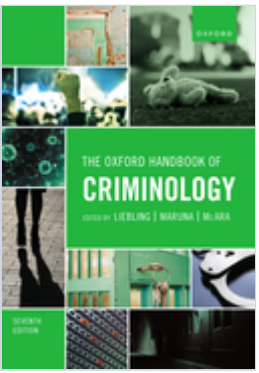

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25. Crime and consumer culture

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Abstract

Proceeding from a theoretical perspective, this chapter examines the various relationships that exist between consumer culture and crime. The chapter starts by looking at criminology's past, and a short review of some of the main theories/theorists that have actually trained attention on consumerism as a criminogenic phenomenon. This section also includes a critique of the supposed oppositional potential of consumerism that dominated the social sciences until relatively recently. Turning to the present, the chapter then introduces three distinct but complementary perspectives that offer a more useful and critical explanation of 'the crime-consumerism nexus'. First, cultural criminology addresses the criminogenic impact of global capitalism at the level of cultural discourse and everyday transgression. Second, ultra-realist criminology identifies the damage caused by consumer capitalism, and more specifically how the dominance of neoliberal ideology shapes the deep-rooted desires and drives behind much identity-driven criminality. Finally, the deviant leisure perspective draws on both these positions to illustrate how dominant forms of commodified leisure drive a range of social, environmental, and individual harms. The relationship between crime and consumerism is not a simple one but, as this chapter argues, it is one that demands serious and critical criminological attention.

Keywords: consumer culture, consumerism, crime-consumerism nexus', cultural criminology, deviant leisure, market culture, theoretical criminology, ultra realism

> The institution of a leisure class has an effect not only upon social structure but also upon the individual character of the members of society ... It will to some extent shape their habits of thought and will exercise a selective surveillance over the deployment of men's aptitudes and inclinations.
>
> (Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, [1899] 1970: 145)

Introduction

If we substitute 'consumer culture' for 'leisure class' in the above quotation by Thorstein Veblen, we get a clear sense of exactly what it means to live in a society predicated on consumption. Veblen's 'metaphysic' (Mills 1970: vi) suggests that to live in a consumer society is to inhabit a culture in which the practice of consumption influences everything from economic practice and political discourse to micro-level concerns about self-worth and self-identity. Veblen, of course, was writing at the end of the nineteenth century and describing an elite stratum of affluent American society. Yet his work on the symbolic practice of consumption was so perspicacious that it foreshadowed the era of mass consumption that started in the first decades of the twentieth century and has continued almost unabated ever since. That said, even Veblen, who originated the term 'conspicuous consumption', could not have predicted the rapid global expansion of the consumer society.

Today, over a quarter of all humanity—1.7 billion people—are now said to belong to 'the global consumer class', 'having adopted the diets, transportation systems, and lifestyles that were once mostly limited to the rich nations of Europe, North America, and Japan'(Gardner *et al*. 2004). In terms of annual expenditure, private consumption now exceeds $20 trillion—a fourfold increase over 1960 levels (ibid.). But this is not simply a matter of demographic expansion. Consumerism has changed qualitatively as well as quantitatively (see Lury 2010, and Wiedenhoft Murray 2017, for good introductions to consumer culture). To start with, the contemporary individual's consumption patterns are now far less constrained by social class than was the case only a couple of ↲ generations ago. Today, goods and services function not simply as markers of social class (as in Veblen's analysis), but as symbolic props for 'storying the self' (Baudrillard 1968, 1998; Featherstone 1994). Indeed, so encompassing is the ethos of consumption that, for many individuals, self-identity and self-actualization can now *only* be accomplished through material means. In other words, we have arrived at a point in human history where the process and practice of consumption now subsumes virtually all other more traditional modes of self-expression (Lasch 1979; Campbell 1989; Featherstone 1994).

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That the vast majority of contemporary Western individuals now derive their values and subjectivities from activities associated with consumption is a given in social theory and across the social sciences (Slater 1997; Miller 1995). Yet the field of criminology has mostly ignored this situation, despite the obvious implications for criminalized consumption. This chapter aims to address this oversight by providing a general introduction to the small but growing body of criminological literature that is committed to understanding and developing what has been described helpfully elsewhere as the 'crime-consumerism nexus' (Hayward 2004a: 157–79; 2004b: 147). The chapter starts with a short review section that looks back over criminology's past in a bid to identify some of the moments when criminology did engage with issues relating to consumption and crime. It then returns to the present and a series of ongoing developments within theoretical criminology that collectively suggest our discipline is finally starting to take consumer culture, and in particular the seemingly unchecked growth of global consumption, seriously.

Criminology and Consumer Culture

Although the changing sensibilities and subjectivities associated with consumerism have seldom been at the forefront of the criminological enterprise, it would be wrong to suggest that criminologists have never engaged with questions about market culture or the destructive emotional states, feelings, and desires associated with capitalist materialism. For example, in the early decades of the twentieth century, the oft-forgotten Dutch criminologist Willem Bonger was employing terms like 'covetousness' in his writings on the human pains of industrial capitalism, stating: 'As long as humanity has been divided into rich and poor … the desires of the masses have been awakened by the display of wealth; only to be repressed again by the moral teaching impressed upon them, that this was a sinful thing' (Bonger 1936: 93). Occupying a far more prominent position in the discipline is the strain theory of Robert Merton (1938). Strain theory argues that crime and deviance occur when there is a discrepancy between what the social structure makes possible (i.e. the means and opportunities for obtaining success), and what the dominant culture extols (i.e. the social value of the glittering prizes associated with material success). While Merton stopped short of evoking any such thing as a 'consumer society', he nonetheless recognized the growing importance of *mass consumption*, peppering his writing with terms such as 'success symbols' and 'differential class symbols of achievement' (Merton 1938: 680–1). But despite the monumental impact of strain theory on criminology, this particular element of his work seldom features in the countless retests of strain theory that have taken place in the subsequent decades (cf. Passas 1997).

Given these important early precursors, why then, did twentieth-century criminology largely shy away from
p. 544 further investigations into the relationship between crime ↵ and consumption? The answer lies in the fact that, for the most part, mainstream criminology has proceeded from the position that capitalist consumerism is an essentially positive development and thus not something a discipline preoccupied with crime and deviance should be concerned with. The main deviation from this position came in the 1960s, with the emergence of critical and radical criminology. Even here, though, despite the focus very much being on the various harms associated with capitalist accumulation (white collar crime, the growth of the prison-industrial complex, the abuses of the Western state, etc.), the specific question of whether or not consumerism itself might be criminogenic remained largely unexplored. Instead, what interest there was in the consumption practices associated with a burgeoning consumer society tended to coalesce around issues of *class and culture*. It is to these (surprisingly few) examples that we now turn.

The obvious starting point here is the work of the broadly Marxist-inspired 'Birmingham School'. One of the original premises of the various scholars who gravitated to the University of Birmingham's Centre for Cultural Studies in the 1960s and 70s was that working-class youth delinquency should be understood as a form of 'symbolic rebellion' against the dominant values and social inequalities associated with capitalist society (Hall and Jefferson 1976). From this starting position, members of the Birmingham School saw something potentially liberating in consumerism. In particular, they believed that, by mobilizing and appropriating a new set of cultural signifiers drawn from the expanding world of mass consumption, young people could enhance their self-identity and use this heightened sense of personal autonomy to challenge convention and subvert the 'repressive social order'. Consequently, members of the Birmingham School took

great pains elucidating the alleged transformative potential of seemingly innocuous or prosaic consumer items like Dr. Martin's boots, motor scooters, donkey jackets, and a host of other eclectic products associated with, inter alia, the mod, punk, and 'rude boy' subcultures.

The strength of the Birmingham approach was twofold. First, it trained the spotlight on the important (and previously neglected) relationship between deviance and subcultural style (Hebdige 1979). Second, and more significantly, it demonstrated sociologically the 'magical' quality of commodities, both in terms of their ability to mediate human relationships and shape individual and group identities. At the time, these were important breakthroughs. However, it is important to stress that the Birmingham School's analysis of consumerism, like Veblen's, was one that turned almost entirely around the issue of class—in this case the particular values and mores of working-class youth subcultures. As such, little attention was paid to the more complex question of whether or not the feelings and emotions engendered by consumerism might ultimately find expression in certain forms of criminal activity. A second problem with the Birmingham School's approach to consumerism was that it massively exaggerated the transformative political potential of subcultural consumption (Hayward and Schuilenburg 2014). Put differently, not only did Birmingham School researchers fail to grasp the inherent paradox of attempting to resist capitalism at the point of consumption, but they also dramatically underestimated capitalism's ability to absorb so-called 'inventive consumer resistance' and then (re)market it in the form of depoliticized items of dull conformity (Frank 1997; Heath and Potter 2006).

Despite these failings, critical criminology of the 1970s and 80s largely accepted Birmingham School claims regarding the oppositional potential of consumerism. It was only after a full two decades of monetarism, neoliberalism and the onward march of consumer markets into more and more spheres of social and private life that critical criminologists ↵ started to take consumer culture seriously. The mood of the times was summed up succinctly by Ian Taylor (1999: 54) in a passage that speaks volumes about criminology's growing awareness of the ever-expanding scope of the late modern consumer society:

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> 'the market' is now a *fundamental* motor force in contemporary social and political discourse and practice, in a way that it was not in the 1970s. 'The market' is *hegemonic* in the realm of discourse, and in very many practices (including some domains of that most resistant area of all, the public sector).

In short, Taylor had recognized that, by the end of the twentieth century, there was no longer any meaningful 'oppositional culture' strong enough to challenge the inexorable rise of 'market culture'. He evidenced this point in his 1999 book, *Crime in Context*, by stressing the prominence of values such as 'entrepreneurship' and 'self-interest' in end-of-the-century youth culture and how these new and fast-developing 'strategies of negotiation' would likely bring about the demise of classic subcultural adaptations (Taylor 1999: 75–7). Taylor's analysis was important in that it highlighted the evolution of critical criminology's position with regard to consumerism. However, it stopped well short of linking the forms of subjectivity engendered by a fast-paced consumer society to criminal motivation. For early criminological forays in this direction we must look elsewhere.

Developing a mid-range theory of post-industrial violence at around the same time, the US-based English criminologist, Elliott Currie, also called attention to 'the increasing potency and primacy of consumer values' (1997: 162). Ultimately Currie outlined seven 'mechanisms' that he believed were contributing to violence in 'materialistic US cities', but one mechanism in particular warrants attention here. Influenced by Bonger and Merton's thinking on relative deprivation, Currie shared with Taylor a concern that young people were rejecting 'productive community life' in favour of 'the valorization of consumption for its own sake—and of getting what you want, or getting ahead of others, by whatever means will suffice' (Currie 1997: 163). But unlike Taylor and other critical criminologists before him, what makes Currie's analysis stand out is that he also trained attention (albeit somewhat obliquely) on the actual 'psychological distortions' that were bring engendered within individuals by what he described as a 'dog-eat-dog', 'frantically consumerist culture' (ibid.). Consider, for example the following passage:

> One of the most chilling features of much violent street crime in America today, and also in some developing countries, is how directly it expresses the logic of immediate gratification in the pursuit of consumer goods, or of instant status and recognition … People who study crime, perhaps especially from a 'progressive' perspective, sometimes shy away from looking hard at these less tangible 'moral' aspects … A full analysis of these connections would need to consider, for example, the impact on crime of the specifically psychological distortions of market society, its tendencies to produce personalities less and less capable of relating to others except as consumer items or as trophies in a quest for recognition among one's peers. (Currie 1996: 348)

As Currie infers, this was not the first time that instant gratification and impulsivity had featured as foci of concern within criminological theory.[1] ↵ Famously, James Q. Wilson and Richard Herrnstein (1985) claimed that personality differences in traits such as impulsivity were often strongly correlated with the development of frequent and long-term anti-social behavior. Central to their argument, and frequently forgotten by many due to the controversy surrounding their work, was the concept of 'present orientation': the idea that a 'rapid cognitive tempo' and 'shortened time horizons' are responsible for impulsive and disinhibited behavior.

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This is a line of thinking common in conservative 'right realist' criminology more generally. For example, in his earlier work, *Thinking About Crime* (1985 [1975]), Wilson had already identified a set of emotions that he believed acted on and effected 'internalized commitment to self-control'. More specifically, he claimed that, as a result of the erosion of the modernist moral order, two modes of self-expression were taking hold: first, a growing sense of personal liberty and individual rights; and, second, a more radical individualism linked to immediate gratification and greed (Wilson 1985: 237–8). In some ways, these claims are not entirely out of step with the line of argument that would later be developed by Taylor, Currie, and others (e.g. Hall 1997; Young 1999; Fenwick and Hayward 2000). Yet, despite general agreement about the importance of subjectivities like individualism and instantaneity in the commission of certain types of predatory crime, the right realist respective explanations for the cause of the problem differed greatly, as one of us has commented previously:

> The problem is that Wilson's critique of immediate gratification, the rise of nouveau fully fledged individualism, and the concept of self-control (and thus his theory of crime more generally) remains one-dimensional. Wilson can only frame his analysis in terms of a perceived loss of 'traditional' (i.e. modern, or, more accurately, a mix of modern and traditional) forms—the erosion of the 'Protestant work ethic' and, more importantly, the demise of community values (remember the centre piece of Wilson's argument is that crime begets crime at a community level). By placing the concepts of impulsivity and immediate gratification so squarely within the context of a lack of social cohesion and disinvestment in society, Wilson presents us with a reading of these important aspects of criminality that is ultimately rooted in a set of conservative morals. By the same token, he chooses to ignore the fact that, in reality, these 'impulsive', 'disinvested' urbanites are simply the obvious end-products of an unmediated system of consumer capitalism. (Hayward 2004a: 178)

One scholar who recognized the need for a more sophisticated analysis of impulsivity and the various other emotional states associated with late modern consumerism was the New Zealand criminologist Wayne Morrison. Writing in 1995, not only did Morrison (1995: 309–10) provide a more sophisticated social theoretical context for Wilson and Herrnstein's ideas about 'differential time appreciation' but more importantly he also recognized the need to augment traditional Mertonian strain models so that they could more effectively incorporate the profound changes—both cultural and ontological—that consumerism was wreaking:

> Criminology not only operates with underdeveloped models of desire, but also largely restricts itself to narrow interpretations of strain theories; wherein crime is the result of frustration by the social structure of the needs which culture identifies for the individual. Today, even in the most contemporary of mainstream criminological theory, ideas of positionality and status are underdeveloped. Instead, ideas of needs and greed predominate. (Morrison 1995: 317)

Morrison's theoretical insights on the relationship between crime and consumerism are complex and manifold and at times get lost amidst his numerous other often overlapping ↵ arguments. However, if one were to summarize his thinking in this area, the following quote is particularly insightful:

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> To become self-defining is the fate that the social structure of late-modernity imposes upon its socially created individuality. The individual is called into action; actions which are meant to express his/her self and enable the individual's destiny to be created out of the contingencies of his/her past … And while resources differ, all are subjected to variations of a similar pressure … namely that of the overburdening of the self as the self becomes the ultimate source of security. The tasks asked of the late-modern person require high degrees of social and technical skills. To control the self and guide it through the disequilibrium of the journeys of late modernity is the task imposed upon the late-modern person, but what if the life experiences of the individual have not fitted him/her with this power? … much crime is an attempt of the self to create sacred moments of control, to find ways in which the self can exercise control and power in situations where power and control are all too clearly lodged outside the self. (ibid.: iv)

Using social theory to make sense of the changing nature of the self within the open social terrain of late modernity is not something that has featured to any great degree in the criminological enterprise (Garland and Sparks 2000). The ascendency of consumer culture, however, meant this had to change. Following the line of travel set down by the likes of Currie and Morrison, other criminologists started to show a marked interest in the growing place of consumerism in everyday life. Echoing Morrison's 'dilemmas of transition' thesis, and drawing on Anthony Giddens' notion of 'ontological insecurity', Jock Young, for example, urged criminologists to rethink Mertonian strain theory for a contemporary world characterized by 'precariousness', 'a chaotic reward system', the 'rise of individualism', and 'a sense of unfairness and a feeling of the arbitrary' (1999: 8–9). Consider, for example, the following quote in which Young moves beyond a structural or class analysis to suggest that consumerism itself might now be criminogenic:

> The market … creates the practical basis of comparison: it renders visible inequalities of race, class age and gender. It elevates a universal citizenship of consumption yet excludes a significant minority from membership. It encourages an ideal of diversity, a marketplace of self-discovery yet provides for the vast majority a narrow, unrewarding individualism in practice. It creates 'uninterrupted disturbances of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation' yet depends on a relatively uncritical acceptance of the given order. The market flourishes, expands, beckons yet undercuts itself. It does all this but is not a mere transmission belt: the mores of the market may be the dominant ethos of the age but this ether of aspiration is shaped, developed and given force by the human actors involved. It is in this light that the problems in the two spheres of order, relative deprivation and individuation, must be viewed. For these are the key to the crime wave in the post-war period. (Young 1999: 47)

Young made good on his promise of extending the concept of strain by augmenting notions of relative deprivation in two ways. First, he argued that relative deprivation should no longer be thought of simply as a 'gaze upwards', but also *as a troubled and anxious look downwards toward the excluded of society* ('it is dismay at the relative well-being of those who although below one on the social hierarchy are perceived as unfairly advantaged: they make too easy a living even if it's not as good as one's own', ibid.: 9). Second, and drawing on developments in cultural criminology, he sought to 'energize' the Mertonian position by showing that crime was not only about bridging a material or structural gap, but that the accrual and display of consumer products often ↵ functioned to alleviate emotional or existential deficits (e.g. 'the structural predicament of the ghetto poor is not simply a deficit of goods—as Merton would have had it—it is a state of humiliation', Young 2003: 408). As ever, Young's work was thoughtful and provocative, but while it challenged researchers to update certain established criminological theories in light of the changing nature of late modern society, it fell some way short of developing a fully-fledged theoretical framework for understanding the criminogenic tendencies inherent in consumer societies. Two other books, however, would do precisely that.

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Although different in their approach, Keith Hayward's *City Limits: Crime, Consumer Culture and the Urban Experience* (2004a) and Steve Hall, Simon Winlow, and Craig Ancrum's *Criminal Identities and Consumer Culture* (2008) both focused attention on the specific question: how does consumer culture cause crime? For Hayward, the answer was to be found in the emotions and subjectivities engendered by consumerism. In particular, he argued that, with its emphasis on the 'new' and the 'now', consumer culture separates

(especially young) people from the consequences of their actions and makes them more likely to pursue exciting or risk-laden activities without regard for conventional normative restraints. Hence his analysis focused primarily on crimes with a strong expressive dimension, such as gang violence, vandalism, joy riding, and drug use—transgressive activities that are most likely to involve playing with new forms of concomitant subjectivity based around desire, simultaneity, individualism, and impulsivity (2004a: 157).

Differing in their approach, Hall *et al*. focused on more problematic forms of narcissistic subjectivity in which individuals were willing to engage in harmful careers of acquisitive and entrepreneurial criminality in order to benefit the self. Their crucial insight was to reverse the conflation of norms and values which have perpetuated the notion that such forms of criminality 'deviate' from mainstream culture. Instead, Hall *et al*. suggest that their subjects' steadfast adherence to the values of consumerism, in addition to their methods of competitive entrepreneurialism within criminal marketplaces, was in many ways a perfect reflection of mainstream consumer and neoliberal values.

Therefore, in different but overlapping ways, these books were the first in the discipline to train attention specifically on the 'crime-consumerism nexus'. *City Limits* focused upon expressive and risk-taking forms of transgression within consumerism's 'culture of now'; while *Criminal Identities* focused upon entrepreneurial criminals' embodiment of ruthless neoliberal competitiveness and their fetishistic attachment to consumer commodities and associated lifestyles. However, both texts speak to consumerism's criminogenic qualities and in doing so set the tone for a new wave of criminological studies concerned with the psychological, social, economic, and environmental impacts of late modern consumerism. It is to this fast-developing body of work that we now turn.

Cultural Criminology

Cultural criminology is concerned with the convergence of cultural, criminal, and crime control processes; as such, it situates criminality and its control in the context of cultural dynamics and the contested production of meaning. Attentive to the realities of a deeply unequal world, cultural criminology strives to highlight how power affects the upwards ↵ and downwards construction of criminological phenomena: how rules are made, why they are broken, and the deeper implications of these processes.[2] Because of its focus on the lived experience of crime, cultural criminologists have always trained attention on those little situations, circumstances and crimes that make up everyday life (see Ferrell 2018). For cultural criminology's critics, this interest in micro-level analysis is a problem (O'Brien 2006; Hall and Winlow 2007). These critics suggest that, by focusing on everyday people and everyday crimes, cultural criminology has foregone macro-economic analyses of crime in the interests of a romantically subjectivist or narrowly cultural focus. But such criticism misses the point. In reality, cultural criminology's focus on the everyday is a strategic choice (Ferrell *et al*. 2015: 87–91; Ferrell and Ilan 2013). For it is here in the everyday world that it is possible to overcome the dualism of structure and agency, and to unearth the connections that frequently link petty transgressions with large-scale criminal markets or organized corporate crime networks. Put another way, while cultural criminologists continue to trace the damage caused by late capitalism at the macro level, they are equally committed to documenting the wide sweep of transcontinental capitalism amidst the most local of situations and common everyday transgressions.

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This multilayered, multifaceted approach is especially useful when it comes to outlining the relationships that exist between consumerism and crime—not least because today consumer culture itself is transmitted and inculcated across *all* levels of late modern society. Not only is it operational at a grand or civic level, eroding informal networks of mutual support by converting collectivities into markets, public services into privatized corporate opportunities, and people into consumers, but the pervasive logic of market society and its attendant consumer values also function psychologically; shaping individual consciousness by propagating insatiable wants and desires and promoting a culture that exalts atomized individual competition and consumption over other social considerations. In light of this situation, cultural criminology looks to analyse and highlight the criminogenic nature of consumerist discourses wherever they may feature within contemporary society (see, for example, Moretti 2023).

Now in its third decade, cultural criminology has, since its emergence, trained considerable attention on consumer culture. It even featured in Ferrell and Sanders inaugurating publication, *Cultural Criminology,* in the guise of Lyng and Bracey's (1995) chapter on the dynamic by which consumerism transforms experiential opposition, and even overt criminal activity, into commodified product. Tracing the history of 'outlaw biker style', Lyng and Bracey show how early attempts to criminalize biker culture only served to amplify its illicit meanings, while later marketing schemes to incorporate the signifiers of biker style (most notably the Harley Davison motorcycle brand) into mass production effectively evacuated its original subversive potential. This process through which criminal or illicit practices are co-opted and then used to sell product is described by cultural criminologists as 'the commodification of crime', and has been identified in everything from the steady dilution of rap music's violent origins (Ferrell *et al*. 2015: Ch. 6), to the way that fetishized S&M sexual practices became integrated into high-street shopping culture (Presdee 2000). Relatedly, cultural criminologists also talk about the 'marketing of transgression', a process by which everyday products such as soft drinks (Ferrell *et al*. 2015: 110), cars (Muzzatti 2010), and trainers (Ferrell and Ilan 2013: 372) ↵ are made 'cool' by employing branding strategies associated with deviant themes or criminal imagery. Various other aspects of consumer culture have also featured prominently in cultural criminology, including work that traces the origins of everyday commodities to the grim sweatshop factories of China or the exploited rainforests of the Global South (Boekhout van Solinge 2008), and studies that show how particular consumption choices can function as 'tools of classification and identification by which agencies of social control construct profiles of potential criminal protagonists' (Hayward and Yar 2006: 23; Treadwell 2008).

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Perhaps cultural criminology's main achievement in this area, though, is the clustering of ideas known as the 'crime–consumerism nexus' (Hayward 2004a, 2004b). The crime–consumerism nexus is a theoretical concept used by (cultural) criminologists to understand the relationships that exist within consumer societies between the values and emotions associated with consumerism and various forms of expressive and acquisitive criminality. The crime–consumerism nexus asserts that consumerism cultivates—especially among young people—new forms of subjectivity based around desire, individualism, hedonism, and impulsivity, which, in many instances, can find expression in transgressive and even criminal behaviour, from gang activity to drug use, mugging to rioting. Importantly, this is not to suggest that consumer culture is criminogenic in any simplistic sense of direct correlation/causation; nor is it an attempt to integrate consumerism into a general theory of crime. Rather, the crime–consumerism nexus should be understood simply as an attempt to outline the striking convergence between novel forms of subjectivity propagated by

consumerism, and many of the characteristics identified within the criminological literature as being constitutive of criminality. Interdisciplinary in nature, drawing as it does on criminology, behavioural economics, consumer research, and the sociology of risk and identity, it is not an easy concept to define. However, four main themes can be identified:

1. *Insatiability of desire (and its concomitant, perpetual dissatisfaction)*: A unique feature of contemporary consumer culture is that insatiable desire is now not only normalized but essential to the very survival of the current socio-economic order. Far from an unintended or unwanted 'side effect', insatiable desire is actively cultivated in a consumer culture. Of relevance to any criminological analysis of consumerism is the flip side of such a situation: namely, *a constant sense of unfulfillment, dissatisfaction, and disillusionment*. The criminogenic consequences of this 'strange combination of perpetual dissatisfaction and a longing for the new' hardly need spelling out. At the most obvious level, a lot of crime—from shoplifting to street robbery—can be understood not as a desperate act of poverty or a defiant gesture against the system, but as an attempt to bridge a perceived 'consumer deficit', and as a form of identity construction.

2. *New forms of 'hyper strain'*: Such thinking is reminiscent of Merton's classic 'strain theory'. However, contemporary hyper-consumerism is contributing to the crime problem in ways that are qualitatively different from those expressed by strain theorists. Today, what people are feeling deprived of is no longer simply the material product itself, but, rather, the sense of identity that products have come to bestow on the individual. Such a situation demands a move away from the *instrumentality* inherent in Merton's strain theory towards a concept predicated more on the *expressivity* associated with new forms of desire.

3. *Engagement with risk*: A further source of tension exists between the desire for excitement that is so prominent a feature of consumer culture and the mundane/over-controlled nature of much modern life—from the encroachment of surveillance to the drudgery of low-wage employment. One way in which individuals attempt to escape this paradox is by exerting a sense of personal control—or more accurately, a 'controlled loss of control'—through engaging with risk. For example, many forms of street crime frequently perpetrated within urban areas such as peer group fighting or graffiti writing should be seen for exactly what they are, attempts to construct an enhanced sense of self or a semblance of control by engaging in risk-laden practices on the metaphorical edge.

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4. *Instant gratification/impulsivity*: In addition to being insatiable, consumer culture cultivates a desire for *immediate, rather than delayed, gratification*. We are, at a societal level, increasingly encouraged to eschew long-term conservatism in favour of instant gratification as evidenced by the massive expansion of credit facilities and the constant emphasis on immediacy in the 'buy now' language of advertising. The bombardment of stimuli associated with consumer culture fundamentally distorts our experience of temporality, now reduced to 'a series of pure and unrelated presents'. With its particular emphasis on the 'new' and the 'now', consumer culture separates people from the consequences of their actions and makes them more likely to pursue excitement without regard for conventional normative constraints. Abridged from Hayward and Kindynis, 2013. Republished with permission of SAGE Reference, from the *Encyclopaedia of Street Crime in America*, Jeffrey Ian Ross (ed.), 2013; permission conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.)

Since this model was developed other elements of the crime-consumerism nexus have started to emerge. First, a growing body of work has exposed the 'infantilizing' nature of late-capitalist culture (Hayward 2012, 2013; Smith 2013). This work explores how 'consumerism as a cultural ethos' is contributing to *both* the depreciation of mature adulthood (and the roles and responsibilities typically associated with that stage of people's lives), and importantly, the 'adultification' of very young teenagers (in terms of lifestyle choices and activities involving sexual activity, drugs, criminality, etc.) (Hayward 2012: 226). Although, the criminological implications of younger and younger people making adult decisions (or inversely, young adults acting like children) have yet to be fully developed, research is beginning to appear that outlines clear links between the narcissistic aspects of infantilization and the hedonistic excesses of the night-time economy (Smith 2013, 2014), as forms of 'anti-social consumption' that impede efforts to limit environmental harms (Brisman and South 2015), and the selfish motivations behind inner-city predatory criminality (Hall *et al*. 2008).

A second additional element that one could now include in the crime–consumerism nexus is the relationship between circuits of wasteful consumption and environmental harm, something that is now being developed under the rubric 'green-cultural criminology' (Brisman and South 2013, this volume; Ferrell 2013). Drawing together the thoughtful green criminological scholarship of Avi Brisman and Nigel South with Jeff Ferrell's (2006) decade-long ethnographic investigations into trash picking, 'dumpster diving', and environmental activism, green-cultural criminology exposes the exploitative ecological practices associated with the globalized consumerist way of life. From the material consequences of the commodification of nature to 'greenwashing' campaigns by which deleterious corporate practices are recast as supposedly pro-environmental activism, green-cultural criminology not only adds an important component to the (green) crime-consumerism nexus, but also illustrates cultural criminology's more general goal of constantly enlivening and expanding the criminological imagination. With this same ambition in mind, two other recent criminological strands have emerged that share a fundamental interest in the relationship between consumer culture and crime: the overlapping theoretical perspectives known as 'ultra realism' and 'deviant leisure'.

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Ultra Realism

'Ultra realism' represents a development of some of the more critical strains of criminological theory that have emerged since the 1970s. Through engagement with ethnographic methods, underpinned by a complex theoretical framework, ultra realism pushes beyond both left realism (Lea and Young 1984) and critical realism (Bhaskar 1997) to offer incisive and penetrative analysis of the realities of life in a world shaped in no small part by global consumer culture and neoliberal ideology.

Ultra realism's central claim is that the empirical world exists suspended above a maelstrom of deeper forces, processes, and structures which contribute to and influence our interaction with the social. In this sense, events such as crime, disorder, or the commission of harm are best described as symptoms—that is, they are visible and even measurable, but not in themselves causative. To fully understand the origins of crime and harm, we must uncover the deep-rooted human drives and actions that help perpetuate the dominant social order.

Taking this position as a starting point, ultra realism seeks to identify fundamental flaws in many of the building blocks of contemporary criminology's theoretical frameworks. More specifically, it criticizes both mainstream and critical criminological perspectives not simply on minor points of difference, but at the root of their fundamental domain assumptions. To illustrate this, consider the way in which 'human nature' is conceived within criminological literature. Although critical to understanding the causes of crime, assumptions about human nature are rooted in political philosophies that inform the most dominant mainstream and critical perspectives of right realist and left liberal paradigms. If these assumptions are questioned or problematized, then the edifice of criminological theory built upon these 'truths' begins to crumble.

This is precisely the aim of Hall and Winlow's thoughtful and provocative *Revitalizing Criminology* (2015). Within this book, the authors carefully explain that right realist and left liberal perspectives are, at their most fundamental level, mirror images of one another in their approach to individual agency and subjectivity. For ultra realists, both these positions are problematic in that they overstate the autonomy of rational and conscious individual agency and thus fail to pay sufficient attention to issues of the unconscious in shaping subjectivity. In a claim that bears some resemblance to the earlier work of Zygmunt Bauman, ultra realists argue that the individual is not inherently good or immoral. Morality is manipulated by social structures and systems as the individual subconsciously seeks to actively identify with what the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan refers to as a *symbolic order*—the set of signs, symbols, rules, and values by which individuals make cogent sense of their lives.[3]

However, in contemporary late modern society, identification with a coherent symbolic order appears increasingly difficult. Our current socio-symbolic system is now overwhelmingly predicated on the principles of neoliberal consumer-capitalism, ideologically supported and reproduced through a corporatized mass media (see Hayward and Hall 2021). Identity and a semblance of ontological security are therefore only
p. 553 ↵ attainable through full immersion in consumer capitalism. Such a situation has inevitable implications when it comes to thinking about how one might resist or challenge consumer capitalism's hegemonic position. Despite an increase in critical perspectives on global consumerism, many scholars remain attached to the possibility of consumerism as a tool of resistance (Riley *et al.* 2013; Maffesoli 1996). For ultra realists, as well as proponents of cultural criminology and deviant leisure perspectives, resistance is impossible at the point of consumption (see Heath and Potter 2004). Rather, consumerism appears to have a tendency to engender a perpetual state of anxiety, fear of cultural irrelevance, and an enduring sense of lack, which in turn serves to perpetuate desire. Consumer capitalism therefore relies upon a culture of competitive interpersonal relations to cultivate envy and a pervasive, deep-rooted sense of dissatisfaction. Temporary relief is promised through consumption and the creation of consumer identities. In this way people actively seek out their own incorporation into consumer culture as a means of addressing their underlying individual anxieties.

Ultra realist theory has been utilized to develop a number of stringent critiques of contemporary issues that highlight the link between consumerism and crime, from hate crime (James and McBride 2022; James 2020) to English nationalism (Telford 2022), workplace harm (Lloyd 2018), migration (Briggs 2020) and white collar crime and corruption (Tudor 2019). In the wake of the UK riots of 2011, Treadwell *et al.* (2013) put ultra realism to work in examining the motivations of those involved in the looting and violence. Initial

criminological reactions were quick to fashion a narrative around the disorder that positioned those taking part as rising up in protest against swingeing economic cuts, contracting job prospects, and an increasing sense of injustice characterized by their interactions with state agencies. The data presented by Treadwell *et al*. however, tells a different story. Initially, the breakdown of law and order and the unpreparedness of the police response opened up a space in which rioters *could* have seized a political initiative. However, for many of the rioters the overwhelming response to this opportunity was to accumulate as many of consumerism's symbolic objects as possible. Thus, from an ultra-realist perspective, the 2011 London riots should be understood primarily as 'consumer riots'—that is, rather than seeking to challenge the established political orthodoxy, the rioters (in the main) illustrated a deep commitment to the ideology of consumer capitalism. Despite many participants' precarious socio-economic position, those who participated in the riots did not want grand socio-political change but simply more of what already existed: the commoditized markers of a life well-lived and the opportunity to correct their marginalized image of what Zygmunt Bauman (1998) might once have described as a 'flawed consumer' (i.e. individuals who are no longer capable of functioning effectively within consumer markets).

For ultra realists, competitive consumerism has infiltrated the core of Western society, impacting upon social relations among young people, driving desire across a broad demographic, and opening up the motivational capacity to commit crime and inflict harm on others in the process.[4] While anti-capitalist movements appear to offer a salve to the dominance of consumer capitalism, ultra realists indicate that even positions of

p. 554 ↵ anti-consumerism can be depoliticized and commodified (Frank 1997). At the same time, new criminal markets made possible by advances in technology are increasingly embedded into everyday life. This in turn provides the backdrop to what Steve Redhead (2015) describes as 'claustropolitanism'—the desire of those with the wealth and means to do so to secede from the reality of what constitutes the social today.

This is complex terrain for criminology, and thus one must be clear about some of the key terms utilized within ultra realism. In particular, it is important to recognize what ultra realists mean by the 'return to motivation' (Hall *et al*. 2008: 1). Stated simply, and irrespective of whether they are analysing the privatization of public space or the intellectual wastelands of much mainstream media, the primary goal of ultra realism is to explore below the *symptoms* of the crime-consumer nexus and explain *why* individuals seek out the symbolism of consumer capitalism. Here, these complex forces and processes are linked to a social order that compels the individual to consume and invokes what the philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2000) refers to as a reversal of the cultural superego. Under different socio-economic conditions, giving into desire would prompt a sense of guilt, as the superego brought to bear shame at an inability to defer gratification. However, today, shame is invoked at failure to take every consumer opportunity and experience that passes within reach of the individual. As Winlow and Hall (2013: 121) note:

> A good life is a life in which we have tasted extreme indulgence, a life in which we have denied ourselves nothing and exposed ourselves constantly to the thrill of the new; a life of sexual adventure, global travel and committed consumerism, in which we forge our own path and blithely ignore decaying conservative accounts of frugality, commitment, obligation and work.

In other words, success—the 'good life'—is measured entirely by competent and sustained engagement within the circuits of consumption—in short knowing what to buy and how to flaunt it. However, within a post-crash, post-Brexit economic environment, it seems reasonable to question how, despite stagnating or falling incomes and increasing precarity, consumerism is still playing such an integral role within the capitalist project.

For ultra realists, the answer is found in the debt economy (Horsley 2015). Because economic growth depends (to a large degree) on the willingness of individuals to take on consumer debt, the consumer marketplace needs to ensure we remain committed to spending money in the pursuit of cultural relevance and status. Today, largely as a result of the emergence of the so-called 'cashless economy' (Graeber 2014), British household debt stands at a record £1.7 trillion, a staggering increase from £400 billion in the mid-1990s (Lloyd and Horsley 2022). Within this new 'culture of indebtedness' (Horsley 2015), access to consumer credit is facilitated and expedited by companies operating (often with impunity) at the predatory end of the loan market. These doorstep credit companies, payday lenders, and rent-to-buy companies often disguise their exploitative practices as a form of community service, but in reality they exemplify the toxicity of high-interest debt as it relates to individuals, families, and communities.[5]

p. 555 ↵ As this chapter has illustrated, it is now possible to link consumerism to a range of harms, many of which strengthen and perpetuate the existing socio-economic system. However, elsewhere, we can see a more direct connection between consumerism and crime. In the effort to cultivate consumer identities, many have no choice but to immerse themselves in the circuits of consumption. Of course, most are able to acquire the necessary consumer symbolism within the legitimate market place, but for some, illegal methods are increasingly becoming a first resort, particularly in post-crash locales of permanent recession (see Hall *et al.* 2008; Telford 2022). Intimidation and a capacity for violence allow determined criminals a direct, albeit brutal shortcut to consumer markets (Ellis 2015). Like the tax-avoiding economic elite of the corporate boardroom (Platt 2015), committed and opportunistic criminals are able to simply take the symbolic objects they need to raise themselves up above those to whom they feel no moral or ethical obligation (Hall *et al.* 2008). Hayward (2016) is perhaps right to suggest that not all crime stories are stories about capitalism, but the long-term effects on individuals of immersion in competitive cultures of acquisition and ornamental display should not be overlooked. In this sense, we can see the value of ultra realism's response to unfolding events and criminological issues that defy simplistic interpretation.

In the following section, our attention turns to commodified forms of leisure and their attendant harms. The development of a 'deviant leisure' perspective as outlined below allows us to draw on the advances in cultural criminology discussed above, while also incorporating the role of deep structures and processes relating to the competitive individualism and the normalized harm outlined in ultra realism.

Deviant Leisure

Commodified leisure markets are perhaps one of the most rapidly evolving examples of global consumer capitalism. As both cultural and ultra realist criminologists have indicated, consumerism and identity are irreversibly connected, with much identity creation and maintenance carried out in the spheres of marketized leisure (Hayward and Turner 2019). Surprisingly, criminology to date has appeared interested

only in instances where leisure contravenes legal definitions of crime, or where youthful leisure practices hint at transgression, rebellion, and excitement (see Smith and Raymen 2016). More recently, however, criminologists have begun to engage with the relationship between leisure and social harm in a more sophisticated and coherent fashion (ibid.; Raymen and Smith 2019). This new 'deviant leisure' perspective draws upon advances in both cultural criminology (see Hayward 2016) and ultra-realist criminology (Hall and Winlow 2015) in order to illustrate the role of commodified and marketized forms of leisure in the commission of harm. As explained above, ultra-realist criminology utilizes a broadly harm-based analysis of the systemic corrosiveness of global capitalism as its focus, whereas cultural criminology's traditional interest in crime, leisure, and subcultures has continuously evolved over the last decade to include an increasingly materialist critique of liberal capitalism, harm, and consumer culture (Ferrell 2006; Hayward and Yar 2006). Through a careful synthesis of these two strands of criminological theory, alongside a reconceptualization of social deviance, deviant leisure perspectives illustrate how individual, social, economic, and environmental harms are structurally and culturally embedded within many accepted and normalized forms of leisure. As ↵ Oliver Smith and Tom Raymen (2016) have suggested in an important article that outlines the parameters of this perspective:

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> When the underlying violence of shopping explodes into realised physical violence in time-bound consumption events (Raymen and Smith, 2015); when sexual assault and violence is a normal, expected, and even desired feature of the ubiquitous night-time economy (Smith, 2014); and when the humiliation and degradation of revenge porn and torture become forms of entertainment to be consumed through pornography and video games (Atkinson and Rodgers, 2015), criminology must look beyond what is socially-defined and culturally accepted as affirming leisure cultures and instead interrogate the nature of leisure itself and its relationship with an increasingly liberalised consumer capitalism.

Defining deviant leisure is not an easy task—indeed the term itself is constructed from two of the broadest concepts in the social sciences. However, what is clear from the outset is that the deviant leisure perspective requires criminologists to travel beyond the boundaries associated with traditional socio-legal constructs of crime and criminality, and into the realm of harm and zemiology (see Chapter 23; Raymen 2022). Put differently, underlying the deviant leisure perspective is a fundamental rereading of the concept of social deviance. 'Deviance' is generally applied throughout the social sciences to describe behaviours that contravene socially accepted norms, values, and ethical standards. However, a deviant leisure perspective seeks to invert this traditional interpretation. In an era characterized by the pursuit of 'cool individualism', and where the primary cultural imperative is to simultaneously fit in while standing out (Miles 1998), the cultivation of many contemporary 'deviant identities' can today be viewed as steadfastly conformist (Hall *et al*. 2008; Hayward and Schuilenburg 2014; Smith 2014). Expressed differently, what could within a more ethical social order be conceptualized as *deviant* behaviour is today being harnessed, pacified, and repositioned as a very specific form of creative dynamism that serves to propel desire for symbolic objects and experiences—desires which are then translated into demand within the circuits of consumption dominated by the leisure economy.

From a criminal justice perspective, the relationship between crime control and leisure is inconsistent. Marketized, taxable forms of leisure such as the gambling industry (Raymen and Smith 2020a), or the development of an alcohol-based night-time economy (Smith 2014; Briggs and Ellis 2017) are regulated relatively lightly, despite clear links to violent crime, debt, and mental health issues (see Smith and Raymen 2019). Other leisure pursuits however, appear to be regulated, criminalized, and controlled to an extent that appears disproportionate to the perceived harms that such pursuits pose. In these cases, Capital has the privilege of defining and redefining the legitimacy of a particular space, thus continuously reclassifying the status of these activities as illegitimate 'deviance' or legitimate 'leisure'. Cultural lifestyle sports or forms of 'serious leisure' (Stebbins 2007) such as skateboarding, parkour, and urban exploration (Atkinson 2009; Garrett 2013; Raymen 2018) occupy a curious position at the interface between deviance and leisure. On the one hand, they are legitimate leisure activities, with their own competitive sporting events and official governing bodies. Moreover, the spectacular imagery of their practice is frequently utilized for the commercial purposes of feature films and advertisements. In these and other ways, then, sports like skateboarding and certain forms of graffiti should be conceptualized not as 'deviant' but entirely conformist; part of the injunction to discover one's true self and construct a persona of 'cool individualism' (Heath and Potter 2006). However, on the other hand, these activities are also policed and controlled, with those participating often facing fines and other sanctions ↵ for engaging in these leisure pursuits outside of the specific spaces of indoor gyms and skate parks. In this sense, as 'right' and 'wrong', 'deviant' or 'legitimate' have become increasingly synonymous with what is 'right' and 'wrong' for the *market,* there has also been a move towards a spatial and, by extension, political and economic definition of what constitutes harmful deviance and legitimate leisure.

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While deviant leisure perspectives provide an explanation for the increased regulation, legitimation, and commodification of leisure forms, they are also used to examine the cultural dominance of the leisure industries. It is here at the interface of leisure and consumer culture that we can see harmful outcomes emanating from the commodification and marketization of a range of activities and behaviours. The night-time high street of bars, pubs, casinos, and strip-clubs, ubiquitous to cities across the UK and beyond, provides us with a clear example. The night-time economy (NTE) is not only culturally embedded within consumer society but is a valuable source of employment and taxation. In this sense it is integral to the cultural and economic aspirations of city councils (see Chapter 25). However, it is also a site in which social harms are written into the same urban scripts that position alcohol-based leisure as indicative of a vibrant, 24-hour city (Roberts *et al*. 2006; Bianchini 1995). These harms tend to be concentrated around fault lines of gender and race (see Smith and Raymen 2016), and in many cases are so ubiquitous as to be accepted as an unfortunate by-product of a night out or employment in the NTE. More familiar to criminology, is the alcohol related violence reported regularly in the media, or served up as the subject of fly-on-the-wall documentaries (see Hayward and Hobbs 2007). These incidents of violence and disorder have been well documented within academic literature, with many commentators explaining the million hospital visits a year attributed to the NTE and the innumerable sexual assaults and violent encounters as the pathology of a minority of working class men whose actions taint an otherwise unproblematic site of creativity and identity construction (Newburn and Shiner 2001; Richardson and Budd 2003). The reality, of course, is much more complex.

If our night-time city centres really are loci of violence and exclusion, then how can we explain their enduring popularity for large numbers of consumers? The answer appears to be tied to the problem of identity within late modern society. Outside of social media, night-time leisure constitutes perhaps the most important arena for identity creation linked to conspicuous and ostentatious consumption in this period of consumer capitalism. Perhaps their appeal lies in the excitement of hedonism alongside the suspension of the moral regulation and behavioural norms associated with day-time comportment. However, central to the deviant leisure perspective is the assertion that these environments rarely generate resistance or political solidarity (Medley 2019). For the most part, these drinkers are not kicking back against the system; they are entirely conformist in their dedication to the values dictated by the market. This claim is substantiated by the indication that this model of alcohol consumption is central to the continued viability of the industry, with committed consumers (or binge drinkers to use the common term) accounting for 60 per cent of profits accrued by the alcohol industry (Boseley 2016). By focusing on the range of harms engendered by legitimized and normalized forms of leisure, such as the NTE, the deviant leisure perspective opens up a space for reappraising our understanding of consumer capitalism and its deleterious effects. Of course, social harm approaches are not new, having been used for some time within the development of a green criminology (see; Tombs and Hillyard, this volume; South and Brisman 2013; White 2013). As our attention now turns to environmental degradation associated with the democratization of tourism, it comes as no surprise that there is a degree of convergence between deviant leisure and green criminological perspectives (Smith 2019).

p. 558 ↵ Over the past two decades, the emergence of a distinct ‘green’ criminology has successfully directed criminological attention toward the harms inflicted upon the environment as a result of non-criminalized activities (see South 1998; White 2013) and from interaction with the global economy. Deviant leisure perspectives build upon this work and interrogate not only the environmental harms that result from engaging with leisure cultures, but the role of consumerism in the creation of individual desire and the cultivation of competitive individualism. For example, as commodified forms of leisure became democratized through the rise of the budget airline, all-inclusive deals, and online booking-agents, leisure activities began to come into conflict with the natural environment on a global scale. Even beyond the 915 million tonnes of CO2 emissions produced by air travel each year (ATAG 2022), the democratization of tourism places unsustainable strains upon the global commons in the pursuit of private gain. Moreover, the environmental harms and waste associated with leisure are not restricted to the far-off tourist idylls of the Maldives but are simultaneously experienced in multiple locations globally.

As leisure markets evolve and grow in order to circumvent the limits to capital (Harvey 2007), the deviant leisure perspective describes a culturally symbiotic relationship between harmful leisure and consumerism. Here, participation in particular forms of leisure promises the creation of new, cool identities. While some of these may be relatively benign, deviant leisure scholars draw upon examples such as the rapid growth and cultural ubiquity of the gambling industry (Raymen 2019), which represents a market worth of £7.1 billion in the UK alone (GCUK 2015). With an increasing array of gambling opportunities quite literally at the fingertips of internet users, it is likely that ‘social’ gambling, fiercely defended by gambling industry lobbyists as non-problematic, masks a range of damaging social and individual effects. Existing criminological analyses have looked at gambling within a paradigm of ‘edgework’ (Banks 2013), yet only rarely do criminologists acknowledge the social harms surrounding social gambling. By using a deviant leisure perspective, it is possible to emphasize how an identity-based culture of sports betting, combined with relentless promises of

'easy wins' encourages chasing losses and impulsive betting (Binde 2010). By embedding 'sociable' gambling within existing leisure markets, the cost of an afternoon watching football in the pub can quickly spiral; and for some individuals these losses are likely to manifest as stress, financial uncertainty, emotional volatility, depression, and anxiety (Raymen and Smith 2020b).

The deviant leisure perspective undoubtedly stands in contrast to many of the more celebratory accounts of leisure and its associated activities. For some critics, then, it may present a rather dour or pessimistic outlook on something that for most people is a source of fun and enjoyment. However, there is some room for optimism, through identification of and engagement with so-called *prosocial* forms of leisure. However, as Smith and Raymen (2016: 5) point out, this will require disconnection of commodified leisure from the hypercompetitive consumer ideology propagated by the current social order:

> In short, *prosocial* forms of leisure are possible, but lie beyond what we term a *hedonic realism*, the inability to see beyond the horizon of a social order where leisure identity is synonymous with the hyper-competitive and individualized arena of consumer capitalism.

In sum, the deviant leisure perspective has the potential to allow us to think more critically about the crime-consumerism nexus. More specifically, the synthesis of ultra realist and critical cultural criminologies enables criminologists to illustrate and understand how individual, social, economic, and environmental harms are structurally embedded within many accepted and normalized forms of leisure.

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Conclusion

Consumer culture pervades every aspect of our lives. The marketization, privatization, and commodification that is perhaps the defining feature of our late modern landscape underpins the global economy and provides us with the consumer symbolism of goods, experiences, and services that are utilized to create new hierarchies of social significance, cultivating envy and desire. In this sense, Anthony Giddens (1991) was right to suggest that we have 'no choice but to choose'; the alternative to immersion in the hypercompetitive individualistic environs of consumer markets is cultural obsolescence, a life not worth living.

The premise of our chapter has been to explore and explain the relationship between crime and consumerism. Here, it would be useful to point to some assiduously prepared statistics, a graph which neatly illustrates the correlation between the growth and dominance of consumer capitalism, and steadily rising crime rates. Unfortunately for us and indeed all criminologists, this is simply not possible. On the surface the last two decades appear to have been an unremitting success for crime preventionists and other proponents of administrative criminology. Much if not all of the global North appears to be experiencing steadily declining rates of crime across the majority of volume crimes (Parker 2010). However, the so-called 'crime decline' masks both a host of new and expanding crime markets, and a huge number of non-criminal harms, some of which have been discussed above, that emanate from a socio-economic system working within neoliberal ideology. As Hall and Winlow (2015) argue:

> Beneath the superficial empirical level, in the realms of the actual and the real, we have seen profound developments in the neoliberal era. We have seen the normalisation and sociocultural integration of 'hybridized' illegal and legal economic activities in a shadow-economy that operates beneath governments' statistical radar.

While some crimes are certainly declining, it is unlikely that this is as much a result of greater sociability or enhanced societal well-being (Pinker 2012), as it is to increased securitization and implementation of pragmatic crime control measures. As we have suggested above, criminal markets are mutating, at a pace and into environments that collators of crime statistics are simply unable to keep up with. As scholars writing from all three of the perspectives outlined above have repeatedly observed, while there has been a statistical drop in 'crime', many harms are now simply normalized and embedded within deeply entrenched circuits of consumption (Raymen and Smith 2015).

When social scientists dare to problematize or critique something that tends to be held in high regard, such as consumer culture, there is a danger that they might be accused of a moralizing conservatism. Indeed, this view is widely held and fiercely protected. Even critical criminological voices such as Roger Matthews have positioned consumerism as 'one of the positive achievements of capitalism' (2014: 100). However, these arguments tend to conflate consumerism and consumption. As we have seen, consumerism involves significantly more than the simple purchase of material goods. Fundamentally, consumer culture relies on the velocity of fashion—the constant renewal of consumer goods within a marketplace—in tandem with a perpetual creation and re-creation of desire. As such it is vital for clothing, music, electronic items, and so on to rapidly fall from fashion and be identified by the anxious consumer as in need of immediate replacement. It is this cyclical process which we can link to global inequalities, ecological destruction, social disintegration, and a proliferation of harmful subjectivities.

p. 560 ↵ Returning to where we started, and the work of Thorstein Veblen on leisure and consumption, many of the connections we have drawn between crime and consumerism echo Veblen's observations made over a century ago. Specifically, Veblen wrote about the emerging culture of barbarism that cultivates envy, harmful forms of competition, and narcissistic tendencies that are reflected in the perspectives outlined above. Contemporary cultures of consumption solicit consumers at increasingly early ages with cultural tropes that dismiss deferred gratification as being for 'losers'. At the same time they urge immediate and conspicuous forms of consumption which are not only tied to cultures of debt, but promote cultures of narcissism, infantilization, and individualized hypercompetitiveness. In this sense, the relationship between crime and consumerism is far from straightforward. Yet, within the criminological frameworks explored above, we are at least equipped to properly explore beneath the socio-legal constructions of criminality and examine the complex structural processes and drives underpinning the crime-consumerism nexus.

Selected Further Reading

Perhaps one of the most prescient and remarkably relevant explorations of consumerism is Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Classes* [1899] (1970). For a more up-to-date overview of consumerism, Smart's *Consumer Society: Critical Issues and Environmental Consequences* (2010) is a useful starting point. The authors of this chapter have made a number of contributions to key discussions in this area. Specifically, Hayward's *City Limits: Crime, Consumer Culture*

and the Urban Experience (2004a) explores the core issue of how consumer culture is linked to crime and discusses how consumerism weakens some forms of social control, driving impulsive, individualistic actions. Published a decade later, Smith's *Contemporary Adulthood and the Night-Time Economy* (2014) examines the erosion of traditional adult identities, framing the cultural attachment to alcohol and its attendant harms as a form of deviant leisure. Hall and Winlow's *Revitalizing Criminology: Towards a New Ultra-Realism* (2015) provides readers with a cogent and persuasive argument for the adoption of an ultra-realist criminology. More recently, Justin Kotze and Anthony Lloyd provide an accessible and engaging introduction to Ultra-Realism, *Making Sense of Ultra-Realism: Contemporary Criminological Theory Through the Lens of Popular Culture (2022)* that draws upon examples from film and television to make sense of its core theoretical components. Hall, Winlow, and Ancrum's captivating exploration of criminal motivation *Criminal Identities and Consumer Culture* (2008), is a similarly important contribution, while the best introduction to cultural criminology is still undoubtedly Ferrell, Hayward, and Young's *Cultural Criminology: An Invitation* (2015). The significance of commodified forms of leisure for criminology is outlined in Oliver Smith and Thomas Raymen's 'Deviant Leisure, A Criminological Perspective' (2016) published in *Theoretical Criminology*, while *Deviant Leisure: Criminological Perspectives on Leisure and Harm* (2019) edited by Raymen and Smith offers a collection of essays that demonstrate the versatility and vitality of work being undertaken in the field of deviant leisure.

Online resources

Try the essay questions *<https://iws.oupsupport.com/ebook/access/content/liebling-maruna7e-student-resources/liebling-maruna7e-chapter-25-essay-questions?options=showName>* for this chapter and visit useful websites *<https://iws.oupsupport.com/ebook/access/content/liebling-maruna7e-student-resources/liebling-maruna7e-chapter-25-useful-websites?options=showName>* for additional research and reading around this topic.

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Notes

[1] Most obviously, psychologists have conducted a mass of research into the way in which supposed deficits in impulse control can bring about delinquent behaviour by interfering with children's ability to control their behaviour and to think of the future consequences of deviant acts (e.g. Mischel *et al.* 1972; Farrington *et al*. 1990; White *et al*. 1994).

[2] For general introductions to cultural criminology see Ferrell *et al.* (2015); Hayward and Young (2012); Hayward (2018); Hayward and Matallana-Villarreal (2021).

[3] A coherent symbolic order provides a level of organization which is shared with other members of society in order to navigate everyday life. Importantly, incorporation into a symbolic order is not achieved through inculcation or coercion on behalf of some ideological state apparatus. Nor is it inflicted through the manufacture of consent by hegemonic power structures. It is a necessary and inescapable part of identity formation that ought to, under the right conditions, provide the individual with a level of stability and ontological security.

[4] This willingness to inflict harm is achieved through a mechanism that ultra realists (see Hall 2012) refer to as 'special liberty'. Put simply, this is the individual belief that one is no longer constrained by ethical codes, and thus has the right to freely express their own unique desires and drives. Those in possession of special liberty are exonerated from the need to acknowledge their harm toward others. Instead, individuals are able to operate under the auspices of a fantasy that elevates them to the status of the most transcendent free individuals in which their harm is negated due to their powers of wealth creation, and their ability to drive new cultural trends.

[5] Importantly, consumers, while being marketed to at increasingly young ages (see Schor 2004; Hayward 2013; Bakan 2011) are being inculcated into cultures of debt while still in their teenage years. Students attending university in England today can expect to take out sizeable loans to pay for tuition. This induction into debt peonage has far reaching implications. Put simply, immersion in a debt society negates any potential for dissent, rebellion, or resistance to the dominant social order. Rather, as some commentators have observed, debt obligations subjugate and depoliticize populations, binding the individual to the neoliberal socio-economic order, without removing the desire to acquire and display consumer symbolism (Lazzarato 2015).