

Case Study

Chapter 5

A twenty-year-old man lives in poverty and has just been laid off from his work. While he still lives at home, he can no longer contribute to the family financially, and no longer has money for discretionary spending. He cannot afford to go to college. He is spending his free time with friends from his neighbourhood who are in a similar situation. They are frequently harassed by police. Within a few months, the group decide to break and enter homes and then businesses, stealing what they can and sharing the profits.

At first, they are not caught despite a few close calls and encounters with angry homeowners and large dogs. After a year, the man is arrested and imprisoned.

- 1. How is this behaviour deviant?**
- 2. Why is there stigma associated with this behaviour?**
- 3. How would a sociologist approach this incident?**
- 4. How would a conflict theorist explain this crime?**
- 5. How would a symbolic interactionist explain this crime?**

Sample Answers:

1. This behaviour is deviant because it is not socially acceptable to enter someone's house or business without permission and take their belongings. It is also illegal and considered to be a property crime.
2. Criminals and prisoners are stigmatized because they are viewed negatively by society both during and after their incarceration.
3. A sociologist would consider careers, cultures, and communities when studying crime and deviance. They would also investigate the crime through a sociological theory, as discussed in the text, and by looking at credible evidence and social factors.
4. Conflict theorists believe that those who are in power create the laws to protect themselves and their property. One aspect of conflict theory, strain theory, asserts that crime, especially theft and robbery, happen because there is a gap between the desire to attain material wealth and the ability to do so by using conventional methods. Therefore, they would explain that this young man committed theft in order to bridge this gap and secure material wealth otherwise unavailable to him.
5. A symbolic interactionist would be interested in how and why a person engages in criminal acts and in what ways these acts would impact their identity. They would argue that this young man learned deviant and criminal behaviours based on his interactions with others, including his friends and the police; therefore, these interactions were a big factor in his decision to commit property crimes.