Crime and Deviance

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

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Contents

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

Operationalising Crime: Observations

Young (2001) suggests *four main ways* to calculate and quantify the amount of crime in our society:

1. Crime Statistics

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

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

Evaluation

Not all crimes actually make it into the official crime statistics, for three main reasons.

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

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

Thirdly, and probably most importantly in terms of their affect on the statistics, not all crimes - for a variety of reasons we'll outline in a moment - that occur in our society are reported to the police. This is a potentially substantial weakness of official crime statistics - one that needs to be considered in the light of other possible ways of measuring crime.

2. Victim Surveys

Victim surveys record crimes people have experienced, but not necessarily reported to the police. This is often achieved, as with the government sponsored *British Crime Surveys* (BCS), by interviewing people about either their personal experience of victimisation or their general awareness of criminal behaviour in an area. The BCS covers crime in England and Wales (biannually between 1982 and 2000 and annually since) and now involves interviewing around 50,000 people aged 16 or over (although the survey will be extended in 2008 to cover respondents under the age of 16). The value of victim surveys' in understanding various aspects of criminal behaviour (in its widest sense) lies in two main areas:

a. Unreported crimes: They provide information about crimes that may not, for a variety of reasons, have been officially recorded.

b. Risk: They can tell us something about people *at risk of* different types of crime, their attitudes to crime and the measures they take to reduce their chances of victimisation.

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

As with any type of interview, the results you get may depend on who and what you ask. Laughing-Boy Bob's reply of "The price of a pint nowadays is bloody criminal" to the question "Have you ever been a victim of a crime?" probably won't make the final draft...

Streets (**Young**, 1994, 1999) are probably the most well known, and such surveys use similar techniques to their national counterparts – **Policing the Streets** surveyed 1000 people in the Finsbury Park region of London.

In terms of *national* levels of risk, according to **Sian et al** (2007), approximately 11 million crimes occurred in the period 2006 / 07 (compared with a peak of nearly 20 million in 1995). In this respect they report that "The risk of being a victim of crime as measured by the BCS, at 24%...is significantly lower than the peak of 40% recorded by the BCS in 1995".

They further note that "Since peaking in 1995, BCS crime has fallen by 42%, representing over eight million fewer crimes, with domestic burglary and all vehicle thefts falling by over 50% and violent crime falling by 41 per cent".

3. Self-Report Surveys These are usually based around interviews or anonymous questionnaires and ask people to admit to crimes they've committed in any given time period. Such surveys provide us with data about the social characteristics of *offenders* (their class and ethnic background, for example) that may be excluded from other survey methods.

4. Other Agencies As **Maguire** (2002) notes, sources of 'systematic information about unreported crime' (from hospitals, for example) have been explored by government departments such as the Home Office, although these are not widely used by sociologists (as yet, perhaps).

Drunk and disorderly? Check. Fraud? Check. Manslaughter? Check. Crack cocaine? Check. Gosh Emily, apart from "Walking on the cracks in the pavement" I think you've got a full house!

Operationalising Crime: Explanations

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

Official Crime statistics

Victim Surveys   Self-Report Surveys   Other Agencies (e.g. hospitals)
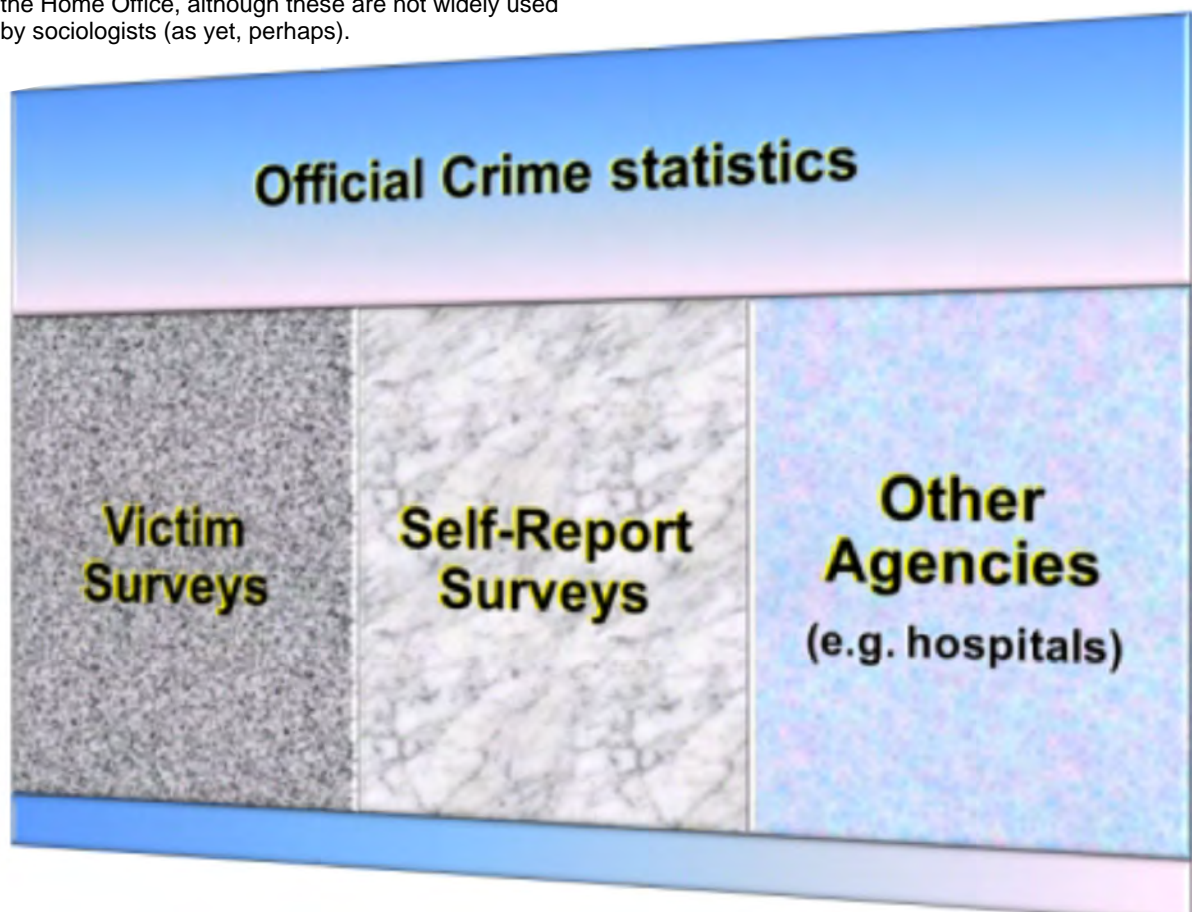
Crime Statistics

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

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

Minor crimes: The victim suffers minor inconvenience and doesn't want the trouble of reporting the offence.

Personal: The victim chooses to personally resolve the issue (by confronting the offender, for example). This is likely to occur within families or close-knit communities where informal social controls are strong (a school or business, for example, may choose to deal with an offender through internal forms of discipline).

Fear: Victims may fear reprisals from the offender if they involve the police (something that may, for example, apply to child abuse as well as more obvious forms of personal attack). Alternatively, witnesses may fail to come forward to identify offenders – in London, for example, Operation Trident was set up in 1998 to 'tackle gun crime in London's black communities', a type of crime hard to investigate 'because of the unwillingness of witnesses to come forward through fear of reprisals from the criminals involved'.

Trauma: With sexual offences like rape (both male and female) the victim may decide not to prolong the memory of an attack; alternatively, they may feel the authorities will not treat them with consideration and sympathy. **Simmons** (2000) notes that sexual offences are the least likely of all crimes to be reported.

Confidence: Unless a victim is insured, for example, there is little incentive to report crimes such as burglary if the victim has little confidence in the ability of the police to catch the offender.

Ignorance: In areas such as fraud, overcharging and the like, the victim may not be aware of the crime. Many businesses, for example, are victims of crimes (such as petty theft) that are defined by offenders and witnesses as 'perks'.

Alternatively, as **Simmons** notes, 'only half of detected frauds are reported to the police', one reason being

that businesses may want to avoid bad publicity from a police prosecution.

Services: Offences such as prostitution and drug dealing involve a 'conspiracy of silence' between those involved – someone buying illegal drugs from a drug dealer has little incentive to report the offence (a type of crime sometimes referred to as 'victimless').

Over-reporting: This occurs when the police, by committing more resources to tackling a particular form of crime (such as burglary), discover 'more crime' and, in consequence, the crime statistics increase. One reason for this is the:

Iceberg effect: A large number of crimes take place each year and those notified and recorded represent the 'tip of the iceberg' (the true extent of crime is effectively hidden from view). When control agencies target certain types of crime they dig into the '*dark figure*' of submerged crime – it's not necessarily that more crime is being committed, only that more committed crimes are discovered. This may mean crime statistics tell us *more* about the activities of control agencies than about crime and offenders.
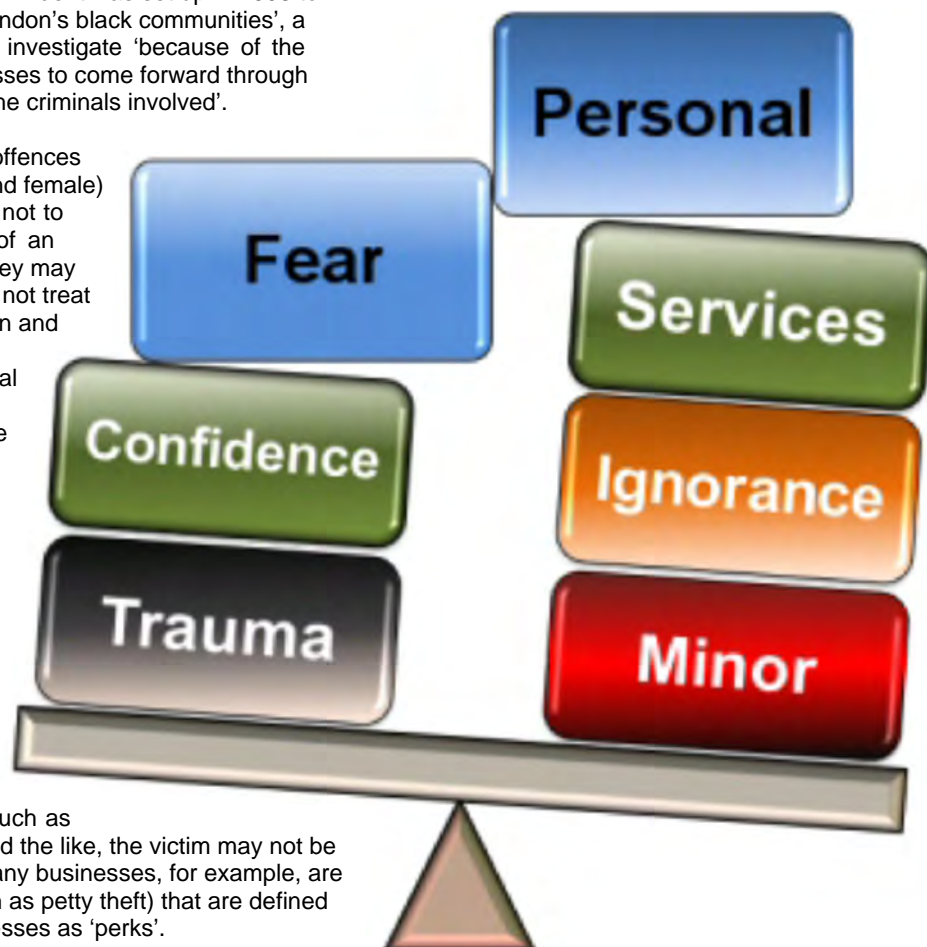
Crime may be under-reported for a wide range of reasons...

2. Victim Surveys

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

a. Selective memory: People are required to remember events, sometimes many months after they happened, and their recall may be limited. Related to this is the idea of:

False memory syndrome – a situation that can occur when the individual is placed under pressure to "remember" instances of victimisation, which they proceed to do in a selective way by reassessing past events and reinterpreting them in a new light. In other words, an event that was not originally considered an example of criminal behaviour comes to be defined as such as a consequence of taking part in a piece of research.

b. Values: **Young** (1994) notes that the 'differential interpretation respondents give to questions' (such as the meaning of 'being hit' in cases of violent behaviour) creates problems of *comparison* for victim surveys. Interpretations of 'crime' and different tolerance levels of criminal behaviour may vary in terms of things like class and gender. Working class respondents, for example, are less likely than their middle class counterparts to classify certain types of behaviour as "violent" or "criminal".

Ditton's (1977) classic study of "pilfering" and "fiddling" also highlights class differences in behaviour, greater and lesser levels of tolerance of criminality and even different ways language is used to describe certain situations. In a follow-up study **Ditton** (1996) extensively documented how "workplace fiddling" is seen by its numerous practitioners as part of the normal workplace experience – as one of his respondents (a taxi-driver interviewed in 1976) forcefully expressed it when asked whether he "felt like a criminal" because of his fiddling:

"Don't be fucking daft!"
"No, but it's breaking the law, isn't it?..... So why don't you feel like a criminal?"
"Nobody even thinks of it".

As **Ditton** explains, "The taxi-driver had just finished telling me how he worked (officially undeclared) nights in a taxi whilst on the dole, and not only regularly overcharged customers, but also systematically neglected to hand in to the boss a portion of the metered 'take' for each night's work".

Our brains can play all kinds of tricks with our memory...

c. Emotions: Just as people may be reluctant to report crimes to the police, they may be similarly unwilling to talk about their victimisation to 'middle-class interviewers'. A frequent criticism of British Crime Surveys in the past has been that the extent of family-related crime (such as domestic violence) was underestimated because the victim was reluctant to admit to victimisation in the presence of the offender (their partner, for example). Recent refinements in interviewing technique have, however, gone some way to resolving this particular problem.

A further issue to include is:

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

And you thought British cab drivers were bad...

3. Self-Report Surveys

Self-report surveys are significant for three main reasons:

1. Foundation: The researcher can get as close as possible to the 'source of criminal behaviour', thereby increasing the *validity* of the information gained, something that, **Thornberry** and **Krohn** (2000) argue, encourages 'increased reporting of many sensitive topics'.

2. Characteristics: Such surveys are one of the few ways available for sociologists to systematically gather information about the social characteristics of *offenders*.

3. Data: These surveys can collect information about the frequency and seriousness of different forms of offending.

Evaluation

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

Representativeness: The majority of self report surveys focus on the behaviour of *young people* (with some exceptions – **Thornberry** (1997) and **Jessor** (1998) for example). Although this tells us something about their behaviour (offending in terms of class, gender and ethnicity, for instance), it's difficult to see how findings can be *generalised*.

Delinquency: Self-report surveys discover a mass of relatively trivial delinquent behaviour, but miss a vast range of offending that's more usually associated with adults (**Weitekamp**, 1989). This includes, of course, 'crimes of the powerful' (such as corporate crime).

Participation: There is evidence (**Jurgen-Tas et al.**, 1994) that 'prior contacts with the juvenile justice system' make offenders less likely to participate in self report surveys. In addition, the setting of many studies ('a middle-class interviewer, often in the official setting of the school') creates what **Young** calls 'an optimum socially structured situation for fabrication'. In other words, respondents consciously and unconsciously *lie*. **Jupp** (1989) further suggests that respondents tend to admit fully to trivial offences and display an unwillingness to admit to serious offences.

4. Other Agencies

4. Other agencies: Agencies such as hospitals can be useful as a means of compiling statistics relating to crimes against the person – "knife crime" is one particular recent example – for the deceptively simple reason that we gain a first-hand, relatively accurate, count of serious crimes that cause personal harm. The Department of Health (2008) for example, reported around 14,000 people were treated "for stab wounds" in 2007 – compared with around 10,000 admissions in 2003 (a near 20% increase).

Although, on the face of things, such statistics might appear to have greater validity than those gained from any other source (such as official crime statistics) they have to be treated with caution for four main reasons.

Firstly, comparisons are unreliable given the different ways injuries have been identified and recorded (with "knife crime" in the news there is a greater likelihood now of an injury both being recorded and interpreted as a "knife injury". Secondly, incidents are recorded as "stabbings" (not "knife crimes" as the media tend to assume) and these may be caused by something other than a knife. Finally, an incident recorded as "a stabbing" is not necessarily caused by someone other than the "victim" – it may, for example, have been a self-inflicted accident. Finally, even if we assume that the recorded increase in "knife crime" admissions to hospital is accurate a further factor complicates the picture, namely the extent to which people are more-likely now to go   for treatment as a hospital out-patient,   rather than see their doctor. The evidence   here, after Health Service changes in   recent years, is that this is a far   more common practice now   than in the past..

"Is this a knife I see before me?"

Patterns of Crime

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

Social Class: Observations

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

Opportunity structures: Where people are differently placed (in the workforce, for example) they have greater or lesser criminal opportunities. Corporate crime is largely carried out by the higher classes (the working class are not, by definition, in positions of sufficient power and trust to carry out elaborate frauds).

Few people in the world held the position of power and influence granted to Bernard Ebbers, CEO of Worldcom.

Unfortunately "Bernie" (as he's probably known to warders and inmates) was convicted of abusing that position to the tune of £9 billion (give or take a billion or so) in 2005...

However, all classes have the same basic **opportunities** to commit a wide variety of offences (from street violence and theft to armed robbery). This suggests we need alternative ways to explain the predominantly working-class nature of these offences, such as:

Lifestyle and **socialisation**: Given that crime statistics show young people have the highest rates of offending, middle-class youths are less likely to be involved in 'lifestyle offending' that relates to various forms of street crime, partly for:
• **Status reasons** – a criminal record is likely to affect potential career opportunities, and partly for

• **Economic reasons** – middle-class youths are less likely to pursue crime as a source of income.

Social Class: Explanations

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

Social control agencies and their perception and treatment of different social classes. *Policing strategies*, for example, covers a number of related areas:

Spatial targeting focuses police resources on areas and individuals where crime rates have, historically, been highest (which, in effect, usually means spaces mainly occupied by the working classes – clubs, pubs, estates or designated 'crime hotspots').

Stereotyping: There is an element of *self-fulfilling prophecy* in this type of targeting ('high-crime' areas are policed, therefore more people are arrested, which creates 'high-crime' areas . . .) which spills over into:

Labelling theory: **Young** and **Mooney** (1999), for example, note how working class ethnic groups are likely to be targeted on the basis of *institutional police racism* as well as the sort of routine police practices just noted.

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

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

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

'Network Rail has been found guilty of breaching health and safety legislation in the run-up to the Hatfield crash. But three . . . managers, and two former employees of Balfour Beatty, the firm that maintained the line, were cleared at the Old Bailey. Four people died when a London to Leeds express train hit a cracked rail and left the tracks. on 17 October 2000. Prosecutors said the crash resulted from a "cavalier approach" to safety.'

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

Age: Observations

One consistent finding of statistical and survey methods is the correlation between age and deviant behaviour; young people (the 10–24 age group in the UK) are more involved in crime and deviance than their older counterparts. **Social Trends** (**Summerfield and Babb**, 2005), for example, puts the peak age for offending at 18 for males and 15 for females, which suggests criminal behaviour declines with age. Two years later **Self and Zealey** (2007) note that "The number of young offenders as a proportion of the population is highest for males between the ages of 10 and 17. In 2005 in England and Wales, 6% of all 17-year-old males were found guilty of, or cautioned for, indictable offences, the highest rate for any age group and four times the corresponding rate for females".

Hirschi and **Gottfredson** (1983) argue that 'the relationship between age and crime is invariant [constant] across all social and cultural conditions at all times', while **Kanazawa** and **Still** (2000) suggest 'crime and other risk-taking behaviour…peaks in late adolescence and early adulthood, rapidly decreases throughout the 20s and 30s, and levels off during middle age'.

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

Age: Explanations

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

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

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

• finding **employment**
• staying in **education**
• getting **married** and
• starting a **family**

distance people from (public) situations in which opportunistic criminality occurs. Complementing this, we could note how:

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

Social status within a peer or family group. The ability to commit skilful crimes or be the 'hardest' person in a group, for example, may confer status that is denied to many working-class youth in society.
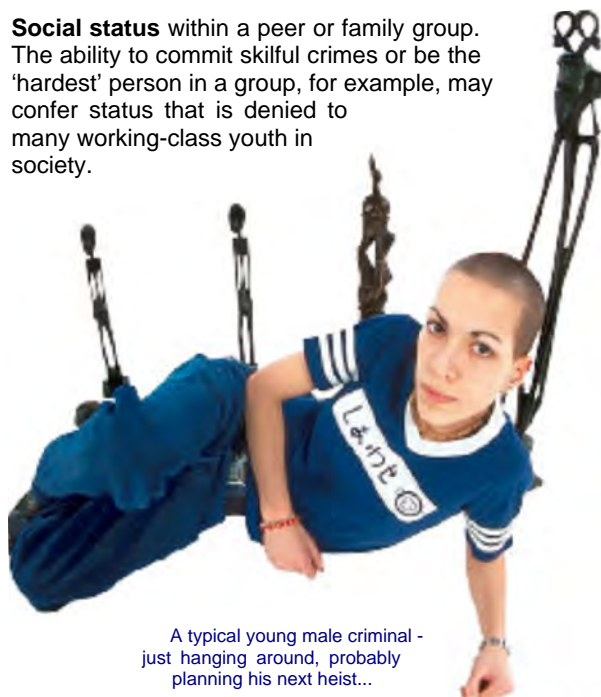
A typical young male criminal - just hanging around, probably planning his next heist...

These types of explanation link into:

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

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

1. **Cultural factors**: 'Image-conscious' youth not only had to maintain a certain sense of image and style (clothes, mobiles, and so forth), they also needed to constantly update and change this image, something that links to:

2. **Economic factors** – the need for money to finance their image. Where family financial support was absent, crime provided a source of funding.

• **Private** domain explanations relate to the way greater forms of individual responsibility develop 'with age', effectively taking people out of the situations in which the majority of crime takes place. The least criminal in our society, the elderly, are also the least likely to be involved in *public domain* activities (most elderly people do not, for example, have a 'pubbing and clubbing' lifestyle).

Alternatives

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

Social control agencies: As with class, gender and ethnicity, *policing strategies* make an important contribution to our understanding of age and crime:

Spatial targeting focuses on spaces occupied by youth and, as we've seen, involves elements of *stereotyping* and *self-fulfilling prophecy.* Part of the ability to police the young in this way comes from their lower social status and lack of power to resist police control and surveillance strategies.

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

Status deviance. Many crimes are not committed for economic reasons alone; some relate to power and prestige within a social group and involve a combination of *risk-taking* and the idea of 'thumbing your nose' at authority.

Most forms of youth crime are relatively petty in nature and extent and some sociological explanations link this to concepts of style and self-expression - the need to create and maintain status within certain social groups.

Smith et al. (2005) suggest young people's contact with the police is more likely to be *adversarial* (conflict-based). Interestingly, this has a class dimension; the higher the class, the *less likely* that police contact would be adversarial.

Gender: Observations

Higher male involvement in crime is, according to **Maguire** (2002), a 'universal feature . . . of all modern countries' and while, as **Self and Zealey** (2007) demonstrate, men and women in the UK statistically commit much the same *types* of crime (with theft, drug offences and personal violence being the main offences for *both* sexes) men commit both more crime and a wider range of offences (from robbery, through burglary, to sex offences). Explanations for this difference focus on a range of ideas:

Socialisation is a traditional place to begin when discussing gender differences, mainly because males and females are subject to different forms of socialisation and levels of social control. Traditional

Nightclubs, pubs, street corners and parks are all open to police targeting as spaces where crime is likely to occur...

sociological discourses, for example, contrast the active, instrumental nature of male socialisation with the passive, affective nature of female socialisation, and while this may or may not be an accurate reflection of current realities, it forms the basis of different attitudes to:

Risk: Males and females develop different attitudes to 'risk-taking' which, in turn, explains greater or lesser involvement in crime. Contemporary takes on this idea, **Davies** (1997) suggests, focus on:

Identity formation, where gender is 'viewed as a *situated accomplishment*'; in other words, deviance and conformity represent cultural resources for 'doing masculinity and femininity'. What this means, in effect, is that concepts of masculinity and femininity in our culture are bound up in different attitudes to risk – men display greater risk-taking attitudes than women because 'taking risks' is associated with 'being male'. **McIvor** (1998), in this respect, argues greater male involvement in youth crime is 'linked to a range of other risk-taking behaviours which in turn are associated with the search for [masculine] identity in the transition from adolescence to adulthood' – something that reflects, for example, functionalist forms of subcultural theory.

Edgework: Taking his cue from the "Gonzo journalist" Hunter S. **Thompson** (1974), **Lyng** (1990. 2004) developed the concept of "edgework" to refer, originally, to various forms of "voluntary risk-taking" – the kinds of things generally subsumed nowadays under the heading "extreme sports". The basic idea to (over) simplify a complex set of ideas, was an exploration and explanation of how and why some people – and young males in particular - engaged in behaviour that continually pushed at behavioural boundaries ("exploring the edges", as **Lyng** puts it) in a dangerous, usually life-threatening, way.
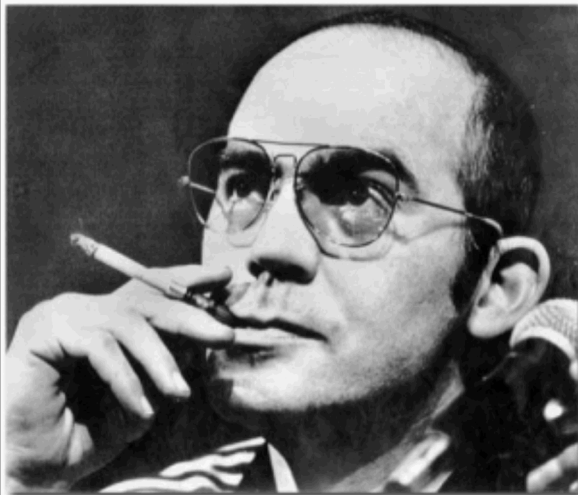
Hunter S. Thompson pioneered a form of journalism that involved becoming part of the behaviour they were reporting (a bit like participant observation but with, in Thompson's case, lots of drugs).

Lyng drew on a wide range of familiar concepts and themes in the sociology of deviance (from status frustration, through resistance to bourgeois hegemony to, on the wider stage, the tension between order and disorder) to suggest that edgework represented a "radical form of escape from the institutional routines of

Are men more open to risk-taking than women?

contemporary life". offering to the individual both

• **Psychological rewards** – feelings of self-actualisation, challenge, the facing and over-coming of fear and:

• **Sociological rewards**, such as the self-confidence and feelings of control and invincibility that comes from having faced and survived extreme danger.

The concept has been expanded in recent times to include, as **Lyng** (2008) suggests " Voluntary risk taking behavior (sic) in various domains of social life, including extreme sports, dangerous occupations, high risk finance and even certain forms of street crime". In other words, just the kinds of "risky deviant behaviour" engaged in by young males (which is why the concept makes an appearance here).

The concept of edgework is an attractive (if highly limited) way to explain many forms of youth deviance (and, by extension, why older men or women in general are
less involved in "street" forms of deviance) because it suggests that there is no real need to explain youth criminality in any way other than "risk"; crimes that, for example, appear "meaningless" or "not cost effective" (the potential costs far outweigh any limited economic benefits that might accrue to the individual) can be explained in terms of the types of psychological and sociological rewards we noted earlier.

This idea has important ramifications for theories of deviance – not the least of these being Right Realist arguments based around the way individuals are supposed to engage in "realistic" assessments of the costs and benefits of their behaviour – since it proposes a synthesis between structural and constructionist explanations of (some forms of) deviance (a synthesis between Marx and Mead, in particular, although we don't need to explore these links here).

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

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

Do greater female responsibilities in the home limit their opportunities for criminal behaviour?

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

Gender : Explanations

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

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

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

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

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

The chivalry effect - another male myth?

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

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

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

Social visibility. Female crime is underestimated because it is 'less visible' to the police, either because women are more successful in hiding their criminal behaviour or because formal control agencies are less likely to police female behaviour. **Maguire** (2002), however, argues that the weight of research evidence suggests there is no great reservoir of 'undiscovered female crime' – there is, he suggests '. . . little or no evidence of a vast shadowy underworld of female deviance hidden in our midst like the sewers below the city streets'.

Ethnicity: Observations

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

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

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

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

1. Social class: Ethnic minority group members are more likely to be working class.

2. Age: Black minority groups generally have a younger age profile than both the white majority and the UK population as a whole.

Ethnicity: Explanations

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

Opportunity structures: The class and age demographics for ethnic minority groups suggest that a general lack of involvement in 'middle-class' forms of offending can be explained in terms of such groups not generally being in a position to carry out this type of crime.

Social control: The relatively low levels of female Asian offending can be partly explained by higher levels of surveillance and social control experienced within the family. Similarly, black minority youth are more likely to be raised in single parent families than their white peers, and this type of family profile is *statistically* associated with higher rates of juvenile offending.

Over-representation: One set of explanations for black overrepresentation in prison focuses on the greater likelihood of black youth being:

Targeted by the police as potential/ actual offenders (an idea that relates to police *stereotypes* of class, age and ethnicity). **Clancy et al.** (2001) note that when all demographic factors are controlled, 'being young, male and *black* increased a person's likelihood of being stopped and searched'.

Prosecuted and convicted through the legal system. **Home Office** (2004) statistics show that although arrests for notifiable offences were predominantly white (85% as against 15% from non-white minority groups), blacks overall were three times more likely to be arrested than whites, although arrest rates varied significantly by locality.

Urban areas (such as London and Manchester) generally had a *lower* ratio of black/white arrest rates than *rural* areas (such as Norfolk, where blacks were eight times more likely to be arrested than whites).

Are class, gender and age more significant factors in explaining deviant behaviour than ethnicity?
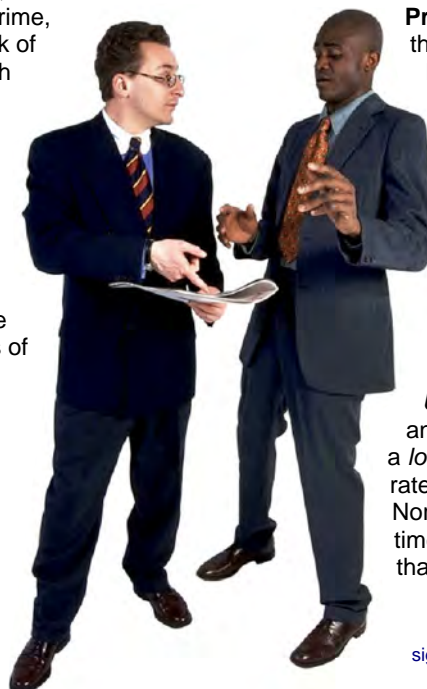
Significantly perhaps, black suspects were also proportionately more likely to be *acquitted* in both magistrate and Crown courts.

One explanation for over-representation might be:

Institutional racism: The **Macpherson Report** (1999) into the murder of the black teenager **Stephen Lawrence** suggested police cultures and organisations were institutionally biased against black offenders and suspects. Lower rates of offending and arrest for Asian minorities, however, suggest this may not paint a complete picture. **Skidelsky** (2000) argues that *social class* also plays a significant part in any explanation since 'poor people, or neighbourhoods, get poor [police] service, whatever their race'. **Young** and **Mooney** (1999) argue that much the same is true for the general policing process in the UK – 'If . . . institutionalised racism were removed the disproportionate class focus (of the police) would still result . . . but at a substantially reduced level'.

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

Judiciary, in terms of thinking about those who are actually found guilty and punished. **Home Office** (2004) statistics show that around 25% of the male and 31% of the female prison population was from an ethnic minority group (ethnic minorities currently make up around 8% of the UK population). Either ethnic minority groups display far higher levels of offending or some other process is at work, distorting the relative figures.

One such factor is that black minority prisoners tend to serve longer prison sentences (for whatever reason) than other ethnic groups (something that might partly be explained in terms of their greater involvement in gun crime). 37% of black prisoners were serving sentences for drug offences (compared with 13% for white prisoners); although this may (or may not) reflect different levels of drug use, the fact that this single form of criminality accounts for such a large proportion of black inmates tells us something about the nature of black criminality in the UK.

Locality: Observations

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

1. Cultural environments: This involves thinking about variables such as class, age and ethnicity, in the sense that area differences in crime and victimisation rates will clearly be related to the cultural composition of an area. We know, from **Clarke et al.** (2004), that working-class areas have higher crime rates than middle-class areas – the question, however, is the extent to which this difference is a function of class, locality or, perhaps, both.

2. Physical environments: Ideas about how people interact with their environment have been outlined previously in relation to both administrative criminology and New Right realism, so we don't need to cover the

The Macpherson Report investigated the circumstances surrounding the racially-motivated murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence. His alleged killers were identified, but never convicted. The Daily Mail ran their pictures on a front page inviting them to sue the newspaper for libel - none of them did so.

same ground here. However, as **Clarke et al.** (2004) note: 'The highest crime rates are in city centre areas, with the lowest in the most rural. Different types of crime tend to occur in different types of areas.'

Locality: Explanations

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

Opportunities: A relatively simple observation perhaps, but urban areas contain more people (especially young people, the peak offenders as we've seen) and places (shops, offices, factories and houses) in which to commit crime. Urban areas also contain more 'lifestyle resources' (clubs and pubs, for example) where large numbers of people (especially young people) gather and socialise, which in turn creates more opportunities for offending. **Zaki** (2003) expresses these ideas in terms of urban areas having 'higher densities of population and premises, and greater mixes of use, and therefore higher crime opportunities. They also tend to have less advantaged populations who are known to be more vulnerable to crime in general'.

Socialisation: **Parsons** (1937) has argued that urban life involves a wider range of impersonal, *instrumental* relationships, something that encourages offenders to distance themselves from the consequences of their behaviour. This 'social distancing' makes people more likely to commit crime in urban areas because they are less likely to have close personal ties to their victims.

The reverse holds true in rural areas where *affective relationships* are more likely; this increases the probability of a potential offender knowing their victim and acts to prevent many forms of criminal behaviour. This idea links into:

Social control: **Tonnies** (1887) suggested rural areas are more likely to be characterised by community (*Gemeinschaft*) type relationships that encourage people to take an interest in the behaviour of their neighbours. Small, tight-knit communities (where everyone knows everyone) make it easier to exercise informal types of social control. In urban areas where relationships are more impersonal (*Gesellschaft*), informal social controls do not operate as effectively. In addition, close-knit communities may deal with offenders in ways that do not necessarily involve the police; alternatively, the police themselves (because of their closer personal ties with a community) are less likely to invoke the criminal law over minor infractions.

Police resources and strategies: Greater numbers and concentrations of police in urban areas increase the likelihood of crime being detected and reported. The police also target 'crime hotspots' – places where offending is either known, or more likely, to take place.

Social visibility: Recent technological developments, such as CCTV, are more likely to be deployed in urban areas (especially city centres or targeted crime hotspots), making it easier to both identify and deter offenders by increasing their social visibility. Conversely, the relative size and social differentiation of urban areas make it easier for offenders to move around 'anonymously' – there are fewer chances of being recognised by victims, for example.

Lifestyle factors: A range of explanations apply in this context, relating to things like:

• **Age**: rural communities tend to have an older age demographic and the elderly are the least likely group to offend.

'• **Lifestyle crimes**': Involving drug use and dealing, theft of personal items, such as mobile phones and personal MP3 players, prostitution and the like.

• **Risk avoidance**: Middle and upper class areas (both rural and urban) are more likely to employ a range of crime prevention strategies (such as burglar alarms).

Explanations for Crime

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

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

The English village - not exactly a seething hotbed of crime and criminality...

Age has a couple of significant dimensions. First, it can reasonably be argued that age is not, in itself, a useful indicator of criminality; this follows because there may be nothing intrinsic to "age" that promotes offending (people don't simply offend because they are young). In this respect we need to explore factors such as **lifestyle** and **identity formation** as they relate to different age groups – the young are more likely to lead active, public lifestyles which bring them into contact with offending behaviour and control agencies. Similarly, if youth identities are more fluid than adult identities (they are not so tightly secured by family, work and individual responsibilities, for example), it may follow that the young are more likely to indulge in risky forms of behaviour, some of which involve crime.

Second, while **Gottfredson and Hirschi** (1990) argue that crime is inversely correlated with age (as people get older their offending declines), **Blumstein et al.** (1986) argue that age and crime do not have this characteristic in terms of *individual offenders*. In other words, crime *declines* at the general population level of society because there are fewer active offenders – where crime declines, therefore, it's because the number of offenders in society declines, not because of a decline in offending at the individual level. This interpretation, if valid, has profound consequences for the way we examine and explain the social distribution of crime, not just in terms of age, but also in terms of removing offenders from society through imprisonment (part of a general debate about the effectiveness of prison as a crime control measure).

Definitions: A further complication is the fact that, although we have 'taken for granted' the definition of crime in this section, such concepts are neither neutral nor self-evident. **Box** (1983) makes the point that even with a crime such as 'murder': 'The criminal law defines only some types of avoidable killing as murder; it excludes, for example, deaths resulting from acts of negligence, such as employers' failure to maintain safe working conditions; or deaths which result from governmental agencies giving environmental health risks a low priority . . .'.

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

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