19 Crime and Deviance

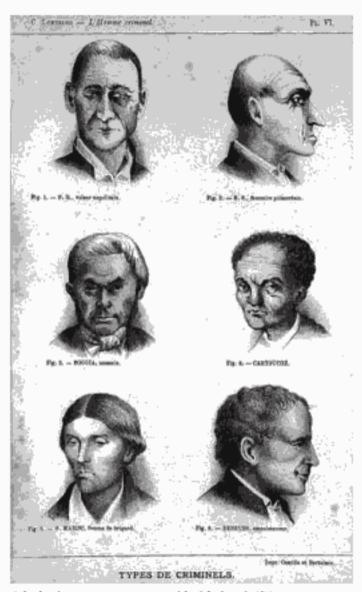WHY DO people commit crimes? A century ago, most people who thought about the issue believed that some people were just biologically criminal. The Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, working in the 1870s, even believed that criminal types could be identified by certain anatomical features. He investigated the appearance and physical characteristics of criminals, such as the shape of the skull and forehead, jaw size and arm length, and concluded that they displayed traits held over from earlier stages of human evolution. Lombroso's pictures showing the physical characteristics of criminals are shown here.

Lombroso's ideas became thoroughly discredited, and seem almost comical to us today, although slightly more sophisticated variants on his biological explanation of crime have resurfaced at various points over the last century. A later theory distinguished three main types of human physique and claimed that one type was directly associated with delinquency. Muscular, active types (mesomorphs), the theory went, are more aggressive and physical, and therefore more likely to become delinquent than those of thin physique (ectomorphs) or more fleshy people (endomorphs) (Sheldon 1949; Glueck and Glueck 1956).

Again, such views have also been widely criticized. Even if there were an overall relationship between bodily type and delinquency, this would show nothing about the influence of heredity. People of the muscular type may be drawn towards

Criminal types, as presented in his book *L'Homme criminel*, by Cesare Lombroso (1836–1909): a robber from Naples, a forger from Piedmont, an assassin, Cartouche, whose criminal tendency is not specified, a brigand's wife and a poisoner.

criminal activities because these offer opportunities for the physical display of athleticism. Moreover, nearly all studies in this field have been restricted to delinquents in reform schools, and it may be that the tougher, athletic-looking delinquents are more liable to be sent to such schools than fragile-looking, skinny ones. Some individuals might be inclined towards irritability and aggressiveness, and this could be reflected in crimes of physical assault on others. Yet there is no decisive evidence that any traits of personality are inherited in this way, and, even if they were, their connection to criminality would at most be only a distant one.

If biological approaches to criminology do not satisfactorily answer our question: 'Why do people commit crimes?' is psychology more successful? Psychological approaches to criminality have searched for explanations of deviance within the individual, not society. But where biological approaches focus on physical features which predispose individuals to crime, psychological views concentrate on personality types. Much early criminological research was carried out in prisons and other institutions, such as asylums. In these settings, ideas about psychiatry were influential. Emphasis was placed on the distinctive traits of criminals – including 'feeble-mindedness' and 'moral degeneracy'. Hans Eysenck (1964), for example, has suggested that abnormal mental states are inherited; these can either predispose an individual to crime or create problems in the process of socialization.

Some have suggested that in a minority of individuals, an amoral, or psychopathic, personality develops. Psychopaths are withdrawn, emotionless characters who act impulsively and rarely experience sensations of guilt. Some psychopaths delight in violence for its own sake. Individuals with psychopathic traits do sometimes commit violent crimes, but there are major problems with the concept of the psychopath. It isn't at all clear that psychopathic traits are inevitably criminal. Nearly all studies of people said to possess these characteristics have been of convicted prisoners, and their personalities inevitably tend to be presented negatively. If we describe the same traits positively, the personality type sounds quite different, and there seems no reason why people of this sort should be inherently criminal.

Psychological theories of criminality can at best explain only some aspects of crime. While some criminals may possess personality characteristics distinct from the remainder of the population, it is highly improbable that the majority of criminals do so. There are all kinds of crime, and it is implausible to suppose that those who commit them share some specific psychological characteristics.

Both biological and psychological approaches to criminality presume that deviance is a sign of something 'wrong' with the individual, rather than with society. They see crime as caused by factors outside an individual's control, embedded either in the body or the mind. Therefore, if scientific criminology could successfully identify the causes of crime, it would be possible to treat those causes. In this respect, both biological and psychological theories of crime are *positivist* in nature. As we learned in our discussion of Auguste Comte in chapter 1, positivism is the belief that applying natural

scientific methods to the study of the social world can reveal its basic truths. In the case of positivist criminology, this led to the belief that empirical research could pinpoint the causes of crime and in turn make recommendations about how to eradicate it.

Early positivist criminology came under great criticism from later generations of scholars. They argued that any satisfactory account of the nature of crime must be sociological, for what crime is depends on the social institutions of a society. Over time, attention shifted away from individualistic explanations of crime, of the kind we have looked at above, to sociological theories that stress the social and cultural context in which crime and deviance takes place. Any full answer to our question: 'Why do people commit crimes?' must be sociological, and it is most likely to start by questioning the terms implicit in the question. What do we mean by crime and deviance?

In this chapter we look at several sociological explanations for crime and deviant behaviour. First, however, we look more closely at what we mean by terms such as 'deviance' and 'crime'. Later in the chapter we examine crime in the UK, before turning to some of the important issues concerning the victims and perpetrators of crime.

Basic concepts

Deviance may be defined as non-conformity to a given set of norms that are accepted by a significant number of people in a community or society. No society, as has already been stressed, can be divided up in a simple way between those who deviate from norms and those who conform to them. Most of us on some occasions transgress generally accepted rules of behaviour. We may, for example, have at some point committed minor acts of theft, like shoplifting or taking small items from work – such as office notepaper and pens – for personal use. At some point in our lives, we may have exceeded the speed limit, made prank phone calls or smoked marijuana.

Deviance and crime are not synonymous, although in many cases they overlap. The concept of deviance is much broader than that of crime, which refers only to non-conformist conduct that breaks a law. Many forms of deviant behaviour are not sanctioned by law. Thus, studies of deviance might examine phenomena as diverse as naturalists (nudists), rave culture and New Age travellers.

The concept of deviance can be applied both to individual behaviour and to the activity of groups. An illustration is the Hare Krishna cult, a religious group whose beliefs and mode of life are different from those of the majority of people in Britain. The cult was first established in the 1960s when Sril Prabhupada came to the West from India to spread the word of Krishna consciousness. He aimed his message particularly at young people who were drug users, proclaiming that one could 'stay high all the time, discover eternal bliss' by following his teachings. The Hare Krishnas became a familiar sight, dancing and chanting in the streets, running vegetarian cafés and distributing literature about their beliefs to passers-by. They are generally regarded in a tolerant light by most of the population, even if their views seem somewhat eccentric.

Hare Krishna devotees dancing and singing in the streets of London.

The Hare Krishnas represent an example of a **deviant subculture**. Although their membership today has declined from its peak some years ago, they have been able to survive fairly easily within the wider society. The organization is wealthy, financed by donations from members and sympathizers. Their position diverges from that of another deviant subculture, which might be mentioned here by way of contrast: that of the permanently homeless. People who are down-and-out live on the streets by day, spending their time in parks or in public buildings. They may sleep outside or find refuge in shelters. Most of the permanently homeless eke out a difficult existence on the fringes of the wider society.

Two distinct, but related disciplines are engaged in the study of crime and deviance. **Criminology** concerns itself with forms of behaviour that are sanctioned by criminal law. Criminologists are often interested in techniques for measuring crime, trends in crime rates and policies aimed at reducing crime within communities. The **sociology of deviance** draws on criminological research, but also investigates conduct which lies beyond the realm of criminal law. Sociologists studying deviant behaviour seek to understand why certain behaviours are widely regarded as deviant and how these notions of deviance are applied differentially to people within society.

The study of deviance, therefore, directs

our attention to social *power*, as well as to the influence of social class – the divisions between rich and poor. When we look at deviance from or conformity to social rules or norms, we always have to bear in mind the question, *whose* rules? As we shall see, social norms are strongly influenced by divisions of power and class.

Explaining crime and deviance: sociological theories

In contrast to some areas of sociology in which a particular theoretical perspective has emerged over time as pre-eminent, many theoretical strands remain relevant to the study of deviance. Having looked briefly at biological and psychological explanations, we will now turn to the four sociological approaches that have been influential within the sociology of deviance: *functionalist theories, interactionist theories, conflict theories* and *control theories.*

Functionalist theories

Functionalist theories see crime and deviance resulting from structural tensions and a lack of moral regulation within society. If the aspirations held by individuals and groups in society do not coincide with available rewards, this disparity between desires and fulfilment will be felt in the deviant motivations of some of its members.

Crime and anomie: Durkheim and Merton

As we saw in chapter 1, the notion of *anomie* was first introduced by Emile

> **Norms and sanctions**
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> We follow social norms mostly because, as a result of socialization, we are used to doing so. All social norms are accompanied by sanctions that promote conformity and protect against non-conformity. A sanction is any reaction from others to the behaviour of an individual or group that is meant to ensure compliance with a given norm. Sanctions may be positive (the offering of rewards for conformity) or negative (punishment for behaviour that does not conform). Sanctions can be levied formally or informally. Formal sanctions are applied by a specific body of people or an agency to ensure that a particular set of norms is followed. The main types of formal sanction in modern societies are those represented by the courts and prisons. A law is a formal sanction defined by government as a rule or principle that its citizens must follow; it is used against people who do not conform.
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> Informal sanctions are less organized and more spontaneous reactions to non-conformity. A studious pupil who is teased by classmates for working too hard, or who is accused of being a 'nerd' when he or she refuses to go out in the evenings, experiences a type of informal sanctioning. Informal sanctioning might also occur, for example, when an individual who makes a sexist or racist comment is met with disapproving responses from friends or co-workers.

Durkheim, who suggested that in modern societies traditional norms and standards become undermined without being replaced by new ones. Anomie exists when there are no clear standards to guide behaviour in a given area of social life. Under such circumstances, Durkheim believed, people feel disoriented and anxious; anomie is therefore one of the social factors influencing dispositions to suicide.

Durkheim saw crime and deviance as social facts; he believed both of them to be inevitable and necessary elements in modern societies. According to Durkheim, people in the modern age are less con-

strained than they were in traditional societies. Because there is more room for individual choice in the modern world, it is inevitable that there will be some non-conformity. Durkheim recognized that there would never be a complete consensus in any society about the norms and values which govern it.

Deviance is also necessary for society, according to Durkheim; it fulfils two important functions. First, deviance has an *adaptive* function. By introducing new ideas and challenges into society, deviance is an innovative force. It brings about change. Second, deviance promotes boundary *maintenance* between 'good' and 'bad' behaviours in society. A criminal event can provoke a collective response that heightens group solidarity and clarifies social norms. For example, residents of a neighbourhood facing a problem with drug dealers might join together in the aftermath of a drug-related shooting and commit themselves to maintaining the area as a drug-free zone.

Durkheim's ideas on crime and deviance were influential in shifting attention from individual explanations to social forces. His notion of anomie was drawn on by the American sociologist Robert K. Merton, who constructed a highly influential theory of deviance that located the source of crime within the very structure of American society (Merton 1957).

Merton modified the concept of anomie to refer to the *strain* put on individuals' behaviour when accepted norms conflict with social reality. In American society – and to some degree in other industrial societies – generally held values emphasize material success, and the means of achieving success are supposed to be self-discipline and hard work. Accordingly,

people who really work hard can succeed, no matter what their starting point in life. This idea is not in fact valid, because most of the disadvantaged are given only limited conventional opportunities for advancement, or none at all. Yet those who do not 'succeed' find themselves condemned for their apparent inability to make material progress. In this situation, there is great pressure to try to get ahead by any means, legitimate or illegitimate. According to Merton, then, deviance is a by-product of economic inequalities and the lack of equal opportunities.

Merton identifies five possible reactions to the tensions between socially endorsed values and the limited means of achieving them. *Conformists* accept both generally held values and the conventional means of realizing them, whether or not they meet with success. The majority of the population fall into this category. *Innovators* continue to accept socially approved values but use illegitimate or illegal means to follow them. Criminals who acquire wealth through illegal activities exemplify this type.

Ritualists conform to socially accepted standards, although they have lost sight of the values behind these standards. The rules are followed for their own sake without a wider end in view, in a compulsive way. A ritualist would be someone who dedicates herself to a boring job, even though it has no career prospects and provides few rewards. *Retreatists* have abandoned the competitive outlook altogether, thus rejecting both the dominant values and the approved means of achieving them. An example would be the members of a self-supporting commune. Finally, *rebels* reject both the existing values and the means but wish actively to substitute

new ones and reconstruct the social system. The members of radical political groups fall into this category.

Merton's writings addressed one of the main puzzles in the study of criminology: at a time when society as a whole is becoming more affluent, why do crime rates continue to rise? By emphasizing the contrast between rising aspirations and persistent inequalities, Merton points to a sense of *relative deprivation* as an important element in deviant behaviour.

> The idea of relative deprivation was discussed in chapter 10, 'Poverty, Social Exclusion and Welfare', pp. 341–3.

Subcultural explanations

Later researchers located deviance in terms of subcultural groups that adopt norms that encourage or reward criminal behaviour. Like Merton, Albert Cohen saw the contradictions within American society as the main cause of crime. But while Merton emphasized individual deviant responses to the tension between values and means, Cohen saw the responses occurring collectively through subcultures. In *Delinquent Boys* (1955), Cohen argued that boys in the lower working class who are frustrated with their positions in life often join together in delinquent subcultures, such as gangs. These subcultures reject middle-class values and replace them with norms that celebrate defiance, such as delinquency and other acts of non-conformity.

Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Ohlin (1960) agreed with Cohen that most delinquent youths emerge from the lower working class. But they argue that the boys most at 'risk' are those who have nevertheless internalized middle-class values and

have been encouraged, on the basis of their ability, to aspire towards a middle-class future. When such boys are unable to realize their goals, they are particularly prone to delinquent activity. In their study of boys' gangs, Cloward and Ohlin found that delinquent gangs arise in subcultural communities where the chances of achieving success legitimately are small, such as among deprived ethnic minorities.

Defining deviance

Many people take it for granted that a well-structured society is designed to prevent deviant behavior from occurring. But, as we have seen, functionalists following Emile Durkheim argued otherwise. Durkheim believed that deviance has an important part to play in a well-ordered society. He argued that by defining what is deviant, we become aware of what is not deviant and thereby become aware of the standards we share as members of a society. It is not necessarily the case, then, that we should aim to eliminate deviance completely. It is more likely that society needs to keep it within acceptable limits.

Seventy years after Durkheim's work appeared, the sociologist Kai Erikson published *Wayward Puritans*, a study of deviance in New England in the United States during the seventeenth century. Erikson sought 'to test [Durkheim's] notion that the number of deviant offenders a community can afford to recognize is likely to remain stable over time'. His research led him to conclude that:

> a community's capacity for handling deviance, let us say, can be roughly estimated by counting its prison cells and hospital beds, its policemen and psychiatrists, its courts and clinics. . . . The agencies of control

often seem to define their job as that of keeping deviance within bounds rather than obliterating it altogether. (1966)

Erikson advanced the hypothesis that societies need their quotas of deviance and that they function in such a way as to keep them intact.

What does a society do when the amount of deviant behaviour gets out of hand? In 'Defining Deviance Down', a controversial article written in 1993, ten years before his death, the American academic and politician Daniel Patrick Moynihan argued that the levels of deviance in US society had increased beyond the point that it could afford to recognize. As a result, we have been 'redefining deviance so as to exempt much conduct previously stigmatised', and also quietly raising the 'normal' level so that behaviour seen as abnormal by an earlier standard is no longer considered to be so.

How has American society gone about this? One example that Moynihan gave was the deinstitutionalization movement within the mental health profession that began in the 1950s. Instead of being forced into institutions, the mentally ill were treated with tranquillizers and released. As a result, the number of psychiatric patients in New York dropped from 93,000 in 1955 to 11,000 by 1992.

What happened to all of those psychiatric patients? Many of them became the homeless people who we see sleeping rough in New York. In 'defining deviance down', people sleeping on the street are defined not as insane, but as persons lacking affordable housing. At the same time, the 'normal' acceptable level of crime has risen. Moynihan points out that after the St Valentine's Day massacre in 1929, in which seven gangsters were mur-

dered, America was outraged. Today, violent gang murders are so common that there is hardly a reaction. Moynihan also sees the under-reporting of crime as another form of 'normalizing' it. As he concludes: 'We are getting used to a lot of behaviour that is not good for us.'

Evaluation

Functionalist theories rightly emphasize connections between conformity and deviance in different social contexts. Lack of opportunity for success in the terms of the wider society is the main differentiating factor between those who engage in criminal behaviour and those who do not. We should be cautious, however, about the idea that people in poorer communities aspire to the same level of success as more affluent people. Most tend to adjust their aspirations to what they see as the reality of their situation. Merton, Cohen and Cloward and Ohlin can all be criticized for presuming that middle-class values have been accepted throughout society. It would also be wrong to suppose that a mismatch of aspirations and opportunities is confined to the less privileged. There are pressures towards criminal activity among other groups too, as indicated by the so-called white-collar crimes of embezzlement, fraud and tax evasion, which we will study later.

Interactionist theory

Sociologists studying crime and deviance in the interactionist tradition focus on deviance as a socially constructed phenomenon. They reject the idea that there are types of conduct that are inherently 'deviant'. Rather, interactionists ask how behaviours initially come to be defined as

deviant and why certain groups and not others are labelled as deviant.

Labelling theory

One of the most important approaches to the understanding of criminality is called **labelling theory**. Labelling theorists interpret deviance not as a set of characteristics of individuals or groups, but as a process of interaction between deviants and non-deviants. In their view, we must discover why some people come to be tagged with a 'deviant' label in order to understand the nature of deviance itself.

People who represent the forces of law and order, or are able to impose definitions of conventional morality on others, do most of the labelling. The labels that create categories of deviance thus express the power structure of society. By and large, the rules in terms of which deviance is defined are framed by the wealthy for the poor, by men for women, by older people for younger people, and by ethnic majorities for minority groups. For example, many children wander into other people's gardens, steal fruit or play truant. In an affluent neighbourhood, these might be regarded by parents, teachers and police alike as innocent pastimes of childhood. In poor areas, they might be seen as evidence of tendencies towards juvenile delinquency. Once a child is labelled a delinquent, he or she is stigmatized as a criminal and is likely to be considered untrustworthy by teachers and prospective employers. In both instances the acts are the same, but they are assigned different meanings.

Howard Becker is one of the sociologists most closely associated with labelling theory. He was concerned to show how deviant identities are produced through labelling rather than through deviant motivations or behaviours. According to Becker, 'deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label'. He was highly critical of criminological approaches which claimed a clear division between 'normal' and 'deviant'. For Becker, deviant behaviour is not the determining factor in becoming 'deviant'. Rather there are processes unrelated to the behaviour itself which exercise a great influence on whether or not a person is labelled as deviant. A person's dress, manner of speaking, or country of origin could be the key factors that determine whether or not the deviant label is applied.

Labelling theory came to be associated with Becker's studies of marijuana smokers (Becker 1963). In the early 1960s, smoking marijuana was a marginal activity within subcultures rather than the lifestyle choice it is today. Becker found that becoming a marijuana smoker depended on one's acceptance into the subculture, close association with experienced users and one's attitudes towards non-users.

Labelling not only affects how others see an individual, but also influences the individual's sense of self. Edwin Lemert (1972) advanced a model for understanding how deviance can either coexist with or become central to one's identity. Lemert argued that, contrary to what we might think, deviance is actually quite commonplace and people usually get away with it. For example, some deviant acts, such as traffic violations, rarely come to light, while others, such as small-scale theft from the workplace, are often 'overlooked'. Lemert called the initial act of transgression **primary deviance**. In most cases, these acts remain 'marginal' to the person's self-identity – a process occurs by

Is this unconventional dresser more likely to be labelled 'deviant' than the bungee jumper?

which the deviant act is *normalized*. In some cases, however, normalization does not occur and the person is labelled as a criminal or delinquent. Lemert used the term **secondary deviance** to describe cases where individuals come to accept the label and see themselves as deviant. In such instances, the label can become central to a person's identity and lead to a continuation or intensification of the deviant behaviour.

Take, for example, Luke, who smashes a shop window while spending a Saturday night out on the town with his friends. The act may perhaps be called the accidental result of over-boisterous behaviour, an excusable characteristic of young men. Luke might escape with a reprimand and a small fine. If he is from a 'respectable' background, this is a likely outcome. And the smashing of the window stays at the level of primary deviance if the youth is seen as someone of good character who on this occasion became too rowdy. If, on the other hand, the police and courts hand out a suspended sentence and make Luke

report to a social worker, the incident could become the first step on the road to secondary deviance. The process of 'learning to be deviant' tends to be accentuated by the very organizations supposedly set up to correct deviant behaviour – prisons and social agencies. (Lemert's studies on 'The Saints and the Roughnecks' are discussed further in the box on p. 810)

Evaluation

Labelling theory is important because it begins from the assumption that no act is intrinsically criminal. Definitions of criminality are established by the powerful, through the formulation of laws and their interpretation by police, courts and correctional institutions. Critics of labelling theory have sometimes argued that there are certain acts that are consistently prohibited across virtually all cultures, such as murder, rape and robbery. This view is surely incorrect; in Britain, for instance, killing is not always regarded as murder. In times of war, killing of the enemy is positively approved; until recently, the laws in Britain did not recognize sexual intercourse forced on a woman by her husband as rape, which also shows that labelling changes over time.

We can criticize labelling theory even more convincingly on other grounds. First, in emphasizing the active process of labelling, labelling theorists neglect the processes that lead to acts defined as deviant. For labelling certain activities as deviant is not completely arbitrary; differences in socialization, attitudes and opportunities influence how far people engage in behaviour likely to be labelled deviant. For instance, children from deprived backgrounds are more likely than richer children to steal from shops. It is not the labelling that leads them to steal in the first place so much as the background from which they come.

Second, it is not clear whether labelling actually does have the effect of increasing deviant conduct. Delinquent behaviour tends to increase following a conviction, but is this the result of the labelling itself? Other factors, such as increased interaction with other delinquents or learning about new criminal opportunities, may be involved.

Deviancy amplification

Leslie Wilkins (1964) was interested in the ramifications of 'managing' a deviant identity and integrating it into one's daily life. He suggested that the outcome of this process is often **deviancy amplification**. This refers to the unintended consequences that can result when, by labelling a behaviour as deviant, an agency of control actually provokes more of that same deviant behaviour. If the labelled person incorporates the label into his or her identity through secondary deviance, this is likely to provoke more responses from agencies of control. In other words, the very behaviour that was seen as undesirable becomes more prevalent, and those labelled as deviant become even more resistant to change.

The broad effects of deviancy amplification have been illustrated in an important work by Stanley Cohen called *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1980). In this classic study, Cohen examined how police attempts to control certain youth subcultures in the UK during the 1960s – the so-called Mods and Rockers – only succeeded in drawing additional attention to them and making them more popular among youth. The process of labelling a group as outsiders and troublemakers – in an attempt to control them – backfired and created even larger problems for law enforcement. Excessive and sensationalistic media coverage of the Mods and Rockers led to a **moral panic** – a term used by sociologists to describe a media-inspired over-reaction towards a certain group or type of behaviour. Moral panics often emerge around public issues that are taken as symptomatic of general social disorder; moral panics have arisen in recent years over topics such as youth crime and 'bogus' asylum-seekers.

Conflict theories: 'the new criminology'

The publication of *The New Criminology* by Taylor, Walton and Young in 1973 marked an important break with earlier theories of deviance. Its authors drew on elements of Marxist thought to argue that deviance is deliberately chosen and often political in nature. They rejected the idea that deviance is 'determined' by factors such as biology, personality, anomie, social disorganization or labels. Rather, they argued, individuals actively choose to engage in deviant behaviour in response to the inequalities of the capitalist system. Thus, members of countercultural groups regarded as 'deviant' – such as supporters of the Black Power or gay liberation movements – were engaging in distinctly political acts which challenged the social order. Theorists of **new criminology** framed their analysis of crime and deviance in terms of the structure of society and the preservation of power among the ruling class.

The broad perspective set forth in *The New Criminology* was developed in specific directions by other scholars. Stuart Hall and others at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies conducted an important study on a phenomenon which attracted enormous attention in the early 1970s in Britain – the crime of 'mugging'. Several high-profile muggings were broadly publicized and fuelled widespread popular concern about an explosion in street crime. Muggers were overwhelming portrayed as black, contributing to the view that immigrants were primarily responsible for the breakdown of society. In *Policing the Crisis* (1978), Hall and his colleagues argued that the moral panic about muggings was encouraged by both the state and the media as a way of deflecting attention away from growing unemployment, declining wages and other deep structural flaws within society.

Around the same time, other criminologists examined the formation and use of laws in society and argued that laws are tools used by the powerful to maintain their own privileged positions. They rejected the idea that laws are 'neutral' and are applied evenly across the population. Instead, they claimed that as inequalities increase between the ruling class and the working class, law becomes an ever more important instrument for the powerful to maintain order. This dynamic can be seen in the workings of the criminal justice system, which had become increasingly oppressive towards working-class 'offenders'; or in tax legislation which disproportionately favoured the wealthy. This power imbalance is not restricted to the creation of laws, however. The powerful also break laws, scholars have argued, but are rarely caught. These crimes on the whole are much more significant than the everyday crime and delinquency which attracts the most attention. But fearful of the implications of pursuing 'white-collar' criminals, law enforcement instead focuses its efforts on less powerful members of society, such as prostitutes, drug users and petty thieves (Pearce 1976; Chambliss 1978).

These studies and others associated with 'new criminology' were important in widening the debate about crime and deviance to include questions of social justice, power and politics. They emphasized that crime occurs at all levels of society and must be understood in the

context of inequalities and competing interests between social groups.

Left Realism

In the 1980s, a new strain of criminology emerged. Known as New Left or **Left Realism**, it drew on some of the neo-Marxist ideas of the new criminologists discussed above, but distanced itself from 'left idealists' whom they saw as romanticizing deviance and downplaying the real fear of crime felt by much of the population. For a long while, many criminologists tended to minimize the importance of rises in official crime rates. They sought to show that the media created unnecessary public disquiet about the issue, or argued that most crime was a disguised form of protest against inequality. Left Realism moved away from this position, emphasizing that the increases in crime had actually occurred, and that the public was right to be worried by them. Left Realists argued that criminology needed to engage more with the actual issues of crime control and social policy, rather than debate them abstractly (Lea and Young 1984; Matthews and Young 1986).

Left Realism drew attention to the victims of crime and argued that victim surveys provide a more valid picture of the extent of crime than official statistics (Evans 1992). Such surveys revealed that crime was a serious problem, particularly in impoverished inner-city areas. Left Realists pointed out that rates of crime and victimization were concentrated in marginalized neighbourhoods – deprived groups in society were at a much greater risk of crime than others. The approach draws on Merton and Cloward and Ohlin and others to suggest that, in the inner cities, criminal subcultures develop. Such subcultures do not derive from poverty as such, but from their exclusion from the wider community. Criminalized youth groups, for example, operate at the margins of 'respectable society' and pit themselves against it. The fact that rates of crime carried out by blacks have risen over recent years is attributed to the fact that policies of racial integration have failed.

> The ideas of relative deprivation and social exclusion, discussed in chapter 10, provide some of the important theoretical underpinning Left Realism.

To address these trends in crime, Left Realism advanced 'realistic' proposals for changes in policing procedures. Law enforcement needs to become more responsive to communities, it is claimed, rather than relying on 'military policing' techniques which alienate public support. Left Realists have proposed 'minimal policing' whereby locally elected police authorities would be accountable to citizens, who would have a larger say in setting the policing priorities for their area. Furthermore, by spending more time investigating and clearing up crimes, and less time on routine or administrative work, the police can regain the trust of local communities. On the whole, Left Realism represents a more pragmatic and policy-oriented approach than many of the criminological perspectives which preceded it.

Critics of Left Realism accept the importance of the stress on victimization. But they argue that Left Realism focused on individual victims only within the narrow confines of the political and media-driven discussions of the 'crime problem'. These narrow definitions of crime focus on the most visible forms of criminality, such as

Left Realists accept that the way crime is constructed may be the product of unequal power relations in society, but emphasize its very real and harmful effects, often for the very poorest people and communities.

street crimes, whilst neglecting other offences, such as those carried out by the state or corporations (Walton and Young 1998).

Control theories

Control theory posits that crime occurs as a result of an imbalance between impulses towards criminal activity and the social or physical controls that deter it. It is less interested in individuals' motivations for carrying out crimes; rather, it is assumed that people act rationally and that, given the opportunity, everyone would engage in deviant acts. Many types of crime, it is argued, are a result of 'situational decisions' – a person sees an opportunity and is motivated to act.

One of the most well-known control theorists, Travis Hirschi, has argued that humans are fundamentally selfish beings who make calculated decisions about whether or not to engage in criminal activity by weighing the potential benefits and risks of doing so. In *Causes of Delinquency* (1969), Hirschi claimed that there are four types of bond which link people to society and law-abiding behaviour: attachment, commitment, involvement and belief. When sufficiently strong, these elements help to maintain social control and conformity by rendering people unfree to break rules. If these bonds with society are weak, however, delinquency and deviance may result. Hirschi's approach suggests that delinquents are often individuals whose low levels of self-control are a result of inadequate socialization at home or at school (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990).

Right Realism

The rise to power of Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the United States in the late 1970s led to vigorous 'law-and-order' approaches to crime in both countries, often described as **Right**

Realism. This approach to the study of crime is still influential, particularly in the USA under the Presidency of George Bush Junior. The perceived escalation of crime and delinquency were linked to moral degeneracy, the decline of individual responsibility derived from dependence on the welfare state and permissive education, the collapse of the family and communities and the wider erosion of traditional values (Wilson 1975). Public debates and extensive media coverage centred on the crisis of violence and lawlessness which was threatening to grip society.

To Right Realists, deviance was portrayed as an individual pathology – a set of destructive lawless behaviours actively chosen and perpetrated by individual selfishness, a lack of self-control and morality. They were dismissive of the 'theoretical' approaches to the study of crime discussed elsewhere in this chapter, especially those that linked crime to poverty. Conservative governments in the UK and USA, influenced by Right Realism, began to intensify law enforcement activities. Police powers were extended, funding for the criminal justice system was expanded, and long prison sentences were increasingly relied on as the most effective deterrent against crime.

'Situational' crime prevention – such as target hardening and surveillance systems – has been a popular approach to 'managing' the risk of crime (Vold et al. 2002). Such techniques are often favoured by policy-makers because they are relatively simple to introduce alongside existing policing techniques, and they reassure citizens by giving the impression that decisive action against crime is being taken. Yet critics argue that because such techniques do not engage with the underlying causes of crime – such as social inequalities, unemployment and poverty – their greatest success lies in protecting certain segments of the population against crime and displacing delinquency into other realms.

One illustration of this dynamic can be seen in the physical exclusion of certain categories of people from common spaces in an attempt to reduce crime and the perceived risk of crime. In response to feelings of insecurity among the population at large, public spaces in society – such as libraries, parks and even street corners – are increasingly being transformed into 'security bubbles'. Risk-management practices, such as police monitoring, private security teams and surveillance systems, are aimed at protecting the public against potential risks. In shopping precincts, for example, security measures are becoming more prominent as part of a 'contractual bargain' between businesses and consumers. In order to attract and maintain a customer base, businesses must ensure the safety and comfort of their clients. Young people tend to be excluded from such spaces disproportionately because they are perceived as a greater threat to security and are statistically more likely to offend than adults. As part of creating 'locations of trust' for consumers, young people find that the public spaces open to them are shrinking.

Police forces have also been expanded in response to growing crime. When crime rates are on the rise, there is almost inevitably public clamour for putting more police 'on the street'. Governments eager to appear decisive on crime tend to favour increasing the number and resources of the police in an attempt to deter crime.

The popularly held view of policing is that it is the cornerstone of maintaining law and order. But what is the role of the police in actually controlling crime? It is not clear that a greater number of police necessarily translates into lower crime rates. In the United Kingdom, official statistics on the crime rate and number of police cast doubt on the link between the two. This raises several puzzling questions. If increased policing does not prevent offending, why do the public demand a visible police presence? What role does policing play in our society?

Controlling crime

Some control theorists see the growth of crime as an outcome of the increasing number of opportunities and targets for crime in modern society. As the population grows more affluent and consumerism becomes more central to people's lives, goods such as televisions, video equipment, computers, cars and designer clothing – favourite targets for thieves – are owned by more and more people. Residential homes are increasingly left empty during the daytime as more and more women take on employment outside the home. 'Motivated offenders' interested in committing crimes can select from a broad range of 'suitable targets'.

Responding to such shifts, many official approaches to crime prevention in recent years have focused on limiting the opportunities for crime to occur. Central to such policies is the idea of **target hardening** – making it more difficult for crimes to take place by intervening directly into potential 'crime situations'. For example, laws requiring steering locks in all new cars are intended to reduce opportunities for car thieves. In some areas, public telephones have been fitted with tougher coin boxes to deter opportunistic vandals. The installation of closed circuit television (CCTV) systems in city centres and public spaces is another attempt to deter criminal activity. Control theorists argue that, rather than changing the criminal, the best policy is to take practical measures to control the criminal's ability to commit crime.

Target hardening techniques, combined with **zero tolerance policing**, have gained favour among politicians in recent years and appear to have been successful in some contexts in curtailing crime. Zero tolerance policing targets petty crime and forms of disruptive conduct, such as vandalism, loitering, accosting people for money and public drunkenness. Police crackdowns on low-level deviance are thought to produce a positive effect in reducing more serious forms of crime (as we see below in the discussion of the 'broken windows' theory). But criticisms of such an approach can also be made. Target hardening and zero tolerance policing do not address the underlying causes of crime, but are aimed at protecting and defending certain elements of society from its reach. The growing popularity of private security services, car alarms, house alarms, guard dogs and gated communities has led some people to believe that we are living in an 'armoured society', where segments of the population feel compelled to defend themselves against others. This tendency is occurring not only in Britain and the United States as the gap between the wealthiest and the most deprived widens, but is particularly marked in countries such as the former Soviet Union, South Africa and Brazil, where a 'fortress mentality' has emerged among the privileged.

There is another unintended consequence of such policies: as popular crime targets are 'hardened', patterns of crime may simply shift from one domain to another. For example, the steering locks that were made compulsory for all new cars in the UK were not required on older cars. The result was that car thefts shifted primarily from newer models to older ones. Target hardening and zero tolerance approaches run the risk of displacing criminal offences from better protected areas into more vulnerable ones. Neighbourhoods that are poor or lacking in social cohesion may well experience a growth in crime and delinquency as affluent regions increase their defences.

The theory of 'broken windows'

Target hardening and zero tolerance policing are based on a theory known as 'broken windows' (Wilson and Kelling 1982). The theory is based on a study made in the 1960s by the American social psychologist Philip Zimbardo, who abandoned cars without licence plates and with their hoods up in two entirely different social settings: the wealthy community of Palo Alto, California, and a poor neighbourhood in the Bronx, New York. In both places, as soon as passers-by, regardless of class or race, sensed that the cars were abandoned and that 'no one cared', the cars were vandalized (Zimbardo 1969).

Physical signs of social disorder can lead to more serious crime, according to the 'broken windows' thesis.

Extrapolating from this study, the authors of the 'broken windows' theory argued that any sign of social disorder in a community, even the appearance of a broken window, encourages more serious crime to flourish. One unrepaired broken window is a sign that no one cares, so breaking more windows – that is, committing more serious crimes – is a rational response by criminals to this situation of social disorder. As a result, minor acts of deviance can lead to a spiral of crime and social decay (Felson 1994).

Since the late 1980s, the 'broken windows' theory has served as the basis for new policing strategies that aggressively focused on 'minor' crimes such as drinking or using drugs in public, and traffic violations. Zero tolerance policing has been widely introduced in large American cities, following its success in reducing crime in New York City, when it was pioneered by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani during his term in office between 1994 and 2001. Starting with an aggressive campaign to restore order in the city subway (underground), the New York Police Department expanded its zero tolerance approach to the streets, tightening restrictions on beggars, the homeless, street vendors and the owners of adult bookshops and clubs. Not only did rates for standard crimes (such as muggings and theft) decline dramatically, but the homicide rate fell to its lowest level in almost a century.

One important flaw of the 'broken windows' theory is that the police are left to identify 'social disorder' however they want. Without a systematic definition of disorder, the police are authorized to see almost anything as a sign of disorder and anyone as a threat. In fact, as crime rates fell throughout the 1990s, the number of complaints of police abuse and harassment went up, particularly by young, urban, black men who fit the 'profile' of a potential criminal.

Theoretical conclusions

What should we conclude from this survey of theories of crime? We must first recall a point made earlier: even though crime is only one subcategory of deviant behaviour as a whole, it covers such a variety of forms of activity – from shoplifting a bar of chocolate to mass murder – that it is unlikely that we could produce a single theory that would account for all forms of criminal conduct.

The contributions of the sociological theories of crime are twofold. First, these theories correctly emphasize the continuities between criminal and 'respectable' behaviour. The contexts in which particular types of activity are seen as criminal and punishable by law vary widely. This is almost certainly linked to questions of power and inequality within society. Second, all agree that context is important in criminal activities. Whether someone engages in a criminal act or comes to be regarded as a criminal is influenced fundamentally by social learning and social surroundings.

In spite of its deficiencies, labelling theory is perhaps the most widely used approach to understanding crime and deviant behaviour. This theory sensitizes us to the ways in which some activities come to be defined as punishable in law, and the power relations that form such definitions, as well as to the circumstances in which particular individuals fall foul of the law.

The way in which crime is understood directly affects the policies developed to combat it. For example, if crime is seen as the product of deprivation or social disorganization, policies might be aimed at reducing poverty and strengthening social services. If criminality is seen as voluntaristic, or freely chosen by individuals, attempts to counter it will take a different form. We shall now examine recent crime trends in the UK and consider some of the policy responses to them.

"We find that all of us, as a society, are to blame, but only the defendant is guilty."

Linking micro- and macrosociology: 'The Saints and the Roughnecks'

The connections between the processes by which deviant behaviour occurs and the larger class structure were noted by William Chambliss in a famous study, 'The Saints and the Roughnecks' (1973). Chambliss studied two groups of delinquents in an American school, one from upper-middle-class families ('the Saints') and the other from poor families ('the Roughnecks'). While the Saints were constantly involved in petty crimes such as drinking, vandalism, truancy, and theft, none of their members was ever arrested. The Roughnecks were involved in similar criminal activities, yet they were constantly in trouble with the police. After Chambliss concluded that neither group was more delinquent than the other, he looked to other factors that could explain the different reaction of the police and the broader community to these two groups.

Chambliss found, for example, that the upper-class gang had cars and thus were able to remove themselves from the eyes of the community. The lower-class boys, through necessity, congregated in an area where everyone in the community frequently saw them. Chambliss concluded that differences of this sort were indicative of the class structure of society, which gave certain wealthier groups advantages when it came to being labelled as deviant. For instance, the parents of the Saints saw their sons' crimes as harmless pranks, while the parents of the Roughnecks acquiesced to the police's labelling of their sons' behaviour as criminal. The community as a whole also seemed to agree with these different labels.

These boys went on to have lives consistent with this labelling, with the Saints living conventional middle-class lives and the Roughnecks having continual problems with the law. As we saw earlier in the chapter (p. 801), this outcome is linked to what Lemert called 'secondary deviance', because it is thought to result from the inability of a person to carry on as 'normal' once he has been labelled as 'deviant'.

Chambliss's study is widely cited by sociologists for showing the connection between macrosociological factors like social class and microsociological phenomena such as how people become labelled as deviant. This study provides an example of how difficult it is to isolate micro- and macro-level factors in the social construction of deviance.