**SOC 3290 Deviance**

**Overheads Lecture 9: The Anomie Perspective**

\* There are two versions of anomie theory having different emphases:

(1) “Normlessness” underlying deviance;

(2) Discrepancies between social goals & legitimate means

**Durkheim and Normlessness:**

\* *Anomie*= a state of “normlessness”/ insufficient regulatory constraints

\* Similarities/differences with social disorganization theory:

- similar: focus on normative chaos resulting from social change

- different: focus on all society, not just an ecological zone

- different: clearer focus on modernizing societies, not all periods

- different: deviance not search for reorganization, but a release of

greed/unlimited aspirations

- different: don’t patch up normative order piecemeal, but overall

\* Durkheim on human nature: (contradictory):

(1) No human nature without society: socially shaped in entirety

(2) Human nature = an “inextinguishable thirst” to be socially

regulated in face of limited resources

\* When social limits either *unclear*, or seen as *unfair*, trouble ensues

\* Problem of transition between traditional & modern societies = shifts in normative patterns

\* Durkheim on suicide:

- demonstrated “private” acts can only be explained socially

- focus on deviance-producing potential of anomie

\* Types of suicide:

(1) *Egoistic* suicide: too little social integration (e.g. the

unmarried);

(2) *Altruistic* suicide: too much social integration (e.g. hara-kiri;

terrorist bombers/ martyrdom);

(3) *Fatalistic* suicide: too much social regulation (e.g. slaves;

those made to feel worthless);

(4) *Anomic* suicide: too little social regulation (e.g. rapid economic

change; expecting too much leading to relative frustration):

- rapid change removes normative “shield” / releases

“insatiable desires”

- winners/losers don’t receive “just desserts” in former terms

- difficulty adjusting/painful

- aspirations spiral against unfulfillment of unobtainable goals

- effort grows when least productive

- one’s desire to live suffers

\* Anomie becoming a “chronic condition”

- economic progress freed from social and moral constraints

- religion, the state and occupational groups waning in influence

\* Mechanical solidarity (waning):

- simple, relatively undifferentiated societies

- similar individuals

- similar social/economic activities

- relative “visibility” to each other

- norms repressive of individual uniqueness

- norms favoring a collective “oneness” (e.g. the Amish)

\* Organic solidarity (growing, but too slowly):

- complex, highly specialized modern societies

- increases in volume and density of populations

- personal replaced by anonymity

- highly specialized division of labour

- common religious beliefs losing power

- new rules slow in emerging

- lack of order/morality in interim: growth in suicide/deviance

**Merton and the Goals-Means Gap:**

\* Robert Merton:

- downplays normlessness in favor of normatively induced

aspirations (e.g. success)

- emphasizes gap between aspirations & legitimately available

means of achieving them (i.e. “anomie”)

- the greater the gap, the more pressure toward crime

\* Modes of adaptation to anomie:

(1) *Conformity* (accepting cultural goals &legitimate means);

(2) *Innovation* (accepting goals/ rejecting legitimate means);

(3) *Ritualism* ( rejecting/limiting cultural goals/ accepting

legitimate means);

(4) *Retreatism* (rejecting both cultural goals & legitimate

means);

(5) *Rebellion* (rejecting both & replacing with new ones).

\* Reformulations/Modifications:

- Cloward and Ohlin: added concept of *differential illegitimate*

*opportunity* affecting drift into different delinquent subcultures:

(e.g. criminal/conflict/retreatist).

- Cohen: added concept of “*status frustration*” to mediate Merton’s “atomistic” account (e.g. delinquent subcultures of lower class boys unable to compete in middle-class terms).

**Identifying Anomic Deviance:**

\* Post WWII faith in science + liberal welfare state = use of official statistics & quantitative measures of deviance/anomie.

\* Ignored/downplayed: Historical context/analysis

Personal experience/qualitative approaches

\* Measures of anomie:

- Lander (“objective” measure: % nonwhite population/ %home owners)

- Srole: “subjective” quantitative measure of individuals’ perceptions

- Short: “subjective” quantitative measures of position discontent

\* Measures of deviance: official government statistics (biased). Much influenced by government research funding

**(2) Social Control of Anomic Deviance:**

\* Two traditions (Durkheim + Merton):

\* Durkheim: reconstruct the normative/moral structure of society:

- not a return to past (e.g. religion)

- a new civic/secular moral order

\* Strategies: (1) New occupational organizations; (2) Education

\* Merton: eliminate strain between societal goals & differentially available means

\* Strategies: Either:

(1) Re-socialize society to accept inequality: eradicate destructive

myth of equal opportunity (not favored); or

(2) Reorganize society so that equal opportunity is available

\* Early 1960's: Merton’s latter approach attempted (“Mobilization for

Youth”). Targeted federal attempt to:

- increase employment ability

- training

- help youth achieve employment goals - provide jobs

- overcome hiring discrimination

\* Results:

- No major reduction in delinquency

- Funds used by poor to oppose blocks to equal opportunity

- Officials felt “biting hand that feeds them”

- Programs cut/ FBI investigations began of community organizers

- Power structure reasserted itself

- Too radical/not radical enough (depending on social position)

**The Anomie Perspective Today:**

\* Enormous influence of anomie perspective (1950's-1970)

\* Current research on anomie & deviance:

- mental illness - drug use and addiction

- suicide - delinquency

**Assessment of the Anomie Perspective:**

\* Major contribution: aspirations to deviate rooted in structural contradictions in society

\* Criticisms (Durkheim):

-Links between normative deregulation and suicide

vague/inconsistent

-statistics less conclusive than once thought

\* Criticisms (Merton):

- Atomistic

- Differential illegitimate opportunity

- Use of official statistics

- Ignoring deviance of higher classes

- Ignoring impact of labeling

- Ignoring societies where social position fixed

\* General criticisms:

(1) An overly exaggerated sense of the unity of social

structure/goals (ignores diversity/subcultures/contracultures

& gender)

(2) Not extending structural analysis far enough (Marxists)

(3) Postmodern critique: real inequalities less important than

“virtual inequalities”