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The Intellectual Debt Deviance Theory Owes Talcott Parsons*

By

Jackson Toby

Unlike his distinguished student, the late Robert K. Merton, Talcott Parsons lacked a flair for memorable words that would forever illuminate the topics he analyzed. Nevertheless, he contributed intellectually to every subject that sociologists study, including some subjects – like criminology and deviance – where his influence is not widely recognized. In this article I propose to demonstrate the intellectual debt that deviance theory owes to Parsons.

Thirty years ago — when “streaking” was arousing wild enthusiasm on American campuses — a reporter from the Rutgers College radio station telephoned to ask whether I thought streaking was here to stay.
“Yes,” I replied, “streaking offers an almost cost-free opportunity for young people to defy adults and flout their rules.” Within a few days streaking virtually ceased on American campuses. Despite occasional reminders from me that playful public nudity can serve as symbolic rebellion, streaking has reemerged only sporadically in the United States; at Princeton University, for example, sophomores have maintained a tradition of cavorting naked at midnight around a quadrangle on the occasion of the first snowfall (New York Times, 1999.)

Streaking has not interested deviance theorists. Drug abuse and armed robbery seem to pose more challenging causal questions for them. Yet the sudden emergence of streaking in 1974 (and its equally sudden hibernation) might well have interested Talcott Parsons. (It was Parsons, you will remember, who wondered why the child is typically socialized by two parents, whereas the patient typically has one psychotherapist.) Parsons, who sought maximum generality for his sociological theories, might have pointed out an intellectual advantage to thinking about the sociology of deviance from the perspective of an ephemeral phenomenon like streaking instead of traditional forms of persistent deviance like alcoholism, criminality, or prostitution (Bales, 1946). An explanation general enough to account for streaking has to appreciate the possibility that the connection between deviant behavior and motivation is loose. If persistent forms of deviance alone are regarded as worthy of causal analysis, one might erroneously infer that an isomorphic mapping can be made between deviant behavior and specific motivational tendencies within the personality system. Parsons always insisted that the social system and the personality system were distinct entities (Parsons, 1951, Chapter 7; Toby, 1973). Attempting to “rehabilitate” some drug addicts, armed robbers, or prostitutes seems a worthwhile endeavor, but
the patent foolishness of attempting to rehabilitate streakers suggests that deviance can and does occur without specifically programmed personality roots.

Deviance theorists speak of the sociology of deviance as though our theories of deviance deal impartially with everything covered by the concept of deviance. In practice, however, deviance theorists tend to think about deviance in terms of traditional types of deviance; consequently they do research concerning juvenile delinquency or sex offenses and formulate theoretical propositions about deviance in general based on such research. They are less likely to design research projects concerning deviance in the family or on the job.¹ I propose to run counter to this tendency. I will attempt to show that Parsonian theories can illuminate several unresolved issues in the sociology of deviance by discussing streaking, an ephemeral form of deviance.

Issue 1: Is the Extent to Which Deviant Behavior Is Denied Cultural Legitimation A Variable in the Genesis and Control Of Deviant Motivation?

By definition, deviant behavior is socially disapproved behavior. In large-scale societies, social disapproval is formally organized through the criminal law and administered by the police and the criminal justice system.
It sometimes seems that legal sanctions are independent of the shared moral sentiments of members of the society, but legal sanctions usually depend on shared moral sentiments (Toby, 2000). In smaller social systems it is more obvious that a major basis for social disapproval is that deviant behavior is regarded as wrong, that is, as defying or evading cultural standards of legitimacy. Talcott Parsons spoke of the institutionalization of cultural standards to call attention to the interpenetration of social and cultural systems in an ongoing society. He did not mean by interpenetration, however, the absence of some independent variability between social and cultural systems, including the social and cultural aspects of deviance.

In the case of streaking, the social and legal norms were clear. Public nudity constituted “disorderly” behavior. The police could and in some cases did make arrests. But what happened in 1974 — for a brief time, anyway — was a redefinition of public nudity as a lark. Although the bodies of young people were totally uncovered as they ran, bicycled, jogged, and pranced through public streets, the behavior was partially legitimated in terms of temporary youthful playfulness rather than as “indecent exposure.” A new term, “streaking,” was coined to describe and evaluate the behavior. A positive label was applied to behavior that would in previous times have been negatively labeled. I am using the expressions, “positive label” and
“negative label,” with diabolical cunning to call attention to the fact that “labeling” is a pejorative term. The more generic and less loaded term is “cultural definition.” In this generic sense, Talcott Parsons was a labeling theorist; he constantly called attention to the necessity for cultural definitions to orient the individual and the society to otherwise indeterminate meanings of the situation.

Before March of 1974 Western culture had evaluated public nudity as immoral because of the symbolic association between nudity and eroticism. But when “streaking” became defined as a youthful lark having almost nothing to do with eroticism, this temporarily legitimated it culturally, at least partially, and justified reducing normative sanctions against it. Although Parsons was still alive and professionally active in 1974, he did not comment on streaking. I am fairly confident, however, that he would have viewed streaking in the context of his general discussion of the cultural legitimating of deviance. He had first called attention to the possibility of cultural legitimation (or partial legitimation) of deviance in his discussion of the sick role (Parsons, 1951, Chapter 10). The sick individual fails to fulfill his social obligations. To the extent that his failure is motivated, he is reprehensible. But he gets partial legitimation for his failure to conform by placing himself in a special social status. As a sick person, he is not
completely getting away with deviance because he acquiesces in the cultural
definition of illness as undesirable by cooperating with nondeviant persons
— “health professionals” — in an effort to get well. The general point that
Parsons made was that deviance is culturally defined and that this definition
affects its attractiveness to members of the society. The greater the legitimacy
of a deviant act, the more likely will it be tried. Furthermore, the greater its
legitimacy, the less likely will conforming members of the system react
with moral indignation and thereby nip deviance in the bud. In other
words, partial legitimation of deviance tends to increase the rate of
deviance because it increases the motivation to engage in it while
simultaneously reducing the motivation of onlookers to control it.

Deviance theorists tend to assume that the greater the rate of deviance
from a norm in a population, the greater the threat to the viability of the norm.
But partial legitimation does not necessarily increase the disruptive
consequences of a specific deviant act. Although its rate tends to be higher,
partial legitimation lessens the stigma to the deviant and thereby increases
the likelihood of his return to conformity. In the case of streaking, partial
legitimation led to its rapid spread and its equally rapid abandonment. When
Parsons discussed the partial legitimation of illness, he demonstrated that,
under some conditions, the deviant from the norm remains bound to the
norm and that consequently even a high rate of deviance does not threaten the norm. In a sense, the sick person is co-opted by society. In a quite different way, so were the streakers. Parsons spoke of this issue in terms of burning ideological bridges to society or of not burning them. Quite clearly, armed robbers and rapists burn their ideological bridges to society in ways that sick people do not. The political radical and even some terrorists also maintain ideological contact with society by claiming to adhere to basic values that society, in its corruption, has abandoned. Thus, the violent student protestor, like the streaker, finds it relatively easy to return to conformity if he later wishes to do so. (Some fiery student radicals of the 1960s have become millionaire entrepreneurs in the 21st century – or successful politicians like Senator John Kerry.) Ultimately, the extent of the threat to the social order of partially legitimated deviance is an empirical question.

A special case of partial legitimation of deviance is subcultural legitimation or, as Parsons called it “inappropriate socialization” (Parsons, 1951, Chapter 7). Parsons used the term, “inappropriate socialization,” to describe socialization within a subsystem of the society so that the individual learns values and norms inappropriate for functioning within the larger society (Bredemeier and Stephenson, 1962: 126-28). The family unit itself
can be a source of inappropriate socialization in a large society differentiated into social classes, ethnic groups, regions, and urban and rural communities. Insofar as these subgroups merely place slightly different emphases on what are common values, the amount of inappropriate socialization arising from these variations is small. However, differences in emphasis shade off into differences in kind. It seems theoretically plausible that regional and ethnic subcultural versions of the value system of the society may serve to partially legitimate deviance.

Although many examples of subcultural legitimation are to be found in the sociological literature, inappropriate socialization by adolescent peers – or, as James Coleman, put it, by “the adolescent society” (Coleman, 1961) -- is most relevant to the emergence of streaking. There has long been a tendency in the sociological literature to regard adolescent peer groups as prime culprits in the promotion of deviance. The sociological literature tends to treat the family as a bulwark against deviance and the peer group as antisocial (Thrasher, 1927). This ready equation of the peer group with antisocial behavior is partly the result of a sampling bias: studies of peer groups tended to be made in slum communities rather than in stable middle-class neighborhoods. Anthropologist Walter Miller attributed the legal infractions committed by adolescent gang members in a slum neighborhood
of Roxbury, Massachusetts (1958) to the lower-class subcultural milieu, which required, or at least encouraged, the expression of “toughness,” “smartness,” and “excitement.” The best-known study of "street-corner society" was conducted during the latter part of the Great Depression in an Italian ghetto (Whyte, 1955). Employment opportunities for young men were scarce, and consequently adolescent irresponsibility was prolonged into the 20s. Even under these unusual conditions deviant behavior was not the main concern of the peer group in Whyte’s study, as it seems to be in other studies (Shaw, 1931). Another sociological source of the bad reputation of the adolescent peer group is the inference from studies of high-school cultures that the peer group is anti-intellectual (Coleman, 1961).

These various descriptions of deviant peer subcultures purport to describe subsystems of the larger society with values different from those of the larger society. According to their subsystem values, behavior deviant in terms of the values of the larger society may be quite justifiable. An intellectual difficulty with theories of deviant subcultures – a difficulty that Parsons stressed -- is that those exposed to them are also exposed to conforming subsystems. As Matza put it, the subculture of deviance is usually manned by children who, though in some ways marginal to the larger society, are in other ways influenced by it.
Children have a curious way of being influenced by the society of elders, which frequently include parents, almost all of whom, whatever their own proclivities, are united their denunciation of delinquent deeds (Matza, 1964: 37).

In short, deviant subcultures are not as autonomous as the culture of an isolated literate society described by an anthropologist. That is why the explanation of delinquency by anthropologist Walter Miller as a simple expression of cultural preoccupations with toughness, smartness, and excitement leaves something out. What is left out is the superordinate culture from which the subculture is a departure and which has implications both for socialization for deviance and for its control. Problems of failing to prevent deviance because of inadequate socialization arise even in families whose values are essentially compatible with those of the larger society. But more frequent problems of socialization can be expected within families that attempt to socialize their children in the face of competition from deviant subcultures. It works the other way around also; the family opposes the values of the deviant subculture and competes with it. In short, deviant subcultures, far from producing deviants automatically, can be expected to produce persons with equivocal and perhaps ambivalent motivation.

The most relevant subsystem from the viewpoint of the emergence of streaking is that of the adolescent peer group. Yet the values of the peer
group must be somewhat congruent with the values of the families and the neighborhoods in which the peer group is located. And, as a matter of fact, a large number of youngsters confirm this point by enrolling in peer-group organizations under adult sponsorship and influence: boys' clubs, settlement house youth groups, 4-H clubs, church youth groups, and the extracurricular clubs at high school and college. What is usually being referred to in discussions of "peer groups" is a special kind of peer group: groups that develop spontaneously in disorganized neighborhoods and that lack adult sponsorship or control. These autonomous groups come into being, exist for several years as vehicles for expressing the interests of particular cliques of adolescents, and then disintegrate. Since they are not usually age-graded and do not have a stable identity, their interests are somewhat unpredictable. They are more likely to tolerate stealing, drunkenness, or assaultive behavior than members of groups structurally attached to adults whose responsibilities in the larger society make them sympathetic interpreters of conventional values and conduct norms. Even autonomous peer groups, however, vary in their stance toward deviance: only the most extreme street-corner groups require blatantly deviant behavior of members. Within these groups the personalities of members, according to Parsons, are necessarily ambivalent to varying degrees.
To put the issue in general terms: Some moral standards are shared throughout the society; others are shared ambivalently within smaller groupings contained in the larger society. Assessing the degree of subcultural legitimation of what is generally regarded as a deviant act is complicated by the system reference of the act; in some systems it is less legitimate than in others. Streaking may well have been temporarily legitimated fairly broadly throughout American society, but there were some subgroups in which it continued to arouse indignation. And on many college campuses it was legitimated far more strongly – but nevertheless always with some vestige of ambivalence.

Streaking was responded to in terms of shared criteria of partial legitimacy, especially on college campuses. This partial legitimation increased the rate of streaking and expanded its incidence. But its high rate did not necessarily mean that the deviant contagion would spread without limit. Remember that college kids were more likely than school dropouts to identify with the societal community, as Parsons called it (Parsons, 1977), Chapter 7), and therefore return to conformity even without special rehabilitative pressures.

To sum up issue 1: Deviance is always defined and responded to in terms of shared symbolic criteria of legitimacy or illegitimacy. That is to
say, cultural values define what is deviant and what is not. Parsons insisted on shared meanings as crucial to orienting actors to the situation in which they act as early as his first major publication (Parsons, 1937), although he was never a cultural determinist, as anthropologists Ruth Benedict (1934) and Margaret Mead (1928) were. Deviance, being meaningful behavior, necessarily is defined by both perpetrators and observers.

**Issue 2: Is Deviant Motivation Qualitatively Different from Conforming Motivation?**

There is a tendency among deviance theorists, no less than among the general public, to perceive the deviant as having a radically different personality from that of the non-deviant. In this case, students who streaked were thought of as odd, if not abnormal. I am not contending that, even on college campuses in 1974 where streaking was widespread, everyone streaked. The personalities of some students made it impossible for them to disrobe publicly despite peer encouragement to do so. Others felt that public nudity was a liberating experience from adult restraints that they had long been looking for. My point is that Talcott Parsons introduced into his analysis of deviance a psychoanalytic recognition of ambivalent motivation that had previously been ignored or unrecognized.
One of Bleuler’s and Freud’s contributions to personality theory was an insistence on ambivalent feelings rather than simple love or simple hostility (Bleuler, 1916), Freud, (1943). Parsons (1951) and Merton (1957) advanced a parallel insight with respect to motivated tendencies either to conform to social rules or to violate them. According to Parsons (1951: chap. 7), a socialized individual cannot violate previously internalized rules without ambivalence. Thus, deviant motivation is always ambivalent. What about conforming motivation? Parsons said that unambivalent conforming motivation is possible but that ambivalent conforming motivation occurs also; it arises from situations in which deviant motives and conforming motives are both present but in which the conforming motivations are stronger. Parsons did not estimate how frequently unambivalent conformity occurs. Probably it is rare, a limiting case. The usual situation is one that Parsons called “strain” — where the individual is simultaneously under pressure to conform and to deviate.

If indeed most conformity as well as most deviance is motivated ambivalently, the *motivational* difference between behavioral conformists and behavioral deviants can be quite small. What seems qualitatively different in *behavioral* terms turns out to be a matter of continuous variation in motivational terms. This proposition has implications for both
deviance and conformity. If the behavioral deviant is motivationally ambivalent, he is not as firmly committed to his deviance as might appear. Similarly, if the behavioral conformist is also motivationally ambivalent, he is more vulnerable to a slip into deviance than might be supposed. The Parsonian approach assumes that both conformity and deviance are chronically unstable, thereby making it easier to explain deviance (because the seeds of deviance are present in outward conformists) and easier to explain the resocialization of deviants into behavioral conformity (because the motivational basis for conformity is present to some degree even in outward deviants). This Parsonian insight seems to me necessary to sustain a belief in the possibility of rehabilitation. Ambivalence provides the leverage for personality change.

Against this intellectual background, consider why streakers emerged so suddenly and why they disappeared equally quickly. In the course of socialization, young people internalized the social norm prohibiting public nudity — along with many other norms taught them by adult socializing agents. Presumably, some of these socialization experiences aroused resentment, psychological resistance to obeying the norm or obeying the norm-giver, or both. Young people had to do what they did not want to do because socializing agents put pressure on them. (Parsons has described
socialization as a process of learning to like doing what you have to do anyway, but he fully recognized that conformists vary in the degree to which they learn to like the norm they have to obey.) Ambivalence about rules and rule-givers stemming from these developmental experiences fed the motivation to streak, once the streaking pattern developed and was culturally defined as quasi-legitimate. That is to say, deviant motivation is, according to Parsons, widely distributed in a population. As soon as situations occur where social controls are weak and cultural definitions propitious, these deviant potentialities get activated, and the outcome is behavioral deviance. On the other hand, it is possible for little or no overt expression of these deviant potentialities to occur. If social controls are strong and cultural definitions of the behavior deny it legitimacy, the personality predispositions toward deviance remain repressed potentialities rather than being carried out in actual behavior.

When streakers streaked, they did not thereby burn their motivational bridges to conventional dress. The prohibition against public nudity was temporarily suspended, not extinguished. As soon as the shared definition of the situation as a collective lark weakened, conventional reservations against public nudity reasserted themselves. The same individuals who enthusiastically ran naked in the streets returned without
regret to clothing. Possibly ex-streakers subsequently patronized nude beaches more than nonstreakers of the same age and background. But Parsons’s theory of the ambivalent nature of deviant motivation suggests that they didn’t. When the compulsive rebellion that motivated streaking was reversed, an equally compulsive repudiation of public nudity could sometimes occur. The outcome depends on the depth of the ambivalence of the streaker, and that is an empirical question. The theoretical point is that streakers never lost touch emotionally with the conforming community, and, consequently, a return to conformity was not difficult. Ambivalence facilitates movement into and out of deviance.

By and large, Dennis Wrong was quite wrong about Parsons’ alleged belief in an oversocialized conception of man (Wrong, 1961); but Wrong was right to suggest that Parsons regarded socialization as a crucial social process. Parsons believed that solidarity between the socializing agent and the socializee persists in the course of socialization even though the socializing agent pressed the socializee to learn a new role. Nevertheless, that solidarity is accompanied by feelings of ambivalence on the part of the socializee based on unconscious resistance to the pressure. Socialization simultaneously creates shared values and ambivalence. To paraphrase Cooley, for Parsons conformity and deviance are twinborn. Thus, the
motivational similarity between behavioral conformists and behavioral deviants is no accident. It arises inevitably from the socialization process and helps to explain both the pervasiveness of deviance and the relative ease of the social control of deviance.

To sum up issue 2: If both conforming motivation and deviant motivation contain varying proportions of inclinations to conform to the rules and to violate them, most behavioral deviants are only slightly different from most behavioral conformists in the organization of their personality systems. This suggests that personality systems have only a limited role in the etiology of deviant behavior — even if they play a significant role in the genesis of deviant motivation.

**Issue 3: Is Personality Overrated As a Cause of Deviant Behavior?**

Clearly, neither organismic changes nor personality changes in the American population explain the streaking epidemic of 1974. Only socio-cultural changes can account for the sudden emergence and sudden disappearance of streakers. Yet streaking, like all behavior, deviant as well as conformist, was motivated. To what extent does the assertion of a loose connection (or no connection at all) between personality factors and streaking contradict the basic postulate that behavior is motivated?
Not at all. Confusion tends to arise because “motivation” is used in two senses: it refers to the constellation of needs arising from the integration of drives within the psyche of the individual, and it also refers to the synthesis of organic, cultural, social, and personality strands of orientation so that integrated action occurs. The first meaning of motivation is summarized in the word “personality.” The second meaning has no unambiguous verbal tag. Talcott Parsons used “general theory of action” to refer to this synthesis of four different motivational systems in concrete behavior (Parsons and Shils, 1951). Parsons was calling attention to the empirical openness of behavior to influences from all four action systems.

When Parsons discussed “the genesis of deviant motivation” in Chapter 7 of The Social System (1951), he was trying to explain why some actors developed the motivation to violate institutionalized rules or to defy authority figures. He devoted considerable space to the problem of the formation of deviant personality structures: compulsive dominance, compulsive enforcement, submission, ritualism, compulsive aggressiveness, incorrigibility, compulsive independence, and compulsive evasion. But in a sense this was a side issue. These deviant personality trends were not the main road to deviant behavior. Nor did their development guarantee
deviant behavior at all. Parsons went on to discuss the role of legitimacy (the cultural system) and of controls arising from the pressure of social systems in producing deviant behavior.

In the case of streaking, a broader conception of motivation than one derived from personality alone is necessary in order to explain how motivation to defy the prohibition against public nudity appeared suddenly in 1974 and then hibernated. I have already discussed some of the main sources of the motivation to streak. Somehow a change occurred in the social expectation system faced by young people, including their expectations for themselves; or a change occurred in the system of the ideas that they shared; or in both. Although the details are not fully known, it seems likely that both social and cultural changes occurred. For a brief period of time, young people developed a shared conception of public nudity (in the course of rapid motion) as funny and liberating: as a lark. Social networks transformed this idea into normative expectations. But considerable streaking occurred in direct response to the cultural definition transmitted through mass media rather than a response to the expectations of face-to-face groups. Social networks were directly implicated in some streaking, but they were not a necessary condition for streaking.
Another way of putting the distinction between deviant motivation and deviant behavior is to point out that personality systems and social systems contribute separately to deviant behavior. In the course of socialization, personality structures are formed that vary in the need to defy the collective conscience. These personalities with their varying needs become committed to a plurality of interactive systems -- families, peer groups, educational organizations, work organizations, neighborhoods -- which act with greater or lesser effectiveness to arrest deviant tendencies before they become well established in the behavioral repertoire of the individual. Thus, it is conceivable that a personality with strong deviant tendencies will participate in interactive systems that inhibit the expression of these tendencies or make expression prohibitively costly. Under these conditions, they do not get expressed in behavior, or perhaps the positive side of the ambivalence gets expressed and the positive side seems more like superconformity than deviance. Similarly, a personality with only weak tendencies toward deviance might participate in interactive systems in which such tendencies are encouraged rather than inhibited -- with the outcome that weak tendencies are acted out. This is what is meant by “a stake in conformity” (Toby, 1957).
Does this mean that the contributions of personality and social systems to deviant behavior are virtually independent? No, Parsons has stressed that personality and social systems contain a common value element. Values and norms internalized in personalities through the process of socialization are simultaneously institutionalized in social systems. Individuals exposed to socialization that inculcates central societal values successfully also tend to be individuals whose social participations are likely to check deviant tendencies. The notion of social stratification hypothesizes such an interrelationship between socialization and social control. Those fairly low in the hierarchy of stratification are less likely to internalize societal values and less likely to find themselves subject to the formal and informal controls of interactive systems. In short, the theory of social stratification provides a basis for expecting more deviance on lower than on higher levels of the system of social stratification.

To sum up issue 3: If deviant motivation is defined broadly enough, it becomes tautological to distinguish between deviant motivation and deviant behavior. Deviant behavior is motivated, like all behavior; hence it springs inevitably from deviant motivation. But it is not tautological to consider the separate contributions of four strands of human motivation: the organic, the cultural, the social, and the personality. Within the skin of
the individual, the four are synthesized so that integrated action occurs. The advantage of separating four strands of motivation rather than aggregating all motivation in one synthetic strand is that the relative weight of different motivational inputs into behavior can be assessed. Although Parsons devoted space and analytical skill to explaining personality factors in deviance, he certainly would not have thought that personality factors were sufficient to explain streaking – or any form of deviance. He probably believed that cultural and social controls were causally more closely related to most forms of deviant behavior.

Conclusion

Although I have discussed three separate issues in the sociology of deviance, they are closely interrelated. Legitimation or partial legitimation of the deviant act affects both sides of the interactional equilibrium. It justifies to the potential behavioral deviant the expression of his or her deviant orientation, and it simultaneously undercuts the willingness of conforming persons to disapprove and to visit immediate negative sanctions upon the deviant. Pope John Paul was probably not aware of the Parsonian analysis of deviance when he said, “The worst thing about terrorism is that it murders man’s sense of sin,” but he was conveying a similar cultural perspective on the legitimation of deviance.
That legitimation should be relevant to deviant behavior follows from the omnipresence of deviant motivation — in the form of ambivalence — even in outward conformists. By raising the issue of continuous variation of personality tendencies toward deviance, Parsons suggested that social and cultural factors had great potential input for the motivation of deviant behavior and for its control.

Finally, although the perspective of the general theory of action opens up the possibility of deviance being influenced by any of the four specific action systems -- behavioral organism, personality system, social system, or cultural system -- the empirical question is which action system predominates in explaining different types of deviant behavior. My guess is that streaking can be explained predominantly in terms of cultural rather than social systems. In the explanation of other forms of deviance, other action systems may have greater explanatory weight. Despite the empirical openness of this issue, the thrust of the Parsonian analysis of deviance is to downgrade the etiological importance of organismic and personality dimensions and to suggest strategies for examining the connections between social and cultural systems and deviant behavior.
That Talcott Parsons, a shy, gentle, very proper theorist, should be capable of providing understanding of a racy subject like streaking, sounds unlikely; yet that is what I claim. The reason he can do so is that all of social life came under his intellectual scrutiny. Because Parsons believed so passionately in overarching theory, his explanations of deviance had to include all deviance, including the bizarre and the ephemeral.
References


1 Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939) wrote about deviance with respect to work expectations and the social-control mechanisms (e.g., “binging”) used by fellow workers to reduce it. But this landmark study in industrial sociology is not usually cited in the deviance literature.

2 Rob Cover, a lecturer in Media Studies at the Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand, has argued in a fascinating paper that the line between non-sexual nudity and sexual nudity has become blurred in recent decades. See Cover (2003). If Dr. Cover is correct about this blurring trend, the cultural definition of streaking as playful nudity having nothing to do with sexuality is less tenable today than it was in 1974, the year of its invention.

3 Parsons was particularly interested in mental illness, such as depression, not in purely physiological ailments. Parsons insisted that deviance was motivated noncompliance but that the motivation was not necessarily conscious. This was the formula by which illness could qualify as deviance.