

## ITEM B: MEDIA AND CRIME

*Sociological research into the mass media suggests that it may have a negative influence on our behaviour and may in fact cause crime. Some researchers have commented on the way in which the media can cause violent crime as audience members may be tempted to copycat scenes from violent films or those which glamorise a life of crime. Similarly, there is a great deal of pressure towards material consumption that makes individuals more likely to turn to crime if they are unable to achieve these goods in a legitimate way. The media itself can also be a tool for crime, for example with the introduction of the 'Dark Web' which allows individuals to engage in criminal activity and transactions undetected, or with the greater potential to commit cybercrimes such as fraud or identity theft.*

*However, not all sociologists would accept that the mass media causes crime, arguing instead that it is due to the nature of society or the social characteristics of the individual.*

### **Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate the view that the mass media causes crime. (30 marks)**

Some sociologists would agree that the mass media causes crime. However, others would disagree and argue that other factors such as class, age, gender or ethnicity play a bigger role in determining criminality. By crime, sociologists mean any act which is against the laws of a particular society. By the mass media, sociologists are referring to the forms of communication that can reach a large audience e.g. the internet, TV, newspapers, etc.

There has been significant debate in sociology about the extent to which the mass media causes crime; however, some sociologists argue that it has a particularly negative impact on its audiences in a number of ways. Firstly, there is concern regarding the potential for copycat crimes. According to Item B, "some researchers have commented on the way in which the media can cause violent crime as audience members may be tempted to copycat scenes from violent films or those which glamorise a life of crime".

The impact of watching violence has in fact been suggested (although not conclusively) based on evidence from psychological research conducted by Bandura in his 'Bobo Doll' experiment. Bandura found that in situations where children had been exposed to violent behaviour towards toys in the mass media, they responded violently towards the toys themselves. This fear that the mass media can in fact cause violent crime was further demonstrated in the tragic case of the 2-year-old toddler Jamie Bulger who was abducted and murdered by two ten-year-old boys who allegedly re-enacted a scene from the horror movie 'Childs

*A clear introduction that addresses the debate and which also clearly defines key concepts offered in the question.*

*Immediate use of Item B and this paragraph also sets the scene for the follow-up debate.*

*Good use of relevant sociological evidence which has been fully analysed and linked to the question.*

*Good use of examples through outlining the case of Jamie Bulger.*

*Clear links back to the question are made.*

Play' as part of their crime. This suggests a concerning link between the mass media and its propensity to cause violent crime. However, critics would argue that the research is inconclusive and does not explain why the vast majority of people who watch violence in the media do not carry out violent acts themselves. Critics point to the cathartic effect of violence in the mass media and actually argue that it has a positive impact upon society as it reduces the overall level of violence carried out.

Other suggestions about the way in which the mass media might bring about criminality include the view that it glamorises a life of crime. Popular music videos often include references to violence, theft and criminal subcultures and all too often the hero of a film actually engages in crime themselves. This could be argued to be a negative influence on audience members as it is a form of secondary socialisation which might normalise for them criminal behaviour. However, critics would point to the fact that audience members are not passive and can make active choices about their media consumption and how they respond to what they see. There is also an argument to suggest that what we view in the mass media can never fully undo the influence of our primary socialisation within the family where we are clearly taught that violence and criminality are socially unacceptable. The New Right, however, would offer a counter-argument here and would state that the impact of the mass media on causing crime may be more keenly felt amongst the working classes or those from lone parent families as they have experienced inadequate levels of socialisation and so are less likely to conform to social norms and values – thus are more susceptible to the influence of the mass media.

Other ways in which the mass media could be said to cause crime could be through desensitisation as the constant images of violence and crime shown in the news would otherwise be too traumatic for audiences to bear and as such they would be unable to watch if they did not use psychological techniques such as desensitisation to distance themselves from what they see. This, however, could be seen to cause crime as individuals may remain detached from criminal activity in their everyday lives and as such they may be more likely to carry out crimes themselves since they do not regard them as damaging to society. However, this view can be criticised as often the response to violence or crime in the mass media is actually one of social action whereby the public rise up to challenge what they

*Criticism is offered within the paragraph and new concepts are introduced and used effectively.*

*Continued analysis and evaluation throughout this paragraph with appropriate examples given.*

*Sociological theories are introduced, as are key concepts.*

*Good synoptic links are made to the family topic.*

*Clear links are made back to the original question.*

*Further explanation of the ways in which the mass media can cause crime which are again evaluated effectively within the paragraph.*

*Contemporary examples and sociological theories are used effectively.*

are seeing, e.g. crowd fundraising for victims of crime. This suggests that crime in the mass media can actually have the impact of reinforcing our norms and values, as suggested by Functionalist theorist Parsons.

The mass media can also create opportunities for crime and therefore can be seen as a cause. In order to access the mass media in the first place individuals have higher levels of consumer goods and so are more likely to be a target of crime in areas of material deprivation. Similarly, according to Item B, “the media itself can also be a tool for crime, for example with the introduction of the ‘Dark Web’ which allows individuals to engage in criminal activity and transactions undetected, or with the greater potential to commit cybercrimes such as fraud or identity theft”. The mass media creates significant opportunities for globalised crime as individuals are able to trade, make contact and access information from around the world and the policing of the internet is still a problem for society since there is no overall authority and each nation has different laws about the ways in which the internet can be used. The growth of social media has also meant that individuals leave themselves vulnerable to attacks as they reveal personal information which can be pieced together by potential criminals to enable them to carry out crimes relating to their identity. This suggests that once again the mass media could be a significant cause of crime.

However, it is important to note, as Item B states, “not all sociologists would accept that the mass media causes crime, arguing instead that it is due to the nature of society or the social characteristics of the individual”. Marxists, for example, would argue that the very nature of the capitalist system is criminogenic as it is based upon unachievable material consumption, competition and social inequality. This results in the relative deprivation identified by Left Realists Lea and Young and also feeds into arguments from Merton’s Strain theory and Cloward and Ohlin’s Subcultural theory which argue that the real causes of crime are an inability to keep up with society’s material success goals and crime is simply a response to this as people turn to illegitimate means to achieve social status.

Other explanations of criminality take into consideration gender, as Messerschmidt argues that men are more likely to commit crimes because it is an outward sign of the socially desirable hegemonic masculinity, whereas Heidensohn suggests that gender plays a factor as women

*Additional use of Item B which is elaborated upon with further analysis and evaluation using wider knowledge.*

*References to globalisation show synoptic links with other topics.*

*Clear links are made back to the original question.*

*Evaluation of Item B and an introduction of further sociological theories and studies. These could, however, be more developed if they had been introduced earlier in the essay but the candidate is strong in comparing and contrasting sociological approaches.*

*Key concepts are used effectively.*

*Synoptic links are made to other topic areas such as gender and key concepts and studies are used effectively.*

are actually unable to commit crime because they are tightly controlled by a patriarchal society. Therefore, it is socially constructed attitudes towards gender which cause crime.

Similarly, attitudes towards ethnic minorities (rather than ethnicity itself) can also be a factor causing crime as it results in discrimination in both the police and the workforce which drives ethnic minorities to a life of crime as they have limited life chances. They may also be responding to their status frustration (Cohen) or simply enacting the negative labels placed upon them (Becker).

However, it is important to note in response to gender, ethnicity and social class the role of media representations in creating negative stereotypes and the scapegoating of social groups, and therefore, like previous arguments, it could be suggested that based on the sociological evidence the mass media does play a significant role in causing crime, even if it is not definitive.

[1264 words]

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

This essay is very analytical and draws on a range of arguments to suggest the role of the mass media in causing criminal behaviour. It has good evaluation throughout, although it could be improved by embedding some of the arguments about gender, class and ethnicity into the original arguments and there could also be some consideration of the impact of age.

There is clear and appropriate use of sociological evidence throughout and key concepts are used effectively. There is regular use of Item B which has been elaborated upon with wider knowledge and there is a clear conclusion that addresses the demands of the question.

*Ethnicity is introduced as an evaluative point and important sociological questions are raised about the nature of society in causing crime. Studies are referenced.*

*A concluding paragraph which explicitly addresses the original question and is based upon the evidence presented.*