

Compelling and
captivating accounts
in hells angels
sociology essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Hell's Angel is book that gives you the brutal truth about the life after war in America. It gives personal insights to how the sub cultural life in the United States was impacted by the consequences of war. The book isn't intended for the politically sensitive or readers who expect a romantic perspective of the post-war sub-cultural life in America.

It is a compelling and captivating personal account of a Sony Barger's life and the scrapes that he managed to get into. Born in California in the year 1938, Barger spent his younger years growing up in Oakland. This was between the early 1940s and 1950s. His mother abandoned him when he was hardly four months old. Barger lived with an alcoholic father and an elder sister. He relay s that he was suspended from school on more than one occasion for physically attacking teachers and fighting with other students.

However looking back at those times now, Barger states that he doesn't look upon himself as a bully or aberrant person. Despite of losing interest in school he continued to spend a major part of his time reading and working at a grocery store. He emphasizes that he didn't resort to robbery or stealing. When he enlisted in the army in 1955, he was kicked out fourteen years later after it was found that he was underage (sixteen) and had submitted a forged certificate.

His return from the army led him to a few tedious jobs but he didn't continue with them for long. He was on the lookout for a purpose in his life, a reason why he existed and he was to discover with time that his purpose in life would later turn out to be a member of a motorcycle club.

While still in high school Barger organized his first club called “ Earth Angels” in 1954. Two years later, in 1956, he became the founding member of his first bike club namely Oakland Panthers. He left the club as fast as he had managed to make it because he felt a lacking of unity. In his own words said that he quit the club very early even though he was one of the starting members. Although they use to party a lot and he use to love it, but then there more selfishness than brotherhood.

He talked to some fellow bikers about starting another club, and suggested they name it “ Hell’s Angels” after a patch that one of these fellows, Boots Don Reeves wore. The patch had a skull on it wearing an aviator cap and a set of wings. They went along with the idea and got more patches of the same design made in April 1957(Lavigne, 2004).

What is deviance?

“ Deviance in a sociological context describes actions or behaviors that violate cultural norms including formally-enacted rules (e. g., crime) as well as informal violations of social norms (e. g., rejecting folkways and mores). It is the purview of sociologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and criminologists to study how these norms are created, how they change over time and how they are enforced.

Stephen Pfohl has described nine methods of conceiving deviant behavior.”

It is evident from the book that Sonny Barger was totally engaged in deviant behavior. However he failed to perceive his behavior as deviant or unnatural. He was convinced that he was doing “ normal” or socially acceptable things

like reading and working which he believed would balance out his deviant behavior.

The Classical Perspective

The Classical perspective as described by Pfohl was evolved from three major elements:

Rational choice

Deterrence

Incapacitation and Just Desert

The element of personal choice widely influences deviant behavior. People engage in deviant behavior on the basis of what their concept of rationality or rational choice is. Sonny Barger didn't perceive that it was irrational to forge his birth certificate to get enlisted in the army. Why? Because people tend to choose any kind of behavior no matter if it is conforming or deviant, in Barger's case the latter, based on their personal rational calculation. Central to this rational calculation is a cost and benefit analysis. Barger found more pleasure in deviance because it maximized his personal pleasure. Though the classical theory states that "choice can be controlled through the perception and understanding of the potential pain or punishment that will follow an act judged to be in the violation of social good" however Barger's case was different. A complete understanding of the consequences of his act couldn't make him stop what he was doing (Sampson, 1967).

General Deterrence is defined as follows:

“ People will engage in criminal and deviant activities if they do not fear apprehension and punishment.”

Sony Barger’s case if summarized in a line can be defined as that of general deterrence. Since the beginning of his engagement in deviant behavior, he was aware of what the punishment would be but fear of punishment and apprehension didn’t exist in his mind.

The Social Disorganization Theory

This theory is believed to be one of the most important theories put forward by Chicago School. The theory directly linked high crime rates to ecological characteristics of the neighborhood. Young people from disadvantaged neighborhoods were believed to be participants of a subculture where being delinquent were an approved behavior. The youth acquired criminality through a process of social interaction in social and cultural settings.

The social theory stands on the basic principle that the location of an individual is equally important if not more with the age, gender and race of a person in determining whether they would involve themselves in illegal or criminal activities (Anne, 2004).

Taking Sonny Barger and his book into account it is evident from his family life and neighborhood description that he had a strong impact of the both on his personality and life which led him to engage in criminal activities later on in his life. Abandoned by his mother at the age of four months, and

compelled to live with an alcoholic father Barger found solace in his deviant
<https://assignbuster.com/compelling-and-captivating-accounts-in-hells-angels-sociology-essay/>

behavior. Assaulting teachers, forging birth certificates and attacking fellow students at school was all part of what he considered to be normal.

Barger has rejected the conception that Hell's Angels was a criminal organization despite of admitting that its members have had a criminal record, most of us were card-carrying felons. He has admitted the usage of drugs when he said that acid was something we all had in common, selling illegal drug sold heroin from the late sixties into the early seventies directly to junkies, forging driver's licenses was also printing up fake driver's licenses.

The social disorganization theory goes on to say that some ethnicities even tend to encourage criminal activity since it is "not considered criminal or wrong". Research has found that delinquent behavior is highest in those areas that suffer from economic problems. Economic instability and weakness is one of the major drivers of delinquent behavior.

Post World War 2 and in the 1940s and 1950s, Oakland's shipbuilding industry disappeared and a decline in automobile industry was also observed. Jobs became scarce in this situation. The city was one of the six cities in the county that experienced one of the largest strike movements in history. All this led to the economic instability and downfall of the city and its residents. Financial instability and insecurity may have also triggered Sony Barger's behavior of deviance and nonconformance. The lack of sense of protection and security that he faced as a child from his home, led him to constitute a club which had members who believed in supporting the fellow members and being united in even the toughest times. The story of Hell's

Angels Motorcycle club represents the best example of brotherhood in which men can even fight to death for each other without regard what the cause is. They stood up for themselves and they believe to be there no matter what happens.

The Functionalist Perspective

The functionalist perspective was shaped by Harvard sociologist Talcott Parsons during the mid of 20th century. However it has its roots in Emile Durkheim's work. The definition of functionalism is as follows:

Functionalism has a concept that everyone in the society has some kind of purpose, which is the cause of existence.

This school of thought believes that people who are indulging in deviant behavior and nonconformance to societal norms and regulations serve a purpose as important as those who conform to the norms. A widely quoted example to explain this phenomenon is that crime, that is believed to be a nuisance by people all over the globe, is believed to serve a purpose by functionalists. It creates the justification or need of employment of lawmakers, police force, criminal investigators and more. It was concluded by Durkheim that crime and deviance serve three major functions for the society:

Deviant behavior reaffirms social norms. It helps clarify them

It promotes the concept of social unity

It questions or challenges the status quo

If Sony Barger's life and happenings are looked at from the functionalist perspective, it rationalizes his doings. Despite of his denials that Hell's Angels is a criminal organization or that he had engaged into any social and moral wrongdoings, his life's account in the book will help readers realize the importance of conformance to norms. Deviance can prove to be beneficial for the society sometimes. Like in the case of Sony Barger who was convicted of conspiracy to violate federal law to commit murder and served a 4 year sentence in prison, people reading the book will realize how non-conformance will result in a negative repercussion.

Conclusion

In conclusion Sony Barger's book " Hell's Angel, The Life and Times of Sonny Barger and the Hell's Angels Motorcycle Club" are a practical application of some of the major theories that have been analyzed by Stephen Pfohl in " Images of Deviance and control". Stephen Pfohl's work helps one gain a deeper insight on Sony Barger's sociological perceptions and ideology. It helps you understand the reasons or factors that are behind the behavior that was adopted by Barger throughout his life.