Your notes

GCSE Sociology: revision notes

Explaining crime and deviance

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Functionalist and subcultural explanations

- Merton's **strain theory** (1938): society sets goals (such as wealth) but not everyone has legitimate means to reach them, causing strain (**anomie**). People respond by conformity, **innovation** (crime to reach goals), ritualism, retreatism or rebellion.
- Cohen (1955): working-class boys who fail at school suffer **status frustration** and form delinquent subcultures, gaining status through deviant acts that reverse mainstream values.

Interactionist explanation: labelling

- Becker argued that deviance is behaviour that people label as deviant: an act isn't deviant in itself.
- Agents of social control, such as the police, may label some groups (such as working-class young men) as criminal. The label can become a **master status** and lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Marxist and feminist explanations

- Marxists: laws protect the interests of the ruling class, the working class is policed more heavily, and crimes of the powerful (white-collar and corporate crime) are less likely to be punished.
- Feminists: Heidensohn argued women commit less crime because they face more social control at home, at work and in public. Carlen argued some working-class women turn to crime when the "class deal" (a decent living from work) and the "gender deal" (rewards from family life) fail them.

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Chambliss and the chivalry thesis (Eduqas)

- William Chambliss' study 'The Saints and the Roughnecks' followed two gangs of American teenage boys. The middle-class Saints broke the law as often as the working-class Roughnecks, but the police and community saw the Saints as harmless and the Roughnecks as criminals. Marxists use it to show **differential enforcement** of the law.
- The **chivalry thesis** says police and courts treat women more leniently than men, because they see them as needing protection. This could make women's crime look lower than it is. Feminists such as Heidensohn and Carlen argue women are not always treated leniently, especially if they don't fit gender stereotypes.

Key terms

Strain theory	Merton's idea that crime results when people can't reach society's goals legitimately.
Anomie	A state of normlessness.
Innovation	Using illegal means to reach socially approved goals.
Status frustration	Cohen's idea that failing at school leads to frustration and delinquency.
Labelling theory	The idea that deviance is behaviour that has been labelled deviant.
Master status	A label that overrides all others, such as "criminal".
White-collar crime	Crime by middle-class people through their jobs, such as fraud.
Differential enforcement	The law being applied more strictly to some groups, such as the working class, than others. (Eduqas)
Chivalry thesis	The idea that the police and courts treat women more leniently than men. (Eduqas)

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Who put forward strain theory?
2. In Merton's theory, what is innovation?
3. What is status frustration?
4. Who is linked to labelling theory?
5. What is a master status?
6. What is white-collar crime?
7. What did Heidensohn argue?
8. What did Carlen argue?

Your notes

Answers

1. Merton
2. Using illegal means to reach approved goals
3. Frustration from failing at school, leading to delinquency
4. Becker
5. A label that overrides all others
6. Crime by middle-class people through their jobs
7. Women commit less crime because they face more social control
8. Some women turn to crime when the class deal and gender deal fail

What to do next

Practise 12 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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