

Stoddard Dare – Sociology – 1<sup>st</sup> Period – Off-Site Learning Packet Day 8

**Sociology**  
**Mr. Stoddard Dare**  
**Thursday, April 2, 2020**

Today you will be introduced to Strain Theory, which hails from the Functional Analysis Perspective of Sociology.

Strain Theory theorizes that people feel a strain from society to meet cultural goals (money, possessions, family etc...) and use conventional means (education, jobs etc...) of achieving these goals. People that are unable to meet these goals through conventional means are more likely to have one of the deviant reactions described below.

Enjoy,

Mr. Stoddard Dare

## Strain Theory

Strain theory states that social structures within society may pressure citizens to commit crimes.

### Key Points

- Social strain theory was developed by famed American sociologist Robert K. Merton. “Strain” refers to the discrepancies between culturally defined goals and the institutionalized means available to achieve these goals.
- Merton was proposing a typology of deviance based upon two criteria: (1) a person’s motivations or her adherence to cultural goals; (2) a person’s belief in how to attain his goals.
- A typology is a classification scheme designed to facilitate understanding.
- According to Merton, there are five types of deviance based upon these criteria: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion.

### Key Terms

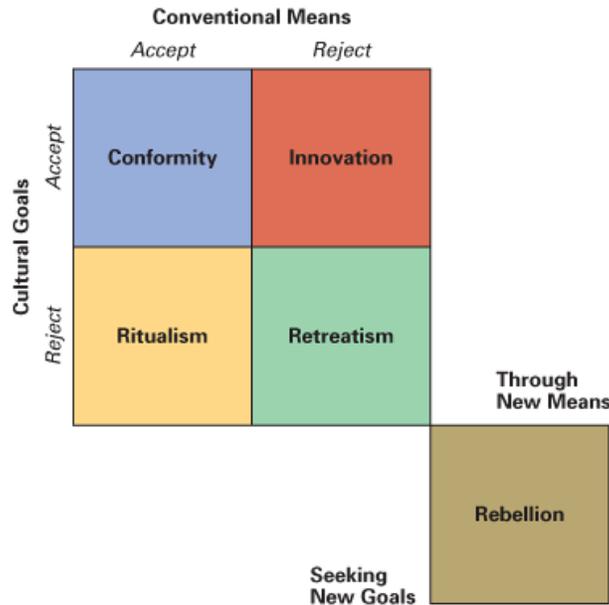
- **typology:** The systematic classification of the types of something according to their common characteristics.
- **Social strain theory:** Social strain theory was developed by famed American sociologist Robert K. Merton who, in his discussion of deviance, proposed a typology of deviant behavior.

Social strain theory was developed by famed American sociologist Robert K. Merton. The theory states that social structures may pressure citizens to commit crimes. Strain may be structural, which refers to the processes at the societal level that filter down and affect how the individual perceives his or her needs. Strain may also be individual, which refers to the frictions and pains experienced by an individual as he or she looks for ways to satisfy individual needs. These types of strain can insinuate social structures within society that then pressure citizens to become criminals.

**Social Strain Theory:** Five types of deviance.

In his discussion of deviance Merton proposed a typology of deviant behavior that illustrated the possible discrepancies between culturally defined goals and the institutionalized means available to achieve these goals. A typology is a classification scheme designed to facilitate understanding. In this case, Merton was proposing a typology of deviance based upon two criteria: (1) a person’s motivations or his adherence to cultural goals; (2) a person’s belief in how to attain his goals. According to Merton, there are five types of deviance based upon these criteria:

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- Conformity involves the acceptance of the cultural goals and means of attaining those goals.
- Innovation involves the acceptance of the goals of a culture but the rejection of the traditional and/or legitimate means of attaining those goals. For example, a member of the Mafia values wealth but employs alternative means of attaining his wealth; in this example, the Mafia member's means would be deviant.
- Ritualism involves the rejection of cultural goals but the routinized acceptance of the means for achieving the goals.
- Retreatism involves the rejection of both the cultural goals and the traditional means of achieving those goals.
- Rebellion is a special case wherein the individual rejects both the cultural goals and traditional means of achieving them but actively attempts to replace both elements of the society with different goals and means.

What makes Merton's typology so fascinating is that people can turn to deviance in the pursuit of widely accepted social values and goals. For instance, individuals in the U.S. who sell illegal drugs have rejected the culturally acceptable means of making money, but still share the widely accepted cultural value in the U.S. of making money. Thus, deviance can be the result of accepting one norm, but breaking another in order to pursue the first. In this sense, according to social strain theory, social values actually produce deviance in two ways. First, an actor can reject social values and therefore become deviant. Additionally, an actor can accept social values but use deviant means to realize them.

Libretexts. "7.4B: Strain Theory: How Social Values Produce Deviance." *Social Sci LibreTexts*, Libretexts, 6 Oct. 2019, [https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Sociology/Book%3A\\_Sociology\\_%28Boundless%29/7%3A\\_Deviance%2C\\_Social\\_Control%2C\\_and\\_Crime/7.4%3A\\_The\\_Functionalist\\_Perspective\\_on\\_Deviance/7.4B%3A\\_Strain\\_Theory%3A\\_How\\_Social\\_Values\\_Produce\\_Deviance](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Sociology/Book%3A_Sociology_%28Boundless%29/7%3A_Deviance%2C_Social_Control%2C_and_Crime/7.4%3A_The_Functionalist_Perspective_on_Deviance/7.4B%3A_Strain_Theory%3A_How_Social_Values_Produce_Deviance)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Strain Theory

- 1) According to Strain Theory, what pressures citizens to commit crimes?
- 2) Who developed Strain Theory?
- 3) What are the two criteria that people use to determine their reaction to the strain they feel from society?

4) Define the five types of deviance, according to Strain Theory:

A) Conformity:

B) Innovation:

C) Ritualism:

D) Retreatism:

E) Rebellion:

5) For each example below, identify which form of deviant response applies:

\_\_\_\_\_ Steve decides to sell drugs in order to afford material objects.

\_\_\_\_\_ Ruth gives up on her goals and develops an alcohol addiction.

\_\_\_\_\_ Jim meets all his social obligations and accepts that his station in life will remain stagnant.

\_\_\_\_\_ Olive calls for a complete realignment of the U.S. health care system and is willing to crash the system in order to achieve goals.

\_\_\_\_\_ Drew is a teacher that requires his students to independently complete 5 pages of worksheets everyday while he sits at his desk and reads sports articles online.

6) According to Strain Theory, what are the two ways social values produce deviance?