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| 12. Learning table on crime, deviance & locality |
| **Key assumptions –**1. **Official crime statistics** show that crime is concentrated in inner city areas and low income housing estates.2. The **BCS** shows that those who live in inner city areas, council housing estates, areas of high physical disorder, and rented accommodation are more likely to be victims of a range of crimes than comparable groups and also fear crime more. |
| **Interactionist theory** | **Evaluation - ☺ ☹ (eet)** | **Environmental theories** | **Evaluation - ☺ ☹ (eet)** | **Left realism** | **Evaluation - ☺ ☹ (eet)** | **Synoptic links** |
| Response to OCSInteractionists **reject** official crime statistics. They believe that the statistics are socially constructed and therefore do not present an accurate picture of the geographical distribution of criminality. The extent of ethnic minority crime and deviance is socially constructedInteractionists abandon attempts to offer causal explanations of the geographical distribution of crime and deviance. Instead they examine the social processes that lead certain areas to be over-represented in official crime statistics. Contemporary interactionists share **Becker’s** (1963) idea that the social distribution of crime and deviance is dependent on processes of social interaction between the deviant and powerful agencies of social control. Interactionists today suggest that certain areas are more likely to be policed and labelled crime ‘hot spots’ than other areas. Interactionists go on to argue that labelling can serve to amplify deviance in certain areas as residents can gain a ‘master status’, which can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. | Strength1. Interactionist theories have gained empirical support. **Gill** (1977) accounts for the high concentration of crime in a Liverpool housing estate (Luke street) in terms of labelling and selective law enforcement. He found the police had a negative image of the area and as a consequence made arrests for minor acts of deviance. He believed that crime and deviance was amplified because the police presence provoked deviancy, and local residents found employment opportunities blocked because of the reputation of the area. This suggests there is some validity in the interactionist ideas.Weaknesses1. Interactionist theories have been questioned on empirical grounds. **Steven’s and Willis** (1979) question the potential biasing effect of the police on crime statistics. This is because they point out that the police initiate only 8% of recorded crimes. This suggests that the validity of interactionist ideas have to be questioned. 2. Interactionist theories have been criticised on atheoretical level. The **New Criminology** argues that the theory has a weak view of power and social control. For example, the theory fails to explain **why** the extent of urban crime and deviance is socially constructed. They also argue that interactionists fail to consider the wider structural origins of urban crime and deviance. This suggests that labelling theory only offers a partial view on crime and deviance.  | **Response to OCS**Environmental theories accept the official crime statistics and therefore believe that crime is concentrated in inner city areas and poor housing estates.The causes of urban crime and devianceEnvironmental theories attempt to explain urban crime in causal terms. 1. **The Chicago school**Shaw and McKay (1942) found in Chicago that the zone of transition (characterised by the poorest housing) consistently had higher levels of crime than other areas. They believed that this was because this area had high population turnover and therefore gave way to social disorganisation. This resulted in weakened informal social control and hence more crime and deviance.2. Differential association theory Sutherland (1942) maintains that crime tends to be highest in urban areas because criminality and deviancy is less likely to be condemned. He also claims that individuals associate with others who have favourable attitudes about crime and are therefore influenced by them. 3. **Tipping theory**Bottoms (1989) suggests that the extent and type of crime is linked to housing areas. He claims that less desirable areas gain bad reputations and get ‘tipped’ which has negative consequences such as:* Attracts ‘problem’ families
* Physical and social disorder
* Little Informal social control
* Loss of community
* ‘Respectable’ people move out
* Criminal subcultures emerge
 | Strength1. Environmental theories have gained empirical support. **Sampson and Groves** (1989) support the claim that crime rates are highest where informal social control is weak. This suggests there is some validity in the environmental theories ideas.Weaknesses1. Environmental theories have been questioned on empiricalgrounds. Recent **Home Office** research questions Chicago school ideas that crime is concentrated in zones. Home Office data suggest that geographical patterns of crime are much more complex. Indeed they point to recent upsurges in rural crime. This suggests that the validity of environmental ideas have to be questioned.1. Environmental theories have been criticised on atheoreticallevel. **Postmodernists** criticise environmental theories for focusing too much on the environment, thereby neglecting wider structural causes. Postmodernists link crime in inner city areas to a growing underclass that have become ‘ghettoised’ in certain areas. This suggests that environmental theories only offer a partial view on crime and deviance. | Response to official crime statisticsLeft realists largely accept the official crime statistics and therefore try to explain in causal terms the geographical patterns they show. They recognise that the statistics have problems (e.g. in terms of police practices) but that this should not lead to their rejection. They suggest that sociologists should supplement official crime statistics with local victim surveys as they reveal patterns of victimisation and fear of crime (which they believe is highest amongst those living in inner city areas).The causes of urban crime and devianceLeft realists such as **Young** (1997) attempt to explain the real problem of urban crime (but also rural too) in terms of three related causal factors.Marginalisation Young suggest that fundamental changes have occurred in the social structure since the 1980s and as a consequence a growing number of inner city (and some rural) youths are finding themselves marginalised or socially excluded. For left realists this marginalisation is an underlying pressure for crime and deviance, but not in itself a direct cause.Relative deprivationYoung argues that crime is most likely to follow when individuals or groups feel relatively deprived. They maintain that some inner city youths (and some rural) often feel worse off than comparable groups and that these feelings of social injustice sometimes result in crime and deviance. SubculturesLeft realists claim that criminal and deviant subcultures emerge in some inner city communities (and other areas too) as response to marginalisation and relative deprivation. Criminal and deviant subcultures allow groups of individuals to feel socially included and serve to facilitate crime and deviance by making such behaviour seem acceptable.  | Strength1. Left realist theories have gained empirical support. **Jones *et al.’s*** (1986) local Islington crime survey shows that crime is real problem for many inner city residents. They found that levels of victimisation and fear of crime were high, especially amongst women and ethnic minority groups living in such areas. They attribute this too locality and racism. This suggests there is some validity in the left realist ideas.Weaknesses1. Left realist theories have been questioned on empiricalgrounds. **Hughes** (1991) suggests that left realists have little empirical research to back up their causal explanations of inner city offending. This is because they have largely relied on victim surveys and therefore have little information on what motivates criminals to offend. This suggests that the validity of left realist ideas have to be questioned.2. Left realist theories have been criticised on atheoreticallevel. **Right realists** reject the focus on social and economic causes of inner city crime and concentrate instead on inadequate social control. For example, the decline in the moral fabric of society. This suggests that left realist theories only offer a partial view on crime and deviance.  | Research methods/methodologyInteractionists reject ocs. Would therefore stress the limitations of OCS.Environmental theories accept ocs. Would therefore stress the advantages of OCS.Left realists largely accept ocs. Would therefore stress the advantages of OCS.Theories/perspectivesInteractionism, environmental theories, and left realism.Other topicsLinks can be made to **power and politics**. **Interactionists** – selective labelling by powerful agents of social control against powerless groups such as those that live in urban areas. Leads to more crime amongst powerless groups – sfp etc. **Environmental theories** Explain crimes committed by powerless groups such as those that live in urban areas – in terms of: social disorganisation, differential association, and tipping.**Left realism**Explain crime committed by powerless groups such as those who live in urban areas in terms of: marginalisation, relative deprivation and subcultures.Research methods/methodologyInteractionists reject ocs.Environmental theories accept ocs.Left realists largelly accept ocs. |
| In conclusion left realism offers a strong theory. This is because it recognises that official statistics on locality and crime have problems, but they do not just dismiss them. Left realism can and has been used to account for recent growths in rural crime. Furthermore the theory does not just consider offenders but also victims and formal and informal social control. However all sociological theories will soon need to look more closely at rural crime and deviance. Recent media sources suggest that crime and deviancy is growing in some rural communities, and locate the causes in terms of unemployment, feelings of relative deprivation, boredom, lack of leisure facilities. |