

6 Deviance and Crime



AmmentorpDK/iStock/Thinkstock

Chapter Outline

- 6.1 Deviance
- 6.2 Deviance as Relative
- 6.3 Crime
- 6.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Crime and Deviance
- 6.5 Deviance and Change

Learning Objectives

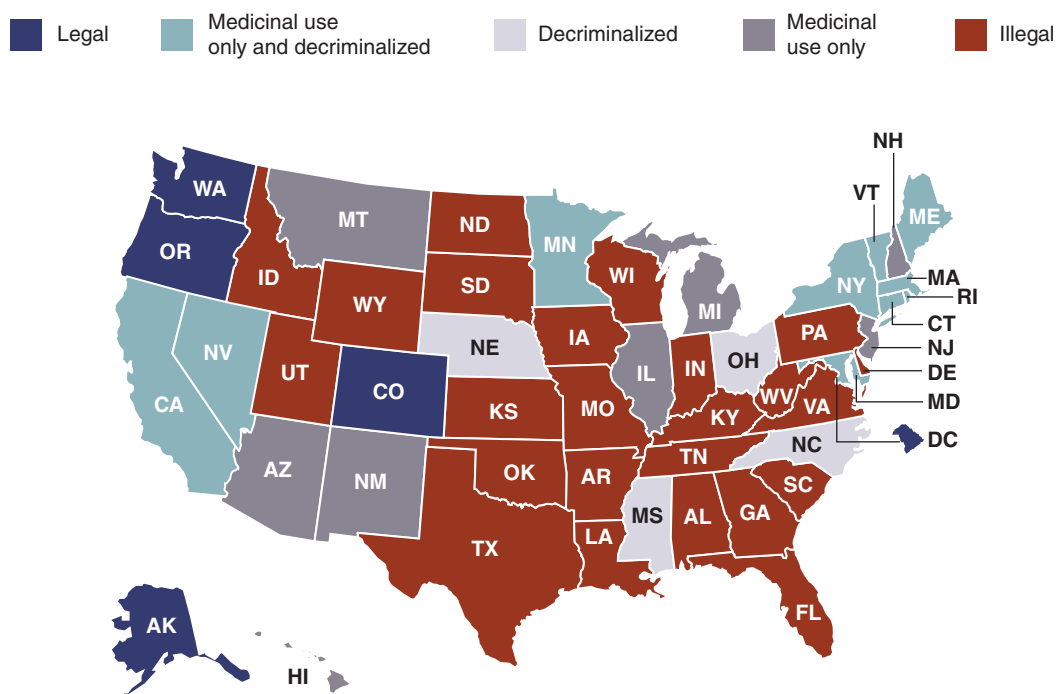
After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Understand the definition of deviance as well as the relative nature of this social phenomenon.
- Describe the measurement, extent, and major types of crime.
- Discuss the major strategies used to attempt to control deviance.
- Explain the major theoretical perspectives on deviance and crime.
- Understand the relationship between deviance and recent technological advances.

In the United States, there are profound differences in attitudes about the social acceptability of marijuana as well as reactions to the use of this substance. In recent years, public support for the legalization of marijuana has increased. According to the Pew Research Center (Motel, 2014), slightly more than half (52%) of Americans support the legalization of marijuana. This is a radical increase since 1989, when only 16% of the population was in favor of legalization. Additionally, more than two-thirds (69%) of respondents to a recent Pew Center survey indicated they believed that marijuana was less harmful than alcohol, a substance that is not illegal and whose use is widely accepted (Motel, 2014). However, the level of support for the legalization of marijuana differs among the various subsets of the population. For example, less than one-third (31%) of Republicans are in favor of legalization, while nearly two-thirds of the so-called Millennial Generation (persons born from the 1980s through early 2000s) support legalization.

Figure 6.1: Marijuana laws in 50 states

Changing attitudes toward marijuana in many parts of the United States have led to changes in state laws.



Source: Pew Research Center. (Oct 2014) 6 Facts about marijuana. Retrieved from: http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/04/07/6-facts-about-marijuana/ft_14-10-24_marijuanamap/

These changing attitudes towards marijuana are reflected in an increasing number of states decriminalizing (i.e., removing criminal penalties for) marijuana possession. Some states have legalized the use of marijuana for medical and even recreational purposes. However, just as there is a diversity of individual opinions regarding the use of marijuana, there is similar diversity in state laws regarding marijuana (see Figure 6.1). Four states (Alaska, Colorado, Oregon, and Washington) as well as the District of Columbia have legalized marijuana altogether. Almost half of the states and the District of Columbia have legalized marijuana for medical purposes. On the other hand, the possession or use of marijuana is illegal in 23 states. In fact, some states have relatively strict penalties for marijuana possession. For instance, in the state of Alabama, the second and subsequent arrests for “personal use” can result in felony charges (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, 2014). In addition, federal law still strictly prohibits the sale and possession of marijuana. The possession of any amount of this substance is punishable by up to a year in jail and a \$1,000 fine.



Alex Menendez/ASSOCIATED PRESS

With legislation allowing for the sale of medical marijuana, dispensaries such as this one are becoming an increasingly common sight.

If we assume there are clear right and wrong behaviors and that all understand the difference the same way, we will ignore many interpretations of the rules and situations. If we simply study rule-breaking behavior, we are likely to overlook the motivation that caused the behavior or the structural factors that encouraged it. The Pew work (Motel, 2014) on the legalization of marijuana indicates that the use of a drug once thought to be as dangerous as heroin (at least according to the 1936 cult film *Reefer Madness*) is now far more accepted by mainstream U.S. culture. However, it doesn't indicate that its use is any higher than it was previously. It doesn't account for changes in enforcement of existing drug laws—both by police and the courts. It doesn't account for the large number of people who have been, and in many cases remain, incarcerated for crimes associated with marijuana. In short, the sociological study of deviance must focus on the rule-breaking behaviors, the rules themselves (and how they got there), the attitudes of the deviant actors, the reaction of society to the deviant actions, and the consequences of breaking the rules.

The discussion of attitudes about marijuana use highlights many of the issues sociologists encounter in studying deviance. Formal laws may vary from state to state. State laws may disagree with federal standards. Furthermore, to understand something like marijuana use, it may be of little consequence what the “law” says. Certain communities, age groups, and subcultures will have more or less permissive attitudes about the use of this substance, which leads these groups to be more or less willing to adhere to laws, social norms, or community standards. In attempting to understand deviance, if we study only the written rules of a society we are likely to miss the behavior variation that exists across groups.

6.1 Deviance

All human societies and social groupings have rules and norms. As discussed in Chapter 3, norms are rules that specify appropriate and inappropriate behavior. **Deviance** is the term sociologists use to describe behavior that violates a norm or differs from expected behavior. It often produces a hostile reaction from others. In this context, deviance is a neutral term. Sociologists are not necessarily making value judgments when classifying behavior as deviant. Rather, they are identifying behavior that goes against social expectations in a given society and is received negatively by that society. On the other hand, when the terms *deviance* and *deviants* are used in everyday language, they typically carry the most negative of connotations (e.g., referring to sex offenders) (Bryant, 1990).

Sociologists examine deviance in the context of social control (this concept of social control is presented in Chapter 3). The goal of social control is to get individuals to conform to social expectations. During the socialization process, people begin to understand, appreciate, and internalize the culture's norms. Ideally, social control results in a smoothly operating and orderly society.

Norms are frequently embodied in rules. Individuals are confronted with a variety of rules on a daily basis. As citizens, we are governed by federal, state, and local laws. There are sets of rules associated with operating a motor vehicle, fishing, and even owning a pet. Religious organizations provide their members with a variety of rules for conduct. For students, there are rules governing academic behavior and personal conduct. Athletic teams, performance groups, and other organizations for students also have their specific rules for members. In the workplace, the employers set rules of conduct for their employees. The behavior of some individuals is also subject to various codes of professional conduct, such as the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, and the American Nurses Association, to mention but a few. Military personnel adhere to the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). Norms come from a variety of sources and can be enforced with formal or informal sanctions, each of which can be, in turn, positive or negative.

Formal Sanctions

Successful socialization regulates deviance, using various ways to reward people who comply with social expectations (Bryant, 1990) and punish those who don't. **Positive sanctions** encourage compliance with rewards. For example, students can win a place on the Honor Roll or scholarships for good academic performance. Employees can be given a promotion, raise, or award to acknowledge their conformity. In many communities, the reward of having a positive reputation is a powerful motivation for conformity.

Negative sanctions are penalties for violating the norms. Societies have official structures in place for dealing with rule-breakers. The police, courts, and correctional system are responsible for formally dealing with cases of criminal deviance. An individual can be arrested, fined, incarcerated, and even executed for criminal behavior. Educational institutions have formal offices and policies in place for dealing with deviance. Students can be given detention, suspended, or even expelled for misconduct. In the workplace, employees can be formally reprimanded, suspended, or even terminated. If the rule-breakers are members of a professional organization, they can have their credentials suspended or revoked. For example, in 2014,

Alex Rodriguez was suspended from playing Major League baseball for an entire season for taking performance-enhancing drugs. ARod faced several negative sanctions, including losing over \$22 million in salary.

Informal Sanctions

Some sanctions are informal; they do not come from those in a formalized position of authority. Peers and other community members often have a powerful influence on human behavior. Those who fail to conform to the norms may find themselves the object of gossip, scorn, ridicule, and avoidance. For instance, a person with poor personal hygiene may be avoided by others and not receive social invitations. Likewise, a student who doesn't "fit in" may be isolated by others in the cafeteria and may find themselves the last kid chosen when teams are selected for games on the playground. Since primary groups have a powerful influence on human behavior, they may be more influential at times in controlling deviant behavior than any formal authority would be. And to return to Alex Rodriguez, his reputation as one of the "clean" superstars in baseball (meaning that he had not "doped," or used performance-enhancing drugs) was destroyed. He is now eligible to return to his team, the New York Yankees, but there seems little desire among the fans or players to have him back.

In some cases the line between the formal and informal can blur. The Amish practice of "shunning" negatively sanctions an individual by systematically excommunicating that member from the community. While the practice is formalized and determined by elders in the community (a formal sanction), the outcome is often that other members of the community shun the sanctioned members—even their own families—in an informal sanction.

6.2 Deviance as Relative

Since norms tend to be relative, deviant behavior is relative as well. Behaviors that are classified as deviant tend to vary from place to place, time to time, and group to group (Hughes & Kroehler, 2013).

Relativity Through Time

In the United States, norms regarding alcohol and drug use have varied greatly throughout history (see Faupel, Horowitz, & Weaver, 2003). There were not many laws about alcohol use prior to the Volstead Act of 1919, which created Prohibition. Then, between 1919 and 1933, the sale, possession, and transportation of alcohol were entirely illegal. After Prohibition was repealed, a minimum drinking



Underwood Photo Archives/SuperStock

During prohibition, those wishing to consume alcohol illegally gathered at speakeasies like this one in San Francisco.

age of 18 was established. By the 1990s, because of concerns over motor vehicle accidents, all states had raised the drinking age to 21. Yet, there are still some parts of the United States where alcohol sales are not allowed regardless of age. For example, there are still many “dry” counties in Kentucky, Texas, and Mississippi.

Relativity Across Groups or Cultures

In the 19th century, drugs such as opium, morphine, cocaine, and marijuana were widely available in America. In the early 20th century, laws such as the Harrison Narcotics Act (1914) and the Marijuana Tax Act (1937) placed strict prohibitions on these substances. As we saw in the opening of this chapter, there is currently a great deal of variation in laws regarding marijuana.



GPO/Handout/Getty Images

The killing of staff members at the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* on January 7, 2015, sparked massive public outrage in France.

In a different example of relativity across groups, 12 people associated with the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* were killed by Muslim extremists who were angered by the magazine's depiction of the Prophet Muhammad in cartoons. Islam considers any depiction of Muhammad to be blasphemous (NBC News, 2015); however, most Muslims would express displeasure with such cartoons through protests or boycotts, not murder. Even within a religious group, where many of the rules are intended to be absolute, there are relative understandings about what the rules mean and how violations should be dealt with.

Relativity Across Situations

Whether or not a behavior is classified as deviant can vary tremendously depending upon the social context. One act may be considered seriously unacceptable in one setting, yet be acceptable (or even encouraged) in another context (Matza & Sykes, 1961). For example, punching and kicking another person is typically considered assault, and will often result in the arrest and incarceration of the assailant. However, in the context of a mixed martial arts (MMA) competition, such behavior is completely acceptable. In some MMA competitions, in fact, a competitor may be penalized for inactivity or not engaging an opponent by launching a competitive attack. Likewise, operating a motor vehicle at an exceptionally high rate of speed is generally prohibited. It can result in a fine, license suspension, and even criminal charges for reckless driving. However, police and paramedics are expected to drive as fast as safely possible when responding to an emergency.

6.3 Crime

A **crime** is an act of deviance that violates a law. Thus, not every type of behavior that a society considers deviant is also subject of a law. Walking on the left side of the sidewalk may be deviant to a small degree, but is not against the law. The concept of deviance has a tremendously wide scope because there are literally thousands of laws covering all types of behavior. These range from jaywalking to premeditated murder. In the United States, criminal law recognizes the distinction in the severity of possible violations (Siegel, 2010). On the one hand, a **misdemeanor** is a minor offense punishable by a fine or brief jail sentence. On the other hand, a **felony** is a serious violation often punished with a lengthy prison sentence and even, in some cases, the death penalty.

Measuring Crime

Figure 6.2: UCR crime definitions

The most serious “index” or “Part I” offenses are defined in this section of the FBI’s *Uniform Crime Reports*.

Offenses Known to Law Enforcement: The FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program collects the number of offenses that come to the attention of law enforcement for violent crime and property crime, as well as data regarding clearances of these offenses. In addition, the FBI collects auxiliary information about these offenses (e.g., time of day of burglaries). The expanded offense data include trends in both crime volume and crime rate per 100,000 inhabitants. Finally, the UCR Program collects expanded homicide data, which includes information about homicide victims and offenders, weapons used, the circumstances surrounding the offenses, and justifiable homicides.

Violent Crime: Violent crime is composed of four offenses: murder and non-negligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Violent crimes are defined in the UCR Program as those offenses which involve force or threat of force.

The Violent Crime section of this report provides more information about violent crime and an overview of violent crime data for 2013.

Property Crime: Property crime includes the offenses of burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson. The object of the theft-type offenses is the taking of money or property, but there is no force or threat of force against the victims.

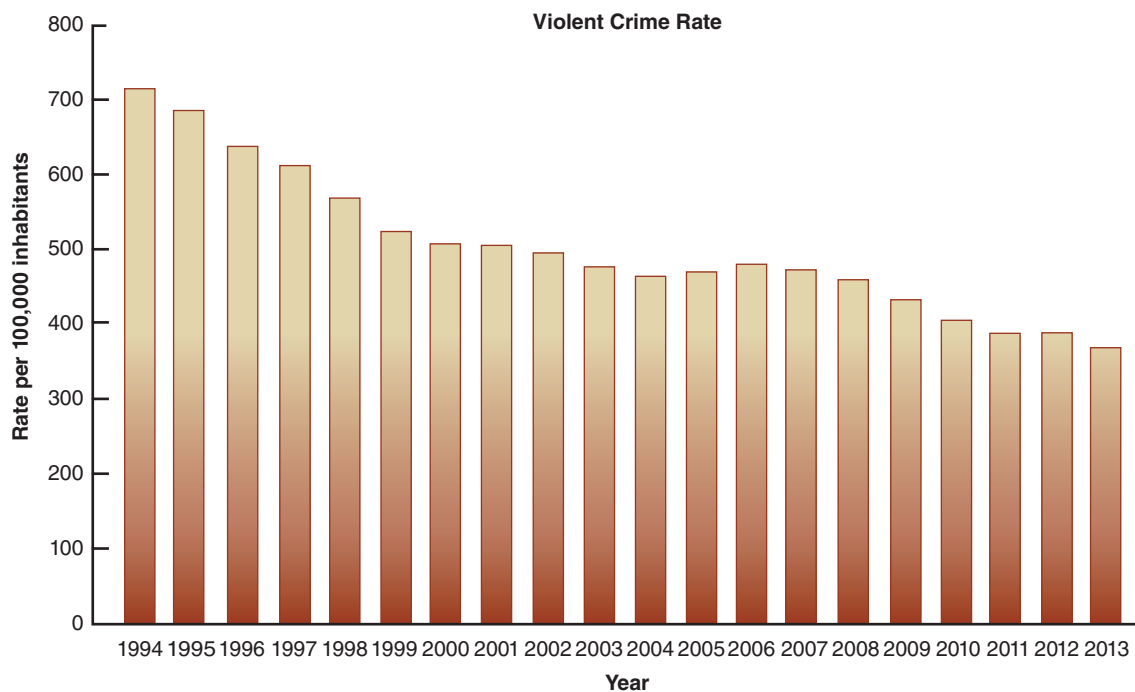
The Property Crime section of this report provides more information about property crime and an overview of property crime data for 2013.

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, Crime in the United States 2013.

One of the major sources on the nature, extent, and distribution of crime is official police statistics. These are violations of criminal law that are known to the police. The statistics are tabulated and reported by the FBI in the *Uniform Crime Report* (UCR). Although this contains information on virtually all criminal offenses, it gives the greatest detail for and analysis of the eight “index” or “Part I” offenses. These index crimes are considered to be relatively serious, occur relatively frequently, and often come to the attention of police. They are divided into two categories. First are violent crimes, which involve force or the threatened use of force. These include murder, robbery, rape, and aggravated assault. Second are the property crimes, which involve the theft or destruction of property. These are larceny-theft, burglary, motor vehicle theft, and arson. The definitions of the respective index offenses that are measured in the UCR appear in Figure 6.2. The trends for the various index crimes since 1994 are shown in Figure 6.3. As indicated by the graphs, the crime rate in the United States has dramatically decreased over the past decade. For instance, the violent crime rate in 2013 was approximately half of what it was in 1994. Furthermore, the property crime rate has decreased about 30% in the last 10 years.

Figure 6.3a: Crime rates in the United States, 1994–2013

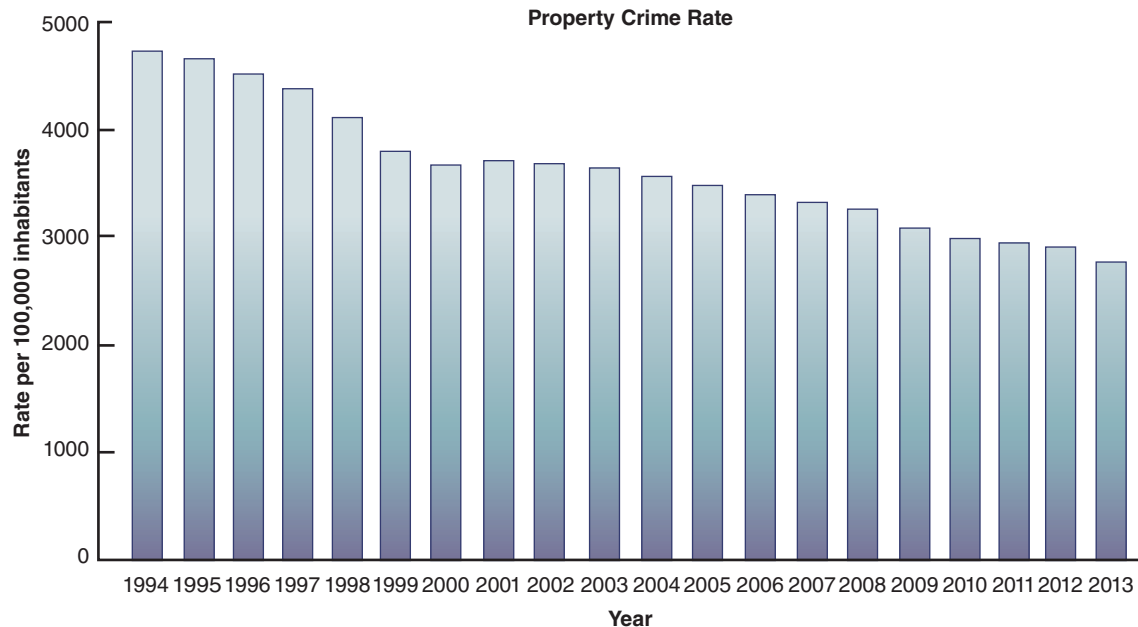
Crime rate trends from *Uniform Crime Reports* show that both (a) violent crimes and (b) property crimes have decreased significantly.



Source: Data from Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013, *Uniform Crime Reports* Washington DC: U.S. Department of Justice.

Figure 6.3b: Crime rates in the United States, 1994–2013

Crime rate trends from *Uniform Crime Reports* show that both (a) violent crimes and (b) property crimes have decreased significantly.



Source: Data from Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013, *Uniform Crime Reports* Washington DC: U.S. Department of Justice.

The major limitation with the UCR data, specifically, is that not all criminal violations come to the attention of police. Certain offenses, such as drug use and shoplifting, often go undetected and thus unreported. Even when there is a victim of a crime, for a variety of reasons the victim does not always report the crime to police (Conklin, 2013). The loss may have been small; reporting it may have seemed not worth the time. Or the victim may be fearful of reprisal from the offender (e.g., in domestic violence). Additionally, some crimes such as rape and sexual assault are highly personal and traumatizing; the victim may wish to avoid reliving painful events. Finally, victims are sometimes involved in illegal activity themselves (e.g., a person robbed at gunpoint while trying to purchase narcotics).

Another source of data of crime is the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). This is an annual survey of approximately 75,000 households that asks people to report their personal and household experiences with victimization. Criminologists generally use the NCVS to supplement the UCR data because of the limitations associated with those official statistics. While the NCVS is helpful in shedding light on those offenses that are not reported to the police, it also has its own limitations (Siegel, 2010). On the one hand, there may be over-reporting by people who misinterpret something as a victimization experience. For example, someone who has lost a smart phone may think it was stolen and indicate that when responding to a victimization survey. On the other hand, there may also be under-reporting because respondents may not disclose an experience for a variety of reasons, including embarrassment and forgetfulness.

Because of the limitations associated with these police statistics, sociologists use another strategy in most of their research on crime and criminals. **Self-reports** are a technique in which the researcher asks subjects to report their own violations of criminal law. Self-reports may take the form of anonymous questionnaires or interviews. Self-reports reveal two important things about crime (Conklin, 2013). First, nearly every person has broken the law at some point (e.g., underage drinking, rolling through a stop sign). Second, they confirm the existence of the **dark figure** (offenses that occur but do not come to the attention of police). However, these self-reports also, of course, have limitations. For instance, respondents might not be honest with researchers, particularly about the most serious violations, such as murder and armed robbery. Additionally, some criminal populations that are of interest to sociologists are difficult to locate for self-reports (e.g., drug traffickers and terrorists).

White-Collar Crime

One type of crime that is of significant interest to sociologists is **white-collar crime**. This concept refers to offenses committed by citizens of high social status in the course of their occupational activities (Sutherland, 1940). Examples include embezzlement, insider trading, securities fraud, and tax evasion. It is important to recognize that this is not a formal legal term nor is it a formal legal charge. In fact, the term did not even exist until Sutherland introduced it approximately 75 years ago.

Green (1997) observed that there are two important sociological aspects to this concept. First, note the social status of the offender. White-collar criminals tend to come from the upper classes of societies. Until Sutherland's work, the term *criminal* tended to be synonymous with the lower classes. Second, consider the occupational mechanism by which the offense is committed. In other words, the offender commits the crime through opportunities that present within his or her occupation. For example, Darryl McCauley, the half-brother of actor and comedian Dane Cook, was sent to prison for six years for embezzling more than \$12 million from Cook while managing his career. The fact that McCauley was Cook's business manager when the comedian became popular allowed McCauley access to his brother's finances at a time when money was plentiful and oversight was minimal (Duke, 2010). The white-collar criminal, by definition, already has a job—usually a career—that pays well.



Chris Hondros/Getty Images News/Thinkstock

In 2009, investment banker Bernard Madoff was sentenced to 150 years in prison for stealing more than \$65 billion from clients.

Victimless Crimes

Victimless crimes (also called “public order offenses”) are also of interest to sociologists. These are consensual offenses that violate the moral order (Schur, 1965). While there is no traditional victim or target in the legal sense, the entire society is considered to be the victim inasmuch as these offenses are claimed to damage the moral fabric of society. Current examples would include drug offenses and prostitution. These crimes are controversial by their very nature. On the one hand, there are strong pressures from religious groups and other social conservatives to keep these offenses illegal (and vigorously enforce laws regarding them). On the other hand, there are increasingly calls from civil libertarians to decriminalize this activity because it involves consenting adults. From a law enforcement perspective, it is difficult (and costly) to enforce the laws regarding public order crimes. Victimless crimes typically lack a willing complainant, a citizen who has been harmed and wishes to file a criminal complaint. So law enforcement frequently have to manufacture their own through undercover operations and the use of informants, who are often involved in criminal activity themselves.

Juvenile Delinquency

Juvenile delinquency refers to illegal or anti-social behavior on the part of a juvenile (someone who is not legally an adult; in most states, this means younger than 18 years old). The category of behavior includes those offenses that violate criminal law, as well as status offenses. **Status offenses** are acts that are not permissible for juveniles because of their age, such as truancy, curfew violations, and running away from home (Burfeind & Bartusch, 2006). The criminal justice system takes a different approach with juveniles because of their age. There are separate courts and detention facilities for juveniles. Rather than being convicted of a crime as an adult would be at a trial, juveniles who get in trouble are generally declared in “need of supervision.” Instead of focusing on punishing young offenders, the juvenile justice system is focused on treatment and rehabilitation. The basic philosophy of this system is to seek to get young people who are getting into trouble the assistance they need to become productive members of society by the time they reach adulthood. The phenomenon of juvenile delinquency is a good illustration of the relative nature of deviance. For instance, the behaviors regulated in young people with status offenses are not dealt with by the legal system when adults engage in it. These acts only produce a formal reaction when persons of a certain social status commit them—specifically, minors.

Controlling Crime

Society seeks to control criminal behavior through the criminal justice system. There are a number of different, and at times competing, philosophies, that have been used in an attempt to stop crime and criminals. One of the best known of these is **deterrence**. The fundamental idea of deterrence (sometimes called the deterrence doctrine) is that fear of punishment will prevent people from engaging in illegal or anti-social behavior. In essence, a painful punishment should prevent crime. At the most fundamental level, deterrence is basically a “threat system” (Siegel, 2010). A person who may be contemplating a criminal act will be afraid to do so because of the unpleasant penalties that society will inflict on them. In order to be

effective, a punishment must meet three criteria. First, it must be *severe*. The unpleasantness of the punishment must outweigh the pleasures or benefits from crime. Second, the punishment must be *certain*. If a person commits a specific crime they will very likely receive that given punishment. The most serious punishment won't be effective if it is unlikely to be received. Finally, to be effective, a punishment must be *swift*. The adverse consequences must follow shortly after the act is committed, when the crime is still fresh in the mind of the offender, as well as the minds of other members of society. The absence of *any* of these three criteria usually renders the deterrence ineffective.

Another philosophy of punishment is rehabilitation. **Rehabilitation** seeks to restore offenders to a law-abiding way of life through treatment (Conklin, 2013). The assumption behind this philosophy is that many people break the law because of some underlying personal problem, such as addiction or mental illness. Once this problem is resolved, the cause of their criminal behavior will be removed and they will stop committing crimes. This is an increasingly popular philosophy within the criminal justice system, and drug- and mental-health courts are rapidly growing in popularity. Research evidence suggests that drug courts are not only effective in reducing criminal offending, but they are much more cost effective than more traditional approaches (Nolan, 2009). Recall the discussion of resocialization in the chapter on socialization (Chapter 4). In resocialization, an individual enters a total institution, which takes control of every aspect of their lives. The goal is retraining the person so that they leave the total institution reformed. Such is the basis for rehabilitation philosophies.



MaxRiesgo/iStock/Thinkstock

The criminal justice system plays a major role in attempts to control deviant behavior.

is that by taking these violent, habitual offenders out of the population, the general public is kept safe and the crime rate is reduced. Selective incapacitation also has elements of deterrence involved: Criminals are expected to reform their behavior because of the threat of a long-term incarceration.

As a result of concern over crime in the 1980s, the philosophy of selective incapacitation was developed. There is a large body of academic research suggesting that the majority of serious crimes are committed by a relatively small percentage of the offending population, who are sometimes called "chronic offenders" (Conklin, 2013). **Selective incapacitation** involves enhanced prison sentences for chronic offenders. An example of these policies is the so-called "three strikes and you're out" laws (Auerhahn, 1999). After an offender has committed a third serious felony offense (usually violent), they are given a mandatory sentence of 20 years or more. The idea

6.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Crime and Deviance

There are four leading theoretical perspectives on crime and deviance. The first is the *strain theory*. This argues that crime and deviance are an adaptive response to structural conditions such as poverty and discrimination. A lack of legitimate opportunities (often coupled with access to illegal opportunities) creates an environment ripe for anti-social behavior. The second is the *social learning theory*. According to this view, crime and deviance are learned behavior. This learning typically takes place in the context of primary groups such as friends and family. It includes the techniques for committing the anti-social act, as well as the attitudes, values, and beliefs that encourage such behavior. The third is the *social bond theory*. According to this view, individuals need to be bonded to conventional people and institutions to ensure conformity. This includes participation in social institutions such as the family, religion, education, and employment. Those who lack such bonds tend to be involved in law-breaking and other norm violations. Finally, *labeling theory* holds that the reactions that people and institutions have to criminal or deviant behavior can play a key role in future behavior. Individuals labeled “deviant,” “criminal,” or “delinquent” face restricted opportunities and a damaged identity because of the stigmatizing responses of police, the courts, and schools. In turn, the person who is the recipient of these labels may adopt a criminal or deviant self-identity and consequently engage in even more crime and deviance in the future as a result.

All of these theories share a common assumption. Specifically, deviance is the result of some social condition. It is not the result of some internal traits or characteristic of the individual (e.g., biological or psychological conditions). In other words, deviance is the product of “nurture,” not “nature.” However, each of these sociological theories differs from the other sociological theories in terms of what it considers to be the specific social condition or root cause of deviance (e.g., social strain, peers, a lack of bonds to society, social reactions of others to behavior).

Functional Approaches

Functionalist sociologists have noted that classifying certain people as deviants and certain behavior as deviance are functional for society. Durkheim observed that crime and deviance were present in all social groups, and he believed that they were a healthy and integral part of all societies. He stated that in a “society of saints,” the acts that we currently consider deviant would surely not be present. However, other acts that would provoke similar outrage surely would be. This is not to say that murder, genocide, and child molestation are “healthy,” but rather that a group reaction to norm violations and violators makes important contributions to group living. In other words, deviance serves “functions” for the group.

Functionalists note that the public reaction to deviance and deviants can lead to social cohesion, which actually strengthens the group. The deviants give the members of the group of society a target for their collective outrage and condemnation. Members come together in a collective fashion to condemn this “evil” or “wrong” doing. For instance, the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay Colony drew together to condemn the dangerous phenomenon of “witchcraft” (Erikson, 1966). After the horrific terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, diverse threads of American society came together and then-President George W. Bush experienced

unprecedented support from citizens. That evening, all of the members of the U.S. Congress made a public appearance on the steps of the Capitol Building and sang “God Bless America.” Several political figures made statements along the lines of “there are no more Democrats and Republicans—only Americans.”

When a deviant is condemned and punished, it serves to emphasize the norms and highlight the boundaries of acceptable behavior in a public fashion. Norms are not always entirely clear. As Harman (1985) observed, groups generally allow for some deviation from the norms. Certain transgressions may be tolerated and are considered acceptable “rule bending.” For instance, motorists are generally allowed to drive a few miles an hour above the posted speed limit. During Mardi Gras, some amount of public drunkenness and partial nudity are allowed, if not encouraged (Redmon, 2003). However, when the group strictly sanctions a person, it makes a strong statement regarding what type of specific conduct is clearly beyond the limits of group tolerance (Feldman, 1984). In other words, there are certain things we can get away with, and there are other things that are simply not tolerated.

Deviance and the reaction to norm violations make important statements about the identity of a group. The processes help to clarify the central values of the group (Feldman, 1984). For instance, the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay Colony placed a great deal of emphasis on the religious values of their group, so the most strictly enforced norms were about “witchcraft” (Erikson, 1966). In a study of the group Alcoholics Anonymous, Rudy (1980) discovered that a tremendous amount of emphasis was placed on those members who had “slipped” by drinking alcohol again. Much of the discussion at group meetings focused on members who had recently relapsed. These members were cited as illustrations to others of how not to behave, as well as examples showing the inherent difficulties faced by alcoholics who are trying to maintain sobriety.

Strain Theory

According to strain theory (Merton, 1938), deviant behavior is a response to the structural conditions of a society. From this perspective, the cause of anti-social behavior lies in the social structure, rather than in any particular traits of the individual. More specifically, there is a gap between the goals shared by most members of a society and the available means for an individual to reach these goals. In turn, this causes a strain on the individual that results in anomie (a concept originally introduced by Durkheim and discussed in Chapter 1)—a sense of normlessness or moral confusion. Some people react to this situation by engaging in deviant behavior as a response.

In American society, the dominant goal mandated for citizens is economic success (Shoemaker, 2005). Merton (1938, p. 675) noted that there is a “cult of success” in the United States. This is represented by the acquisition of wealth, as well as the display of symbols of material success. This phenomenon is highlighted by popular television shows such as *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* (and *New Jersey* and *Atlanta* and so on). Moreover, there are acceptable means that are presented as the proper way to go about achieving these goals. These means include getting a quality education and obtaining a decent job with promising prospects for advancement.

However, as Merton noted, there are some serious problems associated with this situation. First, for certain groups of people (e.g., the poor and minorities), there is limited access to the legitimate means of a quality education and solid job opportunities. Second, American society places far more emphasis on the success goal that it does on the specific means to obtain this goal. In other words, people have a clear understanding of the goal, but only a vague idea that they should try to reach it through “education” and “hard work.” In turn, this situation can create a sense of confusion, frustration, injustice, or humiliation (Siegel, 2010).

Merton proposed five specific modes of individual adaptation to the goal-means situation in American society (see Table 6.1). The first adaptation, conformity, involves individuals who accept the goals of society and meet those goals through conventional means. Merton argued that this would be the most common adaptation in conventional society. **Innovation** involves the individual accepting the success goal, but seeking to meet this goal through illegal means, such as stealing or selling drugs. Merton argued that this is the most common deviant adaptation. **Ritualism** is the mode of people who have scaled back the pursuit of the success goal yet almost compulsively abide by the means. An example would be the college graduate who works diligently at a minimum wage job, having given up hope of advancing or finding more fulfilling employment. While this adaptation is not criminal, Merton felt that the success imperative is so powerful in American society that those who do not pursue it would be considered deviant nonetheless. **Retreatism** involves individuals who reject both the goals and the means of society. Merton argued that these individuals were “in the society, but not of it.” Examples involve drug addicts and chronic alcoholics. Finally, **rebellion** consists of individuals who seek to replace the conventional goals and means of society with new ones. Examples include radicals and revolutionaries who wish to promote extreme social change.

Table 6.1: Merton’s structural adaptations

Adaptation	Goals of culture	Culturally approved means of achieving goals
Conformity	Yes	Yes
Innovation	Yes	No
Ritualism	No	Yes
Retreatism	No	No
Rebellion	No*	No*

*And hope to change the society, its goals, or its values

Source: Merton, R. K. (1938). *Social structure and anomie*. *American Sociological Review*, 3(5), 672–682. *American Sociological Association*

Social Learning Theory

According to social learning theory, deviant behavior, like any other type of behavior, is learned. This learning occurs through a process of social interaction with other individuals. As noted by Sutherland (1947), this not only includes the techniques for committing the deviant act, but also the “mind set” needed to engage in this type of conduct. For instance, a person must learn the specific techniques needed to shoplift clothing from a store (e.g., how to hide the merchandise or remove security tags). However, they must also learn the attitudes

needed to avoid the shame and guilt associated with taking something without paying for it. Leading criminologist Ronald Akers (2000) identifies several variables involved in this learning process.

Differential association refers to the process of being involved in relationships with people who are engaged in, or approve of, deviant behavior. As noted by Akers, most of the learning of anti-social behavior occurs in the context of primary groups such as friends and family. We hear people say that that someone “fell in with a bad crowd” or “comes from a bad family.” Both of those statements are consistent with the ideas of social learning theory. Differential associations are significant for a number of reasons. First, those who are closest to an individual typically are the ones who teach them the techniques for deviant acts. Second, a person normally acquires attitudes that encourage anti-social behavior from their primary relations. Finally, primary groups (such as friends and family) control many of the social rewards and social punishments experienced by a person for either conformity or deviance (Akers et al., 1979).

Differential reinforcement refers to the “anticipated and actual rewards and punishments that follow or are consequences of behavior” (Akers, 2000, p. 78). Acts that are reinforced, either by being rewarded or by allowing the individual to avoid punishment, are likely to be repeated (Pratt et al., 2010). On the other hand, those acts that are punished, or that result in a negative consequence, are likely to be avoided. The differential reinforcers may be either social (e.g., praise, ridicule, arrest) or non-social (e.g., effects of drugs and alcohol). According to social learning theory, deviant behavior will occur when such behavior is rewarded or when conforming behavior is punished.

Definitions are another important component of the learning of deviant behavior. Definitions refer to the attitudes and meanings that an individual attaches to behavior. There are general, specific, and neutralizing definitions. *General definitions*, such as moral and conventional values, encourage conventional behavior and inhibit deviant behavior. These would include statements such as “honesty is the best policy.” *Specific definitions* define a certain act or behavior in either a positive or negative light. So these apply to a specific act, such as theft, murder, or drug use. Finally, *neutralizing definitions* define anti-social behavior as acceptable in a given situation or circumstance (Sykes & Matza, 1957). For example, a car thief may rationalize motor vehicle theft by claiming he is simply “temporarily borrowing” the vehicle. Likewise, a college student may justify binge drinking by claiming such behavior is necessary for a student to have an active social life.

Social Bond Perspective

The social bond perspective attributes the cause of deviance to a lack of social integration for the individual. This perspective has its roots in the work of Emile Durkheim. Chapter 1 discussed Durkheim’s famous study of suicide rates in Western Europe. You may recall that Durkheim found that people who were not strongly integrated into society were more likely than other people to commit suicide. In essence, suicide was the result of a lack of bonds to society. Social bond theory was formally introduced by Travis Hirschi (1969, p. 82), who observed “we are moral beings to the extent we are social beings.” According to this perspective, the motivation for crime and deviance is present in everyone. Rather than asking, “Why did this person do it?” social bond theory asks, “Why did that person *not* do it?” (Shoemaker,

2005). This specific perspective concerns itself with the factors that keep an individual from engaging in crime and deviance. The social bonds are essentially the connections between individuals and society. People bond to society through their participation in conventional activities and institutions such as family, schools, and religion. There are four specific elements of the social bond. If any of them are weak or lacking, then criminal or deviant behavior is likely to occur.

The first element of the social bond is called **attachment**. Attachment refers to the emotional and psychological ties that an individual has to significant others such as family members. For juveniles, the typical focus of this attachment is parents (Leonard & Decker, 1994). People may also be attached to other family members, teachers, coaches, mentors, and close friends. This attachment consists of an emotional connection; the individual would not want to engage in criminal or deviant behavior for fear of disappointing these significant others.

The second element of the social bond is known as **commitment**. This refers to the accumulated amount of time, effort, energy, and other resources a person spends investing in conventional activities and institutions. Examples include getting an education, holding a job (which may turn into a career), and participation in religious activities (sometimes called “religious commitment”). These commitments insulate a person against the tendency to engage in crime and deviance because they represent stakes in conformity that could be jeopardized by engaging in anti-social behavior.

The third element of the social bond is **involvement**. This consists of the amount of time a person spends engaging in conventional activities such as doing schoolwork, participating in extracurricular activities such as clubs or athletics, and working at a job. This component of the social bond is consistent with the adages “an idle mind is an evil mind” and “idle hands are the Devil’s workshop.” The logic here is that if an individual is busy all day participating in conventional activities, they won’t have enough spare time on their hands to engage in crime and deviance. Involvement is measured each and every day, whereas commitment accumulates over the course of one’s lifetime.

The final element of the social bond is **belief**. This consists of the acceptance of a traditional value system. In other words, the individual has a general recognition of the rules of society as being morally valid and binding, as well as respect for authority and the legal system. If for any reason the individual experiences a weakening of conventional beliefs, there is an increased risk for that individual engaging in crime and deviance (Shoemaker, 2005).



James Steidl/SuperStock

According to labeling theory, social reactions to deviances, such as arrest, trial, and imprisonment, actually cause future deviance.

Sociology in Action: College Student Drinking

One of the first things to really engage my sociological imagination was college student drinking. Because of movies like *Animal House*, I expected heavy drinking to be a major part of the college social scene in the 1980s. However, as a socially active undergraduate, I quickly saw that heavy drinking resulted in terrible outcomes for some students. These included arrest, alcohol poisoning, accidents, involvement in physical altercations, and generally ill-advised sexual conduct. I didn't know the formal terms for the phenomena at that time, but it was clear to me that things like the peer group (both positive and negative) and academic attitudes played a major role in the drinking behavior of students.



Ingram Publishing/Thinkstock

Binge drinking by college students is a form of deviance that has been explained using sociological theories.

By the time I reached graduate school, a new classification of drinking, "binge drinking," was receiving a tremendous amount of attention from the media, university administrators, and health officials. Binge drinking, or heavy episodic drinking, involves the consumption of several drinks in a sitting (usually defined as five or more). In fact, in the 1990s, binge drinking was identified as the foremost public health risk for college students (Wechsler, Dowdall, Davenport, & Castillo, 1995). Research had demonstrated that that drinkers report experiencing a wide variety of negative consequences as a result of consuming several alcoholic beverages, such as blackouts, hangovers, missing class because of drinking, falling behind in their studies, doing

something that they later regretted, arguing with friends, involvement in physical fights, and getting into trouble with the police (Wechsler, Davenport, Dowdall, Moeykens, & Castillo, 1994). There had also been several widely publicized student deaths due to drinking, as well as a few alcohol-fueled riots in communities neighboring college campuses.

A fellow graduate student (Timothy W. Wolfe) had made some similar observations to mine regarding college student drinking. Tim and I also shared an interest in theories of crime and deviance. We were both curious about what implications the findings of existing research on binge drinking might have for these theories. Once we began researching this subject, we were surprised to discover that there hadn't been any studies of this nature conducted. So Tim and I embarked on a research agenda to test ideas from two theoretical perspectives (social learning and social bond) on the alcohol-related behavior of college students. Based on a few initial studies (Durkin, Wolfe, & Phillips, 1996; Durkin, Wolfe, & Clark, 1999), we were able to develop what we believed to be a satisfactory questionnaire to measure the variables we were interested in.

Figure 6.4 contains many of the original questions we used. We administered our questionnaire to a total sample of 1,459 undergraduate students enrolled at four-year institutions of higher education. It should be cautioned that this was not a random sample. But the purpose of this research was to look at how variables derived from social learning and social bond theories were related to drinking in a sample of college students, not to make inferences about nationwide patterns of drinking (for a detailed presentation of the results, see Durkin, Wolfe, & Clarke, 2005; Durkin, Blackstone, Dowd, Franz, & Eagle, 2009).

Variables from social learning theory were very strongly related to binge drinking in our student sample. In fact, differential peer associations were the best predictor of binge

(continued)

Sociology in Action: College Student Drinking (continued)

drinking overall. Heavy drinkers were more likely than other students to associate with heavy drinking peers. Two other concepts from social learning theory were also related to binge drinking. First, differential reinforcement played a role: Binge drinkers tended to perceive that alcohol consumption would have more rewarding than negative consequences. Drinkers tended to believe they would be likely to have a good time and to fit into groups better, rather than get sick or feel guilty about heavy drinking. Furthermore, definitions, or the attitudes or meanings that a student attaches to drinking, played an important role in this behavior. Students who were heavy drinkers not only had positive attitudes toward binge drinking specifically, but they also tended to hold attitudes that justified or rationalized that activity. For example, they defined binge drinking as a “harmless” activity or something that is needed to “have an active social life.”

While it was not as effective of an explanation of binge drinking as social learning theory, a few of the variables from social bond theory were related to binge drinking in our sample. These variables reflected the commitment and belief components of the social bond. First, students who had a very strong commitment to higher education were less likely to be binge drinkers. This is the type of student who indicates that trying hard in school and regular class attendance is important to him or her. Second, there was a negative relationship between grade point average and binge drinking. In other words, non-binge drinkers performed better in school. Third, students who had a stronger acceptance of conventional values were less apt to binge drink than other students. These students were more likely than other students to strongly agree with statements like “I am always completely honest in my dealings with other people,” and “When I do something wrong, I usually feel guilty about it.” Finally, non-binge drinkers were more likely than binge drinkers to have a high level of respect for authority (e.g., the police). However, it is important to note that many of the variables from social bond theory, such as religious commitment and attachment to parents, were not related to binge drinking.

Figure 6.4: Questionnaire from alcohol study

The purpose of this research was to look at how variables derived from social learning and social bond theories were related to binge drinking.

Source: Durkin, K. F.

First, we would like to find out about your attitudes and opinions regarding family, school, religion, and the police. Please indicate whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, slightly agree, slightly disagree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements. Please mark an (X) in the box which corresponds with your response for each of these items.

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My parents want to help me when I have a problem.						
My parents and I can talk about future plans.						
I can share my thoughts and feelings with my parents.						

(continued)

Sociology in Action: College Student Drinking *(continued)*

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I have a lot of respect for my parents.						
I would like to be the kind of person that my parents are.						
One of the worst things that could happen to me is letting my parents down.						
Regular church attendance is important to me.						
The things I do when I'm at religious services seem worthwhile and important to me.						
Religion and religious teachings have a great deal of influence on how I lead my life						
Prayer is important part of my daily life						
I try hard in school						
Getting good grades is important to me						
Regular class attendance is important to me						
I honestly believe that I will earn a college degree						
To get ahead, you have to do some things which aren't right						
When I do something wrong, I usually feel guilty about it.						
I am always completely honest in my dealings with other people						
It is okay to break the rules if you can get away with it.						
I have a lot of respect for the local police						
I have a lot of respect for the campus police						
A college student really needs to go out drinking to have an active social life.						

(continued)

Sociology in Action: College Student Drinking (*continued*)

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
College students who get drunk really should not be held responsible since they are under too much pressure to resist						
Older adults have no right to condemn students for drinking since they have more problems with alcohol than students						
People should not condemn students for drinking since it really doesn't hurt anyone						
There is really nothing wrong with having several drinks in a sitting.						

How many of your **best friends** consume several drinks in a sitting at least sometimes?

1 = None or almost none

4 = More than half

2 = Less than half

5 = All or almost all

3 = About half

How many of the **friends that you associate with most frequently** consume several drinks in a sitting at least sometimes?

1 = None or almost none

4 = More than half

2 = Less than half

5 = All or almost all

3 = About half

How would your **best friend** react if they found out you had consumed several drinks in a sitting?

1 = Very negatively

4 = Somewhat positively

2 = Somewhat negatively

5 = Very positively

3 = Neither negatively nor positively

How would your **most of your friends** react if they found out you had consumed several drinks in a sitting?

1 = Very negatively

4 = Somewhat positively

2 = Somewhat negatively

5 = Very positively

3 = Neither negatively nor positively

(*continued*)

Sociology in Action: College Student Drinking (*continued*)

As far as you know, how do most of your friends regard the consumption of several drinks in a sitting?

1 = Very negatively

4 = Somewhat positively

2 = Somewhat negatively

5 = Very positively

3 = Neither negatively nor positively

Below are a list of things that might happen to a student if he or she were to drink alcohol. Please indicate how likely you think each of these would be to happen to ***you personally*** if you were to drink alcohol.

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Likely	Highly Likely
Fit into groups better				
Feel guilty				
Experience relief of boredom				
Drop in school grades				
Feel buzzed or high				
Get sick				
Have a good time				
Develop a drinking problem				

Labeling Theory

Labeling theory argues that society and social groups actually generate deviance by creating rules whose violation constitutes deviance. In his influential book, *Outsiders*, Howard Becker (1963, p. 9) explained that “deviant behavior is behavior that people so label.” According to this perspective, deviance is not an inherent aspect of a specific act, but rather a result of the application of penalties and labels to a so-called deviant. Consider, for example, the act of one person shooting and killing another person. In the first scenario, two people get into an argument at a party. Person A feels insulted and goes back to his home and gets a gun. He returns to the party and shoots and kills person B. This is considered “murder” and person A is considered a “murderer.” In a second scenario, an unstable individual begins attacking young children in a park with a sword. An observer calls the police. A police officer arrives and has to discharge her firearm, thus protecting the lives of the children. In this scenario, the shooting is a “justifiable homicide” and the officer a “hero.” The same act—pulling a trigger—is labeled as deviant or conforming, depending upon the context.

The term **primary deviance** is used to refer to original acts of rule-breaking that are generally not considered “deviant” by others (see Lemert, 1951). Many people’s nonconformity never gets them into trouble, so they never end up getting classified as a “deviant.” For example, many young people (including some prominent politicians in their younger years) “experimented” with marijuana. Few are arrested and classified as “drug offenders.” A recent study by Durkin, Wolfe, and May (2007) found that about 25% of a sample of college students reported driving while intoxicated during the prior year. Few, if any, students who engage in this behavior are arrested, convicted, and labeled as “drunk drivers.”

Yet some people do get caught and get labeled a deviant. The person may be formally declared deviant through **status degradation ceremonies** in which the identity of the offender is transformed into something lower on the social scale (Garfinkel, 1956). This can involve arrest, trial, and incarceration. The labeling can be announced publically in a newspaper or Internet site that publishes mug shots. This label can become a stigma: an attribute that tends to discredit the individual (Goffman, 1963; discussed in Chapter 3).

According to labeling theory, there are a number of *negative consequences* of being labeling a deviant. First, there are *negative impacts on the self-concept*. The individual may now consider him- or herself a “bad person.” Second, the labeled deviants are confronted with *restricted opportunities*. Anyone with a criminal record may experience difficulties gaining access to opportunities in employment and education. Third, the labeled deviants may be *rejected by other members of their community* who do not wish to be associated with deviance. Fourth, they may end up joining up with similar outcasts in a *deviant subculture*.

The end result of labeling and these adverse consequences is **secondary deviance**, or deviant behavior that is the result of the labeling process. For example, those who can’t get a job, having been rejected by those labeled as “good people,” may turn to selling drugs or engaging in prostitution to make ends meet. Because of the consequences of being labeled, they adopt a deviant lifestyle, a phenomenon that is sometimes referred to as career deviance.

Labeling theory is also concerned with biases in the labeling process shown by the criminal justice system and other agents of social control. Critics argue that the poor and powerless are more likely than members of other groups to be labeled deviant (Siegel, 2010). They maintain that the police are more likely to stop and arrest the poor and members of minority groups. Additionally, the courts are more likely to convict members of these groups who, in turn, receive harsher punishments. The situation is further complicated by the fact that members of these groups often lack the economic and social resources to formally defend themselves against the labeling process. Recent work in this area has also examined the phenomenon of “shopping while Black” or “retail racism” in which store clerks and security personnel indiscriminately single out African Americans (regardless of social class) as potential shoplifters. In addition to the case of Trayon Christian mentioned in Chapter 1, there have been several high profile cases of this phenomenon. “Houston Comets basketball star Sheryl Swoopes, Congresswoman Maxine Waters, and even Oprah Winfrey” have experienced this discrimination (Gabbidon, 2003).

In situations like these, we can see the influence of Goffman’s work on stigma. Recall that, using the concepts of “dramaturgy” and “impression management,” Goffman argued that human social behavior should be seen as actors putting on a performance any time there is an audience. To the extent that we are able to control that audience and make them believe our acts, we can transform ourselves and successfully play any role. However, if an actor has a stigma, that characteristic ruins the performance before it begins. For example, Goffman begins his work on stigma by reproducing a letter to an advice column from a woman who was born without a nose. She indicates that this defect essentially invalidates the rest of her characteristics; her personality, intelligence, sense of humor, even other physical attributes are ignored because everyone she meets immediately notices her facial deformity and cannot bring themselves to evaluate her by standards of a typical interaction (Goffman, 1963).

Goffman argues that there are three forms of stigma. One can suffer from a *defect of the body*, such as the missing nose mentioned above or any disease with a physical manifestation (such as Down Syndrome or cerebral palsy). Even wearing eyeglasses or hearing aids can be an

indicator of a physical stigma. Next, one could suffer from a *deviation of personal traits*, or, more generally, a character stigma. These are personal traits such as mental illness, drug or alcohol addiction, or having a criminal record, which would make society question the trustworthiness of a person. Character stigmas posed a unique problem for Goffman; they can often be hidden, which means that one can be treated as a “normal” person simply by not disclosing the stigma. However, if the stigma is discovered, those who know the person may feel betrayed by the omission. For example, you can choose to never mention the time you spent in prison to your new friends at college, but when they find out you are a convicted felon, you will not only face the original stigma but you may now also be seen as a liar by those you deceived.

The third type of stigma is a *tribal stigma* in which a person is a member of a devalued social group. For example, street gangs and White supremacist organizations are both groups that tend to be negatively evaluated by our society. If you choose to be a member of these groups, most people will tend to think negatively of you. However, we also tend to downgrade homosexuals, women, and members of racial and ethnic minority groups simply because inclusion in that social category is seen as negative.

There is significant overlap between Goffman’s stigma and labeling theory. The primary difference is that stigma is based on some specific characteristic held by the stigmatized individual that society as a whole has decided discredits the individual. It is that characteristic (i.e., a missing limb, a psychological condition, a skin color) that is triggering the negative evaluation of the stigmatized individual. If the characteristic is no longer seen as negative, then the stigma disappears. For example, if homosexuality continues to be normalized in U.S. society, it is conceivable that in the next generation there will be no negative connotation attached to a same-sex relationship. In this case, the stigma would be removed.

Returning to our “shopping while Black” example, we see how these stigmatizing conditions can serve to damage the “performance” of African American shoppers. In each of the four cases mentioned, the shoppers were a member of a devalued social group (a racial/ethnic minority) and, because of this classification, they were seen to be more likely to be a thief (character stigma). In short, their performance in the role of “shopper” was ruined by other’s perceptions that someone with such characteristics couldn’t or shouldn’t be shopping at a particular store. Suddenly a college student (or WNBA player, or U.S. congressperson, or the most famous woman in America) has all other statuses overlooked due to the stigmatizing condition.

Routine Activities Theory

Rather than being some unique or novel event, crime is often simply a by-product of the ordinary events that happen in the daily life of citizens. Currently, many sociologists view crime to be a function of the routine activities that people engage in on a daily basis. The concept of **routine activities** describes where people go to work and shop, as well as what they do for leisure and recreation. According to Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson (1979), much crime is situational and occurs when three factors converge. The first factor is *motivated offenders*. These are individuals who are seeking a criminal opportunity. Victimization risks are considered a function of an individual’s exposure to offenders (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2000). The second factor is *attractive targets*. These are individual targets that are appealing

to offenders—whether it is a vulnerable individual or something of value worth stealing. The final factor is a lack of *capable guardians*. These are individuals “who if present, would discourage a crime from happening” (Felson, 2001, p. 338). Spano and Nagy (2005, p. 418) used the concept of **social guardianship** to refer to “the availability of others who may prevent personal crimes by their mere presence or by offering assistance to ward off an attack.”

Routine activities theory sees crime as an event rather than a special phenomenon. This event involves both a victim and an offender. Traditionally, sociologists had seen victims as innocent and passive individuals who were victimized by predatory criminals (Doerner, 2011). However, this is not always the case. Victims frequently play a role, either actively or passively, in the criminal event. The concept of **victim precipitation** suggests that the individual who was harmed in the crime played direct role in causing the events to occur. For instance, a man becomes verbally or physically aggressive to other patrons in a bar room. In turn, one of the people he has provoked responds by hitting him with a pool stick or beer bottle, thus seriously injuring him. Had the victim not provoked the attacker, this situation would not have occurred. Or consider a woman who goes to a neighborhood where drugs are frequently sold, looking to purchase narcotics, and is robbed. Had she not gone to purchase narcotics, she wouldn't have been victimized. This phenomenon may be as simple as leaving one's car unattended with the keys in the ignition to quickly run into a convenience store. Another person sees the situation and steals the car. Had the victim not left the car running, it would not have been stolen.

Conflict Approaches

According to conflict theory, society is composed of different groups, each with its own specific group interests. These diverse groups are frequently in conflict for the scarce resources they believe they require, such as wealth and prestige. These group conflicts are often reflected in issues related to the development and enforcement of laws. According to Vold and Bernard (1986), these struggles make their way into legislative politics. The group in power tends to make laws that reflect and protect their own interests, and these are generally contrary to the interests of other groups. For example, white-collar crime, which is an upper-class phenomenon, is often punished with a fine or a light sentence. On the other hand, street crime, normally a lower-class phenomenon, is punished much more harshly. Conflict theorists also argue that the law is frequently differentially applied on the basis of social and economic power, such as wealth, race, nationality, and social standing (Siegel, 2010).

Conflict theorists argue that there are often similar dynamics in relation to norms and deviance. Schur (1980) wrote about the “politics of deviance.” This involves conflicting groups engaging in **stigma contests** in which the groups seek to apply discrediting labels and definitions to each other. The more powerful group will win these contests and thus classify the behavior of the less powerful group as deviant. This can escalate into “moral panics” in which the powerful group claims that something is a threat to the very moral fabric of society (Becker, 1963).

One example of this occurs regularly in popular music (see Dotter, 2004). On several different occasions, adults (the powerful group) have sought to define the music favored by adolescents (the less powerful group) as problematic and a threat to the social order. For instance, heavy metal music faced a great deal of criticism in the 1980s. This musical genre was linked

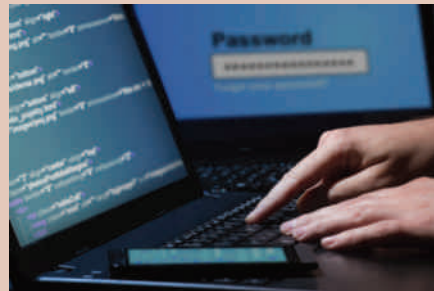
to a vast array of social ills, including promiscuity, suicide, substance abuse, and Satanism (Arnett, 1991). The group at the forefront of this moral crusade was known as the Parents' Music Resource Council (PMRC). Prominent leaders of this group included Tipper Gore (wife of former Vice-President Al Gore) and Susan Baker (wife of former President Ronald Reagan's Chief of Staff James Baker). The efforts of the PMRC resulted in Senate hearings on the subject, which lead to the parental advisory labels found on records and CDs today.

Sociology in Action: Deviance, Society, and the Internet

As a graduate student in the early 1990s, I stumbled into the research topic of crime and deviance on the Internet very much by accident. Because the impact of social change on human behavior was a topic covered in many of the graduate seminars I was enrolled in, I developed an interest in the relationship between technological innovation, crime, and deviance. I conducted initial research on the topic of phone fraud for a possible research topic for my dissertation. However, there wasn't much literature on the topic, and criminals and victims were so geographically scattered that the project didn't offer many inroads to investigation.

At that point in time, a computer user submitting a data file for statistical analysis had to wait up to two hours for the results to return from the mainframe. During our "down time" in the departmental computer lab, a few other students and I discovered USENET discussion groups. There were groups dedicated to nearly any topic of human interest. Several of us would spend this waiting time wandering through these computer forums, and it became clear rather quickly that there were groups dedicated to all kinds of deviant practices and identities. One USENET group frequented by avowed pedophiles caught my attention and served as the source for my dissertation data.

The relationship between the Internet and crime/deviance became an ongoing research interest of mine. Aside from collecting data on sex offenders who use the Internet, I've conducted research on computer fraud, as well as the topic of cyber bullying and cyber harassment. I have identified two important consequences of the Internet for people involved in criminal, deviant, or otherwise anti-social behavior. First, it has changed the way in which people involved in deviant behavior, or who possess a deviant identity, relate to each other. Second, the Internet has created an unprecedented opportunity structure for all kinds of prohibited behavior. This not only includes the opportunity to engage in certain acts, but also access to potential victims.



scyther5/iStock/Thinkstock

Computer technology has created a variety of new opportunities for deviance.

The Internet as a Social Consolidation Mechanism

An early theme that emerged from the results of my research was that the Internet serves as a highly effective social consolidation mechanism for deviant subcultures, bringing individuals together who share a common interest in some form of criminal or deviant behavior (Durkin & Bryant, 1995). The USENET forum I discovered in my dissertation research was a virtual community that provided support and validation for adult men who were avowed pedophiles, as well as providing members with access to the offline organization NAMBLA

(continued)

Sociology in Action: Deviance, Society, and the Internet (continued)

(North American Man/Boy Love Association) (Durkin, 1997). Moreover, this forum provided a platform for statements that served as rationalizations for adults having sexual relaxations with children (Durkin & Bryant, 1999). Such declarations attempt to minimize or deflect the stigma that is normally attached this type of deviant behavior.

The results of my early research, along with other sociological studies investigating the social organization of deviants on the Internet, help to identify trends and mechanisms in the formation and behavior of virtual communities focusing on deviant behavior. The Internet is highly conducive to the formation of subcultures involved in pathological deviance—the anti-social behavior that is so far beyond normative boundaries that it is considered “sick” by most members of the general public (Durkin, Forsyth, & Quinn, 2006, p. 569). While much of the early research on this phenomenon focuses on sexual deviance, it is clear that the social consolidation function of the Internet is not limited to those groups. In fact, it serves the same function for radical and reactionary groups who profess anti-social ideologies and seek to overthrow the existing social order.

The Internet and Opportunity

The Internet provides unprecedented opportunities for many users to engage in various types of deviance that would not have otherwise been available. This technology has opened up access to illicit markets in gambling, pornography, stolen financial data, illegal drugs, and pirated music and computer software. For instance, individuals who are sexually attracted to children have unprecedented access to child pornography on the Internet (Durkin, 1997).

The Internet can also be used to commit criminal or deviant acts. Some of these involve relationships that are illegal, such as when adults use the Internet to solicit children for sexual purposes. They engage minors in sexually oriented communications (e.g., “computer chat”) often with the intention of arranging offline sexual encounters. These offenders have been the subject of rather intense media scrutiny in the United States, and police stings aimed at catching these offenders have been featured on the popular television show *To Catch a Predator*.

In my research, I acquired a small sample of police interrogations of men who were arrested in Internet sex stings. These men were arrested because of their online activities. In the course of the police interviews, the men vehemently denied they were “predators” or “sex offenders.” Many of the arrested men attributed their conduct to some alleged mistake regarding the age of the child. Similarly, they denied that they were meeting the minor for sexual purposes, instead claiming that the purpose of their offline meeting was to engage in some conventional activity like watching a movie or having a meal (Durkin, 2009b).

The Internet also provides new opportunities for people who commit the crime of fraud. For example, Nigerian 419 fraud, which is now a \$3 billion-per-year industry, illustrates just how relatively simple it is for motivated offenders to reach a seemingly infinite pool of potential victims. Nigerian con artists, a group traditionally located on the fringes of the global economy, can now instantaneously target huge numbers of westerners with their fraudulent business proposals by email (Durkin & Brinkman, 2009). Moreover, the feeling of anonymity in Internet interaction can encourage anti-social behaviors and may be a contributing factor in deviant behaviors, such as cyber harassment, cyber stalking, and cyber bullying (Durkin & Patterson, 2011). These well-documented contemporary forms of deviance are exacerbated by the nature of computer-mediated communication.

6.5 Deviance and Change

Contemporary society is characterized by technological advancements. The Internet is probably the best example of this. It has revolutionized business, education, communication, and recreation. However, the Internet has also provided a new venue for deviance and crime. It provides people with new opportunity structures for the pursuit and commission of deviant behaviors. Some forms of deviance, such as theft, have changed. Online classified ads such as Craigslist are creating a new marketplace for stolen goods and illicit sexual services (Adler & Adler, 2006). It takes very little skill or technological sophistication to discover these deviant opportunities. For instance, in one recent study, a Google search for terms related to male escorts resulted in approximately 2 million results (Lee-Gonyea, Castle, & Gonyea, 2009). The Internet provides the opportunity for what feels like anonymous communication and interaction, which may be a contributing factor in deviant behaviors such as cyber harassment, cyber stalking, and cyber bullying (Durkin & Patterson, 2011). Furthermore, it is relatively easy for people to distance themselves from the social ramifications of their online activities. For example, on the Internet one can explore all types of sexual topics with little concern of public stigmatization (Durkin et al., 2006).

The Internet has become a major venue for criminal behavior that is sometimes termed cyber-crime. For example, rather than conducting cash transactions via a face-to-face interaction, many people make financial transactions online. This represents an opportunity for theft of massive amounts of financial data. A recent report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a Washington, DC, think tank, estimates that cybercrime costs the U.S. economy \$100 billion a year (Taylor, 2013). Most readers laugh at the blatantly fraudulent 419 or “advanced fee” email messages they receive from imaginary princes in Nigeria promising great riches in return for assistance. However, in 2005, the estimated global losses to 419 fraud were \$3.1 billion, with the biggest estimated losses in the United States (\$720 million; Durkin & Brinkman, 2009). Other crimes have their online variants, too. Rather than using a rock or a can of spray paint to vandalize property, an individual can now use a computer to destroy things by hacking and defacing websites.

On the other side of the coin, however, technology has proven to be a useful (and controversial) tool for the control of crime. For instance, surveillance cameras are now widely used for the identification and apprehension of criminal offenders. This technology has become the norm in the United Kingdom. In the United States, some municipalities have now installed “red light cameras” at intersections to identify motorists who violate the law. This phenomenon has been termed “policing-at-a-distance” by criminologists (Haggerty, Wilson, & Smith, 2011). Smart phones, complete with audio and video recording capabilities, have become the norm among members of American society. These devices allow citizens to rapidly contact the police in the case of a criminal event, and their recording capabilities have become useful in preserving evidence. Furthermore, law enforcement agencies are using computer and Internet technology in an effort to create more effective databases that will allow them to be more effective in their work. In fact, there is an increasing trend of placing laptop computers in police vehicles.

Summary & Resources

Chapter Summary

Deviant behavior is often mistakenly assumed to be a by-product of poor socialization or individuals with a lack of impulse control. Deviance is relative, meaning that which behaviors and people are considered deviant vary from place to place, time to time, and group to group. Societal approaches to preventing and changing deviant behavior vary and include deterrence, rehabilitation, and selective incapacitation.

There have also been a variety of sociological explanations offered for deviance. This chapter outlined four of them: strain theory, social learning theory, social bond theory, and labeling theory. While these theories differ on what they consider to be the cause of this behavior, they all consider the key variables to be social, rather than biological.

As outlined above, deviance is a very complex outcome of structure and agency, function and dysfunction, situational variation and moral certainty. However, with an increasingly scientific lens being placed on the study of crime, criminals, and victims, the study of deviance will likely be an area of sociology that will expand its influence in the coming years. This trend is significant because the virtual explosion of technological change in society is increasing the opportunities for deviance and crime.

Web Resources

Uniform Crime Reports

<http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/ucr>

The main page for the FBI's uniform crime reports database.

National Crime Victimization Survey

<http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=dcdetail&iid=245>

Main page of the National Crime Victimization Survey by the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Discussion Questions

1. Define deviance. What do sociologists mean when they say deviant behavior is relative? Please provide an example.
2. Discuss the various strategies that are used to measure crime. Which one do you think is the most effective? Why?
3. Briefly explain the major theoretical perspectives on deviance and crime. Which one do you think is the best explanation? Which one do you believe is the least effective? Provide a justification for your answers.
4. Of all of the variables included in the research on college student binge drinking in this chapter, differential peer associations were clearly the most strongly related to college student binge drinking. Why do you think this was the case?
5. How can technological advances change the nature of deviant behavior? With the increasing popularity of cell and smart phones, what new forms of deviance are emerging?

Key Terms

attachment The emotional and psychological ties that an individual has to significant others.

belief The acceptance of a traditional value system.

commitment The accumulated amount of time, effort, energy, and other resources a person spends investing in conventional activities and institutions.

crime An act of deviance that violates a law.

dark figure Criminal offenses that occur but do not come to the attention of police.

definitions The attitudes and meanings that an individual attaches to behavior.

deterrence The premise that fear of punishment will prevent people from engaging in illegal or anti-social behavior.

deviance Behavior that violates a norm and often produces a hostile reaction from others.

differential association The process of being involved in relationships with people who are engaged in, or approve of, deviant behavior.

differential reinforcement The rewards and punishments that follow or are consequences of a behavior.

felony A serious violation punished with a lengthy prison sentence or even the death penalty.

innovation An adaptation to strain in which the individual accepts the success goal but seeks to meet this goal through illegal means.

involvement The amount of time a person spends engaging in conventional activities.

juvenile delinquency Illegal or anti-social behavior on the part of a minor.

misdemeanor Minor offense punishable by a fine or brief jail sentence.

negative sanctions Punishments for violating norms.

positive sanctions Rewards for conforming with social norms.

primary deviance Original acts of rule-breaking that are often not considered “deviant” by others.

rebellion An adaptation to strain where a person seeks to replace the conventional goals and means of society with new ones.

rehabilitation A philosophy of punishment that seeks to restore offenders to a law-abiding way of life through treatment.

retreatism An adaptation to strain in which an individual rejects both the goals and means of society.

ritualism An adaptation to strain in which a person scales back the pursuit of the success goal but almost compulsively abides by the means.

routine activities Daily tasks, including working, shopping, leisure, and recreation.

secondary deviance Deviant behavior that is the result of the labeling process and related consequences.

selective incapacitation A policy of enhanced prison sentences for chronic offenders.

self-reports Technique in which the researcher asks subjects to report their own violations of criminal law.

social guardianship The availability of others who may prevent personal crimes by their mere presence or by offering assistance to prevent an attack.

status degradation ceremonies A ritual in which the identity of the offender is transformed into something lower on the social scale.

status offenses Acts that are prohibited solely because of the age of the individual.

stigma contests Social conflicts in which opposing groups seek to apply discrediting labels and definitions to each other.

victim precipitation Situation in which the individual who was harmed in the crime played a direct role in causing the events to occur.

victimless crimes Offenses that violate the moral order.

white-collar crime Offenses committed by citizens of high social status in the course of their occupational activities.

