

Merton's theory



**ASSIGN
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Compare and contrast Merton's theory and the labelling theory of deviance.**I. Introduction****Your Essay Outline**

Write about Compare and contrast Merton's theory and the labelling theory of deviance in the first sentence. Summarize Mertons Theory in the second sentence. Summarize Labelling Theory of Deviance in the second sentence. Summarize Comparisons & contrast in the third sentence. Briefly summarize So in short, both theories try to explain crime from a social perspective but one explains why crime begins while the other one explains why crime continues. in the final sentence of the first paragraph.

In second paragraph you need to expand on Mertons Theory. Write one sentence summarizing Mertons Theory. Then write two sentences expounding on Mertons Theory. Be sure to back up your argument for Mertons Theory. In the final sentence transition from Mertons Theory to Labelling Theory of Deviance

In third paragraph you need to expand on Labelling Theory of Deviance. Write one sentence summarizing Labelling Theory of Deviance. Then write two sentences expounding on Labelling Theory of Deviance. Be sure to back up your argument for Labelling Theory of Deviance. In the final sentence transition from Labelling Theory of Deviance to Comparisons & contrast.

In fourth paragraph you need to expand on Comparisons & contrast. Write one sentence summarizing Comparisons & contrast. Then write two sentences expounding on Comparisons & contrast. Be sure to back up your argument for Comparisons & contrast. In the final sentence transition from Comparisons &

contrast to your So in short, both theories try to explain crime from a social perspective but one explains why crime begins while the other one explains why crime continues..

In the fifth and final paragraph, summarize Mertons Theory again.

Summarize Labelling Theory of Deviance again. Summarize Comparisons & contrast again. Then write two sentences stating your So in short, both theories try to explain crime from a social perspective but one explains why crime begins while the other one explains why crime continues..

Outline and assess the structuralist themes of crime and deviance

Structural theories of deviance are similar to Merton's theory. They explain the origins of deviance in terms of the position of individuals or groups in the social structure.

In the 1930's Robert k Merton wrote an article entitled Social Structure and Anomie. It became one of the most influential explanations of crime and deviance. He offered a social rather than psychological or biological explanation. In particular, it was a structuralist theory as it saw the structure of society shaping peoples behaviour.

According to Merton, American culture attaches great importance to success - and success is measured in terms of money and material possessions.

There are norms which define legitimate means for achieving success. These legitimate means include gaining skills and qualifications and career advancement. The American dream states that anybody can make it to the top if they try hard enough. So much emphasis is placed on material success that many people experience pressure to deviate from accepted norms and

values. Deviance occurs when they reject the goals of success and/or the legitimate means of reaching that goal. For example, some people are tempted to use any means of getting to the top-even if that involves criminal behaviour. Merton refers to this pressure as a 'strain to anomie'. Anomie means normlessness - it refers to a situation where norms no longer guide behaviour, where 'anything goes'.

Despite what the American dream says, not everybody has an equal chance at success. The social structure prevents equal opportunity. In particular, the strain to anomie is most strongly felt by those at the bottom of the class structure. They are less likely to acquire skills and qualifications needed to reach the top. As a result, they are more likely to seek alternative routes to success.

Merton identifies five possible adaptations or responses to the strain to anomie in American society, conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, rebellion. Conformity according to Merton, most people conform despite the strain to anomie. Even if they don't make it, they continue to strive for success and follow the normative means of getting there. Innovation, people who adopt the deviant adaptation accept the goals of success but, in Merton's words, they have 'little access to conventional and legitimate means to becoming successful.' As a result, some innovate-they turn to legitimate means, to crime. The pressure to select this adaptation is greatest for those in the lower levels of the class system. Ritualism, people who follow this deviant route abandon the goal of success, but stick rigidly to the rules-for example, people in dead end, white collar occupations that follow their job descriptions to the letter. Retreatism, this deviant adaptation involves a

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rejection of both the goal of success and the normative means of achieving it. It applies to people who 'drop out'- tramps, drug addicts and habitual drunkards. Rebellion, this involves a rejection of conventional goals and means and their replacement with alternatives. The revolutionary who seeks to change society illustrates this type of deviant adaptation.

Merton's strain theory was an early attempt to explain crime and deviance in terms of culture and structure of society. It provided a sociological alternative to biological and psychological theories. In particular, it offered an explanation for working class crime. Whatever its weaknesses, Merton's work provided a spur for the development of further theories of crime and deviance.

Merton's theory does raise a number of unanswered questions. First, why do people but not others adopt deviant adaptations? For example, why do some people in the lower levels of the class system turn to crime but others do not? Secondly, Merton's theory focuses on individuals rather than groups. Crime and deviance are often collective activities. How can this be explained in terms of strain theory? Thirdly, crime and deviance are not always motivated by a desire for monetary gain. How can activities such as vandalism and fighting between rival gangs be explained in terms of Merton's theory? In search for these answers subcultural theory was formed.

Subcultural theories explain deviance in terms of the subculture of a social group. They argue that certain groups develop norms and values which to some extent different from those held by other members of society. For example, some groups of criminals or delinquents might develop norms that

encourage and reward criminal activity. Other members of society may regard such activities as immoral, and strongly disapprove of them.

Subcultural theories claim that deviance is the result of individuals conforming to the norms and values of the social group to which they belong. Members of subcultures are not completely different from other members of society: they may speak the same language, wear similar clothes, and attach the same value to family life. However, their subculture is sufficiently different from the culture of society as a whole to lead to them committing acts that are generally regarded as deviant. Often, structural and sub cultural theories are combined, as in Albert Cohen's analysis of delinquency. The development of subcultures is explained in terms of the position of groups and individuals in the social structure.

Cohen was the first sociologist to develop a subcultural theory of working class crime and deviance. He examined delinquent gangs in low-income, inner city areas. Delinquency refers to the criminal and anti social acts of young people.

Cohen agreed with Merton that the mainstream value of success creates problems for young working class males. Many do badly at school and fail to acquire the skills and qualifications needed for success.

Employing Durkheim's concept of anomie, Robert K Merton, an American sociologist, developed his theory of deviance by analysing the American reward system. Merton's argument is that in a well-regulated society, goals and the means of achieving these goals are integrated in that they are available to all in society. In some societies the accepted means of achieving

these goals are not available to all, hence those who wish to achieve the goals, but are not able to do so through legitimate means, must adapt to the situation. Merton presented a typology describing the modes of adaptation. The important aspect of the typology is the relationship between the cultural goals and the institutionalised means of achieving them. I will describe the typology in the following paragraphs.

Howard S. Becker's labelling theory of deviance asserts that "deviance and conformity result, not so much from what people do, but from how others respond to those actions". It analyses how definitions for deviant behaviour are created by social groups.

Merton then sets out a typology of modes of adaptation in terms of conformity, or non-conformity, to cultural goals and institutionalised means:

1. Innovation - accepting cultural goals but employing illegitimate means, for example, property theft, cheats.
2. Ritualism - adherence to means whilst ignoring the goals, for example, bureaucratic adherence to routine - going through the motions.
3. Retreatism - withdrawal, opting out of socially defined desirable behaviour, for example, alcoholics, addicts.
4. Rebellion - not only rejection of goals and means, but a positive attempt to replace them with alternative values, for example, political revolutionaries, religious prophets.

Merton's analysis suggests that deviant behaviour is functional. First, for the individuals involved, since it enables them to adapt to the circumstances in which they find themselves. And second, for society as a whole - since modes of individual adaptation help to maintain the boundaries between acceptable and non-acceptable forms of behaviour.

Criticisms

1. Non conformity, such as ritualism, is not really the same as deviance (indeed with ritualism you do the actions, but have the wrong thoughts - it's nearer blasphemy). It does not convey the same stigmatising quality as in the label ' deviant'.
2. The assumption of cultural consensus is implicit in the idea of cultural goals, and ignores the possibility of sub-cultures and a pluralistic culture, where cultural goals might differ considerably.
3. It does not really provide a causal theory as to why some groups might adapt via rebellion and others by retreatism. Obviously some form of socialised commitment and differential associations becomes crucial for influencing perceptions of the alternatives to conformity. It does not explain movement into deviant careers.
4. It does not take into account that just as legitimate means to success are limited, that so too are the illegitimate opportunities. Not everyone has equal access to criminal sub-cultures. An analysis of the opportunities for deviant activity is required.

However, Merton never claimed that his typology was a total theory of deviance and many of the criticisms of his work were picked up on and improvements attempted by sub-cultural theorists.

Conclusion

Merton's strain theory is basically an explanation of why people commit crime. His approach involves looking at how people accept reject or redefine our cultural goals according to the means available to them in accepting those goals. So for example, success is the goal, the appropriately accepted way to achieve success in America is through the belief that hard work will get us success. But many people work hard and are not successful. So one adjustment would be to reject the idea that hard work is how to become successful and replace that means of achieving success with an alternative method such as selling drugs. You achieve monetary success without hard work.

Labeling theory is also an effort to explain crime from a sociological position. However labeling theory explains why a person continues committing a crime but does not explain why they committed a crime in the first place.

So in short, both theories try to explain crime from a social perspective but one explains why crime begins while the other one explains why crime continues.