

Robert King Merton (1910-2003)

Robert King Merton was born of Jewish immigrant parents in a South Philadelphia slum, where his father was a carpenter and truck driver. He grew up with a passion for learning and won a scholarship at Temple University. There he received his BA and became interested in sociology while taking an introductory sociology course taught by George E. Simpson. Recalling this experience, Merton has said, “It wasn’t so much the substance of what Simpson said that did it. It was more the joy of discovering that it was possible to examine human behaviour objectively and without using loaded moral preconceptions”.

With the help of a fellowship, Merton received a doctorate from Harvard University, where he was one of Parsons’s earliest and most important graduate students. Looking back over his career at Harvard, Parsons stated that of the significant relations he had with graduate students, “the most important single one was with Robert Merton.” He adds, “For a considerable time, Merton and I came to be known as the leaders of a structural-functional school among American sociologists.”

While at Harvard, Merton was also influenced by Pitirim Sorokin, who was not sympathetic to Parson’s work. Sorokin shared Parsons’s propensity for large-scale theorizing, but he balanced this with an equally strong interest in empirical research and statistical studies. It was Paul K. Lazarsfeld who influenced Merton to become active in empirical research, and Merton was closely associated with him at the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University until Lazarsfeld’s death in 1976. Parsons saw himself as an “incurable theorist,” but Merton was actively engaged in empirical research beginning in 1941, when he joined the faculty at Columbia.

Merton’s two classic essays on the relationship between sociological theory and empirical research appear as chapters in his best-known book, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, first published in 1949. Unlike Parsons, Merton did not stop with abstract theory and typology; he formulated empirical hypotheses and often tested them in the real world by gathering data himself and analyzing the results. Please note that most of his writings have been in essay form. An important compilation of these essays is his famous work *Social Theory and Social Structure*. Among the wide range of areas to which he contributed, the most important ones are related to the nature of sociological theory (middle-range theory), clarification and refocusing of functional analysis, theory of deviance, theory of reference group behaviour, sociology of science, etc. In 1957 the American Sociological Society elected Robert K. Merton as its president.

Theories of the Middle Range

One of the most important ways in which Merton diverged from Parsonian functionalism was in his decision to abandon the quest for an all-encompassing theory. He chose, rather, to take the path of what he calls “middle-range theories” designed to guide empirical inquiry. As Merton himself explained,

At the summit of human thought, some sociologists are seeking a single unified theory - a generalized body of explanations as to what cements society together, how institutions fit into a social framework, how discrepant values arise and work their changes upon a society, and so on. My friend and occasional colleague, Talcott Parsons, is doing just that, and, I think, making useful progress. But for most of our energies to be channeled that way would be decidedly premature. Einstein could not have followed hard on the heels of Kepler, and perhaps we haven't even had our Kepler yet. Just as it would stifle sociology to spend all its time today on practical problems before developing theory sufficiently, so it would to spend all its time on abstract, all-encompassing theories. Our major task today is to develop special theories, applicable to limited ranges of data - theories, for example, of deviant behaviour, or the flow of power from generation to generation, or the unseen ways in which personal influence is exercised.

Theories of the middle range transcend sheer description of social phenomena. **They are theories with limited sets of assumptions, from which specific hypotheses can be derived and tested empirically. In Merton's view, middle-range views would gradually consolidate into more general theory.** What he set out to do was to fill in the blanks between raw empiricism (what is referred to by some sociologists as the “fishing expeditions” of researchers who cross-tabulate data with abandon and with no guiding theoretical framework) and grand or all-inclusive theory of the type Parsons was working on in his general theory of action.

Let me simplify this. Merton argues that a theory is a clearly formulated generalization between specific variables. Further, a theory can be productive when while being a general theory it is specific enough to produce a ‘testable hypothesis’. Please note that a hypothesis is a tentative statement asserting a relationship between certain specific variables. Merton argues that the most important criterion of a testable hypothesis is its potential falsifiability. In other words, it implies that a hypothesis when subjected to empirical enquiry may either be proved or disproved. Parsons's theory of social system is too general to be falsified.

According to Merton, sociology, at its present stage of development, needs theories of middle range. Such theories should be grounded in empirical data and at the same time should use concepts which are clearly defined and can be operationalised. Middle range theories are so formulated that specific and verifiable hypothesis can be deduced from these theories and can be subjected to empirical verification. Please note that Merton was not against building generalizations. According to Merton, building generalizations is central to any scientific discipline. However, in an attempt to arrive at higher level generalizations, scientific research should not be compromised. Hence, Merton advocated ‘middle-range theories’ which are empirical, thus, ideologically-neutral. Such theories of middle range offer only limited generalizations, thus, not deterministic. Further, these middle-range theories can act as a bridge between macro and micro sociological theories. Merton argues that middle range theories do not remain separate but are consolidated into wider networks of theory. In other words, from various middle range theories, a more general theory (higher level generalization) could be derived.

In his plea for theories of the middle range, Merton was standing on the shoulders of such great sociologists as Durkheim and Weber. He presented two classical examples of middle-range theories: Durkheim’s *Suicide* and Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. What Merton advocated is not a new approach but a proliferation of works like these classics. For Merton, both theory and research are integral and inalienable aspects of sociological enquiry.

Dear Candidate, Merton has elaborated on the interrelationship of theory and empirical research in his two essays, viz. ‘*The bearing of sociological theory on empirical research*’ and ‘*The bearing of empirical research on sociological theory*’. We have already discussed this earlier under the topic: Fact, Value and Objectivity.

Sociology is Simple
Sociology is Scoring
provided that you
Study Sociology Systematically

Paradigm of Functional Analysis

Merton devoted considerable attention to what he called the “codification of functional analysis in sociology.” This work displays some important differences from Parsons’s functionalism. For one thing, Merton’s functional paradigm is not open to criticisms of inherent conservatism and teleology (explaining things by their function). At the same time, however, Merton offered fewer specific propositions about the structure of societies than Parsons did.

As we have seen, functionalists in general conceive of society as a system of interrelated parts. This is equally true of Merton, who argued that the central orientation of functionalism is expressed in the practice of interpreting data by establishing their consequences for larger structures in which they are implicated. Merton was also deeply interested in social integration, or equilibrium. Like Durkheim and Parsons, he analyzed society with reference to whether the cultural and social structures are well or badly integrated; was interested in the contributions of customs and institutions to the persistence of societies; and defined **functions** as those contributions or consequences that “make for the adaption or adjustment of a given system.” Finally, Merton argued that shared values are central in explaining how societies and institutions work, thus sharing the other major distinguishing concern of all functionalist analysis.

However, through his paradigm Merton clarified and refocused some major aspects of functionalist theory. The most important are his emphasis on **dysfunctions**, his distinction between **manifest** and **latent functions**, his concept of **functional alternatives**, and his insistence on the importance of uncovering and understanding the mechanisms by which functions are fulfilled.

Merton prefers to use the word *functional analysis* rather than structural-functionalism. Merton makes an attempt to refine and develop functional approach. His basic aim to functional analysis is that to point out fundamental errors in the substance of structural functionalism and its related terminology. For a research strategy, according to him, it is necessary to combine the outlined criticisms of functional structuralism and empirical studies in the functional analysis.

Dear Candidate, Merton’s work must be seen in the context when classical functionalism championed by Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski was being severely criticized for its conservative teleology and inability to account for conflict and conflict-led change. Merton rejected the core idea of classical functionalism that recurrent social phenomena should be explained by their functions, such as their benefits to society as a whole.

By 1950s the criticism grew stronger and sharper, thus compelling Merton to take up the task of clarifying and correcting certain basic tenets of classical functionalism. Merton begins with the review of the mistakes of the early functionalists particularly Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown. Merton saw functional theorizing as embracing three questionable postulates:

1. Postulate of the Functional Unity of Society
2. Postulate of Universal Functionalism
3. Postulate of Indispensability

Merton has explained: “Substantially, these postulates hold first, that standardized social activities or cultural items are functional for the *entire* social or cultural system; second, that all such social and cultural items fulfill sociological functions; and third, that these items are consequently *indispensable*.”

According to Merton, the belief in the above mentioned postulates as self-evident truths rather than tentative propositions by the classical functionalists had been responsible for the ideological coloration which functionalism had come to acquire as a result of which it was criticized as conservative teleology. According to Merton, functional analysis must be seen and understood only as a methodology. The ideological tint of the functional approach can be done away with if one abandons the belief in the above mentioned postulates and does not treat them as self-evident truths. Merton, in fact, establishes three prevailing postulates in functional analysis to point-out the distinctive difficulties of structural functionalism. Merton summarized in these three (rejectable) postulates what he thought was flawed in classical functionalism.

1. **Postulate of the Functional Unity of Society**, the assumption that what matters is the contribution of some social element to the *whole* system, thus presupposing that there is such a unity. In other words, this postulate presupposes that every social system must have some minimum degree of functional unity for its survival.

In this context, Merton cites the view of some of the noted sociologists and social anthropologists, such as, Radcliffe-Brown, Malinowski, etc. They had mainly discussed small-scale societies and this assumption has been valid only for such type of societies. The functional unity of society is, therefore, doubtful, argues Merton, particularly for complex and highly differentiated societies. For instance, it would be wrong

to consider that religious ceremonies promoted solidarity throughout the Indian society, but it would be true to say that it contributes to the solidarity of subgroups within it.

According to Merton, functionalists so far have frequently transformed the hypothesis that social system may reveal social integration into necessary integration or need for social survival. While it is difficult to argue that human society does not possess some degree of integration, for otherwise they would not be systems, Merton views the degree of integration in a system as an issue to be empirically determined. To assume that a high degree of functional unity must exist in a social system is to preclude the possibility of its empirical verification. It is due to such a presumption regarding high degree of functional unity that the functional approach has come to acquire a conservative bias and an ideological coloration which can be derived from the works of the functionalists from Durkheim to Talcott Parsons. Thus the degree to which functional unity exists in the social system should be a matter subject to empirical investigation.

Merton argues that functional unity is a matter of observation and investigation. The entire fact of “functional unity” is that it is applicable only to small type of society in which a change in one part of the system will automatically result in a change in other parts. On the other hand, he suggests that a high degree of “functional autonomy” is found in highly differentiated societies, not a functional unity. Thus a change in any part of the system may have little or no effect on others.

2. **Postulate of Universal Functionalism**, the claim that *all* social or cultural forms have some (positive) function. Nineteenth century anthropologists, for instance, such as Radcliffe-Brown, Malinowski, Rivers, Tylor, Durkheim, assumed that every social and cultural element must have positive functions for the maintenance of the society. But the fact is that not every structure, custom, belief, and so forth has positive functions.

Merton suggests that if an examination of an actually existing system is undertaken, it would be clear that there is a wide range of empirical possibilities. Firstly, items may not be always functional for the whole system or a part of it, but can also be **dysfunctional** for either the part or the whole system. For instance, poverty may not be dysfunctional for society as

a whole but only to the poor. Thus Merton suggests that functionalist should analyse any part of system from the point of view of its functional, dysfunctional or non-functional consequences.

Secondly, some consequences whether functional or dysfunctional are intended and recognized by the system and are thus ***manifest***, whereas other consequences are not intended or recognized and are therefore ***latent***.

Merton suggests that the postulate of universal functionalism should be replaced by “the provisional assumption that persisting cultural forms have a ***net balance of functional consequences*** either for the society considered as a unit or subgroups sufficiently powerful to retain these forms intact, by means of direct coercion or indirect persuasion.”

3. **Postulate of Indispensability**, that the function performed by a social or cultural form is an *indispensable* precondition for the survival of the social system. In other words, this postulate states that certain institutions or social arrangements are indispensable to society. The postulate of indispensability is related to two assertions. Firstly, it is assumed that there are certain *functions* which are indispensable in the sense that, unless they are performed, the society (or group, or individual) will not persist. This, then, sets forth a concept of functional prerequisites, or preconditions functionally necessary for a society. Secondly, it is assumed that *certain cultural or social forms* are indispensable for fulfilling each of these functions.

Merton, in fact, raises questions on the assumption of indispensability and rejects it by arguing that: “*just as the same item may have multiple functions, so may the same function be diversely fulfilled by alternative items.*” To replace the idea of indispensability, Merton suggests the concept of *functional alternatives* or *functional equivalents*. According to Merton, “The utility of this concept is not to identify various arrangements with identical consequences, but rather to identify arrangements with identical or similar functions (effectiveness) but reduced dysfunctions (increased efficiency).”

Merton, therefore, accepts the idea that certain function must be met for a society by a range of alternative means rather than the institutions that meet them are indispensable to survive. Furthermore, in looking for such functional alternatives attention is drawn to the questions about the range of the items that could serve as functional equivalents within the existing *structural constraints* of the social system.

In a nut shell, these postulates are debatable and unnecessary. Merton argues that none of these postulates was empirically justifiable. Merton emphasized that functionalist should examine the situation at empirical level. Merton's belief that empirical tests are crucial to functional analysis led him to develop his '**paradigm**' of functional analysis as a guide to the integration of theory and research.

Merton is concerned to deal with the necessity of a paradigm which contains a set of concepts without which the sociologist cannot adequately carry out a functional analysis. Through his paradigm, Merton clarified and refocused some major aspects of functionalist theory. Some of the distinguishing features of his paradigm of functional analysis are discussed below:

Firstly, Merton made it clear that functional analysis focuses on groups, organizations, societies, and cultures. He stated that any object that can be subjected to functional analysis must "represent a *standardized* (i.e. patterned and repetitive) item." These items are, according to Merton, "social roles, institutional patterns, social processes, cultural patterns, culturally patterned emotions, social norms, group organizations, social structures, devices for social control, etc." In addition, Merton argues that any social item which is being subjected to functional analysis must be described in detail on the basis of *empirical observation*. According to Merton, analysis of sociological data is necessary in functional analysis.

Secondly, unlike Parsons's *assumption* of universal needs or functional prerequisites (AGIL), Merton favoured '*empirical identification of needs*.' In other words, the researcher should empirically identify the needs or functional requirements of the system under investigation and provide a detailed account of the mechanism by which these functional requirements are fulfilled.

Thirdly, after the detailed description of a given social item based on empirical observation, the social scientist should also try to distinguish between the concepts of subjective dispositions and concepts of objective consequences. In other words, the researcher should look for *subjective dispositions* (motives, purposes, etc.) of the actors involved and also to the *objective consequences* of the

activity. The researcher must be careful that the subjective dispositions are not confused with the objective consequences.

Let me simplify this. Subjective dispositions may be understood in terms of the meanings that the actors ascribe to a given social item or social condition and the intended consequences (functions) thereof. In Merton's terminology, it is called as ***manifest functions***. In other words, manifest functions of a social item are the consequences that are intended, or of which the participants are aware.

From the concept of manifest functions follows Merton's another key contribution to sociology. It is the concept of ***latent functions***. Latent functions are the consequences that are neither intended nor recognized by the social actors. In other words, latent functions are the unintended and unrecognized consequences associated with a given social item or condition.

As can be seen, Merton actually used two criteria, intentionality and awareness, thus opening up a more complex typology, with four types (intended and recognized, intended but not recognized, unintended but recognized later, unintended and not recognized). This distinction opens an interesting area for analysis and empirical study concerning the relationship between intended and unintended consequences, and concerning processes triggered when hitherto latent functions become manifest.

Please note that Parsons tends to emphasize the manifest functions of social behaviour, particularly in terms of those objective consequences which contribute to the adjustment or adaptation of the system and which are intended and recognized by participants in the system. Merton, on the other hand, pays particular attention to the latent functions of things and the increased understanding of society functionalist analysis can bring by uncovering them.

Thus, Merton's distinction between manifest and latent functions further clarifies functional analysis. However, the notion of latent functions is not a totally new one. Durkheim's discussion of social cohesion as a consequence of punishment was an analysis of the latent function of punishment (the manifest function being retribution). Similarly the functional analysis of religion as a social integrator is concerned with religion's latent function. Merton emphasizes both the distinction between manifest and latent and the way analysis of latent functions "precludes the substitutions of naive moral judgments for sociological analysis." This distinction forces sociologists to go beyond the reasons individuals give for their actions or for the existence of customs and institutions; it makes them look

for other social consequences that allow these practices' survival and illuminate the way a society works.

As an example of the fruitfulness of such analysis, Merton cites Veblen's analysis of conspicuous consumption, the latent function being the enhancement of one's status in the eyes of the world. Merton cites yet another example of the rain-making ceremony of the Native American Hopi tribe to explain this. While the ceremonies are performed by tribe members in the belief that rain will be produced, an unintended consequence, or latent function, is that these ceremonies 'maintain the Hopi society by reinforcing the feelings of solidarity among its members'. The ceremonies don't actually produce rain (the manifest function), but they do help strengthen tribal bonds (a latent function).

For Merton, one cannot complete a functional analysis without considering both manifest and latent functions. He argues that this distinction between manifest and latent functions has various advantages for sociological enquiry. In the first place, the distinction aides the sociological interpretation of many social practices even though their manifest purpose is clearly not achieved. Here, Merton advises that sociologists should not dismiss them as mere superstitions or irrationalities and instead should try to look for the latent functions. The rain-making ceremony of the Native American Hopi tribe is an example of such a situation. Further, this distinction serves to direct attention of the sociologists to other fruitful fields of enquiry and opens new vistas of research.

Merton's own analysis of political machines shows how the distinction between manifest and latent functions can help explain the way institutions work and why they survive and thrive. Please note that by political machines (in USA) Merton implies the local political party organizations in American cities. The manifest function of political machines, especially in the context of ward politics, seems to be personal advancement through corruption as it involves vote buying and similar law breaking. However, because they were so firmly rooted in the local neighborhood, ward politics and political machines were highly functional for such disadvantaged groups as new immigrants. They humanized welfare assistance by providing information about hospitals, marshaling legal aid, and furnishing jobs; thus they kept families together and broke down some of the isolation of immigrant groups. Merton started with the hypothesis that in spite of obvious surface dysfunctions, to survive and be influential the machine must have served important functions for some social groups. By asking "Who benefits?" and uncovering the machine's latent functions, he created a classic piece of sociological analysis.

Fourthly, regarding the study of objective consequences, Merton suggests that the functionalist should analyse any part of system from the point of view of its functional, dysfunctional or non-functional consequences. Talcott Parsons's work tends to imply that all existing institutions are inherently good or functional for society, this tendency has been one the major points of attack on functionalism and the one arouses the most emotion among its critics. Merton explicitly dissociates himself from such a position. Instead he emphasizes the existence of **“dysfunctions”** and encourages sociologists to actively identify them.

Merton's concept of dysfunctions involves two complementary but distinct ideas:

The first is that something may have consequences that are generally dysfunctional; in his words, an item may have “consequences which lessen the adaptation or adjustment of the system.”

The second is that these consequences may vary according to whom one is talking about; the sociologist must ask the crucial question, “Functional and dysfunctional for whom?” In other words, the researcher must seek to identify the range of units for which the item under study has consequences. Thus, the researcher should look for the consequences of the social item at various levels such as **at individual level**, **at sub-system level** (various groups), and **at system level** (i.e. society).

An excellent example of what Merton means by generally dysfunctional consequences can be found in his own discussion of bureaucracy. On the whole, bureaucracy appears as a functional institution for industrial society in that bureaucratic specialization means better utilization of talent and more effective response to the exigencies of the environment. However, Merton's understanding of dysfunctions makes him aware of what may happen when adherence to bureaucratic rules becomes an end in itself – a situation he calls “ritualism” in his theory of deviance. Although adherence to the rules is ordinarily a moral and social good and therefore functional for society, but in some cases overemphasis on the adherence to the rules may prove to be dysfunctional for a particular section of society or society as a whole.

Merton's knowledge of general dysfunction thus makes him aware of the “dark underside” of bureaucracy in a way not generally associated with functionalism. He is close to Weber, who saw bureaucracy as an efficient, rational way of dealing with problems, necessary to a modern state and to the end of feudalism and yet prospectively tyrannical because of its inflexible ritualism, its insistence on rules for everything. Merton is even close to the neo-Marxist conflict

theorist, Habermas, who sees rationalistic bureaucracy as an impressive technical development that threatens human freedom.

Merton's second point – that an institution need not be generally functional or generally dysfunctional but may instead be functional for some people and groups and dysfunctional for others – is an even clearer shift away from a functionalism that implies approval of the status quo. In some ways it approaches conflict theory. Merton talks in terms of whether institutions and practices are functional or dysfunctional for people, whereas conflict theorists generally refer to people's interests and the degree to which these are served. However, they share a concern with the differing benefits that various groups obtain from the social order and with the way these benefits explain the origin, persistence, or decline of social institutions.

We can see what Merton means by dysfunctions and why it is important for sociologists to bear them in mind by looking at such supposedly indispensable institutions as marriage and family living. People commonly think of these institutions as crucial to the health of society. Yet marriage and family life may not be functional for some types of individuals at all. They may be happier with such functional alternatives as joining collectives, renting in singles' apartment complexes, living together as unmarried couples, or living in religious communities. Only by recognizing the dysfunctional aspects of marriage and family living can we explain the development and persistence of these alternatives. Again, as functionalists from Durkheim on have tended to emphasize, an institutionalized and established religion may help to integrate a society by creating common values and identification with the group. However, Merton points out, such a religion is hardly functional for dissidents who are victims of an inquisition, and religious conflicts and wars are dysfunctional for large segments of the societies involved.

In *Social Theory and Social Structure* Merton asks, "What are the consequences, functional and dysfunctional, of positive orientation to the values of a group other than one's own?" His interest in this phenomenon, labeled *anticipatory socialization*, is exemplified in a recent study by a student of Merton's Helen Rose Ebaugh. Ebaugh explores the process of role exit – disengagement from a role that is central to one's self-identity and the reestablishment of an identity in a new role that takes into account one's ex-role." Her study concerns a variety of social groups, including ex-convicts, ex-nuns, ex-alcoholics, divorced men and women, mothers without custody, ex-prostitutes, ex-air traffic controllers, and transsexuals.

Anticipatory socialization is functional for both the aspiring individual and for the group he or she eventually enters. This is true when the seeking and weighing of role alternatives is taking place and, especially, as individuals come closer to a final decision to exit a role. Prior identification with a group serves as a kind of bridge to membership in the group. Ebaugh found, for instance, that transsexuals identified with members of the opposite sex by cross-dressing and taking on the mannerisms of the opposite sex long before they underwent sex-change surgery. She states, “In addition to shifts in orientation, attitudes, and values, individuals at this point in the process also began rehearsing the roles they were anticipating.”

Herbert Gans’s analysis of poverty (in his paper “The Positive Functions of Poverty”) demonstrates how a Mertonian functionalist approach can produce analyses that would generally be associated with radical left conflict theory rather than conservative functionalism. Gans points out that when one distinguishes between different groups in a society, one can see that the existence of poverty serves a number of positive functions for different groups. For example, he argues, poverty ensures the existence of a group willing to serve in a peacetime army, provides the upper classes with an outlet for charity and the gratification it brings, creates jobs for people in professions and occupations that serve the poor, and makes it possible for wealthier people to get dirty jobs and personal services performed at a slight cost. These functions, he suggests, help explain why poverty exists in technologically advanced societies: those who benefit from it with the preserve it.

Merton’s concept of dysfunctions is also central to his argument that functionalism is not intrinsically conservative. It appears to be only when functionalists imply that everything is generally functional in its consequences – something his concept of general dysfunctions denies – and when analysts treat society and its members as one and the same thing, a view he sets out to demolish by asking, “Functional for whom?”

At the same time Merton does retain a distinctively functional perspective. Unlike most conflict theorists, Merton believes that institutions and values can be functional (or dysfunctional) for society as a whole, not just for particular groups. He suggests that researchers should start with the hypothesis that persisting cultural forms may have a “net balance of functional consequences” for society as a unit as well as for subgroups. Merton’s emphasis on dysfunctions balances Parson’s concern with social functions.

Fifthly, with the concept of dysfunctions, Merton could also silence the critics to some extent who labeled functional approach as status quoist. Critics, particularly the Marxists, had argued that with its over emphasis on certain postulates, the functional approach manifests conservative bias by overlooking the conflict present in society and hence, fails to account for conflict led change. In other words, critics argued that the functional approach focused on the static aspects of the social structure, and has neglected the study of structural change.

Merton, however, argued that the concept of dysfunctions provides an analytical approach to the study of dynamics or change. As stated earlier, Merton suggests that functionalist should analyse any part of system from the point of view of its functional, dysfunctional or non-functional consequences. Further, consequences should also be understood at both, manifest as well as latent levels. Then, the functionalist should arrive at “net balance of functional consequences.”

Merton writes: “The concept of dysfunction, which implies the concept of strain, stress and tension on the structural level, provides an analytical approach to the study of dynamics and change.” In other words, Merton argues that the dysfunctional consequences generate strain or tension in the system. Thus, Merton demands that the researcher, after observing dysfunctional consequences of an item, should investigate the strain or tension generated by those dysfunctional consequences.

Sixthly, Merton states that if the dysfunctional consequences are more conspicuous for a given social item than its **functional alternative** or **functional equivalent** must be explored within the given structural constraints. To replace the idea of indispensability, Merton suggests the concept of *functional alternatives* or *functional equivalents*. According to Merton, “The utility of this concept is not to identify various arrangements with identical consequences, but rather to identify arrangements with identical or similar functions (effectiveness) but reduced dysfunctions (increased efficiency).”

Thus, with the concepts of dysfunctions and functional alternatives, Merton armoured the functionalist with the conceptual tools to account for social tension and social change.

Important: Functionalism’s claim of providing specific propositions about how societies work, rather than simply general suggestions about how to set about analyzing and explaining things, rests in large part on its argument that in order to persist a society must have certain characteristics; and correspondingly, all societies will exhibit these characteristics. As we have seen, this argument is central to the work of Parsons who lists such

characteristics in his AGIL schema, and it is also apparent in the work of Durkheim.

In much of Merton's work functionalism serves more as a way of orienting oneself to one's material than as a set of propositions about the structure of societies. But Merton does share this central view, and he puts forward the concept of functional prerequisites, or "*preconditions functionally necessary for a society*." At the same time, however, he emphasizes that particular, given institutions are not the only ones able to fulfill these functions; therefore, a given social structure is in no way sacrosanct. On the contrary, a wide range of what he terms "functional alternatives," or substitutes may be able to perform the same task.

Merton's concept of functional alternatives also clarifies functionalist analysis because it explicitly rejects the idea that existing institutions are necessary and, by implication, good. Therefore, it encourages sociologists using a functionalist approach to question the indispensability of an existing social structure. For example, most functional theorists believe that religion maintains and inculcates certain norms and values central to the group and thus combats the anomie that leads to both social disintegration and personal unhappiness. However this function may be served by structures other than organized religion, and movements that might be interpreted as functional alternatives to religion seem to be cropping up almost yearly in certain parts of America, particularly in California, the birthplace of many occult and therapeutic groups.

Hence the researcher should explore the possibility of functional alternatives or equivalents, which can be substituted for the item under investigation. This focuses attention on the range of possible variations in the items which can serve the same functional requirements. For example, religion may serve the function of promoting social solidarity and regulating social control in simple, homogenous societies but in complex, modern industrial societies it may act as a source of inter-group hostility and conflict, i.e. communal violence. Thus, in modern societies, which are marked by religious diversity, secularism may serve as the functional alternative to religious ideology.

Other functional alternatives can be found among the different types of higher education and vocational training existing in modern industrial societies. All of these sort people into the adult world of work and classify them as qualified for different types of occupations. But the different ways they do so may be more or less functional for different people.

As Burton Clark points out, American society places great emphasis on encouraging people to achieve and on ensuring equal opportunity to do so, and it practices something close to an open-door admission to college. However, in practice, not everyone can become a nuclear physicist, veterinarian, or corporate executive. Colleges impose fairly strict criteria on performance, and many students would, if they entered a four-year college, inevitably encounter standards of performance they could not meet. Using terminology derived directly from Merton's work on deviance, Clark says there is "dissociation between culturally instilled goals and institutionally provided means of realization; discrepancy between ends and means is seen as a basic social source of individual frustration."

For students who would fail in a four-year college, the two-year or community college provides a functional alternative. It performs the same function of sorting students for the labour market, and it makes it clear to less academically oriented students that certain careers are not possible for them. It does so at much less personal cost to such students, for whom the straight academic failure of the conventional college might be personally dysfunctional. Clark describes the "cooling-out" function of these colleges, which permit transfer to four-year colleges but also redirect students through testing programs and extensive counseling that serve to reorient students who need to redefine their goals. Although a four-year college is both personally functional for those who succeed scholastically and an appropriate way to train people for some careers, Clark shows how the two-year college can be a functional alternative for others because it provides alternative achievements that alleviate the personal stress caused by failure. It may also function socially by helping to prevent discontentment and deviance and by directing people successfully into other occupations.

In the wake of the contemporary women's movement, many functional alternatives to traditional marriages have emerged, such as cohabitation and gay and lesbian families. The increasing use of day care facilities and, on a much smaller scale, househusbands are examples of functional alternatives to traditional families where the mother works as housewife at home, but not in the public sphere for a wage. Other examples of functional alternatives to traditional marriages are commuting relationships, equal parenting, and greater husband participation in household work.

Merton's notion of functional alternatives is thus important because it alerts sociologists to the similar functions different institutions may perform, and it further reduces the tendency of functionalism to imply approval of the status quo. However, Merton makes little progress in specifying what the functional prerequisites are that can be served in a variety of ways. Merton apparently does not consider Parsons's schema to be the definitive statement on the subject, but neither does he provide any concrete alternative list of his own. He recognizes the idea of functional requirements as an essential part of any functional analysis, and he refers frequently in his analysis to the degree to which society is well or poorly adjusted. But he fails to define the functional requirements for such integration. Instead he refers to them as "one of the cloudiest and empirically most debatable concepts in functional theory".

As might be expected from his remarks on middle-range theory, in general, Merton's achievement is to provide an excellent clarification of the requirements of functionalist theory and to show how a general functionalist orientation can be used fruitfully in empirical analysis, rather than to provide further general propositions about social structure and equilibrium.

Seventhly, Merton argues that functional analysis must recognize the interdependence of the elements of the social structure as well as the limited range of variation in the items which can fulfill designated functions in the social system. As Merton puts it, "Failure to recognize the relevance of interdependence and attendant structural constraints leads to utopian thought in which it is tacitly assumed that certain elements of a social system can be eliminated without affecting the rest of that system." In other words, the researcher must take into account the **structural constraints** of a given social system. The interdependence of the elements of a social system limits the possibilities of the suitable functional alternatives.

Eighthly, Merton emphasizes on the problem of the validation of various functional assumptions, postulates, imputations and observations. Merton writes: "This requires, above all, a rigorous statement of the sociological procedures of analysis which most nearly approximate the *logic* of experimentation. It requires a systematic review of the possibilities and limitations of *comparative* (cross-cultural and cross-group) *analysis*." In other words, such a functional analysis should be repeatedly subjected to validation, through comparative studies.

Last but not the least, Merton asserts that functional analysis itself has no intrinsic commitment to any ideological position.

Functional analysis of Merton, in fact, provides a new direction to mode of sociological interpretation that tries to find out the central problems of structural functionalism and its conceptual confusion by establishing some of the essential concepts. In this connection, Merton has identified three postulates of the functional approach and provides a detailed analysis of paradigm to remove the conceptual confusion.

Consequently, structural functionalism in the form Merton gave it became a conceptual framework and a set of guidelines to be used in empirical research, rather than a theory with general explanatory claims. As such, it became a very useful tool, and it is much easier to use in conducting empirical research than general and abstract theory of Parsons.

Critical evaluation of Merton's Functional Paradigm

Merton, through his modification, gave a new lease of life to functional analysis. Now, it could be applied to the analysis of modern industrial societies because it could now account for conflict and change.

However, critics argue that the conservative bias persists in functional analysis even now. For example, when Merton says that we should not have naïve moral judgments, then he should have substituted it with more sophisticated moral judgments. But, in the name of doing away with naïve moral judgements, he has totally done away with the idea of moral judgement. He became morally neutral. If you are morally neutral, then it implies that you are indirectly supporting status quo.

Critics also argue that Merton commits the same mistake for which classical functionalism was criticized i.e. conservative bias. For example, Malinowski's universal functionalism implies that every cultural item has some function for the sustenance of society. Merton too tends to justify the political machine in America on similar lines. Just because political machine exists, Merton digs out its latent functions and justifies its existence. Given the manifest dysfunctions of the political machine, Merton should have suggested or explored functional alternative to it.

Further, when Merton talks about 'net balance of consequences', he doesn't suggest any criteria or concrete methodology to arrive at it. For example, how to quantify or compare the functional or dysfunctional consequences of any item empirically?

Critics argue that when Merton talks about ‘dysfunctional consequences’, he doesn’t explain why do things become dysfunctional in the process. Merton’s theory does not account for the processual dimension adequately. That is, things which were once functional, are no longer functional today. Why? Only in the retrospect when there is a conflict in the society, we can look for dysfunctions or dysfunctional items. In other words, we could not anticipate conflict. Merton’s theory falls short of the explanation of the process or factors that may lead to dysfunctional consequences. For example, what circumstances may generate conflict and in what intensity? Merton’s theory is silent on this aspect.

Some scholars suggest that instead of the term ‘functional alternative’, Merton should have used the term ‘structural alternative’. Functional alternatives are actually structural alternatives because they are alternative parts that Merton is looking for. Parts are components of structure, consequences of parts are functions.

Last but not the least, Merton himself never applied his methodology to arrive at any middle range theory. Only in his theory of ‘reference group behaviour’, Merton partly applied his functional paradigm.

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Theory of Reference Group

As stated earlier, it was only in his theory of ‘reference group behaviour’ that Merton had partly applied his functional paradigm.

The concept of reference group was introduced by the American social psychologist Herbert Hyman.

“A reference group is any collectivity, real or imaginary, envied or despised, whose perspective is assumed by the actor.”

– Shibutani

So, this concept of reference group tries to look at human behaviour in terms of **subjectively significant factors** (that is, whatever is important and meaningful from the subjective point of view of the actor). For example, peer group. If the perspective of peer group is assumed by the actor, then, the peer group is subjectively significant for the actor.

Please note that reference group could be any group or individual. Also note those whom you hate (despise), also shape your behaviour because you do just the opposite of what the despised ones do (for example, the members of the despised/hated group are non-vegetarian, but you are vegetarian).

According to **Newcomb**, a reference group may either be positive or negative. The positive reference group is the one that you admire, while the negative reference group is the one that you despise or dislike.

Merton argues that a positive reference group is one, which one likes and takes seriously in order to shape one’s behaviour and evaluate one’s achievements and performance. A negative reference group is the one which one dislikes and rejects and which, instead of providing norms to follow, provokes one to create counter-norms. As Merton says, “the positive type involves motivated assimilation of the norms of the group or the standards of the group as a basis for self-appraisal; the negative type involves motivated rejection, i.e., not merely non-acceptance of norms but the formation of counter-norms”.

Kelley talks about two types of reference groups: normative and comparative reference group. A normative reference group is the one that you emulate, whose norms and values you try to adopt. On the other hand, a comparative reference group is used for self-evaluation. For example, whether we are privileged or deprived, we take somebody as a yardstick for comparison and that is the basis for self-evaluation.

That is how the concept of ‘reference group’ developed in social psychology before Merton. And at the same time there was another concept that developed in sociology immediately after World War II. This was the concept of ‘relative deprivation’.

American Defence Department had appointed a research team headed by **Samuel A. Stouffer** to study the moral of American soldiers during the war. After the war, Stouffer et al. published the book called ‘*The American Soldier*’ in which they came with a very interesting finding, something that goes against common sense observation.

The study suggested that if your objective conditions improve, it does not necessarily mean that it would give you greater satisfaction. So, the sense of being satisfied or deprived is *relative*. It does not necessarily depend on objective conditions.

For example – during freedom movement – Ambedkar, the most privileged dalit (well-educated and employed) – protested the most against the injustices of caste system – because his reference group was the egalitarian western society. Similarly, it is largely the urban educated middle class women who aggressively advocate feminism – not the illiterate rural women – because the reference group of urban women is their male counterparts in industry who occupy higher positions and are better paid – while the rural women tend to take the existing gender relations for granted – because their reference group is other rural women, who are more or less similarly placed in society (normative reference group).

So, the sense of deprivation (negative emotions) is relative – not necessarily dependent on objective conditions.

That is what Stouffer et al. found in their study. “Comparing himself with his unmarried associates in the Army, the married man could feel that induction demanded greater sacrifice from him than from them; and comparing himself with his married civilian friends, he could feel that he had been called on for sacrifices which they were escaping altogether”. Herein we find the kernel of what Merton called relative deprivation. This is not surprising. Happiness or deprivation are not absolutes, they depend on the scale of measure as well as on the frame of reference. The married soldier is not asking, what he gets and what other married soldiers like him get. Instead, he is asking what he is deprived of. Now his unmarried associates in the army are relatively free. They don’t have wives and children, so they are free from the responsibility from which married soldiers cannot escape. In other words, married soldiers are deprived of the kind of freedom that their unmarried associates are enjoying. Likewise, the married soldier feels

deprived when he compares himself with his civilian married friend. Because the civilian friend can live with his wife and children and fulfil his responsibility. The married soldier, therefore, feels deprived that by virtue of being a soldier he cannot afford to enjoy the normal, day to day family life of a civilian. It is precisely because of the kind of reference group with which the married soldier compares his lot that he feels deprived.

Further, it was found that those soldiers who were placed in a very comfortable situation, they complained the most. For example, those who were living in the cantonment base camps, they were complaining and were found to be dissatisfied. But those American soldiers, who were at the battle front, living in the trenches and fighting the war, were most satisfied and found to have a high moral.

So, the objective conditions do not directly shape your subjective disposition with regard to deprivation or negative emotions. So, Stouffer introduced the concept of relative deprivation, that, deprivation is always relative and it does not depend always on objective conditions.

Dear Candidate, these conceptual developments comprise the background against which we should try to understand the contributions of Merton. Merton connected the two concepts of ‘reference group’ and ‘relative deprivation’. Deprivation is relative and it is relative to reference group.

From an earlier example, why urban educated middle class women tend to be strong advocates of feminism? Because their reference group is their male counterparts who happen to occupy higher positions with more responsibility, authority and better pay at workplace despite similar credentials and work experience. These women, then, would feel being discriminated against men. While for rural women, their reference group is just other similar rural women, such as their mother-in-laws, sister-in-laws, etc. Hence they tend to take such discriminatory attitude in society as given (for granted). It is often stated that educated people protest the most because with education and awareness they tend to develop new reference groups.

According to Merton, the deprivation is relative to reference group. Merton explains that those who were in the base camps were highly educated and their reference group was their friends (civilians) back home. While those who were at the battle front, they were the one who had joined army by choice and their reference group was their industrial or other colleagues who could not make it to army. So, because of the different reference groups, their sense of deprivation differs. Merton further argues that this reference group may be either your membership group or your non-membership group.

So, Merton tries to look at the determinants and consequences of reference group behaviour. In other words, what are the factors that determine the choice of the reference group of people – choice between either membership group or non-membership group as their reference group behaviour. And what consequences follow as a result of reference group behaviour

Membership group is the one where your frequency of interaction is highest, with which the individual identifies, which the individual uses to define his social identity. Other groups are **non-membership groups**.

So, what are the factors that determine the choice of the reference group? That is, when are you likely to take your membership group as your reference group and non-membership group as reference group?

1. **degree of engagement** – that is, how deeply one is involved in the group activity – deeper the involvement, greater the chances for choosing membership group as the reference group – peripheral members (loosely integrated members) are likely to take non-membership group as their reference group.
2. **degree of distinctiveness of the membership group** – the more distinctive or unique is the membership group, greater is the likelihood of choosing membership group as a reference group. On the other hand, if the membership group has no distinctive characteristics, then an individual is likely to choose non-membership group as a reference group.
3. **degree of closure** – some groups are closed groups, some are open groups. Suppose the group is a closed one i.e. membership is only by birth, something you can't change by choice e.g. caste – in closed groups, there is a greater possibility for membership group to be chosen as a reference group. In open groups, members may have non-membership group as their reference group.
4. **degree of duration of membership** – longer the duration of membership, greater is the possibility that membership group will be chosen as reference group. In case of new entrants, there is a greater chance for choosing non-membership group as reference group.

5. **degree of social mobility** – if high, then, non-membership group likely to become reference group. If low, then membership group as reference group.
6. **degree of advantages conferred** – if the non-membership group confers any advantages, then it may be chosen as reference group. For example, American society – high income, better career growth and life style, etc.

What are the consequences of reference group behaviour?

(at society level, at sub-system level (group level), at individual level)

A. **When society is closed** (i.e., the norms of the society prohibit its members to change their group. For example, the traditional caste system in Indian society)

(i) **If reference group is the membership group**

for society – functional to society – leads to greater social integration

for group – functional for membership group - it is strengthened when all its members adhere to group norms and values, i.e., they identify with their group – non-functional to non-membership group

for individual – functional for the individual –individual's integration in his group is enhanced

(ii) **If reference group is the non-membership group**

for society – dysfunctional for society – going against the norms of society

for group – dysfunctional for membership group – members starts deserting the group – group disintegrates – but functional for non-membership group – its prestige is enhanced – its norms and values would be more respected

for individual – dysfunctional for individual – when individual leaves his group but society is closed, the non-membership group does not allow entry – then, individual is nowhere – becomes a “marginal man”

B. When society is open (i.e., encourages social mobility – encourages its members to change their groups)

(i) **If reference group is the membership group**

for society – dysfunctional to society e.g. casteism – today India is an open society – we don't want people to be divided on caste lines – but when people become conscious of their caste group and identify themselves only with their caste group, it's called casteism – divides society on caste lines

for group – functional to membership group – non-functional to non-membership group

for individual – partly functional, partly dysfunctional (individual gets integrated with membership group, so group integration and group identification remain high for the individual – but, conflict in society increases – casteism – further, chances of mobility are lost – individual can't jump to higher groups – society encourages mobility and values only those individuals who jump to higher status groups – that is the norm of open society

(ii) **If reference group is the non-membership group**

for society – functional for society

for group – dysfunctional for membership group, functional for non-membership group

for individual – partly functional – in terms of mobility – partly dysfunctional – in terms of integration, highly mobile people are poorly integrated in their group

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Merton's Theory of Deviance

In everyday language to deviate means to stray from an accepted path. Many sociological definitions of deviance simply elaborate upon this idea. Thus ***deviance consists of those acts which do not follow the norms and expectations of a particular social group.*** Deviance may be positively sanctioned (rewarded), negatively sanctioned (punished), or simply accepted without reward or punishment. In terms of the above definition of deviance, the soldier on the battlefield who risks his life above and beyond the normal call of duty may be termed deviant, as may the physicist who breaks the rules of his discipline and develops a new theory. Their deviance may be positively sanctioned: the soldier might be rewarded with a medal, the physicist with a Nobel Prize. In one sense, though, neither is deviant since both conform to the values of society, the soldier to the value of courage, the physicist to the value of academic progress. By comparison, a murderer not only deviates from society's norms and expectations but also from its values, in particular the value placed on human life. His deviance generally results in widespread disapproval and punishment. A third form of deviance consists of acts which depart from the norms and expectations of a particular society but are generally tolerated and accepted. The little old lady with a house full of cats or the old gentleman with an obsession for collecting clocks would fall into this category. Usually their eccentricities are neither rewarded nor punished by others. They are simply defined as a 'bit odd' but harmless, and therefore tolerated.

In practice, the field of study covered by the sociology of deviance is usually limited to deviance which results in negative sanctions. In fact the American sociologist Marshall B. Clinard has suggested that the term deviance should be reserved for 'those situations in which behaviour is in a disapproved direction and of a sufficient degree to exceed the tolerance limit of the community'. Though not all sociologists would accept this definition, it does describe the area usually covered by studies of deviance. In terms of Clinard's definition, crime and delinquency are the most obvious forms of deviance. Crime refers to those activities which break the law of the land and are subject to official punishment; delinquency refers to the criminal activities of young people. However, many disapproved deviant acts are not defined as criminal. For example, alcoholism and attempted suicide are not illegal in Britain today. In practice sociologists have tended to focus their attention on the following types of deviance which generally fall within Clinard's definition: crime and delinquency, illegal drug use, prostitution, mental illness, suicide, alcoholism and homosexuality.

Deviance is relative. This means that there is no absolute way of defining a deviant act. Deviance can only be defined in relation to a particular standard and no standards are fixed or absolute. As such deviance varies from time to time and place and place. In a particular society an act which is considered deviant today may be defined as normal in the future. An act defined as deviant in one society may be seen as perfectly normal in another. Put another way, deviance is culturally determined and cultures change over time and vary from society to society. The following examples will serve to illustrate the above points. At certain times in Western society it has been considered deviant for women to smoke, use make-up and consume alcoholic drinks in public. Today this is no longer the case. In the same way definitions of crime changes over time. Homosexuality was formerly a criminal offence in Britain. Since 1969, however, homosexual acts conducted between consenting adults in private are no longer illegal.

So far, the concept of deviance suggested is fairly simple. Deviance refers to those activities which do not conform to the norms and expectations of members of a particular society. As studied by sociologists it usually refers to those activities which bring general disapproval from members of society. Deviance is a relative concept. Actions are only deviant in relation to the standards of a particular society at a particular time in its history. This view of deviance will become more complex as our discussion proceeds. First, however, some early research on deviance will be considered. The main concern of earlier research was to explain why certain individuals engage in deviant behaviour. It asked straightforward questions such as, 'Why do some people commit suicide?' and 'Why do some individuals steal?' Often the answers were similarly straightforward being based on the following line of reasoning. Deviant behaviour is different from normal behaviour. Therefore deviants are different from normal people. Deviant behaviour is social problem since it has a disruptive effect on social life. Therefore deviants are a social problem. Since they are both different and a problem there must be something wrong with deviants. They must have some kind of pathology, some form of 'sickness'. The answer to the question 'Why deviance?' therefore lies in diagnosing the illness from which the deviant is presumed to be suffering. Much of this reasoning had strong moral overtones since it was assumed that any normal person would have no desire to stray from the straight and narrow. The two main diagnoses of the deviant were physiological and psychological. The first argued that deviants had some organic defect or pathology which they were born with and which influenced or caused their behaviour. The second argued that deviants were psychologically unbalanced due to some emotional disturbance in their past. This imbalance influenced or caused their deviant behaviour. Let's briefly discuss these approaches.

Physiological and psychological theories of deviance

Physiological or biological explanations of deviance argue that particular individuals are more prone to deviance than others because of their genetic make-up. Genetically inherited characteristics either directly cause or predispose them towards deviance. Such theories are similar to ‘common-sense’ notions contained in phrases such as ‘the born criminal’ and ‘he can’t help it because he’s made that way’. An early version of physiological theories is given by **Cesare Lombroso**, an Italian army doctor, in his book *L’Uomo Delinquente*, published in 1876. Lombroso argued that criminals were throwbacks to an earlier and more primitive form of man. He claimed to have identified a number of genetically determined characteristics which were often found in criminals. These included large jaws, high cheek bones, large ears, extra nipples, toes and fingers and an insensitivity to pain. These were some of the outward signs of an inborn criminal nature. Later research found no support for Lombroso’s picture of the criminal as a primitive biological freak.

Despite these crude beginnings, there is still support for physiological theories of deviance. **Sheldon** and **Eleanor Glueck** claim to have found a causal relationship between physical build and delinquent activity. They argue that stocky, rounded individuals, a body type known as **mesomorph**, tend to be more active and aggressive than those with other builds. Their research has shown that delinquent behaviour is associated with mesomorphs. The British psychologist **Hans Eysenck** argues that there is a link between genetically based personality characteristics and deviant behaviour. He maintains that there is a connection between personality traits such as extraversion and criminal behaviour (the extravert ‘craves excitement, takes chances, often sticks his neck out, acts on the spur of the moment, and is generally an impulsive individual’). The modern supporters of genetic theories of deviance are more cautious than their predecessors. They do not suggest that an individual is a total prisoner of his genes. Instead they argue that genetically based characteristics predispose an individual to deviant behaviour. Thus Eysenck states that ‘heredity is a very strong predisposing factor as far as committing crimes is concerned’.

Sociologists tend to dismiss biological theories of deviance, arguing that any association between physical and personality characteristics and deviant behaviour can be explained in other ways. For example, Taylor, Walton and Young provide an alternative explanation for the link between mesomorphism and delinquency. They suggest that, ‘It may well be that lower working-class children, who are more likely to be found in the criminal statistics, are also by virtue of diet, continual manual labour, physical fitness and strength, more likely to be mesomorphic’. Similarly, an alternative explanation may be provided for Eysenck’s association of

extravert personality traits with criminal behaviour. Eysenck's description of extravert characteristics is very similar to the 'subterranean values' which, according to **Matza** and **Sykes**, direct delinquent behaviour. Values are learned rather than being genetically determined. Matza and Sykes views will be discussed later). Finally, a major difficulty with all biological theories is the problem of showing that particular behaviour is genetically based. It is not yet possible to isolate a gene or a combination of genes and to show conclusively that they influence particular actions.

Psychological theories of deviance share certain similarities with biological theories. First, they see the deviant as different from the population as a whole. Second, he is abnormal in a normal population. Third, his abnormality predisposes him to deviance. However, psychological theories differ in their claim that the deviant's abnormality is learned rather than genetically determined. They see abnormal experience rather than abnormal genes as the basis for deviance. This experience produces 'character defects' and 'maladjusted personalities' which in turn produce deviance. Often psychological theories argue that something has gone wrong in the socialization process, usually in the mother-child relationship. This 'defective socialization' involves emotional disturbance which leads to the formation of maladjusted personality traits. Early childhood experience, it is claimed, can have a lasting effect upon adolescent and adult behaviour.

John Bowlby's *Forty-four Juvenile Thieves* is a pioneering work in the psychology of deviance. He argued that a child has certain basic needs, the most important being emotional security, which can be provided most effectively by a close, intimate relationship with its mother. If the child is deprived of maternal love, particularly during its early years, a psychopathic personality can develop. Psychopaths tend to act impulsively with little regard for the consequences of their actions. They rarely feel guilt and show little response to punishment or treatment. Bowlby claimed that those delinquents who were 'chronic recidivists' that is they constantly broke the law with little regard for the possible consequences, had suffered from 'maternal deprivation' during their early years. They revealed psychopathic traits, had often been raised in institutions such as orphanages, and so been deprived of an intimate relationship with a mother figure.

Other studies have argued that a boy's relationship with his father, particularly during the early years of his adolescence, can have important effects upon his behaviour. Robert G. Andry, claimed that boys who had hostile and unsatisfactory relationships with their fathers projected this hostility and acted it out in their relationships with other boys and authority figures. Such unsatisfactory relationships between boys and their fathers produced a 'chip on the shoulder' mentality rather than the more severe psychological disturbances described by

Bowlby. Andry claims that the 'character defects' which resulted were an important factor in accounting for delinquency.

As with biological theories, sociologists tend to dismiss psychological explanations of deviance. Firstly they argue that such theories tend to ignore social and cultural factors in the explanation of deviance. Such factors form the basis of the sociological theories which will be examined shortly. Secondly, they argue that the methodology of the studies is suspect. There is little agreement among psychologists about what constitutes mental health and on how to measure personality characteristics. Thirdly, many sociologists reject the priority given to childhood experience. They dismiss the view that the individual is a prisoner of his early experience which he simply acts out in later life. This approach ignores the influence of a vast number of social factors which influence behaviour during an individual's life. Marshall B. Clinard rather scornfully likens psychological theories of deviance to the older notion of possession by devils. The devil has been replaced by the character defect, exorcism by the priest has been replaced with treatment by the psychiatrist.

Despite their rejection by many sociologists, biological and particularly psychological theories are still widespread and often accepted as valid by the various agents of social control. Both theories have serious implications for the treatment of deviance. Put simply, if deviants are 'sick', they must be treated and cured. This view has resulted in treatment ranging from the use of drugs, electric shock treatment, various forms of psychotherapy, to lobotomy- the removal of portion of the frontal region of the brain. Carried to its extreme, the implications of such treatment are frightening, particularly in the hands of a powerful ruling elite. Soviet 'dissidents' have been defined as mentally ill, confined to institutions and piled with a variety of dangerous drugs in order to 'cure' their 'sickness'. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* would no longer be a work of fiction if one New York psychiatrist had his way. In 1970 he proposed that psychological tests be given to the nation's six-year olds to uncover any criminal tendencies. He advocated psychiatric treatment for those who revealed such tendencies. Apparently this scheme was seriously considered by the American government, but not put into practice.

The remainder of the chapter examines sociological theories of deviance. The criticisms of the above theories from a sociological perspective will become clearer as the chapter develops.

Deviance – a functionalist perspective

The functions of deviance

Rather than starting with the individual, a functionalist analysis of deviance begins with society as a whole. It looks for the source of deviance in the nature of society rather than in the biological or psychological nature of the individual. At first sight it seems strange that some functionalists should argue that deviance is a necessary part of all societies, that it performs positive functions for social systems. Deviance breaks social norms and values. With the functionalist emphasis on the importance of shared norms and values as the basis for social order, it would appear that deviance is a threat to order and should therefore be seen as dysfunctional for society. All functionalists agree that social control mechanisms are necessary to keep deviance in check and so protect social order. However, many argue that a certain amount of deviance has positive functions that it contributes to the maintenance and well-being of society.

Emile Durkheim develops this argument with discussion of crime in *The Rules of Sociological Method*. He argues that crime is an inevitable and normal aspect of social life; it is ‘an integral part of all healthy societies’. It is inevitable because not every member of society can be equally committed to the ‘collective sentiments’, the shared values and moral beliefs of society. Since individuals are exposed to different influences and circumstances, it is ‘impossible for all to be alike’. Therefore not everybody shares the same restraints about breakings the law.

Crime is not only inevitable, it can also be functional. Durkheim argues that it only becomes dysfunctional when ‘its rate is unusually high’. He argues that all social change begins with some form of deviance. In order for change to occur, yesterday’s deviance must become today’s normality. Since a certain amount of change is healthy for society, so it can progress rather than stagnate, so is deviance. For change to occur the collective sentiments must not be too strong, too hostile to change; they must have only ‘moderate energy’. If they were too strong they would crush all originality, both the originality of the criminal and the originality of the genius. In Durkheim’s words, ‘to make progress, individual originality must be able to express itself’. In order that the originality of the idealist whose dreams transcend this century may find expression, it is necessary that the originality of the criminal, who is below the level of his time, shall also be possible. One does not occur without the other’. Thus the collective sentiments must not be sufficiently powerful to block the expression of people like Jesus, William Wilberforce, Martin Luther King and Mother Teresa. Durkheim regarded some crime as ‘an anticipation of the morality of the future’. Thus heretics who were

denounced by both the state and the established church may represent the collective sentiments of the future. In the same way terrorists or freedom fighters may represent a future established order.

If crime is inevitable, what is the function of punishment? Durkheim argues that its function is not to remove crime in society. Rather it is to maintain the collective sentiments at their necessary level of strength. In Durkheim's words, punishment 'serves to heal the wounds done to the collective sentiments'. Without punishment the collective sentiments would lose their force to control behaviour and the crime rate would reach the point where it became dysfunctional. Thus in Durkheim's view, a healthy society requires both crime and punishment; both are inevitable, both are functional.

Durkheim's views of the positive functions of deviance have been developed by a number of sociologists. Albert K. Cohen analyses several possible functions of deviance. Firstly, deviance can function as a safety valve, providing a relatively harmless expression of discontent. In this way social order is protected. For example, Cohen suggests that 'prostitution performs such a safety valve function without threatening the institution of the family'. It can provide a release from the stress and pressure of family life without undermining family stability, since the relationship between a prostitute and her client usually avoids strong emotional attachment. Secondly, Cohen suggests that certain deviant acts may provide a useful warning device to indicate that an aspect of society is malfunctioning. They may draw attention to the problem and lead to measures to solve it. Thus truants from school, deserters from the army or runaways from Borstal institutions may 'reveal' unsuspected causes of discontent, and lead to changes that enhance efficiency and morale'.

Durkheim and Cohen have moved away from the picture of the deviant as psychologically or biologically abnormal. Durkheim suggests that society itself generates deviance for its own well-being. Cohen argues that certain forms of deviance are a normal and natural response to particular circumstances. Yet apart from his work on suicide Durkheim does not explain why particular individuals or groups appear to be more prone to deviance than others. Nor does he explain why certain forms of deviance appear to be associated with particular groups in the population. It was not until Robert K. Merton's famous work in the 1930s that answers to these questions were provided within a functionalist's framework.

Robert K. Merton – *Social Structure and Anomie*

Merton argues that deviance results not from ‘pathological personalities’ but from the culture and structure of society itself. He begins from the standard functionalist position of value consensus, that is, all members of society share the same values. However, since members of society are placed in different positions in the social structure, for example, they differ in terms of class position, they do not have the same opportunity of realizing the shared values. This situation can generate deviance. In Merton’s words, ‘the social and cultural structure generates pressure for socially deviant behaviour upon people variously located in that structure’.

Using the USA as an example, Merton outlines his theory as follows. Members of American society share the major values of American culture. In particular they share the goal of success, for which they all strive and which is largely measured in terms of wealth and material possessions. The ‘American Dream’ states that all members of society have an equal opportunity of achieving success, of owning a Cadillac, a Beverley Hills Mansion and a substantial bank balance. In all societies there are institutionalized means of reaching culturally defined goals. In America, the accepted ways of achieving success are through educational qualifications, talent, hard work, drive, determination and ambition. In a balanced society an equal emphasis is placed upon both cultural goals and institutionalized means, and members are satisfied with both. But in America great importance is attached to success and relatively less importance is given to the accepted ways of achieving success. As such, American society is unstable, unbalanced. There is a tendency to reject the ‘rules of the game’ and to strive for success by any available means. The situation becomes like a game of cards in which winning becomes so important that the rules are abandoned by some of the players. When rules cease to operate a situation of normlessness or ‘anomie’ results. In a situation of ‘anything goes’, norms no longer direct behaviour and deviance is encouraged. However, individuals will respond to a situation of anomie in different ways. In particular, their reaction will be shaped by their position in the social structure.

Dear Candidate, please read the last two paragraphs once again before proceeding further.

Let us recall that Durkheim’s general definition of *anomie* was a lack of regulation, or normlessness. Merton’s definition differs somewhat; for him, anomie is a discontinuity between cultural goals and the legitimate means available for reaching them. He applies this analysis to the United States, where the goal of monetary success is heavily emphasized but there is no corresponding emphasis on

the “legitimate avenues to march towards this goal.” The resulting anomie is, Merton argues, dysfunctional for American society in general and especially dysfunctional for those groups within the country who lack the means to the goal of monetary success. Thus it is a source of strain for the system, in the Parsonian sense, and it leads to a considerable amount of deviance.

In depicting his model graphically Merton chose to use a plus sign (+) to indicate acceptance of the goal of monetary success or the means to the goal, and he used a minus sign (–) to indicate the rejection (or unavailability) of the goal or means to it. He thus arrives at five modes of adaptation, or types of deviance.

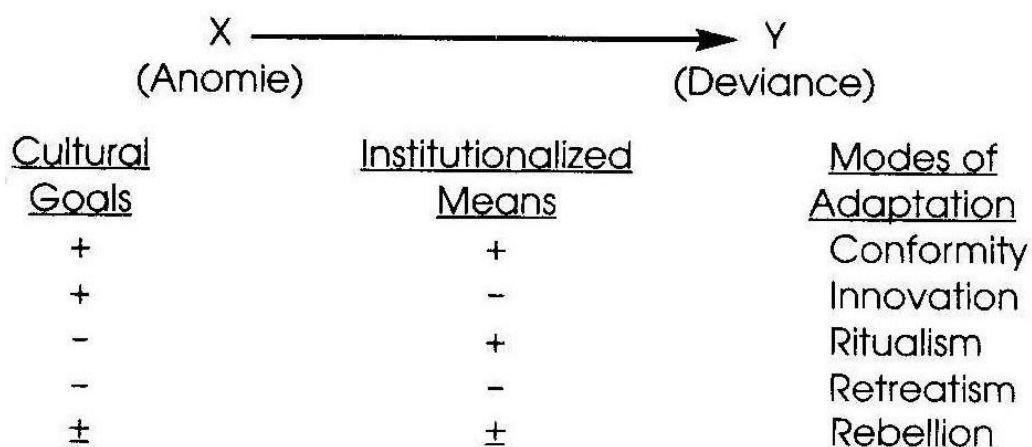


Figure: Goals, Means, and Adaptations: Merton on Deviance

Merton outlines five possible ways in which members of American society can respond to success goals. The first and most common response is ‘**conformity**’. Members of society conform both to success goals and the normative means of reaching them. They strive for success by means of accepted channels. A second response is ‘**innovation**’. This response rejects normative means of achieving success and turns to deviant means, in particular, crime. Merton argues that members of the lower social strata are most likely to select this route to success. They are least likely to succeed via conventional channels, thus there is greater pressure upon them to deviate. Their educational qualifications are usually low, their jobs provide little opportunity for advancement. In Merton’s words, they have ‘little access to conventional and legitimate means for becoming successful’. Since their way is blocked, they innovate, turning to crime which promises greater rewards than legitimate means. Merton stresses that membership of the lower strata is not, in itself, sufficient to produce deviance. In some more traditional European societies those at the bottom of the social structure are more likely to accept their position since they have not internalized mainstream success

goals. Instead they have developed distinctive subcultures which define success in terms which differ from those of the wider society. Only in societies such as the USA, where all members share the same success goals, does the pressure to innovate operate forcefully on the lower classes. Finally Merton argues that those who innovate have been ‘imperfectly socialized so that they abandon institutional means while retaining success aspirations’.

Merton uses the term ‘**ritualism**’ to describe the third possible response. Those who select this alternative are deviant because they have largely abandoned the commonly held success goals. The pressure to adopt this alternative is greatest for members of the lower middle class. Their occupations provide less opportunity for success than those of other members of the middle class. However, compared to members of the working class, they have been strongly socialized to conform to social norms. This prevents them from turning to crime. Unable to innovate and with jobs that offer little opportunity for advancement, their only solution is to scale down or abandon their success goals. Merton paints the following picture of a typical lower middle class ritualism. He is a low grade, bureaucrat, ultra-respectable but stuck in a rut. He is a stickler for the rules, follows the book to the letter, clings to red tape, conforms to all the outward standards of middle-class respectability, but has given up striving for success. The ritualist is deviant because he has rejected the success goals held by most members of society.

Merton terms the fourth, and least common response, ‘**retreatism**’. It applies to ‘psychotics, autists, pariahs, outcasts, vagrants, vagabonds, tramps, chronic drunkards and drug addicts’. They have strongly internalized both the culture goals and the institutionalized means yet are unable to achieve success. They resolve the conflict of their situation by abandoning both the goals and the means of reaching them. They are unable to cope and ‘drop out’ of society, defeated and resigned to their failure. They are deviant in two ways; they have rejected both the cultural goals and the institutionalized means. Merton does not relate retreatism to social class position.

‘**Rebellion**’ forms the fifth and final response. It is a rejection of both the success goals and the institutionalized means and their replacement by different goals and means. Those who adopt this alternative wish to create a new society. Thus urban guerillas in Western European capitalist societies adopt deviant means – terrorism – to reach deviant goals such as a communist society. Merton argues that ‘it is typically members of a rising class rather than the most depressed strata who organize the resentful and rebellious into a revolutionary group’.

To summarize, Merton claims that his analysis shows how the culture and structure of society generates deviance. The overemphasis upon cultural goals in

American society at the expense of institutionalized means creates a tendency towards anomie. This tendency exerts pressure for deviance, a pressure which varies depending on a person's position in the class structure. The way a person responds to this pressure will also depend upon his position in the class structure. Merton thus presents a sociological theory of deviance. He explains deviance in terms of the nature of society rather than the nature of the individuals.

Merton's prediction for the United States, where monetary success is highly valued and the legitimate means to it are unavailable for many, is that such society should have a lot of deviance and that it should most likely occur among the lower classes, who experience the structural blockages most keenly. **In general his model is not clear, however, about when the various types will emerge or in what degree.** Although Merton did not test his hypotheses on deviance himself, they were stated empirically enough to guide other researchers, and it has been said that the publication of this essay on deviance in 1938 in the *American Sociological Review* established Merton "once and for all as a major figure in sociology".

In concluding this section on Merton, we can see that in general he alerts functionalists to question and to evaluate critically the contributions of various social institutions. He also raises questions of inequality when he asks who benefits from certain structures, thus leading to a more critical view than Parsons.

Since its publication, Merton's theory has been frequently modified and criticized. This response will be examined as the chapter develops.

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Structural and sub-cultural theories of 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. Subculture theories explain deviance in terms of the subculture of a social group. They argue that certain groups develop distinctive norms and values which deviate from the mainstream culture of society. Often structural and subculture explanations are combined as in Albert Cohen's analysis of delinquency.

Albert K. Cohen

Cohen's work is a modification and development of Merton's position. From his studies of delinquency, he makes two major criticisms of Merton's views of working-class deviance. **Firstly, he argues that delinquency is a collective rather than an individual response. Whereas Merton sees the individual responding to his position in the class structure, Cohen sees individuals joining together in a collective response.** Secondly, Cohen argues that Merton fails to account for 'non-utilitarian crime' such as vandalism and joy-riding which do not produce monetary reward. Cohen questions whether such forms of delinquency are directly motivated by the success goals of the mainstream culture. He agrees however that Merton's theory is highly plausible as an explanation for adult professional crime and for the property delinquency of some older and professional thieves'.

Cohen begins in a similar vein to Merton. Lower working-class boys hold the success goals of the mainstream culture, but due largely to educational failure and the dead-end jobs which result from this, they have little opportunity to attain them. This failure can be explained by their position in the social structure. Cohen supports the view that 'cultural deprivation' account for the lack of educational success of members of the lower working class. Stuck at the bottom of the stratification system with avenues to success blocked, many lower working-class boys suffer from '**status frustration**'. They are frustrated and dissatisfied with their low status in society. They resolve their frustration not by running to criminal paths to success, as Merton suggested, but by rejecting the success goals of the mainstream culture. They replace them with an alternative set of norms and values in terms of which they can achieve success and gain prestige. The result is a **delinquent subculture**. It can be seen as a collective solution to the common problems of lower working-class adolescents.

The delinquent subculture not only rejects the mainstream culture, it reverses it. In Cohen's words, 'the delinquent subculture takes its norms from the larger

culture but turns them upside down'. Thus a high value is placed on activities such as stealing, vandalism and truancy which are condemned in the wider society. Cohen describes the delinquent subculture in the following way. 'Throughout there is a kind of *malice* apparent, an enjoyment of the discomfiture of others, a delight in the defiance of taboos'. He illustrates this theme with the example of defecating on the teacher's desk. But the delinquent subculture is more than an act of defiance, a negative reaction to a society which has denied opportunity to some of its members. It offers positive rewards. Those who perform successfully in terms of the values of the subculture gain recognition and prestige in the eyes of their peers. Thus stealing becomes, according to Cohen, not so much a means of achieving success in terms of mainstream goals, but 'a valued activity to which attaches glory, prowess and profound satisfaction'. Cohen argues that in this way lower working-class boys solve the problem of 'status frustration'. They reject mainstream values which offer them little chance of success and substitute deviant values in terms of which they can be successful. Cohen thus provides an explanation for delinquent acts which do not appear to be motivated by monetary reward.

Like Merton, Cohen begins from a structural perspective. Because there is unequal access to opportunity, there is greater pressure on certain groups within the social structure to deviate. However, he parts company from Merton when he sees some delinquency as being a collective response directed by subcultural values. In this way he shows how pressure from the social structure to deviate is reinforced by pressure from the deviant subculture.

Walter B. Miller

Miller parts company from both Merton and Cohen in his explanation of lower class delinquency. Firstly, he rejects Merton's view that it represents an alternative means of achieving mainstream goals. Secondly, he rejects Cohen's argument that it results from a delinquent subculture which is a reaction to failure to attain mainstream goals. Instead he sees lower class delinquency as simply resulting from **lower class subculture**. Miller argues that, 'Following cultural practices, which comprise essential elements of the total life pattern of lower class culture, automatically violates certain legal norms'. Miller develops his argument in the following way.

There is a 'distinctive culture system' which may be termed 'lower class'. It includes a number of 'focal concerns', that is major areas of interest and involvement. Included in these focal concerns are 'toughness' 'smartness' and excitement'. Toughness involves a concern for masculinity and finds expression in courage in the face of physical threat and a rejection of timidity and weakness.

In practice this can lead to assault and battery in order to maintain a reputation for toughness. Smartness involves the ‘capacity to outsmart, outfox, outwit, dupe, “take”, “con” another’. It is expressed in the repertoire of the hustler, the con man, the card sharp, the pimp, the pickpocket and the petty thief. Excitement involves the search for thrills, for emotional stimulus. In practice it is sought in gambling, sexual adventures and alcohol, all of which can be combined in a night out on the town. This ‘heady mixture’ can result in damage to limb, life and property.

Two factors tend to emphasize and exaggerate the focal concerns of lower class subculture in the lives of adolescents: firstly, their tendency to belong to a peer group which demands close conformity to group norms; secondly, the concern of young people with status which is largely achieved in terms of peer group norms. Thus the status of a lower working class youth can depend on his reputation for toughness and smartness in the eyes of his friends.

Miller concludes that delinquency is simply the acting out, albeit in a somewhat exaggerated manner, of the focal concerns of lower class subculture. It results from socialization into a subculture with ‘a distinctive tradition, many centuries old with an integrity of its own’. Although this subculture has a life of its own, Miller does give reasons for its origin and maintenance. It stems from and is partly sustained by the necessity for a pool of low-skilled labour. Low skilled workers require the ability to endure routine, repetitive and boring activity and to tolerate recurrent unemployment. Lower class subculture provides the means to live with this situation. Its focal concerns provide satisfactions outside of work and help to deal with the dissatisfaction produced by work: the emphasis on excitement compensates for the boredom of work.

Miller presents a picture of members of the lower class living in a world of their own, totally insulated from the rest of society. They appear to pursue their focal concerns with no reference to the mainstream culture. Many sociologists would disagree with this view. Thus David Bordua, in his criticism of Miller states, ‘Miller seems to be saying that the involvements in lower class culture are so deep and exclusive that contacts with the agents of middle-class dominated institutions, especially the schools, have no impact’. Unlike Miller, most sociologists who use the concept of subculture to explain deviance, see it as secondary to a structural explanation. The final part of the section returns to this position.

Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Ohlin

In *Delinquency and Opportunity* the American sociologists Cloward and Ohlin combine and develop many of the insights of Merton and Cohen. While largely accepting Merton’s view of working-class criminal deviance, they argue

that he has failed to explain the different forms that deviance takes. For example, why do some delinquent gangs concentrate on theft while others appear preoccupied with vandalism and violence? Cloward and Ohlin argue that Merton has only dealt with half the picture. He has explained deviance in terms of the 'legitimate opportunity structure' but failed to consider the '**illegitimate opportunity structure**'. Thus, just as opportunity to be successful by legitimate means varies, so does opportunity for success by illegitimate means. For example, in one area there may be a thriving adult criminal subculture which may provide access for adolescents, in another area this subculture may not exist. Thus, in the first area, the adolescent has more opportunity to become a successful criminal. By examining access and opportunity for entry into illegitimate opportunity structures, Cloward and Ohlin provide an explanation for different forms of deviance.

Cloward and Ohlin present one of the most sophisticated analyses of lower class delinquency from a structural and subcultural viewpoint. They provide an explanation for various forms of delinquency by adding the notion of the illegitimate opportunity structure to Merton's scheme and by placing Cohen's views in a wider context. However, despite the virtues of the various structural and subculture approaches, they are open to damaging criticism. This will be considered in later sections.

The ecology of deviance – 'the Chicago school'

During the 1920s, a group of sociologists based in Chicago, who later became known as the 'Chicago school', developed an ecological approach to the study of social life. Ecology refers to the relationship between organisms and their environment. Members of the Chicago school applied this concept to the growth of cities and argued that behaviour could be explained in terms of the urban environment. In particular, they argued that the growth of cities produced distinctive neighborhoods, each with its own characteristic style of life. **Clifford Shaw** and **Henry McKay** applied this perspective to the study of deviance.

Shaw and McKay divided the city of Chicago into five zones, drawn at two-mile intervals, and radiating outwards in concentric circles from the central business district. They examined the rate of crime for each of these zones. Using statistics on male delinquency from the Juvenile Court, they discovered that the delinquency rate steadily decreased from zone I, the area surrounding the central business district, to zone V on the outskirts of the city. The delinquency rates shown on the map indicate the proportion of delinquents as a percentage of the total male population aged from ten to sixteen living in each zone. Thus, for the

five-year period 1927 to 1933, 9.8% of boys in zone I were charged with criminal offences. Shaw and McKay found that similar pattern applied in Chicago from 1900 to 1906 and from 1917 to 1923. Their method was applied to a number of American cities and produced similar results.

Shaw and McKay explain their results in the following way. Zone I is a 'zone of transition', it has a relatively high rate of population turnover. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, rural migrants to the city usually begin their urban life in zone I. They often have little money and zone I provides the cheapest accommodation; it is the typical inner city slum. In Chicago it houses mainly low-income White and Black migrants from the southern states. Many migrants move out to higher income areas once they have become established, so making room for new arrivals. The expansion of the central business district into the zone of transition provides the second reason for high population turnover. This produces population movement as the business district 'invades' former residential areas. Shaw and McKay argue that these processes of city growth explain the high concentration of crime and delinquency in the zone of transition.

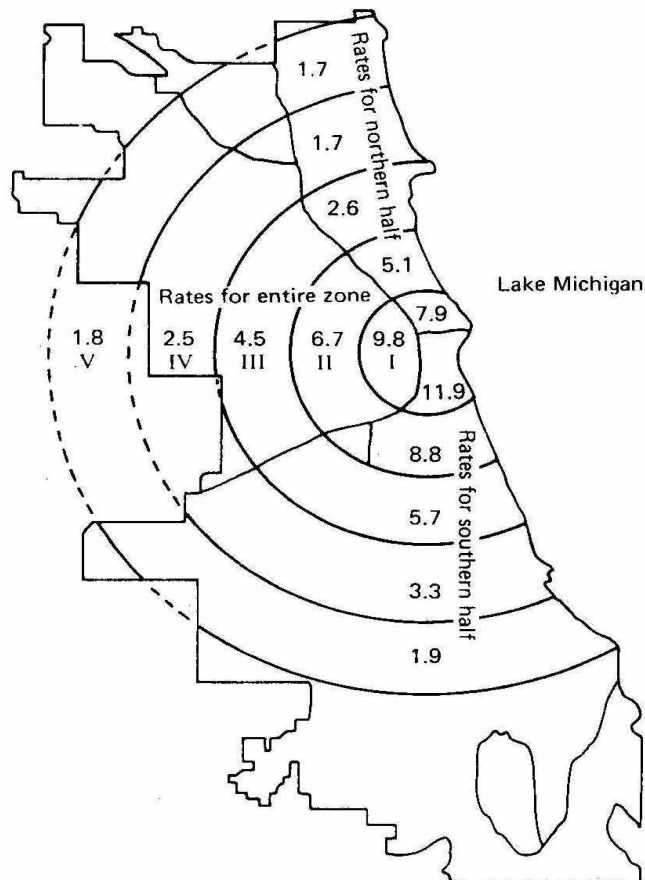


Figure: Map of Chicago showing zone rates of male juvenile delinquents from 1927 to 1933

A high rate of population turnover prevents the formation of a stable community and results in 'social disorganization'. Indications of social disorganization include delinquency, prostitution, gambling, illegal drug use, a high consumption of alcohol, violence and broken families, behaviour which is characteristic of the zone of transition. Such behaviour can flourish because, in an area of shifting population, social controls are weak. Controls such as gossip, public opinion, public surveillance and parental control are not sufficiently strong to prevent the development of deviant norms and values.

Bernard Lander applied the methods of the Chicago school in his study of Baltimore. His study confirmed the conclusions of Shaw and McKay. In his study he too found that in areas with 'shifting populations, social disorganization was widespread and the rate of crime and delinquency was high. Lander argues that social disorganization provides the key to explaining criminal deviance. He concludes that in an unstable community, 'the breakdown of social cohesion frees the individual from the pressure of public opinion and the informal social controls which, in more solidary groups, operate to secure conformity to the norms of conventional behaviour'.

The perspective of the Chicago school has the virtue of linking structural and subcultural theories with theories of community. Shaw and McKay note that the rate of delinquency corresponds closely to economic factors. Income rises steadily from zone I to zone V. Delinquency rates decline steadily from the inner city slums to the tree-lined suburbs. A part of their explanation echoes Merton's views. Shaw and McKay argue that crime in low-income areas 'may be regarded as one of the means employed by people to acquire, or attempt to acquire, the economic and social values generally idealized in our culture, which persons in other circumstances acquire by conventional means'. Their views also echo those of the subcultural theorists. Referring to delinquency, Shaw and McKay state that, 'year after year, decade after decade, the same areas have been characterized by these concentrations'. This is due in part to the development of deviant norms and values which are transmitted from one generation to the next but structural and subcultural theories fail to provide sufficient explanation of criminal deviance. Before crime can flourish, the community must be sufficiently disorganized to provide the freedom for deviant norms and values to develop. This freedom is greatest in the zone of transition.

Several criticisms have been made of the Chicago school. Firstly, the emphasis on social disorganization tends to underplay the degree of organization of criminal and delinquent subcultures. Secondly, there is a tendency for the theory to be tautological, that is saying the same thing twice over in different words. Since crime and delinquency are evidence of social disorganization, social

disorganization cannot be used to explain them. Thirdly, the theory tends to see man simply reacting to forces outside him and beyond his control. The 'natural' growth of cities shaped his behaviour and he has little say in the matter. Many sociologists reject this positivist approach which tends to see man simply reacting to external stimuli. They see man playing a more active role in shaping his situation rather than being simply shaped by it.

David Matza – a cautionary note on delinquency

Three sociological theories, the structural, the subcultural and the ecological, which claim to explain the origins of deviance in general and delinquency in particular, have been examined. All tend to see the deviant produced and directed by forces beyond his control. He is pressured by his position in the social structure, by his membership of a deviant subculture or his presence in an area of social disorganization to stray from the path of convention. In a series of writings during the 1960s, the American sociologist **David Matza** provides a timely warning about the implications of the above theories. Firstly, he suggests that they make the deviant appear more distinctive than he really is. Secondly, he argues that they present an over-deterministic view of the origins of deviance. Determinism is the doctrine that man has little or no freedom to direct his actions since they are controlled by external forces. Thus trapped by circumstances, the individual is automatically propelled down the path of deviance. Matza argues that this view ignores the choices and alternatives which are always available for human action.

In paper written with Gresham Sykes entitled, *Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency*, Matza emphasizes the similarities between delinquents and other young people. He rejects Albert Cohen's notion that delinquency is directed by a delinquent subculture which reverses the norms and values of mainstream society. He does not see delinquents as being committed to deviant values. Matza argues that since many delinquents express 'guilt and shame' about their criminal activities, they must be 'at least partially committed to the dominant social order'. Deviant behaviour is possible, not because of an outright rejection of mainstream norms and values, but by the employment of a set of excuses, justifications and rationalizations for deviance, which Matza terms, '**techniques of neutralization**'. The use of such techniques makes deviance acceptable by neutralizing much of the blame and disapproval associated with deviant activities. Techniques of neutralization include denial of responsibility for a deviant act - the delinquent may remove responsibility from himself by blaming his parents or the area in which he lives; denial of injury resulting from the act - for example the delinquent may argue that joyriding does not harm anyone, it is just a bit of mischief and that he was borrowing rather than stealing the car; denial that the act

was basically wrong - for example an assault on a homosexual or a robbery from an extortionate store owner can be presented as a form of 'rough justice'; condemnation of those who enforce the rules - for example the police may be seen as corrupt, teachers as unjust and hypocritical; 'appeal to higher loyalties' - the delinquent may argue that he broke the law not out of self interest but to help his family or friends.

Matza argues that the use of techniques of neutralization throws serious doubt on the idea of deviant subcultures. Firstly, they are evidence of guilt and shame which indicate at least a partial acceptance of mainstream norms and values. If there really were a delinquent subculture, there would be no need to resort to techniques of neutralization, since there would be no guilt to neutralize. Secondly, techniques of neutralization often employ one set of mainstream norms to justify breaking others. Thus assaulting homosexuals is justified as support for mainstream norms of sexual behaviour. Again, this shows some degree of commitment to mainstream culture.

In a later paper entitled, *Juvenile Delinquency and Subterranean Values*, Matza and Sykes again emphasize the similarity between delinquents and young people in general. Again they reject the notion of a fully fledged delinquent subculture. They argue that so-called delinquent values 'are closely akin to those embodied in the leisure activities of the dominant society'. Thus the search for excitement and adventure and the emphasis on verbal and physical aggression as a means of demonstrating toughness and masculinity are found in leisure pursuits throughout society. In mainstream society, however, these values are expressed only in particular situations, such as the bar, the bowling alley and the football field. Matza and Sykes refer to them as '**subterranean values**'. They exist side by side with other values, but are expressed only in limited contexts. They argue that subterranean values often direct and motivate delinquent activity. If this view is correct, then at least some delinquency is not a product of a deviant subculture.

Matza and Sykes argue that the main difference between delinquents and the population as a whole is simply the degree of emphasis placed on subterranean values. Young people attach greater importance to subterranean values simply because they have the freedom to become more involved in leisure, a freedom which allows such values to flourish. Matza and Sykes argue that 'All adolescents at all class levels are to some extent members of a leisure class, for they move in a limbo between earlier parental domination and future integration with the social structure through the bonds of work and marriage'. If subterranean values do direct delinquent behaviour, Matza and Sykes's theory is able to explain middle-class delinquency. The structural and subcultural theories are limited to an explanation of working-class delinquency.

Again Matza and Sykes cast doubt on theories which attribute distinctive norms and values to deviant behaviour. Firstly, they see little difference between delinquents and young people in general. Secondly, the subterranean values of young people are found throughout society. The only difference is one of emphasis.

In *Delinquency and Drift*, David Matza develops some of the themes outlined above. He rejects the deterministic perspectives of structural and subcultural theories and emphasizes the choices and alternatives available for human action. He suggests that many young people simply 'drift' into delinquent activities. They have no real commitment to delinquency and simply 'flirt' with deviant behaviour. Their delinquency is not a full time 'career', but rather a sporadic and episodic activity, an occasional alternative to conventional behaviour. This view helps to explain why many delinquents find their deviant activities fairly easy to give up. The idea of a delinquent subculture makes it difficult to explain the ease with which many abandon delinquency, since it suggests a commitment to deviant norms and values. Thus Matza argues that many delinquents casually adopt the occasional deviant alternative rather than being impelled upon a deviant carrier by powerful social forces. Again the picture of the deviant draws closer to the non-deviant member of society.

The theories of deviance so far presented have moved steadily away from the view of the deviant as distinct from the non-deviant. Physiological theories locate the origin of deviance in the genetic make-up of the individual. He is born abnormal in a normal population. Psychological theories place the origin of deviance in early childhood experience. They begin with a normal individual who early in life is shunted off the straight and narrow. Abnormal personality characteristics develop which find expression in deviant behaviour and distinguish the individual from the non-deviant population. Structural, subcultural and ecological theories of deviance all begin with a normal individual or group. They locate deviance in the social structure and in processes of community development. They see deviance as the response of normal people to their social situation, not as an expression of a genetic peculiarity or an abnormal personally trait. However, in responding to their position in society, deviants tend to become distinct from the non-deviant population. They may, for example, develop a deviant subculture. Finally, Matza presents a picture of the deviant which differs only in superficial respects from the population as a whole. This developing theme of the deviant as 'normal' will be continued in later sections.

Deviance and official statistics

Many theories of deviance are based in part on official statistics provided by the police, the courts, and various government departments. Such statistics provide evidence of the extent of deviance and information about the social characteristics of the deviant, for example his class position. But official statistics cannot be taken at face value and therefore nor can theories which are based on their use. This section examines the reasons why official statistics must be handled with caution.

There is increasing evidence to suggest that there is a systematic bias in favour of the powerful in the application of the law. As a general rule, if an individual has committed a criminal act, the higher he is in the stratification system the less likely he is to be arrested, if arrested to be prosecuted, if prosecuted to be found guilty, and if found guilty, to be imprisoned. For example, various studies have shown that middle-class delinquents are less likely to be arrested and prosecuted than their working class counterparts. If this is so, then the assumption that many forms of criminal deviance are largely working-class phenomena may be incorrect and theories which attempt to explain deviance as a response of individuals or groups to their position in the stratification system may also be incorrect.

There is evidence of even greater bias in the application of laws which apply directly to the activities of individuals in the upper levels of the stratification system. **Edwin H. Sutherland** was the first sociologist to systematically study what has come to be known as '**white-collar crime**'. Sutherland defines white-collar crime as 'crimes committed by persons of respectability and high social status in the course of their occupations'. Such crimes include bribery and corruption in business and politics, misconduct by professionals such as doctors and lawyers, the breaking of trade regulations, food and drug laws and safety regulations in factories, the misuse of patents and trademarks, and misrepresentation in advertising. There is evidence to suggest that such offenses are not only widespread, but are often accepted practice in business and political life.

A number of factors combine to reduce the apparent extent and seriousness of white-collar crime. It is difficult to detect. Many white-collar crimes are 'crimes without victims'. In cases of bribery and corruption, both parties involved may see themselves as gaining from the arrangement, both are liable to prosecution, therefore neither is likely to report the offence. In cases where the victim is the public at large, such as misrepresentation in advertising, few members of the public have the expertise to realize that they are being misled or a knowledge of the legal procedure to redress the wrong. In such cases detection and prosecution is

often left to a government agency. Such agencies rarely have the manpower or finance to do other than bring a few cases to court in the hope of deterring the practice. Many white-collar crimes if detected, are rarely prosecuted.

The sociological study of white-collar crime provides some support for the view that there is one law for the rich and another for the poor. Edwin Sutherland argues that there is a consistent bias 'involved in the administration of criminal justice under laws which apply to business and the professions and which therefore involve only the upper socio-economic group'.

Official statistics probably underestimate the extent of white-collar crime to a far greater degree than they underestimate the extent of crime in general. As a result official statistics portray crime as predominantly working-class behaviour. Many sociological theories of crime and delinquency have tended to accept this portrayal. As a result they have seen social class as the key to explaining criminal deviance. This conclusion may not be justified in view of the nature of official statistics.

This section has examined some of the problems associated with the use of official statistics on deviance. It has shown that such statistics cannot be assumed to represent either the extent of deviance or the social characteristics of the deviant. Many theories of deviance are based on an examination of 'officially classified deviants', on the selection of those characteristics which appear to distinguish them from the non-deviant population and on the assumption that such distinguishing characteristics are the cause of deviant behaviour. Thus deviants have particular biological characteristics, distinctive childhood experiences, a particular place in the social structure and so on. Given the nature of official statistics it can be argued that explanations of the cause of deviance cannot be approached until a representative sample of deviants has been obtained. However, many sociologists argue that more important problems than this arise from a consideration of the nature of official statistics. These problems cannot be solved by obtaining more reliable data, by better statistics based upon better samples. They demand new ways of looking at deviance, new questions about deviance and perspectives which differ radically from those so far considered.

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Deviance – an interactionist perspective

The interactionist perspective differs from previous approaches in two ways. Firstly, it views deviance from a different theoretical perspective. Secondly, it examines aspects of deviance which have been largely ignored by previous approaches. It directs attention away from the deviant as such and the motivations, pressures and social forces which are supposed to direct his behaviour. Instead it focuses upon the interaction between the deviant and those who define him as deviant. The interactionist perspective examines how and why particular individuals and groups are defined as deviant and the effects of such a definition upon their future actions. For example, the interaction between the deviant and various agents of social control such as parents, teachers, doctors, police, judges and probation officers may be analyzed. The effects upon the individual of being defined as a criminal or delinquent, as mentally ill, as an alcoholic, prostitute or homosexual may be examined. The interactionist approach emphasizes the importance of the meanings the various actors bring to and develop within the interaction situation. Thus it may examine the picture of the ‘typical delinquent’ held by the police and note how this results in a tendency to define lower class rather than middle-class lawbreakers as delinquents. Meanings are not, however, fixed and clear cut. They are modified and developed in the interaction process. Thus, from an interactionist perspective, the definition of deviance is negotiated in the interaction situation by the actors involved. For example, whether or not a person is defined as mentally ill will depend on a series of negotiations between him and a psychiatrist. With this emphasis on negotiated meaning, the interactionist perspective comes closer to a phenomenological view of man. The approaches so far considered, with their emphasis on the deviant simply reacting to forces which are external to himself and largely beyond his control, are closer to a positivist position.

Howard S. Becker – labelling theory

One of the most influential statements on deviance is contained in the following quotation from Howard S. Becker, one of the early exponents of the interactionist approach. Becker argues that ‘*social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance*, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is *not* a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of the rules and sanctions to an “offender”. The deviant is one to whom the label has successfully been applied; deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label’. Becker is suggesting that in one sense there is no such thing as a deviant act. An act only becomes deviant when others perceive and define it as such. The act of nudity in Western society provides an illustration.

Nudity in the bedroom, where the actors involved are husband and wife, is generally interpreted as normal behaviour. Should a stranger enter, however, nudity in his presence would usually be considered deviant. Yet, in particular contexts, such as nudist camps or certain holiday beaches, nudity in the presence of strangers would be seen as perfectly normal by the participants. A spectator at a cricket match who 'streaked' across the pitch may be viewed as 'a bit of a lad' but if he stood and exposed himself to the crowd, he might be regarded as 'some kind of pervert'. Thus there is nothing intrinsically normal or deviant about the act of nudity. It only becomes deviant when others label it as such. Whether or not the label is applied will depend on how the act is interpreted by the audience. This in turn will depend on who commits the act, when and where it is committed, who observes the act, and the negotiations between the various actors involved in the interaction situation.

Becker illustrates his views with the example of brawl involving young people. In a low income neighborhood, it may be defined by the police as evidence of delinquency, in a wealthy neighbourhood as evidence of youthful high spirits. The acts are the same but the meanings given to them by the audience differ. In the same way those who commit the act may view it in one way, those who observe it may define it in another. The brawl in the low-income area may involve a gang fighting to defend its "turf" (territory). In Becker's words, they are only doing what they consider 'necessary and right, but teachers, social workers and police see it differently'. If the agents of social control define the boys as delinquents and they are convicted for breaking the law, those boys then become deviant. They have been labeled as such by those who have the power to make the labels stick. Thus Becker argues, 'Deviance is not a quality that lies in behaviour itself, but in the interaction between the potential deviant and the agents of social control.

Becker then examines the possible effects upon an individual of being publicly labeled as deviant. A label defines an individual as a particular kind of person. A label is not neutral, it contains an evaluation of the person to whom it is applied. It is a 'master status' in the sense that it colours all the other statuses possessed by an individual. If a person is labeled as criminal, mentally ill or homosexual, such labels largely override his status as father, worker, neighbour and friend. Others see him and respond to him in terms of the label and tend to assume he has the negative characteristics normally associated with such labels. Since an individual's self-concept is largely derived from the responses of others, he tends to see himself in terms of the label. This may produce a **self-fulfilling prophecy** whereby 'the deviant identification becomes the controlling one'. Becker outlines a number of possible stages in this process.

Initially the individual is publicly labeled as deviant. This may lead to his rejection from many social groups. Regarded as a ‘junkie’, a ‘queer’, a ‘mutter’, a ‘wino’ or a ‘tearaway’, he may be rejected by family and friends, lose his job and be forced out of the neighborhood. This may encourage further deviance. For example, the drug addict may turn to crime to support his habit since ‘respectable employers’ refuse to give him a job. The official treatment of deviance may have similar effects. The ex-convict may have difficulty finding employment and be forced to return to crime for his livelihood. Becker argues that, ‘the treatment of deviants denies them the ordinary means of carrying on the routines of everyday life open to most people. Because of this denial, the deviant must of necessity develop illegitimate routines’. The ‘deviant carrier’ is completed when the individual joins ‘an organized deviant group’. In this context he confirms and accepts his deviant identity. He is surrounded by others in a similar situation who provide him with support and understanding. Within the group a deviant subculture develops. The subculture often includes beliefs and values which rationalize, justify and support deviant identities and activities. For example, Becker states that organized homosexual groups provide the individual with a rationale for his deviance, ‘explaining to him why he is the way he is, that other people have also been that way, and why it is all right for him to be that way’. The subculture also provides ways of avoiding trouble with conventional society. Thus the young thief, socialized into a criminal subculture, can learn various ways of avoiding arrest from older and more experienced members of the group. Becker argues that once an individual joins an organized deviant group, he is more likely than before to see himself as a deviant and to act in terms of this self-concept. In this context the deviant identification tends to become ‘the controlling one’.

Becker argues that the process described above is by no means inevitable. Ex-convicts do get jobs and go ‘straight’, drug addicts do give up their habit and re-enter conventional society. However, once labeled, ‘societal reaction’ to the deviant places pressure upon him to follow the route which leads to the organized deviant group. Becker’s analysis of deviance begins where previous approaches tend to stop. It locates the origin of deviance within the interaction process between the potential deviant and the agents of social control. It sees the development and reinforcement of deviance resulting from the reaction of members of society to the individual who has been labeled as deviant.

Edwin M. Lemert – societal reaction – the ‘cause’ of deviance

Like Becker, Edwin M. Lemert emphasizes the importance of societal reaction – the reaction of others to the deviant – in the explanation of deviance. Lemert distinguishes between ‘primary’ and ‘secondary deviation’. Primary deviation consists of deviant acts before they are publicly labeled. There are

probably any number of causes of primary deviation and it is largely a fruitless exercise to inquire into them for the following reasons. Firstly, samples of deviants are based upon those who have been labeled and are therefore unrepresentative. For example, it makes little sense to delve into the background of convicted criminals to find the cause of their deviance without examining criminals who have not been caught. Secondly, many so-called deviant acts may be so widespread as to be normal in statistical terms. Thus most males may at some time commit a homosexual act, engage in delinquent activities and so on. In fact, Lemert suggests that the only thing 'known' deviants probably have in common is the fact that they have been publicly labeled as such. Not only is the search for the cause of primary deviation largely fruitless, primary deviation itself is relatively unimportant. Lemert argues that it 'has only marginal implications for the status and the psychic structure of the person concerned'. Thus Lemert suggest that the odd deviant act has little effect on the individual's self-concept, on his status in the community, and does not prevent him from continuing a normal and conventional life.

The important factor in 'producing' deviance is **societal reaction**, the public identification of the deviant and the consequences of this for the individual concerned. Secondary deviation is the response of the individual or the group to societal reaction. Lemert argues that studies of deviance should focus on secondary deviation which has major consequences for the individual's self concept, his status in the community and his future actions. In comparison, primary deviation has little significance. Lemert argue that, 'In effect the original "causes" of the deviation recede and give way to the central importance of the disapproving, degradational, and isolating reactions of society'. Thus, Lemert claims that societal reaction can be seen as the major 'cause' of deviance. This view, he argues, 'gives a proper place to social control as a dynamic factor or "cause" of deviance'. In this way Lemert neatly reverses traditional views of deviance. The blame for deviance lies with the agents of social control rather than with the deviant.

Aaron V. Cicourel – the negotiation of justice

So far, the interactionist studies of deviance have been largely concerned with societal reaction to the deviant once he has been labeled. Aaron V. Cicourel's important study entitled *The Social Organization of Juvenile Justice* looks at the actual process of defining deviance. It examines the interaction between the potential deviant and the agents of social control to discover exactly how and why the label deviant is applied to particular individuals. Cicourel's research is based on an investigation of the treatment of delinquency in two Californian cities.

The process of defining a young person as a delinquent is not simple, clear cut and unproblematic. It is complex, involving a series of interactions, based on

sets of meanings held by the participants, meanings which can be modified during the interaction, so that each stage in the process is negotiable. The first stage is the decision by the police to stop and interrogate an individual. This decision is based on meanings held by the police of what is 'suspicious', 'strange', 'unusual', 'wrong'. Such meanings are related to particular geographical areas. Inner city, low-income areas are seen as 'bad areas' with a high crime rate, consequently behaviour in such areas is more likely to be viewed as suspicious. Interrogation need not lead to arrest. The process is negotiable but depends largely on the picture held by the police of the 'typical delinquent'. If the appearance, language and demeanour of the young person fits this picture, he is more likely to be arrested.

Once arrested, the young person is handed over to a juvenile officer (probation officer). Like the police, he too has a picture of the 'typical delinquent'. If the boy's background corresponds to this picture, he is more likely to be charged with an offence. Factors assumed to be associated with delinquency include, 'coming from broken homes, exhibiting "bad attitudes" toward authority, poor school performance, ethnic group membership, low-income families and the like'. It is not therefore surprising that Cicourel found a close relationship between social class and delinquency. Most young people convicted of offences had fathers who were manual workers. On a seven-class occupational scale, Cicourel found that one third come from class 7. He explains the preponderance of working-class delinquents by reference to the meanings held by the police and juvenile officers and the interactions between them and the juveniles. When a middle-class juvenile was arrested, there was less likelihood of his being charged with an offence. His background did not fit the standard picture of the delinquent. His parents were better able to negotiate successfully on his behalf. Middle-class parents can present themselves as respectable and reasonable people from a nice neighbourhood, who look forward to a rosy future for their child. They promise cooperation with the juvenile officer, assuring him that their offspring is suitably remorseful. As a result, the middle-class juvenile is often defined as ill rather than criminal, as accidentally straying from the path of righteousness rather than committed to wrongdoing, as cooperative rather than recalcitrant, as having a real chance of reforming rather than being a 'born loser'. He is typically 'counselled, warned and released'. Thus in Cicourel's words, 'what ends up being called justice is negotiable'.

Cicourel based his research on two Californian cities, each with a population of around 100000. The socio-economic characteristics of the two populations were similar. In terms of structural theories, the numbers of delinquents produced by the pressures of the social structure should be similar in each city. However, Cicourel found a significant difference in the numbers of delinquents arrested and charged. He argues that this difference can only be accounted for by the size, organization,

policies and practices of the juvenile and police bureaus. For example, the city with the highest rate of delinquency employed more juvenile officers and kept more detailed records on offenders. In the second city, the delinquency rate fluctuated sharply. Cicourel argues that in this city the response of the police to delinquency 'tends to be quite variable depending on publicity given to the case by the local paper, or the pressure generated by the mayor or chief or Captain of Detectives'. Thus societal reaction can be seen to directly affect the rate of delinquency.

Cicourel argues that delinquents are produced by the agencies of social control. Certain individuals are selected, processed and rebelled as deviant. Justice is the result of negotiation in the interaction process. In view of these observations Cicourel questions structural and subcultural theories of deviance which see deviance as a product of pressure from the social structure. He concludes, 'The study challenges the conventional view which assumes "delinquents" are "natural" social types distributed in some ordered fashion and produced by a set of abstract "pressures" from the "social structure"'.

Erving Goffman – deviance and the institution

In general, interactionists view the various institutions for the treatment of deviance – the prisons, mental hospitals and reform schools – as a further set of links in a long chain of interactions which confirm the label of deviance both for the individual so labeled and for society as a whole. In a series of trend setting essays, Erving Goffman examined the treatment of mental patients in institutions. He argues that although the stated aim of such institutions is to cure and rehabilitate, a close examination of interaction patterns within the institution reveals a very different picture.

Goffman is particularly concerned with how, via a series of interactions, pressure is placed upon the inmate to accept the institution's definition of himself. Upon entry, 'he begins a series of abasements, degradations, humiliations, and profanities of self. His self is systematically, if often unintentionally, mortified'. This 'mortification process' strips the inmate of the various supports which helped to maintain his former self-concept. Often his clothes, an important symbol of identity are removed. His possessions, a further symbol of identity, may be taken away and stored for the duration of his stay. He may be washed, disinfected and his hair cut. He may then be issued with a new 'identity kit' such as regulation clothes and toilet articles. Such standardized items tend to remove individuality and define the inmate simply as a member of a uniform mass.

Once the entry phase is over, the inmate settles down to an endless round of 'mortifying experiences'. Each day is strictly timetabled into a set of compulsory

activities controlled by the staff. The patient is allowed little freedom of movement, few opportunities to show initiative or take decisions. Throughout his stay, his actions are scrutinized and assessed by the staff in terms of the rules and standards which they have set. Many of these regulations can be degrading. For example, in some mental hospitals, a spoon is the only utensil provided for the patients to eat with. Goffman summarized what mental hospitals in particular and treatment institutions in general 'say' to the inmate about himself, 'In the mental hospital, the setting and the house rules press home to the patient that he is, after all, a mental case who has suffered from some kind of social collapse on the outside, having failed in some over-all way, and that here he is of little social weight, being hardly capable of acting like a fully-fledged person at all'.

Not surprisingly, inmates in treatment institutions become anxious as their day of release approaches. At best they have not been prepared for life on the outside, at worst they have accepted the institution's definition of themselves as hopeless, hapless deviants. A small minority become 'institutionalized' – they believe themselves unable to function in the outside world, cling to the security of the institution and go to great lengths to remain inside. Despite this Goffman argues that the effects of the institution upon the majority of inmates are not usually lasting. There is a period of temporary 'disculturation', which means that the former inmate must re-learn some of the basic recipes for living in the outside world. However, the most lasting and important consequence is the label 'ex-mental patient' or 'ex-convict'. This, rather than the experience of being inside, makes re-entry into conventional society difficult.

Goffman reaches the rather pessimistic conclusion that many treatment institutions, 'seem to function merely as storage dumps for inmates'. Like societal reaction in general, treatment institutions serves to reinforce rather than reduce deviance.

Deviance and the interactionist perspective – criticisms

The interactionist view of deviance has provoked strong criticism. Firstly, its critics argue that interactionism fails to explain the origin of deviant acts. In starting with the label, it provides no way of explaining the actions of the individual before he was labeled deviant. Even accepting that labeling and societal reaction are important factors in an explanation of deviance, critics argue that deviant activity is not simply created by the label. Why, for example, do certain individuals smoke marihuana in the first place, and others do not? From an interactionist perspective there seems to be no pressure on particular individuals to deviate; there is no indication of the motivation for their deviance.

Thus David Bordua states, ‘The process of developing deviance seems all societal response and no deviant stimulus’.

The interactionist approach tends to picture the deviant as having no awareness that his actions could be seen as deviant until he is stopped in his tracks by a label. But many deviants are aware that their behaviour is regarded by others as deviant. As Taylor, Walton and Young argue, ‘whilst marihuana smokers might regard their smoking as acceptable, normal behaviour in the company they move in, they are fully aware that this behaviour is regarded as deviant by the wider society’. Thus they actively make decisions to break the law. They are not passive, blinkered creatures, suddenly woken from blissful ignorance as a label is slapped upon them. Indeed, many individuals are not only aware of their deviance, they are proud of it and cultivate it. Thus urban guerillas have labeled themselves as deviant long before the agents of social control ever get their hands on them.

Finally, it is argued that the interactionists fail to fully explain societal reaction to deviance. Why, for example, do the police and juvenile officers in Cicourel’s study have particular meanings and definitions of deviance which lead them to label some individuals and not others? Why are some activities regarded as deviant in a particular society and not others? Why, for example, is marihuana smoking against the law? To answer such questions it is important to know who makes the rules and for what purpose. This involves an analysis of the distribution of power and the nature of decision making in society. Such questions form the major focus of the next section.

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Deviance and power

This section examines the following questions: Who makes the rules? For whose benefit are they made? How are the rules enforced? These questions involved a consideration of the nature and distribution of power in society, and link the study of deviance directly to the study of power and politics. The section is mainly concerned with Marxian perspectives on deviance and power, but will first consider functionalist and interactionist approaches.

Deviance and power – a functionalist perspective

Functionalists begin their analysis of the relationship between deviance and power by assuming that there is a value consensus in society. This consensus represents an agreement by members of society on deeply held values. From a functionalist perspective deviance consists of those acts which depart from shared values. Thus Durkheim defines crime as acts which ‘offend strong and definite states of the collective conscience’. The law is therefore a reflection of society’s value consensus, a translation of shared values into legal statutes. Those who execute the law, the police and the judges, are therefore translating shared values into action. Their power is therefore seen as legitimate authority, as just, right and proper because it is based on the value consensus of members of society. The operation of the law benefits society as a whole since deviance must be kept in check and shared values must be maintained. As noted in previous section, Durkheim argues that punishment under the law ‘serves to heal the wounds done to the collective sentiments’. It restores shared values to their required strength, and therefore contributes to the maintenance and well-doing of society.

Many functionalists adopt a version of the pluralist view of the nature and distribution of power in advanced capitalist society. Interest groups and political parties are seen to represent the interests of various groups in society. Political decisions and legal statutes take account of and compromise between these interests. The state does not confidently favour particular groups but represents society as a whole. William Chambliss summarizes the pluralist view of the relationship of power and the law as follow, ‘The law represents the interests of society at large by mediating between competing interest groups’.

The above views have provoked strong criticism, especially from a Marxian perspective. Critics have argued that the functionalists have ignored laws which clearly serve the interests of the powerful, that they have disregarded the systematic bias in favour of the powerful in the execution of the law. Laurie Taylor makes these points nicely in his criticism of Merton. He writes, ‘It is as though individuals in society are playing a gigantic fruit machine, but the

machine is rigged and only some players are consistently rewarded. The deprived ones either resort to using foreign coins or magnets to increase their chances of winning (innovation), or play on mindlessly (ritualism), give up the game (retreatism) or propose a new game altogether (rebellion). But in the analysis nobody appeared to ask who put the game there in the first place and who takes the profits'. Thus Taylor criticizes Merton for not carrying his analysis far enough, for failing to consider who makes the laws and who benefits from the laws. To continue Taylor's analogy, the whole game may have been rigged by the powerful with rules which guarantee their success. These rules may be the laws of society. Such a possibility will result in very different explanations of deviance from those put forward by the functionalist.

Deviance and power – an interactionist perspective

The interactionists have made to important contributions to an understanding of the relationship between deviance and power. Firstly, they have questioned the functionalist view of value consensus by suggesting that there is no general agreement about what constitutes deviance. Secondly, they have shown that definitions of deviance are related to the power of the actors involved in the interaction situation. However, their concentration on the interaction process itself largely prevents an analysis of the nature and distribution of power in society as a whole. In fact when they consider the general relationship between power and deviance, writers such as Becker and Lemert move away from an interactionist perspective.

In this criticism of Merton, Edwin Lemert rejects the idea of value consensus. He describes various situations in which definitions of deviance do not reflect the consensus of society as a whole but rather the views of the powerful. This is particularly obvious in colonial situations where a ruling elite applies its own laws to a conquered majority. Such laws often contradict the norms and values of the native population, which can result in individuals being defined as criminal simply by following their traditional norms. Lemert makes a similar point about multi-cultural societies, such as the USA, which contain a large number of ethnic groups each with its own subculture. Simply by acting in terms of the norms and values of their particular subculture, members of ethnic groups can be defined as criminals in terms of American law. Thus Lemert rejects the idea of value consensus in multi-cultural societies such as the USA and suggests that definitions of crime and deviance will reflect the views of the powerful.

Like Lemert, Becker questions the idea of value consensus. He claims that, 'people are in fact always *forcing* their rules on others, applying them more or less against the will and without the consent of those others'. In particular, he suggests

that in the West the old make rules for the young, men for women, Whites for Blacks, Anglo-Saxon Protestants for ethnic minorities, the middle class for the working class. In place of value consensus, Becker argues that rules reflect power. He states that, 'Those groups whose social position gives them weapons and power are best able to enforce their rules'. Such groups have the power to impose their definitions of crime and deviance on the less powerful.

The interactionists raise the question of the relationship between power and deviance but do not really answer it. They provide interesting suggestions, but stop short of a detailed analysis of the nature of power and deviance in society as a whole. In practice they have concentrated on the actual 'drama of interaction'. They have tended to deal with particular agencies of social control such as the courts, the police and the juvenile bureau and examined the creation of deviance in these contexts. But as Jock Young argues, 'it is not the criminal nor even the administration of crime but, in the final analysis, the system itself that must be investigated'. Thus the relationship between deviance and power must be examined in the context of the social system as a whole.

Deviance and power – a Marxian perspective

Sociologists such as William Chambliss, Milton Mankoff, Frank Pearce and Jock Young argue that only Marxian perspectives can deal adequately with the relationship between power and deviance in society. From this viewpoint, power is held by those who own and control the forces of production. The superstructure reflects the relationship between the powerful and the relatively powerless, the ruling and subject classes. As part of the superstructure, the state, the agencies of social control, the law and definitions of deviance in general, reflect and serve ruling class interests. As an instrument of the ruling class, the state passes laws which support ruling class interests, maintain its power and coerce and control the subject class. Laws are not an expression of value consensus but a reflection of ruling class ideology. They serve to legitimize the use of ruling class power. Thus, a general commitment to laws by members of society as a whole is an aspect of false class consciousness since, in practice, laws benefit only the ruling minority.

From a Marxian perspective laws are made by the state which represents the interests of the ruling class. Marxists such as William Chambliss argue that crime is widespread in every social stratum in capitalist society. The impression given by official statistics that crime is largely a working-class phenomenon is simply due to the selective application of the law. In *Crimes of the Powerful*, Frank Pearce examines the illegal activities of large American business corporations. Measured in monetary terms, Pearce claims that the criminal activities of the working class are a drop in the ocean compared with the huge sums illegally pocketed by private

enterprise. Despite the apparent widespread nature of corporation crime, companies are rarely prosecuted under the anti-trust laws.

Many Marxists see crime as a natural outgrowth of capitalist society. They argue that a capitalist economic system generates crime for the following reasons. The economic infrastructure is the major influence upon social relationships, beliefs and values. The capitalist mode of production emphasizes the maximization of profits and the accumulation of wealth. Economic self-interest rather than publicity duty motivates behaviour. Capitalism is based on the private ownership of property. Personal gain rather than collective well-being is encouraged. Capitalism is a competitive system. Mutual aid and cooperation for the betterment of all are discouraged in favour of individual achievement at the expense of others. Competition breeds aggression, hostility, and particularly for the losers, frustration. William Chambliss argues that the greed, self-interest and hostility generated by the capitalist system motivates many crimes on all levels of society. Members of each stratum use whatever means and opportunities their class position provides to commit crime.

From a Marxian perspective the basis of crime is the private ownership of the forces of production and all that that entails. Thus a socialist society, in which the forces of production are communally owned, should result in a large reduction of many forms of crime. In theory, individual gain and self-interest should be largely replaced by collective responsibility and concern. There is some evidence to suggest that societies which have moved further along the road to socialism than the USA, have a lower crime rate. The evidence is shaky though and the arguments speculative. For example, according to Milton Mankoff, the crime rate in Western Europe is lower than that of the USA. The difference in the crime rate is due in part to the following factors. Firstly, the welfare benefits provided for the poor in Western Europe are considerably more extensive than those available in America. Secondly, compared to the USA, there is a higher working class involvement in trade unions in Europe. Working-class interests are also represented by socialist political parties in practically every advanced capitalist industrial society with the exception of the USA. Such organizations provide means for constructively channeling working-class protest. In America, crime provides one of the few means of expression for such protest. Thus Mankoff suggests that in the USA working-class crime 'represents a primitive pre-political form of protest against powerlessness, alienation, and class society'. If Mankoff's arguments are correct, the solution to crime lies on the road to socialism.

The application of Marxian theory to the study of deviance became increasingly popular during the 1970s. It promised to provide a more comprehensive explanation than previous approaches. Thus it offered explanations

not only for the origins of crime and deviance but also for the nature of law and law enforcement and definitions of non-criminal deviance. In particular, Marxism provided an explanation of the relationship between deviance and the nature and distribution of power in the society. However, its claim that all forms of deviance can be ultimately accounted for in terms of the economic infrastructure is questionable. Even if Marxian theory proved sufficiently flexible and Marxists sufficiently ingenious to explain all forms of deviance in Western society in terms of the capitalist system, problems would still remain. There is ample evidence of crime and deviance in communist society ranging from petty theft to political and religious dissidence. To suggest that such activities are hangovers from a previous era and will disappear once the dictatorship of the proletariat has established a truly socialist society is stretching credulity. Marxian theory fails to provide an adequate explanation for deviance in societies where the forces of production are communally owned.

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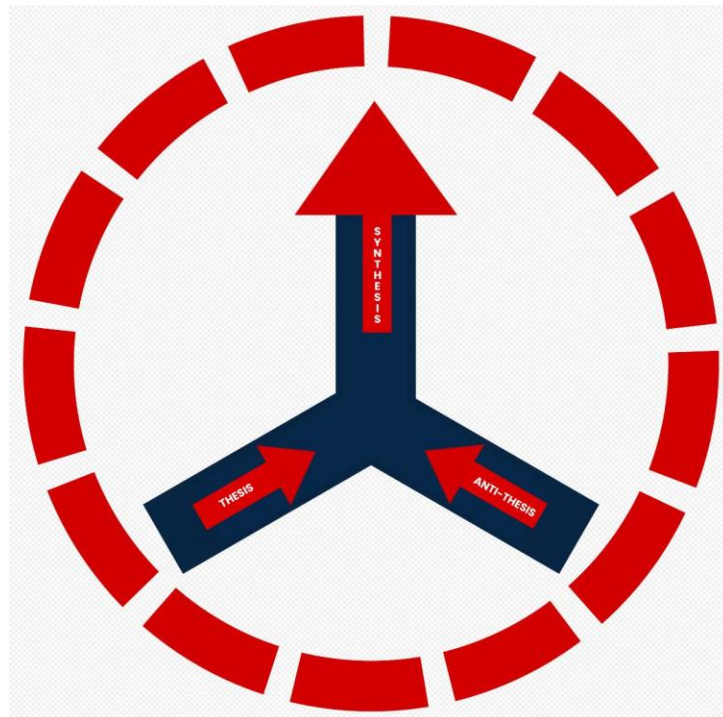
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