

Sociological Theories of Deviance

Course code: MSP2102

Number of lessons per week: 2

Course coordinator/teacher: Dr.Somfalvi Zita, associate professor

Email address: somfalvi.zita@nye.hu

Course Description:

This course explores the concept of deviance through a sociological lens, examining how certain behaviors come to be defined as deviant, how society reacts to norm violations, and how power, inequality, and social structure influence these definitions. Students will engage with classical and contemporary sociological theories, including functionalist, interactionist, conflict, and control perspectives. The course also investigates specific forms of deviant behavior such as crime, substance use, mental illness, and suicide, with attention to their social context, statistical trends, and policy responses.

Course Objectives:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Understand and critically assess the sociological concept of deviance and its relevance in contemporary societies.
2. Identify and compare major sociological theories explaining deviant behavior.
3. Analyze the social construction of deviance and its relation to norms, power, and inequality.
4. Examine various forms of deviant behavior using sociological frameworks.
5. Apply theoretical knowledge to real-world cases, statistics, and policies.
6. Develop critical thinking and academic writing skills through reading, discussion, and assignments.

Course Outline & Weekly Topics

Week 1: Introduction to the Sociology of Deviance (defining deviance; the scope of the field and its relevance; research questions in the sociology of deviance)

Week 2: Norms and Social Control (types of norms: folkways, mores, and laws; conformity vs. norm-breaking behavior; mechanisms of formal and informal social control)

Week 3: Concepts and Forms of Deviance (deviance as a social construct; types of deviant behavior; deviance and moral boundaries)

Week 4: Crime as Deviance (definitions and types of crime; youth and crime, crime and social order; crime statistics, public responses, and criminal justice systems)

Week 5: Mental Health and Suicide (medicalization of deviance; sociological interpretations of mental illness and suicide; suicide statistics and social policy responses)

Week 6: Substance Use – Drugs (drug use as deviance: social perceptions and stigma; comparative drug policy approaches; data and trends in drug use)

Week 7: Substance Use – Alcohol (alcoholism and social deviance; cultural norms around drinking; policy interventions and public health implications)

Week 8: Deviant Subcultures (subcultural theory and group identity; youth subcultures, gangs, and deviant lifestyles; media and moral panics)

Week 9: Deviance and Social Class (socioeconomic status and definitions of deviance; inequality and differential access to power and justice; deviance in elite vs. marginalized groups)

Week 10: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Deviance (biological, psychological, and economic theories; strengths and limitations from a sociological standpoint; nature vs. nurture debates)

Week 11: Functionalist Theories (Emile Durkheim: Anomie and the functions of deviance; Robert Merton: Strain theory and modes of adaptation)

Week 12: Interactionist Theories (Labeling theory: Becker, Lemert; primary vs. secondary deviance; stigma and identity management: Goffman)

Week 13: Conflict Theories (power, inequality, and deviance; radical and critical criminology: Taylor, Walton, Young; left realism and social harm)

Week 14: Control Theories (Travis Hirschi's social bond theory; right realism and rational choice theory; policy implications and crime prevention)

Recommended Literature

Goode, Erich (2019). *Deviant Behavior* (12th ed.). Routledge.

Clinard, Marshall B., & Meier, Robert F. (2015). *Sociology of Deviant Behavior* (15th ed.). Cengage.

Downes, David & Rock, Paul (2011). *Understanding Deviance: A Guide to the Sociology of Crime and Rule-Breaking* (6th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Durkheim, Emile (1897/2006). *On Suicide*. Penguin.

Becker, Howard S. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. Free Press.

Goffman, Erving (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Simon & Schuster.

Lemert, Edwin M. (1951). *Social Pathology: A Systematic Approach to the Theory of Sociopathic Behavior*. McGraw-Hill.

Taylor, Ian; Walton, Paul; Young, Jock (1973). *The New Criminology: For a Social Theory of Deviance*. Routledge.

Young, Jock (1999). *The Exclusive Society: Social Exclusion, Crime and Difference in Late Modernity*. SAGE.

Alexander, Bruce K. (2008). *The Globalization of Addiction: A Study in Poverty of the Spirit*. Oxford University Press.

Joiner, Thomas (2005). *Why People Die by Suicide*. Harvard University Press.

Course Design: Lectures, class discussions will be the procedures employed to cover the topics of this course.

Students are regularly expected to read class material before coming to class.

Attendance at classes: The permissible degree of absence during the semester in full-time education is three times the number of contact lessons per week of the subject. If this is exceeded, the course cannot be evaluated.

Requirement: exam

Evaluation method and schedule, the way the grade is formed: oral exam during the exam period

The exam topics are the weekly topics above.