

What is Anomie? Discuss Robert K. Merton's Theory of Anomie.

~~Merton's Theory of Anomie.~~

~~Meaning of Anomie:~~

The term "anomie" originates from the Greek word *anomia*, meaning "without law." In sociology, it was first used by Émile Durkheim.

Systematically in 'The Division of Labor in Society' (1893) and 'Suicide' (1897). He used it

to describe a state of normlessness, where

social norms break down, lose their authority,

or fail to regulate individual behavior. In

such conditions, individuals experience

uncertainty, disorientation and disconnection

from society's collective conscience.

Durkheim argued that anomie typically arises

during periods of rapid social change,

industrialization, urbanization, economic crisis,

when traditional norms and values weaken

but new ones are not yet established. This

leads to higher rates of deviance, crime,

and even suicide.

## Robert K. Merton's Theory of Anomie

### Introduction:

Building on Durkheim, American sociologist

Robert K. Merton reformulated the concept of

anomie in his essay 'Social Structure and

Anomie' (1938). While Durkheim emphasized

the breakdown of norms, Merton focused on

the mismatch between cultural goals and

institutionalized means of achieving them.

### Core Arguments:

- Every society defines cultural goals for example, wealth, success, social mobility in the U.S "American Dream".
- At the same time, it prescribes legitimate institutional means to achieve those goals for example, education, hard work, and lawful employment.
- Social Structure restricts or completely eliminates access to approved modes of acquiring these goals through legitimate means.

In other words, structural impediments exist for people. For those in lower classes who share

the cultural goal for success but have limited means to attain them, lack of education and job opportunities create a strain towards anomie, which may translate into deviance.

### Merton's adaptations to Anomie

Merton argued that there are five general adaptations to anomie. The key to each is (i) whether there is an acceptance or rejection of cultural goal of success and whether or not the choice is to strive for the goal via (ii) legitimate or conforming means.

		Institutionalized means	
		accept	reject
Cultural goals	accept	Conformity	Innovation
	reject	Ritualism	Retreatism
		new means	
		new goals	Rebellion

~ Merton's Deviance Typology

#### (i) Conformity:

Conformists have accepted the cultural goal of success or wealth attainment, and they are trying

to achieve it via legitimate means. Most college students might be considered conformists as they work hard to earn degree to get better jobs and have more success after graduation. For Meier, conformity was the only non-deviant adaptation to strain and anomie.

### (ii) Innovation:

It is the adaptation for those who have accepted the cultural goal of success and wealth attainment but are trying to achieve it via illegitimate means. Any crime for profit is an example of innovation. Robbers, thieves, drug dealers, embezzlers, would all be and high priced classified as innovators.

### (iii) Ritualism:

This is a category for those who have abandoned the cultural goal of wealth and success but continue to use legitimate to make their living.

Example: dedicated workers who will never advance to management roles, a student who graduates college without any career plans but applies for job because that is what is expected next.

#### (iv) Retreatism:

It is the adaptation of those who have rejected both the cultural goal of success and wealth, as well as, legitimate means of achieving them. Melon describes these people as, "in the society but not of it."

Example: chronically homeless and serious drug addicts might be considered retreatists.

#### (v) Rebellion:

This adaptation is for politically deviant, those who do not play by the rules but work to change the system to their own liking. Rebels reject the cultural goals and replace it with another primary goal; that may use means legitimate or illegitimate to achieve that goal. In other words, rebels will use whatever means necessary to achieve their goal.

Example: terrorist groups who use violence in an attempt to achieve their political goals.

#### Critiques of Anomie

Messner and Rosenfeld discuss four

critiques of Merton's anomie theory. First, Merton assumes that value consensus exists in society and that the goal of monetary success is held above all. It was pointed out that we should not assume that those values are universal; other goals may be equally or even more important depending on person. Second, Merton's theory is class biased and have difficulty accounting for deviance among the privileged classes. Third, Merton seems to suggest that providing more equal opportunities offers a realistic solution to crime and deviance; Messner and Rosenfeld do not believe this to be the case. Finally, Merton never precisely defines anomie.

### Development of Merton's Theory

Richard Cloward, a student of Merton, extended the theory further by adding the dimension of illegitimate means. Just as not everyone has access to legitimate means, not everyone has access to illegitimate means. Those who obtain success through illegitimate means do

not necessarily have the skills and connections to do so. Cloward and Ohlin argued that to understand deviance, we need to understand not only the motivations of individuals but also the accessibility they have to participate in deviant acts.

### Anomie example

#### Abuse at Abu Ghraib

A recent study analyzed at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq in terms of the concept of anomies.

Mestrovic and Lorenzo argue that there were high levels of social disorganization at Abu Ghraib and within the social structures of U.S Army and others who interacted with prisoners. This grew progressively worse over time; this confusion produced widespread deviance among prisoners and U.S personnel alike. Sources of confusion were identified as confusion about who was in charge, insufficient training, pressure to obtain intelligence etc.

This led to U.S soldiers torturing & humiliating Iraqi prisoners in unspeakable ways.

## Conclusion:

Merton's theory of anomalies originates from Durkheim's concept of normlessness, anomie, when societal norms get blurred and there is nothing to regulate individual conduct. It is the first ~~sociological~~ explanation for causes of deviant behaviour. It shows how people adapt to achieve their goals.

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satisfactory

add more examples with each point and para  
over all fine

write a formal intro and conclusion

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