a new typology of deviance: integrating normative and reactivist definitions of deviance

Alex Heckert  
Department of Sociology, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, Pennsylvania, USA

Druann Maria Heckert  
Department of Social Sciences, Fayetteville State University, Fayetteville, North Carolina, USA

The concept of positive deviance is marginalized in deviance literature by the focus on negative deviance and the absence of comprehensive conceptions of deviance. Current conceptions of positive deviance simply parallel definitions of negative deviance, namely normative and reactivist conceptions. Normative definitions posit positive deviance as behaviors and attributes that exceed normative expectations (e.g., overconformity), such as overachieving students. Reactivist definitions view positive deviance as positively evaluated behaviors and attributes, such as athletic talent. We propose a

Received 11 December 2000; accepted 30 October 2001.

Alex Heckert thanks Dr. Ed Gondolf for several valuable discussions about this proposed typology and its potential contributions and Dr. Dave Myers for providing feedback to an earlier draft. Support was also provided by an Indiana University of Pennsylvania sabbatical.

Druann Maria Heckert thanks Dr. Stuart Palmer and Dr. Frank Scarpitti for introducing her to the concept of positive deviance. Both authors thank two anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions.

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2000 meeting of the American Society of Criminology, San Francisco, CA.

Address correspondence to Alex Heckert, Department of Sociology, 112C McElhaney Hall, 441 North Walk, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA 15705.

E-mail: aheckert@iup.edu
new typology, which cross-classifies reactivist and normative definitions of deviance and more precisely distinguishes positive deviance, along with three other categories of deviance. Negative deviance, the traditional focus of the sociology of deviance, refers to behaviors that involve underconformity or nonconformity to norms and negative evaluations. Rate-busting refers to overconformity that is negatively evaluated. Deviance admiration refers to underconformity that is positively evaluated. Positive deviance refers to overconformity that is positively evaluated. This typology compensates for deficiencies in the separate conceptions of deviance by highlighting their contradictions (e.g., reactivists fail to consider rate-busting; normative theorists ignore deviance admiration). Current and historical examples in each category illustrate the utility of the new typology. The typology also accommodates the contextual nature of deviance, accentuates the role of power in defining deviance, and suggests the value of general theories of behavior as opposed to specific theories of “deviant behavior.”

The substantive area of deviance, more so than most substantive areas of sociology, has been marked by a plethora of definitions regarding the nature of the very field itself. While many definitions have been developed—some that fall into major paradigmatic traditions and others that seem almost idiosyncratic—most definitions can be considered to fall into one of two theoretical approaches: normative and reactivist. In this paper, as our central focus, we propose to integrate normative and reactivist definitions.

Traditionally, deviance has been defined as behavior that violates the norms or that is negatively labeled and evaluated. More recently, various social scientists have advanced the notion that positive deviance is conceptually a possibility. While some sociologists reject the potential existence of positive deviance, the concept has been defined from various perspectives. Still, the concept of positive deviance is marginalized in deviance literature by the focus on negative deviance and the absence of comprehensive conceptions of deviance. In this paper, we show how the concept of positive deviance is viable when considered within the context of a typology that integrates normative and reactivist definitions of deviance.
Current conceptions of positive deviance simply parallel definitions of negative deviance, namely normative and reactivist conceptualizations. Normative (or objectivist) definitions posit positive deviance as behaviors and attributes that exceed normative expectations (e.g., overconformity), such as over-achieving students. Reactivist (or subjectivist) definitions view positive deviance as positively evaluated behaviors and attributes, such as athletic talent. We propose a new typology, which cross-classifies reactivist and normative definitions of deviance and more precisely distinguishes positive deviance and three other types of deviance. Negative deviance, the traditional focus of the sociology of deviance, refers to behaviors that involve underconformity or nonconformity to normative expectations and negative evaluations. Rate-busting refers to overconformity to normative expectations that is negatively evaluated. Deviance admiration denotes underconformity or nonconformity that is positively evaluated. Finally, positive deviance designates overconformity that is positively evaluated. This typology compensates for deficiencies in the separate conceptions of deviance by highlighting their contradictions (e.g., normative definitions ignore deviance admiration and reactivist definitions fail to consider rate-busting). Current and historical examples in each category illustrate the utility of the new typology. The typology also accommodates the contextual nature of deviance, accentuates the role of power in defining deviance, and suggests the value of general theories of behavior as opposed to specific theories of "deviant behavior."

TRADITIONAL DEFINITIONS OF DEVIANCE

Deviance has been defined in a number of ways, but generally refers to socially disapproved behavior, attributes, or conditions that violate acceptable standards of behavior or appearance in a given group (Tittle and Paternoster 2000). Best and Luckenbill (1982) have summarized the predominant ways in which sociologists have defined deviance, which include the following. Some scholars have defined deviance as violating social norms within a social system. Others have restricted deviance to violations of social norms that are important enough to elicit a strong reaction.
In addition, some sociologists have extended the concept to include characteristics or states of being that society has discredited, such as obesity and blindness. Finally, adherents of the labeling perspective have suggested that deviance refers to behaviors or conditions that are labeled or reacted to by various members or groups of a society.

Although deviance has been defined in various ways, the major dichotomy is between the normative and reactivist approaches (Liska 1981). Normative or objectivist definitions emphasize the violation or lack of conformity to normative expectations. Deviance occurs when someone violates the norms of a social group and a deviant is a norm violator. Cohen offered an example of a normative definition of deviance when he suggested that deviance is “behavior that violates normative rules” (1966:12). Similarly, Merton stated that “deviant behavior refers to conduct that departs significantly from the norms set for people in their social statuses” (1966:805).

Although there are a number of problems with normative definitions, we will mention only a few. First, it is difficult to identify and measure norms, especially without considering people’s negative reactions. Second, norms tend to be abstract ideals that may be difficult to apply in specific situations and contexts. For example, killing someone may be first-degree murder, negligent homicide, a mercy killing, or an heroic act in wartime. Without the context of the situation, the social group within which the act occurs, and an understanding of the group members’ definitions and evaluations, it is difficult to know what acts (or conditions) are truly deviant. Third, normative definitions ignore the issue of power. While many acts of deviance reflect the consensus of a group of people, other acts of deviance violate the standards of a minority of powerful people in a social group. Fourth, ignoring group reactions is problematic because it fails to recognize that not all acts that violate norms result in a deviant label, and some actors are falsely accused and labeled deviant.

Reactivist or subjectivist definitions of deviance emphasize the role of the social audience in determining deviance. Deviance refers to acts or conditions that are negatively evaluated and labeled “deviance” by a social audience. Becker (1963:11) provided the classic statement of the reactivist position when he contended:
Social groups constitute deviance by making rules whose infractions constitute deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an “offender.” The deviant is one to whom that label has been successfully applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label.

Thus, the reactions and evaluations of a social group seem crucial in the production of deviance. However, several critiques of the reactivist conception can be made. First, what kinds of reactions are necessary and how strong must they be to constitute deviance (Gibbs 1981)? Second, some reactivists seem to ignore norms in their conceptions of deviance. Yet, it is doubtful that social reactions are completely arbitrary; negative evaluations typically occur in response to behavior or conditions that violate some kind of standard (Akers 1968). Third, if individuals engage in repugnant behavior that is not detected, are they “deviant,” or does a social audience have to negatively react to the behavior (e.g., Jeffrey Dahmer before he was detected and arrested)?

Some scholars have recognized the relative strengths and weaknesses of the normative and reactivist conceptions of deviance and developed definitions that acknowledge both. For example, in their recent book, Tittle and Paternoster define deviance as “any type of behavior that the majority of a given group regards as unacceptable or that evokes a collective response of a negative type” (2000:13; italics added). One critique that can be made of their definition is that by emphasizing behavior, they ignore conditions or states of being (such as blindness, disfigurement, obesity, and the like) that are often negatively evaluated and stigmatized (and which have been classified as deviance by many scholars). Perhaps more importantly, by asserting “or,” they create a logical conundrum. Their definition and other synthetic definitions like it allow for behaviors such as rate-busting (e.g., breaking the curve in an academic setting, being too productive in a factory setting, and the like) to be classified as deviant because they elicit negative responses. Yet, no deviance textbooks that we are aware of, theirs included, explicitly discuss such rate-busting behavior (e.g., being too
thin, nerdism, brown-nosing, workaholicism, tactless though honest), although some forms of religious deviance, such as overconformity to the norms of religious cults, can be conceptualized as rate-busting. Further, their definition fails to acknowledge the existence of deviance admiration. Is a behavior deviant if the collective response is positive, even though the behavior violates normative expectations? For example, during the American Revolution, the revolutionaries engaged in a variety of behaviors (e.g., stealing, lying, killing) that violated normative standards, yet many of the revolutionaries were and are considered to be heroes. Are they also deviants? Some of the behaviors of such revolutionaries or reformers as Ghandi and Martin Luther King also violated normative expectations, yet resulted in positive evaluations, and few people today would call them deviants. Bonnie and Clyde were admired by many, yet most people would say they were deviants. Just because the majority of a given group regards a behavior (or condition) as “unacceptable” does not automatically make that behavior (or condition) “deviant.” It is an important theoretical issue to predict and explain why some norm violations engender negative evaluations and other norm violations engender positive evaluations. By the same token, it is also important to predict and explain why overconformity sometimes results in negative evaluations and other times in positive evaluations.

DEFINITIONS OF POSITIVE DEVIANCE

As with deviance per se, positive deviance has been defined in various ways. In addition, however, some scholars have rejected the concept of positive deviance altogether. From this perspective, deviance refers only to the negative or to that which is reacted to in a negative manner (c.f., Best and Luckenbill 1982; McCaghy 1985; Sagarin 1975; Clinard and Meier 1989; Goode 1994; Curra 1994). As Best and Luckenbill noted, “risking one’s life in battle to save one’s comrades breaks the norms of self-preservation, yet it is considered praiseworthy. In contrast, deviant activities are unacceptable, seen as wicked or harmful” (1982:2). Rosenberg, Stebbins, and Turowetz further stated that deviance could be conceptualized as “morally condemned
differences” (1982:1). Sagarin (1975) clearly rejected the concept by declaring positive deviance as an oxymoron. Goode (1991) further claimed that the concept is not viable and that the concept is the product of the thinking of “mavericks.” Indeed, positive deviance could be considered a deviant concept within the substantive area of deviance.

Nonetheless, positive deviance has emerged as a concept within the substantive literature of deviance. While noting that the theoretical construct is marginalized within the discipline, Ben-Yehuda has proclaimed that the concept is significant as “it will open new and exciting theoretical and empirical windows for research” (1990:234). At this point, the theoretical and empirical work on positive deviance is sparse and constitutes a very small portion of the significant substantive area of deviance. Yet, sufficient work exists to consider the concept an important one that merits further exploration.

The various definitions of positive deviance parallel standard definitions of deviance. The major ways that positive deviance has been conceptualized are as follows: analysis of positive deviance without using the term, constructs based on a norm-violation perspective, perspectives using a labeling/reactivist approach, and definitions advocating one form of behavior only. Various conceptualizations will be discussed.

In the first place, certain theorists (including pivotal thinkers of the 20th century), while not using the term positive deviance, have recognized the importance of analyzing positive behaviors within the substantive area of deviance (c.f., Sorokin 1950; Lemert 1951; Wilkins 1965; Katz 1972; Posner 1976; Liazos 1975; Simmons 1969; Harmon 1985; Huryn 1986). Sorokin (1950) examined altruism in the guise of American good neighbors and Christian-Catholic saints, defining both groups as representative of the “deviant classes.” As Sorokin declared:

If criminals are deviants falling below the legally prescribed norms of moral conduct, “good neighbors” are also deviants, but above the level of moral conduct demanded by the official law. As a rule, “good neighbors” discharge not only the duties prescribed for and demanded from all, but something extra, above the minimum of social conduct required by the official law. . . . It is necessary to distinguish between two kinds of so-called “social deviants”: the subnormal types—criminals,
psychotics, and other pathological types, and the “supranormal”—or the positive creative innovators in all fields of culture and social life. Though both classes are deviants and both collide with existing laws and values, they are nevertheless, absolutely different kinds of deviants, much farther from each other than from “the bulk of law-abiding” mediocrity. (1950:81–2)

Furthermore, Lemert concluded:

The aim is to study sociopathic behavior in the same light as normal behavior, and by implication with extensions or deviations of general sociological theory. By the same token, we hold that, with certain modifications in our frame of reference, variations from social norms in desirable and enviable directions should be explored as profitably as the more frequently studied sociopathic variations. The behavior of the genius, the motion-picture star, the exceptionally beautiful woman, and the renowned athlete should lend itself to the same systematic analysis as that which is applied to the criminal, the pauper, or the sex delinquent. (1951:23–4)

Clearly, scholars such as Sorokin and Lemert considered the notion of positive deviance to be important, even though they did not use the term.

Various sociologists (c.f., Sorokin 1950; Wilkins 1965; Winslow 1970) have argued, even when not using the term, that positive deviance can best be understood from the normative approach. Thus, positive deviance is analyzed as behavior or conditions that surpass normative expectations rather than violate norms. Wilkins (1965) suggested that geniuses, reformers, and religious leaders are deviant. Accordingly, deviance was viewed as forming a continuous distribution ranging from bad to good. Normative, or conforming, acts constitute the major portion of the continuum. The negative portion of the normal curve is composed of criminals and the positive end of the continuum includes saints. For example, regarding intelligence, geniuses surpass normative expectations in the positive direction. Similarly, Winslow (1970) suggested that if deviance is considered in relation to statistical norms, deviance could be viewed as a normal curve of conformity and deviance; normative acts compose the middle of the curve. One end of the curve
contains disapproved actions beyond tolerance limits, which are considered deviance (e.g., crime, mental disorder, and suicide). Approved deviance, or positive deviance, makes up the other end of the normal curve and includes those surpassing the norms in wealth, patriotism, health, wisdom, and virtue. Thus, from a normative perspective, positive deviance refers to surpassing the norms or to overconformity.

The other major way that positive deviance has been defined is from a labeling perspective, whether the term positive deviance is used or not. Various theorists (Freedman and Doob 1968; Hawkins and Tiedeman 1975; Norland et al. 1976; Scarpitti and McFarlane 1975; Steffensmeier and Terry 1975) have advocated the labeling perspective, and Ben-Yehuda has advocated the labeling perspective when synthesized with a non-Marxist conflict analysis. For example, Steffensmeier and Terry noted, “Deviance consists of differentially valued phenomena” (1975:4). Phenomena include acts and attributes such as thievery on the negatively valued end of the continuum and performing heroic deeds on the positively valued end of the continuum. Valued denotes that the phenomena are judged (at which point they become deviant) on a scale from “optimally desirable” to “optimally undesirable.” Finally, differentially implies that the phenomena must be distinguished as that which is viewed as needing attention. Some phenomena are inherently less difficult to point out than other phenomena. For example, heroism is more readily labeled than upward mobility. Norland, Hepburn, and Monette (1976:84) provide another example of defining positive deviance from a reactivist point of view. They conclude, “we prefer to theoretically conceptualize the moral dimensions of human behavior as a continuum including both negatively evaluated behaviors and attributes as well as positively evaluated behaviors or attributes.”

As stated earlier, positive deviance has also been defined in reference to very specific types of behavior or actions (c.f., Buffalo and Rodgers 1971; Ewald 1981; Ewald and Jiobu 1985; Palmer and Humphrey 1990). For example, Palmer and Humphrey (1990) proposed that positive deviance is essentially innovative behavior, such as invention and artistic and scientific creativity. Equating innovation with positive deviance is limiting, however, because much innovative
behavior is negatively evaluated, at least when it first occurs (e.g., Van Gogh, the French Impressionists, the theory of evolution, and so on). When discussing positive deviance, Ewald (1981:30) cited sports examples, including zealous weightlifters and runners. He defined positive deviance as the “extension, intensification, or enhancement of social rules. In this case, the zealous pursuit or overcommitment to normative prescriptions is what earns the individual or group the label of deviant. The individual or group is essentially true to the normative standards but simply goes ‘too far’ in that plausible or actual results are judged inappropriate by the general culture.” Although he considers normative expectations and social reactions, we contend that he is really defining rate-busting, rather than positive deviance.

All in all, positive deviance, like deviance, has been defined in various ways, but the primary conceptions are normative and reactivist. From a normative or objectivist perspective, positive deviance refers to behavior or conditions that surpass or over-conform to the normative expectations. From a reactivist or subjective perspective, positive deviance denotes behavior or conditions that are positively evaluated.

PROPOSED TYPOLOGY OF DEVIANCE

We argue that to fully understand the process of deviance, both normative expectations and social reactions have to be taken into account. A fuller picture of deviance emerges when one acknowledges that individuals and social groups have both expectations for behavior and conditions and reactions to behaviors and conditions. In addition, it is important to recognize the contextual and situational nature of deviance. Definitions and evaluations for the same behavior and conditions, as well as normative expectations, can vary across social groups and over time. Accordingly, we offer the typology shown in Figure 1, which cross-classifies normative and reactivist conceptions of deviance.

Negative deviance involves behaviors or conditions that are nonconforming or underconform to normative expectations and elicit negative evaluations from a social group. Rate-busting refers to behaviors or conditions that surpass or over-conform to normative expectations that are negatively
evaluated by a social group. Deviance admiration denotes behavior or conditions that are nonconforming or underconform to normative expectations, yet elicit positive evaluations from a social group. Finally, positive deviance refers to behaviors or conditions that surpass or overconform to normative expectations that are positively evaluated by a social group.

**Negative Deviance**

Negative deviance is deviance that constitutes an underconformity or failure to conform to the norms, which produces negative evaluations or would produce negative evaluations if detected. More precisely, we adapt Tittle and Pasternoster’s (2000) definition as follows: Negative deviance is any type of behavior or condition that the majority of a given group regards as unacceptable and that evokes a collective response of a negative type or would evoke a collective, negative response if detected. This definition synthesizes normative and reactivist perspectives. The bulk of traditional understandings of deviance reflect this particular understanding of deviance. For example, Adler and Adler (2000:8) noted that “people can be

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**FIGURE 1** Deviance typology.
labeled deviant as the result of the ABCs of deviance: their attitudes, behaviors, or conditions.” Thus, deviance can include a plethora of phenomena, and deviants include those with marginalized political or religious viewpoints, the mentally ill, criminals, or the physically handicapped. Norms, even if unfair, have been established and underconformity produces negative evaluations and sanctioning.

As another example, McCaghy, Capron, and Jamieson (2000:106) more narrowly defined deviance as “behavior subject to legal procedures aimed at curtailing the behavior. Such procedures may involve punishment, restoration of losses to victims, or involuntary hospitalization.” Examples of negative deviance include crimes in the streets against persons and against property, family violence, deviance in organizations, deviant drug use, mental disorders, cyberdeviance, and sexual deviance.

All in all, while variously defined and providing different examples, the paradigmatic standard in deviance is the notion that deviance involves underconformity or nonconformity to norms that elicit negative evaluations and consequently, sanctions.

Rate-Busting

Rate-busting refers to overconformity that is negatively evaluated. More precisely, it refers to behaviors and conditions that surpass or overconform to the norms and evoke a collective response of a negative type. Negative reactions to rate-busting are evident in the context of work and educational settings. In a typology of American archetypal characters, based on heroes, villains, and fools, Klapp (1962) described some fools as overconforming fools or mindlessly conforming fools (e.g., yes-men, rigid fools, prigs, and high-minded fools). In other words, they are foolish in the extreme way that they obey the normative structuring of groups. As well, Merton (1957:184), in perhaps the quintessential sociological typology, theorized that one individual adaptation to the social/cultural conditioning of anomie is ritualism, which “refers to a pattern of response in which culturally defined aspirations are abandoned while one continues to abide almost compulsively by institutional norms.” Heckert (1998:26) suggested that overconformity could also be
clarified as supra-conformity (a type of positive deviance) as follows:

In other words, norms operate at two levels—the ideal, which most people believe is better but few achieve—and the realistic version, which most people can achieve. The negative deviant fails to abide by either level; the “normal” person operates at the realistic level, but does not achieve at the idealized level; and the positive deviant is able to attain or behave at the idealized level.

The interesting feature is that overconformity often elicits negative evaluations. For example, popular stereotypical images support the idea that the rate-buster is often negatively evaluated. Gifted and overachieving students are often subjected to a complex stereotypical construction of the “nerd,” “dweeb,” “dork,” or “geek.” They are assumed as rate-busters on the variables of excessive schoolwork or intelligence; simultaneously they are perceived to be devoid of social skills, antisocial, clumsy, lacking in fashion skills, and replete with other undesirable characteristics. Huryn (1986) found that negative characterization of the gifted was especially likely to emanate from peers; parents and teachers were positive about rate-busting students (which highlights the contextual nature of normative expectations and social reactions). As another example, as quoted in Gurko (1953:21), Samuel Grafton, a New York Post columnist stated, “America is the only country in the world where a man who uses a word that isn’t understood by another man is made to feel inferior to that man.”

Another example emerges in the area of appearance—blonde women. Appearance refers to a condition (Adler and Adler 2000) or an attribute (Scarpitti and McFarlane 1975). Attractive women have been defined as a form of positive deviance (c.f., Hawkins and Tiedeman 1975; Lemert 1951; Scarpitti and McFarlane 1975). As such, they are positively evaluated because they exceed normative expectations of attractiveness. While unfair, perhaps, the attractive (within a culturally defined context) are the recipients of tremendous life opportunities and advantages (c.f., Dion 1972; Byrne 1971; Krebs and Adinolfi 1975; Reis et al. 1980; Reis et al. 1982; Benson et al. 1976; Landy and Sigall 1974). Blonde hair, on women, for whatever reason, has been emblematic of attractiveness in Western traditions, and blonde women
continue to be positively evaluated on the variable of physical attractiveness (c.f., Cooper 1971; Synott 1987; Rich and Cash 1993; Clayson and Maugham 1986; Clayson and Klassen 1989). As Cooper (1971:55) claimed, “Fair hair has constantly held its place in the European ideal of feminine beauty. For long periods, the woman with blonde hair has been the object of European male’s desire.” Synott (1987:388) also noted, “Blonde perhaps is seen as an essentially female colour, like pink; with dark hair as primarily a male colour.”

Thus, in a sense, even if discriminatory, blonde hair has been socially constructed as the idealized, as overconformity in relation to norms regulating feminine beauty. Yet, much of the public imagination of blondes has been negative. In qualitative interviews, Heckert (2000) found that blonde women—a aware of the positive spin placed on their hair—also felt subjected to profound stereotyping. The societal stereotyping included the following: innocent, sexier, more fun, easier, and stupid. As well, while blonde women positively experienced attention and treatment based on hair color, they also felt that their relationships with other women were negatively impacted. This contention is consistent with the work of Krebs and Adinolli (1975), who suggested that attractive individuals are often rebuffed by their own sex. As well, they had to devise methods to cope with societal and interpersonal attributes of stupidity, including the following: not taking it seriously (ignoring or joking), playing out the role, taking on the ice princess role, fighting back, and passing. The ubiquity of potent imagery of the dumb blonde is certainly fueled by mass media and jokes; every blonde woman interviewed felt negatively impacted. Blondeness had mediated the way each woman felt she was treated in society. Empirical evidence (Kyle and Mahler 1996) shows that brunette women are often taken more seriously than blondes in the guise of a greater willingness to hire and to offer higher starting salaries. This is a critical negative evaluation shaping the life experience of modern blondes, which is present and powerful.

**Deviance Admiration**

Deviance admiration connotes the scenario whereby underconformity or nonconformity is positively evaluated. More
precisely, it refers to behavior or conditions that the majority of a given group regards as unacceptable, yet which evokes a collective response of a positive type within that group. As an image in society, the James Dean "bad boy" has long been positively evaluated in American film. Kooistra (1989) has perhaps offered the most significant examination of this process in his theory that criminals are often converted into heroes. As Kooistra (1989:7) analyzed the scenario:

Murderers and thieves harm not just their immediate victims but also subvert the moral basis upon which society rests. They are specters of evil that terrorize honest citizens, forcing people to live in fear behind locked doors, to spend large amounts of money to protect themselves, and even to abandon their homes and neighborhoods when the fear of crime seems too great. . . Nonetheless, throughout history we find a handful of individuals who have robbed and killed in clear violation of law, but who were not considered wicked or depraved. Instead these robbers and murderers were viewed as social heroes, and not just during their lifetime but for decades afterwards. They have been popular media creatures whose criminal exploits have been celebrated in song, newspapers, books, plays, mores, and even television dramas. These are lawbreakers who have been transformed from ordinary criminals into legendary Robin Hood figures of epic proportions.

Examples in the U.S. include almost mythical figures such as Billy the Kid, Jesse James, Butch Cassidy, Al Capone, John Dillinger, D.B. Cooper, Bonnie Parker, and Clyde Barrow.

Examples can be easily identified in other cultures as well. In Australia, for example, Edward "Ned" Kelly was a legendary bushranger who was executed in 1880 for killing three policemen. Yet, many Australians viewed him as almost heroic. One of the most distinguished generals in Australia's history, Sir John Monash, who witnessed the capture of Ned Kelly, once told a journalist that he had "never been so overawed in his life as when the redoubtable bushranger spoke a few words to him, and for many a month he was the envied hero of the school as the boy who talked to Ned Kelly" (Ironoutlaw.com, 2001:1). An additional description of Ned Kelly clearly illustrates deviance admiration. "Ned Kelly became a legend during his own life, and a contributor to the mythology of the bush—the bush as a cradle of
mateship, equality, the emphasis on masculine virtues of strength, and the belief that the bush life was the cradle of much that was different from other lands, the cradle of the Australian, the cradle of the yearning of the life of the fearless, the free and the bold” (Iron outlaw.com, 2001:1).

Kooistra (1989) reviewed theories that might account for the elevation of not just deviants, but criminals. Psychological theories would propose that identifying with these figures allows conforming individuals to vicariously express the nature of the rebel, yet, still symbolically understand the futility of crime. Cultural accountings posit that group values, such as courage and loyalty and sickness, can be embodied in these figures. Yet, history does not necessarily support this point, in that these characters are often partially historically accurate and partially mythologized. Sociological explanations are rooted in structural situations. Robin Hood archetypes might be fostered during anomic or other structurally difficult conditions and become a metaphorical representation of the distrust/dislike people hold toward law and politics. As Kooistra (1989:11) commented:

I argue that this anomaly, the heroic criminal, is a cultural product that is called into existence by certain structural conditions. At times when large numbers of people have had their sense of order and security disrupted, particularly by economic upheavals such as depression, then a legitimate crisis occurs. Widespread portions of the public feel “outside the law” because the law is no longer seen as an instrument of justice but as a tool of oppression wielded by favored interests. Social justice and state law are in antithesis, and people turn to symbolic representations of justice outside the law, such as the Robin Hood criminal. These social bandits recall a sense of justice based upon kinship and community rather than one based upon impersonal bureaucratic procedures established by the state. During such times, a national “market” for such symbolic representations of justice exist.

Thus, the actual figure was infused with mythological or symbolic characteristics that matched the quintessential archetype—Robin Hood. Writers puffed their stories with an abundance of prominent values such as courage and success, making the criminal heroes seem positive overall. These “heroes” were also provided with an abundance of
characteristics that resembled the original Mr. Hood. For example, the law violator becomes a criminal due to being victimized by injustices or because of violating a law not popularly perceived as an appropriate law. Conforming types deem this person an upright man and provide support. He is perceived as violating the law—but upholding an important justice—such as taking from the oppressive rich and providing for the worthy poor. This character only bodily harms another if it is in the name of a higher justice or if necessary to defend self. This archetype never threatens the state but rather the corrupt and oppressive powerful group that has denied or undermined justice. All in all, the criminal as hero has emerged in the United States history as a fairly common figure. This figure is also common in other cultural settings. Thus, the underconformity is positively evaluated.

Additionally, those who break the norms of one era are often positively evaluated by a future generation for the fact that their heroism is rooted in their willingness to deviate from past societal/cultural standards that are later perceived as needing change. Merton (1968:238) explicitly explained that the rebel, revolutionary, nonconformist, individualist, or renegade of one era is often elevated into the cultural hero of another era. Coser (1967) has also denoted this phenomenon in relation to innovators. A society may define an innovative behavior as an undesirable departure from the norm, and negative evaluations (and sanctions) will ensue. At a future point in time, the behavior will be differentially interpreted and will be reevaluated. Consequently, if the innovator is still alive, his or her personal status will be drastically impacted and improved. If the innovator is dead, the innovator becomes a "posthumous saint." As well, Dinitz, Dynes, and Clarke (1969) have noted the case of the positively evaluated nonconforming individual. From an opposite perspective, conformists can come to be negatively evaluated and deviantized over time. Yet, sinners, rebels, misfits, malcontents, aliens, outsiders, and even criminals are sometimes admired and can become heroes of a later generation; heroes that endure over time and stand the test of time.

Essentially, underconformers or nonconformers are, at times, positively evaluated. At times, these designations occur during the period of their deviancy. At other times, this occurs at a future point in time.
**Positive Deviance**

A final category, positive deviance, suggests overconformity that is positively evaluated. More precisely, it refers to any type of behavior or condition that exceeds the normative standards or achieves an idealized standard and that evokes a collective response of a positive type. It would appear that this is most likely to occur in contexts when structures and interpersonal relationship are not threatened.

Mother Theresa was almost universally proclaimed as a positive deviant, a person who overconformed on norms of altruism and charity and was almost unanimously appraised in a positive manner, as a saintly woman. Altruism involves selfless behavior and perhaps is more likely to be uniformly evaluated in a positive way than are other forms of behavior. For example, innovation and innovators are more likely to experience negative evaluations since people have a profound tendency to resist change (Lenski and Lenski 1982; Ogburn 1964; Rogers and Shoemaker 1971).

Altruists that have been posited to be examples of positive deviants are good neighbors and saints (Sorokin 1950) and Congressional Medal of Honor winners (Steffensmeier and Terry 1975). Comte (1966) was the first to utilize the word altruism as the diametric opposite behavior of egoism. According to Macauley and Berkowitz (1970:3), altruism can be defined “as behavior carried out to benefit another without anticipation of rewards from external sources.” As Sorokin (1948:59) suggested, “Genuine altruism is pure also in its motivation: altruistic actions are performed for their own sake, quite apart from any consideration of pleasures of utility.” Rosenhan (1970) has subdivided altruism into normal altruism, which refers to acts such as donating small amounts of money and does not require much sacrifice, and autonomous altruism, which refers to actors, such as abolitionists and the “righteous” people who assisted Jews during Nazi domination. Autonomous altruists exert much greater effort and sacrifice and endure much greater consequences.

While the last examples led to negative sanctioning (even death) and thus produced a period of these individuals being deemed negative deviants before being transformed into heroes of mythic properties, many examples of altruists include positive labeling. Volunteers are lauded and positively sanctioned.
Another example of exceeding the norm that leads to positive evaluations is in the case of exceeding the norms on appearance. The physically attractive are treated as positive deviants in that a socially valued appearance—perhaps unfairly—is an innate characteristic that is differentially acted upon. As Byrne (1971:127) proposed, “it would seem safe to propose that in our society, physical attractiveness is a valued attribute.” Cultural standards vary, yet as Morse, Reis, Gruzen, and Wolff (1974:529) proffered, “there are general standards of attractiveness within American society to which both males and females from the same cultural background will subscribe.” As well, within a cultural setting, consensus or agreement is particularly high (Reis et al. 1980). Overall, empirical evidence demonstrates that “what is beautiful is good” in that according to Dion, Berscheid, and Walster (1972:289), “not only are the physically attractive persons assumed to possess more socially desirable personalities than those of lesser attractiveness, but it is presumed that their lives will be happier and more successful.”

The advantage of physical attractiveness transcends the life experience, and many positive evaluations and rewards benefit attractive individual’s lives. Adults react less unfavorably to the transgressions of an attractive child than to an unattractive one (Dion 1972). The attractive are advantageously treated in relation to attributions of sexual attractiveness and consequently, dating and marriage (Byrne 1971; Reis et al. 1982; Krebs and Adinolfi 1975). The physically attractive are even more likely to be beneficiaries of helping behavior (Benson et al. 1976). The physically attractive are advantaged in the screening evaluation stage of the job application process (Dipboye et al. 1975). In many respects and in many cases (perhaps the dumb blonde is anomalous), attractive people who exceed the norms of expected and culturally defined appearance are positively evaluated and sanctioned. Of course, they present no threat to the power structures of society.

Thus, there are behaviors, actions, and attributes that exceed normative sanctions and are positively evaluated. Examples would include normal altruism, or autonomous altruism that does not create a situation of threatening the dominant order. For the most part, attractiveness is a similar category.
THE CONTEXTUAL NATURE OF DEVIANCE

The various examples discussed above highlight the contextual and situational nature of deviance. The same behavior and conditions can result in either positive or negative evaluations, or both simultaneously. For example, many gifted children are negatively evaluated by their peers (rate-busting) yet positively evaluated by parents and teachers (positive deviance). Many attractive women are negatively evaluated (rate-busting) by other women yet positively evaluated by men (positive deviance). Gang members who engage in a drive-by shooting may be positively evaluated by their fellow gang members (deviance admiration) and negatively evaluated by the dominant culture (negative deviance). Similarly, the same behavior or conditions can be negatively evaluated at one point in history and positively evaluated at a later point in time. For example, the French Impressionists (Heckert, 1989) were heavily criticized and negatively evaluated by contemporary critics and other painters (rate-busting), but now are praised and valued as great artists (positive deviance).

We assert that it is an important theoretical issue to examine why overconformity is negatively evaluated by some individuals and social groups and at certain points in time, and why it is positively evaluated by others and at other points in time. At the same time, it is important to examine why underconformity or nonconformity to the norms sometimes result in positive evaluations or deviance admiration, when the typical evaluations are negative.

What accounts for variations in reactions to underconformity and overconformity? We argue that the fundamental issue is power and people’s self-interests. Behavior and conditions evoke negative reactions when those behaviors and conditions threaten the interests of the social audience, regardless where they are on the continuum of underconformity to overconformity. Whether or not the negative reactions have an impact (or become “sticky” to use a labeling term) is primarily determined by the relative power of the (potential) deviant(s) and the social audience. The relative power is determined by a number of factors such as the numbers in each group (deviant and reactors), the amount of wealth and income (property) of each group, the relative prestige of each group, the level of organization of each
group (from individualized to subcultural to organized), and the relative quality of their discourse or claims (ability to persuade and manipulate symbols). These various sources of power interact in determining the ability of a given social group or audience to apply negative or positive labels to a type of behavior, condition, or particular group of (potential) deviants. Viewed in this light, deviant behavior is, in essence, a test of power relationships and serves as a potential threat to the power of the dominant group(s).

In a similar fashion, power and self-interest also help determine the ability of social audiences to apply positive evaluations and labels. Generally, people and groups in power will apply positive evaluations to behaviors and conditions that coincide with their interests. The positive evaluations may be countered, however, by the negative evaluations of other people and groups. Whose definitions will ultimately prevail is primarily determined by the relative power of the competing groups. As with negative evaluations, the relative power is determined by an interaction of factors, such as the number of members in competing groups, wealth and income, relative prestige, levels of organization of competing groups, and the relative quality of discourse or claims of competing groups. Typically, for most behaviors and conditions—whether they reflect overconformity or underconformity—there will be both positive and negative evaluations competing for dominance.

Other factors also are important in determining the nature and level of evaluations. Peoples’ definitions of the situation and the meanings they attribute to behaviors and conditions are relevant. These definitions are sometimes based on self-interest, but they also are learned through a process of social interaction and cultural transmission. Second, the severity or degree of the norm violation is pertinent (on a continuum from complete nonconformity or underconformity to extreme overconformity). Third, the situational context is relevant. For example, killing can occur in the context of a family argument, in the context of a robbery, or in the context of war. The social reactions will be different across these contexts and will vary across the social groups that respond. The same is true of overconformity. Altruistic suicide may be defined as heroic by some groups and as terrorism by others (e.g., the infamous incident of 9/11/2001, in which planes were flown
into the World Trade Center and the U.S. Pentagon). Fourth, other attributes of the actor will help determine the social reactions. For example, social groups respond differently to the same behavior done by individuals of higher status and individuals of lower status. The responses to a religious cleric who tells an off-color joke tend to be different than the responses to a convicted felon who tells an off-color joke. The altruistic act by a nun may be applauded, while the altruistic act by a homeless person may be viewed with suspicion. Fifth, closely related to the factor of relative power, the higher the degree of consensus there is about a norm, the more likely the collective responses will be uniform and consistent (Thio 2001). Low-consensus norms are more likely to evoke conflicting and competing social responses. Sixth, in some situations there are competing norms. Tittle and Paternoster (2000) have classified ten of the most important middle-class American norms and ranked them from most to least important. The responses of particular social groups are affected by the number of norms that pertain to a given behavior and the relative importance of these competing norms to the social audience. Thus, many Americans viewed Oliver North as a patriot and hero even though he engaged in illegal activities and lied about it, because he (said he) did it out of group loyalty. For many individuals and groups, group loyalty is a more important norm than honesty.

THE VALUE OF THEORIES OF “DEVIANT BEHAVIOR”

As Ben-Yehuda (1990) has argued, the concept of positive deviance could potentially lead to exciting theoretical and empirical developments. Tentatively we argue that our typology suggests the value of general theories of behavior as opposed to specific theories of “deviant behavior.” With regard to individual motivation, it seems valuable to develop a theory that can account for the full range of behaviors across all four cells of the typology. The actual and anticipated social responses (negative and positive evaluations and sanctions) tend to increase the costs or rewards of the behaviors. Accordingly, rational or social choice theories or social learning theory as developed by Akers (1985) can explain behavior that occurs in each of the four cells. The social evaluations and
sanctions affect the socialization and learning process, and may affect the potential deviant’s self-identity. Thus, formal and informal labeling processes occur that may influence learning processes and subsequent behavior, but labeling concepts can be easily integrated with social learning theory, as both have their roots in symbolic interaction theory.

Many of the other theories of deviant behavior are designed to specifically explain negative deviant behavior. At this time they are limited because they have specified negative deviance as the focus of interest and thus have failed to consider social reactions. For example gang members can have strong social bonds (Hirschi 1969), characterized by fervent attachments to their fellow gang members. An “original gangster” may be a positive deviant within the gang because of his extreme exploits and adherence to the gang norms, and yet he is considered to be a negative deviant by the dominant culture because of that same strict adherence to the normative expectations of the gang.

Although it is a macro-level “rates” theory, Merton’s (1938) theory of anomie has similar limitations. Each type of deviance presented in his classic typology can be represented in each cell of our typology. For example, innovation can result in negative deviance (e.g., drug dealer), deviance admiration (e.g., gangster), rate-busting (e.g., Bill Gates, as evidenced by the number of negative jokes about him on the Internet), or positive deviance (e.g., computer innovators). Retreatism can result in negative deviance (e.g., substance abuse), deviance admiration (e.g., lovable drunk), or positive deviance (e.g., Thoreau). Similar examples exist for ritualism and rebellion.

Therefore, theories of social reactions are necessary to complement theories of the deviant behaviors. We prefer pluralistic conflict models that account for the production of normative expectations, as well as the production of “deviants,” rate-busters, deviance admiration, and positive deviance, through a process of competing interests and power, social interaction, labeling, and social discourse. Bernard’s “unified conflict theory of crime” (Vold and Bernard 1986) integrates macro-level conflict propositions with social learning theory and thus accommodates the four types of deviance suggested by our typology. The different types of deviant behavior are “normally learned behavior responding
to different reinforcement schedules operating in different social structural locations” (Vold and Bernard 1986:288). One’s location in the social structure (i.e., nested social groups) also determines whether the behavior or conditions become negative deviance, rate-busting, deviance admiration, positive deviance, or some combination of the four.

THE VALUE OF THE TYPOLOGY FOR RESEARCH

This typology is valuable for research in deviant behavior as well as for theory. Because of space limitations we will give just a few examples. First, as introduced by Merton (1938), innovation often involves underconformity and is negatively evaluated (negative deviance). However, as discussed above, innovation also can involve overconformity to norms and positive reactions. Yet, innovative overconformity can be initially defined as negative deviance because it threatens the interests of powerful groups. Research should be conducted to show how powerful actors and groups sometimes suppress innovation or manipulate ideology and social reactions to maintain economic dominance. For example, the insurance and pharmaceutical companies and other powerful groups deliberately manipulated definitions to create negative evaluations of the proposed Clinton health care plan (which, at first, received positive evaluations by the majority of Americans immediately after hearing President Clinton’s speech regarding the proposed health care plan). Many other examples can be cited, such as the dominant oil companies and alternate energy sources; the automobile industry and the Tucker automobile in the 1940s; and, for many years, the American Medical Association and universal health care. It is important to empirically establish when and how powerful groups (as well as less powerful groups) will engage in “ideological warfare” to promote their interests.

Second, research in the area of social change could benefit from using our proposed typology. For example, Heckert (1989) documented how the French Impressionists (artists) were initially negatively evaluated by the dominant ruling elite, which controlled interpretations of what constituted “great” art. Over time, impressionism was redefined as positive and aesthetically pleasing, and became a dominant
art form in its own right. What social changes occurred that allowed such redefinition? Whose interests changed or were challenged, and by whom? How were coalitions of less powerful groups formed to change definitions of impressionism from negative to positive? Similar research is possible on other social changes, such as the growth of Christianity, the civil rights movement, and the gay rights movement.

Third, research should be conducted on deviance admiration. It is likely that the level or degree of deviance admiration varies over time and across societies depending upon the level of anomie and discontent that some members have with regard to the prevailing power structure. When deviance admiration intensifies, can we predict that social change will occur? Can we predict that powerful groups will have to make changes to accommodate the increasing discontent of less powerful groups? Again, hypotheses should be formulated and tested by empirical research—quantitative, qualitative, and historical-comparative.

Fourth, we are living in a time of great uncertainty and are coming off a century (and seemingly, beginning a century) in which evil in the guise of serial murderers, increasing crime rates, genocide, and terrorism are all too common. The more that researchers study human goodness and positive deviance in the guise of heroism and altruism, the more we can understand human nature. Just as sociology is advanced by understanding the etiology of terrorism, sociology can be advanced by understanding the etiology of heroism and altruism. Why do some people run toward danger to help others, even at great risk to themselves? As another example, there is a growing interest in researching resiliency—children who survive and even thrive in the toughest of social environments (Garmezy 1991a, 1991b; Werner and Smith 1989, 1992). Researching resiliency (positive deviance) is as important as researching delinquency (negative deviance) for understanding the full capacity of human behavior and the human condition. The categories of our proposed typology provide a backdrop to study potential research areas such as altruism, heroism, resiliency, and different types of innovation, which can contribute greatly to a more fully developed portrait of the complexity, the elusiveness, and the mysteriousness of the totality of human behavior and social organization.
CONCLUSION

Deviance is complex. Reactions to deviance are complex. Deviance also is differentially evaluated. At times, differential evaluation occurs simultaneously. At other times, differential evaluation occurs across time (or cultures). That is perhaps a major reason why deviance is relative and contextual, and constructing uniform definitions and notions of what is deviant, is inherently fraught with difficulty.

Our typology attempts to capture some of the complexity of deviance and differential reactions to deviance. The typology suggests four types of deviant outcomes: negatively evaluated underconformity (negative deviance); negatively evaluated overconformity (rate-busting); positively evaluated underconformity (deviance admiration); and positively evaluated overconformity (positive deviance). Conceptions of deviance that fail to account for both normative expectations and social reactions are deficient, because reactivist conceptions fail to consider rate-busting and normative conceptions tend to ignore deviance admiration.

Future research and theory could attempt to discern what factors would seem to be prevalent and predominant in explaining differential reactions to both positive and negative behaviors and what structural and cultural conditions are most likely to be conducive to producing these various forms of deviance. The development of hypotheses in each category and about each category will be a valuable development and demonstrate the usefulness of integrating normative and reactivist perspectives. Furthermore, this development could also serve to highlight the potential salience of positive deviance. For example, individuals in a dominated group, such as students, might react negatively to positive behavior (or to rate-busting) due to the conformity to the mandates of a dominating group, such as parents and teachers. This negative reaction might occur in the context of an implicit support of the norm in the abstract, but not in the concrete reality of the achievement of their classmates.\(^1\) As another example, and considering the critical issue of power, an immediate definition of positive deviance is most likely to occur when no power relationships

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\(^1\) The authors would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for the development of this hypothesis.
are threatened. Thus, a great altruist is more likely to be immediately positively labeled for exceeding norms than a social reformer threatening current structures of power.

This typology attempts to synthesize normative and activist perspectives of deviance. Future theoretical and empirical consideration of each cell—negative deviance, deviance admiration, rate-busting, and positive deviance—could provide exciting and viable contributions to the study of deviance.

REFERENCES


A New Typology of Deviance


