

# Understanding society and perspectives of defiance criminology essay



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The term “ deviance” is used by sociologists to refer to behaviour which changes, in some way, from a social norm. In this respect, it is clear that the idea of deviance refers to a violation of social norms and refers to rule breaking behaviour. Deviance refers to those actions which go against the norms, values and beliefs of ordinary culture. For example, drinking alcohol at the age of 16. In relation to deviance, the idea relates to all kinds of rule-breaking which involves such things as murder, theft, rape or wearing unsuitable clothing for a given social situation. Many sociologists have given their own definition of deviance. “ Some sociologist conceive of deviance as a collection of conditions, persons or acts that society disvalue” (Sagarin, 1975, 9) There are various perspectives in Sociology such as the functionalist theories and Karl Marxist theories which asks different questions and focuses on different issues regarding deviance. In order to answer the question above it is necessary to outline and discuss the sociological perspectives on deviance. I will be discussing the main perspectives of deviance throughout sociology.

Functionalism is defined as a “ Framework that conceptualises society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability” (Macionis and Plummer, 1997. p. 19-20). Functionalism has grown through the work of many sociologists including Durkheim and later on by Brown and Merton, The works of these sociologists was based on a biological scientific model called “ organic system-comparison of social operations to that of a living organism” (Giddens, 2001. 16) Functionalist theorists, including Durkheim, state crime as having a social role. Others, including

Merton, state the strain between socialized aims and reality as the true cause of crime.

Functionalist Emile Durkheim believed that societies are held together by shared values and economic dependence. He thinks that society would crumble if principles are not passed from one generation to another. A vital function of society is the preservation of its values, which is done through education and religion. The concept of anomie was introduced by Emile Durkheim which suggested that " In modern societies, traditional norms and standards become undermined without being replaced by new ones". (Giddens, 2009, 941). This is the breakdown of society, and will lead to social disorder, deviance and violence. Durkheim also argues that deviance is useful and necessary in society. It helps to strengthen the consensus of values, norms and behaviour of the majority non-deviant population, through the idea of anger at crime which reinforces social solidarity. Other theorists, including Erikson who argues that influential groups within any society are able to impose their views upon the majority by a process of ideological manipulation. " The excitement generated by the crime quickens the tempo of interaction in a group and creates a climate in which the private sentiments of many people are fused into a common sense of morality."(Bean, 2003, 24).

However, Robert Merton criticised Durkheim's idea of anomie as being unclear. Merton argued that anomie is a state where the socially approved goals of society are not available to a significant amount of the population if they followed socially approved means of obtaining these goals. According to Merton, people turned to deviance in this state because there is anxiety <https://assignbuster.com/understanding-society-and-perspectives-of-defiance-criminology-essay/>

between what people have socialised to want and what they are able to achieve through legitimate means.

Robert Merton, who also accepted the view of functionalists who believed that society, must have certain features to survive. He argues that both goals and constraints on behaviour are socially based, and that desires are socially copied, from socialisation, into cultural goals such as work-related status or financial achievement. Merton's theory on deviance, which is known as the Strain Theory, is a development of Durkheim's ideas of anomie and culture. Anomie, in Merton's perspective, can occur when people are not capable to follow the main norms within a society." Some individuals adapt by becoming ritualises, conforming to society norms without any expectations of achieving them". (Clinard, 2001, 5) Merton argues that individuals are socialized into wanting success, wealth, status and power. When they are unable to achieve this, it results in a strain between what we want, and what we can get. One possible response to the strain theory is deviance through innovation (deviant and criminal behaviour resulting to crime), retreatism (backing out of socially desirable behaviour, for example, alcoholics, drug addicts), Ritualism (ignoring goals of society) and rebellion (rejection of goals and means, but an attempt to replace them with alternative values).

Merton's analysis on deviance suggests that deviant behaviour is efficient. First, for the people involved, it allows them to adjust to the situation in which they find themselves in. Merton sees these responses as useful to the society as they help to release the anxiety, therefore maintain the social system stability. However, Merton was criticised by Valier, amongst others, <https://assignbuster.com/understanding-society-and-perspectives-of-defiance-criminology-essay/>

for his importance on the continuation of a common goal in society. Valier argues that there are a range of goals that people struggle to attain at any one time

Feminist approach have also criticised functionalism for not explain on conflict, also not considering it to be an “ integral part of the social world” (Dominelli, 1997. p. 17). Feminist also argues that this supports and explains structures which have a tendency to be male dominated and in so ignoring the past and women contributions to the society.

In conclusion, it can be argued that Functionalist theories do certainly go a long distance in justifying the reasons for Deviance. However, it is overly deterministic in the view of society and the way in which it shapes and forms human behaviour. However, it should argued that Functionalist theories are useful in explaining and deviance, In terms of civil theories or triangulation and procedural pluralism to stable out the problems and challenges linked with Functionalist theory.

Sub cultural theories on deviance were developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s from the Albert Cohen and Richard Cloward. They stressed that people respond to forces which are outside to them. This therefore leads them to behave in different ways. Their behaviour is explained by social causes. Sub cultural theorists have tried to seek the causes of these differences.

Subculture theories claim to have recognized break downs in the social order. These break downs are seen to be rectifiable by dissimilar types of social engineering e. g. Social reform, social welfare and education.

According to interactionist theories of deviance, they make fundamental ideas of deviance in terms of there being no such as deviant act. They place firm importance on reaction. Interactionist put forward useful idea such as labelling, self-fulfilling prophecy, and mortification and primary and secondary deviance. They are significant of the functionalist and subculture theories of deviance. Interactionists argue that human action is original. Humans create roles in relation to and adjustment to others.

American Sociologist Edwin Lemert, argues that public reaction is a cause of deviance. Lemert starts by explaining between primary and secondary deviance. Primary deviance is deviance before it is openly labelled; it has a number of likely causes and is not worth looking at given that the samples are unfair and it has no impact on the individual, therefore it does not strain status or activities. The general factor among deviants, argues Lemert, is the process of labelling. The public response to the deviant leads to secondary deviance, the response of the deviant to public labelling. Lemert claims that secondary deviance should be the focal point of study because of its result on the individual. The vital idea is that societal reaction can in fact cause deviant behaviour.

The Labelling theorists are another approach in sociology which views the point of seeing deviance from the view of the deviant individual. They claim that when a person becomes known as a deviant, and is expected to have deviant behaviour, it is to do with the way they have been labelled, as the deviant act they are said to have committed. The labelling theory realises that certain acts labelled as deviant are more than likely to be carried out by certain types of people. If society labels a person as a criminal or as deviant

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there is much evidence that this label sticks with the person to the extent that he believes that they are deviant.

So to satisfy society they carry out the role of a deviant to the degree that they are fitting in with what they observe is their role in life or in the society. This makes a great impact on their life, as they need someone to help them to see that they are not deviant or a criminal. If a person becomes a criminal then society need to recognise this and help the person to overcome this, by offering support or counselling to make it aware to the person that this behaviour is not acceptable and if they continue it will lead to them not achieving.

However the main criticism of labelling theory is that it is deterministic, and that it makes the person as if they were not human, which then leads to certain behaviour by the act of labels being given to it, and following behaviour patterns as a result of behaviour patterns that go with it..

The Marxist approach has been one of the most vital approaches in explaining deviant behaviour. They mostly base their ideas and theories on how the powerful people control the society which influences how the society works today. The definition of deviance from a Marxist perspective is a conflict between powerful and less powerful groups. " Definitions of deviance then emerge from class conflicts between powerful groups and less powerful groups". (Clinard, 2002, 118) Marxists believes that working class males of a younger age commit most crime mainly due to the media which emphasize ideas of greed into people. Therefore, results in a materialistic capitalist system that may force working people of a lower class to commit crime as

they have a lower income and may not be able to afford certain equipment such as clothes like the rest of the society.

Marxism criticizes a capitalist society where by the productions are owned by the ruling class and the lower class. The bourgeoisie are the ruling class, whilst the proletariats are seen as the lower class. " The bourgeoisie act as a societies ruling class. The proletariats, on the other hand, fill the ranks of the ruled end of society." (Clinard and Meier, 2008, 77)

The idea of deviance came when Marx attempted to look for something in the world that caused conflicts. He found it in the idea of class struggle. Throughout the past, we have fought against each other for the control of food, shelter, money. Marxists mainly focus on the class distribution and empathises that the ruling class control the norms and values of the society. Therefore, it will not be classed as deviant unless the bourgeoisie say so. The bourgeoisie will only class deviant unless it is committed by a working class person.

However, the Marxist approach in terms of explaining deviant behaviour is only consistent to some degree. Along with the challenges from other perspectives, it shows that improvements can be added to their ideas. Marxists mostly focuses on the class distribution and argue that they the ruling class manage the norms and values of the society. It will not be classed as deviant if the bourgeoisie say so and they will not say so if a working class person commits it.

Finally In conclusion to sociological perspectives of deviance, they all give an account of some explanation to deviance and give their point of view.  
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However, it varies depending on the various approaches. For an act to be thought to as deviance it varies from place to place and from time to time