

# Exploring the Multidimensional Theories of Professional Deviance

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## Abstract

This abstract delves into professional deviance, examining its multifaceted nature through sociological, psychological, and biological theories. It highlights how these theories collectively provide a nuanced understanding of the causes of deviant behaviour in professional settings, emphasizing the role of socialization, individual predispositions, and mental states in shaping such conduct.

*Keywords- Professional Deviance, Sociological Theories, Psychological Perspectives, Biological Influences, Socialization and Behavior*

## Introduction

In contemporary society, the concept of deviance, particularly in professional settings, has garnered considerable attention. This complex phenomenon, transcending mere legal definitions, delves deep into the sociological fabric of human behavior. Understanding professional deviance is pivotal for comprehending broader patterns of social order and disorder. This exploration is not just a quest to identify and mitigate negative behaviors, but also an effort to understand the underlying mechanisms that drive individuals towards such actions.

The study of professional deviance opens a window into the intricate interplay of societal norms, individual behavior, and the various factors that sway people towards activities considered deviant. It's an area rich with interdisciplinary insights, drawing from sociology, psychology, criminology, and law. This comprehensive approach is essential in an era where professional misconduct can have far-reaching consequences, impacting not only individual careers but also societal trust and organizational integrity.

In this context, it becomes essential to examine the theories that explain why and how individuals diverge from accepted norms, particularly in professional environments. These theories, grounded in decades of research and observation, offer a roadmap to navigate the complex terrain of deviant behavior. They provide frameworks to understand the influences – be they societal, psychological, or biological – that shape our actions.

From the sociological theories that highlight the role of socialization and societal structures, to psychological and biological perspectives that delve into individual predispositions and mental states, each theory offers unique insights. They collectively contribute to a nuanced understanding of deviance, transcending simplistic explanations and highlighting the multifaceted nature of human behavior.

As we delve into these theories, we embark on a journey through the landscape of human behavior, exploring the myriad factors that lead individuals down the path of deviance. This exploration is not just academic; it has practical implications for policy-making, law enforcement, and organizational management. By understanding the roots of professional deviance, we can better equip ourselves to address these challenges, promoting a more ethical and orderly society.

## Theories of Deviance

Professional deviance is a subject of interest from both a legal and a sociological perspective. Numerous theorists and sociologists have studied this issue and proposed various theories to explain professional deviance.

### Sociological Theories of Deviance

#### Differential-Association Theory of Deviance.

The Differential Association Theory, initially posited by Edwin Sutherland, provides a sociological explanation for how individuals learn deviant behaviour<sup>1</sup>. According to Sutherland, the environment is a crucial factor in determining the norms that people learn to violate. Significantly, the theory emphasizes the influence of reference groups, i.e., the people we frequently interact with, on our perspective and behaviour<sup>2</sup>.

The process of socialization, where individuals learn the norms and values of their society, is often facilitated by various agents such as family members, teachers, friends, colleagues, and neighbours<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, media exposure can significantly impact the norms we adopt. The theory suggests that criminal behaviour is learned through these interactions, particularly with those in our close social circles.

The Differential Association Theory is applicable to various forms of deviant behaviour. For instance, young individuals, such as children and adolescents, are highly susceptible to the influence of gangs, which can expose them to environments that encourage criminal behaviour. Gangs often present themselves in a glorified manner, portraying countercultural, violent, retaliatory behaviours and crime as quick routes to achieving elevated social status. As a result, gang members often adopt these norms, learning to deviate from mainstream societal expectations.

The Differential Association Theory has made significant contributions to the field of criminology, particularly due to its focus on the developmental nature of criminality. It establishes the notion that deviant behaviour is learned through the associations that individuals maintain. However, some critics of the theory

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<sup>1</sup> Sutherland, E. H. (1947). Principles of criminology. J.B. Lippincott. p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> Matsueda, R. L. (1988). The current state of differential association theory. *Crime & Delinquency*, 34(3), p. 277-306.

<sup>3</sup> Berkowitz, L. (1962). *Aggression: A social psychological analysis*. McGraw-Hill. p. 105.

argue that its terminological vagueness undermines its compatibility with the empirical research methods used in social sciences<sup>4</sup>.

## **Anomie Theory of Deviance**

In the 1960s, sociologist Robert Merton introduced the term "anomie" to describe a state of social disorder caused by the lack of, or confusion resulting from, conflicting social norms<sup>5</sup>. Merton utilized the concept to explain the discordance between socially accepted goals and the accessible means to accomplish them. For instance, while acquiring wealth is often a common societal aspiration, not everyone has equitable access to the resources or opportunities necessary to achieve this goal. This discrepancy is especially prevalent among disadvantaged or marginalized communities<sup>6</sup>.

Individuals who cannot find a legitimate pathway to achieving wealth may experience anomie, a condition characterized by a disconnection from societal norms. Consequently, such individuals may resort to deviant behaviour to achieve their goals, which could involve rebellion against societal norms or seeking to make their presence felt within society.

Merton's theory of anomie is significant for its ability to explain various forms of deviance and its sociological emphasis on defining the role of social forces in engendering deviance. However, critics argue that the theory's broadness undermines its utility. Specifically, they suggest that the theory lacks sufficient attention to the learning process of deviance, including the internal motivators that drive such behavior<sup>2</sup>. Like the Differential Association Theory, Merton's theory of anomie is also criticized for its limited compatibility with precise scientific study<sup>7</sup>.

## **Control Theory of Deviance**

The Control Theory, posited by Walter Reckless, suggests that deviant behaviours are mitigated by both internal and external controls<sup>8</sup>. Internal controls consist of conscience, personal integrity, societal values, moral considerations, and the aspiration to be virtuous. Conversely, external controls are societal and include influences from family, friends, religious institutions, and authoritative bodies such as the police<sup>14</sup>. According to this theory, while there may be latent deviant inclinations within individuals, the majority are deterred from acting on them due to these controls. Travis Hirschi noted that these internal and external

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<sup>4</sup> Curry, G. D., & Spergel, I. A. (1988). Gang homicide, delinquency, and community. *Criminology*, 26(3), p.

<sup>5</sup> Merton, R. (1968). *Social Theory and Social Structure*. Free Press. p. 185.

<sup>6</sup> Agnew, R. (1992). Foundation for a General Strain Theory of Crime and Delinquency. *Criminology*, 30(1), p. 47-87.

<sup>7</sup> Akers, R. L. (1991). Self-Control as a General Theory of Crime. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 7(2), p. 201-211.

<sup>8</sup> Reckless, W. (1967). *The Crime Problem*, 4th edn. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, p. 115. <sup>14</sup> Goode, E. (2008). *Out of Control: Assessing the General Theory of Crime*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, p. 80-82.

restraints together cultivate an individual's self-control, which discourages them from violating societal norms<sup>9</sup>. The development of robust self-control is linked to effective socialization, particularly during early childhood. The theory suggests that children who do not cultivate strong self-control could become more prone to engaging in deviant behaviours and criminal activities as they mature. The Control Theory also implies that individuals often labelled as 'criminals' by society tend to belong to subordinate groups. Critics, however, contend that this perspective oversimplifies the issue, citing instances of affluent businesspersons and politicians who also commit **crimes**. Critics also argue that the theory does little to elucidate the root causes of deviance. Proponents counter these criticisms by asserting that the theory's primary focus is on exploring the relationship between social controls, behaviour, and socialization rather than indulging in etiological explanations.

## Labelling Theory of Deviance

Labelling theory, a perspective within sociology, posits that the connotations and symbolic meanings individuals derive from labels, symbols, actions, and reactions play a crucial role in understanding deviant behaviour<sup>10</sup>. The theory suggests that an act is considered deviant only when society applies a corresponding label. In other words, behaviours are rendered deviant or non-deviant based on societal interpretations and the subsequent attachment of labels.

In examining the dynamics of labelling, the theory seeks to determine who applies a particular label, to whom it is applied, why it is applied, and the ensuing repercussions. Notably, individuals in positions of authority or influence, such as politicians, police officers, judges, medical doctors, and lawyers, frequently impose significant labels within society<sup>11</sup>.

The applied labels—such as 'criminal', 'delinquent', 'drug addict', 'prostitute', 'alcoholic', 'retarded', and others—carry considerable consequences for those labelled. Social research indicates that individuals labelled in such a manner typically experience reduced self-esteem, tend to reject themselves, and may behave more defiantly due to the stigma associated with the label. Furthermore, those who internalize these labels struggle to alter their self-perception, even when confronted with evidence to the contrary<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Pratt, T. C., & Cullen, F. T. (2000). The Empirical Status of Gottfredson and Hirschi's General Theory of Crime: A Meta-Analysis. *Criminology*, 38(3), p. 931-964.

<sup>10</sup> Becker, H. S. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York: The Free Press, p. 9-23. <sup>11</sup> Scheff, T. J. (1966). *Being Mentally Ill: A Sociological Theory*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, p. 6779.

<sup>11</sup> Link, B. G., Cullen, F. T., Struening, E., Shrout, P. E., & Dohrenwend, B. P. (1989). A Modified Labeling Theory Approach to Mental Disorders: An Empirical Assessment. *American Sociological Review*, 54(3), 400-423.

A seminal study conducted by William Chambliss (1973) underscores the profound impact of labelling. Chambliss investigated two groups of white male high school students involved in delinquent activities, such as underage drinking, truancy, vandalism, and theft. Despite both groups committing comparable acts, they were perceived and treated differently by law enforcement based on their behaviour and socioeconomic backgrounds. The group labelled as 'Saints', who maintained polite demeanours, rarely encountered police intervention, while the 'Roughnecks', associated with harsh and unruly behaviour attributed to lower-class upbringing, frequently had encounters with the police<sup>12</sup>.

## Biological Theories of Deviance

Prior to the mid-19th century, sociological theories dominated the field of deviance, predominantly attributing deviant behaviour to socioeconomic conditions. However, a shift occurred with the introduction of a biological perspective by medical criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who was at the helm of the Italian School of Criminology. Lombroso contended that criminality was not solely a product of social conditions but a biological characteristic inherent in specific individuals<sup>13</sup>.

Lombroso introduced the concept of 'atavism,' suggesting that some individuals exhibited physical characteristics reminiscent of earlier forms of life, implying a biological predisposition to criminality<sup>14</sup>. This idea was expanded upon by his colleague, Enrico Ferri, who proposed that individuals who committed **crimes** due to their supposed biological makeup should be incarcerated for as long as possible, negating the effectiveness of deterrence or rehabilitation<sup>15</sup>. Raffaele Garofalo, another prominent figure in this school of thought, is celebrated for his formulation of a 'natural' definition of crime. According to Garofalo, individuals who violated universal human laws were unnatural in themselves<sup>16</sup>.

In contemporary criminology, the influence of the biological theory is less pronounced. The focus has shifted from phenotypic characteristics to genetic factors in the examination of the relationship between biology and crime. For instance, while you may observe a person with a round face in a public place, it

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<sup>12</sup> Chambliss, W. J. (1973). The Saints and the Roughnecks. *Society*, 11(1), p. 24-31.

<sup>13</sup> Rafter, N. H. (2008). *The Criminal Brain: Understanding Biological Theories of Crime*. New York: NYU Press, p. 45-62.

<sup>14</sup> Lombroso, C. (1876). *L'uomo Delinquente*. Milan: Hoepli, p. 77-90.

<sup>15</sup> Ferri, E. (1895). *Criminal Sociology*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, p. 67-85.

<sup>16</sup> Garofalo, R. (1885). *Criminologia: Studio sul Delitto, sulle sue Cause e sui Mezzi di Repressione*. Turin: Fratelli Bocca, p. 120-134.

remains challenging to ascertain the specific genetic combinations that might increase an individual's propensity for aggression<sup>17</sup>.

## Psychological Theory of Deviance

Conduct disorder is a psychological diagnosis applicable to children, characterized by a recurring and persistent behaviour pattern in which other individuals' fundamental rights are consistently infringed<sup>18</sup>. This condition underscores the significant influence a childhood environment can have on an individual's psychological development. If a child is repeatedly exposed to norm violations during their formative years, there is a higher likelihood that they will demonstrate deviant behaviour later in life<sup>126</sup>.

Deviant conduct can also be traced back to psychologically distressing events from an individual's past. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), for instance, is a condition that stems from traumatic experiences an individual has endured, resulting in atypical reactions to certain stimuli<sup>3</sup>. For instance, if an individual was subjected to parental abuse in the past, they might exhibit an abnormal psychological response to any form of beating, irrespective of whether they are the victims or merely witnesses<sup>19</sup>.

Psychological theories are often employed to explain deviant behaviour, albeit with limitations. Given the dynamic nature of the human mind and the uniqueness of individual responses to different situations, generalizing these theories can be challenging<sup>20</sup>. Nevertheless, psychological theories of deviance focus on the individual's mental state as a determining factor in understanding the motives and justifications for deviant behaviour.

Contemporary psychological theories have expanded to include aspects such as brain anatomy, the role of neurotransmitters, and psychiatric disorders to further understand and explain deviant behaviour<sup>21</sup>.

## Psychological Trauma

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<sup>17</sup> Beaver, K. M., & Belsky, J. (2012). Gene–Environment Interaction and the Intergenerational Transmission of Parenting: Testing the Differential-Susceptibility Hypothesis. *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 83(1), p. 29-40.

<sup>18</sup> American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing, p. 469-475. <sup>126</sup> Kistner, J. (2009). Children's aggression, antisocial behavior, and disruptive conduct. In R. E. Ingram & J. M. Price (Eds.), *Vulnerability to Psychopathology* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press, p. 44-70.

<sup>19</sup> American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing, p. 271-280

<sup>20</sup> Paris, J. (2008). *Prescriptions for the Mind: A Critical View of Contemporary Psychiatry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 134-150.

<sup>21</sup> Raine, A. (2002). Biosocial studies of antisocial and violent behavior in children and adults: A review. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 30(4), p. 311-326

Psychological theories of deviance extend beyond mere biological elements and often incorporate the examination of an individual's past to elucidate their deviant behaviour. A case in point is Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a condition that results from a person's past traumatic experiences that can lead to abnormal reactions to various stimuli.

Child psychological abuse can significantly contribute to the development of PTSD, potentially instigating deviant behaviours later in life. This consequence is not limited to those who experienced abuse during their childhood; individuals exposed to traumatic events in specific environments, such as the military, can also develop PTSD<sup>22</sup>.

A striking example of this is Sgt. Robert Bales, a U.S. soldier who, under the influence of alcohol, inexplicably murdered 16 Afghan civilians. It has been hypothesized by some experts that this egregious act may have been a manifestation of PTSD stemming from the stress of multiple deployments.

This analysis underscores the significant role that past experiences and traumas can play in inducing deviant behaviour, highlighting the need to consider these factors in conjunction with biological predispositions when studying and interpreting deviant actions<sup>23</sup>.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of professional deviance through various theoretical lenses offers a comprehensive understanding of why individuals engage in such behavior. From sociological theories emphasizing the impact of socialization and societal norms, to biological and psychological perspectives underscoring individual predispositions and mental states, each approach contributes to a holistic view. Recognizing the complexity of deviance is crucial in developing effective strategies for prevention and intervention. This knowledge not only enhances our comprehension of human behavior in professional settings but also guides the creation of more ethical, equitable, and efficient organizational cultures, ultimately fostering a more orderly and just society.

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<sup>22</sup> Hoge, C. W., Castro, C. A., Messer, S. C., McGurk, D., Cotting, D. I., & Koffman, R. L. (2004). Combat duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, mental health problems, and barriers to care. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 351(1), 13-22.

<sup>23</sup> DeLisi, M. (2018). Psychological Traits and the Genetic Overlap Between Life-Course Persistent Antisocial Behavior and Mental Health. In J. Savage (Ed.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Biosocial Criminology* (p. 145-158). London: Routledge.