

# Mertons theory

Sociology



The Merton Theories: How this could account for white collar crime and how strain can explain street gangs. The question that is kept on my mind is the reason why the supposedly well-fed, intelligent and those people belonging to the upper strata of society would still commit white collar crimes. Financial scandals that have shocked the world came from white collar crimes that the nagging questions remain as to why they did it. I have rationalized that there are underlying reasons that explain s why this is so. In my review, I found Merton Theories of Anomie relevant in clearing up the reasons of behavior in committing crime. By definition, Anomie is a Greek word that means lawlessness referring to an unstable society caused by a breakdown of established qualities, a general feeling of insecurity and isolation. Along this line, this topic provides a discussion on the possibility of a connection between the defiant behavior of the society and anomie as posed in Merton's Theory. To Merton, anomie is a situation wherein a deviant behavior is developed from the prescribed standards of the society. (Garfield, 1987, p. 287). By this, Merton further defines anomie as " a discontinuity between cultural goals and the legitimate means for reaching them" (Smith, L. K, 2008). This means that there is a gap between the prescribed ideals in the society and their means of achieving them. This situation often times result to the breakdown of values in the society as committed by the individual. In searching for an explanation, let us take the case of crime on white collar jobs. This is the kind of crime often times committed at a business by a businessman and by someone belonging to a middle class status of society, such as embezzlement or fraud. As in the Wise Geek (n. d.) article, white collar crimes are mostly financial in nature and are done by those with respectable social status. It is also due to the economic system that

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encourages values, attitudes, and personality structure that is contributing to commitment of white collar emphasis. For instance, the competitive structure of a business gives a person a wide variety of key decision-making positions. Within these positions, there are structural demands that force people into violations of the law and their motivations become earning fast money, thus making a start of white collar crimes. Furthermore, Merton's theory explains that the emphasis of the society is on achievement and success without giving equal impetus on how to attain them. For example, in our society, people is expected to have meaningful work, home ownership and material comforts, but sometimes opportunities are not always available to pursue this. This situation pressures the people to pursue these desires through illegitimate means. As a result, the state of anomie is created wherein there are drug abuse, alcoholism, suicide, vandalism, assault, embezzlement and fraud, the crimes that are noted among gangs and from the upper strata of people. The works of Merton also relates defiant behavior to the strains developed among the street gangs. As argued in Merton's theory, strains are crimes caused by the difficulty in achieving socially valued goals thru legitimate means, and in this case, by those who are poor. For example, those who do not have sufficient educational attainment have difficulty in getting a well paid job and gaining wealth and status, and thus they are prone to use criminal means to achieve these goals. Thus, Grabionski , 2006, explains why gangs exist in poor because of the strain in making money. Aside from this is the peer pressure that entices the young to join gangs, maybe because they are afraid to lose friends. Factors such as boredom and despair are among those noted as causes of strain that leads to gang membership. Gangs provide a vent for boredom, and the comfort

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and family congeniality a youth needs badly that he cannot get at home. In effect, joining a gang gives the youth a sense of belonging and part of being important, something that he/she otherwise could not get from the established society. References Garfield, Eugene. 1987. " The Anomie-Deviant Behavior Connection: The Theories of Durkheim, Merton, and Srole ". Number 39 September 28, 1987 The Anomie-Deviant Behavior Connection: Essays on Information Scientist, Vol. 10, p. 272, 1987, current Contents, #39, p. 3, Sept. 1987, retrieved 25 January 2011 <http://www.garfield.library.upenn.edu/essays/v10p272y1987.pdf> Grabianowski, Ed. 2006. " How Street Gangs Work" . HowStuffWorks.com. retrieved 26 January 2011 Smith, L. K. 2008. Functionalist Definitions and Typologies of Anomie, associated content from Yahoo. A comparison of theories of Emile Durkheim and Robert K. Merton. , Rerieved 27 January, 2011 from [http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/524085/functionalist\\_definitions\\_and\\_typologies.html? cat= 4](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/524085/functionalist_definitions_and_typologies.html?cat=4) Wise Geek, n. d. " White Collar Crimes", retrieved 25 January 2011 <http://www.wisegeek.com/topics/white-collar-crimes.htm>