

# INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF DEVIANT BEHAVIOR

## INTRODUCTION

Near the start of his presidency, Donald Trump spoke to a gathering of police officers on Long Island, New York, encouraging them to be less careful when putting individuals suspected of serious criminal activity into the backs of patrol cars. He said,

Like when you guys put somebody in the car and you're protecting their head, you know, the way you put your hand over, like, don't hit their head and they've just killed somebody, don't hit their head, I said, "You can take the hand away, OK?" (Reily, 2017)

While audience members applauded, police leaders across the country were quick to condemn the president's words, calling them insensitive and claiming that they encouraged illegal behavior. New York City Police Commissioner James O'Neill issued a statement saying that to "suggest that police officers apply any standard in the use of force other than what is reasonable and necessary is irresponsible, unprofessional and sends the wrong message to law enforcement as well as the public" (Reily, 2017). Even national police organizations joined in the fray with the International Association of Chiefs of Police, saying that officers are trained to treat everyone with "dignity and respect." Some people couldn't believe that the president had actually called for increased police use of force, and the group Blue Lives Matter tweeted that his remarks must have been made in jest (Reily, 2017).

Perhaps the most extreme response, however, came from Samuel Walker, professor emeritus of criminal justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Walker (2017) said that Trump's words were not just inappropriate, but that they constituted a criminal offense: "The president effectively incited a specific group of people to commit criminal assault." He went on, saying that

the law on this point is quite clear. Our First Amendment protects all manner of offensive speech, including hate speech related to race, religion, sexual orientation, and everything else. But First Amendment protection stops at the point of direct incitement to criminal conduct. . . . [I]f I tell someone or a group of people to beat you up, then I have committed a crime.

Walker concluded that when Trump told police officers to "Please, don't be too nice," he incited them to violent and illegal activity.

In this text, we will raise questions about many types of behavior. We will ask whether they could be considered "normal," or if they might be deviant, or even criminal. How would you assess President Trump's remarks?

## Learning Objectives

*After reading this chapter, you should be able to*

- 1.1 Define deviant behavior
- 1.2 Describe the dimensions of deviance
- 1.3 Explain how deviant behavior functions in society
- 1.4 Define globalization and summarize how it impacts the nature and extent of social deviance in the United States and around the world
- 1.5 State the theme of the book
- 1.6 Recognize the conceptual framework for the study of deviance that this text uses
- 1.7 Identify what to anticipate as you read future chapters in this text

## DEFINING DEVIANT BEHAVIOR

---

Traditionally speaking, two viewpoints—the *normative perspective*, and the *situational perspective*—have been offered to define **deviant behavior**. The normative perspective sees deviance as human behavior that violates existing and generally accepted social norms. So, for example, few people would have any trouble applying the label “deviant” to a man who runs down a crowded street naked. Not only is such behavior typically a violation of widely shared and generally agreed-upon behavioral standards, but to most people, it seems somehow inherently “wrong” and even disgusting. Hence, from the normative perspective, a naked man running down the street not only provides an example of deviant behavior, but it also makes it easy to see the man himself as a deviant.

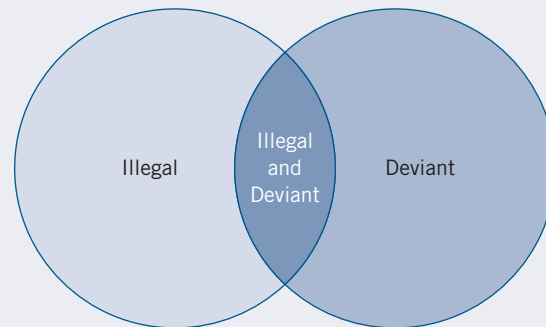
The situational perspective shifts the focus away from the individual and to the social situation surrounding the behavior in question. Let’s imagine that the man running down the street naked was not alone, but instead was among a large party of naked naturalists celebrating a Gaia festival in the midst of a nudist colony fully secured from public view. If such were the case, his behavior might have been seen as quite natural (pun intended). Not only would such an overt display of physical nudity not have violated the social norms of the colony, but it would have reinforced them. Hence, the situational perspective is *relativistic* in that it understands deviance primarily in terms of when and where it occurs.

Some behaviors are defined the same way by both normative and situational perspectives, and activities that are mutually acceptable to both are the most obvious forms of *conformist* or *nondeviant behaviors*. Conversely, when behaviors are negatively defined socially but, nonetheless, are consistent with the normative structure of society, they may be viewed as *extreme forms of conventional behavior*, for example, workaholics, overachievers in school, etc. Finally, certain behaviors do not adhere to the normative structure of society and are almost always situationally condemned. Such behaviors are clearly deviant, but they are also often contravened by statute and the criminal law, meaning that they are *crimes*. As Figure 1.1 shows, some forms of behavior may be against the law, but not be thought of as deviant by a majority of the population (i.e., exceeding the speed limit in certain locales), while some behaviors may be deviant but not criminal, and others may be both deviant and criminal. The relationship between crime and deviance is not static, of course, and forms of behavior considered deviance in the past might be legal today, whereas some of today’s deviance might be criminalized in the future.

Two sociological concepts—culture and social organization—are particularly useful in determining whether certain behaviors should be classified as deviant. **Culture** refers to “a body of widely shared customs and values which provide general orientations toward life and specific ways of achieving common goals” (Palmer & Humphrey, 1990, p. 2). Culture is fundamental to the social order, relatively stable over time, yet it may provide a dynamic approach to the continually evolving challenges of everyday life. Changes in customs and values may originate among certain segments of the society—for example, adolescents and young adults who are involved in continual changes in style of dress, patterns of speech, and forms of entertainment. Another example would be special interest groups that seek to foster the acceptance of particular rights or protections, usually of vulnerable populations or the environment. These cultural changes may become institutionalized and persist through time, or they may be short-lived and disappear from the social landscape. The value of body piercing and tattooing may well dissipate over time, as do styles of dress and verbal expression. Culture provides meaning and stability to everyday life, while allowing for innovation, creativity, and the reassessment of traditional customs and values. Culture, then, provides a backdrop for the establishment of acceptable behaviors. Behaviors that fall outside defined cultural parameters are considered, in varying degrees, deviant (see also Linton, 1955).

**Social organization** provides the means for carrying out the complex network of social interactions between individuals, social groups, and institutions. A central purpose of social organization is to ensure that conflict and discord in social interactions do not impede the effective

Figure 1.1 The Overlap Between Deviance and Crime



Which of the following are deviant? Which are criminal? Which are both? Which are neither? Are there any behaviors listed here that should be criminal but aren't?

- sexting
- “low-rider” pants
- opioid use
- cross-dressing
- tax evasion
- assisting in the suicide of a mortally ill person
- having multiple spouses
- homosexuality/transsexuality
- cohabitation
- suicide
- becoming a believing member of the Flat Earth Society
- date rape
- smoking recreational marijuana
- computer hacking
- atheism
- praying
- praying for the death of a rival
- an old person buying the type-matched blood of teenagers and having a nurse infuse him with it in a bid to extend his life
- an unmarried woman engaging in sexual intercourse with multiple partners
- an unmarried man engaging in sexual intercourse with multiple partners
- sexual abstinence until marriage

functioning of society. Everyday life is remarkably devoid of mass disruption. For the most part, the daily interactions of more than 7.5 billion persons worldwide are carried out in a reasonably predictable and orderly way (www.census.gov). Millions of cars travel at high speeds in close proximity to one another, planes take off and land within minutes of each other, transnational business and commerce are conducted around the clock, and individuals communicate across time and cultures worldwide largely without incident.

Social interaction is organized by a complex set of social norms and roles. **Social norms** are those generally agreed-upon guides for behavior that provide boundaries for interpersonal relations. **Social roles** are defined by a set of social norms for the behavior of individuals who occupy given statuses within society. For example, a college professor occupies a given status within the academy and in the larger society. Norms for the appropriate behavior of college professors serve as guides to carry out the role of a faculty member.

Social norms may be classified as *expectational* or *behavioral*. **Expectational norms** refer to behaviors that are ideal for individuals who are enacting a particular social role or who are in a given social situation. Expectational norms govern the behavior of persons in positions of high responsibility—e.g., surgeons, airline pilots, heads of state, and persons in

extreme life-threatening situations. Acceptable error in the operating room, at the controls of an airliner, or in the Oval Office is extremely limited. Surgeons, for example, are expected to operate on the afflicted part of the patient's body—to always amputate the correct limb and to remove all surgical instruments from the patient's body following an operation. Yet, as we know, medical malpractice, pilot error, and political misjudgment do occur, often with dire consequences.

**Behavioral norms** refer to what persons typically do when occupying a particular social role or in a given social situation. Students are expected to attend class, yet most students miss class on occasion. A minority of students adhere to the expectational norm for class attendance, while most students follow more flexible “behavioral” norms. Behavioral norms are significantly influenced by social demographic and situational characteristics. Younger persons are given more flexibility in the ways they dress, speak, and interact in public than are older persons in positions of more responsibility. Behavioral norms establish a range of acceptable behaviors and, therefore, are far less rigid or exacting than are expectational norms.

Strict adherence to expectational norms—always telling the truth and answering questions in a completely honest way—is required when testifying in court or filing an income tax return. However, honest candor is not always expected when your mother asks, “How do you like my new clothes?” In short, expectational and behavioral norms guide social interactions differently for persons who occupy particular social roles and for those who are in well-defined social situations (Palmer & Humphrey, 1990, pp. 2–5).

### Expectational Norms

Surgeons are understandably held to an extremely high standard of care. Yet, gross surgical malpractice cases are on the rise across the United States. Undamaged limbs are sometimes accidentally amputated, healthy organs removed, and holes may be drilled into the wrong side of a patient's head. Recently, the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations was empowered to revoke the accreditation of hospitals and other surgical sites if they do not comply with newly established

safety regulations. The entire surgical team—surgeons, anesthesiologists, nurses, and technicians—must now take a “time-out” before making an incision in a patient. They must all agree that they have the correct patient on the operating table and that they are actually going to perform the correct surgical procedure. It is mandatory that surgeons “literally sign the incision site, while the patient is awake and cooperating if possible, with a marker that won't wash off in the operating room.”

*Adapted from:* The Joint Commission. (2019). *National patient safety goals effective January 2019*. Retrieved from [https://www.jointcommission.org/assets/1/6/NPSG\\_Chapter\\_HAP\\_Jan2019.pdf](https://www.jointcommission.org/assets/1/6/NPSG_Chapter_HAP_Jan2019.pdf).

### The Situational Perspective and Societal Reaction

Norms governing many behaviors may not be clearly defined, universally accepted, or consistently followed. The situational approach to defining deviant behaviors is particularly useful when there is a lack of consensus about appropriate behavior. While some behaviors are generally considered inherently deviant—murder, rape, or burglary—the definition of other behaviors depends, in large part, on the social characteristics of the actor, the victim, the social context of the behavior, and the social audience that observes or becomes aware of what occurred. Racial or ethnic slurs, for example, may be viewed as simply the remarks of an ignorant person or cause for removal from public office. Graffiti or tagging has alternately been considered an eyesore, malicious damage to public property, or an art form worthy of civic recognition.

The situational approach to understanding deviant behavior contends that behaviors are essentially neutral and take on meaning only when defined by some social entity (Becker, 1963).

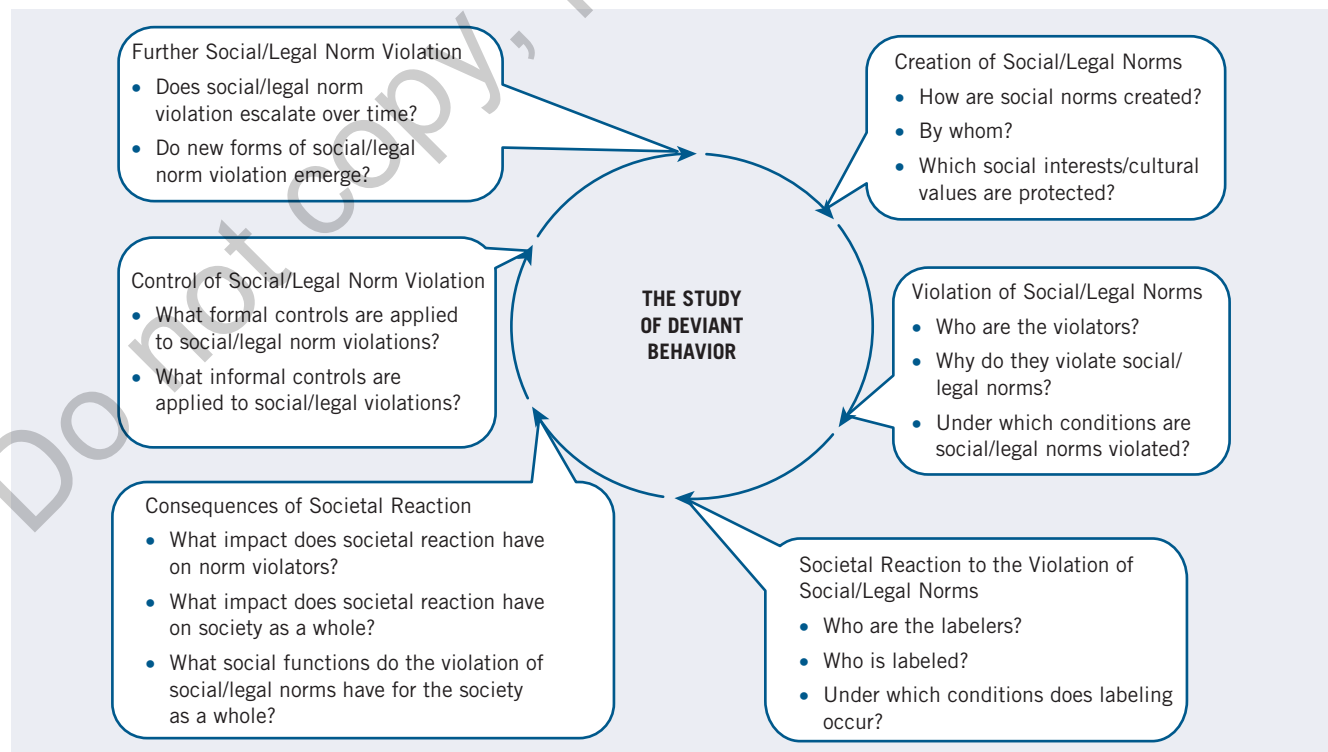
The situational approach involves a three-step process of (1) defining behaviors, (2) labeling actors, and (3) responding to the label attached to actors. Social behavior may be defined as good or bad, moral or immoral, admired or condemned. Individuals are then labeled as deviant or not depending on their activities, their social characteristics, and the circumstances surrounding their behavior. Intentionally ending the life of another human being may, for example, be criminal homicide, an act of self-defense, a compassionate act intended to end suffering, or legally justifiable as in the case of the execution of a condemned prisoner or the shooting of a dangerous person by a police officer in the line of duty.

The societal response to any behavior dictates the extent of its deviance. If both the behavior and the actor are labeled as deviant, then the societal reaction or degree of public condemnation of the behavior and the offender indicates the severity of the deviant act. Formal or informal controls may be used to resolve the situation. An enraged wife who runs over her adulterous husband with her Mercedes-Benz may be seen as being justified in her actions (by some other women) or sentenced to 20 years imprisonment (by the criminal justice system) for willful homicide.

### Issues in the Study of Deviant Behavior

The study of deviant behavior can be approached through a number of important questions. In addition to perceptions of the morality or ethics involved in a deviant act, or assessment of the personal repugnance of the individual offender lie several related conceptual issues: (1) how certain behaviors become defined as deviant and how social and legal norms are created (see Weitzer, 2002, pp. 2–4); (2) who violates social norms and why they do so; (3) possible societal reactions to norm violation; (4) consequences of norm violation for the offender and for the larger society; (5) what types of social control are used for which kinds of social and legal norm violation, and for different types of offenders; and (6) the impact of the use of formal or informal controls on subsequent social and legal norm violation. Figure 1.2 depicts the complex processes involved in the study of deviant behavior.

**Figure 1.2** Issues in the Study of Deviant Behavior





Social and legal norms provide the framework for interpersonal relations within social groups. They are essential for group survival over time, ordering interaction and ensuring that important tasks are accomplished. William Graham Sumner (1906) classifies social norms by the severity of sanction for their violation. He identifies three forms of social norms: *folkways*, *mores*, and *laws*.

*Folkways* refer to everyday practices commonly observed within a given culture (e.g., observing holidays by sending cards and gifts at certain times of the year, courteous behavior in public, or responding in customary ways to the greetings of others). Certainly, sending Christmas cards in July, pushing others aside to get to the head of the line at the movie theater, or telling another person about all your problems when asked, "How are you?" would be a violation of widely accepted folkways. The violation of a folkway may result in the avoidance of the offender, or others may simply consider him or her as strange.

*Mores* refer to norms that govern more important sociocultural behaviors. Matters of morality and ethics, appropriate dress code, and use of offensive language are guided by the mores of a society. When mores are violated, the offender is subject to more stringent social reprisals than are exacted against those who violate folkways. Ostracism, job dismissal, or irreparable damage to one's reputation may follow the violation of mores.

Finally, *laws* are considered the most serious form of social norms. Laws provide a codification of the specific elements of crimes and civil torts and possible sanctions for their violation. Unlike the violation of folkways and mores that invoke informal sanctions, violation of laws may result in a formal response by agents of government.

Typically, the central interests of a group are defined by the recognized leaders of the group or the members who have garnered the most power, influence, or resources. Social constructionists are primarily interested in the processes involved in the formulation of social and legal norms: the imposition of a deviant label on certain violators.

The violation of important social and legal norms is inevitable. A wide array of etiological factors that underlie involvement in deviant behavior have been advanced by theorists who take a positivistic approach to the study of deviant behavior. Positivistic theorists and researchers take an objective view of deviance. That is, certain behaviors are deviant in themselves, and certain social, psychological, or biological factors explain why certain individuals engage in those behaviors. Possible precipitants of rates and individual involvement in deviant behaviors are considered throughout this book. The functional utility of deviant behavior for the survival of a society is also discussed later in this chapter.

The societal reaction to violations and to offenders varies by the severity of the offense, the social characteristics of the victim and offender, and their social relationship (Black, 1976). Societal reaction theories, including labeling theories, focus on the consequences of labeling certain norm violators as deviant and the consequent societal reaction to people who are so labeled (see Becker, 1963; Schur, 1971).

Social control theorists are interested in the ways in which social groups and society as a whole impede the commission of deviant and criminal acts (see Hirschi, 1969). Formal and informal control mechanisms are used to control criminal and other deviant behaviors. Formal controls refer to official sanctioning of certain norm violators, typically by agents of the criminal justice system. Offenders may be arrested, adjudicated by the courts, fined, placed under supervision in the community, or incarcerated. The involuntary hospitalization of persons considered to be psychiatrically ill is another means of formal control. Informal social controls typically involve unofficial means of sanctioning deviants within a group. Gossip, ridicule, exclusion from group activities, and ostracism are common forms of informal control.

Attempts to control deviant members of a social group may well exacerbate their offensive behavior. Rather than changing their behavior, the deviants may, for example, escalate their offending, engaging in more severe forms of violence or theft or becoming engaged in newer forms of deviance. This results in the necessity for creating more stringent norms or increasing the penalties for existing social and legal norms. The processes of deviant behavior are thereby set in motion. Redefined norms lead to the inevitability of their violation and renewed societal sanctioning of offenders.

As tolerance of deviant behavior decreases, societies may evolve into an ever-tightening spiral of more stringent social and legal norms, the propensity to define increasingly more

of their members as deviant, and the development of more punitive control strategies. If this downward-spiraling process is not reversed, then a repressive system of social control emerges that may well lead to the demise of the society.

## **DIMENSIONS OF DEVIANCE**

---

Deviant behaviors may take on various social dimensions that serve to distinguish them from one another. Most forms of deviance involve behaviors that are carried out in patterned and predictable ways. For example, criminal homicide, armed robbery, and date rape involve offenders and victims and social contexts that transcend individual incidents. That is, typical patterns of interaction between offenders and victims and common social circumstances characterize many forms of deviant behavior. Other forms of deviant behavior are more idiosyncratic or unique to given individuals and, therefore, do not form repetitive patterns of interaction or are not characterized by common social contexts.

Other dimensions of deviant behaviors include whether they are positive or negative, innovative or routine, individual or group, and episodic or chronic. Many of these dimensions of deviance overlap one another, resulting in the complex, multidimensional nature of deviant behavior. However, to understand how each dimension characterizes the expression of deviance, we will consider them along separate continua (Palmer & Humphrey, 1990, pp. 5–10).

### **Patterned Versus Idiosyncratic**

Deviant behaviors, for the most part, form patterns of social interactions. That is, deviant behaviors are carried out in similar ways by individuals who have never met one another across widely scattered geographical areas. Date rape, for example, involves offenders, victims, and social circumstances in Mississippi that closely resemble those in New York City. The precipitants of many forms of deviant behaviors transcend sociocultural space and individual actors. The sociocultural and subcultural influences on male–female interactions, the distortion of behavioral and verbal cues, and social circumstances marked by social isolation, excessive drinking, and other drug use combine to increase the likelihood of aggressive behaviors. The need of young men to dominate and control their female acquaintances or dates leads to forced sexual behaviors.

Over time, patterns of deviant behavior become institutionalized and are imbedded in the sociocultural fabric. Sociocultural influences shape the motivations for deviant behaviors, the ways they are carried out, and the social contexts in which they occur.

Far less common are the idiosyncratic forms of deviant behavior. Idiosyncratic deviance is unique to particular individuals, typically less socially visible, and may simply be regarded as “odd.” Paying a contested property tax bill in pennies delivered to the tax office in 55-gallon drums or using a dead husband’s handicapped parking permit are examples of idiosyncratic deviance. While undeniably deviant, these behaviors are not likely to be repeated or to form institutionalized patterns of behavior.

### **Positive Versus Negative**

Deviant behaviors are commonly thought to involve acts that are legally, morally, or ethically prohibited, or at the very least annoying to others. Deviant behavior is thought to have negative consequences for particular individuals, and by extension to society at large. A person, for example, may be the victim of a violent act, of property theft or destruction, of slander or false rumor, of loud noises and graffiti.

However, deviant behavior need not be thought of in exclusively negative terms. Acts that deviate from normative modes of thinking and acting are necessary for creative problem solving and to bring about social and political change. Scientific advances and creativity in the arts and literature are the consequence of persons deviating in positive ways from conventional practices. Positive deviants are willing to think differently about important problems, offer alternative solutions to them, and inspire others to think differently about the world around them. Mother

Theresa provides an apt example of a positive deviant whose extraordinary works affected the lives of millions of persons unknown to her and scattered around the world.

Civil rights activists in the South during the 1960s provided the opportunity to vote for a significant number of African Americans across the country, prompted the desegregation of schools and universities, and drew attention to the widespread denial of the Constitutional rights of criminal defendants adjudicated in state courts.

## Innovative Versus Routine

The innovative process is inherently deviant—a departure from an existing mode of thought, or view of the physical or social world. *Innovation* refers to the combining of two or more theoretical concepts or material objects in a new way. By reordering ideas or physical phenomena, discoveries are made, and problems are solved. Innovation may come about by years of careful experimentation or in a flash of insight. Artistic and scientific breakthroughs occur in both ways. More typically, creative insights follow the arduous task of painstaking research and thought, but not always.

Innovative forms of deviance may be either positive or negative in their consequences. Scientific discoveries and breakthroughs in the ways we understand the physical world, uniquely perceptive literary and artistic contributions, and philosophical insights are examples of positive forms of innovative deviance. Innovative forms of deviance may also have negative consequences. Cybercrime and terrorism may involve innovative ways of accessing secured computer networks or disrupting the flow of information around the globe.

Routine forms of deviance are far more common than innovative deviance. Routine deviant behaviors typically do not require high levels of cognitive ability or involve concerted effort. Acts of violence, drug and alcohol addiction, and most property offenses can be carried out with little effort or extensive planning.

## Individual Versus Group Deviance

Deviant behaviors may be committed by persons alone, in small groups, or in large crowds. Most forms of deviant behaviors are engaged in by lone offenders or in the company of a few, trusted companions. Acts of violence—murder, rape, armed robbery, and so on—are typically committed by a lone offender. Cybercrime and terrorism, sex offenses, mental illness, suicide, and substance abuse are other examples of individual forms of deviance.

Group deviance may involve the unplanned, spontaneous acts of persons largely unknown to one another who are drawn together for a common purpose. The unruly and often violent outbursts of disappointed soccer fans provide an example of this form of group deviance. Similar kinds of group outrage and acts of destruction may be sparked by minority residents of an inner city following a police shooting of one of their members.

A second form of group deviance depends on an organizational structure and the complicity of a network of persons. Organized criminal activity, corporate malfeasance, and terrorism, both international and domestic, require intricate networks of participants and complex means of communication to be successful. Invisibility and secrecy are hallmarks of organized group deviance. To be able to operate in public view, without public attention, is essential to the persistence of group deviant activities.

Less organized and sophisticated are gang-related forms of group deviance—usually acts of violence directed toward rival gangs. Predatory and retaliatory activities of street gangs are highly visible and typically require little long-range planning. Gang violence is often a spontaneous response to a perceived threat from archrivals.

## Episodic Versus Chronic Deviance

Deviant behavior may be confined to certain situations and thereby take on an episodic expression, or it may be persistent and transcend the immediate social circumstance. Extreme situations may give rise to forms of behavior that individuals would not engage in otherwise. Cannibalism is abhorrent to most people; however, when facing certain starvation, an individual may well eat



parts of a deceased occupant of their lifeboat lost at sea. Similarly, binge-drinking partygoers may engage in behaviors that are inconsistent with their sense of morality or ethical principles.

Persistent deviance, however, transcends any situational boundaries. The behavior of a person afflicted with alcoholism or addicted to another drug or gambling is not situation bound. Rather, the chronic deviant persistently engages in aberrant behavior across a wide range of social situations.

## FUNCTIONS OF DEVIANT BEHAVIOR

It is commonly thought that crime and deviant behavior are harmful elements in any society and must be prevented or, at the very least, strictly controlled. Yet, as we shall see later in the text, deviance is viewed as vital to the functioning of any social group.

Emile Durkheim (1938), one of the founders of modern sociology, argued that crime and deviance are not pathological elements of society, but are vitally important to its survival. In short, deviant behaviors serve an essential function for societal well-being. Durkheim (p. 67) notes that “crime is normal because a society exempt from it is utterly impossible.” To Durkheim, the existence of a particular social entity—an entire society or a constituent community—depends on the formation of strong collective sentiments about the kinds of behaviors that are appropriate for its members. These collective sentiments define behaviors that are good or bad, moral or immoral, legal or illegal. In a sense, the collective sentiments about behavior establish distinct boundaries that separate the social collectivity from others and acceptable and unacceptable behaviors among its members. Everyday life is ordered; the work of the community gets done.

The Amish community, for example, has well-defined boundaries between itself and the larger society. The rejection of the conveniences and technological advances of conventional society sets the Amish community apart from its neighbors. Within the Amish community, consensually held norms, values, and beliefs clearly demarcate acceptable from unacceptable behavior. Daily interaction among the members of the Amish community is carried out in an orderly and predictable way. Durkheim (1938, p. 70) argues that

crime is, then, necessary; it is bound up in the fundamental conditions of all social life, and by that very fact, it is useful, because these conditions of which it is a part are themselves indispensable to the normal evolution of morality and the law.

Following the lead of Emile Durkheim, sociologist Kai Erickson (2005) explains how certain behaviors are defined as deviant, the function that deviant behaviors serve in a given community, and the consequences of attempts to control deviant behavior. Erickson (2005, p. 6) argues that “deviance is not a property *inherent* in any particular kind of behavior; it is a property *conferred* upon that behavior by the people who come into direct or indirect contact with it.” As such, “deviance refers to conduct which the people of a group consider so dangerous or embarrassing or irritating that they bring special sanctions to bear against the persons who exhibit it” (Erickson, 2005, p. 6). Deviant behaviors mark the boundaries of a community. Each community occupies a particular “cultural space” and has a distinct “cultural identity.” Boundaries emerge then from the “networks of social interactions” that link the daily lives of the members of a community (Erickson, 2005, pp. 9–10). The boundaries of a community tend to shift over time, and behaviors that were previously considered deviant become commonplace. Yet, the effective functioning of a community depends on the establishment of boundaries that separate conformist from deviant behavior. Deviant behaviors in

### ► Photo 1.1

An Amish family returning from church. Why would the Amish choose a lifestyle so different from the majority of Americans?



© iStockphoto.com/Bastiaan Stalbers

a sense define the community's identity. Erickson (2005, p. 19) writes: "Every human community has its own set of boundaries, its own unique identity, and so we may presume that every community also has its own characteristic styles of deviant behavior."

If deviant behavior is vital to the functioning of communities, is it then not likely, Erickson (2005, p. 13) asks, that "they are organized in such a way as to promote this resource"? The agents of social control—police, courts, correctional and psychiatric institutions—may actually perpetuate the very behaviors that they are intended to control. The process of labeling an individual as deviant, long-term segregation from the community, and marginally humane treatment at the hands of their custodians may significantly reduce the chances of a successful conventional life.

## **Other Functions of Deviant Behavior**

### **Identity**

There are several other latent or unintended functions of deviant behavior. First, involvement in various forms of deviance provides a sense of identity, albeit a negative identity, to persons who are unable to gain status or recognition in legitimate ways. Often teenagers who are not successful in school, who are excluded from athletic competition, or who cannot excel in other areas will be attracted to delinquent gangs. The gang provides a sense of belonging, recognition, and identity. Thus, if conventional means for gaining an identity are not available, then deviant means may be sought.

### **Warning of the Need for Social Change**

Mass deviance—urban riots, commandeering public buildings, and other acts of civil disobedience—signal the need for social change. Public outrage sparked by unfair social policies, discrimination, or persistent inequality in access to social resources—health, education, and employment—may prompt governmental intervention.

Rapid increases in the use of illicit drugs, the emergence of newer "designer" drugs, or waves of teenage suicidal behavior may well signal the need for societal attention to discontent among the young. Deviant behavior may also provide a means for bringing about social change. Innovative forms of deviance—for example, the use of computer chat rooms as group support for troubled persons—can provide an alternative to more visible and costly psychological care.

### **Scapegoating and Tension Release**

The deviants in society provide an ongoing group of persons—some criminal, some eccentric, others simply annoying—who can be blamed for many of the ills experienced by persons who have escaped the deviant label. Deviants can be segregated from the mass of society, treated in aggressive and demeaning ways, and stigmatized, often for life, for their deviant behaviors. Once the label of felon, psychotic, or sex offender has been applied, it most often becomes the "master status" of that person (Becker, 1963, pp. 33–34).

Individuals who are not publicly known as deviant can direct their feelings of frustration, anger, resentment, or simply low self-worth at the deviant. Deviant members of society, then, provide a target for others to vent their pent-up rage and general sense of discontent.

### **Employment**

Societies around the world invest a significant amount of their financial resources and social capital in attempting to control and treat their deviant members. The criminal justice system alone employs hundreds of thousands of persons in federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, courts, and correctional institutions and community-based programs. In addition, psychiatric institutions, therapeutic communities, and public and private agencies employ a vast number of medical personnel, psychologists, social workers, counselors, and occupational and recreational therapists who attempt to change the lives of deviant members of society. An unimaginable economic burden would be created if suddenly criminal and deviant behaviors were eliminated from society. In short, crime and deviance fuel the economy by providing a livelihood to a vast array of social control agents.

## GLOBALIZATION AND DEVIANT BEHAVIOR

This book considers the **processes of globalization**—which include immediate worldwide communication, transnational commerce and trade, and borderless opportunities for political and cultural exchange—as they impact the nature and extent of social deviance in U.S. society and throughout the world. The reciprocal relationship between the processes of globalization and the sociocultural milieu is fundamental to our understanding of deviance in the 21st century.

Thompson (2016) views globalization as

a complex process because it involves rapid social change that is occurring simultaneously across a number of dimensions—in the world economy, in politics, in communications, in the physical environment, and in culture—and each of these transformations interact with the others. (p. 1)

While acknowledging that globalization is exceedingly complex, Tomlinson argues that in simplest terms, globalization is “a process of accelerating ‘connectivity’” (Tomlinson, 1999). To Tomlinson (1999), then, “globalization refers to the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependencies that characterize modern social life” (pp. 1–2). In a sense, the social milieu in which we live out our daily lives is “being increasingly ‘penetrated’ by the connectivity of globalization” (Tomlinson, 1999, p.11).

To Giddens (2002, p. 19),

We are the first generation to live in global society, whose contours we can as yet only dimly see. It is shaking up our existing way of life, no matter where we happen to be. This is . . . emerging in an anarchic, haphazard, fashion. . . . [It] is not settled or secure, but fraught with anxieties, as well as scarred by deep divisions. Many of us feel in the grip of forces over which we have no control.

Giddens (2002) argues that two forces—“risk consciousness” and “detraditionalisation” compromise the ability of the state, family, and religion to provide stable norms and values to guide our everyday lives, and to create viable self-identities.

Risk consciousness refers to “manufactured risks” brought about by scientific advances that make possible genetically altered foods, and the proliferation of the use of nuclear material to provide electrical power, or to threaten the annihilation of our enemies, and the marketing of pharmaceuticals to combat stress and depression. Risk consciousness may lead to a self-identity marred by uncertainty. The government may be seen as unable to control the risks that engulf our lives. A sense of futility and apathy may ensue. Rage against the conditions of manufactured risks may lead to organized protests and the development of grassroots organizations to combat threats to our existence.

A second consequence of globalization is detraditionalization or the dismantling of traditional norms and values that guide everyday life. Traditions provide stability and predictability to social interaction. Agreed-upon standards of “right and wrong,” “good and bad” provide a structure for a given social collectivity. Self-identities emerge from sociocultural traditions and remain relatively stable over time. However, globalization may result in a condition of detraditionalization: “Where tradition lapses, and life-style choice prevails, self-identity has to be created and recreated on a more active basis than before” (Giddens, 2002, p. 65). The process of redefining one’s self-identity, or reflexivity, characterizes the lives of persons around the world.



► **Photo 1.2**

Israelis eating at a kosher McDonald's in Tel Aviv. What might be the dangers involved in the globalization of Western eating habits?

David Silverman/Getty Images News/Getty Images Europe

## Facebook

This book is about deviance, and one special focus is on deviance in the digital world. With about 2.23 billion active users, Facebook is the most widely used social media website in the world. It contains a wide variety of online communities and groups, many with different or competing norms and values. Normative behavior on Facebook encompasses a wide range of online behaviors.

Nevertheless, it is still possible to be deviant as some postings violate wider social norms. To complete this assignment, visit Facebook and identify examples of deviant postings. Also, look for a page that earns its following by posting deviant material, such as fighting or other explicit content. What is it about this content that attracts people? Why do others consider it offensive?

## THE THEME OF THIS BOOK

The theme of this book focuses on the emerging nature of deviant behavior in the digital age. Our understanding of the spectrum of deviant behaviors must take into account the influence of the Internet, particularly the pervasive use of social media, on the everyday lives of a growing number of persons around the world. The processes of globalization, characterized by an intricate web of interrelationships and interdependences, impact the makeup of socioculturally defined space by altering cultural values and meanings attached to everyday behaviors. For example, the value and meaning of time, interpersonal relationships, and material possessions are largely affected by global transmission of Western culture and economic structures. A sense of time urgency, more egalitarian relations between men and women, and the need for material goods to provide pleasure, entertainment, and a sense of self-worth are by-products of globalization. As the needs and wants of persons in less developed areas of the world begin to parallel those common among persons in the West, a sense of relative deprivation may follow. Dissatisfaction with one's life circumstances and feelings of frustration about the opportunities to change them may drive some individuals to engage in self- or other-destructive forms of deviant behavior.

Affected is the relative importance of cultural traditions with the symbols and rituals that provide meaning for life beyond mundane existence. The struggle between materialism and immediate gratification on the one hand, and adherence to traditions of altruism and the centrality of common purpose on the other hand, is being waged in remote places across the globe. The processes of globalization also influence the normative structure of everyday life. Gender inequality, structural barriers to education and economic opportunities, and the relative ability of the young and the old to influence their life circumstances are emerging issues even in less-developed countries.

The central theories of deviant behavior, for example, societal reaction, differential association, anomie, and social control, were formulated with a view that social interaction is largely carried out in physical space—face-to-face interpersonal encounters. However, the physical dimension of social interaction is being altered by a virtual reality made possible by the Internet; and largely played out in a social media environment. Multiple sources of information, opinion, and advocacy use the Internet to convey messages to the world at large. Government agencies, the media, in its various forms, network and cable television, newspapers, other print outlets, organized and impromptu social and special interest groups, private businesses, and religious, educational, and political organizations all rely on the Internet and social media.

This does not mean, however, that the leading theoretical formulations of deviant behavior are no longer useful. Rather, extant theories of deviance are better understood within a virtual reality context. The theme that runs through this book recognizes that within a given



sociocultural environment there is a reciprocal relationship between the use of the Internet, particularly social media, and deviant behavior. That is, the Internet/social media helps us to understand the predictive ability of the various theories of deviant behavior and how deviant behaviors influence the use of the Internet/social media. New forms of deviant behavior emerge as traditional forms are either replaced or fueled by the Internet and social media.

Throughout the book, we provide illustrations of how the reciprocal relationship between the Internet/social media and deviant behavior plays out in everyday life. Theories of deviance are considered within the sociocultural context for the influence the Internet/social media on deviant behavior. Theories of deviant behavior predict the likelihood of engaging in or being victimized by acts of deviance. Consideration is given to theoretical predictions of both negative and positive forms of deviant behavior.

## A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF DEVIANCE

---

We recognize in this book that deviance is not an isolated individual activity, but really a social event. For this reason, we say that deviance is diversely created and variously interpreted—meaning that different people will have various interpretations regarding the who, what, when, where, and why of deviant activity. Deviant behavior is the end result of a coming together of a given social, cultural, and physical setting with a particular person or group of persons possessing individual characteristics, various kinds of prior experiences, and specific motivations.

Every act of deviance has a unique set of causes, consequences, and participants. Deviance affects some people more than others, even impacting those who are not direct participants in the act itself. In general, acts of deviance provoke reactions from the individuals they affect. These reactions may involve a few concerned citizens, larger interest groups, and even society as a whole. Concerns about a particular deviant event, or a series of such events, can manifest themselves in the creation of new social policies, or laws. As the figure shows, reactions to deviance, from the everyday to the precedent setting, may color the interpretation of future deviant events.

Like other social events, deviance is fundamentally a social construction because members of society interpret its meaning and assign it significance. Just as a given instance of deviant behavior may have many causes, it also carries with it many different kinds of meanings. There may be one meaning for the deviant, another (generally quite different) for observers or victims (if the deviant act is a crime), and still another for agents of social control. For these reasons, social scientists apply the concept of social relativity to the study of social deviance. Social relativity means that social events are interpreted differently according to the cultural experiences and personal interests of the initiator, the observer, or the recipient of that behavior. Consequently, deviance has a different meaning to the deviant actor, the sociologist studying it, the police officer who may be investigating it (if it is a crime), and the people experiencing it firsthand. Interpretations of deviant behavior and reactions to it hold consequences for the deviant actor, and may lead to new policies or even laws.

## BOOK OVERVIEW

---

*Deviant Behavior* explores deviance in the United States and around the world. A wide range of deviant and criminal activities is addressed throughout the book. Each chapter provides an overview of the prevalence and incidence of specific forms of deviant behavior. The substantive chapters follow a similar format: At the outset the issue of definition is addressed; next the prevalence, trends, and patterns of the behavior are presented; related special topics and particularly deviant subgroups are also discussed. Each chapter concludes with a consideration of the leading theoretical explanations for either the rates or incidence of deviant and criminal behaviors.



## DEVIANT GLOBALIZATION

In *Deviant Globalization*, co-editor Nils Gilman documents the impact of globalization on deviant behavior around the world.

Key points of Steward Brand's interview with Gilman are summarized below:

To Nils Gilman deviant globalization is "the unpleasant underside of transnational integration." He notes that

there's nice tourism, and then sex tourism, such as in Thailand and Switzerland. The vast pharmacology industry is matched by

a vast traffic in illegal drugs. The underside of waste disposal is the criminal dumping in the developing world of toxic wastes from the developed world. . . .

These are not marginal, "informal" activities. They are enormous, complex businesses straight out of the *Harvard Business Review*. The drug business in Mexico, for example, employs 400,000 people. A thousand-dollar kilo of cocaine grows in value by 1400 percent when it crosses into the US—nice profit margin there.

*Adapted from:* Steward Brand, *The Anti-State Economy*. Retrieved from [www.wired.com/2010/05/deviant-globalization](http://www.wired.com/2010/05/deviant-globalization).

## Special Features

Chapters include several special features. Each chapter begins with an introductory story. Those stories provide the reader with a quick introduction to various forms of crime or deviant behavior, offering interesting facts and relevant statistics. Key concepts and learning objectives are presented at the front of each chapter to prompt readers on what to look for in the chapter and what they should know after reading the chapter. Deviance in Global Context boxes are found in most chapters. Each box illustrates specific types of crime and deviance and provides a picture of deviance in real life and across the globe. In addition, each chapter will feature boxed Portraits of Deviance that provide accounts of individual deviant actors or illustrations of deviant behaviors. Boxes on deviance in the digital world show how the interplay between the Internet and social media explains the emergence, perpetuation, and redefinition of deviant behaviors. A special box for theoretical explanations will outline the relevant theories that explain types of deviance and offer sociological perspectives on each theory. Other boxes include Deviance in the Digital World, which are found in most chapters. Deviance in the Digital World boxes include assignments that readers are asked to complete, and include participation in, posting to, or viewing specified websites. Another set of boxes, called Deviance Challenge, which are available on the Website that supports this text, ask students to perform various and specified forms of deviance to observe the responses of others. End-of-chapter summary sections provide a concise conclusion for each chapter. The definition of key terms and critical thinking questions are included in those summaries to enhance the student's understanding of involvement in deviant behaviors and attempts to control them.

## Organization

This book is divided into six major parts. The first part defines deviance and offers theoretical perspectives to explain deviance. Two chapters are devoted to the explanation of deviance.

The second part is composed of three chapters and addresses violent forms of deviant behavior including criminal homicide, assault and battery (Chapter 4), domestic violence (Chapter 5), and suicide (Chapter 6). The third and fourth parts are organized around other categories of deviance including mental illness (Chapter 7), alcohol abuse (Chapter 8), illicit drug use (Chapter 9), and sexual offending (Chapter 10), as well as property crime (Chapter 11), white-collar and organized crime (Chapter 12), and cyberdeviance (Chapter 13). Additional chapters on positive deviance (Chapter 14) and extreme forms of everyday behavior (Chapter 15) form the fifth part. These specialized types of deviance are somewhat unique to the book as they are often overlooked in the study of deviance. This book concludes with the sixth part, the part on Terrorism (Chapter 16), which provides an overview of terrorism in the United States and around the world.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

Deviant behavior may be considered along a continuum. Definitions of deviance involve a complex interplay between

- the actor,
- the offended party, and
- the wider societal audience.

Cultural and social organization in any society help define what is deviant for that particular society. Social norms—expectational and behavioral—guide social interaction and provide boundaries for acceptable and unacceptable behavior. In this book, we use a definition of deviant behavior which says that deviant behavior is an activity that violates the normative structure of society and is socially condemned.

Deviance must be understood on several conceptual levels:

- Creation of social norms, by whom, and which social interests/cultural values are protected
- Violation of social/legal norms and under what conditions
- Labeling of deviance, who is labeled deviant, and under what conditions does labeling occur
- Societal reaction to norm violators

- Formal and informal controls of social/legal norm violation
- Escalation of social/legal norm violation over time and whether new forms of social/legal norm violation emerge

Deviance may be distinguished along several social dimensions:

- Patterned versus idiosyncratic
- Episodic versus routine
- Individual versus group
- Positive versus negative

Although commonly thought of as harmful, deviance serves a number of functions for society. It

- Defines boundaries and collective sentiments
- Provides identities for persons unable to gain status or recognition in legitimate ways
- Signals a need for change
- Provides for scapegoating or tension release
- Provides employment of persons to control deviant members of society

## KEY CONCEPTS

Behavioral norms 4  
Culture 2  
Deviant behavior 2

Expectational norms 3  
Processes of globalization 11  
Social norms 3

Social organization 2  
Social roles 3

## CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Imagine a society without deviant behavior—where everyone continually conforms to the prevailing social norms. Describe the daily lives of the inhabitants of such a society. What are the advantages and disadvantages of total conformity for the society as a whole and for its individual members? Is it possible that a society without deviant behavior would persist through time?
2. How does globalization provide a context for the cross-cultural dissemination of deviant behaviors? How does the Internet and social media facilitate the emergence, perpetuation, and redefinition of deviant activities across the globe?
3. Devise a strategy for the definition of deviant behavior that differs from the normative and situational approaches discussed in this chapter. What forms of deviant behavior might emerge from your definition of deviant behavior? What forms of deviant behavior defined by the normative or situational approach might be omitted?
4. Why are the vast majority of deviant behaviors routine and institutionalized and so few are considered innovative or idiosyncratic?
5. Discuss how the use of social media affects the formation of a self-identity that is particularly vulnerable to engaging in deviant behaviors. Alternately, how do individuals use social media to create forms of deviant behavior that reinforce a negative self-identity?

Do not copy, post, or distribute