**Ch. 7 Deviance and Social Control**

**Deviance**

According to sociologist William Graham Sumner, **deviance** is a violation of established contextual, cultural, or social norms, whether folkways, mores, or codified law (1906). It can be as minor as picking your nose in public or as major as committing murder.

“What is deviant behavior?” cannot be answered in a straightforward manner. Whether an act is labeled deviant or not depends on many factors, including location, audience, and the individual committing the act (Becker 1963). Listening to your iPod on the way to class is considered acceptable behavior. Listening to your iPod during your 2 p.m. sociology lecture is considered rude. Listening to your iPod when on the witness stand before a judge may cause you to be held in contempt of court and consequently fined or jailed.

## Crime

**Crime is the breach of rules or laws for which some governing authority can ultimately prescribe a conviction.**

In sociology, a normative definition views crime as deviant behavior that violates prevailing norms, or cultural standards prescribing how humans ought to behave normally. This approach considers the complex realities surrounding the concept of crime and seeks to understand how changing social, political, psychological, and economic conditions may affect changing definitions of crime and the form of the legal, law-enforcement, and penal responses made by society.

* In criminal law, an offense against the person usually refers to a crime which is committed by direct physical harm or force being applied to another person.
* **A violent crime** is a crime in which the offender uses or threatens to use violent force upon the victim.
* **Sex** **crimes** are forms of human sexual behavior that are crimes. Someone who commits one is said to be a sex offender.
* **Property** **crime** involves the taking of money or property, and does not involve force or threat of force against a victim.
* **Hate** crimes occur when a perpetrator targets a victim because of his or her perceived membership in a certain social group, usually defined by racial group, religion, sexual orientation, disability, class, ethnicity, nationality, age, sex, or gender identity.
* **Organized** crime is the transnational, national, or local grouping of highly centralized enterprises run by criminals for the purpose of engaging in illegal activity.
* **Virtual** crime refers to a virtual criminal act that takes place in a massively multiplayer online game (MMOG).
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**Victimless crime**

#### Definitions of victimless crime have been formulated since the 1960s. Packer (1968) described victimless crimes as “offenses that do not result in anyone's feeling that he has been injured so as to impel him to bring the offense to the attention of the authorities”

**Labeling theory**

Labeling theory is a theory to understand [deviance in the society,](https://www.sociologygroup.com/deviance-meaning/) this theory is focused more on trying to understand how people react to behavior that happens around them and label it as ‘deviant’ or ‘nondeviant’. This theory was given by Howard Becker who tried to understand, not in the causes behind the deviant behavior but rather which behavior was considered ‘deviant’ and what impact it had on the individual engaging in that behavior.

**Robert K. Merton on deviant behavior**

In his discussion of deviance Merton proposed a typology of deviant behavior that illustrated the possible discrepancies between culturally defined goals and the institutionalized means available to achieve these goals. A typology is a classification scheme designed to facilitate understanding. In this case, Merton was proposing a typology of deviance based upon two criteria: (1) a person’s motivations or his adherence to cultural goals; (2) a person’s belief in how to attain his goals. According to Merton, there are five types of deviance based upon these criteria:

* Conformity involves the acceptance of the cultural goals and means of attaining those goals.
* Innovation involves the acceptance of the goals of a culture but the rejection of the traditional and/or legitimate means of attaining those goals. For example, a member of the Mafia values wealth but employs alternative means of attaining his wealth; in this example, the Mafia member’s means would be deviant.
* Ritualism involves the rejection of cultural goals but the routinized acceptance of the means for achieving the goals.
* Retreatism involves the rejection of both the cultural goals and the traditional means of achieving those goals.
* Rebellion is a special case wherein the individual rejects both the cultural goals and traditional means of achieving them but actively attempts to replace both elements of the society with different goals and means.

**Social Control**

When a person violates a social norm, what happens? All societies practice **social control**, the regulation and enforcement of norms. The underlying goal of social control is to maintain **social order**, an arrangement of practices and behaviors on which society’s members base their daily lives.

The means of enforcing rules are known as **sanctions**. Sanctions can be positive as well as negative. **Positive sanctions** are rewards given for conforming to norms. A promotion at work is a positive sanction for working hard. **Negative sanctions** are punishments for violating norms. Being arrested is a punishment for shoplifting. Both types of sanctions play a role in social control.

Sociologists also classify sanctions as formal or informal.

The table below shows the relationship between different types of sanctions:

| **Informal/Formal Sanctions** | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Informal** | **Formal** |
| **Positive** | An expression of thanks | A promotion at work |
| **Negative** | An angry comment | A parking fine |

**Formal and informal sanctions may be positive or negative. Informal sanctions arise in social interactions, whereas formal sanctions officially enforce norms.**