

Deviance

- The study of deviance is the basis for criminology in sociology—the study of crime and its effects on society.
- Deviance refers to the socially disapproved violations of important norms and expectations of a society.
- Who is deviant differs from one culture to another.
- Stigma is the mark of deviance (the Scarlet Letter).

Social control

- Social controls are sanctions which try to keep people from deviance. Internal social controls are behaviors and attitudes socialized into the individual to protect them from deviance. External controls are society's mechanisms like the law and the police.
- Since everyone breaks social rules and norms, the sociology of deviance usually refers to those who do it big-time.



Theories of deviance

Who becomes deviant? Why do they do it?

Labeling theory

- Labeling theory: a person becomes deviant when they get labeled as such. Getting a deviant identity means distinguishing between primary and secondary deviance. Primary deviance is where most people do something deviant but it is not discovered; secondary deviance is where a person takes on the identity of a deviant and may be thrust into a “deviant career.” Labeling theory fails to explain when being labeled deviant can jolt someone out of becoming a career deviant. Deviants are seen here as helpless victims rather than bad guys

Transmission theory

- Cultural transmission theory or differential association theory: deviance is learned through “transmission,” social interactions with others who are deviant. Criminals learn from other criminals. Dependent on the intensity of contact with deviants; the age at which contact takes place (younger the more vulnerable); the ratio of contacts with deviants. Cultural transmission theory fails to explain those people who are exposed to deviance, but who don’t become deviant. How does a behavior become socially defined as deviant? (Example, alcohol consumption was not a “disease” until the 20th century.)

Strain theory

- Structural strain theory: stems from Durkheim's anomie. Deviance occurs in societies where anomie is great. It is the outcome of social strains which put pressure on people to deviate. There is a discrepancy between socially approved goals and availability of socially approved means of achieving goals. Deviants lack approved means, fall into state of anomie, use deviant means. Merton's conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, rebellion. Structural theory fails to explain why elites or people with resources would result to deviance, i.e. why would already rich people commit fraud? It doesn't explain the process by which acts are defined as deviant.

Control theory

- Control theory or social bond theory: Social bonds connect people to a community and social controls get internalized so people won't be deviant. Control theory argues that deviance is the outcome of a failure of social bonds and social control. Conformity, not deviance, should not be taken for granted. Why do people conform? Control theory fails to explain deviance among high status people. Do people have weak bonds with society because they are deviant or does deviance create weak bonds with society?

Functionalist theory

- Functionalists see deviance as forms of social control which ensure social order. Sanctions provide rewards and punishments for following norms. Deviance functions to clarify the norms of society and define what the rules are; enhance solidarity in the community by reaffirming society's norms and values; diversity discontent as a safety valve; identify problems in the social system.
- Deviance is also dysfunctional to society because it disrupts the social order by making life difficult and unpredictable; confuses norms and values; diverts resources from other areas; undermines

Conflict theory

- Conflict theorists see crime as a function of the haves and have nots. Laws reflect the interests of the elite and powerful. Poor people are arrested more than rich people/ Conflict theorists also consider acts that reflect “principled deviance” acts of deviance based on moral conviction rather than personal goals

Crime

**an act that contravenes
a law**

- Laws apply to behavior that is too socially disruptive to be tolerated and which cannot be controlled through informal sanctions. Law defines the nature of offense and specifies negative sanctions to be applied to offender.
- Crimes and laws are socially defined and differ between societies.

Kinds of crime:

- violent crimes; property crimes; “victimless” crimes (gambling, prostitution, drug use); white collar/corporate crime.

Criminals

- The typical criminal is not “typical” but the one who typically gets arrested. Majority of juveniles are lower-class males.
- Negative sanctions against convicted criminals is for retribution and revenge, deterrence against other criminals, incapacitation to prevent criminals from committing further crimes, rehabilitation and reform.
- Recidivism, repeated crime rate, means prison not good on rehabilitation. “Three strikes you’re out” laws.

Medicalization of deviance

- Medicalization—the process by which the influence of medicine gets extended to over areas of life or social issues.
- In some traditional societies, deviance could be treated by shamans or shamans could legitimately exhibit more deviant behaviors.

Examples

- Abortion was legal until the physicians organized to make it illegal in latter 19th century. (See Mohr's Abortion in America.)
- Alcohol use not considered a medical problem until doctors defined it as a behavior needing medical treatment. (See The Alcohol Republic.)
- Homosexuality ignored historically, then labeled a “sin” by religion, then a crime punishable by imprisonment (19th century), then labeled a mental illness by psychiatrists until the 1970s when it was re-classified in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of doctors as no longer a disease .

Shopping recently defined as an “addictive” behavior to be treated, like gambling and sexual addiction.