

Locating Deviance

Crime, Change and
Organizations

Gerald Mars

ADVANCES IN CRIMINOLOGY

LOCATING DEVIANCE

Gerald Mars is an analyst in the classical traditions of social anthropology and urban ethnography. He is concerned to first understand and then describe, using classification schemes solidly based in the “how” of crime and deviance rather than by jumping mindlessly into the knee-jerk political reflexes of the “why do bad things happen?” and “how shall society punish what it cannot cope with?” questions. This book is essential reading for those including most operational managers who want to take a mental step back and ask fundamental questions about “what kind of society are we, that these unplanned outcomes occur?” and “how is it that we are all implicated in organizations that co-create deviance?”.

David Weir, Professor of Management, University Campus Suffolk, UK, and ESC
Rennes, France

This volume displays and also integrates Mars’ major contributions over several decades to general social theory, anthropology and criminology. Combining subtle and meticulous ethnography with historically-informed innovation in theory, these studies provide master classes in using empirical work for the most ambitious theoretical arguments. In showing how deviance is central to social organization, he elegantly turns Durkheim's aphorism about the normality of crime into a strategy of general social inquiry into institutional dynamics.

Perri 6, Professor of Public Management, Queen Mary College, University of London, UK

Gerald Mars again demonstrates how, using anthropology’s concepts and sensitive participant observation he illumines areas other disciplines find difficult to reach. Via detailed case studies he uncovers the keys to organizational criminality that should appeal to criminologists, anthropologists and managers alike. Easy to read, essentially practical, its final chapter – charting the cultural bases of deviance in the financial service industries – is a tour de force.

Tom Selwyn, Professor of Anthropology, SOAS, University of London, UK

Gerald Mars has been a lifelong student of human behavior as it is shaped and channeled by the cultures and structures of society. But he is at his anthropological best when he delves into the subcultural nuances and situational complexities of ordinary workers. There are few anthropologists of crime and deviance among ordinary folk. Gerald Mars is a master of research on workplace deviance. He digs deep and provides rich layered explanations that illuminate what we take for granted, yet his analysis is central to how we construct meaningful lives. In this latest work Mars integrates his lifetime observations grounded in empirical ethnographies, but reveals a theoretical progression and a deepening sophisticated analysis. This book not only integrates Mars’ studies over a lifetime but provides insight into his own academic journey and that alone is a veritable delight.’

Stuart Henry, Professor of Criminology, San Diego State University, USA

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Locating Deviance

Crime, Change and Organizations

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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2013 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Mars, Gerald.

Locating deviance: crime, change and organizations. – (Advances in criminology)

1. Employee crimes. 2. Applied ethics. 3. Business ethics.

I. Title II. Series

364.1'68-dc23

The Library of Congress has cataloged the printed edition as follows:

Mars, Gerald.

Locating deviance : crime, change, and organizations/by Gerald Mars.

pages cm. — (Advances in criminology)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4094-2789-6 (hardback: alk. paper) — ISBN 978-1-4094-7148-6

— ISBN 978-1-4094-2790-2 (ebook) 1. Criminal psychology. 2. Criminal behavior. 3.

Organized crime. I. Title.

HV6080.M363 2013

364.3—dc23

2012049947

ISBN 9781409427896 (hbk)

ISBN 9781315592886 (ebk)

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Foreword

It is a special pleasure for me to write an introduction to a collection of essays by my friend and mentor Gerry Mars. I first met Gerry when he gave an inspiring visiting lecture on the Masters course in Criminology at the Cambridge Institute of Criminology in 1972. There was, of course, the intrinsic excitement of listening to a speaker share his first-hand experience of ‘fiddling’ in a large variety of different kinds of job. Such ethnographic reports contrasted sharply with the often dry findings about populations of incarcerated offenders. But the more important message that emerged was that crime was an essential part of everyday life and did not have to be limited to the often voyeuristic ‘studying down’ of lower-class offenders (typically those who have been least successful). It strengthened my determination to specialize in the study of occupational crime. (In fact, my doctoral studies set out initially to compare dentists and landlords, a project that I, fortunately, abandoned. But that is another story.)

Gerry Mars typically conducts his research using observation and participant observation, and this book ends with some practical advice for those who wish to practise such methods. But his guiding ideas come from the framework of ‘Cultural Theory’ developed by the anthropologist Mary Douglas. This (perhaps unfortunately named) approach does not treat culture as a description of an interdependent social context but rather as a classificatory scheme that distinguishes social groups in terms of the relationship between hierarchists, individualists, egalitarians and fatalists. These categories (called ‘solidarities’ by Cultural Theorists) reflect how much people are integrated into a group – as well as how far they are subject to a high level of imposed rules. (It is important to note that this is a sociological theory, not an effort to understand individual behaviour.)

The essays included here illustrate how Mars applies Cultural Theory imaginatively to a wide range of cases. He shows that it can provide a key to explaining behaviours as different as dockyard and warehouse pilferage, terrorism, and banking fraud. As important, he also uses it to reveal the pathologies of those appointed to control and gatekeep deviance such as managers or management consultants. Surprises are guaranteed. His jointly authored paper (with Mary Douglas) on terrorism, for example, takes us far from the usual type of work on these groups. Here they are examined for what they have in common with other ‘enclave groups’ (many of whom are animated by egalitarian ideas) and the focus is on their need to restrict the inward flow of information, which then also has consequences for them.

Mars does not think of himself primarily as a criminologist but rather as an ‘applied anthropologist’ (for which he was awarded the prestigious Lucy Mair prize of the Royal Anthropological Institute). In trying to make sense of different settings,

his aim is the empirical explanation of variation using whatever disciplinary tools (such as those found in writings by anthropologists, historians, psychologists, economists or organizational theorists) may be helpful. Although his studies have been influential in the area of occupational crime, this book also suggests some wider implications of his work. Most importantly, it reminds us of the omnipresence of social control as an essential part of the making and unmaking of group life, a factor certainly more significant in its effects than official criminal justice, even as it supplements or circumvents it. Thus, for the subjects of Mars's research, deviance is often a resource for righting perceived grievances and achieving small-scale redistribution of goods (which could be seen as resistance to power and/or a way of diffusing more serious political resistance). Mars shows us the extent to which crime and deviance need to be seen as an aspect of making organizations work, or exploiting them or getting back at them – something that continues to be neglected in much criminological writing, not to mention practical enforcement.

His analyses can also contribute to developing the ever-popular (over-popular?) interest in processes of constructing and deconstructing of crime labels. Attention to such processes in studying matters such as 'pilfering' or 'tax avoidance' is, of course, particularly crucial in the areas of occupational and business crime. His essays show us who is doing (or trying to do) the labelling and the way this works out over time (an important element explaining why there are cycles in the commission of offences and the reactions to them). This book reminds us (as did Mary Douglas's seminal contributions) that responses to social problems and deviance are linked to differential perceptions of risk. Going beyond the somewhat obvious claim that the powerful label the powerless, Cultural Theory argues that different groups (even among the powerful) contest definitions of risks. Hierarchists, fatalists, individualists and egalitarians find different risks (un) acceptable and think differently about risk itself. When, as Mars demonstrates, this approach is brought to bear on the recent economic meltdown, it shows us how deviance was first normalized and then how 'conformity' was redefined, re-empowering the cultural worldviews of both hierarchists and egalitarians.

Mars's work is less concerned with the political or policy choices involved in the legal definition of crime. But arguably, too much concern with this level can obscure as much as it reveals about the relationship between crime and social reaction. This may be seen in the current debate over the growth of punishment, the rise of the alleged 'culture of control' and comparative incarceration rates. It is true that changes in crime rates are not a good explanation of recent rises in punitiveness. Countries with more crime do not necessarily have more people in prison, and, over time, an increased rise in crime rates can be associated with a decreasing use of prison, while a period of reducing crime rates (as recently) can be accompanied by a rise in prison rates. But, in the everyday making of social order, it is misleading to break the connection between conflict, crime and response (indeed, for Durkheim, crime is actually defined by the reaction to it). Mars mobilizes Cultural Theory so as to explain both crime and its control and we learn how difficult it is to separate deviance from the styles of control that shape it.

This has significant implications for the many parts of the world where politicians and police are also in collusion with different kinds of criminals.

The practical (and political) assumptions of Cultural Theory may, at first blush, seem to be relativist ones – all depends on the perspective of which of the four solidarities one adopts. But Mars also uses the approaches of each solidarity to offer critique of excesses of the others (suggesting that there may be some ideal balance). He makes no secret of his views that the current economic crisis can be attributed to an over-emphasis on individualism, even if he has also regularly pointed to the way hierarchical bureaucracies can be a drag on innovation. He has also noted the tendency of egalitarian groups, which reject high grid levels of regulation, to create over-rigid boundaries and to split into smaller groups. When it comes to the problem of enforcement, his analysis suggests that there may be inbuilt (collectively mandated) limits to deviance (as in the way dock workers engaged in pilferage spoke of ‘working the value of the boat’). He also warns us that over-reacting to what are considered ‘perks’ may lead to retaliation by workers. In discussing the reactions to economic excesses in the world of banking and investment, on the other hand, he notes that over-reaction can make the problem worse by discouraging risk taking at a time when bankers’ reluctance to take risks may dry up funds for investment and hence make a recession last longer.

With imagination and with sensitive fieldwork, this book well demonstrates (with Lewin) that ‘There is nothing so practical as a good theory.’

David Nelken
Series Editor

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Preface

A Personal Journey, a Guide to the Book, Chapter Outlines

My Introduction to Crime and Deviance¹

I began to be interested in occupational crime in the ten years of work between leaving school and university. Work in over thirty ‘ordinary’ jobs revealed established fiddling² in all of them except one.³ I found that in some jobs the fiddled medium was cash, in others goods, in yet others, time – and sometimes all three. And I learned that fiddling was not anarchic but operated according to understood rules and was invariably subject to firm moral imperatives. Experience was gained as a tram conductor and in a variety of shops, hotels, pubs, fairgrounds, cafes, offices, a factory, and during two years as a storeman in the RAF.

Most of my jobs in this early period were in Blackpool, then a flourishing seaside resort in the north of England.⁴ At that time, Blackpool was Britain’s most popular holiday resort, with over seven million staying visitors per year. It could well have been considered ‘The Fiddle Capital of the Northern Hemisphere’. Both holiday resorts and ports communities, I later found, were particularly prone to this kind of crime, being, as criminologists term it, ‘criminogenic’, a topic explored in Chapter 6.

These years of practical training ‘on the shop floor’ taught me the mechanics: the ‘how’, ‘when’ and ‘where’ of fiddling. I learned the varying routines by which to cheat customers, clients, employers and the tax authorities as well as different ways of manipulating time. This was followed by academic training in economics and social anthropology, then by two years’ anthropological fieldwork among longshoremen in Canada (called ‘dockers’ in the UK). Fortunately for my interests, the pilferage

1 Crime is behaviour that is against the law; deviance is behaviour that breaks social norms but is not necessarily against the law. I am aware that different groups define crime and assess norms differently and this is centrally addressed in Chapter 9. But for simplicity here I use the words ‘crime’ and ‘deviance’ interchangeably.

2 Minor cheating commonly related to work, is colloquially known as ‘fiddling’ in the UK and ‘scamming’ in the US.

3 And that was in a factory where time was strictly controlled and there was nothing that could usefully be pilfered.

4 A product and victim of mass transport, Blackpool flourished over a period of a hundred plus years that began with the development of cheap railway transport in the mid-nineteenth century and lasted until the mid-1960s when cheap package flights to the Spanish Costa Brava led to the town’s quick and calamitous decline.

rate in St John's was six times higher than the average of other Canadian ports and, like ports everywhere, was just beginning to face the buffeting of global competition and technical change. Two years' intensive participant observation revealed the techniques, internal controls, managerial collusion and morality that underpinned dock theft, and these are outlined in Chapter 5.

After Newfoundland, through my own employments, industrial consultancy and interviewing, I was able to gain data at different levels of organization in the UK and abroad and to confirm that fiddling was often carried on with the collusion of supervisors and sometimes of management. Where this was so, it involved organizations accepting and adapting to fiddles and incorporating them within their structures. In short, fiddling was not only extensive: it operated at many levels, served a number of useful functions, and was often institutionalized.

An extremely experienced workmate at the start of one of my first jobs told me, 'Every job has a fiddle, Gerry. Our job is to find it.' But if this was so, and it seemed it was, could their different forms justify treating them as a single entity when their variances seemed quite wide?

The Need to Classify

What was needed was a system of classification that would allow effective comparison and understanding. Without it, I merely had a collection of disparate accounts and was unable to compare, say, the group-based fiddles of collectively organized longshoremen with those of individually competitive journalists, the fiddles of waiters with those of garage mechanics, or the deviance of autonomous entrepreneurs with those of accountants – and without classification and comparisons there can be no science.

No existing system of classifying occupations⁵ or their fiddles satisfied these requirements. The academic literature revealed a dearth of any generalized and *comparative* accounts of workplace crime.⁶

5 For example, white- and blue-collar occupations and class-based categorizations – lower-, middle- and upper-class occupations.

6 The majority of studies in this field have taken, and still take, a 'managerial/consultancy' and often a moralist approach, to workplace crime, neither of which permits the suspension of morality necessary to dispassionate analysis. Rare exceptions are the pioneering study of managerial deviance, Melville Dalton's early classic *Men who Manage* (1959), Ditton's excellent study of bread roundsmen (1977), and Stuart Henry's *The Hidden Economy* (1978). Ditton's work, being an ethnography, is largely limited to the concerns of a single occupation. Henry's contribution is to link workplace crime to the wider 'Hidden Economy' of which it is a part, but it too does not draw comparisons between occupations. Since their contributions, however, there has emerged a body of useful work on organizational crime, especially Ackroyd and Thompson's *Organizational Misbehaviour* (1999) and Maurice Punch's *Dirty Business* (1996).

This synthesis was later to be provided by Cultural Theory (CT),⁷ which originates with the work of Mary Douglas in anthropology. Its effectiveness when applied to classifying occupations and understanding work-based ‘amateur’ fiddles then became clear⁸ – as did its wider application to organizations and to providing a different, non-orthodox, way of understanding professional crime and criminals as discussed in Chapter 2. The revelations that emerged during the widespread economic crash of 2007–2009 extended interest further – taking analysis from the micro-concerns of the workplace to the macro-deviance emanating from boardrooms, a topic explored in Chapter 9.

A Guide to the Book and Chapter Outlines

This book locates the social contexts in which crime occurs – from the local to the global. After an account of the theoretical framework by which the book’s material is organized, it considers the social contexts of crime more generally. It then focuses on case studies of behaviour in the workplace, then on cases that reveal the intrusion of influence from the communities in which they are set. Finally it assesses the influence of long-wave economic cycles (Kondratieff waves) on organizational crime and deviance, with particular reference to deviance during the last upturn and the subsequent current crash. An appendix offers a ‘how to’ guide to doing fieldwork in workplaces.

Chapter 1 discusses the derivation of CT and its four archetypal categories (variously called cultures, ‘ways of life’ or ‘solidarities’): Hierarchy, Individualism, Egalitarianism and Fatalism. These form the book’s analytic core.

These archetypal cultures derive from the way people’s lives are organized. They are based on two universally validated dimensions – the rules that cultures impose on their people (Grid), and the degree they are integrated into groups (Group). Arranged as continua and presented as a 2×2 matrix, they provide the four archetypes. Each of the four links to a distinct and cohesive ‘cluster’ of values, attitudes and behaviours. Hierarchy demonstrates respect for tradition, order and precedence; Individualism for unfettered competition; Egalitarianism for the virtues of the bounded group, the Enclave as against the exploitative ‘outside’; and Fatalism by a passive acceptance of the status quo. These are compared across cultures to demonstrate their universal relevance across time and place. They are applied here to show how not only organizational deviance but crime more generally similarly reflects the way people’s lives are organized and offers the basis of their classification.

7 See Mary Douglas’s originating article, ‘Cultural Bias’ (1982). For a fuller account of developments in CT, see Thompson et al. 1990. For an update with examples of articles using the theory, see Perri 6 and Mars 2008.

8 The resultant book was published in 1982 as *Cheats at Work: An Anthropology of Workplace Crime*.

Chapter 2 then applies CT to the wider ranges of crime and criminality and pinpoints the strengths and vulnerabilities of each of the four criminal cultures. The chapter then uses the same model to examine the social organization of the police and military intelligence and to identify their strengths and vulnerabilities when dealing with criminal adversaries.

Chapter 3 applies the four cultures to focus on the ‘fiddling’ of ordinary people in ‘ordinary jobs’. It deals with difficulties of classifying and comparing workplace crimes, demonstrates the collusion of supervisors and often of managements, and assesses their justifying ethics.. The chapter identifies eight ‘fiddle-prone’ factors that facilitate workplace crime and the sway of three macro-influences: globalization, new technologies, and the growth of Individualism. It shows how occupational crime causes organizations to adapt their structures, distort their functions, and sometimes determine whether they operate at all. These features emerge with different emphases throughout the book. The final part of this chapter considers the changing nature of workplace sabotage, including computer sabotage.

Each of chapters 4, 5 and 6 takes a different CT culture and, by case studies, illustrates the specifics of each distinctive form of deviance.

Chapter 4 concentrates on the politics of the Enclave, on egalitarianism, to examine the political structures of organized dissent. It focuses on terrorist crime to chart the constraints facing enclavic organizations – though, of course, it is not claimed that dissenting organizations are necessarily terrorist or criminal. But enclaves of all persuasions similarly attempt to manipulate and control the information available to their members. This determines the choices they can make and has implications for the organization’s structure and the behaviour of its members. It refutes more common explanations for behaviours associated with collective dissent commonly attributed to the personalities of their members and leaders.

Chapter 5, a case study of Hierarchy in action, examines dock theft in Newfoundland, Canada to show the parallel organization of legitimate and illegitimate work. It took two years of participant observation to unpick the complex system by which cargo was obtained and distributed, to appreciate the discipline and controls necessary to regulate it, the system of morality by which it was justified, the community norms that supported it, and the inherent collusion of managers who tolerated it.

Chapter 6 again examines the role of Hierarchy to examine a warehouse with an extremely high level of pilferage. It focuses on the links between community and workplace values and behaviour. Set in a dockland community, though not linked to the docks, it reveals the pervasive influence of community culture in the warehouse and the opposed cultures of distant management and locally recruited labour. This chapter concludes by presenting the concept of ‘community criminogenesis’ – the proneness of a community to occupational crime. Two types are identified, one dependent on a dominant industry’s dealings with goods handled by teams, the other with services offered by individuals.

In Chapter 7, two cases of aberrant Individualism are offered, again derived from participant observation, to develop the idea of ‘organizational capture’

leading to ‘Organizational Tyranny’ and the perversion of normative ends. In the first, an enclavic organization of professional recruitment consultants is ‘captured’ by its individualist elite, its normative moral values being then negated and its resources exploited. The second explores how a university business school was similarly captured to reveal how a new individualist management manipulated resources and controlled information to transform it into ‘more of a business than a school’. The concept of ‘organizational tyranny’ is then refined, showing how the inherent checks of hierarchic organizational power can be eroded by competitive Individualism to pervert its functions – that is, to assert the dominance of instrumental at the expense of normative ends.

Chapter 8, also a study in Individualism, details a further case of ‘organizational capture’. It again shows how the resources of an organization can be manipulated to depart from its original purpose. The case details a biscuit factory in Soviet Georgia beset by targets laid down by distant planners. It was ‘captured’ by its local management, who transformed it into a private free-market enterprise. It circumvented its targets to produce 30 per cent *more* biscuits than the plan specified. This it then supplied to an illicit and enthusiastic private market. Here distant and essentially attenuated control offers strong parallels with the distant, globalized controls and targets set for subsidiary organizations by transnational companies, and it has parallels with government-controlled public utilities.

Much of this book, like much of criminology, takes little account of macro economic factors that appear to influence behaviour at micro levels. And yet the climate created by disparate economic conditions is pervasive and has profound influences, not just on behaviour in general but on criminal behaviours in particular.

It is suggested that a useful approach which links economic conditions to criminal behaviours can benefit from the work of Nicolai Kondratieff, a Soviet economist killed by Stalin in the 1930’s.

Chapter 9 accordingly links CT’s behavioural approach to Kondratieff’s theory of economic long waves to demonstrate how different phases of economic cycles rise to dominance and fall as cycles proceed. Four case studies of economic cycles are offered, each exposing the deviance appropriate to each. Upturns reveal the dominance of individualist values: short-term optimism, boldness in decision making, the legitimating of rewards to risk takers, free market competition, freedom from controls and, on occasion, rule bending. An upturn is always marked by ‘deviant exuberance’ that ends in a crash, the beginning of a downturn, and then the emergence of Hierarchy. Hierarchy is characterized by opposed values: pessimism, risk aversion, and the denigration and stigmatizing of entrepreneurs, calls for their regulation and control and a respect for rules and precedent. Particular attention is given here to contemporary deviance in the financial services sector.

Finally the Appendix offers a ‘do-it-yourself’ guide to carrying out an organizational ethnography by calculating grid and group strengths. This offers a ‘quick and dirty’ means to assign organizations and the occupations within them to their appropriate cultures. So armed, the allocation of values, attitudes,

appropriate behaviours and justifying ethics should naturally follow as these are detailed in Chapter 1.

The Ethics of Participant Observation

This is a notably grey area⁹ and each case requires separate assessment. But discussion of ethics appears more complicated than I believe is merited. My standpoint is simple – possibly too simple. It is that the interests of informants should be sovereign, which means never publishing material or passing information to a third party that might identify or disadvantage them. As an example, I assured the longshoremen discussed in Chapter 5 that my findings on pilferage in the docks would remain confidential if publication would, *in their view*, damage their interests. This meant that, for ten years, data on dock theft could not be published. After ten years, however, the technology of shipping had shifted to the use of end- and side-loading vessels and the transport of cargo in containers. This obviated the need for gangs and with it their system of pilferage. It was when this new technology was well established and gangs were no longer employed that I asked my key informants and the Union's executive (the executive of the LSPU, The Longshoremen's Protective Union of St John's) to authorize publication, which they did (Mars 1974; see Chapter 5 of this volume).

However, information gained from one context can also damage the interests of informants in another. When working in the warehouse discussed in Chapter 6, I became well aware of the methods by which goods were pilfered and spirited from the warehouse – they replicated many of the methods I had experienced in RAF stores and by the longshoremen discussed in Chapter 5. But I felt bound not to reveal this in my discussions with employers because it would damage the interest of my warehouse informants.

Two Apologies

In a collection such as this, which derives from ongoing theoretical developments in the behavioural sciences, it seems inevitable that different terms should emerge for the same concepts, jostle for dominance and appear in print, only to become redundant and be replaced. While this might be thought indicative of the creative dynamism of its practitioners (or not!), it can cause considerable confusion to readers of a collection when the cores of component chapters, as here, have been published at different times and use different terms for the same concepts. 'Cultural Theory' started as 'Grid/Group', then became 'Grid/Group Theory' before being abbreviated here as 'CT'. The collective term for the fourfold categories

⁹ A fuller discussion of the ethics of participant observer fieldwork is by Jun Li, 'Ethical Challenges in Participant Observation' (2008).

started off as ‘cultures’, became ‘ways of life’, and now seems to be settled on ‘solidarities’. Perhaps most confusing, however, have been the names describing the ‘strong group / weak grid’ configuration, which has shifted from ‘enclaves’ and ‘enclavism’ to Egalitarianism, with sometimes both terms being linked. Use of the ‘weak group / strong grid’ term has similarly shifted from ‘isolate’ to ‘fatalist’, while ‘Individualism’ in Chapter 4 is referred to as ‘opportunism’.

A second apology concerns repetition. Several chapters have been published at different times and often in a ‘stand-alone’ format. This inevitably has sometimes meant the need here to repeat the basis of CT, while some case details are similarly repeated.

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