

Cultural Deviance Theory

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Cultural Deviance Theory is a useful way to look at why some behaviors are seen as wrong by most of society but are normal within certain groups. It says that deviance isn't just a personal failing but comes from social situations where different values form because of things like being poor or left out. This theory challenges older ideas by focusing on group behavior rather than just individual choices. It started with studies of poor areas and young criminals during the growth of cities and industries. Several thinkers helped shape the theory by looking at how society and local cultures affect each other. The theory looks at how things like laws and community pressure try to control people's behavior. Case studies of deviance in different situations show how cultural norms can clash with what society expects. Some criticize Cultural Deviance Theory for making broad statements about subcultures and not considering individual choice or bigger social problems. Despite these criticisms, it's still important for discussions about preventing crime and understanding different groups in diverse societies. This essay will look at the good and bad of using Cultural Deviance Theory to understand deviance in complex social situations.

Cultural Deviance Theory says people act in ways that are seen as deviant because they're following the values of their group, which are different from what society usually expects. Most theories attribute deviance to individual problems or biology. This theory focuses on how a person's environment shapes how they act. It says some groups invent their own cultures and values to deal with things like poverty or being excluded from society. These subcultures often have values that go against what society considers normal and may even support behaviors that society sees as deviant.

Cultural Deviance Theory basically questions the idea of one right way to act by showing how different cultures affect what we see as deviant. What's considered deviant depends on what a group considers normal, not on some set standard. So, people deeply involved in subcultures with different values might do things seen as criminal not because they're bad people but because it fits in with their group.

This theory looks at how subcultures pass down deviant behaviors through generations. People learn and take on certain actions because their friends support them, reinforcing what the group considers normal. This builds unity and sets them against things like schools, police, and workplaces.

Cultural Deviance Theory helps explain how social inequalities create environments where different norms can grow. It moves the focus from blaming individuals to looking at the social and cultural factors that keep deviant behaviors going in some groups. It also helps us figure out how to deal with problems caused by cultural clashes instead of just punishing individuals.

Cultural Deviance Theory started in the early 1900s as an effort to fix the issues with older theories of crime, which mainly looked at individual problems and biology. This theory came from sociological studies and looked at how group behavior and culture, not just individual traits, affected deviant behavior. The basics of the theory came from research done by the Chicago School in the 1920s and 1930s. This research showed how social environments affect human behavior. Researchers found that some city areas had high crime rates because of things like poverty, diversity, and instability. The results suggested that deviance comes from subcultures with values that oppose what society considers normal.

The idea of subcultures was a big step because it gave a way to study groups with their own values that often went against what society expected. By focusing on what groups share and how they behave, this idea challenged the belief that crime was just a personal problem. The theory became more popular in the mid-1900s with studies of young criminals from working-class families. Researchers found that these teens often had different values that supported behaviors seen as deviant but were adaptive in their local settings.

Cultural Deviance Theory grew alongside other ideas like Social Disorganization Theory and Strain Theory. Still, it made itself different by looking at how cultural norms affect whether people fit in or act out. Over time, it borrowed ideas from symbolic interactionism, which helped show how people understand and use cultural symbols in society. This changed theory from simple explanations to a more complex understanding of how culture shapes behavior, both limiting and helping people.

The history of Cultural Deviance Theory is about trying to see deviant behavior in social situations instead of blaming it on personal failings or social breakdowns.

Cultural Deviance Theory came about through the work of several important thinkers who helped us understand how cultural value conflicts cause deviant behavior. Clifford Shaw is a key figure whose work with the Chicago School showed how neighborhoods create subcultures that differ from mainstream society. Shaw and Henry D. McKay studied young criminals in cities and learned that crime isn't just a personal problem but is connected to societal structures and cultural environments.

Albert K. Cohen took these ideas further in his book *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang*, published in 1955. Cohen said that young people from poorer areas create their own values because they can't succeed in middle-class society through normal means. They reject society's standards and adopt different values, such as being tough, defiant, and seeking quick satisfaction – traits that society sees as deviant. Cohen's theory said that feeling frustrated drives disadvantaged groups to create subcultures with their norms.

Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin added to the theory with their Differential Opportunity Theory. They said that people from different social classes have different chances to legitimately reach goals. If regular paths are blocked, people might look for criminal routes, leading to different

deviant subcultures, like criminal, conflict, and retreatist gangs. These gangs reflect the opportunities available.

These theorists showed how social inequalities lead marginalized groups to create cultural adaptations. Their work highlights how social environments, cultural values, and individual behaviors interact to cause deviant patterns. The theory remains important for understanding criminal behavior as something caused by social and cultural factors, not just personal decisions.

Cultural norms are the basic rules that define acceptable behavior in a society, influencing what people see as right and wrong. These norms change over time and vary among social groups. Cultural Deviance Theory says that when someone's values clash with society's standards, they may act out because they've learned the norms of a subculture. Social control is used to make sure people follow these dominant norms through things like law enforcement, peer pressure, and disapproval.

Social control and cultural norms are tied together. Social control keeps society stable, while also pushing aside or punishing those who don't fit in. Dominant culture defines what's deviant, not nature. Groups that form due to economic problems have their own values. These values excuse behaviors that society considers deviant. So, people in these subcultures do criminal things, not as bad people, but because these actions are normal in their group.

Social controls reflect society's power structure, where powerful groups force their cultural views on less powerful groups, labeling minority behaviors as criminal instead of addressing social issues. Youth gangs in poor areas have their codes that go against middle-class values, but these codes give members identity and support. The conflict between different norms shows how social regulation mechanisms keep deviant behaviors going, instead of resolving them.

Looking closely at how cultural norms and social controls interact helps us understand why some behaviors are seen as wrong while others become normal. It's more effective to study the context of deviance, rather than blaming it on a lack of morals. This method questions ideas about criminal behavior, highlighting how cultural factors define conformity and deviance.

Looking at deviant behavior with case studies gives strong evidence that supports Cultural Deviance Theory. It shows how people stick to subcultural norms that clash with society's values. A key example is the study of young crime in urban areas by William Julius Wilson. Wilson showed that social detachment and economic struggle create subcultures that value actions considered deviant. Youths in these areas do things like theft or gang activity to gain status and identity, not necessarily by personal choice.

Another good example is Albert K. Cohen's research on working-class boys who can't succeed via education. Cohen found these boys often form delinquent subcultures that promote

toughness and resistance to authority. This group rejection creates social patterns of deviance, rather than just individual actions.

Elijah Anderson's research supports this idea through his study of the "code of the street" in African American areas of Philadelphia. Anderson finds that there are social norms that dictate how people act. This code justifies violent actions as necessary for survival and social status, even though they are seen as deviant.

Together, these cases show that Cultural Deviance Theory explains how individuals adopt alternative cultural frameworks that justify deviant actions instead of focusing on personal issues or financial needs. Therefore, studying social context and group behavior is key to understanding deviant behavior.

Cultural Deviance Theory is useful for studying why deviant behavior continues in social groups, but people have criticized its effectiveness and relevance. One critique is that it makes sweeping statements about groups, showing whole communities as deviant. It fails to consider diversity and personal choice. This can spread stereotypes and hide how people interact with norms. Some critics say the theory focuses too much on subcultural values as the cause of deviance. This results in stigmatizing marginalized groups, instead of addressing large social problems.

A major critique is that the theory doesn't focus enough on large societal issues, including economic inequality and power imbalances. Cultural Deviance Theory recognizes that subcultures form as reactions to social systems, but often fails to emphasize how these systems create both chances and limitations. Therefore, some experts argue that focusing on cultural reasons can distract us from economic factors that influence deviant behavior. This restricts thorough policies designed to fight crime.

Also, Cultural Deviance Theory has been criticized because there isn't much proof for it across cultural contexts. The main research was done in American neighborhoods during specific times. That makes it unclear whether this theory can be applied to contemporary settings. The ever-changing nature of culture creates issues for theories that treat subcultural values as fixed. This static view creates challenges when we try to describe deviant behavior across different times and contexts.

Some theorists point out ethical problems with Cultural Deviance Theory, including its potential to blame victims. As long as it focuses on cultural norms within marginalized groups as the cause of deviant behavior, society might ignore how dominant institutions create the conditions that lead to crime. Cultural Deviance Theory provides understanding about group behavior. Still, these critiques highlight the need to combine cultural elements with how structures influence deviance.

Cultural Deviance Theory has implications for society that affect sociological knowledge and social policies, alongside crime prevention strategies. This theory says that people act in deviant

ways because they stick to the values of subcultures that clash with mainstream society. Social inequalities and cultural separation continue as groups create values to respond to financial hardship and social exclusion. Studying this challenges assumptions that crime stems from a lack of morals or biology.

The theory can affect how lawmakers create crime reduction programs that improve social unity. Programs based on Cultural Deviance Theory should prioritize fixing socioeconomic inequalities. Community programs aimed at improving education and job prospects change the context where subcultural values form. Law enforcement should focus on community work instead of aggressive policing which can increase tension between authorities and marginalized groups.

The theory highlights the important need for cultural sensitivity in social services and justice. Actions labeled as deviant can be seen as normal, making it easier to see the complexities in individual behavior. The development of this awareness helps reduce stigma, which encourages rehabilitation methods made to fit community backgrounds.

When applying Cultural Deviance Theory, experts must be careful not to excuse negative behaviors that come from subcultural norms. Plans should maintain an equilibrium between empathy and governance, as they incorporate diverse cultural viewpoints into a unified structure.

Through its analysis of cultural and structural factors, Cultural Deviance Theory provides understanding into behavior in society. This makes development multifaceted approaches which tackle both tangible and cultural factors, and is often necessary to fight deviance.

Cultural Deviance Theory is essential for studying how deviant behavior comes from values of social groups, mainly those marginalized in society. Examining its past shows tries to understand crime in poor city areas by focusing on culture instead of biology. The work of theorists like Shaw and McKay has helped show how subcultural values often clash with society. Examining norms alongside social controls highlights the interaction between group identity and standards and shows how actions seen as acceptable within subcultures can be deviant to social groups. Various case studies support the theory as a framework to understand delinquency patterns across multiple contexts. Many critiques show limitations with the approach, including overgeneralization and neglecting personal choice plus failing to consider inequalities that extend beyond cultural elements. The theory continues to be important for modern studies because it shows how culture shapes behavior patterns. It affects criminal reaction mechanisms, even with criticism. The implications of this reach into policy-making and intervention strategies prioritizing community and cultured people instead of punitive measures. Cultural Deviance Theory strengthens our understanding of deviant behavior by placing it within cultural contexts, prompting a more detailed and systemic perspective tackle social issues.