Social Interaction: Conformity, Deviance and Crime

Deviance or Deviant Behavior

Conformity leads to social constructions known as norms (discussed previously). Without conformity norms fail to direct social interaction.

Discuss Prohibition and public rejection of artificial norm enacted legally but which failed to gain public acceptance.

Deviance involves behavior that violates norms. The norms violated may be morés, customs, or folkways. The perceived level seriousness of the deviant behavior depends on the type of norm violated and the social significance of the norm.

These actions or activities outside of cultural norms or expectations assume many forms. Examples given by students in class: Burglary, murder, rape, child molestation, alcoholism, smoking marijuana. In 1975 homosexuality was consistently identified in surveys as being the number 1 deviant behavior; in our class it wasn't even included in the examples given by students. Conclusion: Norms can, and do, change.
Deviant behavior is, therefore, relative within a society. But deviant behavior, or deviance, if perceived is **stigmatized** and negative values or connotations are assigned to the individual(s) engaging in the behavior. Fear of the effects of stigmatization may or may not preclude deviant behavior.

There are seven (7) specific paths, means or ways to be deviant or to engage in deviant behavior, etc:

1) actually engage in observable behavior that is perceived as deviant
   - drag queens
   - bikers
   - transvestites
2) fail to engage in behavior that is expect and is perceived of as normal
   - internet story
   - Mike story
3) be falsely accused of deviance or deviant behavior -- the label may stick
   - child day care stories
4) hold deviant ideology
   - register to vote as a Communist in America
   - NAMBLA (this also includes path 1)
5) associate with persons considered deviant in their behavior
   - model story

6) defend deviance, or deviant behavior, on the part of others (Disneyland lawsuit story)
   - Disney litigation story

7) be subject to an involuntary state of being
   - have a bad case of acne that makes you stand out from everyone else
   - have enormous breasts (without augmentation surgery)
   - be bald if you are female (due to sickness, or like Sinead O’Conner)

Deviance is defined in accordance with the context in which the behavior occurs and the perception, by the particular society, of the behavior. For example, in some tribal societies females baring their breasts in public is not perceived as being deviant. In America such behavior would be considered deviant.

Those Engaging in Deviance are Plagued by Stereotypic Assumptions: part of the perception and assessment process in determining deviance and deviant behavior:
1) Exaggeration - perception of deviance tends to focus on the extreme example: consider an alcoholic; there are various levels of public display of alcoholism as shown on the scale below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>minimal</th>
<th>extreme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>occasional excessive drinking</td>
<td>always drunk and homeless</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2) Centrality - the deviant behavior is perceived to be central to the deviant's life style and identity

3) Persistence - is is presumed that the deviant behavior has persisted, and will continue, over a long period of time

4) disjunctiveness - actions or a state of being that cause a coming apart or fracturing within society

5 & 6) homogeneity / clustering - the presumption that all engaging in a particular deviant behavior are the same and that their individual indicators of deviance are held in common
Perception is essential to all deviance and it is through perception that society determines and define: Levels of Deviance - in accordance with Interactionist and Labeling Theory

(Edward Lemert and Howard S. Becker)

1) **Primary**: the deviant(s) do not perceive the behavior as deviant; this may be because there is little or no notice or condemnation of the behavior from others, therefore they believe the behavior is acceptable or permissible.

2) **Secondary**: the deviant(s) is (are) confronted by a person or institution attempting to label the behavior engaged in as deviant. For example, a person arrested on a DUI may, in fact, be alcoholic, and the DUI arrest requires confrontation with the problem on a formal basis; or, a spouse or other nuclear family member may confront a drinker with evidence that the deviance is disrupting family or social function; this process of "labeling" (based on Labeling Theory) is typically resisted by the deviant.

3) **Tertiary / Career deviance**: the label of deviance, totally ignored or denied at the primary level, and resisted at the secondary level is now accepted and embraced.
Deviant behavior is deviant because of its relativity to normal social function and social perception.

**PERSPECTIVES AND THEIR PRIMARY THEORIES**

**Functionalists:**
-- Creates Social Cohesion; clarifies boundaries
-- Results from Structural Strain, thus promoting unity
-- Emerges when social bonds are diminished

Theories: Structural Strain is biggest; established norms vs. tools available

**S.I.**

-- Deviance is learned; reinforced through group membership
-- Results, is present, only when labeled
-- Created by people in positions of power and authority
Theories: Differential Association and Labeling (Saints and Roughnecks; Chambliss) are largest

Conflict Theory

-- Dominant classes control the definitions and the sanctions
-- Results from social inequality, including class, race and gender
-- Elite deviance under reported and under/un-punished

Theories: Social Control: Groups, and individuals within groups brought into conformity through dominant social expectations

How, then, does the deviant account for and adapt to his/her deviance?

Erich Goode tells us there are three processes for "neutralizing" the stigma associated with deviance and engaging in deviant behavior:
1) **Exceptionalization**: "I did what you say, but what I did was just a part of my normal behavior. I was really drunk on Friday night and on the last few occasions you saw me, but I'm really not an alcoholic. I just enjoy drinking. Other people who drink as much as I do might be alcoholics, but I'm not."

2) **Normalization**: "My behavior is normal; it's the rest of the world that is out of step."

3) **Excusing**: "There was nothing wrong with what I did. It may have been unusual, but it was necessary due to extenuating circumstances. My neighbor's dog was barking too much and they wouldn't silence it, so it was OK for me to shoot it."

**Sykes and Matza Techniques of Neutralization:**

-- Denial of Responsibility: i.e. random accident; billiard balls on the pool table of life

-- Denial of Injury: Wasn’t wrong because no one was hurt

-- Denial of a Victim: Person hurt deserved what they got, brought it on themselves
-- Condemnation of the Condemner: Call those labeling the deviance to be hypocrites; deny their authority to judge or accuse others because of their own shortcomings, inadequacies or own deviance.

Quick references to the text:

Deviance is any behavior that violates accepted social norms and expectations, and in response to which there are likely to be negative sanctions when the behavior is detected. Deviance is a) probabilistic (probably subject to negative sanctions when perceived), b) subjective (determined by people's perceptions), and c) relative (based on social context)

**But, are there positive aspects to deviance?**

a) discuss Rosa Parks and the civil rights movement

b) Vietnam war protests

c) women’s movement

gay rights movement
Crime - The Most Destructive Manifestation of Deviant Behavior?

Deviance is behavior outside of norms; crime is deviant behavior in violation of specific norms that have been codified. Why does crime occur?

Sociological Perspectives -

Differential Association (Edwin Sutherland) - Society includes many subcultures, some social environments (communities?) encourage illegal activities; most do not. Criminal practices are developed through association with carriers of criminal norms - CRIMINAL SUBCULTURE

Structural Strain and Anomie (Robert Merton) - accepted norms in conflict with social reality; example: work hard and get nowhere. Deviance occurs in response to economic inequalities and frustrations.

Labeling Theory (Howard Becker; previously discussed in primary, secondary deviance) - crime is only crime when society labels it as such. No act is intrinsically deviant; acts are defined as deviant based on legal definitions enacted by the rich and powerful
Rational Choice (Cornish and Clark) - purposeful acts based on benefits derived through deviant behavior

DISCUSS RELATIVE LEVELS OF CRIME AND BASIS/INCIDENCE BASED ON ECONOMICS, RACE AND ETHNICITY: WHITE COLLAR, BLUE COLLAR, ORGANIZED ETC.

CHECK OUT STATS ON TRANSPARENCIES -- HOW POWERFUL ARE THE ECONOMIC FORCES THAT UNDERLIE THE PROBLEM?

Punishment

Sociological perspectives vary - Prisons (isolates but absolutely does NOT deter), Community Policing (police/public estrangement; can community involvement help/deter?), Shaming (really solidly based in labeling theory); what really works?