

Deviance: field studies and self-disclosures



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The following essays will deal with several familiar areas of deviant behavior : prostitution ,homosexuality ,pornography ,drug use and abuse,and the art of conning and "cooling out " the client . they will also be concerned with the question of how the courts and other burearcrtatic agencies designed to counter deviance my inadvertently creat and perpetuate it. Also included are more exotic settings and forms of deviance that ha ve thus far received little or no attention in the socilolgical literature --for example, a fly-in whore house and "adult " bookstores . These ,and other topics ,will be dealt with from an interactionist perspective. Some of the essays include field notes . These are presented to give the reader a better grasp of how the work evolved, that is , how the researcher attended and interpreted the setting in question. These informal notes (edited fo length) are an invaluable source of information when one is trying to

understand how , in interpretive sociology , one's formulation of the problem and interpretation of the data is contingent upon one's understanding of the social scene ,and conversely ,the way in which the latter effects the former . It is the interplay between these two that will hopefully lead the researcher to achieve "verstehen," a stage in the research process that Max Weber sees as a prerequisite for acquiring a sociological understanding. With the exception of the author's essays ,the contributors (two of whom prefer to remain anonymous) are sociology students who have taken graduate or undergraduate course in deviant behavior from the author . Apart from being students , they have worked as college instructors ,lawyers ,parole officers ,social workers ,and are in good standing in a wide variety of employments . The contributors have either studied these forms of deviance close-up and over time , or have themselves been the deviants. All of the essays are written from an interactionist perspective. By this I mean that they concern themselves with such subjective social-psychological considerations as the individual's ,motives ,and morals as these relate to the more general sociological problem of establishing the reality of the social scene. This in turn requires that the researcher achieve an understanding of the social meanings of social actions ,as these are perceived by members of the social setting, and the way in which these meanings affect behavioral outcomes. The interactionist perspective contends that the social meanings of verbal and nonverbal communications do not inhere in the words or deeds themselves but are conferred upon one's words and deeds by others . An interpretive process on that part of alter (the perceiving) and ego (the perceived) is an intervening and integral parts of defining the situation. The meanings that ego attributes to alter, that is , confers upon alter's words or deeds ,depends in large part upon present and past circumstances and future expectations of the participants within a given social context. The interactionist perspective , while encompassing a wide range of sociologists take this process into account in the study of social phenomena.

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