

<b>Title</b>	<b>Radical Criminology (Taylor, Walton and Young).</b>
<b>Time</b>	<b>Approximately 30 - 40 minutes.</b> 10 - 15 minutes for group-based analysis. 4 - 5 minutes for each group to report their solution to the class
<b>Preparation</b>	Ideally, 6 groups of students are required, each group containing a minimum of 2 students for discussion purposes. The activity can, however, be easily tailored for any group. Item A needs to be photocopied, each group being given one element of the theory (1 - 6) each. Each group member should have a copy of the element they are going to work on.
<b>Materials</b>	<b>Item A.</b> This contains an outline of each of Taylor, Walton and Young's 6 elements of a "fully social theory of deviance". Each element in the theory needs to be photocopied separately and each group member needs a copy of their group's element.
<b>Prior Knowledge</b>	Students need some prior knowledge of Taylor, Walton and Young's "fully social theory of deviance". This can be based on the materials or you may have your own way of teaching the basics of the theory.
<b>Objective</b>	Taylor, Walton and Young's theory is a complicated one for students to grasp, but in essence it is based on a number of relatively simple concepts that students will have encountered before. The objective, therefore, is to take a complex piece of work and, by analysing it, render it easily understandable and memorable by identifying the basic sociological concepts that underpin it.
<b>The Exercise</b>	Each group reads through their particular part of the theory (1 - 6) and is required to explain the basic idea behind it in 10 words or less. Most parts of the theory can be described in 1 word (the text contains significant clues). They are given 10 -15 minutes to agree an explanation. A representative of each group is then required to give the rest of the class their explanation. It would be useful to write this explanation on a board / flip chart at the front of the class so everyone can see how the theory hangs together.

**Item A**

## 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 subcultural 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 sub-cultures 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, therefore, 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:
  - a. Personal (an individual's values, ethics, moral background, etc.) and
  - b. Social (the opportunity to commit certain types of crime, the likely rewards and the possible costs, etc.).

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 and so forth.

## 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, especially but not exclusively the moral beliefs people hold about the correctness or otherwise of criminal behaviour (which basically means considering how people are socialised in any society). Any theory of deviance, therefore, has to understand:

- a. How beliefs about the world arise (which involves looking at social ideologies - 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, while reacting quite differently to the same behaviour on another day and in another context?
- Why do the police crack-down on illegal drug use one week while 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) understand:

- 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 by being told the meaning of such 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 (how people choose to react to the reaction of others to their behaviour) are conditioned by two ideas:

- a. The individual's structural position 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 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 organised response of deviants 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?

### **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 (if at all) by the application of a criminal label?

Unlike Interactionist theorists, 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. This, of course, will include an assessment, on the part of the deviant, to escape or, in a worst case, resist, any attempt at labelling. In this respect, deviance can be seen as "planned" (rational), 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. Thus, any outcome will necessarily depend on the ability of the deviant to resist a labelling process. The more-powerful the deviant, the less likely is a label to be successfully applied

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

The final category can be used to sum-up the overall theory. 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.

### **Item B**

Suggested answers for each element of the theory:

1. **Culture**
2. **Sub-culture**
3. **Socialisation.**
4. **Meaning.**
5. **Power of deviant to resist.**
6. **Power of labeller to overcome deviant resistance.**