

Lecture 9 Notes: Deviance & Crime

1 Public Perceptions and Fascination

- In late 2024, 57% of Canadians rated crime and safety as a top electoral issue, surpassing concerns about climate change (38%) in the same poll.
- True-crime media: Approximately 34% of active U.S. podcast listeners report regularly tuning into true-crime shows.
- Politically, “crime” can be used to stoke fear; e.g., in 2024 U.S. discourse, immigrants were framed as criminals to justify mass deportation rhetoric.
- Empirical data contradicts the “immigrants = higher crime” narrative: In Texas, immigrants (regardless of legal status) were arrested at less than half the violent/drug crime rate of U.S.-born individuals, and only one-quarter the property crime rate.

2 Social Control, Deviance, and Crime

Definition 1: Social Control

Actions intended to prevent, correct, punish, or cure behaviours or characteristics perceived as unacceptable. These include:

- **Sanctions:** Positive or negative; formal (laws, policies) or informal (social approval/disapproval).
- **Preventive control:** Measures aiming to stop deviance before it occurs.
- **Reactive control:** Punishments or corrections after deviant behaviour.

Definition 2: Deviance

Behaviours, people, or characteristics judged unacceptable because they violate social norms (folkways, mores). Deviance is socially constructed: an act is not inherently deviant but is defined as such by cultural context and normative expectations.

Definition 3: Crime

A subset of deviant acts that are codified as illegal. Crimes are formally proscribed by law, triggering institutionalized penalties (criminal justice system). Like deviance, the definition of crime changes over time and across societies:

- **Consensus crimes:** Acts widely agreed to be illegal (e.g., homicide).
- **Conflict crimes:** Acts criminalized due to political power struggles (e.g., possession of certain narcotics).

Example 1: Criminalization of Homosexuality

- **1892:** “Gross indecency” between men made illegal; extended to women in 1953.
- **1969:** Legal reform decriminalized some same-sex acts under strict conditions (over age 21, in private).
- **1987:** Full repeal of “gross indecency” provisions.
- **2019:** Age of consent equalized for all sexual orientations.

This illustrates how an act’s criminal status can shift with changing social norms and political pressures.

3 Crime Statistics and Policy Debates

- **Crime rates in Canada:** Peaked in the 1980s–1990s; slight uptick in the past decade (post-2010).
- **Crime Severity Index (CSI):** Weights reported offences by statutory sentence length to capture both volume and seriousness.
- **City-level variation:** Some metropolitan areas (e.g., Toronto) register CSI below the national average.
- **Police budgets vs. CSI:** From 2010–2020, most major Canadian cities increased policing budgets, but no consistent correlation emerges between higher funding and lower CSI.

Sample Question 1: Interpreting Crime Statistics

Using the Crime Severity Index and policing budget data, explain why increasing police funding does not necessarily yield reduced crime severity. What other factors might mediate this relationship?

4 Protection, Rehabilitation, and Deterrence

Definition 4: Recidivism

The tendency of individuals to reoffend or return to contact with the criminal justice system after release. For example, in Ontario:

- 62% of individuals reoffend after correctional involvement.
- 43% recidivism for those whose first contact involved police only; 37% for cases resolved in court.

Definition 5: Deterrence Theory

A theory positing that individuals commit crime when benefits outweigh costs. For deterrence to work:

- **Specific deterrence:** Punishment discourages the same offender from reoffending.
- **General deterrence:** Observers avoid crimes after seeing punishments meted out to others.
- **Effective punishment:** Must be *certain, swift, and severe*.

- **Protection vs. Rehabilitation:**

- Protection aims to incapacitate offenders (e.g., incarceration).
 - Rehabilitation focuses on treatment, education, or skill-building to reduce reoffending.

- **Policy question:** Does investing more in policing and punitive measures reduce crime? Evidence suggests that without addressing underlying social factors, punitive approaches alone cannot lower recidivism.

5 Functionalist Perspectives

Definition 6: Anomie (Durkheim)

A state of normlessness or weak social regulation, arising when cultural goals and institutionalized means become disconnected. Excessive anomie correlates with higher rates of deviance and crime.

Definition 7: Strain Theory (Merton)

Society defines cultural goals (e.g., economic success) and legitimate means to achieve them (e.g., education, stable employment). When access to legitimate means is unequal, individuals experience “strain” and adapt in five modes:

- (a) **Conformity:** Accept both goals and means; pursue success through approved channels.
- (b) **Ritualism:** Abandon goals but rigidly follow means (e.g., working a low-wage job despite knowing homeownership is unattainable).
- (c) **Innovation:** Accept goals but use illegitimate means (e.g., mortgage fraud to achieve homeownership).
- (d) **Retreatism:** Reject both goals and means (e.g., chronic homelessness or long-term dependency).
- (e) **Rebellion:** Reject existing goals and means, substituting alternative values (e.g., forming encampment communities that reject traditional housing norms).

Example 2: Housing as Strain

- **Context:** Average rent for a two-bedroom in Toronto rose from \$1,264 (2015) to \$1,992 (2024). To afford 30% of income on rent, one needs \$40.03/hr.
- **Conformity:** First-time buyers leaning on family, with 31% receiving \$115,000 (2024) as intergenerational support.
- **Ritualism:** Working steady low-wage jobs indefinitely, despite knowing homeownership is out of reach.
- **Innovation:** Mortgage fraud—misrepresenting income to qualify for a loan.
- **Retreatism & Rebellion:** Increasing numbers remain in parental homes well into adulthood (retreat). Some choose encampment living, rejecting conventional housing (rebellion).

Example 3: Policing Homelessness

Municipalities often employ punitive measures (e.g., fines, sweeps) against encampment residents. However, evidence shows these tactics do not resolve underlying housing insecurity. Effective solutions require altering either institutionalized goals (e.g., redefining acceptable living conditions) or legitimate means (e.g., affordable housing programs).

6 Interactionist Perspectives

Definition 8: Differential Association Theory

Developed by Edwin Sutherland: Criminal and deviant behavior is learned through interaction with others who already practice such behaviour. Key points:

- Learning occurs via definitions favorable/unfavorable to law violation.
- Frequency, duration, and intensity of associations shape one's likelihood to engage in crime.

Definition 9: Primary Deviance

The initial, often minor, violation of norms that does not alter the individual's self-image or how others label them. Most people commit primary deviance at some point (e.g., underage drinking).

Definition 10: Secondary Deviance

Occurs when a person's self-concept and behaviour change because society labels them as "deviant." This label can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy and more serious deviance.

Definition 11: Labeling Theory

Suggests that labeling someone as deviant can trigger a process wherein the individual internalizes that label, affecting identity and leading to further deviance (secondary deviance). Society's reaction thus plays a central role in creating "deviants."

Sample Question 2: Labeling and Self-Concept

Choose a real-world scenario (e.g., a teenager caught shoplifting). Explain how primary deviance, societal labeling, and secondary deviance could unfold according to Labeling Theory.

7 Critical Perspectives

- **Structural Inequality:** Economic and social factors (poverty, racial segregation, lack of education) shape crime rates and deviant behavior.
- **Power and Law:** Those in power create and enforce laws to maintain their interests.
 - *Crimes of accommodation:* Offenses by marginalized individuals coping with inequality (e.g., petty theft to pay rent).
 - *Crimes of domination:* White-collar and corporate crimes committed by elites (e.g., insider trading, environmental violations) that harm public welfare.

Definition 12: White-Collar Crime

Nonviolent, financially motivated crimes committed by business or government professionals. Examples include fraud, embezzlement, and insider trading. Often underprosecuted compared to street crimes, despite substantial social harm.

8 Feminist Theory and Intersectionality

Definition 13: Feminist Criminology

Examines how gender shapes definitions of deviance, experiences of being labeled deviant, and exposure to social control. Highlights:

- **Differential standards:** Women and men face different expectations (e.g., male child-care workers viewed as deviant; female oil-rig workers labeled “unfeminine”).
- **Doubly deviant:** Women who commit crimes may be judged both for the act and for violating gender norms (e.g., a woman involved in violent crime).
- **Secondary victimization:** Female sexual assault survivors may face additional stigma and disbelief from institutions.

Definition 14: Intersectionality (revisited)

An analytical framework recognizing how various identities (race, gender, class, sexuality) intersect to shape unique experiences of deviance, victimization, and criminal justice outcomes.

Example 4: True-Crime Consumption and Race

Research shows white women are more likely to consume true-crime media compared to Indigenous women—despite the disproportionate rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women. This reflects how social constructions of “vulnerability” and “deservingness” operate along lines of race and gender.