

# Explaining Deviance: The Functionalist Perspective

# Social Functions of Deviance

- Emile Durkheim argued that deviance has some uses in social life
  - Helps clarify norms
  - Unifies the group
  - Promotes social change

# Explaining Deviance

Why do people commit deviant acts?

- Functionalist Perspective: a natural part of society
- Conflict Perspective: power and inequality
- Interactionist Perspective: interaction among individuals influences deviance

# Functionalist Perspective

- The major functionalist explanation of deviance is Robert Merton's strain theory
- **Strain Theory** views deviance as the natural outgrowth of the values, norms, and structure of society
- Ex: American society places a high value on economic success
  - Not everyone has access to the accepted means to achieve that goal
  - May be prevented by social conditions or lack adequate education
  - Either way, society expects this goal to be met and are judged accordingly

# Functionalist Perspective

- Under the strain of incompatible goals and means, these individuals fall victim to anomie
- **Anomie** is the situation that arises when the norms of society are unclear or are no longer applicable
- Anomie leaves people without sufficient guidelines for behavior, causing confusion for individuals and society

# Merton's Strain Theory of Deviance

Mode of Adaption	Method of Adaptation	Seeks Culture's Goals	Follows Culture's Norms	Examples
Conformity	Accepts cultural goals and pursues them through culturally approved ways	Yes	Yes	Regular worker
Innovation	Accepts cultural goals but uses disapproved ways of achieving them	Yes	No	Criminal
Ritualism	Abandons cultural goals but continues to follow society's norms	No	Yes	Bureaucrat
Retreatism	Abandons cultural goals and the approved ways of achieving them	No	No	Hermit
Rebellion	Challenges cultural goals and norms and substitutes new ones	No – tries to replace	No – tries to replace	Hippy