

Introduction

Nearly every aspect of social life is experienced within the context of the group. A social group includes two or more people. It can be formed on strong social ties, such as a family. Or it can be formed on weak social ties, such as individuals sitting in a movie theater. Regardless of size or social ties, group behavior is regulated and controlled by cultural values and beliefs. In order to remain a member of the group, an individual must conform to these values and beliefs. Lack of conformity, whether criminal or non-criminal, is deviant behavior. Deviant behavior is always sanctioned. Expected behaviors and sanctions are based on the type of group and the established norms within the group.



Crowd¹

Living in Groups

[Society](#) [Video, 26:40 mins] is one very large group, though it may often be composed of many smaller groups. A group is any collection of two or more people that have something in common. Of course there are many different types of group. For example, a large professional group, such as the American Sociological Association does not have the same characteristics as a group that attends a baseball game. When sociologists study group behavior, they first determine the type of group that they are viewing. A crowd refers to a temporary group, or aggregate, that gathers in a public space. Some examples are the audience of a play or sporting event, sightseers that gather outside the White House on a walking tour of Washington D.C. or those who gather at the site of an accident or fire. There are also groups that are known as categories. An example of this might be college students or everyone between the ages of 18 and 24. The type of group is determined by the group function and the emotional ties within the group.



Living in Groups²

Primary and Secondary Groups

The most important group for socialization is the [primary group](#) [Video, 3:10 mins]. The most common primary group is the family. The primary group has strong emotional ties, is important to the formation of identity and is often life-long. A secondary group is a group that is task oriented. These groups

rarely have strong emotional relationships between the members and are typically temporary. They are often larger and can even be anonymous. Examples of secondary groups are on-line bulletin boards, juries, college courses or the people you work with. If you work in the same location for a very long time you can develop strong personal ties to some of your co-workers. However, the task of the group, job performance, is not dependent on these close personal ties.

Social Networks

Everyone belongs to a [social network](#) [Video, 2:12 mins]. The social network refers to every individual with whom you have social ties, or an individual connection. You have no doubt heard the term “networking”, especially in reference to finding employment. This refers to the exploitation of your social ties or social network to advance in society. You have probably heard of [Six Degrees of Separation](#) [Video, 2:16 mins]. This turned into a parlor game called Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon. You can try playing this game yourself. Start with any movie that you have watched recently and see if you can trace the actors in that movie back to a movie with Kevin Bacon in six or less steps. This game illustrates the social network and how your social ties bind you to the rest of society. It suggests that if you have 100 people together in a room, you can find a connection in six steps or less to any other member of society.

The Importance of Group Membership

Social ties are important for accomplishing goals, such as employment or marriage networks. However, they can also protect your life. You read about feral children in the chapter on socialization. Research has proven that we need social interaction to develop normally in childhood. Durkheim’s work on Suicide found that one’s social ties also prevent them from taking their own life. He argued that the absence of close social ties led to a state of anomie, or normlessness. Anomie



Primary Groups in Society³



Social Networks⁴



Social Media⁵

is a form of social isolation that is linked to having too weak social ties. It puts an individual at risk for suicide. There is much debate on the importance of [virtual communities](#) [Video, 2:08 mins] in modern society. Do these online communities, such as social media, replace the brick and mortar communities of previous generations, serving the same social needs? Or are they indicative of social dysfunction and increasing anomie?

Group Dynamics

Sociologists are interested in the [group dynamics](#) [Video, 2:10 mins] of every type of group. They argue that the dynamics change dependent upon the type and the size of the group. A dyad, the smallest group consisting of two people, has the strongest emotional bond. However, it is also the most fragile since it can end on the decision of one person. A triad is a little more stable because the third person can mediate the differences between the other two. Think of a married couple as an example of a dyad. They are bonded through strong emotions however they are vulnerable to divorce for irreconcilable differences. When the couple has a child they become slightly less vulnerable because the needs of the child take precedence over the individual needs of the parents. That is not to say that having a child can save a dysfunctional marriage. Rather it suggests that increasing the size of the functional group shifts the focus of the conflicts within the group. The larger the group, the less intense the emotions but the more stable the group becomes.



Group Dynamics⁶

Groups and Social Identity

Individuals in society learn to identify with groups during their lifetimes. Group membership can and does change across the life course. However, individuals always have an [in-group](#) [Video, 3:28 mins] and at least one out-group. Think about the groups that you belong to or know of. If you think of the term “us” to define that group, it is your in-group. “Them” refers to your out-group. For example, if you are in the military, you might think of your branch of the military as “us”. Other branches of the military become “them”. You learn to identify with the strengths of your in-group that might be built around a [competition, friendly or otherwise, with the out-group](#). Finally, you use reference groups to determine your group memberships. The most common reference group is the family. This is the group that establishes your sense of right and wrong. It is the group whose standards you use to judge the acceptability of your own behavior.



Us versus Them⁷

Group Cohesion and Conformity

Group cohesion refers to the loyalty and solidarity within the group. A group must be cohesive to survive. In the absence of cohesion, members separate from the group. The necessity of cohesion creates [conformity](#) [Video. 1:47 mins] within the group. Americans typically think of conformity as a “dirty word” since the culture is extremely individualistic. However, if Americans failed to conform, the country would fail. Members of the groups exert pressure or power over members to assure conformity. This can be done by [authority](#) [Video, 1:03 mins] members within the group. It can be done by reliance on expectations for behavior. It can also be accomplished through [group-think](#) [Video. 11:23 mins]. As the readings and required videos in this module illustrate, conformity, while necessary, can be harmful without limits.



Milgram's Experiment⁸

Teamwork and Leadership

While teamwork is an important function for social groups, studies show that a team is not as productive as the individual members of the team. One explanation for this is the practice of social loafing. You may have experienced this when working on a group project in the past. When there are more individuals assigned to a project, each individual works a little easier than they would if they were responsible for their own assignment. Some individuals don't contribute at all if they know they will get credit for the assignment as a group member. Each group develops a culture and a hierarchy. There may be a power dynamic, the struggle to control the group that discourages participation. If the power within the group is coercive, it will be led by threat. Influential leaders may get different results because they use persuasion. There may also be a question of how authority, the right to wield power, is designated. Traditional authority is not based on [leadership](#) [Video, 5:31 mins] qualities, but on birthright or divine right. Authority may be established through a legal or rational process. A [Charismatic leader gains authority](#) through the strength of his or her personality. An Instrumental leader is a leader that is focused on a task. An Expressive leader works to maintain the emotional stability of the group.



Teamwork⁹

Bureaucracy

You have likely come into contact with many bureaucracies in

your lifetime. This is a specific type of secondary group. It has set characteristics that are designed to assure efficiency in the pursuit of a goal. These characteristics include specialization, technical competence, a hierarchy, rules, impersonality and formal written communication. The university is a good example of a bureaucracy. Its area of specialization is higher education. It must be technically competent to be successful. The relationships within the university are impersonal. While you may have good relationships with co-workers, professors or fellow students, these will not assist you in getting your degree or getting promoted. The university has a very detailed hierarchy that includes a president, a provost, the faculty and the staff. Every university has rules. There are rules for degree completion, getting tenure, and academic conduct, to name a few. The rules are formally communicated. Universities have mission statements, constitutions, elaborations, and catalogs.



Education as a Bureaucracy¹⁰

McDonaldization

George Ritzer coined the term McDonaldization to describe the increase in rationalization. Bureaucracies are rational. They are run on economic logic. When this logic is applied to human activity it is called rationalization. While this process leads to increased efficiency, it dehumanizes the activity for the actors. Think about the last time you visited a McDonalds. Every worker was probably dressed the same. They likely greeted you with a rehearsed line, such as “Would you like to try out latest product today?” You ordered from a menu that is repeated almost exactly in every McDonalds in the country.

There are some variations by region, but everyone can order a Big Mac. This process leaves little room for ingenuity or individualism for the worker. However, it does provide a level of comfort for the customer who can be sure that a Big Mac will taste as expected no matter where it is purchased.

Deviance

Most people hear the word deviant and assume that it refers only to crime. [Deviance](#) [Video, 4:23 mins] is actually the violation of any social norm, both criminal and non-criminal. Deviance typically gets a negative reaction from society and



The McDonaldization of Society¹¹



Breaking the Norm¹²

may lead to social sanctions. Think about the way the obese are subjected to ‘fat shaming’. This can include laughing or pointing at an individual that is overweight. It can also include bullying or publicly berating the individual. Employers are less likely to hire the obese and the obese make less money than their thinner peers, even if their skills and work ethic are greater. The sanctions that we use to control deviance depend upon the perceived seriousness of the act.

Table 6.1 Theory in Everyday Life		
Perspective	Approach to Deviance	Case Study: Plagiarism
Structural Functionalism	Deviance clarifies moral boundaries and promotes social cohesion.	Punishing those who plagiarize separates those who should be in college from those who aren't responsible enough.
Structural Strain Theory	An individual's position in society determines whether she has the means to achieve her goals or must otherwise turn to deviance.	A student's attitude about plagiarizing depends on whether she has the means to write the paper.
Conflict Theory	Definitions and rules of deviance are applied unequally based on power.	Students with fewer resources are punished harshly and have fewer options afterward; students with more money or connections can either transfer to another school or rely on their parents for help.
Symbolic Interactionism	The definition of deviance is relative and depends on the culture, time period, and situation.	Plagiarism may be labeled as deviant in the United States but not in Russia or India.
Differential Association Theory	Deviance is learned through interactions with others who break the rules.	Students learn to cheat because they hang out with other students who plagiarize.
Labeling Theory	Deviance is determined by the reactions of others; applying deviant labels to an individual may lead her to further deviance.	A student who is caught plagiarizing may come to believe she is unable to write without cheating.

Theories to Explain Deviance¹³

Durkheim argued that society creates the profane or the deviant in order to create the sacred, or valued. This approach suggests that society creates social deviance to establish boundaries for behavior. These boundaries lead to greater social cohesion as individuals work to not only maintain order in their own behavior but use social control to cause others to maintain order. Merton argued that deviance is a byproduct of [social strain](#) [Video, 2:25 mins]. This theory is both functional and conflict based because he argued that deviance is part of the social structure but also that it is motivated by inequality. Merton argued that every society has a set of goals that individuals are encouraged to meet. In the U.S., these goals include success and financial independence for

example. Members of the society are socialized to internalize these social goals as their own personal goals. But not every individual has equal access with the means to meet those goals. Conflict theorists argue that deviance is defined by the powerful to fit the needs of the powerful. Think of the saying “He who has the gold makes the rules”. Conflict theorists argue that when the wealthy make the social rules, the behaviors of the poor are deemed deviant. Symbolic Interactionists argue that deviance is learned through social interaction. Your parent may see the neighbor child throw a rock at a car. For the child, this might be a one off, or primary deviance. Your parent decides the child is a bad influence and warns you away. They warn the parents of other children. The child learns of this and continues to throw rocks at cars. Now this behavior has become secondary deviance. It has become part of the child’s self-identity. This can also be called the [self-fulfilling prophecy](#) [Video, 2:48 mins]. The danger of deviance to the individual is that it leads to a tarnished self-identity.

Criminal Deviance

Deviance is the violation of any social norm. If your entire congregation wears a red hat to religious services and you were a blue hat, you are a deviant. Criminal deviance refers to deviant acts that violate the law. Social scientists are very interested in studying deviance. Society collects data that tracks how often crimes are committed as well as who commits the crime. These data are stored in files such as the Uniform Crime Report (UCR), a database that is managed by the FBI. This tells us how many crimes are property crimes and how many are violent. The data shows that poor areas are typically high crime areas. That doesn’t mean that the wealthy don’t commit crime. They do. Crimes in poor areas are often called street crimes; burglary, assault, theft. Crimes committed by the wealthy are typically white collar crimes; embezzlement, fraud, or insider trading.



Prison Cell in Alcatraz Prison¹⁴

Social Control and Criminal Deviance

Controlling crime requires a criminal justice system. The criminal justice system is the system that regulates the deterrence and punishment of crime. This includes the entire legal and penal system. Deterrence is a focus on crime prevention and punishment is a focus on consequences for crime. Punishment can function as a deterrent. Many people will not break the law to avoid going to jail, for example.



Punishment may swing between [retribution](#) [Video, 1:46 mins] and [rehabilitation](#) [Video, 2:11 mins]. Retribution is based on the belief that once a person is criminally deviant they will always be criminally deviant. This approach focuses on swift and severe punishment for crime. Rehabilitation is focused on the belief that the criminally deviant are poorly socialized and that they can learn to be good members of society. This approach focuses on providing training and education for the incarcerated, substance abuse programs and counseling.

Police Officers at Roll Call¹⁵

Positive Deviance



American civil rights advocate Rosa Parks being fingerprinted by a Montgomery, Alabama, police officer, 22 February 1956, after her arrest due to organizing a boycott of the city's buses to protest their racial segregation of passengers.¹⁶

Not all deviance is bad for society. When a law is unjust, should that law be broken to force society to change the law? For example, when Rosa Parks refused to give her seat on the bus to a white man, she violated the law and was arrested. Her arrest sparked the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement that ended apartheid in the American south and led to more equality for non-whites in the US. Martin Luther King, Jr. called for "civil disobedience", breaking those unjust laws to force the laws to change. Social movements are frequently based in deviant behavior or the violation of laws. However these early criminal acts result in laws that are better for society. This type of deviance is known as [positive deviance](#) [Video, 3:12 mins].

The readings and videos from this module have introduced you to a variety of theoretical approaches to understanding how life is experienced in groups. You have learned how deviance is created and how it is controlled. You have learned how deviance can sometimes help a society. The following activities will give you the opportunity to apply some of these theoretical approaches and test your knowledge of the basic concepts.

Image Citation:

¹ http://quest.eb.com.vlib.excelior.edu/search/132_1291547

² Ferris, K., & Stein, J. (2016). *The real world: An introduction to sociology* (5th ed.). New York, NY: W.W. Norton.

³ Ferris, K., & Stein, J. (2016). *The real world: An introduction to sociology* (5th ed.). New York, NY: W.W. Norton.

⁴ Ferris, K., & Stein, J. (2016). *The real world: An introduction to sociology* (5th ed.). New York, NY: W.W. Norton.

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- ¹⁵ http://quest.eb.com.vlib.excelsior.edu/search/139_1923442
- ¹⁶ http://quest.eb.com.vlib.excelsior.edu/search/140_1644410