

Sociology of Deviant Action: The Duality of Structure and Action

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Abstract:

The study attempts to understand and interpret deviant action, with a focus on the relationship between structure and action, by relying on the sociological heritage and presenting the most important theories explaining the phenomenon, such as Anthony Giddens's theory of structuration, through which he examined the dual relationship between social structure and human action. Robert Merton's theory is also considered one of the most important theories that addressed the nature of interaction between cultural elements and intended actions. Social control theorists also believe that the cause of any deviant action is lack of control and the failure of social control. Using the deductive approach, it was concluded that the way in which social structure is formed is what directs human action, that action is determined through the degree of response and adaptation to society, and that the individual cannot control his actions as long as he is constrained by cultural and social structures.

Keywords: action, structure, deviance, society

Introduction:

The phenomenon of deviance in society in general is one of the most important issues that have concerned those working in sociology, especially since the stability and balance of society are related to the extent of the harmony of its structurally interdependent and functionally integrated systems.

In sociology, deviance is a description of actions or behaviors that violate social norms and public laws. According to the pioneers of structuralism, this is attributed to factors related to the general system, where a contradiction occurs between the functions of the sub-systems that seek to achieve a specific goal. A defect in the value system of individuals may lead to the emergence of abnormal actions that affect the balance of the social structure.

Views have differed in interpreting the motives and causes that lead to deviant action in society. Anthony Giddens believes that structure is not external to persons; it consists of symbols in memory and is enacted in social practices. It is therefore more internal than external to their activities. Thus, structure is not defined only by the constraint it imposes, but is always defined through both constraint and enablement; it restricts us and enables us at the same time to do something. (Eddine and Mahmoud Fayyad, 2020)

Robert Merton asserts that the origins of deviance are caused by the gap between cultural goals and the means available to people to achieve those goals. In his view, societies consist of structures in which the prevailing culture differs according to previously established goals, and individuals use accepted and appropriate means to achieve them. However, if society fails to provide individuals with the means, an imbalance will occur in the process of equilibrium between cultural goals and structurally available means, which may encourage deviance. Compliance with and respect for social norms is also the basic condition and optimal guarantee for regulating individuals' actions, according to the pioneers of social control. They believe that the individual who engages in deviant behavior does not have strong ties with social institutions. (Sadeq, 2012, p. 3)

The social situation, with all its circumstances, may affect individuals' behaviors and patterns of action, due to the lack of suitable conditions to meet their physiological and psychological needs.

This leads individuals to rebel and withdraw from social life, causing them to lose themselves and live in a cycle of loss. Political instability, for example, necessarily leads to economic stagnation, which is the lifeblood of social life. Likewise, the absence of justice and the domination of one group over the rest, who do not possess social capital, as Bourdieu says, are all causes that play a role in influencing human action and directing it toward uprightness or deviance. Accordingly, we will attempt to analyze and understand the phenomenon through the following elements:

1- Explanatory Theories:

1-1 Anthony Giddens's Theory of Structuration:

Anthony Giddens was interested in studying social action, its motives, goals, and intentions, especially in the existential reality of modern life, particularly in its disembedding character, in terms of the role of action in shaping social reality in its various dimensions. In this, he shares with many economists, politicians, and philosophers of life and ethics their interest in social action.

Through his theory of structuration, he studied the relationship between structure and action and which of them has priority. He tends to affirm the idea that social theory is necessarily interpretive, because it appears in light of a double hermeneutic that passes through two levels: the first is the interpretation carried out by people in their social life, and the second is that carried out by those who try to theorize this reality, as they interpret what has already been interpreted.

From the theoretical perspective, Giddens's vision crystallized around the concept of structuration. Through it, he rejected the idea of a fixed structure that has properties extending beyond the limits of time and space, which was promoted by structuralists in sociology. Giddens believes that it is necessary to begin with the practices of individual actors in their daily lives and to study the way in which these practices are formed into social structures that are subject to continuous formation and transformation. From his point of view regarding structure and action, they do not represent two separate types of phenomena forming an opposing dualism, but rather a duality. This means that human behavior is formed in social reality as a result of the mutual influence between action and structure. Both enter into a continuous dialectical relationship as long as the human being practices his social actions, which naturally lead to the formation of social structures. However, because the individual needs a reference that directs and regulates his actions in accordance with the social rules of the group, he tries to rely on the structures he formed when performing social action, which naturally leads to the reproduction of his social actions according to them. (Eddine & Mahmoud Fayyad, 2020)

This can be observed in the difference between social structures whose value system imposes the glorification of certain figures, who may be charismatic leaders, as in German society during a certain historical period, where individuals glorified one person, recognized no one else, and chanted his oath with absolute loyalty. Or religious men of spiritual distinction, such as Sufi sheikhs, who had prestige and status in Islamic society, without forgetting the political influence these figures possessed and how they were able to influence individuals' souls and their conception of social values. The same applies to the peoples of Southeast Asia, where the principle of the sanctity of work represents a common factor among individuals, making them submit to a unified pattern of action.

As for societies whose social structure suffers from fragility in cultural reference, and whose individuals do not tend toward the idea of compliance with values and are not united by a common principle, we find that their actions are unintended and that they are capable of accepting any different culture. Here, the role of social structure in directing the pattern of action becomes evident through

the levels of interaction between individuals and the environment that brings them together, whether under a unified pattern or one with multiple aspects and motives.

1-2 Robert Merton's Theory of Social Structure and Anomie:

In his study of social structure and anomie, Merton applied functional theory to analyze the social and cultural sources of deviant behavior. His aim was to show how social structure exerts specific pressures on certain persons in society to engage in nonconforming behavior rather than otherwise. (elathom, 2012) Merton began by acknowledging that the social and cultural structure confers legitimacy on certain goals, and moreover determines certain acceptable methods for achieving them. In other words, Merton distinguished between two main elements in what he called the cultural structure of society: culturally defined goals on the one hand, and institutionalized means for achieving these goals on the other. (Bouhafs, 2017, p. 233).

In a well-integrated society, there is integration and harmony between goals and methods, because each of them is accepted by the members of society as a whole. They are also accessible to them. Non-integration occurs in society when there is an emphasis on one of the two aspects to a degree that is not proportional to the emphasis on the other. This is similar to what happens in Algerian society, where every individual seeks to achieve a personal goal and climb the social ladder alone, without a similar emphasis on the legal methods for achieving his goals, because they are not available to everyone due to the abuses and illegitimate methods employed by a social class that possesses sources of power and influence, at the expense of another class that possesses nothing but a scattered identity.

This has resulted in a state of anomie in society, because there must be a degree of proportionality between the goal of achieving success and the legitimate opportunities for success, so that individuals obtain the necessary satisfaction that helps the social system perform its functions. If this is not achieved, the social function becomes defective and what Merton called functional obstacles occurs. From his point of view, the state of anomie occurs when the prevailing cultural goals or the legitimate normative means of the actors' behavior are not regulated.

1-3 The Theory of Social Control:

The theory believes that deviance is a phenomenon resulting from the failure of social control over individuals. It begins by presenting its view through an unusual question: how can individuals not deviate when all these temptations are before their eyes? Deviance, then, according to its claim, is a social reward obtained by the deviant, whatever the type of his deviance. The original principle is that the moderate behavior of individuals in the social system arises from the control exercised by society through the law over their dealings with others. This theory relies on Durkheim's experiments, in which he confirmed that deviance is inversely proportional to the social relationship between individuals. (Al-Sadiq, 2020, p. 499) In a cohesive society, deviance decreases, unlike in a disintegrated society. If we study suicide rates among individuals in human society, we notice that they are more widespread in societies that do not give importance to kinship ties and in societies that do not care about relations of closeness. On this basis, the pioneers of this theory built their view that members of a cohesive society, in terms of human relations, are more obedient to the law and more committed to the values they believe in than members of a society whose social relations among its individuals are disintegrated.

2- The Dialectic of Classifying Deviant Action:

In this regard, Ibrahim Othman indicates that this classification of deviant action is based on the concept of social labeling. Accordingly, some theorists in the field of deviance and crime adopted the

foundations upon which the classification of deviance is based. Drug use, for example, may be considered a deviant act by those who do not practice it, while users believe that the problem lies in attempting to prevent them and infringe upon their freedom. This is logical and realistic, especially in secular countries that legislate individuals' freedom to practice whatever they desire. Through this, it can be said that the classification of an action is a relative matter in which several considerations intervene.

2-1 The Influence of Social Groups in Directing Action:

Howard Becker criticized many sociologists who preceded him for not questioning the deviant label applied to deviant behavior, but rather for viewing it as a given. By doing so, they agreed in advance with the values of the group that made this judgment. Based on this criticism, Becker argued that social groups create deviance by formulating rules against those who violate them, making it possible to call them outsiders. Thus, the deviant act is not considered a characteristic performed by a guilty person; rather, the person who performs a deviant act is an individual labeled by a certain category of society that claims moderation in its actions. (Slimani, 2004, pp. 55/54)

Some scholars believe that labeling someone as deviant may be one of the causes of deviance and its continuation. If a person is described as having a type of deviance, this will inevitably affect his actions, because human action is influenced by the psychological state of the individual. Continuous exposure to bullying and labeling may lead to acquiring a personality different from the one the individual actually possesses. This personality may be either a defensive or aggressive reaction, and it may be considered a kind of adaptation to the social situation. This ultimately leads him to embody the role imposed by the group to which he belongs and to continue in it, even if this is beyond his will, and he remains assuming that role throughout his life. (Rahamnia, 2013)

On the other hand, Boudon and Bourricaud believe that it is wrong to address deviance by considering it merely a contradiction between norms and values. Rather, it must also be linked to the ambiguity of those norms and values, or in other words, their multiplicity. Among the examples they provide to clarify what they mean is the term "white adolescent," who grows up in a working-class environment experiencing a state of psychosocial instability. He is pulled by the norms and values of his social environment as a whole, which become the main reference for his values and ways of interacting in society. That is, he belongs to multiple loyalties and does not possess another reference upon which to rely. At that point, marginality appears as a subculture to which the deviant individual resorts in order to protect himself. (Slimani, 2004)

However, this is not necessarily the case, because deviant action is not limited to poor working classes only. There are families belonging to aristocratic classes that practice abnormal acts such as drug trafficking and consumption, money laundering, fraud against the law, the use of illegal methods to occupy important positions in the state, and other deviant acts. Therefore, the social class to which the individual belongs cannot be considered an absolute cause of deviant action.

2-2 The Influence of the Economic Situation:

The social situation, with all its cultural, economic, and political systems, plays an important role in shaping human action. Political instability resulting from wars or internal revolutions inevitably leads to a lack of discipline in individual and collective behavior, and keeps individuals in a constant state of dispersion, losing hope in living peacefully and achieving social security, which is a fundamental requirement in the hierarchy of human needs. A government that adopts failed development policies will certainly witness the emergence of various social ills. In addition, the absence of social justice and the principle of equal opportunities (Said and Amara Fateh, 2022, p. 123) makes individuals feel a kind of marginalization and rejection, which will necessarily give rise to a negative reaction toward

the government and its representatives, as happened in several Arab countries during the Arab Spring. The huge rise in poverty levels and the inflation of unemployment rates lead individuals to search for any means to obtain their basic needs. Likewise, the failure to provide social housing, which is one of the foundations of stability, and the lack of permanent jobs or sufficient grants provided by the state to deprived groups, through which individuals can secure a decent and stable life, are all factors that influence human action and cannot be overlooked when referring to the basic motives of deviant action in society.

The proponents of Marxist theory provided a material explanation of deviant action, considering it the product of the absence of social justice and inequality between the class that owns the means of production, the bourgeoisie, and the general working class to whom only crumbs are thrown. Marxists consider the deviations that occur in society to be a reaction to the oppression practiced against the working classes. The infrastructure is dominated by a deteriorated economic situation that has made it deviate from the values and norms created by the bourgeois class, which monopolizes all resources for itself and its entourage, exploiting every opportunity for its own benefit. The children of the bourgeois classes enjoy a life of luxury and always obtain the qualifications that enable them to hold positions in the most important institutions, while exploiting all privileges and grants. This has resulted in social inequality and the emergence of classism in society. The worker who is responsible for a family under the capitalist system lives in alienation and deprivation of his rights, which negatively affects the rest of his family members, who lack the simplest requirements of a decent life enjoyed by others from the upper class. A feeling of hatred and resentment toward those who possess everything grows within them. (Zineb and Bouchloukh Hadjer, 2018, p. 46)

The scholar Bonger also provided an explanation of the phenomenon of deviance based on the economic factor in his book **Criminality and Economic Conditions**, in which he linked the phenomenon of deviance to the foundations of the capitalist system. Free competition between capital owners and producers pushes them to use immoral means and methods such as monopoly, fraud, denunciation, deception, etc. These practices carried out by capitalists weaken moral values in the human being and also weaken his social instinct, thus dragging him toward deviance and crime. (Zineb and Bouchloukh Hadjer, 2018, p. 48)

The Marxist analyses of the phenomenon of deviant action in society and their linking it to the economic system are very logical, especially since many countries, despite their progress, have not been able to get rid of social ills, as they live the same reality experienced by underdeveloped countries. Some scholars have even considered the capitalist system a form of slavery that makes the relationship between the employee and the employer similar to that of a slave and his master.

Moreover, the feeling among individuals belonging to poor classes of injustice and social exclusion, for which they consider the government, with all its structures, responsible and the main cause of their suffering, has led them to engage in abnormal acts such as attacking and destroying state property, the “baylek culture,” believing that this will cause losses to the state and that they will thereby take revenge.

3- The Impact of Education on Deviant Action:

Tobias believes in his book **Crime and Industrial Society** that the expansion of education on a wide scale in society without providing suitable job opportunities, and the increase in such opportunities, would increase the chances for individuals to become criminals. This is because education may make a person more skilled in crime, and education in this case will change the characteristics of crime but will not change the characteristics of the criminal person. (Lakhdar, 2010, p. 352)

Education serves as a barrier or preventive factor for normal persons who do not have tendencies to commit crimes, as it broadens their perceptions and gives them a kind of awareness that serves as a shield against deviance. This is also achieved by emphasizing the doctrinal dimension in refining the soul and guiding human behavior, especially in non-secular societies. In the same regard, Merton emphasizes the importance of religion in the process of control and reform. He states that the moral function is one of the most prominent and most important functions of religion. In addition to making individuals adapt to one another, it also strengthens and unifies social feelings and emotions. In his view, religion is a social mechanism that strengthens the feeling of groups and their sympathy toward one another, and it is therefore necessary for social integration.

3-1 Deviance in the University Environment:

The university is considered an educational institution with an important social status, as it works to build individuals with integrated personalities and to provide society with scientific cadres and distinguished scholars. It also represents an important system in the social structure in terms of developing and advancing society. The university also performs a function in the cultural reproduction of society, as Bourdieu states in his study of the educational system in general, which can be used in part to analyze the phenomenon. In Bourdieu's view, the function of the university is a mechanism through which the culture of the dominant group is reproduced, and consequently the relations of power are reproduced. From his perspective, the dominant class has its own culture, which it tries to transmit and bequeath to generations. In this way, it ensures the continuity of its dominance and preserves the existing system, as it has become a tool for implementing political, economic, cultural, and social plans. (Iman, 2016, p. 25)

Parsons, representing the functionalist orientation, in his conception that leads to identifying the necessary elements for establishing the system—the actor, the action, and the situation—considered that the most influential factors affecting the actor when he takes his position are the rules, values, and ideas associated with educational culture, which performs a function in society. As for action, in his view, it applies to the individual, the group, the institution, and society, and is often governed by controls dictated from within the system, whether cultural or educational, upon all social actors. (Iman, 2016, p. 27) Although Parsons's analyses are specific to American society, they can be generalized to our society, especially since the educational system is entirely imported and subject to a dominant ideology. When he considers the university to be a basic organization that supplies all productive and service organizations and institutions with professional categories of labor forces trained at the university, he also sees that the educational system has a role in promoting individuals emotionally and behaviorally, developing their creative skills, and making them capable of performing their roles. On another level, he spoke about the importance of academic specialization for university students by emphasizing the importance of the reciprocal relationship between the educational process and scientific research activities, stressing the functional and structural role of higher education institutions within the framework of his distinctive theory of social action.

As for the proponents of the structuralist trend, they acknowledge that all things, whatever their nature, must be governed by a structure, whether stable or dynamic. The degree of progress or backwardness of states is automatically linked to the strength and integration of their structure, especially the educational system. Wright Mills indicated, in a general vision of the structure of systems, relying on three conceptual levels: the individual, society, and history. According to him, for society to continue, the state, as the supreme authority, must arrange the necessary procedures and grant educational systems, including the university, harmony and dynamism, so that individuals

become more adapted to the internal reality of these systems, because they are affected by the social environment. (Iman, 2016, p. 29)

Through Mills's analyses, we conclude that the educational system reflects the strength and stability of society, as it is an important resource for the workforce, which in turn contributes to the development of society. States that gave the educational system the utmost importance and harnessed all appropriate means and conditions to develop individuals and highlight their abilities are the same states that are now among the developed countries of the world. In contrast, states that neglected this system affected the rest of the systems and caused them to lose their balance, which placed society in a state of permanent disorder. Consequently, individuals necessarily deviate from the basic goals because these goals become secondary demands for them. Education, for them, is not a source for meeting their physiological and psychological needs, and the university degree does not enable them to obtain a job. All these justifications have made the university environment a hotbed of deviance and rebellion against the internal law of the institution. Among the most important deviant acts spreading in the university is verbal violence, especially among students, whose speech is rarely free from obscene words, even when they are beside their teachers. The same applies to some immoral behaviors they engage in without respecting the sanctity of the place, especially smoking and drug use. In addition, there are attacks against teachers in some cases where audacity has reached the point of attempted assault. All this is the inevitable result of failed educational policies on the one hand, and the value-based slippages that have spread throughout our society on the other.

4- Is Deviant Action Innate or Acquired?

Some attempts to understand the nature of deviant action were characterized by a biological tendency. They tried to attribute the cause of such actions to innate traits in the human being. The Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso believed in the last century that criminal types could be distinguished by certain anatomical characteristics such as the size of the skull, jaws, forehead, and arm length. Although he acknowledged that social learning may influence patterns of criminal behavior, in general he considered individuals who engage in deviant actions to suffer from a biological deficiency. The type that tends toward deviant tendencies is often muscularly active and has a tendency toward hostility. This theory was, of course, refuted because the arguments and evidence it presented were illogical. (Giddens, 2005, p. 281)

This is confirmed by symbolic interactionist theorists. They believe that deviance and crime are two aspects of a phenomenon that is socially conceived and constructed. (Giddens, 2005, p. 286) They thus reject the idea that deviant action is due to innate factors. They believe that it is the outcome of different cultures that legitimize certain actions, and that criminal behavior is, in most cases, the result of learning acquired by the individual through primary groups. The labeling theory also acknowledges that criminal acts are not innate in essence, but are sometimes related to cultural and legislative data. Killing, for example, is a criminal deviant act punished by law and rejected by society in all cultures. However, it is legalized in a certain situation, such as retaliation in Islamic society, as well as in wars.

General Conclusion:

Through what has been presented, it becomes clear that deviant action is a social phenomenon that can be studied from more than one angle. Social structure is a characteristic that governs and determines social life, and it consists of practical models that direct action. The more the members of society feel frustration and inequality, the more rebellion in action increases in return.

- The importance of social control emerges through the value system and the dominance of positive cultural values in controlling and guiding action.
- Action is influenced by primary groups, from which the individual acquires most of the characteristics that accompany him and which he adopts as a symbol of his loyalty to them.
- The economic system plays a role in the deviance of individuals as a result of the emergence of classism, inequality, and the absence of social justice.
- The cultural system performs the function of preparing individuals for positive integration into society by developing their creative abilities and modifying their actions.
- The university is considered an educational and formative space that maintains the balance and continuity of the general system by supplying it with qualified labor forces and scientific cadres.
- Action is acquired from the social environment and is not innate or inherited except in rare cases, because it is the product of social, cultural, economic, and other factors.

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