
Deviance and deviant behaviour in society

What is deviance and what does it mean to be deviant?

Deviant behavior in terms of broad social conditions is constantly changing. Deviance is not just a matter of numbers nor is what is less common. Deviant acts are not necessarily against the law but are considered abnormal and may be regarded as immoral rather than illegal. An act is deviant because most would consider it immoral rather than criminal because it is not against the laws of that jurisdiction. Other acts of deviance are not necessarily immoral but are considered strange and violate social norms.

Social norms are behaviors accepted by either a significant group of people or those with the power to enforce. These types of deviant acts are meaningful though not considered to be criminal under a legal definition. While some aspects of personality may be inherited, psychologists largely see personality as a matter of socialization and deviance as a matter of improper socialization. Individuals participating in these types of acts may exhibit a tendency toward antisocial behavior often linked to criminal behavior. While there is value in both biological and psychological approaches, each is limited in their explanation of deviance for they only understand deviance as a matter of abnormality and do not answer the question of why the things that are deviant are considered deviant in the first place. Additionally, many jurisdictions are moving to have these deviant behaviors declared illegal while others are doing the opposite to have longer considered illegal.

Is knowing/agreeing upon what is and isn't deviant behavior important for society? Why or why not?

Social control is an attempt to regulate people's thoughts and behaviors in ways that control, or punish, deviance. These negative sanctions are negative social reactions to deviance. The opposite, are positive sanctions that are affirmative reactions that are usually in response to conformity. Formal sanctioning of deviance occurs when norms are codified into law, and violation almost always results in negative sanctions from the criminal justice system. Sociologist Jackson Toby proposed a theory of delinquency claiming that such tendencies toward deviance were shared equally among all individuals. Furthermore, Toby's concept of a stake in conformity may serve to explain what prevents most people from committing a crime.

The stake in conformity is the extent to which individuals are willing to risk by breaking the law or invested in traditional society standards. Agreeing on what is considered deviant behavior is

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important because studies have shown that stake in conformity is one of the most influential factors in an individual's decision to offend. Individuals who have nothing to lose are more likely to take risks and violate norms than those who have relatively more invested in traditional standards. Functionalists and sociologists believe that deviance can have positive functions for society and plays an important role in society, such as being used to challenge people's views.

Emile Durkheim concluded that deviance is an essential component of any strong society. He argued that deviance can serve two necessary functions. It keeps a society stable by defining the boundaries of acceptable behavior to promote integration by causing people to feel that they belong to the group or society that supports those norms. Durkheim also noted that when deviance is punished, societies are made aware of what is acceptable and reaffirms current social norms, which equally contributes to society.

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