

# Race, Gender and Deviance

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover the intersection of gender and race with deviance, through the definition and discussion of:

1. Gender and Deviance
2. Race and Deviance
3. Hate Crimes

## 1. GENDER AND DEVIANCE

How do gender and race relate to deviance? In virtually every society in the world, men have tried to control the behavior of women. Women have historically faced many more constraints than men, and their lives have been more regulated and controlled, even in the U.S. today.

Women's lives have typically been centered around the home, and they face challenges when trying to go outside the home. Men, on the other hand, have lives centered around the public sphere--employment, pursuing careers, being 'out in the world.' In the past, when women have attempted to do this, their opportunities have been constrained by men.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** In the military, politics, and athletic pursuits, women are still limited in opportunity relative to men, even today.

Constraints are society's way of attempting to regulate and control behavior and define what is right and wrong. It follows that if women are facing far more constraints than men, and in turn, they violate these constraints that men have forced upon them in society, they're more likely to be labeled deviant than men. Likewise, women have historically enjoyed less power than men, and this powerlessness has caused their behavior to be much more likely labeled as deviant than the behavior of men. This labeling reflects the power asymmetry of the two genders and the fact that society has tried to constrain the behavior of women, historically.

### IN CONTEXT

In the 19th century, a woman who wanted to get out of the home and pursue a career in the public sphere, or even demand access to equal education, ran the risk of being labeled as deviant. Why is this? Because she was challenging the constraints that the male-dominated society had set up and

therefore, she was labeled as deviant.

Harriet Martineau was an early advocate for equal education and equal opportunity rights for women. Because of this, she ran the risk of being labeled as a deviant. Now, she's certainly not deviant by today's standards, which would support her actions as morally in the right and not deviant, but at that time there were many constraints on the behavior of women in her society. There was no group more powerful than men--no one was trying to constrain their behavior in the same manner as women, so men were much less likely to be labeled deviant.



#### THINK ABOUT IT

In today's society, the act of prostitution typically involves both genders, a male and a female. It also typically involves the woman selling her sex to a male. Why is the woman--the one who's selling her sex--labelled deviantly as a prostitute, while the man often escapes any kind of deviant label or punishment?

The power structure sets up the fact that women are going to be labeled deviant much more often than men. The **feminist perspective on deviance** has recognized the constraints that women face and highlights the fact that women's behavior is often judged differently than men's in society. This also extends into other existing theories of deviance.

Strain theory does not necessarily address the deviance of women. In Merton's strain theory, he defined the cultural goals of financial success, which is typically a male-centric goal. Males have historically been in the public space pursuing careers and financial success, while women have not. Therefore the idea of strain caused by the desire to achieve financial success and not having the opportunities to do so explains male deviance much better than it explains female deviance. In strain theory, little attention has been paid to the strain that results from the ideal of cultural equality on the one hand, and the reality of gender inequality in society on the other, so it does not adequately address women's deviance.

Even though Merton's theory doesn't address it, the reality is that women might be acting out deviantly because they're pursuing this ideal of cultural equality. They feel strain because they want equality, but their opportunities are limited because of their gender.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Feminist Perspective on Deviance**

Emphasizes the subordinate position of women all over the world and draws attention to the fact that existing theories of deviance such as strain, social conflict, and labeling theory, have not adequately addressed the reasons women may become deviant.

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## 2. RACE AND DEVIANCE

You can apply the lens of power differential to understand why people of color are more likely to be labeled as deviant, as well. The relationship of race to deviance is similar to that of gender and deviance.

White people have historically occupied a position of power relative to people of color, and have attempted to control their behavior as much as possible. Therefore, someone who is black is much more likely to be

labeled deviant for their activity because of the racial power asymmetry in society. Indeed, the United States had a long history of racial discrimination. Black people have been systematically subjugated, with their behavior far more likely to be labeled as deviant.

### IN CONTEXT

There was an era when black people were lynched for petty offenses, or worse, no offenses at all. This did not happen to whites--they were actually the ones committing these atrocities. Lynching was used as an example to define the boundaries of deviance for the rest of the community, illustrating what would happen if the others in society interacted with the blacks.

To this day, studies of the death penalty have shown that the death penalty is unequally applied racially.

➦ **EXAMPLE** Suppose there are two similar crimes, crime 'A' and crime 'B'. If a black man commits a crime against a white woman in crime 'A' and a white man commits a similar crime to a white woman in crime 'B', studies found that the black man was much more likely to be sentenced to the death penalty than the white man. This illustrates how the entrenched power structure in society is much more likely to label the behavior of racial categories of minorities as deviant.

## 3. HATE CRIMES

**Hate crimes** is an area where race and deviance intersect. Hate crimes are criminal acts that are motivated by race, sexual orientation, religion, or some form of bias.

➦ **EXAMPLE** A gay student at University of Wyoming, Matthew Shepard, was tragically killed by another group of males for his sexual orientation, a hate crime.

### IN CONTEXT

Recently, in the post 9/11 world, Muslims in this country have been targeted as victims of hate crimes because of their religion. Similarly, in years past, the lynching of black people is also an example of a hate crime being perpetrated as a result of race.

However, hate crimes are not only associated with minorities. In 2008, 1 in 6 hate crimes were committed against white people because of their white race. Hate crimes can go both ways--it's simply when biases induce criminal activity. Hate crimes result from the threat of difference and the need to stigmatize a group in society. They are an unfortunate--and ill-founded--example of all the social ills.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Hate Crime

Criminal acts motivated by race, sexual orientation, religion or some form of bias.



## SUMMARY

Today you learned about **gender and race as they relate to deviance** in addition to discussing **hate crimes**.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Zach Lamb.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Feminist Perspective on Deviance**

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### **Hate Crime**

Criminal acts motivated by race, sexual orientation, religion of some form of bias.