Crime and deviance are relative to time, place and culture. In other words, what counts as crime and deviance varies from time to time, place to place and culture to culture. Societal and situational deviance Ken Plummer (1979) captures this point in his distinction between societal and situational deviance. **Societal deviance** refers to behaviour which breaks the law or which is seen as deviant by most members of society. It is judged to be deviant on the basis of their shared values and beliefs and what ‘common sense’ tells them.

There is general agreement about the identification of societal deviance for example, most people regard armed robbery as wrong, as deviant and as criminal.

**Situational deviance:** refers to the effect of the context or situation on the classification of deviance. In one situation an act may be seen as deviant, in another situation it may not. People interpret what counts as deviance in their personal worlds of friends, colleagues and acquaintances. Plummer accepts that the beliefs and values of the wider society affect views of situational deviance. However he argues that in certain contexts people either neutralize or reject the societal version of deviance.

**Culture and deviance:** Crime and deviance are relative to culture. Different cultures have different norms and values. As a result, what is considered normal and deviant will vary from one culture to another.

As cultures change, so do definitions of deviance and crime. At certain times in Western societies it was considered deviant for women to use make-up and consume alcoholic drinks in public. Today, this is no longer the case. In the same way, definitions of crime change over time. Sexual relations between men were once a criminal offence in Britain. Since 1969, homosexual acts between consenting adults in private have no longer been illegal.

A hero fighting against perpetrators of terror or a war criminal responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent men, women and children?
Every society has methods of making its members toe the line, of making sure that they stick to the straight and narrow. These methods are known as mechanisms or methods of social control. They ensure that most of the people, most of the time, conform to society’s norms and values. For social order to exist, shared norms and values are necessary and conformity to them must be enforced. Enforcing conformity means discouraging deviant and criminal behaviour — behaviour which breaks social norms and goes against shared values.

Social control takes many forms. Some researchers have distinguished between formal and informal methods of social control.

### Formal methods of social control

Formal methods refer to institutions specifically set up to enforce social control. In modern industrial societies, this mainly involves institutions which create and enforce the law — for example, parliament which enacts the law and the police, judiciary and prison service which enforce the law.

The ultimate and most obvious form of social control is physical force. Under certain circumstances, some have the right to use physical force against others in an attempt to control their behaviour. In modern industrial societies, the police are an obvious example. Other formal methods of social control include judicial punishments such as fines and imprisonment.

### Informal methods of social control

Informal methods of social control involve institutions and social groups which are not directly concerned with enforcing social control and upholding the law. These groups and institutions include the family, schools, religious organisations and significant others.

The family and the school socialise young people, teaching them the norms and values of the wider society. Conformity to these norms and values is usually rewarded, deviance from them is usually punished.

Religious teachings often reinforce the values of society. For example, the Christian Commandments ‘you shall not kill’ and ‘you shall not steal’ reinforce the values placed on human life and private property. And, in turn, they back up secular laws protecting life and property. Religions offer rewards to those who follow their teachings and punishments to those who deviate from them. In this way, religion acts as a mechanism of social control.

Significant others are people who matter to an individual. They usually include his or her immediate family, friends, neighbours and workmates. People are concerned about what significant others think about them. Their approval makes them feel good, their disapproval upsets them. Because the opinion of significant others is held so highly, they can play an important part in controlling the behaviour of an individual. People often conform to social norms in order to gain the approval and acceptance of significant others and to avoid their disapproval and rejection.

Many sociologists see informal social controls as more important and effective than the more obvious formal controls.
We start with the sociological study of suicide because it raises many of the major issues found throughout this module. In particular, there is a dispute about the way to do Sociology. The dispute is mainly between Positivism and Interpretivism.

Since the 1980s, however, a challenger to both Positivism and Interpretivism has appeared in the form of Realism. We shall therefore examine Realist analyses of suicide.

**Durkheim's study of suicide**

Durkheim argued that it was not only possible to apply scientific principles to social phenomena but that it was essential to apply scientific principles in order to produce useful sociology. His 1897 book *Suicide: a study in sociology*, uses his scientific methods to explore suicide.

1) Durkheim chose suicide deliberately, because as the most individual, private and psychologically driven act it was considered by most not to be a social phenomenon.

2) If sociology could identify social factors and causes of suicide, this would demonstrate the power and impact of society on individual behaviour.

3) His methodology was rigorous, systematic, detailed and scientific analysis.

4) Durkheim said that if this scientific methodology is followed then "social facts" can be discovered in the same way as scientific research reveals laws or facts of the natural world.

**Suicide rates as social facts**

In Durkheim’s view, our behaviour is caused by social facts – social forces found in the structure of society. According to Steven Lukes (1992), social facts have three features:

- They are external to individuals.
- They constrain individuals, shaping their behaviour.
- They are greater than individuals - they exist on a different ‘level’ from the individual.

For Durkheim, the suicide rate is a social fact. Using quantitative data from official statistics, Durkheim analysed the suicide rates for various European countries over a period of several decades in the 19th century. He noted four regular patterns:

1) Suicide rates for any given society remained more or less constant over time.

2) When the rates did change, this coincided with other changes. For example, the rates fell during wartime, while they rose at times of economic depression and - perhaps surprisingly - times of rising prosperity.

3) Different societies have different rates.

4) Within a society, the rates varied considerably between different social groups. For example, Catholics had lower rates than Protestants, married people with children had lower rates than the single, widowed or childless, and rural dwellers had lower rates than city dwellers.
Suicide & type of society

For Durkheim, modern societies and traditional societies differ from one another in their levels of integration and regulation, and this means that we tend to find different types of suicide in each type of society:

**Modern industrial societies:** have lower levels of integration. Individuals' rights and freedoms become more important than obligations towards the group. This weakens social bonds and gives rise to egoistic suicides. Similarly, modern societies are less effective in regulating individuals because they undergo rapid social change, which undermines accepted norms and produces anomic suicides.

**Traditional pre-industrial societies:** have higher levels of integration. The group is more important than the individual and this gives rise to altruistic suicides. Similarly, these societies strictly regulate their members' lives and impose rigidly ascribed statuses that limit individuals' opportunities, and this produces fatalistic suicides.

Later positivists approaches

Other positivists since Durkheim have sought to build on his work. For example, Maurice Halbwachs (1930), a student of Durkheim's, accepted his positivist approach but sought to modify and add to his theory. Halbwachs had access to more recent and probably more reliable statistics than Durkheim, as well as more sophisticated statistical techniques. Although largely confirming Durkheim's findings, Halbwachs argued that differences between urban and rural residence were the main reason for variations in suicide rates. Higher rates among Protestants, people living alone and so on were more a function of their urban location - these groups were more likely to be found in towns where people lead more isolated lives. Similarly, Sainsbury (1955) found that suicide rates in London boroughs were highest where the levels of social disorganisation (such as divorce and illegitimacy) were highest.

Jack Gibbs and Walter Martin (1964) regard Durkheim's as 'the foremost sociological theory of variability in suicide rates. Like Durkheim, they wish to make law-like, cause-and-effect generalisations and predictions. However, they argue that Durkheim does not operationalise his concept of integration (define it in such a way that it can be measured).

Gibbs and Martin go on to define integration as a situation where there are stable and lasting relationships. They argue these tend to occur when an individual has status integration - compatible statuses that do not conflict with one another, for example, when their educational and occupational statuses are similar. In societies where there is little status integration (for instance, where many well educated people are forced to take low status jobs), the suicide rate will be higher.

Other aspects of Durkheim's study have also been criticised. For example, it is argued that the statistics he used were unreliable and incomplete - in the 19th century, medical knowledge of the causes of death was limited and autopsies rarely performed. Similarly, many countries lacked the sophisticated modern administrative system needed to collect and compile reliable statistics on a national basis. However, these criticisms do not challenge the basic aim of Durkheim's study, to achieve a scientific explanation of suicide. By contrast, other sociologists, adopting an interpretivist perspective, offer a more fundamental critique of his positivist approach.
While positivists have sought to build on Durkheim's theory, interpretivists have sought to demolish it. Interpretivists focus on the meanings of suicide for those involved.

**Douglas: the social meanings of suicide**

Jack D. Douglas (1967) takes a largely interactionist approach to suicide. He is interested in the meaning that suicide has for the deceased, and in the way that coroners label deaths as suicides. He criticises Durkheim's study of suicide on two main grounds.

1) **The use of suicide statistics**

The decision to classify a death as suicide is taken by a coroner and influenced by other social actors, and this may produce bias in the verdicts reached. Douglas argues that this may explain the patterns that Durkheim found. For example, the finding that a high level of integration leads to low suicide rates can be explained by the fact that well integrated individuals may have friends and relatives who might deny that the death was suicide out of their own feelings of guilt, or even cover it up by destroying a suicide note.

By contrast, socially isolated individuals will have no one to oppose a suicide verdict on their behalf. Thus, although it might seem as if integration prevents suicide, in fact integration merely affects the likelihood of a death being labelled and recorded as suicide, rather than of it actually being a suicide.

For Douglas, suicide verdicts and the statistics based on them are the product of interactions and negotiations between those involved - relatives, friends, doctors, police, the coroner and so on, and factors such as integration influence these negotiations.

2) **Actors' meanings and qualitative data**

Douglas criticises Durkheim for ignoring the meanings of the act for those who kill themselves and for assuming that suicide has a fixed or constant meaning. In particular, Douglas notes that the meanings of suicide can vary between cultures. For example, the dishonoured Japanese samurai warrior and the western businessman facing financial ruin may attach very different meanings to their deaths. These motives and meanings must be understood within their own social and cultural context, and this means that Durkheim's attempt to compare rates across cultures is faced with problems.

Douglas also rejects Durkheim's aim to categorise suicides in terms of their social causes. Instead we must classify each death according to its actual meaning for the deceased. To do this, we must use qualitative methods and sources to produce case studies based on the analysis of suicide notes and diaries, and in-depth interviews with the suicide's friends and relatives. From these, we can build up a typology of suicidal meanings.
Although Douglas did not carry out any case studies himself, he suggests that in Western societies the social meanings of suicide include escape, repentance, a search for help or sympathy, self-punishment, revenge and seriousness. However, he points out that suicide may have different meanings in other cultures, for example religious ones such as transformation of the soul (getting to heaven).

For Douglas, using qualitative data also overcomes the problems caused by relying on official statistics. Analysis of suicide notes and so on would allow us to 'get behind' the labels that coroners attach to cases and discover the real meaning of the death for the person involved. From this, we could get a better idea of the real rate of suicide than the socially constructed one that appears in the statistics.

Methods Link: using documents

Jerry Jacobs (1967) analysed 112 suicide notes to gain an understanding of the social meanings of suicide. By putting himself into the actor's place and using verstehen, he was able to classify 102 of the notes into a typology of six categories based on the actor's intentions. For example, one category was people who were ill and felt they could not go on. Jacobs argues that the notes are coherent and rational, and reflect the deceased's conscious deliberation.

Interpretivists see suicide notes as a direct and meaningful form of communication from the deceased. Because they are not written for the researcher, they are likely to be a valid account of motives and meanings.

However Jacobs' relatively small sample may not be representative of suicides in general. For example, those with less coherent motives or who act on impulse may not leave notes. There is also no guarantee that Jacobs' interpretation of their meaning is correct.

Criticisms of Douglas

Douglas produces a classification of suicide based on the supposed meanings for the actors. However, there is no reason to believe that sociologists are any better than coroners at interpreting a dead person's meanings.

Sainsbury and Barraclough (1968) found that the rank order of suicides for immigrant groups to the USA correlated closely with that of the suicide rates for their countries of origin, despite the fact that a different set of labellers were involved - American coroners rather than those of their home countries. This suggests that statistics reflect real differences between groups, rather than coroners' labelling.

Douglas is inconsistent, sometimes suggesting that office statistics are merely the product of coroners' opinions. At other times, he claims we really can discover the causes of suicide - yet how can we, if we can never know whether a death was a suicide and all we have is coroners' opinions?
Durkheim's functionalist theory - The inevitability of crime

While functionalists see too much crime as destabilising society, they also see crime as inevitable and universal. Every known society has some level of crime and deviance - a crime-free society is a contradiction in terms. For Durkheim (1893), 'crime is normal... an integral part of all healthy societies'.

Two reasons why crime and deviance are found in all societies:

- Not everyone is equally effectively socialised into the shared norms and values, so some individuals will be prone to deviate.

- Particularly in complex modern societies, there is a diversity of lifestyles and values. Different groups develop their own subcultures with distinctive norms and values, and what the members of the subculture regard as normal, mainstream culture may see as deviant.

In modern societies there is a tendency towards anomie or normlessness - the rules governing behaviour become weaker and less clear-cut. This is because modern societies have a complex, specialised division of labour, which leads to individuals becoming increasingly different from one another. This diversity means that the shared culture or collective conscience is weakened, and this results in higher levels of crime and deviance. For example, Durkheim sees anomie as a major cause of suicide in modern societies.
Evaluation of Durkheim

- Durkheim offers no way of knowing how much is the right amount.
- Functionalists explain the existence of crime in terms of its supposed function - for example, to strengthen solidarity. Just because crime does these things is not necessarily why it exists in the first place.
- Functionalism looks at what functions crime serves for society as a whole and ignores how it might affect different groups or individuals within society. Functionalism misses this because it fails to ask the question 'functional for whom?'
- Crime doesn't always promote solidarity.

Merton’s Strain Theory

Merton developed the Functionalist theory, especially the idea of anomie. He applied the idea of anomie to American society. He argued that for societies to function, people have to be given incentives to perform certain roles and to achieve the cultural goals of that society, what Merton referred to as “the American Dream”. For many societies, the main goal was material and financial success. At all levels of society, people are socialised and encouraged to strive for success, they are encouraged to achieve the American dream.

However many people in society are unable to achieve success because they lack the means to do so. Social structures and systems do not support them in their quest for success goals. Anomie occurs when success goals exist but people are unable or unwilling to achieve them. His theory is often referred to as Strain theory because Strain occurs when people are denied the opportunities to realise their success goals.

Evaluation of Merton

Merton shows how both normal and deviant behaviour can arise from the same mainstream goals. Both conformists and innovators are pursuing money success - one legitimately, the other illegitimately.

He explains the patterns shown in official crime statistics:

Most crime is property crime, because American society values material wealth so highly.

Lower-class crime rates are higher, because they have least opportunity to obtain wealth legitimately.

However, the theory is criticised on several grounds:

- It takes official crime statistics at face value. These over-represent working-class crime, so Merton sees crime as a mainly working-class phenomenon. It is also too deterministic: the working class experience the most strain, yet they don't all deviate.
- Marxists argue that it ignores the power of the ruling class to make and enforce the laws in ways that criminalise the poor but not the rich.
Marxists argue that although all classes commit crime, when it comes to the application of the law by the criminal justice system, there is selective enforcement. While powerless groups such as the working class and ethnic minorities are criminalised, the police and courts tend to ignore the crimes of the Powerful.

Marxists argue that although all classes commit crime, when it comes to the application of the law by the criminal justice system, there is selective enforcement. While powerless groups such as the working class and ethnic minorities are criminalised, the police and courts tend to ignore the crimes of the Powerful.

For example, Jeffrey Reiman's (2001) book *The Rich Get Richer and the poor get prison* shows that the more likely a crime is to be committed by higher-class people, the less likely it is to be treated as a criminal offence. There is a disproportionately high rate of prosecutions for the kinds of 'street crimes' that poor people typically commit, such as burglary and assault. Yet with the kinds of crimes committed mostly by the higher classes, such as health and safety violations and serious tax evasion, the criminal justice system takes a more forgiving view.

**Ideological functions of crime & law**

The law, crime and criminals also perform an ideological function for capitalism. Laws are occasionally passed that appear to be for the benefit of the working class rather than capitalism, such as workplace health and safety laws.

However, Frank Pearce (1976) argues that such laws often benefit the ruling class too - for example, by keeping workers fit for work. By giving capitalism a 'caring' face, such laws also create false consciousness among the workers.

In any case, such laws are not rigorously enforced. For example, W.G. Carson (1971), in a sample of 200 firms, found that they had all broken health and safety laws at least once, yet only a tiny proportion (1.5%) of these cases resulted in Prosecution.

Furthermore, because the state enforces the law selectively, crime appears to be largely a working-class phenomenon. This divides the working class by encouraging workers to blame the criminals in their midst for their problems, rather than capitalism.

The media and some criminologists also contribute by portraying criminals as disturbed individuals, thereby concealing the fact that it is the nature of capitalism that makes people criminals.
Skogan (1990): Social Disorganisation

Skogan takes the ideas of social disorganisation a stage further by suggesting that social control breaks down when there is a combination of physical deterioration in local buildings and parks, and an increase in social disorder in the form of public alcohol and drug use. This leads to a situation of disorder, which has three consequences:

People withdraw into their own homes, thus undermining the bonds between people. Fear of crime is generated, so people don’t go out at night, thus making it easier for street crime to be committed.

Law abiding people move out of the area making the situation worse.

Methods Link: Methods in Context

Newspapers set out to produce colourful stories about people and places that the people who buy the papers want to read about. Journalists go to great lengths to uncover the names and addresses of deviants, publishing these in “the public good”. The outcome is that both guilty and innocent people have been hounded out of their homes and neighbourhoods. Media campaigns which highlight negative aspects of a particular housing development will mean that people will be frightened to move into the area and those already living there may well feel even more fearful.

Sociologists, too, are interested in deviants and areas with social problems, but they are committed by their code of ethics to minimize the negative impact of their studies on people and areas they research. Before any research programme, the sociologist has to obtain ethical approval from the university. Basically, they must demonstrate that no harm will occur to the people being studied. This is why virtually all studies since the 1980s use pseudonyms for individuals in the study, altering the names of schools, organizations and neighbourhoods where the research has taken place, so that no one will be able to trace the participants. In the study by Baldwin and Bottoms above, for example, the names ‘Gardenia’ and ‘Stonewall’ were used, while Stephen Ball (1981), in his study of a comprehensive school, talks about ‘Beachside Comprehensive’.
Newspapers and television news programmes bombard us with the latest government statistics on a huge range of issues, including crime, health, immigration, earnings, inflation, the list goes on. Typically, politicians from different parties are then interviewed and each places a different interpretation on what the statistics really mean: crime has risen or fallen; the number of patients treated by the NHS has increased or decreased, and so on. Sociologists, too, have their view on what official statistics mean, but their interest generally lies in how these statistics are constructed. Crime statistics depend largely upon people bothering to report a crime to the police and then the police recording that complaint as a crime. Even the alternative British Crime Survey statistics depend upon people considering an action worth marking down as a crime.

At the other extreme of social life — religion — the traditional measures of religiosity, such as church attendance and declared belief in God, depend upon why people go to church. If they do so for social reasons (to make friends, because their parents expect them to), then does it ‘really’ count? When people say they ‘believe in God’, what exactly do they mean by this?

Even factual statistics are subject to the critical gaze of sociologists. Wealth statistics are gathered from Income Tax information. If this is inaccurate, so are the official statistics. Yet, we know that the richest people have numerous mechanisms to avoid tax on their income and wealth.

All statistics are socially constructed and sociologists therefore bear this in mind whenever they need to use them.
1) Using material from Item A and elsewhere, critically examine the usefulness of victim surveys for an understanding of patterns of crime. (21 marks)

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**Item A**

The predominant focus on recorded crime is at best partial and at worst hopelessly ideological. Since the British Crime Survey started to be produced in the early 1980s, it has been clear that police-recorded crime figures provide a far from accurate picture of crime levels. Moreover, a whole range of crimes, from white-collar fraud and business crime to environmental crimes and state crimes, rarely if ever figure in police-recorded crime statistics. However, using victim surveys produces no better results, as, in the first place, the victims are generally unaware that they are victims.


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**The examiner’s advice**

You need to explain first what a victim survey such as the British Crime Survey (BCS) involves, and how the statistics derived from it differ from those produced by the police. You should look at both the advantages and the disadvantages of using victim surveys in studying patterns of crime. What are the problems associated with police figures, and can victim surveys overcome these problems? Do they cover all kinds of crime and all kinds of victim? You could also distinguish between national victim surveys (e.g. BCS) and local ones. Remember to make use of material from the Item in your answer. For example, why are people sometimes unaware that they are victims of crime, and what effect does this have on the data produced by victim surveys?
The chivalry thesis

This second argument is known as the leniency or 'chivalry thesis'. The thesis argues that most criminal justice agents - such as police officers, magistrates and judges - are men, and men are socialised to act in a 'chivalrous' way towards women.

For example, Otto Pollak (1950) argues that men have a protective attitude towards women and that

'Men hate to accuse women and thus send them to their punishment, police officers dislike to arrest them, district attorneys to prosecute them, judges and juries to find them guilty, and so on,'

The criminal justice system is thus more lenient with women and so their crimes are less likely to end up in the official statistics. This in turn gives an invalid picture that exaggerates the extent of gender differences in rates of offending.

The chivalry thesis has been hotly debated. Evidence from some self-report studies - where individuals are asked about what crimes they have committed - does suggest that female offenders are treated more leniently.

For example, John Graham and Ben Boulings (1995) research on a sample of 1,721 14-25-year-olds found that although males were more likely to offend, the difference was smaller than that recorded in the official statistics.

They found that males were 2.33 times more likely to admit to having committed an offence in the previous twelve months - whereas the official statistics show males as four times more likely to offend. Similarly, Flood-Page et al (2000) found that, while only one in 11 female self-reported offenders had been cautioned or prosecuted, the figure for males was over one in seven self-reported offenders.

Women are also more likely than men to be cautioned rather than prosecuted. For example, according to the Ministry of Justice (2009), 49% of females recorded as offending received a caution in 2007, whereas for males the figure was only 30%. Similarly, Roger Hood's (1992) study of over 3,000 defendants found that women were about one-third less likely to be jailed in similar cases.

Evidence against the chivalry thesis

There is considerable evidence against the chivalry thesis. For example, David Farrington and Alison Morris' (1983) study of sentencing of 408 offences of theft in a magistrates' Court found that women were not sentenced more leniently for comparable offences.

Similarly, Abigail Buckle and David Farrington's (1984) observational study of shoplifting in a department store witnessed twice as many males shoplifting as females - despite the fact that the numbers of male and female offenders in the official statistics are more or less equal. This small-scale study thus suggests that women shoplifters may be more likely to be prosecuted than their male counterparts.

If women appear to be treated more leniently, it may simply be because their offences are less serious. For example, Steven Box's (1981) review of British and American self-report studies concludes that women who commit serious offences are not treated more favourably than men. Similarly, the lower rate of prosecutions of females as compared with their self-reported offending may be because the crimes they admit to are less serious and less likely to go to trial. Women offenders also seem more likely to show remorse, and this may help to explain why they are more likely to receive a caution instead of going to court.
EXAM QUESTION

Practice Questions Gender & Crime

Item A

The so-called ‘chivalry thesis’ argues that women are treated more leniently than men by the criminal justice system. As a result, criminal statistics underestimate the true extent of female offending.

For example, Otto Pollak (1961) argued that men - including police officers, for example - are socialised to be protective towards women and thus are less likely to charge them or prosecute them. Similarly, when they appear in court female defendants are treated more sympathetically by male judges and jurors. Pollak also argues that women are accustomed to deceiving men, for example in faking orgasm during sex. This skill in deceit means that their crimes, such as poisoning and infanticide, are less easily uncovered.

2) Using material from Item A and elsewhere, assess the value of the 'chivalry thesis' in understanding gender differences in crime. (21 marks)

The examiner’s advice

This question carries 9 A01 (knowledge and understanding) marks and 12 A02 (interpretation, application, analysis and evaluation) marks.

Start by using the Item to help you outline the chivalry thesis, adding your own examples (e.g. what sorts of offences might policemen let off women but not men for?). You should examine relevant evidence in support of the thesis - e.g. Graham and Bowling’s and Flood-Page et al's self-report data, or studies showing a higher rate of cautions or lower rate of imprisonment for women in similar cases.

You also need to evaluate the thesis. Start by presenting evidence arguing that women are not treated more leniently, such as Buckle and Farrington, Farrington and Morris or Box. You can put this material into theoretical context by introducing a feminist perspective to argue that women are often treated more harshly, especially if they deviate from gender norms, whether as defendants or as victims (as in many rape cases).
Self-report studies ask individuals to disclose their own dishonest and violent behaviour. Based on a sample of 2,500 people, Graham and Bowling (1995) found that blacks (43%) and whites (44%) had very similar rates of offending, while Indians (30%), Pakistanis (28%) and Bangladeshi (13%) had much lower rates.

Similarly, Sharp and Budd (2005) note that the 2003 Offending, Crime and Justice survey of 12,000 people found that whites and those of ‘mixed’ ethnic origins were most likely to say they had committed an offence (around 40%), followed by blacks (28%) and Asians (21%).

The Home Office has conducted nine self-report studies on drug use since the early 1990s, all with remarkably similar findings. For example, Sharp and Budd (2005) found that 27% of males of ‘mixed’ ethnicity said they had used drugs (mostly cannabis) in the last year compared with 16% of both black and white males and 5% of Asian males. Use of Class A drugs such as heroin and cocaine was much higher among whites (60%) than blacks (2%) or Asians (1%).

The findings of self-report studies challenge the stereotype of black people as being more likely than whites to offend, though they support the widely held view that Asians are less likely to offend. However, self-report studies have their limitations in relation to ethnicity and offending.

Overall, the evidence on ethnicity and offending is somewhat inconsistent. For example, while official statistics and victim surveys point to the likelihood of higher rates of offending by blacks, this is generally not borne out by the results of self-report studies.

**Methods Link: using questionnaires**

Self-report studies using self-completion questionnaires are a popular method of researching crime and they have been used to study ethnic differences in offending among young people. Respondents are usually given a list of offences and asked to tick those they have committed and indicate how frequently.

Self-report questionnaires provide a useful check on official statistics - typically they reveal smaller gaps between offending rates of different ethnic groups. However, Hindelang et al (1981) found that black males with criminal records were less likely to report offences already known to the police. Such studies also tend not to ask about more serious offences (e.g. murder), where there is evidence of a higher rate of offending by blacks, and they exclude prisoners, which means they under-represent non-white offenders.
Age and Crime

Key issues

**Young people are Convicted of More Crime than Older People**

Most crime is committed by teenagers. The peak age for criminal activity is 18 for men and 15 for women. It's argued that young people commit more crime because their lifestyles take them to environments where crime takes place. The vast majority of crime is property theft — young people are more likely to be on the streets or in clubs, which is where crimes like this (e.g. pick pocketing or mugging) often happen.

Age and criminalisation

Data from official statistics and self-report studies indicates that most offences are committed by young people — by teenagers and by adults in their early 20s. This section looks at the evidence.

Official statistics

Official statistics In 2002, over 481 1000 people in England and Wales were sentenced in court or cautioned by the police for an offence. Compared to other age groups, young people offended most — the highest rate for males was at age 19, for females at age 15. Theft was the most common crime committed by young people, followed by drug offences, violence against the person and burglary (Social Trends, 2004).

Official statistics from various Western societies show a similar age-crime curve. Offending rises steeply from ages 10 to 18, declines sharply to around age 24, followed by a long, slow decline through the remaining age groups. This generalisation applies to different historical periods and different social groups — for example, males, females and ethnic minorities (Smith, 2002). Table 3 shows the age-crime curve for England and Wales in 2002.

Evaluation official statistics

Official statistics provide information on only a small proportion of offenders. For example, there were nearly 5.9 million recorded crimes in England and Wales in 2002/03. This compares with only 481,000 people convicted or cautioned. The proportion of known offenders becomes even smaller when a comparison is made with British Crime Survey data. According to one estimate, only 3% of BCS crimes resulted in an offender being convicted or cautioned (Barclay & Tavares, 1999).

We cannot assume that all offenders are similar to this small proportion of known offenders.

The information provided by official statistics may exaggerate the proportion of young offenders. Young people are more likely to offend in groups and in public — they are more visible and more likely to be apprehended. And the crimes they tend to commit — for example, vehicle theft — are more likely to be reported to the police. By comparison, white-collar crimes, which a higher proportion of older people may well commit, are less visible and less likely to be reported.
Adolescence is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. It is a time when young people seek independence from their parents and look for status and respect as developing adults. Often, both independence and respect are in short supply — in many ways, young people remain dependent on their parents and they are not yet able to claim the status of fully-fledged adults.

A solution to the dependency problem is to seek out or create situations in which to express independence, freedom and autonomy. A solution to the status problem is to seek respect in the eyes of the peer group — those in a similar situation to themselves.

But, how does this argument help to explain the age-crime curve? Independence can be seen as freedom from constraints. In this respect, deviant and criminal activities — which reject the constraints of conventional society — can be seen as an expression and indication of independence. And, in the context of the peer group, these activities can bring the status and respect which the adult world largely denies young people (Caspi & Moffit, 1995). Albert Cohen’s (1955) subcultural theory of working-class delinquency provides an extreme example of this process. Many of these young men do badly at school and fail to acquire the skills and qualifications needed for success. Defined as failures by the wider society, they experience status frustration — they are frustrated with their low status as ‘losers’. Add this to the problems of young people in general, and their sense of status frustration is particularly acute.

According to Cohen, their creation of a delinquent subculture can be seen as a solution to the problems they share. The ‘successful’ delinquent gains respect and admiration from his peers. And it allows him to hit back at a society which has denied him the opportunity to succeed and branded him as a failure. As the age-crime curve shows, most young offenders stop their criminal activity as they grow older. When they really become independent and adopt adult status, they no longer need the gestures of independence’ of their youth (Smith, 2002).

Data from official statistics and self-report studies indicates that most offences are committed by young people. There are problems with both sources of data. Official statistics provide information on only a small proportion of offenders. And the crimes young people typically commit are more likely to be reported to the police.

Self-report studies reveal far more offences when compared to an individual’s police record. However, they tend to list offences typically committed by young people and omit those which are likely to be spread more evenly across the age group.

**Control theory** argues that young people are more likely to offend because they have loosened the bonds with their parents and have yet to form relatively permanent adult relationships and commitments. Without strong bonds to constrain their behaviour, they are more likely to deviate from conventional norms and values.

Some researchers have seen young people’s high rate of offending as a response to their desire for independence and status.
We live today in a media-saturated society. The media are all around us – and the media are obsessed with crime. Crime is the central theme of media output, both fiction and non-fiction. In a world where we often have very little contact with people whose lifestyles and values differ from our own, the media have become our main source of knowledge about crime. What we know – or think we know – about crime is heavily influenced by the media’s representation of it.

Sociologists are interested in several aspects of the media in relation to crime and deviance. In this section, we shall examine:

- How the media represent crime, both in fiction and in non-fiction such as news broadcasts - how far does this portray an accurate picture of crime?
- Do the media cause crime and fear of crime - for example, do the young imitate the deviance they see in the media? Do the media make us more afraid of becoming victims of crime?
- Moral panics - what role do the media play in defining some groups as ‘folk devils’ and in amplifying deviance?
- Cybercrime - how far do the Internet and other information and communication technology create new opportunities for crime, and for the surveillance and control of the population?

AQA Specification

Globalisation and crime: examples and explanations of globalised crimes such as web-based crimes

- Mass media and crime: media’s role in social construction of crime including moral panics and amplification; crime and news values and agenda setting; representations of crime (both fact and fiction)

Learning objectives

After studying this Topic, you should:

- Know the patterns of media representations of crime and how these differ from the picture of crime in official statistics
- Understand and be able to evaluate different views about the media as a cause of crime and fear of crime,
- Know and be able to evaluate views of the media’s role in the creation of moral panics.
There is also evidence of increasing preoccupation with sex crimes. For example, Keith Soothill and Sylvia Walby (1991) found that newspaper reporting of rape cases increased from under a quarter of all cases in 1951 to over a third in 1985. They also note that coverage consistently focuses on identifying a 'sex fiend' or 'beast', often by use of labels (such as 'the balaclava rapist'). The resulting distorted picture of rape is one of serial attacks carried out by psychopathic strangers. While these do occur, they are the exception rather than the rule - in most cases the perpetrator is known to the victim.

### Fictional representations of crime

We don't just get our images of crime from the news media. Fictional representations from TV, cinema and novels are also important sources of our knowledge of crime, because so much of their output is crime-related. For example, Ernest Mandel (1984) estimates that from 1945 to 1984, over 10 billion crime thrillers were sold worldwide, while about 25% of prime time TV and 20% of films are crime shows or movies.

Fictional representations of crime, criminals and victims follow what Surette (1998) calls 'the law of opposites': They are the opposite of the official statistics – and strikingly similar to news coverage.

- Property crime is under-represented, while violence drugs and sex crimes are over represented.
- While real-life homicides mainly result from brawls and domestic disputes, fictional ones are the product of greed and calculation - murder was the most frequent offence in crime movies since 1945 (Reiner, 2001).
- Fictional sex crimes are committed by psychopathic strangers, not acquaintances.
- Fictional villains tend to be higher status, middle-aged white males.
- Fictional cops usually get their man.

However three recent trends are worth noting. Firstly, the new genre of ‘reality' infotainment shows tends to feature young, non-white 'underclass' offenders. Secondly, there is an increasing tendency to show police as corrupt and brutal (and as less successful). Thirdly, victims have become more central, with law enforcers portrayed as their avengers and audiences invited to identify with their suffering.
The media, relative deprivation and crime

Laboratory based research has focused on whether media portrayals of crime and deviant lifestyles lead viewers to commit crime themselves. An alternative approach is to consider how far media portrayals of 'normal' rather than criminal lifestyles might also encourage people to commit crime.

Left realism and relative deprivation

Left realists argue that the mass media help to increase the sense of relative deprivation - the feeling of being deprived relative to others - among poor and marginalised social groups. As Lea and Young (1996) put it:

‘The mass media have disseminated a standardized image of lifestyle, particularly in the areas of popular culture and recreation, which, for those unemployed and surviving through the dole queue or only able to obtain employment at very low wages, has accentuated the sense of relative deprivation.’

In today's society, where even the poorest groups have media access, the media present everyone with images of a materialistic 'good life' of leisure, fun and consumer goods as the norm to which they should conform. The result is to stimulate the sense of relative deprivation and social exclusion felt by marginalised groups who cannot afford these goods. As Merton argues, pressure to conform to the norm can cause deviant behaviour when the opportunity to achieve by legitimate means is blocked. In this instance, the media are instrumental in setting the norm and thus in promoting crime.
The arrival of new types of media is often met with a moral panic. For example, 'horror comics, cinema, television, videos and computer games have all been accused of undermining public morality and corrupting the young. The same is true of the internet - both because of the speed with which it has developed and its scale: almost half the world's population are now online. The arrival of the Internet has led to fears of cyber-crime, which Douglas Thomas and Brian Loader (2000) define as computer-mediated activities that are either illegal or considered illicit by some, and that are conducted through global electronic networks.

As Yvonne Jewkes (2003) notes, the Internet creates opportunities to commit both 'conventional crimes' such as fraud, and 'new crimes using new tools', such as software piracy.

**Types of cyber-crime**

Wall (2001) identifies four categories of cybercrime:

**Cyber-trespass** - crossing boundaries into others' cyber-property. It includes hacking and sabotage, such as spreading viruses.

**Cyber-deception and theft** - including identity theft, 'phishing' (obtaining identity or bank account details by deception) and violation of intellectual property rights (e.g. software piracy, illegal downloading and file-sharing). An estimated 95% of music available online is downloaded illegally (Swash, 2009).

**Cyber-pornography** - including porn involving minors, and opportunities for children to access porn on the Net.

**Cyber-violence** - doing psychological harm or inciting physical harm. Cyber-violence includes cyber-stalking (e.g. sending unwanted, threatening or offensive emails) and hate crimes against minority groups, as well as bullying by text.

Policing cyber-crime is difficult partly because of the sheer scale of the Internet and the limited resources of the police, and also because of its globalised nature, which poses problems of jurisdiction (e.g. in which country should someone be prosecuted for an Internet offence?). Police culture also gives cyber-crime a low priority because it is seen as lacking the excitement of more conventional policing.

However, the new information and communication technology (ICT) also provides the police and state with greater opportunities for surveillance and control of the population. As Jewkes (2003) argues, ICT permits routine surveillance through the use of CCTV cameras, electronic databases, digital fingerprinting and 'smart' identity cards, as well as the installation of listening devices called 'carnivores' at internet service providers to monitor email traffic.
The media give a distorted image of crime. For example, they over-represent violent crime and exaggerate the risk of victimisation. The fact that news is a social construction based on news values such as dramatisation and violence helps to explain the media’s interest in crime.

Some see the media as causing crime, for example through imitation. However, studies generally show only small and limited effects. Left realist argue that the media increase relative deprivation among the poor, who then turn to crime to achieve the lifestyle portrayed by the media.

The media also cause moral panic, identifying a group as folk devil and exaggerating the threat they pose, leading to a crackdown and creating a Deviance amplification spiral. New media such as the Internet have created new opportunities both for cyber-crime and for Surveillance and control of the population.

Summary

1) Identify three news values that the media use to select crime stories.

2) Identify three ways in which the media’s fictional portrayal of crime and policing differs from that of the official statistics.

3) In what way may the media and fear of crime be linked?

4) Suggest three ways in which the media may encourage or cause crime and deviance.

5) Explain what is meant by the term ‘deviance amplification’.

6) Identify three ways in which the media amplified the deviance of the mods and rockers.

7) Suggest three examples of cyber-crimes.
Green or environmental crime can be defined as crime against the environment. Much green crime can be linked to globalisation and the increasing interconnectedness of societies. Regardless of the division of the world into separate nation-states, the planet is a single eco-system, and threats to the eco-system are increasingly global rather than merely local in nature. For example, atmospheric pollution from industry in one country can turn into acid rain that falls in another, poisoning its watercourses and destroying its forests. Similarly, an accident in the nuclear industry such as the one at Chernobyl in Ukraine in 1986 - can spread radioactive material over thousands of miles, showing how a problem caused in one locality can have worldwide effects.

‘Global risk society’ and the environment

Most of the threats to human well being and the eco-system are now human-made rather than natural. Unlike the natural dangers of the past, such as drought and famine, the major risks we face today are of our own making.

Ulrich Beck (1992) argues that in today’s late modern society we can now provide adequate resources for all (at least in the developed countries). However the massive increase in productivity and the technology that sustains it have created new ‘manufactured risks’ - dangers that we have never faced before. Many of these risks involve harm to the environment and its consequences for humanity, such as global warming caused by greenhouse gas emissions from industry. Like climate change, many of these risks are global rather than local in nature, leading Beck to describe late modern society as ‘global risk society’.

Green criminology

But what if the pollution that causes global warming or acid rain is perfectly legal and no crime has been committed - is this a matter for criminologists? We can identify two opposed answers to this question. Traditional criminology is not concerned with such behaviour but green criminology takes a more radical approach.

Traditional criminology has not been concerned with such behaviour, since its subject matter is defined by the criminal law and no law has been broken. The starting point for this approach is the national and international laws and regulations concerning the environment. For example, Situ and Emmons (2000) define environmental crime as ‘an unauthorised act or omission that violates the law’. Like other traditional approaches in criminology, it investigates the patterns and causes of law breaking.

The advantage of this approach is that it has a clearly defined subject matter. However, it is criticised for accepting official definitions of environmental problems and crimes, which are often shaped by powerful groups such as big business to serve their own interests.
Sovereign power was typical of the period before the 19th century, when the monarch had power over people and their bodies. Inflicting punishment on the body was the means of asserting control. Punishment was a spectacle, such as public execution.

Disciplinary power becomes dominant from the 19th century. In this form of control, a new system of discipline seeks to govern not just the body, but the mind or 'soul'. It does so through surveillance.

Foucault illustrates disciplinary power with the panopticon. The panopticon was a design for a prison in which all prisoners' cells are visible to the guards from a central watchtower, but the guards are not visible to the prisoners. Thus the prisoners don't know if they are being watched, but they do know that they might be being watched. As a result, they have to behave at all times as if they were being watched, so the surveillance turns into self-surveillance and discipline becomes self-discipline. Instead of being a public spectacle, control takes place 'inside' the prisoner.

Foucault argues that the prison is one of a range of institutions that, from the 19th century, increasingly began to subject individuals to disciplinary power to induce conformity through self-surveillance. These include mental asylums, barracks, factories, workhouses and schools. In Foucault's view, disciplinary power has now infiltrated every part of society, bringing its effects 'to the most minute and distant elements' - to the human 'soul', in fact. Thus he argues that the change in the form of punishment from sovereign to disciplinary power in the penal system also tells us about how power operates in society as a whole.

Foucault's work has stimulated considerable research into surveillance and the exercise of disciplinary power but has also been criticised on several grounds:

- The shift from corporal punishment to imprisonment is less clear than he suggests.
- Unlike Durkheim, he neglects the expressive (emotional) aspects of punishment.
- He exaggerates the extent of control. For example, Goffman (1962) shows how inmates are able to resist controls in institutions such as prisons and mental hospitals.
The average chance of an individual being the victim of a crime in any one year is about one in four. However, the risk is very unevenly distributed between social groups.

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<th>Class</th>
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<tr>
<td>The poorest groups are more likely to be victimised. For example, crime rates are typically highest in areas of high unemployment and deprivation.</td>
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<td>The fact that marginalised groups are most likely to become victims is borne out by a survey of 300 homeless people (Newburn and Rock 2006). This found that they were 12 times more likely to have experienced violence than the general population. One in ten had been urinated on while sleeping rough.</td>
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<th>Age</th>
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<td>Younger people are at more risk of victimisation. Those most at risk of being murdered are infants under one, while teenagers are more vulnerable than adults to offences including assault, sexual harassment, theft, and abuse at home. The old are also at risk of abuse, for example in nursing homes, where victimisation is less visible.</td>
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<td>Minority ethnic groups are at greater risk than whites of being victims of crime in general, as well as of racially motivated crimes. In relation to the poorest ethnic minorities, the young and the homeless, are more likely to report feeling under-protected yet over-controlled.</td>
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<th>Gender</th>
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<td>Males are at greater risk than females of becoming victims of violent attacks, especially by strangers. About 70% of homicide victims are male. However, women are more likely to be victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, stalking and harassment, people trafficking and - in times of armed conflict - mass rape as a weapon of war.</td>
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<th>Repeat victimisation</th>
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<td>This refers to the fact that, if you have been a victim once, you are very likely to be one again. According to the British Crime Survey, about 60% of the population have not been victims of any kind of crime in a given year, whereas a mere 4% of the population are victims of 44% of all crimes in that period.</td>
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