Collins

SAMPLE

SOCIOLOGY

AQA A-level
Year 2
Student Book

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CONTENTS

TO THE STUDENT

The aim of this book is to help make your study of AQA advanced Sociology interesting and successful.

Sociology is an attempt to understand how society works. Fortunately, there are some basic concepts that simplify this ambitious task but some of the sociological theories involved are often abstract and will be unfamiliar at first. Getting to grips with these ideas and applying them to problems can be daunting. There is no need to worry if you do not 'get it' straightaway. Discuss ideas with other students, and of course check with your teacher or tutor. Most important of all, keep asking questions.

There are a number of features in the book to help you learn:

- Each topic starts with an outline of the AQA specification points covered within the topic. This will tell you in which chapter you will find coverage of each point.

- Each chapter starts with a Learning Objectives box to show you what you will learn and the skills you will use throughout the chapter.

- Important words and phrases are given in bold when used for the first time, with their meaning explained in an *Understand the Concept* box. If you are still uncertain, ask your teacher or tutor because it is important that you understand these words.

- Throughout each chapter, you will find evaluation questions. They are written in bold and separated from the main text. You should use them as an opportunity to stop and evaluate what you have learned. These questions often make interesting discussion points.

- Throughout the book, you will find *Focus on Research* features that provide real-life sociological studies and questions to answer about each.

- You will also find *Focus on Skills* features which give you the opportunity to test your ability to pinpoint important information and use key words to inform your response.

- At the end of each chapter, you will find the *Check your Understanding* feature. This is a list of questions which enables you to consolidate your learning and check your knowledge of relevant sociological theories and issues.

- After each *Check your Understanding* feature, there is a *Take It Further* challenge. Here, you will have the chance to put your new-found skills and knowledge into practice.

- Each topic ends with a section called *Apply your Learning*. This is a chance for you to put your knowledge to the test with a mix of short information recall questions as well as longer, more involved ones.

Good luck and enjoy your studies. We hope this book will encourage you to study sociology further after you have completed your course.

1 CRIME AND DEVIANCE

AQA specification	Chapters
Candidates should examine:	
Crime, deviance, social order and social control.	Functionalism, strain and subcultural theories, deviance, social order and social control are covered in Chapter 1 (pages 3–11).
	Labelling theory is covered in Chapter 2 (pages 12–19).
	Marxist and critical criminologies are covered in Chapter 3 (pages 20–29).
	Realist theories of crime are covered in Chapter 4 (pages 30–38).
The social distribution of crime and deviance by ethnicity, gender and social class, including recent patterns and trends in crime.	Statistics and patterns of crime are covered in Chapter 5 (pages 39–46).
	Ethnicity and crime is covered in Chapter 6 (pages 47–55).
	Gender and crime is covered in Chapter 7 (pages 56–65).
	Social class and crime is covered in Chapter 8 (pages 66–72).
Globalisation and crime in contemporary society; green crime; human rights and state crimes.	Globalisation, human rights, state and green crime is covered in Chapter 9 (pages 73–84).
The media and crime.	The media and crime is covered in Chapter 10 (pages 85–92).
Crime control, prevention and surveillance.	Crime control, prevention and punishment, victims and the role of the criminal justice system are covered in Chapter 11 (pages 93–106). Issues relating to social control are discussed throughout the topic.

1.1 FUNCTIONALIST, STRAIN AND SUBCULTURAL THEORIES

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

› Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of functionalist and subcultural theories of crime (AO1).

› Apply the theories to contemporary British society (AO2).

› Analyse the differences between different functionalist and subcultural theories (AO3).

› Evaluate functionalist and subcultural theories of crime (AO3).

INTRODUCING THE DEBATE

Functionalism aims to explain why most modern industrial societies are characterised by social order: that is, why these societies run smoothly and are free from disruption and major conflict. There is a consensus, or general agreement, about basic values which helps to maintain the order. However, such order is potentially under threat from crime – actions that break the laws of society – and deviance – when people fail to abide by social norms or informal rules about how they should behave in particular situations. Social control is the process that aims to prevent, deter or respond to crime and deviance and therefore is essential to social order. It provides the basis for 'policing the boundaries' of what is acceptable and what is not. There are two broad types of social control. Formal control is achieved through the writing of laws and rules. Agencies, such as the police, monitor whether people are obeying the laws and rules, and the criminal justice system punishes those who break them. Informal control is aimed at those who engage in behaviour that is deviant rather than illegal – such as adultery. For example, the use of gossip and public opinion is aimed at discouraging people from behaviour that attracts social disapproval.

Crime and deviance are usually thought of as highly individual acts carried out by people who are ill, evil, misguided, troubled, selfish or simply eccentric. Sociologists, however, are more concerned with the relationship between crime and deviance and the wider social order. Many of the theorists discussed in this chapter see crime and deviance as a product of a society gone wrong rather than as a product of flawed individuals, and sociologists such as Durkheim go as far as suggesting that crime can sometimes be good for society. However, as always in sociology, simple explanations of complex phenomena such as crime can be criticised and are often challenged by new research. This chapter examines how far the explanations originally inspired by functionalism are useful for understanding crime and deviance in Britain today.

GETTING YOU THINKING

Between 6 and 11 August 2011 there was widespread rioting in the UK. It started after the Metropolitan Police shot dead a suspected drug dealer, Mark Duggan. There was rioting and looting in a number of London boroughs and in Salford, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol and elsewhere. Property was damaged, a number of shops, homes and vehicles were set alight. There were attacks on police officers and others and five people died during the riots. The looting of goods from shops was one of the most widespread features and it was widely reported that social media had been used to coordinate the rioting. Explanations for the rioting varied widely and ranged from those that put the blame squarely on the individuals involved, to those that put more emphasis on institutions or on society as a whole. Greed, consumerism, the media and gang culture were all suggested as possible causes and an opinion poll found that the public were more likely to cite 'criminal behaviour' as the cause. Research was carried out by the London School of Economics (LSE) in collaboration with *The Guardian* newspaper, in which 270 participants in the riots were interviewed (LSE/*Guardian*, 2012). Those interviewed were most likely to see the riots as anti-police riots expressing resentment at police behaviour, including the shooting of Mark Duggan and the way that the police used 'stop-and-search' powers. Other sources of resentment that helped to motivate the riots were tuition fees and government cuts. Twitter and Facebook were not found to have been significant and nor was gang culture, but BlackBerry Messenger and opportunist theft from shops were. The offenders tended to be from lower-income groups in urban areas.

Of those who took part in the riots, thousands of individuals were prosecuted, but many others were not.

Questions

1. Why might sociologists reject 'greed' and 'criminal behaviour' as plausible and worthwhile explanations of the riot? Why might politicians have a vested interest in such explanations?

2. Would you put greater weight on opinion poll findings or the LSE/*Guardian* research? Explain why.

3. Analyse the reasons why most rioters were from lower-income groups in urban areas.

4. Many sociologists of crime and deviance argue that it is important to study the actions of the police and other law enforcement agencies as well as those of offenders. With reference to the riots, suggest why this could be important.

DURKHEIM, FUNCTIONALISM, CRIME AND DEVIANCE

The idea that deviance is just behaviour that breaks social norms, whilst crime breaks laws that reflect these norms, is based on the belief that society is essentially consensual – that is, the idea that the vast majority of people share similar values. Indeed, it was this approach that was used by Durkheim in his functionalist explanation of deviance and its relationship to crime. Durkheim suggests that every society shares a set of core values, which he called the **collective conscience**. The more behaviour differed from these core values, the more likely

it was to be viewed as deviant. According to Durkheim, a strong collective conscience, backed up by a fair legal system that compensated those harmed by deviant behaviour and punished offenders, formed the basis for social order.

However, Durkheim, perhaps surprisingly, identified two different sides of crime and deviance influencing the functioning of society:

› a positive side, which helped society change and remain dynamic; and

› a negative side, which saw too much crime leading to social disruption.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

To Durkheim it was not just individuals who had a conscience, society had one too. The **collective conscience** consisted of shared beliefs about what was right and wrong, and it existed over and above individual members of society. Individuals could not change society's values at will. Yet it was also carried within individuals who, in most cases, had taken on or internalised the collective values of society (sometimes referred to as the value consensus by other functionalists).

Positive aspects of crime: social cohesion

According to Durkheim (1895), crime – or at least a certain, limited amount of crime – was necessary for any society. He argued that the basis of society was a set of shared values or collective conscience. The collective conscience provides a framework with boundaries, which distinguishes between actions that are acceptable and those that are not. The problem for any society is that these boundaries are unclear, and also that they change over time. Crime can play a role in clarifying boundaries between what is seen as acceptable and unacceptable and, where necessary, can initiate change. Specifically, Durkheim discussed three elements of this positive aspect.

1. *Reaffirming the boundaries* – Every time a person breaks a law and is taken to court, the resulting court ceremony, and the publicity in the newspapers, publicly reaffirms the existing values. This is particularly clear in societies in which public punishments take place – for example, where a murderer is taken out to be executed in public or an adulterer is stoned to death.

2. *Changing values* – On occasion some individuals or groups deliberately set out to defy laws that they believe are wrong. Sometimes, these people are ahead of their time and defy laws that will eventually be seen as outdated. Such groups are known as functional rebels because they help to change the collective conscience, and laws based on it, for the better, anticipating and helping to produce changes that will help society to function more effectively and fairly. An example was the former ANC (African National Congress) leader, the late Nelson Mandela, who opposed and helped to overturn the racist apartheid system in South Africa.

3. *Social cohesion* – Durkheim points out that when particularly horrific crimes have been committed, the entire community draws together in shared outrage, and the sense of belonging to a community is thereby strengthened. This was noticeable, for example, in the UK following the July 2005 London Underground bombings.

Other writers have also suggested that crime can have positive effects. The functionalist Kingsley Davis (1937) suggested that crime could be useful as a safety valve which allowed minor criminality or deviance to avoid bigger problems. For example, the institution of marriage could be stabilised by some married men buying the services of prostitutes. Albert Cohen (1993) suggested that crime could boost employment and the economy by creating jobs for police officers and others who work in criminal justice, not to mention criminologists. He also believes that crime can act as a type of early warning mechanism showing that society, or institutions within it are, going wrong. These can then be corrected before too much damage is done and, in the process, crime is brought back under control.

The idea that crime benefits society goes against the common-sense view that crime is harmful. Some contemporary criminologists from different parts of the political and criminological spectrum emphasise the harm done by crime rather than its benefits. Left realists such as Lea and Young (1993) stress that crime can cause real problems for victims, especially those who are already disadvantaged (see pages 31-36). Right realists such as Wilson and Kelling (1982) stress the harm that crime can do to community cohesion and informal social control. If left unchecked, crime can lead to the breakdown of law and order, with disastrous consequences for those living in the affected areas (see pages 95–96).

The negative aspects of crime: anomie and egoism

While a certain limited amount of crime may perform positive functions for society, according to Durkheim, too much crime has negative consequences. Excessive crime could be the result of two problems with the collective conscience – anomie and egoism.

Anomie occurs when there are periods of great social change or stress, and the collective conscience becomes unclear. During a revolution or rapid economic and social change, the old values and norms may come under challenge without new values and norms becoming established. In this situation, there is uncertainty over what behaviour should be seen as acceptable, and people may be partially freed from the social control imposed by the collective conscience.

Egoism occurs when the collective conscience simply becomes too weak to restrain the selfish desires of individuals. It occurs in industrial societies where there are many specialist jobs so that people have very different roles in society. Soldiers and nurses, for example, have to have very different values to carry out their jobs successfully. If individuals are not successfully socialised to accept collective values, for example, through the education system, they can end up putting their own selfish interests before those of society as a whole and committing crime.

Egoism and anomie can be countered, according to Durkheim, by a strengthening of the collective conscience (for example, by teaching moral values in education): but when this is not done effectively, crime rates can become excessive, preventing the healthy functioning of society.

Durkheim's concept of anomie was later developed and adapted by Merton (1938), who suggested that Durkheim's original idea was too vague. Merton, although not himself a subculture theorist, provided the foundation for the development of later subculture theory.

FOCUS ON SKILLS: WHAT IS CRIME?

A protester being stopped and searched in London before a G8 summit

In the last ten years, the government has created 3,000 new criminal offences, adding to a compendium of 8,000 existing offences.

But what sort of misconduct gets classed as a crime, and why?

There are many sorts of crime, and they vary from travelling at 31mph in a 30mph zone, to committing genocide (which is an offence against the Genocide Act 1969). There is, however, no way to be definitive about the core nature of crime because what amounts to a crime changes with every successive historical context.

A crime is simply anything that the state has chosen to criminalise. So, today, offences include activities that for various reasons were not crimes in earlier ages, such as selling glue to children, computer offences and insider trading. Lending money and charging interest used to be the crime of usury, for which perpetrators

were punished. Nowadays bankers and financiers successful in lending money might attract peerages instead. One function of the criminal law is to promote community cohesion. People tend to stick together to condemn what they see as very wrong, and this choral rage strengthens the togetherness of the majority. The 19th-century French writer Emile Durkheim noted that crime "draws honest consciousnesses together" and that the punishment of crime helps to "heal the wounds inflicted on the collective sentiments". Whether as citizens we coalesce better by having 11,000 different types of crime we can collectively condemn is another matter.

Source: Slapper (2007)

Questions

1. **Explain** what the article means by saying "there is no way to be definitive about the core nature of crime".

2. **Explain** what Durkheim meant by saying that punishment can "heal the wounds inflicted on the collective sentiments" and give an example from the punishment of a criminal in Britain.

3. **Analyse.** Give an example of your own to show how, over time, in Britain some acts have been criminalised and an example of how some acts have been legalised.

4. **Evaluate** whether 11,000 different types of crime can all reflect the 'collective conscience' of society.

Can you suggest any people who today are seen as criminals and/or deviants but who might be seen as 'functional rebels' in the future? Explain why you think they are ahead of their time in terms of society's values.

Evaluation of Durkheim

Tim Newburn (2013) argues that two aspects of Durkheim's work have been central in the development of sociological thinking on crime.

1. Durkheim was the first to suggest that some level of crime is normal in society.

2. Durkheim had the sociological insight to see that crime was linked to the values of particular societies and these values (and therefore what was seen as crime) could change.

However, Newburn thinks that Durkheim paid too little attention to how the powerful could have undue influence on what acts were seen as criminal. Durkheim exaggerated the extent to which there was a collective conscience (or value consensus) in society. Not everyone agrees with laws and morals, not least many criminals themselves. A further criticism is put forward by Taylor, Walton and Young (1973) who argue that crime itself is not functional for society. It is instead just the publicising of crime and public punishment that help to unite society. A further criticism is that Durkheim was vague in identifying which crimes are beneficial for society; critics have noted that most serious crime such as murder or sex crime / abuse is far from beneficial. Nevertheless Durkheim's work has been very influential, as the section on strain theory demonstrates.
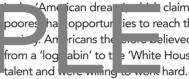
STRAIN THEORY

In the 1930s, Robert Merton tried to develop an explanation of deviance within a functionalist framework. However, Merton did not agree with other functionalists that all aspects of society were always beneficial: aspects of society could become **dysfunctional** and needed to be changed to get society running smoothly again. For Merton, crime and deviance were evidence of a poor fit (or a strain) between the socially accepted goals of society and the socially approved means of obtaining those desired goals. The resulting strain led to deviance. Unlike later theorists, Merton was not a sub-cultural theorist. This is a point of difference between him and Cohen: Merton focused on individual rather than group responses to strain.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

A part of society that is functional helps society to run more smoothly and harmoniously and/or helps the collective aims of society to be achieved (the aims might include economic growth, the reduction of conflict, inequality or poverty, or improving public health). A part that is **dysfunctional** has the opposite effect, preventing society from running smoothly or making it harder for collective goals to be achieved.

Merton argued that all societies set their members certain goals and, at the same time, provide socially approved ways of achieving these goals. Writing in the USA, Merton saw the main goals as wealth and power, as represented by the 'American dream', which claimed that even the poorest had opportunities to reach the highest levels of society. Americans therefore believed that they could go from a 'log cabin' to the 'White House' if they had the talent and were willing to work hard.

However, Merton was aware that not everyone had the same opportunity to achieve these goals. In an unequal, class-based society, those in the higher classes had more opportunity to succeed than others. They had, for example, access to better schools and more wealth to back them if they wanted to start a business. Merton believed that the system only worked well as long as there was a reasonable chance that a majority of people were able to achieve their goals. However, in a very unequal American society, many among the population were unable to achieve the socially set goals, and they became disenchanted with society and sought out alternative (often deviant) ways of behaving. Merton used Durkheim's term 'anomie' to describe this situation.

Merton identified five different forms of behaviour, or adaptations, that could be understood as a response to the strain between goals and means.

1. *Conformity* – The individual continues to adhere to both goals and means, despite the limited likelihood of success. This was typical of most people.

2. *Innovation* – The person accepts the goals of society but uses different ways to achieve those goals; criminal behaviour is included in this response. This was more common in lower social classes because they had less chance of succeeding than higher classes, partly because they did not

have the same chances of success in education as middle- and upper-class children. To Merton, opportunities were not genuinely equal because the better-off had advantages over those on lower incomes.

3. *Ritualism* – a ritualist is a person who immerses him- or herself in the daily routine and regulations of their job but has lost sight of the goal of material success. An example is the bureaucrat who goes through the motions of doing their job but has given up on trying to get promoted or becoming rich and powerful.

4. *Retreatism* – The individual fails to achieve success and rejects both goals and means. The person 'drops out' and may become dependent upon drugs or alcohol.

5. *Rebellion* – Both socially sanctioned goals and means are rejected, and different ones substituted. This is the political activist or the religious fundamentalist, who has decided society no longer works well and needs to be radically changed.

Merton thought that deviant behaviour was particularly common among those from lower classes who were frustrated by their lack of achievement and turned to crime to get money (innovation) or success or who dropped out of the 'rat race' (retreatists). However, because there was no upper limit on success in society's goals – even the well-off could be greedy for more – there were some middle- and higher-class criminals too, although they were less common than working-class offenders.

Do you think that everyone fits Merton's five adaptations? Can you think of exceptions and, if so, what does this suggest about possible weaknesses of his theory?

Evaluation of Merton

Merton has been criticised by Valier (2001), among others, for his stress on the existence of common goals in society. Valier argues that there are, in fact, a variety of goals that people strive to attain at any one time. For example, people might prioritise altruism or a happy family life or leisure over financial success and power. Some sociologists, such as Taylor, Walton and Young, think that he underestimates the amount of middle- and upper-class crime while overestimating working-class

crime (see the section on white collar and corporate crime in Chapter 3).

Merton has also been criticised for failing to explain crimes that do not produce material reward, and for ignoring the role of subcultures and illegitimate opportunities in crime and deviance (see the ideas of Cohen and of Cloward and Ohlin below). His work has, however, been very influential and to some extent has stood the test of time. The theories discussed below identify weaknesses in Merton's theory, but build on them instead of rejecting them altogether. Some contemporary sociologists, including Robert Reiner (2015) think there is still much mileage in his ideas. Reiner sees them as useful for explaining everything from the 2011 riots in England to the parliamentary expenses scandal, when some MPs were found to be claiming excessive amounts for their personal living expenses.

ILLEGITIMATE OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE

The idea of strain between goals and means had a very significant impact on the writings of Cloward and Ohlin (1960), who owed much to the ideas of Merton. They agreed with Merton that lack of opportunity in the legitimate opportunity structure was a cause of crime. However, they argued that Merton had failed to appreciate that there was a parallel opportunity structure to the legal one, called the illegitimate opportunity structure. By this they meant that for some **subcultures** in society, a regular illegal career was available, with recognised illegal means of obtaining society's goals (such as getting money, power or status). Where there was organised crime (such as protection rackets, drug dealing or prostitution) young people could look to crime for a successful career.

UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

Subcultures are groups within wider social groups (for example, within British society) whose attitudes, lifestyles and values are shared by the subculture members, and are significantly different from those in wider society. This might include, for example, different tastes in music, leisure activities and clothing or different attitudes towards groups in authority. Of course, these groups will also share much in common with others in the wider society/culture but they are sufficiently different to be seen by themselves and/or others to be a separate subculture.

According to Cloward and Ohlin, the illegal opportunity structure had three possible adaptations or subcultures.

1. *Criminal* – There is a thriving local criminal subculture, with successful role models. Young offenders can 'work their way up the ladder' in the criminal hierarchy. Young people were often attracted to a criminal career because they could see examples of people from the same background as them who had become successful career criminals enjoying all the trappings of success. They are often recruited when young by the organisations and if they prove to be dedicated and resourceful are given opportunities to take their criminal careers further.

2. *Conflict* – There is no local criminal subculture to provide a career opportunity but territorial gangs exist which recruit or press-gang young people in the neighbourhood to their service. These gangs often engage in violence against one another because violence is a means of achieving 'respect' or status for young people. This respect may be a substitute for qualifications or a well-paid job, either in mainstream employment or in criminal organisations.

3. *Retreatist* – This tends to occur where individuals have no opportunity or ability to engage in either of the other two subcultures or to achieve success in legitimate ways. They are 'double failures' and the result is a retreat into alcohol or drugs, spending their time with others who have dropped out of society in a similar way.

Evaluation of Cloward and Ohlin
Contemporary sociological research suggests that there is some organised crime in Britain and other western societies. A good example of this is given in Dick Hobbs' book *Bad Business* (1998). Research by Vincenzo Ruggiero and Kazim Khan (2007), based on interviews with 110 imprisoned drug dealers of South Asian origin in the UK, found some evidence of criminal careers being available for those who wanted to make money out of drug dealing. However, all the above researchers stress that large-scale organised crime is limited in the UK and what there is tends to be in loose-knit networks rather than well-structured organisations. Most professional criminals are more like individual entrepreneurs than employees. Cloward and Ohlin's theory also shares some of the weaknesses of Merton's original theory. It is difficult to accept that such a neat distinction into three clear categories occurs in real life. For example, there may be an overlap between criminal subcultures and retreatist

subcultures because heroin addicts are often most responsible for crime in any given neighbourhood. There is no discussion whatsoever about female deviancy or of crimes committed by higher social classes.

STATUS FRUSTRATION AND SUBCULTURE

Writing in the mid-1950s, Albert Cohen (1955) drew upon both Merton's ideas of strain and the ethnographic ideas of the Chicago school of sociology. Cohen was particularly interested in the fact that much offending behaviour was not economically motivated and did not therefore seem to fit Merton's idea of the innovator who tried to achieve financial success by non-legal means. It was therefore non-utilitarian crime (crime committed without any obvious benefit to the offender). Examples of this type of crime include vandalism and violence that is not linked to theft or robbery. Cohen also noted that much delinquent behaviour was a group activity. Merton's theory explained why some individuals might be motivated to commit crime but not why crimes often took place in groups or gangs.

According to Cohen, 'lower-class' boys strove to emulate middle-class values and aspirations, but lacked the means to attain success. Their upbringing did not equip them to succeed at school, so they found it difficult to get status from exam success. This led to status frustration – that is, a sense of personal failure and inadequacy. The result was that they rejected those very values and patterns of 'acceptable' behaviour within which they could not be successful. He suggests that school is the key area for the playing out of this drama. Lower-class children are much more likely to fail and so feel humiliated. In an attempt to gain status, they 'invert' traditional middle-class values by behaving badly and engaging in a variety of antisocial behaviours. By doing so they gain status from members of their peer group who have adopted similar values. Together they form a subculture with its own distinctive anti-school values opposed to the mainstream values of the school and wider, 'respectable' society. This was why group or gang crime was so attractive. It gave them the chance to have their crimes witnessed by their peer group so they could get more respect from them and increase their status.

Evaluation of Albert Cohen
Cohen's theory has been influential in studies of delinquency, gangs and subcultures generally and offers a plausible explanation for some offending. Steven Box (1981), however, suggests that it may only apply to a minority of offenders who originally accepted mainstream values and then turn against them.

Walter Miller (1962) suggested that opposition to mainstream values was more widespread in the working class because working-class culture does not correspond to the largely middle-class environment of schools. Cohen's theory is limited because it only attempts to explain male delinquency and says nothing about young female offenders whose delinquency may have different causes (see Chapter 7). Cohen also bases his explanation upon success and failure at school and underplays the significance of relationships outside school, which may play a bigger role in the formation of subcultures.

CRITIQUES OF SUBCULTURAL THEORY

Matza and Sykes

Subcultural theory in general and Cohen's work in particular has been criticised by the American sociologist David Matza (Matza and Sykes, 1961). Matza argued that there were no distinctive subcultural values, rather that all groups in society used a shared set of subterranean values. Subterranean values are values at the margins of society, which exist in leisure and mildly deviant activities, particularly leisure activities. They value spontaneity, a degree of rebellion and self-expression which sometimes leads to people straying outside society's norms. The key thing was that, most of the time, most people control these deviant desires. They only rarely emerge (for example, at the annual office party, a political demonstration or a music festival). People suspend observance of mainstream values but they don't reject them altogether. Matza argues that very few individuals are committed to subcultural values. Most 'drift' in and out of subcultures, conforming to mainstream values most of the time.

The seductions of crime

Most of the approaches we have looked at here seek to explain deviant behaviour by looking for some rational reason why the subculture might have developed. Recent postmodern approaches reject this explanation for behaviour. Katz (1988), for example, argues that crime is seductive – young males get drawn into it, not because of any process of rejection but because it is thrilling. In a similar manner, Lyng (1990) argues that young males like taking risks and engaging in 'edgework'. By edgework, he means going right to the edge of acceptable behaviour and flirting with danger.

Neo-tribes

Maffesoli (1996) introduced a postmodernist innovation in understanding subcultures (see Topic 2, Chapter 3 for a discussion of postmodernism), with his argument for the existence of neo-tribes. Maffesoli was unhappy with the idea that subcultures were stable and clearly defined groups whose members all shared very similar values. He suggested that it was much better to think of subcultures in terms of "fluidity, occasional gatherings and dispersal". Neo-tribes then referred more to states of mind and lifestyles that were very flexible, open and changing. Deviant values are less important than a stress on consumption, suitably fashionable behaviour and individual identity that can change rapidly. The shift towards this sort of grouping implies that, rather than subcultures strongly committed to criminal activity, there are only neo-tribes which are more likely to be involved in occasional mildly deviant behaviour.

Deviant values are less important to many neo-tribes than individuality.

Gangs and subcultures

Perhaps the most widely publicised type of subculture is the juvenile gang. But, despite the widespread media coverage of youth gangs, which gives the impression of widespread gang membership, only about 6 to 9 per cent of young people claim to belong or to have ever belonged to a 'gang', and just 2 per cent claim to carry or to have ever carried a knife, according to research by YouGov (2008).

Indeed, researchers suggest that the idea of a gang is defined differently by different young people. This has led Marshall *et al.* (2005) to suggest that there are three distinct categories of youth groupings, which vary in the degree of seriousness of offending behaviour, but which are often mixed together under the term 'gang'.

1. *Peer groups or 'crews'* – These are unorganised groups of young people who tend to hang around together in a particular place. Any offending behaviour is incidental and does not reflect any great estrangement from society.

2. *Gangs* – Youth gangs in Britain tend to have similar characteristics to peer groups or crews, but instead have a focus on offending and violence. These are the sorts of youth gangs that the majority of the theoretical models of subculture in this topic were intended to explain.

3. *Organised criminal groups* – These are the most serious types of group, who are heavily involved in serious crime. The age of the members vary and there are question marks over the extent to which such groups are integrated.

For details of interactionist approaches, see Chapter 2 and for a neo-Marxist interpretation of subcultures, see Chapter 3.

CONCLUSIONS

The original functionalist theory of Durkheim provided some insights into the relationship between crime, deviance and social order. They have remained influential in persuading sociologists of crime to think about why certain acts are seen as illegal and/or deviant and how this links to changes in society. Durkheim, Merton, Cohen, and Cloward and Ohlin assumed that a widespread and basic consensus about acceptable social values and norms existed. However, this view is hard to sustain in multicultural and unequal societies such as modern Britain. Nevertheless Merton, Cloward and Ohlin, and Cohen have all helped to understand aspects of criminality and its links to wider society. Their ideas seem to provide useful explanations of some types of crime some of the time, but research suggests that their ideas cannot always be applied in contemporary Britain and a greater variety of explanations is required to understand crime and deviance more fully.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. What is meant by a 'functional rebel'?

2. Explain the meaning of 'collective conscience'.

3. Explain the meaning of 'illegitimate opportunity structure'.

4. Identify three different types of subculture.

5. Which of Merton's five adaptations involved 'dropping out' of society?

6. Briefly explain why Matza's idea of 'drift' challenges subculture theories such as Albert Cohen's.

7. Outline the difference between the concepts of 'neo-tribes' and 'subcultures'.

8. Outline two criticisms of Merton's theory of anomie.

9. Analyse two differences between the theories of Merton and of Cloward and Ohlin.

10. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of using the idea of the 'gang' to explain crime in Britain today.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Go to *The Guardian* crime website www.theguardian.com/uk/ukcrime and choose three stories about recent crimes. Choose any one example and analyse the strengths and weaknesses of Durkheim, subculture theorists and Merton in understanding and explaining the crime.