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# UNIT 31 SOCIAL DEVIANCE

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## 31.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- define deviance and describe its nature;
- classify and distinguish the types of social deviance;
- critically examine the biological, psychological and sociological explanations of deviance.

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## 31.1 INTRODUCTION

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Deviance and control are the key concepts linked to the central conceptual framework of sociology. In the earlier unit of this block, we discussed the concept of social control. In this unit we shall discuss nature and meaning of deviance, and introduce you to its types. This unit then focuses on the biological, psychological and sociological explanations of deviance.

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## 31.2 MEANING AND NATURE OF DEVIANCE

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The study of deviance cannot be undertaken without reference to norms. Norms are prescribed standards which guide and regulate behaviour. They are accepted by the group and shared by group members. For this reason, it is only with reference to norms that we can speak of, or define deviance. Human society permits certain

variations in the behaviour demanded by the norms. Essentially these variations are well defined by the cultural norms of the society concerned. When we speak of deviance we are essentially referring to norms violations, or to that behaviour which departs from some norms or standard of behaviour.

### 31.2.1 Difficulty in Defining Deviance

Norms are not the same everywhere. They vary from group to group, within a group, and over a period of time. It is not easy to identify those behaviours that are universally defined as departures from some norm or norms. For example, prostitution may be viewed as well as defined by law as deviant behaviour in India and USA. Yet in certain European countries prostitutes can operate openly in specific areas. Here we are taking a “relativistic view” of deviation. Behaviours, notions and products of human interaction can be understood or evaluated only within the context of the culture and society of which they are a part. A relativistic view of deviance, implies that deviance can be interpreted only in the socio-cultural context in which it occurs. Deviance is not absolute but relative to the social expectations, norms and rules of a particular society.

Also, if an act is defined as deviant in one situation does not mean it is deviant in every other situation. One of the most commonly accepted norms in many societies of the world is “Thou shall not kill”. It is a crime or legal offence to take another person’s life because that norm is a law. But in a situation like war, a soldier is permitted to kill an enemy soldier. This kind of behaviour is normative for soldiers in the war. Therefore, we can expect definitions of deviance to **vary with circumstances or situations.**

### 31.2.2 Variations in the Definition of Deviance

Let us now consider some other important variations, that affect the definitions of deviance, and contribute to the problem of defining deviance in terms of some universal factors.

#### i) Variation by Time

An act considered deviant in one time period may be considered non-deviant in another time period in a society. For example, in India women pursuing collegiate education were defined as “deviants” in the 19th century. But today, women pursuing higher education are not considered deviants.

#### ii) Variation by Culture

Behaviour viewed as deviant in one location, or culture may be considered non-deviant in another. In some cultures having more than one wife is permitted. It may signify the high financial and social status of man. In some other societies monogamy is strictly prescribed, and being married to more than one woman is a socially and legally punishable offence.

There are also variations in the definition of deviance within a culture, or between sub-cultures of particular society. Free interaction between the sexes may not be considered deviant in a big cosmopolitan city. But it may be so in a village or a small town. Similarly, teenage smoking may invite different kinds of reactions from different sections of the population. One sub-culture may often have norms, that are viewed as deviant by other sub-cultures in the same society.

#### iii) Variation by Social Position

Deviance can also vary with social status (the position in society that one occupies). Certain behaviours are given greater approval for men than women. It is acceptable

for men to go topless in an informal occasion, but if women do so, they are considered deviants. There is much diversity in behaviour, convictions and sanctions in different societies. There are also variations in the meanings and definitions attributed to behaviour and sanctions.

**Check Your Progress 1**

**Note:** a) Use the space given below for your answer.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

1) What do you mean by deviance? Use about three lines for your answer.

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2) Point out at least three main difficulties that arise in defining deviance. Use about four lines

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**31.3 BASIC TYPES OF DEVIANCE AND DEVIANTS**

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Both deviance and deviants need to be discussed in terms of their types. This exercise will clarify the nature of deviance.

**31.3.1 Three Types of Deviance**

Sociologists have classified deviance in a variety of ways. Whatever be the basis of judging or defining deviance, we may say that it is behaviour that is considered to be different from the central behaviour expectations in a certain group. It is possible to list the following three types of deviance (see Horton and Hunt 1981).

**i) Cultural and Psychological Deviation**

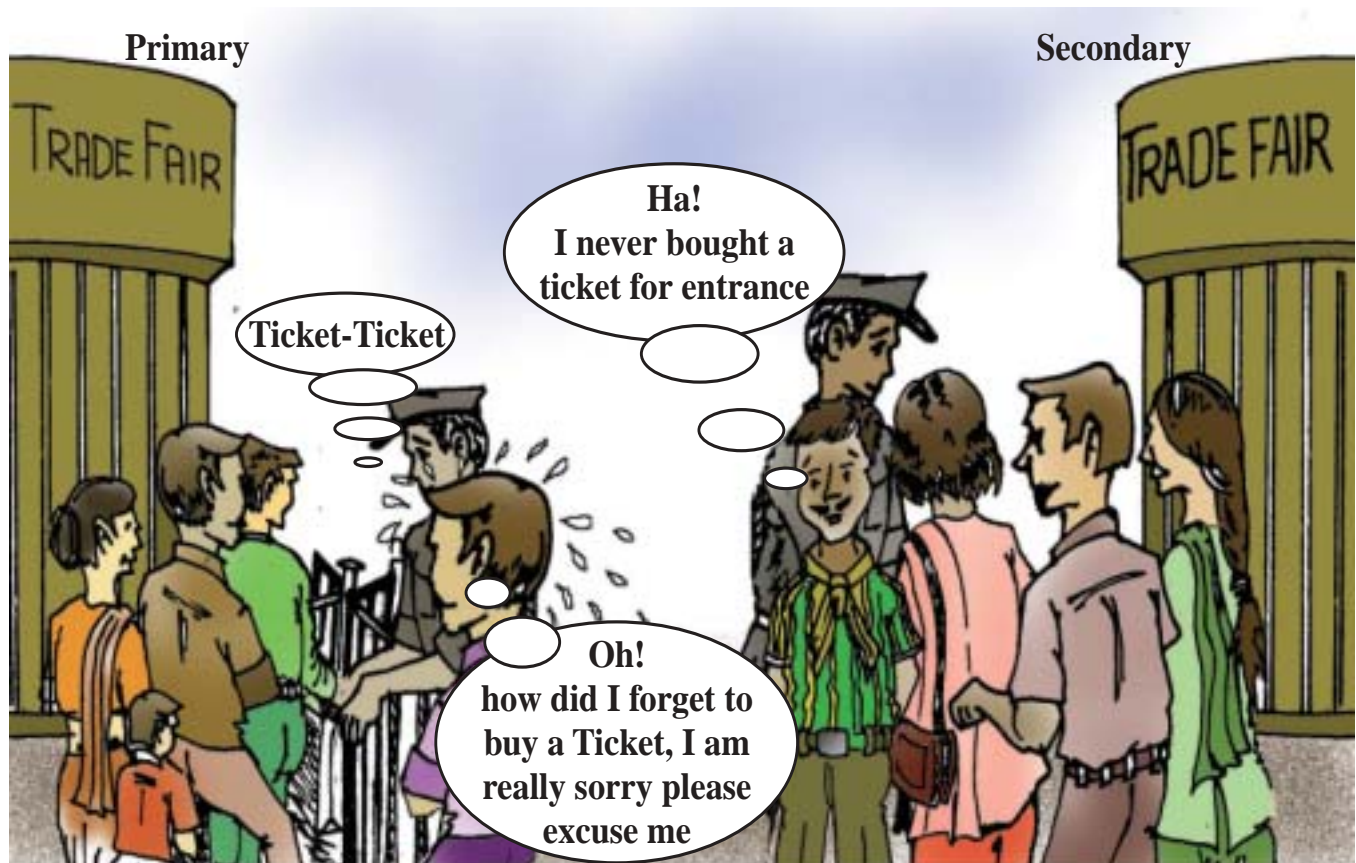
In cultural deviation one departs from the norms of a culture, while the psychological deviant deviates from the norms in personality organisation, for example, the psychotic and neurotic. Both categories may be found in the same person.

**ii) Individual and Group Deviation**

In individual deviation, the person deviates from the norms of a sub-culture. For example, a boy belonging to an educated and respected family takes to drugs and becomes a school dropout. In group deviation, the deviant sub-culture has norms which are condemned by the conventional morality of the society, for example, a street-corner gang of unemployed youth indulging in all sorts of unlawful activities. The gang will be a well-knit group having a private language (known as argot) and a set of stereotyped behaviours, i.e., they develop a distinctive sub-culture. The behaviour of the group members and their activities are condemned by others in society.

### iii) Primary and Secondary Deviation

Primary deviance refers to the violation of social norms committed by a person who is not labelled as a deviant, and who is basically a conformist in his or her life. The deviant act is trivial or tolerated or concealed so that one is not identified as a deviant. For instance, travelling ticket less once in a while, slipping an extra apple into the shopping bag without paying for it etc. Secondary deviation is that which follows from one's public identification as a deviant. One is labelled as a deviant. The labelling process is often the point of no return in the development of deviance. It leads to isolations, possible dismissal, ostracism and sometimes even imprisonment. The deviant may join the association of other deviants. Even if he or she had the choice to discontinue his behaviour, he or she cannot help but continue.



Social Deviance

### 31.3.2 Five Types of Deviants

Let us now look at the five types of deviants and thus explain the nature of deviance.

#### i) Freak

The definition of deviants as 'freak' focuses not so much on behavioural patterns, as on physical attributes. Here, deviance merely means variation from the average norms, in a statistical sense. The 'freaks' are those who stand at the extreme ends of the normal curve. The inadequacy of this definition is, that attitudinal and behavioural attributes are not distributed in the population in the same way as physical attributes. Secondly, even those who are placed at the extremes are not necessarily viewed as 'undesirables'. That is, the mentally retarded may not be equated with a genius (though both stand at extreme ends).

#### ii) Sinful

The deviant as 'sinful' is adjudged as such on the basis of religious ideological codes, commandments, texts and doctrines. The terminology applied to such deviants include sinner, heretic, and apostate. The sinner violates certain norms and doctrines which

he/she accepts. The heretic rejects the doctrines or prescriptions; and the apostate not only rejects the faith or dogma, but accepts some other alternative norms and traditions. This amounts to 'ideological treason' from the group's view point.

### iii) **Criminal**

The 'criminal' deviant is defined according to the legal codes, particularly the criminal law. Laws are ostensibly enacted to prevent acts, injurious to society and group welfare. Those who violate these laws are labelled as deviants and invite punishment. But not all laws are so detrimental to society. There are four types of legal enactment's designating four types of deviant action, not all equally injurious to society. First, laws prohibit acts which are definitely a threat to the society and cannot be tolerated. For example, murder, theft, treason, incest etc. There is generally a social consensus about the necessity of such laws.

#### **Activity 1**

During wars soldiers kill many human beings of the enemy side, but during peaceful situation if the same soldier kills even a single person, he will be declared a murderer and a criminal. How will you explain this? Write an essay of one pages on "Social Aspects of Crime" keeping in mind the above situation. Discuss your essay with other learners at your study centre, as well as your Academic Counsellor.

Second, some acts which are not necessarily immoral or abnormal, but they interfere with public order or public good, and so are made illegal, violation of traffic rules are examples. Third, some criminal laws define certain acts as crimes, but without any victims; these acts do not cause harm or injury to others, and are not malicious as other criminal offences are. The drug addict, the homosexual, and the drunk are examples of such deviants whose behaviour is stigmatised as crime, mainly to enforce certain moral conceptions. Fourth, there are laws which prohibit acts which are 'crimes with willing victims'. Illegal gambling and prostitution are some examples, in which the 'victim' actively seeks criminal services. What all this implies is that some laws prohibiting certain acts, may be based on a general consensus and receive ready acceptance in the larger society. But many laws which proscribe certain acts, particularly those on the border-line of vice and morality, raise critical questions and issues about their justification. The legal definition of deviance (crime) may not always be based on consensual norms of morality. In many situations, it may just be the result of arbitrary processes of legislation, and specific pressures of various interest groups in society.

### iv) **Sick**

The conception of deviant as 'sick' is based on a disease model and defined in the pathological framework. Seen from this view-point, the elements of wilfulness and responsibility on the part of the deviant are removed. When defined as 'sick' or abnormal, the reaction of the society towards the deviants changes from punitive to a treatment orientation. There is now a growing tendency to think of such behaviour which was earlier regarded as vicious, criminal or depraved, as manifestation or symptom of an illness. The drug addict, heavy drinker, and homosexual, for example, are now regarded more as 'victims' of some illness rather than criminals. Yet they are more likely to be seen as deviants insofar as such behaviour is perceived as socially (undesirable). The identification of deviance is based on certain internal or intrapsychic symptoms. These may include, apart from intrinsically psychotic conditions, such persistent psychic state as hostility, guilt, shame, escapism,

withdrawal etc. It is obvious that the definition of these conditions as ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ varies cross-culturally. It also depends on the socio-economic status of the ‘sick’ persons. Thus this definition of deviant as ‘sick’ involves several difficulties.

v) **Alienated**

The definition of deviant as ‘alienated’ persons, focuses on certain categories of social dropouts such as hippies. In the modern industrial society, many people feel estranged and isolated from the values and norms of the society. They are confronted with a sense of powerlessness and meaninglessness. They feel impotent either to control their environment or to determine their own fate. They rarely find an opportunity to express themselves as real or ‘whole’ persons. There is a complete loss of individual meaning in the face of a vast, segmented impersonal, and uncontrollable social order. They are estranged from the normative order of the larger society in a way that, ‘they are in the society but not of the society’. As alienation increases in the modern industrial societies, the number of such alienated deviants also increases, ranging from suicides to addicts.

Such is the variety and complexity of social deviance, that there cannot be any universally applicable classificatory system of this phenomenon. Let us conclude this section, by saying that in defining deviance we should specify the group whose viewpoint we are taking, as also the nature of the normative order (religious, legal) as reference point.

**Check Your Progress 2**

**Note:** a) Use the space given below for your answer.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

1) What are the three types of deviance? Use three lines for your answer.

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2) List out five types of deviants. Use two lines for your answer.

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## **31.4 EXPLANATIONS OF DEVIATION**

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Given the wide variations in deviance how can this phenomenon be explained?

Scientists have offered a variety of theories to explain deviance. Biological theories tend to focus on hereditary, anatomical or physiological factors. Psychological explanations tend to discuss personality, motives, aggression, frustration, and other subjective factors. Sociologists usually emphasise socio-cultural factors. Some of these explanations have more empirical support than others. But it goes without saying that all the explanations can increase our understanding of the complexities of

human behaviour, whether deviant or non-deviant. Given below are the three types of explanations of social deviance-biological, psychological and sociological.

### 31.4.1 Biological Explanations

Biological theories of deviance are generally traced back to the Italian physician-psychiatrist Lombroso (1835-1909). Lombroso was interested in the scientific study of crime. He said that attention should be shifted from the criminal act to the criminal specifically to the physical characteristics of the criminal. He was convinced that there was a “born criminal type”. His conclusions were based on a comparison of 400 prison inmates, with a group of Italian soldiers. Lombroso found that the inmates displayed certain physical abnormalities such as deviations in head size and shape, eye defects, receding chins, and excessively long arms. This led him to the belief that criminal tendencies are inherited, and that the potential criminals could be identified by certain physical characteristic or body types. However, his findings were disproved by later researchers who concluded that there is no such thing as a physical type.

Lombroso was not the only scientist to hold the view that physical traits and deviant behaviour are inter-linked. In the 1940s the American psychologist-physician Sheldon attempted to link body type to behaviour. He classified people in terms of three types of physique. The *endomorph* who is soft, round and usually fat; the *mesomorph* who is muscular, stocky and athletic and the *ectomorph* who is skinny and fragile. He associated these body types with certain temperamental and behavioural tendencies. A disproportionately high percentage of criminals were found to be of one body type i.e., *mesomorphs*—the stocky, muscular body type. Like other biological explanations, this theory was also found to be inadequate. For instance, physically fit boys maybe recruited to delinquency more often than skinny boys, Judges may see muscular boys as more of a threat than skinny or obese boys. More recently it has been proposed that a specific genetic condition may be associated with crimes of physical violence. Some violent criminals have been found to have an extra chromosome, they have XYY chromosomes rather than the usual XY. Other findings, however, indicate that XYY factor is not a cause of deviation (Eshleman and Cashion 1983:159-160).

Biological explanations of deviance have been rejected, mainly because they fail to explain why others having similar biological make up, do not exhibit the same forms of behaviour. Biological explanation also do not explain the variation; in deviance as well as its relative nature.

### 31.4.2 Psychological Explanations

These explanations focus on the person who engages in deviant behaviour. Psychological explanations lay emphasis on the mind of the individual, rather than on body types. These explanations focus on such subjective factors as personality structure, learning, goals, interests, motivations, will power, frustration, ego strength, anxiety, guilt, etc. Social psychologists often consider the social context of behaviour, in addition to these subjective factors.

One group of psychological explanations associates deviance with sickness, arguing that deviance results from a psychological abnormality or a mental illness. For instance, it argues that mentally ill people take to drugs or excessive drinking. Mentally ill people may commit deviant acts. Yet this theory does not account for deviance among people who are not mentally ill nor does it explain why some mentally ill people are not deviant.

Some other psychological explanations suggest that deviance results from frustration. When needs are not fulfilled frustration results which in turn leads to aggression. Frustration over lack of money can lead to aggressive actions—child abuse, robbery, even murder. One difficulty with this explanation is that frustration is defined in such a very broad manner, that it includes almost any behaviour. It does not tell us why there are some people who are frustrated but do not act deviantly.

The psycho-analytic theories of deviation are based on the works of Freud (1856-1939). Freudian theorists linked deviance with defects in the super-ego or conscience. People with weak egos were said to be unable to control their impulse, or follow planned rational courses of action. The greatest difficulty with these explanations based on instinct unconscious needs and conscience is that it is difficult if not impossible to test them empirically. Like the biological theories explaining deviance, the psychological theories too cannot account adequately for the relative nature of deviance. The influence of the social context, variations in rates of deviance, and social responses to deviance are also not given consideration.

### 31.4.3 Sociological Explanations

Sociological theories attempt to explain deviance by looking at the socio-cultural context of deviance. The explanations include both the deviant acts and actors.

The theories we shall consider here are:

i) **Anomie Theory:** It focuses on value conflicts between culturally prescribed goals and socially approved ways of achieving them. ii) **Socio-cultural Learning Theories** are concerned with the way people interact and learn deviance. iii) **Labelling Theory** focuses on the meanings, definitions, and interpretations applied to action. iv) **Conflict Theory** contends that groups in power define the acts of the weaker groups as deviant in order to exploit them.

#### i) Anomie

The concept of anomie has been very important for developing a general theory of deviant behaviour. Anomie literally means normlessness. But this is not its meaning as used in sociology. It does not mean either the absence of norms, or the lack of clarity of norms. In both cases we would be faced with the problem of defining deviant behaviour. Anomie refers to a social and cultural condition in which there is either conflict of norms or ambivalent orientation towards norms. The credit for bringing out the implications of anomie for a general theory of deviant behaviour goes to the American sociologist, Robert K. Merton (1968). He aimed at showing how some social structures exert a definite pressure upon certain persons in the society, to engage in non-conforming rather than conforming conduct. Merton attempted to specify the social and cultural situations which generate varying rates and types of deviant behaviours in different social structures.

To develop his theory of anomie and deviant behaviour, Merton identified two important elements of social and cultural structures. First, let us take the cultural goals, purposes, and interests. These culturally prescribed goals are held out as legitimate objectives, for all the members of the society. The members are supposed to strive for these objectives. Second, actual structures also provide the accepted modes or ways of reaching these goals. That is, there are normatively controlled means to pursue these ends. Then, there is also what Merton calls the opportunity structure in society. That is, the actual distribution of facilities and opportunities to



achieve these goals through socially approved means. As these opportunities are inequitably distributed among various strata of population, there is unequal access to legitimate means to achieve goals.

### Activity 2

Visit a slum near your residence. Find out about the children between 5-18 years and their daily life in the slums. Write a report of one page on "Life in the Slums". Discuss your answer with other students and your Academic Counsellor at your study centre.

The foregoing propositions imply that the cultural goals are held out equally for all, whereas the institutional means to achieve them are not equally available. This differential access to legitimate means and opportunities to achieve goals results in strain, namely, a sense of frustration and injustice. Deviant behaviour can be seen as a symptom of this strain. When people are unable to realise the culturally prescribed aspirations, through socially structured avenues which are not equally available to them, they may adopt alternative, illegitimate means to achieve them. The theory of anomie seeks to explain the rates and pattern of deviant behaviour in different societies. As Merton has himself noted, many countries much poorer than the United States such as India, have lower rates of crime. The low rate of crime in India, despite its poverty can be attributed to the fact that poverty alone, does not operate in the same manner in each society. It is interdependent on other social and cultural variables. When there is traditionally little possibility of getting ahead, as in a caste society, poverty does not account for high crime rate. Once the constitutional values in our country, such as equal opportunity for all, are held out before citizens, the levels of aspiration rise, and the existing inequitable social structure resentment and frustration - the "socially structured strain" - are likely to occur and lead to a higher rate of crime, vandalism and violence.

Merton's theory has been subject to criticism. (i) Critics argue that it wrongly assumes that a single system of cultural goals is shared by the entire society. The goals are different for different people. Everyone does not aim for the same goals. (ii) The critics point out that it has also failed to explain why some people choose one response, while others choose a different one. (iii) Some have been pointed out that certain types of deviance - rape, the behaviour of hippies in the 1960s - have not been accommodated in his analysis. (iv) Other critics argue that Merton's theory ignores the influence of society's reactions in the development of deviance (Eshleman & Cashion 1983: 1630).

In spite of these criticisms the anomie theory provides a framework for examining a wide range of social behaviour.

### ii) Socio-cultural Learning Theories

These theories focus on those processes through which deviant acts are learnt, and the conditions under which learning takes place. These theories emphasise presence of groups that people belong to, and how they learn the norms prescribed by those groups. Two of the theories that specifically focus on deviance are:

a) **Sub-Culture or Culture Transmission Theory:** The emphasis in sub-cultural explanations is on the existence and transmission of deviant traditions, attitudes, and behaviour among certain groups or sectors of society. Culture consists of certain values, beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and ideas shared by members of a society. But within a society there are many variants of the common culture among certain groups, which are normatively distinguishable from the larger society. They simply mean "a culture within a culture". Thus there are some sub-cultures which perpetuate,

and give support to, deviant beliefs and values. The supposition is that particular individuals commit deviant acts because they have identified themselves with, and are exposed to the normative systems that are centrally in conflict with that of the larger society. In other words, individuals in this case receive group support to their activities, which are stigmatised and penalised by the larger society. The sub-cultures of these groups are directly in opposition with the larger society.

For example, some of the criminals, delinquents, homosexuals, or drug addicts may constitute specific groups of deviants, each of which have some attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviour patterns shared by their respective members.

### Box 31.01

Even thieves have a code of conduct. Some of the tribes in India, such as, the Sansis, the Pardis, the Nats, etc. were considered to be the criminal tribes since they practised crimes like theft, robbery, murder as part of their customary traditions. It was committed in a ritualistic manner as part of worship of their gods and goddesses. Thus, you may have heard of murders and dacoities in certain areas in Delhi where the wooden leg of cots were used to kill their victims before robbing them.

Several sociologists have paid attention to the notion of sub-culture in the analysis of a wide range of deviant behaviour, particularly crime, delinquency, drug addiction, homosexuality, etc. This notion was already evident in the urban studies of a group of sociologists known as the “Chicago Sociologists”. They pointed out around the 1920s that in several sectors of the city, particularly in the slum areas, there existed well-developed and persistent patterns of values and norms, which were at variance with those of the ‘respectable’ society. They were reflected in such behaviour as organised forms of crime, delinquency, prostitution, etc. Such patterns were easily transmitted to the younger generations as part of their socialisation process.

b) **The Differential Association Theory:** The differential association theory was devised by Sutherland. He tried to answer the question “Why are some people attracted to deviant behaviours while others are not?” More specifically, he attempted to find out why crime rates vary among different groups of people.

Sutherland (1939) proposed that deviance is learned by association with those who hold these values. Learning a deviant behaviour involves acquiring a set of motives, drives, rationalisations and attitudes and specific techniques for committing the deviant act itself. People are regarded deviant when they acquire more definitions that favour violating norms and laws than oppose such violation. He pointed out that deviant behaviour of individuals in the group may vary in frequency, duration, priority and intensity, depending on the amount of time they have spent with groups possessing different norms. The variations in group involvement’s are known as “differential association”.

He did not believe that contact with criminals is a necessary condition for a person to become deviant. Exposure to conditions favouring deviance was enough. The influence and frequency of these exposures vary from person to person. Sutherland’s theory was later revised as a social learning theory, around the late 70s in terms of the behavioural theory in psychology. Critics argue that socio-cultural learning theories, do not explain how deviance originated or how certain behaviours came to be defined as deviant. It has also been argued that they do not deal adequately with those who commit deviant acts in isolation rather than as part of a group (Eshleman and Cashion: 1983 : 165).

### iii) **Labelling Theory**

The theories mentioned so far have focused on deviance in terms of people and acts, the process of learning deviance. Labelling theory looks specifically at the consequences of labelling a person “deviant”. How does a society construct definitions of deviance? How and by whom are these labels applied to certain people? How does labelling affect a person’s behaviour? Attention is focused on the nature of origin of social norms and on the social reaction to labels aimed at those whose behaviour departs from these norms. The main premise of the approach is two-fold. First, it directs attention to the fact that social deviance, as defined by social norms, is relative. What is deviant at one time and in one context may not be deviant at another time or context. Secondly, the role of those involved in labelling a person as deviant, is itself an independent variable in creating or leading to deviance.

The labelling orientation recognises three levels of analysis. First, the society at large, consisting of various interest groups. These define and judge various forms of behaviour as deviant. Second, there are various individuals with whom the person concerned interacts daily and who label him in one way or the other. Thirdly there are the official and organisational agents of control who implement societal reaction, and label or stigmatise the individual, leading him or her to deviant commitment and career. You may understand this perspective by an example. It is common experience that a child who is constantly labelled by his parents or teachers as a ‘bad’, ‘dull’ or ‘unintelligent’ child, gradually begins to accept his negative self-evaluation, and then begins to ‘actually’ act or behave in similar manner.

The implications of the labelling perspective is that it redirects our attention, to processes of rule making in society, and the interests and activities of those who label the individual as deviant. Labelling analysis is indebted also to the social conflict school. The social definition of deviance and labelling of an individual as deviant, involve aspects of social conflict among several interest groups in society.

The labelling theory too has its critics. They say that it does not explain the causes of deviance. It cannot be used to predict who will be labelled deviant and in what context. Labelling theory is difficult to test empirically. It has also been pointed out by some criminologists that the labelling theory is inadequate. In that it makes all deviance depend on labels, as if, without labels, there would be no deviance (Eshleman and Cashion: 1983 : 169)

### iv) **The Conflict Theory**

Conflict theory argues that most societies have many groups which have different, often conflicting values. The strongest groups in a society have the power and authority to define the values of weaker and subordinate groups as deviant. Quinney (1979) for instance, describes crime as that human conduct which is desired by authorised agents in a politically organised society. These agents often define as criminal any behaviour that conflicts with their interests. By publicising these definitions of crime through the media, powerful people impose their own interest on others. Thus laws about theft, robbery, have been intended to help to protect the interests of powerful capitalists rather than the powerless workers. Many conflict theorists perceive that their findings will stimulate political action. They believe it will help to raise a revolutionary consciousness, and the oppression of the powerless by the powerful.

Like other theories, conflict theory has its own critics. Some of the criticisms have been :

- a) it does not search for causes
- b) it does not explain the crimes and deviance’s that are basically non-political
- c) it assumes that in the Utopian Communist Society (which will materialise after the overthrow of the capitalist regime) murder, robbery, rape and other crimes will disappear after the “power” to criminalise them is abolished (Eshleman & Cashion 1983 : 164).

**Check Your Progress 3**

**Note:** a) Use the space given below for your answer.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

1) What are the major types of explanations generally given for deviance? Use about two lines.

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2) What is the major focus of biological theorists? Use only one line.

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3) Sociological theories attempt to explain deviance by looking at the psychological context. Tick the correct box.

Yes

No

4) List out the major sociological explanations of deviance.

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**31.5 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit you have been exposed to the meaning and nature of deviance. Deviance is a relative concept inasmuch as its definition varies from group to group and from time to time. It is difficult to define deviance universally as different societies differ in their norms and values. A departure from this is called deviant behaviour.

We also talked about the various ways in which deviance has been classified, and then raised the question about what causes deviance. We have outlined the various explanations of deviance from the various explanations of deviance from the perspective of biology, psychology and sociology. In sociology deviant behaviour is seen as a consequence of certain features in the cultural and social structures of society.

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## 31.6 KEY WORDS

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- Alienation** : A psychological condition where an individual feels that he/she is isolated from the rest of the world.
- Anomie** : A social situation in which values are conflicting, weak and absent.
- Instinct** : A complex behaviour pattern that is biologically inherited and common to all members of a given species.
- Social Status** : Positions individuals occupy in the society, e.g. father, mother, occupational positions like Teacher, Student, etc.

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## 31.7 FURTHER READINGS

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Horton. P.B. and Hunt, C.L., 1981. *Sociology*, McGraw-Hill: London.

Johnson, H. 1966. *Sociology: A Systematic Introduction*, Allied Publishers: New Delhi.

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## 31.8 MODEL ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Deviance refers to norm violations or to that behaviour which departs from some norms or standard behaviour.
- 2) The three main difficulties in defining deviance are:
  - a) Variation by time.
  - b) Variation by culture.
  - c) Variation by social position.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1)
  - a) Cultural and psychological deviance,
  - b) individual and group deviance, and
  - c) primary and secondary deviance.
- 2) Freak, Sinful, Criminal, Sick and Alienated.

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) There are three types of explanations:  
Biological, Psychological and Sociological
- 2) Biological theorists tend to focus on heredity or anatomical or physiological factors.
- 3) No
- 4) Anomie Theory  
Socio-cultural Learning Theories  
Labelling Theory  
Conflict Theory