

**ITEM B: THE FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE OF CRIME**

*Unlike other sociological perspectives such as Marxism, Functionalist sociologists have a positive view of crime and deviance, seeing it as a necessary and useful part of social life. Functionalist sociologists believe that crime performs a range of important social functions such as maintaining boundaries and promoting social change.*

*However, critics would argue that crime is simply a manifestation of an unequal society and therefore it is a sign of social dysfunction.*

***Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate the Functionalist perspective of crime and deviance. (30 marks)***

Functionalist sociologists would argue that both crime and deviance have positive functions for society and that they are an inevitable part of social life. Without crime and deviance it would be difficult to establish norms and values and a shared system of beliefs as no member of society would ever deviate from normal social behaviour.

Functionalists such as Durkheim (1983) regard crime and deviance as a normal and in fact inevitable consequence of social life. This is the case because not everyone in society has had the same experience of socialisation (the process of learning the norms and values of society) and therefore their beliefs are always going to be slightly different to one another. As such, individual members of society will of course carry out different behaviours in social situations which, even if they are not considered criminal, may indeed be considered deviant. Durkheim also argued that in a modern society there has been a tendency towards anomie – a state of normlessness which means there is greater diversity in human behaviour and as such members of society naturally choose different behaviours or paths. According to Item B, however, these differences can have beneficial consequences for both the individual and society as crime and deviance perform “a range of important social functions such as maintaining boundaries and promoting social change”.

Durkheim elaborates on these ideas by arguing that criminal behaviour brings about a social reaction amongst members of society that amounts to a condemnation of their behaviour. However Durkheim believed that instead of forcing suffering or pain upon the offender, the purpose of punishment was to restore the boundaries accepted by wider society through making an example of members who

*A clear introduction which briefly outlines fundamental principles of Functionalist theories of crime.*

*A detailed analysis of the ideas of a specific Functionalist sociologist (Durkheim) which introduces new concepts which are used appropriately and are well explained.*

*There is reference to Item B and it has been directly quoted, as well as elaborated upon.*

*A continuation of the previous analysis and new concepts have been introduced.*

*Points have been supported by appropriate sociological*

fail to adhere to the norms and values. Similarly he argued that in order for any social change to occur (positive or negative) it must start with an act that deviates from the norm, and therefore would be considered deviant or even criminal. A famous example of this would be the political activism of Nelson Mandela against Apartheid in South Africa, for which he was imprisoned. However, his behaviour and alternative views ultimately had a beneficial impact upon society as it resulted in a redistribution of wealth and power. This shows that Functionalist ideas about crime and deviance reveal the positive social functions performed by such behaviours and do not simply view them as a “sign of social dysfunction” (Item B).

Durkheim’s ideas have been further developed by other sociologists such as Kingsley Davis (1967) who described criminal/deviant behaviour as a safety valve for society. He commented specifically on the positive social function performed by prostitution, an act which typically would have been regarded as deviant at best, and most likely criminal, as it allows men sexual release without threatening the social institutions of marriage and family since men will not form emotional attachments to sex workers in the way they might if they had an affair. This again shows the ways in which Functionalist ideas can portray a positive view of crime and deviance. However, conflict theories such as Feminism would be hugely critical of this notion – as it fails to recognise the high levels of exploitation and patriarchal control that exist in society and particularly within the sex trade.

However Cohen, another Functionalist, argues that one of the most obvious functions of crime and deviance is as a signifier of a deeper social malaise or that there is a problem in society that needs addressing. He offers examples such as truancy in schools indicating issues within social institutions such as education, and his views can be applied to current affairs in religion whereby terrorism could be regarded as a sign of political dissatisfaction. However Functionalists do generally recognise that crime and deviance is only functional to an extent and if it reaches epidemic levels then it actually undermines social stability entirely.

One of the key criticisms of Functionalist theories of crime and deviance is that although they offer a clear explanation of the positive functions performed by crime, they fail to consider the negative aspects, or indeed why crime and

*examples and there is further reference to Item B, this time in an evaluative context.*

*An introduction of alternative Functionalist sociologists who have developed the ideas of Durkheim.*

*Explicit evaluation of the points made with reference to conflict theories such as Feminism.*

*New concepts have been introduced and clearly explained.*

*Further analysis of Functionalist ideas illustrated by a new sociological study.*

*Some internal evaluation in the final sentences.*

*Explicit and developed evaluation of Functionalist ideas through a comparison to Strain Theory.*

deviance exists in the first instance. Strain theories, for example, argue that one of the key reasons for criminality is that members of society have unequal access to achieve socially approved goals and as such they may go on to experience status frustration (Cohen) and develop criminal or deviant subcultures in which they can achieve success through illegitimate means (Cloward and Ohlin). An example of this could be a violent gang in which its members gain acceptance through a violent initiation act and then continue to climb the hierarchy based upon the levels of violence they are willing to carry out. These ideas are critical of Functionalist perspectives of crime and deviance because they would argue it paints too positive a picture of crime and deviance and also that it makes the assumption of a meritocratic society which many theories believe to be a myth.

Marxism, for example, would continue to criticise the Functionalist view of crime as they would argue that members of the working classes are far more likely to be forced into criminal behaviour than the middle classes simply to be able to survive in an unequal society and that this is even more pronounced at a time of global recession. Marxists also focus on the view that capitalism as an economic system is criminogenic and causes crime as it is based upon exploitation of the working classes, and it is this exploitation that can ultimately cause crime as people may feel the pressure to consume to the levels shown in the globalised mass media, or may experience a sense of frustration or alienation around their lives which can result in crimes against people or property. This shows that there are many aspects of crime and deviance which have not been accounted for by Functionalist theory.

Similarly, Marxists would also argue that the laws, norms and values of society that we are forced to conform to by agents of socialisation and social control do not truly benefit us as they are not reflective of the interests of the whole of society, rather of the powerful ruling elite. Law enforcement focuses largely on the petty crimes of the working classes without focusing enough on the crimes committed by organisations, the state or environmental crime if they conflict with the interests of capitalism. This shows that Functionalism again ignores some important issues regarding the functions of crime and again paints a one-sided picture.

*Sociological concepts and studies are used appropriately as supporting evidence and points are clearly explained/analysed.*

*Conflict theories are introduced as further evaluation and a deep understanding of the theory is shown. Key concepts are used effectively but specific sociological studies could have been referenced here as evidence.*

*Clear links back to the original question.*

*Further development of Marxist theory and the way it criticises Functionalism.*

*Synoptic links are made but could be better developed (state crime/green crime).*

*There are clear links back to the original question.*

Functionalism also fails to consider other social causes of crime and deviance such as biological differences and the impact of socialisation (Right Realism) or relative deprivation and marginalisation (Left Realism). It also fails to comment upon the differences between men and women in terms of their opportunity to commit crime (Feminism) or the links between the levels of crime and media representations. This shows that although Functionalism provides a useful basis for our understanding of crime and deviance there is still much to be considered in terms of explaining the origins of criminality.

*A brief summary of additional criticisms but these needed greater development.*

To conclude, Functionalist theories can be credited in terms of their focus on the positive social functions performed by crime and deviance but their views could be considered too simplistic as they do not give great enough attention to the root causes of crime and the social systems of inequality that bring them about.

*A clear conclusion which doesn't repeat content but which draws appropriate conclusions based on the content of the essay.*

[1231 words]

Examiner style comments: **Mark band 25–30**

This is a top mark band essay. It uses Item B well and clearly outlines the key aspects of Functionalist theories of crime and deviance. It uses sociological theories, studies, concepts and examples appropriately and ideas are well developed in the majority of the essay. There is clear evidence of analysis and evaluation, although this could be more consistent throughout, and the brief reference to Realism/Feminism towards the end suggested the candidate had more to say but was confined by time. To improve further, therefore, the earlier outlining of Functionalism could be more concise or evaluative points could be embedded after each of the positive functions.