

Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

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Unit: 1

Module Name: Robert K. Merton's Theory of Anomie

Module No: 5

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Notes

Merton's Theory of Deviance

Robert Merton developed the structural strain theory. This theory traces the origins of deviance to the tensions that are caused by the gap between cultural **goals** and the **means** available to people achieve those goals. According to Merton, in a well-integrated society, people use accepted and appropriate means to achieve the goals that society establishes. In this case, the goals and the means of the society are in balance. Only when goals and means are not in balance deviance occurs. Imbalance between goals and means leads an individual to deviant behavior.

Economic success is a goal that almost everybody strives for. The legitimate means to economic success are education and jobs. However, not all groups of people have equal access to these means. The result is structural strain that produces deviance. Lower class individuals likely to experience strains as they want same goals. However, they have blocked opportunities for success. These individuals are likely to turn to deviance to achieve economic success.

Five Categories of People

Merton categorized people into five categories with regards to their relationship to culturally accepted goals and the means to achieving those goals: Conformists, Innovators, Ritualists, Retreatists and Rebels

Conformists

Conformists are people who believe in both the established cultural goals of society as well as the normative means for attaining those goals. They follow the rules of society.

Individuals that accept the cultural goals of society but reject the conventional methods of attaining those goals.

Innovators

Innovators accept goals but have few legitimate means to achieve those goals, thus they innovate their own means to get ahead. Means to get ahead may be through robbery, or other criminal acts.

Ritualists

Ritualists abandon the goals once believed to be within reach but dedicate themselves to their current lifestyle. They play by the rules and have a daily, safe routine. Ritualists are individuals who do not believe in established cultural goals of society, but they believe in/abide by the means for attaining those goals.

Retreatists

Retreatists are individuals who reject both the cultural goals and the accepted means of attaining those goals. They simply avoid both the goals and means established by society without replacing those norms with their own counter-cultural forces. Severe alcoholics, drug addicts, some homeless people, and hermits are examples of retreatists. They often retreat into the world of alcoholism and drug addiction. These individuals escape into a non-productive, non-striving lifestyle.

Rebellion

The final adaptation, that of rebellion, occurs when the cultural goals and the legitimate means are rejected. Individuals create their own goals and their own means, by protest or revolutionary activity. Rebels not only reject both the established cultural goals and the accepted means of attaining those goals, but they substitute them with new goals and new means of attaining those goals. Examples of rebels include the terrorists, American Nazi party, "skinheads," and the Ku Klux Klan.