

From Marginal to Meaningful: The Transformative Power of Deviance

(Akira Sugahara, Kyoto University)

Abstract

This study demonstrates that deviance which is socially marginal and negatively evaluated can become meaningful through a theorized process, not as a liability to be mitigated or eliminated, but as a source of value creation and a foundation for institutional sustainability. Prior research on deviance generally assumes that social acceptance is achieved through conformity to dominant norms by the modification, concealment, or dilution of deviant attributes. This study challenges this assumption by examining how morally controversial and socially negative deviant acts generate enduring value within institutional systems.

Using a mixed-methods approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative data, this study analyzes the case of *Bosozoku*-inspired modified supercars, where strong social disapproval coexists with aesthetic appreciation. Analysis reveals that deviance functions not merely as a state of deviance, but through a three-tiered process of valorization. First, at the micro level, social criticism activates commitment to a deviant identity, which paradoxically enables cognitive legitimation. Second, at the meso level, destigmatized deviance with irrationality, and aesthetic innovation is practically translated into new valuable craft forms that re-enchanted a rationalized industry. Third, at the macro level, these practices become institutionalized not as replacements for mainstream categories, but as subcategories that supplement their lost value.

We theorize deviance as an “institutional catalyst” that sequentially drives legitimation, re-enchancement, and complementation through this valorization processes. This theorization redefines deviance not as a marginal waste to be excluded, but as a meaningful generative resource that renews the value of mature institutions. It contributes to the fields of stigma research, craft research, and category research, while also making a cross-cutting contribution to deviance studies and institutional theory.

Key words; deviance, stigma, craft, category, institutional theory