

# **THE SOCIOLOGY OF DEVIANCE**

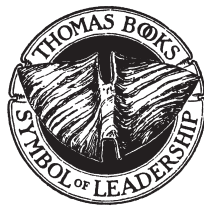


# THE SOCIOLOGY OF DEVIANCE

Differences, Tradition, and Stigma

*By*

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I dedicate this book to those professors who instilled in me a love of sociology, and by doing so are responsible for a 40-year career in sociology and higher education. These individuals believed in me and gave me “the shot in the arm” that launched me through three degrees, and provided me with an understanding of and respect for the sociological enterprise and imagination. They are Dr. Kenneth Root, who I took for three undergraduate courses, and who was the first to “turn me on” to sociology in “Introduction to Sociology.” I’ll never forget the day I was walking across the campus of the University of Nebraska-Omaha and encountered Dr. Root who informed me the Sociology Department was going to ask me to attend graduate school. This lifted me about 10 feet off the ground, and inspired me to think more seriously about a graduate education. The late Dr. Wayne Wheeler took the baton from there, and during my senior year was my mentor in two courses in independent study. Dr. Wheeler had an uncanny knowledge of sociology and shared many of my same interests in the discipline, including social stratification and social change. In April of my senior year he too encouraged me to enroll in graduate school (I had yet to make that decision) eventually becoming my thesis advisor, and one semester I was his graduate teaching assistant. “Wayne,” as I would grow to call him, was a powerful influence on my career and along with Dr. Root is deserving of my fondest memories, respect and gratitude. Other professors deserving mention here are Philip Vogt, whom I consider the finest professor I had during my undergraduate years, and Pete Kuchel who taught me a great deal about criminology and juvenile delinquency. Professor Vogt was a masterful and inspiring teacher of social problems, and minority and ethnic group relations. “Pete” as his students called him, possessed an amazing sense of humor, while offering a practical and experienced-based approach to the study of criminology and criminal justice.



## PREFACE

**T**he *Sociology of Deviance: Differences, Tradition, and Stigma* is dedicated to a sociological analysis of deviance, a term reframed to imply *differences*. Deviance is approached from the outset as meaning *differences: differences* in attitudes, behaviors, lifestyles, and values of people. The terms “deviance” or “deviant behavior” are understood as labels themselves, and are used sparingly, such as in the title, and in Chapter 14 “Elite and Power Deviance” (“deviance” appears with frequency in the theory chapters since it is a term used by the theorists addressed). “Deviance” is employed in the title to draw attention to the fact this is a deviance text. “Deviance” is used in the heading for Chapter 14, since much of the chapter derives from the works of David Simon’s *Elite Deviance*, and in order to introduce a new concept, *power deviance* that is an extension on the concept of elite deviance. Part of the title of the text is *Tradition* and this means the book assumes a traditional approach to the study of differences. Traditional topics are covered such as suicide, mental disorders and physical disabilities, addictions and substance abuse and use, criminal behaviors, and sexual behaviors and differences. The book has one chapter devoted to criminal behavior in order to avoid duplicating criminology and criminal justice texts, with emphasis placed on violent and property offenses. The term *stigma* appears in the title for two reasons: it is to honor the contributions of Erving Goffman to the study of differences, and it is used to accentuate the importance of societal reaction to attitudes, behaviors, lifestyles, and values that are varied and different in a heterogeneous society. Nowhere is this more evident than in Chapter 12 “Societal Reaction and Stigmatization: Mental Disorders and Physical Disabilities” where mental disorders and physical disabilities are approached from understanding them in light of labels and stigma.

*The Sociology of Deviance: Differences, Tradition, and Stigma* includes case studies or examples relevant to every chapter, and “In Recognition” where individuals who have made contributions to related subject matter are honored. These recognitions are toward the end of every chapter, and the case studies are found at the beginning of most chapters, but are placed elsewhere in several instances. A major part of the book includes analyses and empirical

assessments of the theories discussed in Chapters 4 through 8. In this respect the book offers one of the most comprehensive and specific discussions of the theories, and their empirical viability. Four of the five theory chapters present discussions of tests of major theories, thus providing students with more detail on the efficacy of deviance theories than usually is the case. An intent of this book is not to duplicate other texts in deviance, and to show variety in the manner in which different substantive topics are covered. For example, attention is given to historical developments when discussing mental disorders and physical disabilities, but this is not generally the case in Chapter 13 where sexual behaviors and differences are presented. Chapter 11 has coverage of gambling as a form of addiction, an area generally not addressed in other texts on deviant behavior.

R.J.F.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Several individuals were instrumental in producing the final product. One of my colleagues, Dr. Lorraine Latimore provided significant insights and materials into updating empirical studies of many theories addressed in this book, in particular strain and social control theories, as was the case for Carolyn Vinyard, a graduate teaching assistant who also played a major role in identifying major and recent empirical tests of deviance and crime theories, especially social learning theories. Meredith Denney, an undergraduate teaching assistant at the time and now a blooming and promising graduate student undertook the tedious duty of researching and then copying journal articles that are used throughout the book. As always, Meredith went above and beyond the call of duty and located additional materials that are cited in the text. Another colleague, Dr. Susan Sharp introduced me to *Feminist Criminology*, a journal she helped to establish, and by doing so expanded the horizons and coverage of feminist theories addressed in the book. Last are Virginia Franzese-Olin, my daughter and Rick Fry, artist extraordinaire who painstakingly and with great patience helped immensely with computer-related typing and graph/chart issues. Corey Helms and Dr. Craig St. John are deserving of mention. Corey is an outstanding undergraduate student who undertook the difficult task of indexing. As the Chair of the Department of Sociology, Dr. St. John provided me with resources essential to completing the book. The contributions of the above individuals are deeply appreciated and bigger than what I have stated in this brief paragraph. A special thanks goes to my wife Patty who encouraged and supported me throughout the writing of this book, not to mention throughout my entire professional career.



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# **THE SOCIOLOGY OF DEVIANCE**



## **Section 1**

# **BACKGROUND**





## Chapter 1

### THE NATURE OF DEVIANCE

#### CASE STUDY: THE HUTTERITES

Occasionally, societies experience the settlement of successful communal organizations, or subcultures. Over the years the United States has seen the emergence of numerous communes, and to this day few exist. However, several communal organizations have survived and even flourished. One such group is known as the Hutterites, one of three Anabaptist religious communes with origins in central Europe who immigrated to North America in search of religious freedoms during the nineteenth century. Most of the 30,000 Hutterites in North America reside in Canada, and some communes dot the plains of the north central states, such as North and South Dakota.

The Hutterites are an agricultural-based society which partially explains their success and durability. With total focus and in-depth attention of each commune on farming as the major economic mode of production, the communes are well-known for their successful harvests and acquisition of adequate financial resources and security. Notwithstanding, one of the most important values of the Hutterites is communal ownership of wealth as opposed to individual hoarding of wealth, power and income. In this respect

the Hutterites have been referred to as the “Christian Communists of Canada.”

The Hutterites adhere to rigid understanding of the bible, meaning they interpret it literally. From this derives all of the values and practices so deeply followed by the group, including traditional sex roles and corporal punishment for misbehaving children. In respect to traditional sex roles the Hutterites maintain sex role segregation relative to work, family structure and power in the communes. Men undertake physical labor associated with farming and other outside-type chores, while women cook, sew, shop, and take on the primary responsibilities of child-rearing. In addition, Hutterite male and female dress reflects their strong preoccupation with avoiding sins of the flesh, since women wear long dresses that reveal no skin, and they wear head coverings. Male dress is also conservative and like that of women does not vary from man-to-man. All of this spills over to male leadership in each commune, where elected male elders make the major business and religious decisions. Women in essence are in the background and are not allowed an equal status with men.

Although there is evidence of change most Hutterite communes stress education up to but ending with high school. Mastery of the three “r’s,” reading, writing and arith-

metic is the focus of Hutterite education, along with Hutterite religious and cultural education. Some modern communes allow gifted individuals to matriculate to college but this is rare. Experiencing the outside world does occur with Hutterites especially when they go into neighboring towns on business, but to encourage the young to attend college is seen by most Hutterites as a threat to their traditions and lifestyles. Attending colleges or universities would expose young Hutterites to the very issue of greatest concern for their salvation: sins of the flesh. What is more, Hutterites youth might be more likely to leave the life once they found more about the outside world, its opportunities, and many diversions.

Hutterite life appears simple and uncomplicated. Dress style is the same for men and for women, and homes do not allow pictures on the walls, even pictures of flowers or mountains, because once again this is considered worldly and antithetical to Hutterite interpretation of the bible. So day by day, year after year, Hutterite life and culture remains essentially unchanged, centered around religious dogma, farming, and a quiet, peaceful existence.

### **Deviance Defined**

Consider this for a moment: a way of life in twenty-first century America that embraces sex role inequality, and communal as opposed to individual acquisition of wealth. Add to this a very strict adherence to the bible and living miles away from the modern social world with no televisions, radios, DVD players or Ipods. The questions for you may be “what do I make of this” and “would I trade places with the Hutterites” (or would they switch lifestyles with us).

Our first impression may be that the Hutterites are weird or strange, or just not with it. We may even question their mental

health. However, we are reminded that they have chosen to live a much secluded way of life, one reminiscent of the nineteenth century. This type of example is the essence of the study of deviance since sociologists interested in this field often find themselves studying people and lifestyles much different than what most of us have experienced, *or will ever experience*. The study of deviance is the study of differences, and in this book the definition of deviance presented is atypical of those found in other similar texts, and which has been offered by other sociologists. Here deviance is defined in terms of *differences*, with the full definition “*deviance is the differences in behaviors, values, attitudes, lifestyles, and life choices among individuals and groups.*” What separates this definition from others is its lack of value judgment that can emanate from the word deviance itself. Deviance implies a value judgment, and begs the question “according to who?” To say the Hutterites are different means something much different than to identify them as deviant. “Deviance” is a label and carries with it the potential for stigmatizing individuals and groups.

### ***Multiple Definitions of Deviance***

Listed are definitions of deviance that have been offered over the years. These are presented here for the purpose of contrast, with each other and with the definition to be employed in this text. The definitions are those that were developed by major scholars in the study of deviance.

**Ronald Akers:** We consider here only behavior which deviates in a disapproved direction. More specifically, attention is directed primarily to instances of disapproved behavior considered serious enough to warrant major societal efforts to control them, using strong negative sanctions or treatment-corrective techniques. (1977:11)

**Howard S. Becker:** The deviant is one to whom the label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label. (1963: 9)

**Kai T. Erickson:** Deviance is not a property inherent in certain forms of behavior. It is properly conferred upon these forms by the audiences which directly or indirectly witness them. (1962: 308)

**Robert K. Merton:** . . . deviant behavior refers to conduct that departs significantly from the norms set for people in their social statuses. (1966: 805)

**John Kitsuse:** Forms of behavior per se do not differentiate deviants from non-deviants; it is the responses of the conventional and conforming members of the society who identify and interpret behavior as deviant which sociologically transforms persons into deviants. (1962: 253)

**John A. Humphrey:** In short, the process of defining behaviors as deviant or not, and the public response to the act and the actor established a boundary between acceptable and unacceptable behavior in a given society. Norms and values have been established; social organization and culture have been defined. (2006:6).

**Marshall B. Clinard and Robert F. Meier:** Deviance constitutes departures from norms that draw social disapproval such that the variations elicit, or are likely to elicit, if detected, negative sanctions. (2004: 6)

**Alex Thio:** Deviant behavior, we may say, is any behavior considered deviant by public consensus, which may range from the maximum to the minimum. (2006: 12)

### Commonalities Across the Definitions

Although the above definitions of deviance are different from one another, there are some striking similarities among them. First, there is concern for behavior, or behavior that departs from social norms, or societal approved ways of doing things. Of

course, in the study of deviance something must be earmarked in order for there to be purpose to the field of study, and this is usually behavior. Second, several authors use the words “applied,” “conferred,” and “transforms” as indication that those considered deviant become so through social processes and communication. In these definitions there is an almost mystical or religious conversionary notion, in as much as the deviant is “anointed” as such by others, for whatever reasons. Third, societal reaction emerges from the definitions through use of phrases or words such as “label,” “control,” “social disapproval,” and “sanctions”. The implication here, and it is ubiquitous among students of deviance, is that much of what is considered deviant is about *reaction*, or recognition of behaviors that stand out and are annoying, disturbing, and even threatening to people.

### Student Definitions

For years the author of this text has asked students enrolled in his deviance classes to offer their own meanings of deviance. Normally this is done as an “ice breaker,” and as the opening activity in the class. Listed are some of these definitions and they are unedited, meaning they are presented as given in class.

- Any form of behavior that is not socially, culturally or economically accepted.
- Deviance is an action that is consider not acceptable to society.
- Deviance is anything a person can do that another sees as wrong.
- Any behavior outside the social norm.
- What you do when you want to be out of the ordinary-mix things up.
- Any thought, behavior or action that is immoral or lawful.
- Immoral and unethical actions against norms of society.

- Any behavior that can potentially be harmful.
- An act a person commits that a society reacts to negatively.
- Acting as a rebel.

Students quite often define deviance in terms of violations of social norms, and they also see deviance as representing immorality. However, as a semester evolves, quite often students will broaden their horizons, implying they understand the meaning of deviance from multiple perspectives.

### Models of Deviance

Deviance can be conceptualized in a number of ways, and two such conceptualizations are presented in this section. The first is a model developed by Alex Thio, a leading contemporary scholar in the study of deviance. The second model was developed by Ruth Shonle Cavan some decades ago, and is a model designed to apply to juvenile delinquency. Cavan's bell-shaped curve method of understanding delinquency is adaptable to the study of deviance.

Alex Thio (2006) has posited an idea that divides the way sociologists study deviance into two distinct categories: the positivist and constructionist perspectives. Thio's conceptualization is both interesting and instructive in that it sheds significant light on the challenges involved in *defining* deviance, as well as issues involved in the ways that sociologists go about *studying* deviant behavior.

The *positivist perspective* owes its origins to early sociology, and assumes a scientific stance to understanding deviance. From this perspective deviance can and must be examined and understood using the research methods available to social scientists, such as field and survey research. Positivists argue (when studying deviance) it is the responsibility of sociologists to discern the causes

and consequences of deviant conduct. The positivist perspective has three elements or parts: *absolutism*, *objectivism* and *determinism*. *Absolutism* means deviance is real in the social world; the behavior does exist and is worthy of study. Using an example, if marijuana smoking is a topic to be studied, the person doing the research does not question whether or not it's deviant: he or she just goes on and studies it, period. *Objectivism* is an old idea of science, involving the notion that behavior is observable, or measurable. In other words, if it can be sensed, it can be studied. *Determinism* is to be understood to mean deviance has causes that must be unraveled, requiring the development of theories that explain the behavior (2006: 5–8).

The *constructionist perspective* takes a very different, if not diametrically opposite position as that just discussed. This conceptualization assumes the position that nothing is deviant unless it is *defined* as such, or *nothing in-and-of itself is deviant*. Thus using the marijuana example from before, constructionists argue that smoking pot is only illegal or deviant because it has been *defined that way* and, in short, some people clearly do not lend it approval. Similar to the positivist perspective, constructionism has three elements: *relativism*, *subjectivism* and *voluntarism*. *Relativism* concerns *labels and labeling*. It is the notion individuals become labeled by others, with the labels originating from definitions or connotations of deviance developed in society. Consequently, the marijuana smoker who gets caught smoking pot or is known to be engaged in the use of the drug may become labeled as a deviant. *Subjectivism* is the opposite of objectivism, and implies that the way to knowing the social world comes from immersing oneself in it, therefore if a social scientist wanted to understand marijuana smoking, this would entail the need to be in the presence of those smoking pot. There is an underlying assum-