaster film. The attack demonstrated an acute understanding of both fear and fascination – by ‘making real’ that which had hitherto been merely ‘make-believe’ – that both *repelled* (in terms of the terrible loss of life) and *fascinated* (drawing the viewer into an appalling disaster-movie world of death and destruction).

Although this is an extreme example, the basic argument here is that ‘spectacles’ are an integral part of the ‘crime and deviance’ narrative in postmodern society, not just in terms of the ‘reality of crime’, but also crime as ‘entertainment’, whether this be the ‘reality crime’ version (reconstructions and real-life crime videos, for example) or the ‘fantasy crime’ version (television cop shows



Crime as postmodern spectacle?
The destruction of the Twin Towers in New York, 11 September 2001

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and the like). For postmodernism, this is expressed in terms of:

Intertextuality: Both ‘reality’ and ‘fiction’ are interwoven to construct an almost seamless web of ‘fear and fascination’, where the viewer is no longer sure whether what they are seeing is real or reconstruction. **Kooistra** and **Mahoney** (1999) argue that tabloid journalism is now the dominant force in the representation of crime and deviance. Presentation techniques once the preserve of tabloid newspapers, for example, have been co-opted into the general mainstream of news production and presentation (where ‘entertainment and sensationalism’ are essential components for any news organisation trying to break into particular economic markets or preserve and enhance market share in those markets).

* SYNOPTIC LINK

Mass media: Think about how this analysis cuts into the debates we encountered in the study of media effects and representations.

We can outline an example of a postmodern criminology in the shape of:

Constitutive criminology: The basic idea here is to adopt what **Henry** and **Milovanovic** (1999) call a **holistic** approach, involving a ‘duality of blame’ that moves the debate away from thinking about the ‘causes of crime’ and the ‘obsession with a crime and punishment cycle’, towards a ‘different criminology’ theorised around what **Muncie** (2000) terms:

- **Social harm:** To understand crime we have to ‘move beyond’ notions centred around ‘legalistic definitions’. We have to include a range of ideas (poverty,

pollution, corporate corruption and the like) in any definition of harm and, more importantly, crime (which, as **Henry** and **Milovanovic** put it, involves ‘the exercise of the power to deny others their own humanity’).

Redefining crime

In this respect, a *constitutive criminology* ‘redefines crime as the harm resulting from investing energy in relations of power that involves pain, conflict and injury’. In other words, some people (criminals) invest a great deal of their time and effort in activities (crime) that harm others physically, psychologically, economically, and so forth. In this respect, **Henry** and **Milovanovic** characterise such people as:

Excessive investors in the power to harm others – and the way to diminish their excessive investment in such activities is to empower their victims. Thus, rather than seeing punishment in traditional terms (imprisonment, for example, that does little or nothing for the victim), we should see it in terms of:

Redistributive justice, something that **De Haan** (1990) suggests involves redefining ‘punishment’, away from hurting the offender (which perpetuates the ‘cycle of harm’), to *redressing* the offence by ‘compensating the victim’. This form of *peacemaking criminology* focuses on reconnecting offenders and their victims in ways that actively seek to redress the balance of harm.



Weeding the path

Constitutive criminology moves the focus on to an assessment of ‘harm’ caused to the victims of crime and, by extension, the

Discussion point: Is making up hard to do?

One aspect of redistributive justice is that the perpetrator of a crime 'makes good' the harm they have caused to their victim. This might involve, for example, offender and victim meeting, under supervision, to discuss the effect the crime has had on the victim. In addition, the offender will be required to recompense their victim in some agreed way – by doing something for the victim, for instance, rather than in monetary terms.

Thinking about this idea, identify and discuss some ways redistributive justice might operate in places like the workplace, the home and the school (for example, a disruptive student having to spend their lunchtime helping children lower down the school to read).

What advantages and disadvantages of this type of justice come out of this discussion?

social relationship between offender and victim. It draws on a range of sociological ideas, both *theoretical* (holistic approaches to understanding deviance, for example) and *practical* (such as the concept of 'redress'), to argue for a *less punitive* approach to deviance and a more consensual approach to understanding the complex relationship between crime, deviance, social control and punishment. There are, however, a couple of points we need to consider here.

- **Harm:** As Henry and Milovanovic (1999) define it, 'harm' results 'from any attempt to reduce or suppress another's position or potential standing through the use of power'. The danger here, however, is that it *broadens* the definition of crime and deviance in ways that redefine these concepts out of existence (which may, of course, be the intention). Such a definition could, for example, apply equally to a teacher in the classroom or an employer in the workplace.
- **Crime:** Extending the notion of crime to include, for example, 'linguistic hate crimes' (such as racism and sexism) may

not cause too much of a problem; however it does raise questions of where such a definition should begin and end (it may, for example, have the unintended consequence of criminalising large areas of social behaviour that are currently not criminalised).

- **Redress:** Without a radical rethink/overhaul of the way we see and deal with crime and deviance as a society, 'redistributive justice' may simply be incorporated into conventional forms of crime control. In this respect we might characterise this type of criminology as: **Idealistic**, in the sense that, rather than providing an alternative to conventional forms of 'crime and punishment', ideas about redistributive justice simply provide another link in the chain of social control.

Moving on

With these ideas in mind, the next section examines and develops the concept of power, in terms of its relationship to both social control and deviance.

3. The relationship between deviance, power and social control

In the two previous sections we have necessarily touched on some aspects of the relationship between deviance, power and social control (in terms, for example, of thinking about who makes rules and how they are enforced). In this section we're going to develop these ideas by looking more explicitly at concepts of power and control, beginning with an outline of how these two concepts are related.



Preparing the ground: Power and control

Power is an important concept in the sociology of deviance given that most sociological explanations for crime and deviance (from functional consensus, through critical criminology, to social constructionism) draw on the concept at some point as a way of explaining rule creation, rule enforcement and, occasionally, rule-breaking.

* SYNOPTIC LINK

Power and politics: The concept of power has been extensively discussed in this chapter, so rather than simply repeating this information, it would be helpful to review this material if you haven't already studied it.

Social control: Sociologically, deviance is both a product of social interaction and something that cannot exist without the power to proscribe and control social behaviour; concepts of *power*, *control* and

deviance are, in this respect, *sympiotic*. In other words, for deviance to be identified, someone has to establish where the normative behavioural line should be drawn (power) and then take action to defend that line (control).

Pfohl (1998) expresses this idea neatly: 'Imagine *deviance* as noise – a cacophony of subversions disrupting the harmony of a given social order. *Social control* is the opposite. It labours to silence the resistive sounds of deviance . . . to transform the noisy challenge of difference into the music of *conformity*.'

On this note (pun intended), we can identify two basic types of control:

- **Formal controls** relate to legal/organisational codes of behaviour, operate at the overt, usually written, level and involve a formal *enforcement mechanism* – a police or security force, for example. Formal control systems involve formal prosecution procedures. In the case of crime these may entail arrest, charge and trial, whereas in an organisation such as a school or business some sort of disciplinary procedure will be in place.
- **Informal controls** operate between people in their everyday, informal, settings (the family or school, for example) and don't involve written rules and procedures. Consequently, these controls work through *informal enforcement mechanisms*, the object of such controls being the type of informal normative behaviour we might find going on between family members, friends or indeed strangers (such as the normative behaviour that occurs when you buy something from a shop).

Both types of control have a couple of things in common: They can, for example, operate:

- **Directly:** Here, the objective is to regulate a rule (normative standard). If you break the rule, you lay yourself open to punishment (or *sanction*). If you break the law, you might be fined or imprisoned; if you're cheeky to a teacher you might be given detention.
- **Indirectly:** As socialised individuals we don't need to be told constantly where boundaries lie because we learn (from personal experience or from others) the nature of norms and what might happen if we break them.



The potting shed

Identify two examples of social control that operate within peer groups.

For example, if you continually skip your sociology class you may be asked to leave the course and, since you don't want this to happen, you (indirectly) control your behaviour to obey the norm. **Blalock** (1967) suggests two further forms of control:

- **Coercive** involves the attempt to make people obey through the exercise of some form of *punishment* (imprisonment, for example).
- **Placative** involves control through some form of *reward* (giving a child a sweet, for example, to stop it crying).

Finally, both formal and informal social control involve the concept of:

Sanctions: These, as we've suggested, may be *positive* (rewarding people for conformity) or *negative* (punishments for deviance).

- **Time:** Different parts of the day are divided into different time periods during which we are expected to do different

WARM-UP: FEELING THE FORCE

Using the following table as a guide, identify as many examples as possible of different types of social control across a range of sociological areas:

	Formal	Informal	Coercive	Placative
Family life				
Education				
Welfare				
Work				
Health				
Politics				
Mass media				
Religion				

Although it's tempting to think about dimensions of control solely in terms of *sanctions*, there are other, less obvious ways it is exercised.

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things (travel, work, eat, play, sleep). Shaw et al. (1996) noted how the 'free time' of young people (especially young women) was 'controlled or structured by the dominant adult culture'.

- **Mind:** While 'mind control' is probably too strong a term to use (although experiments have been conducted in clinical psychiatry into 'behaviour modification' through both chemical means and brain surgery), one way control reaches into the realm of thought is through:
 - **Language:** The use of language (in everyday talk, for example) is significant in terms of how we classify people. Think, for example, about the way different accents are taken to indicate different levels of sophistication, intelligence and class. Language, therefore, involves the power to both shape how we think about something and influence how we react to it. Language, for example, is linked to sexuality and social control through concepts like 'stud' and 'slag' (something that reflects the power of language to glorify or stigmatise).

* SYNOPTIC LINK

Mass media: In terms of deviance we could note how the 'language of crime' may influence how we see this behaviour. The media frequently use the language of violence to describe crime when they talk about 'crime fighting' or 'the war on crime'.

Types of space

The *patrol* and *control* of different types of space is an interesting aspect of power and social control:

- **Private space**, for example, represents areas of individual control, such as the private spaces in your home.
- **Public space**, meanwhile, signifies areas where access and activities are socially controlled. In other words, when someone enters these spaces they become liable to a range of control mechanisms (CCTV observation being a simple example). The power to control public space is significant because it involves the ability to define the deviant use of space. An employer owns and controls the space occupied by their workforce and is consequently able to specify behaviour in such space. White (1993), among others, has noted how conflict between the police and youth is frequently based on differing interpretations of the purpose and use of public space (such as shopping precincts and malls).
- **Controlled space** involves the idea that institutions (prisons, mental asylums and hospitals, for example) regulate space in ways that relate to the control of things like body and language. In terms of the latter, for example, a relatively modern development is the concept of **medicalisation**, a situation in which deviant behaviour is defined and treated as a physical or mental illness.

* SYNOPTIC LINK

Wealth, poverty and welfare: The idea of physically controlled spaces links to the concept of 'gated communities'.



Growing it yourself: Changing rooms

Technological developments change the way we see and use public spaces. For each of the following (and any others that come to mind) briefly explain how they have the potential to change the way public space is used and controlled.

Technology	Use	Control
The internet (cyberspace)	Access to information	Dangerous spaces?
Mobile phone	Public space redefined as private space?	
Wireless laptop computers	Changes to the way work is organised	The distinction between work and leisure is increasingly blurred
Further examples?		

Body: The relationship between bodies and social control works in a number of ways:

- **Personal control** relates, in part, to what we do with our bodies in terms of individual adornment, display, and so forth (although these choices will be conditioned by social norms governing such things as nudity).
- **Public control** relates to ideas about gender and sexuality (the social meaning of being male or female, for example, and decisions about different types of sexuality) that are, in no small measure, governed by social norms and controls. Our society, for example, generally views monogamous, heterosexual attraction as the norm. Public control also extends into areas such as:

- **Body image** – what size and shape the body should be, for example – and
- **Attitudes** to areas like physical disability and less tangible notions of patriarchal ideas and practices.

Morcillo (2005) suggests public controls extend into areas such as attitudes to youth and ageing, reproduction and *cyberbodies* (the idea that computer technology allows us to create private and public images in the relative anonymity of cyberspace).

A further dimension here is the question of physical public control over both body and space involved in ideas like *incarceration* (prisons, mental institutions and, in some respects, schools) and the various forms of

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punishment that can be (legally and, in some instances, illegally) directed against the body.



Digging deeper: Power and control

We can apply some of the ideas we've just explored to an understanding of crime control in contemporary societies in a range of ways. According to **Cohen** (1979), contemporary systems of deviancy control in our society developed at the end of the eighteenth century around three basic ideas:

- **The state** as a centralised, coordinating structure (considered in terms of definitions of crime, law creation and the construction of law-enforcement agencies).
- **Differentiation** between *criminal deviance* (involving punishment) and *dependent deviance* (such as mental illness) that involved care.
- **Institutionalisation** – the separation of deviants from non-deviants in prisons, asylums and hospitals.

In conventional terms, therefore, societal control has been underpinned by two ideas that we can loosely term '*traditional penology*' (to differentiate it from contemporary penology):

- **Reactive control:** Social controls are applied 'after the event' – following a crime, the offender is identified and processed through the judicial system on the basis of 'what they've done'.
- **Difference:** This involves the idea that 'deviants are different to non-deviants', something expressed in terms of:
 - Identification** – the objective ways

deviants differ from non-deviants in terms of, for example, their:

- **Biology:** **Lombroso** and **Ferrero** (1895) attempted to identify the physical signs of criminality – 'a comparison of the criminal skull with the skulls of normal women reveals the fact that female criminals approximate more to males'.
- **Psychology:** Traditional forms of analysis focused on the idea of crime as *pathological* (mental disturbance) or, as **Lagassé** (2005) notes, the result of 'emotional disorders, often stemming from childhood experience and personality disorders'.
- **Sociology:** **Box** (1983) notes how social factors (such as poverty) have traditionally been *correlated* with official crime statistics to produce a composite picture of 'the criminal offender'.
- **Quantification** – the idea that once the specific origins of deviance are established we can quantify *causality* (whether in terms of chemical imbalances in the brain, family upbringing, social conditions or whatever) that serves as the basis for:
 - Treatment**, considered in terms of punishment and/or care.

Traditional penology

As an example of traditional penology we can note how different control roles are played out at the institutional level of society.

The state, for example, has played a traditionally reactive role in terms of both the way laws are created (largely 'after the event') and applied.

The **police** role was also traditionally interpreted as a reactive one ('catching offenders'). This involved different styles of policing, traditionally interpreted in three (idealised) forms:

- **Consensus** policing involves formal control agents being integrated into the community they police. Their role, in effect, is one of policing with the cooperation and consent of the community.
- **Patrol** policing involves the use of technology (fast cars, mobile communications and the like) to patrol areas in a *semi-consensual* way. There is little day-to-day interaction between the police and the community, but relations between the two are not necessarily antagonistic.
- **Military** (or occupation) policing involves the police playing an occupying and

pacifying role, one that involves imposing order on a population, usually through a physical show of strength. In this type of policing the 'consent' of the community is neither sought nor freely given.

The courts

Punishment is:

- **based** on what someone has done rather than who they are
- **objective** – following agreed procedures and practices
- **delivered** according to certain rules and tariffs (the penalty for murder in the UK is greater than the penalty for theft)
- **impartial** – regardless of social characteristics (such as class or gender).

If the above represents a basic outline of 'traditional penology', what **Feely** and **Simon** (1992) call the:

Discussion point: The three faces of policing

- In three groups, each focusing on one type of policing, identify (using examples) the advantages and disadvantages of your chosen type of policing and present your ideas to the class.

As a class, consider which of the three types of policing is most likely to be effective in the control of crime.

	Consensus	Patrol	Military
Advantages	Police get reliable information from the public about crime	Quick and efficient response to crime	Order can be re-established in a situation of civil unrest
Disadvantages	Slow to react to crime	Police may seem remote from the people they police	No cooperation from those being policed

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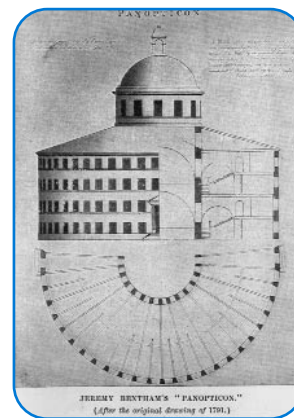
New penology involves subtle changes of emphasis in the roles played by control agencies in contemporary societies. We can outline these in terms of three related categories:

- **Extent of control:** Cohen (1979) suggests three ways to think about how social controls have gradually been extended in modern societies:
- **Blurring the boundaries:** The development of 'segregated institutions of incarceration' (prisons and asylums, for example) had one virtue, according to Cohen – they clearly defined the boundary between the deviant and non-deviant. Modern forms of penology blur these boundaries, through various programmes and treatments, to create a 'continuum of control', involving a range of preventative, diagnostic and screening initiatives, from 'pre-delinquents' (those who haven't 'as yet' committed an offence) at one extreme, to high-risk populations (persistent offenders) at the other.
- **Thinning the mesh** involves the idea of 'interventions to combat crime' by catching deviance *before* it develops and treating offenders *before* they develop deviant careers. We can think in terms of crime control being a net – the larger the holes, the more fish (deviants) escape; by making the holes smaller (thinning the mesh), more people are brought into the overall crime control programme. One effect of this is to:
- **Widen the net** by increasing the total number of people processed through

various programmes (including prison). New forms of offence and the increased application of current laws also draw more and more people into the social control net.

Surveillance

- **Nature of control:** Foucault (1983) argued that the *panoptic prison* (an architectural design that allowed warders to constantly monitor prisoners without the latter knowing exactly when they were being watched) represented 'the essence of power' because it was based on differential access to knowledge. Surveillance was also, he argued (1980), both 'global and individual' (warders could view both the whole prison and individual prisoners). Shearing and Stenning (1985) develop this idea in the context of the kind of processes described by Cohen when they describe postmodern forms of surveillance in terms of:
- **Disneyfication:** Disney World, they argue, is a clever system of social control (what you can do, where you



The panopticon prison: A central column gave warders visual access to all parts of the prison building

Source: Barton and Barton (1993)

can do it), designed to keep people moving through the theme park without an awareness of being controlled. Control, in this respect, is disguised as being 'for the safety of the consumer'. In other words, controls in postmodern society, like those in Disney World, are:

- **pervasive** – covering all areas of life
- **invisible** – there is little awareness of being controlled
- **embedded** – in 'other, less alarming, structures' (such as safety issues)
- **seamless** – they have no beginning or end.

Shearing and Stenning argue that this creates a situation where control is *apparently consensual* because people willingly participate in their own control (as with, for example, the use of CCTV cameras in shops and arcades). This type of surveillance is, they argue, indicative of:

- **Changes in control** expressed, on one level, by *proactive* procedures designed to prevent crime by taking action *before* an offence is committed, which leads **Feely and Simon** (1992) to suggest another level, the idea of:
- **'At risk' populations** – people who, on the basis of known probabilities, are the most likely to commit offences 'at some time in the future'.



The potting shed

Identify and briefly explain two possible social characteristics that might allow control agencies to identify 'pre-delinquents'.

Economic approach

This position, **Feely and Simon** argue, represents a 'new discourse' surrounding how we view crime, one that replaces 'traditional' moral or medical descriptions of the individual with an:

Actuarial approach 'of probabilistic calculations and statistical distributions applied to populations' (actuaries calculate things like 'early death' probabilities for life insurance companies – they mathematically calculate levels of *risk*). This 'economic approach' to crime and social control involves:

- **Identifying and managing** 'unruly groups' with high probabilities of criminal involvement.
- **'Low-cost'** forms of control (such as electronic tagging).
- **Managing** criminal activity through risk assessments (identifying possible situations and areas that require additional surveillance or police resources).
- **Resource targeting:** Some groups, such as young, working-class men, are statistically more likely to offend than others, and by concentrating police resources in the areas where these groups live, offending can be reduced.
- **Sentencing according to risk:** Incarceration in prisons doesn't reform offenders, but when people are in prison they can't commit further crimes. Rather than sentencing offenders for what they've done, therefore, sentencing should reflect the 'risk of reoffending'; habitual offenders, a high-risk category, should be given longer sentences than low-risk offenders.

* SYNOPTIC LINK

Wealth, poverty and welfare: Note how this approach keys into concepts of an underclass that needs to be controlled and punished.

We can complete this section by looking at a couple of different theories of crime and deviance that illustrate the relationship between power and social control. The first type (**administrative criminology** and **New Right realism**) is related to *ecological theories*, while the second (**New Left realism**) has a connection to the strain and subcultural theories we outlined earlier.

Administrative criminology is an umbrella term for a range of theories that draw on *ecological* ideas about people's relationship to their immediate environment and its impact on their behaviour. Although there are a number of different strands to this form of analysis, we can note that, as with its *human ecology* predecessor, administrative criminology focuses on the relationship between two areas, cultural and physical environments.

Cultural environment: This focuses on the development of general theoretical ideas about the 'nature of criminal behaviour' in terms of thinking about *why* people offend (a theoretical analysis of crime and its causes) and *how* to prevent offending (a practical analysis that forms the basis of the type of *situational analysis* of crime prevention discussed below). In this respect, **Clarke** (1980) argues that crime theory should focus on a:

Realistic approach to crime prevention and management that *rejects* traditional ways of viewing criminal behaviour as:

- **Dispositional:** Crime has traditionally, according to **Clarke**, been theorised in terms of 'criminal dispositions'; the idea, in short, that some people are predisposed to crime for biogenetic, psychological or sociological reasons (boredom, poverty, social exclusion and the like).



Weeding the path

These ideas have been questioned in various ways.



The potting shed: Criminal interventions

Which, if any, of the following 'criminal interventions' are likely to result in a *decrease* in criminal activity? (Answers at the end of this section.)

Increasing police numbers
More police on random patrol
Charging more suspects
Corporal punishment
Diversion to leisure and recreation facilities
Fear arousal (e.g. 'scare them straight')

Targeting known offenders
Protecting repeat victims
Patrolling 'hot spots'
Targeting risk factors (poor parenting, etc.)
Family interventions
Instant punishment (on-the-spot fines)

Genetic predispositional theories, for example, ignore the weight of evidence suggesting that the behaviour of offenders changes over time. Most crime in the UK is committed by young males, which suggests that, as they get older and take on a range of personal and family commitments, their behaviour is modified by social factors.

Sociological explanations focusing on areas like poverty as ‘causes of crime’ are also questioned because people from similar social environments behave in different ways – some choose to offend whereas others do not.

Clarke argues, therefore: ‘Theoretical difficulties can be avoided by seeing crime ... as the outcome of immediate choices and decisions made by the offender’ – something that leads neatly into a range of ‘preventative options’ to either limit the possible choices available to ‘potential offenders’ or make the consequences of ‘choosing to offend’ outweigh the possible benefits.

* SYNOPTIC LINK

Theory and methods/social policy: This idea reflects a cost-benefit form of analysis that argues that potential offenders make decisions about their behaviour on the basis of what they are likely to gain from a crime (the benefits) as against any likely costs (such as being caught and punished). This, as we will see, has clear implications for the effectiveness of crime prevention policies.

Part of the ‘realistic approach’ advocated by writers such as **Clarke** stems from the observation that ‘crime’ is not a:

Homogeneous category: Criminal behaviour comes in many shapes and sizes – property theft, for example, is very different

to rape – and it makes little sense to assume that just because they share a common label (*crime*) they have similar causes or outcomes. **Clarke** argues that just as we don’t view ‘illness’ in an *undifferentiated* way (a doctor would see a heart attack and a cold as having different causalities), we should similarly see crime as being *differentiated*. If this is the case, different types of crime respond to different forms of ‘treatment’. In particular, there are two basic characteristics of crimes, both of which fit neatly with the idea of *rational choice*, that make them amenable to various forms of prevention:

- **Opportunity:** The majority of crimes in our society are those of *opportunity* – as **Felson** and **Clarke** (1998) argue, ‘no crime can occur without the physical opportunities to carry it out’ – and *opportunism*. In other words, many crimes are unplanned; offenders don’t particularly look to commit crimes, but if an opportunity occurs (a purse left unattended, for example) they may be tempted to offend if the chances of being detected are less than the likely benefits.
- **Territoriality:** Most crime, according to **Wiles** and **Costello** (2000), is *local* to the offender. Their research showed the ‘average distance travelled to commit domestic burglary was 1.8 miles’, which confirmed **Forrester et al.’s** (1988) research into patterns of burglary in Rochdale.

These ideas are linked, within administrative criminology, in two ways. First, offences committed *outside* the offender’s local area are mainly related, as **Wiles** and **Costello** argue, to opportunities presenting themselves ‘during normal routines’, rather than being consciously planned. Second, if

A2 Sociology for AQA

measures can be taken to reduce opportunities for crime in a particular area, crime rates will fall, since the denial of opportunity, allied to territoriality, means the majority of crimes will *not* be *displaced* to other areas (there are exceptions – activities like drug smuggling and prostitution, for example, are sensitive to displacement).

Physical environment

Where administrative criminology rejects the idea that there is anything unique about offenders – just about anyone, given the right conditions, is capable of offending – crime can be limited by a variety of measures designed to make it more difficult, less attractive and ultimately more costly for the potential offender. Examples of crime prevention strategies include:

- **Crime awareness** – making people more aware of opportunities for (mainly low-level) crime. Advertising campaigns, for example, focus attention on simple ways people can protect their property ('Lock It or Lose It') or be more aware of crime ('Look Out – there's a thief about').
- **Community involvement** includes initiatives to promote both 'self-policing' strategies such as Neighbourhood Watch or Crimestoppers (providing cash rewards to people for informing on offenders) and closer relations between the police and the community. The development of community safety officers in the 1990s was designed to help the police develop community linkages (although **Gilling** (1999) has doubted their effectiveness in this role).
- **Built environment:** A central (ecological) idea behind administrative criminology is the management of

physical space, examples of which we noted earlier in **Wilcox** and **Augustine's** (2001) ideas about how people think about and relate to their physical environment (levels of street lighting, for example). A significant idea here is:

- **Defensible space**, which involves 'structuring the physical layout of communities to allow residents to control the areas around their homes' (**Newman**, 1996). The objective here is 'to bring an environment under the control of its residents' using a mix of 'real and symbolic barriers, strongly defined areas of influence, and improved opportunities for surveillance'. 'Alleygate' projects, for example, have been developed around the UK as a means of limiting access to 'outsiders' on housing estates – gates prevent potential offenders both gaining access to houses and making their escape through a maze of alleyways. A further example is the use of CCTV surveillance.

On another level (quite literally) writers such as **Coleman** (1985) have criticised the replacement of 'the traditional street of houses-with-gardens by estates of flats'. The result, she argues, was not the 'instant communities' envisaged by government planners, but rather the reverse – 'problem estates'. She identified two main reasons for this:

- **Lack of community ownership** of 'common space' (no one took responsibility for corridors, for example) and:
- **Freedom:** The ability of non-residents to move freely – and anonymously – through blocks of flats (something Alleygate projects seek to prevent).

Discussion point: Designing out deviance?

Divide into three groups and identify an area familiar to everyone in the group (your school/college or somewhere reasonably close, perhaps) where you know deviant behaviour takes place. Each group should choose a different *one* of the following to discuss:

- **Awareness:** Ideas for a poster campaign to raise community awareness of deviance and its consequences.
- **Involvement:** Ways to encourage people to become more involved in the policing of their community.
- **Built environment:** Changes you would make to the physical environment to deter deviant behaviour.

Each group should present their ideas to the class.

In terms of the impact of the physical environment on crime (and crime prevention) **Power** and **Tunstall's** (1995) longitudinal study of 'twenty of the most unpopular council estates in the country' confirms that changes suggested by writers such as **Newman** and **Coleman** do have the effect of reducing many forms of offending behaviour.

New Right realism

Administrative criminology is, in some ways, related to a further general variation on ecological theories, namely **New Right realism**, a perspective that has a number of core themes:

- **Rational choice:** This involves a general 'cost/benefit' explanation which we have outlined previously. Although some of the cruder applications of this concept suggest individuals are fundamentally *rational* in their behaviour (people *always* weigh the likely costs of crime against possible benefits), **Wilson** (1983) notes that, at the:
 - **Individual level**, this is not always possible or likely. Try calculating, for example, *your* chances of being arrested should you decide to embark on a career of crime and it's probable you'll have little idea what these chances might be, which suggests rational choice can operate only at a:
 - **General level**, where beliefs about chances of arrest are propagated through the media, family and peer group – people whom, **Wilson** suggests, 'supply a *crudely accurate* estimate of the current risks of arrest, prosecution, and sentencing'. In this situation – where knowledge is, at best, rudimentary – potential offenders are unlikely to be deterred by things like length and type of possible punishment; they are, however, likely to have a good working knowledge of one thing:
 - **Situational variables:** That is, the best places and times to commit crimes with the least possible chances of being detected or caught. **Wiles** and **Costello's**

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(2000) research supports this idea when they note *convicted offenders* gave three main reasons for their choice of place to burgle:

- poor security
- unoccupied
- isolated/quiet.

Risk

The key idea here, therefore, is:

- **Risk:** For **Wilson**, the way to combat crime is to increase the risk for potential offenders, something related to ideas about **deterrence**. If a community puts in place measures to deter crime, the associated risks rise. These measures are many and varied, but all ultimately devolve to another core idea, the importance of:
- **Community and informal social control**, involving a number of crime prevention strategies:
 - **Maintaining order:** Although not the first to suggest it, **Wilson** (1982) observed the *broken window* effect. If a neighbourhood is allowed to physically deteriorate it becomes a breeding ground for unchecked criminal
- **activities.** This follows because urban decay indicates the breakdown of *informal social controls* that keep crime in check – ‘one unrepaired broken window is a signal that no one cares . . .’ This, in turn, is related to the:
- **Fear of crime** within a community. As **Kleiman** (2000) argues, where people fear crime they take steps to avoid it – to the detriment of community life (the streets, for example, become the preserve of lawbreakers).
- **Low-level regulation** involves maintaining ‘community defences’ against non-conformity. These include things like community surveillance, such as Neighbourhood Watch in the UK, or:
- **Zero-tolerance policing:** Every deviant or illegal act, no matter how trivial, needs to be acted on by the police and community because it sets clear behavioural markers and boundaries for potential offenders and the law-abiding alike.
- **Self-regulation:** If the people of a community take pride in their neighbourhood, they learn how to protect it. If criminal behaviour is not tolerated

Discussion point: We know who you are

Imagine you are in complete charge of policing strategies for your local community and the residents tell you that:

- street/low-level criminality is their major concern
- ‘everyone knows’ who the local criminals are.

You decide to arrest these ‘known criminals’ and send them for ‘rehabilitation’ against their will. The crime rate drops, but some innocent people are imprisoned and their families fall into poverty.

Analyse and debate the pros and cons of this strategy.

at any level the potential offender learns that the costs of offending become greater than the benefits.

* SYNOPTIC LINK

Family: Wilson (1983) suggests informal social controls are more significant than formal controls in preventing deviant behaviour – and the most important institution for ‘socialising out crime’ is the family group and the values learnt within it.

Community policing: The police must be fully integrated into and trusted by the community. This means a strong local presence ‘on the ground’, with foot officers building relationships with law-abiding citizens.



Weeding the path

Administrative criminology and *New Right realism* share some related problems:

- **Displacement:** While some writers (Town, 2001) suggest measures to combat crime (such as CCTV) do *not* result in offenders moving their activities to areas where such measures are absent, Osborn and Shaftoe (1995) argue that the evidence is not clear cut; improvements in crime rates tend to be:
 - **ineffective** – physical measures reduce the *fear* of crime rather than crime itself – and
 - **misplaced** – concentrating on areas like business and property thefts rather than areas, such as violence, that cause greater concern.
- **Interventions:** Osborn and Shaftoe conclude that policy interventions in

‘traditional areas of concern’ – relieving poverty, eliminating economic inequality and supporting family life – give more effective *long-term* returns in terms of reducing crime and offending.

- **Self-fulfilling prophecies:** Strategies such as *criminal profiling* (where the police build up a picture of *typical criminals*) result in some groups and individuals being targeted as ‘potential criminals’. When the police target such groups they discover more crime (especially if a *zero-tolerance* policy is being pursued), which ‘confirms’ their initial profiling and feeds into continued profiling.

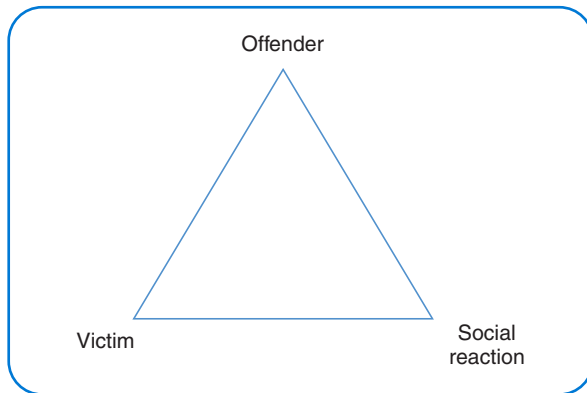


The potting shed

After the London bombings in 2005, the British Transport Police Chief Constable Ian Johnston said his officers would concentrate their efforts on ‘particular racial groups’ and wouldn’t ‘waste time searching old white ladies’. Identify two possible problems with this approach to crime prevention.

New Left realism

New Left realism uses a three-cornered approach (see diagram below) to understand deviant behaviour and its relationship to social control. As Young (2003) puts it: ‘The job of realism is to tackle all three sides of the deviancy process.’ In other words, where *administrative criminology*, for example, focuses on one or other of these areas, left realism focuses on both the content of each area and, more importantly perhaps, the *interaction* between them. This represents a ‘realistic approach’ in two senses:



The 'three-cornered approach'

First, 'the problem of crime' is not an academic one in that, to use **Mills'** (1959) formulation, crime is both a:

- **private problem**, in the sense of its social and psychological effects on victims, and a
- **public issue**, in the sense of the cultural impact it has on the quality of people's lives and experiences.

Second, it addresses the *multidimensional nature* of crime in terms of the relationship between *offender*, *victim* and *social reaction* – something we can understand more easily by considering each dimension in turn.

Offender profiles

These suggest the majority of crime in our society is committed by young, working-class males. Although there may be areas of *over-representation* (black youths, for example, figure disproportionately in official crime statistics) and *under-representation* (the extent of middle-class or female criminality, for example), the statistical picture is, for left realists, *broadly accurate* – there is not, for example, a vast reservoir of undetected 'crimes of the elderly'.

Explaining crime

Lea and Young (1984) suggest that *three related factors* explain why people choose or reject criminal behaviour:

Relative deprivation: Concepts like poverty and wealth are subjective categories *relative* to what someone feels they should have when compared with others (a *reference group* such as 'society', peers or whatever).

Lea and Young use this concept for two reasons:

- **Deprivation** alone cannot 'cause criminality'; many poor people do not commit crimes.
- **Relativity** allows them to include the 'well-off' in any explanation of offending. An *objectively* rich individual may, for example, feel *relatively deprived* when they compare their situation to a reference group that has greater income and wealth.

Marginalisation relates to social status. As writers such as **Willis** (1977) have shown, young, working-class men are frequently 'pushed to the margins of society' through educational failure and low-pay, low-status work. A further aspect of (political) marginalisation is the idea that, where deviant individuals see themselves as facing problems and need to resolve grievances, 'no one is listening'. Criminal activity, therefore, becomes the social expression of marginalisation, especially when it combines with:

Subculture (although the concept of *neo-tribes* would probably fit just as neatly – loose conglomerations of people who have something in common). The ability to form and move around in groups is seen as a *collective response* to a particular social situation. In this instance, the form of the

subcultural/tribal group is determined by feelings of *relative deprivation* and *marginalisation*. Specific subcultural values, in this respect, are not independent of the culture in which they arise and, for **Lea and Young**, it is precisely because working-class youths, for example, *accept* the general values of capitalist society that they indulge in criminal behaviour – the pursuit of desired ends by illegitimate means.



Weeding the path

Once again, the strength of this general theory is that ‘subcultural-type groupings’ are not restricted to the young and the working class – middle-class company directors who deal illegally in shares or fix prices to defraud the public may have their behaviour supported by a (sub)culture that sees such behaviour as permissible.

Victim profiles

As **Burke** (1999) notes, left realism tries to bring *victims* into the picture in a number of ways:

Problematising crime: In this respect **Burke** notes ‘crime is a problem for ordinary people that must be addressed’ by criminologists, especially the ‘plight of working class victims of predatory crime’ whose views have been variously *ignored* (by radical criminologists, for example) or *marginalised* (by administrative criminology and the New Right).

In this respect, left realists argue the:

Lived experiences of crime victims (or those who live in high-crime areas) need to be considered and addressed. In other words, we need to understand how ‘fear of crime’, for example, is related to ‘lived crime rates’. That is, how the experience of crime is *localised* in

the sense of affecting different individuals and groups in different ways – the chances of being a victim differ in terms of factors such as class, age, gender, ethnicity and region.

As **Burke** notes, official crime statistics suggest women are less likely to be murdered than men, but *black* women have a greater chance of being murdered than *white* men. Victim impact is similarly *fragmented*; men tend to feel anger, whereas women are more likely to report shock and fear, and such impact, **Burke** suggests, ‘cannot be measured in absolute terms: £50 from a middle class home will have less effect than the same sum stolen from a poor household’.

In addition, someone living on a *council* estate is more likely to experience crime than someone who owns a *country* estate, and, in a similar way to their New Right counterparts, left realists argue that part of the process of understanding and combating the effects of crime is to work with local communities to build safer environments.

Relationships: Many forms of criminology, as we’ve suggested, *over-determine* the relationship between offender and victim. In other words, the two are seen as practically, and therefore theoretically, distinct and separate. Some forms of criminology *under-determine* the relationship; everyone is seen as a ‘potential offender’, an idea reflected in increasingly restrictive forms of social control and surveillance in the school, workplace and community. For left realists the offender–victim relationship, for many types of everyday crime, is more complex in two ways:

- **Personal:** Offenders may be well known to their victims.
- **Cultural:** People may be, at different times, both offenders *and* victims.



The potting shed

Identify and briefly explain one perspective on crime that over-determines the relationship between offender and victim and one perspective that under-determines this relationship.

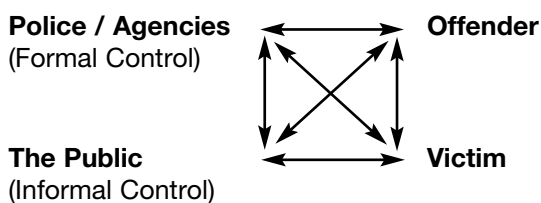
The ideas we've just noted concerning offenders and victims impact on the third corner of the left realist approach in terms of:

Social reactions

Unlike interactionist sociology, which has been concerned largely with demonstrating how different forms of public reaction contribute to the 'problem of crime', left realism focuses on how different types of social relationship (between police and public, offender and victim, and so forth) create different social reactions and, more importantly, different (policy) solutions to the problem of crime.

Young (1997) sketches the broad relationships involved in the understanding of social reactions in terms of what he calls the 'square of crime'. In this respect, social reactions are mediated through a range of different reciprocal relationships, such as that between the police and offenders – how, for example, the police view 'potential

The square of crime (Young, 1997)



and actual offenders' and, of course, the reverse view, how potential offenders view their relationship with control agencies.

This general relationship, and different levels of social reaction, is:

Multidimensional, in the sense that the relationship between formal control agencies and offenders will be mediated further by things like how the general public (informal control agencies) views both offenders and their victims. For example, where an offender or victim can't be easily identified, public reactions may be muted (or uncooperative), which, in turn, may hinder formal police attempts to control a particular type of offending (as may occur with complicated and opaque forms of white-collar/business crime). Similarly, in relation to 'victimless crimes' (such as illegal drug use) 'offender' and 'victim' may be the same person.

Interventions

For left realism, therefore, policy solutions to crime are framed in terms of different 'forms and points of intervention' in the deviancy creation process, and such interventions occur at all levels of society. For **Young** (1997), therefore, the concept of social reaction involves reacting to 'crime' as a general behavioural category rather than simply reacting to criminal behaviour at particular moments (such as when a crime is committed). Reactions, therefore, shouldn't just focus on what to do *after* an offence; rather, *interventions* (or reacting prior to an offence) need to occur at all levels of society:

- **Cultural/ideological** in terms of improving our understanding of the causes of offending, the role and relationship of the police and public, and so forth.
- **Economic** in terms of things like

educational provision and prospects, support for families, job creation and training.

- **Political** in terms of both *punitive* aspects of control (a variety of ways of dealing with different offenders) and the general climate within which offenders and victims operate (levels of tolerance over crime, for example).

Although we've isolated these ideas for theoretical convenience, they are, of course, interrelated; economic interventions (such as providing education and training) are mediated through ideological interventions (how we view different types of offender and victim, for example) and political interventions (the practical measures developed to control crime, for instance).



Weeding the path

Left realism suggests the relationship between crime, deviance and social control is a complex one that, in consequence, requires complex theorising and solutions. The problem of crime is not one (as history shows) that can be solved by relatively simplistic 'solutions' (the idea that imprisonment is both appropriate for all forms of crime and that 'it works' as a deterrent rather than simply as a form of punishment, for example). 'Solutions to crime' require complex analyses that involve thinking about the genesis of deviant behaviour in terms of offenders – the social and psychological conditions that give rise to such behaviour – and control agencies (the role of the public, police and courts, etc.). We can, however, identify two problematic areas:

- **Operationalisation:** The complexity of the left realist position makes it difficult to operationalise in its totality, and

although complexity is not a criticism, it does mean that certain forms of intervention are more likely to be pursued than others. These include, for example, the types of intervention we've previously discussed in relation to both administrative criminology and New Right realism, which in some circumstances makes it practically impossible to disentangle these different types of theory. On a practical level it's difficult to see how specific concepts like relative deprivation and political marginalisation can be measured, and if we can't quantify something like 'marginalisation', how do we know it has occurred for an offender?

- **Common sense:** Mugford and O'Malley (1990) argue that a significant problem with left realism is the 'over-determination of the real'; in other words, it makes what people *believe* about crime (in terms of its causes and explanations) a central theoretical consideration. The experiences of 'ordinary people', in this respect, are considered 'more real' than explanations produced by social scientists, and this leads to the idea that the police concentrate on working-class forms of crime because 'that is what people want'. Although this may reflect the idea that street crime, for example, is a cause for concern for people, it neglects the idea that less visible, more subtle forms of white-collar crime may have greater long-term impact on the general quality of people's lives.

Moving on

Although the precise relationship between deviance, power and control is a complex

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one, it is evident that certain groups in our society have greater and lesser involvement in offending behaviour. In the next section, therefore, we can examine a variety of ways in which criminal behaviour is socially distributed by looking at the relationship between crime and the social categories of class, age, gender, ethnicity and locality.

(‘Criminal interventions’ answer:

According to the Home Office (1998), the measures in the right-hand column are effective in reducing crime.)

4. Different explanations of the social distribution of crime and deviance by age, social class, ethnicity, gender and locality

In previous sections we’ve examined some of the more theoretical aspects of crime and deviance, and while this section contains its fair share of theoretical conundrums (over how we can operationalise the concept of crime, for example), the primary focus is on identifying and explaining patterns of crime (its *social distribution*, in other words).



Preparing the ground: Operationalising crime

Young (2001) suggests *four main ways* to

calculate and quantify the amount of crime in our society:

1 Official crime statistics record crimes *reported to the police*. These twice-yearly government statistics include a variety of categories (robbery, fraud, violent and sexual offences, for example) that constitute:

- **Officially recorded crimes:** That is, those crimes reported to, or discovered by, the police that appear in the official crime statistics.



Weeding the path

We need to note that not all crimes actually make it into the official crime statistics, for a couple of reasons.

First, as **Simmons** (2000) notes, crime statistics record *notifiable offences* – crimes ‘tried by jury in the crown court that include the more serious offences’. *Summary offences* (such as some motoring offences) are generally excluded from the statistics.

Second, the police can exercise *discretion* over *how, why* and *if* a notified offence is actually recorded. As **Simmons** notes, although some UK police forces record ‘every apparent criminal event that comes to their attention’, the majority do not – an offence may be classified as ‘an incident’ which does not appear in the crime statistics.

WARM-UP: CRIMINAL KNOWLEDGE

How many crimes do you think were officially recorded by the police in England and Wales in:

2004

1994

1950

Keep these estimates safe for the moment – we’ll return to them shortly.



The potting shed

From any area of your personal experience, identify an example of criminal behaviour you didn't report to the police and briefly explain why you didn't report it.

2 Victim surveys record crimes people have experienced, but not necessarily reported to the police. This is often achieved, as with the government-sponsored *British Crime Surveys* (BCS), by interviewing people about either their personal experience of victimisation or their general awareness of criminal behaviour in an area. The BCS covers crime in England and Wales (biennially between 1982 and 2000 and annually since) and now involves interviewing around 50,000 people aged 16 or over. Victim surveys' use in understanding criminal behaviour lies in two main areas:

- **Unreported crimes:** They provide information about crimes that may not, for a variety of reasons, have been officially recorded.
- **Risk:** They can tell us something about people *at risk* of different types of crime, their attitudes to crime and the measures they take to reduce their chances of victimisation.

Alongside such surveys, a range of *local crime surveys*, focused on particular areas, are carried out by sociologists from time to time. The **Islington Crime Surveys** (Jones et al. 1986, 1990) and **Policing the Streets** (Young, 1994, 1999) are probably the most well known, and such

surveys use similar techniques to their national counterparts – **Policing the Streets** surveyed 1000 people in the Finsbury Park region of London.

According to **British Crime Surveys** data (2005), approximately 12 million crimes occurred in 2004 (compared with a peak of nearly 20 million in 1995).

- 3 Self-report surveys:** These are usually based around interviews or anonymous questionnaires and ask people to admit to crimes they've committed in any given time period. Such surveys provide us with data about the social characteristics of *offenders* (their class and ethnic background, for example) that may be excluded from other survey methods.
- 4 Other agencies:** As Maguire (2002) notes, sources of 'systematic information about unreported crime' (from hospitals, for example) have been explored by government departments such as the Home Office, although these are not widely used by sociologists (as yet, perhaps).

* SYNOPTIC LINK

Theory and methods: The collection of crime data illustrates the different ways both quantitative and qualitative research methods can be applied to an understanding of the social world.



Digging deeper: Operationalising crime

We can think about some of the respective advantages and disadvantages of different crime survey methods in the following terms.

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Official crime statistics: Crime statistics involve practical and methodological problems (in terms of both *reliability* and *validity*) relating, in particular, to:

Under-reporting: The British Crime Surveys tell us two interesting things in this respect. First, crimes reported by the public account for around 90% of all recorded crime (the police, in other words, are responsible for discovering around 10% of recorded crime). Second, around 50% of all crime is not reported to, or recorded by, the police, and the reasons for non-reporting are many and varied:

- **Minor crimes:** The victim suffers minor inconvenience and doesn't want the trouble of reporting the offence.
- **Personal:** The victim chooses to personally resolve the issue (by confronting the offender, for example). This is likely to occur within families or close-knit communities where informal social controls are strong (a school or business, for example, may choose to deal with an offender through internal forms of discipline).
- **Fear:** Victims may fear possible reprisals from the offender if they involve the police (something that may, for example, apply to child abuse as well as more obvious forms of personal attack). Alternatively, witnesses may fail to come forward to identify offenders – in London, for example, Operation Trident was set up in 1998 to 'tackle gun crime in London's black communities', a type of crime hard to investigate 'because of the unwillingness of witnesses to come forward through fear of reprisals from the criminals involved'.
- **Trauma:** With sexual offences like rape (both male and female) the victim may decide not to prolong the memory of an attack; alternatively, they may feel the authorities will not treat them with consideration and sympathy. **Simmons** (2000) notes that sexual offences are the least likely of all crimes to be reported.
- **Confidence:** Unless a victim is insured, for example, there is little incentive to report crimes such as burglary if the victim has little confidence in the ability of the police to catch the offender.
- **Ignorance:** In areas such as fraud, overcharging and the like, the victim may not be aware of the crime. Many businesses, for example, are victims of crimes (such as petty theft) that are defined by offenders and witnesses as 'perks'. Alternatively, as **Simmons** notes, 'only half of detected frauds are reported to the police', one reason being that businesses may want to avoid bad publicity from a police prosecution.
- **Services:** Offences such as prostitution and drug dealing involve a 'conspiracy of silence' between those involved – someone buying illegal drugs from a drug dealer has little incentive to report the offence (a type of crime sometimes referred to as 'victimless').
- **Over-reporting:** This occurs when the police, by committing more resources to tackling a particular form of crime (such as burglary), discover 'more crime' and, in consequence, the crime statistics increase. One reason for this is the:
 - **Iceberg effect:** A large number of crimes take place each year and those notified and recorded represent the 'tip of the iceberg' (the true extent of crime is effectively hidden from view).

When control agencies target certain types of crime they dig into the ‘*dark figure*’ of submerged crime – it’s not necessarily that more crime is being committed, only that more committed crimes are discovered. This may mean crime statistics tell us *more* about the activities of control agencies than about crime and offenders.

Crime surveys

Victim surveys potentially give us a more *valid* picture of crime in that they include an overall estimate of *unreported crime*. They suggest crime is widespread throughout the population (although it needs to be remembered that many offenders commit multiple crimes), which may have implications for a simple ‘criminal’/‘law-abiding’ dichotomy. They are not, however, without their problems. **Mason (1997)** highlights three specific issues:

- **Selective memory:** People are required to remember events, sometimes many months after they happened, and their recall may be limited.
- **Values:** **Young (1994)** notes that the ‘differential interpretation respondents give to questions’ (such as the meaning of ‘being hit’ in cases of violent behaviour) creates problems of *comparison* for victim surveys. Interpretations of ‘crime’, and different tolerance levels of criminal behaviour, may vary in terms of things like class and gender.
- **Emotions:** Just as people may be reluctant to report crimes to the police, they may be similarly unwilling to talk about their victimisation to ‘middle-class interviewers’. A frequent criticism of British Crime Surveys in the past has

been that the extent of family-related crime (such as domestic violence) was underestimated because the victim was reluctant to admit to victimisation in the presence of the offender (their partner, for example). Recent refinements in interviewing technique have gone some way to resolving this particular problem.

A further issue to include is:

Knowledge: This extends from knowing about a criminal offence (such as vandalism) but not considering yourself ‘a victim’, to areas like corporate crime where ‘victims’ are *unaware* of their victimisation. The BCS, for example, tells us little or nothing about complex, sophisticated forms of criminality carried out by the middle and upper classes, thereby reinforcing the idea of crime as a working-class phenomenon.

Self-report surveys are significant for three main reasons:

- **Foundation:** The researcher can get as close as possible to the ‘source of criminal behaviour’, thereby increasing the *validity* of the information gained, something that, **Thornberry and Krohn (2000)** argue, encourages ‘increased reporting of many sensitive topics’.
- **Characteristics:** Such surveys are one of the few ways available for sociologists to systematically gather information about the social characteristics of *offenders*.
- **Data:** These surveys can collect information about the frequency and seriousness of different forms of offending.



Weeding the path

Despite these advantages, **Young (1994)** suggests the general *reliability and validity* of such surveys can be criticised in terms of:

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- **Representativeness:** The majority of self-report surveys focus on the behaviour of *young people* (with some exceptions – **Thornberry** (1997) and **Jessor** (1998) for example). Although this tells us something about their behaviour (offending in terms of class, gender and ethnicity, for instance), it's difficult to see how findings can be *generalised*.
- **Delinquency:** Self-report surveys discover a mass of relatively trivial delinquent behaviour, but miss a vast range of offending that's more usually associated with adults (**Weitekamp**, 1989). This includes, of course, 'crimes of the powerful' (such as corporate crime).
- **Participation:** There is evidence (**Jurgen-Tas et al.**, 1994) that 'prior contacts with the juvenile justice system' make offenders less likely to participate in self-report surveys. In addition, the setting of many studies ('a middle-class interviewer, often in the official setting of the school') creates what **Young** calls 'an optimum socially structured situation for fabrication'. In other words, respondents consciously and unconsciously *lie*. **Jupp** (1989) further suggests that respondents tend to admit fully to trivial offences and

display an unwillingness to admit to serious offences.



Preparing the ground: Explaining crime patterns

Although there are problems and arguments surrounding the operationalisation of crime, this doesn't necessarily mean the data produced are meaningless. In this respect, we can identify a range of patterns and explanations for the social distribution of crime, starting with:

Social class: Although, as **Young** (1994) notes, self-report studies question the (simple) association between class and crime (partly because they tend to pick up on a wide range of relatively trivial forms of deviance), the general thrust of sociological research shows a number of correlations between class and more serious forms of offending. The majority of convicted offenders are drawn from the working class, for example, and different classes tend to commit different types of offence (crimes such as fraud are mainly middle-class). One reason for this is:

Opportunity structures: Where people

Discussion point: Criminal knowledge revisited

According to the Home Office Crime Reduction & Community Safety Group (2005), officially recorded crime in England and Wales was just under 6 million in 2004, around 5.25 million in 1994 and 461,000 in 1950. How close were your estimates to the actual figures?

What do the estimates produced by the class as a whole tell us about our understanding of crime?

What reasons can you identify for the changes in recorded crime over the past 50 years?

are differently placed (in the workforce, for example) they have greater or lesser criminal opportunities. Corporate crime is largely carried out by the higher classes (the working class are not, by definition, in positions of sufficient power and trust to carry out elaborate frauds). However, all classes have the same basic **opportunities** to commit a wide variety of offences (from street violence and theft to armed robbery). This suggests we need alternative ways to explain the predominantly working-class nature of these offences, such as:

Lifestyle and socialisation: Given that crime statistics show young people have the highest rates of offending, middle-class youths are less likely to be involved in 'lifestyle offending' that relates to various forms of street crime, partly for:

- **status reasons** – a criminal record is likely to affect potential career opportunities, and partly for
- **economic reasons** – middle-class youths are less likely to pursue crime as a source of income.

Theories

We could also include here a range of sociological theories concerning the relationship between crime and primary/secondary socialisation (from **Merton's** strain theory, through differential association and subcultural theory, to New Right and administrative criminological explanations). However, an alternative explanation involves changing the focus from the social characteristics of *offenders* to the activities of:

Social control agencies and their perception and treatment of different social

classes. *Policing strategies*, for example, covers a number of related areas:

- **Spatial targeting** focuses police resources on areas and individuals where crime rates have, historically, been highest (which, in effect, usually means spaces mainly occupied by the working classes – clubs, pubs, estates or designated 'crime hotspots').
- **Stereotyping:** There is an element of *self-fulfilling prophecy* in this type of targeting ('high-crime' areas are policed, therefore more people are arrested, which creates 'high-crime' areas ...) which spills over into:
- **Labelling theory:** **Young and Mooney** (1999), for example, note how working-class ethnic groups are likely to be targeted on the basis of *institutional police racism* as well as the sort of routine police practices just noted.

Crime visibility

A further aspect to labelling is that some forms of crime may not be defined as crimes at all. These include forms of petty theft (using the company's photocopier for personal work), as well as more complex and serious forms of (middle-class) crime. Computer crime, for example, tends to be underestimated in crime statistics because, as we've seen, even when it is detected a company may prefer to sack the offender than involve the police.

Social visibility is also a factor here. Working-class crime, for example, tends towards high visibility – in situations with clear victims, witnesses and little attempt to hide criminal behaviour, detection and conviction rates are likely to be higher.

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Some crimes (such as insider share dealing) are *less visible* to the police and public. Corporate and middle-class forms of criminality may also be *highly complex* and *diffuse* in terms of criminal *responsibility* (as with the Hatfield rail crash) and *victimisation* (there may be no clear and identifiable victims).

Network Rail guilty over Hatfield

news.bbc.co.uk 06/09/05

'Network Rail has been found guilty of breaching health and safety legislation in the run-up to the Hatfield crash.

But three ... managers, and two former employees of Balfour Beatty, the firm that maintained the line, were cleared at the Old Bailey. Four people died when a London to Leeds express train hit a cracked rail and left the tracks on 17 October 2000. Prosecutors said the crash resulted from a "cavalier approach" to safety.'

Hale et al. (2005) also point to the way the media 'reinforce dominant stereotypes of crime and the criminal' in ways that downplay and marginalise corporate forms of criminal behaviour and emphasise the types of crime mainly carried out by the working classes.

Age: A consistent finding of statistical and survey methods is the correlation between age and deviant behaviour; young people (the 10–24 age group in the UK) are more involved in crime and deviance than their older counterparts. **Social Trends** (2005) puts the peak age for offending at 18 for males and 15 for females, which suggests criminal behaviour declines with age.

Hirschi and Gottfredson (1983) argue that 'the relationship between age and crime is invariant [constant] across all social and

cultural conditions at all times', while **Kanazawa and Still** (2000) suggest 'crime and other risk-taking behaviour ... peaks in late adolescence and early adulthood, rapidly decreases throughout the 20s and 30s, and levels off during middle age'.

According to **Social Trends** (2005), for all types of *notifiable offence* the highest offending age group in 2003 was 16–24 year olds. A range of explanations exists for this relationship.

Explanations

Socialisation and social control can be used to explain both the relationship between youth and class (different social classes experience different forms of socialisation and control) and the relationship between declining criminal activity and age. In terms of the former, for example, the *relative* lack of middle-class youth criminality can be explained by their primary involvement in education and their focus on career development. In terms of the latter, **Maruna** (1997) notes:

Sociogenic explanations focus on the idea of *informal social controls* (such as family responsibilities) that increasingly operate with age. In other words, where young people generally have fewer social responsibilities and ties than older people they experience looser informal social control, which results in a greater likelihood of *risk-taking* behaviour. Fewer responsibilities for others, as **Matza** (1964) noted, make young people more likely to indulge in 'self-centred' (deviant) behaviour, an idea sometimes expressed in terms of:

Social distance theory: As **Maruna** notes, things like:

- finding employment

- staying in **education**
- getting **married** and
- starting a **family**

distance people from (public) situations in which opportunistic criminality occurs.

Complementing this, we could note how:

Peer-group pressure among the young may promote deviant behaviour (something that links to **Sutherland's** notion of *differential association*). Given that, as **Matza** argues (and statistics seem to confirm), there is no strong, long-term commitment to crime among young people, this may contribute to explanations about why deviance declines with age. A further dimension here is that for some youth, crime represents a source of:

Social status within a peer or family group. The ability to commit skilful crimes or be the 'hardest' person in a group, for example, may confer status that is denied to many working-class youths in society.

Lifestyle

These types of explanation link into:

Lifestyle factors which focus, to some extent, on the difference between the *public* and *private* domains:

- **Public** domain explanations involve the idea that young people are more likely to have a lifestyle that creates opportunities for (relatively petty, in the majority of cases) deviance – in situations where large numbers of young people congregate and socialise there are greater *opportunities* for relatively unplanned, opportunistic criminality. In this respect, **FitzGerald et al.** (2003) noted the interplay of two factors in youth criminal activity:
 - **Cultural factors:** 'Image-conscious'

youth not only had to maintain a certain sense of image and style (clothes, mobiles, and so forth), they also needed to constantly update and change this image, something that links to:

- **Economic factors** – the need for money to finance their image. Where family financial support was absent, crime provided a source of funding.
- **Private** domain explanations relate to the way greater forms of individual responsibility develop 'with age', effectively taking people out of the situations in which the majority of crime takes place. The least criminal in our society, the elderly, are also the least likely to be involved in *public domain* activities (most elderly people do not, for example, have a 'pubbing and clubbing' lifestyle).

Alternatives

Although these types of explanation focus on the personal/cultural characteristics of 'age groups', alternative explanations focus on the activities of:

- **Social control agencies:** As with class, gender and ethnicity, *policing strategies* make an important contribution to our understanding of age and crime:
- **Spatial targeting** focuses on spaces occupied by youth and, as we've seen, involves elements of *stereotyping* and *self-fulfilling prophecy*. Part of the ability to police the young in this way comes from their lower social status and lack of power to resist police control and surveillance strategies.
- **Social visibility** is also a factor in spatial

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targeting since policing strategies reflect beliefs about the places and situations in which crime is 'likely to occur'. In addition, adults are more likely to commit low-visibility crimes whereas the young are more likely to display:

- **Status deviance.** Many crimes are not committed for economic reasons alone; some relate to power and prestige within a social group and involve a combination of *risk-taking* and the idea of 'thumbing your nose' at authority. **Smith et al.** (2005) suggest young people's contact with the police is more likely to be *adversarial* (conflict-based). Interestingly, this has a class dimension; the higher the class, the *less likely* that police contact would be adversarial.

Gender

Higher male involvement in crime is, according to **Maguire** (2002), a 'universal feature ... of all modern countries'. Statistically, UK men and women commit much the same *types* of crime (**Social Trends**, 2005), with theft, drug offences and personal violence being the main offences for *both* sexes. Men, however, commit more crime and a wider range of offences (from robbery, through burglary, to sex offences). Explanations for this difference focus on a range of ideas:

- **Socialisation** is a traditional place to

begin when discussing gender differences, mainly because males and females are subject to different forms of socialisation and levels of social control. Traditional sociological discourses, for example, contrast the active, instrumental nature of male socialisation with the passive, affective nature of female socialisation, and while this may or may not be an accurate reflection of current realities, it forms the basis of different attitudes to:

- **Risk:** Males and females develop different attitudes to 'risk-taking' which, in turn, explains greater or lesser involvement in crime. Contemporary takes on this idea, **Davies** (1997) suggests, focus on:
- **Identity formation**, where gender is 'viewed as a *situated accomplishment*'; in other words, deviance and conformity represent cultural resources for 'doing masculinity and femininity'. What this means, in effect, is that concepts of masculinity and femininity in our culture are bound up in different attitudes to risk – men display greater risk-taking attitudes than women because 'taking risks' is associated with 'being male'. **McIvor** (1998), in this respect, argues greater male involvement in youth crime is 'linked to a range of other risk-taking behaviours which in turn are associated with the search for [masculine] identity in the transition from adolescence to

Discussion point: Risky business?

Do men have different attitudes to risk than women?

As a class, identify and discuss some of the ways you think men do – or do not – display a greater willingness to take risks in their behaviour. (You could, for example, think about behaviour in the school/classroom – are boys, for example, more demanding and disruptive?)

adulthood' – something that reflects, for example, functionalist forms of subcultural theory.

Socialisation, social control and identity differences also find expression in the idea of:

Opportunity structures which reflect different forms of participation in the *public* and *private* domains. **Davies** (1997) notes how greater female participation in the private sphere of home and family demonstrates how the relative lack of female criminality 'reflects their place in society' – restrictions imposed by family responsibilities and a lesser participation in the public sphere result in fewer *opportunities* for crime.

Although social changes (such as higher levels of female participation in the workplace) have blurred this general 'private/public' distinction, where men and women have *similar* opportunity structures, their respective patterns of crimes appear broadly similar. Shoplifting, for example, is one area in the UK, according to **McMillan** (2004), 'where women almost equal men in the official statistics'. 'Middle-class crime', such as fraud, is predominantly committed by men, which reflects their relatively higher positions in the workplace.

Alternatives

As with class and age, an alternative way to see gender differences in criminality is to focus on the perceptions and activities of:

Social control agencies: Men and women, in this respect, are viewed differently by control agents (from parents, through teachers to the media, police and courts) and, consequently, are treated differently. This difference may be expressed in terms of a couple of ideas.

Overestimation of male criminality: Control agents are more likely to recognise and respond to male offending, which is related to the:

Underestimation of female criminality: One (contested) argument is that the police and judiciary have *stereotyped* views about male and female criminality that, in basic terms, see the former as 'real criminals', which means the police are less likely to suspect or arrest female offenders. In addition, the courts may deal more leniently with female offenders, an idea called the:

Chivalry effect: **Klein** (1996) notes how writers such as **Pollack** (1950) have perpetuated the above ideas about police and judicial behaviour. While **Carlen et al.** (1985) argue that such an effect is overstated, they note that where strong stereotypes of masculinity and femininity pervade the criminal justice system, *both* women and men who do not fit neatly into gendered assumptions about male and female roles and responsibilities are likely to receive *harsher* treatment than those who do.

Although ideas about over- and underestimation are open to some dispute, one aspect of gendered treatment is the:

Medicalisation of female crime. While *pathological* concepts of crime and deviance (explanations that focus on some essential (inherent) biological or psychological quality of males and females) are, as **Conrad** and **Schneider** (1992) show, nothing particularly new, the medicalisation of *female deviance* (in particular) sees offending behaviour redefined as *illness*; female offending, in other words, is more likely to be interpreted as a 'psychological cry for help', or as having a medical rather than criminal causality. This *redefinition process*, therefore, helps to explain lower (apparent) levels of female criminality.



The potting shed



Identify and briefly explain two ways that female deviance may be explained in medical rather than criminal terms.

Easta (1991) documents a number of instances in both the UK and the USA where *premenstrual tension* has been used as an explanation for different types of female criminality, something that **Klein** (1996) argues represents an extension of the way 'femaleness' has a long cultural association with 'nature' and 'biology'. **Easta** notes, however, that many feminists have objected to this medicalisation process because it 'reinforces the view of women as slaves to their hormones'.

An alternative take on the possible underestimation of female criminality is the idea of:

Social visibility. Female crime is underestimated because it is 'less visible' to the police, either because women are more successful in hiding their criminal behaviour or because formal control agencies are less likely to police female behaviour. **Maguire**

(2002), however, argues that the weight of research evidence suggests there is no great reservoir of 'undiscovered female crime' – there is, he suggests '... little or no evidence of a vast shadowy underworld of female deviance hidden in our midst like the sewers below the city streets'.

Ethnicity: While it's important not to lose sight of the fact that, in the UK, the 'white majority' represents a significant ethnic group, the focus here is mainly on *ethnic minority groups* and crime (since previous sections have tended to focus on ethnic majority forms of criminality). In this respect, the **Commission for Racial Equality** (2004) suggests *ethnic minorities* are more likely to be:

- **victims** of household, car and racially motivated crimes
- **arrested** for notifiable offences ('arrest levels from stop-and-searches were eight times higher for black and three times higher for Asian than for white groups')
- **remanded** in prison (refused bail)
- **represented** disproportionately in the prison population.

Just as experiences of crime differ *within* majority ethnic groups (in terms of class, age and gender), the same is true of minority groups. We also need to recognise that different minorities have broadly different experiences; Asians, for example, have a higher risk of being victims of household crime, whereas black minorities are at greater risk of personal crimes such as assault. Although there is little significant difference in *offending* rates between ethnic minority groups, the past few years have seen an increase in gun crime and murder rates

(as both victims and offenders) among young Afro-Caribbean males.

When thinking about explanations for ethnic minority crime we need to recognise two important demographic characteristics of the general minority population:

- **Social class:** Ethnic minority group members are more likely to be working class.
- **Age:** Black minority groups generally have a younger age profile than both the white majority and the UK population as a whole.

Explanations

These characteristics are significant because of the relationship we've previously discussed between class, age and crime. If we control for *social class*, for example, all ethnicities show *similar* levels of 'street crime' activity in their populations. Crime rates for ethnic minorities living in low-crime, 'white majority' communities are not significantly different and the same is true of whites living in 'black majority' areas. This suggests, perhaps, that we should not overstate the relationship between ethnicity and offending. With this in mind, explanations for ethnic minority criminality can be constructed around concepts like:

- **Opportunity structures:** The class and age demographics for ethnic minority groups suggest that a general lack of involvement in 'middle-class' forms of offending can be explained in terms of such groups not generally being in a position to carry out this type of crime.
- **Social control:** The relatively low levels of female Asian offending can be partly explained by higher levels of surveillance

and social control experienced within the family. Similarly, black minority youth are more likely to be raised in single-parent families than their white peers, and this type of family profile is *statistically* associated with higher rates of juvenile offending.

- **Over-representation:** One set of explanations for black over-representation in prison focuses on the greater likelihood of black youth being:
 - **Targeted** by the police as potential/actual offenders (an idea that relates to police *stereotypes* of class, age and ethnicity). **Clancy et al.** (2001) note that when all demographic factors are controlled, 'being young, male and *black* increased a person's likelihood of being stopped and searched'.
 - **Prosecuted** and convicted through the legal system. **Home Office** (2004) statistics show that although arrests for notifiable offences were predominantly white (85% as against 15% from non-white minority groups), blacks overall were three times more likely to be arrested than whites, although arrest rates varied significantly by locality. *Urban* areas (such as London and Manchester) generally had a *lower* ratio of black/white arrest rates than *rural* areas (such as Norfolk, where blacks were eight times more likely to be arrested than whites). Significantly perhaps, black suspects were also proportionately more likely to be *acquitted* in both magistrate and Crown courts.

One explanation for over-representation might be:

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Institutional racism: The **Macpherson Report** (1999) into the murder of the black teenager **Stephen Lawrence** suggested police cultures and organisations were institutionally biased against black offenders and suspects. Lower rates of offending and arrest for Asian minorities, however, suggest this may not paint a complete picture.

Skidelsky (2000) argues that *social class* also plays a significant part in any explanation since ‘poor people, or neighbourhoods, get poor [police] service, whatever their race’.

Young and Mooney (1999) argue that much the same is true for the general policing process in the UK – ‘If ... institutionalised racism were removed the disproportionate class focus (of the police) would still result ... but at a substantially reduced level’.

The courts

Finally, in any explanation of ethnic minority criminality we need to note the role of the:

Judiciary, in terms of thinking about those who are actually found guilty and punished. **Home Office** (2004) statistics show that around 25% of the male and 31% of the female prison population was from an ethnic minority group (ethnic minorities currently make up around 8% of the UK population). Either ethnic minority groups display far higher levels of offending or some other process is at work, distorting the relative figures. One such factor is that black minority prisoners tend to serve longer prison sentences (for whatever reason) than other ethnic groups (something that might partly be explained in terms of their greater involvement in gun crime).

Thirty-seven per cent of black prisoners were serving sentences for drug offences

(compared with 13% for white prisoners); although this may (or may not) reflect different levels of drug use, the fact that this single form of criminality accounts for such a large proportion of black inmates tells us something about the nature of black criminality in the UK.

Locality

As we suggested when we looked at ecological theories, crime can be related to locality/area in a couple of ways:

- **Cultural environments:** This involves thinking about variables such as class, age and ethnicity, in the sense that area differences in crime and victimisation rates will clearly be related to the cultural composition of an area. We know, from **Clarke et al.** (2004), that working-class areas have higher crime rates than middle-class areas – the question, however, is the extent to which this difference is a function of class, locality or, perhaps, both.
- **Physical environments:** Ideas about how people interact with their environment have been outlined previously in relation to both administrative criminology and New Right realism, so we don’t need to cover the same ground here. However, as **Clarke et al.** (2004) note: ‘The highest crime rates are in city centre areas, with the lowest in the most rural. Different types of crime tend to occur in different types of areas.’

Explanations

Although it’s difficult to disentangle cultural and physical correlations, a number of factors can be suggested to explain the rural/urban variation:

- **Opportunities:** A relatively simple observation perhaps, but urban areas contain more people (especially young people, the peak offenders as we've seen) and places (shops, offices, factories and houses) in which to commit crime. Urban areas also contain more 'lifestyle resources' (clubs and pubs, for example) where large numbers of people (especially young people) gather and socialise, which in turn creates more opportunities for offending. **Zaki (2003)** expresses these ideas in terms of urban areas having 'higher densities of population and premises, and greater mixes of use, and therefore higher crime opportunities. They also tend to have less advantaged populations who are known to be more vulnerable to crime in general'.
- **Socialisation:** **Parsons (1937)** has argued that urban life involves a wider range of impersonal, *instrumental* relationships, something that encourages offenders to distance themselves from the consequences of their behaviour. This 'social distancing' makes people more likely to commit crime in urban areas because they are less likely to have close personal ties to their victims. The reverse holds true in rural areas where *affective relationships* are more likely; this increases the probability of a potential offender knowing their victim and acts to prevent many forms of criminal behaviour. This idea links into:
- **Social control:** **Tonnies (1887)** suggested rural areas are more likely to be characterised by community (*Gemeinschaft*) type relationships that encourage people to take an interest in the behaviour of their neighbours. Small,

tight-knit communities (where everyone knows everyone else) make it easier to exercise informal types of social control. In urban areas where relationships are more impersonal (*Gesellschaft*), informal social controls do not operate as effectively.

In addition, close-knit communities may deal with offenders in ways that do not necessarily involve the police; alternatively, the police themselves (because of their closer personal ties with a community) are less likely to invoke the criminal law over minor infractions.

The potting shed

Identify and briefly explain *two* examples of informal social controls for any *two* areas of the Specification.

- **Police resources and strategies:** Greater numbers and concentrations of police in urban areas increase the likelihood of crime being detected and reported. In addition, the police are able to target 'crime hotspots' – places where offending is either known, or more likely, to take place.
- **Social visibility:** Recent technological developments, such as CCTV, are more likely to be deployed in urban areas (especially city centres or targeted crime hotspots), making it easier to both identify and deter offenders by increasing their social visibility. Conversely, the relative size and social differentiation of urban areas make it easier for offenders to move around 'anonymously' – there are fewer chances of being recognised by victims, for example.

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- **Lifestyle factors:** A range of explanations apply in this context, relating to things like:
 - **Age:** rural communities tend to have an older age demographic and the elderly are the least likely group to offend.
 - **'Lifestyle crimes':** Involving drug use and dealing, theft of personal items, such as mobile phones and personal MP3 players, prostitution and the like.
 - **Risk avoidance:** Middle- and upper-class areas (both rural and urban) are more likely to employ a range of crime prevention strategies (such as burglar alarms).



Digging deeper: Explanations for crime

To complete this section we can note a number of concluding comments.

Transgression: When we think, for theoretical convenience and clarity, about the social distribution of crime in terms of categories like class, age, gender, ethnicity and locality, we need to keep in mind the fact that these are not *discrete* categories. In other words, each individual in our society has all these characteristics – and this means, of course, that we must take account of this when thinking about how and why crime is socially distributed.

Age has a couple of significant dimensions we need to consider briefly. First, it can reasonably be argued that age is not, in itself, a useful indicator of criminality; this follows, as we've suggested, because there may be nothing intrinsic to the concept of age that promotes offending (young people don't simply offend because they are young). In this respect, therefore,

we need to explore factors such as lifestyle and identity formation as they relate to different age groups – the young, in particular, are more likely to lead active, public lifestyles which bring them into contact with offending behaviour and, of course, social control agencies. Similarly, if youth identities are more fluid than adult identities (they are not so tightly secured by family, work and individual responsibilities, for example), it may follow that the young are more likely to indulge in risky forms of behaviour, some of which involve crime.

Second, while **Gottfredson and Hirschi** (1990) argue that crime is inversely correlated with age (as people get older their offending declines), **Blumstein et al.** (1986) argue that age and crime do not have this characteristic in terms of *individual offenders*. In other words, crime *declines* at the general population level of society because there are fewer active offenders – where crime declines, therefore, it's because the number of offenders in society declines, not because of a decline in offending at the individual level.

This interpretation, if valid, has profound consequences for the way we examine and explain the social distribution of crime, not just in terms of age, but also in terms of removing offenders from society through imprisonment (part of a general debate about the effectiveness of prison as a crime control measure).

Definitions: A further complication is the fact that, although we have 'taken for granted' the definition of crime in this section, such concepts are neither neutral nor self-evident.

Box (1983) makes the point that even with a crime such as 'murder': 'The criminal

law defines only some types of avoidable killing as murder; it excludes, for example, deaths resulting from acts of negligence, such as employers' failure to maintain safe working conditions; or deaths which result from governmental agencies giving environmental health risks a low priority

This point is particularly relevant, as we've seen, in relation to black criminality and imprisonment, given the fact that nearly 40% of the current black prison population has been found guilty of drug offences; if drug-taking were decriminalised, for example, the consequences for our perception of this particular ethnic minority could well change dramatically.

Moving on

In the final section of this chapter we're going to use the example of suicide to bring together a range of ideas and issues relating to the sociological study of crime and deviance.

5. The sociological issues arising from the study of suicide

To complete this chapter we can use the study of suicide to examine issues, both methodological and practical, of fundamental importance to our understanding of sociology.

WARM-UP: YOU THE JURY

Read the following report:

Deborah Neill was a popular actress in the 1960s, when she appeared in over 25 films. An apparently wealthy woman, she lived alone (she was recently divorced and had no children) in a luxurious apartment in a fashionable part of the city. It was in the garage of her apartment on May 15, 2006 that she was found in her car, poisoned by carbon monoxide from the running exhaust.

The investigation into her death found spots of blood on – and in – the car and on Neill's mouth, prompting one theory she may have been knocked unconscious and then put into the car, although no suspicious people or noises were witnessed by her neighbours. Tests for blood alcohol showed a high enough level to suggest she would not have been completely conscious of her actions. To reach her car Neill had to walk down a steep flight of outdoor steps. Her high-heeled sandals, however, were free of dirt. An unidentified handprint was discovered on the driver-side door handle.

Neill had recently been the victim of a blackmail attempt, about which the police had few details. Her divorce had, moreover, been acrimonious, with suggestions of violent rows. Witness statements from neighbours suggested Neill had suffered recent bouts of depression (for which she had not sought medical help) and on occasions she had talked about 'ending it all'. At the time of her death Neill was being investigated by the Inland Revenue for unpaid taxes and was near to bankruptcy.

- 1 Was this a 'suicide' or some other form of death?
- 2 What evidence led you to your verdict?

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3 Identify, briefly explain and discuss with the class some of the sociological issues thrown up by your deliberations.

The official verdict is at the end of this section.

* SYNOPTIC LINK

Theory and methods: All the issues explored in this section can be related in various ways to theoretical or methodological questions. You should also note opportunities to consider these issues in relation to other parts of the Specification.



Preparing the ground: Sociological issues

This exercise highlights a number of sociological issues illustrated by the concept of suicide, starting with a perennial issue.

Definitions: The ‘problem of definition’ is frequently a sociological issue whenever we study social behaviour – the idea of a *contested concept*, for example, is one you’ve come across a number of times during the course. In this instance, however, definitional problems relate not so much to how suicide can be defined (it has a straightforward, universally agreed definition); rather, the issue here is how we recognise ‘a suicide’. In other words, while we know exactly how suicide is defined, it can be difficult to decide whether or not a particular form of death is actually a suicide (as opposed to a murder, for example).



The potting shed

Identify two ‘contested concepts’ from any area of the Specification and briefly explain how and why each has more than one possible interpretation.

The issue here, therefore, is one of:

Classification: If we want, for example, to explain something like the social causes of suicidal behaviour, our ability to classify clearly some forms of behaviour as suicide (and others as non-suicide) is a crucial issue, one that may be neither straightforward nor simple. This relates, in turn, to a further sociological issue:

Constructionism: One reason for problems of classification within sociology is the idea of human behaviour as *socially constructed*; in other words, the extent to which social behaviour has different:

Meanings and interpretations for different individuals and cultures. In this instance, ‘causes of death’ in our culture have many possible interpretations and the same is true when we broaden the scope to include the behaviour of people in other societies and cultures. A couple of examples should clarify this issue:

- **Crime:** Until 1961, suicide was a criminal offence in the UK. Euthanasia (killing someone at their request) remains a criminal offence, although in countries such as Holland it has been legal since 1984.
- **Deviance:** In the UK, suicide is seen as a deviant act. In traditional Hindu cultures in India, however, a form of *ritual suicide* (*suttee*) was practised (and in some cases still is, even though it was made illegal in 1829) – a widow commits suicide by throwing herself on her husband’s funeral pyre. To *not* commit suicide, in this instance, would be considered a deviant act.

Concepts of *construction* and *classification* suggest a further issue:

- **Typologies** (a systematic classification into different types, based on shared qualities): Here, the question is whether we can *type* 'suicide' as a prelude to explaining it; in other words, if we can identify different types of behaviour (suicide, voting, family groups or whatever) it follows that something must *cause* individuals to behave in communal ways. Whether these causes are found in areas like genetics, psychology or sociology (or some combination of each), the key point is that human group behaviour has a *causality* (a further significant general issue within sociology) that can be identified and explained using typologies, in **Tatz's** (1999) evocative phrase, as 'frameworks for speculation'.

* SYNOPTIC LINK

Theory and methods: Issues of causality are discussed in greater detail in relation to modernity and postmodernity.

For the moment, we can consider the issue of typologies in terms of two ideas:

- **Suicide:** Here, suicide has a relatively clear, standardised meaning deriving from the physical act itself. Once we establish the concept of 'a suicide', therefore, we can move towards identifying different possible types. **Durkheim** (1897), for example, identified four broad types (see below, page 422), whereas **Wekstein** (1979) suggests a ten-point typology, one of which involves the idea of 'suicide by murder' – attacking someone to bring about one's own death. This position sees

suicide as *unproblematic* (not open to interpretation) and, from this, the task of sociology is to explore different possible causal explanations.

- **Suicides:** An alternative interpretation is to make suicide *problematic* by thinking about the meaning people who kill themselves give to their actions. Rather than talk about 'suicide' as if it had a simple, clear and uncontested meaning, therefore, we should, according to **Douglas** (1967), see this act as involving a wide range of possible meanings and interpretations – one 'suicide' is never the same as any other.

Objectivity and subjectivity

Berard (2005) argues that we should see suicide as an '*evaluative category*', one whose particular meaning is decided by 'persons, actions, institutions [and] social contexts'. In other words, 'suicide' is a socially constructed category whose meaning depends (as writers such as **Atkinson** (1978) have argued) on how the act itself is *interpreted by others*, especially those with the power (such as coroners) to decide whether an act is classified as suicide.

These two basic positions illustrate a further sociological issue, namely the distinction between two ideas:

- **Objective knowledge:** The idea here is that we can produce sociological knowledge with the status of objectivity; we can, in other words, produce factual knowledge that proves or disproves certain ideas and explanations based on the use of objective forms of evidence. **Durkheim** (1895) classically expressed this idea as, 'consider social facts as things', something that has a real, objective existence.

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- **Subjective knowledge:** This position suggests all knowledge is both partial (one-sided) and incomplete. In relation to suicide, **Berard** argues that a crucial consideration in any understanding and explanation of social behaviour has to be ‘... the question of *how* the relevant data is identified and assembled’. In other words, the types of official (statistical) data on which supposedly objective knowledge about suicide is based are, in reality, themselves the product of choices and decisions made by social actors (something we replicated in the opening exercise by asking you to judge whether the observed behaviour should be defined as a ‘suicide’).

We can highlight a further range of issues related to *how* and *why* we collect different forms of data in terms of:

- **Methodology:** The study of suicide brings into sharp relief a number of issues relating to both theory and method, some of which we can simply note and others of which we can develop. We can start by thinking about the issue of:
 - **Data collection**, mainly because the problems associated with the study of suicide, while unique (in the sense that perpetrator and victim are the same and the victim can’t, for obvious reasons, be personally questioned), can be related to many other areas of social life. On the face of things, given the problems just noted, the obvious way to study suicide is to use:
 - **Quantitative methods**, such as official

* SYNOPTIC LINK

Theory and methods: These ideas can be used as criticisms of statistical research data and processes.



Growing it yourself: Making an issue of it

Take any *two* of the following issues:

- definitions
- classification
- meanings and interpretations
- typologies
- objective knowledge
- subjective knowledge.

Apply them to any area of the social world/social behaviour you’ve studied during your course.

For example, identify and explain problems associated with defining ‘a family’ or ‘intelligence’.

You should aim to write around 120 words for *each* issue.

suicide statistics. This was the route originally taken by **Durkheim** (1897), for example. His technique was to compare different rates of suicide in different societies (hence the idea of a *comparative methodology*) in order to identify possible *patterns* of suicide, which he could then explain in terms of social forces and pressures acting on individuals that 'propel them into suicidal behaviour'.



The potting shed

Identify and briefly explain one reason for seeing Durkheim's approach as structuralist rather than constructionist.

Alternatively, it's possible to compare different sets of data to search for *correlations*; for example, comparing suicide rates with factors such as levels of unemployment, poverty and family breakdown. This can be done on both regional (**Congdon**, 1996) and national (**Diekstra**, 1989) levels. The main problem with this approach, however, is that of demonstrating that successful suicides actually had the correlated characteristics.

To overcome this, a common statistical method is to work at the individual level, correlating known data about *successful* suicides to identify possible patterns in their behaviour, an approach taken by **Charlton** (1995) among others. Such data might include a mix of both *objective features* of an individual's life (employment and family status, age, gender, and so forth) and *subjective features* (mental health, for example). A problem here, however, is that

the latter type of data are open to different interpretations, especially if data about a suicidal individual's 'state of mind' is gathered from 'unqualified sources' (colleagues, friends and the like).



Weeding the path

Quantitative methods, as writers such as **Douglas** and **Berard** have suggested, may be *problematic* because suicide statistics are, at root, the considered opinions of powerful definers (such as coroners). Decisions about how to define a 'suspicious death' are open to different influences since, as **Berard** notes, 'categorisations of suicide can . . . raise profoundly important questions of a religious, financial, moral or legal nature'. Classification decisions are, therefore, both:

- **Evaluative**, in that they take account of subjective factors and interpretations – for example, was the victim depressed? – and
- **Consequential** – a suicide verdict may have consequences for the living, such as the denial of an insurance payout, stigma attached to friends and family or blame attached to official guardians.

Qualitative methods share certain similarities with at least some of their quantitative counterparts in the sense that they produce:

Reconstructed profiles of individual suicides using a variety of techniques based, by and large, around different forms of *witness testimony*. These include, of course, the testimony of the successful suicide in the form of:

Suicide notes, analysis of which may tell us why someone decided to commit suicide.

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While this technique may produce high-validity data, it suffers from a range of potential problems, not the least being that the majority of suicides *don't* leave a note. In those instances where notes are left, problems remain – they may, for example, be removed from the scene *deliberately* (by friends or family) or *accidentally* (blown away by the wind, for example, if the location for suicide is a cliff top).

Alternatively, reconstructions involve things like:

- **physical evidence** at the scene, such as empty pill bottles or the mode of death
- **eyewitness accounts**, such as evidence of someone jumping from a cliff top
- **testimonies** from friends, medical staff and the like concerning the deceased's 'state of mind'.



The potting shed

Identify and briefly explain two *ethical* problems that might arise with qualitative methods of studying suicide.

A slightly unusual method of reconstruction involves the use of:

Observation over a specified period to complete what **Bose et al.** (2004) has termed a '*verbal autopsy*'. **Bose** monitored 100,000 people in an area of India over an eight-year period, and suspected suicides were investigated in the light of personal observations, life histories and witness testimonies about the victim.

Attempted suicides

A further source of evidence comes from those who have tried and *failed* to commit suicide, since they can, of course, be questioned. A couple of issues are involved here, however. First, ethical issues surround the idea of asking failed suicides to revisit a painful period in their life, and, second, there is a possible qualitative difference between those who succeed and those who fail – was the failure evidence of a *real desire* to die that simply did not work or was it a:

Parasuicide – an 'attempt' to commit suicide that was not, ultimately, designed to succeed? Evidence here is further complicated by what **Baechler** (1979) calls:

Ludic suicide, a situation in which the individual effectively *gambles* with their life (if they survive, for example, this may be



Growing it yourself: Master labels

'A suicide' is a master label, one that may lead people to reinterpret the behaviour of a successful suicide in the light of the label.

Identify and briefly explain possible ways this reinterpretation process may impact on qualitative approaches to suicide in terms of:

- data reliability
- data validity.

taken as evidence that they are meant to continue living).



Digging deeper: Perspective issues

We've identified a range of sociological issues relating to suicide that we can now bring together by exploring sociological perspectives that offer explanations for suicidal behaviour.

Positivist approaches, for example, are based around the idea that knowledge of suicide can be informed by collecting and making sense of empirical evidence. In other words, the focus of these general approaches is the attempt to:

- **Isolate** possible factors in the decision to commit suicide.
- **Correlate** these known factors with incidents of suicide in a variety of ways (on both an individual and cultural level).

Processes

We can illustrate this focus by thinking about a number of related processes.

Statistical analysis of *known suicides* involves the collection and documentation of data that identify suicide patterns and trends. This allows us to make certain statements about the nature of suicidal behaviour and, more importantly perhaps, to *correlate* suicide with different *social characteristics* (age, gender and ethnicity, for example) and *situations* (the effects of unemployment, divorce and the like). **Sale** (2003) notes differences in suicide rates in the UK based on:

- **Gender:** Around 75% of suicides are male.

- **Age:** Rates vary between different age groups (for men, the 25–44 age group consistently has the highest rates).
- **Ethnicity:** South Asian women are three times more likely to kill themselves than other women.

Correlations

We should also, of course, note possible relationships between different characteristics. **Røn** and **Scourfield** (2005) note: 'Young people struggling with issues of sexuality and gender identity face an increased likelihood of attempting suicide.' The identification of *statistical associations* between suicide and social characteristics allows *positivists* to specify a range of:

Correlations between suicide and associated factors (such as age). **Field** (2000) notes how suicide can be correlated with a number of:

- **Long-term factors**, including:
 - **social isolation** (relationship problems with parents, for example)
 - **loss of parents**, through death or divorce
 - **sexual abuse:** In **Van Egmond et al.**'s (1993) research, 50% of sexually abused young women had attempted suicide (although the sample of 158 women was relatively small).
- **Short-term factors** that, when occurring in combination with long-term factors, are likely to push people into suicidal behaviour. These include:
 - **unemployment** (especially long term)
 - **substance abuse** (alcohol or illegal drugs)
 - **financial problems.**

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In turn, the identification of correlations can be linked to two further areas:

- **Risk:** One spin-off from this type of analysis is the possibility of creating *risk assessments* for various social groups and categories. By identifying those groups most 'at risk' and correlating these with known short-/long-term risk factors, we can develop *intervention strategies* to identify, support and help individuals 'at risk' of suicide.

* SYNOPTIC LINK

Social policy: The ideas of risk and risk assessment have implications for the development of social policies, not just in the area of suicide but across a range of social behaviours.

- **Explanations:** These can be tailored to particular correlations. For example, explanations for the lower rate of female suicide in the UK involve ideas such as:
 - **Emotional differences:** Women are more likely to seek help with their problems before they get to the stage of suicide.
 - **Methods:** Men use more violent methods (hanging, jumping from a high building) that have a greater certainty of death.

Another way to explain suicide from this general perspective is to think in:

Algorithmic terms – a general set of *rules* that can be applied variously to all forms of suicide. **Field** (2000) suggests certain 'life events' (such as abuse and divorce) create two basic types of state:

- **Stable states** represent things 'that won't go away' (such as feelings of pain or remorse).
- **Global states** represent things that affect all areas of someone's life (such as continual depression stemming from feelings of remorse).

Triggers: A small, relatively trivial trigger, related to the stable state in some way, may then produce a much larger reaction in the individual and push them into a suicidal frame of mind, a general idea we can develop in the following way.

Realist approaches

Although similar to their positivist counterparts (in the sense that there are 'real features' of social behaviour to be explained), this approach makes reference to social processes that are not directly observable. Reality, from this position, is:

Multi-layered: Searle (1995) argues that social reality consists of two main facts:

- **brute facts** or what we experience as *real* and
- **mental facts** that represent the *meaning* of brute facts.

In terms of suicide, a *brute fact* is that someone kills themselves and a *mental fact* is the meaning we give to this action. In other words, *mental facts* represent a layer of meaning that underpins our interpretation of *brute facts*.

However, a further layer can be added when we reflect on the idea that mental facts are, by definition, socially constructed (people have to agree on the meaning of mental facts). In other words, just as brute facts are significant in terms of how they're

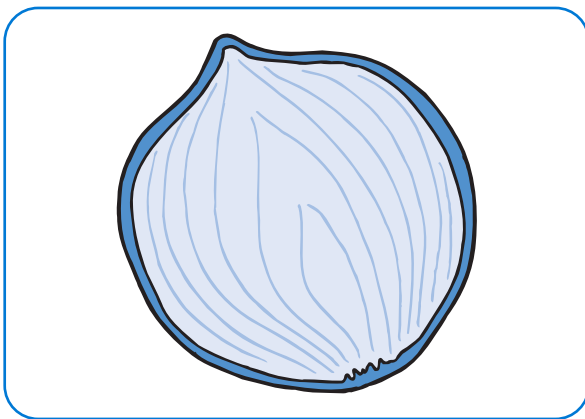
interpreted, mental production is itself based on a further, underlying layer. We can apply this to understand suicide in the following way.

The 'top layer' is an observable act, such as someone taking their own life. Since, from statistical analysis, we know this act is not random (there are clear patterns to suicide – in the UK, for example, the majority of suicides are clustered around December and January), there must be something that causes non-random distribution.

The layer underpinning this patterned behaviour, therefore, involves identifying a range of factors 'underlying the fact of suicide' that correlates with the act (for example, social isolation resulting from divorce that leads to 'depression' and hence suicide).

Causality

For *positivists*, the hunt for causality begins and ends with observable and measurable relationships (for example, when a long-time partner dies and the remaining individual is



Realist approaches

Think about social reality as being layered – like an onion.

over the age of 60 and they have no friends or family, suicide is likely).

Realists, however, want to dig deeper into a further 'layer of reality' to answer the question of what *causes* these *observable relationships*. In other words, although we know that under a certain combination of conditions individuals have an 'increased risk' of suicide, why do these conditions (social isolation, for example) give rise to increased risk? We can answer this question using **Durkheim's** (1897) classic explanation for suicide.

For **Durkheim**, social order was underpinned by two types of organisational pressure:

- **social regulation**, or the general rules that governed individual and cultural behaviour, and
- **social integration**, or the extent to which regulated individuals felt they belonged to a social group.

Regulation and integration, therefore, represent two important *forces* acting on the individual. When these are 'in balance' (the individual is 'normally regulated and integrated') there is no prospect of suicide. **Neeleman et al.** (1998) suggest lower rates of suicide among African-Americans were 'mostly attributable to their relatively high levels of orthodox religious beliefs and devotion' – in other words, they were normally integrated into a belief system that effectively decreased the likelihood of suicide.

However, if these forces are imbalanced (the individual is under-regulated or over-integrated, for example), the *risk* of suicide is increased (an idea expressed in the table on the following page).

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Emile Durkheim: Types of suicide			
Social order	Normal form	Pathological form	Type of suicide
Integration	When 'in balance' the individual is 'protected' from the likelihood of committing suicide	Under-integration	Egoistic
		Over-integration	Altruistic
Regulation		Under-regulation	Anomic
		Over-regulation	Fatalistic

Thus, from this perspective we can note four basic types of suicide:

- **Egoistic** results from a failure (within a social group whose membership the individual values) of group members to return the intense feelings of belonging held by the individual. Suicide derives from a weakening of the social ties that bind the individual to the group. When people become detached from group values and expectations they suffer what **Durkheim** termed an 'excess of individualism', resulting in suicide becoming a strong behavioural response.
- **Altruistic**: Individuals so closely associate themselves with a particular social group that their identity is submerged into that of the group itself. Thus, someone who feels they have shamed or disgraced the group may see suicide as a means of atonement.
- **Anomic**: **Nisbet** (1967) suggests this type of suicide is caused '... by the sudden dislocation of normative systems – the breakdown of values by which one may have lived for a lifetime'. In other words, where an individual becomes confused or uncertain about their world (through sudden, life-changing events, for example), the risk of suicide is increased.
- **Fatalistic**: Suicide results when the individual sees no possibility of relief from 'oppressive social discipline and



The potting shed: Types of suicide

Identify some additional examples of **Durkheim's** different types of suicide – we've done the first ones for you.

Egoistic	Altruistic	Anomic	Fatalistic
Death of long-time partner	Suicide bomber	Bankrupt	Political prisoner held without trial

regulation'. Suicide, in effect, becomes a means of escape.

Realist and positivist methodologies are not incompatible (as **Durkheim's** work demonstrates); whereas realist perspectives may highlight a range of general, underlying factors that increases the risk of suicide (such as anomie/lack of social regulation), positivist/empiricist studies can, in some instances, build on this insight to 'fine-tune' particular forms of explanation – for example, to examine empirically a range of anomic factors (such as periods of severe economic depression) and their particular relationship to suicide.



Weeding the path

To complete this section we can briefly note how:

Interpretivist approaches have contributed to our understanding of suicide in a couple of ways:

- **Problematics:** As we've suggested, interpretivist sociology has questioned the extent to which we can take suicide data (mainly, but not exclusively, in the form of *official statistics*) at face value – in terms of the idea that statistics represent 'social facts' independent of the (subjective) decision-making processes by which they're created. **Payne** and **Lart** (1998) identify a couple of problematic features of both:
 - **Completed suicides** and
 - **Incomplete suicides** (*parasuicides*) – situations where an individual has engaged in some form of life-threatening, *self-harming* behaviour.

This distinction is important because any discussion of suicide must take into account both those who are successful and those who are not.

- **Recording:** Just as not all 'suicides' are necessarily classified as such (a range of *misclassifications* will affect the reliability of suicide data), the same is undoubtedly true for parasuicide. As **Platt** (1992) suggests, our (partial) knowledge of parasuicide is limited by the way it may (or may not) be reported. By and large our knowledge comes from hospital/medical records and this raises two main problems of *data validity*.

First, not all parasuicides are brought to the attention of the medical profession. Second, if our knowledge of parasuicides is based on partial records, and we use this knowledge to inform possible theoretical explanations of suicide (by assuming that parasuicides are simply 'unsuccessful suicides'), we run the risk of generalising from incomplete data. As **Platt** notes, the majority of parasuicides that come to official attention involve self-poisoning – and the majority of these are female. This, if we're not careful, leads to the *erroneous* (unjustified) conclusion that women are more likely than men to survive suicide attempts and that female attempts at suicide are not a 'real attempt' but rather a 'cry for help'.

Objectivity and subjectivity

As we've seen, attempting to correlate various objective factors (employment status and age, for example) to suicide is relatively straightforward. Subjective factors (the individual's 'state of mind', for example) are

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much less straightforward and subject to revisionism from a variety of sources, both official (coroners, for example) and unofficial (such as family or friends). Even when dealing with parasuicide, where the victim may be willing to talk about their behaviour, it's by no means certain that a researcher can get at 'the truth' (either because the parasuicide is unwilling to give

it or, more likely perhaps, because there is the danger that accounts are simply *revisions* (reconstructions and reinterpretations) of a mass of confusing and possibly contradictory feelings and actions.

(Answer to 'You the Jury': A verdict of suicide was given in the real case from which this question was constructed.)

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ISBN 0340889349

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ISBN 0-340-91255-3



9 780340 912553