

We're Going Streaking!
**The Theory of Sanctioned Deviance at Hamilton
College**

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It's 11 p.m. in the Burke Library of Hamilton College during finals week. Coffee-toting students pack the library to cram for exams. Other students are feverishly writing papers. All of a sudden, a buzz of "shhs" erupts from a far away corner. A pack of naked men and women weave in and out of the rows of desks and then speed down the stairs. The Hamilton College Varsity Streaking Team strikes once again. The students look up from their work, and after a few minutes of giggling and chatter, everyone goes back to work.

Why can these students run around campus naked and go unpunished? To answer this question, I have created the theory of sanctioned deviance. The theory of sanction deviance attempts to explain why Hamilton's streaking team is generally seen as acceptable rather than a deviation from the micro and macro social structures controlling public nudity. Sanctioned deviance identifies Hamilton College as an institution that has an internalized collective consciousness regarding acceptable forms of public displays of nudity.

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A collective consciousness represents a set of beliefs common to all members within the same society (“Collective Consciousness,” 2002). This theory will examine streaking within the micro-level structure of Hamilton College and its student body. In addition, the theory will address macro-level concerns towards nudity within our greater American society. Sanction deviance allows for the exploration of a social phenomenon unique to our culture on the Hill.

On a biological level, individuals “streak” because the human species is innately pleased when in the nude. Thinking in terms of Freud, our animalistic, libido-driven id loves nudity (1961). One member of the streaking team candidly noted that “streaking is wicked fun” (“Buff and Blue,” 2004). Individuals gain a great sense of pleasure when we actively defy the regulation of the ego and shed our clothing. Streaking is ‘wicked fun’ in comparison to other mundane ego activities because

the feeling of happiness derived from the satisfaction of a wild instinctual impulse untamed by the ego is incomparably more intense than that derived from sating an instinct that has been tamed (Freud, 1961, p. 26).

Part of this id pleasure stems from the actual act of defiance against the societal superego. The society superego creates internal regulations, derived from society at large, and then censors actions of

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the ego deemed devious (Freud, 1961, p. 83). In a society controlled by the superego, the members of the streaking team employ strategic actions to embrace the pleasures of the id and defiance.

To justify breaking superego-driven cultural taboos and laws concerning nudity, the streaking team presents a particular front to legitimize their actions. Erving Goffman postulates that all human interactions are performances of ‘fronts’ colliding with one another (Goffman, 1959, p. 23). This dramaturgy school of thought sees all human interactions as performance, with society as the audience. The streaking team’s performance occurs in the “theater of the absurd” (Marek, 2005). United by the common desire to enjoy the id’s pleasure of nudity, the streaking team becomes a “performance team” who work together to present their deviance to a campus-wide audience (Goffman, 1959, p. 79). The specific front of the streaking team helps to inform audiences that this is a team performance of deviance from superego taboos.

The characteristic of a team allows the campus-wide audience to view these naked individuals in the context of a sport. When people enter a new social situation, we often draw upon relevant past experiences to help create our performance as an audience member (Berger and Luckman, 1966, 58-59). Calling the streaking team the

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“Hamilton College Varsity Streaking Team” encourages the audience to view the team’s performance in the same way we recognize other intercollegiate sports. The streaking team also uses the language of sport, such as “undefeated,” which helps to reemphasize the team’s similarities to other sports. Though the streaking team may use the word ‘team’ as a way to mock other N.C.A.A. sanctioned sports, it nonetheless draws dramaturgical comparisons from the norms of intercollegiate sports.

The habitual performance of the streaking team creates a level of sanctioned deviance within the micro collective consciousness of the student body. The streaking team’s performance is habitual in that “the action in question may be performed again in the future in the same manner and with the same economical effort” (Berger and Luckman, 1966, p. 53). The streaking team always consists of naked men and women on college campuses. Sometimes the team may wear masks, or carry horns and banners, but the nudity is always held constant. Habitual actions, however, contextualize and normalize a given situation. Contexts provide a set of typifications, which organize our society into a set of objectified interactions (Berger and Luckman, 1966, p. 21). This typification provides audiences with past experiences of nudity on campus and, in turn, minimizes the level of

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their reaction. Students are less shocked by public nudity the more often they witness the event. Individuals create a library of past experience in which to draw appropriate reactionary performances. This is why the element of surprise is essential to a streaking team's performance. When surprised, people cannot quickly sift through their library of reactionary performances and thus present their true first reactions. The minimal reactions to the habitual performance of the streaking team in the library signals the micro level acceptance of this deviant behavior.

The institution of Hamilton College is set in a precarious situation concerning the extent to which it will allow deviant behavior on campus. For the most part, Hamilton functions under the influences of macro-level structures of our greater society. The laws that govern our greater society influence the general level of order on campus and general absence of egregious crimes. But Hamilton as a micro-level institution can deviate from some of the macro-level regulations. For instance, the school knows that illegal underage drinking occurs on campus, but the college does not actively seek out violators on a regular basis. For the most part, the micro-level structure of the college allows the streakers to go unpunished. Recently, the institution attempted to regulate streaking during a concert held over family

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weekend. I theorize the reason for the institution's sudden interest in regulating deviant nudity is that family members from outside of the Hamilton micro-structural sanctioned deviance were present for the concert. The college feels the necessity to implement macro-level controls against deviance when members outside of Hamilton's micro-level community are present on campus.

One potential reason for the college's acceptance of a collective consciousness of sanctioned deviance is because the institution could reap the media attention without having to invest in the team. The college saw that the streaking team's deviation from the institutional power could actually bring positive attention to the school. Performance teams often present a front for an organization as well as for the individuals (Goffman, 1959, 77). In this case, the streaking team is acting on behalf of the college but without personally obtaining any financial gains from the institution. Although allowing the streakers to use the school's name may seem irrational due to the societal superego's dislike of nudity, the benefits of media attention outweighed angering individuals. For example, Hamilton College could have followed in the footsteps of Princeton University and ordered the team to disassemble (Duerson, 2005). Ordering the disassembly of the team might have seemed logical in the wake of

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many recent negative media stories, which include President Tobin's plagiarism, the 2003 cocaine sting operation, the Ward Churchill scandal, and Professor Nancy Rabinowitz's inclusion in David Horowitz's book *The Professors: 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America* (2006). However, in the months following the creation of the streaking team, stories were written in local newspapers, *Sports Illustrated on Campus*, and even *GQ*. The team's crowning media achievement occurred with an article in the education section of the *New York Times* (Fuchs, 2005). Written in a light-hearted humorous manner, the article brought a large amount of national attention to the college. As a result of the article, CNN interviewed two members of the streaking team on television. These media stories brought attention to the institution of Hamilton College as a result of the streaking team's activities.

The college, however, did financially contribute to the team in one instance. For the premier of the streaking team's movie *Buff and Blue*, the school "allow[ed] the streakers to use the school's world-class auditorium, then signed off on an on-campus party and after-party that plowed through five kegs and 30 cases of beer" (Morgan, 2005). The college willingly permitted further deviations through the presentation of "pornography" and consumption of alcohol. Only

within the micro level collective consciousness of sanctioned deviance could Hamilton support such actions.

Even though streaking is a legitimate action on the Hamilton campus, one must use appropriate macro-level collective consciousness language to describe nudity. Our society polices our language of nudity by screening out certain “devious” words (Foucault 1976, 17-18). In the *GQ* article for example, the author chose the word “tochis” to describe a person’s buttocks (Veis, 2005). In the *Sports Illustrated on Campus* article, the author uses the phrase “...that which God gave us” to reference nudity (Duerson, 2005). This exemplifies the permeating power of the macro-level regulation of language in our society. Even though a particular action is sanctioned in a specific place, the language surrounding the event is still controlled by the macro social structure of our civilization. As a result, articles written for the macro culture in the public media must avoid words that directly reference nudity due to our general policing of statements.

In addition to macro-level society controlling the language of nudity, the streaking team cannot escape the greater societal control over the display of nudity. One may often go unpunished for streaking under sanctioned deviance at Hamilton College, but in the civilization at large, streaking is not an acceptable public performance. Members

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of the streaking team have been arrested and/or charged with disorderly conduct while streaking at other collegiate institutions. These fellow institutions do not have a collective consciousness of sanctioned deviance and so rely upon the macro-level policing structure of society.

In the spring of 2005, I attended the premier of the streaking team's movie *Buff and Blue*, held in Wellin Hall. While sitting next to the Dean of Students, I watched on a large screen as my peers ran around naked. Normally, one would not feel comfortable sitting next to the Dean during a movie with a large amount of nudity. Here at Hamilton College, the theory of sanctioned deviance allows this situation to occur, and with a certain level of comfort. This theory, however, is only an attempt to create order in our small world upon the Hill. Theories can adapt, expand and even diminish. No one can know for certain if streaking will continue to be permitted at Hamilton. Until then, I will wear my "Official Streaking Team T-Shirt" without fear of censorship, because it represents the acceptance of streaking under the specific collective consciousness of sanctioned deviance.

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