

# **“A” Level Sociology**

## **A Resource-Based Learning Approach**

### **Deviance and Social Control**

#### **Unit M10: Radical Criminology**

**These Notes have been designed to provide you with a knowledge and understanding of the following:**

"Be familiar with sociological explanations of crime, deviance, social order and social control".

**The Aims of these Notes are to allow you to understand:**

1. Radical Criminology as a Marxist theory of crime and deviance.
2. Radical Criminological theories of crime and deviance.

**The Objectives of these Notes are to allow you to understand:**

1. Taylor, Walton and Young's principles of a "fully social theory of deviance".
2. The relationship between the social structure of Capitalist society and crime.
3. Radical criticisms of Functionalist and Interactionist theories of deviance.
4. Ways in which Taylor, Walton and Young's principles of a fully social theory of deviance can be applied.

**Introduction: The New Criminology...**

The idea of a **new, radical**, form of criminology - one based upon concepts such as **class, power** and **ideology** developed by Marxists in their analysis of Capitalist society - developed initially in Britain and the United States in the **early 1970's**.

The prime movers behind the development of **Radical Criminology** in **Britain** were Paul **Taylor**, Ian **Walton** and Jock **Young** and the first statement of their intent to formulate a "new theory of deviance" came in the book "**The New Criminology**", 1973 (which, not surprisingly, is why Radical Criminology is sometimes referred-to as the "**New Criminology**" or even "**Critical Criminology**" following the publication of an anthology of the same name in **1975**).

These two works represent the **primary source of ideas** concerning this "new" form of **critical deviancy analysis** and, whilst other works (such as "Policing the Crisis" by **Hall** et al) can be considered to form part of a (brief) body of Radical Criminological thought, it is the work of Taylor, Walton and Young that forms the core of these Notes.

**Radical Criminology**, to paraphrase Taylor, Walton and Young, represented a modern attempt to **move the focus** of criminological debate (as they saw it) **away** from both **traditional criminological** preoccupations (attempting to explain crime and deviance from "**official**" points of view, such as how to explain criminal behaviour in "**individualistic**" terms - see the varieties of Functionalist theories we've considered in earlier Teachers' **Notes**) and **Interactionist** theories which, whilst suggesting that power - in the form of a **social reaction** to behaviour - was a significant variable, **failed** to develop an **adequate explanation** of the **origins of power** in **Capitalist society**.

In this latter respect, the concepts developed by Marxists were seen to be important, since they allowed Radical Criminologists to locate crime and deviant behaviour in a **structural setting** that recognised that conceptions of **deviance** are **not constructed randomly or arbitrarily**. On the contrary, Taylor, Walton and Young wanted to demonstrate that conceptions of crime and law were based upon the **ability of powerful classes in society to impose their definitions** of **normality** and **deviance** on all other social classes. **Concepts of crime and deviance**, therefore, had to be considered ultimately in terms of **power relationships** that derived from **ownership / non-ownership of the means of production in Capitalist society**.

In these Notes, therefore, I want to basically concentrate on **three major areas**:

1. Firstly, an **outline** of the way **Taylor, Walton and Young** presented their ideas for what they termed a "fully social theory of deviance".
2. Secondly, **examples** of Radical Criminological arguments and studies, focusing in particular on the work of writers such as Stuart **Hall**, Richard **Quinney** and William **Chambliss**.
3. Finally, an **evaluation** of Radical Criminology in relation to both its explanation of deviant behaviour and their general attempt to create a theoretical framework for the general explanation of crime in Capitalist societies.

As I've noted above, Radical Criminologists were concerned to, initially, **reject** those (mainly Functionalist) theories of crime / deviance that placed **too much emphasis** upon the **structural origins of deviance** whilst **neglecting** the idea that **deviants** are able to make **rational choices** about their behaviour.

This idea is a frequent criticism of Functionalist theorising in general and can be related to the idea that Functionalists tend to "**over-determine**" the part played by social structures in people's behaviour (the "**over-socialised conception of Man**", to use Dennis **Wrong's** classic phrase).

In particular, **orthodox or conventional criminologists** (that is, **non-Marxist criminologists**) were accused of a **lack** of basic **objectivity** in their work, since they tended to start with the proposition that crime was a **social problem**. The task of criminologists, from this viewpoint, was to **help** official **control agencies** (governments, the police and so forth) to find **solutions** to the "problem".

As Taylor, Walton and Young - amongst others - argued, this tended to lead to an "**over-identification**" on the part of Orthodox Criminology with the work of **social control agencies** like the police, government and the judiciary (in effect, Taylor, Walton and Young argued that Orthodox Criminology simply **assumed** that "crime" was a **social problem** for "society as a whole", rather than questioning the very basis of this idea as a prelude to the construction of a theory of deviance).

In addition, Radical Criminologists, while being more-inclined to consider Interactionist theories of crime (especially **Labelling Theory**) as having some **validity**, **criticised Interactionism** for the **opposite reason**. Interactionists, it was argued, tended to see the question of crime and deviance primarily from the **viewpoint of the deviant**. In this respect, the **basic criticisms** involved:

1. An **over-identification with the deviant** (in effect, turning the deviant into some kind of "**victim**" of a **labelling process**).
2. A lack of consideration of the idea that deviants do not exist in a moral vacuum where their behaviour - and the **social reaction** to that behaviour - makes no reference to other forms of behaviour and institutional structures in society.
3. A **failure to theorise the nature and origins of power** in Capitalist society.

In this respect, whilst power was seen, by Interactionists, to be a very significant **variable**, they simply **assumed** it existed without ever adequately theorising or **explaining its social origins**. This, of course, is hardly surprising, since to do so would be to give social structures / institutions a theoretical prominence that was largely considered superfluous in Interactionist thought.

The above represents a brief overview of the Radical Criminological position in relation to various forms of competing theoretical explanations in the sociology of crime and deviance. If you read "The New Criminology", for example, the above ideas are dealt with in painstaking (some might say tortuous) detail and, whilst it is always interesting to understand the theoretical origins of any perspective, it has not been considered particularly appropriate to reproduce the depth of the Radical Criminological "review of literature" in any great detail here. What would be more-useful, perhaps, is to have a brief look at the **general theoretical basis of the Radical Criminological position**, so we need to now consider in more-detail the first of the points noted above, namely the **theoretical origins of Radical Criminological thought**.

### Theoretical Background

The development of Radical Criminology focused around **two basic ideas**:

1. Firstly, the belief that (criminal) **behaviour has a structural origin**:

That is, the idea that behaviour is rooted in the way in which societies are organised at the **institutional level**. In particular, Radical Criminologists such as Taylor, Walton and Young were concerned with the analysis of **Capitalist social systems** and the relationship between criminalized behaviour, the economic organisation of Capitalist society and inequalities of wealth, influence and power.

2. Secondly, **Interactionist theories**:

In particular, the idea that people have an **element of choice** in relation to their behaviour - whether they choose to be deviant or non-deviant, for example.

For Radical Criminology, the objective was to explain both the nature of the criminalization process in Capitalist society (the **social structural** aspect) and the **specific reasons** why people chose to deviate from social norms (the **social action** aspect). As with most forms of Marxism (or Structuralist sociology come to that), **social action** had to be explained within the framework of **norms** and **values** created at the **structural level** of any society. In this respect, Radical Criminology has two major dimensions:

1. **Firstly**, an **objective dimension**, whereby in order to understand why people are criminalized we have to understand the origin and purpose of the creation of laws (**legal norms**).

This analysis of law creation involved an understanding of the way in which a **ruling class** was seen to:

- a. Create laws that served their basic interests.
- b. Exercise a **dominating** (or **hegemonic**) **ideological** influence over all classes in society, such that laws which Radical Criminologists considered to be "ruling class laws" (because they were created to serve and protect the interests of this powerful class) came to be seen as existing for the benefit of all (or at least that section of the population that is law abiding).

As an **aside** we can see in the above an implicit **criticism** of Functionalist analyses of crime and deviance, in that laws have the **appearance** of being in the interests of society as a whole. In reality (from a Radical Criminological point of view), laws really operate in the general interests of a **ruling class** (the most powerful economic class in Capitalist society).

This idea demonstrates a **methodological difference** between Functionalism and Marxist Conflict theory, since Marxism attempts to identify and understand the **underlying social processes** upon which **social reality** is constructed. Thus, in Capitalist society legal norms have the appearance of fairness (they apply equally to everyone and so forth), but this appearance is the product of **ideological distortions** and **manipulations** (which produce a **false consciousness** amongst all other classes in society). A ruling class is able, through their ownership of the mass media for example, to portray the law as being in the interests of all whilst in reality laws exist because it is the interests of this class for them to exist.

2. **Secondly**, a **subjective dimension** that seeks to discover the precise social conditions under which people deviate from social norms.

In this respect, the debt to **Interactionist sociology** is evident since:

- Radical Criminologists have stressed the idea that crime is something committed by **all social classes**.
- **Different social classes** indulge in **different forms of deviant behaviour** (working class crime, for example, tends to be highly visible, whilst the middle and upper classes tend to commit crimes that are both less visible and more easily covered-up).

However, **unlike Interactionism**, Radical Criminologists do not see deviants as passive victims of labelling, since:

- a. Deviant activity is seen to involve a level of **choice** on the part of the deviant (in its simplest form, the choice of committing or not committing a deviant act).
- b. **Power** is seen to be a significant concept, especially in relation to:
  - **Why** some activities (but not others) are labelled as deviant.
  - **Why** some groups in society are more-likely than others to be criminalized.
  - The idea that some forms of deviance have an explicitly **political dimension** (for example, groups promoting gay rights, black power, etc.).

In the above respect, therefore, the basic objective of Radical Criminology was to create a **fusion** between the **Structuralist emphasis of Marxist conflict theory** and the **interpretivist aspects of Interactionism**:

In this sense, while behaviour is seen to be **conditioned** by various structural prerequisites / forces (mainly those relating to economic / political conflicts), it is **not merely a simple response** to these structural stimuli.

As we have seen, Radical Criminology developed, as a theoretical perspective, out of a **critical** analysis of **Orthodox Criminology** (a perspective that included **psychiatry, psychology, medicine** and some **forms of sociological theorising**). For Radical Criminologists, these ways of thinking about and theorising crime and deviance were:

- a. **Wrong** - in the sense that they did not produce adequate explanations of crime / deviance, and also fundamentally
- b. **Misconceived** - in the sense that Orthodox Criminology was seen to begin from a **value-laden** position that started with the proposition that crime was a **social problem**. From this, the task of Orthodox Criminology was seen to be that of suggesting policies to combat crime (and, of course, thereby to implicitly side with the interests of a ruling class in devising ways of controlling the behaviour of other social classes).

Thus, by **separating** the **criminal** from the **social context** within which behaviour is criminalized (the nature of **structural relationships** within a society), the causes of criminal behaviour could, according to Orthodox Criminology, only be found in:

- a. The **personality** (possibly genetically determined) of the individual (psychiatry / psychology).
- b. Some form of medical **pathological** model of behaviour, whereby the individual was not really responsible for his / her deviation (they were somehow seen as "sick", in the medical sense).
- c. The particular **subculture** to which an individual belonged (psychology / sociology - especially Functionalist sociology).

What Radical Criminology argued, in this respect, was two basic things:

1. Firstly, that human behaviour must, if it is to be plausibly explained, be located in a social context that takes account of such variables as:

**Structural inequality,  
Power,  
Authority,  
Ideology,  
Wealth and so forth.**

2. That any form of theoretical explanation that did not, for whatever reason, take account of such variables in attempting to explain deviance was either:

- a. **Unable** to adequately explain deviance, or
- b. **Disqualified** from providing an adequate explanation because it ignored the idea that **structural** factors within society itself contribute to the causal explanation of crime / deviance.

Thus, **medical and psychiatric models** of deviance were seen to be **biased** because they assumed that deviance was simply a problem of individual adjustment to social norms. They failed to address the question of the nature and origin of those norms in the first place...

The significance of these ideas (and the reason as to why I've been labouring them at great length for the past few pages) is that, in terms of a new criminology, **any explanation of deviant behaviour** has to do **two things**:

1. **Firstly**, it has to understand the way in which laws are socially-produced by powerful social groups (or **classes** in Marxist terminology).
2. **Secondly**, it has to understand the way people in different economic positions in society have both different **life experiences** and are **differentially-placed** in relation to the pursuit of (and likely chances of achieving), social goals. In another context, this latter idea reflects one proposed by the (non-Marxist) Conflict theorist **Max Weber** when he talked about different individuals having different **life chances**:

In short, the chances of achieving those things considered desirable in society (health, wealth, power, status and so forth) and of avoiding those things considered undesirable (poverty, criminal status and so forth).

In this respect, the basic Radical Criminological position is that, as Taylor, Walton and Young argue, the "**cause of crime is the law**". In order to understand why people commit crimes we have to firstly understand the way Capitalist societies are **structurally differentiated** in terms of **wealth** and **power**. Without this understanding we are doomed to produce forms of explanation that are both incomplete and ideologically-biased in favour of the **powerful**.

For Taylor, Walton and Young, therefore, the "problem of criminal behaviour" **cannot** be resolved by simply:

**a. Identifying criminals empirically:**

Official crime statistics must simply reflect what powerful groups in society consider to be crimes.

**b. Understanding crime as a labelling process:**

It is evident that the **criminalization** of behaviour **is not arbitrary**. Some groups / individuals have a greater chance of their behaviour being criminalized, which suggests that some underlying, structuring, process is at work.

As I've suggested, for Radical Criminologists (and Marxists generally), such things are "surface manifestations" of an underlying social process - one that involves:

- The power to create laws,
- To criminalize behaviour and
- To make that criminalization process effective.

Once we understand this, therefore, we can now look at the way Taylor, Walton and Young put-forward their proposals for a "**fully social theory of deviance**".



To **sum-up** what we have seen thus far, it is evident that:

1. Traditional Marxist theory has highlighted the need to understand the way in which a society is **structured** (in terms of relations of **domination** and **subordination** between **social classes**). In particular, any theory of deviance needs to take account of - and produce explanations for - two main concepts, namely:

a. **Power** (in terms of the ability to create and enforce legal relationships).

b. **Ideology** (in terms of the ability to "sell" a particular interpretation of the social world to others in society).

2. Interactionist / Social Action theories have also demonstrated that:

a. **Laws are unequally applied** in society.

b. The **penalties** for various forms of crime are **arbitrary** (why, for example, should theft carry a greater penalty than reckless driving in which an innocent party is killed?).

c. **Criminalization is arbitrary** in that it focuses more forcefully on the activities of the young and the working class rather than upon middle / upper class criminality.

d. The **powerful create, apply and enforce laws**. The powerless are the main subject of those laws.

For Radical Criminologists, therefore, any explanation of crime must be:

a. **Social** (as opposed to biological / psychological) in the sense of trying to understand both the cultural and psychological factors that surround deviance.

b. Formulated in the context of an understanding of **social structures** (in particular, the **power** that derives from the way in which Capitalist society is unequally structured at, primarily, an economic level of analysis).

In this respect, Radical Criminologists tend to characterise the criminalization process (which involves both **formal control agents** such as the police and **informal control agents** such as social workers, psychiatrists and the like) as one in which certain social groups are singled-out for both:

- a. Control and
- b. Segregation.

**Question:**

**What arguments can you construct to evaluate the idea that any explanation of deviant behaviour must, ultimately, be explained in social as opposed to biological / psychological terms?**

**A Fully Social Theory Of Deviance?**

In the second section of these Notes we can start to look at the way **Radical Criminologists** have suggested we can, sociologically, **theorise deviant behaviour**. In this respect, the most conceptually coherent, outline of such a theory of deviance has been provided by Taylor, Walton and Young ("The New Criminology", 1973) and it is to an understanding of these ideas that we can now turn.

You should, however, note that this section of Notes is organised along the following lines:

1. Firstly, an outline of Taylor, Walton and Young's seven principles of a radical theory of deviance. This involves a general discussion of each principle.
2. Secondly, we can apply these principles to a specific example of deviant behaviour, namely sex crimes such as rape. To help us do this, a reading from **Soothill and Grover** ("The Social Construction of Sex Offenders", 1995 in **Sociology Review** ) will be used as the basis for the analysis.
3. Thirdly, an example taken from the work of **Hall** et al ("Policing The Crisis", 1978) forms the basis of an application of Taylor, Walton and Young's seven principles to an economic form of crime, namely "mugging".

Although this represents a rather long-winded way of doing things, each of the above interpretations and applications will help you to come to terms with a theory that is both abstract and highly speculative.

## Taylor, Walton and Young: Seven Theoretical Principles\_

Taylor, Walton and Young outline **seven aspects or dimensions** to a **fully social theory of deviance**. While each aspect is theoretically-distinct, they argue that the power of their theoretical conception derives from the way each aspect combines with and builds upon the others to produce an overall theoretical explanation of deviance. If we now outline each element in the theory, in turn, we can perhaps begin to understand this idea more-clearly.

### 1. The Wider Origins of the Deviant Act

Crime is not something that just happens because people are "bad" or "evil" (as most "common-sense" explanations of crime tend to ultimately suggest). Crime - at least in Capitalist societies - is related to **inequalities of power, authority, economic ownership, wealth** and so forth. In this respect, it is necessary **to locate individual behaviour** in a **cultural context** that encourages or discourages certain forms of thinking and behaviour. For **example**, in a society that generally encourages **racist or sexist ideas**, these forms of deviance will be fairly common.

In short, therefore, the argument here is that we can trace the "wider origins" of deviance to structural relationships and inequalities in the basic political and economic organisation of Capitalist society.

### 2. The Immediate Origins of the Deviant Act

Just as we have to understand the wider origins of individual behaviour, so must we try to understand the immediate origins of that behaviour, in terms of the specific relationships between the people involved in a particular social act. The cultural background of an individual (their social circumstances) will, for example, be a significant factor in explaining their conformity or deviance.

As sub-cultural theorists have shown, people clearly react - in many different ways - to their social situation (the example of **youth subcultures** might be instructive here).

In this, people are clearly aware of the number and type of choices of behaviour that seem plausibly open to them in life (in basic terms, whether to conform or deviate, the type of crime they commit and so forth).

A Marxist theory of crime needs to develop an understanding of both how and why people come to choose crime as an option. For example:

For the **poor**, it may be rational to choose crime within the **social context of poverty, powerlessness** and so forth.

Equally, for the **rich** it may be rational to choose crime as a means of increasing your **power** over others. These choices are, however, conditioned by various **immediate** factors, both:

- **Personal** - in terms of an individual's values, ethics, moral background and so forth - and
- **Social** - in terms of the opportunity to commit certain types of crime, the likely rewards and the possible costs, etc.

In this respect, deviants are **not simply powerless victims** of a **labelling process**. Crime represents an attempt to acquire **power** - over property and over other people.

Just as a **businessman** may attempt to acquire more and greater power through crime, so too might the poor try to use crime as a means of acquiring power. Deviant acts are expressed differently because the deviant individual is differentially placed within the (power) **structure of society**. This means that people have different levels of **opportunity** in relation to the type of crimes they are likely to consider and to commit.

In the above, the basic argument to note is that, in terms of understanding the **immediate origins** of deviant acts we have to understand the way in which different types of crime are related to an individual's social circumstances, motivations, etc.

### 3. The Actual Act:

The way people try to produce solutions to the problems they face in life is significant - and crime is one possible solution (amongst others) to various problems. The decision to commit a deviant act (or not, as the case may be) is seen to be conditioned by various factors, not the least being the kinds of beliefs people hold about the correctness or otherwise of criminal behaviour. Although the relationship between beliefs and actions may not always be clear **empirically** (if you think about it, we do not always act upon our beliefs), it is nevertheless a significant one.

Any theory of deviance, therefore, has to understand:

- a. How beliefs about the world arise (which involves looking at **ideological frameworks** in society - the **wider origins** of deviant acts).
- b. The range of possible options that people see as available to them in any particular situation.

In this respect, in order to understand crime and deviance the sociologist must attempt to understand what a particular criminal or deviant act means to the people involved. This is especially true of the individual(s) who are instrumental in committing a criminal act, since we need to understand why they chose to do what they did to the exclusion of all other possible actions (deviant and non-deviant).

### 4. The Immediate Origins of a Social Reaction:

What we have to understand here are the reasons for various forms of **differential social response** to a person's actions. Why, for example, is it possible for the same form of behaviour to produce different responses from **formal / informal control agents**?

For example, why does a parent react violently to a child's behaviour on one day and in one context, whilst reacting quite differently to the same behaviour on another day and in another context?

Why do the police crack-down on, for example, illegal drug use one week whilst effectively ignoring this same behaviour the following week?

What we need to understand, therefore, are the basic conditions that underpin any **social reaction** to people's behaviour (which involves such things as our relationship

to control agents, status differences and so forth). In addition, we need to understand how an audience reacts to particular behaviour. Why, for example:

- Working class criminality may be more-harshly treated than upper class criminality.
- Female criminality may be treated differently to male criminality and so forth.

We also need to understand the social processes involved in relation to the way people (and especially control agents) perceive:

- a. The possible seriousness of the act.
- b. The level of threat created by the act.

The role of **ideology** is significant here (especially the role of a **dominant ideology**) in terms of such things as:

- a. How people are encouraged (through the mass media, for example), to react to particular forms of behaviour.
- b. Why people are encouraged to react in particular ways.

When looking at the immediate origins of a social reaction, therefore, we have to study the specific ways that people react to a particular form of deviance. In effect, we would need to study the particular circumstances of a specific deviant act in order to understand the meanings given to it by those directly and indirectly involved in its production.

### 5. The Wider Origins of the Deviant Reaction:

Just as people react to (deviant) behaviour, so too must this reaction have an effect upon the deviant. In this respect, behavioural choices (in short, how people choose to react to the reaction of others to their behaviour) are seen to be conditioned by two ideas:

- a. The individual's **structural location** in society (whether they are rich / poor, powerful / powerless, their social class, gender and the like).
- b. The individual's personal attributes (whether or not they are accepted into deviant sub-cultures, for example).

Just as behavioural choices are open to the deviant, so too are they available to those who **react** to deviation - and this reaction (and any "reaction to the reaction"), will be conditioned by such things as:

A person's position in society.

The relationship between the deviant and **control agents** (for example, your family and friends are likely to react differently to deviance than are strangers, the police and so forth).

Underpinning any assessment, by control agents, of the likely levels of **social reaction** to deviant behaviour are such things as:

- a. The **power of the deviant to resist any reaction**.
- b. The **power of control agencies to act** against individuals, companies and so forth.
- c. The **possible organised response of deviant individuals / groups** to the control process. In simple terms, the more internally-organised is the deviant group, the greater its ability to resist any social reaction (and thereby reject any social labelling directed towards individual members of the group).

The individual thief, for example, may be relatively powerless in relation to control agents (although this will depend upon such things as wealth and status).

A multinational corporation, on the other hand, can buy influence, threaten a reaction against control agents and the like.

- d. The **organisational ability** - and hence **power** - to **redefine** the parameters of such things as:

Illegal behaviour - what constitutes "criminal behaviour", for example.

Responsibility - who, for example, is responsible for Corporate decisions?

**Question:**

**In the Zeebrugge disaster, for example, who was criminally at fault:**

**The man who accidentally left a bow-door open, or the directors of P and O who, in the interests of cost-cutting, profit maximisation and so forth turned a "blind eye" to potentially dangerous practices on their ferries?**

## **6. The Outcome of the Social Reaction to a Deviant's Further Action:**

Interactionists have shown that deviant actions are, in part, an attempt to come to terms with any social reaction to **primary deviation** (for example, see the distinction **Lemert** makes between **primary** and **secondary deviation**).

What we need to understand, therefore, is the process by which a deviant responds to a social reaction (real or imagined). How, for example, will a deviant's behaviour be changed by the successful application of a criminal label?

Unlike Interactionism, however, we **cannot take for granted** the **reaction** of the **deviant**, since "rule-breaking" behaviour involves an assessment, on the part of the deviant, of the likely gains and possible costs involved in deviation. In this respect, deviance can be seen as "planned", in that the deviant act involves some assessment of risk and, probably, knowledge about the likely extent of any social reaction. No-one, for example, ever contemplates theft safe in the knowledge of their certain capture...

## **7. The Nature of the Deviant Process as a Whole:**

As I noted at the start of this outline, each of the above categories has to be considered as one element in an overall theoretical explanation of deviance. In this sense, Radical Criminologists are arguing that we have to adopt a multi-causal

explanation of deviance. That is, an explanation that looks for answers in terms of the way in which each of the factors outlined above relates to all of the other factors.

For Radical Criminologists, therefore, any explanation of deviant behaviour must involve:

- a. An understanding of the process whereby the deviant comes to see deviation as the "solution" to a particular "problem".
- b. An understanding of the process whereby control agents come to be involved in the criminalization process on a selective - but not arbitrary - basis.

### **Radical Criminology: A Diagrammatic Outline**

It is sometimes useful to outline a theory diagrammatically in order to achieve a visual picture of that theory. We can do this in relation to Radical Criminology in the following way\_

#### **7. The Nature of the Deviant Process as a Whole**

1. The Wider Origins of the Deviant Act
2. The Immediate Origins of the Deviant Act
3. The Actual Act
4. The Immediate Origins of a Social Reaction
5. The Wider Origins of the Deviant Reaction
6. The Outcome of the Social Reaction to a Deviant's Further Action

## Radical Criminology - Examples

We can look at some examples of radical criminological arguments in terms of a number of studies conducted throughout the 1970's by both British and American sociologists.

### 1. Hall et al: "Policing The Crisis" (1978).

The basic argument that came out of this study was that the police consciously targeted "muggers" in early 1970's because of a general economic and political crisis in British society. By targeting and **scapegoating** this type of visible, petty (in terms of value) crime, the police were acting the interests of a ruling class by:

- a. Creating a **moral panic** around street crime and thereby distracting people's attention away from the general political / economic crisis in Britain.
- b. Showing that they were prepared to act swiftly and vigorously against any potential threat to **social order**.
- c. Promoting a sense of **social solidarity** by creating "hate figures" against which everyone in society could supposedly identify.
- d. Targeting "inner city youth", a general form of police / legal repression could be justified by the State / government..

### 2. Herman and Julia Schwendinger ("Defenders of order or guardians of human rights?")

The Schwendingers maintain that the police in Capitalist society should be seen not as **neutral** protectors of the general public and guarantors of human rights, but rather as partial defenders of a particular form of social order (Capitalism) and a particular social class (the bourgeoisie). The police, in effect, are **agents of a ruling class** and laws reflect the basic interests of this class. This follows because of:

- a. Particular types of behaviour that are criminalized and punished most forcefully.
- b. The types of behaviour that are not criminalized (for example, economic exploitation, upper class crimes and so forth).

### 3. Richard Quinney ("Crime Control in Capitalist Society")

Quinney, using a similar argument, sees the law as a **tool** used by a ruling class to maintain its hold on society. The legal system provides the **mechanism** for the forceful and violent control of the rest of the population. In the course of the battle, agencies of the law (police, prosecutors, judges, etc.) serve as a military force for the protection of domestic order (and, by extension, the general interests of a ruling class).

Thus, laws governing non-economic deviance (murder, bodily harm, etc.) exist not to protect basic human rights but because they are needed to maintain a social order that favours a ruling class (by maintaining social order, the **economic exploitation** of all other classes in society can continue).



For **example**, although killing in peace time is considered a crime (since it threatens social order), killing in wartime is considered a duty, since the threat from another society threatens the social order on which a ruling class bases its economic and political domination.

You should **note** here the way that Radical Criminologists such as **Quinney** explain differences in the way behaviour is labelled by locating their explanation in a strong theory of power. Interactionists recognise the distinction but have difficulty theorising it because of an under-developed theory of power.

**Quinney** summarises his basic argument in the following terms:

- a. American society is based upon an advanced Capitalist economy.
- b. The State is organised to serve the interests of the dominant economic class (the Capitalist ruling class).
- c. Criminal law is an instrument of the State and ruling class to maintain and reproduce the existing social and economic order.
- d. Crime control is carried-out by a variety of institutions and agencies that are established and administered by a government elite, representing a ruling class. The purpose of crime control is to establish domestic order.
- e. Subordinate classes have to be oppressed by whatever means necessary.
- f. Only with the collapse of Capitalism and the establishment of socialism will there be a solution to the crime problem.

#### **4. William Chambliss** ("The Political Economy of Crime"):

Chambliss highlights the theoretical differences between two Structuralist perspectives (Functionalism and Marxism). From this distinction he then tried to develop, through a **6-year participant observation study of crime** in the American city of **Seattle**, an analysis of how certain types of lower class crimes are not only not discouraged but actively encouraged by control agencies and the local bourgeoisie.

He argues there is a **sybiotic** (mutually beneficial but unequal) relationship between:

- a. Law enforcement agents / politicians.
- b. Local men who control the distribution of gambling, prostitution, pornography and usury (high interest loans) - which he terms "Vice Lords".

The thing that **bound these two together** - the **official law makers and enforcers** and the **unofficial law makers and enforcers** - was **bribery / payoffs**.

The Vice Lords ("the syndicate") made their money from illegal activity.

To stay in business they had to payoff police, politicians and local government officers (fire, health, and so forth).

The web of corruption spread from the top to bottom of Seattle society.

A tithe was collected by a local businessman from various sections of a community and then distributed to all official interested parties (police, politicians, businessmen etc.).

In this **web of institutionalised corruption**, Chambliss argued that it was **structurally-difficult** for **non-corrupt police officers** to actually **apply laws**, since any arrest made may have involved someone already paying-off the police or influential politicians. Only very minor offences tended, therefore, to be successfully pursued and prosecuted.

**"In Seattle, over 70% of all arrests during the time of the study were for public drunkenness".**

Chambliss concludes, on the basis of his study that:

The law enforcement system is not organised to reduce crime or enforce public morality. Rather, he argues that it is organised to **manage** crime by co-operating with the most criminal groups and enforcing the law against those whose crimes are a minimal threat to society. Thus, the law enforcers:

- a. **Encouraged** the development of quasi-legal criminal gangs and networks.
- b. **Managed** crime in Seattle through their relationship with the syndicate.

Thus, they controlled crime by allowing it to flourish under the guidance of vicious, exploitative, crime lords.

**The law enforcers policed the crime bosses.**

**Crime bosses policed petty criminals.**

In this respect, Chambliss' study argued that criminal acts that serve the interests of a ruling class (local or national) will go unsanctioned, whilst those that do not will be punished. In particular, he argued that where it suits the economic interests of a ruling class to ignore or perpetuate certain types of crime, this form of crime will flourish under the control of the bourgeoisie.

**Overall Evaluation.**

There are a number of basic **problems** that we can identify in relation to the radical criminological argument:

1. Taylor, Walton and Young in particular spend a great deal of time and effort criticising various alternative theories of deviance, but very little time is spent actually showing how Radical Criminology is supposed to explain deviant / criminal behaviour.

Although they produce a number of principles around which a "Radical Criminology" might theorise deviance, no attempt was made to operationalize this theory. Additionally, they give us no indication about how this theory might be operationalised.

2. The above is important because it brings into question whether or not it would be possible to study crime in the way suggested by Radical Criminology. If you think about it, in order to understand crime you would have to undertake a wide-ranging study of the society within which crime exists in order to trace the various origins and social contexts of crime and the reaction to crime - something that is unlikely to be **empirically** possible.

3. Radical criminology tends to produce clear rejections of Functionalist and Interactionist explanations, but very little in the way of a "Marxist" explanation of crime / deviance.

The main problem here is that, in order to consider crime from a Marxist point of view they inevitably end-up talking about **modes of production**, **power relationships** and so forth in such an abstract way that the object of study (crime) tends to get lost somewhere along the way.

Thus, because crime and criminality has to be considered in *the wider social context*, the tendency is to write about this "wider context" and say very little about crime. In this respect, the central question that we have to ask is have Radical Criminologists actually produced anything new in the way of actually advancing our knowledge of crime and deviance?

4. In relation to the attempted break with Interactionism, Radical Criminologists do seem to be suggesting something valuable.

Although concepts of deviance / crime are **social constructs** (and hence specific to particular societies at particular times - deviance is a product of social reaction, not a quality of the act as Interactionists would argue) Radical Criminologists recognise that at the moment of the act, such behaviour becomes as much a quality of the act itself as of the social reaction.

That is, in order for the act of killing someone to be defined / sanctioned as "murder", the event is both a quality of the act (killing someone) and the reaction to the act (whether or not the actor is arrested, criminalized, etc.).

5. There appears, throughout the work of Radical Criminologists, a tendency to romanticise criminal behaviour, both in terms of casting criminals as the victims of an unequal power struggle and, more significantly, in terms of seeing criminals as being a threat to the rule (**hegemony**) of a ruling class.

Behaviour, according to Radical Criminologists is defined as criminal because it somehow threatens the existence of Capitalist order. The next step from

this idea is to see the criminal in terms of some form of "political rebel" - in effect someone whose behaviour threatens the **status quo**.

**Paul Hirst**, an **Orthodox Marxist** writer, argues that this idea is both **naïve** and **wrong**. Criminal activity simply reflects dominant Capitalist norms, since a thief, for example, steals to make money (he or she exploits the people from whom they steal). Similarly, a Capitalist exploits his / her workforce by making a profit. Criminals, therefore, want the same things as Capitalists, they simply don't want to provide anything in exchange\_

6. In many respects, the Radical Criminological position appears to reflect the basic proposition that if laws did not exist, there would be no crime / deviance. Whilst this is true, it hardly gets us very far...

7. Finally, a major criticism of Radical Criminology is that it tends to dissolve into what has been termed (somewhat ironically by writers such as **Jock Young**), a form of **Left-wing Functionalism**.

Whereas Functionalists talk about laws functioning in the interests of everyone in society, Radical Criminologists talk about laws functioning to protect the basic interests of a ruling class.

**Summary**

1. Radical criminology originated in Britain in the early 1970's, mainly through the work of Paul Taylor, Ian Walton and Jock Young ("The New Criminology", 1973; "Critical Criminology", 1975 (Ed's)).
2. Radical criminology attempted to combine various Marxist concepts (social structure, economic exploitation, alienation and so forth) with a number of Interactionist concepts (social reaction, primary and secondary deviation and so forth) in a "new" theory of crime and deviance. In this respect, Radical criminology attempted to combine a Marxist theory of power with a form of labelling theory.
3. In order to understand both criminal and non-criminal behaviour, Radical criminologists argued that we have to understand the social framework within which laws are created and applied by and to various groups in society.
4. "Laws" are not "neutral" expressions of social relationships; on the contrary, they are created and applied in capitalist societies for two main reasons:
  - a. To protect certain property rights (laws governing theft, contract rights, etc.).
  - b. To maintain a form of social order that is conducive to the continued economic exploitation of the working class by the ruling class (various "public order" offences - violence, picketing, political activity and so forth).
5. Deviants are not seen to be "passive victims" of a labelling process, since it involves a level of choice on the part of the deviant (primary deviance). However, in terms of secondary deviation, the social reaction is conditioned by the ability of powerful groups to proscribe ("make unlawful") and prosecute various forms of deviance.
6. A "fully social" theory of deviance involves consideration of the following:
  - a. The wider origins of a deviant act.
  - b. The immediate origins of a deviant act.
  - c. The act itself.
  - d. The immediate origins of a social reaction.
  - e. The wider origins of a deviant reaction.
  - f. The outcome of the social reaction to a deviant's further actions.
  - g. The nature of the deviant process as a whole.
7. A major weakness in the Radical criminology perspective appears to be that although they illustrate the way it is possible to arrive at a "social theory of deviance" no attempt was ever made to put this theory into practice.
8. Radical criminologists have been accused of "romanticising criminals" as being somehow in the revolutionary vanguard of the fight against Capitalism (mainly because criminals are seen to disrupt and threaten the accumulation of capital / profit). Traditional Marxism warns against this type of view (as does Functionalism for that matter), since there appears to be more evidence to support the view that criminals are simply involved in exploiting others through criminal means.
9. Radical criminology is a branch of Marxism that is termed "instrumental Marxism" because it focuses upon empirical demonstrations of the way in which a ruling class is held together by common class backgrounds, experiences and values.

**Examination Questions.**

1. Discuss the argument that Radical criminology is neither radical (in the sense of "new") nor particularly concerned with the explanation of crime (25 marks).

2. "The radical criminological argument appears to be that if there were no laws, there would be no crime".

Assess this statement (12).

3. Explain the ways in which Radical criminology represents a departure from both Orthodox Marxist, Functionalist and Interactionist theories of deviance (25).