

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

*Principles of Sociology: Societal Issues & Behavior* is the third title in Salem's *Principles of Sociology* series. *Personal Relationships & Behavior* and *Group Relationships & Behavior*, were published by Salem Press this year. This series is intended to introduce students and researchers to the fundamentals of important and far-reaching topics in sociology using easy-to-understand language.

The field of sociology is vital in the world we live in today, and relevant in many social groupings and behaviors. This work includes categories such as "Deviance & Social Control," "Race & Ethnicity," "Sex, Gender & Sexuality," "Society & Technology," and "Sociology of Health & Medicine."

The entries in this volume are arranged in five major sections, and then A to Z within each, making it easy to find the topic of interest. Each entry includes the following:

- *Abstract* giving a brief introduction to the topic;
- *Overview* that presents key terms and concepts;
- Clear, concise *presentation of the topic*, including a discussion of applications and issues;

- Definitions of key *Terms & Concepts*;
- *Bibliography* for further reading.

The back matter in *Principles of Sociology: Societal Issues & Behavior* contains a thorough and valuable index.

Salem Press thanks the contributors, whose names are listed with each essay. Their diverse backgrounds include graduate degrees in a wide field of expertise and experience that allows them to offer information in language that is often more accessible than that of sociology specialists, whose explanations may be narrowly focused. A list of contributors' names follows this Publisher's Note.

The essays in this volume are written for a varied audience. Our goals include attention to clarity and avoidance of unnecessary jargon. For those readers who desire more specific information on any one topic, each essay includes a list of entries for further reading.

*Principles of Sociology: Societal Issues & Behavior* is, as are all Salem Press titles, available in print, as an e-book and on <https://online.salempress.com>.

# Deviance & Social Control

## INTRODUCTION

This section includes articles that discuss social behavior that goes against the rules and norms of society, exploring patterns and differences in people engaging in this behavior. Since the beginning of time, some individuals have chosen to go against societal laws and rules put in place. Although most people live within social boundaries, societies are changed and shifted by the defiance and criminology of those refusing to conform.

Deviance is identified not only by criminal behavior, but also by going against the norms or society expectations. For example, a teenager who chooses to stay out past curfew, harm themselves, or dress in a controversial way can be considered deviant. Women fighting for equal rights, speaking out and choosing traditionally masculine professions and dress were considered deviant in the early twentieth century, although today, a woman wanting to be a doctor or lawyer is no longer seen as deviant. Often, behavior defined as deviant changes with the norm of current society.

For the purpose of the articles in this section, deviance is characterized by “poor self-control, impulsivity, aggression, lack of empathy, thrill-seeking, and poor reasoning and verbal skills, a ... predisposition ...to antisocial behavior... poor parenting skills, child abuse, parental criminal history, and lower verbal IQ scores...”

This section includes theories that explore why some people engage in defiant behavior, gender differences in defiant behavior, and criminology, including *Control Theory*, *Rational Choice Theory*, and the *Differential Association Theory*. Control Theory believes that people’s behaviors serve to meet their needs and most people, although tempted by the excitement

of being defiant, choose to stay within the norms and follow the rules of society. The Rational Choice Theory says that people are motivated by meeting their own interests and make decisions based on the risk/reward possibilities of their behavior i.e., a teenage boy choosing to engage in gang related criminal behavior; he may not want to sell drugs or shoot someone, but the benefit of the family dynamic of a gang, the money and increased position in his community is worth the risk of going to jail. The Differential Association Theory believes that people who will choose to engage in deviant or criminal behavior tend to attract each other, and spending time together causes shared beliefs and tendencies.

Another interesting focus in this section is gender differences in deviance. Research shows that men engage in more socially defiant and criminal behavior than women do, and that men are more likely to commit violent crimes, while women’s traditional subordinate position to men cause them to commit less violent crime. Women may be arrested for prostitution more often than men, a result of women being over-sexualized by a patriarchal society.

This section also discusses the dynamics of different kinds of crimes such as violent crime (assault or murder), hate crimes (crime against a specific group such as LGBTQ or a religious sect), victimless crime (drinking under age or speeding), white collar crime (tax evasion or financial fraud), gang membership (generally grouped by race or ethnicity and often including drug dealing, stealing, or other crime), and juvenile crime (committed by children under 18). Also covered is how the media impacts and portrays crime, and how American society chooses to handle anti-social or deviant behavior. *Informal social control*

are subtle reactions in society that shape behavior; *formal social control* are laws and rules put into place to control people's actions. The enforcers of formal social control in the United States are our police force. As the initial responders to deviant behavior issues, police face many challenges, including dealing with behavior by people of race and ethnicity different from their own. The court system then decides how to correct and/or punish people for acting against cultural rules and laws.

American society has long relied on removing societal rights as a form of punishment for deviant

behavior by sending people to jail or prison. This section also explores the struggle of how to reintegrate people back into society after spending a length of time in the prison system. Defiant and anti-social behaviors that send people to prison often intensify while in prison. Sociologists continue to study this dynamic in modern American culture, integrating new ideas through social programming attempting to transform behavior and improve quality of life.

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## BIOLOGICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES OF DEVIANCE

### ABSTRACT

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Many psychological theories of deviance are inextricably linked to biological conditions of the human body and mind. Characteristics of deviants, such as poor self-control, impulsivity, aggression, lack of empathy, thrill-seeking, and poor reasoning and verbal skills, all may have a biological component that predisposes an individual to antisocial behavior. New scientific methodologies, such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), provide additional insights into the relationship between biology, psychology, and learning as they relate to deviance and criminality. Regardless of causation, poor parenting skills, child abuse, parental criminal history, and lower verbal IQ scores, all are important elements in the development of deviant and delinquent behaviors.

### OVERVIEW

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The debate of nature versus nurture is a central theme in any review of psychological theories of deviance. Is a person born bad, or is it by interacting with others that an individual fails to learn acceptable social behavior? In part, the answer to that question depends upon the focus one brings to the issue. Experts in genetics, neurology, and related biological sciences tend to develop perspectives based upon more innate physical qualities that impact human behavior. Social scientists and psychologists tend to focus on human interactions as a basis of social development. Some individual scholars view one factor as causal in terms of deviance and criminality, while others seek a more integrated theoretical analysis that looks at several factors. For example, although a detailed analysis of the causes of sexual offending is beyond the scope of this article, Ward and Beecher (2008) provide a useful integrated theory that includes genetic predisposition; adverse developmental experiences (such as child abuse, rejection); psychological dispositions/trait factors (interpersonal problems, mental disorders); social and cultural structures and process (sexism, masculinity, and other learned behaviors); and contextual factors (such as stress or intoxication). While their theoretical framework is related to sexual offending exclusively, it could also be helpful in the development of theories of violent crime in

general. Thus, although the balance of this article looks at the various factors individually, it is important to appreciate the complexity and interconnectedness of biological and psychological theories of deviance and criminality.

Because so many factors pertaining to our physical existence impact our brains and emotional responses, some biological theories of deviance and criminality deserve mention in this look at psychological theories. Biochemical theories of deviance might consider how allergies, vitamin deficiencies, lead poisoning, hypoglycemia, low brain serotonin, alcohol consumption, or responses to drugs like Prozac, for example, could affect an individual's propensity toward deviant or criminal behavior. For example, studies on animals relate high levels of dopamine and norepinephrine to impulsive or reactive acts of aggression (Raine, 1995). It may be the case, then, that no one cause or condition explains criminal deviance.

### FURTHER INSIGHTS

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#### Biological Factors in Deviance

##### The Frontal Cortex

Studies of brain conditions and development also provide some compelling research on the development of antisocial behavior. Raine (1995) and her colleagues surveyed the literature and set forth two areas of the brain that may relate to antisocial behavior: the frontal cortex and the left hemisphere. The frontal cortex regulates aggression, self-control, social judgment, concentration, and intellectual flexibility, while the left hemisphere of the brain governs "functions of language, verbal comprehension, and expressive speech" (p. 53). Studies of adults and delinquent youth show lower verbal IQ scores, suggesting that they may have a left hemisphere dysfunction. Based on magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) studies, scientists believe that the brain of a juvenile is less developed than that of an adult, especially in the front lobe, which is responsible for executive, high order functioning, such as memory, planning, and inhibition. Bower and others suggested that this condition presents some juveniles with difficulties in "regulating aggression, long-range planning, mental flexibility,

abstract thinking, the capacity to hold in mind related pieces of information, and perhaps moral judgment" (2004). In addition to the recent findings on children's apparently inherent diminished brain functioning capacity, MRI research suggests that exposure to violent video games and television might negatively impact frontal lobe development and function ("Playing With," 2003; Phillips, 2004). Because of these findings, advocates within the juvenile justice field, such as the Human Rights Watch, are pressuring politicians and judicial leaders to reconsider harsh, punitive measures when sentencing juvenile violent offenders.

### **Neurology**

Neurology, the study of the nervous system, also may provide some insights into the psychological aspects of deviance and criminality. In their review of this literature, Raine and her colleagues point to two major areas of consideration based upon studies of psychopaths, defined as people who exhibit aggressive, violent thoughts and actions and who lack empathy (1995). "Arousal theory" suggests that "antisocial individuals are pathologically under-aroused physiologically, as indicated by low heart rate, low skin conductance, excessive slow-wave electroencephalographic (EEG) activity" (Raine, 1995, p. 52). Individuals with this condition are "less sensitive to the subtle cues required for learning prosocial behavior" and the condition may "impair the classic conditioning of emotional responses thought to be important in conscience formation and avoidance learning" (Raine, 1995, p. 52-53). Arguably, then, the violent behavior might be a mechanism for seeking stimulation or, in the alternative, the individual may not experience violence or stress as something negative and to be avoided. Similar arguments can be made in relation to the second theoretical framework discussed by Raine, "impulse/motivational systems analysis" (p. 51-52). Briefly stated, this theoretical framework argues that psychopaths have a heightened desire for rewards, along with a reduced perception of the risks of punishment. Arguably, this hyper-focus on "reward may also interfere with learning the cues that lead to punishment" (p. 52). Conversely, by being unable to feel anxiety and stress as it relates to punishment, these individuals have an increased likelihood of acting in antisocial or criminal ways.

### **Extraversion & Neuroticism**

Another important look at the interplay between psychological and physiological causes of deviance was set forth by Eysenck in the late 1940s. Eysenck employed statistical analysis to personality studies and determined that high and low levels of two factors were at play in a person's likelihood of exhibiting deviant behavior: "extraversion," which was related to a person's ability to enjoy positive social events; and "neuroticism," which referred to a tendency to experience negative emotions. According to Eysenck's analysis, the neurotic extraverts were the most likely individuals to develop into criminals since they would have difficulty socializing with other children and, as a consequence, not learn acceptable social conduct or be able to adhere to it. Although counterintuitive, Eysenck argued that because the introverts' brain arousal was more active, they sought less stimulation from social or criminal conduct, while extroverts needed the stimulation of highly social or dangerous behaviors. In the 1970s, Eysenck added levels of "psychoticism" to his scale, arguing that psychotics exhibit aggressive, cold, and impersonal behavior that can lead to interpersonal conflicts and criminal conduct (Eysenck, 1989). Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) criticized Eysenck's work, arguing that his personality dimensions overlapped conceptually and that they could not be measured independently from the behavior that they were meant to describe. Like so many other personality scales developed during the twentieth century, Eysenck and his colleagues had apparently included questions about criminal conduct and violence in their questionnaires, and they concluded that whichever traits the criminal respondents exhibited were proof of criminal tendencies.

### **Other Personality Traits**

Another major contribution on personality traits was by Wilson and Herrnstein (1985). They concluded that individuals with criminal and violent personalities exhibited the following characteristics: assertiveness, fearlessness, aggressiveness, unconventionality, extroversion, poor socialization, psychopathy, schizophrenia, hypomania, hyperactivity, impulsiveness, and left-handedness. Other scales include lower empathy, risk taking, and an external locus of control as additional personality traits that evidence criminality (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Since questions on these scales related to past criminality and acts of

violence, however, these studies fall into the same methodological problems of labeling individuals with criminal pasts as having criminal personality traits.

In their general theory of criminality, Gottfredson and Hirschi argued that self-control factors are the most powerful predictors of deviance and crime (1990). Committing a crime is easy, exciting, and offers immediate gratification. Similarly, it takes little or no planning and does not require any long term commitment or ongoing interpersonal negotiations. Finally, since criminals exhibit little empathy with or consideration for the needs of their victims, the resulting harm to the victim does not disrupt the perpetrator's criminal urges. Gottfredson and Hirschi suggested that two factors are related to an individual's inability to control their behavior: ineffective parenting and biology. Similarly, Hardwick has argued that although parental supervision plays an important role in the development of self-control, biological factors appear to play the most significant role in the relationship between deviance and self-control (2007).

In the theoretical frameworks discussed above, biological factors either exacerbated or diminished cues in such a manner as to cause antisocial or deviant behavior. In some ways, Freud's psychoanalytic theory of personality development describes a similar internal process, possibly because he was a neurophysiologist. According to Freud, human nature is inherently antisocial and lacks feelings of guilt, with sexual desire serving as the motivational force of the psyche. Freud labeled this psychological essence as the id. Through interactions with other human beings, a well-developed child forms a superego, or a moral conscience that helps him or her learn the parameters of acceptable social behavior. If the superego should become overdeveloped, according to Freud's theoretical framework, the individual exhibits an unhealthy desire for punishment. On the other hand, an underdeveloped superego fails to regulate the strong antisocial urges of the id. Negotiating between the id and the superego is the rational ego, which regulates the demands for instant gratification of the id with acceptable behavior (Vito, Maahs, & Holmes, 2006). Freud was focused on the internal process of psyche development, while the balance of the psychological theories of deviance discussed below focus on the interactions of the individual with others. In other words, the focus is turning to "nurture," or the lack thereof, as a cause of deviant behavior.

### **Psychological Disorders & Deviance**

Numerous psychological disorders can lead to deviance and criminality. Passive aggressive disorder, for example, occurs when an individual buries feelings of resentment of an authority figure and then channels those feelings into other behaviors, such as procrastination, forgetfulness, or harmfulness that seems accidental ("Passive Aggressive," 2008). Impulse control disorders involve strong, sudden urges that the individual cannot control. These disorders may lead to pyromania (fire-setting), kleptomania (stealing), or aggressive and violent outbursts (intermittent explosive disorder) (Impulse Control Disorder, 2007). Borderline personality disorder involves extreme mood swings and difficulty controlling emotions and impulses. Individuals suffering a borderline episode may change their careers, friends, and lifestyle suddenly and act violently if he or she feels abandoned or betrayed (Borderline Personality Disorder, 2006). Cognitive disorders involve the mental processing of information. Individuals suffering from cognitive disorders may be confused, forgetful, and exhibit impaired awareness, reasoning, and judgment (Cognitive Disorders, 2006). Dissociative disorders "occur when people frequently escape reality by suppressing their memories or taking on other identities (Dissociative Disorders, 2008, p. 1). It is believed to be a coping mechanism when stress or trauma is unbearable. In rare instances, individuals develop dissociative identity disorder, which was formerly known as multiple personality disorder. In these instances, the individual has two or more distinct identities that control their thoughts and behaviors at different times. This condition is most frequently associated with extreme childhood trauma, such as sexual, emotional, or physical abuse.

People with antisocial personality disorder (APD) formerly were called sociopaths or psychopaths. Adolescents who have these same characteristics are labeled as having a conduct disorder. APD appears to occur in about 3 percent of the general population, and between 20 percent and 25 percent of the prison population. The personality characteristics of APD include a failure to conform to social norms, lying, cheating, stealing, exploiting and manipulating others, lack of remorse, absence of anxiety, self-centeredness, recklessness and impulsivity, and aggressiveness (Vito, 2006). These individuals can be superficially charming, but they have an inconsistent

work history, poor judgment, and are financially irresponsible, sexually promiscuous, and irresponsible parents. Punishment does not seem to be effective as they cannot learn from past experiences and continuously exhibit poor judgment (Vito, 2006). Schizophrenia, attention deficit disorder, and some forms of psychosis, such as having hallucinations or delusions, may also play a role in deviance. All of the psychological disorders discussed above may have some biological component as well, such as a head injury, sleep deprivation, substance abuse, brain injury, or dementia.

### Learning Theories of Crime

Although biological aspects play an important role in psychological theories of deviance, learning theories of crime have dominated the professional literature as well. The most prominent theoretical framework has been social learning theory. It holds that children can learn inappropriate or deviant forms of behavior, either through the modeling of negative behavior or through repeated reinforcement of negative behavior that thus increases its frequency. Consequently, many studies focus on parenting aspects of child rearing and criminality. Gottfredson and Hirschi offered that “all of the characteristics associated with low self-control tend to show themselves in the absence of nurturance, discipline, or training” (1990, p. 95). At a minimum, they argued, in order to teach self-control, a parent must be able to: “(1) monitor a child’s behavior; (2) recognize deviant behavior when it occurs; and (3) punish such behavior” (p. 97). Unfortunately, many parents are not able to perform these responsibilities, possibly in part because they lack self-control themselves. One of the most telling aspects of this parenting research, for example, is that “the parents of delinquents are unusually likely to have criminal records themselves” (p. 97). Many of the interventions to reduce juvenile criminal rates, therefore, focus on teaching parenting skills in high-risk families and communities.

Similarly, Glueck and Glueck (1950) have argued that harsh and inconsistent parenting can lead to child delinquency. More specifically, if parents ignore inappropriate behavior, are inconsistent with punishment when it occurs (or threaten punishment but do not follow through with it), their children are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior as they grew older. Patterson argued that if parents

effectively monitored, punished, and reinforced behaviors, their children would not become delinquent (1996). Wilson’s study of delinquency in Birmingham, England, for example, concluded that when parents exercised “chaperonage” they significantly lowered the risk of their children becoming delinquent (1980). *Chaperonage* was defined as parents keeping a close watch on their children and sheltering them from negative aspects of neighborhood life. This was accomplished by escorting children to and from school and forbidding them to play with troublemakers. In her analysis, however, Judith Rich Harris argued that peer influences rather than parental behavior affect a child’s long-term development toward delinquency (Gladwell, 1998).

From her studies of abused and neglected children, Widom concluded “that childhood victimization increases the likelihood of delinquency, adult criminality, and violent criminal behavior” (1992, p. 254). Widom followed child abuse victims for twenty years, along with a matched control group of individuals, and concluded that “being abused or neglected as a child increases a person’s risk for an arrest as a juvenile by 53 percent, as an adult by 38 percent, and for a violent crime by 38 percent” (p. 255). Similarly, although males in general have a higher rate of criminal behavior than women, abused or neglected women in Widom’s study faced a 77 percent greater risk of adult arrest than the women in the control group who did not face abuse or neglect (p. 256). In addition to being much more likely to commit violent offenses toward others, Widom’s findings concluded that victims of childhood abuse and neglect were at a much greater risk of harming themselves as well. Surveying the role of neglect on language development, psychosocial development, empathic responsiveness, attention deficits, and poorer emotional stability, Widom also concluded that neglect—defined as intentionally failing to provide the material, medical, emotional, psychological, and educational resources necessary to a child’s development—can have as significant a negative impact on a child as actual physical violence in terms of subsequent criminality.

Theoretically speaking, several explanations can be offered for a child learning antisocial behavior. In his theory of differential association, Edwin Sutherland argued that criminal behavior is learned through interactions with others. Just like any other

learning process, the individual, through observation and training within intimate personal groups, learns the techniques, motivations, rationalizations, and attitudes of a criminal. The greater the frequency, duration, and intensity of the deviant contact, the greater the likelihood that an individual will engage in criminal conduct as an adult. Since young boys are more likely than young girls to be in gangs that engage in delinquent behavior, Sutherland's theory would explain why more men engage in criminal conduct than women. Although empirical studies of Sutherland's theory demonstrate its credibility as an explanation for some criminal behavior, it does not explain criminal conduct by individuals whose childhoods did not contain criminal influences.

## VIEWPOINTS

### Other Theories of Deviance

Another theory of deviance is called social control theory (Curran & Renzitti, 1994). It argues that strong attachments to social institutions such as the family, a church, or a school prevent the development of criminal delinquency. Unfortunately, close attachments to youth peers, especially for boys, may enhance the likelihood of deviant conduct.

Operant theory argues that behavior is learned by the consequences that it produces. Thus, criminal behavior is learned through a process of desirable consequences and infrequent punishment. The individual is conditioned to engage in repeated criminal conduct because it offers monetary reward, enhanced reputation, masculine credibility, and group identity reinforcement as some of its many reinforcing assets. If punishment is not seen as likely, swift, effective, and harsh, the learning or conditioning process fails to deter deviant behavior.

Cognitive psychological theories of deviance deal with the thought processes that influence behavior, and these too can be learned. Often criminals rationalize their conduct by arguing that they are not hurting anyone or that the victim "was asking for it." Through cognitive-behavioral programs, criminals are taught to develop empathy, moral reasoning, anger management, and self control (Vito, Maahs, & Holmes, 2006).

Theories of moral development are also associated with deviance. Kohlberg, who based his work on Piaget's, is the most prominent theoretician

pertaining to moral development (1981). Kohlberg argued that ideal moral development occurred in six stages:

- At Stage 1, the individual blindly obeys authority figures in order to avoid punishment. At this level, the interests of others are not a consideration.
- Stage 2 involves furthering one's own interests and considering the interests of others only as a means to one's own ends.
- Stage 3 moral development involves moral reasoning and caring about others.
- Stage 4 has an even more developed sense of right versus wrong and a commitment to social institutions like family and community.
- Stage 5 moral decisions are driven by social contract as one weighs one's own concerns with legal principles and the common good.
- Stage 6 moral development bases decisions on universal, ethical principles, such as justice and human dignity, that span specific legal principles and cultural contexts.

Individuals' morality can develop throughout their lifetimes, according to Kohlberg, and not all individuals reach the later stages of development. Kohlberg has been criticized most effectively by Gilligan, who argued that his framework's focus on justice is a male-centered concern and does not take into account a female developmental focus on the ethics of caring about others (1977).

The intelligence scales used since the early 1990s are another prominent aspect of the psychology of deviance. Gottfredson and Hirschi provided an excellent review of the strengths and weaknesses of this discipline (1990). Early studies by Goddard found that criminals scored high on feeble-mindedness, but when the tests were used on World War I draftees, the draftees also scored dismally. Ongoing criticisms have alleged that the tests contain age, class, gender, and ethnicity biases. One aspect of the testing that does seem to have some credibility is that criminals score lower on verbal IQ measurements. This finding is consistent with the brain imaging studies that evidence left hemisphere brain dysfunction in people with records of deviance, as mentioned above. It suggests that criminals may use less internal speech to analyze and plan their conduct. Having a higher verbal IQ helps one understand the consequences of