

## **Different perspectives on Deviance:**

(From: Henslin, J.M. (Ed.). *Sociology: A Down-to-Earth Approach* (8th Edition)  
New York: Pearson)

**Sociobiologists:** look for deviance *within* individuals. **Genetic predisposition.**

**Psychologists:** Again, abnormalities *within* individuals. **Personality Disorders.**

**Sociologists:** Look for factors *outside* the individual.

### 1. Symbolic Interactionism

- a. Differential association theory (Edwin Sutherland 1924): deviance is learned because of the different groups we associate with. Families, Friends, Neighborhoods, Subcultures.
- b. Control Theory (Walter Reckless 1973) Two control systems work against our motivation to deviate. Inner Controls: conscience, religious principles, ideas of right and wrong. Outer controls: people, family friends, police.
- c. Labeling Theory: significance of the labels (names, reputations) we are given. Labels become part of our self-concept and help to set us on paths that either propel us into or divert us from deviance (e.g. whore, pervert, cheat, slob).

### 2. Functionalism

- a. Strain Theory (Robert Merton 1956): Crime is a natural part of society. Mainstream values generate crime. Society tries to motivate everyone to strive for success. Society does this by creating discontent—making people feel dissatisfied with what they have so that they will want to better themselves. But not all have equal access to **institutionalized means** of achieving success (e.g. education). Deviants are people who either give up on the goals or used deviant means to achieve them.
  - i. Four deviant paths:
    1. Innovators (accept the goal, look for other means)
    2. Ritualism (abandon the goal, but continue to go through the motions)
    3. Retreatism (abandon both goal and ritual)
    4. Rebellion (reject dominant interpretation and strive to create a new system with different goals)

### 3. Conflict Theory

- a. The group in power (the capitalist class) imposes its definitions of deviance on other groups (the working class and marginal class). The law becomes an instrument of oppression used to maintain power and privilege of the few over the many. Marginal working class commits visible crimes. The criminal justice system (operated by

those in power) becomes a tool of oppression, punishing these crimes while allowing those in power (e.g. corporations, wealthy, etc) to go relatively unpunished.

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