Objectives and organization

This first half of the Core Course (taught in Michaelmas Term) seeks to develop understanding of the organizing categories and central claims of a range of modern criminological perspectives of crime and social control. It equips students to recognize the main problems, questions, dichotomies and ideas that have shaped modern criminological thought, and to understand the nature of ‘theory’ and ‘explanation’ within criminology. Throughout attention is paid to the contexts that shape the emergence and reception of modern criminological theory and to the modes of social intervention that different criminological perspectives expressly or implicitly propose.

Upon satisfactory completion of the course, students should be able to:

i) recognize the main problems, questions, dichotomies and ideas that have shaped modern criminological thinking;

ii) assess the organizing concepts and substantive claims of competing theoretical perspectives within criminology;

iii) grasp the nature of ‘understanding’ and ‘explanation’ within criminology;

iv) appreciate the social, cultural and political contexts that condition the emergence, development and effects of different perspectives within criminology;

v) Understand the modes of social intervention that different criminological perspectives expressly or implicitly propose.
The course is comprised of the following components:

- Two introductory lectures delivered in Week -1 of Michaelmas Term.

- In Weeks 1-6 and 8 of Michaelmas Term seven 90-minute seminars that take place on Mondays from either 10:00 – 11:30 or 12:00 – 1:30 in Seminar Room E in the Manor Road Building. Each seminar is devoted to discussing a significant theoretical perspective in criminology, the discussion being organized around a set of questions that helps draw out the key ideas/concepts of the theories under review.

- A revision tutorial in Week 7.

**Reading and preparation**

Students are expected to come to classes having read and digested the reading for each seminar marked ‘essential’. They should be prepared to participate in discussion of the seminar questions, and any other issues that may have arisen from their reading, with the course tutor and other members of the class. Students may also be expected to prepare specific contributions to the class at various points throughout the course.

Students will get most out of this course by reading original accounts of the theories that are being discussed, rather than textbook summaries of them, and the reading lists will, as far as possible, be organised to reflect this. The essential readings will thus usually take the form of extracts from key criminological texts, or original articles from leading criminology journals. The majority of these will be reproduced in a Reading Pack which can be purchased from the Graduate Studies Administrator. The rest are journal articles which are available electronically.

Students are also advised to keep abreast of the main criminology journals that can be found in either the Social Science Library or the Bodleian Law Library (they can also be accessed electronically on SOLO). The most useful are British Journal of Criminology, Theoretical Criminology, Criminology & Criminal Justice, Punishment & Society, European Journal of Criminology, Global Crime, Crime, Media, Culture, Criminology, and Crime and Delinquency.

The general overviews will offer students introductory summaries of the key perspectives under discussion. There is, in this regard, a criminological theory reader which contains extracts from the work of many theorists we shall be considering on the course, as well as a recent handbook of the field. Students may therefore find it useful to have access to them:


There are also a number of available criminology textbooks that students new to criminological theory might find of some value. The best of an expanding bunch include:


The further/contextual readings will generally take the form of commentaries on the theoretical perspectives under discussion and their wider intellectual and social contexts. In this vein the supplementary texts students will find most in keeping with the spirit of the course are:


For students new to criminology, the Melossi text offers the best single introduction to the history of criminological theorizing in Europe and the US and the intellectual and social contexts out of which different ways of thinking about crime have emerged.

**Assessment**

The course is assessed in the following ways. Students may select to write the compulsory formative 1,500-word essay from the core course.

There is an unseen two-hour, two-question examination for this course taken in Week 0 of Hilary term at the Examination Schools. This is provisionally scheduled for Friday 13th January 2017 (time and date to be confirmed).

(A second two-hour unseen written examination covering the topics taught by Professor Julian Roberts in Hilary Term will take place in Week 0 of Trinity Term 2017.)
Teaching schedule

Week -1

*Monday 26\textsuperscript{th} September* 14.00-15.30 - Seminar Room G

Introductory lecture I: The field of criminology

*Wednesday 28\textsuperscript{th} September* 10.00 – 11.30 – Seminar Room G

Introductory lecture II: Key dichotomies in criminological theory

Week 1

Seminar 1: Criminal Environments

*Monday 10\textsuperscript{th} October* 10:00 – 11:30 in Seminar Room E, or 12:00 – 1:30 in Seminar Room E

Week 2

Seminar 2: The Making and Unmaking of Criminal Persons

*Monday 17\textsuperscript{th} October* 10:00 – 11:30 in Seminar Room E, or 12:00 – 1:30 in Seminar Room E

Week 3

Seminar 3: Crime Events and Situations

*Monday 24\textsuperscript{th} October* 10:00 – 11:30 in Seminar Room E, or 12:00 – 1:30 in Seminar Room E

Week 4

Seminar 4: Economy, Inequality and Opportunity

*Monday 31\textsuperscript{st} November* 10:00 – 11:30 in Seminar Room E, or 12:00 – 1:30 in Seminar Room E
**Week 5**

Seminar 5: Cultures of Transgression

*Monday 7th November*  
10:00 – 11:30 in Seminar Room E, or  
12:00 – 1:30 in Seminar Room E

**Week 6**

Seminar 6: Social Reactions to Crime

*Monday 14th November*  
10:00 – 11:30 in Seminar Room E, or  
12:00 – 1:30 in Seminar Room E

**Week 7**

Revision tutorials – preparing for the examination in January.  
Time and venue TBC.

** Please also use weeks 6-7 to read for the seminar in Week 8 **

**Week 8**

Seminar 7: Intersectionality and Criminological Theory in a Global Age

*Monday 28th November*  
10:00 – 11:30 in Seminar Room E, or  
12:00 – 1:30 in Seminar Room E
Reading lists and seminar questions

This opening lecture is concerned with the following questions: what is criminology is for? What do criminologists do? To help us begin to think about these questions you should examine two or three recent editions of one or more of the following journals (by at least reading the abstracts):

The European Journal of Criminology – [http://euc.sagepub.com/](http://euc.sagepub.com/)
Theoretical Criminology - [http://tcr.sagepub.com/](http://tcr.sagepub.com/)
Criminology & Criminal Justice - [http://crj.sagepub.com/](http://crj.sagepub.com/)

What do they tell us about the issues, problems and dilemmas that are tackled by criminologists today? What does it mean to think about these issues and problems ‘criminologically’? Do criminologists treat their subject matter differently from other scholars or social commentators on crime? How does criminology differ from other sources of knowledge and opinion about crime and punishment? How would you describe the purposes and parameters of the subject?

These questions will form the basis of the lecture and discussion in this session. In thinking about them you may also find the following useful:

Sutherland, E. and D. Cressey (1955) *Principles of Criminology (5th edn).* Chicago: Lippincott (ch. 1)


Introductory lecture II: Key dichotomies in criminological theory

In this session, we use the example of the riots of Summer 2011 in England as a ‘way into’ some key issues and dilemmas that confront criminologists as they attempt to understand and explain crime, criminal justice, punishment and social control. The lecture and discussion will focus on those dilemmas. In so doing, we consider the ways in which it is possible to understand ‘theory’ in criminology, and the issues that are inescapably at stake when we think about crime and its control.

Please read consult the materials on this web page produced by The Guardian and LSE on the 2011 Summer Riots in England: http://www.theguardian.com/uk/series/reading-the-riots

Among the questions to think about are these:

1. Is it useful to try to understand the historical context of these riots?
2. How can one best explain the outbreak and spread of disorder?
3. Are some criminological theories better equipped than other to offer such an explanation?
4. How do we determine the ‘best’ explanation? What will be the practical implications of that explanation?
5. Do we need to construct local (jurisdiction specific) explanations are can we develop a single explanatory account of public disorder?
6. What are the implications of different theoretical accounts for both the maintenance of public order and for crime control?
7. What are strengths and weaknesses of the research conducted by The Guardian and the LSE? See the full report here:

   http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46297/1/Reading%20the%20riots(published).pdf

8. What further research might be done to expand our understanding of the riots?

You may also find the following useful as introductory reading:


Seminar 1: Criminal Environments

Our concern this week is with those criminologists and sociologists – from the Chicago School onwards – who have focused on the spatial dimensions of crime and social control. These ‘environmental’ criminologists argue that something essential is lost from the analysis of crime unless regard is paid to its spatial dimensions, and to concepts of place, neighbourhood and community. The explanatory and interpretive concern here has been twofold. The first has been to document and explain the spatial distribution of offenders and offences between locations. This raises two questions for us to think about:

1. Why should criminologists concern themselves with the social structure and life of cities?

2. Is crime and disorder located in particular urban locations? If so, why and with what consequences?

The second has been to understand what distinguishes high crime from low crime neighbourhoods and to identify ‘neighbourhood effects’ on patterns of offending. Much of this work has focused on the concepts of ‘social disorganization’ and – latterly – ‘collective efficacy’ and ‘social capital’. The question this raises is:

3. Can ‘high crime areas’ plausibly be claimed to be ‘socially disorganized’ or to exhibit low levels of ‘collective efficacy’?

Finally, in this session we need to think about two challenges that have been addressed to spatial theories of crime. One line of criticism is made by criminologists who begin from either structural or individualist positions. A second asks about the implications for environmental criminology of processes of globalization. The questions that result are:

4. Can environmental criminologies defend themselves against the charges levelled by theorists who place explanatory emphasis on social structure on the one hand, or the individual on the other?

5. How, if at all, can one practise the criminology of place in a world of global networks and flows?

READING

Essential reading


Journal of Criminology, 54: 503-526

Shaw, C. and McKay (1942) *Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas* (pp. 164-70, 435-41). Chicago: CUP.


General overviews


Further/contextual reading


British Journal of Sociology (2009) 60/1, Commentaries on Sampson by Gilroy, Bottoms, Sennett, Wikstrom, Body-Gendrot, Wiles and reply to critics by Sampson.
Seminar 2: The Making and Unmaking of Criminal Persons

Our focus this week is on those criminological theories that address the question of why some individuals become offenders (while others do not) or persist in offending (while others desist). One such theory comes at these questions by asking why individuals conform. This is a position known as ‘control theory’ and has been most closely associated with Travis Hirschi. Hirschi has at different times formulated different versions of control theory, one focused on the ‘social bonds’ that conduce individuals to be law-abiding, the second (in a book co-authored with Gottfredson) on the significance of ‘self-control’ and its absence for crime and anti-social behaviour. A second body of work – often called ‘developmental’ or ‘life course’ criminology - is interested in locating the ‘risk factors’ associated with the onset and duration of criminal careers (and with the kinds of intervention that can ‘protect’ individuals from crime). Two questions arise from consideration of these perspectives:

1. Is conformity a product of either ‘social bonds’ or a developed capacity for ‘self-control’? What do you understand by these terms? Are the two ideas reconcilable?

2. What ‘risk factors’ are most closely associated with criminal behaviour? How useful is it to think about crime in this way?

This work has generated much debate and has great practical import. Some writers, such as Sampson and Laub, argue that more attention needs to be paid to change across the life course, and to the significance of ‘turning points’ in people’s lives. Others have seen in these perspectives the resources for explaining one of the central facts of criminology – that criminal offending is mainly an activity of males. In the light of this we need to ask:

3. Can control theory and developmental criminology adequately account for the onset, duration and termination of criminal careers, and for differential rates of offending between men and women?

These theories also prompt us to consider two underlying controversies that run like a thread through the history of criminological thought – namely, the relationship between (anti-social) beliefs and (criminal) behaviour and the question of whether such beliefs and behaviour are confined to a crime-prone sub-set of the population. Here the work of David Matza remains an important and challenging counter to the assumptions of control and developmental perspectives. We might also consider the image of crime and representation of offenders that is to be found within these theories, and ask:

4. Is offending the activity of a minority of individuals who are deficient in the things that the law-abiding majority possess?
READING

Essential reading


General overviews


Further/contextual reading


Seminar 3: Crime Events and Situations

Our concern this week is with two close theoretical cousins – rational choice and routine activities theory. Both these perspectives start from a critique of structural or ‘dispositional’ theories of crime (with their search for ‘root causes’) in favour of an approach which focuses on the decision-making of individual offenders and the situations in which offending takes place. The watchword of each is: ‘opportunity is the root cause of crime’. Rational choice theory imports into criminology an economic view of human behaviour and challenges us to think about offending and crime control as if individuals weighed up the cost and benefits of offending and acted accordingly. The questions this poses for discussion are:

1. What reasons are there to think that crime is the result of rational choice? What does it mean to say this and what are its practical implications?

Routine activities theory views crime as the product of the coming together in crime and space of a motivated offender, a suitable target and the absence of a capable guardian (what Felson calls ‘the chemistry of crime’). This can be understood as a micro account of how criminal events occur in particular situations (and how controls can be put in place to prevent them). But there is also in Felson’s work a macro story about the rise of crime in western societies in the second half of the twentieth century. Our discussion therefore needs to address Felson’s work at both micro and macro levels – giving rise to the following questions:

2. How convincing is Felson’s claim that ‘opportunity is the root cause of crime’?

3. Are the social routines of contemporary western societies crime-producing? If so, what are the consequences of this for crime reduction?

At first blush, rational choice and routine activities theory appear to re-introduce the individual offender and his or her choices into criminological theorizing. But they introduce a formal model of offender decision-making and in fact display relatively little interest in investigating offender motivations. In fact, these perspectives shift the focus of criminological enquiry away from offenders and why they offend towards a focus on criminal events, how they happen and what practical steps can be taken to prevent them. Here we need to ask:

4. What are the implications of this shift of focus? What is the value, and what are the limits, of a science of criminal events?
Essential reading


General overviews


Further/contextual reading


Seminar 4: Economy, Inequality and Opportunity

This seminar focuses on a different sense of ‘opportunity’ – economic opportunity – and returns us to macro/structural explanations of offending. We concentrate here on those criminological perspectives that are interested in the relationship between crime and economic conditions. Some of this work is Marxist in theoretical orientation (notably that of the early 20th century Dutch criminologist Willem Bonger). But much of it today draws inspiration from Robert Merton’s re-working of the Durkheimian notion of ‘anomie’ and his account of the discrepancy between socially-induced expectations and the distribution of legitimate opportunities to meet them. So, to begin with, two questions arise:

1. Is there a relationship between crime and economic conditions? If so, how is that relationship to be understood?

2. What resources does Merton’s ‘anomie’ theory offer for understanding the relationship between crime and social stratification in contemporary societies?

Recent work from this perspective has taken a number of related forms. Some recent authors have used Merton’s work to develop ‘institutional anomie’ theory – this theoretical account, it is claimed, can explain crimes among the powerful as well as the powerless. Others have addressed what they see as the crime-producing implications of the emergence since the 1970s of market societies. Others have focused on relative deprivation – the experience of inequality rather than absolute deprivation – as a key explanatory factor. Common to all these perspectives is the importance of culture – the question of how inequality/blocked opportunity are experienced and interpreted – as a mediating factor between social structure and individual action. This gives rise to the following questions for us to consider:

3. How convincing is the claim made by Currie, Messner, Rosenfeld and others that market societies are ‘criminogenic’?

4. What is ‘relative deprivation’ and what are its connections to crime and crime control?

Finally, in this session, we need to address the criticisms that have been levelled at ‘crime and inequality’ perspectives by those working in other traditions – whether they be Hirschi, or Felson or conservative writers such a James Q. Wilson. In other words:

5. Can the political economy of crime explain what Wilson once called the paradox of ‘crime amidst plenty’ – the mix of rising living standards and rising crime levels that characterized most western societies from the 1950s to the 1990s?
READING

Essential reading


General overviews


Further/contextual reading


Hall, S., S. Winlow and C. Ancrum Hall, S. *Criminal Identities and Consumer Culture*. Cullompton: Willan (esp. ch. 3).
Seminar 5: Cultures of Transgression

Our concern this week is with those criminological perspectives that do make individual motivation central to criminological theory and research, and focus on the ‘cultures’ (whatever that might turn out to mean) that give rise to criminal transgression. These perspectives have roots in the sociology of deviance of the 1960s with its humanistic concern – in David Matza’s terms - to appreciate (rather than correct) deviant behaviour. It is worth pausing for a moment to reflect on this starting point, and asking:

1. Should criminology seek to understand or ‘appreciate’, rather than ‘correct’, criminal behaviour? Are these objectives reconcilable?

This starting point has given rise to perspectives and ethnographic research on offenders and their motivations, and more generally to a re-discovery of the role of emotions in crime and public responses to it. Criminology, so the argument runs, needs to account for the ‘seductions of crime’, the thrill of transgression, and for the range of moral emotions that give rise to offending or emerge in its wake. This prompts the following questions:

2. What are the strengths and limitations of the ‘return to motivation’ in criminological theory?

3. What place should human emotions be accorded in the understanding and explanation of offending?

4. Does good criminological theory require ‘Merton with Energy, Katz with Structure’, as Jock Young puts it?

In recent years, these concerns have been re-articulated by a number of authors seeking to develop a ‘cultural criminology’. In thinking about what is new or valuable in this perspective, it is worth asking the following overarching question:

5. What role can and should the concept of culture place in the social analysis of crime?

READING

Essential reading


G. Hughes (eds.) *Criminological Perspectives: Essential Readings*. London: Sage. or,


General overviews


Further/contextual reading


Seminar 6: Social Reactions to Crime

Our attention shifts in this seminar away from theories claiming to explain crime and its causes to those which focus on social reaction to crime, and the ways in which ‘crime’ (now in scare quotes) is defined and caught up in social processes of meaning creation, labelling and boundary maintenance. The focus, in other words, is not on the behaviour of offenders but on understanding those who define some acts as crime and respond accordingly – whether victims, witnesses, the media, the ‘public’ or, crucially, the state.

The starting point for all these theories is that basic but crucial question: what is crime? For many writers considered this week crime is not a self-evident set of facts – it has no ‘ontological reality’, as Hulsman puts it. Rather, crime is socially constructed through the application of meaningful categories. So our first question needs to be:

1. What does it mean to say that crime is ‘socially constructed’ and what are the practical implications of saying so?

From this perspective the analytical and research focus is on processes of social reaction – with the question of why and with what consequences certain events are publicly ‘named’ as crime and responded to as such. Various theoretical resources and ideas have been deployed in this regard to explain both the criminalization of (some) individuals and groups, and the way in which crime is used to ‘frame’ public problems and mobilize attention and resources. Two concepts have remained significant within this body of work – ‘labelling’ and ‘moral panics’, which leads us to ask:

2. How useful are notions of ‘labelling’ and ‘moral panic’ in the analysis of public reactions to crime and disorder?

The central insight of much of this work is that social reactions to crime cannot be explained solely by the acts to which they are, ostensibly, a response. The source of those reactions lies elsewhere. For those working in a neo-Durkheimian tradition reactions to crime are part of a process of social perception and boundary maintenance through which ‘we’ define ourselves by drawing lines of affiliation and opposition between us and various categories of ‘them’. Those working in a neo-Marxist frame focus rather more on how crime functions ideologically to buttress the interests of powerful social groups – especially during moments of economic and social crisis. In either case, it is claimed that studying social reactions to crime tells us a great deal about values, divisions and organization of particular societies. Here the following questions arise for consideration and discussion:

3. How convincing do you find the claim that crime and punishment function as categories through which communities re-affirm their external boundaries and internal divisions?

4. What are the practical implications of thinking sceptically and sociologically about state/public responses to crime?
READING

Essential reading


General overviews


Further/contextual reading

Seminar 7 (Week 8): Intersectionality and Criminological Theory in a Global Age

In our final seminar we return to two key themes of the course which have huge implications for how we understand criminological theory and the ways in which we evaluate the explanatory power of criminological theories in the contemporary world. First, we examine in greater depth the notion of intersecting identities, and a growing body of work which emphasises the importance of integrating intersectionality into criminological theory.

We will consider the historical development of feminist perspectives in criminology and the feminist critique of criminological theory; the development of perspectives that focused on both masculinities and femininities in seeking to explain crime and responses to it; and more recent developments which have sought to integrate an understanding of intersecting identities of race and ethnicity, gender, social class, sexualities, and global location.

1. What does it mean to integrate intersecting identities into criminological theories? Why is this important? Is it possible to have ‘universal’ criminological theories that don’t make these distinctions?

2. What does the critique of identity-blindness and power-blindness from intersectional perspectives mean for the criminological theories we have considered during this course. Can these theories still have relevance in the contemporary world?

Next, we focus upon the global nature of the contemporary world and its implications for criminological theory. We will consider the neglect of global issues within criminology and criminological theory; the dominance and privileging of the global North in the production of criminological knowledge; and the need for a criminology of globalization, attending to questions of global justice and security.

3. In an age of increasing global interconnectedness, can criminological theories that ignore or neglect these patterns continue to have explanatory power?

To conclude the course, we will return to the question posed throughout the course:

4. What makes a good criminological theory? How well equipped is contemporary criminological theory to explain crime and its control in the contemporary world?
READING

A) Intersectionality


Further reading


B) Criminological theory in a global age


Aas, K.F. “The Earth is One but the World is Not”: Criminological Theory and Geopolitical Divisions’, *Theoretical Criminology*. 16(1): 5-20


Further reading


Modern criminologists, therefore, seem to be seriously concerned with the problem of crime to protect the society from such anti-social activities of criminals. It is for this reason that the two sister branches of criminal science, namely, criminology and penology work hand in hand to appreciate the problem of criminality in its proper perspective. Objectives: The purpose of this unit is to make the students understand the concepts of crime and schools of thought about explanation of criminal behaviour. The unit defines criminology and other important terms necessary to appreciate the subject.