

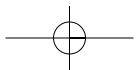
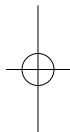
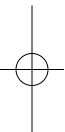
1

Youth Crime

Representations, Discourses and Data

Overview

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Overview

Chapter 1 examines:

- the concepts of 'crime', 'youth', 'criminalization' and 'social construction';
- how young people have come to be regarded as a threat;
- how the 'problem of youth' is frequently collapsed into the problem of crime and disorder;
- how young people are represented in media and political discourses;
- the reliability of statistical measures of youth offending;
- the gendered nature of offending;
- the relationship between gangs and violent crime;
- the relationship between drug use and criminality.

key terms

corporate crime; crime; criminalization; delinquency; demonization; deviance; discourse; folk devil; gang; hidden crime; moral panic; official statistics; protective factors; recording of crime; reporting of crime; representation; risk factors; self report studies; social constructionism; status offence; youth

This introductory chapter is designed to promote a critical understanding of the relationship between youth and crime. The equation of these two terms is widely employed and for many is accepted as common sense. Stories about youth and crime are a mainstay of most forms of media. Official crime statistics are readily and uncritically recited to substantiate a view that youth crime and disorder are now 'out of control'. But how far do the media reflect social reality and how much are they able to define it? How valid and reliable is statistical evidence? By asking these questions, the chapter draws attention to how the state of youth and the problem of crime come to be defined in particular circumscribed ways. Its critical starting-point is to view 'crime' and 'youth' as social constructions. Populist assumptions and dominant political **discourses** tend to treat social problems as phenomena about whose existence and seriousness we can all agree. The basis of **social constructionism** is that we should ask instead, who says this is a social problem? – and why do they say so? This approach affords a central role to the processes through which the meaning of social phenomena is constructed, produced and reproduced. It is based on the premise that social issues (such as crime, anti-social behaviour, disorder, delinquency – all terms commonly associated with young people) are not self-evident. Rather, their identification, as being worthy of primary media and political (as well as academic) concern, depends on certain individuals and/or organizations making 'truth claims' about

the phenomena and being in a position to bring their claims to public awareness. As a result, the chapter explores how certain negative images and notions of youth and crime are able to be institutionalized, sedimented or 'taken for granted' as facts and objective knowledges, while positive images of young people are relatively downplayed or ignored. It also pays attention to the ways in which these 'constructions' have been challenged, or can be contested, by empirical and theoretical research. In short, it provides an overview of the presences and absences routinely employed in discourses of the 'problem of youth'.

The Threat of Youth

1.1 There is no neutral English noun which can identify a period of **youth** with the same certainty and impersonality as 'child' or 'adult' (Springhall, 1983–84, p. 20). While 'child' and 'adult' are largely neutral terms connoting what is generally viewed as a normative period in life, 'youth' and 'adolescence' usually conjure up a number of emotive and troubling images. These range from notions of uncontrolled freedom, violence, irresponsibility, vulgarity, rebellion and dangerousness to those of deficiency, vulnerability, neglect, deprivation or immaturity. In 2008, the American magazine *Time* captured this mood by declaring that 'Britons are frightened of their own young' (Mayer, 2008). As such, 'youth' is largely defined in terms of what it is lacking; by what it is *not* rather than by what it is (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, p. 41).

For young people, the terms '**crime**', '**deviance**' and '**delinquency**' collide to attract critical attention to a much wider set of 'problem' behaviours than is usually afforded to adults. For example, 'being incorrigible', running away from home, truancy and congregating in groups are usually only considered to be problematic when committed by young people. In the USA, they are commonly termed '**status offences**'. Common-sense understandings of crime also tend to rely on legal definitions and those behaviours and events that are specified in criminal law. They imply there is some underlying consensus about what constitutes criminality and what does not. But conceptions of crime clearly vary from place to place and change over time. Indeed, Wilkins (1964, p. 46) has claimed that 'there are no absolute standards. At some time or another, some form of society or another has defined almost all forms of behaviour that we now call "criminal" as desirable for the functioning of that form of society.' Moreover, many of the most harmful actions in terms of loss of life and property (think: illegal arms dealings, genocide, corporate fraud, state-sponsored torture, workplace death and injury, domestic violence, child abuse, and so on) either remain relatively hidden or are not recognized as 'crime' at all. The picture is further confused because many of the 'crimes' that we attribute to young people – vandalism, joyriding, mugging, hooliganism – are media-inspired terms and not specific offences recognized by the law.

This section explores how these troubling, and often contradictory, notions are 'resolved' in media and political discourses.

Innocents and Demons

On 12 February 1993, 16 video cameras in a shopping centre in Bootle, Merseyside, filmed two 10 year old boys abducting 2 year old James Bulger. He was found two days later battered to death near a railway line. This particular murder was to form a watershed in media and political responses to youth crime, and not simply because of its apparent brutality. It had at least three related consequences. First, it initiated a reconsideration of the social construction of 10 year olds as 'demons' rather than as 'innocents'. Second, it coalesced with, and helped to mobilize, adult fear and moral panic about the moral degeneracy of youth in general. Third, it recast child offenders as 'devils' (Fionda, 2005) and legitimized a series of tough law and order reforms which came to characterize the following decade and continue to do so. The reverberations are still being felt in a climate of 'child hate' and the denigration of a generation of 'undisciplined' and 'disrespectful' children as 'feral', 'evil' and 'barbarous thugs' (Scraton, 2007 Chapter 6).

The death of James Bulger triggered widespread moral outrage. It was also given widespread and sensational press coverage, both nationally and internationally. The story conformed perfectly to what Chibnall (1977) referred to as the five informal 'rules of relevancy' that govern how popular crime journalism decides what is *newsworthy*: that is how news is *selected* and how it is *presented*. These 'rules' are visible and spectacular acts, physical or sexual violence, graphic presentation, notions of individual pathology, and demands for a firm deterrent and retributive response.

In June 2001, the two boys convicted of the murder were released on parole. The tabloids had long condemned the fact that they had been held in secure units (rather than prison), where according to the *Sun* (9 January 2001) they had enjoyed a 'luxury life' of 'treats, trips and gifts'. When the High Court Judge, Lady Butler-Sloss granted them life-long anonymity to protect them from vigilantes, the *Daily Mail* (9 January 2001) declared this to be 'NO JUSTICE'. Since then the rumour mill has gone into overdrive. On the tenth anniversary of the murder, the *Sunday Mirror* (9 February 2003) had asked where the two boys might be now: 'ON HOLIDAY (ALL EXPENSES PAID, OF COURSE)', with round-the-clock protection by armed police, was the reply. Many seem to assume that the two boys have been relocated to Australia, although this has been consistently denied by both governments. Nevertheless, in 2006, police in Perth, Australia, were forced to make a public statement that a man accused of murdering an 8 year old school girl was *not* either Venables or Thompson (*The Age*, 28 June 2006). Successive email campaigns ('we have to do something to make them pay') have been launched to petition Butler-Sloss to reverse the anonymity ruling. The latest of these was in 2008, following a request for information made in the Queensland State parliament (*Courier Mail*, 4 May 2008).

The Bulger murder still seems capable of galvanizing a mistrust of youth in general and of raising interminable fears of a failing justice system, of child abduction and of 'stranger-danger' in particular (Brown, 2003, p. 52). However, the murder of children by strangers is rare; children are at far more risk from parents and carers (see **Chapter 5**). The murder of a child by other children is also rare. There have been only 27 such murders in the previous 250 years – most notably the case of 11 year old Mary Bell, who

killed two small children in 1968. So the story of James Bulger was exceptional: indeed, 'unthinkable' (James and Jenks, 1996, p. 315). But being unusual and unexpected, it was automatically considered newsworthy. In Hall's (1978, p. 22) words, 'It's as if newspapers set out each day with the unspoken assumption that things in the world will be exactly as they left them yesterday. The bigger, the more unexpected, the more violent the change, the bigger the story.' This is what is new; this is what makes the news.

Franklin and Petley (1996) and Davis and Bourhill (1997) provided detailed assessments of the newspaper reportage of the trial of the two boys who were eventually convicted for the murder of James Bulger in November 1993. For all but the *Financial Times* and the *Morning Star* it was the front-page headline story. The *Daily Mail* carried 24 separate articles; the *Daily Express* an eight-page supplement. One of the *Daily Mail's* headlines 'THE EVIL AND THE INNOCENT' (25 November 1993) set the tone for some intensive media agonizing over 'HOW COULD IT HAPPEN?' However, it was the video footage from a security camera of James Bulger being led hand in hand by one of the 10 year olds out of the shopping centre that made the case famous. The blurred and shaky image was replayed endlessly on television. As Alison Young (1996, p. 112) argued, it invited feelings of helplessness and horror as we watched the boys slowly disappear from view with the voyeuristic knowledge that death was to follow. As such, the event 'always existed as much as an image of itself as it did in itself' (Young, 1996, p. 137).

A recurring theme in media **representation** of the case was the juxtaposition of childhood innocence and children as inherently evil. Innocence was easily imputed to James Bulger; he was the symbolic epitome of an ideal child. Normally, 10 year old children would also be media-idealized as innocent victims. But, as Hay (1995) argues, herein lies the crux of the event. We are forced to confront the uncomfortable notion that 10 year olds may not be innocent at all. As the *Sunday Times* (28 November 1993) put it: 'we will never be able to look at our children in the same way again ... Parents everywhere are asking themselves and their friends if the Mark of the Beast might not also be imprinted on their offspring.' And so it was that one of the preferred media explanations of 'why it happened' dwelt on the theme of 'evil'. The *Daily Mirror* (25 November 1993) described the 10 year olds as 'Freaks of Nature' with 'hearts of evil'. Elsewhere, terms such as 'boy brutes', 'monsters', 'animals' and the 'spawn of Satan' abounded. For many, the case demanded that *all* children be regarded as a threat and that childhood be redefined as a time of innate evil. As James and Jenks (1996) suggested, it was not just two children who eventually were put on trial, but the very nature of childhood itself.

Other popular explanations dwelt on an assumed decline in moral responsibility as a result of '1960s permissiveness'. The disintegration of the nuclear family, single parenting and the influence of media violence (particularly the film *Child's Play 3*, 1991) were all cited as key precipitating factors. William Golding's novel *The Lord of the Flies* (1954) was repeatedly referenced as 'evidence' of the horror and evil that are unleashed when children are free from the discipline of adults (*Guardian*, 16 February 1993; *Daily Mail*, 25 November 1993). As a result, any number of alternative 'readings' based on welfare, health, psychology, victimology, psychiatry, behavioural science or economics were subsumed by, or were ruled out in favour of, the law. Once the killing was coded as 'crime', it was the legal process and the assumption of

individual responsibility which 'laid down the agenda for what could be reported and commented upon as "news"' (King, 1995, p. 173). To do otherwise would necessitate the questioning of some fundamental inequalities in society and how the state treats some of its most vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens. And such questions do not conform to the imperatives of newsworthiness (Muncie, 1984, p. 20).

The Prime Minister's initial reaction was simply that we should 'condemn a little more and understand a little less' and the Home Secretary opined that no excuses could be made for 'a section of the population who are essentially nasty pieces of work' (*The Times*, 22 February 1993). The two 10 year olds – Jon Venables and Robert Thompson – were tried as adults in the Crown Court and eventually sentenced to be detained for a minimum of eight years. This was raised to 10 years by the Lord Chief Justice and to 15 years by the Home Secretary (a decision subsequently declared to be illegal in July 1996). Much of this punitiveness was inspired by the *Sun* urging its readers to plead with the Home Secretary that the boys should be locked up for life. In 1999, the European Commission of Human Rights ruled that both their trial and their sentencing violated articles of the European Convention on Human Rights and the 'right to a fair trial'. Doubts had long been raised that the age of the defendants and the formality of the Crown court process precluded their full understanding and participation in the legal proceedings. It also ruled that sentencing decisions must be reserved for those independent of government. As a result the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 removed such power from the Home Secretary and handed it to the courts.

The Bulger case also came to symbolize something much broader; it became a signifier for a generalized 'crisis' in childhood and a breakdown of moral and social order (James and Jenks, 1996; Davis and Bourhill, 1997). In a climate of general anxiety about crime, the exceptional murder of an infant by two boys, barely at the age of criminal responsibility themselves, was viewed as symptomatic of a prevailing youth crime wave, even though they bore no obvious relation to each other. As Hay (1995, p. 204) argues:

One mediated event ... does not in and of itself constitute a moral panic. Through the process of discursive amplification, the 'event' is translated from a particular conjuncture that must be understood in its own terms, to an event which is seen as emblematic and symptomatic of broader processes – moral decay, social malaise and the destruction of the social fabric of the family and thus society itself. The shadow of such a threat only becomes identifiable by virtue of the event itself. Yet once the event is seen in this context, the nature of the submerged threat becomes immediately obvious and this in turn makes sense of a multitude of formerly unrelated, yet nonetheless individually troubling phenomena.

In the early 1990s, a raft of youth troubles – most notably truancy, drug taking, disturbances on housing estates in Oxford, Cardiff and Tyneside following police clampdowns on joyriding, and images of 'youth out of control' and 'one-boy crime waves' – had already raised levels of public concern. The Bulger case provided 'the strongest possible evidence to an already worried public that there was something new and terrifying about juvenile crime' (Newburn, 1996, p. 70). Individual TV images, such as that of an 11 year old in a balaclava mask being arrested after

crashing a stolen car, galvanized politicians of all parties, the police, judges and magistrates to demand more effective measures to deal with young offenders. Indeed, just 10 days after the Bulger murder, the Home Secretary announced plans to establish a new network of secure training units for 12–15 year old offenders.

The Prime Minister also promised a crackdown on ‘bail bandits’, whereby those committing further offences while on bail (or if there was the slightest reason to believe they *might* reoffend), would be automatically remanded in custody (‘TLL LOCK UP YOUNG VILLAINS’ – headline, *Daily Mail*, 22 February 1993). ‘Truancy Watch’ was launched in autumn 1993. Above all, a sense that the courts and law and order agencies had become impotent to deal effectively with offending was widely propagated and this mood persisted for much of the decade. In the run-up to the 1997 general election, a bewildering array of *additions* to the youth justice system in England and Wales were proposed, including curfews for children, the naming of young offenders in court, the shaming and public humiliation of offenders, parental control orders, fast-track punishment for ‘persistent’ offenders, the adoption of ‘zero tolerance’ campaigns to prosecute even the most petty and minor of offences, secure training centres for 12–15 year olds and the removal of the legal presumption of *doli incapax* for 10–13 year olds. Indeed, all of these measures were acted upon in the following decade. And between 1993 and 2003 the number of under-18 year olds held in secure institutions increased from some 1300 to over 3000 (see **Chapters 7, 8 and 9**).

The role of the media, and particularly the symbolic purchase of the Bulger case, no doubt played a part in this escalation of fears and change in political mood. By comparing the Bulger case with a similar murder in Norway in 1994, Franklin and Petley (1996) argued that the contemporary British press and judicial system were particularly ‘punitive, harsh and unforgiving’. The initial sentence of Venables and Thompson was widely condemned as being too soft. Not only was the recommendation of eight years seen as too lenient but the conditions of their custodial confinement were viewed as akin to a ‘holiday camp’ (*Today*, 25 November 1993). In contrast, the language used by the Norwegian press and judiciary was more conciliatory. There the murder of a 5 year old by three 6 year olds was phrased in terms of a ‘tragic accident’, in which it served no purpose to simply apportion blame to those involved. Moreover, in most European countries, Venables and Thompson would have been considered much too young to be prosecuted at all. In England, the age of criminal responsibility is 10, across Europe it is usually 14 or above (see **Chapter 10**).

Comparison of the media and legal treatment of Venables and Thompson with that of two 8 year olds – Barrett and Bradley – in a similar murder case in Stockport in 1861 is also informative. Though also initially demonized, the jury in 1861 delivered a judgment of manslaughter and was widely supported for having done so. Barratt and Bradley were sent to a reformatory for five years with public support, rather than resentment, for the prospect of their rehabilitation (Rowbotham et al., 2003). Most pernicious, perhaps, was the way in which reaction to the death of James Bulger firmly located violence solely with youth. As Scruton (1997a, p. 164) concluded: ‘What a terrible irony this represents given the apparently insatiable appetite that much of the adult, patriarchal world has for violence, brutality, war and destruction.’

In these ways the Bulger case came to signify something more than an isolated tragic event. It set in motion fears about juvenile crime in particular and a **demonization** of

young people in general. Quite simply it was widely assumed that Demons had invaded the Innocents.

Youth in the News: Dangerous, Deficient and Vulnerable _____

Images of dangerousness are arguably the most familiar public appearance of youth encapsulated in the threat and danger of the mob or gang. It is a recurrent theme vividly illustrated by the headline 'LORD OF THE FLIES GANGS RULE ESTATES' (*Sunday Times*, 17 August 2003) as evidence of what can happen in areas of high child population density whether in Britain or (as was claimed in this article) Baghdad and Beirut. A sequence of moral panics about 'depraved youth' has been a dominant and recurring feature of media representations of young people. In 1950s Britain, for example, these fears were premised on the image of a teenager who had no respect for authority and lived in a world that was generally dismissive of anything adult. Teddy boys were Britain's first post-war teenage **folk devils**, popularized as violent, depraved and sex-crazed (see **Chapter 6**). In the 1960s, student revolt, drug usage, sexual permissiveness, football hooliganism, vandalism and truancy combined to amplify the level of public concern. In the 1970s, black youth, mugging, punks, violence in schools and groups of 'vicious young criminals' were the most potent symbols of a now 'rapidly deteriorating youth condition'. In the 1980s, the sight of thousands of young people rioting on the streets added a new dimension to this social preoccupation with youth disorder. In the 1990s, panics about joyriding, alcopops, Ecstasy, girl gangs and persistent offenders were the latest in a long history of despairing but 'respectable fears' (Pearson, 1983); to be joined by 'hoodies', 'boy racers', 'mini-moto riders', 'happy slappers', 'video-gamers', 'under-age binge drinkers', and 'feral yobs' in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

In contrast, some young people are portrayed not so much as depraved but as deprived, not necessarily of material wealth and power (though this is usually the case), but of moral standards, proper guidance, training and self-responsibility. Such 'deficiency' is characteristically viewed as part and parcel of the peculiarities of adolescence. Bizarre dress, 'blatant' sexuality, irresponsibility and moodiness are somewhat disparagingly passed off as 'just a phase they are going through' which will be 'grown out of'. As a result, young people are typically viewed as being at a 'vulnerable' stage: capable of being corrupted by all manner of 'evil' influences, unless their behaviour is tightly regulated and controlled. Such control is often justified in terms of giving young people 'protection' (from others and themselves). The notion that youth are a problem both to society *and* to themselves is a recurring theme in media and youth research (Wyn and White, 1997, p. 21).

Although the sources of 'youth' imagery are wide and varied (including personal experience, television news, radio, film, TV sitcoms, and so on), it is apparent that one of the key agencies that informs the public about young people is the national and local press. The first quantitative content analyses of British newspapers to focus specifically on young people was carried out in the late 1970s (Porteous and Colston, 1980). Throughout June 1979 Bradford University's Social Work Research Unit scanned eight national daily newspapers and two local (Yorkshire) papers. Any article

that involved young people between 11 and 19 years was categorized according to size, location and content, and each was assigned an evaluation category (positive, negative, neutral). A total of 913 articles were analysed. The local *Bradford Telegraph and Argus* contained most stories (15 per cent of total), followed by the tabloids (between 10 per cent and 12 per cent of total), the broadsheets (between 7 per cent and 9 per cent of total), and the *Morning Star* (2 per cent of total). Stories relating to sporting events accounted for 11.4 per cent of this coverage and education 6.7 per cent, but most notably 34.9 per cent of all reports of youth were related to crime in one form or another. Of these, the most frequent categories were burglary, theft, vandalism and breach of the peace (9.2 per cent), murder (5.1 per cent) and sex crimes (2.3 per cent). Reporting was also frequent where adolescents were the victims of crime. The authors concluded that 'according to our daily press, a typical adolescent is a sporting youngster, criminally inclined, likely to be murdered or injured in an accident' (Porteous and Colston, 1980, p. 202). The 'positive' aspects of 'youthfulness' that were given coverage, were largely accounted for by the atypical careers of a small number of media celebrities and sporting personalities. A tripartite image of youth emerged: as either gifted, dangerous or innocent.

Twenty years later, the charity Children's Express monitored over 400 stories in local and national newspapers and found a similar degree of stereotyping. Young people were routinely parodied as 'victims', 'demons', 'cute', 'brilliant', 'brave' or as 'adult accessories' (Neustatter, 1998). In 2004, Porteous and Colston's study was replicated by MORI. Monitoring 17 newspapers which carried 603 youth-related articles during one week in August, they found that 71 per cent had a negative tone and a third of articles discussed young people in the context of violent crime or anti-social behaviour (see Box 1.1).

Box 1.1

Newspaper articles about youth, by newspaper type, subject and tone

Base	Tabloids (281)	Broadsheets (159)	Locals (53)
Violence/Crime/ASB	35	26	33
Child abuse/ Neglect	12	17	8
Lifestyle	16	9	7
(Mental) Health	10	11	12
Accident	14	8	15
Education/Parenting	6	22	17
Achievement	8	6	9
Negative	82	50	71
Neutral	8	36	9
Positive	11	15	20

Source: www.ipsos-mori.com/polls/2004/young-people-now.shtml

Clarke (1984) concludes that the link between these separate and diverse images lies in their assumption of the *different* or *deviant* nature of *all* young people. So although the images of dangerousness, deprivation, vulnerability, and so on find their pinnacle in those singled out for media attention, the implications of such imagery carry over to inform adult reaction to the invisible mass. All young people are variously demonized by a persistent dominant imagery of 'being adolescent', of 'lack of control, of 'posing a threat' ('WHO'S AFRAID OF TEEN TERROR?': *Observer*, 1 August 1999; 'KNIFE TEENS RULE IN CITIES OF CRIME': *Sunday Mirror*, 27 January 2008).

Phil Cohen (1986, p. 6) has identified four major assumptions that lie behind most political, policy and professional reactions to the 'youth question' (see Box 1.2).

Box 1.2

Dominant representations of the youth question

1. Youth is a unitary category with certain psychological characteristics and social needs common to the age group.
2. Youth is an especially formative stage of development where attitudes and values become anchored to ideologies and remain fixed in this mould in later life.
3. The transition from childhood dependence to adult autonomy normally involves a rebellious phase which is itself part of a cultural tradition transmitted from one generation to the next.
4. Young people in industrial societies experience difficulty in making successful transitions and require professional help, advice and support to do so.

Source: Cohen (1986, p. 6).

These 'common senses' of a universal 'youth condition' continually resurface in political and media discourses as explanations of why young people can never be freed from moral, legal and social regulation. At one time feared, young people are at another time pitied for their vulnerability. They are simultaneously constituted as in need of control, and protection. They are the constant object of fascination. The adult gaze is fixed on youth as something both desirable and threatening. Desirable, because youthful energy remains a part of adult longing; desirable too because it is here that new styles and fashions are generated that are ripe for commercial exploitation. In this sense 'youth' is also a commodity. But a fear of youth is never far beneath the surface. Too much freedom is dangerous when unsupervised and unregulated. Above all, youth is treated as a key indicator of the state of the nation itself. Young people are the nation's future. To secure that future and to solve the problems of the present, 'youth' is a consistent referent. Young people have to carry this 'peculiar burden of representation' (Cohen, P. 1997a). Their condition is increasingly seen as being 'symptomatic of the health of the nation, or the future of the race, the welfare of the family, or

the state of civilization as we know it'. Youth is 'the site of a singular nexus of contradictions' (Cohen, P., 1986, p. 54).

Crime in the News: Demonization and the Criminal 'Other' _____

Various critical studies of media representations of youth and crime have identified a number of key and recurring processes:

- A distortion of the nature and incidence of crimes against the person. While personal violence accounts for only 6 per cent of all recorded crime, on average, British newspapers devote 64.5 per cent of their crime reporting to such cases (Williams and Dickinson, 1993, p. 40). Similarly, studies of the provincial press by Ditton and Duffy (1983) in Strathclyde and by Smith (1984) in Birmingham found that media reportage consistently and dramatically distorted the 'true' picture of crime. Surette (1998) refers to this as 'the law of opposites'.
- Definitions of youth crime are structured within particular explanations proffered by the 'primary definers' of politicians and law enforcement agencies (Hall et al., 1975). The credibility of their definitions is enhanced by their official and institutional standing such that a 'deviance-defining elite' is able authoritatively to set its own moral and legal agendas (Ericson, 1991, p. 223). Such agendas may be contested and, in certain circumstances, negotiated, but the organization of journalistic practice generally seeks out and promotes the views of those in authority (Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994, p. 20).
- Stereotypical images of offenders and their behaviour encourage understandings of events in terms of the simple dichotomies of good (the victim) and evil (the offender). Such stereotyping and dismissive labelling may be used to deny legitimacy to the actions of whole groups – they become defined as the nation's 'folk devils', as the 'criminal other' (Cohen, S., 1973a; Hall, 1978).
- In particular, *atypical* crime events (such as youth violence) are selected as newsworthy. But these are presented as *stereotypical* (symptomatic of a general youthful moral decadence) and contrasted with visions of the 'normal world' which are *overtypical* (adults as law-abiding) (Young, 1974).
- The media do not simply reflect reality, they define it in a particular way. They are not a window on the world but a prism subtly distorting and side-stepping 'reality' (Jewkes, 2004). To prolong an event's newsworthiness, other apparently similar (but unrelated) incidents are sought out (Hall, 1978). Public concern and fear are directed from a single incident and towards the possibility of 'crime waves' through which the whole of society appears threatened (Cohen, S., 1973a). The reaction to particular crime incidents at particular times, it is argued, has more to do with fears of social transformation than with any significant shifts in the actual behaviour of young people (Taylor, 1981a).

- This process is now commonly referred to as a **moral panic** in which clear boundaries are drawn between 'right' and 'wrong' and which need to be secured through retributive and deterrent responses towards offending (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994). The term 'moral panic' was first used by Jock Young (1971, p. 182) to illustrate the process whereby an initial concern over drug taking in Notting Hill, London prompted the police to set up specialist drug squads, thereby ensuring that the 'problem' was *amplified* by increasing the number of drug-related arrests. A 'fantasy crime wave' was created (see **Chapter 5**).
- Crime news is a commodity. Its intrinsic 'market value' tends to override other news-making criteria, such as accuracy or relevance (McQuail, 1993, p. 253). As a result, it has been contended that public images of youth crime are 'popular' only in so far as they are the consequences of information provided by law enforcement sources with a vested interest in 'crime control' and by media sources with a vested interest in 'newsworthiness' (Muncie, 1984, p. 23). News values also militate against any balanced public knowledge of sentencing practices. The popular misconceptions that crime is always rising, that most crime is violent and that the courts routinely hand out unduly lenient sentences are all fuelled by a steady 'repetitive' stream of atypical and unrepresentative stories emanating from the media (Sanders and Lyon, 1995; Hough and Roberts, 1998). Nevertheless numerous researchers have concluded that there is no simple deterministic relationship between media reportage and the formation of public opinion. While media representations do have an effect, they are unlikely to be received passively, but rather interpreted by an 'active audience' (Roshier, 1973; Livingstone, 1996; Reiner, 2002).
- Since the late twentieth century it appears that there has been something of a shift from discrete panics to a perpetual period of moral crises in which the fact/fiction dichotomy has been dissolved. Crime-as-news has blended into crime-as-entertainment. 'Reality' TV, crime reconstructions, live newscasts and CCTV footage have fused 'facts' with institutional values and popular myths. Mass media and law enforcement agencies have become inextricably related in constituting the 'realities' of crime, justice and order (Osborne, 1995; Brown, 2003). It has become increasingly difficult to disentangle the real from the mediated (Jewkes, 2004).

Collectively, these processes may not determine public reaction, but they remain a key source of political sensitization. In political discourse young people tend to be a perennial source of anxiety. Law and order enthusiasts, for example, have persistently warned us of 'new' delinquent syndromes in which youth seems to delight in crudity, cruelty and violence. The characteristic perennial expression of this is that young people have suffered unduly from single parenting or from the degeneracy of parents and have developed into a dangerous and undisciplined mob. In 1961, the British Medical Association offered the following despairing analysis of British youth:

Looked at in his worst light the adolescent can take on an alarming aspect: he has learned no definite moral standards from his parents, is contemptuous of the law, easily bored. He is vulnerable to the influence of TV programmes of a deplorably low standard ... [and] reading matter [which is] full of sex and violence. (cited by Pearson, 1983, p. 17)

In the 1970s, Patricia Morgan, of the Institute of Economic Affairs, readily equated violence and destruction with youth, and talked of this 'new barbarism' as the major cause of urban breakdown and moral decline in Britain (Morgan, P., 1978, pp. 12–13). Government ministers foresaw the imminent destruction of society epitomized by Margaret Thatcher's denunciation of the football hooligan as the 'new enemy within'. Twenty years later, it seemed little had changed. The Chief Executive of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority expressed his opinion that:

a family breakdown, a 'synthetic pop culture' and a lack of identity among bewildered youngsters all contributed to a failure of a growing number of pupils ... some young people have little sense of their own worth. Some have little sense of basic values. Some have no sense of identity as members of a community. Some are unaware that they have responsibilities as well as rights. (*Daily Mail*, 20 September 1996, p. 25)

MPs have gone to some quite extraordinary lengths to lay claim to 'solutions' to the 'youth problem'. Some have called for a return to corporal punishment and the use of stocks to punish offenders (*The Times*, 14 March 1981). One Conservative MP contemplated flogging criminals live on television before or after the weekly National Lottery draw in order to humiliate and deter (*Independent*, 20 March 1995). In the 1990s, Digby Anderson, founder of the conservative Social Affairs Unit, reiterated a familiar concern that now the 'yobs and criminals' had been 'allowed to take over' (*Sunday Times*, 2 June 1996). Indeed from mid-1991 onwards, stories appeared regularly in the press about some young people who, it was argued, were so involved in crime that they seemed to account for much of the crime in the areas where they live (Newburn, 1996, p. 69) (see Box 1.3).

Box 1.3

The demonization of children

'ONE-BOY CRIME WAVE' (*Daily Mail*, 10 September 1992)

'RATBOY: A 14 YEAR OLD BECOMES A BYWORD FOR TROUBLE'
(*Independent*, 9 October 1993)

Alleged to have committed 55 offences by the time he was 14, one boy in north-east England first came to the notice of the police when he was 10, for burglary. After two cautions his parents volunteered him for local authority care, from which he absconded 37 times. In February 1993 he was found hiding in a ventilation duct. A local newspaper could not print his name, so invented the nickname Ratboy. Next day he was front-page national news. With the construction of images of sewers, of a hidden underworld and of secret

tunnels running beneath the urban landscape, the boy became a symbol of all juvenile crime against which the police and courts were 'impotent' to act (despite the existence of local authority secure units). But in many other respects the boy did not live up to the prevailing stereotypes of dangerous and outcast youth. He did not come from a broken home; he was not violent; he did not grow up in some 'urban wasteland'; he became a 'symbol surrounded by clichés' (*Independent*, 9 October 1993). Again, in 1993, an 11 year old crashed a car through a fence. When he appeared on television in a black ski mask, he became Balaclava Boy, Spider Boy, Homing Pigeon Boy, Boomerang Boy and The Terror Triplets all followed until it was decided that in certain circumstances young offenders could be publicly named.

Source: Muncie, 2004, p. 28.

In popular and political discourse the 'problem of crime' is almost synonymous with 'youth crime'. By 1997, the *Sunday Times*, (16 February) was talking of a 'persistent hard core' of 'superpredators': a term taken from American neo-conservative commentators. In the USA, the political scientist John DiIulio declared that 'this nation is threatened by large numbers of remorseless young predators' amidst dire predictions that crime was going to get much worse. In a similar vein in the late 1990s, John Ashcroft (later to become US Attorney General) declared 'we are living with a juvenile system that reprimands the crime victim for being at the wrong place at the wrong time and then turns round and hugs the juvenile terrorist' (cited by Gary Smith, 2002). Of course the 'superpredator bloodbath' failed to materialize but served to underline a transatlantic orthodoxy that the young are to be defined primarily as a problem, rather than representing any positive or creative possibilities for the future (Muncie, 1997; Waiton, 2001).

Such 'excessive' fears do, however, feed into political debate and policy formulation. For example, in 2002, the *Sun* launched its 'crusade against crime' with the headline 'ANARCHY IN THE UK' and seven subsequent pages detailing the failures of the justice system 'to smash crime with an iron fist' (*Sun*, 8 March 2002). It followed this with the assertion that 'our streets are ruled by muggers and yobs' (*Sun*, 18 March 2002). The newspaper was responding to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner's claim of undue delays in court procedures, excessive use of bail, and processes that favour defendants over victims. The campaign also reflected the Lord Chief Justice's call for a 'robust sentencing policy' for mobile phone thieves first made in January. It was also a response to the assertion that muggings had risen in London, particularly after September 11, 2001, when police were 'diverted from crime fighting to antiterrorism' (*Sunday Times*, 30 December 2001). By early 2002, the *Mirror* (21 February 2002) was already announcing that we are 'drowning in a tidal wave of violent crime'. The Home Secretary first responded by announcing an extension of electronic tagging of young offenders on bail (*Independent*, 27 February 2002). At the end of March, the Prime Minister made the unprecedented move of convening a taskforce with seven cabinet ministers to combat street crime. Meanwhile the *Mirror* (20 March 2002) ran with the headline 'VILE LAWLESS

TEENAGERS TERRORISING THE STREETS' and the *Daily Express* (25 March 2002) declared that 'KIDS OF FOUR TURN TO CRIME'. By April, a robbery reduction initiative based on the principles of zero tolerance and fast-track courts was in place in ten police areas. On 22 March 2002, the *Daily Express* argued 'AT LAST WE GET TOUGH ON YOBS' as on-the-spot fines for low-level offenders were introduced. One local authority began drawing up plans to impose curfews for under 15 year olds (*Guardian*, 26 March 2002). Docking child benefit from the parents of young offenders was proposed. Extra resources were released to finance over 2,000 new places in secure units and prisons (*Guardian*, 18 April 2002) and to pay for a more intensive policing of truants (*Guardian*, 26 April 2002). Further the Home Secretary insisted that children as young as three should be monitored for signs of nascent criminality. In May a mother was jailed for 60 days for failing to ensure that her children attended school.

Debate continues over whether the year 2002 did in fact witness a 'tidal wave' of street crime associated with violence. The British Crime Survey reports that there was a 25 per cent fall in all crime and a 24 per cent fall in violence between 1997 and 2002/3. The risk of being a victim of crime was reduced to an all-time low. Police recording of violent crimes, however, increased by 2 per cent (Simmons and Dodd, 2003). This might suggest that the police recorded more crime when fewer offences were being committed. It is a process that fuels political expediency and media sensationalism as well as heightening public fear. In 2002, almost three-quarters of the public still believed the crime rate to be increasing (Simmons and Dodd, 2003). Repeated claims were being made that the justice system was too soft, particularly when the tabloids questioned the proposition 'TOUGH ON CRIME?' by devoting 11 pages to gruesome pictures and harrowing accounts of violence (*Daily Mirror*, 12 July 2002). In contrast, research on sentencing practices revealed magistrates and judges bowing to media and political pressure by bypassing fines in favour of community penalties; by jailing offenders who previously would have received community penalties; and by imposing longer sentences. As a result the number of under-18 year olds sentenced to detention increased from 4,000 in 1992 to 7,600 in 2001 (NACRO, 2003). Over the decade custodial rates increased by 71 per cent for adults, but by 90 per cent for young people (see **Chapter 9**).

Such punitiveness appears unrelenting. In 2003, the *Sun* (15 October) launched its 'Shop a Yob' campaign promising to name and shame the 'guilty', condemning the 'politically correct claptrap' of 'soft courts' and advocating the setting up of 'tough work camps' for the 'animals who make your lives a misery'. By 2007, the *Sun* (20 August) was once again declaring that there was ANARCHY IN THE UK in which an absence of police patrols had allowed 'yob gangs' armed with knives and 'fuelled by cheap booze' to rule 'our streets by fear'. The theme of 'anarchy' was readily turned to by the Conservative leader on the same day when launching an attack on government 'failure' to tackle 'family breakdown' (*Daily Mail*, 20 August 2007). More prison places, zero tolerance policing, more powers to 'exclude unruly pupils' and the 'common sense that with young people you need to hit them where it hurts – in their lifestyle and aspirations' were all advocated as means to 'mend our broken society' (Cameron speech, 22 August 2007). By March the next

year the American magazine *Time* (26 March 2008) was faithfully reproducing the adage that 'the most important issue now facing Britain' is that of 'the scourge of feral youngsters'. And there appears to be little political resistance to such an idea. When the Secretary of State for Justice was asked what he might do to reduce the trend of demonizing young people, his response was unequivocal: 'these are not children; they are often large unpleasant thugs' (Hansard, 10 June 2008).

In promoting such views the media and politicians regularly claim they are simply responding to public opinion. The nature of populist punitiveness is, however, far from straightforward. 'Public opinion' is often presented as some undifferentiated and homogeneous entity and its divergences and complexities rarely fully acknowledged and understood. Public attitudes to crime and punishment often exhibit a degree of tolerance that is frequently lost when asking bald generalized statements about sentencing preferences. When presented with concrete descriptions of actual cases, the public tend to be less punitive. When given adequate information about the range of legal punishments available, the public are less likely to endorse the use of imprisonment (Hough and Roberts, 1998; 2004). The more detail that people are given about the circumstances of any given crime, and the more time they are given to reflect on appropriate penalties, the less likely they are of perceiving the courts as being 'too soft' (Gillespie and McLaughlin, 2003; Hancock, 2004).

The Extent of Offending

1.2 The 'true facts' of offending by young people (or any other group) have been, and will remain, unknowable. There are three main means by which crime rates have been estimated – recorded statistics, victim surveys and self report studies – but none can claim to provide an objective and incontrovertible picture. The problem arises because all quantitative data depend not only on which behaviours are perceived and *defined* as crime, but also on the *validity* of the various statistical measures and on the range of *interpretations* that can legitimately be made of any figures, no matter how they are produced (see Box 1.4).

Box 1.4

Press headline reaction to release of crime statistics 24/25 January 2008 (ranked by circulation)

30 GUN CRIMES COMMITTED A DAY (*The Sun*)

DRUG OFFENCES SOAR 21 PER CENT IN A SINGLE YEAR (*Daily Mail*)

HOME SECRETARY JACQUI SMITH SAYS CRIME FIGURES ARE 'EXCELLENT' (*Daily Mirror*)

GUN CRIME UP AS SMITH SAYS UK SAFER THAN EVER (*Daily Telegraph*)

(Continued)

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT ACCUSED OVER CRIME RISES (*Daily Express*)

GOVERNMENT ACCUSED OVER CRIME RISES (*Daily Star*)

FEWER ROBBERIES, ASSAULTS AND BURGLARIES, BUT CRIME AT GUNPOINT IS ON THE RISE (*The Times*)

CRIME FALLING EVER FASTER, BUT DRUG AND GUN OFFENCES INCREASE (*Guardian*)

RISK OF BECOMING VICTIM OF CRIME AT 27 YEAR LOW (*Independent*)

Most obviously, changes in policing priorities, or changes in what the law counts as crime, or shifts in public tolerance will all affect statistical representations of the 'youth problem'. It might be tempting, then, to discard all such measures as 'worthless'. Yet they cannot be so readily dismissed. They provide valuable insights into self-police and court definitions of crime and tell us much of the organizational capacities, constraints and priorities of the youth and criminal justice systems. They cannot, however, be expected to aid our understanding of an 'independent entity of crime' for, as Lea and Young (1984, p. 15) acknowledge, 'by its nature no such fact exists'.

The Social Construction of Official Statistics

The main sources of data on the extent of offending in England and Wales are the annually and quarterly produced *Criminal Statistics* (based on crimes recorded by the police) and the *British Crime Survey* (BCS) (based on victim interviews). Following a review in 2001 these are now combined in the annual Home Office reports *Crime in England and Wales*. In Scotland, similar statistics appear in *Recorded Crime in Scotland* and the Scottish Executive Justice Department conducted its own victim surveys four times between 1993 and 2003. In 2004, these data sources were renamed the *Scottish Crime and Victimization Survey*.

The first National Crime Survey was carried out in 1972 in America. It surveyed a representative sample of the population and questioned them on their experience of being a victim of crime. The aim was to shed light on **hidden crime** by uncovering those crimes committed (and for which a victim was recognized) which were not reported to the police. Predictably, these early victimization surveys revealed that the extent of crime may be up to five times greater than that detailed in official statistics. The first British Crime Survey (BCS) was carried out in 1982 (Hough and Mayhew, 1983) and by 2000 had been repeated eight times. Since then it moved to an annual cycle with 40,000 interviews with those aged 16 and over conducted each year. Collectively these are the most commonly referred to sources of information on offending rates and patterns and are regularly used by politicians, the media and criminological researchers (see Box 1.5).

Box 1.5**Statistical pictures of youth offending**

- The peak age of known offending is 17 or 18 for males and 15 for females, but adults account for more than 80 per cent of all detected crime.
- The number of indictable offences committed by young people under 18 dropped by 27 per cent between 1992 and 2004 (despite public perceptions to the contrary). Between 2003 and 2006 there was a 19 per cent rise.
- Theft and handling stolen goods account for just under a half of all youth crime. Violence against the person accounts for less than one-fifth of indictable offences.
- Adults are responsible for three times as many violent offences and five times as many sexual offences, than young people.
- Approximately 80 per cent of youth offenders are male.
- Black or black British young people are over-represented at all stages of the youth justice system.
- 33 per cent of males and 9 per cent of females born in 1953 had been convicted of an offence before the age of 46.

Source: Simmons and Dodd (2003); Bateman (2006); NACRO (2008).

However, **official statistics** often paint a controversial and contradictory picture. First, they imply that for much of the past two decades youth crime became less of a problem as crime rates generally fell, but they still maintain that 'youth' is the most criminogenic age. Public confidence has failed to reflect such a long-term downward trend. Second, they suggest that the 'crime problem' is a problem caused predominantly by males. Third, the majority of youth crime is made up largely of less serious property offences. Sexual offences and robbery are rare. Violent crime, though increasing, accounts for less than one-fifth of all indictable offences. Moreover, in 2004, 63 per cent of these were dealt with by reprimand and warnings, suggesting their less serious nature (NACRO, 2008). Finally, there is a widespread belief that whatever these figures do tell us, they represent the tip of an iceberg. Many other offences are not detected, others are not recorded by the police or a conviction is not secured. Indeed, the Audit Commission (1996, p. 14) argued that only 3 per cent of offences lead to arrest and action by the criminal justice system. If this is the case, then the official statistics provide a particularly skewed vision of the nature and extent of young offending.

The first and most paramount 'fact' about the *Criminal Statistics* is that they are both partial and socially constructed (Muncie, 2001, p. 25). This is so for a number of reasons, outlined below.

Public Reporting

The *Criminal Statistics* depend initially to a large degree on the **reporting of crime** to the police by the public. Although the police do detect some crime, in the main

they rely on the general public or victims to bring crime to their notice (Bottomley and Pease, 1986, p. 34). Yet not all crimes are reported, for a variety of reasons: there may be ignorance that a crime has occurred (for example, computer fraud and many instances of corporate crime and state crime); there may be no obvious victim (for example, certain drug offences); the victim may be powerless (for example, child abuse); there may be distrust of the police (for example, by certain youth cultures); the offence may seem too trivial (for example, shoplifting); the offence may be considered to be youthful 'high spirits' (for example, brawls); or the victim may have no faith that the police will take the offence seriously (for example, racial harassment) (Jupp et al., 1999).

The 1996 British Crime Survey (which bases its data on reports from victims) found that the main reasons for not informing the police were that the incident was not considered serious or that the police would not be able to do much about it or would not be interested. Some felt that the incident was better dealt with privately without recourse to formal agencies. Vehicle vandalism, assault and minor theft had particularly low reporting rates. Burglary with loss and motor vehicle theft had almost 100 per cent reportage rates, presumably in order to meet insurance company requirements (Mirrlees-Black et al., 1996, pp. 24–6). This latter observation has caused many to query the validity of the assumption that crime is always on the increase. As Jenkins (1987, p. 25) perceptively argued: 'the total has about it an eerie, suspicious regularity. It advances relentlessly in step with the proliferation of telephones, of police computers and of household insurance ... we could be victims of nothing more offensive than a wave of being middle class'.

Police Recording

Even when an incident is reported to the police, it will not count as crime unless the police *record* it as such. As Walker (1983, p. 286) noted, although the police have a statutory obligation to record crimes, considerable discretion remains about whether it is considered sufficiently serious to warrant their attention. The 1994 British Crime Survey estimated that 40 per cent of offences reported to the police were not recorded (Mayhew et al., 1994), while eight years later, the 2002/3 survey found it had increased markedly to 70 per cent (Simmons and Dodd, 2003).

Coleman and Moynihan (1996, p. 35) argue that the police **recording of crime** depends on three broader contexts: the political context at the time of the offence, the organizational context of policing priorities and the situational context of how the offence is reported and by whom. For example, in the 1950s when crime was not a political issue, there was little or no incentive for the police to record large numbers of offences. It had no financial (increased resource) implications and if there seemed little chance of a 'result', then such recording would only reflect poorly on subsequent clear-up rates. For many years Nottinghamshire, somewhat surprisingly, has had one of the highest crime rates in England and Wales, but this has been accounted for by the tendency of the

Nottingham police to record minor thefts and to record multiple and continuous offences as separate crimes (Farrington and Dowds, 1985). This particular recording policy was subsequently considered worthy of national implementation and a National Crime Recording Standard was introduced in 2002.

Similarly, how a reported offence is recorded by the police – as ‘theft from a person’ or ‘robbery’ or as ‘attempted break-in’ or ‘criminal damage’, for example – will affect the rate at which certain crimes are believed to be committed. Indeed, Farrington (1996), commenting on the statistical decline in juvenile crime since the 1980s, argues that this has been illusory and simply reflects the police practice at the time to deal with many juvenile offenders informally. One of the clearest example of crime rates being affected by police targeting and recording occurred in 1932. Then, London’s Commissioner of the Police ruled that all cases classified as ‘suspected stolen’ should be redesignated as either ‘lost’ or ‘stolen’. The result was that recorded thefts increased by over 300 per cent in one year (Williams, 1994, p. 49)! Similarly, increases in the youth crime rate since 2004 have been largely accounted for by changes in police practices in order to meet government targets. This has led to disproportionate rises in ‘sanction detection’ for younger age groups, for girls and for lesser offences (NACRO, 2008). Previously these offenders and offences were more likely to have received an informal response.

Creating Crime Waves

Changes in law enforcement and in what the law counts as crime preclude much meaningful discussion over whether youth crime is forever rising (or indeed falling) (Muncie, 2001, p. 27). Pearson (1983, p. 216), for example, notes how successive pieces of welfare-inspired legislation governing the treatment of young people in the early twentieth century encouraged law enforcement agencies to proceed with cases they might previously have dealt with informally. The end result was more young people being dealt with in court, creating the impression of a ‘crime wave’ when all that had changed was the readiness of official agencies to intervene (see **Chapter 2.4**). Pearson (1983, p. 217) elaborates on this process by noting how after 1977, the distinction between minor and major criminal damage was abandoned in favour of a classification of all as ‘known crimes’. This resulted in an apparent doubling of vandalism in one year: ‘adding at a single stroke a sixth of a million indictable offences to the criminal records’. Similarly, Singer (1996) details how changes to juvenile offender law in New York in the late 1970s effectively *recriminalized* youth by redefining previous acts of delinquency as ‘crimes’ and delinquents as ‘juvenile offenders’. In the wake of a media and political ‘moral panic’ about a ‘crisis’ in youth crime, the age of criminal responsibility was lowered, ensuring that juveniles were placed in New York’s adult criminal justice system (see **Chapter 10**). Taylor (1998a) also notes how changes in police priorities and politics will effect what is recorded. He argues that increases in crime between 1914 and 1960 can be accounted for by senior police officers ‘playing the crime

card' in order to increase police numbers and powers. In the 1990s with the advent of performance indicators, 'cuffing' of cases was revealed as common practice as the police tried to improve clear-up and detection rates to politically acceptable levels (*Guardian*, 18 March 1999).

While victimization surveys are undoubtedly a more reliable means of measuring crime than police statistics, they too suffer from a range of methodological problems (Coleman and Moynihan, 1996, pp. 74–82). Inevitably they only measure criminal incidents where a victim can be identified or where a victim accepts such a status. 'Victimless' crimes such as some drug offences or consensual sexual acts will not be recognized and for crimes such as domestic violence there may be an unwillingness to accept a 'victim' status. For **corporate crime**, individual victimization is not only likely to be unknown, but its extent may be enormous. Other shortcomings include the lack of representativeness of the chosen samples, the problem of victims' memory recall and indeed whether respondents can always be relied upon to tell the truth. Moreover, questions relating to *youth* victimization have remained conspicuously absent from the BCS (to date it only included specific information on under-16s in 1992, though the Home Secretary has promised that this will be rectified) (see **Chapter 5**).

Self-evidently, changes in legislation and in the number of arrests and sentences do not represent actual changes in the level of crime, but changes in the capacity of the criminal justice system to process individual cases. More police and more prisons, coupled with the political will and resources to support law enforcement, have an infinite ability to increase the amount of recorded crime. As Christie (2000) argues, there is always an unlimited well of unrecorded crime/disorder/anti-social behaviour to be tapped and as techniques of mass surveillance increase and political priorities change, so too will more 'crime' be discovered. This again is likely to impact most strongly on young people: their offences usually occur in the most visible of public places – the street, the shopping mall, the football ground. In contrast many 'adult' crimes will remain hidden at work (pilfering), in the home (domestic violence), the corporate boardroom (fraud, embezzlement) or in the corridors of power (torture, illegal arms dealing). As such, increases in police resources will almost inevitably lead to a statistical rise in *certain kinds* of crime, just as prison building programmes will create more prisoners of the same kind. New legislation meanwhile remains capable of ensuring the **criminalization** of ever wider sections of the population. For example, Nick Cohen (2003) noted that since 1997, 661 new criminal offences had been created and hundreds of anti-crime initiatives had been launched. Between 1997 and 2007 there were more than 50 major Home Office bills (more than in the whole of the previous century). Many of these were directed at non-conformist and anti-social behaviour or that previously considered 'irritating' (see **Chapters 7 and 9**).

Box 1.6 outlines the various processes whereby an incident may, or may not be, eventually registered as an official crime statistic and reveals how 'official data are social products' (Box, 1981, p. 208).

Box 1.6**The social construction of youth crime**

Event	Mitigating factors
Incident occurs	Visible or hidden? Recognized as crime? Changes in law over time?
Reported	Serious or trivial? Police able to act? Trust in police?
Recorded by police	Serious or trivial? Organizational priorities? Law and order directives? Status of complainant?
Arrest	Nature of evidence? Sufficient police resources and time? Possibility of a 'result'?
Charge/court/sentence	Legislation reform? Legal representation? Social status of offender? Previous convictions? Political climate of 'law and order'?

↓ ↓

Official statistics are constructed which are the end result of numerous intervening social variables. Data are partial, misleading and unreliable.

Self Reports and Hidden Crime

Given the doubts about the validity of official statistics, criminologists have increasingly turned to other measures. **Self report studies**, which ask people to list the crimes they have committed (whether they have been detected or not), were pioneered in the USA in the 1940s. Since then they have been widely used as a means not only to gain a more accurate picture of 'hidden crime' but also to shed light on why offending occurs and the degree to which it correlates with other social factors, such as gender, 'race' and socio-economic position. They have, in the main, been directed at young people.

Most self report studies conclude that young offending is far more widespread than the official statistics would have us believe. In a study of 1,400 London schoolboys, Belson (1975) reported that 98 per cent admitted having at some time kept something they found (legally, theft); 70 per cent had stolen from a shop and 88 per cent had stolen from school. Yet only 13 per cent had been caught by the police and only half of these were subsequently sent to

court. Similarly, Rutter and Giller's (1983, p. 27) summary of youth self report research found that *inter alia* 82 per cent admitted breaking windows of empty houses, 70 per cent had stolen from a shop and that almost no one admitted no offences at all. Risk of prosecution ranged from 8 per cent (shoplifting) to 60 per cent (breaking and entering).

In 1992/3, Graham and Bowling (1995) interviewed a national sample of 1,721 young people aged 14–25 about their family life, school experiences, lifestyles and offending behaviour. Twenty-three offences were covered, ranging from shoplifting to serious assault. Similar to previous studies, they found offending to be widespread with over a half of males and a third of females admitting that they had committed an offence at some time. For a majority, however, these were restricted to no more than one or two minor property offences. A follow-up study in 1998/9 (Flood-Page et al., 2000) found little overall change, but with an increase in the population of 14–17 year olds admitting an offence. The Home Office now carries out such surveys on an annual basis under the auspices of the *Offending, Crime and Justice Survey* (for example, Wilson et al., 2006).

The prevalence of crime as an everyday part of young people's lives was also substantiated by research in Edinburgh (Anderson et al., 1994). On the basis of questionnaires completed by 1,150 11–15 year olds and 120 face-to-face interviews in 1990, this study found that two-thirds admitted to committing a crime in the previous nine months: the majority being rowdiness, fighting in the street or shoplifting. In a nationwide sample of 14,500 11–17 year olds in 2000/1 almost half reported having knowingly broken the law at some stage. A third of 14–15 year olds admitted shoplifting. Twenty per cent of 15–16 year old boys admitted attacking someone intending serious harm. The survey, on the other hand, also found that offending was infrequent and that most young people were law-abiding most of the time (Beinart et al., 2002). In the largest survey to date, Armstrong et al. (2005) collected self-reported data from over 30,000 young people, aged 7–16, in what were considered the *most* high deprivation, high crime areas in England and Wales. They found that 52 per cent reported involvement in offending in the last 12 months (55 per cent of boys and 49 per cent of girls). The most commonly reported types of offending were, however, vandalism, stealing and receiving stolen goods.

From studies such as these it is clear that a majority of people have broken laws and rules at some time in their lives. To this degree, transgression may be considered a typical, rather than abnormal, form of behaviour. It is, as Durkheim (1895/1964) argued, a normal and enduring feature of the social order (see **Chapter 3**). However, the major contribution of self report studies has been to seriously question widely held beliefs about the correlations of class position, 'race' and gender to criminality. Both Anderson et al. (1994) and Graham and Bowling (1995) found that middle-class children were just as likely to be involved in crime as working-class children. Indeed, a survey by the British Household Panel in 2001 based on interviews with 1,000 13–15 year olds found that those from higher-income families were *more* likely to commit

vandalism, play truant and take illegal drugs (*Guardian*, 25 February 2001). The relationship between social class and offending that is reflected in the *criminal statistics* (and accepted by many criminological theories) is at best tenuous and probably non-existent. As Box (1981, p. 91) concludes: 'self report studies have on the whole failed to reveal the significant inter-class differences implied in official statistics ... Only if this single fact is kept in the forefront of the reader's consciousness can there be sustained a critical stance towards many sociological theories on delinquency.' This suggests strongly that official statistics reflect not patterns of offending but patterns of policing. As a result, the relative criminality of certain groups of young people has been exaggerated. For example, inner-city working-class youths face a greater risk of arrest than middle-class youths engaged in similar activities but in areas where the police presence is lower. Ethnic minority youths are statistically more likely to be stopped and searched by the police (Burke, 1996), but self report studies show that those of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin have significantly *lower* rates of offending and that for African-Caribbeans the rate is no higher than for whites. Self report data also cast some doubt on the relative lack of offending by young women. Up to the age of 17, offending rates are not dissimilar to those of young men, but female offending then drops sharply, while male property offending increases (see Section 1.3 below). Graham and Bowling explain this differential by noting that those young women who have completed full-time education, left home, formed stable partnerships and had children are more likely to stop offending abruptly than those who have not. For males, however, passing these landmarks has no such effect: 'they tend to lag behind young women in virtually every area of social development' (Graham and Bowling, 1995, p. 56).

Despite these seemingly 'incontrovertible' findings, it would be misleading to take self report studies at face value. They too have a number of limitations. Most obviously they depend on the willingness of interviewees to admit their 'criminality' to researchers. Second, they are often administered by questionnaires which have notoriously high non-completion rates, particularly from ethnic minority groups. This in itself may result in highly skewed samples (Coleman and Moynihan, 1996, p. 59). Third, they tend to check offending against a relatively small list of 'standard' and sometimes trivial offences. Other areas of hidden crime such as domestic violence, child abuse and corporate crime are rarely (if ever) analysed. As a result the parameters of the 'crime problem' and assumptions about 'typical offenders' are not seriously challenged.

Patterns of Offending and Non-offending

1.3 Despite the shortcomings of official statistics, self reports and victim surveys, it remains widely assumed that age is a major indicator of involvement in crime. Because proportionately more ethnic minority

and working-class youth and fewer female youth are dealt with by the youth justice system, it is also believed that the crime problem is predominantly a problem of young males from lower social class and ethnic minority communities. This focus has also encouraged research into 'risk prediction' and how criminal careers are formed and developed. In popular idiom, the 'truant of today' will eventually be the 'criminal of tomorrow'. And for a small number, offending will not be transient, but will be both frequent and persistent. This section provides a critical assessment of these 'taken-for-granted' notions.

Risk Prediction and Criminal Careers

The 'criminal career' approach suggests that offending is part of an extended continuum of anti-social behaviour that first arises in childhood, persists into adulthood and is then reproduced in successive generations. One of the most ambitious projects to investigate why delinquency begins and to assess how far criminality can be predicted is the ongoing Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development. In 1961, a sample of 411 working-class boys aged 8 was selected from six primary schools in Camberwell, London. Girls were not included. Twelve boys were from ethnic minorities. They were contacted again when aged 10, 14, 16, 18, 21, 25, 32, 46 and 48 to examine which of them had developed a 'delinquent way of life' and why some had continued a 'life of crime' into adulthood. About a fifth of the sample had been convicted of criminal offences as juveniles and over a third by the time they were 32. But half of the total convictions were attributed to only 23 young men – less than 6 per cent of the sample. Most of these 'chronic offenders' shared common childhood characteristics. They were more likely to have been rated as troublesome, impulsive and dishonest at primary school. They tended to come from poorer, larger families and were more likely to have criminal parents. They had also experienced harsh or erratic parental discipline (Farrington, 1994, 2003). Based on this data, Farrington has consistently identified various individual, family and environmental predictors ('**risk factors**' or 'profile') of future criminality. The most important *individual* factors are low intelligence, personality and impulsiveness. The strongest *family* factors are criminal or anti-social parents, poor parental supervision and disrupted families. The most notable *environmental* factors are peer association, areas of deprivation and high delinquency rate schools (Farrington and Welsh, 2007). On this basis, the Cambridge study contends that future 'chronic offenders' can be identified with reasonable accuracy at the age of 10. Moreover, Farrington (2000) maintains that similar longitudinal research, particularly in the USA and the UK, has established that the 'risk factor prevention paradigm' has global (western) reliability and strong practical application (see **Chapter 9**). The most significant – in policy terms – are individual and family factors (Farrington, 2007) (see Box 1.7).

Box 1.7**Individual and family risk factors identified by developmental criminology**

Risk factors identified by developmental criminology are:

- impulsivity
- attention problems
- low school attainment
- poor parental supervision
- parental conflict
- an anti-social parent
- a young mother
- large family size
- low family income
- coming from a broken family.

Children from poorer families are likely to offend because they are less able to achieve their goals legally and because they value some goals (e.g. excitement) especially highly. Children with low intelligence are more likely to offend because they tend to fail in school. Impulsive children ... are more likely to offend because they do not give sufficient consideration and weight to the possible consequences. Children who are exposed to poor child rearing behaviour, disharmony or separation on the part of their parents are likely to offend because they do not build up internal controls over socially disapproved behaviour, while children from criminal families and those with delinquent friends tend to build up anti-authority attitudes and the belief that offending is justifiable. The whole process is self-perpetuating.

Sources: Farrington (1994, pp. 558–9); Farrington (2007).

Using the same sample, Farrington et al. (1996) also maintained that if children had a convicted parent by the time they were 10, then that was the 'best predictor' of their becoming criminal and anti-social themselves. Criminal behaviour, it was argued, was transmitted from parents to children: simply put, crime runs in the family.

Risk analysis has become more and more common since the 1990s as interest in crime prevention research has burgeoned. Something of a consensus around the precipitative factors of family conflict, truancy, drug use, irresponsible or lack of parenting, low intelligence, delinquent friends and community disorganization has emerged (Goldblatt and Lewis, 1998; Rutter et al., 1998; Flood-Page et al., 2000; Beinart et al., 2002; Youth Justice Board, 2005). The problem, however, remains of deciphering which of these numerous variables has more pertinence with some people at some times. The degree to which they interrelate and react remains uncertain. And while they may correlate with *recorded* offending, their applicability to all rule breaking – as self reports indicate – is at best tenuous. For example, Webster, MacDonald and Simpson's (2006) qualitative research of 185 young people

(including girls) found that over 50 per cent who would be considered high risk on Farrington's measures (came from broken homes/were regular truants) had never offended at all. Other longitudinal research carried out by the University of Edinburgh has argued that the key risk factor propelling young people into and through the criminal justice system is not their dysfunctional families but police perceptions of who appears respectable and who is not (McAra and McVie, 2007, and see **Chapter 9**).

A core problem with the 'risk factor prevention paradigm', therefore, is its presentation of specified individualized 'risks' as if they comprise uncontroversial facts, truths and scientific realities. Risk factor research may reveal some *correlations* with statistical records of offending but this should not be confused with having discovered the *causes* of such offending. It is a self-fulfilling and reductionist exercise in so far as it only measures offenders against a prescribed menu of factors derived from research with a narrow psycho-social focus. Its replication, then, is predictable, but not necessarily revealing. Such aggregate studies only tell us *what* factors are linked to (known) offending, not *how* and *why* such factors might be linked. Such quantitative data also necessarily 'miss' valuable data about perceptions of risk that could be gleaned from juvenile justice practitioners or young people themselves (Armstrong, 2004; Case, 2007). It applies *generalized* probabilities to individuals which are likely to produce substantial numbers of 'false positives': that is mis-labelling and inaccurate identification of putative offenders who are then subject to unwarranted degrees of intrusive intervention (Smith, 2006). It peripheralizes the significance of material social-structural contexts. The Pittsburgh Youth Study, for example, concluded that a key 'risk factor' is the socio-economic status of particular neighbourhoods. Those with some of the lowest *individual* risk factors offended more frequently if living in the most deprived neighbourhoods (Wikström and Loeber, 1998). This places serious doubt on the priority given to individual and family factors which have dominated mainstream criminology and deeply impacted on criminal justice policy (see **Chapters 4 and 9**).

Using an ethnographic, rather than statistical and personality measurement approach, Foster's (1990) study, which spanned the generations in one area of south-east London in the early 1980s, also found that parental attitudes to education, street life and crime were replicated (through subtle processes of parental reinforcement) by their children. Youth crime served as an apprenticeship to adult offending when, for example, techniques could be learnt to minimize the risks of detection and arrest. But all this occurred in a context whereby many of their illegal activities were not considered as crime: 'these were not criminal "careers", just ordinary people whose everyday world took for granted certain kinds of crime' (Foster, 1990, p. 165). As a result, while the Cambridge study is a good example of the degree to which various social and personality factors correlate statistically with 'known' offending, it fails to capture the broader context in which such offending takes place. It assumes that legal definitions of crime are shared by all communities. Foster's analysis shows clearly that this is not the case. The issue becomes not simply one of law breaking, but of conflicting cultural and moral values embedded in different material realities. Moreover, the Cambridge study substantiates public concern about lower-class

criminality, but only because the range of other types of criminal activity typically associated with white-collar and corporate crime are not identified as problematic. For example, it has no application to understanding crimes of the powerful and state crime and serves only to identify the 'usual suspects' and to perpetuate an uncritical listing of the 'failings' of (some) white working-class male youth in industrialized western societies. It may be able to shed some light on the characteristics of those offenders who are recorded in the official statistics, but it tells us little about the extent, causes and meaning of offending *per se*.

From a different theoretical perspective, Craine and Coles (1995) used the concept of 'career' to explore how young people in inner-city Manchester coped with unemployment and social deprivation in the 1980s and the realization that the prospect of a traditional 'career' in the formal labour market had largely disappeared. The alternative 'careers' that were developed included market trading and social security fraud (working and claiming), 'fencing' stolen goods, unlicensed street trading, acting as 'lookouts', 'touting' and 'hustling'. As with Foster's (1990) informants, these 'edge of crime' activities were regarded as quite legitimate. For some this ethos may have heralded a progression to organized shoplifting, robbery and drug dealing whereby crime came to be a major means of earning a living. But, above all, the 'drift into crime did not involve a major moral dilemma for the young people concerned. Rather it was the result of a series of incremental choices to access the alternative opportunity structures around them' (Craine and Coles, 1995, p. 20). The picture of 'crime careers' painted by the Cambridge study is one of inadequate and morally damaged individuals. For Craine and Coles it is a matter of young people reacting rationally to the (lack of) opportunities available to them.

The question of risk has also been tackled from another angle: namely that intervention at an early age – particularly in the form of secure institutions – is unlikely to prevent re-offending and may only succeed in cementing 'criminal careers'. In Crowley's (1998) sample, more than half had spent time in institutional care. Bailey et al. (1994) found that of all those sent to a secure unit, 80 per cent had previously been in local authority care. Some 93 per cent had had previous psychological or psychiatric contact. Similarly, Boswell (1995) found that 91 per cent of all 10–17 year olds who had committed the most serious offences had experienced abuse or loss in their earlier life. Re-conviction rates on leaving the secure estate are also high. Most studies estimate this to be between 70 and 90 per cent (Goldson, 2006). This suggests that some types of intervention are not only inappropriate, but may also encourage those 'careers' that they are designed to treat or deter (see Chapters 5 and 9).

A Question of Gender?

Farrington (1996) contends that the **protective factors** that best serve to protect young people from offending include having a resilient temperament, an affectionate relationship with at least one parent, parents who provide effective and consistent discipline and parents who maintain a strong interest in their children's education. However, one of the strongest predictors of non-offending seems to be that of

gender. Only one in six of all known young offenders is a young woman. In general their offending seems less serious, with theft and handling stolen goods by far the most common. Such data led Newburn and Stanko (1994, p. 1) to observe that 'the most significant fact about crime is that it is almost always committed by men'.

Nevertheless some reservations about the validity of such a bald statement should be noted. Gelsthorpe and Sharpe (2006), for example, note that, notwithstanding the questionable nature of statistical data, available evidence does suggest something of an increase in female youth offending since the 1970s. Self-report studies, for example, have suggested that although fewer girls than boys do break the law, the difference is not marked. Anne Campbell (1981, p. 22) notes that while official statistics in 1976 produced a ratio of male to female offending of 8.95:1, results from self reports of 16 year old schoolgirls showed a ratio of 1.33:1. She argues that when young women commit crime they follow the same pattern as young men in terms of which acts they commit. In contrast, Walklate's (1995, p. 6) review of the statistical data concludes that while 'men and women commit similar crimes albeit at different rates, women appear to commit the more serious crimes at a much lesser rate than men'. This is even more the case when the largely hidden crimes of domestic violence are taken into consideration. Moreover, as self report studies (Graham and Bowling, 1995; Flood-Page et al., 2000) found, the rate of offending for young women peaks earlier and recedes at an earlier age than that of young men. So although at ages 12–14 a similar proportion of boys and girls admit offending, by the age of 17, boys outnumber girls 3:1 and by the ages of 22–25 it is 11:1.

It is clear then that even though it would be misleading to view young women as non-offenders, significant gender-based differences in rates and frequency of offending still need to be explored. One explanation lies in shifts in the continuities of control in women's offending and non-offending lives. As Worrall (1999, p. 46) put it: 'The criminalization of a small group of girls, the welfarisation of a larger group and the socialisation of all girls are processes which form a "pyramid" of gendered social control.' By 2000, it seemed as if the shape of this pyramid was shifting towards criminalization. Fuelled by media-driven panics about a 'new breed' of girl gangs, the numbers of girls convicted of indictable offences rose, the use of diversionary measures (cautions, reprimands and warnings) decreased, and the numbers sentenced to immediate custody increased dramatically (by 365 per cent between 1993 and 2002) (Gelsthorpe and Sharpe, 2006). Much of this increase, particularly since 2003, however, may be the result of an increased presence in the night-time economy and a propensity to view young women as less in need of protection and more deserving of criminal control (*Guardian*, 9 May 2008).

Overall, men account for nearly nine out of every ten people found guilty of indictable offences and are responsible for 92 per cent of convicted cases of violence against the person. Statistics such as these have long been available, but it is only in the past few decades that it has seriously been suggested that the problem of crime may indeed be a 'problem of men'; or perhaps more precisely termed a problem of 'maverick masculinities'. This academic interest coincided with increasing public and political concern about the apparently growing anti-social behaviour of the young urban male which the Prime Minister referred to in 1994 as a 'job culture' (see Box 1.8).

Box 1.8**Representations of the 'job'**

Job is a species of young white working class male which if the British media is to be believed, is more common than ever before. The job is foul mouthed irresponsible, probably unemployed and violent. The job hangs around council estates where he terrorises the local inhabitants, possibly in the company of his pit-bull terrier. He fathers children rather than cares for them. He is often drunk, probably uses drugs and is likely to be involved in crime, including domestic violence. He is the ultimate expression of macho values: mad, bad and dangerous to know ... The job is carrying the weight of masculinity which for a variety of reasons middle class society finds increasingly unacceptable and rhetorically dumps onto the men of the lower class. He is a classic scapegoat: lugging around the sins of our culture whilst the rest of us look sanctimoniously on.

Source: Ros Coward (1994) 'Whipping Boys', *Guardian Weekend*, p. 32.

The term captures many of the real and imaginary fears of crime and disorder, although it is unclear at what point shouting, swearing and drinking and so on turn from the irritating to the 'yobbish'. In the 1990s, images of the 'job', as Coward (1994) contended, became to a degree legitimized by right-wing notions of a dangerous under-class (Murray, 1990) and by feminist critiques of masculinity (Campbell, 1993). For Murray, unmarried and unemployed men are akin to primitive beasts lacking any civilizing influence (see **Chapter 4.2**). For Beatrix Campbell, the 'threat' of masculinity is more complex. Her analysis of the various riots of 1991 in Britain's working-class housing estates drew attention to what was 'self-evident' but publicly rarely acknowledged: they were perpetuated in the main by young men. While public debate circulated between unmarried mothers failing to exercise control over their male offspring, and unemployment and urban deprivation creating legions of the dispossessed, Campbell (1993) stressed how the abandonment of certain communities by the state has not caused a crisis of masculinity, but unleashed it in extreme forms. Young men on council estates became engaged in a militaristic culture of crime: celebrating war and force as ways of sorting things out (Campbell, 1993, p. 323). Unemployment denied access to legitimate masculine status. Joyriding, drugs, ram raiding, burglary or rioting on the streets became the key means by which *young men* in economically deprived areas could assert themselves as men. In contrast, Campbell argued, *young women* responded to the same circumstances of deprivation by forging self help and constructive solidarities and provided vital means through which their communities could be sustained. Moreover, she contended that on the streets, and particularly in the context of car crime, joyriding and police chases, it is a similar display of masculinity that is being expressed by the perpetrators and the law enforcement agencies alike. Or as Connell (1995, and see **Chapter 4**) contends, violence and crime are key contexts in which a particular collective conception of masculinity is 'made'.

Nevertheless trying to find 'violent crime' predominantly in 'masculinity' remains a vexed issue. Coward (1994, p. 35), for example, notes how the equation has simply

'become a way of attacking the least powerful men in our society'. Indeed, demonizing the 'yob' can serve to hide the continuities between their behaviour and that of other men (Walklate, 1995, p. 179). Similarly, Stanko (1994) argues that the discourse of male violence is fixated on the predatory crimes of the street. Not only does this tend to overlook the fact that working-class male youth are likely to be both the perpetrators *and* victims of such crime, but it detracts from the hidden violence used by men against women in the home. A focus on *masculinity* denies that there may be many and varied masculinities (Connell, 1995). The key variable may indeed not be gender alone, but, as Segal (1990, p. 27) contends, how gender and class combine to reflect back the 'increased barbarism' created by the social divisions and inequalities of contemporary capitalism. The limitations of a 'doing gender' approach have also been commented upon by Walklate (2001, p. 73) when she argues: 'debate which proceeds under its umbrella strains to fit all kinds of criminal behaviour occurring in all kinds of contexts within its terms'. It is both simplistically universal and tautological.

Gangs, guns and knife crime

Although groups of youth have long attracted adult condemnation (see **Chapter 2**), the notion of the 'gang' is peculiar to the twentieth century and largely confined to America. The gang was first defined by Puffer (1912) as 'the play group' existing alongside the family and the neighbourhood. This interpretation was subsequently adopted by Thrasher (1927) in his influential study *The Gang: A Study of 1313 Gangs in Chicago*. Influenced by social ecology theory (see **Chapter 3.2**), Thrasher estimated that in the 1920s there were over 1,000 youth gangs operating within Chicago's 'zone of transition' alone. While it is clear that this included any number of loose-knit groups, Thrasher's work set the tone for much subsequent gang research in his argument that what begins as a form of play brings youth into conflict with their community and into an environment where a delinquent career progresses. The gang is organized around working-class territorial imperatives and is based on group solidarity and codes of conduct that are passed down through generations of boys on the streets. The gang provides an alternative refuge and source of belonging and support in otherwise socially disorganized (and largely immigrant) communities: 'a substitute for what society fails to give . . . it fills a gap and affords an escape' (Thrasher, 1927, p. 33). Whyte's (1943) similarly classic study of street corner boys in Boston reiterated many of these themes while stressing the importance of a structured (rather than disorganized) environment supportive of long-term mutual obligations. The gang, rather than being in conflict with its community, was viewed as an integral part of the local social order.

However, Campbell and Muncer (1989) argued that (notwithstanding the British media's continual use of the term) none of this much applied to Britain. Downes' (1966) classic study *The Delinquent Solution* had suggested that the idea of gangs existing in Britain (at least in the 1960s) was symptomatic of middle-class attempts to impute a structure and organization to working-class groups which they did not possess. The orthodoxy is that America owns the gang, while Britain has traditionally been the home of youth subcultures (see **Chapter 6**). Thirty years later, Bill Sanders,

an American academic moved to Brixton, London, to test this proposition. He concluded that 'US style street gangs were not in Lambeth and that they never really have been' (Sanders, 2005, p. 3). One of a few British studies which did claim to have discovered the gang was Patrick's (1973) Glasgow research, but, as Campbell and Muncer argue, even though these groups of male youth may have been known by territorial names, they had little internal structure and failed to persist over time. In contrast, the contemporary and classic ethnographic studies of white, black, Chinese and Puerto Rican gangs in America (Thrasher, 1927; Whyte, W.F., 1943; Vigil, 1988; Jankowski, 1991) paint a picture of neighbourhood groups, organized largely along racial lines, with a strong sense of local territory, mutual obligations and, latterly, direct involvement in extortion, trafficking and the drugs trade. As such, Campbell and Muncer (1989) conclude that unlike British youth cultures, American gangs are typically alternative business enterprises and communities of identity. While this may be the case, American gang research in the 1990s has also warned of imputing any uniformity to the processes of gang formation and development. Huff (1996), for example, notes that none of the contemporary research on American gangs delivers clear or unequivocal messages. Gangs are diverse and take a wide variety of forms. Gangs may be joined for protection yet *intra* gang conflict is endemic. They may offer a sense of belonging but many lack stability of membership, cohesion and continuity. Gangs have long been popularly associated with crime, but entire gangs as collectives are rarely involved in its commission. Gang members are not uniformly delinquent. Most violence is internally directed. Gangs are firmly associated with youth, but the age spread of gang members also extends into the forties. There is little evidence that gangs evolve into adult criminal organizations. There may be 'drug crews', 'wilding groups', 'prison gangs', 'gutter punks', 'bikers', 'neo-nazi skinheads' and 'football hooligans' *ad infinitum*. But their differences confound any attempt at definition. Ball and Curry (1995, p. 227) were forced to conclude that most attempts to identify 'the gang' are little more than 'veiled expressions of bourgeois disapproval'.

Indeed, Katz (2000) argues that widely held perceptions of the American gang as rapidly increasing in number, increasingly violent and embedded in drug trafficking are largely driven by news coverage, police recording practices and a popular culture that widely assumes that, but for the existence of gangs, youth crime rates would be substantially lower. Comparing New York and Los Angeles, he contends that gangs, as an interpretive lens for understanding deviance in the American city, appear to rise and fall in relationship to anxieties focused on waves of foreign immigration (Katz, 2000, p. 180). Thus the preoccupation with gangs in New York in the 1950s – subsequently reflected in the play *West Side Story* – coincides with the immigration of Puerto Ricans after the Second World War. The 'gangs problem' in Southern California in the 1980s converges with coterminous initiatives to block immigrants' access to public services. The 'gang' provides a convenient symbol to attach to all forms of youth crime and violence.

These complex issues in definition and identification have, however, done little to prevent the constant search for the 'gang' in Britain. In 1998, Eurogang, a collaboration of European and American academics was established. From the late 1990s a proliferation of gang membership and gang-related crime has become widely assumed. Under the headline 'GANG MEMBERSHIP SPIRALS AMONG

UNDER 16s' (*Observer*, 8 September 2002), it was claimed that there were as many as 30,000 gang members in England and Wales clustered within London, Birmingham and Manchester. A year earlier the same newspaper (*Observer*, 15 April 2001) also claimed that 'GIRLS LEAD THE PACK OF GANGLAND VIOLENCE'. Reality or myth? How far – as Katz might suggest – is contemporary concern with gang violence in the UK simply generative of fears, say, about immigration and asylum seekers?

Such questions were brought into a sharper focus during 2007. From January through to September, eight children and teenagers lost their lives in shootings while another 17 died through stabbings. The most infamous was the tragedy of 11 year old Rhys Jones in Liverpool in what appeared to be an 'accidental shooting' in a long-standing dispute between youths from estates in the Croxteth and Norris Green areas. Like the murder of James Bulger 14 years earlier, the *Sun* announced it as a 'pivotal moment' and the *Telegraph* declared that we were now CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE OF GANGLAND BRITAIN (*Telegraph*, 26 August 2007). The next day the *Telegraph* posed the familiar question: 'How could it have come to this? Surely these tribes of anarchic children murdering one another and terrorising whole adult communities into silence must be some entirely new phenomenon, unique in Britain's social history?'

A report for the Youth Justice Board (2007) was, however, more circumspect maintaining that 'while there are gangs that use serious violence and threats to assert control locally (often in competition with similar groups), these are more likely to involve young adults than 10 to 17-year-olds. While juvenile versions of these gangs may exist, these are relatively rare' (see Box 1.9).

Box 1.9

Groups, gangs and weapons

- Mislabelling of youth groups as gangs runs the risk of glamorizing them and may even encourage young people to become involved in more serious criminal behaviour.
- While evidence shows that most offending by young people is group related in some way, it is less clear is whether group offending by young people has increased in recent years, despite an increase in public perceptions of groups of young people as posing a problem.
- Most young people who had carried a knife claimed this was only for protection and that they had never actually used them.
- Young people who offended together were not necessarily tied exclusively to a particular group and they might also associate with non-criminal peers.
- Where group violence was anticipated, members might carry weapons, which included knives but might also be improvised, such as sticks and bottles. Few routinely carried a knife – not least because of the risk of being stopped and searched by the police.
- Despite claims that many knew how to obtain guns, with the exception of one gang member, there was little to suggest they had ever had possession of a gun, still less used it.

- The young men involved in group offending recognized that there was a certain kudos in claiming to be a gang. However, they tended to see most such claims as empty boasts, and they drew clear distinctions between their own group affiliation and gang membership. Real gangs were distinguished by transgressing certain norms they themselves adhered to, particularly with regard to their deliberate use of unacceptable levels of violence.

Source: Derived from Youth Justice Board (2007).

Most information we have comes from Home Office projects into particular crime problems. For example, Bullock and Tilley's (2002) research into shootings and violent incidents in Manchester was part of a Targeted Policing Initiative and relied on police data for identifying gang members. The research identified four main gangs – Longsight Crew, Pit Bull Crew, Gooch and Doddington – in a small area of South Manchester – each largely made up of black or mixed race males but all were between the ages of 21 and 25. There were relatively few female members. Indeed, the idea of hyper-violent girl gangs so often depicted in the media has been widely dismissed as fanciful (Chesney-Lind et al., 1996; Batchelor, 2001). Conflict between the four gangs was endemic. The existence of such groups may be beyond dispute. Their permanency is, however, open to debate. Research conducted by Manchester University's school of law also found that while the police respond to gangs as clearly identifiable groups, in reality, they are forever changing, and are less criminally active and have less of a clear leadership than is commonly supposed (*Guardian*, 14 July 2008). At the time of the Rhys Jones shooting the government was also keen to point out that while firearms-related homicides might be increasing, these were not necessarily gang related and that the overall trend in gun crime was down. Gun crime is neither prolific nor widespread.

Further concern has been repeatedly voiced about knife crime. Between 1997 and 2006, the number of young people convicted of carrying a knife rose from 482 to 1265, but the extent of knife-related crime remains unknown. According to the British Crime Survey, knife-enabled crime (any crime involving a knife) remained stable at around 6–7 per cent of all crime, comprising 30 per cent of all homicides (Nicholas et al., 2007). A survey by the Metropolitan police in 2007 showed that knife crime dropped by 15.7 per cent over the previous two years, from 12,122 to 10,220 incidents (*Guardian*, 13 May 2008). Total murders in London were down in 2007 for the fifth year in succession, from 222 in 2003 to 160. Within that total, 'the numbers of teenagers killed rose – by 'over 50 per cent' as some reports put it – but this was an increase from 17 deaths to 26' (<http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php?site/article/5196/>). The recording of deaths specifically by a knife (as distinct from any other sharp object) has never been classified separately. Year on year comparison is thus impossible. The official statistics, however, do tell us that the number of young people killed in violent crime is small and volatile: ranging in recent years from 44 in 1995 to 20 in 2005/06. Moreover four out of 10 child homicides are perpetrated by a parent (BBC News, 31 January 2008 and

see **Chapter 5**). Knife carrying is thought to be largely driven by a concern for self-protection or to enhance status. At the end of 2007, new powers were enacted making it illegal to sell an imitation gun or a knife or an air rifle to anyone younger than 18 years old; in 2008, £5 million was devoted to targeting 'knife hot spots', the use of electronic metal detectors burgeoned and the police were given new powers to stop and search. The Prime Minister urged that there should be a 'presumption to prosecute' over-16 year olds carrying a knife. This was not enough for the leader of the Opposition. He sought a 'presumption to incarcerate' *anyone* caught carrying a knife without good reason (BBC News, 7 July 2008). What was given less attention was that both perpetrators and victims were most likely to be from the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and that *if* youth knife crime is indeed increasing, it may also reflect a growing lack of young people's trust in the ability of adults to protect them.

This of course does not deny that lethal violence is a matter of concern. However, it calls into question the accuracy of media pronouncements such as AN EPIDEMIC OF DEADLY YOUTH VIOLENCE (The *Sun*, 27 May 2008) and the convenient academic, political and popular concepts of the 'gun gang' or 'knife gang'. This problem is exacerbated in any attempt to distinguish the gang from crime firms, organized crime and alternative commercial practices. Fraud and the drug trade, as bootlegging has in the past, often represent a significant blurring of what constitutes legality and illegality (Hobbs, 1997).

Drugs: Crime and Criminalization

Tackling drug use has long formed the centrepiece of governmental strategies to control criminal and anti-social behaviour. Yet the use of drugs for experimental, recreational and social reasons appears to be widespread. Miller and Plant's (1996) survey of 7,722 15 and 16 year olds found that 94 per cent had drunk alcohol, a third had smoked cigarettes in the past 30 days and that 42 per cent had at some time used illicit drugs, mainly cannabis. In Graham and Bowling's (1995) self report study of 14–25 year olds, 45 per cent of young men and 26 per cent of young women admitted to illegal drug use at some time. The rate was significantly *higher* for white than ethnic minority populations. Similarly, data derived from successive British Crime Surveys estimated that around one in two young people has tried a prohibited drug at some point in their lives and 25 per cent in the last year (Ramsay and Percy, 1996; Ramsay and Spiller, 1997; Ramsey et al., 2001; Aust et al., 2002; Murphy and Roe, 2007).

Statistics such as these appear to suggest that half of the population have engaged in criminal activity, simply through their use of illegal substances. Moreover, in the 1990s, a number of media, probation and police sources came to argue that drug use was a significant factor in driving young people towards other forms of crime – most commonly expressed as a 'need' to thief or rob in order to finance an 'expensive' drug habit. The National Association of Probation Officers claimed that nearly a half of all property crime and theft that had been cleared up had been committed to fund drug and alcohol dependence (cited by Matthews and Trickey, 1996, p. 3). A Home

Office study – the NEW-ADAM survey – initiated in response to requests from the Association of Chief Police Officers, found that 65 per cent of all people arrested in Britain tested positive for some illicit drug (Bennett et al., 2001). In these ways a drugs–crime connection has become widely assumed.

However, the BCS studies also reported that while illicit drug use amongst young people is widespread, it is an episodic rather than ongoing activity. The 2006/07 survey estimated that only 14 per cent of 16–24 year olds had taken illegal drugs in the previous month. The picture is also confused when measured against the use of particular *types* of illicit drug. The 2001/02 BCS survey found that by far the most common monthly use was cannabis (17 per cent), followed by Ecstasy (3 per cent), amphetamines (2 per cent), cocaine (2.1 per cent), amyl nitrate (1.5 per cent), LSD (0.3 per cent), solvents (0.2 per cent), with use of heroin and crack cocaine extremely rare (0.1 per cent) (Aust et al., 2002). Moreover, while some research studies have shown a relation between use of heroin or crack cocaine and acquisitive crime, in general there appears to be no direct causal relationship to support the popular perception that drug use invariably results in anti-social, criminal or violent behaviour. Seddon (2006) concludes that such assumptions are unhelpful and far too simplistic. Again, contrary to media depiction, there is also evidence that illegal drug use by young people may be declining. For example, the BCS reported that among 16–24 year olds use of any drug decreased from 31.8 per cent to 24.1 per cent between 1998 and 2006/07. Cannabis remains the most used, but now followed by cocaine and ecstasy. Class A drug use has, however, remained stable over the past decade (Murphy and Roe, 2007).

Researchers have come to recognize that any reliable investigation of a drugs–crime connection must take into account the relevance of historical shifts in law enforcement, specific forms of drug use, local variations and subcultural factors. All of these tend to be missing from national surveys such as the BCS.

The idea of a ‘drugs problem’ is probably no more than a hundred years old. In the eighteenth century, opiates (opium, morphine and heroin) were freely available and widely used for pain relief. Opium was used – as laudanum – to calm distressed children, and explored for creative reasons by a succession of Romantic poets, notably Coleridge, Wordsworth and Thomas De Quincey. In the mid-nineteenth century Britain fought two major wars to compel the Chinese government to continue importing British opium grown in India (Porter, 1996). In the early 1900s cocaine use was marginal in Britain but it was widely used in the USA, where it was a primary ingredient of Coca-Cola. The origins of an overtly penal response to such drug use lie amidst a complex of imperialist, racist and political concerns. In the USA, the Harrison Narcotics Act of 1914, aimed at regulating and controlling opiates and cocaine, made it illegal for doctors to prescribe such narcotics to patients. It was largely designed to placate white fears of Chinese opium use and black cocaine use. As a result whole new *criminal* classes of addicts were constructed. The addict became, not a medical problem, but a criminal one (Beirne and Messerschmidt, 1991, pp. 139–40). In turn, criminalization created a black market and a narcotics underworld. In Britain, the Dangerous Drugs Acts of 1920 and 1923 similarly initiated a ‘criminal’ model of addiction, even though the regulation of supply was left in the hands of doctors as well as the Home Office (Pearson, 1991).

The next wave of drug control legislation surfaced in the 1930s. This time, in the USA, it was directed at Mexicans with the 1937 Marijuana Tax Act being introduced not because of any medical evidence of marijuana's effects but because of racist attitudes towards those minorities who used it. In Britain, cannabis has been prohibited since 1928 and until 1971 was considered, legally, to be on a par with heroin. Current concern about its use originates from the mid-1950s, associated in the main with jazz and black music cultures. However, it was not until the 1960s that young people, in particular, were believed to be the major source of the nation's 'drug problem', epitomized by the use of cannabis, amphetamines and LSD in various bohemian and youth subcultures (see **Chapter 6**). As Porter (1996, p. 4) concludes:

perception of a 'drugs problem' is quite modern; it has little to do with the substances involved and much to do with social crisis and the strategies of politicians, police and experts ... the formulation of theories of addiction and the pursuit of criminalization have together created a problem that will not easily go away.

Of all the illegal drugs currently in circulation, it is heroin that has received the lion's share of criminological research, although it should be remembered that cannabis remains the most widely used and accounts for over 90 per cent of all drug seizures. Various researchers (Parker and Newcombe, 1987; Pearson, 1987; Parker et al., 1988) noted a sharp increase in heroin use in particular cities in the north of England and Scotland during the 1980s. Research based in Merseyside suggested that there was a very close relationship between increases in theft and burglary between 1981 and 1986 and the presence of a large number of young, unemployed heroin users. Yet as Parker and Newcombe (1987) point out, most acquisitive crime continued to be committed by non-heroin users and most opiate-using offenders had committed crimes *before* beginning their heroin use. A causal relationship between heroin use and crime is thus far from established. Equally, Pearson (1987, p. 5) notes that the problem was highly scattered and localized, often concentrated in areas with high levels of unemployment and thus arguably reflective more of poverty and deprivation rather than of wilful criminality. By the 1990s fears of a heroin 'epidemic' were largely superseded by a new set of concerns about Ecstasy, amphetamines, and poly-drug use where a mix of drugs used in combination (alcohol, cannabis, Ecstasy, amphetamines) was believed to have become a 'normalized' practice (Measham et al., 1994). In such 'pick and mix' usage, clear distinctions between the legal and illegal have become eroded. All of this throws the drugs-crime debate into further disarray. Certainly both Parker, Measham and Aldridge's (1995) research in the north-west of England and Matthews and Trickey's (1996) research in Leicester suggest that amongst 13-16 year olds there is no direct link between drug use and crime. In the Leicester sample only six (of 758) respondents admitted that their drug use was financed by crime. Only a small minority had problems of drug dependency. As a result, most reviews of the literature in Britain and internationally conclude that only a small proportion of crime is drug-driven (Hough, 1996, and see Box 1.10).

Box 1.10**Young people, drugs and crime**

- Around four million people use illicit drugs each year; about 45 per cent of those aged 16 to 24 have used drugs in their lifetime.
- Most illicit drug use is relatively controlled '*recreational*' use of cannabis.
- Since 2003, cocaine has been the second most commonly used illicit drug after cannabis.
- The use of any illicit drug by young people decreased between 1998 and 2007.
- There is no persuasive evidence of any causal linkage between drug use and property crime. Most offenders who use drugs do not commit crime to finance their drug use.
- A very small proportion of users – estimated at 300,000 – have chaotic '*problematic*' lifestyles involving dependent use of heroin, crack/cocaine and other drugs.
- An even smaller proportion of users – perhaps around 100,000 people – finance their use through crime.
- Problem drug-using offenders have particularly high rates of offending, but they also have high rates of a range of other problems, such as homelessness, unemployment, low educational attainment and disrupted family background.
- If appropriate drug treatment is given to this group, they reduce their offending levels.
- Police crackdowns have no impact on drug availability or on levels of crime.

Source: Derived from www.drugscope.org.uk/, accessed 2003/2008; Murphy and Roe (2007).

This is not to deny, however, that illicit use of drugs – particularly cannabis – has not become an increasingly normal aspect of some young people's recreation. The normative nature of drug usage is such that it can no longer be simply attached to particular youth cultures, but has transcended class and gender boundaries. As Parker (1996, p. 296) put it, 'perceptions of how to create and take "time out" are in transition in the UK'. As such, it is all the more anachronistic to pathologize drug usage as evidence of some delinquent or damaged personality (Perri, 6. et al., 1997).

The case for normalization has been most forcefully put by the north-west England longitudinal study of recreational drug users (Parker et al., 1998; Parker et al., 2002). This traced the changing attitudes to drug use of 465 young people from 1991 to 1995 and again in 2000. Various measures of normalization appear to have been met, particularly in acceptance, availability and use of cannabis. Not only did informal friendship networks make the drug readily available, but usage rates increased with age and had by the age of 22 become further accommodated into everyday lifestyles. As Parker et al. (2002, p. 959) explain:

That so many otherwise law-abiding citizens have collectively socially reconstructed an illegal act, the supplying of controlled drugs, which carries severe

penalties is a good example of the interplay of the dimensions of normalisation; availability and access of drugs continues to grow but is only made possible by socio-cultural accommodation of 'sorting' by youth populations.

Further evidence of the normalization of cannabis might also be seen in the government's decision in 2002 to downgrade it to a C classification, with possession to be treated on a 'seize and warn' basis. But decriminalization and legalization were ruled out (*Guardian*, 11 July 2002) and the fragility of 'liberalization' was witnessed six years later when a B classification was once more advocated despite the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs advising the contrary. The irony at that time was that two-year prison sentences for possession, and up to 14 years for supply were already in place. Moreover, since reclassification, cannabis consumption had markedly declined.

As a result, the political urgency to fight a 'war on drugs' still holds the potential to criminalize large numbers of the otherwise law-abiding. What criminal and social policy still fails to reflect is that for most young users drugs are *not* a problem; they do not interfere with other aspects of their lives; they are quite simply a rational lifestyle choice (Coffield and Gofton, 1994; Hammersley et al., 2002). Equally research on 'drug-related crime' will remain of limited value unless it begins to seriously address the geopolitical contexts of economic polarization, social exclusion, consumerism, drug production and trafficking in which conditions of supply and demand are maintained (Seddon, 2006).

■ ■ Summary ■

- In much media and political debate the terms 'teenage', 'adolescence', 'youth' and 'generation' have been trapped in a negative discourse to describe a condition which is considered both troubled and troublesome. These images in the main derive from a predominantly bio-psychological literature dating back to the first decade of the twentieth century but persist as a successful newsline for the press, television and radio and as a potential vote winner for politicians.
- Young people are trapped in official definitions and measurements of 'crime'. Legal definitions reflect only what is sanctioned by the criminal law and fail to recognize far more serious 'social harms' committed by adults and the powerful.
- The concepts of 'delinquency' and 'anti-social behaviour' extend the parameters of 'youth crime' to include a host of trivial 'nuisances' and 'misconducts'.
- Young people are widely perceived not to be rational and responsible enough to be fully empowered, but are deemed fully rational and responsible if they offend.
- The extent of youth crime is unknowable. There are no reliable statistical indices. To this extent what is known about young offending is a social construction – a product of particular social reactions and policing practices which become embedded as 'facts', not only in official statistics, but also in popular and political discourses.

- Youth regularly appear as the cornerstone of a number of key concerns about a disordered present. Are the streets safe? Are schools too permissive? Are parents failing to exercise proper control? Is television a corrupting influence? Are the courts too soft on young offenders? The 'problem of youth' is driven by adult mistrust, fear and intolerance.

■ ■ study Questions

- 1 What can be learned about youth crime by studying crime statistics?
- 2 Why do media, politicians and law enforcement agencies attach so much significance to the transgressions of young people?
- 3 In what ways can 'youth crime' be considered a social construction?
- 4 The 'youth crime problem' is an illusion, a trick to deflect our attention from more serious crimes and social harms. How far do you agree?
- 5 'The issue of youth crime is less to do with breaking the law and more to do with fears for the nation's future.' Discuss.

■ ■ Further Reading

One of the best critical commentaries on the construction of criminal statistics remains that of Coleman and Moynihan's *Understanding Crime Data* (1996). Disjuncture between statistical evidence and public opinion is revealed by Hough and Roberts (2004). There is still no single text which explores media representations of youth and crime, but the most accessible introduction to media and crime in general can be found in Jewkes (2004). Davis and Bourhill (1997) catalogue how the media were implicated in creating a 'crisis' about childhood in the 1990s. The breakthrough self report studies are those associated with the Youth Lifestyles Survey first conducted in 1992 (Graham and Bowling, 1995) and repeated with a larger sample in 1998 (Flood-Page et al., 2000). The Home Office now carries out an annual self report survey targeted at 10 to 25 year olds. Anyone seriously interested in youth drug use and the possibilities for reform can do no better than start with Parker, Aldridge and Measham's *Illegal Leisure* (1998). For a good introduction to gender and crime see Walklate's (2001) *Gender, Crime and Criminal Justice*, though this does not focus exclusively on young women. Sheila Brown's (1998; 2nd edition 2005) *Understanding Youth and Crime* does more than most to force us to acknowledge that 'youth crime' is a product not of absent fathers, single mothers, lack of discipline, and so on but of the production and consumption of partial knowledges.

: // Web Resources /

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/index.html>

The main portal for criminal statistics, victim surveys and self reports in England and Wales.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/15730/9012>

The main portal for crime and justice statistics in Scotland.

<http://www.nacro.org.uk/data/resources/>

The crime reduction charity organization NACRO (National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders) occasionally produces briefings which synthesize statistical data on youth crime and youth justice.

<http://www.umsl.edu/~ccj/eurogang/euroganghome.htm>

A collaboration of US and European academics who have formed a 'thematic network for comparative and multi-method research on violent youth groups'.

<http://www.drugscope.org.uk/>

A useful site for current statistics on drug use and commentaries on contemporary policies.

<http://www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/health-and-lifestyles-related-surveys/smoking-drinking-and-drug-use-among-young-people-in-england>

An annual survey carried out on behalf of the NHS in participating schools across England to provide information on 11 to 15 year olds' smoking, drinking and drug use behaviours.

<http://www.mediastudies.com/>

A hub providing links to over a hundred international news, media studies sites, and other resources worldwide for students, and researchers.

<http://www.iir.com/nygc/>

The National Youth Gang Centre is part of a coordinated response to America's gang problem by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and illustrates the centrality of concern about gangs (as opposed to youth cultures) in American law and order discourse.

<http://www.spiked-online.com/>

An on-line critical commentary on various current affairs including media and political campaigns against youth, anti-social behaviour, crime and violence.