Young Offenders from Different Ethnic Backgrounds: A Qualitative Study

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University of Surrey
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Abstract

This thesis develops a theoretical framework for explaining offending among young male offenders, and generates provisional insights and hypotheses about ethnic differences among this group. The study involves qualitative interviews with 51 young male offenders under sentence in Young Offender Institutions: 19 white, 14 Black-Caribbean, 8 Black-Mixed, and 10 Asian.

The framework highlights how young males become offenders because of range of 'criminogenic constraints' in their backgrounds, consistent with strain, subcultural, control and psychological theories. However, it also highlights how individuals become offenders in part resulting from their own volition. That is, offenders help create some of the criminogenic constraints which contribute to their downfall, and must ultimately choose, actively, to pursue crime, over and above these constraints. This requires that they embrace certain motivations to develop into offenders. Such motivations are not simply reducible to the criminogenic constraints they experience, and draw potentially on wider cultural influences. Furthermore, these motivations play an important role in shaping the extent of their offending and the offences they carry out.

The framework provides a basis for comparing ethnic groups. Importantly, the research suggests that there is much commonality among young male offenders from different ethnic groups. This being said, insights into possible ethnic differences were identified, which could be used to provide hypotheses for further research. White offenders appeared to have more psychological problems, serious drugs or alcohol problems and be more disposed towards burglaries and car crime. Black-Caribbean offenders appear to have fewer of these types of problems, appear more highly motivated by offending to spend on consumption-oriented lifestyles, and more often involved in robbery. Asian offenders appear to have the least difficulties in their backgrounds, but also appear least developed in their offending.
Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank my parents, Carey and David Miller, for their continued support throughout my involvement in this research project.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Nigel Fielding and Alan Clarke, my supervisors on this project, who have guided me well in writing the thesis, and remained supportive and encouraging throughout. I would also like to thank Marian FitzGerald who helped supervise my work during the early stages of the thesis.

Finally, I would like to thank the participants in this research. This includes not only the interviewees, who provided the core data for the project, but also the prison staff who granted me access to the interviewees, and made it possible for me to carry out the research.
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1. Introduction

Race, crime and criminal justice: an enduring problematic

For many years, statistics have shown that black people are represented within the criminal justice system to a far greater extent than would be expected from their numbers in the population. This is usefully illustrated using national prison statistics. Table 1.1 provides information on male British nationals under sentence focusing on 1998, the year in which this study was undertaken. The table is divided between young and adult offenders; and, for the purposes of comparison, it includes an ethnic breakdown of the national population for equivalent age-groups.

Table 1.1 Young and adult male offenders from different ethnic groups in 1998, compared with young people and adults in the general population, England and Wales 1997-99 (British Nationals only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Young male offender population (15-20) June 1998 %</th>
<th>Male population aged 15-20 1997-99 %</th>
<th>Adult male offender population (21 and over) June 1998 %</th>
<th>Male population aged 21-65 1997-99 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>93.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>14.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black African</td>
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<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black-Caribbean</td>
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<td>1.1</td>
<td>6.0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.9</td>
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<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asian</td>
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<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
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<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
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<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1.6</td>
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<td>Chinese</td>
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<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian-Other</td>
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<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other-Other</td>
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<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


By comparing the prison populations with the national picture, it can be seen that, with the exception of Pakistani adults, white, Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani offenders in both age groups are under-represented in the prison population compared to their proportions within the population as a whole. By contrast, black people from all groups are substantially over-
represented, and this over-representation is particularly acute for Black-Caribbean young offenders.

It is important to note that there is also some important variation between ethnic groups in the crimes they are associated with. Notably, this has included a strong association between black offenders and robbery. Tables 1.2 and 1.3 show the breakdown of sentenced male prisoners according to their conviction types, again for young and adult sentenced prisoners. Compared to white young offenders, young black offenders - particularly those from Black-African and Black-Caribbean backgrounds - are far more likely to be convicted of robbery offences and to a lesser extent drugs offences. Asian young offenders show some similar differences, although they are less likely to be convicted of robbery and more likely to be convicted of drugs offences. Conversely, white young offenders are far more likely to be convicted for burglary, theft and handling, and 'other' offences.

Among adults, differences are less pronounced. However, black offenders are again more likely than white offenders to be convicted of robbery and drugs offences. Adult Asian offenders stand out for their high level of imprisonment for drug offences, particularly among Pakistanis, but are no more likely than white offenders to be imprisoned for robbery. As with their young counterparts, white adult offenders are disproportionately convicted for burglary, and for theft and handling.
Table 1.2  Offences of sentenced young male offenders in prison by ethnic background 1998 (British nationals only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Young male offenders (British Nationals)</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>South</th>
<th>Bangladesh</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Pakistani</th>
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<td>22</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
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Source: Prison statistics 1998
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adult male Offenders (British Nationals)</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Black-Asian</th>
<th>Black-Caribbean</th>
<th>Black-other</th>
<th>South-Asian</th>
<th>Bangladeshi</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Pakistani</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Asian-Other</th>
<th>Other-other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
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<tr>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Theft and handling</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td>504</td>
<td>613</td>
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</table>

Source: Prison Statistics 1998
Prison statistics describe the end-point of the criminal justice system, and should not, therefore, be taken as representative of all stages of the criminal justice system. However, many of the patterns of ethnic difference observed here are found elsewhere. For example, black people are over-represented in stops and searches by the police (e.g. Bucke, 1997; Home Office, 2000a); among those arrested (Phillips and Brown, 1998; Home Office 2000; FitzGerald and Sibbitt, 1997); among those sentenced at Crown Court (Flood-Page and Mackie 1998, Hood 1992) and among those on probation (Home Office, 2000b). For Asians, the picture is more mixed. For example, whilst they appear less likely to be stopped by the police (Bucke, 1997) recent ethnic monitoring data for selected police force areas (Home Office, 2000) shows they more likely to be arrested than whites in a range of police force areas. There is also evidence that Asians are sentenced in Crown Court more than would be expected from their numbers in the population (Flood-Page and Mackie, 1998; Hood, 1992). Because most research and statistics relating to the criminal justice system do not distinguish between Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, findings are likely to disguise variations between these groups.

The over-representation of black people in criminal justice statistics and, probably to a lesser extent, the connection between black people and robbery offences, are issues that have provoked considerable public and academic debate (FitzGerald, 1997 provides a commentary on this). It also provides an important starting point for the rationale of this thesis. Below, therefore, some of the key features of this debate - as played out in academic research - will be sketched out, and the objectives of the study, which follow on from this, will be articulated.

**Understanding why over-representation occurs**

The debate about over-representation of black people in criminal justice statistics, and to some extent also the debate about black offenders and robbery, has centred predictably on two countervailing types of explanation. On the one hand, these have been seen as a product of racial discrimination within the criminal justice system; on the other, it has been argued that black people are generally more often involved in crime - and robbery offences in particular.
Yet, it is only the first of these explanations that have received any significant academic attention, in the form of research that explores the nature and extent of any discrimination. It is fair to say, by contrast, that research looking at the nature and extent of offending among different ethnic groups is fairly thin on the ground. It is useful here to review these two types of explanation.

**Racism?**

Biases in treatment by the criminal justice system have been theorised in a number of ways, drawing principally on the concepts of discrimination or racism. The range of these concepts is discussed below.

Direct racial discrimination occurs where a person treats another person less favourably on racial grounds than he treats, or would treat, someone else. Insofar as this may exist, it is likely to be equated with racist attitudes and stereotypes among police officers. This might hinge, for example on the recruitment of racist officers to the police service, or through the existence of a racist 'canteen culture' within the police service (Reiner, 1993). Indirect racial discrimination, by contrast, consists of treatment which may be described as equal in a formal sense as between different racial groups but discriminatory in its effect on one particular racial group. This arises if the criteria on which actions or decisions are made a) affect minority ethnic people in a disproportionately adverse way, yet b) are not essential to those actions and decisions (FitzGerald, 1993). Certainly, the low relative socio-economic position of ethnic minorities is likely to place them at a disadvantage in terms of policing (Reiner, 1993).

The report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Macpherson, 1999) found evidence of 'institutional racism' in the police service. The definition used by this inquiry appears to straddle both direct and indirect forms of discrimination, and involves:

'...the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.' (p.321)
While not necessarily falling under the rubric of discrimination, it is also possible that ethnic
differences in decisions taken by suspects themselves may affect their representation within
the criminal justice system. For example, Phillips and Brown (1998) showed that black
people were less likely to admit offences upon arrest, making them ineligible for caution and
more likely to proceed further into the criminal justice system. FitzGerald (1993) has dubbed
such a process 'amplification'.

Historically, the most compelling evidence for direct racism within the criminal justice
system has come from Hood (1992) in his study of sentencing practice in West Midlands
Crown Court Centres. Among other things he found that, after controlling for a large range
of other relevant social and legal variables, black men were a little more likely to be
sentenced to custody than white men, while Asian men were slightly less likely. However,
subsequent studies of sentencing have not reproduced this finding (e.g. Flood-Page and

In practice it is often difficult to pin down such 'pure' discrimination. In attempts to do so,
elaborate statistical models are typically used which allow relevant social and legal factors to
be controlled for. This process typically draws attention away from the structural factors that
are likely to play an important role in structuring ethnic disadvantage (Jefferson, 1993;
Reiner 1993). In practice, it may be that broader structural factors, which in some cases
might more appropriately fall under the heading of indirect discrimination, play a more
important role. For example, one type of indirect discrimination might be that minority
ethnic groups, because they tend to live in more deprived areas which are likely to be
policed more intensively, are more likely to come into contact with the criminal justice
system. In a different example, research by Hood (1992) suggests that African-Caribbean
males are disadvantaged when sentenced at Crown Court because they are more likely to
have been remanded in custody before trial which is associated with a greater likelihood of a
custodial sentence.

In a summary review of the relevant literature, FitzGerald (1993) identified the following
features of ethnic differences within the criminal justice system. In practice, these
differences might arise from some combination of direct and indirect discrimination, broader
structural disadvantages, and indeed amplification based on ethnic differences in suspects'
responses to the criminal justice system:
• Afro-Caribbean youth are especially likely to be stopped by the police and to be arrested (although only a small proportion of these arrests results from stops). Asians are less likely than whites to be stopped.

• Once arrested, Afro-Caribbeans are less likely to be cautioned than whites and may be less likely than Asians to have no further action taken against them.

• The overall pattern of charges brought against Afro-Caribbeans differs from that for whites or Asians.

• Afro-Caribbean defendants are more likely to be remanded in custody.

• Afro-Caribbeans are more likely to plead not guilty to the charges against them.

• Afro-Caribbeans are more likely to be tried at Crown Court.

• Afro-Caribbeans are more likely to be acquitted.

• Afro-Caribbeans found guilty of crimes are likely to receive more and longer custodial sentences and a different range of non-custodial disposals.

It is notable, however, that despite such differences, authors who have reviewed the field tend to conclude that racial discrimination is unlikely, on its own, to explain in full the substantial over-representation of black people in prison (FitzGerald, 1993; Smith, 1994; Reiner, 1993). In general terms, this is because ethnic differences in treatment by the criminal justice system, identified by research, do not appear significant enough to explain this over-representation. Smith, for example, drawing on a range of research evidence observes, among other things, that:

• Where ethnic bias is found in the criminal justice system, its potential impact is fairly limited.
• A racist criminal justice system would involve a steady increase in the proportion of black suspects and offenders through the system - instead, the proportion of black people is about the same among suspects as described by victims, those arrested, and the prison population.

• Policing of certain crimes, such as burglary, cannot easily be directed at black people specifically (because the police will be less likely to work with suspect descriptions than, say, robbery), yet large racial differentials in arrest rates still exist for these crimes.

**Ethnic differences in offending?**

As noted, there is only a limited amount of literature on ethnicity and offending. One direct source of information on offending among different ethnic groups involves a self-report survey carried out by Graham and Bowling (1995) on young people aged between 14 and 25 in the general population. This revealed no significant differences between the proportions of white and black respondents admitting to ever having committed an offence; neither were there differences between white and black respondents for any of the subcategories of offence types. On the other hand, proportionally fewer Asian respondents reported offending for all major types of offences. However, the findings of this study should be treated with some caution. The survey encountered considerable problems of non-response among minority ethnic people and, more generally, significant concerns about the reliability of self-report methods among minority ethnic people have been raised in relation to US data (Hindelang et al., 1981).

On the question of robbery specifically, evidence based on victim descriptions does, consistently, support the view that black offenders are disproportionately involved in robbery. For example, an analysis of amalgamated 1988 and 1992 British Crime Survey data suggested that for 32 per cent of 'muggings' of white people (where descriptions could be given) they were carried out by black people (Mayhew, et al., 1993). Mugging predominantly involves street robbery, but is also taken to include snatch thefts. This suggests there is a substantial overrepresentation of black people in mugging offences, given that black people make up less than two per cent of the population. Stockdale and Grisham (1998) also reported that police statistics also showed a very substantial over-representation of black people amongst robbery suspects in the Metropolitan area.
Rationale for this study

The inference from the literature so far reviewed is that at least some differences in levels and patterns of offending are likely to be implicated in an explanation of ethnic differences within criminal justice statistics. Yet the paucity of existing research means that this issue is not well understood, and remains an important area for academic focus.

There are very practical reasons, too, for focusing on this question. In policy terms, it is obviously important that policies designed to tackle crime fully meet the needs of all ethnic groups. Yet, without detailed knowledge on the nature and origins of offending among different ethnic groups, it is more difficult to tailor policies to meet the needs of minority ethnic people. It is certainly possible that offenders from minority ethnic backgrounds may have distinctive experiences that are not always addressed by mainstream interventions. Research that explores this issue is, therefore, of particular value.

Objectives

This project was not designed to provide, on its own, definitive answers to the questions raised here about ethnicity and offending. Given the minimal existing work in this area, there is important groundwork that needs to be done before such questions can be properly resolved. Rather, this study has been conceived as a pilot study that could pave the way for such work. As such, it was concerned with generating some provisional insights, which could serve as a basis for further research. Specifically, the objectives set for this study are:

1. To develop a theoretical framework for explaining offending which is sensitive to the potential role of ethnicity and which could be applied to young male offenders more generally.

2. To obtain provisional insights and to generate hypotheses relating to ethnic differences among young males offenders in relation to:
   - the processes by which they become involved in crime;
   - the nature of their offending.
Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into a total of eight chapters, including the current one.

Chapter 2 explores the existing literature on the causes and nature of offending in general and considers the implications of ethnicity. As such, it provides a body of theory and evidence that informs the empirical analysis.

Chapter 3 provides details of the interviews carried out with offenders, and outlines the reasons for and practicalities of the data collection approach adopted. This is followed by Chapter 4, which goes on to provide details of the epistemological approach taken to the interview data, and the specific methodological and analytic strategies used to develop insights from the interviews.

The empirical analysis is presented first of all in Chapter 5, which focuses on the 'background' to offending - namely the broader biographical characteristics of interviewees - and is primarily concerned with assessing the relevance of existing theory. This is followed by Chapter 6, an empirical chapter which focuses on the 'foreground' to offending - involving the nature of offending and the motivational dynamics that direct it. While this chapter is concerned with existing theory, it also develops some new theoretical ideas.

Chapter 7, the final empirical chapter, looks at the careers of interviewees as a whole. While this draws on the insights of the previous empirical chapters, it provides the basis for the development of some generalised theoretical principles to describe offending careers.

Finally, Chapter 8 presents the conclusions of the thesis, focusing on the study's two key objectives. It also sketches out ideas for further research to test and develop some of the ideas generated.
2. Existing theory and evidence

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with exploring the existing literature which has examined the causes and nature of offending in general and, as far as possible, to consider the implications of ethnicity for these things. In doing this, it aims to marshal concepts and evidence to orient the later chapters in addressing the study's objectives.

Specific aims of the chapter

The aims of this chapter, therefore, are:

• to identify existing theoretical ideas relevant to the development of a theoretical framework for explaining offending;

• to identify promising areas for further theoretical development in arriving at such a framework;

• to identify existing evidence on similarities and differences between ethnic groups in reasons for becoming involved in crime, and the nature of their offending.

Chapter structure

This chapter will first explore, in general terms, the key theoretical models which have dominated explanations of offending within criminology. It will then go on to review literature which sheds light on the nature of offending - notably the issue of specialisation. These two topic areas will then be revisited and considered alongside the limited evidence relating to ethnicity. Finally, in a discussion section, the project's objectives will be reviewed again, highlighting the lessons learned from the literature reviewed.
The origins of delinquency

There are a number of well-established sociological theories or perspectives that have been used, over the years, to explain why people become involved in offending. None of these has uniquely triumphed in the face of empirical evidence or more general critical scrutiny. As such, therefore, none has provided a clear and overarching framework for understanding crime. However, all may be seen as having something to offer an understanding of delinquency. Acknowledging this need for synthesis, more recent theoretical efforts have attempted to integrate the main perspectives under more generalised, albeit more complicated, theoretical formulations (e.g. Johnson, 1979, Farrington, 1994). Thus far, however, little attention has been devoted to ethnic dimensions of these explanations.

At the outset of this thesis, it is useful to review these key perspectives in turn, for these will be used to inform subsequent analysis. In line with the specific focus of this study, the main perspectives reviewed will be those which are concerned with why individuals become involved in crime, rather than theories which focus on the reasons why crimes take place (such as those in the 'rational choice theory' tradition). As such, the predominant theoretical focus of this chapter is on strain, subculture, control and psychological perspectives on delinquency.

Strain theory

Strain theory has its roots in the work of Durkheim's concept of 'anomie' expounded in his study of the causes of suicide (1970). Within this analysis, he used anomie to describe the pathological mental state of the individual who is insufficiently regulated by society and suffers from the 'malady of infinite aspiration' - or an unregulated and insatiable desire for the unobtainable. This stands in contrast to the individual who is properly regulated by society, and whose aspirations are realistically in keeping with his position in the social order. The frustration associated with the condition of anomie was seen as potentially leading an individual to commit suicide or homicide. Certainly, anomie played an important part in Durkheim's explanation of variations in suicide rates across Europe.
The concept of anomie was adapted significantly in earlier theoretical developments: notably in strain theory, which emerged in the work of Merton (1938)\(^1\). While Durkheim viewed anomie as an exceptional condition, aggravated by social upheaval but largely held in check by social regulation, Merton conceived of anomie as a normal and routine part of the way society was structured. Specifically, he looked at the relationship between the normalised expectations of US society, namely wealth and success - or the 'American Dream', and the institutional means of achieving them - for example in the form of educational and economic opportunities. He argued that ultimately these two concepts could not be reconciled for many in society. Putting it bluntly: for those lower down the social structure, high goals were simply not matched by the legitimate means to achieve them. And while many could keep this disjunction of ends and means in check, for those who could not, one of four 'deviant adaptation' would occur: innovation, ritualism, retreatism or rebellion. Of these, it was innovation in particular that involved criminality. This involved the adoption of illegitimate means to attain the cultural goal of 'money-success'.

While for many years, strain theory was widely accepted, since the early 1960s it has faced strong criticism. Some have disputed the existence of a consensus around the goal of 'money-success' (Downes and Rock, 1998) - for example, suggesting that expectations are structured by social position. Similarly, it has been argued that in a complex society 'money success' is only one goal among others (op. cit.). Others, (e.g. Lemert, 1964) have gone further to dispute the adequacy of the concepts of social structure and culture upon which strain theory depends. Authors have also questioned the extent to which delinquency should be viewed independently of its construction, through societal reactions to perceived deviation (op. cit.). However, despite such criticisms, it seems likely that the importance of money and material success is valued across society, even if this takes different forms or jostles and competes with other goals in different social groups and contexts. Certainly, such criticisms do not detract fundamentally from the essential logic of strain theory.

A more compelling criticism, however, is the tendency of strain theory to over-predict delinquency in the lower classes, while under-predicting it elsewhere in the social structure (e.g. Box, 1971). While a disproportionate emphasis on lower class criminality may be evidenced by official crime statistics, it has been argued these may in fact reflect police

\(^1\) Of modern theories of delinquency, it is perhaps ‘control theory’ which has the closest similarity to Durkheim’s original formulation. This, however, is a later theoretical development.
practices, rather than the real distribution of crime. Where self-report studies of crimes have been used, such class-based tendencies have not been observed anything like so starkly (e.g. Hirschi, 1969; Box, 1971; Graham and Bowling, 1995). Certainly, strain theory does little to explain crime higher up the social hierarchy, and does not explain why many lower down do not resort to criminality.

We should, however, be cautious about taking self-report studies entirely at face value and in doing so writing-off strain theory. These methodologies have been subject to criticisms that may undermine the claims they make about offending and social class. Notably, they have often involved in-school (rather than school excluded or truant) populations, they have tended to focus on more trivial rather than serious offences, and they have not acknowledged biases in the way those across the social structure respond to self-report studies (see Hindelang et al, 1981). All of these factors are likely to downplay offending lower down the social class structure and therefore undermine claims about a limited relationship between social class and offending associated with self-report studies. Notwithstanding, even Hirschi's study found evidence that those lowest in the social structure report offending more. We should also not be too ready to dismiss the patterns associated with official statistics. As Young (1994) has noted, the criminal justice system does not have a free rein to produce such statistics according to particular agendas. Certainly, Phillips and Brown (1998) have shown that the majority of police arrests involve the police reacting to information passed to them, rather than as a result of proactive policing. At any rate, it is well known that offending is concentrated in poorer areas, which would suggest that those down the lower class structure are more likely to be involved (Audit Commission, 1996; Farrington, 1996a, 1996b).

Another problem with strain theory is that research has often failed to connect evidence of frustrated ambitions with offending (e.g. Hirschi, 1969; Johnson, 1979). Specifically, authors have failed to find evidence that subjectively acknowledged discrepancies between desired and expected educational and occupational outcomes are clearly related to offending. However, this theoretical failure may lie with the precise way it has been conceptualised and operationalised in research - focusing in particular on occupation achievement as a measure of success and aspiration. In practice it may be the power to consume is of most significance in judging success and frustrated aspiration. In other words it may be the prizes of high occupational achievement rather than the achievement itself that may be valued in a way that
drives delinquency. Certainly, the growth in advertising and the increased social penetration of television and other media forms since the second world war, all of which have undoubtedly promoted and raised the profile of material goods and lifestyles (Lea and Young, 1984), have undoubtedly produced an increase in a concern with consumption. And this long-term development been accompanied by rise in crime rates over the period. This might also go some way to explaining why even those higher up in the social structure may still resort to criminal means, if they too experience very high aspirations brought about by widespread advertising and media. This shift may be part of a broader structural and cultural shift that has been described by some as involving a shift from a modern to a postmodern society. Bauman (1994), for example, argues that the emphasis placed on consumerism by postmodern society outweighs and deflects traditional modernist concerns with social relations and the politics of production:

'...all potentially explosive troubles like frustrated personal ambitions, humiliating refusals of the public confirmation of self-definitions, clogged channels of advancement, even eviction from the sphere in which job-ascribed, publicly recognized meanings and identities are distributed, lead at best to a still more feverish search for market-supplied prescriptions, skills and tools of self- or image-improvement, or finish up in the disconsolate resignation of the welfare recipient' (pp.360-361)

In this context, it is possible to imagine that any frustrations felt by offenders may be focused more on the sphere of consumption than on educational and occupational prestige. This may take the form of some kind of revised notion of strain theory, within which frustration arising from inherent structural disadvantage may express itself with a concern for prestige through consumption, but which is unattainable through legitimate means.

To sum up, then, strain theory has had a difficult empirical ride. However, this may reflect the way it has often been operationalised, focusing in particular on strain in relation to occupational aspirations and opportunities. Shifting the focus of conceptions of strain towards consumption may offer more promising avenues for this type of explanation.

**Subcultural theories**

Subcultural theories posit, in broad terms, that people commit crime because they are members of particular social groups - or subcultures - that have different values from mainstream society which promote deviance and crime.
The first systematic use of subculture in the explanation of delinquency starts with the work of Cohen (1955). Significantly, Cohen looked not only at the nature and characteristics of delinquent subculture, but also asks the question: why is there a delinquent subculture? He argued that, while mainstream culture provides a strong basis for conformity, at certain points in the system normative conflict occurs as structure and culture make incompatible demands - in a way reminiscent of Merton's strain theory. Subcultures typically borrow ideas from the mainstream culture, but rework them into distinctive forms. They emerge where those facing similar conflicts have the opportunity to interact and form a distinctive subcultural response.

While Cohen saw the scope for the development of subcultures for a variety of different groups faced with problems of adjustment, his focus was on the gang delinquency of urban neighbourhoods. In his conception, while embracing themes of strain theory, Cohen's theory actually challenges one of its main assumptions. In contrast to the idea that delinquency is a utilitarian means of achieving highly placed goals, Cohen takes the view that a delinquent subculture is in fact 'non-utilitarian, malicious and negativistic'. Thus, existing theories were unable to account for crimes such as violence, vandalism or joy-riding. His theory asserts that working class and middle class people within society are accorded a different social status, and that dominant institutions of society, notably schools, are essentially middle-class in their values and organisation. This leaves the working class boy in a position of disadvantage because of the difficulty of achieving to middle-class standards. It is in this context that a delinquent subculture may emerge by providing working class boys with a fundamentally different set of status criteria that they are in a position to achieve. According to Cohen, a 'reaction-formation' takes place. This involves a rejection of mainstream values and, as a reaction, the adoption of their antithesis. This conception of a delinquent subculture explains the essentially non-utilitarian and malicious nature of much crime, such as violence, vandalism, and even to some extent theft.

A further development of this type of subcultural theory came from Cloward and Ohlin (1960). While they proposed a similar model of structurally generated delinquency as Cohen, they argued he had under-estimated the degree of specialisation. In order to explain this, Cloward and Ohlin not only address the broader structural context giving rise to normative conflict but also the role of local criminal infrastructures in the development of
criminality. In this conception, individuals are seen as being located in two opportunity structures - one legitimate, the other illegitimate. With limited access to success-goals by legitimate means, the nature of the delinquent responses to this limitation varies according to the nature of illegitimate opportunities that are open to them.

Accordingly, three distinct delinquent subcultural adaptations to discrepancy between success-goals and legitimate means are identified, each contingent on different criminal environments. A 'criminal' subculture will develop where there are close bonds between offenders of different ages, and where criminality is more integrated with the conventional order. This facilitates the involvement of young delinquents in instrumental types of criminal activity, while at the same time mitigating against less disciplined forms of non-utilitarian crime through control by the adult criminal system. A 'conflict' sub-culture, on the other hand, will develop where there are severe limitations on both conventional and criminal opportunity: discontent coupled with a lack of alternative opportunities or social control will lead to violent crime, as a search for status amongst delinquent peers. Finally, a 'retreatist' subculture develops where reactions to lack of opportunity are negotiated in a more solitary way by individuals. Retreatism develops among people without access to legitimate means, and who either (i) have inhibitions about pursuing illegitimate means associated with criminal or conflict subcultures described above, or (ii) have failed to achieve success within criminal or conflict subcultures. Retreatist subcultures are characterised typically by drug-use.

Not all subcultural theory focuses so explicitly on economic opportunity. Some, such as Miller (1958) represent more of a theory of cultural difference and clashes associated with different classes. Thus, the long-established differently patterned lower-class culture in the US had a fundamental resonance with features of delinquency. He identified the characteristics of 'toughness', 'excitement', 'smartness' and 'fate' as central to both. Thus working class culture supported the commitment of delinquent acts. Sutherland and Cressey (1974) also offer a less economically circumscribed and rigid view of a broadly subcultural type of explanation in their 'differential association' theory. They posit, in a simple and plausible way, that people will learn delinquent skills and motives from peers who are engaged in crime, according to whether they spend time associating with such peers. So those who spend time with delinquent peers will tend to become delinquent themselves.
Cohen and Cloward and Ohlin and Miller represent key figures in the American tradition of subcultural theorising. Britain, too, has also invoked subculture in looking to explain delinquency. Downes (1966) looked at delinquency among adolescent boys in East London in the early 1960s. This suggested that a clear delinquent subculture associated with status frustration was not in evidence. Typically, the boys were not members of structured delinquent gangs, with a marked sense of territory, leadership, hierarchy, and membership. The boys were disassociated with, rather than embittered about schooling. Occupational aspirations and expectations were pitched realistically low. In this context, intermittent delinquency appeared as a hedonistic response to the anomic strains of dull English life. Downes and Rock (1998) note this finding is seen in other work in a review of the British subculture literature and question the relevance of a conscious mismatch between aspirations and expectations in an understanding of British delinquency (indeed they note also such a finding in the American ethnographic work of inner-city areas):

'Because their fatalism about school and work is so entrenched, leisure assumes immense significance, not least when the expectation of action is met with the reality of "nothing going on". It is out of their response to this impasse that not only much delinquency, but also the successive styles of youth culture have emerged, particular since the post-war employment boom for young workers led commercial interest to develop the lucrative "teenage market"'. (p. 157)

A further, important strand of subcultural theorising in Britain emerged in the Birmingham school in the 1970s. This registered some of the insights noted by Downes and Rock, but placed youth cultures and, to varying extents, associated delinquency within explicitly Marxist frameworks (e.g. Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Cohen, 1972; Willis, 1977). For example, Cohen argued that the styles adopted by working class youth in East London represented a symbolic, rather than material, attempt to resolve the contradictions thrown up by capitalism in the working class inner city. Willis (1977) observed that the culture of working class boys at school, with their themes of violence, sexism and racism formed part of a masculine identity appropriate, and indeed necessary, to their embracing of manual labour following on from schooling.

A number of criticisms of subcultural theory have much in common with strain theory - which is no surprise given the clear conceptual crossover between the two. Thus, the idea that the most serious forms of delinquency are to be found in highly localised forms in one sector of the social system (i.e. the male, lower class adolescent) is clearly a gross simplification. Neither does the conception do justice to the fact that many people who may
occupy such a social position do not commit crimes. Again, this connects with debates above about reliance on official crime statistics. Critics have also registered concerns about the conceptualisation of subcultures in a concrete, stable and clearly definable way associated with much subcultural theorising (e.g. Downes, 1966).

One important response to crude and mechanistic excesses of much subcultural theorising may lie in the conception offered by Matza writing in response to American proponents of subcultural theory, though his arguments may be seen as having a particular relevance to the English subcultural context, such as that described above by Downes and Rock (1998). His critique, which emerges across several different pieces of work, is usefully summarised by Downes and Rock (1998). Matza accuses subcultural strain theories for 'over-predicting' delinquency - accounting for far more than exists. Matza does not see crime as flowing from a deeply-held set of oppositional values embodied in delinquent subcultures, but arising from 'drift' - where an individual exists in limbo between convention and crime. Crime is 'willed', 'intermittent' and often 'mundane' behaviour, facilitated by a 'subculture of delinquency' (rather than a more tightly-knit and discrete 'delinquent subculture') and supported by certain 'subterranean values' existing within mainstream culture. Ultimately, the delinquent is not someone dislocated from the wider society, but someone indulging in the darker side of a common culture as part of their adolescent development. Conventional values are retained - evident in the neutralising apologies for criminal actions given by offenders (e.g. 'everybody does it', 'nobody got hurt'). Furthermore, Matza accepts that young people grow out of crime with relative ease, as they are comfortably able to embrace a more legitimate adult role. Whilst Matza has been criticised for actually 'under-predicting' crime, his critique alerts us to the subtle and often overlooked connections between criminal values and the more conventional values and the contingent way in which people become involved in offending.

Matza's approach, in drawing the focus of criminal motivation towards individuals actively choosing delinquency, and interpreting and utilising diffuse sets of delinquent values, has something in common with the approach offered by Katz (1988). Katz takes us further away from traditional subcultural theory - indeed his approach is rooted in the tradition of phenomenology rather than subcultural analysis. Specifically, he is concerned with understanding the immediate subjective processes that accompany and motivate criminal activities. On the one hand, some of these might be seen as rooted in subcultural dynamics,
reminiscent of descriptions of delinquent subcultures by other authors (though Katz does not explicitly acknowledge this). For example, Katz talks about how the 'ways of the badass' animate certain forms of criminal lifestyle. This approach involves cultivating a 'tough' image, constructing 'alien' aspects of the self - appearing deliberately different from others in order to unnerve them, and learning to be 'mean' - that is to display a commitment to violence. In doing so, Katz implicitly acknowledges the subcultural dimensions of this:

'In many youthful circles, to be "bad" or to be a "badass", or otherwise overtly embrace symbols of deviance is regarded as a good thing'. (p. 80)

On the other hand, however, some aspects of Katz's analysis do not so directly suggest subcultural types of explanation. So, for example, in discussing the nature of 'sneaky thrills', he highlights how shoplifting can be a clear source of excitement for even middle-class young people. This group would not traditionally be seen as part of a delinquent subculture. Rather, the basis for this type of offending is the playing out of an exciting psychic drama:

'The sneaky thrill is created when a person (1) tacitly generates the experience of being seduced to deviance, (2) reconquers her emotions in a concentration dedicated to the production of normal appearances, (3) and then appreciates the reverberating significance of her accomplishment in a euphoric thrill' (p. 53)

Importantly, Katz holds out the possibility that the focus on subjectivity in understanding crime can provide the basis for a more elaborate understanding of criminality which, nonetheless, makes reference to broader causes and antecedents of criminality. This approach therefore might point us back to the kinds of explanations already offered by subcultural theories, or for that matter, other traditional theoretical approaches. However, it is clear that other, more novel, themes might be invoked in any explanation using such an approach.

A final reflection in relation to subculture and crime involves the issue of drug use. While the use of illegal drugs, and to a greater extent alcohol, is fairly common across the general population (e.g. Flood-Page et al.) there is evidence that particular patterns of drug use can be linked to particular criminal subcultures. For example, Auld et al. (1986) describes common but irregular use of heroin among a group of working class men in North London involved in crime. Similar suggestions emerge from a range of other studies on heroin use (e.g. Mott and Taylor, 1974). Brain et al. (1998) in their research into crack cocaine note its use is largely limited to just a few cities within England, typically associated with acquisitive
crime, and exploit the personal connections between crack users to carry out their research, suggesting important subcultural dimensions to crack involvement.

It is important to acknowledge that most drug use is not linked with crime; for example, Edmonds et al. (1998) calculate that 97% of illicit drug users have not encountered serious problems associated with this involvement, and for this group there is little convincing evidence of causal links between drug use and crime. Even where drug use is associated with those involved in crime, some authors have argued that drug use is primarily a symptom of a criminal lifestyle (e.g. Hammersley et al., 1989). However, there is increasing evidence of a direct causal link between certain types of drug use and criminality. So, Edmonds et al. (1988) argue that for the three per cent of drug users who have problematic patterns of use, the 'evidence is overwhelming of clear but complex links between drug misuse and crime'. Causal links between drug use and crime may be particularly important for those involved in crack or heroin use. A recent piece of work by Bennett (2000), looking at police arrestees notes a correlation between drug use and crime. However, he finds that this association was particularly strong for crack cocaine and heroin, and observes that illegal incomes associated with crack and heroin are very substantial. The clear suggestion here is that people offend to buy drugs - particularly those involved in harder drugs. Earlier research also posits an important causal relationship between drug use - notably heroin - and crime (Gandossy et al., 1980; Chaiken and Chaiken, 1991). Although money for drugs is likely to be an important motivation for offending, it is also conceivable that drug use may cause crime through its effects on those under the influence. Certainly, Flood-Page et al (2000) have shown that those who drank alcohol in greater quantities and with more regularity were more often involved in violent crime.

In the context of the drugs literature, therefore, is important to consider that certain kinds of drug use, in their own right, may contribute towards offending, over and above delinquent associates and delinquent values implicated in subcultural theories or, for that matter, any of the other main types of criminal explanation.

To conclude this section, then, regardless of the precise conceptualisation, one stark and enduring finding in much empirical work shores up the likely importance of some kind of subcultural influence on offending. This is the observation that delinquents are far more likely than non-delinquents to associate with other delinquents (e.g. Johnson, 1979;
Farrington, 1996a 1996b; Graham and Bowling, 1995) and, as theorised by Sutherland and Cressey (1974) this is likely to reflect, at the very least, the learning of some delinquent skills and motives from peers. It is likely, nonetheless, that a culturally informed understanding of crime will ultimately draw not simply on a conception of delinquency rooted in a tightly bound subcultural group, but also of individuals engaging with delinquent values, or sources of satisfaction, which are not simply rooted in an immediate social group. This is likely to require a more nuanced conceptualisation of culture, subculture and their influences on offending. This idea is an important one, and is one that will directly inform the approach taken in this thesis. As a final thought, it will also be important to consider the role of drugs in criminal subcultures, alongside criminal skills and values, in the understanding of offending behaviour.

**Control theory**

Control theories have their roots in the thinking of a number of historical scholars, including Durkheim, Hobbes and Aristotle (Downes and Rock, 1998). Notably, it has a strong theoretical resonance with Durkheim's (1970) theory of anomie:

'It is not human nature which can assign the variable limits necessary to our needs. They are thus unlimited so far as they depend on the individual alone. Irrespective of any external regulatory force, our capacity for feeling is in itself an insatiable and bottomless abyss'. (p.247)

The starting point of control theory - in contrast to other theories of delinquency - is the question: "why do men obey the rules of society?" (Hirschi, 1969). From this point of view, deviance is taken for granted; it is conformity that must be explained. Hirschi argues that delinquent acts result when an individual's bond with society is weak or broken. According to Hirschi, the key elements of this social bond are: 'attachment', 'commitment', 'involvement' and 'belief'. Attachment, for example relates to levels of intimacy with parents and levels of parental supervision, as well as attachments to school. 'Commitment' arises from having a stake in conformity: a person who has made a certain investment in a conventional line of activity risks losing it if he commits a delinquent act. 'Involvement' is a measure of time spent doing conventional activities - the behavioural counterpart of commitment. Finally, 'belief' in the moral validity of social rules is conducive to conformity. Hirschi finds strong evidence to support his theory based on his own self-report survey in the US, looking for example at parental supervision, measures of intimacy and affection with
parents and teachers. The same survey provides little support for strain or subcultural theories. Notably, social class shows little correlation with offending, and there are no clear class-based values reflected in the survey that might be conducive with a delinquent subculture.

The empirical power of Hirschi's arguments is persuasive. Subsequent studies have reproduced findings that suggest control factors are strongly correlated with offending. For example weak parental supervision (Farrington, 1996a 1996b; Graham and Bowling, 1995; Johnson, 1979; Wilson, 1980), weak attachments to school (Johnson, 1979) exclusion or truancy from school (Graham and Bowling, 1995) have all been associated with offending.

We should be less convinced by Hirschi's dismissal of other theories of delinquency on the basis of his findings, however. The difficulty of pinning down strain theories using self-report methods, for example in relation to class differences in offending or differences in occupational opportunities and aspirations, has already been discussed above. We should also be cautious about placing statistical surveys above detailed ethnographic work in identifying the existence or otherwise of distinctive cultural traits in particular sections of society. Such complex phenomena are unlikely to be easily reduced to the patterning of a simple set of survey questions.

A key limitation of Hirschi's theorisation is that it lacks any account of the motivational attractions of offending - why is it that those with weak bonds to society should choose to carry out crimes? Subsequent versions of control theory have tried to address this problem. For example, Box (1971) has incorporated elements of strain and subcultural theory in explaining the will to delinquency among those not closely bonded with society. The decision to deviate is seen as linked to the chances of concealment of the crime, the knowledge required to deviate, access to the necessary equipment, and the support of associates and wider cultural factors. Whether or not we take Box's formulation at face value, it is clear that while the weak social bonds may have a particular explanatory value, it is clear also that motivational factors need also to be invoked to provide a full explanation of crime. Clearly, some of the other theories reviewed here may therefore play an important role alongside control theory in providing a fuller picture of the etiology of crime.
Psychological theories of offending

As well as focusing on the key sociological theories of offending, it is important also to consider psychological approaches, for these have made an important contribution to theories of offending.

Conditioning theories have looked at the way parental punishment controls children's behaviour. Trasler (1962) has argued that when a child behaves in a socially disapproved of way, the parent will punish the child, which will create an anxiety reaction in them. After this ritual has been repeated a number of times, the child has a conditioned anxiety response to contemplated misbehaviour, and this response tends to block that course of behaviour. However, children are unlikely to build-up the link between disapproved behaviour and anxiety unless their parents supervise them closely, use punishment consistently, and make punishment contingent on disapproved acts. Trasler argued that middle-class parents were more likely to explain to children why they were being punished and to be concerned with long-term character building and the inculcation of general moral principles, and their main punishment sanction was the withdrawal of love. By contrast, lower-class parents supervised their children less closely, were more inconsistent in their use of discipline and used more physical punishment. Trasler thus argued that lower-class children committed more crimes because lower-class parents used less effective methods of socialisation. There is a notable crossover here between the principles of control theory, as discussed above, particularly the notion of 'attachment'. As such, there is some important complementarity between elements of control and psychological theory.

More recent learning theories have tended to employ cognitive social learning theories which emphasise the role of modelling, instruction, thought processes, and interpersonal problem-solving strategies (Bandura, 1977; Nietzel, 1979; Sarason, 1978). For example, Ross and Ross (1988) argued that offending was linked to cognitive deficits, and that offenders tended to be impulsive, egocentric, concrete rather than abstract in their thinking, and poor at interpersonal problem-solving. Interestingly, offender rehabilitation programmes which rely on cognitive-behavioural techniques have been marked by relative success, lending some credibility to these ideas (e.g. Vennard et al, 1997).
Some psychological theories have also emphasised inherent differences between individuals in underlying criminal tendencies. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) for example suggested that people differ in underlying criminal propensities and these differences appeared early in life and remained stable over much of the life course. The key individual difference factor in their theory is low self-control, which refers to the extent to which individuals are vulnerable to the temptations of the moment. People with low self-control are impulsive, take risks, have low cognitive and academic skills, are egocentric, have low empathy and short time horizons.

All of these theories have empirical foundations. For example, Farrington's (1996a, 1996b) international review of literature found evidence that problematic parental supervision, discipline and attitude, low intelligence, and hyperactivity and impulsivity at a young age (before 5 years old) are associated with offending across a range of studies. While this thesis will not investigate countervailing claims from the psychological literature, in view of the strong empirical basis for psychological modes of explanation, it will be attuned to the possible psychological origins of criminality. In doing so, it will be fundamentally concerned with problematic behaviour early in childhood which appears to form a common thread through all of the psychological literature.

Importantly, in drawing our attention to these early influences, a psychological perspective alerts us to the value of taking in the long-term history of an offender's development in understanding their present offending, and points us towards a polygenetic etiology of offending.

Empiricist perspectives - 'predicting delinquency'

Some of the most compelling recent approaches to delinquency have placed formal theory on the back-burner and focused instead on the empirical correlates of offending. While this provides the basis for assessing theory, it does not necessarily align itself explicitly with any theoretical perspective. Instead, this kind of analysis gives rise to statistical risk factors that reliably predict offending.

Farrington (1996a, 1996b) has made an important contribution to the understanding of the risk factors of offending in an international review of literature on youth offending. Other
studies more directly initiated to inform public policy have also drawn on correlational analysis. For example, within the Home Office, Graham and Bowling (1995) carried out their study of Young People and Crime that was to become influential in policy-making circles. The Audit Commission (1996) followed this with a study looking not only at the origins of offending, but also on policy responses to it, which again was influential in policy-making circles. Summarising together these empiricist approaches, some of the key 'risk factors' are as follows:

- **Family and home factors** - including large family sizes, problematic family relationships, parental separation, poor supervision, harsh and erratic discipline, delinquent family members and time spent living away from parents, such as periods in care, and other unstable living conditions.

- **School difficulties** - including low attainment, exclusion, truancy and poor school ethos.

- **Lack of training or employment.**

- **Friends involved in offending.**

- **Involvement in drugs and alcohol.**

- **Living in deprived neighbourhoods.**

- **Low socio-economic status** - particularly as measured by low family income and poor housing.

- **Behavioural and psychological factors** - including hyperactivity, impulsivity and low intelligence, often evident from early in childhood.

It is useful to note, for the purposes of the present study, that the existence of these risk factors suggests that delinquency is indeed multi-causal in nature. Certainly, the risk factors identified here lend potentially strong support to elements of strain, subcultural, control and psychological theories. It should be borne in mind, however, that these factors should not be seen as an exhaustive list of potential causes of crime. This is particularly true when one
considers that they rely explicitly on statistical methodologies. As such, they are unable to capture those aspects of social life that may have relevance to delinquency but which are not clearly captured by statistical measures - for example particular cultural values or themes that may give rise to delinquency.

**Critical perspectives**

There are a number of critical voices that have sought to problematise conventional understandings of crime drawing attention away from traditional concerns with the etiology of crime to societal reactions and constructions of criminality. While these arguments will not form a central concern of this study, it is worth briefly reviewing this perspective - particularly given that the interviews carried out for this study were drawn from within the criminal justice system and are therefore affected by the criminal justice system's reactions to perceived delinquency.

Critical perspectives are strongly influenced by labelling theory. According to this perspective, a crime exists due to the labelling of activities as criminal by members of society. The roots of this thinking can be found in the work of Becker (1963), who says:

> 'social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling (sic) them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather the consequence of an application by others of rules and sanctions to an "offender".' (p. 9)

Lemert (1964) has distinguished between the primary and secondary effects of labelling. In the first instance, somebody becomes a 'deviant' by having their activities labelled as such. However, a secondary form of deviance can arise when an individual's identity becomes directly informed by their label and their deviant actions become more exaggerated in line with their new self-image.

'Left idealism' (Young, 1994), often taking a Marxist or neo-Marxist perspective, takes this insight and chooses as its object of study the institutions of the state and their criminalising role, often focusing on how working class youth and ethnic minorities become labelled as delinquent. One example of this type of approach comes from Hall et al. (1978). They focus on the crime of 'mugging'. In the 1970s, much was made by the police, judges, government
and media of the apparent increase in the number of street attacks, strongly associated with black perpetrators. Hall et al. dub this social phenomenon a 'moral panic', and argue that the supposedly new crime of 'mugging' was not in fact new at all, rather it dated back to the nineteenth century. Hall et al. give examples of how police deliberately targeted black people in attempts to address the problem of mugging. They argue that a labelling process helped produce figures that implicated black people in crime, and which in turn justified stronger police measures. Hall et al. argued that the scapegoating of black people as responsible for society's ills has allowed a deflection of attention away from economic problems.

Such approaches are limited - particularly in relation to this study - in that they leave the original occurrence of criminal behaviour unexplained. Furthermore, they tend to overstate the biases that the criminal justice system can conceivably introduce into the focus of their efforts to control the population (Young, 1994). However, it will be important to bear in mind the possibility that interventions by the police and criminal justice system may have a role over and above the criminal act in defining somebody as an 'offender'.

Synthesising theoretical approaches

Given the range of theories of delinquency for which there is some empirical support, it is no surprise that some authors have tried to integrate some of these divergent perspectives into more complex and overarching theoretical frameworks. Johnson (1979), for example, attempted an integration of strain, subculture and control theories into a testable theory. Using a self-report survey in the US, he tested and developed this framework. He found strong evidence of the operation of both control and subcultural processes in explaining offending, though he found no evidence that strain principles were operating. I have already noted, however, the limitations of using self-report measures to assess evidence of strain - notably those based on occupational strain - so it may be that Johnson's methodology mitigates against validation of any strain-based hypotheses.

Farrington (1994) too has achieved some integration of divergent perspectives involving a sophisticated theoretical framework that he calls the 'Farrington theory'. In this theory, he takes the view that offending is associated with an anti-social personality that evolves through time and manifests itself through, among other things, offending behaviour.
Important questions relate to how offending and other types of anti-social behaviour evolve through the life-course, for example using concepts such as onset, persistence, escalation and desistance. In order to understand how such processes are mediated, Farrington's theory invokes a range of social and psychological theories already reviewed in this chapter. For example, he argues that the level of anti-social tendency depends on 'energising', 'directing' and 'inhibiting' processes. In his elaboration of these, the diverse theoretical traditions discussed in this chapter are brought into play (1994):

"The main long-term energizing factors that ultimately lead to variations in anti-social tendency are desires for material goods, status among intimates. The main short-term energizing factors that lead to variations in anti-social tendency are boredom, frustration, anger and alcohol consumption... In the directing stage, these motivations lead to an increase in antisocial tendency if socially disapproved methods of satisfying them are habitually chosen... In the inhibiting stage, antisocial tendencies can be inhibited by internalized beliefs and attitudes that have been built up in a social learning process as a result of a history of rewards and punishments..." (p. 558)

Such integrated approaches are likely to offer more adequate conceptualisations of the origins of offending. However, we should perhaps be cautious about relying too heavily on frameworks structured and informed principally by statistical approaches as the above two approaches have been. Not only do they sometimes entail problems of measurement (for example in self-report studies), but they also tend to limit themselves to variables that can be captured relatively easily by statistical measurement (rather than those which ethnographic or qualitative approaches might more clearly elucidate). Perhaps more profoundly, however, such theories - based as they are on probabilistic statistical models, and relying on statistical tendencies, averages and correlations - inevitably involve a significant degree of simplification and homogenisation of social phenomena. While such simplifications can be useful, they inevitably involve some loss of theoretical complexity and difference that may inhere across the range of offenders they examine. This point is returned to and discussed in the next chapter, which focuses on this study's methodology.

The nature of offending

This thesis is concerned with exploring the nature, not just the causes, of offending behaviour. It is plain that what we call crime breaks up into a variety of different activities, though these may overlap - violence, theft, burglary, robbery, fraud and sexual abuse to name the main categories of activity. Yet when we talk about offending, and its explanation,
it is typical to find that explanations do not attend in great detail to different types of crime. Rather, the range of activities which qualify as offending are often lumped together in the complex of 'offending'. In large part this is because offenders appear very often to be involved in a range of crimes. Indeed, Farrington (1994) notes that offenders are predominantly versatile rather than specialised: people who commit one type of offence have a significant tendency also to commit other types. For example, 86 per cent of convicted violent offenders in his Cambridge study also had convictions for non-violent offences. Levi (1994) in his review of violence also notes a tendency for generalised offending, noting that violent offenders generally and rapists specifically tend also to be convicted of non-violent offences.

This being said, this evidence which is based largely on statistical analysis of convictions may lack the sensitivity to identify unusual or specialised patterns of offending which may be too subtle for statistical measurement, or which exist at the margins of offending populations and are therefore not salient using general statistical techniques. It is important to note that different theoretical perspectives to some extent explain different types of crime. For example, strain theory - at least where this involves criminal innovation to achieve society's goals of success. - is seen as involving utilitarian crimes oriented towards accumulation of money. By contrast, subcultural theory has allowed for the possibility of crimes that are expressive, such as violence, vandalism, and joyriding. Furthermore, different subcultural formulations and responses, which have respectively been identified by theorists, appear to favour and sanction different types of crime. I have already noted, too, how Katz (1988) has shown in his analysis of the 'seductions of crime' that different criminal acts and lifestyles may be bound up with different types of cultural and psychological processes. At an empirical level too, there is compelling evidence for different types of motivation for different types of crime. For example, in their Cambridge study of offenders, West and Farrington (1977) found that the most common motives for property offences were utilitarian, rational or economic ones. Offences were also committed for hedonistic reasons, such as vandalism and vehicle theft. And Farrington et al (1982) found motives for aggressive acts, such as physical fights could be anger at provocation, loyalty to others, or the projection of toughness and masculinity.

For now it is enough to note that while offenders appear to be generalised and wide-ranging in their offending, the possibility of some specialisation is at least possible. Furthermore, this
might involve some different etiological characteristics. This insight will become more relevant through the course of this thesis.

**Ethnicity and offending**

Having reviewed in general terms the key theoretical areas relevant to this thesis, these will now be considered in explicit relation to ethnicity, which forms the study's main focus.

In practice, there is little etiological research into the subject of ethnicity and offending, so it is necessary to draw, in a piecemeal way, on a number of fragments of evidence to sketch a provisional picture of differences and similarities between ethnic groups in the origins and nature of their offending.

**Different origins of offending?**

In the review of theory in this chapter I have broadly concluded that some combination of the key theoretical perspectives is likely to be important to understanding the origins of criminality. However, it is important to consider whether and how the relevance of different theoretical perspectives may be similar or different for different ethnic groups.

From existing sources, there is some evidence that while black and white offenders have similarities in their backgrounds, there are some differences. Thus, an analysis of the 1991 National Prison Survey (FitzGerald and Marshall 1996) which looked at offenders aged 18 and over, found strong similarities between white and Black Caribbean offenders in variables relating to employment, education and family. Nonetheless, Black Caribbeans were more likely to have left school later than whites and less likely to have been persistent truants; they were more likely to have been single and to have grown up with one parent; they were also less likely to have parents with criminal convictions.

A report laying out strategies for youth crime in Lewisham (London Borough of Lewisham et al, 1998) noted some other differences. The report identified at least two 'prominent and distinct' groups of young offenders, based on the experiences of local agencies:

'One is a group of predominantly black young people whose crime is largely associated with supporting a lifestyle, categorised by high fashion clothes and
recreational drugs. This group is normally of around average intelligence, unemployed or not attending school and living at home. The second group are characterised by chaotic or poor functioning families from an early age, their crime does not follow a particular pattern or purpose. This group are frequently involved with Social Services or looked after (p. 10).

Other research has characterised samples of street robbers or 'muggers' - dominated by young black offenders - in a similar way to the first of these groups. For example, Burney (1990) comments on the 'normality' of those involved in mugging. Most lived on council estates with their parents who were usually working, and appeared to come from stable, loving families - although these often comprised a single parent. The main motivation for this type of offending was money to buy stylish clothes and trainers (footwear), and offenders were not characterised by drug addiction, alcoholism or mental health problems (common among offenders more generally). Similar motivations were also found among predominantly Afro-Caribbean street robbers in a study by Barker et al (1993). Earlier research by Pitts (1986) looking at white and black young offenders is consistent with this picture. This suggested that, compared to others, young black people involved in crime had less often been involvement in welfare services concerned with social or family problems, and those in penal establishments were more socially and academically able and were drawn from 'respectable' rather than 'disreputable' families.

Interestingly, research exploring school exclusion suggests some similar ethnic differences to those suggested by the above - this is not necessarily surprising, as school exclusion is closely associated with criminality (e.g. Graham and Bowling, 1995). Thus, OFSTED (1996) found evidence that excluded African-Caribbean children tended to be of higher or average ability, had not usually shown disruptive behaviour from early in their school career, and showed less evidence of deep-seated trauma than white excluded pupils.

Taken together, these pieces of evidence point to some possible differences in the reasons why white and black young people become involved in crime - although these should be seen as relative rather than absolute. In particular, there is evidence that black offenders, compared to their white counterparts, appear less often to have difficult personal histories, associated with fewer psychological problems during childhood - involving for example difficult family relationships, truancy, drug or alcohol dependency or mental health problems. This suggests that, overall, psychological theories of offending may have less relevance to black than white offenders. There is also some evidence that offending
motivated by the desire to buy material goods may be an important feature of some young black offenders. This points to the possibility that strain theory - at least a version of it that is concerned with consumption - may have a particular relevance to this group.

It is conceivable, too, that a distinctive patterning of motivational dynamics associated with black offenders might in turn have roots in some distinctive cultural or subcultural dynamics. This would chime with the suggestions of Lea and Young (1984) who proffer a specifically subcultural approach to explaining differences in crime between different ethnic groups. They argue that the higher levels of involvement in crime of 'second generation West Indian Youth' represents a distinctive subcultural response to deprivation, yet one which is not found among Asian young people. This is because African-Caribbeans have apparently evolved a different subcultural response to their structural circumstances.

It is also possible to consider the likely relevance of different theoretical perspectives by exploring the prevalence of different risk factors among different ethnic populations. Table 2.1 presents ethnic breakdowns for a range of variables that may be seen as crude indicators of some of the main criminal risk factors (as outlined above). These focus primarily on the experiences of young males, and include information on age-structures, neighbourhoods, socio-economic status, family, school and drug-use.

According to the table, compared to white people, common indicators of risk among young black people - particularly those in the Black-Caribbean group - include their concentration in deprived neighbourhoods, the prevalence of single-parent families, their high levels of school exclusion and their high rate of unemployment. It may be, therefore, that these variables are of particular significance in understanding offending behaviour among young black males. These variables can be placed into some theoretical context: high rates of unemployment and concentration in deprived areas give both strain and subcultural perspectives potential importance. However, the high level of single-parent families and school exclusions suggest that low levels of control are likely also to play an important role in explaining offending among this group.

Compared with white people, the table indicates that young Asian males, particularly Bangladeshis and Pakistanis, are characterised by their concentration in deprived areas, low socio-economic status, large family sizes, low levels of qualifications and young age-
structure. However, the fact that these groups are the least likely to be excluded from school suggests that their childhood behaviour is not as problematic as the overall risks they experience might suggest. Given also that these groups also have a relatively low representation in the criminal justice system, it appears that common predictors of offending are unlikely to be particularly relevant to this group. Certainly, strain and subcultural processes do not seem to have a foothold within this group despite the adversities they face. In this context, and given the low rates of single parent families and low rates of school exclusion, it may be that strong control mechanisms are an important inhibitor to offending for this group.

**Different patterns of offending?**

A number of differences between ethnic groups in the offences for which young males tend to be convicted were outlined in the last chapter. The most salient of these involved the association between black offenders and robbery offences. Significantly, this association has been identified through a variety of other evidence that does not simply reflect the outcome of criminal justice processes. For example, an analysis of amalgamated 1988 and 1992 British Crime Survey data suggested that for 32 per cent of 'muggings' of white people (where descriptions could be given) they were carried out by black people (Mayhew, et al., 1993). Mugging predominantly involves street robbery, but is also taken to include snatch thefts. This suggests there is a substantial overrepresentation of black people in mugging offences, given that black people make up less than two per cent of the population, based on the 1991 Census. Stockdale and Grisham (1998) also reported that police statistics also showed a very substantial over-representation of black people amongst robbery suspects in the Metropolitan area. Despite the contention of Farrington and others (discussed above), therefore, there is some prima facie evidence of specialisation in offending behaviour, at least along ethnic lines.

One of the most contentious issues in discussions of ethnicity and crime has been the possibility of differential rates of offending among different ethnic groups. Certainly, this picture of difference emerges from criminal justice statistics, though clearly there are reasons to be sceptical as to whether this properly reflects true levels of offending.
One source of data on offending among different ethnic groups that is independent of criminal justice processes is a self-report survey carried out by Graham and Bowling (1995) on young people aged between 14 and 25 in the general population. This revealed no significant differences between the proportions of white and black respondents admitting ever to have committed an offence; neither were there differences between white and black respondents for any of the subcategories of offence types. On the other hand, proportionally fewer Asian respondents reported offending for all major types of offences. However, the findings of this study should be treated with some caution, the survey encountered considerable problems of non-response among minority ethnic people and, more generally, concerns about the reliability of self-report methods among minority ethnic people have been raised in relation to US data (Hindelang et al., 1981).

In the absence of much direct evidence on offending, it is possible to examine the general levels of offending risks faced by different ethnic groups as a whole. Looking again at Table 2.1, which summarises available information that act as indicators of such risk factors, some general conclusions can be drawn. On the face of it, the table suggests there is likely to be a higher risk of offending among black and Asian groups, compared to white groups, with criminal risk most concentrated among Bangladeshi and Pakistanis, and to a lesser extent Black-Caribbean and other black groups. Overall, then, some over-representation of black people in the criminal justice system is probably to be expected. What is surprising, however, is the contrast between the low profile of Asian males within the criminal justice system and the high level of risk they apparently experience, particularly young Pakistani and Bangladeshi males. As already discussed, however, it may be that control factors may play a particularly strong inhibitory role in the low rates of offending and conviction among these groups.
## Table 2.1  Indicators of criminal risk for different ethnic groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators of criminal risk</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black-Caribbean</th>
<th>Black-African</th>
<th>Black-Other</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Pakistani</th>
<th>Bangladeshi</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Other-Asian</th>
<th>Other-other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age structure</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>% of population under 25, Labour Force Survey 1995-7 (derived from Schuman, 1999)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>58</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neighbourhoods</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>% under 16-year-olds living in 44 most deprived local authority districts in England (1991 Census)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Socio-economic status</td>
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<tr>
<td>% males over 16 in social class IV and V, Census 1991 (Peach, 1996)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% in households below half average income, Family Resources Survey 1994/5 and 1995/6 (Berthoud, 1998)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>% households with 1+ person per room, 1991 Census (Owen, 1993a)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% households with 1+ person per room, 1991 Census (Owen, 1993b)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>Families</td>
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<tr>
<td>% children (under 16/18) living in lone parent families 1991 Census, 1% sample (ONS, 1996)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of children under 15 per household, 1991 Census (Coleman and Salt, 1996)</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>% males 16-24 without O-level equivalent qualifications (PL4 survey of ethnic minorities (Modood et al. 1997)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>27/22</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% school pupils permanently excluded (England) 1997/98 (DfEE figures)</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drug use</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>% 14-25 year-olds ever taken a drug, Youth Lifestyles Survey (Bowling and Graham, 1995)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. As identified by the Social Exclusion Unit (1998a).
3. This figure applies to Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups combined.
4. Relative risk is calculated based on dividing the range of values across ethnic groups into three equal parts.
5. The figure in brackets relates to African Asians.
6. This figure applies to both Asian-Other and Other-other groups.
7. This figure applies to all black groups.
Discussion

In the previous chapter I outlined the objectives of this research. It is useful, at this point, to return to these objectives as a basis for discussion. Below, I restate the objectives, and discuss the implications of the literature reviewed in this chapter for taking forward these questions:

1. **To develop a theoretical framework for explaining offending which is sensitive to the potential role of ethnicity and which could be applied to young male offenders more generally.**

In general terms, this chapter has established that delinquency is multi-causal and probably best explained in terms of processes which sit within a range of sociological and psychological perspectives. Importantly, we have encountered some evidence that suggests these processes may apply differentially to different ethnic groups.

For the purposes of this thesis, therefore, it is important to be attuned to the possible role of the range of different causal processes within the main theoretical perspectives outlined. It is important to note, furthermore, that the varied processes implicated by these perspectives focus, in empirical terms, on a range of areas (e.g. socio-economic structure, friendships, family relationships, and school). Furthermore, they direct our attention not just to the offenders' present circumstances, but also those reaching far back into their past - even into their early childhood. In taking forward a perspective which is attuned to these different causal processes, therefore, it will be important to be as specific as possible about the role of different processes. This might involve asking questions, such as: In what specific ways are particular causes relevant to an unfolding criminal career? Are there different types of offending career? How might ethnicity interact with these phenomena?

It will also be important to identify any evidence for further explanations for offending which are not found in the main traditional approaches. A promising area for consideration - emerging from my discussion in this chapter of subcultural explanations and the nature of offending - relates to what might be called the 'foreground' of crime, and follows in particular from Katz's (1988) phenomenological concern with the subjective aspects of offending. This might involve focusing on the processes by which offenders encounter and
take on delinquent values, how these dynamics may play out differently for different crimes, and what broader structural factors they point towards not necessarily encompassed by traditional theoretical approaches. Again, it will be important to consider how these may vary across ethnic groups.

2. To obtain provisional insights and to generate hypotheses relating to ethnic differences among young male offenders in relation to:
   - the processes by which they become involved in crime;
   - the nature of their offending.

As already noted, existing evidence tells us that the relevance of theoretical perspectives may vary for offenders from different ethnic groups. In particular, there is some provisional evidence of differences in the reasons why white and black young people become involved in crime. Notably, it appears that black offenders, compared to their white counterparts, may less often have difficult personal histories - suggesting fewer psychological problems during childhood. There is also some evidence that offending motivated by the desire to buy material goods may be an important feature of some young black offenders. This points to the possibility that strain theory - at least a version of it that is concerned with consumption - may have a particular relevance to this group.

Thinking about the nature of offending, much (statistically based) research has pointed to the generalised rather than specialised nature of offending. However, the range of theories suggest that different causal processes are likely to be at work when accounting for different crimes. Furthermore, evidence specifically on ethnicity and offending points to a particular association between black offenders and robbery offences, suggesting that there may be some specialisation in offending, at least along ethnic lines.

In this context, the thesis needs to assess whether there is any further evidence for differences in the origins of offending, consider how these relate to different types of offending, and understand the implications of this for specialisation among offenders. Obviously, the role of ethnicity in all of these things must be fully explored.
3. Methodology I: Research design and data collection

Introduction

The key empirical element of this study involves the detailed analysis of qualitative interviews with young male offenders in Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) between March 1998 and August 1998. This chapter explains why such an approach was taken and describes how it was carried out in the field. A discussion of the analysis of the data generated is held over to the following chapter.

Specific aims of the chapter

The aims of this chapter, therefore, are to:

- explain the methodology chosen and reasons for choosing it;
- provide details of the practicalities of implementing this methodology;
- provide basic details of the achieved interview sample.

Chapter structure

The chapter will first of all review the methodological dilemmas confronting the study, it will then go on to describe the data collection instrument used, the sample chosen, practical issues in carrying out the interviews including the details of the sample achieved.

Methodological dilemmas

This study has been conceived as a piece of pilot work, exploring a relatively under-researched area and it is important to orient the methodology accordingly. In particular, the area is likely to benefit from a methodology that allows a close look at the details and processes that give rise to offending, and which involve differences across ethnic groups. Following from Chapter 2, it is clear that, in doing this, it must be concerned with a range of
theoretical perspectives and the associated empirical dimensions of these. However, it should also focus on other areas that might inform theory development - most notably those that sit in what I have identified as the 'foreground' of offending.

In taking forward these concerns, it is also important to be aware of a number of methodological issues that follow from the discussion in Chapter 2. Within the discussion, the chapter began to highlight how different theoretical perspectives have often been associated with different methodological approaches. It was seen, furthermore, that particular theories often appeared to succeed or fail on the strengths and weakness of the methodologies that have underpinned them.

The discussion below, therefore, outlines the key dilemmas that this study had to address in order to arrive at a methodological approach involving qualitative interviews. It also elaborates on how the qualitative interviews were constructed to respond to these dilemmas.

A collective or individual approach?

A collective approach to the study of delinquency might focus on a group of offenders, piecing together the nature of their offending from observation or accounts given within a group context. Such an approach is closely associated with ethnographic methods. The advantage of such an approach is that it can allow for the observation of the group dynamics and culture which underpin deviant behaviour. These empirical issues are important ones for an analysis of delinquency to grapple with, particularly in light of the potential importance of subcultural explanations of offending.

However, an approach that focuses on the group alone will tend to downplay, or even ignore, the importance of issues that attach to the individual rather than the group. As already noted, control theory (e.g. Hirschi) has shown how particular individual bonds with family and institutions are highly predictive of delinquency. Similarly, psychological approaches (e.g. Farrington, 1996a) have shown how a number of factors, such as relationships with parents, or early behavioural characteristics, which are specific to the individual, have strong predictive value in an understanding of delinquency.
For this study, therefore, it was important to take an approach that can attend in detail to the circumstances of the individual. However, so as not to disregard the collective or group dynamics from which offending may take some of its impetus, the methodology explicitly draws on the ethnographic insights of the individuals studied so that some kind of more collective-level picture may be built-up.

In resolving this methodological dilemma, we are already pointed towards an individual interview approach that allows for detailed exploration of individual circumstances and the development of ethnographic insights. This is clearly suggestive of a qualitative interview approach.

A 'present time' or historical approach?

Many of the approaches which have looked at offending - ranging from self-report surveys (e.g. Hirschi, 1969) to ethnographies of gangs or groups of people (e.g. Cohen, 1955; Downes, 1966; Willis, 1977) - may be seen as locating the origins of offending in relatively recent circumstances. This may involve general issues of social structure, or more localised issues such as schooling or parental supervision. Yet it is clear from research which has a longitudinal gaze - most notably that within a psychological perspective (e.g. Trasler, 1962; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Farrington, 1994) that the development of offending has precursors which can be located very early in life (e.g. impulsivity or hyperactivity as a child or poor early parenting). To ignore the sweep of a person's history in understanding the origins of offending is therefore to narrow the empirical focus in an unsatisfactory way.

Yet I have also emphasised the importance of building up an ethnographic picture of the nature and context of offending as it occurs. This would respond to the need for some kind of subcultural understanding of the basis of offending, as well as the more general foreground, such as what Katz (1988) calls the 'seductions of crime'. Finally, it would help us understand the nature of different types of offending, and the connection between these and the various immediate and distant contexts for criminal activity.

These concerns point us towards an interview schedule that draws out the life-histories of offenders, but which attends to the more immediate details of their offending and its context.
**Statistical or qualitative approaches?**

I have already made something of a case for a qualitative approach - emphasising its potential importance in producing ethnographic insights from interviewees. However, there are some further reasons for opting for a qualitative approach to the current study.

As I noted in the last chapter, probabilistic statistical models - which are typically used where statistics are invoked to understand offending - inevitably involve a significant degree of simplification and homogenisation of social phenomena, relying as they do on statistical tendencies, averages and correlations. While such simplifications can be useful, they inevitably involve some loss of theoretical complexity and difference that may inhere across the range of offenders they examine. I have already noted that Farrington (1996a) has emphasised the lack of specialisation in offending. Similarly, while there may be potentially different pathways into offending, statistics can lead us to generalise about the 'average' offender. Certainly, Farrington is inclined to generalise about offenders, such as in the following quote (1994):

'Just as offenders tend to be versatile in their types of offending, so they also tend to be versatile in their anti-social behaviour generally. In the Cambridge Study, delinquents tended to be troublesome and dishonest in their primary schools, tended to be aggressive and frequent liars at age 12-14, and tended to be bullies at age 14. By age 18, delinquents tended to be anti-social in a wide variety of respects, including heavy drinking, heavy smoking, using prohibited drugs, and heavy gambling' (pp. 513-4)

Yet, a key objective of this study is to develop provisional insights into similarities and differences between offenders from different ethnic groups. It is therefore important to employ a methodology that allows as fully as possible for identification of differences between groups of offenders, even if these may be subtle ones. A statistical approach may not be best attuned to this focus.

Statistical approaches are also limited in what they can measure - certainly more ethnographic insights which this study aims to generate are not so readily susceptible to statistical measurement, and similarly it is unlikely that the possible 'seductions of crime' (as discussed by Katz, 1988) could be ascertained easily through statistical measurement. In a related way, statistics are unlikely to do justice to the volitional and negotiated way in which people may become involved in crime over time - for example associated with Matza's idea
of 'drift' (1964). Certainly, work by Becker (1963) which looks at how people become marijuana users emphasises contingency and negotiation in the development of a deviant role. It is highly unlikely that his insights would have emerged from a statistical study.

Finally, as already noted, the issues being researched in this thesis have, thus far, not received much prior attention in research and are not well understood - and this thesis is conceived, therefore, very much as an exploratory study. This points us towards an approach that takes a close-up and fine-grained view. Qualitative interviews provide for such an approach in the opportunities they give for in-depth discussions of topics. Importantly, they allow interviewees to provide their own subjective accounts and explanations which can present a challenge to the expectations or assumptions which might be held by a researcher engaging with this topic for the first time.

**Designing a data collection tool**

The prior discussion has rehearsed and resolved a number of key methodological dilemmas faced by this study, and produced a rationale for a research tool which:

- involves a one-to-one interview - therefore focusing on the development and experiences of each individual studied;
- is qualitative - and therefore allows identification of details, processes and ethnographic insights on the world of the offenders;
- includes a significant life-history element - allowing an understanding of the precursors and development of offending and criminal justice experiences;
- explores the context and nature of recent offending - allowing for ethnographic detail and an understanding of the nature of different types of criminal activity.

Such a tool was therefore developed and used in this study (see Appendix A). In keeping with the empirical areas identified as potentially relevant to offending (see Chapter 2), a number of key topic areas were chosen for inclusion in the interview schedule. These were relevant both to testing key elements of existing theory, and developing potentially new theoretical areas - notably relating to the 'foreground' of offending. These topics included:

8. The topic guide also covered issues relating to contacts and experiences of the criminal justice system. However, these were not analysed for this thesis.
The design of the schedule drew on a standard approach to semi-structured interviews (e.g. Fielding, 1993) involving the use of headline topics, and a list of relevant probes. However, a particular innovation employed in this study was to place most of the topics for discussion within cells of a two-dimensional grid, rather than placing them in a linear order. This allowed more topics for discussion to be incorporated onto a single page. It also meant that topics were not structured in a linear order. The result of this was that as interviewees crossed between different topics of research interest, as the interviewer, I could both allow and manage these shifts more easily, without losing track of the relevant prompts; the schedule design did not encourage the interviewer to bring the interviewee 'back' to a linear topic order. Insofar as this allowed the interview to readily follow a path which was more comfortable for the interviewee, the interview data generated was perhaps of a better quality than if I had been more rigid in my approach to questioning, that might have followed from a simple list of questions.

**Choosing a sample**

There were two key questions that needed to be addressed in relation to sampling. First, it was important to establish what kind of offenders should be interviewed for the study. Second, it was important to decide how offenders within this category should be selected.
The first of these questions was resolved primarily with reference to practical considerations. The offenders chosen were those who had been given custodial sentences within YOIs. The key advantage of this approach was that, in being convicted, I could have some confidence that these were genuine offenders and that could be easily accessed within the YOI context. Specifically, they are accessible because they were located in one particular place, fairly consistently through time. Furthermore, the YOIs hold records on the offenders in their administrative offices, which provided a useful basis for choosing a specific sample. These practical advantages place this approach in contrast to alternatives, which might, for example, have included interviewing offenders on probation, where access to offenders, and the ability to hold them in a particular place for interview may have been far more difficult. Indeed, discussions with fellow criminological researchers suggested that this would have been a far more resource intensive approach than sampling from YOIs. Furthermore, the idea of interviewing offenders not identified or under sanction by the criminal justice system would have been even more difficult, with points of access far less obvious.

It should be borne in mind that, in choosing offenders who were sentenced within YOIs, the sample could be expected to disproportionately include more serious types of young offenders. As such, they should not be seen as 'representative' of the range of young offenders - a point that has implications for the inferences that can be made from the sample. However, this feature has some particular advantages too: in representing more serious offenders, they may be seen as offering the researcher the possibility of observing more marked processes leading to offending.

The second question that needed to be addressed was how to choose particular offenders within YOIs. Given that the choice of offender type was, in some respects limited, it was important that within this category some variation was achieved. Furthermore, without knowing at the outset what cases might be of particular interest, or theoretically critical, a decision was taken to go for a spread of the more 'typical' types of offenders found within YOIs - in a way reminiscent of 'typical case sampling' as outlined by Patton (1990). In particular, this meant choosing those offenders convicted for common types of crime. However, some concession to representativeness was made in that, for each ethnic group, the most dominant crime represented within the sample corresponded to the most dominant offence categories for the overall YOI population.
The rationale for this was because it was felt that, at least to some extent, the distribution of convicted offenders within YOIs was likely to reflect to some extent the pattern of offences (or at least more serious offences) among these groups among different young male ethnic populations. Certainly, the disproportionate number of young black males in YOIs for robbery offences appears to reflect a real difference in offending - as I discussed in the last chapter. It was therefore important to have enough offenders of this type to get a good handle on the phenomenon of 'black robbery'. Beyond this, differences in the distribution of offences between groups in the YOI population is not great, and did not call for large differences in the distribution of offence types between samples. Ultimately, given the qualitative nature of this study, probably the most important issue in sampling was to get a reasonable spread of the more common offences for the different ethnic groups.

Finally, it was initially intended to obtain about 20 interviews respectively from white, black and Asian backgrounds. It was felt that this number in each of the main ethnic categories should provide a solid basis for some sound analytic insights. As we shall see below, this was achieved for white and black offenders, but there were problems in achieving this with Asian offenders.

Practical issues in selecting and interviewing offenders

Interviewees were drawn from three YOIs within England, chosen for their large minority ethnic populations. Two of these were from the Midlands and one from the South East, and most of the interviewees came from the Midlands and London, although some were drawn from other parts of Britain, including North Wales, West Sussex, Shropshire, Berkshire, Leicester and Luton.

In practical terms, selection of inmates was carried out by the researcher reviewing administrative records on prisoners held within the YOIs. Lists of potential interviewees were drawn up for particular 'wings' within YOIs, so that sets of interviews could be carried out over a particular period within a particular wing. The lists were drawn up by the researcher, and passed to prison staff. The prison staff would then approach those on the list to seek their permission to participate in the research. In practice, many of those on an initial list would not be available for interview for a number of reasons, including the following:
• prisoners had moved off the wing by the time that the interviews took place (typically one to two weeks after lists were compiled);
• prisoners were engaged in work or study, or had visits from friends or family, which sometimes meant they were not available;
• a few prisoners declined to be interviewed (although this was rare).

Therefore, lists drawn up were deliberately larger than the number of interview slots that were actually available.

As previously noted, the intention was to achieve a sample of 20 interviewees from black, white and Asian backgrounds. In practice, however, there were difficulties in obtaining sufficient numbers of interviews with those from Asian backgrounds due to their relative scarcity within the YOI populations. As a result, people from Asian backgrounds were represented less than initially intended. Ultimately, therefore, a sample of 19 white interviewees, 21 black interviewees and 11 Asian interviewees (making a total of 52) was achieved. As discussed in more detail below, however, an Indian interviewee was discounted from the sample for analysis because he claimed never to have committed a crime. This left 51 interviewees, in total. Fuller details of the sample breakdown are provided below.

Selection of inmates was oriented towards generating a sample approximately representative each of the main ethnic groups in YOIs, in terms of the offences for which they were convicted, as already discussed. This was achieved reasonably well, although the Asian group was unfortunately small, and while overall it had a reasonable spread of offences, the distribution for any Asian category was small and not reflective of the full range of possible offences (for example the only Bangladeshi offenders were robbers).

**Doing the interviews**

Interviews took place within the YOIs with only the interviewer and the inmate present, usually within an interview room. They were typically carried out between 10.00am and 5.00pm.

There are some well-rehearsed approaches to achieving inter-subjective validity within the qualitative interview situation. The development of 'rapport' between interviewer and subject
is one of these - this might include the establishing of trust and familiarity, showing genuine interest, assuring confidentiality and not being judgmental (Miller and Glassner, 1997). The use of 'prompts' and 'probes' during interviews (Fielding, 1993) can also assist with developing a fuller and more complete account during an interview. These principles were applied throughout the study to ensure that information was communicated, as far as possible, in a full and honest way.

These methods seemed reasonably successful. Interviewees appeared very open about their histories. Notably, this was true in relation to offending. Interviewees were willing to discuss offences regardless of whether they had been detected by the police and when asked about convictions, these seemed generally consistent with official records. This is actually one of the principal means of validating self-report offending data (Tarling, 1993). The overall impression, therefore, was that interviewees were fairly honest about their offending and could be taken as a fairly valid indicator of prior offending. This may perhaps be seen as an important indicator of validity in the accounts given by interviewees - an issue returned to in the next chapter.

**Characteristics of the achieved sample**

The sample structure is detailed in the Table 3.1. In line with the breakdown of offences in prison discussed in Chapter 1, reflected in evidence of differentials in offending associated with different ethnic groups, discussed in Chapter 2, it can be seen that the Black-Caribbean sample had a substantial number of offenders convicted of robbery, while the white sample most often included those convicted of burglary.
Table 3.1 Young offender sample: main offence by prison ethnic category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black-Caribbean</th>
<th>Black-Other</th>
<th>Bangladeshi</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Pakistani</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>51</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

a. The table excludes an Indian interviewee who claimed never to have offended, as noted above.
b. There was one case in this table where an ethnic category was altered in this table: a white person had been obviously mis-classified as Black-Caribbean. His ethnic category is therefore reported here as white.

Following provisional analysis of the interviews, the ethnic identity of interviewees based on the prison classification was revised to reflect what appeared to be important differences in the ethnic origins and the lifestyles of interviewees. The key revisions affected the classification of 'Black-Caribbean' and 'Black-other' interviewees. Interviewees in both these groups were re-classified into 'Black-Caribbean' and 'Black-Mixed' groups. Black interviewees who had white mothers or had black mothers who themselves had a white parent were classified as 'Black-Mixed'. By contrast, those black interviewees who did not have a white British parent or grandparent were described as 'Black-Caribbean'. This choice was made specifically because it appeared that this maternal white British influence was a strong one, and inevitably gave rise to a mixed heritage in the interviewee.

In view of the small numbers of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian interviewees, these were grouped together as 'Asians' for comparisons with the other main ethnic groups. It was realised that, in doing this, those from ethnic groups that, in the population at large, have important social, economic and cultural differences were being collapsed. However, for the purposes of this study, their characteristics as offenders appeared similar enough for them to be grouped together without disguising substantial variations between them.

The four main ethnic categories referred to in this research are summarised in Box 3.1.
Box 3.1 Ethnic categories used for the research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White (19)</td>
<td>These were all of white origins. A minority had some non-English family origins, mostly from Ireland. There was also one interviewee who was related to travellers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black-Caribbean (14)</td>
<td>These all had two black parents — bar one with a Puerto Rican father — and one or both of these parents were of Caribbean origin. Other black origins also included French African and African American. Interviewees in this group did not have white British relatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black-Mixed (8)</td>
<td>These were black interviewees who have been brought up by white British mothers or black mothers who themselves had a white British parent (in some cases this meant they had two non-white parents). Their black heritage was mostly Caribbean, but there also interviewees with African or African-American roots.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian (10)</td>
<td>These interviewees had Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Indian (including East-African Indian) origins.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2 shows the ethnic breakdowns by offence for the revised ethnic classification.

Table 3.2 Young offender sample: main offence by revised ethnic category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black-Caribbean</th>
<th>Black-Mixed</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age

Looking at age, interviewees overall were principally aged between 16 and 21, with one interviewee aged 15 - reflecting the distribution of offenders within YOIs generally. Comparing the four different groups, the average of age interviewees was very similar at
aged 19. Furthermore, each of the groups similarly all had a similar spread of ages, as illustrated by Figure 3.1 below.

**Figure 3.1 The ages of interviewees in different ethnic groups**

![Bar chart showing the ages of interviewees in different ethnic groups]

*Previous convictions*

It was also possible to look at previous convictions of offenders using the Offenders' Index. This showed that most of the interviewees had previous convictions. The numbers of previous convictions ranged considerably between individuals - whilst some had no previous convictions at all, others had several, and six interviewees had more than ten. Convictions covered a wide range of offences, including those involving vehicles (such as thefts of vehicles and aggravated vehicle taking), burglaries, robberies, violent offences, thefts, shoplifting, driving offences (such as driving whilst disqualified, careless or drunk driving, driving without insurance), drugs offences and criminal damage.

Whilst there was substantial variation in the numbers of previous convictions within each of the ethnic groups, broad differences between ethnic groups were evident. Table 3.3 summarises information on the numbers of previous convictions amongst those from different ethnic groups.

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9. While the Offenders' Index was the most accessible way of obtaining information on the previous convictions of interviewees, it is generally acknowledged that it is not a perfect measure of previous convictions given that some convictions can take a while to end up on the index as a result of bureaucratic delays. However, this limitation is likely to affect ethnic groups equally across the board, so it can be treated nonetheless as a useful indicator of prior official offending.
Table 3.3 Numbers of previous convictions by ethnic group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous convictions</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black-Caribbean</th>
<th>Black-Mixed</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, previous convictions were most common amongst white and Black-Caribbean interviewees. They were less common amongst the Black-Mixed interviewees and less common still amongst the Asian interviewees. Reassuringly, this pattern is broadly consistent with previous analyses of previous convictions of prisoners by ethnic origin (Home Office, 1994) suggesting that the study's sample approximated to the spread of offenders within YOIs generally in this regard. Ages of first conviction also varied considerably, with two interviewees having their first conviction at aged eleven, whilst at the other extreme some interviewees had their first conviction as late as twenty years old. Bearing in mind that there was often wide variation within ethnic groups, ages of first conviction were, overall, lowest amongst the white and Black-Caribbean interviewees (the mean age of first conviction for both groups was about 16), and higher amongst Asian interviewees and Black-Mixed interviewees (the mean age of first conviction for both groups was about 17). There was a wide range of convictions within each of the main ethnic groups. However, the white interviewees stood out for convictions for vehicle-related offences.

Self-reported offending

The interviews were not designed to quantify exact numbers of previous offences, and interviewees were often vague about the actual numbers of previous offences they had carried out. However, it was clear that there were significant variations between individuals in the extent and seriousness of their offending histories, as well as evidence of broad ethnic differences in offending, which broadly mapped on to the ethnic differences found with the criminal records. White and Black-Caribbean interviewees often had histories of frequent offending - with white offenders appearing to have offended slightly more overall - whilst the Asian interviewees appeared to have offended the least. It appeared that the white
interviewees had started offending the earliest, overall, with about nine out of 19 of them starting to offend before the age of 14. Black-Caribbean interviewees had less often started their offending this early, with five out of 14 starting their offending before this age. Asian and Black-Mixed interviewees had started offending the latest, overall, with about one or two interviewees in each case starting to offend before 14 years old.

It was also notable that there were a few interviewees drawn from white and ethnic minority backgrounds who felt that they were under sentence for crimes they had not committed or because their actions had been misinterpreted as criminal acts. This is an important point, and suggests that some of the labelling effects of the criminal justice system, as discussed in Chapter 2, were identifiable here. However, in most of these cases, the interviewees had nonetheless been involved in at least some crime in the past. As such, this finding is not an issue of concern, bar the one Indian interviewee who claimed never to have been involved in crime. As already noted, he has been excluded from the analysis because it was felt that his experience should not be used to explain offending.

Summary

This chapter has explained the reasons for, and nature of, the methodology chosen, and its application in the field.

In choosing a qualitative life-history interview approach, the research was able to provide insights into:

- the individual's specific circumstances;
- their life-history, and associated historical precursors to offending;
- the ethnographic and cultural context and nature of their offending.

The research tool that was developed covered a range of empirical areas relevant to existing theory, but also relevant to developing new theoretical areas, specifically including the 'foreground' of offending.

A total of 52 interviews were carried out, though only 51 of these were used (having excluded one interviewee who claimed never to have offended). For largely practical
reasons, these were chosen from those under sentence within YOIs. Within each ethnic group, interviewees were chosen from a spread of offences, though with some concession to representativeness in relation to YOI populations so that dominant offences within each particular ethnic group were well represented within specific ethnic samples. Three YOIs in England were chosen that had large minority ethnic populations. Inmates were selected using administrative records. While it was hoped to get roughly 20 interviewees, respectively, from white, black and Asian backgrounds, in practice there were difficulties achieving the full sample for Asians.

Some ethnic re-classification was carried out on the offenders interviewed, to more directly reflect ethnic differences that were present among them. This led to a total of 19 white interviewees, 14 Black-Caribbean interviewee, 8 Black-Mixed interviewees, and 10 Asian interviewees. These had a spread of ages from 15 to 21, and a varying number of previous convictions - 16 had none, while six had more than 10. Similarly, there was some variation in the extent and seriousness of self-reported offending among the interviewees - with white and Black-Caribbean interviewees having the most developed histories of offending.

The next chapter will examine how the data generated through the interviews was analysed to address the key objectives of the study.
4. Methodology II: Analysis

Introduction

In line with a rigorous approach to the analysis and interpretation of data and the extrapolation of research findings, I have devoted a separate chapter to this topic. This covers details of the general epistemological approach taken, and the specific methodological and analytic strategies.

Specific aims of the chapter

The aims of this chapter, therefore, are to:

- outline an epistemological framework for meeting the research objectives;
- develop a critical strategy for interpreting offenders' accounts;
- outline the key analytic perspectives taken;
- describe the practicalities of analysis, specifically considering the role of computer technology.

Chapter structure

The chapter structure takes forward, in turn, the four objectives outlined above.

Epistemological orientations

It has been noted already that this study is not concerned with providing definitive answers to questions about ethnic similarities and differences in offending - these might follow from subsequent research. Rather, it is concerned with developing a theoretical framework of offending which is sensitive to the possible role of ethnicity, and developing insights and hypotheses relating to possible ethnic differences. The conclusions, therefore, range in status
from the more robust to the more tentative. In order to do justice to this range of conclusions, it is important to provide a set of concepts and vocabulary that can be used to flag-up, in an explicit way, how the data will be used to generate conclusions, and the status of these conclusions.

To do this, I will draw directly on a set of epistemological concepts developed by Stones (1996). He develops a primary distinction between what he calls 'player' and 'dreamer' models of research. The player model is, in Stones' view, the most epistemologically robust way to generate knowledge of the empirical social world. He describes the model as follows:

'...the player model of theory construction is designed to address contextualised single cases, sometimes, but not always (depending upon the question asked), including an analysis of the hermeneutic frames of meaning of social actors. Where the ideal type of player theory turns itself towards generalisations, it does so by being parasitic on its single, contextualised cases'. (p.71)

The notion of 'contextualisation' is important to Stones' player model. The essence of contextualisation is the drawing on the empirical richness and detail of the cases under study. One of the important elements of a contextualised approach is attention to 'relations of contiguity'. These are the immediate relations between things, agents and events in time and space, whether in the personal biographies of actors, in their daily routines, or whether in the broader system of interconnections beyond the time and space occupied by the actors under study. Stones' player model can be further subdivided into what he calls 'contextualiser' and 'floater' approaches. The contextualiser approach has high levels of contextualisation, in ways such as those already discussed. The floater approach is associated with a broader and longer-range perspective acquired by floating above a surface of events. While this is necessarily less contextualised in its nature, it still involves a focus on key points of the contextualised detail underneath (he invokes the metaphor of a hot air balloon, which floats high above the ground, able to view a wide expanse from a distance, but landing every now and then - and in doing so is able to view things in far more richness and detail).

Using a player model of analysis in the current research project, conclusions that can be generated about explanations of crime, and ethnic differences, can be applied only to the select group of 51 convicted young males serving sentences within a YOI under study. To extrapolate such findings to all young males in YOIs, to all young male offenders, to general
differences between ethnic groups of offenders etc. would be to transcend the boundaries of this model. Similarly, to postulate the existence of causal processes underlying criminality which are only partially evident from the accounts of the 51 interviewees, would also be beyond the scope of the player model.

Contrast this, however, with the 'dreamer' model of research:

'In this model, instead of...[asking]...a question in relation to a single contextualised case, one asks a question in relation to multiple cases abstracted from their specific contexts. One...proceeds to a hypothesis about general trends or characterising features of an epoch or period in social life...although the hypotheses often draw on empirical research into specific cases, they do so in a limited way, using cases as illustrative examples of a more generalised trend. The more generalised trend is, in fact, the imagined (dreamer) hypothesis. It is creatively imagined rather than empirically grounded in knowledge of many specific cases, as with the player model. Indeed, dreamer theory should be seen as, in a very strong sense, hypothetical; it is not grounded in the way that player theory is.' (pp. 79-79)

In the context of this study, a dreamer approach opens the way for empirical claims about the causes of crime among young male offenders generally or ethnic differences among young male offenders generally. It also allows the development of explanatory theories which extend beyond that which is clearly evident from the empirical evidence applying to the 51 interviewees - rather it may draw on factors which are partially evident, or indirectly suggested by evidence within the interviews. In particular, it will make use of claims made in interviews relating to offenders and offending more generally - not just their personal histories.

Stones clearly emphasises the importance of treating claims within a dreamer model as provisional. That is, while they are informed by empirical evidence, they are not tested against the full range of relevant evidence that would be required for them to be empirically robust. However, a slight development of Stones' dreamer model will be made for the purposes of this thesis. This involves recognising that, within a dreamer model, some generalised dreamer-level claims can be made with more confidence than others. This rests on the principle that claims are likely to be more robust under certain kinds of circumstances. These circumstances include where some or all of the following apply:

10. As noted in the last chapter, one Indian interviewee who claimed never to have offended is excluded from the analysis.
• where there is more circumstantial (i.e. not contextualised) evidence of something in a wider set of cases (i.e. there is evidence from other sources);

• where the claims being made are more general and abstract, rather than specific (i.e. they do not make claims at the level of detail which necessarily requires a very contextualised exploration);

• where we can invoke crude statistical principles to generalise with some confidence from a subset of cases to a wider population of cases (i.e. if something is very common across a sub-set of cases we would expect to find this in other cases which are of a broadly similar character).

This means that we can - in crude terms - grade dreamer level claims according to their robustness. Furthermore, while for the most part these claims remain provisional, it ought to be possible to make some claims, albeit highly generalised ones, which can be treated as reasonably robust.

The player and dreamer models of research have a very important role to play in this thesis. For, on the one hand, the research is concerned to develop insights in as rigorous a way as possible about the 51 interviewees involved. As such, the player model will be fully deployed - the core analysis of the three main empirical chapters will rest fundamentally on this approach.

However, the value of this study is, principally, its ability to map out directions for future research. In particular, this involves the development of a general theoretical model for conceptualising offending (Objective 1) and to map out provisional insights and hypotheses relating to ethnic differences in offending (Objective 2). In doing this, it will draw on the dreamer model of research. This model of research is directly contingent upon the player model, in that it will principally draw its empirical referents from it, though it will also make use of some existing literature and statistics. In ways already outlined, dreamer-level claims will be assessed for their robustness.

While, for the most part, the claims made will remain provisional in status, the dreamer model will nonetheless be used to develop, with a very real confidence, a theoretical
framework for conceptualising the etiology of offending. This is because such a framework successfully satisfies key criteria for dreamer-level robustness laid down above: the framework will make general rather than specific claims (in some senses the framework may be seen as meta-theoretical); and, insofar as the framework is developed out of dynamics which apply very consistently across the 51 interviewees, we can have some 'statistical' confidence that they are likely to apply to offenders more generally.

Table 4.1 illustrates how these two models of research will be applied within this thesis.

Table 4.1 Use of player and dreamer models in this research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Empirical basis</th>
<th>Scope of claims</th>
<th>Epistemological status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Player</td>
<td>• Personal histories of 51 interviewees under sentence in YOIs.</td>
<td>• Relating to 51 young males under sentence in YOIs.</td>
<td>• Robust specific claims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Wider perceptions of 51 interviews under sentence in YOIs.</td>
<td>• Relating to processes for which there is clear and direct evidence.</td>
<td>• Robust abstract claims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Existing research, statistics and literature.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreamer</td>
<td>• Personal histories of 51 interviewees under sentence in YOIs.</td>
<td>• Relating to young male offenders generally.</td>
<td>• Robust abstract claims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Wider perceptions of 51 interviews under sentence in YOIs.</td>
<td>• Relating to processes that are only partially evident or indirectly suggested by evidence.</td>
<td>• Provisional specific claims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Existing research, statistics and literature.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Hypotheses.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

A critical approach to interview accounts

Moving on to consider how the interviews should be used to inform the research, it was necessary to give some consideration to the status of these accounts as a source of empirical information. This is important because, when working at the player level at least, we need to be confident that our claims are properly and reliably grounded in the evidence at hand - necessary to meet the requirement for contextualisation which forms its basis. The issue is of even more significance when we consider the fact that the epistemological status of interviews is a contested issue in research methods literature. That is, there are authors - working primarily in an ethnomethodological tradition - who see interview accounts primarily as constructions produced within an interview context, more suitable for analysis as context-specific constructions, than to be used as valid and reliable representations of
phenomena outside the interview situation (e.g. Lyman and Scott, 1970; Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984). Some also might argue, from a common sense point of view, that the accounts of those who are already singled out for their criminal activities, and who are likely often to have disturbed backgrounds of various kinds, may not be the most reliable witnesses to phenomena which might inform social science.

**Concerns about offenders' accounts**

The sceptical ethnomethodological view of accounts has been described in detail by Silverman (1993). Summarising his review of this 'social constructionist' position, Miller and Glassner (1997) describe the tenets of the approach:

'...no knowledge about a reality that is 'out there' in the social world can be obtained from the interview, because the interview is obviously and exclusively an interaction between the interviewer and interview subject in which both participants create and construct narrative versions of the social world. The problem with looking at these narratives as representatives of some 'truth' in the world, according to these scholars, is that they are context-specific, invented if you will, to fit the demands of the interactive context of the interview, and representative of nothing more or less.'

(p.99)

Luckily, this social constructionist position can be seen as occupying the extreme of a spectrum of views by methodologists, in which (to varying degrees) interviews are seen as reflecting some combination of both presentational dynamics and the broader social world that the interview subject occupies. Certainly, common sense tells us that it must be both in practice - indeed, it would be a nonsense to think otherwise. For while research interviews may be a rarefied form of interaction, they nonetheless have much in common with everyday interactions in which people successfully communicate with one another. This might, for example, involve communication about the time of a meeting or social event, an instruction to buy or sell goods or directions for driving or walking between A and B. If the utterances and texts associated with these exchanges were not effective ways of passing intersubjectively valid information between social actors, the activities of everyday life, the social structures of society, and our material survival would simply not be possible.

What the social constructionist position usefully does, however, is to alert us to the fact that presentational work is being carried out within an interview situation. This may involve the selective recall of events, a particular story or 'spin' being put on events or actions, or
particular myths of stories about the world being communicated uncritically by an interview subject. In this analysis, there are a number of presentational distortions we might, on the face of it, expect. Indeed, Sykes and Matza (1957) have specifically talked about the way in which offenders narrate their criminal activities that give us some clues. They find that in discussing their offending, offenders tend to play down the moral gravity of their offences through a number of 'techniques of neutralization' which variously take the form of: 'denial of responsibility', 'denial of injury', 'denial of the victim', 'condemnation of the condemners' and 'appeal to higher loyalties'.

Taking on board the considerations of Sykes and Matza, but also invoking other possibilities, plausible distortions might include such things as:

- down-playing offending behaviour (because of shame);
- exaggerating offending behaviour (to show-off);
- down-playing or not mentioning family problems (because of shame);
- down-playing learning difficulties such as dyslexia (because of shame);
- minimising personal responsibility for negative actions (to avoid moral blame).

There are some well-rehearsed approaches to achieving inter-subjective validity within the qualitative interview situation which, as we noted in Chapter 3, were used in this study. The development of 'rapport' between interviewer and subject is one of these - this might include the establishing of trust and familiarity, showing genuine interest, assuring confidentiality and not being judgmental (Miller, 1997). The use of 'prompts' and 'probes' during interviews (Fielding, 1993) can also assist with developing a fuller and more complete account during an interview. However, these interventions do not circumvent the problem that interview subjects will inevitably give a particular set of descriptions and stories in their interview, which cannot be taken simply as a balanced account of social reality.

There are also a number of general checks that might be used to assess the validity of accounts given within interview transcripts. One source of useful insight on this issue comes from Fielding and Conroy (1992) in their discussion of the use of 'statement validity analysis' in evidence gathering for child sex abuse cases. This involves assessing the narratives given by children against criteria that might give clues to their validity:
Particular characteristics, such as admitted lack of memory, accurately reported
details not understood, and pardoning the perpetrator, are taken as indicating
enhanced validity...Unusual details, such as a description of semen as blue in colour,
are taken as lowering validity. The point is that, in statement validity analysis, a
judgement is reached on the balance of probabilities taking each criterion into
account and systematically working through the evidence for and against each
alternative interpretation of each criterion' (Fielding and Conroy, 1992; 118-119)

Lawrence et al. (1990) outline a set of criteria that have been developed for this purpose,
detailed in table 4.3, below.

Table 4.3 Content criteria for statement analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Logical structure</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Unstructured production</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Quantity of details</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific contents</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Contextual embedding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Descriptions of interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Reproduction of conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Unexpected complications during the incident</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peculiarities of the content</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. Unusual details</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Superfluous details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Accurately reported details not understood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Related external associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Accounts of subjective mental state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Attribution of perpetrator’s mental state</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation-related contents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14. Spontaneous corrections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Admitting lack of memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Raising doubts about one’s testimony</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Self-deprecation</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Pardoning the perpetrator</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offences-specific elements</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19. Details characteristic of the offence</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: Lawrence et al. (1990)

This method was designed for application to specific interviews with children about cases of
suspected child abuse, for legal and therapeutic purposes. It was not designed for social
scientific analysis of a number of interviews covering a range of topics. It would not,
therefore, be appropriate or practical to apply this method 'off-the-shelf' in this thesis. However, the approach usefully alerts us to some questions that we might ask when assessing the validity of our data. These principles are therefore taken on board in a strategy for interpreting accounts.

However, to go further in exploring how accounts might be used as an empirical resource it is useful to give some consideration to elements that can be contained within an account, and how these elements are used to develop biographical information about interviewees. In doing this, examples are taken from the interviews in this study by way of illustration. Prescriptions for making the most of accounts, while simultaneously managing their validity problems, are developed through this discussion.

*Accounts of 'facts'*

Some phenomena can be seen to have, or to have had, a tangible and concrete reality external to the actor. Accounts of these phenomena, hypothetically at least, can be checked with other people or records, which would allow their status as 'true or false' claims to be ascertained. For the purposes of this thesis, I will call these accounts of 'facts'. Different types of accounts of facts, and issues of validity are discussed below.

*Circumstances*

Within most accounts, there are likely to be depictions of an interviewee's current or historical circumstances. In many cases, these are likely to involve clear-cut circumstances, which could, in theory at least, be corroborated. An example from one interview provides an illustration of how facts about where an interviewee has grown up are established.

J:  *Just tell me a little bit about yourself first off: where are you from and where did you grow up? Stuff like that.*

M1: *I'm from Birmingham, Hockley.*

J: *Where's that - Hockley?*

M1: *Yeah. Lived there most of my life.*

J: *Yeah. Is that where you were born?*
M1: *No I was born in Ladywood*

J: *I don't know that. Is that near by?*

M1: *Yes, it's not far from where I live.*

(White interviewee)

In this way, it becomes clear that the interviewee has grown up for the most part in one area, but was born nearby in another place.

*Events*

In contrast to general circumstances, events are likely to relate to the occurrence of particular phenomena, or a change in circumstances, which is specific and located in a particular time. For example:

*My dad lived with me until I was about seven and then moved out.* (M1, White interviewee)

*Actions*

Within accounts, interviewees often describe how they acted in a particular way at a particular time - it is notable that these may overlap with 'events' as described above. For example:

*I went out and I actually got the stereo but made a mistake really, in getting caught. I was walking down the road and the wires were sticking out of my jacket...* (M8, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Similarly, accounts can describe the specific actions of other actors:

*These police came round and said, 'You're under arrest for burglaries in a house in Chelmsley Wood'* (M8, Black-Caribbean interviewee)
**Routine and habitual activities**

Accounts regularly involve generalisations about repeated actions through time. Accounts of these include the following:

*Most of my mates are from Berkley Green, Birmingham. Go clubbing it and that like when it comes to a weekend we go out or whatever. In the day we just stay indoors, go round my mates and play his computer and have a smoke and that.* (M2, White interviewee)

*Well if it was a sixth former like they're 16, 17 year olds and I was say 12, they'd chase me up and down the field. As soon as I saw one of them on my round I'd take them round, bang, I'd hit him and then take the others. I'd fight them but not all at once. It was funny, I loved getting chased by the big guys cause I could run like the wind, but as soon as I got one of them on their own I'd beat the shit out of them - if I had a lump of wood in my hand or a brick in my hand I would hit them with it.* (M16, White interviewee)

Of all of the 'facts', these are probably the most slippery. What may constitute a routinised action may involve a large element of interpretation - for example, in presenting something as 'usual' interviewees necessarily make a judgement about how frequent or common this implies it to be. Furthermore, in elaborating the elements of a common occurrence, there is perhaps more scope for interviewees to leave in or out of an account those things, which they wish to give more or less emphasis to.

**Issues of validity in accounts of facts**

The truth or falsity of accounts of facts, in theory at least, is open to corroboration in ways, which are likely to produce strong collective inter-subjective agreement. For example, the place somebody lives, who they lived with, the crime they committed to end up in prison, and (though perhaps to a slightly lesser extent) what kinds of things they used to get up to with their friends of an evening, are all things that can be seen as true or false and could, in theory, be clearly and successfully contested if they were misrepresented.

The argument made here therefore is that, because of this character, accounts of facts are likely to be quite tightly regulated by social convention. That is, if people lie about facts, this will tend to become apparent to others they interact with, and will therefore tend not to be tolerated. This is not to say that people do not lie about facts, or indeed mis-remember them. However, it is to say that this is probably less likely than when giving accounts of
'meanings', which will be discussed in more detail below. In this connection, I have already noted when discussing the sample characteristics that official criminal histories, obtained from the Offenders' Index seemed to be matched closely by the verbal accounts given by offenders in interview. Thus, their accounts of these facts at least could be corroborated as reliable.

Perhaps one of the key difficulties that may affect the validity of factual information collected through interviews is the problem of partial or incomplete coverage. That is, even without distorting facts, the recounting of them in an interview may involve excluding some facts of relevance. As such, it was clearly important for the wide range of topics likely to be of relevance to research questions to be covered within an interview, and furthermore (and as already discussed) for prompts and probes to be used to elicit as much detail as possible. Brown (1983) who has looked in detail at methods for addressing validity problems in interview accounts emphasises the importance of 'sensitive and free-flowing forms of interviewing' in his approach to collecting this type of information. Furthermore, he argues that accounts of biographical circumstances are less likely to be distorted when interviewees are not responding to questions directed specifically at matters of meaning and motive. This suggests that, as far as possible, when 'fact-gathering' in an interview context, attention should be paid on the one hand to addressing, in a neutral factual fashion, a range of subjects of possible relevance to research questions, but for information on these to be collected in a flexible and open-ended way. This is consistent with the semi-structured approach taken to the interviews in this study.

Interpreting accounts of facts

In general terms, therefore, I have placed a strong emphasis on the likely validity of factual accounts. However, I have also noted the importance of detailed but open-ended coverage of factual issues of concern within interviews, an approach which was taken in this research. It is possible also to draw on some of the issues flagged up by statement validity analysis in assessing their status, and to feed into the analysis process. To confirm the validity of factual claims, I had to be sure that the following questions can, for the most part, be answered positively:

- Are accounts of facts consistent within an interview?
• If not absolutely consistent, do interviewees make excuses for, cast doubt on, elaborate reluctantly on, or correct admissions in a way which may indicate their original admission is likely to be correct, but embarrassing?
• Or if not absolutely consistent, does consistency in claims emerge following careful prompting and probing?
• Have facts been explored in detail within the interview?
• Has the interviewer allowed the interviewer the 'space' to properly articulate factual detail?
• Are factual claims consistent with what we know from other sources (whether this is other information on the interviewee, or accounts of similar things given by other interviewees)?

To give an example where this approach to validity was effective, the extent and nature of one interviewee's account of his involvement in robbery only became clear after continued probing:

J: What about robbery, done any robberies?
M8: I've done a robbery.
J: I mean, how many times?
M8: I don't know, a few times. I've had businessmen's computers off 'em.
J: What you mean...like laptop?
M8: Yeah, the laptop.
J: So what kind of, who've you done that with?
M8: On my own, yeah.
J: Did anyone tell you how to do a robbery?
M8: No, it's common-sense, common-sense. I've done a few armed robberies as well.
J: OK, what have you done? On your own?
M8: No this is with some guys that I knew that's brought me on a job 'cos they said I've got a lot of bottle for my age...

(Black-Caribbean interviewee)
In this example, not only does the interviewee own up to more robberies than he initially claimed, he also owns up to a more diverse range of robberies, and more serious robberies, than he does at the beginning of his account.

In addition to developing insights into discrete factual details within interviews for their own sake, the process of identifying valid factual details was also critical in the development of more holistic biographical narratives about interviewees. This is discussed in detail below.

Accounts of 'meanings'

In contrast to the types of accounts so far described, there are accounts of phenomena that can be seen, to a large extent, to be internal to the interviewee, or other actors. While these might be subject to corroboration from other sources, these meanings are less clearly true or false. Rather, they are open to some interpretation, and would not necessarily involve agreement among actors about their nature. Furthermore, an interviewee might even change his interpretation of them through time. Examples of these 'meanings' are discussed below, and questions of validity are discussed alongside them.

Interviewees' motivations

Underpinning the actions or habits and routines of interviewees' actions are, at some conscious or unconscious level, motivations. Interviewees often gave accounts of such motivations. Thus in the following example, an interviewee claims that the reason for his offending is the desire for money:

[We used to] nick cars, nick car stereos, just to get money though. We won't nick - if we were going to nick a car we would just get it to sell, not to drive, get the car to sell then that would be it done. (M2, White interviewee)

In a different example, an interviewee describes how his misbehaviour in class is motivated by boredom, which arises in turn from a desire to save face in class - rather than admitting he has finished his work quickly, he would rather wait and avoid the opprobrium from his peers of appearing a 'boffin':
...if I said that I'd finished [my schoolwork], everybody's [in the class] going to think 'eh Boffin, he thinks he's clever' and all that. So I'd sit there, get bored and like talk to people and distract them. (M4, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Interpretations of others' actions

Similarly, in talking about other people's behaviour, accounts were sometimes given about why people behave the way they do or did:

...if I'm in a nice car and I'm driving down the street they [the police] are going to stop me 'cause they think I'm a drug dealer cause I'm in an expensive car. (M26, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

In this example, the interviewee suggests that officers are motivated by a particular stereotype of a drug-dealer in their decision to stop him.

Attitudes and evaluations

Finally, interviewees may be seen to express an attitude or evaluation of something or somebody. This could involve expressing a preference based on taste, or could involve a judgement based on a moral schema. For example, one interviewee evaluates schoolwork as essentially boring:

The work was all right but like you'd get bored and that. Just like sitting there and writing all day. Boring. (M1, White interviewee)

In a different example, an interviewee makes a moral judgement about his past actions:

Now I know I've done wrong. (M16, White interviewee)

Issues of validity in accounts of meanings

In contrast to accounts of fact, it is argued here that accounts of meaning are less closely regulated by social convention. This is because while they are open to challenge, such challenges are less easily resolved as claims about meanings are less easily verified as 'true' of 'false'. Rather, they are open to much wider interpretation. Indeed, meanings given to actions, events and so on may even change depending on the point in time they are recounted, or on the mood of the person recounting them. Certainly, an event in the past of
an interviewee may be interpreted differently in the context of an interview, than at the time when it occurred. In the following case, for example, an interviewee reports on how his attitude towards his former friends has changed since coming to prison:

A lot of them [my friends] are crooks really. Well not crooks but a lot of them around our area that they are all, hardly any of them work and do you get what I mean, just dossers really, which isn't very good thing. Well I've come here and I just totally ignored my friends who have written to me and I have [decided]...that I don't really want to know them when I get out. (M16, White interviewee)

It is notable that an argument for a distinction between accounts of fact and accounts of meaning is implicitly given some empirical weight by the work of a number of authors who actually place themselves in an ethnomethodological tradition in their treatment of interview data. For example, Lyman and Scott (1970) argue that people's accounts are oriented towards the justification or excusing of past actions. However, this practice can only be seen as necessary insofar as people actually acknowledge and describe, rather than lie about, their past actions, and do so even when these actions may potentially offend the sensibilities of an audience. Taylor (1979), taking a similar perspective, discusses the rhetorical function of account construction. However, his concern is not with any observed variation in the reporting of actions per se, but with the culturally specific way in which motives are apparently imputed to those actions.

The status of accounts of meaning is clearly, therefore, more problematic. Compared to accounts of fact, they are more fluid and more easily misrepresented. They are also more open to the possibility of change with the perspective of the interviewee. The question then is: how should accounts of meaning be treated for the purposes of analysis?

One author who has addressed this issue is Brown (1983). He argues, as I do, that the meanings described by actors are often not accurate, while retaining more confidence in descriptions of concrete, situational aspects surrounding actions. However, he suggests that accounts of motive and meaning should not be used as a basis for assessing the motives and meanings they seek to describe. Instead, he argues it is possible to make judgements about these things by relying on the more reliable accounts of fact. This approach draws upon Weber's (1968) idea of 'verstehen' or 'understanding' by which an analyst tries to render intelligible another's action on the basis of its context. Brown (1983) argues:
'Unbiased, if not always correct judgements about meaning by the investigator are still possible in so far as respondents are reasonably accurate about reporting biographical circumstances of possible relevance' (P.52).

This approach offers us a useful strategy: it enables us to make judgements about likely meanings or motives, which may be attached to an interviewee's experiences. This might be useful where such meanings are not already articulated in an interview. However, it may also be useful when accounts of meaning are provided, particularly when these do not seem plausible - an approach which is discussed below. A verstehen approach will be drawn upon as part of the methodology used in this study.

Wallis and Bruce (1983) have also written about the problem of accounts, particularly as presented by those operating in an ethnomethodological tradition. They make the useful and constructive suggestion that accounts of meaning should be treated as hypotheses:

'Since actors have privileged access to their intentions and beliefs, the presumption must be that characterizations of their actions and their accounts of why they are performing them are the correct ones. Such a presumption must prevail until evidence is advanced either to show that they are lying, or to show an alternative set of characterizations and reasons unknown to the actor, accompanied by an explanation - supported by further evidence - of why they think they are doing something else, and why they fail to see the real reasons for their actions and beliefs' (p. 99).

This idea too informs the methodology used here. However, rather than thinking in terms of such claims being hypotheses - which implies a particular scientific method - I will argue that accounts of meanings should, at least in the first instance, be treated as provisional representations of social phenomena.

*Interpreting accounts of meanings*

Using accounts of meaning can be important in the testing and development of existing theoretical claims and in the development of explanations. However, I have argued that accounts of meaning are readily open to interpretation, re-interpretation or misrepresentation and, as such, should be seen as provisional data on social phenomena, at least in the first instance. A number of issues raised by statement validity analysis are relevant to moving beyond this provisional status, including questions of consistency. Furthermore, as already noted, one way in which we might assess a particular claim about meaning is to rely on a 'verstehen' approach.
Overall, therefore, while it is important to exercise judgement for each case, it was important to be cautious about interpreting accounts of meaning in a confident fashion. However, where this was done meanings needed to achieve a positive response to most of the following questions:

- Are accounts of meanings consistent within the interview?
- If not absolutely consistent, do interviewees make excuses for, cast doubt on, elaborate reluctantly on, or correct admissions in a way which may indicate their original admission is likely to be correct, but embarrassing?
- Or if not absolutely consistent, does consistency in claims emerge following careful prompting and probing?
- Are the meanings given by interviewees plausible, given the factual context?
- Are they corroborated by other sources?

Following this logic, in the following example we are able to discount an initially proclaimed intention to shoot somebody in the kneecaps when, through further questioning, it seemed implausible, and at odds with other claims made:

J: Why would you want to kill your own brother?
M42: No, I was going to get his kneecaps shot off, that's about it.

....

J: Right, is that something you're in the habit of doing, blowing off people's kneecaps?
M42: No, it's just that if people fuck about, they get on my nerves, I get something done about that.

J: So have you done it in the past?
M42: I don't blow people's knees off, I get them whacked. Whacked with bats and ... and that's about it.

(White interviewee)

Finally, in the absence of relevant accounts about meaning, we may make some provisional inferences by relying on a verstehen methodology, taking into account accounts of fact, in
the way already described by Brown (1983) discussed above. This was actually quite a useful technique in the current study where accounts were factual and matter-of-fact.

Ultimately, while interpretation and analysis of meanings played an important role on its own terms, the development of reliable interpretations of meanings also fed importantly into the development of broader biographical narratives, discussed below.

'Stories'

Many accounts of 'facts' and 'meanings' are brought together in 'stories'. These often involve a wide range of causal linkages, and judgements of various kinds, and conform more closely to the literary conventions of story-telling. As such, they are the most theoretically elaborate of interviewees' accounts of their worlds. For example, one interviewee accounts for the development of his offending, placing it in the context of offending more general and drawing on broader social structural factors as apparent causes:

> Basically my offending started when I was about 14. I got mixed up with the wrong crowd at that time um car thefts, stealing from the shops, ramraids everything. It was just something to do, because there was no youth club around the area where you could go and do something you were just on the street and bored, you just wanted something to do basically. So you used go out and nick a car put a brick in a shop put a brick through a window...I've never stopped until last year. I've actually stopped stealing now, I'm in for fighting which is a totally a different thing. I don't really blame anybody else but myself but there's nobody really to help from where I'm from, it's just loads of kids, even now the younger kids are starting...even 7 or 8 from where I live - burgling old people's houses, because they haven't got anything to do - it's not their fault. It's because they are bored...even though you bored you shouldn't go and steal from people. But they haven't got nothing to do, but rob the money. It's a different generation to our eldest one. (M8, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

In contrast to this quite sociological story, another interviewee tells a story about the development of his delinquency that makes more explicit reference to psychological factors in his development, and the interpersonal relationships that underpinned them:

> I was down in the school and I was getting into trouble - I was always running away from school and all that. Like hitting the teachers, getting into fights at school cos I couldn't - I just didn't - I think basically I didn't understand why my dad was away. I didn't understand where he was, my mum wouldn't tell me. But anyway some lads started winding me up at school. I was only little. They said your dad's in prison and all that and I was in detention like in when they had their break I had to sit because I was getting into a lot of trouble at school and like they didn't know what to
do with me. Anyway, some lad come up to the window, I remember his name Martin Bates and he was winding me up and I put a ruler through his eye and nearly blinded him. But after that, they got like social services involved... (M10, White interviewee)

Issues of validity in stories

Stories, drawing as they do on the building blocks of accounts of facts and meanings, raise the issues of validity already discussed. However, they also raise some further questions about their status as explanations of social phenomena.

Talking about stories, Miller and Glassner (1997) give some clues to how these may be shaped according to wider social influences. Drawing on Richardson (1990: 25) they talk about 'cultural stories' which represent stories of social phenomena told from the 'point of view of the ruling interests and the normative order'. By contrast, 'collective stories' relate to those stories which may reflect the view of interview subjects and 'give voice to those who are silenced or marginalized in the cultural [story]' (Richardson, 1990: 25). When discussing these, Miller and Glassner (1997) prioritise the validity of the latter type of story. I would argue, however, that either of these may amount to a script reproduced uncritically by interviewees, and as such should not always be taken at face value.

However, stories told in interviews offer some important insights that may be important to testing or building theory. As generalised claims about the empirical world, or as claims about what people believe to be true, it is necessary that such accounts are given only a provisional theoretical status. This provisional status follows not only from the fact that stories may be a product of cultural influences. It follows also from the status accorded to accounts of meaning, already discussed. And similarly, it follows from problems of partiality in the coverage of factual detail. For in telling a particular story, it is likely that some factual details take centre stage, while others are marginal or not mentioned; yet theory development may still find these to be important.

Interpreting stories

As elaborate explanations of social phenomena, stories can be particularly effective in informing the development of our thinking, and were drawn on this research to some degree.
However, the weight given to stories in the development of our theories was greater where I could say 'yes' to at least some of the following questions:

- Are stories logically structured and consistent?
- Are stories detailed - for example including details of conversations or interactions?
- Do they include reference to subjective mental states, as well as neutral depictions of circumstances and events?
- Do stories include unexpected or superfluous information?
- Do interviewees' stories go further than simply articulating stereotypes in the form of obvious 'cultural' or 'collective' stories?
- Are stories similar across interviewees?

To illustrate issues of validity in story-telling, in the following example there is evidence of an interviewee switching from what appears to be a reasonably authentic claim about his understanding of police racism, to a claim which quite explicitly borrows from a wider cultural story, and which appears fairly implausible as a proposition:

J:  *Do you think they are racist, the police?*

M8:  *Phew, huh, it's half and half, as in everything I'd say.*

J:  *What, do you mean half of them are and half of them aren't?*

M8:  *Hm. But I know for a fact that when a lot of people, say a lot of black people go to police station, police generally are racist and if you look, I mean like, research into people dying in custody I have done...*

J:  *Research you have done? What here?*

M8:  *Yeah. Yeah. Not anything special - just go to the library or something like that - there was like 64% of black people when they get arrested they receive horrific injuries from the police...*

(Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Again, as revealed in more detail below, stories played an important role in piecing together biographical narratives revealed by interviews.
Finally, it is important to consider the status of the holistic biographies revealed by interviewees. By using this term, I am referring to their life histories - focusing in particular on their offending and its antecedents. Biographies play a key role in this thesis, for they allow us to make specific links - most importantly causal links - connecting events and processes between different parts and times of interviewees lives. The etiological 'threads' that are rendered visible through qualitative life-history interviews stand the methodology apart from many others. For example, statistical analysis, which makes causal links primarily through interpretation of correlations, cannot directly bear witness to causal processes. Even some analysis of qualitative interviews might simply rely on patterns of association between different phenomena as clues to causal processes, rather than being used as a resource to directly illuminate such processes. As such, biographies are a distinctive resource, and represent a key empirical resource for the testing and development of theory.

Biographies are different in important ways from the elements of accounts already discussed. For, in the case of most interviews, a full 'story line' of their offending career was not given. And even where they did offer biographies (in the form of 'stories', as already discussed) these often appeared simplified when set against the full range of other things that they revealed about their histories. As such, biographies were actually constructed through a process of analysis (that is they are simultaneously a product of, and resource for, analysis). In practice, they were painstakingly pieced together by working through entire interviews, drawing upon dispersed fragments of facts, meanings and stories given by interviewees. As such, they sit above, and are directly contingent upon, other elements of accounts so far discussed - they were not 'off-the-shelf' quotable accounts delivered by interviewees.

**Issues of validity in biographies**

Constructed as they are from the facts, meanings and stories upon which they are contingent, the issues of validity so far discussed in relation to these elements apply to biographies and need to be borne in mind when, during the analytical process, they are constructed. These validity issues, relating to such things as partiality of account coverage, reworking of
meanings, the influence of cultural scripts on stories told, have already been discussed above.

However, the distinctive, holistic character of biographies raises some further validity issues that also need to be considered. In particular, it is important to consider the causal connections that need to be made between elements and processes in the lives of interviewees. This is a particularly important issue given that such connections involve some difficult judgements to be made about what constitutes 'causation'. These are central to the construction of credible biographies, and involve application of the strategies detailed below.

**Constructing robust biographies**

In general terms, it must be accepted that the biographies are a construction. This being said, through a rigorous process of interrogating and interpreting accounts a reasonable confidence about their veracity can be assumed. Specifically, there were a number of resources and ideas that I was able to draw upon which lent robustness to the process.

First of all, I used facts, ordered in historical sequence through the life history of each interviewee, to form the 'backbone' of the career analysis. Obviously, in developing this sequence, validity checks, as already outlined, were carried out. The decision to use facts in this way was taken first of all because they are fundamentally significant in terms of theory, and, therefore, etiology. Conveniently, because facts are seen as forming the most robust elements of accounts, this lends more strength to this approach than would have existed if I had relied primarily on meanings or stories, instead.

However, it was clearly important to make inferences from this factual backbone for, on its own, arranging facts in a sequence amounts to little more than a list. In particular, I was concerned with the etiology of offending, and how causal linkages could be inferred from the biographies. To make such inferences, while there was no watertight way to proceed, a number of guidelines were invoked which, collectively, could be used to assess the likely causal linkages between phenomena. These revolved around the following principles:
• **Stories and meanings**

Obviously, one of the key sources of information on etiological processes was the stock of meanings and stories provided by interviewees. These were used (albeit critically - following the validity checks outlined above) in the development of causal linkages in the interviewees' biographies. Explanations or accounts upon which interviewees place a strong explanatory emphasis in the telling of their story were used as clues to critical events which appear to have had an important role in the development of an offending career.

• **Logical causal relationships**

Certain events logically presuppose others. That is, the causal relationship between one event and another is self-evident. For example, an involvement in gang violence presupposes that, within a particular neighbourhood, there are gangs there that can be participated in. Or, if an interviewee starts carrying out crimes during the daytime, when others are at school, this necessarily follows from the fact that he has been excluded, or is truanting, from the school.

• **Temporal contiguity**

A key indication of causal relationships, is a close temporal association between events or processes. For example, the close relationship in time between exclusion from school, and the beginning or escalation of an offending career would suggest a causal link between the two. Or, a sudden development of delinquency straight after a significant event - such as the death of a father - would be a strong candidate for a causal relationship.

• **Comparative method**

To some extent, the role of certain events and processes in causing others could be assessed by looking at the presence or absence of these events and processes within each of the interviewees and, at the same time, look for the presence or absence of the events or processes that may be implicated in causing. This approximates to a correlational analysis in statistical terms. So, for example, in the interviewees there was some 'correlation' across interviewees between an involvement in hard drugs, such as crack or heroin, and serious levels of offending.
• 'Borrowed' explanations
An important stock of ideas about the nature of casual linkages was the generic processes and phenomena that were well elaborated across a number of interviewees, for example through stories. This information could be used to inform the biography of those interviewees where similar events and processes were being described, but with less detail, but could be expected to have some similarities.

• Verstehen
Causal inferences could also rely on subjectively plausible motives being invoked - in keeping with Weber's idea of verstehen, as discussed in relation to meanings, above. Where a subjectively plausible motive 'connected' certain processes or events, then this gave some credibility to the idea that a causal link existed between them. For example, if - in the context of family problems or difficult family relationships - an interviewee were to have run away from home, it would be reasonable to infer that there was a connection between these two things. This connection would involve the interviewee reacting negatively to his home circumstances, and choosing to leave his family.

• Causal event sequences
Finally, in considering the links between more distantly related phenomena - where causes might have implications that are somewhat 'downstream' - it is important that an intervening causal sequence could be identified. So for example, in the following example, an interviewee was moved to a new school in a racist area. This event, through a chain of further events (which included engaging in fights as a response to racist provocation, truancy because of unhappiness at school) contributed to him ultimately being expelled from school. Some of this is apparent in the following excerpt:

M30: ...you see my brother messed up, you get me, so he thought yea, we'll send him to a far off school, at least he'll learn something instead of going to one of these schools, all his friends will be dossing about, so I went to a far off school and like the whole school there were only three Asians in the whole school, so it was a bit hard for me, you get me.

J: Why was it hard?

M30: 'Cos the area it was based it was a racist area, you get me.

J: Racist?
M30: *Yea, racist area. So you just get prats giving you remarks, you get me.*

J: *What kinds of remarks?*

M30: *'Paki this', 'Paki that', you get me?*

J: *Did you have any fights or anything?*

M30: *Yeah, I used to get into fights a lot, in that school...I was not happy in this school, no not this school, probably next door, but not this school... after a bit I got pissed off a bit, started fighting a lot, so they expelled me.*

(Pakistani interviewee)

**Analytic approach**

Thus far in this chapter I have outlined an epistemological framework for meeting the objectives of the study, and have shown how interview data can provide the empirical basis for such a framework, provided a critical approach is used. It is important, now, to consider the specific analytic strategies used to meet the objectives of the study.

**Three perspectives**

In Chapter 2, I noted that a range of theoretical perspectives appeared relevant to offending. Furthermore, these theories identified causal processes that could be located across the life histories of offenders. So, in developing a theoretical framework for offending - Objective 1 of this study - consideration will be given to such a range of theories, and empirical elements through the life-course. Furthermore, in pursuing Objective 2 of this study, the range of theories is explored in relation to possible differences between offenders from different ethnic groups. Chapter 2 also highlighted how objectives 1 and 2 would benefit from fresh theoretical development - most notably drawing on issues within the 'foreground' of offending.

Taking forward these issues, the analytical approach involves three key elements, discussed below.
The background to offending

In the first instance, the analysis will explore those empirical elements that can be seen as located in the 'background' of offending. This will focus on the broader biographical characteristics of interviewees lives, whether in the present or in the past. In exploring such broader issues, it will be strongly guided by existing theory and the factors they have implicated in the explanations of offending, such as family, school, employment, and friends. As such, this element of the research will be primarily concerned with assessing existing theory in relation to the interviewees, though will involve some clarification and development of details of the key theoretical approaches. This will obviously feed into the development of a theoretical framework for offending and provide an opportunity to identify ethnic differences that might have a broader relevance (i.e. both objectives of the thesis).

The foreground to offending

Secondly, the thesis will explore the elements that make up the 'foreground' to offending. That is, it will be directly concerned with the nature of offending and the motivations, values and processes that direct it. In doing so, it will be concerned still with testing some of the elements of existing of theories. However, this will also present an opportunity to develop new ideas for theory. In doing this, I will be drawing on the methodological injunctions offered by Katz (1988):

'Somehow in the psychological and sociological disciplines, the lived mysticism and magic in the foreground of criminal experience became unseeable...Whatever the historical causes for treating background factors as the theoretical core for the empirical study of crime...it is not necessary to constitute the field back to front. We may begin with the foreground, attempting to discover common or homogeneous criminal projects and to test explanations of the necessary and sufficient steps through which people construct given forms of crime. If we take as our primary research commitment an explorations of the distinctive phenomena of crime, we may produce...a systematic empirical theory of crime - one that explains at the individual level the causal process of committing a crime and that accounts at the aggregate level for recurrently documented correlations with biographical and ecological background factors' (pp. 311-312).

So, in looking at the foreground issues, we may still be directed, ultimately, to the background again, albeit not necessarily in the same places as those suggested by the main theoretical perspectives. Obviously, issues of ethnic difference will be explored through this process.
As with the 'background' approach, this analysis will feed into the development of a theoretical framework for offending and provide an opportunity to identify ethnic differences that might have a broader relevance (addressing both research objectives).

Offending careers

Finally, an analytic view will be taken of the offending career as a whole. This will involve a fuller appreciation of how different theoretical processes play themselves out at different points within the lifecourse than is possible looking separately at the background or foreground. This is an important issue for, as we saw in Chapter 2, an appreciation of the past and the present are likely to be important elements in a full understanding of offending. It will also provide an opportunity to fully integrate the foreground and background elements explored into a more generalised theory.

So, while the 'background' and 'foreground' will make important contributions to the development of a general theoretical model of offending, the career level analysis will provide the basis for a final model for offending, meeting Objective 1 of the thesis. Through the development of this career-based model, further insights about similarity and difference will be identified, making a further contribution to meeting Objective 2.

Assessing existing theory

It is important to make clear how existing theories will be assessed. Table 4.2 therefore spells out the specific data against which key existing theoretical perspectives are examined. In constructing this table, some intellectual debt is acknowledged to Johnson (1979) who constructed a similar table for his survey-based analysis (p. 139). However, his version of this table has been adapted here, most notably to additionally include psychological theories of offending.

It is notable that, in operationalising psychological theory, I was not concerned with which of the various psychological perspectives was likely to be relevant (whether based, for example, on conditioning, social learning, or inherent traits) - as this lies beyond the scope of the method. Rather, I was concerned with evidence that essentially psychological factors
were important in the development of offending. As such, I was keen to identify the evidence for significant 'anti-social behaviour' or other obvious psychological problems, that could be traced back into early childhood, and pre-dating full-blown offending. This follows from theorisations which typically locate the initial manifestations of psychological problems as dating back to childhood, and taking the form variously of, 'low self-control', 'risk-taking', 'impulsivity' 'low cognitive and academic skills', 'egocentric', 'poor at interpersonal problem-solving', 'low empathy' or 'short time horizons'. (e.g. Trasler, 1962; Bandura, 1977; Nietzel, 1979; Sarason, 1978; Farrington, 1996a, 1996b; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). Insofar as psychological theories invoke particular social processes to explain psychological problems in the first place, these are actually dealt with here under the rubric of control theory, for this provides a sociological account of what are basically the same processes. Specifically, I am talking about weak or problematic relations with family members - notably parents.

In view of the conceptual crossover between strain and, at least some, subcultural theory, I was keen to distinguish between their essential elements within this research. I therefore focused, on the one hand, on socio-economic and cognitive processes which were, respectively, 'strain producing' or 'strain driven', and, on the other hand, the specific subcultural processes which provided a vehicle for the development of offending, whether or not motivated by strain. As such, these elements have been separated out across the two perspectives in Table 4.2.
Table 4.2 Testing of theoretical perspectives: relevant evidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Relevant ‘background’ evidence</th>
<th>Relevant ‘foreground’ evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strain</td>
<td>• Mismatch between occupational/financial aspirations and opportunity (experienced in school context and in labour market) • Low socio-economic status</td>
<td>• Financial/material motivation for offending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subculture</td>
<td>• Delinquent friends and associates • Criminal family members</td>
<td>• Delinquent values/motivations rooted in subcultural group processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>• Lack of commitment/involvement in education/training • Lack of commitment/involvement in employment • Weak/problematic bonds with family members • Low levels of supervision/ineffective discipline</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>• Anti-social behaviour/psychological problems dating back to early childhood</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data analysis strategies and use of computer technology

The main analysis carried out for this research was performed at the end of the data collection process\(^\text{11}\). The practical analysis process was actually quite complicated, and relied on computer technology. In practice there were three main data analysis strategies. First, was the process of coding and retrieving text using Atlas/ti, a qualitative software package. Second, was the condensing of life-story information into short 'thumbnail' processes.
biographies, which could be reviewed collectively. Finally, I used a technique of 'charting' using Excel. These strategies served, on the one hand, to provide insights about particular 'topic areas' and, on the other, about interviewees - or 'cases' - as a whole. Additionally, a fourth, supplementary, strategy involved the direct review of the original interview transcripts. This was used primarily to support the other three strategies, and was invoked to fill gaps that emerged in data presentation.

It is important to note that there was no direct correspondence between the three analytic perspectives already outlined (foreground, background and career) and the three main data analysis strategies. In practice, particular analytic perspectives were supported by more than one data analysis strategy. It is also notable that the three analytic strategies have no direct correspondence, either, with the different elements of accounts which have been discussed (i.e. facts, meanings, stories, or biographies). In general terms, different data analysis strategies drew variously on different elements of interviewees' accounts. This being said, the use of thumbnail biographies followed, to a significant extent, the approach to biography construction detailed above.

The use of Atlas/ti and Excel software packages in this research can usefully inform questions which have been raised in discussions of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) in academic literature. These questions include:

- To what extent does the 'code-and-retrieve' method supported by CAQDAS limit or homogenise analytical approaches? (Coffey et al., 1996)

- To what extent do code-and-retrieve methods directly support inductive 'grounded' theorising? (Coffey et al., 1996)

- To what extent does CAQDAS contribute directly to analysis, and to what extent is it simply a database or archiving tool? (Kelle, 1997)

The three main data analysis processes are discussed in turn below, highlighting the specific roles of the computer software in each case. Following this discussion, the questions directly above will be returned to, and insights offered on them, based on the lessons of the study.
Coding and retrieval of text

CAQDAS software is designed, in essence, to allow for the coding and retrieval of pieces of text within larger documents - in this case interviews. The approach I have taken to coding the interview data has been influenced by a bottom-up 'grounded theory' approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). By this, I mean I allowed categories to emerge from the data, though these have been developed with certain questions and theoretical perspectives in mind. So, within Atlas/ti I developed several 'code-families' which corresponded more or less to themes of interest which either emerged, or were of interest a priori based on previous research e.g. family, home, school, drugs/alcohol etc. Within each code-family, I allowed a range of codes to develop as I combed through the details one at a time.

Unlike much conventional coding, which uses a particular code to flag up a subject area (e.g. 'relationship with mother'), I invested my codes with specific claims arising from the interview data (e.g. 'conflict with mother' or 'gets on with mother'). This allowed a more 'transparent' reading of code categories, for the specific claims made in the text could be ascertained quickly with reference to code headings. This was a useful feature in informing theoretical ideas, and navigating the data.

Within my coding system, I broadly distinguished between those elements of accounts already discussed above:

1. biographical details and descriptions - approximating to 'facts';

2. attitudes and dispositions (and to a lesser extent motivations) - approximating to 'meanings'.

3. inferences and insights, often involving accounts of personal motivation, approximating to 'stories'.

In practice, respondents revealed a fair amount about themselves without necessarily placing these details within broader explanations or expressions of meaning (e.g. they may have said they were expelled from school, but not that it gave rise to early delinquency). Therefore, type (1) codes were used extensively. Where respondents talked about what they wanted,
wished for, liked and disliked type (2) codes have been used. Finally, in many cases respondents offer up insights and interpretations of events (e.g. 'after I kicked out of school I had nothing to do. That's when I started getting involved in crime'), and in these cases, I have used type (3) codes. It is also notable that, in setting-up the three-way distinction, accounts of motives were typically subsumed in broader 'stories' given that they tended to be invoked as part of story-telling activity. As such accounts of motives were generally placed in category (3) rather than (2), which might have been their natural home.

Although in practice these three types of code are a little mixed between the code-families, broadly speaking, type (3) codes were set up in one code family called 'ethnography'; type (2) codes are found within a number of other code families, including 'morality and disposition' and 'aspirations'; and type (1) codes are found within the remaining code families. So, for example one of the type (1) code families, and some constituent codes is reproduced below, and relates to descriptions of the areas where they had lived when growing up:

**Code family: Area**  
**Select codes:** 'front-line'  
area 'OK'  
car crime - a lot  
conflict in area  
crime in area  
gangs  
nothing to do  
quiet  
rough  
vviolence - area

Similarly, for code-families relating to type (2) codes, the following example illustrates interviewees' discussions of aspirations:
Code family: Aspirations  Select codes: avoid crime in future
continue crime
getting qualifications
help community
settle with girlfriend
getting qualification
want go college
wants girlfriend

And finally, type (3) codes are illustrated using the ‘ethnography’ code family:

Code family: Ethnography  Select codes: accident put off crime
area to crime
boredom-money connection
care to crime
drugs to crime
friends teach car-theft
peer pressure truancy
robbery not burglary
truant- poor grades
work not crime

In doing this coding work, only half the interviews were coded fully and in detail (ensuring coverage of the main demographic groups in relation to ethnicity and conviction type). At this point, a large degree of saturation was achieved, in that prospects of new claims and codes emerging from the data became fairly limited. Nonetheless, to ensure that I was not missing anything in the second half of the set of interviews, these were read closely too, and where novel or at least interesting sections of text were identified, these too were coded.

Analysis using code-and-retrieve methods worked at two levels. First, the very process of doing the coding sparked off theoretical ideas that could be tested and developed. The testing and development of existing theoretical ideas could be carried out by retrieving text relating to single codes, sets of related codes, or whole code families which were relevant to the theory in question. Close working of the data, could then be carried out in a similar way
to that outlined by Agar (1986). In broad terms, this involves the testing of theoretical ideas against 'strips' of data. In moving through these strips, 'breakdowns' occur, in which theoretical ideas fail to match patterns in the data strips. This is followed by the refinement or 'resolution' of theoretical ideas and continued systematic comparisons with strips until a theory is fully consistent with the data.

The use of code and retrieve (as well as text retrieve based on key words) also fed directly into the analytical process supported by the charting approach discussed below. Text for relevant topic areas could be retrieved and reviewed together and used to fill in summary cells in an analytical chart. This process will be discussed in more detail, below.

In analysing and reviewing the textual data retrieved by the software, it was important to keep fully in mind the questions against the validity and epistemological status of interview transcripts that I have already outlined. The ability to retrieve all relevant parts of text within interviews helped facilitate this approach, as it allowed for a clear examination of issues of consistency and coverage which were important in this regard.

Thumbnail biographies

In addition to coding, when going through each interview I also wrote a summary of the main features of the life-history which seem relevant to their development into offenders. This was achieved by attaching a 'memo' to each of the interviews within the Atlas/ti software. Following from our discussion of biography construction, detailed above, the thumbnail biographies focused in particular on the more 'factual' details of the interviewees' biographies, drawing on features of life-histories which sit in key theoretical models, along with other important details offered by interviewees that also appeared to have relevance to biography construction (following the discussion of biography construction above). Once again, in compiling the biographies, it was important to keep fully in mind the questions against the validity and epistemological status of interview transcripts that I have outlined, and to interpret the raw interview text accordingly in producing the summary narrative.
For example, one interviewee's biography was narrated as follows:


Grew up in big family until 10.

Parents split - which caused arguments with mother.

Started following brothers into 'trouble'.

10-16 put into care (mother phoned social services) - following a burglary at 10.

Got in with joyriding/glue sniffing crowd at bad care home. Spent time in secure unit (15). Foster parents 16.

Seems to be happy and relatively out of crime now with foster-mum.

History of serious violence in family (e.g. 0251, 0270) - including violent confrontation between family members. Brother particularly violent. However, brothers and sisters and parents, aunts uncles etc. have had some jobs between them.

Enjoyed a good smoke and hanging out with friends when growing up. Friends white and black.

Suspend from junior school at 8 for taking the nuts of the wheels of the headmaster's car - didn't return. Next junior school expelled for threatening headmaster with flick-knife. At senior school was expelled after scuffle with games teacher - put this down to a bad start associated with brothers' former reputation at the school.

After that did a few odd jobs through family - and was obviously in care.

Basically done car crime (joy-riding) and commercial burglaries. Done one robbery following a tip-off.

Started off with burglaries and then got into cars in a big way - just for the driving (joy-riding). Burglaries dropped off.

Thumbnail biographies were very useful in that they could be interrogated as part of a more holistic mode of analysis - importantly, as already discussed, allowing for the identification of etiological threads running through interviewees lives. It is notable that during analysis, more biographical detail was required than had been incorporated within the thumbnail biographies. An important supplement, therefore, to this was the spreadsheet 'chart' of interviewees, discussed below, which provided additional material. However, during analysis, reference was also made, in some cases, to the full original interview transcripts to explore particular biographical themes.
Testing, development and building of theory were all carried out on biographies. Whether the ideas 'tested' started off as established theoretical concepts, or as hunches based on emergent ideas when processing the data, the basic process corresponded once again to the 'breakdown' and 'resolution' process detailed in Agar (1986), discussed above. What was particularly notable about this approach, however, was that by taking whole biographies as single 'strips' of data for this analytical process, some very different and important insights were possible than would have been possibly from relying simply on the code-and-retrieve methods already discussed, or even the chart methods discussed below. As already noted, these concerned the processes by which the interviewers had developed through time and had ultimately become involved in offending. This approach highlighted some important limitations of a simple reliance on code-and-retrieve methods in carrying out life history analysis, which will be discussed below.

*Spreadsheet 'chart'*

The third data analysis strategy involved the development of a chart using an Excel spreadsheet. The chart involved a two dimensional matrix, with cases listed in rows, and key topic areas listed in columns. For each cell of the matrix, therefore, there was a need to provide information corresponding to a particular issue for a particular topic area. This involved processes of data reduction and display, as detailed by Miles and Huberman (1994).

Key information - principally biographical, and often more 'factual' information (though certainly including meanings and stories too) was entered in a very summary form for each cell. This was made feasible through a number of mechanisms, all facilitated by the way the interview data had been set-up and coded within Atlas/ti. Text retrieval for particular codes played an important role, and allowed a summary digest of information on particular topics to be achieved based on retrieved chunks of code. However, uncoded text was also retrieved by a more mechanistic use of searches using key words. This allowed the interview texts to be navigated quickly with the goal of focusing in only on those sections where there were interview exchanges of topical interest. This approach was particularly important for the second half of the set of interviews, which had been coded only minimally. The thumbnail biographies could also be used to supplement these approaches. And as a final, back-up,
measure, a close reading of at least some parts of interview transcripts allowed cells to be filled in for topic areas that were more elusive, and less susceptible to retrieval or search functions. As before, interview text was reviewed critically in arriving at the summary information for each of the chart cells.

Interestingly, the development of a chart with summary case information took place after the initial coding of the data, and was not planned in the first instance. The need for a way of representing summary data on key topics (see Miles and Huberman, 1995) within and across cases emerged as particularly important when comparisons were attempted between different groups of interviewees. Given that this study involved an important comparative dimension, concerned as it was with ethnic similarities and differences among offenders, the chart emerged as a critical tool in arriving at many key analytical insights. The chart also helped serve the more holistic analysis discussed in relation to the thumbnail biographies. In common with the biographies, the ability to scrutinise each case as a whole, in a readily accessible way, made it a useful resource for looking at the overall life-histories of interviewees.

Once again, the chart was useful in the testing of theory, but also in its development. While, to some extent, a particular cell or individual could be viewed as a data strip and analysed in accordance with Agar's approach, already discussed, one of the strengths of the chart was to allow for some crude 'quantification' of the frequencies of different characteristics across groups of offenders. Clearly, while such comparisons could not meet the criteria of statistical confidence associated with quantitative methods, they gave some useful pointers to ethnic difference. In some cases, these could be further interpreted in the context of other insights, for example from claims made by interviewees, or previous research and statistics on related topics. As such they could give additional weight to some provisional ideas about ethnic differences, or in the absence of supporting evidence could, in some cases, be posed as provisional ideas of their own.

**The overall analysis process**

Hopefully, the discussion above will have indicated how interview transcripts were interrogated critically through three main (and partly interdependent) data analysis strategies; the insights from all of these strategies contributing to the three analytical
perspectives which make up the study. This process is represented in diagrammatic form in Figure 4.1 below.

**Figure 4.1 The analytical process**

![Diagram of the analytical process]

Lessons learned from using CAQDAS

I noted earlier that there are number of questions raised by CAQDAS, and these issues are returned to here.

Coffey et al. (1996) have argued that 'code-and-retrieve' techniques which lie at the heart of various types of CAQDAS software, are having a homogenising influence on analytical approaches to qualitative data. Countering this claim, Lee and Fielding (1996) rightly point out that there is little evidence that suggests that this homogenising process is afoot and that there are a range of analytic strategies that are open to researchers using computer strategies.
However, I would argue, based on my analytical experience here, a slightly different point, which nonetheless echoes some of the sentiments of Coffey et al.'s claim. Specifically, and reflecting directly my own experience, I would argue that the use of text-based strategies for analysis, which lie at the core of CAQDAS methods, may not on their own support a rounded analysis, if this requires a holistic case-level scrutiny. Certainly, the code-and-retrieve focus of Atlas/ti did not point me towards this type of analysis in the first instance. Rather, I came to fall back on the use of charts and biographies when it became apparent that the code-and-retrieve methods would not lend themselves to such an approach. This may have been a particularly significant issue for the life-history element that characterised this research.

Coffey at al. (1996) have also suggested, in a related way to their claim about homogenisation, above, that the use of CAQDAS software, with its focus on coding and retrieval of text, is closely bound up with the use of 'grounded theory' - or at least methods which aspire to this title. Again, this has been disputed by Lee and Fielding (1996), who note from their analysis of studies carried out using ETHNOGRAPH - a particular CAQDAS application - that less than a third made any mention of grounded theory. Similarly, Kelle (1997) argue that developers of different CAQDAS software occupy a range of different analytic traditions, of which grounded theory forms only a part. In reflecting on my own experience of using the software, it was very clear to me that while some variant of grounded theory was used in the analysis - particularly where coding categories emerged from the data - Atlas/ti was entirely effective for a very different strategy - namely theory-testing. By retrieving text segments in theoretically relevant coded sections of interviewees' accounts, pre-existing theoretical hypotheses and ideas could be tested and developed.

Kelle (1997) has also questioned the extent to which CAQDAS contributes directly to analysis, and to what extent is it simply a database or archiving tool. His own response to this question is that CAQDAS software programmes are:

'tools to mechanize clerical tasks of ordering and archiving texts used in the hermeneutic sciences...To be clear about this issue we should address these programs as software for "data administration and archiving" rather than as tools for "data analysis"' (p.13)

The experience of this project confirms this point. In fact, this is true despite the fact that the version of Atlas/ti used for the analysis has its own theory building tools, allowing the
analyst to build visual links between codes, quotations, families or memos in the pursuit of theoretical networks and schemes. In practice, this was not used at all in the analysis, perhaps for two key reasons. In the first instance, it was difficult to see the theory-building tools in Atlas/ti as offering much more, at the end of the day, than a glorified pen and paper. For, despite the extra level of sophistication they may offer over these more traditional tools (for example the option to open and close codes, quotations etc. within the visual display) the development of theoretical links are entirely a product of the creative choices of the analyst, and do not follow from any algorithm within the software to make such links. Perhaps more profoundly, however, the theoretical links that might be made within the software are structured by the categories (whether interviews, codes, families, memos etc.) set-up within the software. As I have already noted, there were in fact three key prongs to the data analysis process, and only two of these were supported directly by the Atlas software. Important case-level biographical insights were not made through Atlas/ti. As such, it was inevitably easier to develop theoretical thinking using pen and paper, in a way that allowed a cross-fertilisation of the three data analysis strategies.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the approach taken to analysis in this thesis, including its epistemological framework, its approach to interpreting interviews, the key analytical perspectives taken, and the practicalities of analysis - specifically considering the role of computer technology.

The epistemological framework makes use of both a 'player' and a 'dreamer' model of research. A 'player' model of research relies on the detailed, contextualised, evidence of the 51 interviewees to form conclusions about those interviewees. A 'dreamer' model of research, by contrast, allows more freedom to make claims about offenders in general. However, it does this only by explicitly acknowledging the provisional nature of the claims upon which it is based. The latter model is crucial for this research to meet its stated objectives.

This chapter has also considered the status of interview accounts. It has argued against a view that sees them only as context-specific constructions. Instead, it has proposed a critical approach to extracting information from them about the world beyond the interview.
situation, but which is aware of the way in which accounts may be constructed. This involved drawing on a range of strategies, including issues of consistency, corroboration, and plausibility. These strategies were deployed differently for interpretation of 'facts', 'meanings', and 'stories'. In turn, these elements allowed for the construction of biographies which had an important etiological function. These too invoke a range of strategies for making causal inferences, including assessment of logical relationships between events and processes, temporal contiguity and comparisons between interviewees.

The thesis will involve three analytical perspectives, which variously involve both the assessment of existing theory, and the development of new theory. These include a focus on the background of offending, the foreground of offending, and offending careers. The assessment of existing theory will draw on strain, subcultural, control and psychological perspectives. Assessing these theories will take place principally when focusing on the background to offending.

The practical analysis process involved three main data analysis strategies. First, was the process of coding and retrieving text using Atlas/ti. Second, was the condensing of life-story information into short 'thumbnail' biographies, which could be reviewed collectively. Third, I used a technique of 'charting' using Excel. Additionally, a fourth, supplementary, strategy involved the direct review of the original interview transcripts. These strategies served, on the one hand, to provide insights about particular 'topic areas' and, on the other, about interviewees - or 'cases' - as a whole.

Through the analysis process, a number of insights emerged about the use of CAQDAS software that connected with some existing debates. Firstly, I suggested that the use of text-based strategies for analysis, which lie at the core of CAQDAS methods, may not on their own support a rounded analysis, if this requires a holistic case-level scrutiny. Secondly, in a reply to those who have argued that CAQDAS primarily supports 'grounded theory', the experience of this project showed that testing of existing theory could also be carried out. Finally, it was observed that CAQDAS software principally allowed the administration of archiving of data, rather than constituting a direct tool for data analysis.

The three main analytic perspectives focusing on background, foreground and career respectively form the basis for the next three chapters.
5. The background to offending

Introduction

This chapter will explore issues that are located in the 'background' of the offending of interviewees. That is, it will focus on the broader biographical characteristics of interviewees' lives, whether in the present or in the past. In doing so, it will be primarily concerned with assessing the relevance of existing theory for the interviewees, insofar as it makes specific claims about the links between such factors and offending.

The analysis conducted will draw in the first instance on a 'player' type of analysis, as defined in Chapter 4 - that is, it will be concerned with the patterns among 51 interviewees. However, 'dreamer' type analysis will also be developed off the back of this, to meet with the objectives of the study. This will be most explicitly articulated in the discussion section at the end of the chapter.

Specific aims of the chapter

The aims of this chapter, therefore, are:

- to identify whether the various theories of offending appear relevant to the offending behaviour of interviewees, based on interviewees' backgrounds;

- to describe the specific processes within each relevant theoretical perspective which help explain how the interviewees have become involved in offending;

- to assess whether there are any differences among interviewees which relate to their membership of different ethnic groups;

- on the back of this player approach (focusing only on the interviewees), to use a more generalised dreamer approach to contribute to meeting the study's objectives.
The key empirical referents within the interviews that are used to assess the relevance of the various theoretical perspectives were identified in Chapter 4 within Table 4.2. It is important to remember that this chapter is followed in the next chapter by an analysis of foreground factors, which will also be used to assess theories further and, in the chapter after, by a career analysis in which the theoretical processes will be placed in a broader career framework.

Chapter structure

In order to explore the topic areas relevant to the different theories, this chapter will review a number of broad substantive areas, namely: family and home life; friends and associates; education and training; employment; and outlook and aspirations. In reviewing these different areas, evidence for each of the theoretical perspectives will be assessed. Following this thematic analysis, the chapter will go on to summarise and discuss the implications of the analysis for the objectives of the study.

Validity issues

A number of issues about the validity of interview data were raised in Chapter 4. With these issues in mind, a set of working principles and validity checks were proposed for the interpretation of data. These are consistently applied within the analysis presented in this chapter. However, attention is not drawn to them at every stage of the analysis. Instead, I provide a brief explanation of their general application in advance, and raise specific issues of relevance through the chapter, as they emerge.

I have noted that factual elements are treated as the most robust elements of accounts. Throughout this chapter, inferences are made which are based, to a significant extent, on factual claims, and the biographies that could be developed off the back of them. Obviously, factual claims are treated critically and consideration is given to issues of consistency within accounts, with other sources, and degree of exploration within the interview - as outlined in Chapter 4. Analytical claims within the chapter will also draw on some of the less robust meanings and stories articulated within the accounts, feeding once again into the development of biographies. Again, these are reviewed in terms of consistency and plausibility, as outlined in Chapter 4. Rather than basing claims solely on meanings and
stories, they are principally used to supplement and add further weight to claims that rely on factual claims. In this way, I have avoided placing excessive weight purely on accounts of meaning and stories.

**Family and home life**

There are a number of claims made by the different theoretical perspectives relating to the family and home lives of offenders. Table 5.1 reminds us how family and home life issues potentially relate to the main theoretical perspectives.

**Table 5.1 Testing of perspectives in relation to family and home life**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Evidence for theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strain</td>
<td>• Low socio-economic status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subculture</td>
<td>• Criminal family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>• Weak/problematic bonds with family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Low levels of supervision/ ineffective discipline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The family and home lives of interviewees are explored under a number of key headings below.

**Family structures**

Most interviewees had spent time growing up in families with at least one of their natural parents, even though they had often spent some time away from this main family unit - such as with relatives or in care. The make-up of interviewees' family units often changed through time, for example when parents or step-parents came and went, or if interviewees moved between the families of different parents. The main family type during teenage years is classified for different ethnic groups in Figure 5.1.
The majority of the white interviewees described growing up in families with two parents present for a substantial amount of time, although these often involved step-parents. Black-Caribbean and Black-Mixed interviewees typically characterised their families as headed solely by their mothers although they had sometimes also spent time living with their fathers separately. The Asian interviewees described growing up in families where both natural parents had been present, although in two cases fathers had died in recent years. The sizes of families also varied. On average, Asian and Black-Mixed interviewees had grown-up in families with the most siblings, sometimes having as many as half a dozen, followed by white interviewees who also often had large numbers of siblings. Black-Caribbean interviewees generally had the fewest number - often with just one or two brothers or sisters within a family, although they sometimes had half-siblings in other families.

It was difficult to make connections between interviewees' family structure and offending from the accounts that they gave. While large family sizes have been associated with offending in previous literature (Farrington, 1996a), in the case of interviewees with large numbers of siblings there was no clear indication that this had influenced their offending particularly.

Nonetheless, offenders' family structures may provide some clues to the operation of different criminogenic processes. It is notable that previous literature (Farrington, 1996a, 1996b) has connected parental separation with offending. Family structures which have changed as a result of domestic difficulties may be an indication of some dysfunctional
family relationships, which may amount to weak family attachments in the language of control theory. This possibility is explored below.

**Economic status**

Key to strain theories, and those subcultural theories which invoke strain mechanisms or make an association between working class cultures and offending, is the idea that offenders come from a background of low socio-economic status. Existing literature certainly suggests that low socio-economic status is associated with offending, particularly in the case of low-income and poor housing (Farrington, 1996a; Farrington 1996b).

The interviews revealed that families were, on the whole, working class: with a few exceptions, the occupations of family members were generally manual or low skilled non-manual, and this was true across ethnic groups. Women's jobs often included factory work, office work, shop work, care work and cleaning. Occasionally interviewees would cite examples of relatives with professional jobs such as nurses, engineers, and in one case a probation officer. An important variation between ethnic groups was that a substantial minority of white interviewees (8/19) reported fathers, step-fathers or relatives as self-employed or running a small business, something less common among other ethnic groups (Black-Caribbean: 2/19; Black-Mixed: 0/8; Asian 2/10). This difference appeared to have important implications for the Black-Caribbean interviewees as I will reveal later in the chapter. Interestingly, family members were rarely described as unemployed.

On the face of it, then, there is certainly prima facie evidence for a connection between working class backgrounds and offending in a way which might support strain theory - albeit with some exceptions. However, interviewees themselves did not suggest there was any direct connection between their family's economic situation and their offending. This is perhaps not surprising - strain theory is more directly concerned with the cognitive recognition and response to a mismatch between aspirations and expectations, so we would not necessarily expect a clear connection between family economic status and offending. This is an issue that will be explored in more detail later in this chapter. However, it does not support a version of strain which posits a close and simplistic connection between the attributes of working class culture and those of offending, such as that suggested by Miller (1958).
Interestingly, in a couple of cases where there was a clear connection between economic disadvantage and offending, this related to housing which was clearly described as inadequate and had a disruptive effect on the lives of interviewees. For example:

*Sometimes I like sitting there, but all the kids in the living room, it's only a small house, it's over-packed. I have to get up at 6 o'clock when the baby gets up. My mum has to come downstairs with him, and all that, I have to wait for one of the little kids to get up...go into their bed for a bit...I'd rather stop at my friend's house - I can have a lie-in. That's what got me into trouble.* (M6, Black-Mixed interviewee)

As such, this may be seen as more indicative of a breakdown of control mechanisms - in the form of parental supervision - than the operation of strain or subcultural processes.

**The nature of family relationships**

A range of problems within family relationships, including parental separations and conflict, and cruelty and abuse have been found to predict offending among young people (see Audit Commission, 1996 and Farrington 1996a for a discussion), and these types of problems appear to provide evidence for control perspectives. Certainly, there were many examples of these kinds of problems in the family backgrounds of interviewees, and in many cases these had had a clearly disruptive effect on their lives. These findings give strong support to the idea that weak bonds with family (as specified by control theory) characterised the lives of many offenders. It was notable, however, that these problems showed some variation between the different ethnic groups of interviewees.

Tales of conflict and disruption within families were articulated most strongly and frequently by the white interviewees, with most experiencing some difficulties and about half (10/19) describing serious problems. Their stories commonly included difficult parental separations, violence and alcoholism. For example, one interviewee described how he was affected by the separation of his parents as a result of his father's violence and drinking:

*I didn't know why my dad went away, but now I've got older, now I know why he went away - because my mum couldn't handle him. He was beating us up and all that, getting violent and he was always getting out again into fights, coming home with his head split open.* (M10, White interviewee)

Another described the violent and hostile relationship with his older brother:
He wants to get me stabbed, yeah, he's going to get someone to stab me up. I just tell him I'll get him shot. (M42, White interviewee)

For most of those with serious problems, there was strong biographical evidence of a link between these kinds of problems and the development of offending (8/19) - even if this could be indirect. For example, one interviewee (M16) spoke of a difficult family life, involving parental separation and an estranged brother. He also was treated violently by his stepfather, which he associated with his own violence:

It's probably just that I want to get the anger out because my mum and dad hits me. I get angry and I want to let it out, and the only way I can let it out is if I have a fight. (M16, White interviewee)

It was clear that he was a very aggressive and violent child - he even put somebody in hospital, for which he was arrested. Eventually, because of his continued involvement in fighting - linked also, in part, to racism he experienced about 'travellers' from fellow school-pupils - his father pulled him out of school at around 13. This was also a time when he stated getting involved in stealing motorbikes and pushbikes, and started taking drugs and drinking a lot of alcohol. Later on, the violence he received at home led him to actually leave home, and to become homeless for a while. It was during this time that his offending developed into robbery for money to feed himself. The implication from his biography is, therefore, that the problems he experienced with his family relationships - particularly his stepfather - were influential in the development of his offending.

The Black-Caribbean interviewees, overall, were a little different. On the one hand, there were some examples of serious family problems, involving such things as death, alcoholism and family conflict (4/14). For example, one interviewee described how he ended up in care after his aunt died and his immediate family remained in Jamaica:

My mum's always lived in Jamaica. I came over with my dad to this country and I stayed with my dad's twin sister. And my dad went back there and then my auntie she got me to get an English passport and all that. ...[I lived with her]...until she died. Then I went into care, and that's when I started getting in trouble... I was nearly eleven, ten or eleven. I try to forget about it, you get me. (M46, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Again, there were clear links between these serious problems and the development of offending (3/14). So, in the example of M46 - quoted above - he makes an explicit link between the unfolding nature of his problems: the death of his family guardian leads to his
entry into the care system which in turn leads to him getting into 'trouble'. Elsewhere, he elaborates on the link between care and crime, which critically involved living with a foster family where he was very unhappy, and where they showed little interest in him:

...they don't really give a toss, you get me like. They don't try and discipline you or nothing. They don't care really and truly you get me like. They are just getting paid to look after you at the end of the day you get me...They don't try nothing man. You get into as much trouble as you want, when you come home they won't say nothing to you. (M46, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Beyond the few cases where there were serious problems, as described, in the remainder of cases, Black-Caribbean interviewees did not report any particularly significant problems, other than where tensions had emerged as a result of interviewees' offending. While the separation of their parents could sometimes entail resentment, generally it was treated in an accepting matter-of-fact way rather than a source of trauma, as reflected in the following interviewee's attitude towards his absent father:

I know him but, I don't know...now I'm older I don't really think about him that much (M41, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Interestingly, an image of black offenders with fewer family problems than their white counterparts emerges from sources reviewed in Chapter 2 (London Borough of Lewisham et al, 1998; Barker et al., 1993; Pitts, 1986). This suggests that this may be a phenomenon that extends beyond the current sample.

Among the Black-Mixed interviewees about half (4/8) described problems such as conflicts and death in the family, with some suggesting links with offending (3/8). The Asian interviewees, overall, described the least disordered family backgrounds. There were no instances of the types of conflict described by other interviewees, and where there were problems, these involved a few instances of death (2/10) and illness (1/10) of parents from interviewees across Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian backgrounds. Where these problems were found, there was evidence (2/10) that they had placed strains on interviewees, which had contributed to the development of offending, as articulated by one interviewee in the following way:

Once he passed away. I've been getting into trouble and all that - with the police, and like staying out late and that, like hanging about really, and that really got me into trouble. (M27, Bangladeshi interviewee)
Discipline and supervision

Issues of discipline and supervision are important to explanations offered by control theory.

First of all considering questions of discipline specifically, previous research has connected erratic and excessive use of punishment as a correlate of offending (Audit Commission, 1996; Farrington 1996a). Certainly, examples of reprimand and punishment meted out by family members were cited by interviewees from across ethnic backgrounds:

...every time I used to like go against their wish, stay out, you know, I used to come back...[and they'd give me]...a real telling off. (M44, Bangladeshi interviewee)

My mum was shocked the first time I ever got arrested...I got a bollocking and grounded, because my mum's very strict with me. (M8, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Significantly, there were a few interviewees from white, Asian and Black-Mixed backgrounds who reported violent punishment, which sometimes appeared inconsistent and excessive, and as such may potentially have had a role in underpinning delinquent behaviour. This mode of punishment was sometimes bound up with the difficult family relationships. One interviewee spoke of his stepfather's violence:

...he'd hit me if I got in trouble. If his back's playing up, because he wants to take his tension off...he'd take it out on me. It could be anything though...It's like if he [the dog] got out of the garden and got hurt, he'd blame me for it. Nobody else, but he'd blame me, and he'd hit me for it. There could be any reason - a plate got broke in the house, I get hit. (M10, White interviewee)

With this interviewee we also saw above the violence he experienced, particularly from his step-father. It will be recalled that this gave rise to his own violence and had important biographical links with his own offending.

Ultimately, the nature and extent of problematic types of discipline - particularly where this may have been abusive - was not probed in detail within the interviews for ethical reasons. It is therefore difficult to draw concrete conclusions about its prevalence, or any ethnic differences that may have existed. It is probably as much as can be said that the anecdotal

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12. I did not feel equipped in the course of a social science interview to enter into potentially painful areas for the interviewees. I made the judgement that these types of issues, which might be appropriate to a more therapeutic type of interview, were not appropriate for the purposes of this research.
examples of abusive treatment recounted by at least some interviewees suggests it may have been relevant to the development of their offending.

Looking at the quality of parental supervision - this has clearly been associated with offending in existing research (Farrington, 1996a, 1996b; Graham and Bowling, 1995). As mentioned, this issue is of key importance to a control perspective. In practice, it was difficult to establish precisely the levels or effectiveness of supervision attempted by parents or other family members, and certainly there was no clear evidence of differences in the experiences of interviewees from different ethnic groups. Overall, there were interviewees from all ethnic groups who gave examples of instances where family members had clearly tried to monitor and impose boundaries on their activities:

*She used to be like, 'why do you go out so much?' and...I just like to go out. We'd argue about that sometimes as well because she'll say she wants me to stay in the house...[...]...She'd ask me what time I'm going to be in, phone her if I think I'm going to be in later or anything...* (M26, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

However, in practice, many of these attempts at supervision were unsuccessful, as interviewees were typically competent at subverting control and ultimately doing what they wanted:

*When she used to ground me, I used to like sneak out, climb out of the window, just jump out of the windows.* (M1, White interviewee)

And there were some interviewees from all ethnic groups for whom family control appeared minimal:

*I was always allowed to stay out as late as I want, really. If I said I was going out somewhere 'I'll be back at 2am' she'd say 'fine'.* (M32, Black-Mixed interviewee)

Overall, therefore, there was at least some sense that supervision had either been ineffective or absent. Interestingly, however, interviewees rarely made a direct link between a lack of supervision and their involvement in crime. Nonetheless, in light of the consistent association between this trait and offending in previous literature, it does seem likely that poor supervision was an important factor in the offending of many of the interviewees.
Time spent away from families

While growing up, it was not uncommon for interviewees to report having spent time living away from their main families, such as time spent with relatives, in institutions, or perhaps when older in their own accommodation. This finding is in line with other research suggesting that these patterns can be associated with offending (Audit Commission, 1996). These experiences may be symptoms, or causes, of family problems. As such, they may give us clues to control problems that may be important to understanding offending.

Where interviewees had spent time with relatives, this included spending time with aunts, uncles, grandparents, older siblings or fathers. Often, moving in with relatives was a response to difficulties at home, making it easier for them to live elsewhere. In other cases, interviewees were sent to live with relatives because of their problematic behaviour, such as their involvement in crime. In some instances, however, it appeared that interviewees had moved in with relatives when there were fewer obvious problems. It was difficult to evaluate the overall effects of the movement of interviewees among family and relatives, although in some cases it appeared to create or exacerbate problems. Indeed, we saw above how, for a Black-Caribbean interviewee (M46), movement into a foster family was linked to the development of his offending. In a different example, a white interviewee, for example, described how he was abused at a care home:

I was sexually abused by one of the older lads, like when I ran away with him. And in [X] I got smothered underneath a pillow, beaten up, shit thrown at me, pissed on, spat on and everything. (M10, White interviewee)

Although the samples are small, moving in with relatives was more commonly described by Black-Caribbean interviewees (this was true for 10 out of 14 Black-Caribbean interviewees, compared to 4/19 white, 1/8 Black-Mixed and 3/11 Asian) and among this group, movement between relatives appeared more often to have been a way in which parents shared the load of bringing-up their sons with wider family networks, rather than as simply a response to problems.

There were also examples of interviewees from white (5/19), Black-Caribbean (3/14) and Black-Mixed (1/8), but not Asian backgrounds who had passed time in institutions such as children's homes or residential schools, or time in foster care as a result of family or
behavioural problems. There were also interviewees from all ethnic backgrounds had also spent time in YOIs during their time growing up in addition to their current term.

Finally, interviewees across ethnic backgrounds had sometimes also spent time away from family in their own accommodation or with friends and girlfriends. There were examples where this appeared to have been a positive influence on interviewees' lives, as well as those where interviewees found this difficult.

Overall, it was difficult to evaluate the significance of time spent away from home in terms of control perspectives on offending, though it is likely, across ethnic groups, that this was associated with some problematic family relationships - representing either a cause or a symptom of these problems. In this regard, however, it may be significant that no Asian interviewees had spent time in children's homes, residential schools or foster care. This suggests that family problems may have been less acute within this group, in keeping with the observations already made.

**Criminality within the family**

Young people's offending has also been connected to the offending of other family members (Farrington, 1996a, 1996b; Graham and Bowling, 1995). This could provide evidence for a family-based subcultural influence on offending (although it might plausibly be a symptom of intergenerational consistency in other criminogenic factors).

In keeping with previous literature, it was common to find that interviewees' family members had been involved in crime at some stage, although this was least pronounced for Asian interviewees (reported family members involved in crime: 11/19 white, 5/14 Black Caribbean, 4/8 Black-Mixed, and 3/10 Asian) not least because, in contrast to other groups, none of the Asian interviewees associated their fathers or significantly older family members with crime. Overall, it was fathers and brothers who were most commonly associated with crime, as described in the following examples:

[My father's] been in prison, when he was young, and I don't really ask what he is doing [now]. (M11, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

[My brother's] had a few offences and that, but nothing come of it, like. He's just sorted himself out. (M7, White interviewee)
The relationship between interviewees' offending and that of their family members was rarely explored by interviewees, however, and it did not generally appear that interviewees had offended with relatives or consciously copied their activities. Nonetheless, a couple of interviewees did feel that the crime of relatives had influenced them in some way. For example, one interviewee recalls how his father - a drug-dealer - was a role model for his own drug dealing:

*I don't know maybe I got inspiration from him and he didn't know. I used to see him and I just wanted that... he had a lot of money, he was a rich man.* (M37, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Overall, then, while there was some evidence of a family subcultural influence on offending, the association between offending of interviewees and family members may be explicable by other processes. Insofar as there was evidence for this, it appeared less important for the Asian interviewees.

Friends and associates

Previous research has made a strong connection between the offending of individuals with the offending of friends (Farrington, 1996a, 1996b; Graham and Bowling, 1995). An exploration of the nature and influence of friendships on the interviewees' offending is principally relevant to evaluating a subcultural perspective. This is illustrated in Table 5.2.

**Table 5.2 Testing of perspectives in relation to friends and associates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Evidence for theory</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subculture</td>
<td>• Delinquent friends and associates</td>
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In fact, the importance of friends and associates in offending came through very clearly in the discussions of interviewees. This involved various domains, discussed below.
Friends

Interviewees had made friendships with those drawn from the local neighbourhood, school and through other friends, and an almost universal feature of their friendship circles, regardless of ethnic group, was that some or all of their friends had been involved in crime. Typical of descriptions of friendship circles included the following:

Only about four or five of them have been locked up before. But most of them have been in trouble for something. (M4, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

I've got quite a few friends who I hang about with round the area. All of them have been to jail - most of them, yeah - for theft. (M33, White interviewee)

[My friends are] A bad crowd really because all they want to do is to thieve and go in and out jails, thieve go in and out of jail. (M6, Black-Mixed interviewee)

It was common, furthermore, for interviewees to connect their own offending with the offending of their friends. In part, this was because interviewees typically offended alongside friends. Significantly, however, they often gave examples of how friends drew them into crime, by encouraging them to participate, and sometimes by teaching them criminal techniques. For example, one interviewee described how he became involved in car crime:

They used to say, 'come on lets go and nick a car' and then they nick the car, 'Let's go joy-riding in it.' Then I started nicking cars because they showed me how to do it. So I learnt that way. (M15, White interviewee)

In another example, an interviewee made a more general link to his friends involvement in robbery, and his current conviction - also for robbery:

My friends and all that they're a bit into all of [robbery] nowadays. Yeah, like, and that's probably the reason why I've ended up in here. (M44, Bangladeshi)

Interestingly, some interviewees from all ethnic backgrounds reported friendships with people significantly older than themselves. Some of these relationships were accorded particular significance in their introduction into crime, further reinforcing the idea that offenders were often 'recruited' into crime:

I started hanging out with the big people, doing...crime... when I was about 16 I used to hang around with 18, 19 years old. (M48, Indian interviewee)
Yeah we was going clubs and that, at the age of 14 we was all getting into clubs, going pubs and all them sort of things with the older boys, we thought yeah we was in with them. (M32, Black-Mixed interviewee)

In sum, the immediate friendships of interviewees across ethnic groups typically involved other offenders, and many interviewees made a clear connection between this and crime. For some interviewees from across ethnic backgrounds specifically identified friendships with older people who were instrumental in drawing them into crime. This evidence clearly provides a very strong basis for arguing for subcultural processes rooted in friendships underlying offending behaviour.

**Neighbourhoods**

A consideration of interviewees' subcultural context might also encompass the broader context of the neighbourhoods in which they had lived. The majority of interviewees from all ethnic groups had grown up in areas characterised by a high level of deprivation\(^1\), a fact in keeping with previous research associating these types of neighbourhoods with offending (Farrington, 1996a, 1996b). However, when talking about these areas most interviewees from all ethnic groups emphasised high levels of crime rather than deprivation as such:

*It's the people round there, you have to watch them, you know what I mean? Because, I mean, the minute you go out to the shop and things like that, your door's off, you know what I mean, and your things have gone.* (M3, White interviewee)

Not only did most interviewees associate their neighbourhoods with crime, many also explained the development of their own offending as a consequence of the crime going on around them. Crime became seen as normal, and the skills required to carry out crime were picked up from others in the area:

*When I was about 14, the kids round by us was about 18 and 19. And the boys my age used to look at them and say, 'Ah, look at him! He's got this car and he's got that or they're going out to steal.' And we used to think, 'They're mad' and that. And then as the months and the years go on, you slowly pick up things and you start doing little bits what they're doing. And then it gets full-blown, on a full-blown scale, and you start doing things yourself.* (M8, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

13. For most interviewees, the precise geographic wards of their home areas could be distinguished; and in almost all cases the local authority areas were known. The deprivation of these areas was assessed using the Index of Local Deprivation compiled by the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions. It should be borne in mind that ward-level data have not been updated since 1991; and even at ward level, there can be heterogeneity in levels of deprivation.
It's just like the environment you grow up in, and that. You just get used to everything, like, you get used to crime all around and you start doing it yourself.
(M1, White interviewee)

The powerful influence of areas on offending behaviour is illustrated by some interviewees who had moved between areas, and found that their involvement in offending changed. One interviewee, for example, described how moving away from his home area while on bail had reduced his involvement in violence and drugs:

[X] is completely different from living in [Y] altogether. Like when I first went down there, I was all like, 'Yeah, let's go to a pub and start some trouble or something, try and liven-up the place.' But when I got into the pub everyone was ... just, 'Alright, mate?', all happy sort of thing...[...]...after a couple of months I just changed... you could actually go out for a night without fighting and taking all the drugs. (M32, Black-Mixed interviewee)

While interviewees from all ethnic backgrounds told similar stories about their neighbourhoods, there was evidence that the character of these neighbourhoods was not always the same. In exploring this point, it is important to note that I am moving away from a player analysis, which looks at the personal histories of the full range of interviewees, and toward the more generalising claims of some interviews, more appropriate to a dreamer analysis. Notably, crime in neighbourhoods was described by some interviewees in a way that suggested it could vary according to their ethnic make-up. For example, some areas with large black populations were described by interviewees as 'ghettos'. These areas were often portrayed in the most extreme terms:

I don't know if you know, but [X] is called the 'ghetto' of [Y City]. It's the place where everybody is out for themselves. From when you are a kid you were seeing things around you that people the other side of town don't see. You see money, you see drugs, you see prostitution, you see guns and you see big nice cars - everything...I don't know if you've heard about all the shootings and things that have been happening...There's a lot of it you know. (M8, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

By contrast, descriptions of some areas that were racially more mixed or predominantly white, suggested a different, more mundane, character:

It's a boring area because there's really nothing there. One youth club, one school, one set of shops, one pub and a golf course. It's absolutely dead around there...Everything happens at night. You ain't got nothing to do. You just go to the pub, you get drunk, and just end up fighting. Fighting with the same people, week after week. (M32, Black-Mixed interviewee)
Additionally, some areas with substantial Pakistani or Bangladeshi populations were noted for their high levels of drug-use, such as in the following description:

In [X] it's like mainly Asians... a lot of Asian blokes are into heroin. (M27, Bangladeshi interviewee)

In sum, therefore, not only do immediate friendships appear to provide an important subcultural context that influences the development of offending. The broader neighbourhood also constitutes a subcultural context in which offending behaviour may be promoted and legitimised. Of further interest, in terms of the focus of the current study, is the (dreamer level) evidence that these neighbourhood cultures vary in terms of the criminal character, and that some of this appears to vary according to ethnic group - with 'black' areas described in probably the most extreme terms.

Associates in other contexts

Beyond core friendships and the neighbourhoods where interviewees had grown up, there were some specific institutional contexts within which interviewees met, and apparently became influenced by, other delinquent people. Again, this points to the importance of delinquent subcultures as an important dimension to offending. This was mentioned, for example, in the context of children's homes:

I don't really see the point of homes because it's just a place where more crime gets committed. When I went there I weren't like stealing cars as much. I stole some cars but when I went there I was going out nearly every night stealing cars and that. (M1, White interviewee)

Where interviewees previously spent time in YOIs - prior to their current stint - these spells were nonetheless associated with an escalation in offending by some interviewees in view of the contacts made within this environment, such as in the following example:

When I first come in here, to tell you the truth I wasn't as bad as I was before I come in. When I first come to jail when I was 16 [I was] hearing stories, how to do things, cars, burglaries and that. I am thinking: 'yeah, yeah, yeah! I'll go out there and try it'. (M30, Pakistani interviewee)

We shall also see, below, that the school appears also to provide an important cultural context within which offending behaviour is shaped.
Education and training

The context of education and training - perhaps particularly the school provides an environment in which a range of processes contributing to offending, sitting within strain, subcultural, control and psychological theories, may potentially be played out. The range of these processes is illustrated in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Testing of perspectives in relation to education and training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Evidence for theory</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strain</td>
<td>• Mismatch between occupational/financial aspirations and opportunity through school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subculture</td>
<td>• Delinquent friends and associates in schooling environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>• Lack of commitment/involvement in education/training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>• Anti-social behaviour/psychological problems dating back to early childhood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All interviewees had attended school for some time while growing up, and many had gone on to attend college after the age of 16. However, among interviewees from all ethnic backgrounds these experiences typically involved problems of various kinds, many of which line up with particular theoretical processes associated with offending. In elaborating on these problems, it is most useful to place them under the headings relating to the theoretical perspectives against which they align.

Strain processes?

In line with existing research on offenders (Farrington, 1996a, 1996b; Graham and Bowling, 1995), most interviewees had experienced difficulties at school. About half of those from all ethnic groups had stopped attending school before the age of 16 and only a minority of interviewees from any ethnic group managed to obtain any qualifications while at school. These were typically limited to a few GCSEs.
It was clear that interviewees often related their lack of success at school to their current situation, rooted as it was in their offending. For example, one interview remarked:

*I wanted to be a policeman. Yeah, when I was a kid, I wanted to be a policeman. Give me the chance again, I would have stopped at school, done my GCSEs. Because you don't realise when you are at school. You don't think of the future.* (M8, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

However, while there was a clear equation between a failure to achieve at school and subsequent offending, there was no sense from the interviews that such difficulties had their roots in any future-oriented strain or that they were fundamentally alienated from the values of schooling (as suggested by Cohen, 1955). Rather - as the above quote suggests - the interviewee had actually not been very conscious of the future or their prospects when at school. And the fact that the interviewee remarked on the possibility of getting GCSEs if he had his time again, does not suggest that interviewees were conscious of immutable lack of opportunity to achievement within the school setting or that they had any fundamental opposition to the values of school.

Of course, we need to be cautious about validity issues when interpreting the meanings or 'stories' given to situations in the past from the present, as we discussed in Chapter 4, although a close reading of interviews does not indicate any inconsistency between these claims and other details in the accounts. For, insofar as interviewees did tell stories about their problems at school, it was clear from these that they became alienated from school not because of the role or values of schooling, but because of their reaction to specific features of schooling, or because of a dissociation from schooling born of other processes which drew their attention or energies elsewhere. This pattern of dissociation rather than alienation from the values of school echoes the findings of Downes (1966) in his earlier ethnographic study of English delinquents. As such, psychological, control and subcultural processes, rather than strain dynamics, were implicated in the school context. These are discussed below.

**Subcultural processes**

I have noted already the fundamental importance of friends and associates suggested by the interview evidence in providing a cultural context for and influence upon the offending
among interviewees. Interviewees certainly gave stories, within a school setting, where involvement in delinquent peer groups appeared to have an important role in facilitating delinquency, at least within the school context, lending further weight to the significance of subcultural processes as a reason for delinquency:

At first it was all right. But when I moved [to]...East London, I started hanging about with the wrong people, like class clowns...[I] never really learnt. I used to get in a lot of trouble at school. (M27, Bangladeshi interviewee)

We'd have a fight and I'd win, and then all the girls would like me...[I was] a popular boy at school. (M13, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Control processes

There were a number of dynamics recounted by interviewees which were suggestive of a breakdown in control mechanisms, which in turn led to problems and delinquency at school, and in many cases could be traced through, ultimately, to offending.

One of the most clear breakdowns in control processes associated with schooling was when a pupil had been excluded from school - either temporarily or permanently - something true of a majority of interviewees from all ethnic backgrounds (17/19 white; 14/14 Black-Caribbean; 6/8 Black-Mixed; 6/10 Asian). Exclusion often occurred several times during their school career. This was typically associated with bad behaviour, or that which was perceived as bad:

They kicked me out of there...[for]...Fighting and just normal kids' stuff like fighting and that all the time. Just being disobedient you know tell them to 'fuck off' and all this. (M7, White interviewee)

I used to get suspended but it wasn't for fighting, it was just like for talking...They say I'm distracting peoples. That's what I had on all my report card: 'talks and distracts other peoples'. (M4, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Fundamental control breakdowns also involved truancy from school - also found in a majority of interviewees from all ethnic backgrounds (though figures were less clear, 15/19 white, 8/14 Black-Caribbean, 5/8 Black-Mixed, and 8/11 Asian reported it at some time). Truancy, ranging from occasionally missing part of the school day to extended periods of absence, was often associated with an alienation from school, perhaps certain lessons, school in general, or fellow pupils:
I used to bunk off school] not a lot, just certain lessons...Music and drama and things like that. (M20, Black-Mixed interviewee)

I started truanting half-way through [year ten] and when I've been truanting for about a month and a half, came back for about a month, truanted again for another month. (M44, Bangladeshi interviewee)

Experiences of truancy and exclusion were very often directly associated with an involvement in offending by interviewees - particularly where this involved an extended period absent from school, as the following quotations illustrates:

When I got expelled from all the schools, and no school would have me back, I had...nothing else to do...I'd go and steal cars, doing burglaries... stealing from the cars, selling them...I used to do all those kind of things. (M30, Pakistani interviewee)

I didn't like school. I used to go up there on the bus and that. I just didn't bother going in. I'd just walk the streets and that... Used to walk the streets stealing cars and that. (M1, White interviewee)

Even where such a direct connection was not made between truancy or exclusion and offending, it appeared, by following through their biographies, that the disruption it caused within their lives could still be influential in the development of their offending.

About half of the interviewees had often gone on to attend college courses after leaving school (6/19 white; 8/14 Black-Caribbean; 4/8 Black-Mixed; 4/10 Asians). In a few cases interviewees had attended GCSE classes. However, attendance at college typically involved vocational training, working towards qualifications such as NVQs. Despite the popularity of college courses among interviewees, they were often left unfinished, owing to factors ranging from practical difficulties - including the interruption caused by prison sentences - to a loss of interest. For example:

I left [college]...Because I moved to [X] for a little while, and it was too far to come back. (M28, White interviewee)

In line with the tenets of control theory, a lack of involvement in training has been associated with offending among young people (Audit Commission, 1996). As might be expected, therefore, the difficulties experienced by interviewees pursuing college courses were often associated with, in some cases even implicated in, the development of an offending lifestyle:
I just stopped going to that college - that college was shit. I just started getting up every day doing robberies, making money...every day. (M12, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Another area in which control processes appeared to fail, which in many cases was linked directly to alienation from features of schooling, was where interviewees had failed to get on with teachers, as the following quote illustrates:

*The teacher can make a difference. If the teacher's all cheerful and all that, and like they want to learn you, then you can learn something. But if they're just there, they put some work in front of you and sit down and carry on with their own work, you start messing about don't you.* (M36, Pakistani interviewee)

Some interviewees also described schools that had a poor ethos. Not only did this seem to be associated with poor academic performance, but it also led to pupils becoming delinquent in the school setting. For example:

*The teachers was scared of the boys that was there, more or less - all the teachers, even the headmaster. He never used to come in, or when he did come in he'd hide in his office and he wouldn't see no one. It's a mad school, man. I don't know what it's like now, but when I was there the people...[had]...more or less the run of the school. You'd sit in the lesson and smoke cigarettes and drinking pop and that. The teacher talking or whatever - you could throw things at him. A mad school.* (M8, Black interviewee)

A number of interviewees reported victimisation in the school context. One response to this was an engagement in conflict with other pupils. Another, not necessarily separate, response involved interviewees disengaging from school, notably by playing truant. For example:

*The boys used to go and try and take your money off you...and I used to say 'I'm not going to school, man, I'm not going to school'.* (M8, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

*If I was getting threatened by another person and that person was stronger than me, then I were off.* (M15, White interviewee)

**Psychological processes**

Psychological processes potentially underpinning offending have been formulated, within this study, as anti-social behaviour dating back to early childhood. There was no doubt that such problems were evident among interviewees, and were most visible from the accounts interviewees gave of their early schooling - before teenage years and typically during
primary school. These problems typically manifested themselves as violence and fighting. There were important ethnic differences in these processes, elaborated in more detail further below in this chapter. Suffice it to say at this point, that these types of problems were particularly common for white interviewees and uncommon for Asian interviewees (the interview evidence suggested that such problems were evident in at least: 12/19 white, 4/14 Black-Caribbean, 3/8 Black-Mixed, and 1/10 Asian interviewees).

Very often (though not always), where this kind of behaviour was observed, there was evidence of significant problems within the families that they had grown up with. It is notable, too, that where such problems occurred they typically underpinned the development of many other problems in the lives of interviewees as they grew up. As such, they were, to a significant extent, precursors to full-blown offending.

It is useful to review some examples to illustrate the manifestation of psychological problems. M2 (a white interviewee) reported being expelled from primary school for hitting the teacher - aged 10. After a year off school, he entered secondary school. Here he reported bullying other children, and within two or three years again was expelled - also for hitting a teacher. It was clear that he came from a family in which family members were violent to one another, and within which he reported receiving violent discipline himself. In the unfolding of his biography, his repeated exclusion from school led to him going to a special 'centre' for excluded children. Around 12 or 13, he was arrested for setting fire to a neighbour's front door, and was involved variously in vandalism and car crime up to his mid-teens.

In a different example, M13 (a Black-Caribbean interviewee) with no very obvious family problems, nonetheless went through primary school getting into a lot of trouble for fighting, and narrowly missed getting expelled. One of his anecdotes about primary school proved particularly revealing:

M13:  Certain days I used to go to school, they used to take my trainers off me.
J:    Why, because you weren't supposed to wear them?
M13:  I used to start kicking people...

(Black-Caribbean interviewee)
The interviewee repeatedly found himself in trouble for fighting, and was eventually kicked out of secondary school just before his exams for fighting. After expulsion from school, with little to do, he used to sneak out of school to be with his 'gang', which was an important basis for his involvement in offending.

An important issue, which appeared in a few cases to contribute to psychological problems - perhaps even in the absence of serious family problems - was where interviewees experienced learning difficulties in the school context such as dyslexia. This could be important in leading to disruptive behaviour, when they had difficulties doing the schoolwork that was given to them. One interviewee, without any obvious problems at home, recounted such an experience as a result of such problems:

*I was terrible at school. I think it was because I couldn't concentrate. I wasn't very - I wouldn't say thick - but I couldn't catch on quick enough and stuff like that, and so I would...disrupt the class and that...So that's where it starts...I just get used to being disruptive and that.* (M7, White interviewee)

The experience of this interviewee is recounted in more detail in Appendix B. It is notable that he ended up dropping out of school altogether by the age of 15, and becoming involved in offending.

**Issues of ethnicity in education and training**

While a range of school-based processes from across theoretical frameworks (though not obviously strain processes) were operating across interviewees, there was evidence of some ethnic differences in their patterns among the interviewees. While some of these appeared to be quantitative differences between the groups of interviewees, in some cases these differences appeared consistent with differences suggested by other literature (this corroboration adds to the confidence that we can have when making provisional 'dreamer level' generalisations on the back of the 'player level' quantitative differences). Furthermore, there were other areas where distinctive issues emerged for particular ethnic groups which were suggestive (also at a dreamer level) of potentially important qualitative differences in the experiences of offenders. In many cases, these too, had some corroboration from other literature. With this in mind, I will elaborate on ethnic differences, below:
White interviewees

Difficulties with the schooling of white interviewees were probably most acute, overall. Almost all (17/19) had been temporarily or permanently excluded at some point. In keeping with the high prevalence of psychological problems within this group, serious disruptive and aggressive behaviour was often found in primary school, with a substantial minority (8/19) having been excluded at this stage, most of whom had been expelled (6/19). In some cases, psychological problems manifesting themselves in the school context coincided with difficulties in family backgrounds that were common among the white interviewees. They also often coincided with a limited aptitude or interest in schoolwork, which also appeared more common among this group.

In one unusual case, an interviewee who was related to travellers also experienced some racism, which drew him into fights with other pupils and disrupted his education - or in the language of control theory, weakened his bonds with school:

_I told them like I'm related to travellers and they use to take the piss out of me...and they take my dinner and that. And that's another reason, that's why I used to get in fights at school and that's why my dad took me out of school._ (M16, White interviewee)

Black-Caribbean interviewees

Compared to the white interviewees, those from Black-Caribbean backgrounds more often gave accounts suggesting academic ability at school compared to their white counterparts. Furthermore, as we have already seen, they less often showed evidence of psychological problems or, for that matter, problems in relation to their family backgrounds suggestive of control problems. Despite these advantages, they had all experienced difficulties - or had weakened school bonds, with all having been temporarily or permanently excluded at some point. With fewer examples of obvious psychological problems, difficulties at school emerged later than with white interviewees (4/14 had been excluded at primary school but just 1/14 had been excluded permanently at this time). This picture is remarkably similar to the findings of an OFSTED study (1996) looking at those excluded from school. This found evidence that excluded African-Caribbean children tended to be of higher or average ability, although were seen by schools as underachieving; had not usually shown disruptive
behaviour from early in their school career, and showed less evidence of deep-seated trauma than white excluded pupils.

Although the types of difficulties Black-Caribbean interviewee had experienced were broadly similar to their white counterparts, some Black-Caribbean interviewees encountered apparently distinctive difficulties that might help explain their slightly different experience. An important issue described by some Black-Caribbean interviewees was treatment by teachers that appeared unfair or inappropriate - and in some cases racist - contributing to this weakening of bonds with school. This often involved a readiness for teachers interpret their behaviour as delinquent and to respond accordingly. One interviewee described how his experience of school in England was disappointing compared to his successful period in a school in Jamaica:

In Jamaica, I passed the... big national exam...I didn't have to do it, but I done it to get a free scholarship to high school and I passed. My name was in the paper and everything, so I was doing all right over there...it's totally different [there]. In England, [the] education system here...like you can't be yourself. When you are trying to express yourself and be loud, they try to suppress you, be quiet like. It is my personality. If I am loud, you can't try and tell me to be quiet, you get me? Like over [here]...they try and contain you like, and say 'no, you can't be loud, be quiet'. Every time you talk: 'be quiet'. [In Jamaica] like after you've done your work, you can go outside and sit in the sun, you get me, it is totally different. (M52, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Interestingly, a similar picture of black pupils' experiences at school has been painted by other research - giving some strength to any dreamer level claims we might wish to make on the back of this finding. Sewell (1997), for example, in a small-scale qualitative study found teachers showed more control and criticism of African-Caribbean boys. Wrench and Hassan (1996) found that perceptions of unfair treatment by teachers when they had been at school was a common complaint among a sample of 50 underachieving Afro-Caribbean young men - a problem which often escalated into more problems when they responded to what they saw as unfair treatment. And a review of qualitative research by Gilborne and Gipps (1996) found that a high level of tension and conflict often exists between white teachers and African-Caribbean pupils, in which teachers' criticisms and negative expectations of black pupils become self-fulfilling. This suggests that a breakdown in effective control mechanisms within schooling for Black-Caribbean pupils - perhaps related ironically to an exaggerated tendency for teachers to try to control them - may be a feature of the experiences of black offenders which extends beyond the current study.
There was also evidence from a few Black-Caribbean interviewees that they became involved in a disruptive peer-group culture characterised by confrontation, aggression and bullying, which drew them into trouble. One Black-Caribbean interviewee described how he spent time at a predominantly black school, and found himself constantly fighting:

'It's a terrible thing...you all want to be tough...I just used to get in fights with other people at that school...it's more hassle at an all black school.' (M13, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

In this case, the need to be 'tough' was associated with a tendency to precipitate or at least participate in conflict. In this respect, there may be an important subcultural influence on black pupils on school that draw them into trouble - contributing ultimately to a breakdown of the bond with school. As noted previously, however, the victimisation associated with these subcultural influences could also lead to a loss of attachments to school - thereby triggering a weakening of control mechanisms: one Black-Caribbean interviewee found himself being bullied by other black pupils who came from a different area and ended up not turning up at school to avoid the problem.

Finally, one of the Black-Caribbean interviewees reported experiencing racism at school - again suggestive of a weakening of bonds. This experience left him feeling alienated from the school and drew him into regular fights with white pupils:

'We used to have fights - used to be black boys on to the white...at lunchtime [in the] playground. One of my best friends went there [to this secondary school] from primary school. My best friend! I went there [and] he was filling me in¹⁴...[they would] start calling me black nigger, then they all start beating me up.' (M13, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Black-Mixed interviewees

The school experiences of Black-Mixed interviewees were not dissimilar to those from white or Black-Caribbean backgrounds: most (6/8) had been excluded at some point, and one or two had been excluded during primary school. It was difficult to identify any distinctive experiences among this group.

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¹⁴. 'Filling me in' means 'beating me up'.
Asian interviewees

Asian interviewees were different from other interviewees in that their school problems, overall, emerged later in their school careers than any of the other groups, and were probably less acute. As already noted, psychological problems appeared rare for this group. Accordingly, their experiences of exclusion from school were generally less severe than those from other backgrounds: they had been excluded least often (6/10), with no exclusions occurring during primary school among interviewees from this group.

There were, however, examples of some distinctive problems among the Asian group. One Indian interviewee and one Bangladeshi interviewee found their schooling had been disrupted by movement between family at home and abroad which involved missing weeks or months of school. Upon their return, they often encountered problems, for example because they were behind on their schoolwork. In one case this led to his dropping out of school entirely from a young age:

* I came back from holiday and they never accepted me in my school, I couldn't go back so I just left school at 13, 14. (M49, Bangladeshi interviewee).

Interestingly, the Indian interviewee (M23) who has been excluded from the analysis because of his claim never to have offended, had also fallen behind on his school work following an extended visit to see relatives, and ultimately contributing to disruptive behaviour and exclusion at school. Significantly, also, the findings of Wrench and Qureshi (1996) - focusing on young Bangladeshi males - found that prolonged visits to Bangladesh seemed to be a factor that contributed to poor academic performance. These patterns of travel, then, plausibly have the potential to impact negatively on the control mechanisms within a school context more generally, and may be a factor in the development of Asian offenders other than those involved in this study. This idea will be taken forward in the dreamer analysis.

Also, echoing the experiences of other interviewees from minority backgrounds, one Pakistani interviewee described an experience of racist bullying which drew him into fights with other pupils, ultimately leading to his expulsion from school and a movement into crime:
...I went to a far off school... there were only three Asians in the whole school...it was a racist area...you just get prats giving you remarks... 'Paki this', 'Paki that'... I used to get in fights a lot in that school... they expelled me. (M30, Pakistani interviewee)

Again, this suggests that racist victimisation can impact negatively on control mechanisms within the school context. Interestingly, other research (Gilborne, 1990) has suggested that problems of racial harassment at school can be particularly acute for Asian pupils. It may be, therefore, that harassment may contribute to offending among other young Asian people - another idea to be taken forward in a dreamer analysis.

**Employment**

The issue of employment has an important role for at least two of the theoretical perspectives on offending. First, strain theory would suggest that the jobs available to potential offenders were inadequate to meet their aspirations. As such, they would be less inclined to become involved in work - at least where this was seen as poorly paid or low status. Control theory would suggest that engagement in employment would be a basis for conformity - and conversely that lack of employment would involve a lower level of control, and a greater readiness to offend as a result. However, this propensity to offend would be associated with a lack of engagement with work, rather than a failure of available jobs to meet with aspirations.

Table 5.4 illustrates the evidence relevant to assessing the processes.

**Table 5.4: Testing of perspectives in relation to employment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Evidence for theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strain</td>
<td>• Mismatch between occupational/financial aspirations and opportunity in labour market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>• Lack of commitment/involvement in employment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lack of employment has been connected with offending by previous research (Audit Commission, 1996). It was, on the face of it, perhaps surprising therefore that a majority of the interviewees from all ethnic backgrounds had worked at some point in their past. This
work had ranged from service jobs in retail, restaurants and hairdressing, to manual work in building and trades and labour in factories and warehouses.

In practice, however, episodes of work were typically short, sporadic and insecure and the lives of interviewees had not generally been characterised by stable or regular employment after leaving school. This was because the jobs were often casual, interviewees lost interest - particularly where work was menial or poorly paid, or interviewees were no longer needed or sacked. For example:

*I had a bricklaying job - my girlfriend's dad got it me. It was only three days...I was on a building site, Birmingham city centre. Three days, I got £90. Yeah, I was happy with that.* (M6, Black-Mixed interviewee)

*I got a job when I was about 16, a labouring job... I was working for about a month and then I just couldn't be bothered anymore. I just couldn't be bothered with it.* (M33, White interviewee)

**Assessing strain processes**

Lack of employment, or erratic employment probably followed from a number of causes. However, there were examples where interviewees talked about jobs in a way which suggested they simply did not appear to pay enough money, and so crime seemed to be a more rational economic choice. As such, there was definitely evidence from some interviewees' accounts that strain processes were operating.

One Black-Caribbean interviewee (M18) epitomised this dynamic. He stayed on at school to complete his GCSEs, then started as a hairdresser on a youth training scheme. He packed this in because the money was poor, and did some work with father as a door-to-door salesman selling vacuum cleaners. Again, this job was 'rubbish', because he wasn't making much money, so he found another job in a barber's shop. This he left because the boss was too 'bossy', but set up hairdressing on his own, and making the same kind of money. It was clear that he actually enjoyed hairdressing ('I liked the job, I liked cutting hair and that'). However, he claimed the money simply was not enough ('if it was a good week you could earn something like 75, 80 quid'). He decided, therefore, to start working as a drug-dealer alongside this job simply to supplement his income. Prior to this, his offending had been minimal. The drug-dealing activity made a substantial difference to his income:
I knew that there was...a lot of money in selling drugs and there wasn't a lot of money in what I was doing. It's not like I look on somebody who's a seller and look on him and say 'you've got all this and all that and like I'm going to go and [become a drug-dealer]'...it's not that. It's just that, if I knew how to get to your position [a civil servant] and like earned the same amount of money that I was earning, I'd do that if it was easier. I just did the easiest thing going about. (M18, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Interestingly, while there were some examples where the amount of money that work provided was a factor in offending, there was little evidence that job status was a significant issue - which suggests that any strain processes operating here were more closely linked with income than occupation. So, while interviewees were often unclear or vague about what kind of job they would want, their occupational aspirations for the future were not generally pitched very high, as the following quotations suggest:

I'd just be a mechanic. That's all I'd be, there ain't nothing else to do. (M12, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

I'm going to go college when I get out. To be like a chef. (M31, White interviewee)

This being said, there were occasional interviewees whose aspirations were more exaggerated. Interestingly, such aspirations were most common among those from Black-Caribbean interviewees:

I'd like to have my own fitness centre. I think I'll have my own fitness centre, with a little bit of help from, bits and bobs off people. (M8, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Overall, then, evidence for strain was apparently rooted more immediately in income. Broader, occupation based strain, may have been more of a feature of the Black-Caribbean interviewees, though was not highly significant, even for this group.

Assessing control processes

There was also evidence from interviewees, in keeping with control theory, that involvement in work - even where it was not well paid - had had an inhibiting effect on offending because it had engaged the interviewees and, conversely, at times when they were not working, this left them with more time on their hands and were more minded to offend. There was even a suggestion that it was an inhibitor of more exaggerated aspirations:
Actually, that's one time I did keep out of trouble... because I was doing a bit of plastering... It wasn't enough [money] you know, but really there wasn't time to go out there and commit offences, you know when I was doing it, when I was working [during the day]... and at night time I was just chilling... (M9, Black-Mixed interviewee)

Interestingly, there was some limited evidence of ethnic differences in the frequency of interviewees who had worked. Black-Caribbean interviewees in this study reported having worked slightly less often than those from other backgrounds (Black-Caribbean: 8/14; white: 16/19; Black-Mixed: 7/8; Asian: 8/10), though obviously we should be cautious about over-interpreting these small quantitative differences in a sample of this size. However, an important issue which may have disadvantaged the Black-Caribbean interviewees in the pursuit of work was that they had less often found work through family and friends (Black-Caribbean: 3/14; white: 10/19; Black-Mixed: 4/8; Asian: 4/10). The fact that Black-Caribbean interviewees, at least compared to their white counterparts, less often had self-employed relatives as described earlier in this chapter, played some role in this. This method of finding work provided an easy and informal way of obtaining employment, and is probably particularly valuable to underqualified groups, such as offenders, for whom more formal channels into work may have presented difficulties. This might be conceived as an important issue of control - i.e. the potential for family and friends to find routes into work may, in the language of control theory, support a stronger social bond with legitimate society, promoting a more legitimate lifestyle.

For example, interviewee M2 (a white interviewee) was able to work with his uncle doing double-glazing, after being permanently excluded from school. Although this did not stop the development of his offending, there was some suggestion that it mitigates against it to some extent. More recently, over the year before coming into prison, he had been working every week with his father as a bricklayer. During this time, his offending had more or less stopped, it appeared.

A broader statistical picture of Black-Caribbean people generally, involving higher than average levels of unemployment generally and lower levels of self-employment. (e.g. Owen, 1997), lends credibility to the idea that this issue may be a more general problem for other Black-Caribbeans at risk of offending. It is also notable that in Wrench and Hassan’s qualitative (1996) study of underachieving Afro-Caribbean males, attempts to find work
through 'word-of-mouth' were, in a majority of cases, unsuccessful. This pattern feeds usefully into dreamer level analytic claims.

Discussion and conclusions

To finish this chapter, I will highlight some of the key findings within it, considering the evidence from both 'player' and 'dreamer' perspectives as outlined in chapter 4.

Player level conclusions

Thinking, first of all, about the evidence on interviewees' backgrounds - and thereby adopting initially a player perspective - the evidence suggests that interviewees offending can be understood as involving psychological, control, subcultural and strain processes. The specific processes and the evidence suggested by interviews as important to their offending are summarised in Table 5.5. Subcultural influences were certainly powerful - most apparently through friends and neighbourhood criminal influences. A range of control breakdowns were also strongly implicated in the development of offending of interviewees. These included significant family problems, poor family supervision, school exclusion and truancy, poor school ethos, problems with teachers and victimisation from other pupils. There were also clear examples of where psychological problems had been an important factor in the development of offending. Finally, strain theory had some support. However, this worked best when conceived as strain operating in relation to immediate financial aspirations and opportunities, rather than occupational status.

The interviews highlighted fundamental similarities across ethnic groups based on the background processes. This being said, there was some evidence of differences. The differences are summarised below:

- The white interviewees described the most psychological problems and weak or problematic family bonds.

- The Black-Caribbean interviewees' accounts less often suggested problems with family bonds or psychological problems compared to their white counterparts. The development of offending among Black-Caribbean interviewees highlighted a few distinctive
processes that invoke primarily control and subcultural processes. These included unfair or inappropriate treatment by teachers, distinctive peer-group influences involving bullying and victimisation, racial harassment at school and apparently limited informal connections into work.

- With the Black-Mixed interviewees, there was clearly evidence of the same psychological, subcultural, control and strain problems as existed across the interviewees generally. Small numbers in this sample make it difficult to draw out any distinctive characteristics for this group.

- The Asian interviewees, overall, appeared to have the fewest psychological or problems with family relationships among all the ethnic groups of interviewees. Where problems did occur in relation to family bonds, these tended to be to do with family illness or death, rather than difficult family relationships. However, there was evidence that among the members of this group, there were some distinctive experiences of a control nature, which may have contributed towards the development of their offending, including educational disruption caused by extended travel abroad and racial harassment at school.

**Dreamer level conclusions**

A dreamer perspective, it will be recalled from the previous chapter, looks to take the insights developed in the player analysis, and consider their implications and relevance for offenders, and explanations of offending, more generally. In doing so, it is important to remember that claims made in this way have a provisional status, though some may be seen as potentially more robust than others.

The compelling evidence for psychological, control, subcultural and strain processes across the interviewees, suggests strongly that these too are likely to be at work in the offending of young males more generally from across white, Black-Caribbean, Black-Mixed and Asian backgrounds. We might also wish to modify our conception of strain processes so that these are directed primarily at the mismatch between aspirations and opportunities as they apply to financial means, rather than occupational status. This is a point which is consistent with broader social shifts towards a focus on consumption rather than production, reviewed in Chapter 2 (e.g. Bauman, 1994). These inferences, which feed directly into Objective 1 of
Objective 2, of this thesis, is concerned with issues of ethnic difference in relation to offending. As previously noted, the ethnic differences across the interviewees (i.e. at a player level), however, should be treated more tentatively as characteristics of offenders more generally (i.e. dreamer level claims). To a large extent, differences were 'quantitative' in nature - they reflected differences in prevalence between the different ethnic groupings of interviewees. In view of the small samples involved, these differences, on their own terms, should be seen only very provisionally as a clue to patterns in wider populations of offenders. However, where they suggested patterns corroborated by other research and statistics, a little more confidence may be attached to some of the differences. There were also more 'qualitative' differences - that is dynamics that appeared to attach in specific ways to particular ethnic groups. Again, these may be indicative of ethnic differences among offenders more generally. Once again, these often had similarities with other literature.

Differences between interviewees that drew support from other literature included many of those that existed between white and Black-Caribbean interviewees. These include a view of Black-Caribbean offenders as having fewer or less significant psychological problems or problematic or weak bonds with family than their white counterparts (consistent with evidence from London Borough of Lewisham et al, 1998; Barker et al., 1993; Pitts, 1986). This also includes a view of black offenders having had less academic or behavioural problems at school (OFSTED, 1996) but having, on the other hand, more experiences of apparently unfair and over-controlling treatment by teachers (Sewell, 1997; Wrench and Hassan, 1996; Gilborne and Gipps, 1996) - again suggesting that psychological problems were less significant, but highlighting distinctive control issues within school. It also encompasses the idea that black offenders may suffer from fewer connections into employment through family and friends - supporting a stronger social bond with legitimate society (Owen, 1997; Wrench and Hassan, 1996). Differences for which supporting literature was not identified, included a black peer-group culture within school which exerted a distinctive subcultural influences involving bullying and victimisation - which also appeared to weaken bonds with school. A final dreamer level reflection was offered, which was drawn primarily from interviewees' wider accounts of crime, rather than simply their
own personal histories, and which should certainly be treated as provisional. This is the idea that neighbourhood cultures vary in terms of the criminal character, and that some of these variations appear to be associated with different ethnic populations. From these accounts, there was a suggestion that black populations - and therefore black offenders - were exposed to criminalised neighbourhoods that were more extreme in nature.

It is also important to review the differences between Asian interviewees and others. A notable difference between Asian interviewees, and those from other backgrounds, is the less common evidence of psychological problems of the ethnic groups of interviewees or serious family problems. There is little other literature that bears on this issue so it is difficult to assess this - it must remain a tentative hypothesis - though it does tie in with the inferences I made in Chapter 2 about likely causes of crime among Asians, based on my discussion of Table 2.1. Some experiences of interviewees which are consistent with other pieces of literature, however, include the role of travel abroad (Wrench and Qureshi, 1996) and racial harassment (Gilborne, 1990) as potentially important factors - which may be seen as breakdowns in 'control' processes, contributing towards the development of offending.

The dreamer analysis - and associated hypotheses - will be developed further as we go through the chapters which follow.
Table 5.5 Evidence for different criminogenic processes among the 51 offending interviewees (player analysis only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential criminogenic factor</th>
<th>Prevalence of factor (based on accounts given)</th>
<th>Strength of evidence suggesting factor important to offending</th>
<th>Ethnic variation?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strain based</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low socio-economic status</td>
<td>very common</td>
<td>weak</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mismatch between financial aspirations and opportunities</td>
<td>occasional</td>
<td>strong</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mismatch between occupational aspirations and opportunities</td>
<td>occasional</td>
<td>weak</td>
<td>Most evident among Black-Caribbean interviewees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subcultural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal family influences</td>
<td>common</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>Less important for Asian interviewees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal friendship influences</td>
<td>very common</td>
<td>strong</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal neighbourhood influences</td>
<td>very common</td>
<td>strong</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School delinquent peer-group influences</td>
<td>very common</td>
<td>strong</td>
<td>Particularly strong delinquent culture involving confrontation, aggression and bullying culture reported by some Black-Caribbean interviewees.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
a. ‘Occasional’ indicates that less than a third of interviewees indicated the presence of a factor; ‘common’ indicates that more than a third, but less than two thirds of interviewees suggested a factor was present; ‘very common’ indicates that the more than two thirds indicated a factor was present.
b. Strength of evidence is based on the extent of apparently causal links, revealed by biographies, between the factors and subsequent offending.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential criminogenic factor</th>
<th>Prevalence of factor (based on accounts given)</th>
<th>Strength of evidence suggesting factor important to offending</th>
<th>Ethnic variation?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult family relationships</td>
<td>common</td>
<td>strong</td>
<td>Particularly important for white interviewees, least important for Asian interviewees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family illness/death</td>
<td>occasional</td>
<td>strong</td>
<td>More relevant to Asian interviewees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor family supervision/discipline</td>
<td>common</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misbehaviour/exclusion from school</td>
<td>very common</td>
<td>strong</td>
<td>Most significant for white interviewees, least significant for Asian interviewees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truancy</td>
<td>very common</td>
<td>strong</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor school ethos</td>
<td>occasional</td>
<td>strong</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrupted schooling because of travel abroad</td>
<td>occasional</td>
<td>strong</td>
<td>Relevant only to some Asian interviewees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived unfair/inappropriate treatment by teachers</td>
<td>occasional</td>
<td>strong</td>
<td>Apparently more common among Black-Caribbean interviewees - sometimes having an explicitly racist nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victimisation from other school pupils</td>
<td>occasional</td>
<td>strong</td>
<td>More relevant to ethnic minority interviewees, either through racism or among Black-Caribbeans as a product of delinquent subculture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited family networks into employment</td>
<td>very common</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>Particularly relevant to Black-Caribbean interviewees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychological</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-social behaviour/psychological problems dating back to early childhood</td>
<td>common</td>
<td>strong</td>
<td>Most common among white interviewees. Rare among Asian interviewees.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. The foreground to offending

Introduction

This chapter explores offending among interviewees from a contrasting perspective to the last chapter. That is, it is concerned with the elements that make up the 'foreground' to offending among the interviewees. As such, it is directly concerned with the nature of offending and the dynamics that direct it. While it will be concerned with key existing theories, it will present an opportunity to develop new ideas for theory.

Once again, in doing this, the analysis conducted will draw to a significant extent on a 'player' level of analysis, as defined in Chapter 4. However, a 'dreamer' level of analysis will be developed off the back of this in order to pursue the study's key objectives - namely to contribute to a generalised theoretical framework of offending, and to identify provisional ethnic differences and similarities.

It is important, to remember that the convergence of the theoretical ideas tested in the previous chapter and themes developed in the current chapter will only reach their final crystallisation and synthesis within the chapter that follows (Chapter 7).

Specific aims of the chapter

Specifically, the chapter will:

- describe the offending carried out by interviewees;

- identify the reasons for offending, and its different manifestations, drawing in particular on the 'foreground' motivations which shape it;

- identify any connections between foreground issues and broader theoretical processes;

- explore the specialisation of offending among interviewees;
• assess whether there are any differences in these processes among interviewees which relate to their membership of different ethnic groups;

• on the back of this player approach (focusing only on the interviewees), use a more generalised dreamer approach to contribute to meeting the study's objectives.

**Chapter structure**

This chapter is broken down into three main empirical sections. The first of these will explore the main types of offences which interviewees had been involved with. The second empirical section will explore the reasons for offending, as manifested in the foreground. The third section will explore the issue of specialisation in offending. Following this, the chapter will go on to summarise and discuss the implications of the analysis at both player and dreamer levels.

**Validity issues**

This chapter, in contrast to the last one, makes significant use of interviewees' accounts of meanings and stories told - though draws also on factual accounts and biographies too. This has a number of consequences. In broad terms, it inevitably means - based on the methodological assumptions laid out in Chapter 4 - that the conclusions based on meanings tend to have a more provisional status than the conclusions of the last chapter, which made much more use of accounts of facts. It also meant that the practical validity-checking strategies that came into play were, in many cases, different than those used in the last chapter. As in the last chapter, issues of internal consistency, and the extent of elaboration of themes within interviews was important in assessing levels of validity. However, other common strategies involved checking between interviews for consistency in the types of explanations given. It also relied on assessing the plausibility of meanings and stories, in the context of the more factual elements of accounts given - invoking a verstehen type of approach, as discussed in Chapter 4. It also involved an awareness of possible cultural scripts which might animate or shape particular types of explanations, and where there was evidence of these, it was important to assess their role as influences on offending vis-à-vis their role in accounting for offending.
It is notable, too, that to a significant extent, some interviewees' 'third person' stories about other offenders provide a way of triangulating claims made in 'first person' narratives by interviewees - and as such, were an important validity check. Insofar as these 'third person' narratives also pointed beyond the 51 interviewees who were the key subjects of the study towards other offenders and other types of explanation (albeit often in impartial and incomplete ways), they also provided an important bridge between player and dreamer levels - that is they were themselves a source of potentially more generalisable claims about offending and ethnicity.

Types of crime

I noted in Chapter 2 that what we call crime breaks up into a number of activities, and it is important to explore this variety in the current study. Interviewees had carried out a range of offences between them, including burglaries, robberies, thefts, violence and drug dealing.

Perhaps the most fundamental distinction to be made is between those offences that were oriented towards material gain, and those that were not. Accordingly, these may be described as 'utilitarian' and 'non-utilitarian' offences.

Utilitarian offences

As noted, utilitarian offences were those oriented towards material gain. The most common ones are discussed below.

Burglary

Burglary commonly involved both domestic and commercial premises. Domestic burglaries involved private dwellings. In some cases, thought was given to how these were targeted:

I [used to] go out and do burglaries with people...just for money...we wouldn't it to any old house, we knew what house we would do...[if the] house is empty, nice TV, stereo, maybe a bit jewellery laying about, we'd go and do it. (M16, White interviewee)

Commercial burglaries could be more varied. A popular target was offices where expensive computer equipment could be found:
...most times, you know when you're driving around...you'll see office buildings and that. You know there's computers and that in there. You just go and kick off the door and go in. Sometimes you just cut the phone wires and that...Like kick the alarm box off sort of thing, staying out all night and just empty the place. Get a transit van or something and load it. (M1, White interviewee)

Some interviewees also talked of burglaries of shops, for example by ram-raiding. This involved driving a car into the front of a shop to break in, and then to load up a car with the goods to be stolen:

...when you burgle shops you have be fast. You can't like take your time like...because the alarm is straight to the police innit...We just sometimes put a car through the front window...You got two cars...one in the front window and load...up...the other car. (M30, Pakistani interviewee)

Other examples of commercial burglaries included warehouses or pubs.

Street robbery

The most common form of robbery was street robbery. This involved accosting people on the street for their money and valuables. This typically involved the threat of violence, or actual violence, as illustrated in the following example:

...we'd walk up to them and then we'd ask them for their money and they'd say something and then one of us would either punch him if they didn't give you or something, then we'd drag him up an alley or something, check the pockets, take the money and that. And if they had bank cards we'd take 'em up to the bank with us and use the bank cards in the bank machine. (M24, White interviewee)

Robberies were often specifically targeted towards certain goods. For example, people talked variously about targeting those with cash, mobile phones, lap-top computers, or expensive jewellery. In the following example an interviewee who specialised in robbing people for their Rolex watches describes his strategy:

[We'd be] walking around up [X], sees a Rolex - there'd be like two or three of us - and then...when we [they] get to back roads, put them to sleep.... clamping them - put your left hand around their neck, and squeeze about three seconds and they have gone to sleep...and then take their Rolex and that...If it was the right one, we could get three to ten grand for a Rolex. (M52, Black interviewee)
**Robbery of establishments**

Other robberies involved commercial premises, including establishments such as shops, building societies, travel agents, or bookmakers. Some even talked about robbing banks, as in the following quotation, in which an interviewee recounts his experience of robberies:

...the first one [robbery] I came in here for, that was a petrol station. But this one what I'm in here for now, that's a bank. ...I waited for the security door to open, then rushed in, emptied the tills and ran back out. (M34, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

**Vehicle theft**

A commonly reported crime, instrumental in pursuing material gain was the theft of cars. The skills for this kind of activity often grew out of the non-utilitarian crime of 'joy-riding'. It required interviewees to learn how to hotwire a car, overcoming the security mechanisms which cars had installed.

Stealing cars to sell for cash was common. In the following example, an interviewee described how he became a regular car thief, to the point where he was actually stealing cars to order:

[I used to] sell cars as well...cars people wanted...[they would] say: 'so and so car, like this colour'. Then you go out and get it for them - you don't ask them what they are going to do with it. (M30, Pakistani interviewee)

Some interviewees also reported stealing cars to assist in other property crimes, such as burglaries, robberies or ram-raiding. In the following example, an interviewee described how he routinely used to steal cars, but in order to carry out burglaries:

Everyday when we was doing burglaries, like we need the car [so] before we do the burglary we nicked a car. (M14, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

**Other types of theft**

Interviewees also reported a range of other types of theft. Shoplifting was common, as described by the following interviewee:
[I've] done a bit of shoplifting but ain't [been] caught...when I was in school - like secondary school. Clothes mainly...Not a lot. I've nicked about three pairs of jeans. A jacket I nicked once. (M44, Bangladeshi interviewee)

Thefts from vehicles were also common - particularly among those people who were already interested in stealing cars.

I was thieving a lot out of cars, thieving anything like car stereos, anything that was in the car really that was worth selling. (M33, White interviewee)

And a range of other types of theft was also mentioned. A couple of examples are described below:

Whenever I saw a push-bike I unlocked a decent one and take it. (M16, White interviewee)

Me and my mates we had a little...device and we used to be able to clock credits in machines and stuff without putting any money in...we were passing the stamp machine we thought we may as well try it in there and we were doing it and getting the stamps out - possibly could have sold them, that's what we were thinking. (M44, Bangladeshi interviewee)

Drug-dealing

Involvement in drug-dealing amongst interviewees could be quite casual. In the following example, the extent of drug-dealing was fairly minimal. The interviewee sold some drugs principally because he was asked to in a social situation involving, as it turned out, an undercover police officer:

I went into a nightclub on three occasions and sold £30 worth of drugs and the judge gave me three years for it...we weren't dealers or anything...we were both pestered by...an attractive, undercover, female copper coming on to you after seven pints and you're drunk. You'd do anything for her...especially...when you're not out with your girlfriend that night. (M50, White interviewee)

However, some interviewees made a serious business of selling drugs, which could lead to significant earnings. The following interviewee describes how his drug-dealing reflected hard-headed economic calculation, and a desire to make a lot of money:

Well it started off with weed first. It was going too slow. Then I started selling crack and brown...Get about an ounce of brown for about £700, £800. When I sell it I
make like about £1500, £1800. And I could sell an ounce of brown in like three days, so I was making quite a bit. (M52, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Non-utilitarian crimes

There were crimes for which there was no material motivation, more typically revolved around entertaining oneself, or playing out a grudge. The main non-utilitarian crimes detailed by interviewees are reviewed below.

Joy-riding

The theft or taking of cars, commonly referred to by interviewees as 'twocking' - based on the offence of TWOC or 'taking without owner's consent' was a common form of crime. I have noted that, in some cases this was associated with material gain. However, commonly cars were taken for the purpose of joyriding them - that is for having fun simply from driving the cars around. So, in the following example, an interviewee describes how he used to take cars and drive them around local fields.

[We'd] just have a laugh on the fields...if we got a car, then we nick it and park it up, like joyride it, park it up, and then leave it till the next day. We'd like have a car for about three weeks, if we kept it like. (M2, White interviewee)

Violence

Violence of various kinds was very common amongst interviewees. On the one hand, it could be associated with acquisitive offences - most typically robbery, a crime I have discussed above. However, violence for its own sake was a common occurrence. Examples of this varied from eruptions of violence, through spontaneous disputes or conflicts with others, or to more developed and institutionalised patterns of conflict. So, in the following example, violence emerged from a spontaneous dispute between the interviewee and a person who was picking on his friend, in which friendship loyalties were invoked:

...he was a good friend of mine, and...one kid started on him - a big kid he was. I said: 'well don't start on him. Go and fight me if you want to fight anybody.' So we got into a fight, broke his nose and knocked one of his teeth out... (M19, White interviewee)
More routinised or institutionalised violence was evident in more regular and established patterns between individuals or groups. For example, the following interviewee described regular fights between groups of people at different schools:

_There's a certain thing that started at school, with our school and the rival school, like. And we always used to be fighting at school. And when we got out of school, they lived in a different area to us. So we'd go down there and we'd do them in, like._

(M20, Black-Mixed interviewee)

**Vandalism**

Examples of vandalism were cited by some interviewees. These, to a significant extent, were carried out almost out of desire for 'something to do' - that is some kind of enjoyment. So in the following example, an interviewee describes how his destructive behaviour was underpinned by boredom:

_You'd just be walking along and someone would just pick up something and chuck it and you'd hear like a window smash and then you would run...I don't know, it's just out of boredom I suppose._

(M32, Black-Mixed interviewee)

There were also examples of where this was motivated by a particular grudge, almost as an indirect form of violence, or intimidation, towards somebody, as described in the following example:

...if someone says something like to us, part of our mate's family or something...or say for like if my mates brother gets smacked or something by some other geezer's dad, then like... you'd all gang up, it'd all happen at once... cars get smashed, windows on the house will go through or something... (M2, White interviewee)

**Motivations for offending**

Having explored the nature of offending it is useful to explore more directly the reasons for this crime, as identified by the interviewees' in their own understanding of their offending. From the accounts given by interviewees, it was clear that their involvement in crime was propelled, shaped and sustained by various day-to-day motivations (or 'seductions' in the language of Katz, 1988). While evidence for such motivations principally took the form of interviewees' accounts of their own offending, a number of interviewees had themselves
drawn such conclusion through their observations of other offenders. One interviewee, in reflecting upon this issue made the following claim:

_There's hundreds of different reasons [for doing crime] isn't there? Some people need to commit crime to feed a habit, or just to get money for some reason or other. Some people just do it for greed - some people have got a lot of money anyway and they just keep on committing crime because they just want more money and more money and they have got a taste of the money and they just carry on. I mean some people just do it for the buzz don't they, the adrenaline buzz that they get out of it..._ (M19, White interviewee)

It is important to realise that these motivations - at least in the minds of interviewees - feature more fundamentally as the 'causes' of their offending lifestyles than the factors reviewed in the last chapter, linked more directly to the traditional paradigms of explanation.

By exploring motivations, sometimes we can, to some extent, assess the key theories to be explored, as illustrated in Table 6.1.

**Table 6.1 Foreground evidence relevant to testing of key theoretical perspectives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Relevant evidence for theory</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strain</td>
<td>• Financial/material motivation for offending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subculture</td>
<td>• Delinquent values rooted in subcultural group processes</td>
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</tbody>
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However, other theoretical processes, not linked to these key theories, are suggested by the analysis of motivations. These point us to some different antecedent causes.

The different motivations for offending identified by offenders are explored below, drawing out notable ethnic differences among interviewees. In doing so, the different theoretical processes they point to are highlighted and developed.

**Consumption-oriented lifestyles**

One of the most important motivations of offending described by interviewees was their desire for money to support an expensive lifestyle, including spending on clothes, social life, recreational drugs and cars. This, inevitably, involved utilitarian types of offending. Such
motivations were articulated, at least to some extent, among interviewees from all ethnic backgrounds. One interviewee articulated his attachment to this lifestyle in the following way:

You start thinking, 'Yeah, I need a car' you know what I mean, 'I need some expensive clothes, I need this and that stuff for my yard [home] - television, and I need to buy my drugs man, I want to go out there and fucking enjoy myself while I'm young.' (M20, Black-Mixed interviewee)

Clothes with designer labels were probably the most common 'lifestyle' commodities mentioned by interviewees, and these often were a very important requirement:

It was all the same with all of us with clothes. We all had to have designer clothes, so that's where the petty crime started coming to, because of the peer pressure you would be the one left out if you didn't have designer clothes...like Versace, Armani and stuff like that, good trainers. And if you didn't have them...you would be left out really. Sad really. Should never be like that, but it was. (M16, White interviewee)

However, going out to raves, nightclubs or parties appeared to be a regular feature of many interviewees' social lives and some explicitly connected their offending to these activities:

It was solely to go out [that we did the robbery]...We'd like a party to go to, and we never had no money to go. (M44, Bangladeshi origin)

An interest in cars could also be a part of interviewees' lifestyles and, as already noted, this could involve stealing them. However, some interviewees also wanted to buy cars to have as possessions:

I have my own cars as well - legal cars. Robbed cars ain't your cars are they?...We used to buy the auto trader on a Friday morning and see what cars are for sale. (M22, White interviewee)

Thinking, for a moment, about the validity of these types of claims - they were plausible for a number of reasons. Not only were such claims highly consistent across the range of interviewees, but most interviewees' had clearly been involved in a number of property crimes which clearly had the potential to generate significant revenue. And for those who were not involved in serious drug habits, consumer goods and recreation present one of the main alternatives. Certainly, the more factual claims made by many interviewees about their lifestyles and expenditure would suggest that they had a significant amount of income available, and their limited involvement in the labour market suggests that much of the income spent was probably from illegal sources.
There were some very significant variations between interviewees in the extent to which this consumption-focused motivation was important. It had some role to play in the offending of most of the interviewees - though there were a few individuals for whom it was not particularly significant, for example where their offending was predominantly violent, or where money obtained through crime was swallowed up by an expensive drug habit. Most notable, however, was the important role it was described as playing in the offending of many of the Black-Caribbean interviewees, for whom a very high level of significance was attached to it. This was evident from the way in which Black-Caribbean interviewees gave such a strong emphasis to the importance of specifically conspicuous consumption:

No one wants to be walking around in, like, old clothes and all that, and old trainers, and can't get no girls, can't go raving and all that, you get me. If you've got money, you've got respect. (M46, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Among many of the Black-Caribbean interviewees, part of this motivation involved a distinctive fascination with money as a symbol in itself. While interviewees from other backgrounds may have been concerned with obtaining money, this was far more likely to be described as a means to an end - to buy clothes, cars, drugs or whatever. However, it is perhaps reasonable to talk about a 'fetishisation' of money for many of the Black-Caribbean interviewees:

I was obsessed of money...I just needed money - every day I wanted money...I just wanted to spend and to look good. I just wanted a good time. You know what I mean? (M14, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

One Black-Caribbean interviewee (M52) described this kind of phenomenon as 'being bit by the money bug'. Certainly, a concern with money took on obsessive proportions for some of these offenders which appeared to have a powerful escalatory effect on their offending:

I probably think about [the possibility of hurting somebody]...now and I've stopped doing all those things. But, at the time I got used to going...it's just, the money was overpowering anything else. I was thinking: 'he's got money, I need money, therefore I take'. That's the kind of think I was thinking of. (M4, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

The concern with money and lifestyle among Black-Caribbean interviewees was also characterised by expenditure on certain distinctive status symbols, such as champagne, in addition to the common ones such as clothes and cars, which were common among interviewees from all backgrounds. For those interviewees who pursued particularly
expensive lifestyles the quantities of money required were large. Some interviewees described generating enough money through crime to allow them to spend hundreds or thousands of pounds in a matter of days or weeks for these purposes.

Looking to a dreamer level, it is notable that the lifestyle offending depicted here echoes the picture of at least some black offenders portrayed in other literature (London Borough of Lewisham et al., 1998; Burney 1990; Barker et al., 1993). This broader picture was also evident from some interview accounts. For example, a Bangladeshi interviewee provided a confirmation of this type of dynamic when talking about his black friends involved in crime:

_They go out a lot, so they wear like the latest designers and stuff like that. They go through several pairs of trainers each and things - I don’t know what luxuries. They love the money. That’s the impression they give - they love the money. They’ll do any like robbery, burglary to get the money._ (M44, Bangladeshi interviewee)

These triangulating sources suggest strongly that the strong emphasis on offending for lifestyle among Black-Caribbean interviewees (in a player analysis) should be translated to more confident dreamer level claims.

The identification of this broad consumer-oriented lifestyle as a motivation for crime is a significant finding, given our interest in strain theory. It provides strong support for a strain-based theory, though one with quite a specific form. Notably, it does not point towards a strain involving frustrated educational and occupational aspirations - which, at any rate, found only weak empirical support in the last chapter (as it has in other previous research). Rather, it involves a very specific concern with consumption. In particular, it would seem that interviewees are offending in many cases to satisfy an immediate desire to have and to spend money on expensive and fashionable items.

However, the relationship between social structure and offending, via the motivation of consumption-oriented lifestyles, was not necessarily a straightforward one. On the one hand, there were interviewees who started their offending as a response to perceived inadequacies in the consumption power associated with legitimate lifestyle choices that confronted them - already detailed in the last chapter. For example, an interviewee described how he abandoned a poorly paid job to join his friends in their offending in a way strongly suggestive of strain processes, following directly from their socio-economic position and opportunities:
I'd seen them coming home with about three hundred pound a day and that. I just thought 'forget working for forty-five pound a week...I could just go out and go out with them and earn some money with them'. (M17, Black-Mixed interviewee)

Cases such as these provide clear evidence for a strain dynamic rooted directly (cognitively, even) in economic structures, and interviewees location within them. By contrast, however, there were other examples of where a concern with consumption among interviewees evolved alongside offending, and was fed by the opportunities brought by crime - notably the access to money. This dynamic was articulated in a story told by one interviewee:

I am the only full blown criminal in the family, like robbing... when I sat here and thought about it, it is 'cos I got used to having a lot of money - everything I wanted, at that age... the money was so easy to get I just think, 'yea, man, I need that, get this' all the time. It's easy innit. That's why I am a full blown criminal. (M52, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

This directs our attention to the dynamic cultural aspects of this fascination. More so for the fact that the fascination with consumption had some very potent symbolic aspects - particularly for Black-Caribbean interviewees (e.g. designer clothes, bottles of champagne, money as a symbol in itself). This might well involve specifically subcultural modes of explanation. Certainly the importance of peer-groups in the fascination with consumption was, in some cases, articulated by interviewees - as is clear from some of the quotations already provided. For example, M16 (a white interviewee) and M46 (a Black-Caribbean interviewee) above make it clear that status with peers was an important aspect of this concern.

It is important to note, too, the parallels with subcultural analyses offered in other literature, notably by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the 1970s, which might at the broadest level be considered strain based. Invoking neo-Marxist modes of explanation, and looking at youth culture more generally, a consumption focused youth style was typically portrayed as a response to structural and economic conditions, as exemplified by Cohen's (1972) analysis of working class youth cultures in East London, in which Mod style is interpreted as an:

'try to realize, but in imaginary relation, the conditions of existence of the socially mobile white-collar worker. While their argot and ritual forms stressed many of the values of their parent culture, their dress and music reflected the hedonistic image of the affluent consumer.' (pp. 23-4)
However, it is probably true to say that a specifically subcultural explanation that invokes the peer group or social group as the primary repository and source of delinquent values for the offender may not do justice to the complex way in which delinquent values are encountered and invoked by offenders. For some of the interviewees - notably the Black-Caribbean group - a consumption-based lifestyle seemed to draw on cultural themes far broader than the immediate peer group. Specifically, the media was implicated by some interviewees, such as in the following quote:

You watch TV programmes and you see all this - it brain-washes you basically...You watch gangsters films and you see and you're like: 'why can't I do that? He's human and I'm human'...it's like you want that and you see it and you'll do anything to get it - nothing, nothing will stop you. You see like they got big mansions and cars and Rolex and diamonds...I just want to be well off and I want everything that I didn't have, I want my kids to have, basically...like everyone wants to live in a big house and wants Rolexes and everyone wants gold and everyone wants a good job and everyone wants to live a life of luxury. You ask anyone, anyone, anyone. I'm just one of them people. (M37, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

This way of life, important as it appeared to be for the Black-Caribbean interviewees and black offenders more generally, seems to have some resonance with a broader black identity which may be seen as drawing from the experiences and representations of black people (and particularly young black males) outside Britain. In making these connections, I inevitably enter into the realm of a dreamer level analysis, as these phenomena were not strongly and directly evidenced across interviewees. However, there was some compelling evidence for this type of dynamic, nonetheless. For example, one interviewee made a connection between a particular black identity presented in Hip Hop music, and a fascination with expensive lifestyles and the crime required to finance them:

Back then, I would listen to a lot of Hip Hop and that. And like the words they're pertaining...is like they've got grands, and they wear Rolexes, and they wear Versace, Moschino, and they drink champagne twenty-four seven in the bathroom - wherever they are they drink champagne, they smoke expensive cigars. And it comes from there, so the people who listen to their music want to be like that...a lot of black people fall into that trap... And that's what a lot of the boys in here think, that, 'Yeah, I can be like him because if I do a bank robbery, I'll get the money to be like him'... (M26, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

With the freedom granted by a dreamer level analysis, it is useful to illustrate the striking parallels between the characterisations of lifestyles presented by many of the Black-

15. 'Grands' mean thousands of pounds.
Caribbean interviewees and the depictions of Hip Hop music. As an example, I will quote from the lyrics of one example of the US 'gangsta rap' genre - the Notorious B.I.G. The following excerpt is the first verse and chorus from a track called 'I Love the Dough':

[Verse 1]
We push the hottest Vs, peel fast
Through the city, play Monopoly with real cash
Me and Biggie and the models be, shakin' they saditty ass
In Prada be, something you cats got to see
And the watches be all types and shapes of stones [jewels]
Bein' broke is childish and I'm quite grown
Run up in the club with the ice [diamonds] on, me and Python
Scope the spot out, see somethin' nice and I'm gone
You cats is home, screamin' the fights on
I'm in the fifteen hundred seats, watchin' Ty-son
Same night, same fight
But one of us cats ain't playin' right, I let you tell it
People place yourselves in the shoes of two felons
And tell me you won't ball every chance you get
And any chance you hit, we live for the moment
Makes sense don't it? Now make dollars
Cats pop champagne bottles bone [have sex with] chicks that favor Idaly's
And rack up frequent flier mileage

[Chorus]
Gotta let it show, I love the dough, hey
I love the dough, more than you know
Gotta let it show, I love the dough, hey

If there is some circumstantial evidence to suggest that a 'gangsta rap' discourse has structured the lifestyles of the young black offenders in a way that leads to their crime, then this might be consistent with similar trends identified elsewhere. For example, Gilroy (1993) observes that black music from outside Britain has been accorded a central place in the cultural adaptations of post-war Caribbean settlers by a number of commentators:

'The musics of the black Atlantic world [namely the Caribbean and Black America] were the primary expressions of cultural distinctiveness which the population seized upon and adapted to its new circumstances...This musical heritage gradually became an important factor in facilitating diverse settlers to a distinct mode of lived blackness' (pp. 81-82)

16. 'Twenty-four seven' means twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.
At this point, I will flag-up here a new theoretical idea that I shall return to later - one that feeds directly into a dreamer level analysis. That is, in contrast to the idea of a subculture as a basis for offending (i.e. one rooted in the social associations within a peer group or a particular section of a society), I suggest the existence of 'transculture' as a basis for offending. By transculture, I am referring to a set of globalised, international cultural themes not mediated primarily by direct personal social associations, but through the impersonal processes of general media consumption - in this case involving music. We have seen some evidence of how this may have played a role in the offending of young black males. Indeed it was in relation to this group that the dynamics were most clearly present. That is not to say, however, that a delinquent subculture does not operate alongside these transcultural influences.

In some ways, the idea of 'transculture' has similarities with Matza's (1964) conception of a 'subculture of delinquency' which differs from much theorising about delinquent subcultures. Notably it invokes the idea of a diffused set of 'subterranean values' that can be invoked and utilised by those engaged in offending. This stands in contrast to a set of delinquent values that are rooted directly and exclusively in a more immediate delinquent peer group.

It is important here to flag-up some validity issues in relation to how we interpret the accounts of the Black-Caribbean interviewees. Corresponding as they do with an existing 'gangsta rap' discourse around criminality there is certainly a risk that the discourse is being used post hoc to describe their criminality. It does seem that in at least some cases, this may be occurring. There were certainly some interviewees who talked in a way that suggested a kind of exaggerated showing off:

*I don't think I could work yeah, save up the money, taking about, say a month yeah, to get something like worth £200 yeah when I can just go there, take five minutes and get triple amount in about two minutes, two minutes I can make something like £8,000, two minutes £8,000 and get away and I get what I want...* (M12, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

However, I would suggest there are important reasons for seeing it as more than simply a narrative device. For one (and as we have seen in some of the data presented above), some interviewees not involved in this type of lifestyle and not necessarily from a Black-Caribbean background - and who may even have shown some disapproval towards this type of lifestyle - were still able to describe it among their black associates. It was also clear that
some interviewees who had turned their back on that type of lifestyle, and were somewhat disapproving of it, were still able to describe it as a part of their past:

_This day and age now its all about cash, like cash. But like I have experienced what cash can do and that, I am in here now. But for five years, but like my other mates and that they are here for six years just for one bank ... Being in prison well I learnt my lesson now...I have learnt it big time. Learnt it. Like I have lost someone I love, my girlfriend. I need my freedom and that. I can’t go out when I want to...._ (M14, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

To conclude this section, therefore, a powerful motivation for offending was the desire for money for the purposes of pursuing consumption-oriented lifestyles. It is possible - though by no means clear - that this followed (in a similar way to strain theory) from some kind of structural inequality. It appeared that among Black-Caribbean interviewees this fascination reached its most developed form - involving a distinctive fetishisation of money as a symbol in its own right. This lends support to strain theory - notably in relation to consumption, rather than frustrated educational and occupational aspirations. However, while in some cases that offending seemed to follow directly from the economic situation of interviewees facing a choice between legitimate and illegitimate opportunities, a concern with consumption could also evolve alongside offending, suggesting that this concern may have had important cultural aspects, which were embraced by those involved in offending. This might represent a direct cognitive response to structural economic conditions. It might be part of a more subcultural response to structural economic conditions. However, among the Black-Caribbean interviewees at least, there was some evidence of delinquent cultural themes that went beyond peer-groups. Specifically, there was evidence (albeit circumstantial, and therefore at a dreamer level) that it had some resonance with global 'transcultural' themes relating to black identity, notably propagated through music, epitomised in a 'gangsta rap' discourse.

**Drugs and alcohol**

It was noted in chapter 2, that drug use, and alcohol use, were at least correlated with crime, and there was also evidence of causal links - most notably involving heroin and crack cocaine (e.g. Bennett, 2000). Against this backdrop, it may be no surprise that all interviewees had had at least some involvement in drugs or alcohol during their lives and, in some cases, where this had been serious it appeared to have an important influence on their offending.
There were very striking ethnic differences in the patterns of interviewees' involvement in drugs and alcohol and its role in their offending behaviour. Problematic histories of drug and alcohol use, such as regular and chronic use of alcohol or hard drugs such as crack or heroin were quite common among white (10/19), Black-Mixed (3/8) and Asian interviewees (3/10). The following quotations give a flavour of this:

*Drink was part of my life, and I had to have a drink to get by, you know what I mean? If I didn't have a drink I couldn't wake up and I wouldn't know what to do, really. I was always getting the shakes and all that.* (M10, White interviewee)

*When we started taking heroin we didn't really know like what it's really like, you know - what like the after effects are and everything. And by the time we realised we were like addicted to it, and once we're addicted to it we just kept on taking it because you wanted the pain to go or whatever.* (M27, Bangladeshi interviewee)

This type of involvement in drugs or alcohol could contribute significantly to interviewees' utilitarian offending. A key way in which this contributed to motivations to offend was through interviewees' need for money to pay for their habit. Where interviewees had a crack or heroin habit, this could involve substantial amounts, chiming with the findings of Bennett above:

*I was doing crack for about seven, eight months...you get through...near enough about two hundred pound [a week], I think... So I do a bit of crime here and there just to get money for [it]...* (M38, Pakistani interviewee)

A second way in which a problematic involvement in drugs or alcohol could influence interviewees' offending was through its effects on their judgement and behaviour - though we might not so directly count this as a 'motivation' for offending. Often this involved a propensity to violence - commonly associated with drinking:

*At the time [when you're involved in violence]...you don't really think about the drugs or if the drugs are doing it to you or not. It's like being in here now that I look back on it I see the only reason that I done all that is because I was either drunk or I was on drugs. If I weren't on drugs or anything I wouldn't do those sort of things.* (M32, Black-Mixed interviewee)

This type of claim is certainly plausible, particularly in the context of the statistical association between alcohol and violence (Flood-Page et al, 2000). However, there was some indication that drug use could also render interviewees more likely to commit property
crimes, because of its effects on judgement, as illustrated in the story told by one interviewee:

[Temazepam] started the crime off, really, because you just do anything on them because it gives you Dutch courage, you know? You just think you're invisible - you just pinch a car, you can just break into people's houses... (M40, White interviewee)

It is important to note, too, that even where interviewees had already been involved in crime, the development of a crack or heroin habit could involve a significant escalation in the level and seriousness of criminal activity - suggesting that these drugs have the power to 'ratchet up' offending behaviour. Again, this is consistent with existing evidence already reviewed.

In the following example, an interviewee who had already been involved in property crime to fund his social lifestyle and a recreational drug habit describes how his offending became more serious as his dependency on heroin got out of control:

[The heroin] started getting daily but it wasn't costing that much because I was only having a bit every day...But once I started getting into it, it was starting to cost more and more and I just couldn't pay for it...Just before I came to jail I was spending seventy pounds worth a day - a gram a day - which is a lot of money when you are not working, you have to go out and earn it every day. Madness really...I'd go out do robberies of off licences and that, and if I had six hundred pounds I wouldn't smoke the gram a day, I'd like smoke a lot more than a gram a day 'cos the money was there... You just seem to wanna smoke more and more...you always chasing that first buzz for some reason. (M19, White interviewee)

In sharp contrast to the often serious involvement in drugs and alcohol found among some white, Black-Mixed and Asian interviewees, the experience of Black-Caribbean interviewees, overall, was far less serious. Only in one case had a Black-Caribbean interviewee experienced a dependency on hard drugs. This was an interviewee who, through his drug-dealing, had experimented with crack, and went on to develop a habit. In general, however, use of hard drugs was rare and consumption of alcohol was occasional and moderate. Instead, Black-Caribbean interviewees typically described themselves as having been very regular users of cannabis and little else:

I only take weed because it relaxes me, you get me. I don't take no drugs. I don't drink. I drink Champagne and like spirits, but I don't drink whisky, no whisky...I don't drink ale and beer and bitter and all that. (M46, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

It is important to remember that this profound ethnic difference among interviewees may be a product of the relatively small samples taken for the purposes of the qualitative study. However, the differences are very stark - suggesting that chance alone is unlikely to be to
blame. It is also notable that for the Black-Caribbean interviewees, the lack of involvement in hard drugs or alcohol did not appear simply to be a product of luck or chance. Rather, there was a strong sense that involvement in serious drugs or excessive amounts of alcohol was seen as undesirable within this group generally:

[There were] these people that was like drinking around me. Up until now I don’t drink alcohol. I’m not against it, but it's just not for me. (M8, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

I don’t touch anything else. I steer clear against them [hard] kind of drugs. Stay with weed. (M4, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

The significance of Black-Caribbean interviewees' involvement in cannabis should perhaps not be trivialised. In many cases, smoking was a very regular part of their lives, the habit was often financed through crime, and there was some suggestion that it could contribute to the problems in interviewees' lives. However, in general terms, the involvement of Black-Caribbean interviewees in cannabis did not have the same profound effects on interviewees' offending as for many of those from other ethnic backgrounds. This was at least in part because a cannabis habit was less expensive, and it may also have been because its effects are less criminogenic in its effects on mood and judgement.

It is important to assess how an involvement with drugs or alcohol might feed into some of the existing theories of crime. Certainly, there was evidence that it often had an important subcultural basis, as suggested in Chapter 2. Thus, whilst the full reasons for different types of involvement were not always clear from the backgrounds of interviewees, the origins of drug or alcohol often started with contact with drugs through friends.

I was on heroin for two years...I suppose it was like all my friends [were] taking it and like I felt like kind of left out really... (M27, Bangladeshi interviewee)

...the first girlfriend who I was with got me into smoking...cannabis (M26, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

The influence of neighbourhoods, too, were also mentioned as providing a context for developing a drug habit, fitting with a subcultural theme:

...it seems to be an epidemic, it seemed to come around to the area all the same time and there was a lot of heroin flooding the streets and I tried it - and we all seemed to try it at the same time. So we all started taking it at the same time... (M19, White interviewee)
Also keeping broadly within a subcultural mode of explanation, the involvement in drugs and alcohol sometimes also appeared to relate to the influence of family members:

*Who introduced me [to cannabis]? I think my older brother.* (M14, White interviewee)

*My dad use to keep [beer]...in the fridge and I use to call round to see my mum and dad and I use to make an excuse so I’d run into the kitchen to get a drink of water and go into the fridge and there’d be drink in there so I use to steal a beer or something...* (M15, White interviewee)

It is conceivable that other dynamics may also have underpinned an involvement in drugs, implicating different theoretical processes. This might involve broader cultural attitudes towards drug-taking - specifically where this involves a disposition to experiment with particular kinds of drugs. The physical availability of drugs in an area is likely to be important too, which might point us towards a consideration of drug-markets in contributing to offending. Perhaps psychological factors may have played a part - for example in influencing a propensity towards drug or alcohol dependency. However, these are speculations, and are properly located within a dreamer level analysis.

Staying at a dreamer level, it is important to consider whether the ethnic differences in this phenomenon are generalisable to young male offenders at large. The very stark quantitative ethnic differences within the sample lends some credibility to the idea that more than chance, alone, is responsible for the differences in levels of problematic drug or alcohol use between Black-Caribbean and other interviewees. There are, however, other pieces of evidence which bear on this issue. For example, the predominantly black street robbers examined in studies by Burney (1990) and Barker et al. (1993) were not involved in hard drugs. It is possible, too, that the issue of black identity, as previously discussed, may be relevant here. Certainly, in the lyrics of 'gangster rap', while cannabis makes an appearance as the drug of choice, harder drugs are not presented as glamorous drugs to be seen taking.

As a final point to note: interviewees' involvement with drugs and alcohol might, in some ways, be seen as a 'background' feature of interviewees lives - insofar as this related to their broader biographical characteristics. Such an involvement does not, in itself, constitute a 'motivation' though it obviously gives rise to motivations. Its inclusion here reflects the fact, nonetheless, that an involvement in drugs or alcohol could be closely bound up with their
offending - particularly in the subjective worlds - or 'foreground' of some interviewees. However, a conceptualisation that might be appropriate is to consider the involvement in drugs, and perhaps the poor judgement that accompanies them, as a background feature, while the specific motivation to offend for drug money might be seen as a foreground feature. The status of drugs and alcohol involvement vis-à-vis a concern with background and foreground will be resolved more clearly in the next chapter.

**Machismo**

Some offending appeared to involve interviewees' desire to stand up for themselves or their friends when confronted or challenged in some way, to assert themselves generally or to project an image of toughness or machismo. Versions of this attitude were voiced explicitly by some interviewees:

*I don't like people taking liberties with me, making fun of me, get me? I have to stand up for myself. I'm not going to let people talk to me in a certain way. I'm not going to stand here and say, 'Oh yeah sticks and stones will break my bones' and all that.*

(M37, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

In criminal terms, this logic was sometimes implicated significantly in non-utilitarian offences of violence among interviewees, as illustrated by one interviewee in the following quote:

*We've been fighting since school and I come out of a pub and he was in a Chinese restaurant, it was the first time that I had seen him in about six months or so and I was shouting at him, telling him to go away before I end up beating him up or something and he was just ignoring me...So I sort of smashed a bottle, walked in the Chinese restaurant and stabbed him in his eye.*

(M32, Black-Mixed interviewee)

I noted, too, that examples of vandalism might also implicate this kind of motivation.

Versions of this motivation were found among interviewees from all ethnic backgrounds, and it would be difficult to identify any player level differences. However, working at a dreamer level, there was at least a perception among the interviewees that black people often had a tougher and more risk-taking mentality. This perception was found among interviewees from across ethnic backgrounds, lending some validity to the claim. One white interviewee, for example, made the following claim:
I think a lot of black people they got a lot of front, more than white people, they use their mouth a lot better, and they big themselves up a lot better... like, I'm the big "I am" - [if] you mess with me I'm hard' (M19, White interviewee)

Staying at a dreamer level, there was some suggestion that this more risk-taking mentality among black people could also draw them into more serious crime. In the following example, a Black-Caribbean interviewee compared the different approaches taken to acquisitive crime by white and black people, arguing that black people were more reckless, taking more risks and aiming for more money:

The way I see it, like, white people - they don't want to get caught, but they want to do it. But like black people don't give a damn. They don't care. It's whoever wants more money the most, you get me? White people...want to be cautious, like they don't care if they make this little bit of money, as long as they don't get caught. Black people, though, as long as they make a thousand pounds or something, they don't give a damn if they get caught. (M37, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Interestingly, and feeding into a dreamer model of analysis, the connection between being black and a more risk-taking taking attitude was also found in Sewell’s (1997) ethnographic study of black male school pupils. In one case, he reports on a discussion of illegal activities or 'scams' among a group of black pupils, in which they distinguish between a more risk-taking approach taken by young black people compared to their white counterparts in their approach to carrying out scams.

It is difficult, at a player level, to locate this kind of attitude in any precise way within the key theoretical processes assessed in this thesis, for the interviews did not provide any strong connections between these attitudes and their origins. As we shall see later in this chapter, however, some of this kind of attitude is located within group or gang processes, and could be said to be subcultural with some confidence. At a dreamer level, too, we might anticipate that there were some subcultural dimensions. Certainly, in specific formulations of subcultural theory, delinquent values have been portrayed as having some similar elements. For example, in Miller's (1958) conception, the characteristic of 'toughness' was seen as a key cultural theme underlying delinquency in the US, which had some similarities with this idea. Some evidence of this kind was also found in Downes study of English delinquents (1966). Jack Katz (1986), in his exploration of the 'ways of the badass' - a particular criminal dynamic - draws attention to the dynamic of 'being mean'. While not explicitly theorised as

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17. In a similar way to the quote above, one of a group of Afro-Caribbean subjects in Sewell's study says: 'the Black kids do it right up front and they don't care'.

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subculture, it is clear from his descriptions that this is seen, at least in part, as rooted in peer-group.

There may also be other processes at work. Staying at a dreamer level, such behaviour might also be a feature of, or emerge from, psychological problems and their manifestations as anti-social behaviour.

**Thrills**

For many interviewees from across ethnic backgrounds, some kind of enjoyment or 'thrill' was often invoked as a reasons for offending, and this was directly articulated by a number of interviewees. One interviewee, made this point very explicitly in a story he told about himself and his friends growing up:

> [Crime was] our sign of fun - not going to the adventure playground and playing on the swings. That ain't fun, we wanted more than that...I don't know, it's like when you're young you're just adventurous and you'll try all different things. (M37, Black-Caribbean)

This pursuit of thrills, as recounted in the stories of interviewees, has a certain plausibility. In the previous chapter, it was seen that interviewees became involved in offending when they were not at school, training or work and while living in deprived areas - often with little to do. At any rate, as noted above, certain non-utilitarian offences would appear to have an almost inevitable association with some kind of enjoyment, given that there were no material rewards for this kind of activity, nor were they associated with conflict or grudges. Joy-riding was perhaps the most obvious example:

> Just [used to] nick [cars]...for fun - just to joy-ride them to get a buzz out of it. (M15, White interviewees)

This being said, utilitarian crimes - carried out for material gain - were also described as exciting, suggesting that this could be a motivation to some extent. One interviewee talks about the fun associated with carrying out commercial burglaries:

> ...sometimes you get a little thrill out of it you know. Like you're running down the road with a computer. (M1, White interviewee)
Another recounted the excitement involved in carrying out armed robberies involving large amounts of cash:

...once you get into the swing of doing armed robberies it's just easy. I don't know, it's like a buzz. I can understand why people are doing that, because it's quick money and at the same time you're getting a buzz from it because...you're seeing all this money in bundles and big sacks and draws, thousands that you never thought you'd be able to get your hands on. (M8, Black-Caribbean)

There was some evidence of differences in the nature of thrills pursued by interviewees from different ethnic backgrounds. In particular, the pursuit of some crime among many of those from white, Black-Mixed, and to a lesser extent Asian backgrounds, often appeared to be motivated by a desire to stave off boredom, with material or financial benefits a secondary consideration or even absent. This led to non-utilitarian offending - obvious examples including vandalism or joy-riding. By contrast, offending among Black-Caribbean interviewees was more often described in instrumental ways, focusing more directly on the financial benefits accruing from it than simply the 'fun' of it. The basic quantitative differences between different ethnic groups of interviewees in this regard, however, could not be generalised to other offenders in a confident way. It might, however, be taken forward tentatively within a dreamer analysis.

At a player level, there was, once again, some evidence again of subcultural dynamics underpinning the pursuit of thrills. This is not least because crime tended to be carried out with others, and there was evidence of shared fun that emerged in this context. At a dreamer level, it is notable that thrill-seeking has a resonance with previous conceptualisations of delinquent subculture, such as Miller's (1958) notion of 'excitement' or the hedonism associated with Downes' (1966) young delinquents in England.

However, Matza's (1964) conception of 'delinquent subculture', which involves people looking for excitement by drawing on society's 'subterranean values', points us away from too rigid a view of the cultural origins of thrill-seeking. And Katz (1986), too, perhaps echoes this idea, in his discussion of 'sneaky thrills', in which he describes how shoplifting can be a clear source of excitement for middle-class young people. Rather than seeing such behaviour as situated within any kind of delinquent subculture, it is rooted in the playing out of an exciting psychic drama.
There is also some evidence that links thrill-seeking directly with processes within control theory. In the absence of legitimate activities to engage their attentions, illegal activities were perhaps a logical alternative source of satisfaction in their lives. At a player level, a few interviewees suggested such factors were important, for example:

I think part of the reason why I do the crime is for the money, yeah,...but the other reason is because it's something to do during [the] day, something to do. Something to go around and go home and think about, 'Oh yea, I've done that today, that was good'. (M29, White interviewee)

At a dreamer level, this dynamic was also articulated in relation to other offenders. One interviewee described these processes among young people in the area he had been living:

...all the kids...[have] got nothing to do... they're saying to me: 'oh, come on let's do something I'm bored man, I'm bored. He hasn't got caught - he's got two hundred pounds in his pocket' (M6, Black-Mixed interviewee)

Again, however, it is not possible to fully pin down the origins of thrill-seeking behaviour with the evidence here.

**Territorialism and gangs**

The idea that peer-groups provide an important basis for offending among interviewees from all ethnic groups is supported by the findings of the last chapter, which showed that interviewees had very often offended alongside friends. Beyond this, however, there were other ways in which the membership of groups could be seen as an important driver of offending, and these showed some potentially important differences between ethnic groups. This involved local tensions between groups of people from different areas, and in some cases the existence of more formal gangs. Loyalty to groups could involve participation in non-utilitarian conflict and violence. As such, it was a specific form of the machismo motivation discussed above. For example, one interviewee describes his involvement in a local conflict in the area he had grown up:

You've got two sorts of groups of people who hang around on [X]. Like on one side you've got the golf course, and then on another side, you've got the only pub that there is in [X] there. And we'd normally be in the pub, and they'd be in the golf course, and after a night's drinking you meet up with each other, and everyone would start fighting. (M32, Black-Mixed interviewee)
One Black-Caribbean interviewee also described conflict between gangs or areas over the proceeds of crime:

*Everything you got, you don't let people take it away from you...Like money that we work hard for, like you seem to work hard for, but you're really just stealing it, you get me. And people from other areas are doing the same thing. They feel tough like you. But some days they might not have money, so they want to take it from you. And you just don't have none of it, you get me. And it just starts turning your world into a crazy world.* (M13, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

In general terms, direct memberships of gangs, or something approximating to gangs, was relatively rare among the interviewees. One white interviewee who was in a gang, for example, claimed to be involved in the 'Triads', connected to the Chinese community. A couple of Black-Mixed interviewees also implicated some kind of gang culture in their delinquency, although this did not seem to involve well-organised gangs. None of the Asian interviewees appeared to be involved in gangs, though interviewees made references to Bangladeshi gangs in east London. A couple of the Black-Caribbean interviewees gave accounts that suggested involvement in gangs, though only one of these appeared particularly well formalised.

At a player level, therefore, the implication of this pattern among interviewees is that gangs are not likely to be a major factor in the explanation of offending. This militates against subcultural formulations which rely heavily on the gang-based explanations of delinquency (e.g. Cohen, 1955), though is consistent with earlier characterisations of English delinquency in which gangs do not play any significant kind of role (e.g. Downes, 1966). This being said, the fact that a number of interviewees had experienced involvement in gangs suggests that it does have some subcultural importance, and needs to be taken forward in a dreamer level analysis.

Staying at a broader, dreamer level, the descriptions given by interviewees when talking about gangs or territorialism in the areas they lived in, allows for some more generalised observations and some suggestions about ethnic differences. For example, in some cases, there was evidence that these hostilities involved conflict between those from different ethnic backgrounds. One Bangladeshi interviewee described such tensions in his local area:

*There's always fighting going on...between Bengalis - Asians against white boys or black boys. There's always racial tension going on.* (M27, Bangladeshi interviewee)
This might take us back to an idea of delinquency rooted, in some way, within ethnic conflict or racism. This was implicated in the last chapter in the school context, where some interviewees schooling was disrupted by what appeared to be racist harassment.

In the descriptions given by interviewees - notably the Black-Caribbean interviewees - gang culture among black people was portrayed as being more pervasive, organised and powerful than among other ethnic groups. This is in keeping with the more extreme descriptions given of black neighbourhoods by some interviewees, discussed in the last chapter. For example:

They're all black gangs...They're just all over the place, every area around [X], and I would say even in [Y], there's all gangs now...there's a big one in [A], big one in [B], and [B] and [A] fight against each other. One of the top lads there last year got killed. He was shot. So like it gets worser and worser. (M26, Black-Caribbean)

It's nothing but war out there...Gang wars and that. It's all just gone pear-shaped...now when you're out there you have to watch your back, man. You don't know who's your enemy and where's your enemy, what direction they are going to come from and that...People don't use fists no more to fight; they don't use knives no more to fight. They use guns. (M51, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

In addition to violence, the gang activities discussed by Black-Caribbean interviewees appear to involve a direct link to other forms of crime, including examples of utilitarian crime. One gave the following insight into the recruitment process for his local gang:

I know the person who's the leader...You might get a friend to go to him and ask him, and he might say 'what is he like?' and 'can he rob banks?' and that. And then you'll probably go out on a bank robbery the first time...jump over the counter of the bank and that, and probably like nine boys have CS gas and bicycle masks over their face, jump over the counter, grab the money from behind the back of the counter, jump back over, and if you hold good in that, you're just one of the lads from then. (M26, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Staying at a dreamer level of analysis, there is some circumstantial evidence, once again, that distinctive black gang style criminality articulated by interviewees may take some of its influence from international cultural influences. Certainly, there is an immediate resonance between the accounts given by Black-Caribbean interviewees with black gang culture in the US. Once again, 'gangster rap' lyrics may provide us with a useful narrative around archetypes of US based gang lifestyle. The following verse from NWA's 'Gangsta Gangsta' serves as an illustration:
[Verse]

Here's a little somethin' 'bout a nigga like me
Never shoulda been let out the penitentiary
Ice Cube would like ta say
That I'm a crazy mutha fucka from around the way
Since I was a youth, I smoked weed out
Now I'm the mutha fucka that ya read about
Takin' a life or two
That's what the hell I do, you don't like how I'm livin' well fuck you!
This is a gang, and I'm in it
My man Dre'll fuck you up in a minute
With a right left, right left you're toothless
And they you say goddamn they ruthless!
Everywhere we go they say [damn!]
NWA's fuckin' up the program
And then you realize we don't care
We don't just say no, we too busy sayin' yeah!
To drinkin' straight out the eight bottle
Do I look like a mutha fuckin' role model?
To a kid lookin' up ta me
Life ain't nothin' but bitches and money.
'Cause I'm tha type o' nigga that's built ta last
If ya fuck with me I'll put a foot in your ass
See I don't give a fuck 'cause I keep bailin'
Yo, what the fuck are they yellin'?

Supporting this idea, one Black-Mixed interviewee observed, in relation to some of the black inmates within the YOI where he was interviewed, that a territorial culture was evident, and had a resonance with media portrayals of US:

_They always say 'yeah, I'm from South London', 'yeah, I'm from West', 'I'm from East'. They all seem to be just one mad competition to see who can get the most money, see who can buy the most clothes and that...they just think they're like in America or something, been watching too many videos and listening too much to that rap music._ (Black-Mixed interviewee, M32)

'Survival'

While offending for money to spend on expensive lifestyles was a common feature of interviewees' offending, as has been discussed above, offending to provide for basic needs was relatively rare. Nonetheless there were occasional examples where this had happened. For example, one interviewee who had run away from home, and was not in the receipt of
any income from work or financial support from his family, found himself committing crime to pay for food:

*I wanted money to...feed myself as well, I was always hungry, always eating, always being hungry.* (M16, White interviewee)

In another example, an interviewee began crime to provide for his family, after his mother became an alcoholic and was no longer providing for her children effectively:

*My mum weren't doing...no food shopping, she weren't buying no clothes. All she was doing was collecting her child benefit money and whatever and was drinking it. That...would leave me and my sister hungry, no food in the house. So who is going to look after us? Obviously I had to go out and do it, like.* (M51, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

This phenomenon was less a direct symptom of any poverty or deprivation within interviewees' backgrounds; rather it featured more as a problem contingent on other difficulties - in these case running away from home and the potential support that provided, and an alcoholic mother failing to provide parental care to her children. As such, these problems may be seen as symptomatic of a breakdown in control processes in the backgrounds of offenders. In any case, the infrequent nature of such events means they probably do not feature as very significant explanations for offending among offenders more generally.

**Specialisation**

In Chapter 2 I observed that much previous, albeit statistical, research suggests that offending is a generalised rather than specialised activity. I suggested, however, that a qualitative approach might yet allow for a more nuanced exploration of the possibility of specialisation in offending. I noted, also, that upon inspection there was quite compelling evidence from other research and statistics for specialisation along ethnic lines - a dimension often unexplored within some of the key statistical studies which have addressed the issue of specialisation.

**The nature of specialisation**

The picture that emerges from the interviewees is suggestive of a degree of specialisation among offenders. That is, while interviewees, or at least those who had offended more, had
typically been involved in a range of offences, the interviews suggested nonetheless that interviewees were often different from one another in the offences they had favoured during their offending careers. So while some might have focused on car crime, others may have focused more on robberies, while others may have focused more on violence. For example, M32 (a Black-Mixed interviewee) had never carried out a utilitarian crime, but had been seriously involved in violence, including stabbings, often relating to gang fights. M3 (a white interviewee), while he had been involved in burglaries and stealing cars to sell, had predominantly focused on joyriding offences. And M4 had principally carried out street robberies.

Not only was this true for the offending of the interviewees within the study, it was also a point made and acknowledged in the stories told by some of the interviewees, such as in the following account:

... everyone's got their own choice of what crimes they want to do. When you ask everyone in here why they're in here well they tell you all sorts of things that they are in here for...all sorts of things they do. (M45, Pakistani interviewee)

The pattern of specialisation among interviewees also showed a relationship with ethnicity. That is, there were some important broad ethnic differences in the types of offences that had been carried out by interviewees, even after disregarding the interviewees under sentence for the offence being compared. These differences can be summarised as follows:

- robbery was more common among Black-Caribbean interviewees;
- burglary was more common among white and Black-Mixed interviewees;
- car theft - particularly where it involved joy-riding - was more common among white interviewees;
- drug-dealing was found to be more common among Black-Caribbean and Black-Mixed interviewees; and
- examples of vandalism were more common among white and Black-Mixed interviewees.

Once again, these player level differences were echoed in information from other sources - strengthening dreamer level claims that might be made off the back of them. I have already noted that the association of black people with robbery offences is consistent with a more general picture of offenders which emerges from empirical evidence reviewed in Chapters 1
and 2. This includes, for example, the association of black offenders with robbery (e.g. Mayhew et al. 1993; Stockdale and Grisham, 1998; prison statistics in Table 1.2), and to a lesser extent, the association of young black male offenders with drugs offences, and burglary with young white male offenders (prison statistics in Table 1.2). Additionally, some interviewees also made explicit links between ethnicity and crime in their accounts - lending further weight to the idea that this pattern was a more general one. The strongest connections were made between black offenders and robbery offences, while white offenders were more often associated with crimes such as burglary or car theft:

> It is associated with black people, really, street robberies...A lot of the white kids, they don’t do it...[...]...white guys will do burglaries, joyriding, ram raids, things like that. (M19, White interviewee)

> Some [of my friends] would do small robberies and some would be big robberies...they’re mostly black...I know a lot of white lads from [X]... they would do crime but they would do no crimes of this scale - [instead they would do] like ringing and car robberies [thefts] and car stereos and that and sell hash. (M26, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

In relation to Asian offenders, no clear pattern of specialisation emerged from the interviews, although there were perceived connections made between Asian groups and crimes related to drugs:

> What I’ve noticed with Asians is that there is a few people that do [crime]...But most of the Asian people are doing...either like drug dealing or something like that most of the time. There is crime, yeah, but they are not like going out, like committing crime, robbing people or doing that. (M38, Pakistani interviewee)

> [In X]...Asians are mainly into heroin and all that - a lot of Asian blokes are into heroin. (M27, Bangladeshi interviewee).

**Explaining specialisation**

It is important to explore explanations of specialisation. In doing this, it is useful, first of all, to acknowledge that the motivational themes discussed above play a very important role in specialisation, because of the distinctive links they have with different types of crimes. To recap on some of the main motivations that have been identified, and the crimes with which they are associated, I have summarised these in Table 6.2. This utilises the distinction between utilitarian and non-utilitarian offending, discussed earlier in the chapter. However,
based on the fact that non-utilitarian crime could be carried out potentially for enjoyment, or for reasons of conflict, this has been further subdivided.

Table 6.2 Motivations and associated offences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of offending</th>
<th>Crimes</th>
<th>Motivations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Utilitarian offending</td>
<td>Burglary, Robbery, Theft, Drug-dealing</td>
<td>Consumption-oriented lifestyles, Money for drugs/alcohol, ‘Survival’, (Thrills), (Machismo), (Territorialism and gangs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment focused non-utilitarian offending</td>
<td>Joy-riding, Vandalism, Violence</td>
<td>Thrills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflictual non-utilitarian offending</td>
<td>Vandalism, Violence</td>
<td>Machismo, Territorialism and gangs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At a basic level, it is self-evident that, to a significant extent, the balance of criminal motivations that can be found within individuals go some way to accounting for the crimes they engage with. So, for example, if we return to the examples of specialised offenders discussed earlier, we can see that different types of motivations may dominate for different individual's offending patterns. M32 (a Black-Mixed interviewee), it will be recalled, had never carried out a utilitarian crime, but had been seriously involved in violence, including stabbings, often relating to gang fights. Clearly, he was strongly motivated by machismo which, in turn, was tied in with territorialism or gang loyalties. It is possible, too, that thrills were an important part of his motivation. M3 (a white interviewee), while he had been involved in burglaries and stealing cars to sell, had predominantly focused on joyriding offences. As such, he was particularly motivated in his offending by the pursuit of thrills, but had some interest in offending for a consumption-oriented lifestyle. And M4 (a Black-Caribbean interviewee), who had principally carried out street robberies was highly motivated by a consumption-oriented lifestyle. To some extent, ethnic variations in offending across interviewees also reflect such motivational differences. For example, the connection between robbery and Black-Caribbean interviewees - which is clearly a

18. 'Car ringing' involves changing the identities of stolen cars for resale.
utilitarian crime - seems to have a strong consumption-oriented lifestyle motivation, which featured as an important motivation for many of the Black-Caribbean interviewees.

It is probably not enough, however, simply to see different offenders as having different 'bundles' of the motivations already reviewed, for these on their own, lack the specificity that is required. They do not tell us, for example, why in some cases robbery is chosen, while in other cases burglary is chosen, for both of these are utilitarian crimes and might be seen as tied in with the same range of motivations. Furthermore, even if we accept that variations in patterns of motivations are responsible for variations in patterns of offending, it is important that we understand how these come about. Exploring these issues takes us beyond highly contextualised evidence within the 51 interviewees. Instead, it draws on a number of fragments of evidence from interviews - often involving interviewees reporting on other offenders. As such, this section primarily involves a dreamer analysis.

**Subcultural influences**

I have noted already that subcultural processes, at least in part, appear to underpin the development of at least some criminal motivations. Importantly, the evidence from the interviews also suggests that these subcultural influences can also contribute in a more specific way to specialisation in terms of specific crimes, and no doubt the motivations that accompany them. For example, some interviewees attributed their involvement in certain types of crime with particular social contacts:

*My two mates they used to live...directly over the road from my mum's house. And one day, like, one of them came out...[and] me and him just started communicating...And after that I just started hanging about with him...And then we'd just go out, thieve a car, do a burglary, do the same thing everyday...[Later on]...like I stopped hanging about with him and then starting moving with my other mates. Then it started to robbery.* (M14, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

*I picked up the idea of [fraudulently obtaining credit at] electrical places off of a friend, because he was doing it. He always used to do it - a couple of people I know used to do that so I thought: 'yeah'. I picked some of the ideas up off of it.* (M20, Black-Mixed interviewee)

Moving to a dreamer level, the idea of subcultural influence rooted in the social backgrounds of interviewees, was an idea suggested by a number of interviewees in relation to particular neighbourhoods. For example:
[In X] you find...drugs and drug crimes and a few robberies. And if you go to somewhere like [Y], you find a lot more burglaries and car theft. (Black-Mixed interviewee)

A lot of the kids in our area do like robberies and all different crimes, where [X on the other hand]...like they are car thieves and ram raiders. (White interviewee)

Staying at a dreamer level, we might go further and suggest that some of the ethnic specialisation in offending was attributable to subcultural differences. Certainly, this suggestion was made by some interviewees, drawing notably on the idea of neighbourhood. For example, one interviewee felt there was a direct connection between robbery among young black male offenders and a particular area in which they had grown up:

If you ever did look at a survey or did do a survey in the jail [you would]... see that...most of the black guys that are in are from...[X] and that's where the street robberies are, because they grow up in a community where these things happen. (Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Drugs

It is notable that where interviewees reported developing serious drug problems, particularly where this required obtaining money for their habit, they often described a general ratcheting-up of crime. Those interviewees (typically those who were not Black-Caribbean) whose main utilitarian offences were initially non-violent - such as theft or burglary - could often get involved in more violent types of crime to make money - namely types of robbery - as they became increasingly desperate for money quickly and often in large quantities. For example, M19 a white interviewee who initially was involved in crimes such as thefts and burglaries, became involved in robberies of off-licences when he became heavily dependent on heroin. Similarly, M29 who was involved in stealing cars, and a few street robberies, developed a crack habit that ratcheted up his crime. At this point, his crime developed into a far more regular pattern of robbery.

This pattern, however, does less to specifically explain ethnic specialisation. Indeed the effect of drug or alcohol problems is to reduce the difference between black offenders and those from other backgrounds in their different propensities to engage in robbery offences.
A key idea to emerge from the interviews is that different types of offenders - and accompanying motivations and specialisms - may have broader distinctive characteristics. These 'identities' can be seen as important in structuring patterns of offending. This idea was best illustrated in the following account:

_You get a certain type of people who do a certain crime. You get the shop-lifter type, the car-thief type, burglary type. You've got the kind that will be in for assaults and crimes...like violence, robberies. ...I can look at someone and I could tell you from the way they talk and the way they carry on what sort of things they do. The way they dress, or there's this particular walk - you can tell what kind of person they are._

(M21, Black-Mixed interviewee)

In keeping with the idea of offenders having particular identities, and that these identities involved certain offending dispositions, some interviewees could offer specific moral rationalisations for their offending choices:

_I will help an old lady across the road - I won't agree with no-one mugging an old lady...I've never robbed no-one in my life...I've robbed their houses but I've never robbed them._ (M31, White interviewee)

_I don't like to rob people. Like I prefer to rob a business because they've got insurance, you get me? I don't like picking on people - like actually robbing someone, get me? Like if you had a Rolex watch I wouldn't trouble you getting it. I would rather go and rob a bank you know what I mean?_ (M6, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

We should be cautious about taking these claims at face values, based as they are on uncorroborated meanings within accounts, and corresponding closely with Sykes and Matza's (1957) 'techniques of neutralisation'. However they do add some further weight to the dreamer level idea that offenders' identities had some role in structuring their offending choices.

No doubt, identities evolved through the kinds of processes already discussed, such as engagement with particular subcultural groupings, or involvement in drugs. However, it is unlikely that these identities are reducible to them. For there was some evidence that the different offender identities could have distinct ethnic dimension to them, and in exploring this, other sources of identity are highlighted. I have already discussed, in my exploration of the motivations of offending, certain strong elements of consumption-oriented lifestyle,
machismo and involvement in gang culture as potentially important themes directing black offenders. In turn, some of these have been linked to broader cultural, or transcultural, themes. These themes appear also to form a part of a specific identity among some black offenders. So, in relation to specialisation the idea of black identity was invoked by some interviewees in a specific way to explain an association between black offenders and robbery. This drew on particular types of motivation, already discussed, but was worked into a specific form. So, an association of black people with confrontation and risk-taking motivations was linked with robbery offences by one interviewee, himself from a Black-Caribbean background:

*The black community's probably, I could put it down to more aggressive...I could even put it down to more bottle. They would prefer to go out and rob someone of his possessions than rob [burgle] a shop when it's shut the door...* (M8, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

This point was echoed in a similar claim by a Black-Mixed interviewee:

*That's why a lot more muggings are done by black people: because they're braver, they're bolder, they do things that a lot of people wouldn't do, whereas...another different kind of criminal would go and steal a car or break into someone's house...* (M21, Black-Mixed interviewee)

Additionally, there was also some suggestion that robbery could more readily provide the cash that could feed into the distinctive money-focused lifestyle which was an important motivation for some black offenders. Indeed there was even a suggestion that the crime itself was bound up with the lifestyle and identity, as suggested by one Black-Caribbean interviewee:

... it's like robberies were fashionable...It's like everyone's doing it like. And then well I see two of my mates coming back, they're older yeah, and I was about 15-16 it was the summer holidays and he must have had something like £14,000 and he must have gave me about £900. He just gave it to me, and I went with someone one time and he just flew a little off-licence till like...and from then it just went on and on. (M12, Black-Caribbean interviewee)

Offender identities may take their origins from wider cultural sources - a point that emerged most strongly in relation to black offenders. For example, looking again at the connection between black people and robbery, it is notable that robbery can be seen to feature in the lyrics of 'gangsta rap'. This point was made by Black-Caribbean interviewee M26 in an earlier quotation in this chapter. It is not hard to find examples of robbery within such lyrics. For example, Eazy E's track 'Nobody Move' describes an armed bank robbery, characterised
by the repeated sample: 'Nobody move, nobody get hurt'. This might, as earlier on, point towards transcultural influences on offending.

It is important to avoid an excessive essentialism in equating a distinctive offending identity with those from Black-Caribbean backgrounds. As Back (1996) has shown, ethnic identities within multi-racial urban environments show a certain amount of fluidity and hybridity - certainly there are those who may take on aspects of ethnic identity not dictated by family lineage, but reflecting patterns of social and neighbourhood association. This idea is reflected in a different example, in which an interviewee describes how white offenders may embrace a black offender's identity, both in terms of the music listened to, and in terms of robbery as the crime of choice:

\[
\text{I've actually known a couple of white lads that do street robberies... but... they've picked up a black's identity. The white boys, they're more like black boys: they listen to reggae music, soul, R & B. They're not like white guys... (M8, Black-Caribbean interviewee)}
\]

As a final point, it is important to note that the focus here, and earlier, on motivational and identity issues specifically as they attach to black offenders to some extent reflects the emphasis within the interview data. In part this probably reflects my interest as an interviewer - in pursuing the issue of specialisation and ethnicity, the particular association between black offenders and robbery was an inevitable focus. However, it also reflects the fact that interviewees themselves tended to single out black offenders for their distinctive characteristics. This being said, it is important to keep our mind open to other forms of ethnic offender identities that were less explicit with this interview data, but which might, for example, go some way to explaining the high levels of engagement in drugs among white interviews, or their fascination with joy-riding and car theft.

**Discussion and conclusions**

In this chapter, I have taken a direct look at the foreground of interviewees' offending to provide an alternative to the background focus of the previous chapter. The chapter has come to some important conclusions. On the one hand, it has come to some measured and well grounded conclusions based at a player level. However, the analysis has also involved some more developed, albeit more provisional, dreamer level ideas. The player levels and dreamer levels are dealt with in turn, below.
Player level conclusions

The player level analysis is obviously concerned exclusively with the 51 interviewees studied. It should be noted at the outset, too, that because of the heavy reliance on 'meanings' within the accounts of interviewees (as defined in Chapter 4) the analysis - particularly around the issue of motivations - should be seen as slightly less robust than the more factual analysis in the previous chapter, of for that matter the specific, factual patterns of offending described within this chapter.

At a player level, this research identified a range of both 'utilitarian' and 'non-utilitarian' offences that interviewees had carried out. Several motivations for criminality were also identified among interviewees - though it is important to acknowledge that these should not be seen as definitive, for relying strongly on accounts of meanings, as they did, they had a provisional status. These motivations included: consumption-oriented lifestyles; money to fund a serious involvement in drugs or alcohol; machismo; 'thrills'; territorial and gang conflicts; and, occasionally, providing for basic needs - or 'survival'. These motivations varied in the extent to which they supported different types of crime - in particular whether they supported utilitarian or non-utilitarian crimes. There was evidence of ethnic differences among interviewees in their motivations, notably including specific ethnic differences. Thus, the accumulation of money to spend on lifestyle was a concern among white interviewees, their offending frequently influenced by an involvement in drugs and alcohol. While similar motivations were found among the Black-Mixed and Asian interviewees, the Black-Caribbean interviewees were different. Their offending was very often focused on the accumulation of money to finance an expensive lifestyle, and was not closely associated with serious drug or alcohol problems. In view of the strength of this theme for the Black-Caribbean interviewees, it appeared therefore that strain dynamics was a particularly important issue for them.

These motivations, importantly, supported broader criminological theories invoking strain and subcultural explanations. However, the delinquent motivations among interviewees were not necessarily reducible to these theoretical processes. Though interviewees accounts did not allow for a full assessment of the origins of all of these motivations, it was suggested that other processes, related to such things as drug markets or individual sources of psychic
satisfaction might also have underpinned such motivations - though these are suggestions which can only be made at a dreamer level. We shall also see below how, at a dreamer level at least, there was some suggestion of broader cultural influences at play in shaping offending motivations.

This chapter also found that interviewees were, to some extent, specialised in their crime - that is different interviewees had some tendency to favour certain types of crime over others. Importantly, this specialisation had an ethnic dimension to it. Notably, robbery was more common among Black-Caribbean interviewees, burglary was more common among white and Black-Mixed interviewees, car theft - particularly where it involved joy-riding - was more common among white interviewees; drug-dealing was found to be more common among Black-Caribbean and Black-Mixed interviewees; and examples of vandalism were more common among white and Black-Mixed interviewees. In general terms, variations in the patterns of motivations between individual interviewees, and between ethnic groups, go some way to accounting for specialisation in their offending. However, on their own, basic motivational differences outlined are probably not specific enough to account fully for specialisation and, at any rate, require explanations themselves. Although it was beyond a player level of analysis to develop these explanations further, the dreamer level analysis did so - and is discussed below.

**Dreamer level conclusions**

In considering the dreamer level conclusions that can be made from the findings of this chapter, it is useful, once again, to consider these alongside the key research objectives.

First of all, then, I shall consider the implications of this chapter's analysis for Objective 1 - to develop a theoretical framework for conceptualising the etiology of offending. Perhaps the most powerful and significant observation to make - one that can be made with a genuine confidence about offenders more generally - is that offending needs to be understood with reference to the motivations that direct it. In particular, a theoretical framework should pay attention to the motivational themes identified across the interviewees in this study - particularly given that many of these are evident also in other studies, e.g. consumption-based motivations (Cohen, 1972), drugs and alcohol (e.g. Audit Commission, 1996; Flood-

In considering the nature and origins of these motivations, among the interviewees, this chapter further supports the idea of a generalised theoretical framework encompassing consumption-oriented strain theory and subcultural theory, as proposed in Chapter 5. However, criminal motivations should not be seen as following in any simple way from the background causal processes that contribute towards the development of offending, dealt with by established theory (and explored in Chapter 5). While such processes may be important, broader cultural or transcultural processes are likely to be important too, as perhaps are other dynamics, such as individual forms of psychic satisfaction or drug markets.

In significant part, different patterns of motivational themes, as outlined, go some way to account for variations in the types of crime carried out and patterns of specialisation among offenders. In turn, it is likely that specialisation is ultimately underpinned by, and given more specificity through, background influences. The chapter identified localised neighbourhood subcultural influences as one influence, and serious involvement with drugs as another. However, one important suggestion is that there were different types of offenders with different characteristics, or 'identities', and that these might also play a role in structuring patterns of offending.

I will now go on to consider Objective 2 - relating to provisional ideas about differences between offenders from different ethnic backgrounds. First of all, a broadly similar range of motivations can be seen to underpin crimes across ethnic backgrounds. Motivations that appear particularly common across ethnic groups, based on the interviews, include consumption-oriented lifestyles, thrill-seeking, and machismo. In this sense there were important consistencies across ethnic groups which are likely to be more generalisable. Nonetheless, there were differences in the importance of these motivations across interviewees. These differences, furthermore, were acknowledged by interviewees, and showed some consistency with other literature, suggesting that they were likely to be more generalisable.
Notably, the consumption-oriented lifestyle motivation echoes with the picture of at least some black offenders portrayed in other literature (London Borough of Lewisham et al., 1998; Burney 1990; Barker et al. 1993). The same evidence suggests that hard drugs may not be a feature with the black offenders, also consistent with the Black-Caribbean interviewees. Dreamer level evidence, not reflected at the player level, further suggested that black offending was often more assertive, and could involve developed 'gang' or 'territorial' conflicts. The connection between being black and a more risk-taking attitude was also found in Sewell's (1997) ethnographic study of black male school pupils. Though there is less direct corroborative evidence, the influence of drugs and alcohol among white interviewees, and to a lesser extent Black-Mixed and Asian interviewees, also translates to a dreamer-level claim. Interestingly, given that the experiences of Black-Mixed interviewees seem more closely aligned with white than Black-Caribbean interviewees, it might be suggested that the white maternal lineage among the Black-Mixed offenders anchors them more closely in the circumstances and lifestyles of white offenders than Black-Caribbean offenders. In exploring the Black-Caribbean group's concern with a consumption-based lifestyle I drew on some interview evidence, and music lyrics, that suggested the existence of 'transculture' as a basis for offending for black offenders - namely international cultural themes not mediated primarily by direct personal social associations, but through the impersonal processes of general media consumption. There was some interview evidence that these influences might also be relevant to gang-culture among black offenders.

Staying with Objective 2, and thinking about the specialisation of offending, it seems likely (following the interviewees) that broadly similar crimes are committed by offenders across ethnic background. This being said, there is a strong case for some specialisation with ethnic dimensions. Most marked among interviewees was a strong association between black offenders and the crime of robbery - echoed in the wider perceptions of a range of interviewees about offenders more generally and the empirical evidence reviewed in Chapters 1 and 2. This includes, notably, the association of black offenders with robbery (e.g. Mayhew et al. 1993; Stockdale and Grisham, 1998; prison statistics in Table 1.2). By contrast, white offenders were more often associated with burglaries and car crimes. While it was difficult to identify offending specialisation among Asian interviewees, Asian offenders were perceived by some interviewees to be associated with drug-related crimes. As already discussed, different patterns of motivational themes outlined in this chapter within individuals go some way to accounting variations in the types of crime carried out and
patterns of specialisation - in turn associated with, and given more specificity through, subcultural, cultural and other influences, such as those already outlined. It is likely that these play an important role in structuring specialisation along ethnic lines. However, specific 'offender identities' have also been suggested as important. Specifically, there was some evidence of a distinctive black identity bound up with consumption-oriented lifestyles, machismo and gang culture. These were potentially important themes directing their offending - notably robbery seemed bound up with this identity. While it went beyond the evidence presented within this chapter, a dreamer level analysis also allows us to speculate that other forms of ethnic identity might be important in framing and directing the motivations and offending of other ethnic groups. This might include an identity among white offenders which supported thrill-seeking behaviour in the form of joy-riding.
7. Offending careers

Introduction

In this chapter I look at the careers of offenders. While I draw on the insights of the previous chapter, I consider how they are relevant to an unfolding criminal career. This will allow for the development of some generalised theoretical principles to describe these careers. I will illustrate issues relevant to the development of such a theoretical framework by making reference to specific interviewees - sometimes at length. As a supplement to this, a number of the interviewees’ histories are also presented as case studies in Appendix B drawing, to a significant extent, on interviewees’ own accounts.

Specific aims of the chapter

The aims of this chapter, therefore, are:

- to assess how the theoretical processes identified in the foreground and background of offending apply across interviewees' careers;

- to develop theoretical ideas to explain offending careers;

- to assess whether there are any differences in these processes among interviewees which relate to their membership of different ethnic groups;

- on the back of this player approach (focusing only on the interviewees), to use a more generalised dreamer approach to contribute to meeting the study's objectives.

Chapter structure

The chapter will proceed first of all by providing a general description of interviewees offending careers. This will be followed by an extensive discussion about causal processes as they unfold within an offending career. A typology of offender 'types' will then be developed, incorporating the emergent insights within the chapter. Finally, a discussion
section will draw together the insights of the chapter, specifically attending to the objectives of the study.

Validity issues

This chapter will draw, to a significant extent on biographies constructed through analysis process, as detailed in Chapter 4. To recap: these rely to a significant extent on the facts that were provided by interviewees. As such, these biographies have a robust underpinning. Nonetheless, the construction of biographies also relied on meanings and stories, which were inevitably less robust elements of accounts, so these biographies are, in places, necessarily more provisional. Overall, however, the insights developed within this chapter should be seen as fairly robust.

Histories of offending

It is important, first of all, to recap and develop some of the empirical features of offending careers, which need to be explained. There a number of important observations to make, in this regard, which apply across ethnic groups.

First of all, the age at which offending began in the career of interviewees was quite variable. This variety is usefully illustrated by looking across the cases studies in Appendix B. For example, Marcus (a Black-Caribbean interviewee) notes how he has been 'on the street raising money' from the age of eight. By contrast, Wayne (a Black-Mixed interviewee) started offending at 18, after completing school at 16 and doing part of a youth training course and some casual work becoming involved in crime. In general terms, there were a few interviewees who had started their crime very early such as eight to 10 years-old. However there were a few who had started as late even as 18 years-old.

Secondly, in following through the careers of interviewees, it was broadly possible to identify two broad clusters of offending behaviour. On the one hand there were interviewees whose offending patterns had developed into a 'serious' pattern, in that they had come to offend frequently or at least had come to be involved in some very serious crimes (though usually both). On the other hand, there were interviewees whose offending patterns had been 'less serious' - that is, at their most developed offending patterns involved less regular
offending and less serious crimes. For example, Michael (M8, Black interviewee, in Appendix B) was a 'serious' offender. He had carried out a large number of crimes - particularly car thefts and robberies - and eventually became involved in armed robbery. By contrast Farhad (M44, Bangladeshi interviewee, in Appendix B) was a 'less serious' offender, who had a more occasional involvement in offending, had carried out occasional thefts (principally shoplifting) and some credit card fraud. His most serious crime was a single street robbery, which involved taking somebody's ring.

Finally, a point to bring out from the previous chapter is the issue of specialisation. As noted previously, for example, while some interviewees focused on car crime, others focused more on robberies, while others may have focused more on violence. So, M32 (a Black-Mixed interviewee) had never carried out a utilitarian crime, but had been seriously involved in violence, including stabbings, often relating to gang fights. M3 (a white interviewee), while he had been involved in burglaries and stealing cars to sell, had predominantly focused on joyriding offences. And M4 had principally carried out street robberies.

Explaining offending careers

In looking to explain offending careers, it is important to consider how the contrasting perspectives offered in the previous two chapters should be reconciled. We have seen, on the one hand, how background issues in the lives of interviewees had a structuring role in the offending behaviour of interviewees. On the other hand, we have noted the importance of the more immediate, subjective worlds of offenders, involving the specific motivations, in directing offending behaviour.

In doing this, it is useful to acknowledge that the two perspectives resonate with traditionally opposing paradigms of social analysis which have focused respectively on structure (e.g. positivism, functionalism) and action (e.g. symbolic interactionism, rational choice theory). In criminological terms, it is probably fair to say that many of the studies relying on statistics (e.g. Farrington, 1994; Graham and Bowling, 1995) have often framed the development of offending in terms of 'structure', in the form of factors which are seen, in broad terms, as things that 'happen to' or 'act on' those who become involved in offending. Historical strain perspectives (specifically those which do not rely on subculture) might also fall into this category. By contrast, studies which are concerned primarily with action include some other
studies already discussed (e.g. Katz, 1984). A classic approach of this kind is by Becker (1963) who used qualitative interviews to identify the criteria by which people became marijuana users. In doing so, all of his criteria involved active effort and engagement on the part of the user to learn to smoke and enjoy the drug.

In practice, some synthesis is required of the extreme perspectives of, on the one hand, a fully active actor in total control of his destiny, and, on the other hand, a passive actor whose behaviour is simply a product of social forces. Certainly, while the interviews in this study illustrate that interviewees were confronted with contexts and situations which they did not fully control, it is clear, nonetheless, that they actively negotiated and responded to these factors, and even had some role in shaping the factors that they had to contend with. Thus, while they may have been born into dysfunctional families, grown up in criminalised neighbourhoods, gone to bad schools, mixed with criminals, or have had certain psychological difficulties, in order to commit crime it is likely that they first chose to make friends with other people involved in crime, they may have decided to experiment with drugs, they may become interested in clothes or cars, and ultimately, they had to choose to offend. It is reasonable to suggest that some people with such difficult backgrounds do not choose the path that takes them to criminality. This can be illustrated in a limited way using the case studies in Appendix B. For example, Wayne (M17, Black-Mixed interviewee), despite having some early family problems, and some of his friends dropping out of school and becoming involved in crime, completed school, did his exams and went on to do youth training. Clearly, he later became involved in crime. But, until he was 18, he resisted the temptation to follow his friends into criminality. By contrast, Farhad (M44, Bangladeshi interviewee; also in Appendix B) with no clear family problems, started truanting and got into crime from the age of about 15, apparently responding to the influences of his friends and those in his neighbourhood. While we probably do not know all the circumstances of the careers of these two interviewees from their accounts, there is a strong suggestion that they negotiated some similar issues in different ways and, accordingly, became involved in crime at different stages of their lives.

This chapter, in bringing together the foreground and background analysis of previous chapters, must develop a framework for thinking about action and structure together.
Criminogenic constraints

To do this, it is first of all useful to draw on Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration, which is specifically committed to resolving the disjunction between the structure and action approaches in traditional social theory. Specifically, this chapter will invoke Giddens' notion of 'constraint'. Giddens argues that only in very exceptional circumstances are humans completely constrained. These occasions involve physical force, for example when a person is unwillingly knocked to the ground. In all other circumstances, even where people claim to have no choice, there are options open to them. So if somebody has a gun to their head and is asked for their money, the option of refusing is still open to them, even though the consequences might be dire. The point here is that people almost always have the option to 'do otherwise'. Therefore, it is not reasonable to think of social forces operating through actors. Thus, in relation to the current study, we should not think of the interviewees as doing crime as a necessary consequence, for example, of having weak bonds with family or school, or as a consequence of economic strain, or of their location within a group of peers involved in offending.

Giddens identifies three types of constraint. Physical constraints are taken to revolve around 'the body and its location in contexts of the material world'; included in this, among a range of other things, are 'the sensory and communicative capabilities of the human body'. Constraints of power are experienced as sanctions of various kinds, or the prospect of them. Finally, structural constraints relate to 'given' or 'objective' structural properties that the individual agent is unable to change. These place 'limits upon the range of options open to an actor, or plurality of actors in a given circumstance or type of circumstance'.

To take this idea forward in this chapter, I will use the idea of 'criminogenic constraint'. This will be used to refer to those circumstances and processes that have been implicated in this research as giving rise to offending through their 'constraining' effects. Specifically, they will encompass those factors which sit within interviewees' backgrounds, dealt with most directly in Chapter 5 of this thesis. It is important to note that psychological processes are included here as constraints. This is because the kinds of issues we are dealing with can be seen as falling within Giddens idea of 'physical' constraints. In a similar way, I will also invoke a problematic involvement in drugs as a constraint, for this too may be seen as 'physical'. To elaborate on the reasoning here, the point of including these as constraints is to
do justice to the very significant limiting influence on the reasoning and choices made on interviewees of these issues. So established psychological problems (manifesting themselves as longstanding anti-social behaviour patterns), dyslexia, drug-withdrawal symptoms, or intoxication all can be seen as forms of constraint which interviewees have had to actively negotiate.

**Motivated action**

Having identified the criminogenic constraints that operate on interviewees, it is also important to consider further how interviewees negotiated those constraints, and how motivational elements come into play. Giddens is weaker on addressing this kind of issue. Certainly, he identifies motivations and reasoning as important in understanding action. However, he does little to elaborate what these might consist of in practice, or how they may play themselves out - at least not in a way which would help us understand how people choose deviant or unusual actions.

Digging further back in history, therefore, an author who made an earlier attempt to reconcile structural and motivational elements of action was Weber, in his analysis of the origins of capitalism (Weber, 1930). Weber's point is a simple one. He claims that the structural conditions for modern capitalism had been present at a number of times and places in history. However, capitalism only actually developed in one of these contexts (i.e. Western Europe in the eighteenth century) where an animating capitalist 'spirit' emerged alongside those conditions. This spirit had its roots in a Calvinist religious doctrine of predestination, and was associated with a particular subjective condition of 'salvation anxiety' that galvanised workers to engage in modes of production and accumulation of a capitalist kind.

There are clearly differences between the explanation of offending behaviour in an individual and the development of capitalism in a society, and I would not want to stretch the analogy too far. The key point to take from Weber, however, is the idea that structural factors (or constraints) which may be seen as necessary or important to a particular type of action (in our case offending) do not, on their own, give rise to that action. Actors, also, need to be motivated in a subjectively meaningful way for, without such motivation, they would not be disposed to act in a particular way - or tying in with Giddens' idea above, in these
circumstances they would tend to 'do otherwise'. Furthermore, the subjective motivations for action need to be understood on their own terms: as having their own dynamics, and maybe even having origins which have little to do with the structures which more directly underpin the action.

So, in terms of offending, we should be thinking about how motivational themes, based on the analysis of Chapter 6, might come into play among interviewees. To recap, these include, in general terms:

- consumption-oriented lifestyles;
- money for drugs;
- thrill-seeking;
- machismo;
- territorialism / gang-membership;
- 'survival'.

Obviously, these should not be seen as a final set of themes. For one thing, these are a provisional, rather than definitive, set of themes - as will be recalled from the last chapter. Furthermore, I also suggested (at a dreamer level) that other motivational dynamics are likely to be important, such as those more specifically tied into local neighbourhood criminal cultures, or specific offender identities.

It is clear that motivational themes may emerge directly from a particular criminogenic constraint. For example, we have seen that the association with other delinquents (a criminogenic constraint) can directly facilitate engagement with a range of motivational themes (e.g. thrill-seeking, the pursuit of consumption-oriented lifestyles, the desire to buy drugs), particularly where such cultural themes are already present in the peer-group.

Importantly, however, there are those criminogenic constraints that did not, in any clear way, furnish interviewees with a set of delinquent motives (perhaps other than in provoking a reaction). Examples of these might include breakdowns in control processes, such as exclusion from school or lack of parental supervision, which are not associated directly with any delinquent motivations - perhaps other than giving people the space to develop some.
Finally, there are likely to be motivational themes that draw on influences other than the criminogenic constraints identified in this thesis. Notably, the dreamer level analysis carried out in the last chapter suggested that some of these cultural themes were rooted in what I called 'transculture', namely international cultural themes that were primarily mediated through media rather than direct social contact. I also suggested that offender identities might potentially be important, drawing in part on these broader cultural sources.

The impact of action on the development of criminogenic constraints

In exploring the idea of criminogenic constraint in the interviews, a useful distinction emerges between what might be called 'fundamental' and 'contingent' constraints. In essence, this distinction rests on whether or not the interviewee had any role in bringing about the situation which, subsequently, constrained them. 'Fundamental' constraints refer to those which were primarily outside the control of the interviewee - for example, the neighbourhoods that interviewees grew up in, the families they were born into and many of the associated family problems, and psychological problems.

'Contingent' constraints, by contrast, are those that the interviewees had some hand in bringing about. These might include, for example, an interviewee misbehaving at school and being excluded, truanting, or hanging around with offenders, avoiding training or employment. For while the decision to exclude somebody from school is ultimately the decision of teachers, the actions which lead up to it also include those of the actor. For example, in looking at the case studies in Appendix B, we can see that John (M3, white interviewee) was expelled from primary school twice, and around this time started to become involved in crime. However, in the first case, his expulsion followed him taking the nuts of the head teacher's car wheels. The second time, he threatened a teacher with a knife. It is important to bear in mind that, even with contingent constraints, the degree of influence that an interviewee showed in relation to contingent constraints was actually quite variable, and other actors are undoubtedly important. For example, Darren (M19, white interviewee) clearly made a choice to experiment with heroin, which ultimately led to a serious dependency on the drug. As such, he had a significant role in the development of this constraint. By contrast, Michael (M8, Black-Caribbean interviewee) was mistakenly accused of stealing a calculator that led (albeit in the context of other misbehaviour) to his expulsion.
from school (though this was later revoked). The specific event, if we take it at face value, was probably significantly influenced by other actors.

Table 7.1 identifies what may be considered the key criminogenic constraints identified among interviewees within this thesis. It divides the constraints, crudely, between those most likely to be 'fundamental' and those most likely to be 'contingent'.

**Table 7.1 Fundamental and contingent criminogenic constraints**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fundamental criminogenic constraints</th>
<th>Contingent criminogenic constraints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Mismatch between financial aspirations and legitimate opportunity (where this is rooted in immutable abilities and opportunities)</td>
<td>• Mismatch between financial aspirations and legitimate opportunity (where this arises from choices made)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Criminalised neighbourhoods</td>
<td>• Delinquent friends and associates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Weak/problematic bonds with family members</td>
<td>• Lack of commitment/involvement in education/training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Low levels of supervision/ineffective discipline</td>
<td>• Lack of commitment/involvement in employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Anti-social behaviour/psychological problems dating back to early childhood</td>
<td>• Problematic involvement in drugs/alcohol</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The classification of constraints between 'fundamental' and 'contingent' here should not be considered absolute. It is possible to imagine, for example a potential offender having a role in choosing to live in a criminalised neighbourhood (making this a contingent rather than fundamental constraint). Conversely, it is possible to imagine that somebody might be absolutely denied the opportunity to go to school because of their parents (making this lack of involvement in schooling a fundamental rather than contingent constraint).

It is important to give further consideration to how active choices, giving rise to contingent constraints, came about. Following the reasoning already presented in this chapter, in which motivational themes were posited as necessary to the decision to act as an offender, over and above criminogenic constraints, the same reasoning needs to be applied to the development of contingent constraints themselves. That is, while they may emerge in the context of existing constraints, we still need to understand why individuals choose particular actions which contribute to their development. For example, this might involve asking what motivational factors were involved in an interviewee choosing to hang around with delinquent people, even though we may already know that he had grown up in a criminalised neighbourhood. Or, we might ask why was an individual personally tempted to take heroin -
even though we know that many of his friends took heroin. Or it might involve asking why
an interviewee did not look for a job, even though we know his job prospects were not
particularly good.

Some of the motivational themes I identified in relation to choices taken to offend were
probably also implicated in the development of contingent criminogenic constraints. For
example, in Chapter 4 I observed examples of interviewees who had dropped out of training
or work because of their concern to obtain money for consumption-oriented lifestyles. There
were examples of behaviour that might be considered as motivated by machismo (as
addressed in Chapter 6) that were implicated in exclusion from school. However, the
motivational dynamics that relate to these kinds of questions go beyond the scope of this
study - which was more directly concerned with explaining offending. Nonetheless, an
awareness of this dynamic is very important - because it alerts us to the idea that an
understanding of contingent constraints must ultimately take into account the fact that they
are produced by motivated action. This implicates motivational themes, which in turn may
have some of their origins outside of conventional criminogenic constraints. For example,
they may draw on some of the broader cultural dynamics already discussed (e.g. wider
culture, transculture, and identity).

**Histories of criminogenic constraint**

Following on from this discussion, it is useful to consider how criminogenic constraints
routinely emerged within the lives of interviewees.

First of all, the development of offending almost always involved a number of different
criminogenic constraints. There was only one exception to this: a white middle-class
interviewee (M50) who had been involved in a limited amount of dealing of recreational
drugs, whose offending was not well developed. This interviewee had none of the
criminogenic constraints already outlined - he had been reasonably successful at school, was
employed, came from a affluent area, and did not associate with other criminals.
Furthermore, among most interviewees, at least some of these constraints were fundamental.
Perhaps the most obvious example of this is growing up in criminalised neighbourhoods,
which appeared to be a feature of most of the interviewees’ experiences. In many cases, there
were several other fundamental criminogenic constraints alongside these including, for example, psychological problems, or problematic family relationships.

Secondly, it was observed that, to a significant extent, criminogenic constraints tended to contribute to the development of others among interviewees. That is, by constraining the actions of interviewees, they often appeared to direct them in such a way that their actions tended to contribute to the development of further (contingent) criminogenic constraints. In doing so, the extent of criminogenic constraints often snowballed from an original problem. This is clearly illustrated in the case of Mark (M7, white interviewee, in Appendix B). Mark's problems emerged from difficulties faced with schoolwork, which led him to misbehave within school (a psychological problem - and a fundamental constraint). Perhaps related to this, he reported involvement in a group of people (subcultural, contingent constraint) with whom he would play truant (contingent breakdown in school-based controls). The culmination of these problems apparently lead to Mark leaving school at 15 after being expelled, (a further contingent breakdown in school-based controls). Mark’s offending emerged and developed alongside the snowballing of his problems. It escalated further when he developed a serious crack addiction (contingent drug problems), which began when he came across a large amount of the drug while carrying out a burglary.

This being said, the development of criminogenic constraints was not reducible simply to a snowballing effect. There were also many examples of criminogenic constraints that were not related to one another in this way. For example, one interviewee (M48, Indian interviewee) who had a history of behavioural problems and had quite disrupted education - owing to migrating to England first of all with his family at the age of 8, then going back and returning from India a second time - became involved in offending owing apparently, at least in part, to this problem. However, it was subsequent to this that his father then died, which appeared to exacerbate his pattern of offending further, as illustrated by the following exchange:

J: And you said you got into crime after your father died?

M48: I started doing after my father died, yeah.
A typology of careers

Having explored the nature and development of offending, criminogenic constraints, and motivations, it is useful to consider how these elements relate to one another. While in doing this, it is first of all important to acknowledge that each of the interviewees' stories was truly unique in terms of the precise configuration of its circumstances, some generalised patterns revealed themselves across interviews when examined at a more abstract level. In examining careers at this level, it is possible to arrive at a typology of offenders which have revealed some key etiological dynamics. This typology includes: 'disordered offenders', 'dabblers' and 'committed offenders'. Their breakdown across ethnic groups is illustrated in Figure 7.1, further below.

Fundamentally constrained careers: 'disordered offenders'

Cutting across ethnicity, a group of interviewees could be identified that had particularly high levels, and distinctive patterns, of fundamental constraint (12 white, 4 Black-Caribbean, 2 Black Mixed, 1 Asian), all of whom had gone on to become serious offenders, in that their offending was typically frequent and tended to involve serious offences.

Significantly, all of these interviewees had psychological problems (typically manifested as anti-social behaviour involving violence and fighting) dating back too early in life. In most cases, the psychological problems coincided with (and were probably significantly related to) family problems - mostly conflict or difficulty in family relationships, but also including strongly criminalised families (e.g. with fathers and brothers having been in prison). For two interviewees, serious behavioural problems emerged for them when they were a little older - during their early teens. However, in both these cases, a sudden death within the family appeared to trigger a significant delinquent shift in behaviour. In only about three cases was there no clear evidence of some family based problems. In one of these the interviewee claimed that educational problems had been a cause of significant problems. In the other two
cases behaviour was clearly disturbed from an early age - with one of them being sent to residential schools because of the inability of mainstream school to deal with him.

In this context, many contingent criminogenic constraints that emerged later on in the life-course of interviewees could very often be traced back to these early, more fundamental constraints. To re-iterate: the psychological problems, coinciding typically with family problems played an important role in structuring other parts of their lives in such a way that these, too, acted in a criminogenically constraining way. It is perhaps reasonable here to talk in terms of a significant, earlier 'underlying' basis for later offending behaviour.

The offending behaviour of these interviewees had typically started earlier than with the other interviewees. For about half of them, significant offending behaviour had apparently started before teenage years. As already noted, it had gone on to become serious, in that it was usually frequent and often, too, involved serious offences. Out of the nineteen interviewees, perhaps only one was not a very frequent offender, though he had been involved in some serious robberies, including robberies of a post office and a bookmaker's.

Obviously, the development of offending among this group of interviewees involved the development of delinquent motivations, and associated offending preferences. It would be difficult to make too many generalisations across the group with regard to these dimensions of offending. For while this group shared some similar patterns of criminogenic constraint, each appeared to develop distinctive sets of motivations around offending, and different repertoires of offending. These did not necessarily relate in any direct way to the criminogenic constraints they were confronted with. Furthermore, these motivations and repertoires typically changed through time. So, drawing again on Appendix B and looking at cases from this group, we can see how most of John's (M3, white interviewee) offending had revolved around car-theft, and in particular joy-riding - and as such can be assumed to have had a strong element of thrill-seeking. Mark (M7, white interviewee) by contrast was - earlier in his offending at least - more concerned with offending to provide for expenditure on clothes and cars, and as such was involved in burglaries and car theft. Subsequently, following the development of a serious crack habit, his offending became more violent and desperate, and became strongly motivated by the need to find money to buy the drug. Marcus, who had been involved in all manner of crimes, had come to specialise in street-robberies to a significant extent and this was linked, in turn, with a strong commitment to
spending on consumption-oriented lifestyles. Beyond these cases, there were other variations, for example M32 (a Black-Mixed interviewee) who had come to be heavily involved in a range of drugs, had been heavily involved in violence - notably that involving rival gangs, but had no involvement in property crimes.

However, insofar as generalisations about offending styles and motivations were possible, they tie in with those made already detailed in Chapter 6 relating to ethnicity. Notably, there was a strong theme of consumption-oriented lifestyle motivation among the four Black-Caribbean interviewees in this category. Furthermore, they were more often involved in robbery - with three out of four involved significantly in these kinds of offences. By contrast, a significant involvement in robbery was less common among other interviewees (a total of five out of fifteen had some significant involvement in these offences - and these tended to be those with serious drug/alcohol problems) and consumption-oriented lifestyle offending was less developed.

**Contingent careers: 'dabblers' and 'committed offenders'**

The remaining interviewees (6 white, 10 Black-Caribbean, 6 Black-Mixed, and 9 Asians) had careers which were not subject to the same level of fundamental constraint as those described above. That is not to say fundamental constraints were not operating. Most had grown up in criminalised neighbourhoods. There were some family problems, though these were less common than among the disordered offenders (probably about six interviewees spread across ethnic groups might have had family problems which might have counted as 'serious'). Rather, it is to say that, the extent of fundamental constraint was not so severe - and certainly did not involve the kinds of psychological problems associated with the disordered offenders. Instead, offending was linked more directly to the development of contingent constraints. Specifically, it tended to be more immediately underpinned by a wide range of criminogenic constraints sitting within a range of theoretical paradigms, which came later in the life course, sometimes even after leaving school at the age of 16. These included problems at school involving truancy or exclusion, friendships with other delinquents or, in some cases, an involvement with drugs or alcohol. Ultimately, for all of the interviewees within this group, offending did not got underway until their teenage years.
Within this group, it is fair to say, therefore, that interviewees had far more space to 'actively' shape their careers than those interviewees, already described, who were more fundamentally constrained. In this context, the development of constraints, motivations, and ultimately offending, was far more variable in nature. A powerful way of making this point is to note that within this group, the extent of fundamental constraint, such as it existed, did not tie in closely with the extent of offending that emerged among interviewees (in contrast to the disordered group). To provide some further detail about this group, it is useful to subdivide this group of offenders into two further categories. This categorisation rests on whether the interviewees' offending was more or less developed - i.e. whether it was frequent and serious, or whether it was intermittent and less serious.

'Dabblers'

Those offenders whose offending was less frequent and serious I will call 'dabblers'. As already noted, the offending behaviour of dabblers started during their teenage years. Their offending appeared, very often, to be a transient phase, although it might also have marked just the beginning of a more serious criminal career which at the time of interviews was not fully underway. Motivations towards crime were less developed among dabblers than other groups of interviewees, so that even for those interviewees where there were a range of constraints, the interviewees often avoided involvement in crime to any great degree. As with other groups, however, the nature of this motivation was variable and, accordingly, so were the crimes dabblers chose to carry out.

In some cases, criminogenic constraints were not particularly developed among interviewees in this group, though for others, a range of constraints was evident. Most significantly, there were variations in the extent to which these interviewees could be considered fundamentally constrained. For example Farhad (M44, Bangladeshi interviewee, in Appendix B) appeared to come from a stable family background. His parents were together, his siblings were generally working and married, and there was no history of offending within the family. As with most other interviewees, however, Farhad had grown up in a neighbourhood where there was a lot of crime, and many of his friends were involved. Farhad's offending appeared to start during his mid-teens - notably around 15, when he started truanting from school. He had not developed into a 'serious' offender at the time of the interview (age 18) - he had been involved in a few thefts (mostly shoplifting), some fraud and a single street robbery. His
offending had taken place intermittently, over a period of time when he also completed his schooling, then went to college, and ultimately went on to work in McDonalds. Insofar as it was possible to identify a clear set of motives for Farhad, it appeared that most of his offending had been to supplement his income or for some extra clothes, and as such was most closely aligned with lifestyle offending, though was clearly not well developed.

A different example is offered, to illustrate how dabblers may have significantly disrupted (or fundamentally constrained) backgrounds, but nonetheless avoided offending to any great degree. M26, (Black-Caribbean interviewee) was in a care home between the ages of two and 12, because his mother was unable to look after him. After this time, he returned to live with his mother in a criminalised area, apparently with a strong gang culture. The school he described attending when he returned to live with his mother was apparently quite rough, with fellow pupils apparently robbing shops during lunchtimes. He moved out of his mother's home and into a hostel at the age of 17 - a move that he clearly found very difficult. Despite these kinds of adversities, he managed to get some GCSEs, go to college and study, and hold down some different jobs. His crime was fairly minimal. He was in prison following a dispute with a former friend about some money owed to him, which had been interpreted (incorrectly in his opinion) as a street robbery. Otherwise, he had been involved in selling stolen goods and helping out a friend who was a dealer of cannabis - which probably gave him little more than a bit of extra money in his pocket. During this time, many of his friends were involved in far more serious crimes. Yet, despite being to some extent tempted by this lifestyle, he had managed to avoid become too heavily involved, and had held down his studies and his jobs quite successfully.

'Committed offenders'

For this group of interviewees - also characterised by contingent careers - offending had become more serious than with the dabblers. Accordingly, criminal motivations were far more developed for this group. In most cases, the development of serious offending was closely linked with the escalating effects of one of two motivational dynamics - though there were cases were these dynamics were not present. Either, it was associated with motivations connected to the development of a serious drug problem, or it was motivated by the development of an exaggerated desire for money to spend on a consumption-oriented
lifestyle. Once again, there was a range of fundamental constraints operating in the lives of these interviewees - some with more, some with less.

So, Michael (M8, Black-Caribbean interviewee, Appendix B), had at least two types of fundamental constraints operating, relating to a criminalised neighbourhood, and significant breakdown in his supervision, as well as a certain amount of bad luck contributing to the development of other contingent constraints. He was keen to point out in his interview how he came from a respectable family and was well brought up, and he seemed to lead a fairly happy and straightforward childhood. However, the area he lived in was characterised by a certain level of criminality, and people he knew and came to hang around with in the area were involved in crime. He also spent some time living with his aunt, where he was far less well supervised than he was when living with his mother. This also led him to develop a taste for expensive clothes, as he began hanging around with his older cousins. Following a series of unfortunate events within his schooling - including his violent response to a racist incident during his teenage years - he moved schools several times, and ultimately found himself in a school where he was bullied. Unhappy at this school, he ended up playing truant. All of these processes appeared to play a role in the development of his offending. His offending developed to involve a large number of crimes - particularly car thefts and robberies - and eventually became involved in armed robbery. A key motivating dynamic here appeared to be the importance of money to spend on lifestyle and 'flash things' and all of his crime was oriented to obtaining money.

By contrast, Darren (a white interviewee) who was another committed offender was probably less fundamentally constrained, and his offending was driven, ultimately, by significant drug-related motivations. So, though he came from a rough area, he had a reasonably happy family life, he completed school, and obtained employment. His offending started around the age of 16 or 17, initially while he was in work. First of all, his offending was very much motivated by lifestyle considerations: money to spend on clothes, nightclubs and recreational drugs. This involved him becoming involved in shoplifting, then car-thefts, then burglary. Eventually, however, he started taking heroin, and this significantly escalated his offending as he became highly motivated by the need to obtain money to spend on the drug. Consequently, he went on to become a prolific robber of off-licences. This more violent, and perhaps desperate, style of offending appeared linked to the desperation associated with his drug habit.
These two examples highlight, clearly, the important escalatory roles of, on the one hand, consumption-oriented lifestyles and, on the other, drug problems, and the offending required to finance them. However, beyond these motivations, there were a couple of examples where other motivational dynamics played a significant escalatory role. One Black-Caribbean interviewee (M41) had run away from home and started living with a friend, and found that he had no money for living on which led him into regular street robbery - though he undoubtedly became comfortable with easy income which propelled his offending further. In this case, offending for 'survival' is significantly implicated. Also, one Bangladeshi interviewee (M49) developed a passion for cars linked most closely to what we have previously called 'thrills', which led him to a prolific involvement in car related crimes - notably taking and driving for enjoyment, rather than profit.

Important ethnic differences were evident in the development of motivations among committed offenders - in line with patterns described in the last chapter. Thus, six out of eight of the Black-Caribbean committed offenders were clearly motivated by strong consumption related motivational themes. By contrast, probably only two out of the remaining 13 (5 white, 4 Black-Mixed, and 4 Asians) interviewees had developed this kind of motivation for offending in such an exaggerated form. And looking at those with significant drug or alcohol problems, none of the Black-Caribbean interviewees in the committed offenders group had these. By contrast eight out of the remaining 13 interviewees, from other ethnic groups, had such problems.

And, in terms of specialisms, as was true of the interviewees more generally, robbery played a strong role in the offending of Black-Caribbean interviewees. It was less common among interviewees from other backgrounds, though where a serious drug problem had developed among other interviewees, this had sometimes led to robbery too.

**Breakdown of offender types**

Having discussed these three basic offender types, it is useful to display their quantitative breakdown among the 51 offenders and, in doing so, bringing in the dimension of ethnicity. This provides a useful backdrop to the discussion already outlined.
One of the interesting patterns which emerges from the figure is the large proportion of white interviewees who were disordered, compared to those from other backgrounds - that is their offending seemed more fundamentally constrained, thereby linked with psychological problems. The Black-Caribbean interviewees, by contrast, were most often committed offenders. Thus, although offending in this group was often serious, their offending was a more contingent development. As such, the active shaping of criminal careers may play a disproportionate role in the development of serious offending among Black-Caribbean offenders, linked in turn with significant attachments to consumption-oriented lifestyles. The Asian interviewees were notable for the proportion that were dabblers or late developers: offending typically arising from contingent constraints, and often not very developed. Clearly these player-level differences are a feature of a relatively small qualitative sample, and may not reflect ethnic variations in the wider population of offenders. However, they reflect some differences already reflected upon which were and supported by some other literature (London Borough of Lewisham et al., 1998; Burney, 1990; Pitts, 1986) - notably those relating to white and Black-Caribbean offenders and give us some dreamer level confidence.

**Discussion and conclusions**

In this chapter, I looked across the length of interviewees' offending careers to arrive at an understanding of the theoretical processes at work. I review and consider here the conclusions of this chapter relating to player and dreamer levels of analysis.
Player level conclusions

This chapter has looked to explain offending careers of interviewees, which have certain characteristics: the age at which offending began was quite variable; there were broadly two clusters of offending behaviour that had developed among interviewees - a 'serious' pattern involving frequent offending or very serious crimes (usually both), and a 'less serious' pattern not involving these things; and offending was specialised, as discussed in the last chapter.

In interpreting the relationship between background and foreground factors dealt with in previous chapters, I developed the idea of 'criminogenic constraint' to refer to the background features which provide a constraining context in which the interviewees developed their offending careers. However, I observed that interviewees also needed to have been motivated in a subjectively meaningful way to become offenders for, without such motivation, they would not have been disposed to act in such a way. This draws on the motivations dealt with in Chapter 6. Importantly, while motivational themes may emerge directly from a particular criminogenic constraint - that is the constraint may furnish them with a set of delinquent motives - there are likely to be motivational themes that draw on influences other than conventional criminogenic constraints.

In further exploring the idea of criminogenic constraint a useful distinction emerged between 'fundamental' and 'contingent' constraints. 'Fundamental' constraints refers to those which were primarily outside the control of the interviewee - for example, the neighbourhoods they grew up in, the families they were born into, many of the associated family problems, and psychological dispositions. 'Contingent' constraints, by contrast, were those that the interviewees had some hand in bringing about. These might include, for example, an interviewee misbehaving at school and being excluded, truanting, or hanging around with offenders, avoiding training or employment. Some of the motivational themes I identified in relation to offending were also implicated in the development of contingent criminogenic constraints though themes that related to these kinds of questions go beyond the scope of this study. However, an awareness of this dynamic is very important - because it alerts us to the idea that an understanding of contingent constraints must ultimately take into account the fact that they are produced by motivated action. This means that these forms of constraint
need to be understood partly as a product of motivational themes which have their origins outside of criminogenic constraints generally, for example drawing on some of the broader cultural dynamics already discussed (e.g. wider culture, transculture, identity issues).

Among interviewees, the development of offending almost always involved a number of different criminogenic constraints. At least some of which were fundamental constraints - most commonly, this included growing up in criminalised neighbourhoods. To a significant extent, criminogenic constraints tended to contribute to the development of others. That is, by constraining the actions of interviewees, they often appeared to direct them in such a way that their actions tended to contribute to the development of further (contingent) criminogenic constraints. This being said, the development of criminogenic constraints was not reducible simply to a snowballing effect. There were also many examples of criminogenic constraints that were not related to one another in this way.

Looking at the careers of interviewees, cutting across ethnicity, a group of interviewees could be identified that had particularly high levels of fundamental constraint. Most significantly, all of these interviewees had psychological problems (typically manifested as anti-social behaviour involving violence and fighting) dating back to early in life. In most cases, these coincided with family problems. This group all went on to become serious offenders. In this context, many contingent criminogenic constraints that emerged later on in the life-course of interviewees could very often be traced back to these early, more fundamental constraints. While this group shared some similar patterns of criminogenic constraint, each went on to develop distinctive sets of motivations around offending and different repertoires of offending. These did not necessarily relate in any direct way to the criminogenic constraints they were confronted with. This group has been called 'disordered offenders'.

The remaining interviewees had careers that were not subject to the same level of fundamental constraint. Instead, the development of offending was linked more directly to the emergence of contingent constraints, typically later in the life course. Ultimately, for all of the interviewees within this group, offending did not get underway until their teenage years. Within this group, it is fair to say, therefore, that interviewees had far more space to 'actively' shape their careers and the development of constraints, motivations, and ultimately offending, was far more variable in nature. Notably, the extent of fundamental constraint,
such as it existed, did not tie in closely with the extent of offending that emerged among interviewees (in contrast to the disordered group). Those interviewees in this group whose offending was less frequent and serious I called 'dabblers', while those who was more serious, I called 'committed offenders'. Within the latter group, the development of serious offending was often closely linked with the escalating effects either of a serious drug problem or the development of an exaggerated desire for money to spend on lifestyle.

Insofar as patterns of offending styles and motivations were discernible, they tie in with those made already detailed in Chapter 6 that relate to ethnicity. Notably, there was a strong theme of lifestyle motivation among the Black-Caribbean interviewees in this category, and drugs and alcohol motivations among others.

One of the interesting patterns which emerges from the figure is the large proportion of white interviewees who were disordered, compared to those from other backgrounds - that is their offending seemed more fundamentally constrained. The Black-Caribbean interviewees, by contrast, were most often committed offenders. Thus, although offending in this group was often serious, their offending was a more contingent development. The Asian interviewees were notable for the proportion who were dabblers or late developers: offending typically arising from contingent constraints, and often not very developed.

**Dreamer level conclusions**

In considering the dreamer level conclusions that can be made from the findings of this chapter, it is useful, once again, to consider these alongside the key research objectives.

First of all, then, I shall consider the implications of this chapter's analysis for Objective 1 - to develop a theoretical framework for conceptualising the etiology of offending. In general terms, this chapter has brought together many of the findings from the previous two chapters in a synthesis that provides a basis for a more generalised theory of offending. So, what can we take from the predominantly player level analysis this chapter has carried out and use for a more generalised theoretical framework? In assessing this question, it is useful to recall key rules for generalising from player level to a dreamer level, outlined in Chapter 4. We can generalise more confidently when there is more circumstantial (i.e. not contextualised) evidence of something in a wider set of cases; where the claims being made are more
general and abstract, rather than specific; where we can invoke crude statistical principles to
generalise with some confidence from a subset of cases (i.e. a sample) to a wider population
of similar cases. With these principles in mind - particularly the idea that more general rather
than specific claims are likely to be generalisable and the idea that statistical principles can
be used to generalise from a subset of cases - we can take some of the ideas forward at a
dreamer level.

The key general theoretical claims that can be made off the back of this chapter's analysis
with some confidence are as follows:

- The development of offending among individuals is likely to be underpinned by
criminogenic constraints, as previously defined.

- The development of offending is not simply a product of criminogenic constraints. It
also requires that the individual embraces criminal motivations. These are not reducible
in any simple way to criminogenic constraints. Indeed, they are, to some extent
autonomous, and may even take influences from other origins. And the nature and the
extent of these motivations will structure the extent and nature of an individual's
offending.

- Some criminogenic constraints 'happen' to individuals (they are fundamental), others
emerge, in part through the actions of the individual (they are contingent). An
understanding of the development of contingent constraints is likely also to require an
understanding of motivational themes that are associated with their development, which
is likely to draw on broader cultural processes.

- To a significant extent (though not always) criminogenic constraints tend to contribute to
the development of others. In this way, a snowballing of constraints often occurs. In
dynamic terms, this happens because one set of criminogenic constraints direct the
actions of an individual in such a way that he will tend to act in a way that precipitates
the development of further (contingent) constraints.
• The variable nature and extent of, respectively, criminogenic constraints and criminal motivations means that their criminal careers are highly variable - both in terms of how offending emerges, and the form it takes.

• Individuals who experience high levels of fundamental constraint, particularly where this involves psychological problems which appear to have a powerful influence, will tend (i.e. be more constrained) to act in ways which create further contingent constraints and, following from this, tend to go on to become serious offenders. By contrast, where individuals are less fundamentally constrained - and where they do not experience significant psychological problems - the offending follows more directly from the development of contingent constraints. In this context, offenders have more space to 'actively' shape their careers, including the development of constraints, motivations, and ultimately offending. Therefore, the extent to which criminal motivations are embraced and, consequently, the seriousness of their offending is likely to be more variable.

• The development of drug problems, even among those who do not experience high levels of fundamental constraint, can play an important role in escalating offending to serious levels.

• The development of an exaggerated concern with lifestyle offending, even among those who do not experience high levels of fundamental constraint, can play an important role in escalating offending to serious levels.

I will now go on to consider Objective 2, relating to provisional ideas about differences between offenders from different ethnic backgrounds. In fact, many of the observations made about ethnic differences here have much in common with those made in earlier chapters. Notably, there was a strong theme of lifestyle motivation among the Black-Caribbean interviewees in escalating offending to serious levels, even among those without high levels of fundamental constraint. These differential types of escalation, among those with fewer fundamental constraints, might be an important generalised ethnic difference across young male offenders generally.

Finally, we might tentatively suggest that the quantitative differences found amongst the interviewees were more generalisable. Certainly, some differences - notably those between
white and Black-Caribbean interviewees - resonate with other studies of offenders reviewed already reviewed in this study (London Borough of Lewisham et al., 1998; Burney, 1990; Pitts, 1986). In which case, we can suggest say that white offenders are the most fundamentally constrained - indeed the most likely to suffer from psychological problems. By contrast, the Black-Caribbean offenders are perhaps less often fundamentally constrained, and more often contingently involved in offending. If this is so, the active shaping of criminal careers may play a disproportionate role in the development of serious offending among Black-Caribbean offenders. There may be a link here to motivational themes for this group - notably lifestyle offending - which, in turn, might be linked to a powerful influence of a black offender identity. It would be difficult to generalise from the Black-Mixed group. Finally, Asians were the least fundamentally constrained and, furthermore, were less serious offenders. This could be read as meaning that, currently, Asian young male offenders face less fundamental criminogenic constraints and are less driven by criminal motivations.
8. Conclusions

In this final chapter, I will revisit the study's objectives a final time, and articulate the conclusions that emerge from across the empirical chapters. In doing this, I will draw on the dreamer level analysis which is necessary to meet these objectives. Following this, I will consider the implications of this thesis' conclusions for further research and policy, and sketch out how further research in this area might proceed.

Addressing the study's objectives

**Objective 1: To develop a theoretical framework for explaining offending which is sensitive to the potential role of ethnicity and which could be applied to young male offenders more generally.**

I will first of all describe the elements of such a framework. I will then go on to consider its implications.

*A theoretical framework*

Elements of a theoretical framework emerge from the 51 interviewees within this study, and are based on the principles established in Chapter 4 for making generalisations. Specifically, generalisations are possible where: they involve general rather than specific claims, which are likely to have a wider relevance to offenders; and where they emerge from findings that apply consistently across interviewees, and could therefore be expected to apply across a wider range of offenders.

1. The development of offending among individuals is underpinned - or caused - by a number of potential factors or 'criminogenic constraints'. These are characteristics or processes that are found within the broader biographical characteristics of offenders' lives, whether in the present or in the past. They are conceived of as 'constraints' because, while they have the effect of constraining the choices open to an actor and thereby making him more likely to offend, they do not determine his actions. To a large extent, criminogenic constraints are those implicated by psychological, control, subcultural and strain theories, though with some modifications. First, constraints associated with strain processes primarily
revolve around a mismatch between aspirations and opportunities as they apply to financial means, rather than occupational status. Second, an important criminogenic constraint that does not sit directly within these theoretical paradigms is the serious and problematic involvement of individuals with drugs or alcohol.

In broad terms, therefore, these constraints include:

- mismatch between financial aspirations and legitimate opportunity;
- criminalised neighbourhoods;
- delinquent friends and associates;
- weak/problematic bonds with family members;
- low levels of supervision/ineffective discipline;
- lack of commitment/involvement in education/training;
- lack of commitment/involvement in employment;
- anti-social behaviour/psychological problems dating back to early childhood;
- problematic involvement in drugs/alcohol.

2. However, as already noted, the development of offending is not simply a product of criminogenic constraints. While the latter may limit the options for action open to an individual, it is still necessary that he actively embraces criminal motivations and chooses to offend. The motivations that are embraced by offenders are not reducible in any simple way to criminogenic constraints. Indeed, they are, to some extent autonomous, and may even take influences from other origins, which might include broader cultural or 'transcultural' processes, or broader offender identities. The nature of this engagement with motivations goes an important way to explain the nature of their offending, both in terms of its extent and the crimes carried out. A provisional list of criminal motivations includes offending for:

- consumption-oriented lifestyles;
- money for drugs;
- thrill-seeking;
- machismo;
- territorialism / gang-membership;
- 'survival'.
3. Offenders are, to some extent, specialised in their crime: that is, they choose to carry out some crimes more than others. This, in turn, is tied in with different criminal motivations, which vary in the extent to which they supported different types of crime - notably, whether they support utilitarian or non-utilitarian crimes. Therefore, the variable way in which offenders embrace the motivational themes listed here can be seen to account for some important variation in the nature of offending behaviour. However, this does not, on its own, account for its full specificity. One important possibility is that neighbourhood influences, 'transcultural' influences, or different offender 'identities' that are embraced by some offenders, are also important in structuring patterns of offending through their motivational effects.

4. Criminogenic constraint can be divided into 'fundamental' and 'contingent' constraints. 'Fundamental' constraints are those which were primarily outside the control of the individual - for example, the neighbourhoods they grew up in, the families they were born into, many of the associated family problems, and psychological dispositions. 'Contingent' constraints, by contrast, are those that individuals have some hand in bringing about. These might include misbehaviour at school resulting in exclusion, truanting, hanging around with offenders, or avoiding training or employment.

Importantly, an acknowledgement of this distinction means that while individuals are landed with some fundamental constraints that they can do little to change, there are others that they have a hand in producing. In crude terms, this means they help create some of the conditions of their own downfall through actions that are motivated. Some of the motivational themes associated with offending (listed above) are implicated in the development of these contingent criminogenic constraints, though there are likely to be others besides, perhaps including those that have their origins beyond conventional criminogenic constraints. They might also draw, for example, on some of the broader cultural dynamics already discussed (e.g. wider culture, transculture, or identity issues).

5. Within the careers of offenders, to a significant extent, though not always, criminogenic constraints tend to contribute to the development of others. In this way, a snowballing of constraints often occurs. In dynamic terms, this happens because one set of
criminogenic constraints direct the actions of an individual in such a way that he will tend to act in a way that precipitates the development of further (contingent) constraints.

6. The variable nature and extent of, respectively, criminogenic constraints and criminal motivations means that their criminal careers are highly variable - both in terms of how offending emerges, and the form it takes. Within this context, certain distinctive dynamics can occur which give rise to different types of offending careers. These dynamics are likely to include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Individuals who experience high levels of fundamental constraint, particularly where this involves psychological problems, will tend (i.e. be more constrained) to act in ways which create further contingent constraints and, following from this, tend to go on to become serious offenders.

- Where individuals are less fundamentally constrained - and where they do not experience significant psychological problems - contingent constraints play a more critical role in the development of their offending which, in turn, means that the motivations which direct the development of these contingent constraints are of particular etiological importance. In this context, offenders have more space to 'actively' shape their careers, including the development of constraints, criminal motivations, and ultimately offending. In this context, the extent of constraints, criminal motivations, and offending is quite variable.

- The development of drug problems, even among those who do not experience high levels of fundamental constraint, can play an important role in escalating offending to serious levels - notably utilitarian offending for money or goods.

- Similarly, the development of an exaggerated concern with lifestyle offending, even among those who do not experience high levels of fundamental constraint, can play an important role in escalating offending to serious levels. Again, this will involve utilitarian offending for money or goods.

Finally, Figure 8.1 provides a visual representation of some of the key principles of the model outlined here.
Figure 8.1 A general model of offending

DIFFERENT OFFENDER PATHWAYS

OFFENCES COMMITTED
(e.g. burglary, robbery, theft, violence, vandalism, drug dealing)

OTHER INFLUENCES
(e.g. culture/transculture, identity)

REALM OF INDIVIDUAL'S MOTIVATED ACTION

lifestyle
drugs
thrills
machismo
territorialism/
gangs
'survival'

CONTINGENT CRIMINOGENIC CONSTRAINTS
(e.g. limited economic opportunities, criminal friends/school problems, drug/alcohol problems, limited involvement in training or work)

FUNDAMENTAL CRIMINOGENIC CONSTRAINTS
(e.g. limited economic opportunities, criminalized neighbourhoods, family problems, psychological problems)

OTHER ACTORS

OTHER ACTORS
Implications of the framework

The insights associated with this model have some important implications which need to be given careful attention, and which are pertinent to research and policy.

One conclusion, then, is that no single one of the traditional theoretical frameworks triumphs as a dominant form of explanation. Each, nonetheless, makes an important contribution to an explanation of offending. In fact, this is not a great revelation, for (as Chapter 2 illustrated) a multi-causal model straddling theoretical paradigms is, in the face of previous evidence, by far the most plausible, and indeed has been taken forward in more recent research (e.g. Johnson, 1979, Farrington, 1994).

A more profound implication of this model, however, is the status it accords motivation within the etiology of offending. For while some previous theories have dealt with the issue of motivation - notably strain and subcultural theories - to a large extent these theories have reduced motivations to the background factors that underpin offending. Others, such as control or psychological theories, have not accorded motivation a significant and distinctive role in explanation. However, it is clear from this research, and the model that emerges from it, that such an approach simply does not do etiological justice to the offending patterns of individuals. Perhaps more profoundly, as we have seen from the provisional insights and hypotheses about ethnic difference which have emerged across this thesis (which will be discussed in more detail below), such an approach is blind to some potentially important ethnic differences between offenders. Recognition of this dynamic could potentially draw us into some very different empirical areas for research on offending. It might revolve around an examination of, for example, media consumption patterns of those who become involved in offending. It might involve focusing on the specific narratives and semiotic elements of cultural influences on young people. Importantly, it might involve specific cultural analyses of the collective experiences of particular groups, notably different ethnic groups.

This is not just an issue for research. It also has implications for policy. For, if there are important etiological dimensions within the foreground of offending that are not fully acknowledged or understood, then policies will not be equipped to deal with them. Certainly, a focus on background issues dominates much of the recent policy literature on prevention (see Farrington, 1994, 1996a, 1996b; Graham and Bowling, 1995, Audit
Commission, 1996) and this literature has been an important impetus to national policy. Yet, more novel strategies can be envisaged which do deal precisely with the foreground domain and issues of motivation, which are less well understood. For example, Sewell (1997) provides ideas for specific strategies for dealing with problems experienced by Afro-Caribbean school pupils, oriented in particular to reducing school exclusions, which involve a more explicit acknowledgement and engagement with ethnic heritage and issues of race and racism within schools as played out within the school context.

A further set of implications follows from considering the model presented within this thesis in the context of recently empirically driven research, already discussed (Farrington, 1994, 1996a, 1996b; Graham and Bowling, 1995, Audit Commission, 1996). A key feature of this kind of research is a concern with discrete 'risk factors' that are associated with offending, and can be interpreted as predictors or even causes of offending. This has a number of implications. First of all, while risk factor approaches are valuable in drawing attention to processes which contribute to offending, they do not necessarily do full justice, or give full emphasis, to the linkages between these factors, and the broader processes that underpin them. This can lead to perspectives which 'zoom in' closely on isolated risk factors, even when such factors may be, to a significant extent, manifestations of an individual's development, and other problems, within a pathway of delinquency.

This is not just an issue for how research is reported, it also has important implications for how policy is developed off the back of research. For example the Social Exclusion Unit (1998b) report on school exclusion and truancy makes recommendations about reducing these problems nationally. These recommendations, which are dominated by what schools, education authorities and police should be doing, have become the basis, subsequently, for national policy. However, there is little mention, within these recommendations, of interventions which address problems with individuals outside of the school environment - which are likely to be very important in giving rise to problem behaviour in the classroom. This is despite the fact that the Social Exclusion Unit is a body dedicated to cross-departmental 'joined-up' solutions to problems (i.e. cutting across areas of policy). It certainly appears, therefore, that this unit has been a victim of a paradigm which (to caricature) views passive pupils being excluded by problematic schools. This is in contrast to a view which sees schools, in part at least, as responding predictably and fairly to problem behaviour among pupils which has its causes rooted outside the schooling environment.
A further consideration is that approaches that are concerned primarily with risk factors downplay the diversity of offending careers, which are a feature of the model developed in this thesis. Importantly, this includes the specialisation in offending terms that this research has highlighted. Risk factor approaches tend to treat all offending as, more or less, the same. Following this research, it is clear that studies of offending would do well to explore this issue further. Once again, this observation has policy implications. For example, if we are to take seriously the idea that offenders are, to some extent, specialised in their offending, and if, furthermore, there are ethnic dimensions to this difference, this might have important implications for the way in which different groups of offenders are dealt with. For example, robbery is viewed by the criminal justice system as a more serious crime than burglary, so if, as much evidence suggests, black people are more involved in this crime, then it stands to reason that they are going to more often end up with more serious sentences, including imprisonment. Interventions with offenders that gloss over the issue of specialisation may miss an opportunity to address important differences in ethnic experience.

Diversity in careers, as suggested by the theoretical framework presented in this research, relates not just to styles of offending. It highlights variety in the pathways by which people become offenders. Notably, some offenders are more fundamentally constrained, others are less so. Some start with psychological or family problems, others do not. Again, risk factor based approaches downplay such diversity. This is true, even when considering some of the more sophisticated career approaches which go beyond simple risk factor analyses, such as Farrington's (1994a; 1994b). For in his model, full-blown offending is largely the expression, later in life, of the anti-social behaviour that can still be identified earlier in life - even though intervening factors can modulate this personality. However, the framework developed within this thesis suggests that while some offenders fit this image, others fit it far less well. That is, there are offenders who, in early life, did not have so clearly an anti-social personality. Rather, events later in life triggered the development of offending. Once again, this might well have policy implications. For rather than treating offenders as, more or less, equivalent, it is possible that some offenders might be targeted with different interventions than others, to reflect a different type of career.
Objective 2: To obtain provisional insights and to generate hypotheses relating to ethnic differences among young male offenders in relation to:

- the processes by which they become involved in crime;
- the nature of their offending.

In addressing this objective it is necessary to re-iterate the main insights developed through the empirical analysis carried out in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

The first thing that can be said off the back of this research, with confidence, is that there are core similarities between ethnic groups. The framework developed to meet Objective 1 provides the core elements that can be applied across ethnic groups. Importantly, a range of criminogenic constraints that fall within psychological, control, subculture and strain perspectives are likely to exist across offenders from different ethnic groups. Similarly, in general terms it appears that motivational themes are important in directing offending behaviour. Specifically, spending on consumption-oriented lifestyle, thrill-seeking, and machismo, which have a strong commonality across ethnic groups within the interviewees in this study, might be expected to be found with some regularity across different ethnic groups of offenders more generally. And, obviously, broadly the same types of crime were committed among interviewees, regardless of ethnic background, and this, once again, is likely to be generalisable across offenders.

Beyond this core set of similarities, however, there was evidence of some differences. Exploring these differences takes us into the territory of more specific rather than general claims - and it is necessary to be more tentative about these claims, following the methodological injunctions in Chapter 4. This being said, wider evidence was sometimes available which lent support to ethnic differences, and which therefore gave greater confidence to provisional claims. In practice, some ethnic differences were crudely 'quantitative' - in that they reflected differences in the prevalence of particular characteristics. Though this is a poor basis for confident generalisation, given the small-scale qualitative samples used in this study, some of the differences chimed with evidence from other sources, raising our confidence about generalising claims. Furthermore, there were some distinctive, qualitative differences in experience between ethnic groups. Again, evidence from other sources sometimes echoed these patterns, and gave support to the idea that these might be generalised across offenders.
I will re-iterate the main insights about differences between ethnic groups that this research has suggested. This will be done by reviewing, in turn, each of the ethnic groups that were studied here, and stating in each case the hypotheses that can be offered on the basis of provisional insights. These are graded as 'more confident' or 'more tentative' based on these principles of differentiating more or less confident provisional claims. Additionally, I will offer further, speculative lines of inquiry, which might follow on from the specific hypotheses presented, and provide a basis for thinking about further research.

White offenders

Table 8.1 (below) provides a set of hypotheses that focus on white young male offenders. In broad terms, these reflect a characterisation of white offenders as a group experiencing careers with more fundamental criminogenic constraints - notably in the form of psychological problems, and often related in turn to family problems. They involve a view of white offenders as having serious drugs or alcohol problems that play an important role in motivating their offending. They also involve a characterisation of white offenders as more disposed towards burglaries and car crime. The hypotheses presented around these themes are mostly based on 'more confident' insights, following their corroboration from other sources.

Beyond the hypotheses presented here, it is useful to consider further areas which research might examine in a more exploratory, and less hypothesis-driven way. Perhaps most significantly, it would be useful to explore more directly the possibility of 'offender identities' among white offenders. For, though these were not clearly revealed by the evidence within this study, circumstantial evidence suggests that these may be important, and might be a promising area for further investigation.

Finally, it would be important to ask some broader questions about why it might be that white offenders have different characteristics than those from other ethnic groups. For example, this might involve asking questions like: Why are white offenders more likely to have psychological problems? Is this because only those white young males with the most problems - and the most fundamental constraints - end up as criminals? If this was the case, then, why are those with fewer fundamental constraints not going on to develop contingent
constraints and to become offenders anyway - as they apparently more often are with Black-Caribbean offenders? Could this be with different motivational themes directing them away from the development of contingent constraints? Or could this be because contingent constraints are less likely to develop for young white males because of the role of other actors - for example, might school exclusion, or unemployment, be less likely to emerge for young white males because of broader social and economic advantages?

We might also ask: why are drug or alcohol problems more common for white offenders? Is this a symptom of greater psychological problems among this group? Or might this be a symptom of broader motivational themes among young white males that promote involvement in drugs and alcohol?

Table 8.1 Hypotheses about white young male offenders based on research insights

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<th>White offenders</th>
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**Hypotheses based on more confident insights:**

- Offending among white offenders more often has origins in psychological problems than Black-Caribbean and Asian offenders.
- Offending among white offenders more often has origins in weak or problematic bonds with family members than with Black-Caribbean and Asian offenders.
- Offending careers among white offenders typically evolve from more fundamental criminogenic constraints than Black-Caribbean and Asian offenders.
- Offending among white offenders more often has origins in serious drugs and alcohol problems than Black-Caribbean offenders.
- Offending among white offenders is more often motivated by the desire to buy drugs than with Black-Caribbean offenders.
- White offenders are more often involved in burglary than Black-Caribbean offenders.
- White offenders are more often involved in car crime than Black-Caribbean offenders.

**Hypotheses based on more tentative insights:**

- Neighbourhood subcultural influences help structure types of motivations and offending choices among white offenders.
- Offending among white offenders from minority backgrounds (e.g. travellers) sometimes has origins in racist victimisation within school.
Table 8.2 (below) provides a set of hypotheses that focus on Black-Caribbean young male offenders. In broad terms, these reflect a characterisation of Black-Caribbean offenders as a group experiencing careers with fewer fundamental criminogenic constraints than their white counterparts - notably in the form of psychological and family problems. They involve a view of Black-Caribbean offenders as influenced, importantly, by a motivation to offend for money to spend on lifestyle - though also highlight machismo, and gang or territorial loyalties as potentially important. It involves a view of Black-Caribbean offenders as disposed towards robbery offences. It reflects a number of insights about distinctive experiences, including unfair or inappropriate treatment by teachers, disruptive peer-group cultures, and racial victimisation at school. It also incorporates issues of broader black offender identities, and transcultural influences on black offenders, which appear important in structuring their offending. The hypotheses are based on insights which range between more confident and more tentative - based on the level of corroboration from other sources.

No doubt, in addition to assessing these hypotheses further, there is more work that could be done, perhaps focusing further on issues of identity, and on transcultural influences. It would also be important to ask further, and broader, etiological questions about Black-Caribbean offenders. These might include: why do Black-Caribbean offenders emerge - apparently in substantial numbers - with fewer fundamental constraints such as psychological or family problems than their white counterparts? What contributes to the development of contingent constraints within this group, which seem to be particularly important for their offending? Is this to do with distinctive difficulties, such as problems with teachers, or limited opportunities to gain employment? Or is this to do with powerful black offender identities, or motivational themes that place a strong emphasis on offending for consumption-oriented lifestyles? And how do these things give rise to an emphasis on robbery offences? And could a particular tendency towards the development of these contingent constraints account for particularly high levels of offending among Black-Caribbeans and, in turn, their substantial over-representation of in the criminal justice system?
Table 8.2 Hypotheses about Black-Caribbean male offenders based on research insights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Black-Caribbean offenders</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hypotheses based on more confident insights:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Offending among Black-Caribbean offenders less often has origins in psychological problems than with white offenders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offending among Black-Caribbean offenders less often has origins in weak or problematic bonds with family members than with white offenders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offending careers among Black-Caribbean offenders typically evolve from fewer fundamental criminogenic constraints than white offenders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offending among Black-Caribbean offenders sometimes has origins in distinctive school problems associated with unfair or inappropriate treatment by teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offending among Black-Caribbean offenders sometimes has origins in limited opportunities to obtain employment through family and friends, compared to offenders from other ethnic backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offending among Black-Caribbean offenders is more often motivated by a desire to spend money on expensive lifestyles than offenders from other ethnic backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Black-Caribbean offenders are more often involved in robbery offences than those from other ethnic backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Hypotheses based on more tentative insights:** |
| • Offending among Black-Caribbean offenders has some origins in a distinctive school-based subculture involving bullying and victimisation. |
| • Offending among Black-Caribbean offenders sometimes has origins in racist victimisation within school. |
| • Offending among Black-Caribbean offenders has some origins in criminal neighbourhood influences that are more extreme than for other ethnic groups. |
| • Offending among Black-Caribbean offenders is more often motivated by machismo than for offenders from other ethnic groups. |
| • Offending among Black-Caribbean offenders is more often motivated by loyalties to gangs or territorial loyalties. |
| • Offending among Black-Caribbean offenders is more often motivated by ‘transcultural themes’ which are rooted in international themes within broader cultural and media representations. |
| • Patterns of motivation and offending among Black-Caribbean offenders has a connection with a distinctive black ‘offender identity’ within broader cultural and media representations. |
| • Neighbourhood subcultural influences help structure types of motivations and offending choices among Black-Caribbean offenders. |
**Black-Mixed offenders**

Table 8.3 presents hypotheses relating to Black-Mixed offenders. They rest on the idea that styles of offending among this group approximate more closely to white offenders than Black-Caribbean offenders, based exclusively on the interview data. These hypotheses are tentative ones, given that they are not supported by corroborative evidence.

Clearly, Black-Mixed offenders would benefit from further exploratory research. This might involve exploring how different ethnic heritage, and socio-economic dimensions of Black-Mixed young males, might impact on the levels of fundamental constraint, the development of contingent constraints, and the development of motivations and choices of crimes. It would, once again, be interesting to explore offender identities among this group, particular given their dual heritage. Again, it would be important to link with other broader etiological questions, as discussed with white and Black-Caribbean offenders.

**Table 8.3 Hypotheses about Black-Mixed male offenders based on research insights**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Black-Mixed offenders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hypotheses based on more tentative insights:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Offending motivations among Black-Mixed offenders are more similar to white than Black-Caribbean offenders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Offending patterns among Black-Mixed offenders are more similar to white offenders than black Black-Caribbean offenders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Asian offenders**

Table 8.4 (below) presents hypotheses relating to Asian offenders. These reflect a characterisation of offenders as the least fundamentally constrained of the main ethnic groups and also the least developed in their offending. These hypotheses are mostly tentative ones, given that they are not generally supported by corroborative evidence.

Further research should look to differentiate between Asian offenders from different backgrounds, i.e. Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi. Such research might look at broader cultural influences among these offenders, and offending identities that might exist.
Important, broader, etiological questions might ask whether the relatively low levels of offending among Asian offenders, despite high levels of deprivation among much of the Asian population (see Chapter 2, notably Table 2.1), is associated with much lower levels of fundamental constraint in the form of psychological and family problems - as this research might suggest.

Table 8.4 Hypotheses about Asian male offenders based on research insights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses based on more confident insights:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Offending among Asian offenders sometimes has origins in distinctive patterns of disruptions to schooling associated with family travel abroad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offending among Asian offenders sometimes has origins in racist victimisation within school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses based on more tentative insights:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Offending among Asian offenders less often has origins in psychological problems than with offenders from other ethnic backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offending among Asian offenders less often has origins in weak or problematic bonds with family members than with offenders from other ethnic backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offending careers among Asian offenders typically evolve from fewer fundamental constraints than white or Black-Caribbean offenders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Where weak or problematic bonds are involved in the development of offending among Asian offenders, these more often result from family illness or death than with white, Black-Caribbean or Black-Mixed offenders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Asian offenders are less often serious offenders than those from other ethnic backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Asian offenders are less influenced in their offending by criminal family members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Neighbourhood subcultural influences help structure types of motivations and offending choices among Asian offenders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further research

This study is, essentially, a pilot study concerned with generating provisional insights, which could serve as a basis for further research. In this spirit, the conclusions and reflections made so far in this chapter identified questions for further research concerned with both hypothesis testing and further exploratory research. Ideas for further research are outlined below.
**Exploratory research**

A number of areas might benefit from further exploratory research, which this research was only able to explore incompletely. Obviously, ethnic dimensions and variations around these issues would be of fundamental importance.

One area relates to the dynamics associated with motivations for offending. Specifically, this might encompass a study of cultural, subcultural and transcultural themes which offenders draw upon in their offending. Close ethnographic work with offenders involving an analysis of their styles of offending, their locations and connections with broader cultural themes might serve this purpose. This might encompass an analysis of music, media, neighbourhood, and other social influences that are engaged with and drawn upon by offenders.

Further exploratory work might be carried out around the development of particular contingent criminogenic constraints (e.g. school exclusion, the development of drug or alcohol problems) - and in particular how these emerge from the actions of those who become offenders, and the extent to which other actors are important in their development. This, again, might benefit from ethnographic, or at least qualitative, work with those potentially at risk of developing particular constraints.

**Career research**

A career perspective, spanning the development of criminogenic constraints and offending motivations has been used in this research. This perspective could be developed further to test the hypotheses generated within the research, and to develop some further insights besides. Importantly, it could be applied to far larger, and more representative samples of offenders. In doing this, more specific quantitative information could be collected, and hypotheses tested for statistical significance. However, statistically-based career analyses would do well do incorporate strong qualitative dimensions to the analysis - perhaps involving collecting detailed qualitative material alongside quantitative indicators for a subsample of cases to tease out and illuminate processes that statistical measures alone would not do justice to.
Such an approach would be particularly powerful if it involved a cohort approach that allowed data to be collected and tracked throughout the development of offending. This would ideally involve tracking young people who do not end up becoming involved in offending, as well as those that do. For this would provide an opportunity to assess how young people may have negotiated some similar constraints, or motivational concerns, but nonetheless avoided offending. Ultimately, this would further clarify the critical role of particular criminogenic constraints or motivational themes on the development of offending.

In carrying out such a piece of research, it would clearly be important to develop measures of the nature and extent of motivational themes among subjects, and ideally to measure levels of engagement with and exposure to broader cultural themes. This might include measuring consumption of different forms of music or other media or cultural forms, as well as themes encountered through social contacts. It would also be important to measure 'specialisms' or even self-ascribed offending identities. This would need to do more than just to rely on analyses of convictions. It would need to be guided by a significant self-report element, which might lend itself to a closer examination of patterns of specialisation. The development of valid and reliable quantitative measures would no doubt require developmental work. Certainly it could build on some of the themes developed in this research, but would perhaps also require insights from the type of exploratory research described above. Usefully, when tracking the development of criminogenic constraints and, for that matter, motivational themes through a career, measures could be developed that were sensitive to the level of 'activity' and 'passivity'. Specifically, this would involve gauging the extent to which motivations and constraints evolved through the choices and actions taken by the subjects, and the extent to which other actors were involved in generating these constraints and themes.

Finally, in analysing the careers it would be important to identify not just the averages and general tendencies of careers in general. It would require a specific commitment to developing statistical models for the different types of careers that exist - varying, for example, according to levels of fundamental constraint, levels of offending, types of motivational themes, and offending choices.
Offending and social structure

As a final thought, it would be useful to locate the processes implicated within offending careers within society as a whole - particularly if we are to assess the prevalence of offending risks within the population at large, and indeed if we are to develop policy responses to this. This might involve developing the kind of broad statistical assessments of prevalence of particular 'risks' which was carried out in Chapter 2 (Table 2.1) of this study. However, an important challenge would be to incorporate measures of some of the 'softer' factors which this research has identified as important, but which were not incorporated into Table 2.1. This would include the prevalence of certain types of cultural themes, identities and motivations which might be implicated in the development of offending. No doubt this could draw on survey work which explored some of these themes in the national population. Developing statistical measures of these things could draw on the types of statistical measures developed for the career analysis, discussed above.
Bibliography


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Appendix A - Interview schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. WHERE GROWN UP?</th>
<th>2. GROWN UP WITH WHO?</th>
<th>3. SITUATION OF FAMILY ETC.</th>
<th>4. GET ON WITHIN FAMILY ETC?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- born?</td>
<td>- parents, other adults?</td>
<td>- origins?</td>
<td>- like each other?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- accommodation (owned, rented, council)?</td>
<td>- aunts/uncles/cousins?</td>
<td>- jobs?</td>
<td>- arguments/fights?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- number of rooms?</td>
<td>- partner?</td>
<td>- education?</td>
<td>- ever in trouble?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- *any time away from home (e.g. care)</td>
<td></td>
<td>- interests?</td>
<td>- change over time?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. FRIENDS</th>
<th>6. ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>7. CULTURAL LIFE</th>
<th>8. SUPERVISION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- from where?</td>
<td>- things like doing?</td>
<td>- music?</td>
<td>- do parents ask what you're doing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- different times of life?</td>
<td>- with whom?</td>
<td>- TV?</td>
<td>- do you tell parents?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- how spend time?</td>
<td>- time on your own?</td>
<td>- films?</td>
<td>- what do parents think you doing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- girlfriends /partners?</td>
<td>- much time at home?</td>
<td>- clothes?</td>
<td>- do parents ever try to stop you going out?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- expectations of girlfriends?</td>
<td>- typical week? how long doing what?</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- best friends</td>
<td>- changed over time?</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- what schools?</td>
<td>- things you liked?</td>
<td>- what have you been doing?</td>
<td>- ever had a job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- what type?</td>
<td>- things you didn’t like?</td>
<td>- been ‘unemployed’/signing on?</td>
<td>- how find job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- when?</td>
<td>- schoolwork? good/bad?</td>
<td>- anything else for money?</td>
<td>- what was it like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- bunk off?</td>
<td></td>
<td>- did you finish?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- suspended/expelled?</td>
<td></td>
<td>- why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- get in trouble? what happened?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- parents reaction to trouble?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- parents attitude to school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- change over time?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>13. DRINKING</th>
<th>14. DRUGS</th>
<th>15. INVOLVEMENT IN CRIME / POLICE</th>
<th>16. ILLEGAL THINGS DONE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- friends?</td>
<td>- which? how often?</td>
<td></td>
<td>- nicked stuff? shoplifting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- family?</td>
<td>- friends?</td>
<td></td>
<td>- threats?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- family?</td>
<td></td>
<td>- fights?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>17. FIRST ILLEGAL THING</th>
<th>18. FAMILY / FRIENDS KNOW?</th>
<th>19. REASONS FOR CRIME</th>
<th>20. FIRST CONTACT WITH POLICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- why not other crimes?</td>
<td>- who were you with?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- were friends involved?</td>
<td>- when?/where?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- time of day?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- previous contact?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>21. GENERAL POLICE CONTACT</th>
<th>22. EXPERIENCES OF ARREST</th>
<th>23. OUTCOMES OF ARRESTS?</th>
<th>24. EXPERIENCES OF COURT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- how often?</td>
<td>- first time arrested?</td>
<td>- NFA</td>
<td>- how many times?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- been arrested?</td>
<td>- examples?</td>
<td>- caution</td>
<td>- plea?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- different police officers?</td>
<td>- how did police behave?</td>
<td>- charge</td>
<td>- co-Ds?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- treated fairly?</td>
<td>- do they explain things?</td>
<td>- prosecution</td>
<td>- who accompanies you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- ever treated badly?</td>
<td>- adult present? who?</td>
<td>- bail / remand</td>
<td>- who is lawyer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- ever had any physical fights?</td>
<td>- what legal advice? who?</td>
<td>- trial (which court?)</td>
<td>- legal advice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- answer questions? (right to silence?) with solicitor?</td>
<td>- disposal</td>
<td>- PSR?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- what are interviews like?</td>
<td></td>
<td>- evidence on your behalf?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- what do friends and family think?</td>
<td></td>
<td>- treated fairly?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- ever supervised?</td>
<td>- context</td>
<td>- police treatment?</td>
<td>- plea?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- what have to do?</td>
<td>- how did the police get you?</td>
<td>- legal advice?</td>
<td>- co-DS? what happened to them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- how often?</td>
<td>- what did they say?</td>
<td>- plea?</td>
<td>- accompanied?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- did you do it?</td>
<td>- answer questions?</td>
<td>- treated fairly?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- treated fairly?</td>
<td>- treated fairly?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- what was family and friends' reaction?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>29. OTHER TIMES IN PRISON?</th>
<th>30. BEING IN PRISON NOW?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- for what?</td>
<td>- what's it like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- how did you find it?</td>
<td>- prison staff?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- what did your family/friends think?</td>
<td>- other inmates?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- see friends/family?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
31. Do you think different types of people do different types of crime? (Possible ethnic probe on: black overrep, dominance of robbery)

32. If you could suggest ways that the police could do their job better, what would you suggest? - do you think the police are racist?

33. What about lawyers?

34. What about courts?

36. What about Probation Officers?

37. What about prison staff?

38.a. What kind of crime deserves a 2-year sentence? b. What about 5-years?

39. Do you know people from your background who have not been involved in crime?

40. Are there people you know who have given up their involvement in crime? - friends? - family? - why? what has been different about their life?

41. Taking into account what you have told me, is there anything that would have made a difference to you being here?

42. Given the chance, is there anything in life you would have done differently?

43. Looking realistically at the future, what do you expect you’ll be doing 5 years from now? - job, family, friends

44. Ideally, what you really like to be doing 5 years from now? - job, family, friends
Appendix B - Examples of life histories of interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>John, aged 18, white 'disordered offender' (M3)</th>
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</table>

John grew up initially with three brothers and three sisters and his mother. His father left his mother when he was two years old, which left him feeling resentful:

My dad had left...and he wasn't keeping in touch with us. At first I blamed him and then when I got to about eight I started to blame my mum, you know what I mean. She must have pissed him off, or he pissed her off, whatever, and he's gone, you know what I mean. Basically her fault.

He was expelled twice from primary school. The first time for taking the wheels of the headmaster's car and the second time for threatening the headmaster with a knife. Around the age of 10, John started becoming involved in crime:

Well really I just started to follow my brothers, getting into trouble and things like that. I'd come back, my mum would have argued, 'You are not going out!'...and things like that.

At this time his mother contacted social services and he went into care:

I was in and out different children homes. Went to one of the worst ones in [X] really...when I was 15 and stupidly enough I got in with the wrong people there, started glue-sniffing and out joy-riding and things like that. And then I got put into a secure unit when I was 15.

More recently, John started living with a foster mother which had had a positive effect on his life:

I can get on with her better... I ain't got nothing to blame her for, she ain't got nothing to moan at me for. All the time I was up at her house I behaved. When I was around her area, I behaved.

Despite this, his offending did not stop entirely, as relationships with old acquaintances persisted:

Now and then I would end up going back to [X] - my old friends and getting arrested...

Most of his crime has revolved around car theft. This was for selling on but, importantly, for joy-riding, too. He also been involved in other crimes such as burglaries, violence, vandalism. However, had also managed to work sporadically, picking up informal work through family contacts:

...little jobs here and there, just weekenders and things like that, uncles, cousins. Roofing and building.

Although he has previously been remanded, this is his first prison sentence for the burglary of a chemist. He has 13 previous convictions for a range of offences including burglary, theft, theft of a motor vehicle, handling stolen goods and possession of an offensive weapon.
Mark, aged 19, white ‘disordered offender’ (M7)

Mark grew up with both his parents and an older brother. Despite no obvious family problems, it was clear that Mark was getting into trouble early on in life - he was expelled from school as young as nine years old for stealing a teacher’s handbag. It appeared that an important source of his problems emerged resulting from difficulties faced with schoolwork:

I was terrible at school I think it was because I couldn’t concentrate, I wasn’t very, I wouldn’t say thick, but I couldn’t catch on quick enough and stuff like that, and so I would disrupt people like that I would disrupt the class and that and ...that’s where it starts...

During his educational career he moved between a number of schools. However, he found himself hanging around with a group of people with whom he would play truant:

There was a few good lads who were my mates. I don’t know, they’re just the same as me as we were never there [at school] and that was always the way.

And while in school was clearly very troublesome - culminating in his expulsion from school and the end of his education:

I finished [school when I was] young, when I was about fifteen...I got kicked out of school for like fighting and that, and bad behaviour... I fucking got kicked out of a few schools...I was always fighting, I used to love a fight.

His offending emerged and developed alongside the snowballing of Mark’s problems. Used to do burglaries and car thefts. Initially, this involved making money for clothes and cars. However, his offending escalated further when he developed a serious crack addiction, which began when he came across a large amount of the drug while carrying out a burglary:

I think we broke in a house once and there was a lot [of crack] there. We found a lot in the house, drugs and money and that....There was about 10 ounces of crack and that...I started smoking it in a joint and found out how to put it in a pipe and that...

Mark describes the way in which his involvement with crack affected his criminal motivations:

[On crack] you just rob anything, you just, you know what I mean, you just start getting lower and lower and start pinching anything for money. Start robbing your mum and stuff like that.

Notably, this led to more violent forms of offending, including robbery and aggravated burglaries.
Marcus, aged 21, Black-Caribbean 'disordered offender' (M52)

Marcus, had problems from the age of seven, when his twin sister died of a brain tumour. This event had a devastating effect on the family, which consisted of Marcus’s mother and another sister:

\[
\text{When my sister died my mum just flipped, innit. Started drinking and that. When she started drinking she never used to buy no food, she never used to buy no clothes for me and my sister.}
\]

Marcus’s father was not around to support the family during this difficult time, which was clearly a source of resentment for Marcus. In the context he tried to take control of the situation. On his own:

\[
\text{I've been the man of the family. I have been out from the age of eight, I've been on the street raising money. I've been on the street from the age of eight looking after my mum and my sister so it's no wonder why I'm in these kind of places you know.}
\]

Very soon, Marcus was taken into care, which involved a series of spells in different institutions and foster families:

\[
\text{Been in children's' homes, been in foster homes - I've been there, nearly everywhere. I ain't bothered. They can't do nothing to me what they ain't already done.}
\]

Marcus was expelled from mainstream schooling at about twelve for stabbing the teacher with a pencil, and was later expelled from boarding school for a serious assault against one of the other residents. This left him effectively illiterate, until taking classes in prison.

Although he offended to raise money for his family, he also started offending to finance his image. And, as he became older, upholding an image became a very important concern:

\[
\text{I've got a standard to uphold. I'm not walking on the street looking like no tramp. I mean I've got to buy my clothes. I've got to get money from somewhere just to buy my clothes and that you know what I mean. There's no way I'm going to slip and slide. If I slip and slide my name's gone down.}
\]

His favoured type of crime was robbery, although he recounts involvement in a range of offences, including shoplifting, burglaries and crack-dealing, and has convictions for burglary, theft, criminal damage and assault, among other things. These convictions involved him spending some previous time in prison.

Before coming into prison, he had started living with one of his several girlfriends following a disabling car accident.

\[
\text{I started living with my girl '96 October when I had my car crash. I had a car crash. I couldn't use my hand any more. I still can't use it but like I used to live with my girlfriend. I can't do half the things for myself now. Like she helps me so it's better to stay with her.}
\]

His current prison sentence is for a street robbery that resulted in a conviction for theft.
Michael grew up with his mother, and a younger brother and sister. His father also lived with him for some of the time, although much of the time he was absent, touring as a musician in Barbados. Describing his family, he was keen to highlight their respectability:

*Everybody's got a job – most of my family are doing a high standard of work... I've grown up with manners, so my mum's always taught me to respect my elders and respect for each and every person.*

His problems appeared to develop during secondary school, when he started getting in trouble for fighting. He was actually expelled from this school at 13, following his violent reaction to a teacher who called him a ‘black bastard’, in which he broke the teacher's nose. Following this, he went on to a series of other schools, encountering problems in each of them. At his next school, the teachers had no control over the pupils so his mother moved him to a technology college. There, he was wrongly accused of stealing for which he was suspended:

*The principal...said, 'Listen, we're going to suspend you for three days for...misconduct'... I'm thinking now, 'Everything is just going downhill for me, everything's just gone downhill'*.  

Following this incident, his mother transferred him to his last school, where he experienced serious bullying from other pupils and began to truant because he was frightened to come to school. This meant he effectively dropped out of school around the age of 15.

Although Michael had had dealings with police as early as nine for driving a car, his crime started properly towards the end of his time at school, although it involved people from outside of school.

*Basically my offending started when I was about 14. I got mixed up with the wrong crowd at that time: car thefts, stealing from the shops, ram-raids everything. It was just something to do, because there was no youth club around the area where you could go and do something you were just on the street and bored. You just wanted something to do basically.*

Soon after this, he started hanging around with his older cousins, and was out of his mother’s supervision. His offending became more serious, and this was partly because he became more interested in an expensive lifestyle:

*Going out to the clubs with my cousins is another reason I turned to a different style of crime - because I needed money to support myself when I went out buying clothes and buying things - buying flash things.*

Thus, while he was originally involved in car-theft, he later started doing snatch-thefts and robberies of laptop computers of businessmen, and most seriously became involved in some armed robberies. However, his crime had levelled off more recently, and he had been working as a fitness instructor before coming to prison.
Darren's family appeared to have provided him with a secure background: his mother was a probation officer and his father an engineer and appeared to have a promising future. At school, he was relatively successful obtaining seven GCSEs, didn't want to stay on to study further:

I got good marks all the time. My teachers in school said, 'Oh, you don't apply yourself so much...why don't you do A levels?' because I was in the highest groups, like maths and English and science. I says: 'I don't want to. I want to get my GCSEs, I want to leave school and get myself a job'.

After school he found himself work in various jobs, including work as a pipe-fitter and as a forklift driver. He also had an abiding passion for football:

I played a lot of football - everything revolved around football really. I played semi-professional teams and that...I think if I'd stayed with football I would have become a footballer.

Darren sees the origins of his problems as the time he started going to raves towards the end of his time at school.

I think it all started off with like the raving. We all used to go to the raves together.

This lifestyle entailed recreational drugs and expensive clothes. Petty crime started in order to finance this lifestyle around the age of 16 and 17. While this started as shop-lifting, it graduated to car-theft and burglary. However, soon his drug-use escalated to heroin, which involved an escalation in cost:

It was going up in drugs. You would go from whizz to ecstasy, from ecstasy to cocaine. Eventually you end up on heroin...Then as soon as I like started getting into the heavier drugs that's when the crime started going on - robberies and stupid things. You need more money because the drugs cost more money.

Soon he was no longer working, his involvement in heroin became all-consuming, and his offending became frequent and serious, involving regular robberies of off-licences:

Just before I came to jail I was spending seventy pounds-worth a day - a gram a day - which is a lot of money when you are not working. You have to go out and earn it every day. Madness really... I'd go out, do robberies and off-licences and that, and if I had six hundred pounds I wouldn't... smoke the gram a day, I'd like smoke a lot more than a gram a day because the money was there... you just seem to want to smoke more and more.

Finally, Darren was caught in the act of a robbery by a group of off-duty policemen that led to his current conviction for robbery. Darren had some previous convictions, including an assault that took place during a football match, as well convictions for shoplifting and a driving offence.
Wayne grew up with his mother and two younger and two younger brothers. His parents split up when he was five:

*They were always arguing...I think my dad was having drugs - crack or something...he was on drugs and kept on beating up my mum and that.*

However, despite these early problems, he had some stability while growing up. His mother held down regular work, and despite some of his friends dropping out of school, he had stayed to the end:

*Some of them that left school early, when I was still at school. They started getting into crime and that. I stayed on at school until I finished doing all my exams and that.*

After school, he started a youth training course as a bricklayer. However, he left this after a bad experience with his supervisor.

*Something went missing...and because me and my friend had a padlock on our locker thing and we was away...[he] tried sawing off the thing - thought we had the stuff in like our locker and that. I just left there after that...[the] geezer didn't trust us.*

He also helped a friend’s father with some cable-laying work, which was short-lived temporary work. However, with little else to do, and now living in a flat with his girlfriend, Wayne started his involvement in offending at the age of 18. He was tempted into this after observing his friends making large amounts of money from crime:

*Seen them coming home with about three hundred pound a day and that. I just thought forget working for forty-five pound a week...I could just go out and go out with them and earn some money with them.*

During this period, he was experimenting with a range of drugs, and eventually developed a dependency on heroin:

*I smoked it for about six months, and all of a sudden I started to get all that after effects...wake up in the morning had bad stomachs and all that and the pain wouldn’t go away until I had some more heroin.*

Fortunately, however, he had taken a course of methadone treatment before coming into prison and managed to come off the heroin.

His crime started with shoplifting, then moved on to stealing stereos and mobile phones from cars, and eventually involved commercial burglaries that allowed him to make more money. His convictions include shoplifting, theft, vehicle taking as well as a previous robbery charge - which he claimed he was only a bystander to. His current charge - also classified as a robbery - started off as a burglary of a warehouse with friends, which involved a confrontation with a security guard.
David, aged 21, Black-Mixed ‘dabbler’ (M21)

David was born in England, but between the ages of five and ten lived in Nigeria, before returning to England again. His parents, who were religious, were quite strict with him, and actually prevented him from going out and socialising.

His problems developed in the context of sixth-form college. Though he started off college as very ‘health conscious’, he became interested in cannabis:

*Until I got to college, I didn’t smoke cigarettes or anything, played as much sport as I could. Then I saw people smoking, smoking weed or cannabis or whatever you call it, and it was just that I was just sort of interested to find out why, why, what’s the buzz like, why do so many people do it, there must be a reason, so I ended up trying it.*

From here, he was distracted from his studies, and became disappointed at his failure to achieve his potential:

*Towards the end of college it was, it was getting that instead of going to lessons or whatever I’d be like going out the back of the college like, smoking cannabis like, I’d rather do that than go to lessons. I mean, you know, I didn’t get the grades that I wanted in the end so when I left I was sort of like depressed in a way, I hadn’t really, I’d spent two years and not really achieved what I should have done...*

After leaving school, he remained depressed, and had problems finding a job, and problems doing his re-takes. This was exacerbated by his moving away from his parents, who he found too strict:

*I went back to college, to another college to improve my grades. I was there until, from September ‘til December, like that didn’t work out ‘cos I found I didn’t, living away from home and I didn’t have the finances to fund college without a job. So I started to leave that and get a job, then I couldn’t get a job, I found myself with nothing to do, you know I had friends coming round all the time and like just smoking, just dossing, not doing anything.*

Eventually, he accumulated debts to his cannabis dealer that he could not pay. At this point, at the suggestion of his dealer, he sold some cannabis himself to clear his debt:

*I was in a circle where so many people use the drug that you didn’t even think of it as a drug, it was like, just like a cigarette. I mean it comes like normality...So without thinking about what I was actually doing, I found myself doing something which was illegal and I carried on for a while. And then I got caught...in town with some cannabis on me and my flat was searched and they found some more there...I know what I was doing was wrong so I admitted it.*
Farhad, aged 18, Bangladeshi 'dabbler' (M44)

Before coming to prison, Farhad lived with his mother and father. He is the youngest of six, and his brothers and sisters had mostly married and seemed to have successful lives. However, Farhad was scathing of the area he lived in the years before coming to prison, and accords this an important place in the explanation of his offending:

> It's rough. There's a lot crime and drugs, a lot of drug trafficking there... just outside my doorstep as it goes... No-one gives a damn round that area... If you know how to get around it it's alright but it's not somewhere I would like to live any more if you get what I'm saying... that's probably the reason why I've ended up in here.

During school, Farhad went through a period of truancy, but in the fifth year, with the help of a social worker, his attendance improved and he took his GCSEs.

> School was alright. I used to get along with everyone. Never had a fight in my whole school life. I truanted you could say half of my GCSE years - [in the]... fourth I year had attendance record of 47 per cent. My last year [however]... I fixed up, and then I came out alright, but I could have done better.

After school, Farhad successfully completed a college course in IT and then found a job in McDonalds where he became a trainee manager.

> At first it was peanuts really, but then when I went for my training as manager I started to, it's still peanuts but I got four pounds an hour. It was alright for the time being, especially as I was living at home. I weren't doing that many hours a week, I was only doing part-time. Three days a week, sometimes four if I wanted the extra hours.

Although Farhad first landed himself in some trouble with police at nine, for stealing from an ice-cream van with some friends, the next time he recalled offending was for stealing some stamps from a machine when he was 15. Again, he was caught for this by police, for which he received a conditional discharge from court. Also, when at school, he shoplifted some clothes on a few occasions. After leaving school, at 17, he became involved in some fraud, and a one-off robbery, both of which he was caught for by police:

> I never got into trouble with the police for about two years since I was 15. Then when I turned 17 my friend must have showed me a few tricks like fraud and stuff like that - cheques and credit cards and stuff like that. I got into it... for about three months and then I got caught doing it... I did a robbery during that time and I robbed a little boy of his ring and that's why I've been in here now.

Reflecting on his offending, Farhad commented:

> Most of the people that I know are into... crime. And when you're involved in that and you've grown up with that all around you all the time, you just get yourself involved because you feel the desire for money as well as they do, and it's like you think: 'should I go with them?'