

Deviance in a social context

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ABSTRACT: This study consists of a critical presentation of deviance, focusing on an interdisciplinary investigation. While using a thematic literature review, we discuss the internal mechanisms of social cohesion and observe that every scholarly domain develops its own research pattern. Deviance is a highly debated phenomenon strictly relevant to social functioning. On the one hand, economists discuss it concerning social market regulation, stating that people's actions can be explained through Weber's rational choice theory, where social order is depicted as social capital. On the other hand, the cultural approach is profoundly influenced by a metaphysical worldview, considering the religious, historical, and aesthetical experiences. Their focus is upon the notion of morality, which is, unfortunately, not clearly defined, and its impact on the features of canon, particularly the relationship established between social taste and social distinction, which are frequently criticized by sociologists, whose opinions gravitate towards the norms, anomie, and social bond processes. After a short portrayal of the conceptual limits of social deviance, which are reflected in the Marxist, feminist, and ecological perspectives, the paper ends with our opinion on this complex issue.

KEYWORDS: deviance, social market regulation, rational choice, social capital, social control, norms, social taste, social distinction

INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the analysis of *deviance* as a social phenomenon. It aims to depict the internal mechanisms of social cohesion by exploring the relationship with the concepts of *social order*, *social control*, *morality*, *law*, and *anomy*.

The concept of *deviance* was introduced in the sociological research by the leading representatives of the Chicago School, whose members combined the methods of Field Research (particularly the use of ethnography) with the theory of Symbolic Interactionism, developed by Mead (*Mind, Self and Society*, 1934) and Cooley (*Sociological Theory and Social Research*, 1930). In this case, we should remember the works of Sellin (1938) and Merton (1968), who activated during the Cold War period and studied several cases of social American delinquency. They use this term in the field of socio-criminogenesis (Cioban, Lazar, Bacter, & Hatos, 2021; Dragomir, 2009); (Zhou, Liu, Lee, Xu, & Sun, 2024) and stated that its conceptualization is determined by the antonymy with the Durkheimian notion of *social order*, which means the system of rules followed by people in society (Merton & Merton, 1968; Moessinger, 2000; Nickerson, 2024; Rawls, 2010). Thus, it is characterized by generality, impersonality, rewards and sanctions, freedom of will and action.

Taking as a starting point the prior studies of the *deviant* phenomena, our paper questions the way in which this topic is mirrored in social sciences. It aims to cover the existing gap in the mainstream literature, surpassing the classical approach based on criminological directions (strain theories, rational choice theories, social control theories, labelling and social reaction theories, social conflict theories, and ecological theories).

We employed the thematic literature review method to offer an answer, which involves organizing and synthesizing existing literature based on recurring themes or topics. Better comprehension and broad insights help identify possible research gaps across themes, providing a comprehensive understanding within a wider context and eventually allowing the researcher to initiate a deep exploration (Hart, 1998). Thus, we intend to depict a panoramic view of *deviance*, focusing on a critical analysis of the existing research in the field of this phenomenon. So, it realizes an investigation of the significant theoretical directions during the last three centuries, identified in economy, culture, and sociology, centring upon the general socio-cultural context. For finding the relevant studies, the first step was employing Boolean search operators on Google Scholar website (for articles) and Google Books (for books) which contained terms such as “devian* AND economy”, “devian* AND social order”, “devian* AND moral*”, “devian* AND culture”, “social control AND devian*”, “society AND devian*”, “devian* AND norms”, “devian* AND social stability”, “devian* AND social inequality”, “historical view AND (devian* OR outsider OR marginalized)”, “theories AND devian*”, “deviance AND education -positive -deviance”, “limits AND deviance”, “(deviance AND harm*) OR (“deviance AND risk”). The identified papers were manually selected based on the title, abstract and availability.

Next, the researchers added other relevant resources from the bibliography of the first identified papers. Based on this sample, they classified the literature and looked for other relevant studies on the revealed topics. It is worth mentioning that this scrutiny represented an attempt to organize the literature based on the limits of a systematic literature review on a similar topic conducted in 2021 by one of the authors (Cioban et al., 2021).

The main identified topics during the research consist of: *social order, social interaction, social institutionalization, social capital, morality, ethics, conformism, social approval, social strain, social contract, social control, censorship, canon, positive deviance, anti-canon, subculture, social disorganization, social status frustration, group resistance, outsiders, taste culture, social capital, social distinction, counterculture, social stability, norms, anomie, social adaptation, social functionalism, social discontent, self-control, social bond, social inequality, class struggle, social problems, discrimination, pollution, prohibition.*

Using a thematic literature review, the following article intends to offer relevant conclusions regarding the topic of *deviance* by comparing the existing approaches and signalling the inter or transdisciplinary connections. In this way, we hope it will give a better understanding of this complex phenomenon, which could be applied in theoretical investigations and common life situations.

1. DEVIANCE, SOCIAL ORDER, AND THE POLITICAL-ECONOMIC APPROACH

From a political and economic point of view, *social order* is strictly connected with the concept of *social capital*, introduced by Lyda Hanifan (1916), Pierre Bourdieu (1972), James Samuel Coleman (1980), and Robert Putnam (1993), which represents an engage in exchanges and transfers of social resources to gain individual rewards from the outcome of a social event (J. S. Coleman, 1988). This direction of research explains the internal mechanism of *social market regulation* (Gottschalk & Hammerton, 2024; Hayek, 1980; Mandeville & Hundert, 1997), considering that people's actions are motivated by practical initiatives through the principle of *rational choice* (Giddens, 1971). It postulates that an individual performs a cost-benefit analysis in order to determine whether an option is suitable for his personal fulfilment. Scholars (Moessinger, 2000) identified three main political and economic perspectives of analysing the *social order*: *market balance* approach (which derives from Max Weber's theory of rationalization, 1921), *institutional* approach (which associates the *social order* with a set of interconnected procedures that regulate individual choice), and *organisational* approach.

Firstly, the *market balance* approach states that social behaviour, including the commitment to *deviant acts*, represents the consequence of personal social interaction (Giddens, 1971; Moessinger, 2000). Weber affirms that *social order* is a dynamic process established by historical circumstances (Giddens, 1971), during the Industrial Revolution (Weber, Henderson, & Parsons, 1947), through the means of Protestant work ethic (Weber, 1930),

where *formal rationality* (exterior norms, usually stated in the current legal system) was separated from *substantive rationality* (individual values). This cultural innovation, materialized in the proliferation of bureaucracies, generates the displacement of affective action and introduces methodical ways of life (means-ends reason), focused on efficiency and self-optimization.

By considering that the practical effect is more important than the abstract framework, the *market balance* approach is frequently associated with the philosophical works of Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527), who developed the concept of *self-interest*, defined as a concern for the achievement of personal welfare (Machiavelli, 2011), and served as a starting point for Adam Smith, who tried to quantify the *social order* by using mathematical and logical calculations, concentrated on the fulfilment of financial stability and professional career (Smith, 1776; Smith & Stewart, 1853). They offered supporting arguments for Coleman's linear system of action, centred upon the process of commercial exchange (Coleman, 1994).

Secondly, it is the *institutional* approach, which denies purely individual choices, dealing with the instruments of behaviour regulation through the means of education (Alston, Alston, Mueller, & Nonnemacher, 2018; Di Maggio & Powell, 1983; Furobotn & Richter, 1991; Hurwicz, 1945). The institutionalists are preoccupied with the origin of *social order*, which, in their opinion, equals the process of *social institutionalisation* (Opp, 1990), which was first described in the Age of Enlightenment through the works of Voltaire concerning the Kingdom of France during the reign of Louis XIV (1643-1714). The Voltairean speculations (Voltaire, 1779) served as a starting point for the research of Norbert Elias (1939), whose interest concerns the relationship between law, power, emotion, and knowledge over time, particularly the interdependencies of *etiquette* standards (Elias, 1978). By taking as a case study the diffusion of courtly norms in the bourgeois communities, Elias discovered the phenomenon of *internalization*, through the thresholds of shame, disgust, repugnance, and self-constraint developed by the *absolutist mechanism*, through which the state becomes the supreme body of physical violence. A similar conclusion can be found in Niklas Luhmann, who depicts the *codification* of *intimate feelings* during the Age of Romanticism (1986); Edward Said, who discusses the normative consequences of *colonial empires* (2001); and Daniel Cohen, who focuses on the global impact of digital technologies (2024).

Thirdly, the *organisational* approach perceives the *social order* as a structure of institutional interactions, offering a critical examination of *rational choice*. Its *founding father* is the Austrian philosopher Friedrich Hayek, who criticises classical institutionalist thinkers with his theory regarding the interdependence of economic, social, and institutional phenomena. In this way, he introduced the term *spontaneous order*, which is defined as the product of two distinct influences that do not always tend in the same direction (Hayek, 1980) by associating it with the *free prize* system and the *rule of law* (Hayek, 1988), whose only mission is to maintain the social hierarchical structures produced by

the process of work division through the means of *social insurance* and *social safety net*. Another key figure is Pierre Moessinger, who takes into consideration the role of neuro-evolutionary psychology (Jean Piaget), arguing that the stability of the social order resides from the linkage of non-rational interpersonal conducts, materialised in attitudes, values, cognitions, and behaviours (Moessinger, 2000). In this way, he left a significant legacy on current research, particularly in social network analysis.

2. THE CULTURAL ASPECTS OF DEVIANCE. MORALITY, CANON, AND SOCIAL TASTE

Deviance can also be studied from a cultural perspective, which is perceived as a *symbolic capital* (Bourdieu, 1986). In this case, the major point of reference is the concept of *morality*, which plays an essential role in the maintenance of *social order* (Ben-Yehuda, 1990; Schafer, 1974); its task resides in the guidance of social actions towards a specific purpose and the establishment of legitimate means for their achievement.

The cultural view defines *morality* through a permanent appeal towards the instances of *good* and *evil* or *justice* and *injustice*, which consist of a reminiscence of totemic customs and ancient law systems (particularly the Babylonian code of Hammurabi or the Jewish Ten Commandments), being invested with a divine, biological, or rational power. Consequently, they are endowed with an absolute character, often liberating them from the contingencies of common right (Ogien, 2002) by manifesting an attitude of indifference towards social approval; Becker calls them *moral entrepreneurs* (Becker, 1995). Thus, it is created a list of presumably universal *deviant* phenomena (Gibbs, 1966; Goode, 2022; Opp, 1989), which frequently includes the facts and behaviours that cause fear (robbery, theft, corruption, piracy), disease (incest, prostitution, addiction), pain (fight, strike, rape, injury) or death (crime, suicide, cannibalism, abortion).

2.1. RELIGIOUS DOGMA

Morality is perceived as an ideal social order, usually imposed by a superior instance. Its arguments are built on the basis of the religious dogmas developed during Antiquity and Middle Ages (Stark & Bainbridge, 1997), when people's existence was totally controlled by the geographical environment and the only form of social commitment was the obedience towards a dynastic family, who frequently ruled in an authoritarian mode, consolidating its status with the use of corporal or even death punishment (Green, 2013). These dogmas assured the entire social activity through the force of *memory* (Stark, 2015); they served as an instrument of psychological pressure (Berger, 2011; Dawkins, 2006), focusing on the practice of *deterrence theory*, which implies the continuous use threats and force in order to dissuade a potential deviant behaviour (Sorenson, 2022).

A typical example can be found in the Judeo-Christian tradition, where it is talked about

the remembrance of a tragical prehistorical event, either real or fictional, which is usually called the *Original Sin* (Schwartz, 1998); in this situation, it evoked a rebellion against God, which materialized in episodes such as the Fall of Angels, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the Flood or the Tower of Babel. So, *deviance* is used as an equivalent to *damnation*, described as a *negative selection* that eventually leads to *extinction* through thermodynamic annihilation (Dawkins, 2006; Schwartz, 1998).

Theoretically, religion affirms that there is no future for *deviant* groups (Harris, 2004; Ward, 2006); it is said that all of them will be burnt into the flames of hell. However, some cults (especially Christianity) developed several strategies of *social reintegration* (Stark & Finke, 2000), such as *repentance*. As a result, the *deviant* actions can be forgotten if they are followed by a ritual of *spiritual purification* (Stark & Finke, 2000), which is characterized by self-culpability (through prayer, fasting, confession, flagellation, eucharist, etc.) and *non-deviant* behaviour (forgiveness, charity, assistance, generosity, etc.).

This mechanism served as a foundation for the principle of *restorative justice* (Braithwaite, 2000; Johnstone & Van Ness, 2006; Menkel-Meadow, 2007; Rossner & Taylor, 2024), which implies the inception of shame feeling (Braithwaite, 2000; Elias, 1978; Luhmann, 1986), moral panic (Ben-Yehuda, 1990; Cohen, 2011; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2010; Renold & Ringrose, 2011), and the repairing of harm caused by deviant behaviour by providing of opportunities for safe and voluntary dialogue between offenders and victims (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2006; Matza, 1990; Rossner & Taylor, 2024).

2.2. SOCIAL CONTRACT

Consequently, *morality* illustrates the *social contract* theory developed by the political philosophers during the Age of the Enlightenment, particularly Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), who discussed in their works the relationship established between the State and the Individual, conceptualising the core principles of *constitutionalism*. Social contract theorists sustain that the notion of *morality* appears as a voluntary submission to the state authority; the individuals have consented, either explicitly or tacitly, to renounce some of their *rights* in exchange for protection and security. Taking as a starting point the examination of the human condition, perceived philosophically, they seek to demonstrate that personal and social behaviour are endowed with biological freedom, considering the law formation as a corruption of personal power and conscience.

The social contract's primary concern was the so-called *state of nature*, formulated by the Dutch lawyers Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) and Samuel Pufendorf (1632-1694). There appeared to be two antagonistic positions. The Hobbesian position (*Leviathan*, 1651) said that the *state of nature* represented a permanent threat to human life, as it offered unlimited personal power, which eventually generated an endless war of all against all (*bellum omnium contra omnes*), caused by the biological competition for survival (*Homo*

homini lupus), which anticipated the Social Darwinist idea regarding the *survival of the fittest* (Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Biology*, 1864) and legitimated the phenomenon of *conformism*, suggesting that the sovereign's edicts, even if they were arbitrary or tyrannical, offered the best solution for *social development*. On the contrary, Locke (*Two Treatises of Government*, 1690) and Rousseau (*Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men*, 1755; *The Social Contract*, 1762) outlined a different version of social contract theory, stating that the *state of nature* facilitated the preservation of human life (he depicted people as genuinely good). So, the foundation of social order was laid in the sovereignty of *general will*, which was later developed by Kantian deontological ethics (*The Metaphysics of Morals*, 1785), John Rawls' *Theory of Justice* (1971) and Robert Agnew's *social strain theory* (Agnew, 1985), promoting a collectivist conception, based on the utopian supposition of social equality.

The social contract theorists established a deep connection between *conformism* and *risk management* (materialized in the election process), which laid the groundwork for Chauncey Starr's theory of *risk perception*, used in modern criminology (Yue, Mc Neeley, & Melde, 2024). When the law became not a limitation of freedom but rather an expression, the community assumed a hierarchy of social threats (Starr, 1969), which were perceived differently by its members. Thus, it is well known in scholarly research that a major difference between adolescent and adult behaviour is the degree of tolerance concerning risk and ambiguity situations; the first ones are inclined towards ambiguity, while the latter is towards risk (Tymula et al., 2012).

Due to its religious and philosophical background, the social contract view became later an object of theoretical criticism; its limits are firstly outlined by David Hume (1711-1776), who stresses in his works that such a concept represents a convenient *fiction* in the essay *On Civil Liberty* (1742), he argues that the presumed Rousseauan *consent of the government* works only theoretically (Gowans, 2013). By obeying the laws, the citizens voluntarily assumed the *majority* rule to obtain general welfare (Rousseau offered a statistical explanation of *deviance* by associating it with the *will of the minority*) and automatically legitimized the practice of *discrimination*. Social contract theories signalled the situations of *white-collar crime* (Amos, Longpre, & De Roos, 2024; Braithwaite, 1985; Coleman, 1987; Croall, 2001; Shapiro, 1990), claiming that class hierarchy led to higher pressure on disadvantaged members (the situation of Marquis de Sade), which eventually increased the likelihood of becoming criminals. As an alternative, Pierre Joseph Proudhon (*General Idea of Revolution in Nineteenth Century*, 1851) and Mikhail Bakunin (*Revolutionary Catechism*, 1866) advocated a conception of individualist anarchist contract that did not involve an action of surrendering sovereignty, but rather protection from coercive governmental measures (De Hart, 2024; Pettit, 2002; Riley, 1973; Shapiro, 1990; Skyrms, 2014).

2.3. NIETZSCHE'S MORAL THEORY. HISTORICAL ETHICS

Another controversy gravitates towards the claims regarding the *state of nature*, which was not confirmed by biological, archaeological, or anthropological research (Childe, 1946). Considering this point, Friedrich Nietzsche offered an alternative to the social contract by proposing the *herd instinct* model, centred on *master and slave morality*, which put into question the factual existence of *deviance*. In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), *The Genealogy of Morality* (1887) and *Ecce Homo* (1888), the German philosopher initialized the preoccupations for historical ethics, establishing a link between language, codes, practices and institutions; he analysed the evolution of European value system from Homeric Greece towards the Modern Era.

The main aspect of Nietzschean thought consists of the psychological feature of the *inferiority complex*, which gives birth to *ressentiment*; it is affirmed that the *slave morality* operates as a mechanism of *self-denial*. Its arguments are built on the critical examination of Judeo-Christian faith, which was interpreted as a symbolical Darwinist clash (Dawkins, 2006), whose main actors are the hunters and the gatherers (*evil* is portrayed in *Revelation* 13-16 as the *worship of the beast*). Thus, he observed a slight separation between facts and words; violent behaviour usually accompanies the rhetorical affirmation of non-violence. As a result, he proclaimed the concept of *social control*, which was later improved by Talcott Parsons, defining it as a social strategy implemented by the hegemonical authorities through the means of education, law, rewards and punishment in order to maintain their cultural and political domination (Parsons, 1991).

3. THE AESTHETIC DIMENSION: DEVIANCE AND SUBCULTURE

Nietzsche emphasises that, as time passes, religion creates *censorship*, which implies the selection of information; in this case, it should be mentioned the inception of the *occult* (White & Rudbeg, 2023), which penetrates the history of Western ideas through several alternative currents, including the so-called hermetic philosophy, schools of magic, alchemy, astrology, numerology, theosophical and New Age movements (Hanegraaff, 2012; Lachman, 2015), whose social activity is frequently evoked in Horror or Fantasy programmes (poetry, novels, music, visual art, cartoons, movies, etc). Through censorship, it was established the *canon*, whose aim was to impose social control upon knowledge and memory in order to avoid the spread of *deviance* (Gowans, 2013; Hick, 2024; Mc Donald, 2001). First time used in order to explain the formation of Biblical texts (Frye, 1982; Mc Donald, 2001), the concept of *canon* expresses a process in which various aspects of social culture are regarded as icons of moral values, becoming instruments of formal education and collective identity (Langfeld, 2018); it is usually associated with the works of art or literature exposed in public spaces (museums, libraries, temples, schools, market squares, etc.).

A canon lays to permanence, which is considered valid independent of time and place. It is widely regarded as a standard, a reference point (Tandirli, 2012) and therefore worthy of imitation, being continuously fed by an institutionalised hierarchy of artists and styles (Langfeld, 2018), established through a set of competitions and rewards, such as the Salon events of French Rococo and Neo-Classicism, where the winners obtained Le Prix de Rome (a trip to Rome paid by the state) and the Legion of Honour (Brauer, 2013; Goldstein, 1996; Gyenes, 1975; Haldane, 2024). For that reason, *canon* is accepted by its audience as something self-evident, faultless or even divine (Campbell & Parras, 2024; Langfeld, 2018), consisting of the starting point of the myths regarding the Muse, the Holy Ghost, the Angel of Inspiration or the Poetic Genius, who offers immortality to the person, or the group involved in the phenomenon of aesthetic recognition. In this way, art itself becomes an instrument of sacralisation (Burckhardt, 2001) (Van der Leeuw, 2006) and, therefore, an act of what is called *positive deviance*, which is, in fact, an *anti-deviance* phenomenon; it is said that the angels themselves descended upon earth to finish the paintings of Fra Angelico and Raphael or to whisper the melodies of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

As a response to *canon*, the anti-canon is developed, whose social expression is the *subculture*. For the first time, David Riesman (*The Lonely Crowd*, 1950) defined this concept as an identifiable social group that differentiates itself from the standard cultural values of the majority, developing its own morality and social order norms. Usually, its representatives interpret the mainstream view critically; that is why the earliest studies of the phenomenon identify it with the subversion of *normalcy* and, therefore, the nature of *deviance* (Hebdige, 1979). Starting from the thesis of *social disorganization theory*, which directly links crime rates to neighbourhood ecological characteristics (Thrasher, 1927), they claimed that subcultures emerge because of some population sectors' lack of socialization through means of selection and segregation processes, where deviant models concentrate and reinforce (Conzen, 1996). Consequently, the classification system of Albert Cohen (*Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang*, 1955) was created, whose aim was to explain the status frustration of working-class youth communities (the *Corner Boys* of Chicago).

3.1. CHICAGO SCHOOL. CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORY AND SUBCULTURE

Influenced by Frederic Thrasher's analysis of gang behaviour (Thrasher, 1927), Albert Cohen depicted juvenile delinquency as a *subcultural* trend, stating that criminal activity is motivated by economic needs and social status frustration (Cohen, 1955). He draws attention to the fact that criminals, in their view, do not act criminally at all; young men of the lower classes find themselves replacing their society's norms and values with alternative ones in order to obtain a sense of values and social status which cannot be received from the larger society. Taking this point into consideration, he identifies six types of *subcultural* behaviour (Cohen, 1955; Downes & Rock, 2007): *nonutilitarian* (the deviant

actions are not committed on the basis of economic activity); *malicious* (the purpose is to annoy or injure others), *negativistic* (it is motivated by the external prohibition); *versatile* (in the sense of various delinquent behaviours that occur), *hedonistic* (the focus is on the momentary pleasure) and *resistant* (to external pressure of conformity and loyalty towards their own group).

Cohen's theory of *subculture* counts for the increasing rates of non-utilitarian crime (vandalism, loitering and joyriding) in Cold War Western societies, holding the view that the reaction to status frustration is a collective response rather than an individual one. It served as a reference point for Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin, who formulated the Illegitimate Opportunity Structure (IOS) model (1960). They state that there are only three subcultural forms: *the criminal* (characterized by utilitarian needs, which develop in a stable working class and provide an established pattern of delinquency, serving as an alternative to the legitimate job market), *the conflict* (emerges in socially disorganized areas, where there is a high rate of population turnover and the means of achieving goals, both legal or illegal, are blocked; it generates street violence, gang warfare, etc.) and the *retreatist* (manifested as a double failure, both mainstream and delinquent one; the result is an *escape* into alcoholism, drug addiction, prostitution).

The IOS model was later criticized for its categorical assertions; its opponents point out that most criminal gangs did not have a single subcultural type (Matza, 1990). Thus, prostitution and drug addiction can also be encountered in an organised delinquency system (such as drug dealing). Moreover, it does not take into consideration several contemporary social phenomena, including racism (Frazier, 1957), moral panics (Matza, 1990), white-collar crimes (Miller, 1958), gender issues and social reproduction of inequalities through genderized education (Hagan, 1991), and the process of historical evolution, which determines a radical change in the *subcultural* profile, materialized in the appearance of *nondelinquent* and *nonviolent* youth protest (Gelder, 2007). So, the criminological approach was gradually replaced by the *collective identification* paradigm, proposed by the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies (CCCS) during the 1970s.

3.2. BIRMINGHAM SCHOOL. ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY AND SUBCULTURE

Unlike the Chicago School, the CCCS orientation rejects the correspondence between social and cultural *deviance*, interpreting the *subcultural movements* in a structuralist way. The works of Richard Hoggart (*Only Connect: On Culture and Communication*, 1972), Stuart Hall (*Resistance Through Rituals, Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, 1976), Dick Hebdige (*Subculture. The Meaning of Style*, 1979), Paul Willis (*Moving Culture*, 1990), and Sarah Thornton (*Club Cultures. Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*, 1995) perceived the *subcultural* phenomena in the key of *group resistance* to dominant culture; formation of *subcultures* did not result in the alternative

action strategies of achieving goals, but in the social labelling processes (Becker, 1995). The *subcultural* groups are somewhat *outsiders* than *delinquents* because their internal structure is weakened by its reflection in the mass-media, which acts as an instrument of regulation and uniformization (Hebdige, 1979).

Hebdige (1979) asserts that there is a strict dependence between the Post-War youth working-class clothing style (mods, rockers, reggae, punkers) and the policy of decolonization (it adopts an African-inspired fashion and eventually becomes the victim of racial stereotypes, inspiring fear, poverty, anxiety, and savagery), illustrating *subculture* as a dynamic concept. Thus, he states that *moral entrepreneurs* eventually find a way to integrate it into the *canon* area through the means of *cultural industry*, which transforms it into *consumer goods* for *mass society* (1979), inspiring the hypothesis of Sarah Thornton (1995), who formulates the concept of *taste culture*.

By applying the theoretical model of *cultural capital*, constructed by Pierre Bourdieu (1979), Thornton (1995) rejects the idea of a unitary *subcultural* ideology, identifying different levels of what she called *subcultural* capital (Thornton, 1995). In this way, the *subcultural* phenomenon is portrayed as a form of *social distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984), endowed with elastic borders, which are inserted into relations of interaction and cooperation rather than interdependence and conflict. Focusing on the dynamics of *hipness* (which expresses the youth's desire towards the freedom of speech), she considers that there is a *subcultural* aristocracy (Thornton, 1995), which acts similarly to the mainstream one, raising its status through instruments of symbolic capital (jewellery, hair-style, clothes, etc.), materialized in the creation of a specific habitus (Bourdieu, 1984), in order to express its own identity.

The Bourdieuan hierarchy of *social taste* (Bourdieu, 1984) is also exploited by Ken Gelder (2007), who discusses the separation between *subculture* and *counterculture* by invoking their immersion in society and identifies six major features: *subculture* is characterized by an anti-work ideology (it encourages gaming, leisure, fun, etc.), lack of social class-consciousness, territorial association (the street, the hood, the club, the city, etc.), anti-familial attitude (non-domestic belongings: friendships, tribes, promiscuity, sex group, LGBT, etc), stylistic exaggeration, refuse of ordinary life and massification (Gelder, 2007).

3.3. POST-SUBCULTURAL THEORY

The limits of Birmingham School's approach were outlined by Steve Redhead, who introduced the notion of *post-subcultural* theory (*Emotional Hooligan. Post-Subcultural Research and the Histories of Britain's Football Gangs*, 2007), in order to suggest that subcultural divisions had receded. During his analysis of youth taste (particularly the British football fans), Redhead considered that the past connection between style, taste, and identity had become increasingly fluid (Redhead, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016). Individuals draw inspiration from multiple aesthetic sources rather than adhering to a fixed

subcultural identity, creating fragmented identities. As a consequence, the presumed *subcultural* features cannot be determined by different theoretical boundaries due to the fact that their particular objects or symbols become products of the market economy (Redhead, 2007; Williams, 2011); the contemporary youth seem to be more concentrated on consumption exchanges than on preoccupations for genuine identity. So, the trend of *post-authenticity was identified* (Bennett & Bennett, 2024), where individual choices determine group cohesion through the ironical or strategical adoption of collective lifestyles promoted by the global entertainment industry (Denison, 2011). This social phenomenon affects not only sports audiences but also anime clubs (Brenner, 2007); (Cooper-Chen, 2012; Fennell, Liberato, Hayden, & Fujino, 2013; Omoloso, Mahamood, & Zainab, 2024; Tung, Lee, & Hudson, 2017), cosplay practitioners (Backdahl, 2024; Crawford & Hancock, 2019; Peirson-Smith, 2013) or gaming communities (Pitroso, 2024).

Instead of focusing on the formal aspects of youth aesthetic preferences, the *post-subcultural* theorists reveal an evolutionary process in the perception of *canonicity*; they launched the concept of *neo-tribes* (taken from Michel Maffesoli's 1988 book, *The Time of the Tribes. The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*), which implies the existence of loosely defined social groups formed around consumption practices (Bennett & Bennett, 2024). In this case, affiliation is realized by sharing common interests, connecting through social media, and frequent attendance at thematic events (parties, shows, festivals, etc.), involving a peculiar set of rituals (music, fashion, jewellery, fanfiction, leisure activities). Unlike *subcultural* communities, the *neo-tribal* ones adapt to changing circumstances, personal growth, and individual hobbies; the *resistance* to mainstream culture is replaced by an active engagement, characterised by appropriation and reinterpretation (Bennett & Bennett, 2024; Williams, 2011). Moreover, their members are not dependent on group leadership's decisions and can participate in multiple communities simultaneously, including mainstream cultural audiences; a football fan can be, at the same time, a successful teacher or businessman (Redhead, 2009, 2016). In this way, it creates a relation of *hybridisation*, which eventually leads to broader social acceptance (Williams, 2011); when a *neo-tribe* gains popularity, it is absorbed into mainstream culture, which often simplifies, commodifies and dilutes its unique practices (Backdahl, 2024; Cooper-Chen, 2012).

4. DEVIANCE AND CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGY. NORMS, ANOMIE, AND SOCIAL BOND

The limits of cultural *canonicity* (Bourdieu, 1996; Mc Donald, 2001), which generate heated debates among the scholars of art history, represent the starting point for the sociological approach. Thus, sociologists focus on the internal mechanisms which offer social stability and functionality (Durkheim, 1938); they appeared as a continuation of the philosophical imperatives established by Auguste Comte (1798-1857), who argued that knowledge in the physical and natural sciences of his age had reached a stage of de-

velopment where it would be possible to apply their combined resources to study every aspect of human interaction (Comte, 1852). He believed that society functioned like a biological organism characterized by an ordered, harmonious system of interrelated and interdependent cells.

4.1. EARLIER SOCIOLOGICAL PERCEPTIONS OF DEVIANCE

Comte's image of *deviance* (apud Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*, 1893) is rather ambiguous; he does not use this term literally, preferring the word *crime*, which represented a Romantic equivalent for *sin* and *evil* (Creeber, 1998). So, it did not refer to a social behaviour punished by penal laws (particularly the act of murder) but to a general *antisocial* attitude, identified in the Kantian concept of *perversion of will*. Consequently, this phenomenon was perceived in a pathological way, frequently described as a medical disease which had to be cured by a specialist through the use of specific medication (Comte, 1852).

Durkheim's view of *deviance* (1938) inaugurates a revolution in sociological research. Although he was a faithful disciple of Comte and shared a similar perception concerning social dynamics, Durkheim disagreed with the purely biological determinism of his teacher, which oriented his contemporaries towards the theses of Social Darwinism; he categorically rejected the perspective of *social disease*, postulating the principle of the necessary *evil*, which was later adopted by Parsons (1991), Erikson (1962), Berger (2011), Merton (1968), and Abrutyn (2019). In this way, the notion of *anomie* is formulated, taken from the works of Jean-Marie Guyau (1854-1888), which is defined in opposition to *norms*, indicating a reminiscence of the Hobbesian *state of nature*'s portrayal. While Guyau presented *anomie* as the *malady of the infinite*, in which personal desire had become more intense but can never be fulfilled due to its self-destructive capacities, Durkheim stated that it must be treated as a social and institutional problem whose main cause resides in the breakdown between the general acceptance of normative regulations and the unequal distribution of social opportunities (Durkheim, 2005).

According to scholarly research (Horne & Mollborn, 2020), there are three major directions in the study of *norms*: the consequentialist, the relational, and the agentic. Each of them believes that the *anomie* generates personal or group frustration, which eventually produces *delinquency* or even *criminality* (Agnew, 1985; Agnew & Petersen, 1989; Coleman, 2014); there are four types of *anomic* phenomena: normlessness, dysfunctionality, disintegration and dislocation (Abrutyn, 2019). On the contrary, norms instruct people to keep their promises, to drive on the right or to abide by the golden rule, serving as useful explanatory tools employed to analyse phenomena as grand as international diplomacy and as mundane as the rules of the road (Hechter & Opp, 2001). Scholars classified them into *regulative* (which constrains behaviour), *constitutive* (which shapes interests) and *prescriptive* (which prescribes what actors ought to do), claiming that their

effectiveness can be determined through logical and mathematical algorithms.

4.2. CONSEQUENTIALIST THEORY

The consequentialist theory perceives *norms* in relation to the problems of social cooperation; it centres upon what should be accepted and what should be sanctioned, taking its arguments from the *utilitarian* philosophy of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), James Mill (1773-1836) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). The origin of *norms* is strictly related to the *hedonistic* approval of personal behaviours. So, they exist when the socially defined right to control the action is held not by the actor but by the others (Coleman, 1994, 2018). Minimally, this means that A can sanction B's action if it deviates from the norm without A becoming the target of disapproval or sanctions from a third party (Elster, 2015). It is assumed that social relationships between the potential beneficiaries of a norm increase the likelihood of sanctioning those who do not contribute to the provision of public goods (Coleman, 2018). The beneficial behaviour is appreciated as *positive*, while the harmful one as *negative*. When group members experience similar consequences, norms are *conjoint*; they are universally accepted. At the same time, if the consequences are different, norms are *disjoint*, generating conflictual situations (Horne & Mollborn, 2020).

4.3. RELATIONAL THEORY

The relational theory, however, states that the potential consequences of behaviours do not reflect the function of norms, affirming the primacy of social relationships. Created by Christine Horne (2001), who draws inspiration from Merton's strategies of *social adaptation* (1968)—conformism, ritualism, innovation, retreat, and rebellion—and Parsons' *social functionalism* (1991, 2001)—which accentuates the role of motivation, it demonstrates the emergence of *norms* occurring as a result of group expectations; an interdependent network of people expects to benefit from future interactions with one another, particularly when the actors involved possess a high social status. Thus, the mechanism of *social control is established*, and its aim is to maintain the actual *social balance* (Umberson, 1987). In this way, the approval or disapproval process is frequently modified by the gradual alteration of the costs and benefits derived from their adoption. In this way, *deviance* is portrayed as a form of social discontent characterized by a lack of adaptation and empathy. So, relationists do not agree with radical punishment (Irwin, Mulder, & Simpson, 2014).

4.4. AGENTIC THEORY

Unless the consequentialists and the relationists, the adepts of agentic theory, developed by Albert Bandura (1971), do not discuss the phenomenon of *norms'* foundation; instead,

they analyse the appliance of *norms* in particular cases. According to them, individuals use different justified reasons to regulate a certain *norm*, taking into consideration the features of the person whose norm is applied. So, the normative system is depicted as a dynamic situation that implies the features of negotiation and interpretation, which leads to the conclusion that the conceptualization of *deviance* cannot be fully understood from a simple *anomic* perspective (Bandura, 1971, 2001). Hence, Erikson (1962) postulates that the *anomie* is responsible only for the appearance of the *deviant potential*, which does not necessarily cause *deviant activities*, while Hirschi (1998) replaces the supremacy of social control with self-control (Hirschi, 1998, 2017), through the elaboration of social bond model (obtained from the combination of attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief), announcing the social learning approach (Akers, 1991) and Tittle's *control balance* theory (1995). In this sense, deviance is not universal, as it includes acts sanctioned in a particular time as deviant (facts that do not go along with the norms of the category that holds authority in a specific society).

4.5. SOCIO-CONSTRUCTIVISM

All these approaches fusion into the social constructionist paradigm, which describes deviance as a polysemantic concept which includes not only the phenomenon itself but also the cultural traits created during the labelling process (Bicchieri, 2005; Goode, 2022; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2010). A typical example is Becker's classification (1963), which identifies four types of *deviant behaviour*: *conforming deviants*, *pure deviants*, *falsely accused deviants*, and *secret deviants*. While *conforming behaviour* is under the imposed rules and *pure deviance* reflects infringement of the agreed rules, secret deviance relates to facts that do not obey the rules but are hidden from society. A peculiar case is the one of *falsely accused deviants* who, although they did not commit a deviant act, are regarded by society as if they were guilty. With these examples, Becker (1963) reveals the importance of perception in labelling - *the deviant*, *the outsider*. In this case, it can be seen the influence of non-professional sociologists, such as Michel Foucault (1926-1984), whose works primarily address the historical relationships between power, knowledge, and sexuality (Foucault, 2016). Foucault's concern does not focus on *deviance*; it gravitates towards the internal mechanism responsible for the institutionalisation of *madness*, which occurred in the last years of the French Old Regime (Foucault, 1971). However, his conclusions do not necessarily apply to the specified themes, as it interrogates the general features of the human condition through the tactics of *panopticism* (Foucault, 2016), which are based on the psychological torture created through the impression of isolation and perpetual gaze, can be found everywhere in the modern society, affecting both *deviants* and *nondeviant*.

4.6. INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN THE STUDY OF DEVIANCE – DEVIANCE AND EDUCATION

Nowadays, the boundary in the conceptualisation of deviance in social sciences is blurred, a fact that entails the existence of a mixture of economic, criminological, sociologic and cultural orientations.

Thus, sociological studies take into account the correlation between deviance and economic conditions with reference to socioeconomic status as a covariate of deviant behaviour (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Heimer, 1997; Ross & Mirowsky, 2001; Shihadeh & Steffensmeier, 1994; Tippet & Wolke, 2014; Wright, Caspi, Moffitt, Miech, & Silva, 1999) and the influence of deviant acts committed by juveniles (predominantly delinquency) in the life course over the economic conditions and labour market integration (Anderson, Mitchell, & Butler, 1993; Apel & Sweeten, 2010; Backman & Nilsson, 2011; Caspi, Wright, Moffitt, & Silva, 1998; Chen & Kaplan, 2003; George, 1993; Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002; Hartnagel, 1998; Horney, Osgood, & Marshall, 1995; Kirk & Sampson, 2013; Tanner, Davies, & O'Grady, 1999).

The link between cultural values and deviance is noticed in the study of adolescent deviance, as the socioeconomic status of the family influences teenagers' behaviour through mothers' value system, a fact that leads to the social reproduction of inequalities through education. In this sense, Hagan (Hagan & Foster, 2001; Hagan & McCarthy, 1998; Hagan, Simpson, & Gillis, 1987; Hagan & Kay, 1990; Macmillan & Hagan, 2004) posits juvenile delinquency in working-class families – boys from working-class families commit deviant acts as a way to show their masculinity. Girls from the same families are encouraged to be more obedient. On the contrary, the difference between girls' and boys' behaviour is less evident in middle-class families.

Along with differences related to value system, scholars also study effects of school characteristics over educational attainment and deviance (Bernburg, Thorlindsson, & Sigfusdottir, 2009; Bjarnason, 2009; Busching & Krahé, 2018; Caspi et al., 1998; Chen & Cheung, 2020; Chen & Kaplan, 2003; Demanet & Van Houtte, 2011, 2013; Hatos, 2010, 2012). The role of context in relation to adolescent deviance is outlined by ecological theorists, who perceive behaviour as a result of the interaction between multiple levels (family process, parent characteristics, family structure, peer group, school, community) (Benson & Buehler, 2012; Bowman, Prelow, & Weaver, 2007; Hong, Hunter, Kim, Piquero, & Narvey, 2021; Williams, 2022).

The relationship between involvement in deviant acts and social and symbolic capital concretizes the perception of these acts as ways of enjoyment and showing affiliation to a group. In this respect, affiliation with a deviant group represents an essential covariate of deviance, especially in the case of juveniles (Agnew, 2003; Barnes, Hoffman, Welte, Farrell, & Dintcheff, 2006; Bowman et al., 2007; Costello & Zozula, 2018; Hoebe,

Meldrum, Walker, & Young, 2016; McGloin & Thomas, 2019; McMillan, Felmlee, & Osgood, 2018). The absence of parental monitoring and harsh discipline may amplify even more the effect of peer deviance, a fact shown by routine activities theorists (Haynie & Osgood, 2005; Hoebe, Osgood, Siennick, & Weerman, 2021; Osgood, Wilson, Omalley, Bachman, & Johnston, 1996; Ragan, Osgood, & Feinberg, 2014). Moreover, peer effects and cultural capital are the main predictors of online deviance, considering the characteristics of Internet communication and social networks (Udris, 2014, 2016, 2017).

5. CONCEPTUAL LIMITS REGARDING THE NOTION OF SOCIAL DEVIANCE

The social conflict theorists, whose starting point is represented by the writings of Georg Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) and Karl Marx (1818-1883), initiated a critical approach to the concept of deviance. They postulate that using such a term automatically legitimates an attitude of social discrimination, which eventually materializes into social inequality; instead, they recommend the notion of social problems. Thus, Willem Bonger (1916, 1939) draws attention to the unequal distribution of penalties in the USA, signalling a connection with racial stereotypes and the disconsideration of the working class. His statements are confirmed in the studies of Turk (1966, 1969) and Quinney (1970), who demonstrate that the so-called deviant *fact* is a fictional construction of the dominant political elites, which has the role of consolidating their economic interests. In their opinion, there is no innate consensus on fundamental values and goals because the normative regulations express the class exploitation. The hierarchical distribution of resources is also featured in Liazos' work (1972), where it is revealed that the presumed *deviant people* of the working class are relatively powerless; they are only the *collateral victims* of the general belief in the *fairness of penal legislation* controlled by the administrative apparatus.

The question of *justice* generates heated debates among the *feminist* ideology, which is nurtured by the Hindu principle of *Shakti*, Jewish *Kabbalah*, Sufi Islam, and Christian Mariology (particularly the Catholic dogma of the *Immaculate Conception*); these religious orientations, which promoted a mystical approach upon biological processes (affirming the sacrality of the human body), consisted the basis of the *matriarchal utopia*, launched by Johann Jacob Bachofen (1815-1887) and popularized into the common audience during the British *counterculture* of the 1960s, through the activity of the *Goddess Movement* (Goldenberg, 1980), focused on the establishment of *matriarchal cults* (like Dianic Wicca). However, even though it has a profound social impact (especially in the archaeological and philosophical research), the feminists did not form a clear sociological orientation; this supposed failure is illustrated by Robert Franzese's classification of *deviant theories* (2015), which is denied the existence of *pure feminism*. In Franzese's view (2015), there are only *feminist* topics of discussion (family, prostitution, gender, etc); on what concerns the theoretical discourse, it can be observed a certain political agenda (he distinguished between *liberal feminism*, *Marxist feminism*, *socialist femi-*

nism, *radical* feminism, and *multicultural* feminism).

A peculiar form of *feminism* represents the *ecological* paradigm (Nauser & Steiner, 2002), which developed in the last decades of the 20th century as a reaction to the Industrial Revolution. In this case, the point of interest does not represent the social phenomena of *deviance* but the human intervention in the geographical and biological environment; for ecologists, *deviance* means *pollution*, which is defined as a catastrophic environmental change caused by the excessive presence of toxic chemical substances (*pollutants*), whose provenience is usually represented by the industrial activities (manufacturing, extractive industry, metallurgy, waste management, public transport, pesticides, medical drugs, etc.). So, it is conceptualized as a *post-human* (or *trans-human*) ethics whose target refers not only to social group interaction but also to animal rights, general living standards and alimentation (Nauser & Steiner, 2002).

Unfortunately, this moralistic reform cannot be put into practice nowadays, as its promoters do not have a unitary image of the necessary laws to implement. Some of them (Nauser & Steiner, 2002) still believe in scientific and technological progress (the *durable development* project); that is why they sustain only gradual measures, recommending a rational exploitation of resources rather than a public ban. Others (Garwood, 2007; Kaczinsky, 2022; Postman, 1992), instead, sustain a literal Rousseauan *return towards Nature* and promote the rehabilitation of *anachronic* disciplines (alchemy, astrology, witchcraft, etc), expressing their total attachment for pre or non-industrial worldviews. In this case, it should be mentioned orientations like *Young Earth* (Morris, 2003), *Flat Earth* (Hendrie, 2018), *Four Elements*, etc, whose option gravitates towards the agrarian (the *Bio-luddites*) or even herbivory lifestyles (the Vegans, who advocate the prohibition of meat eating (Montbiot, 2022)).

In social sciences, the term deviance is frequently replaced with risky/at-risk behaviours with emphasis on behaviours which have an uncertain outcome (Aven & Renn, 2009). In this category are included mostly alcohol and substance use, driving with high speed, school drop-out, juvenile delinquency -vandalism, theft, and bullying- (Beyth-Marom, Austin, Fischhoff, Palmgren, & Jacobs-Quadrel, 1993; Bozzini, Bauer, Maruyama, Simões, & Matijasevich, 2020; Kapetanovic, Bohlin, Skoog, & Gerdner, 2020). In the case of cyber-deviant behaviours, online risks represent situations which may have negative consequences for the users: sexting, cyberbullying, hacking, grooming, self-harm, NUGC (Livingstone, Sonia, Haddon, & Görzig, 2012; S. Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ólafsson, 2011; S. Livingstone et al., 2017; Sonia Livingstone, Professor Julia Davidson, Saqba Batool, Haughton, & Nandi, 2017). While the term risk behaviour/at-risk behaviour already suggests a reference to a specific outcome (to what relates a certain risk?), scholars perceive risky behaviours based on their relation with health, employing terms such as healthy vs unhealthy behaviour - *health behaviour* (Pusztai, Kovács, Kovács, & Nagy, 2017), harmful - *self-harming behaviour* (Branley & Covey, 2017; Fye, 2019; John et al., 2018; Pater et al., 2019; Ryan-Vig, Gavin, & Rodham, 2019).

Acknowledging the critics of the concept of deviance and the inclusion of particular norms' transgressing behaviours in categories such as risky behaviours, self-harming behaviours, and harmful acts, Udris (2016) still considers relevant the use of deviance. In this sense, conceptualizing specific phenomena as *deviant* adds an understanding of the mechanisms beyond the involvement (based on the formulated theories) and helps in designing interventions for mitigating these types of acts.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Even if it seems very easy for a common audience, the topic of *deviance* as a social phenomenon (Palmer & Humphrey, 1990) is a subject of permanent discussion among scholars due to its ambiguity concerning the historical legitimacy of the penal legislation (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1990). This interdisciplinary investigation, whose aim is to offer a panoramic view of the mentioned issue, illustrates the significant directions in the public sphere during the last three centuries, from the *social contract* theories of the Enlightenment towards the *social constructivist*, *feminist*, and *ecologist* directions of today.

The paper contextualizes *deviance* as connected to social order, morality, norms, anomie, social control and protest. From the economic perspective, deviant acts result from non-rational behaviours, consisting of a delineation from the social order, therefore affecting market balance (Hechter, 1984). Sociologists move a step forward, analysing the effect of *deviance* on social stability. Hence, the deviant is not only the person who commits acts that are condemned but also a label attributed to marginal categories, the so-called *outsiders*. Therefore, *deviance* is seen both in the context of morality and as a product of marginal categories, as Coleman renders in his description of the delinquent boys from Chicago Streets. It follows that the universally accepted rules and norms are not the only ones existing in a society. A dimension of this concept is also mirrored in the art domain, designating the works of art that hinder a protest to the Academic, aesthetic standards or the social-cultural accepted canon. They are accompanied by specific norms that each group imposes, and the quest for universal acceptance is more likely a quest for the group's supremacy.

The historical perspective employed in this article aims to add a critical perspective to the study of *deviance*, reflecting upon the emergence and later development of the concept. Contextualising it as connected to social order, rationality, morality, norms, social control, and protest allows for a better demarcation and fewer negative connotations of the term itself. Beyond functionalism, moral panics and social disorganization, *deviance* must be studied in specific contexts.

A new challenge for the concept is brought by the digital era, where *online deviance/cyber-deviance* encompasses both the characteristics of deviance and digital communication. A better understanding of *deviance* aims to shed more light on this field. Considering this point, while studying online phenomena of concern (cyber-deviance, online

risks, online harms, negative content published online), scholars should pay attention towards understanding their relationship with social order, norms, morality, rationality and social control.

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