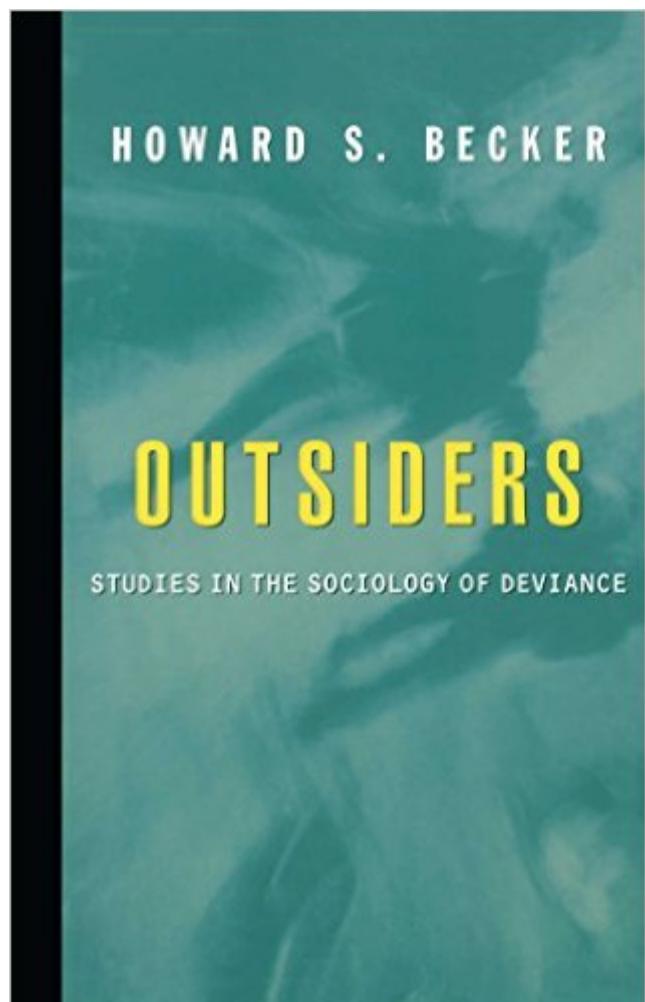


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Outsiders: Studies In The Sociology Of Deviance



Synopsis

One of the most groundbreaking sociology texts of the mid-20th century, Howard S. Becker's *Outsiders* is a thorough exploration of social deviance and how it can be addressed in an understanding and helpful manner. A compulsively readable and thoroughly researched exploration of social deviance and the application of what is known as "labeling theory" to the studies of deviance. With particular research into drug culture, *Outsiders* analyzes unconventional individuals and their place in normal society.

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Customer Reviews

Howard Becker's 1963 book *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* begins with a careful attempt to distinguish factors that cause a person to be labeled "deviant." As Becker convincingly argues, the term "deviant" depends not only on characteristics of the person so labeled, but on a transaction between the labeled person and the society that labels him. One disappointment is that Becker fails to apply the same level of scrutiny to terms used to describe certain categories of deviance. He repeatedly uses the term "drug addict" as a synonym for "drug user." (see. e.g., p. 5) This obviously fails to recognize that not all drugs are addictive, and not all users of potentially addictive drugs are in fact addicted to them. But, what is far more troubling, it fails to recognize that the word "addict," just like the word "deviant," attempts to represent, as a diagnostic category, social norms that are not universally agreed upon. Psychology's new incarnation as a science of "behavioral health" is regrettably not a single step closer to accounting

for Becker's criticisms. Becker writes, "The medical metaphor limits what we can see ... It accepts the lay judgment of something as deviant and, by use of analogy, locates its source within the individual, thus preventing us from seeing the judgment itself as a crucial part of the phenomenon." The contemporary debate on criminality also largely fails to address Becker's criticisms. The debate seeks to decide, is crime caused by mental disturbance in the criminal, or by social conditions in which she finds herself? A third possibility is omitted. Perhaps the criminal simply does not accept the legitimacy of the law.

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