3.1 Subcultural and Strain Theories of Crime and Deviance: 30-minute Pack

AQA 7192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. For short answer questions, one or two sentences is usually enough; for the 12-mark evaluation write in full sentences and include a brief conclusion. Time guidance: 30 minutes for the whole pack.

1 Give one practical method a sociologist could use to study a youth subculture like those in Item A, and state one practical or ethical problem with that method.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 Discuss how far sociologists would agree that strain and subcultural explanations are useful for explaining working-class and youth crime.

(Total for Question 2 is 12 marks)

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3 Define what Merton meant by the 'anomie' or 'strain' produced by unequal access to legitimate means in the context of crime and deviance.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

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4 Outline two of Merton's five adaptations to strain (for example, innovation and ritualism) and explain each.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

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5 Item A: A coastal town has a former shipyard closed for two decades. Unemployment is high, many young people drift into gangs. There is one organised ring selling stolen goods, while rival youth groups fight for territory. Local schools report low achievement.

(a) Using Item A and your knowledge, identify two features of the town that support Cloward and Ohlin's explanation for why different subcultures form in different neighbourhoods. **(2)**

(b) Using Item A, explain one way low school achievement could encourage the formation of a delinquent subculture, linking to Cohen or Merton. **(2)**

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

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Mark scheme · 3.1 Subcultural and Strain Theories of Crime and Deviance: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

identifies a method, e.g. participant observation, interviews or surveys **B1**

identifies a practical or ethical problem, e.g. gaining access and trust for participant observation, or risk of harm and confidentiality concerns in interviews **B1**

Answer: Method: participant observation of a youth group. Problem: gaining access and trust can be difficult, and there are ethical risks in observing illegal activity and protecting participants' confidentiality.

Question 2

Level 1 Basic statements about strain or subcultural theories with little development or limited accuracy. Little or no use of evidence or examples. **1-3**

Level 2 Some relevant knowledge of strain and subcultural theories with simple development. May include one or two brief examples or limited application to working-class youth. **4-6**

Level 3 Clear explanation of strain and subcultural theories, with developed use of evidence or examples. Some evaluation, showing awareness of strengths and limitations and comparing different perspectives. **7-9**

Level 4 Sustained analysis and evaluation, deploying evidence and sociological arguments to show a balanced judgement. Addresses both how these theories explain working-class and youth crime and their limitations, and reaches a supported conclusion. **10-12**

Indicative content:

- AO1 points: outline of Merton's strain theory, the five adaptations (especially innovation and retreatism), Cohen's status frustration and delinquent subcultures, Cloward and Ohlin's illegitimate opportunity structure and the three subculture types, Miller's focal concerns.
- AO2 points: application to working-class youth, showing how blocked opportunities, low school achievement and lack of legitimate jobs create pressure to innovate or join subcultures; how availability of organised crime leads to criminal subcultures and lack of opportunities to conflict subcultures.
- AO3 evaluative points: strengths include linking social structure to crime, explaining group responses and different local patterns; limitations include overgeneralising working-class culture, neglecting individual agency and ethnicity/gender differences, and methodological limits of early studies; alternative explanations such as labelling theory or contemporary structural inequalities could be considered.
- Comparisons: evaluate whether strain covers individual adaptations while subcultural theories explain collective group formation; consider how Cloward and Ohlin add refinement by noting differing illegitimate opportunities.
- Evidence and examples: use hypothetical or real examples of youth gangs, organised property crime rings, or schooling failure; critique reliance on studies from specific times and places.
- Conclusion: reach a balanced judgement, for example concluding that strain and subcultural theories are useful for explaining some patterns of working-class and youth crime but insufficient alone to explain all variation, and should be combined with other perspectives.

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Question 3

identifies that anomie or strain is a social condition where cultural goals exceed legitimate means available to some members of society (oe) **B1**

development, e.g. this pressure can lead individuals to adapt in different ways, some of which involve rule breaking **B1**

Answer: Anomie or strain is a social condition where cultural goals, such as success and wealth, exceed the legitimate means available to some people; this pressure can lead to different adaptations, some involving rule breaking.

Question 4

identifies one adaptation correctly, e.g. innovation (oe) **B1**

explains that innovation involves accepting cultural goals but using illegitimate or criminal means to achieve them **B1**

identifies a second adaptation correctly, e.g. ritualism (oe) **B1**

explains that ritualism involves abandoning cultural goals but rigidly following legitimate means or rules **B1**

Answer: Innovation involves accepting society's goals but using illegitimate or criminal means to achieve them, for example theft to gain wealth. Ritualism involves giving up on the goals but continuing to follow legitimate rules and routines, for example doing a low paid job with no hope of advancement.

Question 5

(a) identifies one feature from Item A, e.g. the existence of an organised ring selling stolen goods indicating organised illegitimate opportunities **B1**

(a) identifies a second feature from Item A, e.g. rival youth groups fighting for territory indicating conflict subculture conditions **B1**

(a) Answer: The organised ring selling stolen goods shows a criminal illegitimate opportunity structure; rival youth groups fighting for territory illustrate conflict subculture conditions.

(b) identifies low achievement reduces access to legitimate success means in education or employment (oe) **B1**

(b) explains link, e.g. Cohen would say status frustration leads to joining subcultures that offer alternate status, or Merton would say blocked legitimate means promote innovation or retreatism **B1**

(b) Answer: Low achievement reduces access to legitimate means of success; Cohen would say this produces status frustration leading boys to form delinquent subcultures offering alternative status, while Merton would see blocked means encouraging innovation or retreatism.

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