

Modern society and world society essay

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Anomie, first developed by Emile Durkheim, is very evident in today's society. The concept of anomie, according to Durkheim, is a state of normlessness, where individuals are succumbed to deregulation in their lives and through out their society brought on by a social change.

Robert K. Merton, following the ideas of Durkheim, developed his own notion of anomie, called Strain Theory. Merton argued that anomie was a day to day function in society, seen as a social structure that embraces the same goals to all of its members without giving them equal means to achieve them.

In the name of progress, modern society has promised a better world, yet in modern society anomie has not become the exception but instead the norm.

Emile Durkheim, a French Sociologist, originally introduced the concept of anomie in his first paper called *The Division of Labor in Society*, in 1893.

According to Emile Durkheim there are two kinds of societies with one being simple called mechanic solidarity and the other being complex or organic solidarity. In mechanic societies there is a high solidarity among all members of that society; they have the same beliefs, religion, and means of survival.

As society becomes increasingly organic there is more differentiation between members of that society since not everyone endures the same role. Once societies become organic, work also becomes more complex and there is an increase in the division of labor, and specialized economic activity.

By becoming different from each other through their work, individuals become more different in their lives, resulting in a decrease of the collective conscience, community sharing common sediments, and the collective constraint. Individualism replaces the collective conscience. In this society,

people are no longer tied to one another and social bonds are impersonal. The term anomie refers to the breakdown of social norms and it a condition where norms no longer control the activities of members in society. Individuals cannot find their place in society without clear rules to help guide them. Changing conditions as well as adjustment of life leads to dissatisfaction, conflict, and deviance. Durkheim felt that sudden change caused a state of anomie.

The mechanic solidarity of simple societies that are intended to replace the social and moral forms had not developed fully thus modern society was experiencing a crisis of morality in a period of transition (Fenton, 1984, p. 20). The system of norms and values breaks down either during a great prosperity or a great depression. Discussing anomie more in depth and in addition to wanting sociology to be defined as scientific, Durkheim refers to the theory of suicide, not as an individualistic act but a societal problem. He sought to explain suicide not as to why it occurs, he left that to psychology, but as a social fact, which required other social facts and empirical research for an explanation.

Durkheim believed that the rates of suicide dealt with social integration or interaction of society and social regulation. Categorizing suicide into four types; egoism, altruism, anomie and fatalism, he attempted to describe reasons individuals possibly choose such a harsh outcome. Egoism or egotistical suicide refers to low social integration, a feeling of not part of society or society not part of the individual. Through empirical research, Durkheim concluded that a Protestant unmarried man was most likely to

commit suicide for reasons that described the individual as having low social integration. The Protestant religion is not as integrated as the Christian or Jewish religions Durkheim studied and as well as married people are more socially integrated than unmarried individuals and men commit suicide more than women.

Altruism or altruistic suicide, described as extreme social integration, lack of individuality. Anomie or anomic suicide refers to low regulation or in other words, the regulative powers are disturbed. Seen as imbalances between means and goals, Durkheim describes two forms of economic anomie, being that of acute and chronic and then chronic domestic anomie.

According to Durkheim in acute economic anomie: Rules relating means to ends were inapplicable, and individuals were freed from social restraint creating disequilibrium, unhappiness and leading to an increase in suicides. Chronic domestic anomie was a product of a longer term diminution of social regulation of the relation between the means and ends (Thompson, 1982, p. 112). Acute domestic anomie, examples a widow suffers the great crisis of a loved ones death and cannot adapt the new situation, resulting in suicide. Chronic domestic anomie, examples marital relations affect the individual sometimes resulting in divorce.

Although not as in depth as previous, the last type of suicide described by Durkheim is fatalism or fatalistic suicide, where regulation is in excess. Suicide described as “ persons with futures pitilessly blocked or all suicides attributable to excessive physical or moral despotism” (Thompson, 1982, p. 113).

Throughout these four types of suicide Durkheim began to notice that not only the rich or not only the poor were the victims of the structural pressures but that the consequence were not intended nor willed but unintended human actions. Thus, Durkheim proposed the belief that scientific sociology should reveal the underlying structural services that produced these effects, hence further his notion of anomie (Thompson, 1982, p. 116). An American sociologist Robert K Merton built on Durkheim's notion of anomie to develop his own ideas called strain theory. Merton argued that the real problem is not created by a sudden change, as Durkheim anticipated, but rather by a social structure that is imbalanced between socially sanctioned means available to different groups of people and widely held goals and values of society, thus the opportunity is a structured inequality, making some people liable to anomie. Merton focused on two elements of social structure and culture, desirable goals and legitimate means which are available in attaining those goals.

Lack of integration and what the culture calls for and what the structure permits, results in deviant behaviour, “ social structures exert a definite pressure upon certain persons in the society to engage in nonconforming rather than conforming conduct” (Brym, 2001, p. 455). In American society money is seen as the purpose of life, overemphasized. In attaining that money, for some individuals is not always great but the money in the end, the goal, is greater. Success is attainable for everyone which leaves failure to be the fault of the individual.

Merton described five modes of adaptation, depending on the individual's attitudes toward cultural goals and institutional means to attain them. The first approach to the adaptation of strain in society is Conformity, the most common. Individuals accept both the goals as well as the advised means for attaining those goals. The last four adaptations Merton described were seen as deviant; Innovation, Ritualism, Retreatism, and Rebellion. Individuals adapting to strain through innovation, see the importance of material success as a goal but no legitimate means pursued, the goal is then attained by illegitimate means, crime is evident in innovation. Ritualist, accepting strain through ritualism, a person who cannot actually attain the goal but forcefully follows the legitimate means in order to attain the goal, like a ritual. Retreatism is the rejection of both the goals as well as the means to attain those goals, to withdraw from society. Merton saw this mode of adaptation in examples of drug addicts, psychotics and autistics.

The last mode of adaptation Merton describes is rebellion, or rejecting both the means and the goals but also inventing or replaces them with other means or goals of their own which are seen as superior (Fenton, 1984, p. 188). The five modes, proposed by Merton lead to deviation, however he did not indicate that everyone who was denied access to society's goals became deviant (Fenton, 1984, p. 189).

Merton's theory, focusing on various acts of deviance, may be understood to lead to criminal behaviour, does not give everyone the equal admittance to the legitimate means to attain those goals, leaving the individual in a state of anomie. " Anomie has stimulated a major tradition of work on the causes

of crime which has moved from dominant orthodoxy to unjust neglect. The relationship of crime, law and punishment to social and political development is being increasingly studied even if current work suggests that Durkheim's substantive account is at best grossly oversimplified at worst the obverse of the historical record" (Fenton, 1984, p. 201). The notion of normlessness as proposed by Durkheim, as well as the notion of the strain in a social structure, argued by Merton, is very prominent in today's society as for example the economic depression as well as the economic boom. Individuals in the 1930's were in turmoil with the great economic depression, factory workers lost jobs as a result. Their norms of everyday life were disturbed, and no new norms were yet to be set in place, experiencing anomie (Ritzer and Goodman, 2004, p. 90).

The effect of an economic boom could possibly lead people to quit their jobs and to move away, causing a disturbance in the regulation of everyday life (Ritzer and Goodman, 2004 p. 90). Anomie was and still is very well-known following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, as America, as well as the world, underwent the immensely tragic event. Everyone, for the most part, was and still is affected by such an experience.

The disastrous incident left many individuals and many subcultures in a state of complete chaos, where the norms of everyday life were disrupted or in another words, in a state of anomie. 9/11 affected many realms of everyday life for the present that day, as well as the future to come including; the economy, the stock market, the political stance, the farming industry, the retail industry, religion, tourism, and as well as many others.; The American

consumer, for example, after September 11th, chose to invest their money wisely. “ Post-Sept. 11, almost 8 in 10 Americans (77 percent) say that a company’s commitment to causes is an important consideration when making decisions about what to buy or where to shop, compared with just over half (52 percent) who said the same prior to Sept. 11.” (American Demographics, Feb 1, 2002 p16).

People began to lose their jobs as a result of no money being spent so employers had to make cutbacks with their employees, “ the Labor Department reported ‘... U. S. employers cut more jobs in September (2001) than in any month since the 1991 recession” (Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service, Oct 8, 2001 pK5144). Family life had changed for many, as a result of money loss in the home, families began to break up, leaving one-parent families as oppose to two, thus the possibility of troubled children could arise. The United States was in an immense state of anomic shock.

The possible outcome for suicide could have occurred that day and may still occur today. Suicide as both anomic, norms removed and no new norms set in place, and as well as fatalistic, social regulation in excess, for example an individual assumes the probable end of their life and decides to take their own life themselves. Anomie, according to Durkheim, was exceptionally apparent that day for the American society.; In reference to Merton and the strain theory, September 11th left many individuals to deal with strain and to adapt to it. The terrorist act could be seen as a rebellion according to the American society.

The terrorists had a goal and attained that goal, however the goal and means of that goal were not seen as acceptable means, and they invented their own goals and means. The terrorists could also be seen as retreatists, withdrawing from society of the world, rejecting the goals of society as well as the means to attain those goals. The families of the victims of 9/11 may have dealt with the strain through innovation as attaining a goal, for example moving on with everyday life, but not following the legitimate means of attaining that goal. Not accepting the fact that the tragic event happened, the families may have just pretended to ‘move on’.

In dealing with the aftermath of the terrible event, George W. Bush could be seen as an innovator by the American population but at the same time he could be seen as a rebel by the world as a society. The American people, for the most part, could be seen as conformists, conforming to the ideas of their leader, George W. Bush. The many mourners left on that day could possibly be seen as ritualists, by not being able to attain the goal of moving on with their everyday life, but still follow the legitimate means of doing so as in living their life day to day and not changing or accepting the facts in order to move on. Adapting to the strain of September 11th, individuals could be categorized into one of the four groups, which are seen as deviant to the normal routine of society. The concept of anomie was coined about one hundred years ago, at a time where urbanization and industrialization transformed deeply the social fabric of society.

Durkheim’s concept of anomie and its relation to suicide are still alive today. It can be argued that we are observing a break down in society as people

have become disconnected from their families, neighbours, and communities because of the fast pace capitalist society we live in. They are far less engaged in civic and religious organizations, community projects, having friends over for dinner, card clubs, and various other group activities, this disengagement has left many western societies in a chronic state of anomie.