

“assess functionalists explanations for patterns of crime and deviance.”

[Law](#), [Criminology](#)



“ Assess functionalists explanations for patterns of crime and deviance. ” The patterns of crime and deviance have proven to be a popular topic amongst sociological groups, arguably because it crosses over with many key ideas and debates discussed within sociology. Functionalists are just one of numerous groups who have thrown their hat in the ring by attempting to provide a definitive answer behind the patterns of crime and deviance. However, like all explanations in one way or another, functionalists have been subject to criticism. One of the most prominent functionalists to have lived, Durkheim, explained crime as a problem of modernity associated with the decline of mechanical solidarity, a society that is homogenous and in cohesion. In times of social change people may lose sight of the shared norms and values they’ve become accustomed too, creating a weaker collective conscience. Durkheim describes this state of ‘ normlessness’ as anomie which is expressed not just through crime but, also by suicide, marital breakdown and industrial disputes. Anomie is used to describe why some people become dysfunctional in society and turn to crime. According to Durkheim, society becomes more individualistic because of anomie as people resort to what they do know, themselves, therefore not looking out for their community which would have once been the norm. However, Durkheim doesn’t acknowledge that anomie may not always result in individualism and can lead to the exact opposite. For instance, some people have formed stronger ties to their religious group in reaction to the emergence of the new media, which has caused wide scale social change. Unlike most sociological theories of crime, Durkheim recognised that crime could be a force for good rather than always having negative repercussions.

Too much crime and deviance can lead to uncertainty and disruption in society. However, a certain amount of crime can be viewed positively, helping to promote change and reinforce values. Durkheim categorised crime using three groups: normal, universal and functional. Examples of crime that were beneficial to society are the Suffragette movement, Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat on the bus to a white man and Nelson Mandela forming the first black government in South Africa. Following on from the work of Durkheim, Merton developed 'strain theory' to reflect the strain between goals and means of achieving those goals. He listed five different forms of behaviour that could be understood as a strain between goals and means: Conformity (the individual continues to adhere to both goals and means, despite limited likelihood of success e. g. the American Dream), Innovation (the individual accepts the goals of society but uses different means of achieving this e. g. criminal behaviour), Ritualism (individual adheres to societies means but loses sight of societies goals e. g. police officer enforcing the law, ignoring whether it's just or not), Retreatism (individual rejects both means and goals of society e. g. depends upon drugs or alcohol) and Rebellion (individual substitutes societies goals and means with different ones e. g. religious fundamentalism).