**Anomie theory of crime**

The concept of Anomie was first introduced during the latter part of the nineteenth century by French sociologist Emile Durkheim who described the phenomenon as a condition of normative confusion or “normlessness” which existing rules and values have little impact. In other words, Anomie is the breakdown of social norms and values. Decades later, building on Durkheim’s work, Robert k. Merton of Colombia University used the concept of anomie to develop a general theory of criminal behavior. This theory is also known as strain theory. This theory stems from Robert Merton’s 1938 analysis of the relation between culture and social structure. Merton suggested that society has two component parts: a culture and a social structure. The culture consists of a set of norms, values and attitudes that establishes the goal that individuals should pursue and the acceptable means and behavior patterns for achieving those goals. The social structure involves the organized set of social relationships in which the members of a society play their various roles. He elaborates that every society has cultural goals and institutionalized means for achieving these goals. Crime results from the gap between aspirations and achievable goals. His ideas are better explained as below.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Modes of adaptation | Cultural or societal goals | Institutionalized means |
| Conformity | + | + |
| Innovation | + | - |
| Ritualism | - | + |
| Retreatism | - | - |
| Rebellion | +/- | +/- |

In the above diagram, the + symbol indicates acceptance and – indicates rejection.

**Conformity** is the term used to describe the acceptance of cultural goals and the approved means for achieving them. Conformists are those people, having cultural goals and use legal means for achieving these goals. Moreover, they do so even when the legitimate means for reaching the valued goals are out of their grasp. Most of the people wish a secure and successful career. They desire a safe livable environment, entertainment, vacations and material possessions. Yet, a vast majority of people living in poverty have few means for satisfying these desires. Nevertheless, most love income citizens still conform. They play by the rules and earn a living the best way they can. Furthermore, they do so because there are other society-wide cultural influences that support conformity i.e. religious values, belief in opportunity, public education and the absence of formal legal restrictions against upward mobility.

**Innovation** involves acceptance of cultural goals but rejection of the means a society deems proper for reaching these goals. The innovators are the people who selects disapproved means to achieve goals. Students cheating on exams, thieves, stock manipulators, drug dealers and CD pirates attain cultural goals, such as wealth or grades but have rejected conventional routes. Rather they innovate, choosing new means of achieving these goals. Innovation, however, is actually a poor choice of terms for this form of adaptation. Most criminals merely copy illegitimate means already known to them. Thus, using disapproved means is hardly the same thing as inventing or creating new ones. Innovators are those people who wish to achieve cultural goals but use illegitimate means for achieving these goals when the goals are out of their grasp.

**Ritualism** is the rejection of society’s goals but the acceptance of society’s means for achieving those goals. Ritualists accepts the means for their own sake; and the goals become irrelevant and are ignored. They use institutionalized means but having no goals. The example of ritualist most often cited in the government bureaucracy who insist on strictly enforcing every petty rule.

**Retreatism** describes the rejection of both the goals a society or culture establishes and the means society prescribes for achieving these goals. The people who have no cultural goal and no struggle for goals. They are aside from the rest of the world. These people include addicts and psychopaths.

**Rebellion** is characterized by the acceptance and rejection of the goals and the means of achieving those goals established by society. Rebels characteristically also aim to establish some new social order. They attempt to create a new set of goals and new norms governing appropriate means. They are different from innovators because the philosophy behind their rejection is change in society. The most visible and expressive examples of rebellion involve the various terrorist organization throughout the world that resort to bombing, kidnapping, and assassinations in order to draw attention to their cause and to initiate change.

**Criticisms.** This theory is criticized on the following grounds

* This theory fails to explain the causes that why people opt for criminal life style.
* It also under explains the conventional crimes.
* Furthermore, this theory is criticized because it ignores social control (Ibid).