

Deviance and Social Control

How is deviance socially constructed? In what ways does it contribute to self-fulfilling Prophecy?

Howard Becker defines deviance as an infraction of rules agreed upon by others. To him, every group sets some rules, and the deviant is the person who breaks these agreed-upon rules. he has defined deviance as "social groups define deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders." According to this viewpoint, no action in itself is deviant. It is how society responds to the activities of individuals. Deviance does not reside in an individual's behavior; instead, it resides in the interaction between the person committing the act and the individuals responding to the specific action. Thus deviance is socially constructed (Becker, 1963).

Different factors play an essential role in how society responds to the actions of individuals and label them as deviant. The construction of the deviance can be well studied by looking at the classical study of Roughnecks and Saints by William Chambliss, 1970. Chambliss studied two school groups, namely the Roughnecks and the Saints. Both the groups were equally involved in wrongdoings, but society held different approaches towards both. The Saints group consisted of eight members from the upper-middle class, white, and very active in academic activities and students' affairs.

Contrary to saints are the roughnecks, who were also white but were lower class and had poor classroom performance. Although both groups were equally involved in delinquency, society always treated them differently. There are many factors to this unequal treatment, including the socio-economic status of these groups. Saints always manage to escape from

school and help each other escape from class. Their plans were always flawless, and any teacher never caught them. In contrast, roughnecks were always in trouble with the police and society (Chambliss, 1973).

Both cohorts were involved in equal sowing of the wild oats, but society had a different perception about these groups. Saints were engaged in vandalism, driving crazy while drunk, and lifting items from construction sites. Most delinquent acts went unnoticed because they chose places far from school and the area they were living in. They used to keep changing places where they met, so the members of their society never caught them. On the other hand, Roughnecks were primarily involved in three delinquencies; fighting, lifting items and drinking. They were relatively poor and did not have their cars. They were also engaged in siphoning gasoline from automobile stations. But this event only happened once or twice a year because they did not own any car and had to borrow from their parents. Roughnecks, unlike saints, used to meet at a central point because it was equally accessible for all six members. That was why they always got in trouble, and society labeled them deviant. Saints managed to escape from the crime scene because they had cars. Roughnecks' frequent visibility at crime sites is the primary reason for being labeled deviant.

The behavior of these cohorts to the intervening party also resulted in differential treatment by society. Saints were polite, well-mannered, and well dressed. If any community member encountered or intervened, they stayed calm and handled things nicely. Roughnecks were most of the time in trouble because of their demeanor. They caught problems by making comments on passersby. They were intolerant and pole opposite from saints.

Society and school administration knew everything about both groups. But they perceived the wrongdoings of saints to be comparatively less harmful to society. At the same

time, roughnecks were perceived more into severe delinquency. Society's perpetual bias played a significant role in labeling these groups. Society labeled roughnecks as trouble makers, and they accepted their reality this way. Saints were looked upon as good boys who accidentally or occasionally got into mischief or pranks for fun.

Deviance and Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Robert K. Merton introduced the term "self-fulfilling prophecy" in 1948. It refers to a situation in which false expectations of others become real in their consequences (Merton, 1948). The same went with the group of roughnecks and saints. Visibility, demeanor, and bias play an essential role in shaping deviant identity. Society's perception and prejudice played a crucial role in activating self-fulfilling Prophecy. Almost all saints completed their high schools and advanced degrees except for one. The one could not make up to the other group members due to his circumstances and later affiliation to the other group. Saints were also high achievers in schools, and they also performed well in their later life. Most roughnecks were average students at schools except for two members who were the best athletes. They started as athletes and completed high school (Chambliss, 1973).

The society also knew that saints are engaged in delinquency and deviance, but they were regarded as active youth leaders in school and community. They were good high achievers, and they helped each other pass exams and class activities. They are organized and make the best strategies and plans to achieve their goals. Society treated them with compassion because of their class. They were upper-middle-class youngsters who could succeed later in life despite their deviant behavior. This perception of society played a significant role in shaping their personality and success in professional life. Early labeling undoubtedly impacted later lives; members who outperformed among roughnecks were athletes and somehow managed to get respectable

positions. They were successful in later life, while Jimmy among saints could not be successful because of his domestic circumstances. Labeling played an essential role in the self-fulfilling Prophecy. Society's false expectations and judgments lead these boys to conform to their behavior. They acted out in a certain direction.



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