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The Generality of Deviance

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Book Reviews

The Generality of Deviance, by Travis Hirschi and Michael R. Gottfredson. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1994. 272 pp. \$39.95. ISBN 1-56000-116-X.

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In *The Generality of Deviance*, the authors introduce one central theme that combines all forms of deviant and criminal behavior under one basic denominator which is the tendency of the actor to pursue immediate rewards without concern for long-term expected negative ramifications (punishments). The book features a prime theoretical framework in the social psychology of deviance, the self-management approach, as an explanatory tool, capable of interpreting various forms of deviant and criminal behavior. As a theory, I see it as a promising contribution to the field of criminology and deviance.

In a sort of theoretical equation, the authors argue that “all acts that share deviant features including criminal acts are likely to be engaged in by individuals usually sensitive to immediate pleasure and insensitive to long-term consequences” (p. 2). The authors offer another theoretical equation as they probe the social-psychological make-up of the actor. They contend that “the immediacy of the benefits of crime implies that they are obvious to the actor and that no specialization skills or learning is required” (p. 2). How can one then explain criminal behavior? The authors offer the equation that a “property of the actor,” namely “self-control,” is the key factor that determines the variations in the likelihood of engaging in such acts. These theoretical equations are a challenge to several giant traditional theories in the field of criminology and deviance.

The authors further argue that the variation in self-control is established early in life. They support their argument with researched evidence. The authors assert that deviant acts “follow a predictable path

over the life course, peaking in the middle to late teens and then declining steadily throughout life” (p. 2). Supported with evidence, this book is an investigation in which the authors identify what they refer to as the “latent trait” as the central contributing factor of deviant behavior. Through this factor they point out two main sources for deviance:

1. The statistical association among criminal and deviant acts, where the authors argue that the acts are heterogeneous because they occur in a variety of situations. The authors assume generality among their acts and insist that what they have in common somehow “resides in the person committing them” (p. 2).
2. The stability of difference between individuals over time. Here the authors contend that “individuals who relatively commit deviant acts at one point in time are more likely to commit crime at later points in time.” Yet they ascribe these differences to a “persisting underlying trait possessed in different degrees” (p. 3).

In their theory the authors challenge the existing psychological explanations of crime and deviance. They see that psychological laboratory research confuses one form of aggression with another to the point where conformity is treated as deviance. As they apply their theory of self-control to explain aggression, the authors see no threat to the validity of their theory from the results of the psychology laboratory. Furthermore, the authors investigate the strength of their theory as they consider the relationship between deviance and the family. Self-control theory shows how family influence is a central determinant of deviance. This theory explicitly assigns to parents, or functionally equivalent adults, a major role in the development of self-control without denying that family institutions may affect the likelihood of crime in other ways as well (p. 47).

Self-control theory provokes another critical argument in criminology, that is the question of gender. The authors take the gender issue as a challenge to the theory and present the idea that gender is an opportunity variable. Their conceptualization explains gender differences without invoking any notion that males and females are differently motivated (p. 77).

A new insight the reader will find in this book is the notion that there is a relationship between accidents and crime. The authors con-

tend that "involvement in crime increases the probability of getting involved in accidents of all kinds" (p. 81). Their research presents a correlation between factors that are related to accident liability and those related to crime. The theory of self-control offers an explanation of motor vehicle accidents! The authors provide evidence which indicate that "those who are lacking self-control, show a tendency to violate not one but a host of social mores both consistently and simultaneously, including driving habits" (p. 131). Their research puts some emphasis on an issue of national and universal concern, i.e. "driving under the influence."

Another major social problem, to which the authors draw attention in this book, is alcohol and drug use. The authors argue that drug use shares other general properties of crime and delinquency. Drug use is versatile and the authors insist that drug use is as delinquency, a manifestation of low self-control.

Among other timely topics of concern, the book addresses the problem of rape and prostitution. The authors argue at this point that current theories of rape seem to "confuse rather than clarify" (p. 171). Thus they offer self-control theory as an alternative theory, which accounts for rape in the same way it accounts for all offenses. Self-control assumptions tend to challenge some contentions found in feminist theories.

On the issue of career criminals and specialization, the authors offer research results that reflect little evidence of specialization in crime and delinquency. Their investigations are presented in a two-class model: delinquents and nondelinquents. They argue that findings imply that offense specialization is unnecessary to describe the pattern of offending among offenders. The notion that race is a differential factor in committing offenses is not supported. The findings also do not support the notion that older and more experienced offenders tend to commit the same type of crime (p. 189).

Another challenging notion is that the "causes of committing one illegal act are the same as causes of committing many illegal acts" (p. 211). The authors here question the different causes of participation and frequency of illegal activity.

Finally the authors argue that delinquency in childhood has a "significant and very substantial relationship with a wide range of adult criminal behavior" (p. 248). Their research findings support other research and suggest the existence of underlying theoretical constructs that reflect a general tendency toward criminality and other troublesome behaviors" (p. 248).

This book engineers a new strategy in understanding and explaining deviance and criminality. It is a new and challenging tool in the field. I consider this work a sociological stimulant to “significant other” disciplines, with new research and new arguments.

Psychotherapy with the Orthodox Jew, by Herbert Strean. Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1994. 179 pp. \$30 cloth. ISBN 1-56821-230-5.

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Orthodox Jewry is a distinctive subculture. While no reliable epidemiological data is available to document mental illness within this population, all observers acknowledge the existence of problems requiring intervention. The insularity and world view of this community deter individuals from seeking assistance from mental health professionals. These providers are seen as ignorant of the complex web of Jewish laws governing individual and interpersonal behavior, or worse, of viewing these religious obligations as a source of the difficulties.

Steven Weiss best expresses the objective of the book in his dust jacket endorsement as “sensitizing the psychodynamically oriented psychotherapist to the complex and controversial issues surrounding the treatment of the Orthodox Jewish patient.” Dr. Strean maintains that “devoutly religious individuals. . . can be helped therapeutically without fearing they are betraying or compromising their religious ideals and principles” (p. xiii). The author, a doctor of social work, does not convincingly support this premise because of a number of serious limitations in his presentation.

Orthodoxy is presented as a single monolithic subculture ignoring the significant variations within this community. All Orthodox Jews share a common commitment to complete religious observance derived from Sinaitic revelation and codified in normative works based on rabbinic scholarship. Yet, important differences divide Orthodox adherents. The division between modern and ultra-Orthodox is reflected by the attitude to secular education and the relation to Zionism and the state of Israel. The modern Orthodox attend college and are strongly Zionist. The term “haredi” has gained recent acceptance among scholars as a substitute for ultra-Orthodox which is value-laden and assumes