

Anomie and Strain Theories

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Introduction to Criminal Justice
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Anomie and Strain Theories

- Robert Merton
 - Early Anomie
 - Was an early challenger to the biological explanations of crime
 - Many believe his article (1938) is the most highly read article in sociology
 - It was Merton's belief that crime derives from society
 - Defined as the breakdown of social norms; a total loss or rules

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Anomie and Strain Theories

- Robert Merton
 - Anomie
 - Felt social values could be divided into two categories
 - Acceptable goals
 - Acceptable means of obtaining these goals
 - Anomie was then a split between the goals and the means as a result of society's structure
 - Deviance then results when cultural goals and means are separated from each other

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Anomie and Strain Theories

- Robert Merton
 - Anomie
 - Noted that certain goals are emphasized throughout society
 - Certain means are also emphasized to reach these goals
 - When goals are too strongly stressed, the stage is set for anomie
 - Anomic conditions can change, as social conditions change

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Anomie and Strain Theories

- Robert Merton
 - Anomie
 - Merton offered 5 ways in which people deal with non-equal access to legitimate means to accomplish goals:
 - Conforming
 - Innovation
 - Ritualism
 - Retreatism
 - Rebellion

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Anomie and Strain Theories

- Albert Cohen
 - Delinquent Boys (Subculture)
 - Student of Merton who asked question that Merton could not answer, "How do we explain the origins of delinquent subcultures?"
 - Cohen discovered that gang delinquency was the most common form of delinquency
 - Individuals in gangs commit more crime in attempts to gain social status

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Anomie and Strain Theories

- Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin
 - Differential Opportunity Theory
 - Often considered the easiest theory to understand
 - Individuals who are denied access to the commonly accepted means will be forced to locate alternate means
 - These alternatives are equally well established in the illegitimate structure as in the legitimate structure

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Anomie and Strain Theories

- Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin
 - Differential Opportunity Theory
 - Proposed 3 ideal types of delinquent gang subcultures
 - Criminal Subculture
 - Conflict Subculture
 - Retreatist Subculture

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Anomie and Strain Theories

- Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin
 - Differential Opportunity Theory
 - Criminal Subculture
 - Requires integration of offenders at various age levels
 - Close integration of the carriers of conventional and illegitimate values
 - The systems of relationships between legitimate and illegitimate persons constitute the environment in which a criminal subculture can come into being

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Anomie and Strain Theories

- Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin
 - Differential Opportunity Theory
 - Conflict Subculture
 - Transiency and instability produce powerful pressures for violent behavior among the young
 - » First, an unorganized community cannot provide access to legitimate channels to success
 - » Second, access to stable criminal opportunity systems is also restricted

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Anomie and Strain Theories

- Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin
 - Differential Opportunity Theory
 - Retreatist Subculture
 - Addresses question of what happens to those who are subject to "double failure"
 - These individuals are more susceptible to becoming retreatists
 - Does not imply that all will become retreatists

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Anomie and Strain Theories

- Richard Rosenfeld and Steven Messner
 - Crime and the American Dream
 - There are features of the American Dream that contributes to the high rate of crime
 - Strong Achievement Orientation – personal worth tends to be evaluated on the basis of what people have achieved
 - Individualism – in the pursuit of success, people are encouraged to make it on their own
 - Universalism – everyone is encouraged to aspire to social ascent
 - Monetary rewards – the receipt of money

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Anomie and Strain Theories

- Richard Rosenfeld and Steven Messner
 - Crime and the American Dream
 - Felt the core elements of the American Dream have their underpinnings in the economy
 - Conditions are common to all capitalist societies; however, there are two distinctions about the United States:
 - exaggerated emphasis on monetary success
 - unrestrained receptivity to innovation

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Anomie and Strain Theories

- Richard Rosenfeld and Steven Messner
 - Crime and the American Dream
 - Capitalism developed in the United States without institutional restraints found in other societies
 - Economy assumed an unusual dominance in the institutional structure of society
 - Dominance is manifested in 3 different ways
 - Devaluation of non-economic institutional functions and roles
 - Accommodation to economic requirements by other institutions
 - Penetration of economic norms into other institutional domains

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Anomie and Strain Theories

- Richard Rosenfeld and Steven Messner
 - Crime and the American Dream
 - Devaluation of non-economic institutional functions and roles
 - Education
 - » Regarded as a means of occupational attainment
 - » Few acquire knowledge for its own sake
 - » How many obtain degrees for personal pleasure?
 - Family
 - » Disagrees with argument that industrialization causes devaluation of family
 - » Some countries have maintained strong commitment to the family, these countries are not "obsessed with crime"

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- Richard Rosenfeld and Steven Messner
 - Crime and the American Dream
 - Accommodations that emerge in those situations in which institutional claims are in competition
 - Family
 - » Family routines are dominated by the schedules and routines of the labor market
 - » This is far different from many other countries
 - Education
 - » Educational institutions are more likely to accommodate to the demands of the economy
 - » People go to school to prepare for “good” jobs

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Anomie and Strain Theories

- Richard Rosenfeld and Steven Messner
 - Crime and the American Dream
 - The penetration of economic norms into other institutional areas
 - Education
 - » Schools rely on grading as a system of rewards
 - » Teaching tends to become oriented toward testing
 - Family
 - » Most resistive to penetration of economic values
 - » Fewer women can afford to be full time homemakers

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Anomie and Strain Theories

- Robert Agnew
 - General Strain Theory
 - According to Merton, crime results from the inability to achieve monetary success or other valued goals through legitimate means
 - Developed three major types of strain
 - Strain as the failure to achieve positively valued goals
 - Strain as the removal of positively valued stimuli from the individual
 - Strain as the presentation of negative stimuli

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Anomie and Strain Theories

- Robert Agnew
 - General Strain Theory
 - Strain as the Failure to Achieve Positively Valued Goals
 - 3 sub-types of strain under this category
 - » First category encompasses most of the major strain theories in criminology
 - » Second and third categories are derived from the justice literature and were new at the time of their release

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Anomie and Strain Theories

- Robert Agnew
 - General Strain Theory
 - Strain as the Failure to Achieve Positively Valued Goals
 - Strain as the disjunction between aspirations and expectations/actual achievements
 - » Everyone is encouraged to pursue the ideal goals but are often prevented from achieving such goals through legitimate means
 - » To address criticisms, there have been some who argued that a youth subculture that emphasizes a variety of immediate goals and depends on factors other than social class

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Anomie and Strain Theories

- Robert Agnew
 - General Strain Theory
 - Strain as the Failure to Achieve Positively Valued Goals
 - Strain as the disjunction between expectations and actual achievements
 - » Focus is on expectations not aspirations
 - » Literature argues that the failure to achieve leads to such emotions as anger, disappointment, and unhappiness
 - » Largely ignored in the literature despite the fact that it could be a better explanation in some ways

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- Robert Agnew
 - General Strain Theory
 - Strain as the Failure to Achieve Positively Valued Goals
 - Strain as the disjunction between just/fair outcomes and actual outcomes
 - » individuals do not necessarily enter interactions with specific outcomes in mind
 - » rather they expect that certain distributive justice rules will be followed
 - » as a result of inequity insulting, vengeful, and deviant behaviors may result

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Anomie and Strain Theories

- Robert Agnew
 - General Strain Theory
 - Strain as the Removal of Positively Valued Stimuli From the Individual
 - states that loss of a positive influence in life may result in the onset of strain
 - anticipated loss of positively valued stimuli may lead to delinquency as the individual tries to prevent the loss of the stimuli

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- Robert Agnew
 - General Strain Theory
 - Strain as the Presentation of Negative Stimuli
 - presentation of negative stimuli may lead to aggression in certain situations
 - Agnew focused on the presentation of noxious stimuli that adolescents cannot escape legally from noxious stimuli

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- Robert Agnew
 - General Strain Theory
 - The links between strain and delinquency
 - Delinquency may be a method for alleviation strain
 - Delinquency may be used to seek revenge
 - Delinquency may occur as adolescents try to manage their negative affect through illicit drug use
 - Each type of strain may create a predisposition for delinquency or function as a situational event that instigates a particular delinquent act

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- Questions??
- Comments??

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