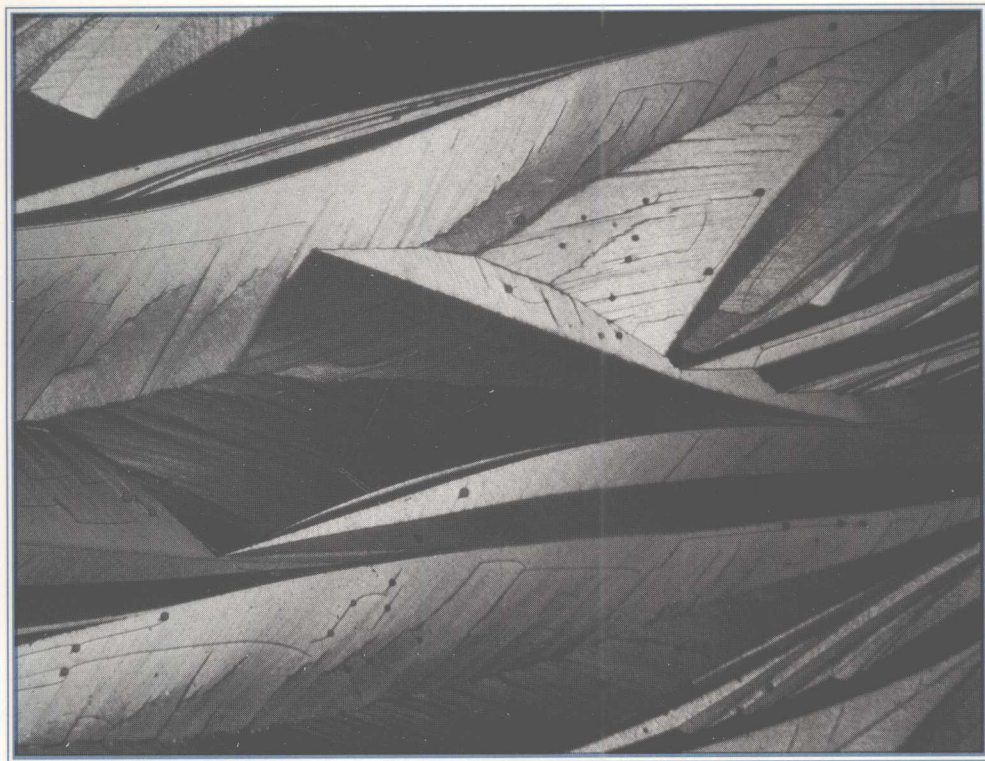


Theories *of* Deviance

FOURTH EDITION

EDITED BY

Stuart H. Traub and Craig B. Little



THEORIES OF DEVIANCE

Fourth Edition

Edited by
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THEORIES OF DEVIANCE

Preface to the Fourth Edition

Our objective in presenting the fourth edition of *Theories of Deviance* is to expose students to theoretical foundation statements from diverse perspectives within sociology. We believe that a large part of the writing and research concerning deviance emanates from a relatively small number of key passages, which ought to be read in the original. We also see substantial value in offering students a varied, as opposed to uniform, theoretical background for the study of deviance. We believe that examination of seminal contributions heightens critical insight and appreciation for the complexities of theory construction, and the selections in the first seven chapters represent what we see as the mainstream approaches in the sociology of deviance. In this edition we also consider some more recent approaches in a new final chapter entitled "New Directions in Deviance Theory."

Because these principles continue to be important to us in our own teaching and in the organization of this edition, many of the readings in prior editions also appear in the fourth. Analysis and Critique sections at the end of each chapter have also been retained to extend the scope and flexibility of the text as a teaching tool. These theoretical critiques expose students to the scholarly debate that is central to the theoretical development of any field, and they tie the perspectives together and help demonstrate the cumulative development of theories of deviance. We have also retained the essay on social structure and anomie from Robert Merton's *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Macmillan, 1968), rather than the more frequently reprinted article of the same title from the *American Sociological Review* (October 1938). In this case, we believe that students can acquire a fuller understanding of anomie theory by reading Merton's more complete formulation of it.

This edition does differ from the third edition in important ways, however. Chapter 8 on new directions includes selections on biology and deviance, the medicalization of deviance, rational choice and routine activity theories, and a feminist analysis of deviance theory. There is also a new selection on a theory of family violence in Chapter V. Selections from Chapters VII and VIII in the third edition have been

combined in a new chapter under the title "Politics and Class in the Study of Deviance." The Introduction to the text and the chapter introductions have all been revised and expanded.

While there is considerable theoretical breadth in the readings selected for the fourth edition of *Theories of Deviance*, we do not think this will confuse students with disorganized eclecticism. The flow of the text follows the development of the sociology of deviance from 19th-century functionalism to the societal reaction school, and the last chapter is devoted to what we perceive to be emerging issues in the literature. In selecting the readings, we have sought to provide students with an opportunity to recognize cross-fertilization, compatibility, and counterpoint among the theorists whose works are represented.

We gratefully acknowledge the authors and publishers who have granted permission for their works to appear in this text. We continue to be indebted to Richard A. Dodder, Richard J. Gelles, and Arnold S. Linsky for their insightful reaction to the selections and chapter introductions in the first edition. In addition, we extend our appreciation to Barry Cohen, Robert G. Dunn, and James D. Orcutt for their reactions and suggestions concerning the second edition. This edition benefited from the comments of Phil Brown, Joseph Harry, Ronald Kramer, and Richard O'Toole. Once again, we express our gratitude to Ted Peacock, publisher, and Gloria Reardon, editor, of F. E. Peacock Publishers for making this latest enterprise a pleasant one for us. Thanks also to Lisa Smith for her assistance in securing author and publisher permissions, as well as to Gilda Haines for carefully typing the manuscript.

Finally, as we have noted in the preceding editions of this text, the order of our names on the cover was decided by a flip of the coin and does not imply that either of us contributed more than the other. Thus, we share equally the responsibility for its success and its shortcomings.

Stuart H. Traub
Craig B. Little

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Introduction

Explaining why some members of a society deviate from its commonly accepted rules, or norms, seems always to have fascinated students of society. Plato apparently wrote *The Republic* to explain the aberrant behavior of many Athenians, which he interpreted as symptomatic of an underlying social pathology.¹ From this early utopian treatise to Auguste Comte's call for a separate science of society, and continuing to the present, social philosophers often have been concerned with investigating the relationship between social order and disorganization, social control and individual liberty, and conformity and deviance.

In this text we have not reached back into the earliest foundations of theories of deviance for our selections. We readily acknowledge that our starting point is somewhat arbitrary. Nevertheless, we want to make it clear that concern for deviance is not an exclusively modern phenomenon, and theories to explain it are not entirely contemporary developments. As American sociologists, we are mainly interested in the origins and themes found in American sociological theories of deviance.² In Chapters I-VII we sketch broadly the evolution of the theories we have chosen to present and define the relationships among them. In Chapter VIII, we introduce several more recent, emergent theories or approaches.

The French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) has surely had a more profound impact on American sociological theorizing about deviance than any other classical European theorist. It was Durkheim who most dramatically gave sociology its *raison d'être* by arguing that social facts such as crime rates or suicide rates can be explained adequately only by analyzing uniquely social conditions such as the breakdown in the norms that operate throughout a society. Durkheim's approach was radically sociological because it required

the theorist to remain at the societal level of analysis for explanations of social phenomena, rather than searching for presumed psychological or biological causes.

Durkheim was clearly opposed to the analytical individualism of his contemporaries, such as the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso (1836–1909). Lombroso, generally acknowledged as the founding father of modern criminology, is best known for his biological theory of atavism, which states that criminals are evolutionary throwbacks to earlier stages of physiological development. This aspect of Lombroso's theory is an attempt to explain deviant behavior at the individual level of analysis by reference to the most rudimentary biological determinism, wherein social environmental factors are all but ignored. Durkheim, to the contrary, argued that the existence of crime in a society could be explained without searching for pathology-producing anomalies in the individual's physical makeup or psyche. Crime, according to Durkheim, actually helps to maintain a society as a healthy, surviving entity. Thus crime can be accounted for in terms of the functions it performs or the positive contributions it makes to the adaptation and survival of the society. As used in Chapter I, therefore, the term *functionalist* refers to the theory of Durkheim and those who have built upon it.

David Matza has remarked that the principal legacy of the functionalists was to establish and extend "appreciation" for deviance as a natural product of human collectivities.³ In doing this, functionalism contributed to the elimination of the initial assumption that deviance is a pathological trait of the individual or society that must be "cured." However, this contribution was not directly introduced into American sociology until many years after it was developed. Durkheim did most of his writing during the late 1800s, but it did not have a significant impact on American sociology until Talcott Parsons directed attention to its importance to the functionalist approach in the mid-1900s.

When the earliest American sociologists, members of the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago, studied social problems and deviance in the 1920s and 1930s, they organized most of their work around the idea of social pathology. The Chicago School, as it became known, included theorists such as W. I. Thomas, Robert E. Park, Ernest Burgess, Clifford R. Shaw, Henry D. McKay, Robert E. L. Faris, and H. Warren Dunham, who were reacting to the rapidly increasing heterogeneity or diversity of American society during the first third of the 20th century. For these writers, social ills such as juvenile delinquency, suicide, and mental illness were essentially urban problems that could best be understood through a detailed analysis of the urban setting. Their ecological studies of Chicago neighborhoods

established that differential rates of deviance could be found in various areas of the city, and, further, that the areas with high rates of deviance were socially disorganized.

Social disorganization theory, which is considered in Chapter II, proposed that rapid immigration, industrialization, and urban growth were tending to disrupt or inhibit stable, well-organized patterns of life guided by mutually agreed-upon rules of conduct. As the rules disintegrated during periods of rapid social change, standards to regulate people's behavior and relationships were weakened or disappeared. The resulting social disorganization in areas that were also characterized by other problems such as transient populations, speculative real estate practices, and high rates of disease created fertile ground for social pathologies.

The functionalist and social disorganization perspectives converged in American sociology, if somewhat indirectly, in Robert K. Merton's anomie theory, which is discussed in Chapter III. The idea of anomie was first proposed by Durkheim, who conceptualized it as a condition of "normlessness" in a society. Not unlike the Chicago theorists, Durkheim suggested that as social rules become less binding due to decreasing consensus in a complex society, people feel less constrained by social norms. As a consequence, evidence of deviance such as crime and suicide is bound to increase. This social condition was called anomie, or normlessness, by Durkheim, while the Chicagoans spoke of it as social disorganization. Both hypothesized that increasing rates of deviance are the result of structural conditions in society.

Merton was even more explicit in specifying the societal sources of the breakdown in consensus about norms and the conditions under which different types of deviance are most likely to emerge. His argument was that when virtually all people in a society are taught to seek culturally prescribed goals (such as occupational success and money) that everyone cannot attain because some do not have access to the legitimate means by which these goals can be secured, the result will be higher rates of deviance. A prediction derived from Merton's theory is that deviance will be more prevalent in the lower socioeconomic classes than in the higher classes because people in the lower classes are less likely to have available to them the legitimate means to success. Therefore, they will be under more strain to use illegitimate means to attain the culturally prescribed ends.

Every sociologist was not satisfied with this sort of reasoning, however. One who reacted strongly to it was Edwin H. Sutherland, who offered as an alternative to Merton's analysis his theory of differential association, presented in Chapter IV. Sutherland raised two im-

portant points about anomie theory. First was the question of how it explains crime outside the lower class (generally, white-collar crime). Middle- and upper-class people presumably have access to the legitimate means to success, yet there is evidence of a great deal of white-collar crime. The problem then is how to explain crime among those who do have access to legitimate means of success. Second, Sutherland's standard of an adequate theory was that it must apply to every single case it is supposed to explain. The method of theory construction he used was analytic induction, which amounts to stating a hypothesis or series of hypotheses about a phenomenon such as crime. If a single case of crime, for example, fails to correspond to a hypothesis about crime, the theorist must redefine that case as something other than a crime. If this is not possible, the hypothesis must be modified to include the case.

Sutherland's theory of differential association states that individuals learn criminal techniques and motives in association with others, in exactly the same ways they learn noncriminal behavior and motives. The primary condition for criminal behavior, therefore, is association with others whose definitions are favorable to violation of the law. Sutherland's theory is a very general one which is intended to explain criminal behavior in any social class. In contrast to Merton's anomie theory, which deals with rates of deviant behavior under specified circumstances, differential association theory distinctly focuses on the interactive (learning) aspects of becoming deviant. The other theorists discussed in Chapter IV also draw attention to how, under certain conditions, people go through a process of learning, rationalizing, and decision making that makes deviant behavior possible.

In control theory, presented in Chapter V, attention was shifted from exclusive concern with the processes involved in becoming deviant to factors considered important in maintaining conformity. The focal point in understanding deviance clearly then is explaining why the majority of people do not deviate. Control theorists pointed out that while individuals are motivated to violate norms, most people are contained or controlled by various forces from acting upon these impulses. Rather than explaining deviance in terms of interactional patterns, as sociological learning theory proposed, they viewed deviance as an outcome of inadequate socialization. Most individuals conform because internal and external controls are strong, routes to goal achievement are not restricted, and there is a high degree of social integration, as evidenced by the individual's attachment to others and the normative structure of society. Deviance results where these controlling mechanisms break down or deteriorate.

A number of theorists, also identified with the University of Chicago tradition, have continued the emphasis on interactive processes as well as the effects of control agents on deviance production, but they have focused on the consequences for the individual of being tagged with the label *deviant*. What happens, for example, when a young person who engages in a prank or minor crime is arrested and officially declared a juvenile delinquent by the courts? The consensus of the labeling theorists presented in Chapter VI is that a person who is officially labeled a deviant:

1. May be more inclined to see himself or herself as an outcast and act accordingly.
2. May be blocked from the opportunity to take on nondeviant roles due to an unsavory reputation.
3. Because of 1 and 2, may be more likely to seek the moral and physical support of others who have been similarly stigmatized with a deviant label.

As a result, subcultural communities of deviants are formed.

Labeling theory concentrates on the results of interaction between the alleged deviant and those in the society who seek to sanction such an individual. The theory clearly suggests that social control agents, rather than reducing or "correcting" the behavior they are reacting to, may in fact be perpetuating this behavior and solidifying the labeled person's self-image as deviant. At the same time, these agents are creating conditions under which deviant subcultures flourish at the group level by establishing the need of those so labeled for physical and moral support from others.

One effect of labeling theory has been to shift attention away from the individual deviant and toward those persons and groups in society with the power to designate certain individuals or actions as deviant. This is also the emphasis in Chapter VII, "Politics and Class in the Study of Deviance." Several theorists concerned with the conflict and political aspects of deviance offer a response to the question of how certain types of behavior come to be defined as "deviant" in the first place. An essential assumption is that, as Durkheim carefully noted in his functionalist argument, no behavior is *inherently* deviant. Rather, conformity and deviance are established by adherence to or disregard for the standards adopted by a particular group, community, or society. A behavior is officially classified as deviant when it harms or offends those with enough political power to pass a law against it, or when labeling that behavior as deviant appears to serve their interests. Joseph F. Gusfield (Reading 26) argues that the ability

of members of an interest group to define as deviant the behavior commonly associated with members of some outgroup itself significantly enhances their own power, prestige, and status.

The other theorists represented in Chapter VII not only expand upon these views, they offer critical reactions to all of the theories presented in the preceding chapters. These theorists contend that too often in the past, theorizing about deviance concentrated on a "dramatic deviant," without examining carefully the role of advanced capitalism in the production of deviance and deviant populations. The selections by Richard Quinney, Alexander Liazos, and Steven Spitzer represent recent attempts to redress this class bias in deviance theories by explicitly taking into account the role of the state and the political-economic elite in the creation of deviance and the formulation and application of criminal law.

From one viewpoint, theories of deviance that emphasize politics and class appear to be an outright rejection of their predecessors. However, it is important to note the debt these critics owe to the targets of their sometimes harsh words. Durkheim insisted on the need to look further than the biological or psychological constitution of the individual for explanations of deviance. The American social pathologists who looked for causes in social disorganization also sought to understand deviance at the societal level of analysis. While C. Wright Mills (Reading 8) condemned the middle-class ideology of social pathologists for placing too much blame on the individual, even he would probably have agreed with Matza's conclusion that both Durkheim and the Chicagoans made a major breakthrough in their search for societal causes of deviance.⁵

We have suggested that functionalism and social disorganization theory seemed to merge in Merton's extension of Durkheim's anomie theory. In Merton's "Social Structure and Anomie" (Reading 10), the explanation of deviance remains very much at the societal level, with the imbalance between cultural goals and institutionalized means described as the key causal factor. Sutherland's alternative to Merton's approach was the theory of differential association (Reading 13), which proposed an explanation of crime at the interactional level of analysis. A somewhat different view was expressed by control theorists, who sought to explain deviance as a failure of adequate socialization to conform rather than as the outcome of socialization in deviant subcultures and the acceptance of nonconforming values. The labeling perspective on deviance emerged from a concern about the consequences of being labeled for the individual. Theorists in the political-economic tradition have emphasized instead the dynamics behind the labeling of certain behaviors as deviant. The common thread linking

all of these theories is a movement toward an understanding of deviance as more than simply the bizarre, idiosyncratic, pathological behavior of individuals that, like illness or disease, must be treated and cured.

Chapter VIII, "New Directions in Deviance Theory," presents some recent developments in the field. The first selection reviews contemporary biological perspectives on deviance, reflecting the reemergence of an approach that was influential in the earlier part of the 20th century. Today, however, the study of biological determinants of anti-social behavior goes far beyond genetic explanations to include biochemistry, psychophysiology, and psychopharmacology. The results of such work are being treated cautiously by responsible researchers who are careful to give recognition to the likely interactions among biological, psychological, and sociological factors.

Increased attention to the biology of crime, no matter how prudent, inevitably nudges theories of deviance and their associated social policies toward the medical domain, however. To the extent that deviance is conceptualized as an illness, the medical establishment becomes the arena for its control. The "medicalization of deviance" has been a major theme in the orchestration of social control during the latter half of this century. A medical explanation of deviance necessarily assumes a lack of responsibility on the part of the aberrant individual for his or her behavior. Those who are sick or biologically "flawed" can hardly be held accountable for behavior that flows from their "pathology." In sharp contrast to biological approaches, the "rational choice" perspective assumes that deviants make calculated decisions about how they act, and the most effective deterrents to deviance are those that are designed to minimize opportunities to deviate.

The underlying differences between the biological and rational-choice approaches date back more than 100 years. Positivists sought explanations for behavior that employ factors such as genetic constitution over which the individual has no control. Classical theorists sought explanations that emphasize humans' capacities to make conscious choices about how they behave. The unresolved debate between positivist and classical theorists continues today: How much deviance is *determined by* factors or forces over which the individual has no control? And how much is a result of individuals exercising *free will* in a rational calculation to commit deviant acts?

Contemporary theories of deviance are also being shaped by feminist theorists. In this perspective, established male-oriented deviance theories are critiqued, and distinctly sociological concerns that particularly affect the lives of women and children, such as poverty, racism, child abuse, patriarchal domination, and other forms of sexism, are

reintroduced as central to an understanding of deviance in American society.

NOTES

1. Robert Nisbet, *The Social Philosophers* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1973), pp. 105–117.
2. Throughout this book we use the term *theory* in its broadest sense. For our purposes, a theory is a proposed explanation of an event or phenomenon.
3. David Matza, *Becoming Deviant* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), pp. 31–37.
4. Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1937).
5. Matza, *Becoming Deviant*, pp. 31–32.