

# Discuss how the strain theory explains criminal behavior

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Strain theory of Crime This paper will seek to examine how strain theory explains the cause of crime in society. The strain theory was initially developed by Robert K. Merton an American sociologist. Merton modified Durkheim concept of anomie to develop his theory. He argued that in society, the social structure sets the same goals to all members but fail to provide them with equal means to achieve these goals. This lack of integration between what society's culture advocates for and what the social structure allows to individuals is what causes deviant behavior in society. Merton therefore perceive deviancy as a defect of the social structure and results from anomie, which is a breakdown of society's normative system. Merton's theory seeks to examine certain acts of deviancy that results into criminal behaviors in society. Merton notes that society always emphasizes the achievement of certain goals such as education and hard work and also emphasizes the means to fulfill such goals. However, in society not all individuals have equal access to the means of achieving such goals legitimately. This results into strain and anomie.

In his theory, Merton highlights five modes of adapting to strain which is caused by limitation to socially accepted goals and means. He noted that restricted access to society's goals did not ultimately result to individuals becoming deviant but the modes of adaptation entirely depended on individual's attitudes to society's goals and means to the institutional means of achieving them. Merton identifies various modes of adaptation. The first mode of adaptation is the Conformity. This is the most common and in this mode, individuals accept both the goals and the means of achieving them. The second mode is Innovation. Individuals who are innovators accept the

society set goals but are faced with few legitimate means of achieving the set goals and are therefore forced to come up with their own means to achieve their goals. These means that they come up with include illegal means such as robbery and embezzlement. The third mode of adaptation is the Ritualism. In this adaptation, individuals usually abandon the goals they once believed would be achieved if unable to achieve them and restrict themselves to their current lifestyle. These individuals also, accept to abide by society's rules.

The fourth mode is Retreatism . It is made up of individuals who have given up on the set goals as well as the way of achieving them. These individuals either become alcoholic or drug addicts and detach themselves from a productive life in society.

The last mode of adaptation is Rebellion . This adaptation happens when individuals reject all culturally approved goals and means and set their own goals and means such as the use of protest and revolutions. In conclusion, Merton notes that Innovation and Ritualism are the main cause of anomie in society as they result in discontinuity between society set goals and means of achieving them. (newworldencyclopedia. org, 2011)

Work Cited:

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