Durkheim theorized that deviance was a necessary condition for a well-functioning and stable society. Now that's very counter-intuitive. How would deviance help to promote social order, social cohesion, and an overall stability and harmony of the society? Well, that's the beauty of this theory, because it is so counter-intuitive. It's fascinating the way Durkheim theorized deviance with relation to social solidarity. So we're going to break that down and explore this in today's lesson.

Deviance has four social functions. Deviance clarifies our cultural values, and deviance helps to define our morality. And thirdly, deviance helps to unify society. And finally, fourth, deviance promotes social change. Those are the four functions of deviance that Durkheim theorized. So we're going to explore each of them in turn, and then look at a theory, a theoretical application of Durkheim done by a sociologist, Kai Erikson, who studied the Puritans. So let's move into the four functions of deviance.

Firstly, we're going to start with how deviance clarifies our cultural values. The first of Durkheim's functions of deviance is that deviance clarifies our cultural values. Deviance helps to define what is good and what is bad in society. So what is good rests on the polar opposite what is bad. We can only define the good in relation to the bad, and we can only define the bad in relation to the good. So these two concepts are inextricable. They are always going to remain paired. So we need examples in society of what is wrong so that we can become unified around what is right. And deviant behavior helps to define these boundaries for us. So without definitions of deviance, we can't have any social order, because everyone would be running around with their own moral code, their own set of standards that society would come unraveled.

So what deviance does is, by referencing what is bad, it gets us all on the same page with respect to what is good and how to act in society. So recall that Durkheim was a structural functionalist. And structural functionalists are concerned with what makes society harmonious, orderly, and stable. And deviance, then, was one of these functions. Because deviance holds society together. Paradoxically, deviant behavior sets an example for the rest of us so we can become unified on what is culturally valued and right as opposed to what is wrong. So those cultural values of right, sharing them is what holds us together. So in that way, really fascinatingly, deviance helps to hold society together.

The second function of deviance that Durkheim theorized is that when we respond to deviance, this defines our collective notions of morality. So this is closely related with defining cultural values. In addition to our values, then, our moral notions are also clarified when we respond to deviant behavior. If someone gets caught stealing, for
instance, and is punished, this sends a signal to the rest of us that stealing is wrong. And in this way, it helps to shore up the edges of our moral behavior and define what is right and wrong.

This gives us all the same code to live by. Right and wrong behavior, we're all on the same page. And this allows us to live in groups and play by the same rules, as I said before. So deviance, then, is an absolutely critical function for society because it enables us to live in groups when we uphold the same notion of deviance and the same morality.

Thirdly, and most fascinating for me, is that Durkheim theorized that deviance-- when we respond to deviance, it helps to unify society. And this is a really fascinating aspect because when we respond to deviant behavior, we come together against the common offender and strengthen our social bonds in the community, strengthen our social ties, and in the process, create shared values of right and wrong.

This can happen on a large scale or a smaller scale. National responses to disasters like 9/11 or Pearl Harbor unified an entire nation against a common enemy. Like in 1984, the book, George Orwell talked about the importance of we always have to have a common enemy. If we don't have a common enemy, we don't have unity. So unity in this way is created against a common enemy. Or it can happen in a more community base, like the outcry when a sex offender wants to move into a suburb. Up in arms about that, a community comes together against this common enemy.

So what happens, then, is that people say things like, he's not like us. We're right. He's wrong. We have something in common based upon our shared conviction that he is wrong. Fellow feeling is created like this that helps to glue society together. So the way that we respond to deviance then, unifies society.

Finally, Durkheim theorized that deviance is very important for the process of social change. As is often the case, deviance is the spark that lights the fire of social change. Recall the civil rights movement from the 1960s. You had Rosa Parks, who refused to sit in the area of the bus where she was supposed to sit. This was regarded as deviant behavior that proved a catalyst to galvanize a movement to cause social change. Likewise, the Greensboro Four, the four black youth who staged the sit-ins at the lunch counter at Woolworth's in Greensboro, North Carolina. They were sitting at the "whites-only" counter. And this proved to be a very important catalyst in Civil Rights Movement. So we see, then, how deviant behavior can cause social change.

Now I'd like to shift gears and take up the idea of is there any society without deviance. What if there's a society with little or no deviance? What happens? Well, the answer to this question, emphatically on the board here, there is no society without deviance. Durkheim has shown how deviance promotes morality, elevates the idea of good as opposed to bad, promotes social solidarity and the essential functioning of the social order. But what happens when there's little "conventional" deviance? The idea of deviance is relative. What is deviant in one society might
not be deviant another society. That's not the point. The point is that deviance exists in both societies.

So let's turn now to a study by a sociologist, Kai Erikson, who did a historical study of the Puritans and their forms of deviance. Puritans were a very pure, non-offending group of people. Yet they still had relative forms of deviance. Some infractions had to be identified and prosecuted in order to maintain the social order. So Erikson looked at conventions of deviance through time and found that the Puritans had several waves of crime. They were different, but the rate of deviant offenders stayed the same throughout the whole time.

The most famous one of these waves is the witch trials, where witches were burned at the stakes. So, in this sense, this ludicrous form of deviance got created for all the reasons we talked about before, all those four functions of having to maintain solidarity in society, set what's good as opposed to what's bad, define a morality in our cultural values. We can't do this on our own without some exemplar, some pariah.

So in a pretty stable, pure, "Puritan," harmonious society, we still had to have some form of deviance in order for society to stay glued together. This is brilliant sociology. We are hugely indebted to Durkheim for giving this theorization, that deviance, counter-intuitively, we might think, actually benefits society. Human beings, when we live in groups, we need order. We need rules. We need norms. We can't live without it, and deviance helps to provide these for us. It's an essential part of cohesive, social living.

Well, thank you very much for joining me. I hope you enjoyed this discussion of deviance. Have a great rest of your day.