

BOOK REVIEW

Sagarin, Edward. *Deviants and Deviance: An Introduction to the Study of Disvalued People and Behavior*. New York Praeger Publishers, 1975. 458pp. Clothbound.

Deviants and Deviance represents an ambitious attempt to provide a truly general introduction to the sociology of deviant behavior while avoiding the superficiality so common to such projects. The author, much to his credit, has managed to produce a single volume which gives consideration to most of the theoretical, methodological, and practical issues of the field.

Sagarin's book is divided into six rather long chapters which deal respectively with conceptual matters, etiological and epidemiological theories, the medical model of deviant behavior, selected methodological problems, social control and its relationship to deviant "survival patterns", and broad policy implications of deviance research. Its approach is essentially interactionist, but the author does not limit himself to the issues raised by this school of thought. Biological, psychological (especially psychoanalytic), and macro-sociological perspectives are presented and evaluated in a relatively unbiased manner, and this lends a great deal to the book's value as a teaching aid. From the standpoint of most undergraduate students, the author's willingness to give consideration to both "theoretical" and "practical" matters (if the two can be separated at all) must be counted among the strong points of the book. Representative of the author's treatment of practical matters are discussions of victimless crimes and decriminalization, the applicability of various causal theories to social control, and the ethical problems associated with mental hospitalization. Consequently, the book manages to confront issues which are of interest to many undergraduate students without straying too far from its more basic intellectual objectives.

Unfortunately, *Deviants and Deviance* is plagued by certain problems which may outweigh the advantages noted above. Certain chapters, "Survival Patterns and Social Control" and "Prospects and Policies" in particular, are not organized as clearly

as they might be. As a result, the reader often finds himself wondering what the author is trying to say and what, if anything, his conclusion will be. Some students, not to mention instructors, will undoubtedly find portions of the book dry, confusing, or both. Maintaining the interest of students in the readings is often difficult enough, even when the text scores high in "readability". Sagarin's book compounds this problem from time to time.

A far more serious shortcoming of Sagarin's book, however, is its tendency to oversimplify and even misrepresent certain basic theoretical approaches to deviant behavior. While serious students of the literature will be able to find numerous instances of this, a few examples may suffice as illustrations. In his discussion of differential association theory, the author cites a criticism of the approach that is often encountered; namely, that the approach is unable to explain why people such as "criminal lawyers, who have a majority of their associations with criminals, do not themselves become criminals" (p. 117). He completely fails to point out that the answer is quite simple: associations vary not only in "frequency" but also in "duration", "priority", and "intensity". The lay reader is thus left with the notion that differential association theory is unable to deal with this problem and is useless as an explanatory scheme. The theory certainly has its difficulties, but this inability is not one of them.

Over-simplification is even more evident in the author's consideration of the labelling perspective. It is accused, for example, of generating an "underdog ideology" which casts all deviants in a positive moral light and all conventionals in a negative one, and of taking the position that any efforts at punishment or rehabilitation should be abandoned. A few "labellists" may indeed take such positions, but they are hardly integral tenets of the perspective. Still more inaccurate is the author's contention that the labelling perspective is guilty of extreme ethical relativism because of its insistence that deviance is an inter-subjective imputation rather than an objective quality of certain acts. In this suggestion, Sagarin contradicts his own earlier discussion of the concept of deviance, in which he acknowledges that "deviance" and "evil" are not one and the same. Clearly, labelling theorists argue that no act is inherently *deviant*, but this

is hardly to "deny the intrinsic evil in some human acts" (p. 134). Moral judgments are made by everyone, whether they are sociologists or laymen—labelling theory merely insists that they be kept apart from the concept of deviance.

Sagarin's discussion of the debate over the medical model is also rather superficial. While attempting to outline the essential ideas of such principle figures as Thomas Szasz, Thomas Scheff, and R.D. Laing, he seems to miss many points entirely, especially those which deal with the finer epistemological issues involved in the concept of mental illness.

These and other misrepresentations of theories and issues are matters of serious concern not only because they do an injustice to specific theorists, but also because they turn students away from perspectives which they might very well find useful in their own thinking about crime and deviance. Sagarin's presentation of the various theories in such a way that they appear to be in opposition to one another probably has the same effect. No single theory can be expected to be "true" in any absolute sense because theory is by nature abstract; i.e., any theory necessarily selects some portion of reality as its primary focus and de-emphasizes other portions, a fact which does not necessarily detract from the heuristic value of that theory. This is an idea, however, which is rather difficult for many undergraduate students to grasp. Consequently, Sagarin's method of presenting the various sociological theories of deviance tends to leave them with the impression that the study of deviance involves nothing more than groundless speculation and endless quarrelling over terms. It is undoubtedly true that eclectic and multi-causal orientations can be taken to the point that one's thinking about the world becomes sterile—but insisting that each framework be evaluated independently of the contributions of all others leads to even greater sterility.

The author casts further aspersions upon sociology as a whole through such sweeping generalizations as the following: "Sociologists take sides and tend to structure their studies to confirm their sympathies" (p. 132); "Sociologists have been quick to place the label of stereotype or of misconception, intolerance, and prejudice on those who hold views unlike their own" (p. 349).

While it can hardly be argued that such statements are without support, the wisdom of sprinkling them through an introductory textbook is suspect. All disciplines have those who share certain intellectual habits which are less than ideal, and sociology is no exception. But for those of us who feel that the sociological mode of consciousness offers something valuable to people in all walks of life and wish to make it more widely available, such broad indictments are counter-productive.

In sum, *Deviants and Deviance* may be more useful as a textbook in courses on deviance which are made up of students who already have a fairly well-developed capacity to evaluate their readings critically—and even here it may be necessary for the instructor to clarify and correct the text from time to time.

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Amundsen, Kirsten. *A New Look at the Silenced Majority: Women and American Democracy*. Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1977.

A New Look at the Silenced Majority: Women and American Democracy by Kirsten Amundsen won't be an entirely new look for those who have been involved in the feminist movement for several years. They are already familiar with the myths surrounding women and the superficiality of the token or isolated advances that have been made. They will even be familiar with a number of the many studies cited to support this disappointed outlook.

But newcomers to the movement, students perhaps, will be introduced to a fairly comprehensive review of both empirical studies and essays concerning the women's movement. Ms. Amundsen writes succinctly, moving the book at a fast pace through eight chapters with thorough documentation in 160 pages. Yet she covers a broad spectrum of feminist issues and illustrates with much detail the ubiquitous nature of sexism and its consequences. The destructive myths of the pampered American woman are debunked. The realities of being second-class citizens are thoroughly documented. Ms. Amundsen does a superior job of presenting sexism as a systematic integral part of our entire institutionalized cultural order. Her discussions on power and democracy are particularly worthwhile.

On occasion the brisk writing style leaves one with the impression that she may have indulged in a naive assumption or simplistic solution, but these could be nothing more than a failure to qualify general statements.

Ms. Amundsen concludes that the solution can be no less comprehensive than the problem. In her final chapter, "The Liberated Society", she visualizes many of these changes and proposes a number of strategies for making them realities.

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