5 | Deviance

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter introduces us to the basic concepts of crime and deviant acts. It offers a basic introduction to a popular sub-field of sociology: criminology. The first and perhaps most important thing to take away from this chapter is that acts of deviance are never static. Deviance is merely what a group in a certain location, at a certain point in time, defines as unacceptable behaviour to society and its survival. A perceived deviant act in one part of the world might be viewed as acceptable in another.

Furthermore, deviance can be both positive and negative. While the term usually connotes a negative image, deviance is simply not complying with authority or the status quo. Many revolutions and movements (human rights, feminist, civil and equal rights) are all types of deviant behaviour, but their actions are for the betterment of society rather than harm. Sociologists are interested in deviance as a product of social interaction and group structure. The study of deviance addresses ways of acting and ways of being that elicit some form of moral condemnation.

The very nature of deviance can make researching difficult. Secrecy and safety are notable concerns, along with the moral dilemma of whether or not to report deviant behaviour if you are studying it. The authors talk about three types of theoretical frameworks to understanding deviance, with each having its own strengths and flaws. Merton's strain theory argues that deviance results when people experience a gap between their aspirations and their opportunities. Cultural support theory posits that people behave in ways that reflect the cultural values that the individual has come to learn, internalize as acceptable, and act out in society. Control theory proposes that people engage in deviant behaviour when the various controls that might be expected to prohibit them from doing so are weak or absent.

Another aspect of deviance is usually understood in terms of who is most likely to be the deviant person. Factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, and class all provide various pictures of why those in a certain category are more likely to become deviant. The idea of dialectical opposites is also present on the topic of deviance. Where there are deviant actors, there are also claims-makers (moral entrepreneurs) who bring specific issues to the public and attempt to garner some form of support in an effort to curb or remove the deviant issue.

Lastly, a person is only deviant because society labels him or her as such (stigma application). Building upon the previous notion that deviance is based on what the majority of people in a given place labels as such, deviant people go through a status degradation ceremony at which point a label is attached, characterizing their actions as deviant and unacceptable to the wider society.

KEY TERMS

Claims-making	First Nations	Social control
Class	Master status	Social groups
Conflict theory	Roles	Social interaction
Control theory	Self	Status degradation ceremony
Corporate crimes	Sex	Stigma
Cultural support theory	Situated transaction	Strain theory
Deviance	Social constructionism	Validity

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are the three broad types of objectives toward which claims-making is directed? (p. 121)

2. What is deviance, according to the formal sociological conceptions of the term? (p. 109)

3. What is the difference between primary and secondary deviance? Give an example of each. (p. 122)

4. What is the difference between the objective and subjective character of deviance? (p. 126)

5. David Luckenbill identified which six common stages of murder? (pp. 115–116)

6. What are the three ways in which successful claims demonstrate the gravity of a problem? (p. 121)

7. What is the difference between discreditable and discredited when talking about stigma? (p. 122)

8. Are poorer or minority people more likely to be deviant, or are they just more likely to get caught? (p. 118)

9. How can sex correlate with a wide range of deviant behaviour? (p. 116)

10. What are the three broad objectives claims-making is directed toward? (p. 119)

READINGS AND WEBSITES

Linden, Rick (2009). *Criminology: A Canadian Perspective* **(6th ed.). Toronto: Nelson Education.**

Linden's book offers introductory criminology students with an array of information necessary to the understanding of deviance in society. Theories and explanations of crime are given, from the early theorists to the modern theorists who have built on and improved such theories. This is followed by addressing the different types of crimes and analyzing the impact to society.

Winterdyk, John, and Russell Smandych (eds) (2012). *Youth at Risk and Youth Justice.* **Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.**

Winterdyk and Smandych's book offer students a comprehensive look at a wide variety of topics in regards to youth deviancy. The book balances theoretical aspects, methodological, and historical data/trends. The book is specifically tailored for students in an upper-level criminology course, and will benefit students who have an interest in criminology and criminal justice.

Woolford, Andrew (2009). *The Politics of Restorative Justice.* **Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.**

The use of restorative justice in the Canadian criminal justice system is relatively a new system. Unlike the more punitive prison system, restorative justice understands crime and deviance as not only affecting the victim and offender, but also social relations between the families of both parties and the community at large. What restorative justice attempts to achieve is to restore the "balance" and damage that has been done. The book provides a close look at what restorative justice entails, and its ideas and history. In addition, the author provides the different styles of restorative justice such as victim–offender reconciliation, family group conferencing, and the truth and reconciliation commissions.

Agnew, Robert. (2017) *Crime Causation: Sociological Theories - Strain Theory, Social Learning Theory, Control Theory, Labeling Theory, Social Disorganization Theory, Critical Theories.* **[Website]. Retrieved from** http://law.jrank.org/pages/824/Crime-Causation-Sociological-Theories.html

This site provides a very comprehensive discussion of deviance and crime theory for educational and research purposes.

Surveillance Studies Centre. **(2017). [Website]. Retrieved from** http://www.sscqueens.org/

This website contains a wealth of information relating to the Queen's University Surveillance Project. The project is concerned with the study of the increasingly large number of technologies and social practices employed for the purpose of social control.