

## The Anomie-Deviant Behavior Connection: The Theories of Durkheim, Merton, and Srole

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In my recent review of the literature on fraud,<sup>1</sup> I suggested that a critical aspect of the situation involves the concept of anomie. The word "anomie" derives from the Greek word *anomia*, meaning lawlessness or "without law,"<sup>2</sup> and refers to societal instability resulting from a breakdown in broadly accepted values, as well as widespread personal feelings of uncertainty and alienation.

The possible connection between anomie and deviant behavior in science is the most recent factor that led me to contemplate the theme of this essay. But a persistent stimulus has been my long-standing knowledge that the work on anomie by the sociologist Robert K. Merton, Columbia University, New York, was not generally known to our readers. I could therefore not resist the challenge to summarize this work in *Current Contents*® (CC®). Social scientists will especially appreciate the monumental, if not impossible, task involved in condensing over 50 years of work on anomie; but short of simply reprinting Merton's work, we make some attempt to describe this major contribution to twentieth-century sociology.

What follows, then, is an attempt to distill what ought not to be distilled. However imperfect this essay may be, I do think citation analysis allows us to say something unique about this field of research. Indeed, anomie is the topic of several current research fronts (see Table 1). The essay provides some bibliographic material to whet the appetite of readers who wish to know more, and we hope that social scientists will enjoy the confirmation by citation analysis of what may seem obvious to many of them.

But if we do nothing more than make more CC readers aware of the important theories of anomie, we will have succeeded.

### Anomie

The first sociological use of the term "anomie" is usually attributed to a founder of modern sociology, French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) in his book *The Division of Labor in Society*, originally published in 1893.<sup>3</sup> But according to sociologist Marco Orru, University of South Florida, Tampa,<sup>2,4</sup> it was actually Jean-Marie Guyau, a French philosopher, who first used the term sociologically in his books *Esquisse d'une Morale sans Obligation ni Sanction*<sup>5</sup> and *L'Irréligion de l'Avenir: Étude Sociologique*;<sup>6</sup> Durkheim's first use of "anomie" actually occurred in his review of the latter of Guyau's books.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the first use of the word was in the literature of ancient Greece, by historians in discussions of the social conditions of their times.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, it was Durkheim who promulgated a theory of anomie.<sup>9</sup> It was later developed by Merton;<sup>10</sup> Leo Srole, College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University;<sup>11</sup> and many other sociologists.

### Merton's Theory of Anomie

Merton theorizes that anomie (normative breakdown) and some forms of deviant behavior derive largely from a disjunction between "culturally prescribed aspirations" of a society and "socially structured avenues for realizing those aspirations."<sup>12</sup> (p. 188)

In other words, a gap between people's aspirations and their access to legitimate means of achieving them results in a breakdown of values, at both societal and individual levels.

In the US, unlike many other societies, the cultural goal of economic success—the “American Dream” of social mobility, meaningful work, home ownership, material comforts, and easeful retirement—is held up as a legitimate expectation for *all* members of society, not just for a fraction of them. Doctrinally, this culturally defined goal is achievable through socially approved avenues that are held to be equally available to all. In reality, however, that ideal has never been achieved. While it may have exhibited extraordinary strides, US society still restricts or closes access to these avenues of opportunity for significant portions of the population; at the same time, it places heavy emphasis on the achievement of success.<sup>12</sup> (p. 186-90)

One result is that culturally sanctioned goals are often largely unattainable by legitimate means (or perceived as such) for certain segments of society. This leads to pressure to succeed by illegitimate means. This potent combination is seen by Merton and others as the background cause—and the interactive result—of many of US society's ills, such as drug abuse, alcoholism, suicide, delinquency, vandalism, assault, embezzlement, and fraud. As mentioned earlier, we have referred to an overemphasis on “success” as having been proposed as at least a partial explanation for the occurrence of intellectual dishonesty in science.<sup>1</sup>

### Social Structure and Anomie

The scholarly interest in anomie as a factor in social deviance is evident in ISI®'s research-front data. One 1985 front entitled “Drug use and delinquency among adolescents” (#85-0382) has 40 core documents and 400 published—that is, citing—papers. Among the core works is Merton's first landmark paper, “Social structure and anomie” (SS&A), published in 1938 in the *American Sociological Review*.<sup>10</sup> The article presents the underpinnings of Merton's

theories on anomie and has been included and further developed in each of the three printings (1949, 1957, and 1968) of Merton's book *Social Theory and Social Structure* (STSS).<sup>12</sup>

Sociologist Stephen Cole, State University of New York, Stony Brook, says that “this theory has probably been more frequently cited and reprinted than any other paper in sociology.”<sup>13</sup> But though STSS, in which SS&A was reprinted, has long since become a *Citation Classic*®,<sup>14</sup> it is difficult to say precisely how often the SS&A piece has been cited. Over 200 explicit citations of it since 1955 can be found in the *Science Citation Index*® (SCI®) and since 1966 in the *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI®). But an unknown number of citations to the paper are masked as references to one of the three editions of STSS, which have collectively received a total of over 3,600 citations since 1955, according to data from the SCI, SSCI, and the *Arts & Humanities Citation Index*™ (A&HCI™). That “Social Structure and Anomie: A Classic Revisited” was the subject of a plenary session of the 57th annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society, held this May in Boston, is an indication of the continuing interest in its central themes. Another indication is that SS&A, in addition to being core to front #85-0382, is also core to the 1986 front “Adolescent drug use, risk taking, and deviant behavior” (#86-0409), which has 29 core publications and 265 citing papers. See the historiograph (Figure 1) for a microhistory of this area of anomie research for the past few years.

As Merton notes, his theories of anomie are based on the “analysis of behavior deviating from prescribed patterns of conduct” and his search for an explanation of how it is that the “frequency of deviant behavior varies within different social structures and how it happens that the deviations have different shapes and patterns in different social structures.”<sup>12</sup> (p. 185)

A key component in Merton's formulation is the typology of individual adaptations to the imbalance between cultural goals and access to legitimate means of achieving

**Table 1:** The 1985 and 1986 *SCJ*/*SSCJ*® research fronts on various aspects of deviance and anomie. A=number of core papers. B=number of citing papers.

Number	Name	A	B
85-0382	Drug use and delinquency among adolescents	40	400
85-2716	Sociological studies on alienation	5	47
85-5046	Durkheim's sociological methodology	2	7
86-0409	Adolescent drug use, risk taking, and deviant behavior	29	265
86-1454	Self-rejection and the explanation of deviance	2	24
86-2121	Deviant behavior and mass media	2	25
86-5072	Development of Durkheim's sociology of religion	2	20
86-7673	Deviance in science and trends in criminology	2	26

them. Merton characterizes five types of adaptive behavior and cautions that the categories "refer to role behavior in specific types of situations, not to personality"; he also observes that the categories are not absolutes and that "people may shift from one alternative to another as they engage in different social activities."<sup>12</sup> (p. 194) Merton's typology summarizing these modes of adaptation is reproduced from *SS&A* in Table 2.

The first of these categories—"conformity"—involves acceptance of both the prevailing cultural goals and approved means of achieving them. In stable societies, Merton says, this is by far the most common adaptation. "Innovation" occurs when the individual accepts cultural goals but takes alternative approaches for attaining them. "Ritualism" combines the abandonment of cultural goals with a deep attachment to the socially approved means of advancing toward them. In effect, individuals scale down their aspirations to a realistic level; at the same time, they continue to abide religiously by the "rules." "Retreatism," or what has since become known as "dropping out," entails the rejection of both cultural goals and approved means of attaining them; "people who adapt (or maladapt) in this fashion are, strictly speaking, *in* the society but not *of* it." Finally, there is "rebellion," which "presupposes alienation from reigning goals and standards" and aims to bring about "a social structure in which the cultural standards of success would be sharply modified and provision would be made for a closer correspondence between merit, effort, and reward."<sup>12</sup> (p. 195-210)

**Table 2:** Schematic representation of the five types of adaptation to culturally prescribed goals and means of achieving those goals exhibited by individuals in Robert K. Merton's theory of anomie. Plus signs (+) signify acceptance and minus signs (-) symbolize rejection; a combination of the two (±) signifies "rejection of prevailing values and substitution of new values."

**A TYPOLOGY OF MODES OF INDIVIDUAL ADAPTATION**

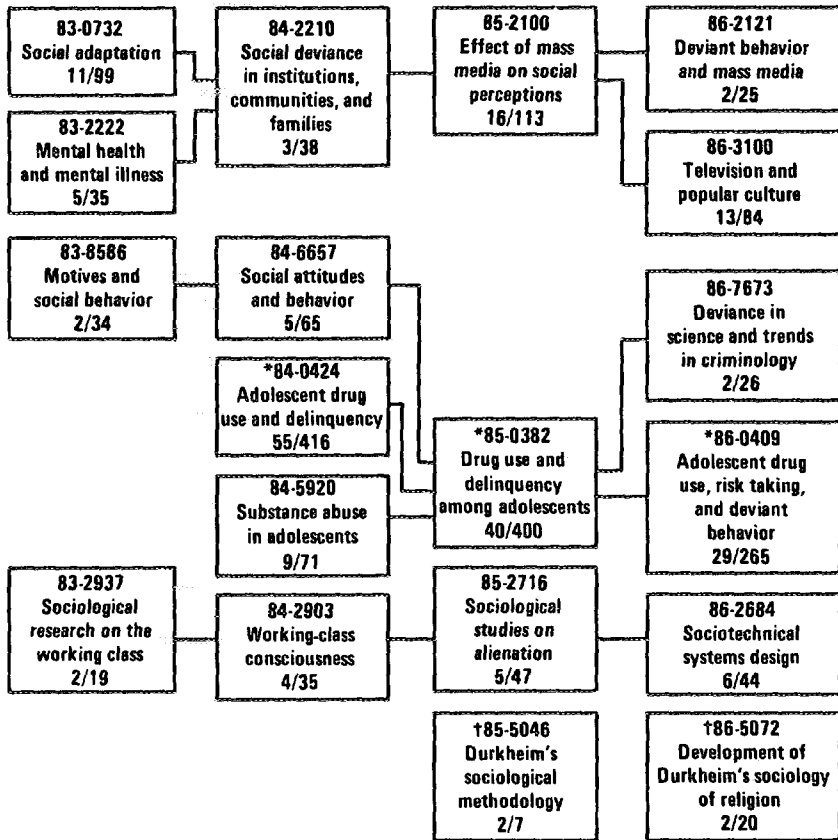
Modes of Adaptation	Culture Goals	Institutionalized Means
I. Conformity	+	+
II. Innovation	+	-
III. Ritualism	-	+
IV. Retreatism	-	-
V. Rebellion	±	±

**The Place of *SS&A* Today**

Cole writes that Merton's theory specified "how a certain type of society and location within that society generates motivation to commit deviant behavior" and notes that anomie theory was "probably the dominant theory in the area of deviance" through the late 1960s. However, since that time, Cole says that the field of deviance research has shifted away from an emphasis on anomie.<sup>13</sup>

During the 1950s and 1960s, "juvenile delinquency was seen as a pressing problem" by deviance researchers, Cole says. "The federal government demanded that the delinquency action programs it funded have a research component and be guided by some theoretical orientation. [Merton's anomie theory] was utilized by many social scientists involved in such projects.... There

Figure 1: Historiograph tracing research on various aspects of anomie, 1983-1986. Numbers of core/citing papers are indicated at the bottom of each box. Daggers (†) indicate that Emile Durkheim is a core author in that research front. Asterisks (\*) indicate that Robert K. Merton is a core author.



has...been a *relative* decline in interest in both crime and delinquency and a greatly growing interest in other forms of deviance," such as deviant behavior involving sex or drugs. The relative decline in the use of Merton's anomie theory "may be partly a result of the end of the dominance" of the primary concern with delinquency.<sup>13</sup>

However, Cole's content analysis of citations to SS&A from articles in four leading sociological journals over a 22-year period (from 1950 to 1972) indicated that SS&A is often cited in acknowledgment of the key role it plays in theories of deviance; in a total of 123 references, it was criticized seven

times.<sup>13</sup> Cole also noted that the theory continues to be heavily cited and reprinted and concludes that "its significance at the research front of other areas may be increasing, and as an exemplar or paradigm of sociological theory it may continue to be reprinted in anthologies and cited in introductory texts for years to come."<sup>13</sup>

### Durkheim's Concept of Anomie

As mentioned earlier, Durkheim was the first to develop the concept of anomie into a sociological theory. Indeed, anomie is a recurrent concept in many of Durkheim's

published works as well as in posthumously published letters. Durkheim's most-cited discussion of the concept appears in his book *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, first published in 1897.<sup>9</sup> The English translation of the book appeared in 1951 and, according to data from the *SCI* and *SSCI*, has been quoted in over 1,300 papers since 1955—and in countless other books. Of course, since ISI's *SCI* coverage doesn't begin until 1955 and the *SSCI*'s coverage starts in 1966, there are surely hundreds of earlier citations to this landmark work. We'll know more about the citation record of *Suicide* when we complete the *SCI* and *SSCI* for the post-World War II years. The *SSCI* for 1956-1965 is scheduled for completion in 1988, as is the *SCI* for 1945-1954.

Another indication of the continuing importance of Durkheim's works is that they form the basis of the 1985 research front identified as "Durkheim's sociological methodology" (#85-5046) and a 1986 front identified as "Development of Durkheim's sociology of religion" (#86-5072). The two core works in the 1985 front are Durkheim's *The Division of Labor in Society*<sup>3</sup> and *The Rules of Sociological Method*, originally published in 1895 and translated into English in 1938.<sup>15</sup> The 1986 front was identified by the co-citation of two works on comparative religion: Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*,<sup>16</sup> first published in 1915; and *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, first published in 1898 by Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, College of Advanced Studies, Paris.<sup>17</sup> There were 27 papers published on this topic in those two years.

In *The Division of Labor in Society*, Durkheim described anomie as one result of an inequitable division of labor within the society;<sup>18</sup> such inequality, Durkheim wrote, causes a breakdown or lack of rules in society and results in class conflict.<sup>3</sup> (p. 353-73) In *Suicide*,<sup>9</sup> Durkheim viewed anomie as an outcome of rapid social and economic change and hypothesized that it explained a particular kind of suicide that occurs when individuals experience marked and sudden changes in their social condition.<sup>18</sup> Broadly speaking, then, during

times of great upheaval, increasing numbers of individuals "cease to accept the moral legitimacy of society," as sociologist Anthony R. Mawson, University of Keele, UK, notes.<sup>19</sup>

### Measuring Anomia

Whereas *anomie* describes the instability of a society in which widely accepted rules have broken down, the term *anomia* refers to the personal sense of unrest, alienation, and uncertainty stemming from the lack of ideals or purpose. In order to study the concept of anomia empirically, it became important to develop a standardized means of identifying and measuring such feelings. In 1956 Srole took the first step in that direction with the publication of a paper entitled "Social integration and certain corollaries: an exploratory study."<sup>11</sup>

The paper was intended to test the hypothesis that anomia in individuals is associated with "a rejective orientation toward out-groups in general and toward minority groups in particular."<sup>11</sup> Subjects were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with statements made in an opinion-poll format. For example, to test whether the individual felt that community leaders were "detached from and indifferent to [the individual's] needs," the subject was asked to react to the statement, "There's little use writing to public officials because they aren't really interested in the problems of the average man." To find out if the individual believed "that his framework of immediate personal relationships, the very rock of his social existence, was no longer predictive or supportive," subjects were asked to agree or disagree with the statement, "These days a person doesn't really know whom he can count on."<sup>11</sup>

Srole interpreted the answers to these questionnaire items to gauge the subject's sense of powerlessness and alienation, thus establishing a scale of anomia. According to data from the *SCI*, *SSCI*, and *A&HCI*, Srole's paper has been cited over 550 times since its publication. It is one of five publications making up the core of the 1985

research front entitled "Sociological studies on alienation" (#85-2716). Srole's *Citation Classic* commentary on the article appears in this issue of *CC/Social & Behavioral Sciences* and *CC/Arts & Humanities*.<sup>20</sup>

The social integration study grew out of a landmark work linking social and cultural factors with mental health, entitled *Mental Health in the Metropolis: The Midtown Manhattan Study*<sup>21</sup> and coauthored by Srole, Thomas S. Langner, Stanley T. Michael, and Thomas A.C. Rennie (1904-1956), Cornell University Medical College, New York, New York, and Marvin K. Opler, University of Buffalo School of Medicine, New York. Published in three editions (1962, 1975, and 1978), the study attempted to identify the effects that eight "socio-cultural attributes"<sup>21</sup> (p. 13) have on mental health. The variables studied were age order; sex; marital status; socioeconomic origin (the financial status of one's parents); national origin; religious origin; the kind of community in which one grew up (such as rural or urban); and the number of generations since one's immigrant forebears arrived in the US.<sup>21</sup> (p. 17)

Srole also wrote a *Citation Classic* commentary on the Midtown Manhattan Study. In it, he states that the flurry of attention from the popular media that greeted the monograph upon its publication raised "a controversial storm of critical approbation, skepticism, and disparagement" toward it later, when scholarly reviews of the book appeared in the journal literature.<sup>22</sup> The pioneering study overcame the circumstances of its publication. It has been cited over 1,670 times in the years since 1962. Srole also reported that a follow-up to the original study, entitled *Mental Health in the Metropolis Revisited: Twenty Years Later*,<sup>23</sup> is in preparation; a preliminary report of the study's findings appeared in 1980 in the *Archives of General Psychiatry*.<sup>24</sup> That paper has been cited over 30 times since its publication.

Although measuring subjective feelings of anomia are important for empirical research on anomie, objective indicators of anomie are also useful. Merton suggests, for in-

stance, that the rate of disrupted social relationships might be one variable influencing feelings of anomia.<sup>25</sup> One work that is core to front #85-2716 concerns objective indicators of anomia. Published in 1961 by Dwight G. Dean, Denison University, Granville, Ohio, the paper discusses scales for measuring three components of alienation: powerlessness, normlessness, and social isolation.<sup>26</sup> Dean found at the time that these three components were inversely proportional to occupational prestige, education, income, and the degree to which an individual had a rural background. He also found a small positive correlation between alienation and advancing age.<sup>26</sup>

### Trends in Anomie Research

As indicated by Table 3, which shows a selected list of the journals reporting on anomie, the research comprises a wide range of topics in numerous fields. Such studies investigate the relationship between anomie and various social attributes, such as socioeconomic and marital status, drug use, advancing age, religion, and serious illness. Other areas of interest concern the relationship between anomie and antisocial behaviors—such as delinquency, crime, and child abuse—and anomie in specific groups and subcultures within society (see the Bibliography at the end of this essay for a selected list of articles on these and other topics).

### Anomie and Fraud in Science

Owing to the recent spate of attention to fraud in science,<sup>1</sup> one of the subcultures that may draw more research attention in the future is that of the scientific community itself and its reward system.<sup>27</sup> In 1957 Merton applied the conceptual scheme of SS&A to help account for various kinds of deviant behavior in science. He noted then that "competition in the realm of science, intensified by the great emphasis on original and significant discoveries, may occasionally generate incentives for eclipsing rivals by illicit or dubious means."<sup>28</sup> For, as he later

**Table 3:** Selected list of journals reporting on anomie. A=title, first year of publication, editor, and publisher. B=1986 impact factor.

A	B	A	B
American Journal of Sociology (1895) W.L. Parish, ed. University of Chicago Press Chicago, IL	1.55	Revue Francaise de Sociologie (1960) Editorial Board Editions du CNRS Paris, France	0.25
American Sociological Review (1936) W. Form, ed. American Sociological Association Washington, DC	2.51	Social Forces (1922) R.L. Simpson, ed. University of North Carolina Press Chapel Hill, NC	0.91
Criminology (1963) D.A. Smith, ed. American Society of Criminology Columbus, OH	0.85	Social Problems (1953) J.D. Orcutt, ed. University of California Press Berkeley, CA	0.69
Deviant Behavior (1979) C.D. Bryant, ed. Hemisphere Publishing Corp. Washington, DC	0.22	Sociological Focus (1967) B. Lavin & E.I. Mullins, eds. North Central Sociological Association Kent, OH	0.16
International Journal of the Addictions (1966) S. Einstein, ed. Marcel Dekker, Inc. New York, NY	0.32	Sociological Quarterly (1960) G.L. Albrecht, ed. JAI Press, Inc. Greenwich, CT	0.56
Journal of Drug Issues (1971) R.L. Rachin, ed. Journal of Drug Issues, Inc. Tallahassee, FL	0.44	Sociology and Social Research (1916) M. Felson, ed. University of Southern California Los Angeles, CA	0.37
Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency (1964) V. O'Leary, ed. Sage Publications, Inc. Newbury Park, CA	1.03	Youth & Society (1969) D. Gottlieb, ed. Sage Publications, Inc. Newbury Park, CA	0.30
Journal of Studies on Alcohol (1940) J.H. Mendelson & N. Mello, eds. Alcohol Research Documentation, Inc. New Brunswick, NJ	1.24		

observed in a reprise of his work on anomie, "the culture of science has long put a premium on originality, on being the first to make a scientific discovery. Being second, let alone a subsequent  $n^{\text{th}}$ , hardly counts at all."<sup>29</sup>

In *Deviance and Social Change*, edited by Edward Sagarin, Harriet Zuckerman, Columbia, describes the spectrum of deviant behavior that can be elicited by the pressures of trying to make important, original discoveries.<sup>30</sup> These violations of the norms of science range from what Zuckerman characterizes as "bad scientific manners"—such

as publicity seeking, eponymizing oneself, the underacknowledgment of collaborators on joint research—to such deliberately deceptive practices as plagiarism, data trimming and cooking, and the wholesale fabrication of data.<sup>30</sup>

Fraudulent practices in science, according to Merton's theories of anomie, become more likely when accepted avenues of attaining the culturally prescribed goals are unavailable (or perceived to be unavailable) or when great emphasis is placed on such goals without similar emphasis on the means of attaining them.<sup>12</sup>(p. 188).<sup>29</sup> As was

noted in our recent two-part essay on fraud,<sup>1</sup> sociologist Jerry Gaston, Texas A&M University, College Station, wrote in 1973 that a scientist's failure to achieve a goal according to the "rules of the game" may encourage that scientist "to adopt a different mode of operation to get an edge or advantage over...competitors."<sup>31</sup> In the same year, sociologists Jonathan R. Cole, Columbia, and Stephen Cole observed that "when a reward system is defined as inequitable, a rationale is provided for violating the norms of the system. In short, the structure of the reward system can produce personal justification for deviant behavior."<sup>32</sup>

However, in focusing attention on deviant behavior in science, we should not lose sight of the fact that the vast majority of scientists are honest. Indeed, as expressed by sociologist William Simon, University of Houston, Texas, the critical question may not be why "so many scientists violate the norms of science, but why do so many scientists effectively honor these normative requirements?"<sup>33</sup> Yet, with the budget cutbacks affecting science in many countries and the increasingly negative attitude toward science in various parts of the world, one might well wonder whether large numbers of scientists will no longer honor those norms. For example, Bernard Dixon, European editor for *THE SCIENTIST*<sup>™</sup>, said that in the UK, there is a "sense that the present administration is simply not interested in the long-term intellectual value of scholarship and curiosity-oriented study. The ensuing impairment of social/political approval and thus self-regard is a pertinent contemporary example of anomie. Whether pure scientists will now become delinquents and drug abusers is not yet clear."<sup>34</sup>

### The Anomia of Success

While failure (what Merton calls "the anomie of deprivation"<sup>35</sup>) may foster deviant behavior, even success within the limits defined by the norms is not without its risks. In a paper published in 1964 in *Anomie and Deviant Behavior*, edited by Marshall B. Clinard, University of Wisconsin, Madison,

Merton wrote of the "anomie that at times attends success."<sup>35</sup>

Merton notes that this anomia of success is rare and still largely a matter of speculation. But Merton noted that "psychiatrists testify to a plenitude of cases" in which people respond to the socially legitimate achievement of a highly prized goal with deviant behavior. They take note, for example, of businesspeople who plunge into despair after apparently successful financial deals; of writers who commit suicide shortly after their novels are critically acclaimed; and of scientists who suffer nervous breakdowns following important discoveries.<sup>35</sup>

Merton asked why some of those who apparently attain their hearts' desire should react as if they had failed. He pointed out that, for them, success involved "the personal discovery that the attainment of a long sought-after goal is no stable stopping point. What appeared from below as the end of the road becomes, in the actual experience, only another way-station.... Social pressures do not easily permit those who have climbed the rugged mountains of success to remain content:...more and more is expected of [them], and this creates its own measure of stress."<sup>35</sup>

### Big Science and Anomie

In this era of Big Science, with its over-emphasis on results, will there be an increase in anomie? Scientists now live and work in a worldwide community, where many perceive that greater levels of achievement than heretofore are necessary to gain recognition. The worldwide scientific community suffers from pressures similar to those described by Merton in his analysis of the opportunity structure and anomie in large cities.<sup>35</sup> In these densely populated areas, it often seems that any goal can be reached, for all around each inhabitant are examples of those who have succeeded. But though many are drawn to the city by this "highly visible tower of opportunity, comparatively few can be chosen."<sup>35</sup> And so it may be with modern science. Recognition is one of the main rewards of doing science, but even if your



peers realize the value of your work, the elite academies can accept only a fraction of the best—and even then, often quite late. Meanwhile, the mass media herald the discoveries of a few superstars—even though it is often impossible for them to understand the difference between genius, charisma, and, at times, skulduggery. Moreover, even success does not guarantee satisfaction, since one great discovery seems to demand more.

### The Heritage of "Social Structure and Anomie"

As Stephen Cole remarks, "SS&A is an approach to studying a wide range of behavior that stimulated much theoretical thought

and a good deal of empirical research."<sup>13</sup> Sociologist Piotr Sztompka, Jagiellonian University, Cracow, Poland, writes that "during the last half-century [SS&A] has led to fundamental theoretical discussions, conceptual and taxonomic elaborations, and empirical application."<sup>36</sup> In tribute to the seminal nature of Merton's theories of anomie, Srole called him "the century's preeminent sociologist in the Durkheim tradition, a giant, to borrow an ancient image, 'standing on the shoulders of a giant.'"<sup>37</sup>

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