

# KRM 310 (A): CRIMINOLOGY THEORY

## UNIT 6: SOCIAL STRUCTURE PERSPECTIVES

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**Strain theories:** this theoretical agenda emphasizes that stress, frustration or strain (generally a product of failed aspirations) increases the prospects of crime and norm violation.

- Norms are alleviated to alleviate the strain, that accompanies failure

### **Emile Durkheim:** Origins of Social Structure Theory

Durkheim's focus was on how the organization of society can propel people toward violating norms – behaviour was socially rather than individually determined.

**Anomie:** *refers to a state/condition in society which the norms are no longer effective in regulating behaviour.*

- Durkheim indicated that Anomie is as a result of a disjunction between people's aspirations and their ability to achieve these goals.
  - This can be brought about by rapid social change such as drastic economic growth. Such economic expansion would more likely affect the upper & middle class whose expectations/aspirations expand to an insatiable level.<sup>1</sup>
  - Aspirations are class related, with the upper classes having higher goals than those below them.
- Durkheim emphasized that a successful social structure defines reasonable limits for desires
  - When that social disorganization falters, insatiable desires are unleashed.
  - Unlimited aspirations create pressure for deviant solutions.

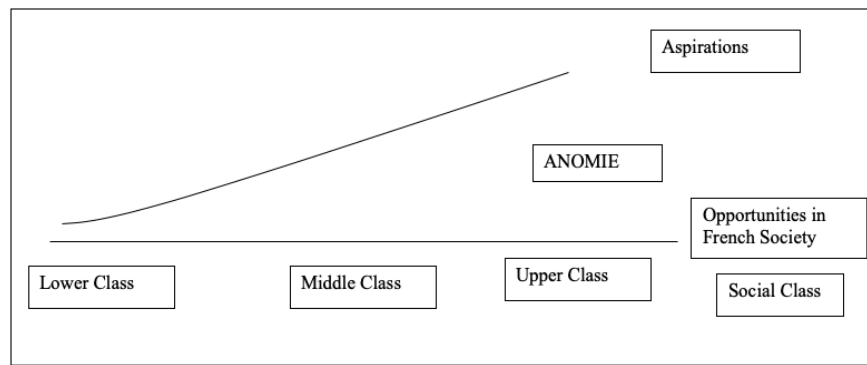
### **Durkheim's Conception of the Relationship Between Social Class and Anomie**

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<sup>1</sup> Durkheim noted that poverty insulated the poor from experiencing anomie.

**ROBERT K.**

**MERTON:**



### Social structure and Anomie

Merton presented that social conditions place pressures on people differentially throughout class structure, and people react individually to these conditions.<sup>2</sup>

All societies have a system that denotes approved values and goals and that details acceptable norms/institutionalized means for achieving these goals.

- These goals enable people to pursue success in appropriate ways, but also exert pressure on some segments in society to engage in non-conforming behaviour in an effort to achieve this success.
  - This happens when the goals of success are emphasized more than acceptable ways of attaining that success.

Institutionalized means for pursuing wealth are not always feasible for most people at the bottom of the social structure.

Legitimate means for obtaining wealth are differentially available throughout class structure.

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• <sup>2</sup> While Durkheim assumed that humans are naturally inclined to have unlimited desires that must be socially controlled, Merton felt that such desires are socially generated.