

# Anomie, Social Changes and Dysfunctional Socialization

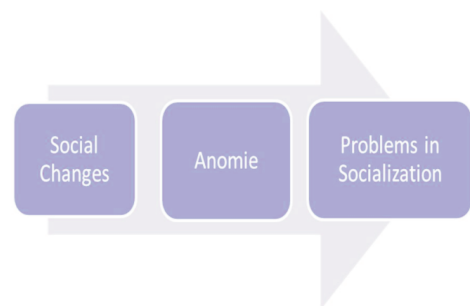
GREGORY A. KATSAS\*

## Abstract

*This presentation focuses on the sociological approach to socialization of the individual, in an effort to connect structural characteristics of society with the concept of socialization. The presentation begins with a reference to the role of social change in this process. Reviewing changes in recent decades, the initial argument is that the social changes we experience are abrupt and massive. Following there is an attempt to establish a causal link between social change and growing levels of anomie in societies. The reference to anomie and its implications is the central axis that affects socialization in a negative manner. The paper refers to the basic characteristics of socialization and concludes that the major obstacles to smooth socialization are structural changes which include anomie.*

essentially leads to social anomie, a condition where the sense of purpose and objective is lost in the overall society and, as a consequence among its members. This way, the presentation ends up with the presentation of the central argument: that is, as a result of social anomie Western society today is experiencing problems in the proper socialization of its members.

The central argument of the presentation can be presented schematically in the following diagram:



**Key words:** Social Change, Anomie, Socialization

## Introduction

Given the increasing levels of anomie in society and concerned about the role of media in this, the aim of this presentation is threefold. First, to investigate the connection of two important concepts: anomie and socialization. The second objective is to focus on the social context and the social structures that define socialization. The third and final objective is to create a forum for a wider understanding of socialization.

The structure of the presentation revolves around three themes: social change, lawlessness, and socialization. The presentation begins with a general reference to the many important social changes we are experiencing in today's societies. With examples from specific institutions, it is argued that all these social changes constitute a paradigm shift in thinking. This

## Social changes

We live in an era characterized by large and sudden changes. Changes in social institutions and social structure are experienced in a direct way by more people. One could say that this was always the case. The difference is that we believe that these changes are more massive and faster. We respond this way precisely because we are in the middle of all the changes and we have not figured out how to adapt.

Starting with the social institution of the family, we experience changes that tend to relax the previously rigid structures. The definition of 'family' keeps on changing, including new, non-standard structures. Examples are single parent families, one-person families, or parents of the same sex. Additionally, the typical family in economically developed countries is smaller

\*Associate Professor of Sociology  
Deree-The American College of Greece

due to the reduction in the number of births. Another structural change is the increase in the divorce rate.

Continuing with the social institution of religion, once taken-for-granted levels of faith and support, crumble as a result of major scandals that come out in public every so often. Regardless of the scandals, the role of religious faith and the church representatives is declining in economically developed countries.

In the economic sphere, the structural changes that occur lead to an increase in inequality at the global level, the declining ability for mutual support between generations and lead to greater insecurity. Two other social institutions, education and politics, are being targeted having lost much of their glamour and are increasingly characterized by uncertainty and inability to provide reasonable and safe direction.

So we live in the age of deconstruction of institutions and habits. The system itself is self-defeating and places its structures in a process of disbelief. Through all these many changes, people in society lose their standard points of reference, the constants that they have used throughout their lives.

This period of social change that we experience can be characterized as a change of thinking, what has been termed as paradigm shift (Kuhn, 2000). These paradigmatic shifts always occurred and are structural components of social change. Consider the 1960's that brought serious challenges in ruling class through constant challenges of powerful institutions. Political, military and racial practices that for decades were taken for granted, started being disputed. Let's not get too far back. The early 1990's brought the challenge of socialism through a paradigm shift that brought huge political, cultural and economic changes that we are experiencing even today.

## **Anomie**

All these examples show that today's economically developed societies have to manage extremely volatile situations that might lead to personal and social insecurity. This uncertainty is the result of social anomie that increasingly characterizes societies.

Emil Durkheim, the great French sociologist, introduced the concept of anomie to describe a condition of deregulation in society. It refers to the situation where the rules for how people should treat each other break down so people do not know what to expect from oth-

ers. Thus, anomie is a condition where the rules or expectations for behavior are unclear or absent. Being preoccupied with the consequences of social change, Durkheim suggests that the lawlessness and lack of social norms leads to deviance (Macionis, 2008).

Durkheim considered that sudden changes in a society cause a state of lawlessness. As a consequence, lawlessness led to the same result: the collapse of the system, either during a great prosperity or a great depression (Durkheim, 1960).

Lawlessness thus refers to a breakdown of social norms in a situation where the activities of the members of society are not controlled by evaluative standards. Individuals cannot find their place in society, because there is lack of clear rules. Abruptly changing conditions and attempting to adapt to an uncertain environment, lead to dissatisfaction, conflict, and delinquent behavior. Durkheim noted that periods of recession (for example economic) are accompanied by greater anomie and higher rates of crime and delinquent behavior (Garfield, 1987).

Extending the work of Durkheim, the American sociologist Robert Merton uses the term 'structural anomie' to describe deviant behavior. Merton argues that the differences between socially acceptable goals and socially acceptable means to achieve the objectives create a tension that can lead to deviant behavior. This tension is permanent and refers to the difference between the ideologically expected and the realistically achievable. (Merton, 1938).

## **Socialization**

We all belong to a social unit. Inclusion and participation in groups is achieved through the socialization process that lasts throughout our lifetime. Through this, the members of a society are incorporated in the cultural expectations and the anticipated normative structures. In other words, people learn the habits and values of their culture. Central to this process are groups and institutions such as family, education, and media.

## **Theories of Socialization**

One of the major scholars of socialization, George Herbert Mead argues that a person's behavior can be understood only in terms of the behavior of the whole social group in which the person belongs. This is

because the individual acts of a person reflect larger social structures that go beyond the self and define it as part of a larger group. Mead proposed the explanation of the personal experience through the perspective of society, because the person belongs to a social structure. He argues that the definition of the individual self cannot exist outside society and is defined by it through a perpetual process of interactive communication. This process creates the consciousness of self. (Macionis, 2008).

The central idea for Mead is the self: the part of a person's personality composed of self-awareness and self-image. He claims that the self does not exist at birth, but develops through social experience. Given that social experience is the exchange of symbols, people tend to find meaning in every action. In fact, the other is a mirror in which we see ourselves. With the limited social experience, infants' self can only develop through imitation. Gradually, children learn to assume the roles of many others. The final stage is the generalized other, which refers to the broad cultural norms and values we use as a benchmark for the evaluation of others. (Mead, 1962)

Elaborating Mead's ideas, Lawrence Kohlberg suggests the theory of moral development. He argues that people judge situations as right or wrong based on the development of moral rules in three stages of adulthood. The first is the pre-conventional stage where children experience the world in terms of pain and pleasure. The second stage, conventional scene occurs during adolescence. The teens learn how to determine what is right and wrong according to the wishes of their parents and begin to conform to cultural norms. The last stage of moral development is the post-conventional level, where people move autonomously, having internalized the rules of society and the abstract moral principles (Kohlberg, 1981).

### **Socialization and Mass Media**

The application of the above is directly applicable to the issues of socialization of young people by the media. The increasing presence of media increases their involvement with issues of deviance and diversity. Media, while presenting anomic situations create phobic people. Thus, while the media recently developed as a means of socialization, they influence public opinion, shaping the way we see ourselves and the world

around us. (Muzzatti, 2007).

This effect is more pronounced at younger ages. Media can play an important role in shaping the social behavior of children and adolescents. Although parents have the greatest influence on children, media can be considered very strong agent of socialization. The use of mass media, especially television exposure, can affect the development of self-image, the attitudes of children towards others, and interpersonal behaviors. That is, the way that media present their programs affects the development of self according to Mead and has a negative impact on the creation and understanding of necessary ethical standards according to Kolberg. Consequently, the effect on self-image of children and adolescents is negative, creating persons with problematic socialization (Nathanson, 2008).

### **The Connection of Anomie with Socialization**

The argument is that a society with a high level of anomie creates problems of socialization of its members. This does not mean that members of society will not socialize. But it does mean that socialization will contain the building blocks of a social structure characterized by anomic situations. If we wonder how the anomie is associated with socialization, we need to refer to two major issues: deviant behavior and the role of media.

The classic sociological concept of anomie has been used as a tool for understanding the relationship between social structures and cultural characteristics and delinquent behavior. The various applications of the term are associated with the European tradition of the 19th century, namely Durkheim for whom delinquent behavior is also the study of social change. (Bernburg, 2002).

Thus, we can understand deviant behavior directly related to important issues of our time, such as the penetration and influence of the economic logic of the market (Block, 1990). By extension, we can use anomie for understanding socialization and specifically explain problematic socialization.

In relation to the role of mass media, the research focuses on the effects on young ages. The exposure of youngsters to media can cause two kinds of effects. First, short-term effects include simple imitation and transfer of enthusiasm. Second, the long-term effects involve learning through observation or desensitization

of emotions. All these have different application and impact according to age, but overall are very strong (Greenwood and Pietromonaco, 2004).

Recent field research is the impact of interactive media such as online gaming, sending and receiving messages among children and adolescents. The results so far indicate that although there are differences in age, gender, and motivation, the influence of Internet is particularly important at younger ages (Lenhart, A, et. Al. 2001).

The research experience so far agrees: the way the material is presented by the media, creates or increases a feeling of anomie. If we accept that the media have a key role in shaping the self, i.e. socialization, we conclude that socialization, especially by the media can turn out to be problematic.

Applications and examples are many. One application is the members of a society do not share the same sense of what is right and what is not, what should and what should not be. This increases in recent years with the way that media present aspect of immigration. This leads to the disruption of social cohesion, resulting in the decline of importance that individuals attach to institutionalized rules, focusing on extra-institutional factors such as race.

The next application refers to the case that the rules are not consistent with the defined values, when the behavior does not serve the objectives or worse impedes their achievement. One example is the behavior expressed by athletes in a race. Their goal is to win with what this may mean, not necessarily victory through socially acceptable procedures or through lawful means.

The third case describes the relationship between the construction of norms and that of ideas. The difference between these two creates an anomic situation leading many people to alienation due to inability to participate in the reality presented by the media. For example, the persistent presentation of particular lifestyle by the media can lead to loss of goals and anomie among people who are convinced of its value but fail to follow it. That is, it is perceived as a case where society promises something in the beginning that is denied later on in reality.

Finally, we can refer to the anomie that is created due to the difference between the institutional construct and the construct of opportunity. A typical example is the insistence of media in presenting opportunistic and fast wealth, through lucky games or situations. The result is the decline of the importance of hard work and long term effort in the minds of individuals.

## **Conclusion**

This presentation attempts a connection between structural characteristics of society and the concept of socialization. The central argument used is that because of sudden social change, a state of anomie is created. This anomie, particularly through the role of the media results in problematic socialization. Emphasizing the exploration of the connection between anomie and socialization, this presentation focuses on the social context and the social structures that define socialization.

The term anomie describes the difficulties or shortcomings in finding objectives and direction. It is argued that in today's western societies anomie is increasing. Central to this process are the media as agents of socialization.

In conclusion, socialization problems are not due directly to the character and personality of each individual. They are largely a result of structural changes and structural problems in the wider society. This difficulty creates persons with contradictory socialization.

So, starting from weak and anomic social structures, we arrive at persons who find it difficult to understand their position in the social context. We conclude that the problem is not that there are no values. There always have been. The problem is that values change and through this change, we lose our firm reference points. This process is much more pronounced when the level of anomie are high.

The connection of the two concepts, anomie and socialization appears important. However, it remains to be investigated how powerful this is through the quantification of specific characteristics.

## Βιβλιογραφία

1. Bernburg, Jon Gunnar. 2002. "Anomie, Social Change and Crime." *British Journal of Criminology*. 42:729-742.
2. Block, F. 1990. *Postindustrial Possibilities: A Critique of Economic Discourse*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
3. Durkheim, Emile. 1960. *The Division of Labor in Society*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press (orig. 1893).
4. Garfield, Eugene. 1987. "The Anomie-Deviant behavior Connection: The Theories of Durkheim, Merton, and Strole." *Essays of an Information Scientist*. 10:272-281.
5. Greenwood, D.N. and Pietromonaco, P.R. 2004. "The Interplay Among Attachment Orientation, Idealized Media Images of Women and Body Dissatisfaction: A Social-Psychological Analysis." (pp. 291-308) In L. J. Shrum, Ed. *The Psychology of Entertainment in Media: Blurring the Lines Between Entertainment and Persuasion*. Mahwah, NJ : Erlbaum.
6. Kohlberg, Lawrence. 1981. *The Psychology of Moral Development: The Nature and Validity of Moral Stages*. New York: Harper & Row. Kuhn, Thomas. 2000. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
7. Lenhart, A, Rainie, L and Lewis, O. 2001. *Teenage Life nline: The Rise of the Instant Message Generation and the Internet's Impact of Friendships and Family Relationships*. Washington DC: Pew Foundation. Available: [www.pewinternet.org](http://www.pewinternet.org).
8. Macionis, John J. 2008. *Sociology*. London: Pearson Education.
9. Mead, George Herbert. 1962. *Mind, Self and Society*. Charles W. Morris, Ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962; orig. 1934)
10. Merton, Robert K. 1938. "Social Structure and Anomie." *American Sociological Review*, 3(5):672-682.
11. Muzatti, Stephen. 2007. "Mass Media and Socialization." In, George Ritzer, Ed., *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*. New York: Wiley Blackwell
12. Nathanson, Amy I. 2008. "Socialization by the Media." In, Wolfgang Donsbach, Ed., *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*. New York: Wiley Blackwell.