A Visual Model of Deviance:
Social Triggers and Unacceptable Behavior

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The nature of deviance is often enigmatic because of its extreme qualitative etiology. "Normal" and "abnormal" behavior are fickle concepts. Society changes and so too does the definition of deviance with its plethora of theory. This paper proposes a generic, visual model of deviance that will consolidate theories, not as an analysis, but as a graphic guide to the process clarifying strategies and placing theory in perspective.

The nature of deviance is understandably difficult because of its qualitative nature. "Normal" or accepted social behavior at one time is not necessarily the same at another (Heiner, 2000). Society changes, as does the definition of accepted behavior. Normal accepted behavior has a definition constructed from a collective idea based on what is considered right and proper. Unaccepted social behavior (deviance) is subject to the same scrutiny. To complicate the issue, "deviance" may be in vogue as an accepted way of acting while still retaining its original negative definition (Clinard & Meier, 2011). Understanding the dynamics of deviance often is obstructed by its heinous nature (Mills, 2000). Value judgments on unacceptable social behavior must be minimized for conceptual clarity. To ameliorate the dilemma, this paper suggests a solution to the problem by presenting a visual model covering all instances of deviance. It is not an analytical model, but more a universal identifying process arguing dynamic relationships. An in-depth analysis is only salient in terms of the specific situation, time and place in confluence with this paper's suggested model. The distinction between this model and others is visual. The efficacy of a visual model is its lasting impression and fluidity of application. Many are the "twists and turns" in deviance that create a "picture" generically orienting complex behavioral processes.

Control and Deviance

No one likes uncertainty and society does what it can to eliminate or, at the least, minimize this feeling. This means there is a continuing quest

for control on all levels of the social structure and, indeed, control is a major theme for preventing deviance. However, the type and specifics of control are not easily identified due to the negative complexity of goals involved. Even still, control is important to everyone on every subjective level for maintaining adequate social identity and security (Thio, 2004). The fundamental aspect of deviance is a behavioral rogue of which the collectivity will take steps to minimize or eliminate. First, however, a discussion of control dynamics for understanding the social foundation of deviance.

Social Goals and Interaction

One method for people's understanding of the self is through reciprocal social interaction while moving toward a goal (Tepperman, 2010). Graphically, this goal is at the top of a social hierarchy (Fig. 1.) and could be existentially labeled in relation to the person as "More Than" whatever its specifics may be. Not possessing the goal of "more than" (Person, Fig. 1) is experienced as "Less Than." For example; students in college have the goal of obtaining enough credits to graduate. The diploma is the actual goal and each gained credit moves them closer to "More Than" from their position of "Less Than" (Berger & Luckmann 1966). Once the diploma is achieved the student is no longer "Less Than" because the goal is now theirs, however, it remains as to what to do now! Well, graduation indicates one has met minimum requirements for an occupation, but that is a new Goal and, of all things, one is once again "Less Than" until they get a new goal or a job. ("More Than") So it is suggested life in general is a hop-scotching from "Less Than" to "More Than" up the social ladder, whatever one's

Fig. 1. "More Than/ Less Than."

personal definition of self may be in addition to defining the quality of their life in terms of how they perceive the strength and control of their identity and security. This dynamic will be the basis for a suggested model of deviance.
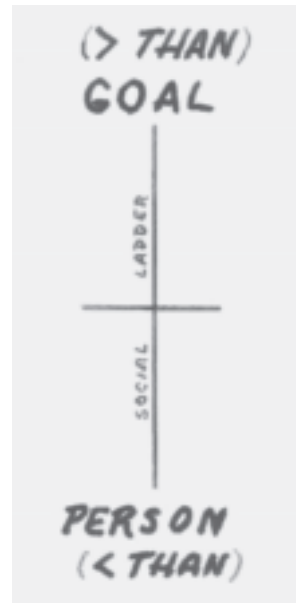
The Model

There are several substantial theories on deviant behavior (Clinard & Meier, 2011). Each of these has their unique approach in addressing itself to the analysis of a specific form of interaction. The theories, however, are not generic, not visual and sometimes have hidden agendas (Agnew, 2001). This is not to say they are unsound. Most have insights to the study of deviance, but they do not tell the whole story and at times can be misleading if not addressed from a broader perspective (Merton, 1957). For this reason, a deviance model based on the visual is here presented suggesting a common process inherent in all theories concerning deviant behavior. The model is not a catholicon. It is a graphic path analysis and does not claim to provide underlying reasons, although it does suggest specific areas of investigation often overlooked.

Suppose a person is walking down a street and notices a house that appeals to them. They really like the house and begin the process of moving in a direction to buy. In their short journey, they encounter a problem. The house costs $1,00,000. Well, OK, but our person is a fry flipper at a fast food restaurant, has no other skills and cannot afford the mortgage. Actually, if they did have superior skills, the area still does not have an economic base with appropriate compensation for the house. The person is devastated, but society does not like such situations. Society will always provide alternatives to frustrated goals or "More Than". In this case, the possible respective alternatives could be: a less expensive house, an apartment or public assistance housing. The alternatives are fine, but they still do not satisfy the person's desire for what is conceived in terms of identity and security. Certainly, they are not going to be homeless, which is losing much more than what the social order offers, yet there is a continuing problem. The person really, really wants that house and cannot get it out of their mind. They think, talk and dream about it and the house is no longer just a goal, it is life itself. What to do? Well, for instance, the person robs a bank or sells drugs and buys the house with the proceeds! They have moved from acceptable to unacceptable social behavior or deviance. In the process, they have also suggested a universal model of deviance.

Let us go back and see how this example creates a model. Figure 2 is a social hierarchy based on dominance and submission. Those desires at the apex are most dominant while those at the nadir are least desirable. X1 is the goal or house and X3 is the house seeker with X2 being a social barrier.

One sees how "More Than"/"Less Than" fits into the model. X4, X5 and X6 are alternative solutions to the dilemma.
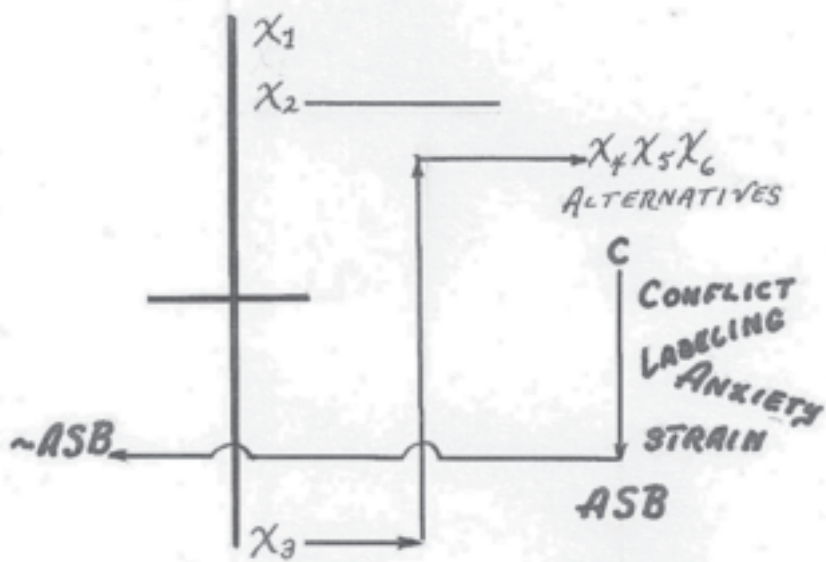

Fig. 2. Goal Process.

Point C is where a person may make the decision to go another route and obtain the goal. All behavior on the right side of the hierarchy is acceptable social behavior or "normal" and that to the left of the hierarchy line is unacceptable social behavior or "deviant." The unacceptable methods for achieving the goal as selling drugs, murder or fraud are perceived as unacceptable pathways for normal behavior. They may also be understood as situation conversion because the person reinterprets the unacceptable as acceptable insomuch as it meets their needs (Deviants do not see themselves as wrong). It is only when the collectivity judges them as wrong that an ambient value judgment becomes operative (Heiner, 2008). A word of caution. The model reflects choice. A person at the alternatives always has a choice to pick one of the situations or go on to point C and contemplate moving into unacceptable behavior. Even at point C one has a choice, although it may be a difficult one depending on the situation. There are degrees of choice in why one moves toward deviance. However, certain social situations are conducive to suggesting one move toward unacceptable behavior. These are designated as triggers which, when activated, may have serious consequences. Triggers come in a variety of

forms of which five will be discussed (A codicil: All triggers are subject to choice and, no matter how strong, one is not obliged to honor them).

Triggers

One of the mildest triggers is Labeling. Often ethnocentrism is a devastating imposition for people not involved in the group (Goode, 1975). Groups develop social borders which define their level of security and identity. This "social border" will be defended vigorously and sometimes takes the defensive form of labeling (Goode, 1975). Nerd, teacher's pet, jock, goth, dreamer and others are some labels to categorize and strengthen internal group bonds generally directed towards one person, although it may be several. Most labels do not impel one to extreme negative behavior because all one has to do is ignore them or find solace in their own ethnocentric group. On the other hand, depending on the sensitivity of the target person, labels can lead a person to disastrous consequences. Labels are weak triggers for unacceptable social behavior and most are minimized as one grows older. Paradoxically, as a label is rejected, the labeled person willfully finds a group against the label and they too become an inadvertent labeler.

Self-fulfilling Prophesy often tends to follow (Shover & Hochstetter, 2006) from labeling and is a bit stronger. For example, one might hear that a group considers their behavior deviant. The offending group, no matter what the person does, continues to consider them a "real bastard"! Eventually it may be the case that the labeled person gets tired of trying to prove they are a friend and thinks, "Well, if they think I am a real bastard, then that is what they are going to get!" and the person begins to superficially act in terms of the group's definition. At this point, labeling has become a self-fulfilling prophesy and the person has moved into deviant behavior. Notice the interaction between this trigger and labeling. There is always a relation between all triggers because often one leads to another or is dependent on another's characteristics.

Strain Theory (trigger of insecurity) has a close association with labeling. Once one believes they are estranged from the collective social order by labeling, they are under a certain amount of strain (Agnew, 2001). In general, there are some patterns of social behavior conducive to strain that are beyond labeling and are stronger triggers. A common reaction to goal failure may also be seen as a failure of one's self thus leading to insecurity and setting the stage for strain (Agnew, 2001). Most people

realize that there are unobtainable goals even though society all too often expounds that, "You can be anything you want to be." A lack of money, status or education (Thio, 2004) can lead to strain. This anomic situation can become so overwhelming that a trigger is activated and the strain can only be alleviated by unacceptable behavior. Again, strain is a choice even though the trigger strength may be great.

Differential Association (triggers by proximity) Edwin Sutherland (1978) studied the social structure of prisoners and wrote extensively on what he termed - differential association. Put simply, (probably doing a great injustice to his work) place a criminal into a society of criminals and they become better criminals! Differential association suggests social influence may turn our behavior in a certain direction that may be against our better judgment (Tepperman, 2010). It is not unknown that a person will go along with the crowd because the crowd has social power or the person wants to be accepted. Everyone, at one time in their lives, does something they may regret because of social proximity. Crowds and social icons are strong persuaders for someone to be triggered into unacceptable behavior through influential proximity. Differential association can be a strong trigger because the impetus for deviancy tends to be a constant reminder for one to change, even though they may be against it internally.

Conflict Theory (trigger by oppression) introduces one to extreme emotional and sometimes logical triggering. Certainly one understands the social hierarchy of dominance and submission. There is nothing inherently wrong with such an arrangement as, for example, the relationship between parent and child. However, Marx (Spitzer, 1975) would argue it becomes wrong when the dominant person and/or group oppresses the non-dominant to their disadvantage. In conflict theory, there is a growing gap between the two social strata and the farther away a person gets from their goal by conflict, the greater the social estrangement. The problem is inequality by conflict (Marx, 2001) experienced through oppression. If this is the case, the oppressed can manufacture their social order through rebellion to conflict and thus deviance (Berne & Messerschmidt, 2006). Conflict is a strong trigger for moving a person toward deviance because they often have nothing to lose. Still, this is a choice, but sometimes the conflict trigger is so strong as to convince the individual that deviance is the best (or only) choice.

The Trigger of Triggers

These five are the most common triggers and the relationship between them is complicated. Labeling causes strain, strain causes conflict. Differential association can cause them all and conflict puts a strain on one's psyche in a powerful manner. Each trigger and combinations are involved with anxiety that enhances their strength. As this strength is increased, a generic anxiety is created (a trigger of triggers) complicating analysis of the process. These triggers (Fig. 3) can be considered as "pushers" in that they are influencing the person toward deviance. A "puller" has to do with goal strength and it too enhances the magnitude of triggers (pushers).
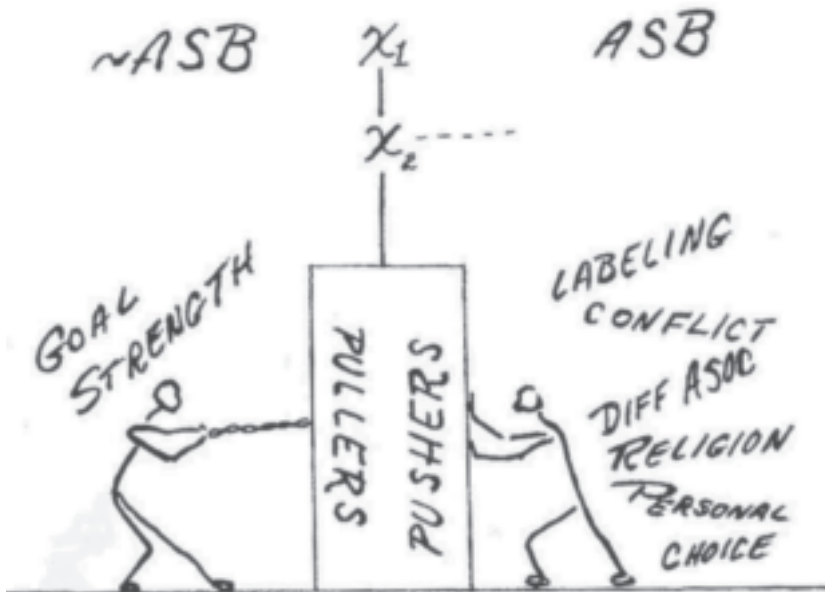

Fig. 3. "Pushers" and "Pullers."

Goal strength is a "puller" that strongly entices the person to come over to the unaccepted social behavior side as opposed to "pushers" that originate in accepted behavior. If the magnitude is great, goal strength may override all of the triggers or may act in concert with them to create deviance. For example: A young girl pinned a picture of herself and girlfriend on her bedroom wall. Her mother came in and chastised her strongly reminding the girl "We do not pin things on the wall!" The little girl replied, "But I really, really wanted it!" An example of goal strength, which is suggested as having little to do with the triggers discussed. "Pins on the wall" is an example of

something strongly positive (in the girl's eyes) redefining her mother's definition of deviant behavior! Pushers and pullers are activated because a negative event is perceived in reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Finally, Figure 4 is the model for deviance and is illustrative of any deviance one
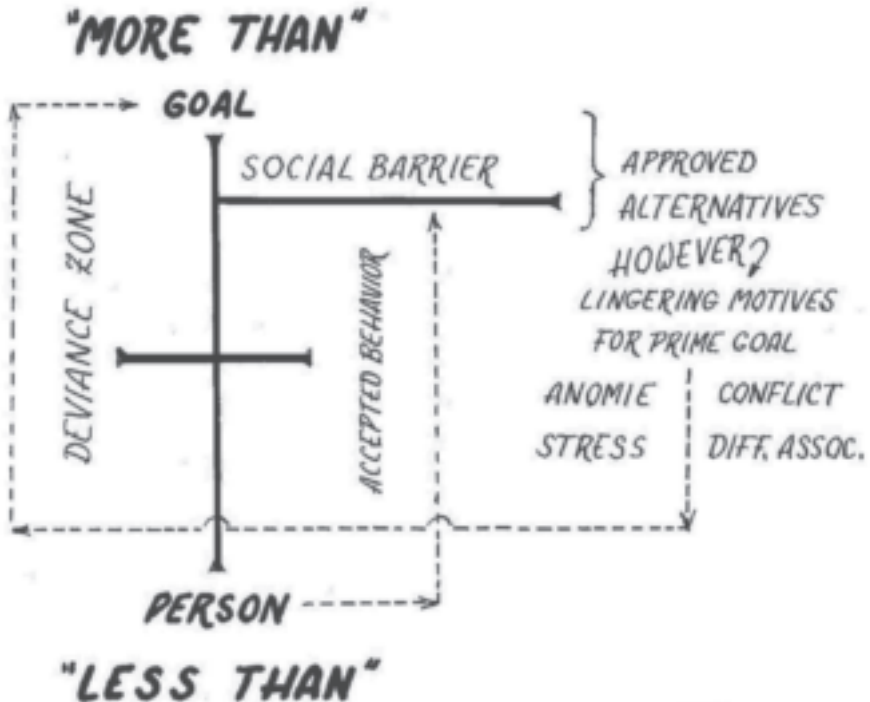

Fig. 4. The Model of Deviance.

wishes to conceive. Certainly, the model does not dismiss theoretical approaches. For example; Freud, Cooley and Mead all suggest something important in regard as to how one comes to know who they are, but have boundaries. However, Goffman (1967) unifies their approaches with impression management procedures. The model (Figure 4) is similar in that it takes the theoretical positions mentioned (frankly, any) and places them visually as to synthesize the eclectics of deviance. The model is a unique visual tool for deeper etiological investigation of dynamic theoretical relationships inherent in the process of deviance which no other author suggests. It presents a picture of the objectivity of subjectivity or, as has been suggested pictorially - "pins on the wall!"

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Personal Biography

Dr. Vazzana is an associate professor specializing in visual sociology at Kent State East Liverpool. Dr. "Jack" has had eleven shows of giclee photography exploring the hidden iconic meanings of culture. His work has been also exhibited at the prestigious Waterpower Show in Louisville sponsored by the National Foundation for the Arts. He has also done work for the University of Pittsburgh, Bullen Racing in England, photo portraits of notable sports stars and ethnic essays. Dr. Vazzana's papers emphasize the theoretical and visual aspects of social theory. In essence, a picture is really not worth a thousand words - probably ten thousand!

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