

State Crime Theory

Core Idea: States can commit crimes when they violate domestic or international law, or fundamental human rights, through action or omission

Key Figures: Stanley Cohen – states of denial.

Penny Green & Tony Ward – state crime and human rights.

MKULTRA Relevance: Conducted illegal human experimentation, often without consent, violating the Nuremberg Code (1947).

Activities were concealed through classification, false reporting, and destruction of records.

Illustrates state-corporate crime — CIA partnered with universities, hospitals, and pharmaceutical companies.

Analytical Point: Shows how states can justify illegal acts under the guise of national security.

Differential Association Theory

Core Idea: Criminal behaviour is learned through interaction with others

Key Figure: Edwin H Sutherland

MKULTRA Relevance: Operatives, scientists, and doctors working on MKULTRA learned techniques of deception, coercion, and non-consensual experimentation from one another.

Differential Association Theory (cont)

Created a subculture where ethical norms were inverted — illegal actions were normalised as patriotic duty.

Analytical Point: Professional networks and covert culture reinforced deviant methods.

Neutralisation Theory

Core Idea: Offenders use justifications to neutralise guilt and maintain a positive self-image.

Key Figures: Gresham Sykes & David Matza

MKULTRA Relevance: Denial of Injury: "The greater good of national security outweighs harm to individuals."

Appeal to Higher Loyalties: "Protecting America from communism justifies extreme measures."

Denial of Victim: Subjects seen as expendable or as enemy sympathisers.

Analytical Point: These rationalisations helped participants continue unethical work without moral breakdown.

Strain Theory

Core Idea: Crime can result from the pressure to achieve societal goals when legitimate means are blocked.

Key Figure: Robert K. Merton

Strain Theory (cont)

MKULTRA Relevance: Cold War paranoia created pressure to achieve perfect interrogation/mind control techniques before the Soviets.

CIA saw "normal" scientific progress as too slow — resorted to illicit, high-risk experimentation.

Analytical Point: Shows how Cold War competition functioned as a structural strain encouraging deviance.

Techniques of State Secrecy

Core Idea: Powerful actors use secrecy, bureaucracy, and manipulation of law to conceal wrongdoing

Key Figures: Jock Young – criminology of the powerful

Laureen Snider – corporate/state crime cover-ups

MKULTRA Relevance: Use of front organisations, code names, and fragmented funding streams to hide activities.

Destruction of records in 1973 to prevent exposure during Watergate climate.

Manipulating research grants to universities to mask the true purpose.

Analytical Point: Demonstrates how state power enables crimes that ordinary citizens cannot commit or hide.



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Victimology

Core Idea:	The study of victims and victimisation patterns
MKULTRA Relevance:	Many subjects came from vulnerable groups: psychiatric patients, prisoners, sex workers, addicts, homeless individuals. The CIA targeted those with low social capital to minimise backlash. Victims were often unaware they had been experimented on until decades later.
Analytical Point:	MKULTRA shows structural victimisation — harm inflicted on those least able to resist or seek justice.

Organisational Deviance

Core Idea:	When illegal or unethical practices become embedded in an organisation's culture
Key Figures:	Diane Vaughan (The Challenger Launch Decision)
MKULTRA Relevance:	Deviant practices institutionalised within CIA's Technical Services Division. The culture rewarded secrecy, operational success, and innovation — not legality or ethics.
Analytical Point:	The deviance was not a rogue act, but part of CIA's operational DNA.

Routine Activity Theory

Core Idea:	Crime occurs when motivated offenders, suitable targets, and lack of capable guardians converge
Key Figures:	Lawrence Cohen & Marcus Felson
MKULTRA Relevance:	Motivated Offenders: CIA operatives/scientists seeking Cold War advantage. Suitable Targets: Vulnerable human subjects. Absence of Guardians: Lack of oversight from Congress, courts, or public.
Analytical Point:	Secrecy acted as both a motivator and a shield against accountability.



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