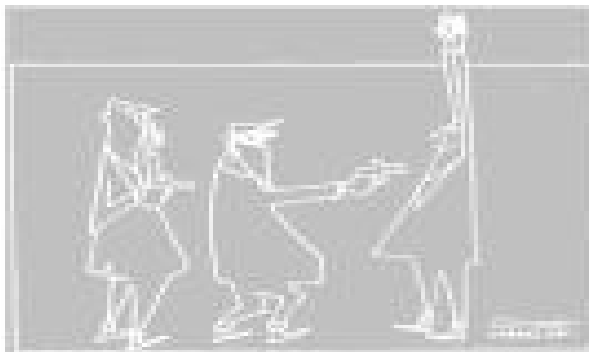


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A note for A2 students

As a module, it is both challenging and rewarding and, if you are studying it for A2, remember the need to look at the relationship between this unit and other units you have studied. At the end of the day, Deviance and Control is a unit that holds great relevance to our society. You will find, on some pages, suggested synoptic links between some of the key themes we have discussed to aid you here – just look out for the title -

A very important starting point with this module is to recognise that “deviance” is a **continuous variable** – we tend to have the assumption when thinking of a deviant as someone who has (quite wittingly) broken the law – in other words, our assumptions of what a deviant is equate to a term that we all recognise – a criminal.

However, **not all deviants are criminal.**

Let’s have a closer look at the two concepts;

Deviance;

Imagine you teacher turning up to a lesson wearing a string vest, shorts and cultivating a long straggly beard – quite a sight for sore eyes you may imagine! This offers a clear example of a deviant act – to deviate means, literally, to stray, or move away from the culturally accepted norms of society. To deviate is also not always bad!

A norm = a very common pattern of behaviour in society – in this respect, it is an approved way of behaving. Perhaps it might be useful to think back to the “Twix” advert – “Break away from the norm”!

Deviance, then, is a much more **generic (general)** category than **crime**. Indeed, sociology divides deviance into two distinct categories;

- 1 Informal deviance and;
- 2 Formal deviance

Informal Deviance

Informal deviance refers to the fact that an individual (or group of individuals) may be slightly non-conformist to the general trend of society; however, his/her/their behaviour does not constitute an illegal act.

In Sociology you will find lots of examples of informal deviants – a recent example is David Blaine;

Informal deviants are people / groups of people therefore whose behaviour might raise an eyebrow but will not encourage a person to call the police.

Informal deviants are people who are simply “different” for some reason or another. In effect, it is fair to say that we are all informally deviant to some degree or another.

In Sociology, there is a fascination with young people because of their informally deviant tendencies – particularly when looking at **youth subcultures**

A subculture = a group of people in society whose behaviour (and sometimes style of dress) is significantly different from wider society – so much so that they have a unique culture (away of life). However, because they still exist within our society they are called sub cultures.

Formal Deviance

Formal deviance, quite simply, describes an act committed by a person or group of persons that contravenes (goes against) the established laws of society. A formal deviant is therefore a **criminal**.

Key examples of clear formal deviants are; Harold Shipman, Ted Bundy and Ian Huntley (can you think of any more?)

What Haralambos is saying in this above quote therefore, is that what is regarded as formally and informally deviant is never set in stone. The picture is constantly changing.

Let's give some examples of this;

Where would you put the below "deviant" acts – would they be informally deviant or formally deviant?

Domestic violence	Smoking
Murder	Drinking too much
Fox hunting	Suicide
Allowing children to use mobile phones	Buying alcohol underage
Using Internet chat rooms	Graffiti

10 quite different acts – clearly, for some we have a "gut" instinct that they are formally deviant – such as domestic violence – however, on looking at the issue of domestic violence, this was not always the case; domestic violence was something that was once largely "left alone" – what happened in the family stayed in the family. It is quite possible that some of the acts above that you listed as informally deviant may be formally deviant in the future and vice versa (consider suicide for example – an act that was once illegal in Britain – now it is informally deviant – perhaps it is fair to say just about however)

Relative means, therefore, subject to change across time and location.

Some societies' definition of formally deviant and informally deviant is considerably different from ours for example.

It is also the case that we interpret deviant acts in relation to where they happen – consider for example one man killing another – instantly, we might assume a formally deviant act – however, in the context of a war this is acceptable, in the context of a suburb or inner city, this is clear murder.

The picture is therefore, never constant – in this respect Sociology argues that deviance is a

We will examine this point in a little while

For A2 students, consider this term “social construct” – it is a term that you have probably come across before – for example, the family is a social construct – therefore our notion of what a family is, is subject to change across time and location.

An important point worth making before we progress is that not all informal deviance is negative – informally deviant acts can be positive as well – consider, for example, Bono of U2, – a Rock and Roll star who perhaps drifts quite considerably from the norm of a “Rock and Roll” star by getting involved in social issues and charities.

Okay, so we made the point above that deviance is socially constructed – what is meant by that?

Well, in a very simple way, what we regard as informally and formally deviant is determined by society at large – if enough people in society over a long period of time feel an act that was informally deviant is formally deviant for example, there might be pressure on the legal system to make such an act formally deviant. Past examples might include stalking, harassing people with text messages and using mobile phones when driving.

And vice versa – if enough people in society over a long period of time feel that an act which is formally deviant needs to be informally deviant there might be such pressure on the legal system to oblige to such changes – for example cannabis has now been down graded (but still illegal in certain contexts).

Hagan (1984), a Canadian Criminologist, outlined how society constructs our notion of deviance;

He argued that society tends to use three measures of seriousness when judging the degree of deviance of an act.

These are;

- 1) **The degree of agreement about the wrongfulness of the act**
– This may range from confusion / apathy to total agreement
- 2) **Severity of the social response elicited by the act;** this can range from life imprisonment to polite avoidance,
- 3) **Societies evaluation of the harm elicited by the act;** this looks at the degree of victimisation – the degree of personal and social harm.

If you look back you will find that you probably sub-consciously used these measures to judge the severity of deviance in relation to each of the acts.

Let's illustrate this with a few examples ;

- 1 9/11 – an act which undoubtedly scarred America and permanently altered the way we live and see the world in its aftermath; Western society (and it is fair to say, most of the world) was united in the way it saw the extreme wrongfulness of the act; and there was a severe response as a result.
- 2 Cloning – an act which, one could argue is likely to be classed as a social diversion or a conflict crime for a while – society is divided as to the harm this causes, its wrongfulness and as a result responses are likely to be mixed.

We have two types of deviance;

Informal deviance (just being different!)

And

Formal deviance (Breaking the established laws of society – being a **criminal**)

All criminals are deviants but not all deviants are criminal.

Deviance is a **continuous variable** – it is a bit like trying to mould putty – it constantly changes shape and nature.

It does this because what is deviant is **determined** by society

Therefore, deviance is a **socially constructed term**.

Thus crime and deviance are **relative terms; they are subject to change across time and location**.

Hand in hand with deviance, however, comes the concept **social control**

For A2 students, the term “Social Control” will also be a concept you have come across before – e.g. look at Religion and Marxism – how is Religion a form of Social Control, how might the family be regarded as a form of Social Control through such a perspective? Remember social control can be positive as well as negative – what might Functionalism say about how such institutions control us?

Social control exists to prevent negative deviance (that is deviance which can be damaging to others) – as most deviance is, it could be argued, negative anyway, we will simply use the term “deviance” here

There are two types of social control;

Informal and Formal

For A2 students, this is an excellent opportunity to show your awareness and knowledge of other subject areas in relation to the concept “social control”

Informal Social Control

If you had a problem, who would you turn to first? A friend? Family? It is quite likely that you would seek solace in someone you knew well...someone who you saw regularly – someone who plays a very important part in your life. This is what we mean by informal social control. This form of control is therefore based on the approval or disapproval of those around us whose review of us we regard as important.

Hence, the three main groups that fall into this category are;

1) Family,

Our basic learning of norms and values (what is regarded as desirable and achievable, often dictating how we should live) are learned in the realm of the family. The family therefore plays a very important role on socialising us and therefore giving us our own identity. It is in this realm that we learn the basic morality of society (*note for A2 students – which political perspective, however, argues that this is under threat? Why?*) and we learn to develop a conscience. The family controls us in a very subtle way – unless we do very wrong perhaps where punishment is obvious and pronounced.

2) Friends,

In Sociology, the term “peer group” is often used as an alternative to the term “friends”. A peer group is a group of people of a similar age to us who we relate to. Often peer groups can teach us informally (i.e. often in a very “piece meal” and subtle way – much like the family) how to behave correctly and properly, but sometimes they do the opposite as we shall see later!

3) Work Colleagues

Very similar to peer groups but perhaps work colleagues are less likely to abuse the way they can control us!

Formal Social Control

The second form of control is formal social control. In Sociology, these institutions are referred to as organisations or systems that exercise rigid rules, ideologies and morals that we are often **compelled** to obey.

However, it may also be more useful to look at those who exercise formal social control us people in suits – people or institutions that we don't always come into every day contact with and when we do it is in a very rigid and timetabled way.

Hence, in formal social control we can include;

1) Religion

Historically, the church was one of the major forms of social control. However, perhaps its degree of social control has waned a little now (*note for A2 students – see the argument of post-modernists for example; although also look at the counter argument by the Functionalists – see Parsons, Malinowski etc.*). Its significance as a form of social control, however, may still exist in the way it has influenced the legal system, the family and education.

2) Education

Education has often been cited as a form of control in the way morality and citizenship are taught to pupils. Often, this has been referred to as the *Hidden Curriculum* (Bowles and Gintis) ; a curriculum that you learn without really thinking about it.

3) The Mass Media

The mass media (radio, television, cinema, arts etc) influence us by providing models of behaviour that we copy (it is through the mass media that we have role models) while condemning other “deviant” forms of behaviour. This is something we will look at in more depth later on; indeed, it could be argued that the media is playing a more and more crucial role in shaping public opinion that it ever has.

4) The Health Service

At first it may seem quite strange to suggest that the Health Service is a system of social control; but remember, when talking about social control we are not necessarily talking about negative control (i.e. condemning behaviour that is deviant); social control also describes positive control (i.e. encouraging us to conform to the values of society). The Health Service encourages us to be responsible about our health; think about very subtle things for example like a child getting a lollipop at the dentist – that is a sign that you have done what is expected of you. Some perspectives, however, argue that the Health Service is more likely to be a system of informal social control.

5) The Legal System

Undoubtedly the most obvious type of social control in society. The Legal system, therefore, is the most powerful institution that deals with social control. Included in this are the police and the courts.

As stated in the previous page, the legal system is the most powerful institution of social control.

They are the arm of the state whose **sole purpose** is to exercise social control; unlike the other institutions that we have examined.

Generally, when talking about the legal system, sociology has a keen need to particularly understand the role of the police. There are two main positions in understanding the role of the police to society;

CONFLICT POLICING

This model of policing has been suggested by Scraton (1985) who argues that the police can be seen as an occupying force, imposed, particularly upon working class and ethnic minority communities.

Indeed, consider the scenario in the 1984 Miners Strike in the South Wales Valleys for example; it was very much an “us” vs “them” mentality.

Indeed, this model argues that the police are influenced by powerful groups in society (such as the upper class) and powerful forces in society (such as the mass media)

Young (1984) describes this style of policing as a “military style”;

Large numbers of police officers patrol designated areas with a maximum use of technology for intelligence gathering.

CONSENSUS POLICING

Needless to say, the second role of the police would be a more positive affair. The consensual approach sees the police as having a close relationship with the local area being policed.

The role of the police force is seen to be representing the interests of the community.

Indeed, the consensual approach believes that the police “hold” the community together; in a way, it is possible to suggest that they actually form the “hub” of the community. This is aptly represented in such programmes as the 60’s “Dixon of Dock Green” and the 90’s version of the 60’s with “Heartbeat”. (An era where this perspective of the police was particularly favoured).

It is also felt among this approach that the majority of law abiding people in the community put great value on the importance of the police in maintaining order – thus, great respect is credited to the police for the work they do.



You cannot have social control, however, without the use of sanctions. Social control is exercised through the use of sanctions. There are four types of sanctions exercised which ensure we conform to the expectations of society;

1) Formal Positive Sanctions

These are sanctions that are exercised by a group (or groups) that fall under the concept “formal social control”. So, for example, they are sanctions that are exercised by the law or by education for example. However, notice the word “positive” – this means that rather than the sanction being a punishment, it is a **reward for good behaviour / achieving something desirable**. Let’s give some examples;

- 1 Winning a medal in a sporting contest
- 2 Receiving a Bible on Confirmation
- 3 Celebrating Bar Mitzvah,
- 4 Getting a Certificate after finishing a course,
- 5 Receiving a cash prize for reporting a suspected criminal.

2) Formal Negative Sanctions

These are sanctions that are again exercised by “people in suits” so to speak. Yet, the sanction this time comes in the form of a **punishment for bad behaviour / undesirable behaviour** rather than a reward.

Let’s give some examples;

- 1 Receiving a prison sentence,
- 2 Being ordered to pay a fine,
- 3 Being given detention in school

3) Informal positive sanctions

Informal sanctions are not so severe either way. They are sanctions that are applied by groups in society that we are most likely to turn to for guidance – hence they are groups that fall under the term “informal social control” e.g. family, peer groups. Notice the word positive here; not all sanctions are negative!

Let's give some examples;

- 1 A pat on the back by a friend,
- 2 A bunch of flowers from a friend for helping her out,
- 3 A present from your family on your birthday

4) Informal negative sanctions

Agencies of informal social control do, however, also exercise negative sanctions. Hence, agents of informal control also provide punishments as well as rewards;

Let's give some examples;

- 1 A friend telling you off for doing wrong,
- 2 Parents grounding a child,
- 3 A work colleague telling you to pull your weight.

Sanctions are exercised day in day out – not only are they applied to us – we apply them to other people as well – often subconsciously.

CASE STUDY

John Scott (1969) is a Sociologist who argues that a blind man is made blind by the society he lives in. The following text illustrates this example;

Peter was a 29 year old man who, following a car accident in his teens, has been blind most of his life. He has learned that most of his activities now involve asking people for help. This is something he resents. If he doesn't get help he gets told off by both his mother as well as his visiting carer.

He has longed to live an independent life and, despite accepting that there are some things he cannot do any more, he established a reputation as the local bowls champion and one day hopes to be world champion

- 1) *Give the two main types of social control that Peter comes into contact with? Would you class them as informal or formal social control?*
- 2) *What type of sanctions do you think Peter's mother applies to Peter when he tries to act independently? Give reasons*
- 3) *What type of social control Peter's friends would apply to him in the bowling centre? (Would you class it as formal / informal, negative of positive?) Give reasons.*

SOURCE; Idea partly influence by Moores' "Sociology Alive!" and Ray Henshaw and Bernadette Howells' "Health")

How social control is exercised, however, is open to abuse and you will find ample evidence of this in the first sociological perspective we are to examine;

Social Control exists everywhere

There are two types of social control;

Informal and Formal

Social Control is exercised through the use of sanctions.

There are four types of sanctions

**Informal Negative,
Informal Positive,
Formal Negative,
Formal Positive**

How social control is exercised, as a system of guidance, can be abused by certain institutions as we shall see.



If we were perfectly normal we would receive / issue any sanctions – no-one is normal however!