

Seventh Edition

CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORY

Frank P. Williams III

Professor Emeritus,
California State University—San Bernardino

Marilyn D. McShane

Section II The Development of American Criminology

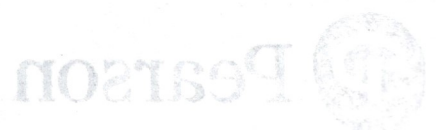
Chapter 4 THE CLASSICAL SCHOOL 43

Introduction 43
The Birth of the Classical School 44
The Development of the Classical School 45
Classical Criminology 46

Classical Criminology and the Birth of the School 47
Classical Criminology and the Birth of the School 48
Classical Criminology and the Birth of the School 49
Classical Criminology and the Birth of the School 50



ISBN 10: 0-13-422200-9
330 Hudson Street, NY, NY 10013



Anomie Theory

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Objective 6.1: Summarize Durkheim's view of the causes of crime.

Objective 6.2: Explain what the term "anomie" means and where it comes from.

Objective 6.3: Outline Merton's view of how people adapt to anomie in different ways.

Objective 6.4: Discuss the role of social structure in the creation of deviance.

Objective 6.5: Describe some of the policy implications that can be drawn from anomie theory.

INTRODUCTION

Anomie is a concept closely associated with two theorists, Emile Durkheim and Robert K. Merton. When Durkheim introduced the term in his 1893 book *The Division of Labor in Society*, he used it to describe a condition of "deregulation" occurring in society. By this, he meant that the general procedural rules of a society (the rules that say how people ought to behave toward each other) have broken down and that people do not know what to expect from each other. This deregulation, or normlessness, easily leads to deviant behavior. Durkheim later used the term *anomie*, in *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (1897/1951), to refer to a morally deregulated condition in which people have inadequate moral controls over their behavior (see Olsen, 1965). Thus, a society may be anomic if people do not know when to quit striving for success, or how to treat other people along the way. Whichever of these two descriptions of anomie is used—a breakdown in either the rules of society or the moral norms—it is clear that Durkheim was talking about a disruption of normal societal conditions.

Durkheim's central thesis in *The Division of Labor in Society* was that societies evolved from a simple, nonspecialized form (mechanical) toward a complex, highly specialized form (organic). In both cases, he referred to the way in which people interact with each other and the way in which labor is carried out. In the mechanical society, people behave and think similarly and, except for a division of labor along gender lines, perform most of the same work tasks and have group-oriented goals. As a society becomes more complex, work also becomes more complex and specialized. Modern, organic societies are characterized by highly interactive sets of relationships, specialized labor, and individual goals. For example, one person's work skills are rarely sufficient to provide all that is necessary to live. People depend on each other to produce various items. The distribution of these items, once produced, is a problem. Highly complex relationships are required to distribute the products of each person's skills. This, for Durkheim, suggested that an organic society is a contractual society, and he saw almost all relationships as contractual ones. By this, he meant that people are no longer tied together by bonds of kinship and friendship but, because of the impersonality of modern society, by various types of contractual bonds. The problem with such societies is that these bonds are constantly being broken (the concept of bonds reappears in our discussion of social control theories in Chapter 11). In sum, the rules governing how people in organic societies interact with each other (the contracts) are continually in flux, and social conditions are constantly in danger of disruption. When disruption occurs, we have anomie.

Robert K. Merton (1910–2003)

Robert K. Merton was born in Philadelphia on July 4, 1910, to Jewish immigrant parents from Russia. He lived in an apartment over the dairy shop that his father owned until it was destroyed by fire and his father had to work as a carpenter's assistant. Although he immersed himself in the area's art, music, and library resources, Merton also dabbled in magic tricks. When he was 14 years old, Merton decided to change his name, which was originally Meyer R. Schkolnick, to Robert Merlin, after Merlin, the wizard of King Arthur's legendary court. However, friends prevailed upon him to choose something more practical and, therefore, he became Robert King Merton.

Merton received an A.B. from Temple College (1931) and his masters and doctorate from Harvard University (1936). Merton taught at Harvard until 1939, when he left to become Chair of the Department of Sociology at Tulane University. A few years later, he was invited to join the faculty at Columbia University, where he was named Associate Director of the Bureau of Applied

Social Research (1942–1971). He was an adjunct professor at Rockefeller University and was also the first Foundation Scholar at the Russell Sage Foundation. He was elected President of the American Sociological Association in 1957. In 1963, Merton was named a Giddings Professor of Sociology at Columbia. He was awarded the university's highest academic rank, University Professor, in 1974, and he became a Special Service Professor upon his "retirement" in 1979, although he continued to teach for five more years. Merton was also named one of the prestigious MacArthur Foundation Fellows in August, 1983. In 1990, Columbia University established the Robert K. Merton Professorship in the Social Sciences.

In a ceremony hosted by President Bill Clinton, Merton received the National Medal of Science for Behavioral and Social Science in 1994. Three years later, one of his sons, Robert C. Merton, won the Nobel Prize in economics. Merton died in 2003 at the age of 92.

Anomie, then, refers to the breakdown of social norms and a condition in which those norms no longer control the activity of societal members. Without clear rules to guide them, individuals cannot find their place in society and have difficulty adjusting to the changing conditions of life. This in turn leads to dissatisfaction, frustration, conflict, and deviance. Studying France and Europe after the Industrial Revolution, Durkheim saw economic crises, forced industrialization, and commercialization as factors producing anomie. Durkheim was fairly sure that contemporary Western societies had reached such a point of complexity that they were in a constant state of anomie. Even so, he saw that a period of social disruption, such as an economic depression, would make matters worse and result in greater anomie and, of course, higher rates of crime, suicide, and deviance.

In 1938, Merton borrowed the concept of anomie to explain deviance in the United States. His concept, however, differed from that of Durkheim. Merton disagreed that changes and deregulation within society created anomie; instead, he felt that the critical ingredient was the ability of the social system to exercise control in the form of social norms. Dividing social norms (or values) into two types, Merton talked of societal *goals* and the acceptable *means* for achieving those goals. In addition, he redefined anomie as a disjuncture (or split) between those goals and means as a result of the way society is structured; for example, with class distinctions. Deviance, then, could be explained as a symptom of a social structure within which "culturally defined aspirations and socially structured means" are separated from each other. Or, in other words, deviance is a product of anomie. It is Merton's treatment of anomie that we consider in this chapter.

Before we leave this brief introduction to both Durkheim and Merton, it is perhaps best to precisely distinguish between the two approaches to anomie, as Merton saw it. According to Merton (quoted in Cullen & Messner, 2007, p. 21), Durkheim focused on *social conditions* in society (such as economic depressions) where rules lost their value. Merton, on the other hand, saw his approach as focusing on embedded social structure and cultural disparities in society, which generate anomie. In other words, Durkheim was more interested in changing social conditions and Merton more so in permanent features of the social structure of a society.

THE HERITAGE OF THE THEORY

The Social Heritage

Like the Industrial Revolution, the Great Depression of the 1930s produced insights for social scientists. An entire generation of sociologists could observe the collapse and deregulation of social traditions and the effect this had on both individuals and the institutions of society. As did Edwin Sutherland, Merton noted that crime was not necessarily an intrinsic part of the person,

and he rejected individualistic views of pathology (Merton & Ashley-Montagu, 1940). The increasing popularity of Durkheim's discussion of anomie, when combined with the Depression, provided sociological insights into the connection between social structure and deviant behavior. Similarly, the notion of the division of labor opened up possibilities for an examination of the role of aspirations and opportunities in American society.

The importance of analyzing social structure itself became firmly grounded when the government's New Deal reform efforts focused on rearranging society. Sociologists and others found themselves moving away from the narrower applications of sociology and toward an examination of social structure as a whole (Merton, 1964, p. 215). Given the popular belief of the time—that government was largely responsible for society's problems—Durkheim had provided social scientists with a readymade explanation: society was simply in a state of deregulation.

Another factor affecting criminology during the 1930s was the emergence of, and emphasis on, the collection of demographic data (information about people). Moreover, in examining both the ecological data collected by Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay and the newly created *Uniform Crime Reports*, it was evident that certain segments of society were burdened with high crime rates. These were the very same segments of society in which a relatively permanent state of deregulation could be observed. An obvious explanation was that, somehow, deregulation led to deviance. Finally, the idea that social class might be a crucial sociological factor in explaining societal events was gaining popularity. Just as sociologists were viewing other behavior as being influenced by social class position (Dollard, 1937; Lynd & Lynd, 1929), it occurred to theorists that an explanation of deviance based on social class differences might be productive.¹

The Intellectual Heritage

Merton was influenced by two sociologists during the 1930s. He was first introduced, as a student and research assistant at Harvard, to Durkheim's concept of anomie by Pitirim Sorokin, whose 1928 book *Contemporary Sociological Theories* called attention to Durkheim's use of the term "anomic suicide" (Merton, 1964, p. 215). Merton also worked with a young Talcott Parsons at Harvard and assisted in the production of his seminal work, *The Structure of Social Action*, (1937), which explained social events by emphasizing the way society is structured. This approach became known as "structural-functionalism." As an undergraduate at Temple University, Merton had also studied under George Simpson, who was to write the popular English-language translation of Durkheim's *Division of Labor in Society* in the 1930s (Martin, Mutchnick, & Austin, 2009). Merton, then, was well prepared to adopt Durkheim's interest in anomie.

Parsons saw society as the product of an equilibrium of forces (like a pendulum) that served to produce order. When the various components of the social structure became "unbalanced"—that is, when the pendulum swung too far to either side—society became disorganized. Durkheim's concept of anomie fit nicely into the Parsonian framework and was a major focus of Parsons' book, *The Structure of Social Action* (1937). With Simpson's translation of Durkheim's *Division of Labor* in 1930, the use of social structure in explaining social behavior became accepted.

Two strains of psychological/biological positivism during the 1930s also exerted an influence on Merton. Freudian psychotherapy, with its emphasis on internal conflicts, was exceedingly popular. Moreover, Earnest Hooton had created a stir with his controversial books on the biological inferiority of criminals. Merton reacted strongly to these approaches and, with anthropologist Ashley-Montagu, published a rebuttal to them in 1940. In sharpening criticism against the nonsociological positions, Merton more clearly focused his thoughts on the effects of social structure. In addition, Merton was very familiar with the works of Karl Marx during the 1930s. The Marxist influence can be seen most clearly in Merton's focus on the American capitalist system's excessive attention to financial success goals.

Finally, there is the question of whether a linkage exists between Sutherland's differential association theory and Merton's anomie theory. Merton (1997, p. 519; as quoted in Cullen &

¹ It is worth noting that Robert Merton grew up in the Philadelphia slums and certainly was aware of the issues of class yet did not characterize his experiences as culture conflict, instead preferring to refer to it as a sort of benign slum (Merton quoted in Cullen & Messner, 2007, p. 15).

Messner, 2007, p. 17) himself said that he views the two theories as complementary. In one sense, then, the individual-level process (the sociopsychological, in Merton's words) had already been developed by the Chicago School and its followers. Merton wanted to explain what he felt was the missing part—"how those patterns of criminal preferences and behaviors emerged in the first place." Thus, the theory of anomie was partly an avoidance of processual elements and partly a push to explain the structural components of deviance.

THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Merton's anomie theory is, above all, a theory of deviance; that is, it does not focus on criminality. Further, Merton's approach to deviance itself is relatively general. When one conceives of a society that emphasizes well-structured goals for its members and equally structured avenues to reach those goals, deviance becomes any behavior that does not follow commonly accepted values. For example, Merton uses the term "deviance" to refer to bureaucratic behavior as well as to criminal behavior.

Merton notes that certain goals are strongly emphasized throughout society (he uses the example of financial success). Society also emphasizes (legitimizes) certain means to reach those goals (such as hard work, education, starting at the bottom and working one's way up). When these goals are too strongly stressed, as Merton said financial success was in the United States, the stage is set for anomie. Not everyone has equal access to the achievement of legitimate financial success and, as a result, these people may search for other, perhaps illegitimate, ways of succeeding. Because of social inequality, the approved means to reach the success goals are not readily available to certain groups in society, even though the goals are said to apply equally to all. Certain groups of people, the lower social class and minorities, for instance, may be at a disadvantage in gaining business positions that would allow them to pursue the goal of financial success.

According to Merton, when this inequality exists because of the way society is structured, the social structure is anomic. Given the evidence that there are several segments of society in which legitimate avenues to success are severely restricted without a corresponding reduction in the emphasis on achievement, U.S. society seems to be in a permanent state of anomie. The individuals caught in these anomic conditions (largely the lower classes) are then faced with the strain of being unable to reconcile their aspirations with their limited opportunities. As with Durkheim's formulation of anomie, this does not mean that anomic conditions are constant. As social conditions change, thereby resulting in greater or lesser inequality, so does the degree of anomie.

We should note, however, that legitimate means are not necessarily the most efficient methods of reaching the goals. Other means, although perhaps illegitimate or de-emphasized by society, may be both available and more efficient. These other means are, however, not compatible with Merton's true success goals in that the emphasis is on *legitimately* reaching them. It is also important to keep in mind that Merton focuses on financial success only as an *example* throughout his work; he did not mean to imply that it was the only major goal that exists in American society. In fact, Merton later stated (1968, p. 220) that "The theory holds that *any* extreme emphasis upon achievement" (cultural goals) will serve to reduce conformity to institutional norms. This is particularly true for those in the lower social classes. Moreover, it is this lack of fit between goals and means that creates anomie, or strain as it is frequently termed today. Of interest is that these cultural goals don't have to be wide-spread ones, as in financial success, as Merton offers these alternative examples (1968, p. 220): "scientific productivity ... the conquests of a Don Juan."

The success goals themselves are not necessarily applicable to all social classes at the same time. Indeed, each class may have its own brand of success goals, and a number of different goals are possible. Rather than a reference to specific goals, Merton talks about the presence of a cultural message that legitimates upward striving and the alleged mobility that is available to all those who desire to achieve. It is then the *emphasis* on reaching the goals that becomes important. Because of this, any test of the theory that concentrates on one goal or concept of success will invariably be deficient.

It is at this point that Merton's scheme can be related to Sutherland's differential association. According to Merton (1997), Sutherland's definitions can be interpreted as values related to legal or illegal means. Thus, at the neighborhood level, the presence of values conducive to delinquency or crime essentially tells those who live there that legitimate opportunities are scarce and encourages illegal means to reach goals. Conversely, conventional values in the neighborhood support legitimate means.

An Example of Anomie at Work

In November 2015, the current MMA women's champion, Rhonda Rousey, was crushingly upset and knocked out in short order by Holly Holm. This was Rousey's first loss and shocked the MMA world as all of her other fights ended quickly with first or second round victories, sometimes in seconds after the start of the match. Clearly, Rousey's expectations were that this match would be like all the others, which had made her the most publi-

cized figure in the MMA world. Based on anomie theory, her surprising failure to meet lofty expectations and success aspirations resulted in this quote on the Ellen DeGeneres Show four months after the match: "I was sitting in the corner (of the post-fight medical room), and I was like, 'What am I anymore if I'm not this?' And I was literally sitting there and thinking about killing myself ..."

The Modes of Adaptation

Merton presents five ways (modes) of adapting to strain caused by restricted access to the socially approved goals and means. If the emphasis on goals and means is maintained even in the face of a realization that the means are restricted, an individual will remain conforming. Most people follow this adaptation, Merton maintains; if they did not, the very existence of society would be threatened. The remaining four modes, however, represent a departure from this all-endorsing adaptation and thus are the "real" deviant modes of adaptation.

First is the case in which the emphasis on the approved goals of society is maintained while legitimate means are replaced by other, nonapproved means. This mode of adaptation, called innovation, is the most common of the four deviant types. Interestingly, for some segments of society, innovative means may be *more efficient* in reaching a goal than the approved means for doing so. For example, instead of saving money and letting it slowly earn interest in a bank, a faster way of accumulating a lot of money is to rob the bank. The primary characteristic of innovation can also be seen in the familiar statement, "The end justifies the means."

However, when the goals themselves are rejected and the focus is shifted to the means, the mode of adaptation is that of ritualism. In this mode, the means can become the aspirations of an individual, as when one attempts to treat a job (means) as a form of security instead of using the job as a means of achieving success. In this example, keeping the job has become the goal, resolving the frustration of unsuccessfully chasing the original goal. Ritualism can also be seen in bureaucratic behavior, in which an employee has no power to actually do anything for anyone and instead focuses on the fact that the paperwork must be correctly filled out.

The fourth mode, retreatism, involves a rejection of *both* the goals and means. Retreatists are those individuals who opt not to be innovative and, at the same time, need to resolve their inability to reach the important goals in life. Their solution is that they simply quit trying to get ahead and retreat from standard modes of behavior. This pattern is best seen as dropping out of society and is exemplified by vagrants, alcoholics, and drug addicts. In 1938, Merton saw retreatism as the least common mode of adaptation. Today, perhaps, it is more common.

The final mode of adaptation, rebellion, is of a different type from the other four. While those modes emphasize rejection of means or goals, or both, rebellion focuses on the *substitution* of new goals and means for the original ones. Merton's conception suggests that rebellion "leads men outside the environing social structure to envisage and seek to bring into being a new, that is to say a greatly modified, social structure. It presupposes alienation from reigning goals and standards" (1968, p. 209). These individuals, then, are precisely what the term indicates: rebels and revolutionaries.

In short, Merton's anomie theory explains how social structure contributes to the creation of deviance on all levels, although the primary focus of the theory is on the lower class. Because of the societally induced disjunction (separation) between cultural aspirations and the approved methods of attaining those aspirations, the lower class is most likely to exhibit deviant, nonapproved, adaptive behavior. In a later discussion of his theory, Merton (1997, p. 519) referred to the "American Dream" (upward mobility in status and money) as a major, but largely unattainable, goal for everyone because the resources for reaching that dream are simply not available to large segments of society (the lower classes). In addition, Merton emphasized that the theory focuses on socially-structured sources of deviance and, thus, purposefully did not discuss the "social mechanisms" by which individuals come to such deviance, either initially or long-term.

Finally, the difference between two types of conformity—the conformity mode of adaptation and “real” conformity—is worth exploring. Real conformity would be found in those individuals for whom there is no problem in accessing the means for achieving goals: primarily the rich and elite. Merton included conformity as a deviant mode of adaptation because inequality causes an anomic split between goals and access to means. The victims of this inequality who nonetheless remain committed to society and its rules/laws therefore are actually deviant. A dominant number of these conformists are required to keep society from falling apart. Therefore, it is in the interests of those for whom the social structure works best (the real conformists) to keep a large share of the population believing in the system and with some small degree of access to legitimate means.

Merton continued, throughout his life, rethinking and adding commentary to his original 1938 essay (Merton, 1995). In particular, he rethought the theory in his book *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1957a, 1968). In 1964, he added the notion that the increasing degree of deviance precipitated by a class-structured anomic society would, ultimately, result in a feedback effect. This effect would essentially subvert the original norms justifying the institutionally-approved means, resulting in more anomie and more deviance. Different types of deviance were also explored, on purpose, to demonstrate the utility of his theory in explaining more than class-based deviance (for instance, he discussed scientific fraud in 1957b). He also, in 1997, reconciled differential association and anomie by noting that each explained a different but complementary piece of the deviance-generating process.

CLASSIFICATION OF THE THEORY

Anomie theory is a *positivist* theory. In contrast to positivist theories locating pathology within the individual, anomie theory locates pathology within the social structure. Merton explains how a pathological social structure (one in which there is an undue emphasis on goals, especially economic ones, without corresponding avenues of access available to all members of the society) serves to create a strain in certain segments of society and, ultimately, a push toward deviance. Because of this concern with structural strain, anomie theory is often referred to as a “strain theory” (see the discussion of strain theory later in this chapter).

The assumption of a *consensus* of values also characterizes anomie theory. American society imposes on us the “right” things to do and the “right” ways to do them. Unless there is considerable unanimity about societal goals and means, there can be no anomic condition that results in adaptations to those goals and means. In other words, adaptations or deviations would merely be alternate modes of success or achievement.

Anomie theory is a *structural* theory. It focuses on the way society is structured and how that structure serves to create deviance within American society. It does not, nor did Merton intend it to, specify the process by which *individuals* become deviant. Instead, anomie theory deals with the pathology of existing social structure and the subsequent forms of deviance arising in the various segments of society as a whole. In short, Merton intends to explain variations in rates of deviance (1968, p. 186) among societal groups and not how the process of choosing among adaptations takes place. This broad scope and emphasis on explaining social structure also makes anomie theory a *macrotheory*.

Finally, and outside of our usual classification scheme, anomie theory is often called a *functionalist* theory. Functionalism presumes that it is desirable to explain a social phenomenon in terms of its effect on, and its consequences for, the social structure in which it exists. In other words, Merton uses the concepts of cultural goals and norms to explain how they serve to produce both conformity and deviance within the social structure.

Summary

Merton’s theory of anomie is still among the most influential of all criminological theories, although presented as long ago as 1938. It continues to draw commentary and research, and several modifications have been offered (Richard Cloward’s [1959] addition of an illegitimate opportunity

structure is probably the most important; see the discussion of differential opportunity theory in Chapter 7). Further, elements of anomie theory are, at least in part, found in more contemporary criminological theories (e.g., Hirschi, 1969, p. 198).

Anomie theory comments on extreme emphases on cultural goals and accompanying cultural messages that assert the importance of striving for those goals. Unless the means to reach the goals are equitably distributed in society, the overemphasis on goals and inequality of means will result in socially structured and patterned rates of deviance. Groups who have the greatest access to the approved means are mostly conforming. Conversely, those groups with the least access to the means have higher rates of deviance. In U.S. society this suggests that structured inequality leads to deviance and crime, with the highest rates among the lower classes. Indeed, the theory's premise is that the lower class suffers the most anomic conditions and therefore has the highest level of involvement in deviant behavior.

MAJOR POINTS OF THE THEORY

1. Most members of society share (or are socialized into) a common system of values.
2. This common value system teaches us both the things we should strive for (cultural goals) and the most appropriate ways (societal means) to achieve those goals.
3. If the goals and the means to achieve them are not equally stressed, an anomic condition is created.
4. In a disorganized society, different degrees of access to these goals and means exist. Thus, the means are not equally distributed within a disorganized society.
5. Some societies, such as that of the United States, may place too much stress on success goals. In a disorganized society, this results in a striving toward those goals, but not enough access to the means to achieve them.

6. Without reasonable access to the socially approved means, members of society will attempt to find some way to resolve the pressure to achieve. These alternative solutions are called "modes of adaptation."
7. The various modes of adaptation are formed by combinations of accepting, rejecting, or substituting for the goals and the means.
 - a. If, in the face of moral pressure, the individual continues to "accept" the value of both the goals and the means, the form of behavior exhibited will be conforming. This is the most common form of adaptation.
 - b. If the individual accepts the goals but rejects the means to achieve them, the form of behavior will be deviant and innovative. Here, more available and faster ways of achieving the goals are created.
 - c. If the individual sees the goals as unattainable (rejects them) but accepts the means anyway, the form of behavior will be deviant and ritualistic. In this case, the focus of the individual becomes the means rather than the ends.
 - d. If the individual rejects both the goals and the means, the form of behavior will be deviant and retreatist. A person engaged in this behavior will no longer strive toward the goals and not even continue in the normal stream of life.
 - * If both the goals and the means are rejected and then substituted for the form of behavior will be deviant and rebellious. This form of deviance actually rejects the way society is currently set up and attempts to create a new form of society.

The catch 22

The Hood Impacted Society Areas
Minorities

Epilogue: Current Directions and Policy Implications

CURRENT DIRECTIONS

Alarm over the suicides of seven young people in a depressed Welsh town (Katz, 2008, p. A26) forced officials to confront many of the ideas argued by anomie theory. Comments included the area's "deepening sense of foreboding and hopelessness," the loss of jobs, high unemployment, a high level of illness, and the lack of meaningful activity for the youth that leads them to drink and take drugs. Ironically, even the recreation center cost too much to use. One resident explained the feelings of the teens "when something goes wrong in their inner circle, they feel helpless and don't know where to turn... nobody really knows what to... society is disconnected."

These circumstances correspond well with the current theoretical emphasis of anomie theory as a form called strain theory. Although Merton uses the word "strain" in his presentation, he rejected the idea that his theory was a strain theory. To his way of thinking, strain tends toward psychosocial and microlevel analysis and anomie theory was never meant to be an explanation of that (as quoted in Cullen & Messner, 2007, p. 21). In a similar vein, Albert K. Cohen (himself referred to as a strain theorist) argues that Travis

Hirschi, in his 1969 book *Causes of Delinquency* "invented" the category of modern strain theory (Cohen, personal communication, January 29, 1993) and vehemently denies that he wrote about "strain." The term was also used by Ruth Kornhauser (1978) in her critique of criminological theories. Featherstone and Deflem (2003) even present a case for Merton's theory having two parts: anomie, which is the structural component of the disjunction between goals and means which causes normlessness, and strain, which is the adaptation to blocked opportunities.

This category of theories is defined by its focus on *motivation*. That is, strain theories require that people be motivated to commit criminal and delinquent acts. Without such motivation, there would be conformity. In other words, strain theories are focused on some special state of mind (or collective state of mind) such as a pathology, tension, frustration, or mental conflict. As a result, people in this state of mind "see crime as expressions, symptoms, or ways of dealing with, solving, or getting relief from whatever is troubling them" (Cohen, personal communication, January 29, 1993). Such theories include psychological and psychoanalytic versions, which explain the source of these symptoms by looking at

individuals and locating answers in their own situation and history. Because strain is a dominant contemporary approach to Merton's theory, there have been several attempts to incorporate various motivations we might otherwise refer to as psychological ones.

The sociological versions of strain theory ask the question, "Where do these strains come from?" In other words, what is it about the way in which society is organized and arranged that tends to produce the conditions and circumstances that give rise to deviant behavior? Sociological strain theories also attempt to explain the origins of motivational states (and usually are concerned with the distribution of those states). They search for the origins of strain in the way society is put together or arranged; that is, in the social structure. Theories such as Merton's place the source of strain in cultural messages and social inequalities. We refer to all these approaches as *structural strain theories*.

Other than Merton's further writing and elaboration on his theory, several theorists have added to the general strain theory perspective. Most notable are Cohen (1955, 1965), Cloward (1959), and Cloward with Ohlin (1960). These extensions are examined in detail in the chapter on subculture theories (Chapter 7). Other theorists, however, have directly added to anomie theory by suggesting new categories for the modes of adaptation (Dubin, 1959; Harary, 1966; Murphy & Robinson, 2008; and with Merton's, 1959 commentary on Dubin and Cloward's contributions). Most of these writers were concerned with Merton's use of the substitution concept and argued that it opened the door to many more than the five modes of adaptation predicted by the scheme of accepting and rejecting the goals and means. Other criminologists have critiqued the theory and conducted studies to see if the relationships implied in the theory exist. Many have noted that the theory is wanting in support, but some have argued that much of the research on anomie theory has been done with microlevel variables dealing with individuals, rather than the more appropriate use of macrolevel variables measuring characteristics of groups. As a result, the downturn of popularity for anomie theory during the 1970s is more likely the result of criminological attention turning to "newer" theories rather than any lack of supportive evidence (Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2014).

ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

One variety of newer work carries on the Mertonian tradition of examining disparities between aspirations and expectations. In this vein, aspirations are viewed as the ideal goals that one should strive for, whereas expectations are what the individual thinks he or she can actually achieve. The argument is that a disparity between aspirations and expectations leads to a sense of frustration and higher probabilities of deviant behavior.

Typically, this approach is used for adolescents, because they have not had time to be rejected by the social system and thereby meet Merton's criteria for a shortage of means. Robert Agnew, in particular, has argued in his general strain theory that blockage of adolescent's goals leads to deviance.

RELATIVE DEPRIVATION

Another direction suggests that the relative discrepancy between poverty and wealth is important in determining crime rates. For instance, in areas of extreme poverty or extreme wealth, we might expect to find that such conspicuous differences create more frustration and despair and, subsequently, higher crime rates. Several studies have suggested that this variation of strain theory makes sense and, indeed, does have the anticipated effect.

IMMEDIACY OF GOALS

Yet another variety of strain theory seeks to resolve one of the major criticisms of strain theory: that the goals/means formula does not explain middle-class deviance very well.² While this might not be a valid criticism, Delbert Elliott and Harwin Voss (1974) added middle-class delinquency to the strain picture. They did so by focusing more on immediate goals than the long-range aspirations usually connected with strain theory. Juveniles are more likely to be concerned about their immediate goals (popularity, athletic achievement, good grades) than whether they will eventually succeed in life. Moreover, these immediate goals are not necessarily tied to social class, although middle-class juveniles are perhaps more likely to chase immediate goals that are more difficult to achieve (class president, captain of cheerleaders). When coupled with other impediments to success (physical unattractiveness, poor personality, lack of coordination, or inferior intellectual ability), the inability to achieve goals may be seen as a combination of several factors.

NEW STRAIN THEORIES

Two forms of strain theory emerged during the 1980s and 1990s. The first, Robert Agnew's *general strain theory* (1985, 2001, 2005) focuses on juveniles and adds the concept of blocked avoidance of painful situations. Agnew's theory (see Chapter 14) is a good example of the inclusion of psychological factors as instrumental in the development of strain, using anger coupled with feelings of loss of control and stress to explain the creation of personal strain. Just as blocked legitimate opportunities create strain, so too does the inability to avoid stressful circumstances. Thus, Agnew takes Merton's structural explanation to the individual (or micro) level. The second new version, *institutional strain theory*, is from Steven Messner and Richard Rosenfeld (2007). They posit that anomie also reduces the control of most social

² This critique ignores the fact that Merton was writing about a more general notion of deviance, not specifically crime or psychopathology. As a result, his use of conformity as the dominant mode of adaptation nicely captures middle-class efforts to remain true to the status quo system even in the face of self-evident lack of opportunities to gain "real" success.

institutions (family, school, law) over individuals and exacerbates cultural economic sources of strain. This, too, can be viewed as moving strain theory to a more personal level but Messner and Rosenfeld emphasize the institutional (social structure) pressures members of society face. This renewed structural emphasis in criminology has been called the “new institutionalism” by Karstedt (2010) and implies a contemporary return to macrolevel social factors in crime causation. Each of these additions to the Mertonian strain approach provides another level of explanation to the structural variables of the original perspective and demonstrates the value of relationships between cultural strain and personal factors. This acknowledgment of the complexity of strain is an important advance in combining structural factors with individual-level variables (see Chapters 14 and 15 for more detail on these theories).

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Policy implications are easy to draw from anomie and strain theories; putting them into practice is another matter entirely. Because anomie is a macrolevel theory, the proper form of policy would be aimed at modifying the social structure. Examples would include the elimination of class structures, racism, and prejudice, all of which are factors working to limit the opportunities for reaching goals. Other approaches, as we discuss in Chapter 7, involve programs to provide increased job opportunities. Although most clearly seen in the Depression-era work programs, many programs that aimed to increase opportunities for meaningful work were also created during the 1960s. Similarly, providing greater educational opportunities would be a desirable approach under strain theory. California’s education master plan of the 1960s, for example, gave all citizens free access to at least two years of

college. Programs aimed at decreasing school dropout rates and increasing educational levels are also in keeping with the anomie tradition. From the perspective of Agnew’s strain theory, a reasonable approach would be to find ways to decrease negative relationships in families, schools, and neighborhoods and to increase methods of avoiding other negative strains. Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) argue that more flexible work plans for parents, including family leave and working from home offices, may help restore the balance between the pressure for success and the need to devote time and energy to supportive social structures such as the family. Schools that strive to incorporate parents in special activities and companies that allow employees to devote work time to community projects also help strengthen these institutional controls.

A final policy implication deserves attention. Ruth Kornhauser (1978) as well as Steve Brown, Finn Esbensen, and Gil Geis (2010) have suggested that one possible policy implementation of anomie theory would be to reduce aspirations. While they do not actually suggest that we do so, some of the possibilities are intriguing. We could, for instance, introduce a caste system in which individuals remain in the caste to which they are born, never being allowed to dream of goals beyond their reach. Or, perhaps we could mount a campaign to tell everyone that the American dream is over. None of these things would, of course, be desirable—crime is not necessarily the worst ill in society. On the positive side though, we could attempt to restrict advertising that announces the availability of all sorts of luxury goods and our need to secure those goods to keep up with the proverbial “Jones family next door.” In this sense, the advertising media might be blamed (under anomie theory) for magnifying the tensions between the haves and the have-nots.

Questions and Weblinks

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Do you think our current society reflects a certain level of anomie? Why or why not?
2. How does advertising and media contribute to our drive for material forms of success and is there any benefit for attempting to control that?
3. Do you think the American Dream is the same today as when Merton first wrote his theory?
4. In the late 1950s, Leo Srole developed a scale that attempted to measure individual levels of anomie. The survey asked if you agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

- a. Despite what some say, the conditions of the average person are getting worse.
- b. The way the future looks, it is hardly fair to bring children into this world.
- c. A person has to mainly live for today and let tomorrow take care of itself.
- d. Today it is hard to tell who you can really count on.
- e. It is no use writing public officials, they don’t care about you.

Answer the questions a–e above with agree or disagree and compare your results with those in your class.

Practice Essay Questions

1. Discuss how progress in society contributes to the development of anomie according to Emile Durkheim.
2. As described in this chapter, what are some of the different ways that people adapt to the strain of not having access to the goals or means that society offers?
3. How does social structure interfere with someone’s ability to access the means to obtain the “American Dream?”

Related Websites

<http://www.samhsa.gov/prevention/>
http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Teen-Suicide-010.aspx
<http://www.afterschoolallstars.org/programs/need-for-after-school/?gclid=CPmymMHA68wCFZRlfgod4G4Ofw>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-common-youth/201301/mentoring-youth-matters>
<http://www.fedcap.org/programs-services/programs-services-for-youth-and-young-adults/youth-and-young-adult-services>

Bibliography

- Agnew, R. (1985). A revised strain theory of delinquency. *Social Forces*, 64, 151–167.
- Agnew, R. (2001). Building on the foundation of general strain theory: Specifying the types of strain most likely to lead to crime and delinquency. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 38, 319–361.
- Agnew, R. (2005). *Pressured into crime: An overview of general strain theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, S. E., Esbensen, F.-A., & Geis, G. (2010). *Criminology: Explaining crime and its context*. Cincinnati, OH: Anderson.
- Cloward, R. A. (1959). Illegitimate means, anomie, and deviant behavior. *American Sociological Review*, 24, 164–176.
- Cloward, R. A., & Ohlin, L. E. (1960). *Delinquency and opportunity: A theory of delinquent gangs*. New York: Free Press.
- Cohen, A. K. (1955). *Delinquent boys: The culture of the gang*. New York: Free Press.
- Cohen, A. K. (1965). The sociology of the deviant act: Anomie theory and beyond. *American Sociological Review*, 30, 5–14.
- Cullen, F. T., & Messner, S. F. (2007). The making of criminology revisited: An oral history of Merton's anomie paradigm. *Theoretical Criminology*, 11, 5–37.
- Dollard, J. (1937). *Caste and class in a southern town*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Dubin, R. (1959). Deviant behavior and social structure: Continuities in social theory. *American Sociological Review*, 24, 147–164.
- Durkheim, E. (1930). *The division of labor in society* (G. Simpson, Trans.). New York: Free Press. (Original work published 1893.)
- Durkheim, E. (1951). *Suicide: A study in sociology* (J. A. Spaulding & G. Simpson, Trans.). New York: Free Press. (Original work published 1897.)
- Elliott, D. S., & Voss, H. (1974). *Delinquency and dropout*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Featherstone, R., & Deflem, M. (2003). Anomie and strain: Context and consequences of Merton's two theories. *Sociological Inquiry*, 73, 471–489.
- Harary, F. (1966). Merton revisited: A new classification for deviant behavior. *American Sociological Review*, 31, 693–697.
- Hirschi, T. (1969). *Causes of delinquency*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Karstedt, S. (2010). New institutionalism in criminology: Approaches, theories and themes. In E. McLaughlin & T. Newburn (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of criminological theory* (pp. 337–359). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Katz, G. (2008, January 27). Loss of seven young people leave Welsh town reeling. *Houston Chronicle*, p. A26.
- Kornhauser, R. R. (1978). *Social sources of delinquency*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lilly, J. R., Cullen, F. T., & Ball, R. A. (2014). *Criminological theory: Context and consequences* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lynd, R. S., & Lynd, H. M. (1929). *Middletown: A study in American culture*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World.
- Martin, R., Murchick, R., & Smith, T. (2009). Robert Merton. In R. Martin, R. Murchick, & T. Smith (Eds.), *Criminological thought: Pioneers past and present* (pp. 207–230). New York: Macmillan.
- Merton, R. K. (1936). Social structure and anomie. *American Sociological Review*, 1, 894–904.
- Merton, R. K. (1937a). *Social theory and social structure* (Rev. ed.). New York: Free Press.
- Merton, R. K. (1937b). *Problems in scientific discovery: A chapter in the sociology of science*. *American Sociological Review*, 22, 635–639.
- Merton, R. K. (1938). Social conformity, deviation, and opportunity structures: A comment on the contributions of Durbin and Cloward. *American Sociological Review*, 3, 177–188.
- Merton, R. K. (1964). Anomie, strain, and social interactions: Contexts of deviant behavior. In W. B. Cloward (Ed.), *Anomie and deviant behavior* (pp. 215–240). New York: Free Press.
- Merton, R. K. (1968). *Social theory and social structure* (Rev. and enlarged ed.). New York: Free Press.
- Merton, R. K. (1985). Opportunity structure: The emergence, diffusion, and differentiation of the sociological concept, 1930s–1950s. In F. Adler and W. S. Lantieri (Eds.), *The legacy of anomie theory: Advances in criminological theory*, Vol. 6 (pp. 3–78). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Merton, R. K. (1987). On the evolving synthesis of differential association and anomie theory: A perspective from the sociology of science. *Criminology*, 25, 817–825.
- Merton, R. K., & Anshel-Mintzberg, W. F. (1940). Crime and the anthropologist. *American Anthropologist*, 42, 384–408.
- Messner, S. F., & Rosenfeld, R. (2007). *Crime and the American dream* (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Murphy, D., & Robinson, W. (2008). The maximizer: Clarifying Merton's theories of anomie and strain. *Theoretical Criminology*, 12, 501–521.
- Olsen, M. (1965). Durkheim's two concepts of anomie. *Sociological Quarterly*, 6, 57–66.
- Parsons, T. (1957). *The structure of social action*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Sorokin, P. A. (1928). *Contemporary sociological theories*. New York: Harper and Brothers.

Research Bibliography (from 1990)

- Agnew, R., Cullen, F. T., Burton, V. S., Jr., Evans, T. D., & Dunaway, R. G. (1996). A new test of classic strain theory. *Justice Quarterly*, 13, 681–704.
- Allen, T., & Fox, K. A. (2013). Multivariate dimensions of age, gender, and weapon use in spousal homicides. *Victims & Offenders*, 8(3), 329–346.
- Balkwell, J. W. (1990). Ethnic inequality and the rate of homicide. *Social Forces*, 69, 53–70.
- Baron, S. W. (2011). Street youths and the proximate and contingent causes of instrumental crime: Untangling anomie theory. *Justice Quarterly*, 28, 413–436.
- Baron, S. W., & Hartnagel, T. F. (1997). Attributions, affect, and crime: Street youths' reactions to unemployment. *Criminology*, 35, 409–434.
- Bernburg, J. (2002). Anomie, social change and crime. *British Journal of Criminology*, 42, 729–742.
- Bjarnason, T. (1998). Parents, religion and perceived social coherence: A Durkheimian framework of adolescent anomie. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 37, 742–755.
- Bjerregaard, B., & Cochran, J. (2008). Want amid plenty: Developing and testing a cross-national measure of anomie. *International Journal of Conflict & Violence*, 2, 182–193.
- Braithwaite, J. (2011). Anomie and violence in Indonesia and Timor-Leste, 1997–2009. *Asian Journal of Criminology*, 6, 51–68.
- Brezina, T. (1996). Adapting to strain: An examination of delinquent coping responses. *Criminology*, 34, 39–60.
- Burton, V. S., Jr., Cullen, F. T., Evans, D. T., & Dunaway, R. G. (1994). Reconsidering strain theory: Operationalization, rival theories, and adult criminality. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 10, 213–239.
- Cao, L. (2007). Returning to normality: Anomie and crime in China. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 51, 40–51.
- Cao, L., Zhao, R., Ren, L., & Zhao, J. (2010). Social support and anomie. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 54, 625–639.
- Carmichael, B. (1990). An exploratory study of values and attitudes of black delinquents in custody. *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 13, 66–85.
- Chamlin, M. B., & Sanders, B. A. (2013). Falsifying Merton's macro-level anomie theory of profit-motivated crime: A research note. *Deviant Behavior*, 34(12), 961–972.
- Chen, C. W. (2014). Are workers more likely to be deviant than managers? A cross-national analysis. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 123(2), 221–233.
- Chen, C. W., Cullen, J. B., & Parboteeah, K. P. (2015). Are manager-controlled firms more likely to bribe than shareholder-controlled firms: A cross-cultural analysis. *Management and Organization Review*, 11(02), 343–365.
- Cochran, J. K., & Bjerregaard, B. (2012). Structural anomie and crime: A cross-national test. *International Journal of Offender Therapy & Comparative Criminology*, 56, 203–217.
- Cullen, J. B., Johnson, J. L., & Parboteeah, K. P. (2014). National rates of opportunity entrepreneurship activity: Insights from institutional anomie theory. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 38(4), 775–806.
- DeFronzo, J. (1996). Welfare and burglary. *Crime & Delinquency*, 42, 223–230.
- Dolliver, D. S. (2015). Cultural and institutional adaptation and change in Europe: A test of institutional anomie theory using time series modeling of homicide data. *British Journal of Criminology*, 55(4), 747–768.
- Edwards, W. J. (1992). Predicting juvenile delinquency: A review of correlates and a confirmation by recent research based on an integrated theoretical model. *Justice Quarterly*, 9, 553–583.
- Edwards, W. J. (1996). A measurement of delinquency differences between a delinquent and nondelinquent sample: What are the implications? *Adolescence*, 31, 973–989.
- Hill, G., & Crawford, E. (1990). Women, race, and crime. *Criminology*, 28, 601–626.
- Hirtenlehner, H., Farrall, S., & Bacher, J. (2013). Culture, institutions, and morally dubious behaviors: Testing some core propositions of the institutional-anomie theory. *Deviant Behavior*, 34(4), 291–320.
- Hoffman, J., & Su, S. S. (1997). The conditional effects of stress on delinquency and drug use: A strain theory assessment of sex differences. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 34, 46–78.
- Hughes, L. A., Schaible, L. M., & Gibbs, B. R. (2015). Economic dominance, the “American dream,” and homicide: A cross national test of institutional anomie theory. *Sociological Inquiry*, 85(1), 100–128.
- Jarjoura, G. R. (1996). The conditional effect of social class on the dropout-delinquency relationship. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 33, 232–255.
- Johnson, E. A. (1993). Crime and the Industrial Revolution: The German case. *Criminal Justice History: An International Annual*, 12, 19–27.
- Junger, M., & Polder, W. (1992). Some explanations of crime among four ethnic groups in the Netherlands. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 8, 51–78.
- Keane, C. (1993). The impact of financial performance on frequency of corporate crime: A latent variable test of strain theory. *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, 35, 293–308.
- Konty, M. (2005). Microanomie: The cognitive foundations of the relationship between anomie and deviance. *Criminology*, 43, 107–131.
- LaFree, G., & Drass, K. A. (1996). The effect of changes in intraracial income inequality and educational attainment on changes in arrest rates for African Americans and whites. *American Sociological Review*, 61, 614–634.
- Lanier, M. M., and Carter, D. L. (1993). Applying computer simulation to forecast homicide rates. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 21, 467–479.
- Lee, D. J., DeFrank, R. S., & Rose, R. M. (1990). Anomie, alcohol abuse and alcohol consumption: A prospective analysis. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 51, 415–420.
- Levchak, P. J. (2015). Extending the anomie tradition: An assessment of the impact of trade measures on cross-national homicide rates. *Homicide Studies*, 19(4), 384–400.
- Li, L. (1995). Sociological explanations of crimes in late imperial China: 1744–1903. *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice*, 19, 107–127.
- Martin, K. D., Cullen, J. B., & Martin, M. W. (2013). What's yours is now mine: Deviant consumption through acquisitive crime. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 32(1), 140–157.
- Martin, R. (2000). Anomie, spirituality, and crime. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 16, 75–99.
- McCall, P. L., & Brauer, J. R. (2014). Social welfare support and homicide: Longitudinal analyses of European countries from 1994 to 2010. *Social Science Research*, 48, 90–107.

- McCarthy, B., & Hagan, J. (1992). Mean streets: The theoretical significance of situational delinquency among homeless youths. *American Journal of Sociology*, 98, 597-627.
- Messner, S. F., & Golden, R. M. (1992). Racial inequality and racially disaggregated homicide rates: An assessment of alternative theoretical explanations. *Criminology*, 30, 421-445.
- Messner, S. F., Rosenfeld, R., & Karstedt, S. (2013). Social institutions and crime. In F. T. Cullen and P. Wilcox (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of criminological theory* (pp. 405-423). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Miller, B. L., Agnich, L. E., Posick, C., & Gould, L. A. (2015). Cheating around the world: A cross-national analysis of principal reported cheating. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 26(2), 211-232.
- Piatkowska, S. J., Messner, S. F., & Raffalovich, L. E. (2015). The impact of accession to the European Union on homicide rates in Eastern Europe. *European Sociological Review*, 32(1), 151-161.
- Rogers, M. L., & Pridemore, W. A. (2013). The effect of poverty and social protection on national homicide rates: Direct and moderating effects. *Social Science Research*, 42(3), 584-595.
- Schaible, L. M., & Altheimer, I. (2015). Social structure, anomie, and national levels of homicide. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 60(8), 936-963.
- Sharpe, N. (1995). Corporate performance crime as structurally coerced action. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 28(1), 73-92.
- Siegmunt, O., & Wetzels, P. (2015). Institutional anomie theory: An empirical test. *Sociological Studies*, 4, 78-87.
- Stamatel, J. P. (2015). Democratic cultural values as predictors of cross-national homicide variation in Europe. *Homicide Studies*, doi: 10.1177/1088767915611178.
- Stults, B. J., & Baumer, E. P. (2008). Assessing the relevance of anomie theory for explaining spatial variation in lethal criminal violence: An aggregate-level analysis of homicide within the United States. *International Journal of Conflict & Violence*, 2, 215-247.
- Vilalta, C., & Muggah, R. (2016). What explains criminal violence in Mexico City? A test of two theories of crime. *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 5(1), doi: 10.5334/sta.433.
- Walters, S. (1991). Alienation and the correctional officer: A multivariate analysis. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 16, 50-62.
- Young, T. (1990). Native American crime and criminal justice require criminologists' attention. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 1, 111-126.
- Zhao, L. (2008). Anomie theory and crime in a transitional China (1978-). *International Criminal Justice Review*, 18, 137-157.
- Zhao, R., & Cao, L. (2010). Social change and anomie: A cross-national study. *Social Forces*, 88, 1209-1229.