
Crime and deviance criminological concepts

Crime and deviance are criminological concepts argued to be greatly impacted by practical issues such as gender and media exposure. Firstly, regarding gender; There have been numerous attempts to explain this idea and one way to see the main difference is by investigating official crime statistics. By doing this, criminologists have concluded that throughout most countries in the world, males commit more crime than females, this is referred to as the “crime-gender gap” or the “crime-sex ratio (Browne, Blundell and Law, 2016)’.

Official crime statistics for England and Wales in 2013-14 show that males accounted for 75% of all persons convicted for all offences, and 85% of all people being convicted for more serious offences as well as 95% of prisoners being male (Browne, Blundell and Law, 2016). Many criminologists criticise the use of official crime statistics and have attempted to use self-report studies to test their validity. Graham and Bowling (1995) done this after studying 1,721 14-25 year olds and concluded that although males did commit more crime than females, this was only by twice as much rather than four times, as suggested by official crime statistics. However, both the use of official crime statistics and self-report studies in crime can be criticised in similar ways, mainly based on validity as both methods rely only on reported crimes. Figures show that for official statistics, “women were more likely than men to report a physical injury (42% versus 18%) or fearing for their lives as a result of the spousal violence (33% versus 5%)” in 2009 (Hotton Mahony, 2010), therefore, figures may not actually be completely representative. This is known as the “dark figure” of crime, which refers to the amount of unreported crime. Additionally, self-report studies lack further ecological validity as they have a relatively small sample size therefore they too, are not accurately representative.

Many criminologists have attempted to explain these differences in crime rates between gender. Firstly, Chivalry thesis was developed by Pollak in 1950 and argues that the criminal justice system is male-dominated, and as gender stereotypes regard women as being more vulnerable and in need of protection, those within the criminal justice system are socialized to treat women offenders in a more lenient, protective and patriarchal manner therefore their crimes are less likely to appear in official crime statistics, further inhibiting the validity of these statistics (Browne, Blundell and Law, 2016). On the other hand, support for this thesis includes work from criminologists such as Sear and Player (1986) who found that according to home office statistics, supported by statistics from the ministry of justice, 35% of females that were found guilty received cautions whilst only 19% of men did, and 50% of females received suspended sentences whilst only 36% of males did (Newburn, 2017). Additionally, the Home Office also showed that females were generally regarded as less of a threat by police, thus benefiting from informal approaches to their charges such as cautions or warnings rather than being charged.

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However, chivalry thesis has been criticized by many criminologists. It has been argued that the more “lenient” approach to women in the criminal justice is simply because females commit less serious crimes than men, and also generally have more mitigating factors such as showing remorse and having caring responsibilities which are considered by the criminal justice system and can lead to a reduced sentence length. Another concept has been developed to explain how women are treated more harshly and are subject to oppressive and paternalistic forms of justice by the criminal justice system. This is known as double deviance as women are essentially judged twice, firstly for the committed crime and secondly for their deviance from stereotypes of femininity. This concept has been supported by many different criminologists such as Smart, who argued that women can be treated more harshly/unsympathetically by courts and can be stigmatised with negative identities such as an “evil woman” if their criminal act is particularly deviant from norms related to gender roles like being caring and sensitive, such as child neglect/abuse or serious physical abuse.

Similarly, some criminologists argue that social constructs regarding stereotypical gender roles influence crime rates. These ideas focus on concepts like the aforementioned double deviance, as well as the role of socialisation to explain why females are less likely to commit crimes than men. Heidensohn (1985) argued that women are expected to base their lives within the “private domestic sphere of the home” where they will be occupied with responsibilities such as domestic labour and childcare, thus leaving them no time or opportunity to commit crime, whilst teenage girls are also more likely to be more closely supervised by their parents than boys, thus reducing their chances of committing crime too (Browne, Blundell and Law, 2016). This idea of females having less time and opportunity outside the confines of the home to commit crime has also been enhanced by Dobash and Dobash (1979) who found that some females were subject to domestic violence and their husbands exarate their power through financial power, such as not giving their wives sufficient funds for leisure activities therefore restricting their time outside of the home (Newburn, 2017). Further societal impacts also include the idea of labelling, as Lees, in her study “Losing out” proposed the idea that women hold fears regarding the threat of losing their reputation and being labelled negatively. It was found that girls tend to avoid negative labels such as “slag” by conforming to social controls imposed by institutions such as the family, education system and peers whilst boys had no such fears therefore they are more likely to commit crime as they do not fear the informal punishment of labels.

A similar argument has also been used to describe how social constructs prevent women from rising the occupational ladder to more senior roles. This is known as the “glass ceiling” and criminologists argue that as women are less likely to be in these more powerful job roles, there is less opportunity for them to commit white collar crime.

Furthermore, criminologists also focus on many other factors explaining why females are thought to commit less crime than women. One of these explanations was developed by

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Lombroso and Ferri (1895) who used biology as an explanation. They argued that by studying the skeletal structure, it's possible to distinguish between those who are criminal and those who are "normal" and as women are "less evolved" than men, they are unable to deviate as much therefore they commit less crime. Lombroso also stated that females biologically lack the aggressive trait that males possess therefore they are less likely to be involved in criminal activity of an aggressive nature. This idea has also been supported by other scholars who argue that it is the hormone testosterone that leads to the committing of a crime, hence why females commit less as they lack this hormone. In criticism to this, Smart (1977) argues that this explanation is oppressive as it ignores the idea of free will and suggests that biological influences predetermine an individual's actions, as well as the fact that it does not address social constructs of gender roles which could lead to a difference in crime rates between genders (Newburn, 2017).

Despite many arguments as to why males commit more crimes than females, female involvement in crime has recently been increasing. This can be seen as the number of women being charged with criminal offences has increased from 304, 343 in 2009/10 (Statistics on Women and the Criminal Justice System, 2011) to 314, 175 in 2015/16 (Women and the criminal justice system statistics 2015, 2016) . Some have argued that this could be due to increased widespread drug use, as 47% of female offenders reported using crack cocaine during the year leading up to their arrest, compared to only 35% of male offenders, however, this figure is based on self-report meaning that it lacks reliability.

The second practical issue in today's society is the effect that the media has on criminal behaviour and aggression. Aggression can be defined as "Feelings of anger or antipathy resulting in hostile or violent behaviour; readiness to attack or confront" (Oxford dictionaries, n.d) this can refer to both physical and/or verbal behaviour such as hitting, shouting or swearing. Media can be defined as "the main means of mass communication" (Oxford dictionaries, n.d) for example tv, newspapers, the radio and the internet. Many criminologists have argued that as exposure to media outlets heighten, there is a direct correlation with rising levels of aggressive behaviour in society; this has been supported by work such as that of Anderson (2003) who's research concluded that media violence increased the likelihood of both immediate and long term aggressive behaviours (Browne, Blundell and Law, 2016). This link could be due to factors such as desensitisation, imitation and the stimulation of desires for unaffordable goods.

Firstly, it has been argued that exposure to violence and crimes through the media lead an individual to become desensitised towards it as the increased exposure to aggressive behaviours leads them to be less fearful or sympathetic therefore they become socialised into accepting aggression as a normal every day behaviour. Research supporting this theory includes work by Bartlett et al (2009) who conducted a study involving 69 male participants who

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were randomly allocated to play either a violent or a non-violent video game, afterwards they were asked to choose an amount of hot sauce to be given to an individual who stated that they disliked spicy food. It was found that those who played the violent video game chose to administer significantly more than those who played the non-violent video game (Busching, Allen and Anderson, 2016). This supports the idea that exposure to aggressive behaviour leads to a higher likelihood of the individual displaying aggressive traits, however this research lacks both population and ecological validity as it took place in a lab and had a small all-male sample making it difficult to generalise to the wider population. Additionally, this argument has been disputed by theorists such as Young (1981) who stated that rather than becoming desensitised, exposure to aggression and violence actually leads an individual to becoming positively “sensitised” as individuals become increasingly aware of the consequences of violent acts through examples seen through the news or tv and therefore become less tolerant and may try to avoid it (cgp).

Another theory is that the media create moral panics and folk devils which lead to deviancy amplification through labelling. A moral panic is when the media amplify a perceived risk of being a victim of a crime which leads to a public response of panic or outrage (cgp). Stanley Cohen (1972) developed this idea and used the example of the “mods and rockers” in 1964, two groups of working class youths clashed at a seaside town and the media created a moral panic by exaggerating the extent of the violence between them and negatively labelled each group whilst also turning them into folk devils; individuals or groups posing an exaggerated threat to society (Browne). Other examples of this theory include how the media may exaggerate isolated incidents of students’ bad behaviour in schools leading to the public going into a moral panic and believing that all students are deviant and a threat to social order. This label can then become internalised by some students, leading to the self-fulfilling prophecy where the label becomes actualised leading to increased deviancy. This process of the media exaggerating or creating these problems leading to a response of social control through authorities such as the police, which in turn provokes further deviance is known as deviance amplification (cgp). A criticism of this theory of deviancy amplification and moral panic is that it is outdated. McRobbie and Thornton (1995) stated in a media saturated society with a range of different media types such as the internet, social media and tv mean that there is a larger diversity of media reports and interpretations of events. This means it is more difficult for media sources to portray false or exaggerated issues or events in a manner to cause a moral panic (Browne, Blundell and Law, 2016). Additionally, this theory is deterministic as ignores the concept of free will and it relies on labelling as a cause of deviancy, implying that deviancy would be non-existent without labels.

Additional theories that look at causes of deviancy and crime without factoring media influences include theories of personality differences. Firstly, a genetic disorder leading to an extra Y chromosome in males has been found to lead an individual to hold more irrational, impulsive

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and neurotic personality traits, thus these people more likely to behave aggressively. Stochholm et al conducted a longitudinal study from 1978-2006 comparing the chromosomes of criminal men between the ages of 15 and 70 with those in the general population. It was found that there were significantly increased rates of conviction with men carrying the extra y chromosome, thus supporting the hypothesis that the presence of this extra sex chromosome could lead to the increased likelihood of aggressive and criminal behaviours (Stochholm et al., 2012). Whilst this study has high population validity due to its wide range of male participants making it generalisable, along with the fact it holds advantages as it was conducted as a longitudinal study in a lab setting meaning it has high reliability as it is repeatable, it is reductionist as it does not consider other factors such as those of a socioeconomic nature.

Other factors that could lead to crime and aggressive behaviour include chemical influences. Neurotransmitters such as serotonin have been found to reduce activity between the frontal lobe and weaken communication between the amygdala and the frontal lobe. As the frontal lobe controls impulses and the amygdala is concerned with stress, these could lead to cognitive impairments causing the aggressive and deviant behaviour (Salomon et al., 1994). These reduced levels of serotonin could be due to genetic factors or could be linked to nutrition, as it has been found that a lack of the nutrient tryptophan in the diet can lead to a reduction of serotonin (Salomon et al., 1994). Similarly, alcohol also encourages aggressive or violent behaviours by disrupting normal brain functions and cognitive processes. This is known as the disinhibition hypothesis, and according to the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, it theorises that alcohol weakens the brain mechanisms that normally restrain impulsive or aggressive behaviours, thus, an increase in a person's alcohol intake could lead to an increased likelihood of criminal or aggressive behaviour (Pubs.niaaa.nih.gov, 2017).

In conclusion, whilst the reasons for the difference in crime rates between genders has been widely argued, there is no definitive evidence that can be relied on to support any specific theory. Similarly, as some criminologists argue about a link between exposure to media and the likelihood of aggressive behaviours, there is no evidence that media content is actually a cause of the hostile behaviours rather than an effect of it. In contrast, other theories like those considering chemical or socioeconomic factors offer distinct evidence or a more reliable, holistic explanation therefore more research into the impact of media on aggression needs to be conducted in order to ensure that appropriate and strategies and interventions are put in place to reduce crime and deviance in contemporary society.

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