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[Psychology](#), [Behaviorism](#)



Reading Analysis

Kimmel and Arson describe how crime is an act of deviance that is enforced by a legal body, meaning it is government regulation for what constitutes as good or bad. However, what is considered deviant is different from person to person. The powerful and rich often escape a deviant label, and are able to evade the punishment that those who are less privileged would receive.

Kimmel and Arson provide four theories that explain how crime occurs and why: Robert K. Merton's "Strain Theory," Philip Zimbardo's "Broken Windows Theory," Richard Quinney's "Conflict Theory," and Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin's "Opportunity Theory."

In *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison*, Jeffrey Reiman writes that the American Justice system favors the rich and powerful. He argues that the poor are most likely to get arrested, charged, and convicted of crimes, then sentenced to harsher punishments than upper class people. Reiman also talks about how African Americans have harsher experiences in the criminal justice system than white Americans. While black Americans do not make up the majority of incarcerated people, their proportion in prison is far greater than their respective proportion of the population. Reiman cites unequal distribution of wealth favoring white people and bias towards people of color as at fault for this.

Cloward and Ohlin's Opportunity Theory accurately describes how crime works in our society. This theory states that the more opportunities one sees to commit crime, the more that they will do so. They argue that people must

learn deviance, in stable neighborhoods where people don't move in and out but family's stay for generations, criminal subcultures develop. An example of this Cloward and Ohlin gives is " in stable neighborhoods where most people know each other throughout their lives...young men can rely on social contacts with experienced older men to learn the roles of being a criminal." The opportunity to become a criminal is much more present for someone in this upbringing than someone who was not associated with other criminals.

One other theory that explains crime but is not as valid as the Opportunity Theory is Strain theory, by Robert K. Merton. This theory claims that society promotes goals but does not have equal means for everyone to attain them, causing inequality and strain. This conflict between accepted norms and social reality provokes people to use deviance to attain these goals. Merton argues that people who cannot attain these goals like wealth and success, they either become conformists, innovators, ritualizes, rebels, or retreatments. Kimmel and Arson cite Merton's explanation of innovators: " innovators accept the values but reject the means...They seek out new means to financial success. They may try to win the lottery, or they may become con artists or thieves." Clearly, Merton sees that people who commit crimes are cheating the system, and doing so out of necessity. However, a theory is that fails to explain white-collar crimes, and only applies to lower classes. If this theory were true, the only people committing crimes would be doing so simply to gain money and success. It fails to explain people who murder or even commit petty crime, like speeding or littering.