DURKHEIM’S FUNCTIONALIST THEORY

Society is based on value consensus. It sees its members of society as sharing a common culture (a shared set of norms (rules), values, beliefs, and goals). Sharing these produces social solidarity.

Functionalists argue that to achieve solidarity society has two key functions:

Socialisation: instils shared cultures into its members. Helps to internalise the same norms and values as society and teach

them to act in a socially acceptable way.

Social Control: Rewards; positive sanctions/rewards for conformity and punishments/negative sanctions for deviance. Ensures members act in the way society expects.

Inevitability of Crime

Functionalisits see crime as inevitable and universal.

Durkheim (1893) ‘Crime is normal...an integral part of all healthy societies.’

There are two reasons why crime and deviance are found in all societies.

1 – Not everyone is equally effectively socialised into the shared norms and values of society, so some members are prone to deviate.

2 – Particularly in modern societies there is a diversity of lifestyles and values. Different groups develop their own subcultures with distinctive norms and values, and what theses subcultures regard as normal may seem deviant to wider society.

Anomie or normlessness - the rules governing behaviour become weaker and less clear-cut. This happens more in modern societies as they have a complex, specialised division of labour which leads members to become increasingly different to each other. This weakens shared culture or Collective Conscience and results in higher level of deviance.

Positive Functions of Crime

Boundary Maintenance

Crime unites members of society in condemnation (against) the wrongdoer and reinforcing their commitment to the shared norms and values of their society. This explains the function of punishment. It isn’t to make the wrongdoer suffer or remove crime from society. It is to reaffirm societies shared rules and reinforce social solidarity to Durkheim.

This may be done through the courtroom to dramatize the wrongdoing and publicly shame the offender. This reaffirms the values of the law-abiding majority and discourages others from rule breaking.

Similarly: Cohen looked at this in his ‘dramatization of evil’ and media coverage of crime often creates ‘folk devils’ in order to discourage from deviance.

Adaption and Change

There must be some scope for challenging and changing existing norms and values, although in the first instance this will inevitably appear as deviance.

Example: authorities often persecute religious visionaries who advocate a new ‘message’ or value system. However, in the long run their values may give rise to a new culture. If the ideas are suppressed societies will stagnate and be unable to make necessary adaptive changes.

Neither a high or low level of crime is desirable.