

# Free research paper on sociology of deviance

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## - Introduction and Thesis Statement

Sociologists believe that both deviance and race are things that have been socially constructed in the society and have been embedded in people's way of life (Innes, 2003, p. 34). Deviance attributes to the actions of one defiling the social norms engrained in the society, which causes one to be marginalized in a given society. Race is also a social construct of the society based on one's phenotype, which often results to the stereotypes of certain people in the society (Lemelle, 1995, p. 56). This paper will discuss how race impacts deviance behavior and sparks a social response by looking at different sociological theories that explain deviance. The paper will focus on what brings out or contributes to the deviance behavior through looking at a number of theories that describe deviant behavior based on the minority race.

Goode writes that deviance is an individual's behavior and characteristics that often is contrary to the society's norms. As a result, this behavior is often resented and punishable by the social institutions that instill law and order in a given community (Goode, 1994, 28-9). For example, when an individual commits a crime or disobeys their parents, the individual is deviant to the measures and standards of the society. It is crucial to note that deviant characteristics and personalities grow gradually. A behavior is characterized as deviant if the actions represent hostility or undermines the social norms engrained in the larger society (Humphrey, 2006, p. 53). When an individual is delinquent they violate the social environment they are surrounded by and arouse a social reaction. Social reaction may be classified as one being given a warning or members of the community seeking help

from social institutions such as the law court or the police officers.

Sociologists such as Lemert believe that an act of deviance may be as a result of an unintended accident or a provoked reaction from fear, defense, or retaliating to the enemy (Lemert, 1971, p. 37). In addition, an individual can use a deviant act when one has been victimized or when one's human rights and freedoms are undermined. This shows that there are many characteristics that invoke a deviant behavior that is invoked when an individual feels violated. Lemert also argues that deviant behavior can result from one's background and the family structure (Lemert, 1971, p. 37-8). This means that a family structure filled with conflict, abuse, neglect, deviant parents among other things mould an individual to have a deviant behavior. In a household filled with violence, one has to become deviant to the society as a whole because they have been socialized from their family households to be delinquent (Cohen, 2004, p. 65).

#### - Deviance and Race

Given that deviance is often linked with one's social class and racial profiling. In the US the black people are often associated with crime because they occupy the lower quintile in the American social class. This means that crime is one of the society's deviances but often associated with the African American community (Tepperman, 2006, p. 103). According to the labeling theory, deviance not only applies to people breaking the social norms and rules but also how the society responds to certain behaviors. Stereotypes arise when the society makes a deviant label to a given community of people (Innes, 2003, p. 123). Given that the African Americans are mainly associated with crime in the US, it has resulted to the society tagging most

black males as criminals. According to statistics, the African American account for 33% of the crimes in the US whereas white people account for 60% of the crimes (Innes, 2003, p. 93). This indicates that the African American community has less criminal activities compared to the White Americans but the latter are often stereotyped as criminals. These extreme social disparities contribute to delinquent behavior to a particular race. The African Americans have less power in the society and are the subordinate group, which explain why they have a deviant label in that they cannot influence the greater society (Lemelle, 1995, p. 45).

Media has also become a part and parcel of building stereotypes that promote delinquent behavior among the minority race (Humprey, 2006, p. 73). Media has become a precursor of promoting social stratification in the community by painting the poor communities, including people of color, as where the rate of crimes is high. In most gang violence scenario, people of color are often depicted as the perpetrators which builds on the stereotypic remarked engrained in the community (Humprey, 2006, p. 75). In addition, the media exaggerates some of the violence crimes in that the media reports many instances of people of color as the offenders and rarely as the victims of an act of violence. Thus, instances of deviance of a particular race are spread by the media because it regales the public with gang violence stories.

Another factor that promotes acts of deviance is poverty. Poverty drives people to be delinquent to the societal values in that people turn to criminal activities such as burglary and drug trafficking in order to find income. This is because the poor cannot afford enough money to sustain themselves

because they do not have a given prestige or social class in the society. It is crucial to note that violent crimes such as theft and burglary are associated to people who live in the ghettos or the African Americans because the society labels them as not hardworking and a violent population. This negative attribute is associated with poor minorities in that they are marginalized, experience high unemployment levels, and are forced to assimilate and integrate into the society. It is crucial to note that the African Americans do not have the same opportunities as the white population because most of them live in poverty relative to the white population. Thus, they cannot afford a good quality education. Thus, African Americans believe that overall social norms are advantageous to one race, the white population. The minority groups tend to deviate from mainstream norms because they experience a negative effect in terms of disparities in healthcare, income, and occupation among other things. This means that a redistribution of socio-economic aggregates would help reduce the delinquent behavior.

The rich and the elite in the society can also be deviant by getting involved in the white collar crimes ((Tepperman, 2006, p. 114). The wealthy turn to corporate criminals because they have accrued enough capital to influence different agencies and constitutions. For example, the rich who control big oil companies are responsible for the negative externalities. Destruction of the environment by dumping hazardous materials puts people's health at a risk or embezzling funds. This means that the rich can also be affiliated with deviant behaviors (Humphrey, 2006, p. 116). However, it is important to note that wealth gives one a sense of power and pride. Thus, the wealth can

exploit and influence institutions in that the rich and powerful companies can dump toxic materials in poor neighborhoods. This is because the rich have power and prestige over the poor in the society.

Racism has also been identified as a significant impact on deviance and conflict. Given that most racial minorities such as the Africans Americans and the American Indians were marginalized in the society because the white populations believed that they were savages. Thus, when the Africans Americans and the American Indians resisted assimilation to the white supremacy in the society, they reacted through launching warfare against the dominant race, whites (Tepperman, 2006, p. 168). Though the African Americans and Americans Indians were justifiable to fight against oppression and exploitations, their behaviors is defined as deviant according to the social institutions, government, implemented at that time.

- Theories that explain deviance in the society

Given that the deviant labeling is significant in the society, prejudice and discrimination are integrated in the society way of life. Becker believes that an individual's behavior is brought about by when an individual internalizes the label that the society had tagged them (Becker, 1994, p. 23). The label theory is believed to be a social process that is socially contracted to nurture people into deviants or non-deviants. This means that a deviant label ought to change an individual's personnel or the overall perceptions of an individual (Goode, 1994, p. 69). For example, the self-fulfilling prophesy changes an individual's perception of themselves because the society expects them to be different. This means that when the society labels one to be a criminal, they end up being one to meet the society's expectations.

Thus, the society can facilitate a deviant behavior through stereotyping in that treating an individual as a deviant exacerbates the deviance perception into a reality (Goode, 1994, p. 72). For example, the African Americans are considered to be criminals and violent in the American society thus, these prejudices in the country facilitate them to turn to criminals because the society already expects them to be that way.

Another type of theory that seeks to explain deviance and race is the Sutherland theory (Peterson, 2002, p. 75). According to Sutherland, the act of deviance is initiated through normative and collective behavior. These aggregates determined an individual's characteristics depending on the social environment one is surrounded by. For example, delinquent behavior can be as a result of one's negative experience and values that affects one's belief and nature of their beliefs (Peterson, 2002, p. 76-7). This may be true because one's social environment is of the tools that characterizes our way of thought and behavior. Hence, when an individual has more negative experiences than good, they often resonate with the negative experiences thereby, shaping their moral behavior and activities. For example, if one has been brought up in a rough and violent neighborhood, they have a desire to join other community gangs for protection and also as a means of fitting in to the community.

Sutherland also professes that people have been socialized to believe that street crime is more serious than white collar crime instead of the vice versa. Corporate and government crimes are known as white collar crimes and are more dangerous and injurious to the overall socio-economic performance of the society compared the street crime (Peterson, 2002, p. 105). This has

become a reality in that the wealthy people can be acquainted with serious crimes such as embezzlements of millions of funds, exploiting workers through paying them less than the minimum wage, fraud and false advertising such as the pansy schemes that steal people's money among other things (Humphrey, 2006, p. 91). According to today's culture, these offenses have been treated as subtle compared to street theft such as mere theft. In real sense, the white collar crimes tend to do the society more harm than the street criminal deviance. This illustrates that the elite and wealthy tend to make the decision of what is morally wrong and acceptable in the society (Humphrey, 2006, p. 92). Given that the judicial system tend to be lenient with white collar crimes tells us that the social institutions are driven by selfish interests of the wealthy and the upper class elites. This phenomenon is in tangent with the conflict theory that explains that an individual's socio-economic status and their social classes based on the racial profiling are one of the key factors that contribute to deviance (Peterson, 2002, p. 84). This means that the upper class elite and wealthy people define and make the laws that govern a given society. Conflict theorists believe that the law was enacted to protect the dominant people in the society and inflict fear and suppression to the minority. This form of connotation explains the levels of inequality in the society and also explains why crime rates seem to be higher in poor neighborhoods around the globe (Peterson, 2002, p. 87). This is because criminal laws target the minority because they have minimal power to influence social institutions unlike the wealthy upper class elites. Thus, the act of deviance is biased in that negative behavior is mainly associated with a particular race or the lower



working class quintile and not the wealthy that tend to commit the white collar crimes (Goode, 1994, p. 43).

In addition, the wealthy elite groups are also responsible of the racial segregation in the US in that laws had been enforced to ensure a form of hierarchy in the society. The de facto segregation is still evident today in that there is a huge disparity among races thereby, causing discrimination. According to theorists, discrimination in the society brings about social injustice, which correlates to individuals' delinquency (Goode, 1994, p. 82). As a result, of social injustice makes people of certain races form complex impetus for deviance. For example, ethnic minorities such as the Africans Americans and Hispanics form gangs as a repertoire to the institutionalized racism embedded in the greater society. Given that institutionalized racism is integrated to the society by the upper class elite group, the minorities have to adapt to alternative social norms such as gang violence (Goode, 1994, p. 83). Racial profiling in the society has also incarcerated many African American youths because of their deviant social norms. It is crucial to understand that in Sutherland theory, a particular race tends to turn into delinquency because of negative experiences in that African Americans are marginalized and segregated in the society (Peterson, 2002, p. 118). This is has been facilitated by the upper class elites who tend to instigate disparity among races or social classes.

Sociology of deviance also focuses of Merton's structural theory where he believes that one's success is based on meritocracy and those who cannot achieve the societal goals retreat to acts of deviance (DeKeseredy, 2005, p. 98). This means that Merton believed that one's cultural behavior is linked

towards one's attitudes towards one achieving their goals. One of the things that support one to achieve certain goal is education but it is limited to the wealthy people. However, public education has facilitated the number of elites and raised literacy levels. Merton introduces the term anomie to define people who often feel discontented with society's performance in that they feel undermined by the greater society (Cohen, 2004, p. 89). For example, institutionalized racism makes people of color feel rejected and not part of the greater community as a result of their phenotype. This initiates people of color to act in a deviate way by joining drug trafficking or other acts of criminal activities to achieve financial success. Merton's law argue that acts of criminal violence correlates with social changes that often are beneficial to the upper class elites or a particular race thereby, leaving some people out (Goode, 1994, p. 122).

Given the social institutions such as the society are supposed to help one achieve their goals and not undermine them. This is because the government tends to impose laws that favor one group of people while others are left out (Innes, 2003, p. 102). For example, the occupational structure of the US indicates that the upper white collar jobs are mainly controlled by the wealthy and the elites whereas the lower blue collar jobs are reserved for people who do not have an advanced education. This means that the social institutions single out people depending on one's level of education. As a result, those who cannot afford an education, are stuck below the occupational spectrum in that their skills and knowledge do not match up to the white collar jobs. Thus, many people who can hardly afford an education cannot progress in the society, which makes them adapt to

deviant behavior such as alcoholism (Humphrey, 2006, p. 143). For example, the Native Americans have often been oppressed in the community by being forced to live in reserves and adopt the American way of life by rejecting their cultural identity. This means that the American Indians have been given an ultimatum in that for them to be successful; they have to assimilate to the American culture by throwing away their cultural beliefs (Peterson, 2002, p. 105). In addition, they are undermined as a culture and race, despite being the indigenous people on the US. Thus, most American Indians turn to alcoholism as a way of numbing the pain brought by oppression of the cultural identity. Thus, it is evident that certain people resonate to deviant behavior for comfort from the disparity among individuals in the society. Gordon Allport discusses the contact theory that explains how acts of prejudice and discrimination can be eliminated in the society. Allport believes that a good way to annihilate the prejudices of a given race and the deviance labeling is through the interaction of races (DeKeseredy, 2005, p. 175). It is crucial for the dominant race to be part of eradicating the racial profiles in that the dominant race instigated the racial segregation and acts of stereotyping in the first place. Given that racial profiling may be eradicated from the greater community, social stratification and acts of deviance may disappear (DeKeseredy, 2005, p. 178).

In conclusion, deviance and race are both socially constructed and that both attribute to societal prejudices and stereotypes. A behavior can be characterized as deviant if the actions represent hostility or undermine the social norms engrained in the larger society. On the other hand, Sociologists such as Lemert believe that an act of deviance may be as a result of an

unintended accident or a provoked reaction from fear, defense, or retaliating to the enemy. An individual can also use a deviant act when one has been victimized or when one's human rights and freedoms are undermined.

Deviance is often linked with one's social class and racial profiling. This brings about deviance labeling. Deviance labeling is also a significant factor in studying how deviance and race are interrelated. It is important to note that one's social class is deemed as a key factor in deviance. Given that most African Americans are below the social class hierarchy, they are often associated with criminal activities because of the social prejudices and discrimination. Media has also become a precursor of building stereotypes that promote delinquent behavior among the minority race by affiliating the people of color as offenders and rarely as the victims. This propels as a sense of racial profiling and stereotypes.

There are also theories that explain how racial profiling brings about deviant behavior. Firstly, the label theory is believed to be a social process that is socially constructed to nurture people into deviants or non-deviants. This means that a deviant label ought to change an individual's personality or the overall perceptions of an individual. The society can facilitate a deviant behavior through stereotyping in that treating an individual as a deviant exacerbates the deviance perception into a reality. Secondly, the Sutherland theory believes that the act of deviance is initiated through normative and collective behavior. These aggregates determine an individual's characteristics depending on the social environment one is surrounded by in that negative experiences contribute to a delinquent effect to an individual. For example, when one lives in the ghetto, one develops a violent behavior

for protection. Sutherland also believes in the self-fulfilling prophesy and that the corporate and government crimes are injurious to the society more compared to the street crimes. Merton theory believes that acts of criminal violence correlates with social changes that often are beneficial to the upper class elites or a particular race thereby, leaving some people out.

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