**Essay plan: Strain theory and crime**

Item B: Strain theories focus on the ways in which people may resort to crime of deviance when they are unable to achieve socially approved goals by legitimate means. For example, Merton argues American culture emphasises achieving success, but an unequal structure limits some individuals’ opportunity to do so legitimately. This may induce frustration in the individuals concerned. Some strain theorists see the response to this situation as a group reaction, in which individuals create or join deviant subcultures.

**Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate the contribution of strain theories to our understanding of crime and deviance [30 marks]**

Some possible ideas for a structure:

**Suggestion to help plan:** Consider the different strain theories, focusing most of your attention on Merton’s strain theory and subcultural strain theories of A K Cohen and Cloward and Ohlin, but mention recent strain theories too.

Para 1: Examine Merton’s idea of the ‘strain to anomie’ and his typology of adaptations to strain- give examples. Link to how he is different to Durkheim.

Para 2: Use Merton’s focus on the individual and utilitarian adaptations to lead into subcultural strain theories, explaining how they criticise and build on his ideas (Cohen). Evaluate Cohen.

Para 3: Do this again with Cloward and Ohlin. Evaluate Cloward and Ohlin.

Para 4: Evaluate using Miller and Hirschi – use issues such as determinism, neglect of power, and who makes the law, and reliance on official statistics.

Para 5: If possible (although we haven’t covered it yet) consider other theory’s views e.g. Marxists- you could do some additional reading.

Conclusion: are strain theories useful to understand crime and deviance.



**Key areas of the question that you need to address:**

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| What does the question want? | |
| **Introduction:** needs to address the debate and define key concepts in the question. Provide a brief overview of labelling approaches i.e. that they explain reactions to deviance but not the cause | |
| How could you use the **item** | |
| What key concepts will need to be included? | |
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| Conclusion- weigh up the debate: based on the evidence you have presented, does labelling theory really help us understand crime and deviance? | |