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Social Deviance

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## Social Deviance

### **1. Deviance: Perspectives and Theories**

Deviant behavior is the one that contradicts customs of people. Deviance is the act of being opposite to socio-economic and political norms of society. Since it is the deviation from the law, all forms of correction mechanisms are applicable as long as one's behavior steers towards the acceptable (Mertin, 1959).

I have grown to believe that deviance is a bad trait in society and is worthy of punishment. I have understood that deviance is not necessarily a personal thing but rather has cultural, environmental, and situational boundaries that either encourage or demean such behavior. For instance, if travelled to Jamaica where everyone had dreadlocks, I would be seen as an odd person there. It means that I am not in touch with the Jamaican reality, and the Jamaicans are likely to perceive me as an outcast.

My attitude towards deviance has changed, and I have realized that deviance varies depending on such factors as location, society, social status, age, and environment. Deviance is relative and obeys relativistic laws. For example, killing someone in a battle is acceptable, but killing in the streets of New York is not only deviance but also a severely punishable act that results in life imprisonment for the guilty (Mertin, 1959). Society influences what people call deviant behavior. In some societies in Africa, female circumcision is a rite of passage to adult life, and those who undergo it are highly esteemed. In America, it is deviance to perform female genital mutilation, and everyone found practicing the rite is to be brought to legal punishment. It is acceptable for a child to cry when parents refuse to buy a toy for him or her, but it is quite odd for an adult to do the same especially in public.

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The differential theory focuses on age as the main factor in the passage of deviant behavior. It is right to say that the younger a person is, the faster he or she learns deviant behavior. The differential perspective advocates that close association with those who demonstrate certain deviations may result in learning their deviant behavior. Avoiding to associate with those with deviant behavior at the young age reduces the risk of deviance later in life.

The control theory seeks to explain the reason behind deviant acts and spells out self-control as the gear of behavior. The self-control people impose on themselves derives from both internal and external mechanisms people acquire from the societal environment. These mechanisms include values, virtues, and principles that innately control one's behavior. People learnt most of these moral principles while growing up, and they have become acceptable as cultural norms. These principles have become an internal behavior control system. Other external control mechanisms include police, religion, and other people who discourage deviant behavior. Other factors of control theory include the level of connection, attachment, commitment, and belief. One who involves with family or friends and believes in family values will not engage in unusual behavior. Deep connections, commitments, and attachments to others in society prevent engaging in bad behavior.

If one does not attain socially accepted goals, he or she is deviant according to the anomie theory. Society has erected the social walls that everyone has to climb to avoid deviance. The availability of resources also influences on the choice of means one will use to achieve these goals. For instance, when someone does not find a high paying job (misses the goal of earning a

lot of money to gain social status), he or she may turn to bank robbing to get quick money (Merton, 1959).

## **2. Static and Dynamic Concepts of Deviance**

Society has great influence on what people call deviance. Its cultural, social, and environmental demarcations shape the values and principles people believe in (Clinard, 2011). The type of society helps to analyze the static and dynamic concepts of deviance. Different societies encourage different morals and behaviors.

The static theory of deviance talks of a static society as the one with defined values and morals. Such societies do not change over time. Deviance is a disruption of the societal system, and everyone who exhibits such traits is an outcast. In this model, crime is part of society, and people recognize its existence despite its unacceptability.

The dynamic theory thrives in a dynamic society, the one whose formations and principles are bound to change with time. Society members constantly reform interactions, and changes in relationships and conflicts are common. Since man is a decisive being, this theory considers the most decisive individuals and sets a platform for the strongest to rule. Those with domineering ideas carry the day, and society approves their values and whims and encourages its members to embrace them. Sociologists believe that society is constantly under dynamic change since behavior constantly changes according to age, place, and times. Most sociologists believe that relationships are constantly changing depending on interpersonal interactions. Since deviance is a socially-created problem, it is the responsibility of society to deconstruct it. This is only possible by embracing dynamism that extends the social boundaries over time. Allowing diversity in human relations helps people have a look into other people's customs and cultures and integrate the same into their own.

### **Durkheim's Postulates on Deviance**

Durkheim is right stating that deviance is critical in society. It is impossible to find a society where there are no deviants. While most sociologists have spent time illustrating the ills of deviance, Durkheim postulations have made great sense over the years in presenting deviance as a desirable tool of change in various ways.

One of the most cited advantages of deviance is its role in social and political changes. Such historic figures as Martin Luther King, John Lewis, and Joyce Landner had to defy the restrictive rules of segregation and struggle for black equality and fair wages. Most activists in various countries defy laws and regulations and demonstrate deviant behavior in the streets chanting victory songs under the glare of anti-riot police.

Durkheim states that deviance is beneficial in instilling cultural and moral values and creating awareness of societal set norms. For instance when someone punishes a criminal, it deters others from such acts and defines what things society does not accept or accommodate. Deviance helps distinguish right from wrong. When a teacher punishes a child for stealing, he and the other children understand that stealing is evil (Durkheim 1952).

Lastly, though the effects of deviance may be fatal, favorable results are achievable. When terrorism as an act of deviance claims life and property, the victims console each other creating unity. However, there are better ways of achieving solidarity rather than engaging in terrorist acts.

### **3. Own Understanding of Deviation**

Deviance is everything that opposes common norms or practices. Practices may be either good or bad. Deviance involves actions, beliefs, values, and customs. The understanding of deviance may be different depending on a situation or place. Sometimes a person may behave

in a deviant manner unintentionally when he or she does not understand that his or her behavior contradicts the rules and regulations of a country. So, it is important to note that those with deviant behavior are not necessarily criminals.

Deviance as an act depends on the relativistic view in society. Going to the office wearing sweat pants may not land one in jail but the act does not auger well with the socially accepted practices at work places. In a group of criminals, if one does not steal with them, he or she is deviant and may be punished by other criminals. The criminal nature of defiance is associated with breaking of formal rules and regulations of a country. A criminal act is the one that causes the police to hunt a person down.

While going against accepted organization norms and codes of behavior at a work place is deviance, some deviant acts can be acceptable. For instance working against one's boss in a part of a project may lead to a big trouble, but the corporal results will earn the deviant respect at the work place. The boss is sure to warn the deviant and even spell out punishment, but what matters is the achievement of goals rather than the deviant behavior itself.

Once deviant behavior occurs, it is sure to receive criticism from society. The main forms of punishing deviant behavior may include jail term, beating, or labeling. The first time deviant behavior happens, it receives public disapproval. When someone repeats the same action, he or she may either change behavior or stop to associate with those who demonstrate deviant behavior (difference theory). When more people associate with certain deviant behavior, people's attitudes begin to change and they label a particular group as deviant. Deviant identity develops and becomes part of society although being under a label (inclusion dynamics). Society becomes aware of a particular deviant group and does not discrimination against it but treats the group as a separate entity by itself.

Everything wrong or unexpected done by a member of a society is deviance. Using such accounts as excuses, people have become deviants to a common norm. At one point, they did something wrong and were fearful of punishment; thus, they gave excuses. These excuses take the form of acknowledging the action as deviant but not accepting that they did it. A person found uprooting sweet potatoes at a nearby farm denies responsibility. He or she may even justify their deed by saying that they stole the sweet potatoes because they were hungry. Most people have been perpetrators of disclaimers. For example, a friend finds out that you have his long lost watch. The first thing you do is to ask your friend to remember where he forgot his watch. So, deviance is a relativistic issue, and it depends on the type of society.

References

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