



The Threads of Society

A Visual Map of Sociological
Approaches to Crime and Deviance

A Curated Exploration of Criminological Thought

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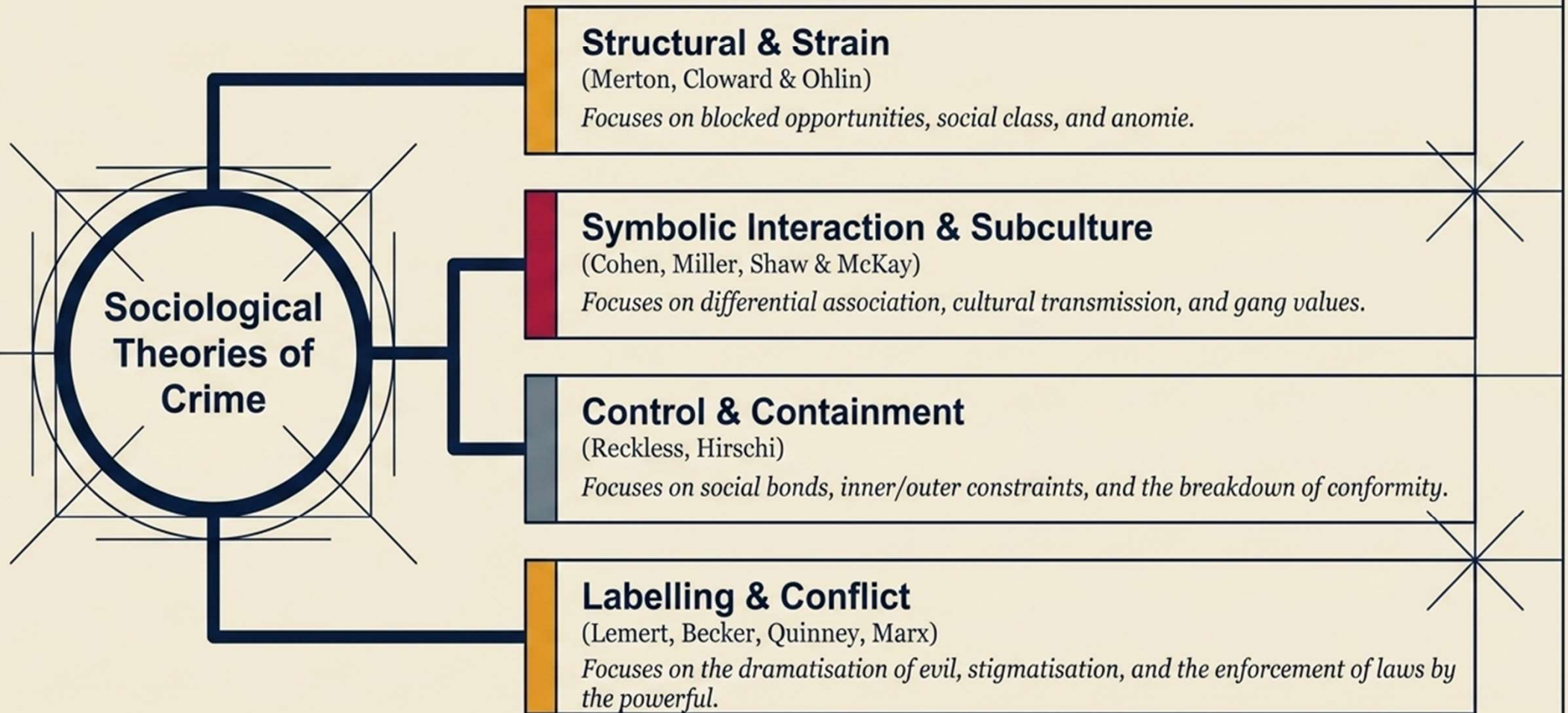
The Deviance vs. Control Typology

Three major paradigm shifts in criminological questioning.

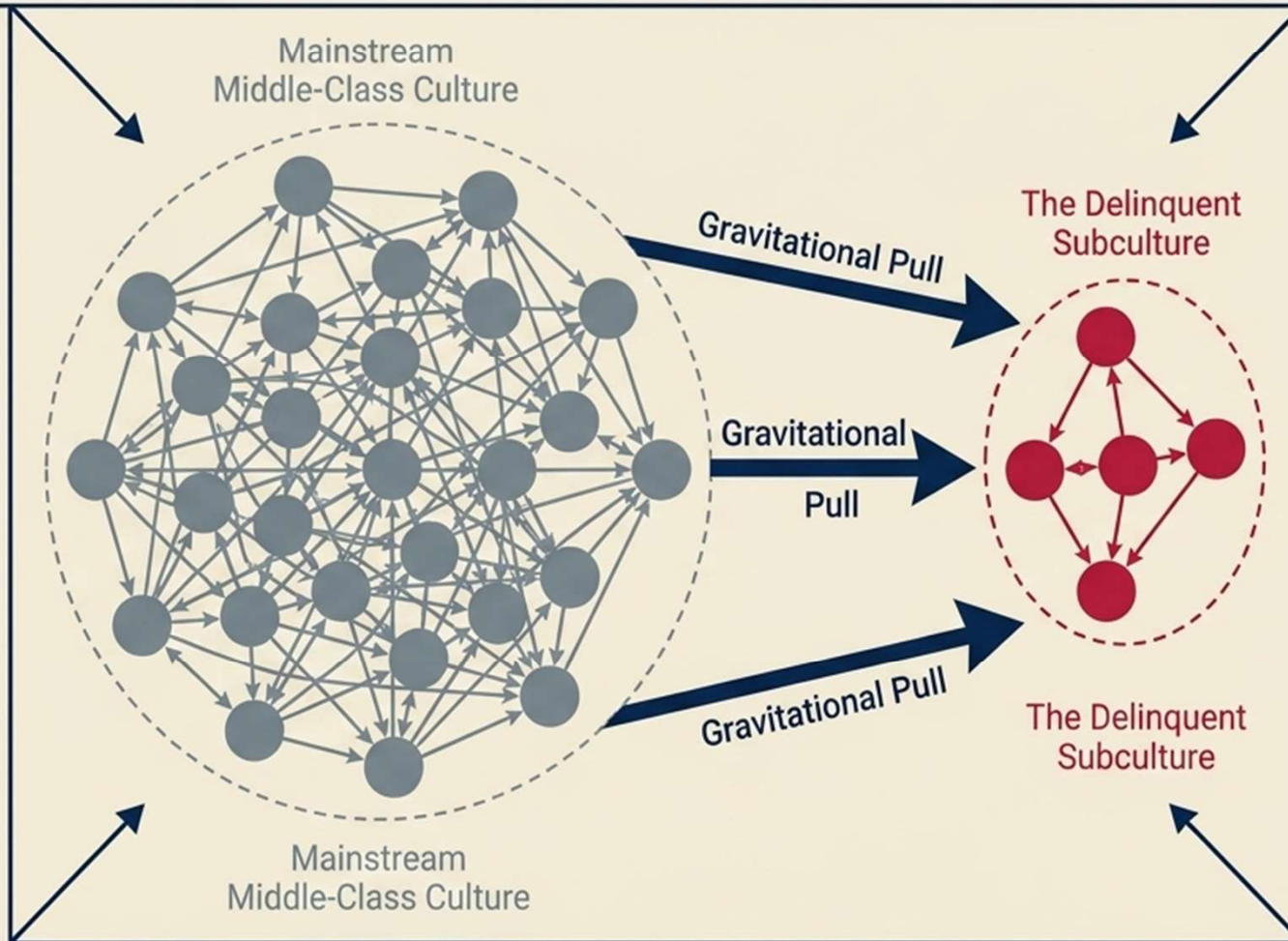
The Fundamental Question Matrix

Strain & Subculture Theories	Control Theories	Labelling & Deviance Theories
The Key Question:	The Key Question:	The Key Question:
Why do people deviate?	Why do people conform?	Who decides what crime is?
Assumption of Human Nature:	Assumption of Human Nature:	Assumption of Human Nature:
Inherently socialised and conforming. Motivation for deviance comes from the individual or social class pressures (anomie).	Amoral. Individuals must learn right and wrong. Deviance is natural when social systems or normative guidance are weak.	Neutral. Behaviour is only criminal when society defines and enforces it as such.

Criminological Taxonomy Map



Subculture Theory: The Gravitational Pull of the Gang



Main takeaway

A person develops within a peer group where the value system deviates from larger society, but remains constant among members.

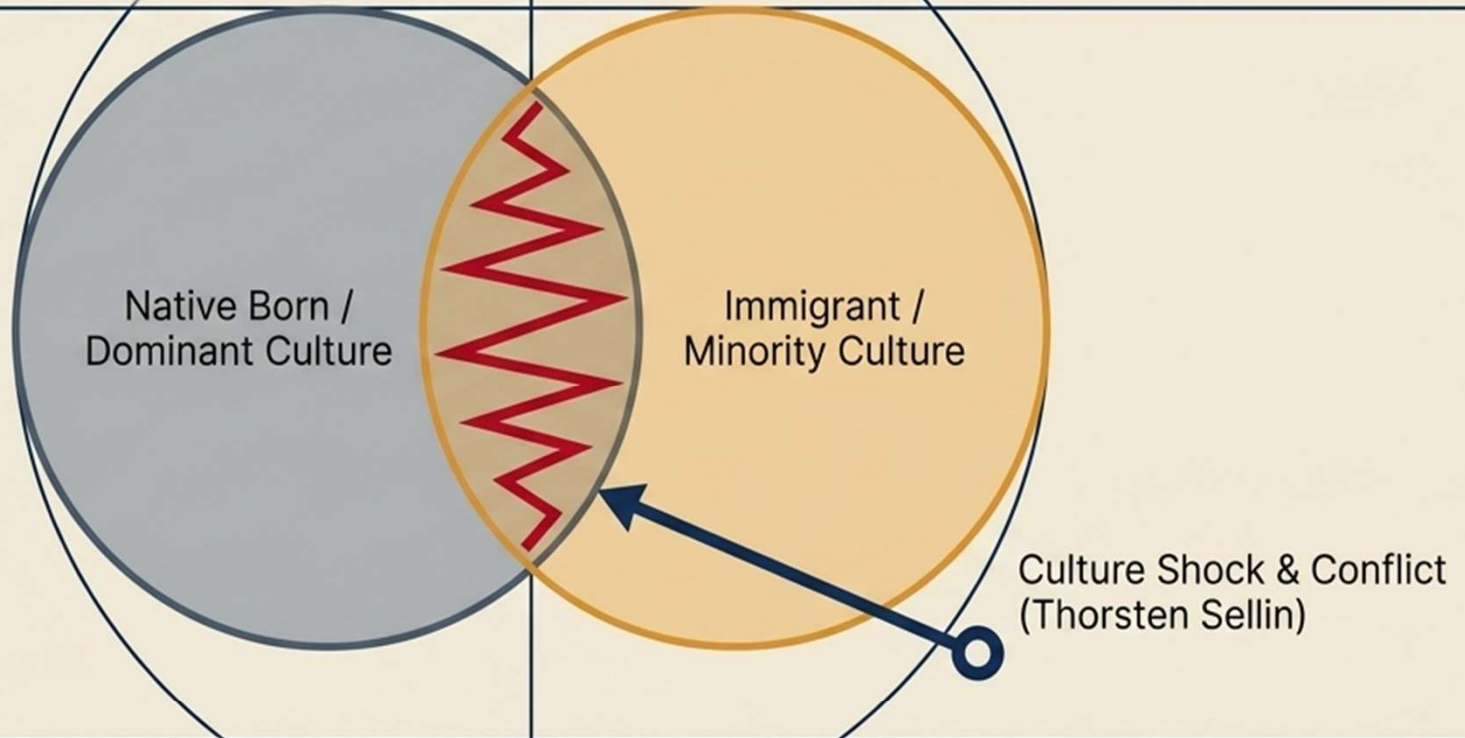
- **Cohen's Insight:**

Gang action is problem-solving. Lower-socioeconomic youth face the world on their own terms, seeking status within the gang rather than the broader society.

- **Miller's Focal Concerns:**

Working-class delinquent values emerge from a need for toughness, smartness, excitement, fate, and autonomy. Middle-class delinquency is often an upward diffusion of these lower-class attitudes.

Culture Conflict Theory: Clashing Normative Boundaries



The Core Concept

Crime frequently emerges from the intense normative conflict between different cultural backgrounds, rather than inherent criminality.

The Schoolhouse Example

Minority children face immense culture shock entering middle-class schools. While native children expend energy strictly on learning, minority children must expend energy adapting to strange norms.


The Result

Identified by the system as aggressive, these children assume this expected role, defending themselves and engaging in deviant behaviour to survive the normative clash.

Neutralisation Theory: Shielding the Conscience

Sykes & Matza: Delinquents use cognitive norm erosion to justify acts.

The Moral
Bind of Law &
Childhood
Development



1. Denial of Responsibility
I am a victim of circumstance.

2. Denial of Injury
Nobody was really hurt; it was
just a private duel.

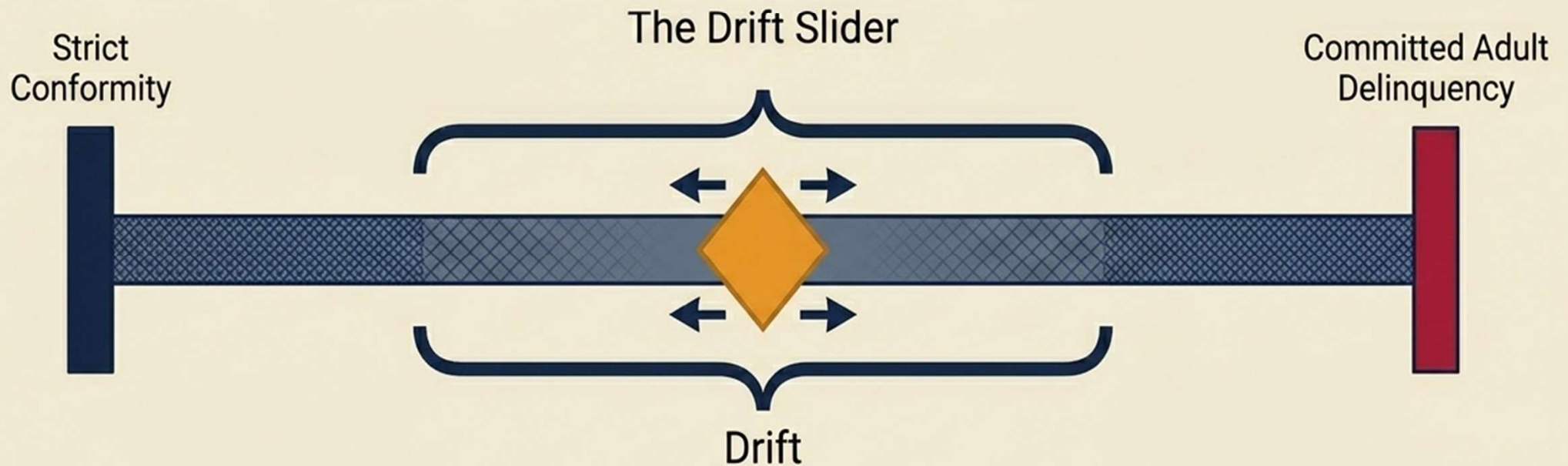
3. Denial of the Victim
They asked for it / They were
out of place.

4. Condemnation of the
Condemners
The authorities are hypocrites
driven by personal spite.

5. Appeal to Higher Loyalties
I had to sacrifice society's rules
to protect my group.

Drift Theory: The Transient Nature of Offending

Matza: The uncommitted space between legality and criminality.



The Core Concept

Delinquents use neutralisation to free themselves from the moral bind of law, allowing them to drift in an unidentified area without permanent commitment.

Systemic Enablers

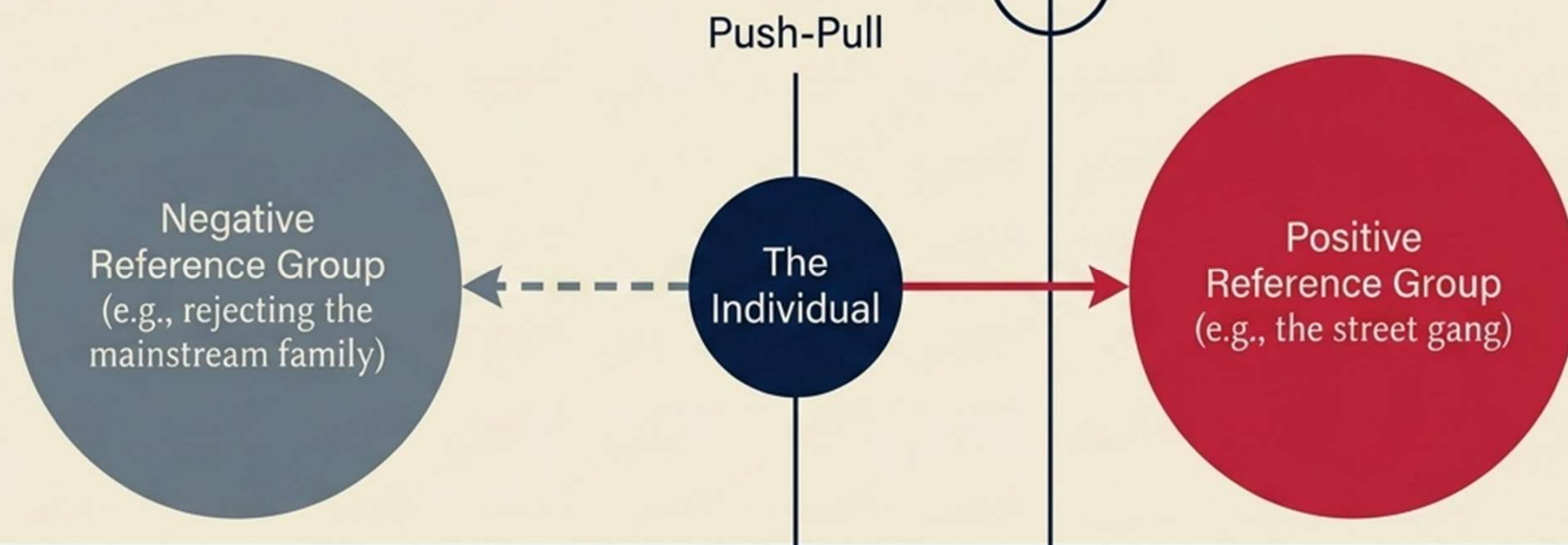
Young people exploit the fact that criminal laws are not rigidly enforced, using the discretion left to police and courts as extenuating circumstances to justify their behaviour.

The Outcome

Most eventually drift out of delinquency as they mature; only a few commit to a permanent life of adult crime.

Reference Group Theory: The Tension of Loyalty

Core Concept (Glaser, Shibutani)
Behaviour is dictated by the groups whose perspective constitutes an individual's frame of reference, regardless of actual membership.



The Mechanism (Haskell)

- 1** When an adolescent becomes dissatisfied with their family, it becomes a negative reference group.
- 2** The individual rejects their rejecters and adopts a street group with a delinquent subculture as their new positive reference group.
- 3** In the dynamic assessment preceding a delinquent act, loyalty to the new reference group dictates the decision to offend.

Containment Theory: The Structural Defences

W.C. Reckless: The barriers against environmental pressures.

Outer Containment (The Structural Buffer)

The immediate social world holding a person within norms: effective family life, consistent moral front, discipline, opportunity for acceptance, and community belonging.

Inner Containment (The Psychological Buffer)

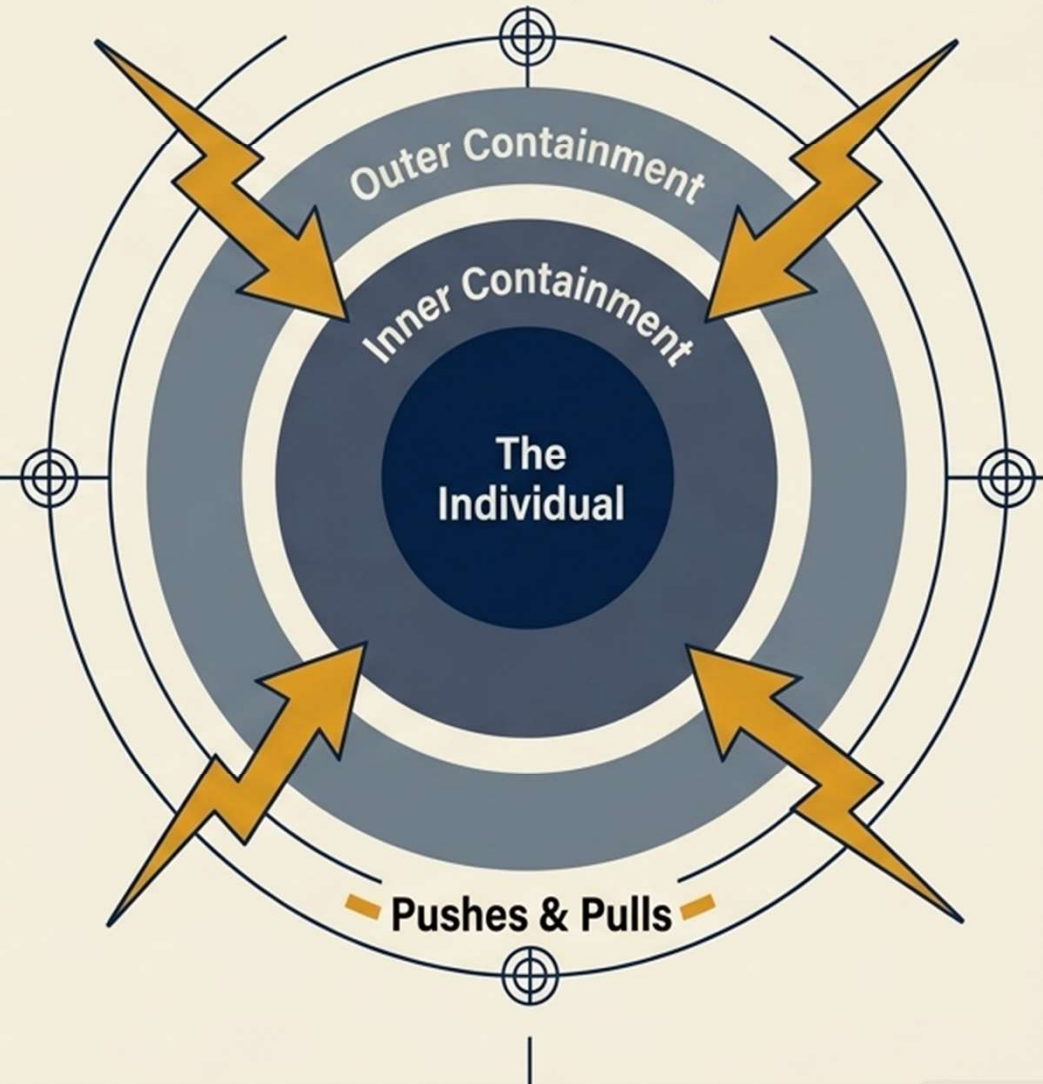
The ability to withstand pressures: good self-control, ego strength, high frustration tolerance, goal orientation, and tension-reducing rationalisations.

Pushes & Pulls (The Threat)

Poverty, deprivation, mass media distractions, criminal subcultures, and blocked opportunities.

Insight: In a fluid, mobile society where outer containment weakens due to alienation, inner containment becomes the critical defence against crime.

Containment Target Diagram



Labelling Theory: The Dramatisation of Evil

Step 4: Integration & Identity

Realising even efforts to be good are viewed with suspicion, the child retreats into the delinquent play group. The child accepts the label of incorrigible.

**The
Self-Fulfilling
Prophecy of
Stigma**

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graph TD; S1[Step 1: The Act] --> S2[Step 2: Suppression & Scrutiny]; S2 --> S3[Step 3: The Label Applied]; S3 --> S4[Step 4: Integration & Identity]; S4 --> S1;
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Step 1: The Act

A child engages in normal, slightly disruptive play (raising hell).

Note: No act is intrinsically criminal until defined by law.

Step 2: Suppression & Scrutiny

Community and police demand suppression. The child is scrutinised based on stereotypes (race, class, appearance).

Step 3: The Label Applied

Authorities and parents formally define the child as bad or different. The dramatisation of evil begins.

Deviance Theory: The Act vs. The Identity

Lemert's distinction between initial rule-breaking and the adoption of deviant status.

Primary Deviance

Definition:

The initial, often isolated act of deviating in accordance with anomie or structural strain.

Self-Perception:

The individual does not view themselves as a criminal. The behaviour is rationalised or considered a temporary lapse.

Secondary Deviance

Definition:

Deviance used actively as a **means of defence, attack, or adjustment to social penalties and societal stigmatisation.**

Self-Perception:

A **crisis** is reached at **society's tolerance level**. The individual **embraces the deviant social status, strengthening defiant conduct as a reaction to the penalty itself.**

The New Criminology (1970s)

Mapping the Marxist-inspired approaches to systemic power.

Foundation: Emerged in 1973 (Taylor, Walton, Young) focusing on economic/structural forces, though Marx himself had little interest in the lumpenproletariat criminal classes.

Conflict Criminology

Core Belief: Nothing is intrinsically criminal. Criminality is a definition applied by the classes holding power.

Critical Criminology

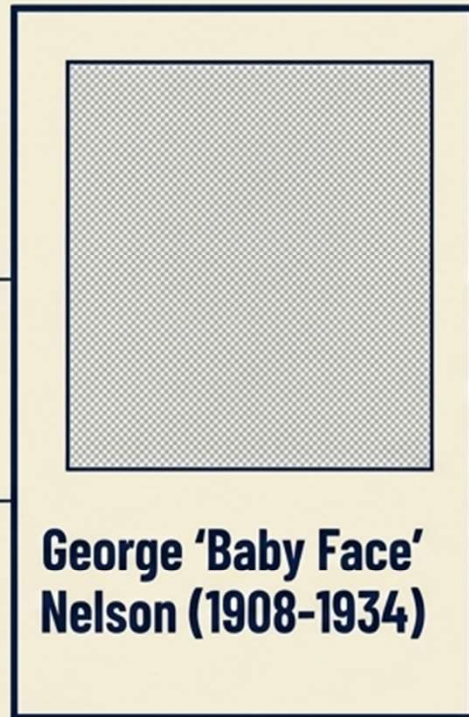
Core Belief: Maintains an intellectual alliance with the system, but heavily critiques it for contradictory structures that lay in the path of human liberation and social justice.

Radical Criminology

Core Belief: Draws from civil rights and anti-imperialist movements. Abandons reform in favour of a goal to completely revolutionise society and dismantle capitalist structures.

Theory in Practice: The Systemic Outlaw

Mapping theoretical frameworks onto historical case studies.



Subculture Theory

Born Lester Gillis in a tough Chicago neighbourhood. Sought status and recognition within a street gang environment.

Conflict & Strain

Short of stature (5'4), he was constantly snubbed. To achieve the toughness focal concern of his class, he turned to the gun as an equaliser.

Labelling & Secondary Deviance

Labelled an extreme strong-arm man for Al Capone. When his violence became too extreme, the mob dropped him. Rejected by both mainstream society and the criminal establishment, he embraced ultimate secondary deviance, joining John Dillinger in a spree of robbery and murder.

Theory in Practice: The Cognitive Shield

Contrasting Nelson's systemic criminality with pure Neutralisation.

**Jesse Woodson
James (1847-1882)**

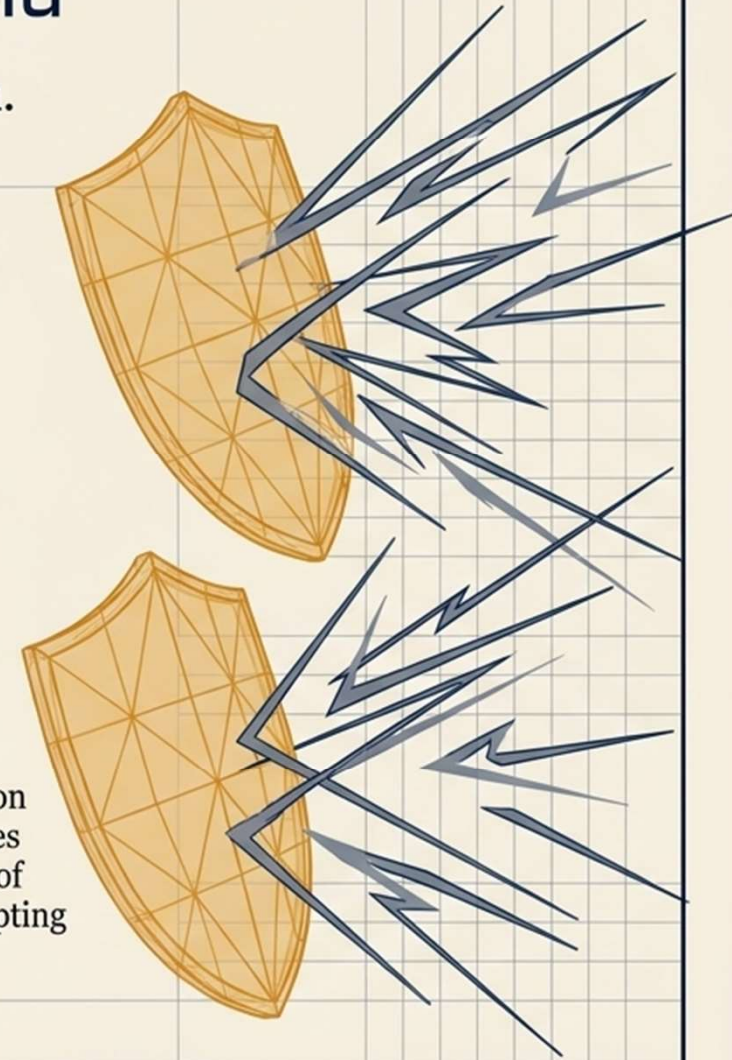
*The Yankees
made me do it!*

Appeal to Higher Loyalties

James served the Confederacy in Quantrill's Guerrillas. His subsequent 16-year spree of bank robberies was mentally reframed not as common theft, but as a continued act of partisan loyalty to the defeated South.

Denial of Responsibility / Dramatisation of Evil

By viewing himself as an actor acted upon by a hostile Northern government, James successfully neutralised the moral bind of the law, killing with impunity while adopting the heralded role of the rebel outlaw.



Synthesis: The Threads of Society

The Two Classifications of Delinquents (Johnson, 1959)

1. The Unconsciously Driven (The Majority)

Individuals who commit crimes due to underlying structural pressures, anomie, or weakened containment, but who cannot articulate why they offend.



2. The Sociological Group / Gang (The Minority)

Subcultural participants whose behaviour is severely damaging to society, but who possess clear rationalisations, neutralisations, and shared value systems for their actions.



Final Insight: Understanding crime requires examining both the goal-oriented pressures of the individual and the role-oriented dynamics of the group. Deviance is as much about the weakness of the social fabric as it is about the individual pulling the thread.