

Chapter 2

Topic 1 Functionalist, strain and subcultural theories

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Activity: Media Why do people commit crime?

Learning objectives

At the end of this activity you should be able to:

- explain key features of Merton's strain theory
- apply Merton's theory to a range of examples of crime and deviance.

Work in pairs.

A. Using pages 72-73 of your textbook, complete pages 4 and 5 of your workbook relating to Merton's strain theory.

B. Watch the clip and answer the questions that follow:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Js6PPZNp4J0>

1. What do the statistics on the value of hard work suggest about Americans' belief in the American Dream?
2. What do the statistics on earnings of children and parents suggest about people's chances of achieving the American Dream?
3. What does the pattern of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer suggest about the American Dream?
4. Why do Americans want to believe in the value of hard work and the American Dream?
5. How does the American Dream act as a motivator?
6. Which two of Merton's five adaptations to strain do Romon and Sarah illustrate? Explain your answer.

C. According to Merton, the American Dream can be pursued through either legitimate or illegitimate means. Alternatively, individuals may reject the American Dream. The following range of films illustrate how Hollywood portrays the rejection of the American Dream or its pursuit by illegitimate means. You may not be familiar with some of the films mentioned. If so, use the internet to check their plot lines and make notes on the following:

1. How do the following films illustrate the pursuit of the American Dream through crime:
 - a. Gangs of New York
 - b. Goodfellas
 - c. The Wolf of Wall Street
 - d. The Godfather
 - e. Robin Hood
 - f. Aladdin?
2. How do the following films illustrate the rejection of the American Dream:
 - a. Rebel Without a Cause
 - b. Saturday Night Fever?

D. From your answers to parts B and C, use Merton's theory to write a summary paragraph on 'Why do people commit crime?'