

Deviance and Social Control





In just a few moments I was to meet my first Yanomamö, my first primitive man. What would it be like? . . . I looked up [from my canoe] and gasped when I saw a dozen burly, naked, filthy, hideous men staring at us down the shafts of their drawn arrows. Immense wads of green tobacco were stuck between their lower teeth and lips, making them look even more hideous, and strands of dark-green slime dripped or hung from their noses. We arrived at the village while the men were blowing a hallucinogenic drug up their noses. One of the side effects of the drug is a runny nose. The mucus is always saturated with the green powder, and the Indians usually let it run freely from their nostrils. . . . I just sat there holding my notebook, helpless and pathetic. . . .

The whole situation was depressing, and I wondered why I ever decided to switch from civil engineering to anthropology in the first place. . . . [Soon] I was covered with red pigment, the result of a dozen or so complete examinations. . . . These examinations capped an otherwise grim day. The Indians

would blow their noses into their hands, flick as much of the mucus off that would separate in a snap of the wrist, wipe the residue into their hair, and then care-

fully examine my face, arms, legs, hair, and the contents of my pockets. I said [in their language], "Your hands are dirty"; my comments were met by the Indians in the following way: they would "clean" their hands by spitting a quantity of slimy tobacco juice into them, rub them together, and then proceed with the examination.

"They would "clean" their hands by spitting slimy tobacco juice into them."

This is how Napoleon Chagnon describes the culture shock he felt when he met the Yanomamö tribe of the rain forests of Brazil. His ensuing months of fieldwork continued to bring surprise after surprise, and often Chagnon (1977) could hardly believe his eyes—or his nose.



I took this photo on the outskirts of Hyderabad, India. Is this man deviant? If this were a U.S. street, he would be. But here? No houses have running water in his neighborhood, and the men, women, and children bathe at the neighborhood water pump. This man, then, would not be deviant in this culture. And yet he is actually mugging for my camera, making the three bystanders laugh. Does this additional factor make this a scene of deviance?

If you were to list the deviant behaviors of the Yanomamö, what would you include? The way they appear naked in public? Use hallucinogenic drugs? Let mucus hang from their noses? Or the way they rub hands filled with mucus, spittle, and tobacco juice over a frightened stranger who doesn't dare to protest? Perhaps. But it isn't this simple, for as we shall see, deviance is relative.

What Is Deviance?

Sociologists use the term **deviance** to refer to any violation of norms, whether the infraction is as minor as driving over the speed limit, as serious as murder, or as humorous as Chagnon's encounter with the Yanomamö. This deceptively simple definition takes us to the heart of the sociological perspective on deviance, which sociologist Howard S. Becker (1966) described this way: *It is not the act itself, but the reactions to the act, that make something deviant.* What Chagnon saw disturbed him, but to the Yanomamö those same behaviors represented normal, everyday life. What was deviant to Chagnon was *conformist* to the Yanomamö. From their viewpoint, you *should* check out strangers the way they did—and nakedness is good, as are hallucinogenic drugs. And it is natural to let mucus flow.

The Relativity of Deviance. Chagnon's abrupt introduction to the Yanomamö allows us to see the *relativity of deviance*, a major point made by symbolic interactionists. Because different groups have different norms, *what is deviant to some is not deviant to others.* This principle applies not just to cultures but also to groups within the same society. Look at the photo on this page and the one on page 6-6. We explore this idea further in the Cultural Diversity box on the next page.

This principle also applies to a specific form of deviance known as **crime**, the violation of rules that have been written into law. In the extreme, an act that is applauded by one group may be so despised by another group that it is punishable by death. Making a huge profit on business deals is one example. Americans who do this are admired. Like Donald Trump and Warren Buffet, they may even write books about their exploits. In China, however, until recently this same act was considered a crime called *profiteering*. Those found guilty were hanged in a public square as a lesson to all.

A Neutral Term. Unlike the general public, sociologists use the term *deviance* non-judgmentally, to refer to any act to which people respond negatively. When sociologists use this term, it does *not* mean that they agree that an act is bad, just that people judge it negatively. To sociologists, then, *all* of us are deviants of one sort or another, for we all violate norms from time to time.

Stigma. To be considered deviant, a person does not even have to *do* anything. Sociologist Erving Goffman (1963) used the term **stigma** to refer to characteristics that discredit people. These include violations of norms of appearance (a facial birthmark, a huge nose or ears) and norms of ability (blindness, deafness, mental handicaps). Also included are involuntary memberships, such as being a victim of AIDS or the brother of a rapist. The stigma can become a person's master status, defining him or her as deviant. Recall from Chapter 4 that a master status cuts across all other statuses that a person occupies.

How Norms Make Social Life Possible

No human group can exist without norms, for *norms make social life possible by making behavior predictable.* What would life be like if you could not predict what others would do? Imagine for a moment that you have gone to a store to purchase milk:

Cultural Diversity around the World

Human Sexuality in Cross-Cultural Perspective

Human sexuality illustrates how a group's *definition* of an act, not the act itself, determines whether it will be considered deviant. Let's look at some examples reported by anthropologist Robert Edgerton (1976).

Norms of sexual behavior vary so widely around the world that what is considered normal in one society may be considered deviant in another. In Kenya, a group called the Pokot place high emphasis on sexual pleasure, and they expect that both a husband and wife will reach orgasm. If a husband does not satisfy his wife, he is in trouble—especially if she thinks that his failure is because of adultery. If this is so, the wife and her female friends will sneak up on her husband when he is asleep. The women will tie him up, shout obscenities at him, beat him, and then urinate on him. Before releasing him, as a final gesture of their contempt they will slaughter and eat his favorite ox. The husband's hours of painful humiliation are intended to make him more dutiful concerning his wife's conjugal rights.

People can also become deviants for following their group's ideal norms instead of its real norms. As with many groups, the Zapotec Indians of Mexico profess that sexual relations should take place exclusively between husband and wife. However, the Zapotec also have a covert norm, an unspoken understanding, that married people will have affairs, but that they will be discreet about them. In one Zapotec community, the *only* person who did not have an extramarital affair was condemned by everyone in the village. The reason was not that she did not have an affair but that she told the other wives the names of the women their husbands were sleeping with. It is an interesting case,



for if this virtuous woman had had an affair—and kept her mouth shut—she would not have become a deviant. Clearly, real norms can conflict with ideal norms—another illustration of the gap between ideal and real culture.



A Pokot married woman, Kenya

For Your Consideration

➔ How do the behaviors of the Pokot wives and husbands mentioned here look from the perspective of U.S. norms? What are those U.S. norms? What norms did the Zapotec woman break? (We discussed this concept in Chapter 2.)

Suppose the clerk says, "I won't sell you any milk. We're overstocked with soda, and I'm not going to sell anyone milk until our soda inventory is reduced."

You don't like it, but you decide to buy a case of soda. At the checkout, the clerk says, "I hope you don't mind, but there's a \$5 service charge on every fifteenth customer." You, of course, are the fifteenth.

Just as you start to leave, another clerk stops you and says, "We're not working anymore. We decided to have a party." Suddenly a CD player begins to blast, and everyone in the store begins to dance. "Oh, good, you've brought the soda," says a different clerk, who takes your package and passes sodas all around.

Life is not like this, of course. You can depend on grocery clerks to sell you milk. You can also depend on paying the same price as everyone else and not being forced to attend a party in the store. Why can you depend on this? Because we are socialized to follow norms, to play the basic roles that society assigns to us.



Violating background assumptions is a common form of deviance. Although we have no explicit rule that says, “Do not put snakes through your nose,” we all know that it exists (perhaps as a subcategory of “Don’t do strange things in public”). Is this act also deviant for this man in Chennai, India?

Without norms, we would have social chaos. Norms lay out the basic guidelines for how we should play our roles and interact with others. In short, norms bring about **social order**, a group’s customary social arrangements. Our lives are based on these arrangements, which is why deviance often is perceived as threatening: *Deviance undermines predictability, the foundation of social life.* Consequently, human groups develop a system of **social control**—formal and informal means of enforcing norms. At the center of social control are sanctions.

Sanctions

As we discussed in Chapter 2, people do not enforce folkways strictly, but they become upset when people break mores (MO-rays). Expressions of disapproval for deviance, called **negative sanctions**, range from frowns and gossip for breaking folkways to imprisonment and death for breaking mores. In general, the more seriously the group takes a norm, the harsher the penalty for violating it. In contrast, **positive sanctions**—from smiles to formal awards—are used to reward people for conforming to norms. Getting a raise is a positive sanction; being fired is a negative sanction. Getting an *A* in intro to sociology is a positive sanction; getting an *F* is a negative one.

Most negative sanctions are informal. You might stare if you observe someone dressed in what you consider to be inappropriate clothing, or you might gossip if a married person you know spends the night with someone other than his or her spouse. Whether you consider the breaking of a norm merely an amusing matter that warrants no sanction or a serious infraction that does, however, depends on your perspective. Let’s suppose that a woman appears at your college graduation in a bikini. You might stare, laugh, and nudge the person next to you, but if this is *your* mother, you are likely to feel that different sanctions are appropriate. Similarly, if it is *your* father who spends the night with an 18-year-old college freshman, you are likely to do more than gossip.

In Sum: In sociology, the term deviance refers to all violations of social rules, regardless of their seriousness. The term is neutral, not a judgment about the behavior. Deviance is relative, for what is deviant in one group may be conformist in another. Consequently, we must consider deviance from *within* a group’s own framework, for it is their meanings that underlie their behavior.

Competing Explanations of Deviance: Sociobiology, Psychology, and Sociology

If social life is to exist, norms are essential. So why do people violate them? To better understand the reasons, it is useful to know how sociological explanations differ from biological and psychological ones.

Biosocial Explanations. *Sociobiologists* explain deviance by looking for answers within individuals. They assume that **genetic predispositions** lead people to such behaviors as juvenile delinquency and crime (Lombroso 1911; Wilson and Herrnstein 1985; Goozen et al. 2007). An early explanation was that men with an extra Y chromosome (the “XYY” theory) were more likely to become criminals. Another was that people with “squarish, muscular” bodies were more likely to commit **street crime**—acts such as mugging, rape, and burglary. These theories were abandoned when research did not support them.

With advances in the study of genetics, biosocial explanations are being proposed to explain differences in crime by age (juvenile delinquency), sex, race, and social class (Walsh and Beaver 2009). The basic explanation is that over the millennia people with certain characteristics were more likely to survive than were people with different characteristics. As a result, different groups today inherit different propensities (tendencies) for empathy, self-control, and risk-taking.

A universal finding is that in all known societies men commit more violent crimes than women do. There are no exceptions. Here is how sociobiologists explain this. It took only a

few pelvic thrusts for men to pass on their genes. After that, they could leave if they wanted to. The women, in contrast, had to carry, birth, and nurture the children. Women who were more empathetic (inclined to nurture their children) engaged in less dangerous behavior. These women passed genes for more empathy, greater self-control, and less risk-taking to their female children. As a result, all over the world, men engage in more violent behavior, which comes from their lesser empathy, lower self-control, and greater tendency for taking risks.

Biosocial theorists stress that deviant behavior does not depend on genes alone. Our inherited propensities (the *bio* part) are modified and stimulated by our environment (the *social* part). Biosocial research is promising and holds the potential of opening a new understanding of deviance.

Psychological Explanations. Psychologists focus on abnormalities *within* the individual. Instead of genes, they examine what are called **personality disorders**. Their supposition is that deviating individuals have deviating personalities (Barnes 2001; Mayer 2007) and that subconscious motives drive people to deviance.

Researchers have never found a specific childhood experience to be invariably linked with deviance. For example, some children who had “bad toilet training,” “suffocating mothers,” or “emotionally aloof fathers” do become embezzling bookkeepers—but others become good accountants. Just as college students and police officers represent a variety of bad—and good—childhood experiences, so do deviants. Similarly, people with “suppressed anger” can become freeway snipers or military heroes—or anything else. In short, there is no inevitable outcome of any childhood experience. Deviance is not associated with any particular personality.

Sociological Explanations. Sociologists, in contrast with both sociobiologists and psychologists, search for factors *outside* the individual. They look for social influences that “recruit” people to break norms. To account for why people commit crimes, for example, sociologists examine such external influences as socialization, membership in subcultures, and social class. *Social class*, a concept that we will discuss in depth in Chapter 8, refers to people’s relative standing in terms of education, occupation, and especially income and wealth.

To explain deviance, sociologists apply the three sociological perspectives—symbolic interactionism, functionalism, and conflict theory. Let’s compare these three explanations.



Every society has boundaries that divide what is considered socially acceptable from what is not acceptable. Lady Gaga has made her claim to fame by challenging those boundaries.

The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

As we examine symbolic interactionism, it will become more evident why sociologists are not satisfied with explanations that are rooted in sociobiology or psychology. A basic principle of symbolic interactionism is that we are thinking beings who act according to how we interpret situations. Let’s consider how our membership in groups influences how we view life and, from there, our behavior.

Differential Association Theory

The Theory. Going directly against the idea that biology or personality is the source of deviance, sociologists stress our experiences in groups (Deflem 2006; Chambliss 1973/2012). Consider an extreme: boys and girls who join street gangs and those who join the Scouts. Obviously, each will learn different attitudes and behaviors concerning deviance and conformity. Edwin Sutherland coined the term **differential association** to indicate this: From the *different* groups we *associate* with, we learn to deviate from or conform to society’s norms (Sutherland 1924, 1947; McCarthy 2011).

Sutherland’s theory is more complicated than this, but he basically said that the different groups with which we associate (our “*differential* association”) give us messages about conformity and deviance. We may receive mixed messages, but we end up with more of one than the other (an “excess of definitions,” as Sutherland put it). The end result is an imbalance—attitudes that tilt us in one direction or another. Consequently, we learn to either conform or to deviate.

Can you contrast biosocial, psychological, and sociological explanations of deviance?



Motherhood Manifesto
on mysoclab.com

Families. Since our family is so important for teaching us attitudes, it probably is obvious to you that the family makes a big difference in whether we learn deviance or conformity. Researchers have confirmed this informal observation. Of the many confirming studies, this one stands out: Of all prison inmates across the United States, about half have a father, mother, brother, sister, or spouse who has served time in prison (*Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics* 2003: Table 6.0011; Glaze and Maruschak 2008: Table 11). In short, families that are involved in crime tend to set their children on a lawbreaking path.

Friends, Neighborhoods, and Subcultures. Most people don't know the term *differential association*, but they do know how it works. Most parents want to move out of "bad" neighborhoods because they know that if their kids have delinquent friends, they are likely to become delinquent, too. Sociological research also supports this common observation (Miller 1958; Chung and Steinberg 2006; Church et al. 2009).

In some neighborhoods, violence is so woven into the subculture that even a wrong glance can mean your death ("Why you lookin' at me?") (Gardiner and Fox 2010). If the neighbors feel that a victim deserved to be killed, they refuse to testify because "he got what was coming to him" (Kubrin and Weitzer 2003). Killing can even be viewed as honorable:

Sociologist Ruth Horowitz (1983, 2005), who did participant observation in a lower-class Chicano neighborhood in Chicago, discovered how the concept of "honor" propels young men to deviance. The formula is simple. "A real man has honor. An insult is a threat to one's honor. Therefore, not to stand up to someone is to be less than a real man."

Now suppose you are a young man growing up in this neighborhood. You likely would do a fair amount of fighting, for you would interpret many things as attacks on your honor. You might even carry a knife or a gun, for words and fists wouldn't always be sufficient. Along with members of your group, you would define fighting, knifing, and shooting quite differently from the way most people do.

Members of the Mafia also intertwine ideas of manliness with killing. For them, *to kill is a measure of their manhood*. If a Mafia member were to seduce the *capo's* wife or girlfriend, for example, the seduction would slash at the *capo's* manliness and honor. The only course open would be direct retaliation. The offender's body would be found with his penis stuffed in his mouth. However, not all killings are accorded the same respect, for "the more awesome and potent the victim, the more worthy and meritorious the killer" (Arlacchi 1980).

From this example, you can see how relative deviance is. Although killing is deviant to mainstream society, for members of the Mafia, *not* to kill after certain rules are broken is the deviant act.

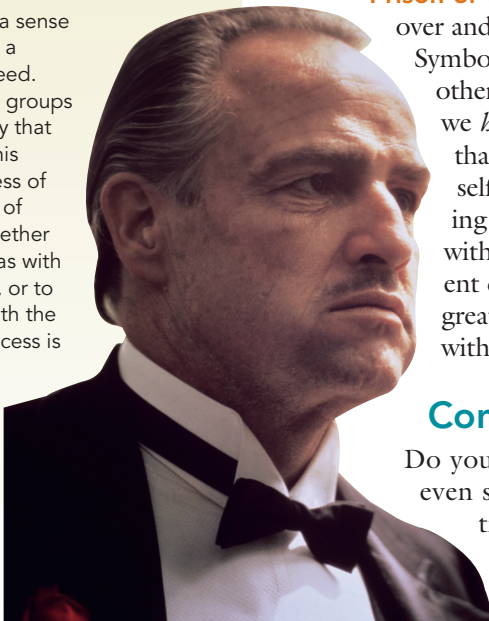
Prison or Freedom? As was mentioned in Chapter 3, an issue that comes up over and over again in sociology is whether we are prisoners of socialization.

Symbolic interactionists stress that we are not mere pawns in the hands of others. We are not destined to think and act as our groups dictate. Rather, we *help to produce our own orientations to life*. By joining one group rather than another (differential association), for example, we help to shape the self. For instance, one college student may join a feminist group that is trying to change the treatment of women in college, while another associates with women who shoplift on weekends. Their choices point them in different directions. The one who joins the feminist group may develop an even greater interest in producing social change, while the one who associates with shoplifters may become even more oriented toward criminal activities.

Control Theory

Do you ever feel the urge to do something that you know you shouldn't, even something that would get you in trouble? Most of us fight temptations to break society's norms. We find that we have to stifle things inside us—urges, hostilities, raunchy desires of various sorts. And most of the time, we manage to keep ourselves out of trouble.

To experience a sense of belonging is a basic human need. Membership in groups is a primary way that people meet this need. Regardless of the orientation of the group—whether to conformity, as with the Girl Scouts, or to deviance, as with the Mafia—the process is the same.



What is differential association theory? How do family and friends fit into this theory?

The basic question that **control theory** tries to answer is, With the desire to deviate so common, why don't we all just "bust loose"?

The Theory. Sociologist Walter Reckless (1973), who developed control theory, stressed that two control systems work against our motivations to deviate. Our *inner controls* include our internalized morality—conscience, religious principles, ideas of right and wrong. Inner controls also include fears of punishment, feelings of integrity, and the desire to be a "good" person (Hirschi 1969; McShane and Williams 2007). Our *outer controls* consist of people—such as family, friends, and the police—who influence us not to deviate.

The stronger our bonds are with society, the more effective our inner controls are (Hirschi 1969). These bonds are based on *attachments* (our affection and respect for people who conform to mainstream norms), *commitments* (having a stake in society that you don't want to risk, such as your place in your family, being a college student, or having a job), *involvements* (participating in approved activities), and *beliefs* (convictions that certain actions are wrong).

This theory can be summarized as *self-control*, says sociologist Travis Hirschi. The key to learning strong self-control is socialization, especially in childhood. Parents help their children to develop self-control by supervising them and punishing their deviant acts (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Church et al. 2009). They sometimes use shame to keep their children in line. You probably had that forefinger shaken at you. I certainly recall it aimed at me. Do you think that more use of shaming, discussed in the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page, could help increase people's internal controls?

Applying Control Theory.

Suppose that some friends invite you to go to a nightclub with them. When you get there, you notice that everyone seems unusually happy—almost giddy. They seem to be euphoric in their animated conversations and dancing. Your friends tell you that almost everyone here has taken the drug Ecstasy, and they invite you to take some with them.

What do you do?

Let's not explore the question of whether taking Ecstasy in this setting is a deviant or a conforming act. This is a separate issue. Instead, concentrate on the pushes and pulls you would feel. The pushes toward taking the drug: your friends, the setting, and perhaps your curiosity. Then there are your inner controls—those inner voices of your conscience and your parents, perhaps of your teachers, as well as your fears of arrest and the dangers you've heard about illegal drugs. There are also the outer controls—perhaps the uniformed security guard looking in your direction.

So, what *did* you decide? Which was stronger: your inner and outer controls or the pushes and pulls toward taking the drug? It is you who can best weigh these forces, for they differ with each of us. This little example puts us at the center of what control theory is all about.

Labeling Theory

Suppose for one undesirable moment that people around you thought of you as a "whore," a "pervert," or a "cheat." (Pick one.) What power such a reputation would have—both on how others would see you and on how you would see yourself. How about if you became known as "very intelligent," "gentle and understanding," or "honest to the core"? (Choose one.) You can see that such a reputation would give people different expectations of your character and behavior.

This is what **labeling theory** focuses on, the significance of reputations, how they help set us on paths that propel us into deviance or divert us away from it.

Rejecting Labels: How People Neutralize Deviance. Not many of us want to be called "whore," "pervert," or "cheat." We resist negative labels, even lesser ones than



The social control of deviance takes many forms, including the actions of the police. Being arrested here is a Florida woman accused of prostitution.



How powerful are labels? Consider Mel Gibson. Previously, he had a sterling reputation (a label) as an actor and film maker. After anti-Semitic rants when stopped for drunk driving and, later, threats to a pregnant girlfriend, Gibson's reputation changed abruptly. How do you think his new label will affect his life? Do you think Gibson can rescue his reputation?

Down-to-Earth Sociology

Shaming: Making a Comeback?

Shaming can be effective, especially when members of a primary group use it. In some communities, where the individual's reputation was at stake, shaming was the centerpiece of the enforcement of norms. Violators were marked as deviant and held up for all the world to see. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, town officials forced Hester Prynne to wear a scarlet A sewn on her dress. The A stood for *adulteress*. Wherever she went, Prynne had to wear this badge of shame, and the community expected her to wear it every day for the rest of her life.

As our society grew large and urban, the sense of community diminished, and shaming lost its effectiveness. Now shaming is starting to make a comeback (Appiah 2010). One Arizona sheriff makes the men in his jail wear striped prison uniforms—and pink underwear (Billeaud 2008). They also wear pink while they work in chain gangs. Women prisoners, too, are put in chain gangs and forced to pick up street trash. Online shaming sites have also appeared. Captured on cell phone cameras are bad drivers, older men who leer at teenaged girls, and people who don't pick up their dog's poop (Saranow 2007). Some sites post photos of the offenders as well as their addresses and phone numbers. In Spain, where one's reputation with neighbors still matters, debt collectors, dressed in tuxedo and top hat, walk slowly to the front door. The sight shames debtors into paying (Catan 2008).

Sociologist Harold Garfinkel (1956) gave the name **degradation ceremony** to an extreme form of shaming. The individual is called to account before the group, witnesses denounce him or her, the offender is pronounced guilty, and steps are taken to strip the individual of his or her identity as a group member. In some courts martial, officers who are found guilty stand at attention before their peers while others rip the insignia of rank from their uniforms. This procedure screams that the individual is no longer a member of the group. Although Hester Prynne was not

banished from the group physically, she was banished morally; her degradation ceremony proclaimed her a moral outcast from the community. The scarlet A marked her as not "one of them."

Although we don't use scarlet A's today, informal degradation ceremonies still occur. Consider what happened to this New York City police officer (Chivers 2001):

Joseph Gray had been a police officer in New York City for fifteen years. As with some of his fellow officers, alcohol and sex helped relieve the pressures of police work. After spending one afternoon drinking in a topless bar, bleary-eyed, Gray plowed his car into a vehicle carrying a pregnant woman, her son, and her sister. All three died. Gray was accused of manslaughter and drunk driving.

The New York Times and New York television stations kept hammering this story to the public.

Three weeks later, Gray resigned from the police force. As he left police headquarters after resigning, an angry crowd surrounded him. Gray hung his head in public disgrace as Victor Manuel Herrera, whose wife and son were killed in the crash, followed him, shouting, "You're a murderer!" (Gray was later convicted of drunk driving and manslaughter.)



To avoid jail time, this woman in Pennsylvania chose the judge's option of public shaming.

For Your Consideration

- ➔ 1. How do you think law enforcement officials might use shaming to reduce law breaking?
2. How do you think school officials could use shaming?
3. Suppose that you were caught shoplifting at a store near where you live. Would you rather spend a week in jail with no one but your family knowing it (and no permanent record) or a week walking in front of the store you stole from wearing a placard that proclaims in bold red capital letters: I AM A THIEF! and in smaller letters says: "I am sorry for stealing from this store and making you pay higher prices"? Why?

these that others might try to pin on us. Some people are so successful at rejecting labels that even though they beat people up and vandalize property they consider themselves to be conforming members of society. How do they do it?

Sociologists Gresham Sykes and David Matza (1957/1988) studied boys like this. They found that the boys used five **techniques of neutralization** to deflect society's norms.

Denial of responsibility. Some boys said, "I'm not responsible for what happened because . . ." and then they were quite creative about the "because." Some said that what happened was an "accident." Other boys saw themselves as "victims" of society. What else could you expect? They were like billiard balls shot around the pool table of life.

Denial of injury. Another favorite explanation was "What I did wasn't wrong because no one got hurt." The boys would define vandalism as "mischief," gang fights as a "private quarrel," and stealing cars as "borrowing." They might acknowledge that what they did was illegal but claim that they were "just having a little fun."

Denial of a victim. Some boys thought of themselves as avengers. Vandalizing a teacher's car was done to get revenge for an unfair grade, while shoplifting was a way to even the score with "crooked" store owners. In short, even if the boys did accept responsibility and admit that someone had gotten hurt, they protected their self-concept by claiming that the people "deserved what they got."

Condemnation of the condemners. Another technique the boys used was to deny that others had the right to judge them. They might accuse people who pointed their fingers at them of being "a bunch of hypocrites": The police were "on the take," teachers had "pets," and parents cheated on their taxes. In short, they said, "Who are *they* to accuse *me* of something?"

Appeal to higher loyalties. A final technique the boys used to justify their activities was to consider loyalty to the gang more important than the norms of society. They might say, "I had to help my friends. That's why I got in the fight." Not incidentally, the boy may have shot two members of a rival group, as well as a bystander!

In Sum: These techniques of neutralization have implications far beyond this group of boys, for it is not only delinquents who try to neutralize the norms of mainstream society. Look again at these techniques—don't they sound familiar? (1) "I couldn't help myself"; (2) "Who really got hurt?"; (3) "Don't you think she deserved that, after what she did?"; (4) "Who are you to talk?"; and (5) "I had to help my friends—wouldn't you have done the same thing?" All of us attempt to neutralize the moral demands of society, for neutralization helps us to sleep at night.

Embracing Labels: The Example of Outlaw Bikers

Although most of us resist attempts to label us as deviant, some people revel in a deviant identity. Some teenagers, for example, make certain by their clothing, music, hairstyles, and body art that no one misses their rejection of adult norms. Their status among fellow members of a subculture—within which they are almost obsessive conformists—is vastly more important than any status outside it.

One of the best examples of a group that embraces deviance is a motorcycle gang. Sociologist Mark Watson (1980/2006) did participant observation with outlaw bikers. He rebuilt Harleys with them, hung around their bars and homes, and went on "runs" (trips) with them. He concluded that outlaw bikers see the

While most people resist labels of deviance, some embrace them. In what different ways does this photo illustrate the embracement of deviance?



How do juvenile delinquents neutralize their deviance? How do you?

world as “hostile, weak, and effeminate.” Holding this conventional world in contempt, gang members pride themselves on breaking its norms and getting in trouble, laughing at death, and treating women as lesser beings whose primary value is to provide them with services—especially sex. They pride themselves in looking “dirty, mean, and generally undesirable,” taking pleasure in shocking people by their appearance and behavior. Outlaw bikers also regard themselves as losers, a view that becomes woven into their unusual embrace of deviance.



The Saints and the Roughnecks
by William Chambliss
on mysoclab.com

The Power of Labels: The Saints and the Roughnecks. Labels are powerful. When courts label teenagers as delinquents, it often triggers a process that leads to greater involvement in deviance (DeLisi et al. 2011). We can see how powerful labeling is by referring back to the “Saints” and the “Roughnecks,” research that was cited in Chapter 4. As you recall, both groups of high school boys were “constantly occupied with truancy, drinking, wild parties, petty theft, and vandalism.” Yet their teachers looked on one group, the Saints, as “headed for success” and the other group, the Roughnecks, as “headed for trouble.” By the time they finished high school, not one Saint had been arrested, while the Roughnecks had been in constant trouble with the police.

Why did the members of the community perceive these boys so differently? Chambliss (1973/2012) concluded that this split vision was due to *social class*. As symbolic interactionists emphasize, social class is like a lens that focuses our perceptions. The Saints came from respectable, middle-class families, while the Roughnecks were from less respectable, working-class families. These backgrounds led teachers and the authorities to expect good behavior from the Saints but trouble from the Roughnecks. And, like the rest of us, teachers and police saw what they expected to see.

The boys’ social class also affected their visibility. The Saints had automobiles, and they did their drinking and vandalism outside of town. Without cars, the Roughnecks hung around their own street corners, where their drinking and boisterous behavior drew the attention of police, confirming the negative impressions that the community already had of them.

The boys’ social class also equipped them with distinct *styles of interaction*. When police or teachers questioned them, the Saints were apologetic. Their show of respect for authority elicited a positive reaction from teachers and police, allowing the Saints to escape school and legal problems. The Roughnecks, said Chambliss, were “almost the polar opposite.” When questioned, they were hostile. Even when they tried to assume a respectful attitude, everyone could see through it. Consequently, while teachers and police let the Saints off with warnings, they came down hard on the Roughnecks.

Certainly, what happens in life is not determined by labels alone, but the Saints and the Roughnecks did live up to the labels that the community gave them. As you may recall, all but one of the Saints went on to college. One earned a Ph.D., one became a lawyer, one a doctor, and the others business managers. In contrast, only two of the Roughnecks went to college. They earned athletic scholarships and became coaches. The other Roughnecks did not fare so well. Two of them dropped out of high school, later became involved in separate killings, and were sent to prison. Of the final two, one became a local bookie, and no one knows the whereabouts of the other.

How do labels work? Although the matter is complex, because it involves the self-concept and reactions that vary from one individual to another, we can note that labels open and close doors of opportunity. Unlike its meaning in sociology, the term *deviant* in everyday usage is emotionally charged with a judgment of some sort. This label can lock people out of conforming groups and push them into almost exclusive contact with people who have been similarly labeled.

In Sum: Symbolic interactionists examine how people’s definitions of the situation underlie their deviating from or conforming to social norms. They focus on group membership (differential association), how people balance pressures to conform and to deviate (control theory), and the significance of people’s reputations (labeling theory).

The Functionalist Perspective

When we think of deviance, its dysfunctions are likely to come to mind. Functionalists point out that deviance also has functions.

Can Deviance Really Be Functional for Society?

Most of us are upset by deviance, especially crime, and assume that society would be better off without it. The classic functionalist theorist Emile Durkheim (1893/1933, 1895/1964), however, came to a surprising conclusion. Deviance, he said—including crime—is functional for society, for it contributes to the social order in these three ways:

1. *Deviance clarifies moral boundaries and affirms norms.* By *moral boundaries*, Durkheim referred to a group's ideas about how people should think and act. Deviant acts challenge those boundaries. To call a member into account is to say, in effect, "You broke an important rule, and we cannot tolerate that." Punishing deviants affirms the group's norms and clarifies what it means to be a member of the group.
2. *Deviance encourages social unity.* To affirm the group's moral boundaries by punishing deviants fosters a "we" feeling among the group's members. In saying, "You can't get away with that," the group affirms the rightness of its own ways.
3. *Deviance promotes social change.* Not everyone agrees on what to do with people who push beyond their accepted ways of doing things. Some group members may even approve of the rule-breaking behavior. Boundary violations that gain enough support become new, acceptable behaviors. Deviance, then, may force a group to rethink and redefine its moral boundaries, helping groups—and whole societies—to adapt to changing circumstances.

In the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page, you can see these three functions of deviance as well as the central point of symbolic interactionism, that *deviance* involves a clash of competing definitions.

Strain Theory: How Social Values Produce Deviance

Functionalists argue that crime is a *natural* part of society, not an aberration or some alien element in our midst. Even mainstream values can even generate crime. Consider what sociologists Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin (1960) identified as the crucial problem of the industrialized world: the need to locate and train its talented people—whether they were born into wealth or into poverty—so that they can take over the key technical jobs of society. When children are born, no one knows which ones will have the ability to become dentists, nuclear physicists, or engineers. To get the most talented people to compete with one another, society tries to motivate *everyone* to strive for success.

We are quite successful in getting almost everyone to want **cultural goals**, usually possessions, wealth, or prestige. But we aren't even close to successful in equalizing access to the **institutionalized means**, the legitimate ways to reach these goals. Sociologist Robert Merton (1956, 1949/1968) developed **strain theory** to explain how people react when their access to success is blocked. *Strain* refers to the frustrations people feel. It is easy to identify with mainstream norms (such as working hard or pursuing higher education) when they help you get ahead, but when they don't seem to be getting you anywhere, you feel frustrated. You might even feel wronged by the system. If mainstream rules seem illegitimate, you experience a gap that Merton called *anomie*, a sense of normlessness.

Table 6.1 on the next page compares the ways that people react to these goals and means. The first reaction, which Merton said is the most common, is *conformity*, using socially acceptable means to try to reach cultural goals. In industrialized societies most people try to get good jobs, a quality education, and so on. If well-paid jobs are unavailable, they take less desirable jobs. If they are denied access to Harvard or Stanford, they go to a state university. Others take night classes and go to vocational schools. In short, most people take the socially acceptable path.

Down-to-Earth Sociology

The Naked Pumpkin Runners and the Naked Bike Riders: Deviance or Freedom of Self-Expression?

They can hardly sleep the night before Halloween, thinking about how they will carve their pumpkins and all the fun to come. When night falls, they put sneakers on their feet and, the pumpkins on their heads and run into the street. There is nothing between the pumpkins and the sneakers—except whatever nature endowed them with (Simon 2009).

They join one another for their annual chilly, late-night run. Do the gawkers bother them? Maybe a little, but it's all in good fun. The crowd is waiting, hooting and hollering and waving them on.

"Not so fast," reply the police in Boulder, Colorado, where the naked pumpkin run is held on the last day of each October. "You are breaking the law."

If the naked pumpkin run isn't enough, the Boulder police also have to deal with the annual World Naked Bike Ride, which has become so popular that it is held in 70 cities around the world (Vigil 2009). The naked bike rides seem to be a celebration of youth and freedom—and as older people join in, just freedom and maybe the joy of being alive.

Though the Boulder police have prided themselves on tolerance, they don't see the run and ride in quite the same way as the participants do. "The law," they say, "clearly states that no one can show genitalia in public."

"Are women's breasts genitalia?" they've been asked. "No, those are okay," replied the police. "But watch the rest of it—uh, that is, don't watch . . . uh, that is, don't show anything else. You know what we mean. If you do, we will arrest you, and you'll end up on the sexual offenders list."

"Bad sports," reply the naked pumpkin runners and the naked bike riders, pouting just a bit. "You're trying to ruin our fun."

"We didn't make the laws," the police reply, not pleased about the many who have become angry at their lack of understanding. "We just enforce them."

Trying to recover their tolerance, the police add, "Just wear a thong or a jock strap, and run and ride to your hearts' content."

The American Civil Liberties Union has stepped into the fray, too, saying that nakedness is a form of free speech. Participants should be able to express their, well, whatever it is they are expressing.



The annual Naked Pumpkin Run, Boulder, Colorado

For Your Consideration

➔ Here is a basic principle of deviance: As people break rules, sometimes deliberately to test the boundaries of acceptable behavior, the group enforces its norms, or bends them to accommodate the deviants. How do the naked pumpkin runners and the naked bike riders illustrate this principle? What do you think the result will be in Boulder, Colorado?

Four Deviant Paths. The remaining four responses, which are deviant, represent reactions to the gap that people feel between the goals they want and their access to the institutionalized means to reach them. Let's look at each. *Innovators* are people who accept the goals of society but use illegitimate means to try to reach them.

TABLE 6.1 How People Match Their Goals to Their Means			
Do They Feel the Strain That Leads to Anomie?	Mode of Adaptation	Cultural Goals	Institutionalized Means
No	Conformity	Accept	Accept
Yes	Deviant Paths:		
	1. Innovation	Accept	Reject
	2. Ritualism	Reject	Accept
	3. Retreatism	Reject	Reject
	4. Rebellion	Reject/Replace	Reject/Replace

Source: Based on Merton 1968.

What do you think the social functions of group public nudity are?

Crack dealers, for instance, accept the goal of achieving wealth, but they reject the legitimate avenues for doing so. Other examples are embezzlers, robbers, and con artists.

The second deviant path is taken by people who become discouraged and give up on achieving cultural goals. Yet they still cling to conventional rules of conduct. Merton called this response *ritualism*. Although ritualists have given up on getting ahead at work, they survive by rigorously following the rules of their job. Teachers whose idealism is shattered (who are said to suffer from “burnout”), for example, remain in the classroom, where they teach without enthusiasm. Their response is considered deviant because they cling to the job even though they have abandoned the goal, which may have been to stimulate young minds or to make the world a better place.

People who choose the third deviant path, *retreatism*, reject both the cultural goals and the institutionalized means of achieving them. Some people stop pursuing success and retreat into alcohol or drugs. Although their path to withdrawal is considerably different, women who enter a convent or men a monastery are also retreatists.

The final deviant response is *rebellion*. Convinced that their society is corrupt, rebels, like retreatists, reject both society’s goals and its institutionalized means. Unlike retreatists, however, rebels seek to give society new goals, as well as new means for reaching them. Revolutionaries are the most committed type of rebels.

In Sum: Strain theory underscores the sociological principle that deviants are the product of society. Mainstream social values (cultural goals and institutionalized means to reach those goals) can produce strain (frustration, dissatisfaction). People who feel this strain are more likely than others to take the deviant (nonconforming) paths summarized in Table 6.1.

Illegitimate Opportunity Structures: Social Class and Crime

Over and over in this text, you have seen the impact of social class on people’s lives—and you will continue to do so in coming chapters. Let’s look at how social class produces different types of crime.

Street Crime. In applying strain theory, functionalists point out that industrialized societies have no trouble socializing the poor into wanting to own things. Like others, the poor are bombarded with messages urging them to buy everything from Xboxes and iPods to designer jeans and new cars. Television and movies are filled with images of middle-class people enjoying luxurious lives. The poor get the message—all full-fledged Americans can afford society’s many goods and services.

Yet, for children in poverty, the most common route to success—education—presents a bewildering world. Run by the middle class, schools are at odds with their background. What the poor take for granted is unacceptable in the schools. It is questioned and mocked. Their speech, for example, is built around nonstandard grammar. It is also often laced with what the middle class considers obscenities. Their ideas of punctuality and their poor preparation in reading and paper-and-pencil skills also make it difficult to fit in. Facing such barriers, the poor are more likely than their more privileged counterparts to drop out of school. Educational failure, of course, slams the door on many legitimate avenues to financial success.

Not all doors slam shut, though. Woven into life in urban slums is what Cloward and Ohlin (1960) called an **illegitimate opportunity structure**. An alternative door to success opens: “hustles” such as robbery, burglary, drug dealing, prostitution, pimping, gambling, and other crimes (Anderson 1978, 1990/2006; Duck and Rawls 2011). Pimps and drug dealers, for example, present an image of a glamorous life—people who are in control and have plenty of “easy money.” For many of the poor, the “hustler” becomes a role model.

Down-to-Earth Sociology

Islands in the Street: Urban Gangs in the United States

For more than ten years, sociologist Martín Sánchez-Jankowski (1991) did participant observation of thirty-seven African American, Chicano, Dominican, Irish, Jamaican, and Puerto Rican gangs in Boston, Los Angeles, and New York City. The gangs earned money through gambling, arson, mugging, armed robbery, and selling moonshine, drugs, guns, stolen car parts, and protection. Sánchez-Jankowski ate, slept, and fought with the gangs, but by mutual agreement he did not participate in drug dealing or other illegal activities. He was seriously injured twice during the study.

Contrary to stereotypes, Sánchez-Jankowski did not find that the motive for joining was to escape a broken home (there were as many members from intact families as from broken homes) or to seek a substitute family (the same number of boys said they were close to their families as those who said they were not). Rather, the boys joined to gain access to money, to have recreation (including girls and drugs), to maintain anonymity in committing crimes, to get protection, and

to help the community. This last reason may seem surprising, but in some neighborhoods, gangs protect residents from outsiders and spearhead political change (Kontos et al. 2003). The boys also saw the gang as an alternative to the dead-end—and deadening—jobs held by their parents.

Neighborhood residents are ambivalent about gangs.

On the one hand, they fear the violence. On the other hand, many of the adults once belonged to gangs, some gangs provide better protection than the police, and gang members are the children of people who live in the neighborhood.

Particular gangs will come and go, but gangs will likely always remain part of the city. As functionalists point out, gangs fulfill needs of poor youth who live on the margins of society.



For Your Consideration

➔ What functions do gangs fulfill (what needs do they meet)? Suppose that you have been hired as an urban planner for the city of Los Angeles. How could you arrange to meet the needs that gangs fulfill in ways that minimize violence and encourage youth to follow mainstream norms?

It should be easy to see, then, why street crime attracts disproportionate numbers of the poor. In the Down-to-Earth Sociology box above, let's look at how gangs are part of the illegitimate opportunity structure that beckons disadvantaged youth.

White-Collar Crime. Like the poor, the *forms* of crime of the more privileged classes also match their life situation. And how different their illegitimate opportunities are! Physicians don't hold up cabbies, but they do cheat Medicare. Investment managers like Bernie Madoff run fraudulent schemes that cheat customers around the world. Mugging, pimping, and burgling are not part of this more privileged world, but evading income tax, bribing public officials, and embezzling are. Sociologist Edwin Sutherland (1949) coined the term **white-collar crime** to refer to crimes that people of respectable and high social status commit in the course of their occupations.

A special form of white-collar crime is **corporate crime**, executives violating the law in order to benefit their corporation. For example, to increase corporate profits, Sears executives defrauded \$100 million from victims so poor that they had filed for bankruptcy. To avoid a criminal trial, Sears pleaded guilty. This frightened the parent companies of Macy's and Bloomingdales, which were doing similar things, and they settled out of court (McCormick 1999). Citigroup is notorious for stealing from the poor. In 2004, this firm had to pay \$70 million for its crimes (O'Brien 2004). But, like a career criminal, it continued its law-breaking ways. The firm "swept" money from its customers' credit cards, even from the cards of people who had died. Caught red-handed once again—even

stealing from the dead—in 2008 this company was forced to pay another \$18 million (Read 2008). *Not one of the corporate thieves at Sears, Macy's, Bloomingdales, or Citigroup spent a day in jail.*

Seldom is corporate crime taken seriously, even when it results in death. In the 1930s, workers were hired to blast a tunnel through a mountain in West Virginia. The company knew the silica dust would kill the miners, and in just three months about 600 died (Dunaway 2008). No owner went to jail. In the 1980s, Firestone executives recalled faulty tires in Saudi Arabia and Venezuela but allowed them to remain on U.S. vehicles. When their tires blew out, about 200 Americans died (White et al. 2001). The photo at the right shows another human cost. Not a single Firestone executive went to jail.

Consider this: Under federal law, causing the death of a worker by *willfully* violating safety rules is a misdemeanor punishable by up to six months in prison. Yet to harass a wild burro on federal lands is punishable by a year in prison (Barstow and Bergman 2003).

At \$500 billion dollars a year (Reiman and Leighton 2010), “crime in the suites” actually costs more than “crime in the streets.” The physical and emotional costs are another matter. For example, no one has figured out a way to compare the suffering of rape victims with the pain of elderly couples who lost their life savings to Madoff’s white-collar fraud.

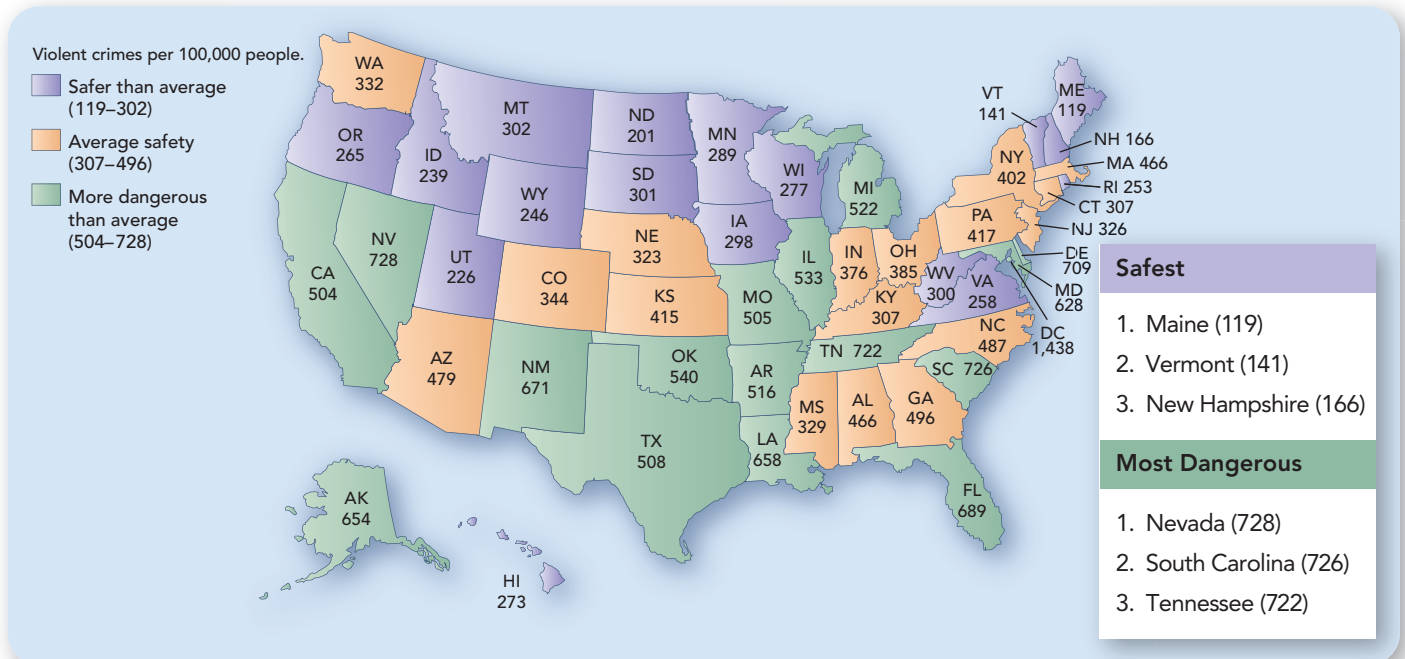
Fear, however, centers on street crime, especially the violent stranger who can change your life forever. As the Social Map (Figure 6.1) shows, the chances of such an encounter depend on where you live. You can see that entire regions are safer—or more dangerous—than others. In general, the northern states are safer, and the southern states more dangerous.



White collar crime usually involves only the loss of property, but not always. To save money, Ford executives kept faulty Firestone tires on their Explorers. The cost? The lives of over 200 people. Shown here in Houston is one of their victims. She survived a needless accident but was left a quadriplegic. Not one Ford executive spent even a single day in jail.

FIGURE 6.1

How Safe Is Your State? Violent Crime in the United States



Note: Violent crimes are murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. The chance of becoming a victim of these crimes is six times higher in Nevada, the most dangerous state, than in Maine, the safest state. Washington, D.C., not a state, is in a class by itself. Its rate of 1,438 is twelve times higher than Maine’s rate.

Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2011: Table 304.

TABLE 6.2 Women and Crime: What a Difference a Few Years Make

Of all those arrested, what percentage are women?			
Crime	1992	2009	Change
Stolen property	12.5%	20.9%	+67%
Car theft	10.8%	17.8%	+65%
Drunken driving	13.8%	22.7%	+64%
Burglary	9.2%	14.9%	+62%
Aggravated assault	14.8%	22.0%	+49%
Robbery	8.5%	11.9%	+40%
Larceny/theft	32.1%	43.6%	+36%
Arson	13.4%	17.3%	+29%
Illegal drugs	16.4%	18.7%	+14%
Forgery and counterfeiting	34.7%	37.7%	+9%
Fraud	42.1%	44.3%	+5%
Illegal weapons	7.5%	8.1%	1%

Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2012: Table 324.

Gender and Crime. Gender is not just something we are or do. It is a feature of society that surrounds us from birth. Gender pushes us, as male or female, into different corners in life, offering and nurturing some behaviors while it withdraws others. The opportunity to commit crime is one of the many consequences of how society sets up a gender order. The social changes that opened business and the professions to women also brought new opportunities for women to commit crime. From stolen property to illegal weapons, Table 6.2 shows how women have taken advantage of this new opportunity.

In Sum: Functionalists stress that just as the social classes differ in opportunities for income and education, so they differ in opportunities for crime. As a result, street crime is higher among the lower social classes and white-collar crime higher among the higher social classes. The growing crime rates of women illustrate how changing gender roles have given women more access to what sociologists call “illegitimate opportunities.”

The Conflict Perspective

Class, Crime, and the Criminal Justice System

TRW sold transistors to the federal government to use in its satellites. The transistors failed, and the government had to shut down its satellite program. TRW said that the failure was a surprise, that it was due to some unknown defect. U.S. officials then paid TRW millions of dollars to investigate the failure.

Then a whistle blower appeared, informing the government that TRW knew the transistors would fail in satellites even before it sold them. The government sued Northrop Grumman Corporation, which had bought TRW, and the corporation was found guilty (Drew 2009).

What was the punishment for a crime this serious? The failure of these satellites compromised the defense of the United States. When the executives of TRW were put on trial, how long were their prison sentences? Actually, these criminals weren’t even put on trial, and not one spent even a night in jail. Grumman was fined \$325 million. Then—and this is hard to believe—on the same day, the government settled a lawsuit that Grumman had brought against it for \$325 million. Certainly a rare coincidence.

Contrast this backdoor deal between influential people with what happens to the poor who break the law. A poor person who is caught stealing even a \$1,000 car can end up serving years in prison. How can a legal system that proudly boasts “justice for all” be so inconsistent? According to conflict theory, this question is central to the analysis of crime and the **criminal justice system**—the police, courts, and prisons that deal with people who are accused of having committed crimes. Let’s see what conflict theorists have to say about this.

The Criminal Justice System as an Instrument of Oppression

Conflict theorists regard power and social inequality as the main characteristics of society. The criminal justice system, they stress, is a tool designed by the powerful to maintain their power and privilege. For the poor, in contrast, the law is an instrument

of oppression (Spitzer 1975; Reiman 2004; Chambliss 2000, 1973/2012). The idea that the law operates impartially to bring justice, they say, is a cultural myth promoted by the capitalist class to secure the cooperation of the poor in their own oppression.

The working class and those below them pose a special threat to the power elite. Receiving the least of society's material rewards, they hold the potential to rebel and overthrow the current social order (see Figure 8.5). To prevent this, the law comes down hard on its members who get out of line. The working poor and the underclass are a special problem. They are the least rooted in society. They have few skills and only low-paying, part-time, or seasonal work—if they have jobs at all. Because their street crimes threaten the social order that keeps the elite in power, they are punished severely. From this class come *most* of the prison inmates in the United States.

The criminal justice system, then, does not focus on the executives of corporations and the harm they do through manufacturing unsafe products, creating pollution, and manipulating prices. Yet the violations of the capitalist class cannot be ignored totally,

In early capitalism, children worked alongside adults. At that time, just as today, most street criminals came from the *marginal working class*, as did the boys shown in this 1911 yarn mill in Yazoo City, Mississippi.



Why do conflict theorists view the criminal justice system as an instrument of oppression?



for if they become too extreme they might outrage the working class, encouraging them to rise up and revolt. To prevent this, a flagrant violation by a member of the capitalist class is occasionally prosecuted. The publicity given to the case provides evidence of the “fairness” of the criminal justice system, which helps to stabilize the social system—and keeps the powerful in their positions of privilege.

The powerful are usually able to bypass the courts altogether, appearing instead before an agency that has no power to imprison (such as the Federal Trade Commission). These agencies are directed by people from wealthy backgrounds who sympathize with the intricacies of the corporate world. It is they who oversee most cases of price manipulation, insider stock trading, violations of fiduciary duty, and so on. Is it surprising, then, that the typical sanction for corporate crime is a token fine?

In Sum: Conflict theorists stress that the power elite developed the legal system, which is used to stabilize the social order. It helps control the poor, who pose a threat to the powerful, for if they rebel as a group they can dislodge members of the criminal justice system from their place of privilege. To prevent this, the criminal justice system makes certain that heavy penalties come down on the poor.

Reactions to Deviance

Whether it involves cheating on a sociology quiz or holding up a liquor store, any violation of norms invites reaction. Before we examine reactions in the United States, let’s take a little side trip to England. I think you’ll enjoy this little excursion in the Cultural Diversity box on page 6-23.

Street Crime and Prisons

Let’s turn back to the United States. Figure 6.2 on page 6-22 shows the surge in the U.S. prison population. And what a surge! Prisoners have been coming in so fast that the states haven’t been able to build prisons fast enough to hold them all. To accommodate their many new guests, the state and federal governments have hired private companies to operate “for-profit” prisons. About 130,000 prisoners are held in these private prisons (*Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics* 2010: Table 6.32.2009).

Actually, the United States has even more prisoners than shown in Figure 6.2, since this total does not include jail inmates. If we add them, the total comes to about 2.3 million people—about one out of every 135 citizens. Not only does the United States have more prisoners than any other nation in the world, but it also has a larger percentage of its population in prison as well (Warren et al. 2008).

Who are these prisoners? Let’s compare them with the U.S. population. As you look at Table 6.3, several things may strike you. About half (49 percent) of all prisoners are younger than 35, and almost all prisoners are men. Then there is this remarkable statistic: Although African Americans make up just 12.8 percent of the U.S. population, close to two of five prisoners are African Americans. On any given day, *one out of every nine* African American men ages 20 to 34 is in jail or prison. (For Latinos, the rate is one of twenty-six; for whites one of one hundred [Warren et al. 2008].)

Finally, note how marriage and education—two of the major ways that society “anchors” people into mainstream behavior—keeps people out of prison. *Most* prisoners have never married. And look at the power of education, a major component of social class. As I mentioned earlier, social class funnels some people into the criminal justice system and diverts others away from it. You can see how people who drop out of high school have a high chance of ending up in prison—and how unlikely it is for a college graduate to have this unwelcome destination in life.

For about the past twenty years or so, the United States has followed a “get tough” policy. One of the most significant changes was “three-strikes-and-you’re-out” laws, which have had unanticipated consequences, as you will see in the following Thinking Critically section.

The cartoonist’s hyperbole makes an excellent commentary on the social class disparity of our criminal justice system. Not only are the crimes of the wealthy not as likely to come to the attention of authorities as are the crimes of the poor, but when they do, the wealthy can afford legal expertise that the poor cannot.



“If you want justice, it’s two hundred dollars an hour.
Obstruction of justice runs a bit more.”

TABLE 6.3 Inmates in U.S. State and Federal Prisons

Characteristics	Percentage of Prisoners with These Characteristics	Percentage of U.S. Population with These Characteristics
Age		
18–24	15.9%	9.8%
25–34	33.6%	13.5%
35–44	29.1%	14.0%
45–54	14.8%	14.6%
55 and older	6.7%	23.9%
Race–Ethnicity		
African American	38.4%	12.8%
White	34.3%	65.6%
Latino	20.3%	15.4%
Other ^a	6.9%	5.5%
Sex		
Male	93.2%	49.2%
Female	6.8%	50.8%
Marital Status		
Never married	59.8%	26.0%
Divorced	15.5%	10.4%
Married	17.3%	57.3%
Widowed	1.1%	6.4%
Education		
Less than high school	39.7%	13.4%
High school graduate	49.0%	31.2%
Some college ^b	9.0%	26.0%
College graduate	2.4%	29.4%

^aAsian Americans and Native Americans are included in this category.

^bIncludes associate's degrees.

Source: By the author. Based on *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics* 2003: Tables 6.000b, 6.28; 2006: Tables 6.34, 6.45; 2009: Table 6.33.2008; *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2011: Tables 8, 10, 56, 227.

THINKING CRITICALLY

“Three Strikes and You’re Out!” Unintended Consequences of Well-Intended Laws

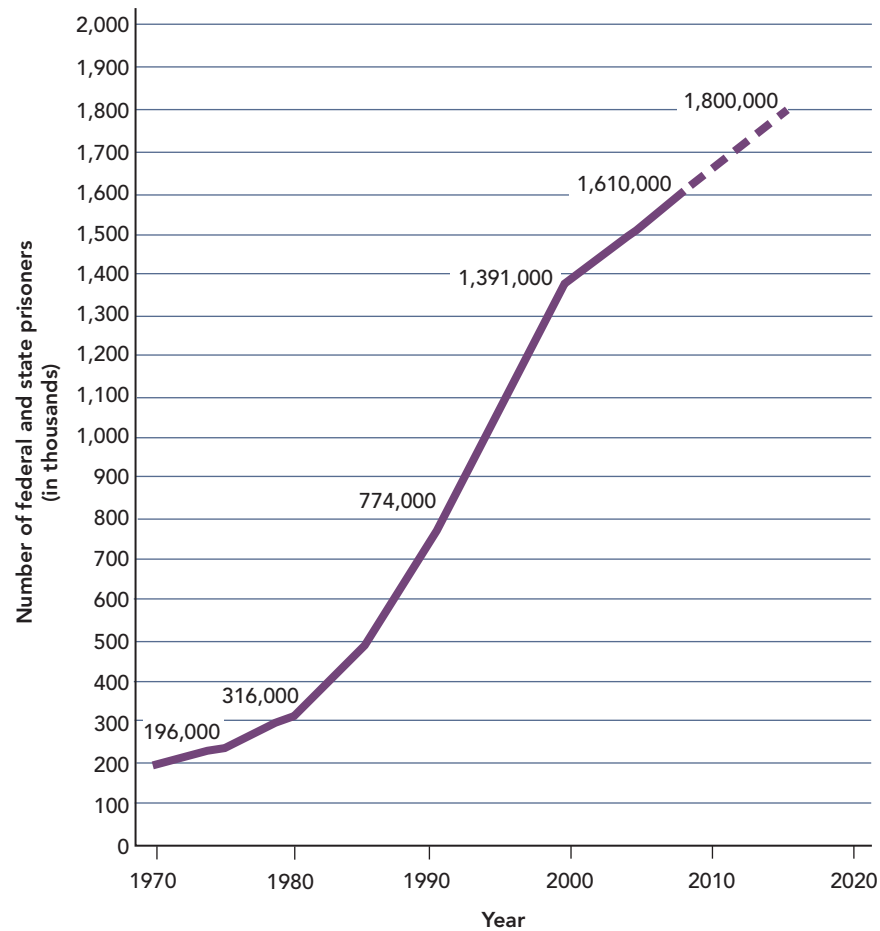
As the violent crime rate soared in the 1980s, Americans grew fearful. They demanded that their lawmakers do something. Politicians heard the message, and many responded by passing “three-strikes” laws in their states. Anyone who is convicted of a third felony receives an automatic mandatory sentence. Although some mandatory sentences carry life imprisonment, judges are not allowed to consider the circumstances. While few of us would feel sympathy if a man convicted of a third brutal rape or a third murder were sent to prison for life, in their haste to appease the public the politicians did not limit the three-strike laws to *violent* crimes. And they did not consider that some minor crimes are considered felonies. As the functionalists would say, this has led to unanticipated consequences.

Here are some actual cases:

- In Los Angeles, a 27-year-old man who stole a pizza was sentenced to 25 years in prison (Cloud 1998).
- In Sacramento, a man passed himself off as Tiger Woods and went on a \$17,000 shopping spree. He was sentenced to *200 years* in prison (Reuters 2001).

Why don't the characteristics of prisoners match those of the U.S. population?

FIGURE 6.2 How Much Is Enough? The Explosion in the Number of U.S. Prisoners



Between 1970 and 2008, the U.S. population increased 50 percent, while the number of prisoners increased 821 percent, a rate that is *sixteen times greater* than population growth. If the number of prisoners had grown at the same rate as the U.S. population, we would have about 294,000 prisoners, only one-fifth to one-sixth of today's total. Or if the U.S. population had increased at the same rate as that of U.S. prisoners, the U.S. population would be 1,670,000,000—approximately the population of China and all of Europe combined.

Sources: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 1995: Table 349; 2011: Tables 1, 6, 344. The broken line is the author's estimate.

- Also in California, Michael James passed a bad check for \$94. He was sentenced to 25 years to life (Jones 2008).
- In Utah, a 25-year-old sold small bags of marijuana to a police informant. The judge who sentenced the man to 55 years in prison said the sentence was unjust, but he had no choice (Madigan 2004).
- In New York City, a man who was about to be sentenced for selling crack said to the judge, "I'm only 19. This is terrible." He then hurled himself out of a courtroom window, plunging to his death sixteen stories below (Cloud 1998).

For Your Consideration

➔ Apply the symbolic interactionist, functionalist, and conflict perspectives to the three-strikes laws. For *symbolic interactionism*, what do these laws represent to the public? How does your answer differ depending on what part of "the public" you are referring to? For *functionalism*, who benefits from these laws? What are some of the functions of three-strikes laws? Their dysfunctions? For the *conflict perspective*, which groups are in conflict? Who has the power to enforce their will on others? ■

How are the three-strikes laws part of the reason for the explosion in the number of U.S. prisoners?

The Decline in Violent Crime

As you have seen, judges have put more and more people in prison, and legislators have passed the three-strikes laws. As these changes occurred, the crime rate dropped sharply, which has led to a controversy in sociology. Some sociologists conclude that getting tough on criminals is the main reason that violent crime dropped (Conklin 2003; Bhati and Piquero 2008). Others point to higher employment, a drop in drug use, and even abortion (Rosenfeld 2002; Joyce 2009). We can rule out unemployment, for when the unemployment rate shot up with the economic crisis the lower crime rates continued (Oppel 2011). This matter is not yet settled. We'll see what answers future research brings.

Recidivism

If a goal of prisons is to teach their clients to stay away from crime, they are colossal failures. We can measure their failure by the **recidivism rate**—the percentage of former prisoners who are rearrested. For people sent to prison for crimes of violence, within just three years of their release, two out of three (62 percent) are rearrested, and half (52 percent) are back in prison (*Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics* 2003: Table 6.52). Looking at Figure 6.3, which gives

Cultural Diversity around the World

"Dogging" in England

In some places in England, people like "dogging." This is their term for having sex in public so others can watch. The sex often is between strangers who have arranged to meet through the Internet.

"Dogging" is a strange term, and no one knows its origin. The term might come from voyeurs who doggedly follow people who are having sex. Or it might refer to the similarity to female dogs in heat that have sex with any dog around. Or it might even come from the statement "I'm just going to walk the dog," when they are really going out to do something else entirely.

Regardless of the term's origin, frolicking in the fields is popular. Internet sites even lay out basic rules, such as "Only join in if you are asked."

The Internet sites also rate England's dogging locations. The field in Puttenham, a village an hour's drive from London, is ranked Number 2 in England. The field is mostly used by homosexuals during the day, with heterosexuals taking over at night.

One motorist who stopped his car to use the bushes for a bathroom break was startled when a group of eager men surrounded him. He said that he took the quickest pee in his life.

Dogging isn't legal, but the police mostly ignore it. The police have even warned the public, but in a discreet English way. They have designated the field in Puttenham as a "public sex environment."

Some village residents are upset at the litter left behind, from condoms to tea cups. Others are upset that the dogging field is just 400 yards from the village nursery school. A woman who went to the police to complain showed them a pink vibrator she had found in the field. "What



should we do with it?" asked the officer. Seeing that she was going to get nowhere, she said they could just put it in Lost and Found.

After listening to citizen complaints, the County Council Cabinet wanted to know if anyone had practical solutions. One suggested that the police patrol the site with dogs. Another said they should fill the field with bad-tempered bulls.

Distressed at such inconsiderate reactions, one empathetic cabinet member said, "If you close this site, they wouldn't have anywhere else to go. There might be an increase in suicides."

The citizens and Council members reached a compromise: They would put up a sign. "Don't have sex here" seemed too direct for the English, so the sign, much more polite and circuitous, says, "Do not engage in activities of an unacceptable nature."

Source: Based on Lyall 2010.

For Your Consideration

➔ What do you think the police would do if there were a "dogging" field in your town? What do you think the public's reaction would be? Why do you think the police are so "heavy handed" in the United States while those in England take such a lighter approach?

a breakdown of three-year recidivism by type of crime, it is safe to conclude that prisons do not teach people that crime doesn't pay.

The Death Penalty and Bias

As you know, **capital punishment**, the death penalty, is the most extreme measure the state takes. As you also know, the death penalty arouses both impassioned opposition and support. Advances in DNA testing have given opponents of the death penalty a strong argument: Innocent people have been sent to death row, and some have been executed. Others are just as passionate about retaining the death penalty. They point to such crimes as those of the serial killers discussed in the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page.

Geography. Apart from anyone's personal position on the death penalty, it certainly is clear that the death penalty is not administered evenly. Consider geography: The Social Map (Figure 6.4) on page 6-26 shows that where people commit murder greatly affects their chances of being put to death.

Social Class. The death penalty also shows social class bias. As you know from news reports, it is rare for a rich person to be sentenced to death. Although the government does not collect statistics on social class and the death penalty, this common observation is borne out by the education of the prisoners on death row. *Half* of the prisoners on death row (50 percent) have not finished high school (*Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics* 2009: Table 6.81).

Gender. There is also a gender bias in the death penalty—so strong that it is almost unheard of for a woman to be sentenced to death, much less executed. Although women commit 9.6 percent of the murders, they make up only 1.8 percent of death row inmates (*Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics* 2009: Table 6.81). Even on death row, the gender bias continues: Of those condemned to death, the state is more likely to execute a man than a woman. As Figure 6.5 on page 6-27 shows, only 0.9 percent of the 1,137 prisoners executed in the United States since 1977 have been women. This gender bias could reflect the women's previous offenses and the relative brutality of their murders, but we need research to determine if this is so.

Race–Ethnicity. At one point, racial-ethnic bias was so flagrant that it put a stop to the death penalty. Donald Partington (1965), a lawyer in Virginia, was shocked by the bias he saw in the courtroom, and he decided to document it. Going back to 1908, he found that 2,798 men had been convicted for rape and attempted rape in Virginia—56 percent whites and 44 percent blacks. For rape, 41 men had been executed. For attempted rape, 13 had been executed. *All those executed were black.* Not one of the whites was executed.

After listening to evidence like this, in 1972 the Supreme Court ruled in *Furman v. Georgia* that the death penalty, as applied, was unconstitutional.

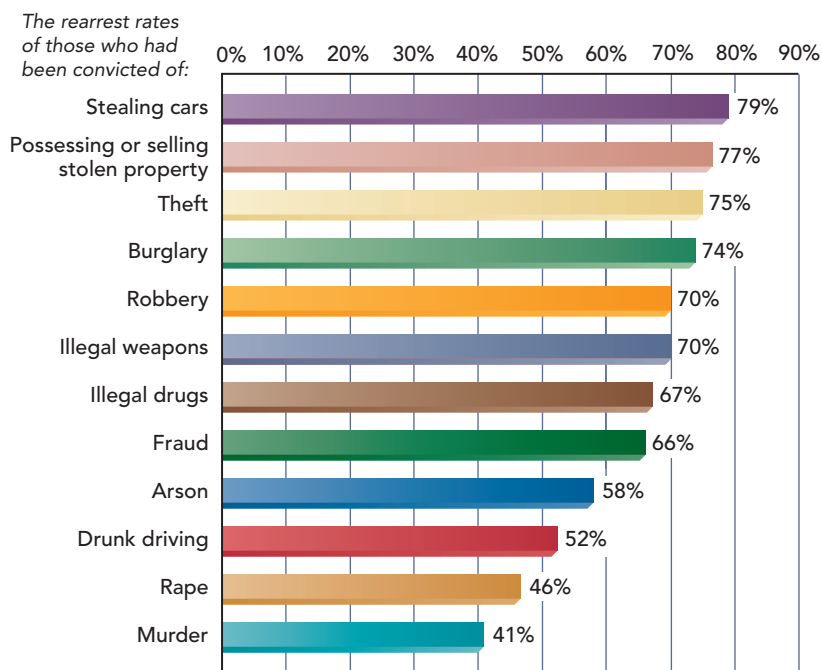


"It's interesting—with each conviction I learn a little more about myself."

Unfortunately, whatever prisoners do learn about themselves in prison—if anything—fails to keep them from coming back.

FIGURE 6.3 Recidivism of U.S. Prisoners

Of 272,000 prisoners released from U.S. prisons, what percentage were rearrested within three years?



Source: By the author. Based on *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics* 2003: Table 6.50.
Note: The individuals were not necessarily rearrested for the same crime for which they had originally been imprisoned.

Based on recidivism, how effective are our prisons? Why do you think we have a gender bias in the death penalty?

Down-to-Earth Sociology

The Killer Next Door: Serial Murderers in Our Midst

Here is my experience with serial killers. As I was watching television one night, I was stunned by the images. Television cameras showed the Houston police digging up dozens of bodies from under a boat storage shed. Fascinated, I waited impatiently for spring break. A few days later, I drove from Illinois, where I was teaching, to Houston, where 33-year-old Dean Corll had befriended Elmer Wayne Henley and David Brooks, two teenagers from broken homes. Together, they had killed twenty-seven boys. Elmer and David would pick up young hitchhikers and deliver them to Corll to rape and kill. Sometimes they even brought him their own high school classmates.

I talked to one of Elmer's neighbors, as he was painting his front porch. His 15-year-old son had gone to get a haircut one Saturday morning. That was the last time he saw his son alive. The police refused to investigate. They insisted that his son had run away. On a city map, I plotted the locations of the homes of the local murder victims. Many clustered around the homes of the teenage killers.

I decided to spend my coming sabbatical writing a novel on this case. To get into the minds of the killers, I knew that I would have to "become" them day after day. Corll kept a piece of plywood in his apartment. In each of its corners, he had cut a hole. He and the boys would spread-eagle their handcuffed victims on this board, torturing them for hours. Sometimes, they would even pause to order pizza. As such details emerged, I became uncertain that I could recover psychologically from months-on immersion into torture and human degradation, and I decided not to write the book.

My interviews confirmed what has since become common knowledge about serial killers: They lead double lives so successfully that their friends and family are unaware of their criminal activities. Henley's mother swore to me that her son couldn't possibly be guilty—he was a good boy. Some of Elmer's high school friends told me that that his being involved in homosexual rape and murder was ridiculous—he was interested only in girls. I was interviewing them in Henley's bedroom, and for proof they pointed to a pair of girls' panties that were draped across a lamp shade.



Ted Bundy is shown here with his defense attorney, when he was on trial in Miami for killing two college students. You can get a glimpse of his charm and wit and how, like most serial killers, he blended in with society. Bundy was executed for his murders.

Serial murder is killing three or more victims in separate events. The murders may occur over several days, weeks, or years. The elapsed time between murders distinguishes serial killers from *mass murderers*, those who do their killing all at once. Here are some infamous examples:

- During the 1960s and 1970s, Ted Bundy raped and killed dozens of women in four states.
- Between 1974 and 1991, Dennis Rader killed ten people in Wichita, Kansas. Rader had written to the newspapers, proudly calling himself the BTK (Bind, Torture, and Kill) strangler.
- In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Aileen Wuornos hitchhiked along Florida's freeways. She killed seven men after having had sex with them.
- The serial killer with the most victims appears to be Harold Shipman, a physician in Manchester, England. From 1977 to 2000, during house calls Shipman gave lethal injections to 230 to 275 of his elderly female patients.
- In 2009, Anthony Sowell of Cleveland, Ohio, was discovered living with eleven decomposing bodies of women he had raped and strangled.

Is serial murder more common now than it used to be? Not likely. In the past, police departments had little communication with one another, and seldom did anyone connect killings in different jurisdictions. Today's more efficient communications, investigative techniques, and

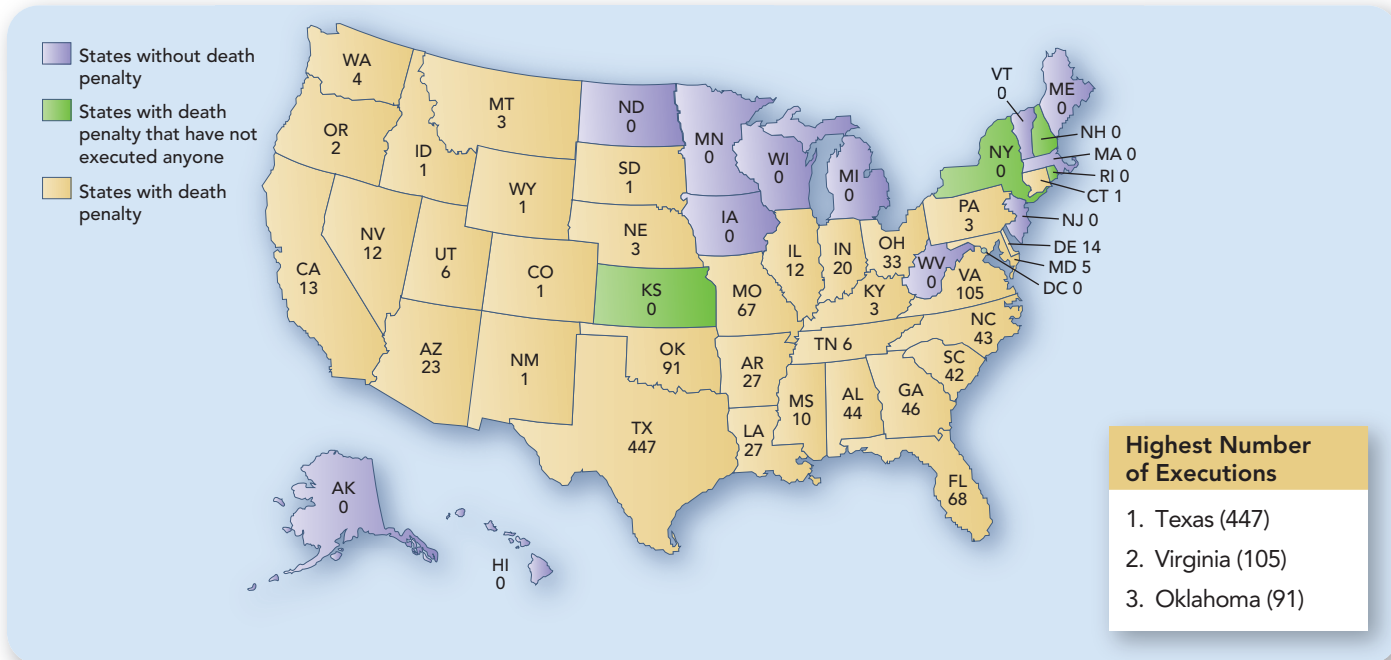
DNA matching make it easier for the police to know when a serial killer is operating in an area. Part of the perception that there are more serial killers today is also due to ignorance of our history: In our frontier past, for example, serial killers went from ranch to ranch.

For Your Consideration

➔ Do you think that serial killers should be given the death penalty? Why or why not? How do your social locations influence your opinion?

The execution of prisoners stopped—but not for long. The states wrote new laws, and in 1977 they again began to execute prisoners. Since then, 65 percent of those put to death have been white and 35 percent African American (*Statistical Abstract* 2011: Table 349). (Latinos are evidently counted as whites in this statistic.) While living on death row is risky for anyone, the risk is higher for African Americans and Latinos who killed whites. They are more likely to be executed (Jacobs et al. 2007). The most accurate predictor of

What do you think the penalty for serial killers should be? Why?

FIGURE 6.4 Executions in the United States*Executions since 1977, when the death penalty was reinstated.*Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2011:Table 350.

who will be put to death, though, is somewhat surprising: Those who have the least education are the most likely to be executed (Karamouzis and Harper 2007). On Table 6.4 on the next page, you can see the race-ethnicity of the prisoners who are on death row.

Legal Change

Did you know that it is a crime in Saudi Arabia for a woman to drive a car (Usher 2011)? A crime in Florida to sell alcohol before 1 P.M. on Sundays? Or illegal in Wells, Maine, to advertise on tombstones?

As has been stressed in this chapter, deviance, including the form called *crime*, is so relative that it varies from one society to another and from one group to another within the same society. Crime also varies from one time period to another, as opinions change, as different groups gain access to power, or as we discuss in the following Thinking Critically section as technology changes.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Sexting

Four eighth-grade girls were having a sleepover. As they talked about how they could impress the boys they were interested in, they came up with an idea. They took off their clothes, covered themselves with whipped cream, and sent pictures to boys of themselves licking it off.

It seemed like a good idea at the time, but the girls didn't think so the next day. As they walked to class, the boys stood around leering, laughing, and holding up the girls' images on their cell phones.

The boys who received the images had forwarded them to their friends—who forwarded them to their friends, and so on.

What bias in the application of the death penalty led to it being declared unconstitutional?

TABLE 6.4 The Race–Ethnicity of the 3,316 Prisoners on Death Row

	Percentage	
	on Death Row	in U.S. Population
Whites	44%	67%
African Americans	41%	13%
Latinos	12%	14%
Asian Americans	1%	4%
Native Americans	1%	1%

Source: By the author. Based on *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics* 2010: Table 6.80 and Figure 9.5 of this text.

Even some parents received the photos on their cell phones, and, as they say, then all hell broke loose.

Sexting, sending sexually explicit text or images electronically, is a new crime brought about by changing technology, and it is giving lawmakers and enforcers a hard time.

Not to mention teenagers.

If two people over the age of 18 send sexually explicit messages to one another, this is a matter between them. If someone forwards those images, it is still a problem between those individuals. But people under the age of 18 are legally minors, and their sexually explicit photos are classified by law as child pornography.

And what should law enforcers do? If they learn about sexting by minors, can they just ignore it? No, because they are sworn to uphold the law, and sexting comes under the law. And those who are convicted—both those who send the messages and those who pass them on to others—are guilty of producing or disseminating child pornography. So let's prosecute, say some district attorneys. And those who are convicted will have to register as sex offenders for decades!

"Absolutely ridiculous," reply other district attorneys, teachers, and parents. "This is just kids having misguided fun. Let's just teach the kids that they are being foolish and irresponsible."

"You're all getting excited about nothing," says one 17-year-old girl. "You're overlooking the positive side to sexting. You can't get pregnant from it, and you can't transmit STDs. It's a kind of safe sex."

Lawmakers and enforcers are grappling with sexting. Some think that the current laws are good enough, but the general consensus seems to be that the laws passed to prohibit child pornography don't apply to this new behavior. Most proposals for legal change center around educational programs and community service for minors who transmit images of "sexually explicit conduct." Then, of course, there is the more severe penalty—banning the offenders from using cell phones.

For Your Consideration

➔ Do you think there should be any sanctions for sexting by minors, or should this be a private matter, much as it is for adults? If you think there should be sanctions, which ones? The same ones for sexters age 13 and age 17? The same sanctions for nudity and for the depiction of activities like penetration, sadism, and masturbation? ■

Source: Based on "What They're Saying..." 2011; Hoffman 2011.

FIGURE 6.5 Who Gets Executed? Gender Bias in Capital Punishment



Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2011: Table 349.

The Medicalization of Deviance: Mental Illness

When the woman drove her car into the river, drowning her two small children strapped to their little car seats, people said that she had "gone nuts," "went bonkers," and just plain "lost it" because of her problems.

How are the sexting laws an example of an evolving criminal justice system?

Neither Mental Nor Illness? When people cannot find a satisfying explanation for why someone does something weird or is “like that,” they often say that a “sickness in the head” is causing the unacceptable behavior. To *medicalize* something is to make it a medical matter, to classify it as a form of illness that properly belongs in the care of physicians. For the past hundred years or so, especially since the time of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), the Viennese physician who founded psychoanalysis, there has been a growing tendency toward the **medicalization of deviance**. In this view, deviance, including crime, is a sign of mental sickness. Rape, murder, stealing, cheating, and so on are external symptoms of internal disorders, consequences of a confused or tortured mind, one that should be treated by mental health experts.

Thomas Szasz (1986, 1996, 1998), a renegade in his profession of psychiatry, disagrees. He argues that what are called *mental illnesses are neither mental nor illnesses. They are simply problem behaviors*. Szasz breaks these behaviors for which we don’t have a ready explanation into two causes: physical illness and learned deviance.

Some behaviors that are called “mental illnesses” have physical causes. That is, something in an individual’s body results in unusual perceptions or behavior. Some depression, for example, is caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain, which can be treated by drugs. The behaviors that are associated with depression—crying, long-term sadness, and lack of interest in family, work, school, or grooming—are only symptoms of a physical problem.

Attention-deficit disorder (ADD) is an example of a new “mental illness” that has come out of nowhere. As Szasz says, “No one explains where this disease came from or why it didn’t exist 50 years ago. No one is able to diagnose it with objective tests.” ADD is diagnosed because a teacher or parent is complaining about a child misbehaving. Misbehaving children have been a problem throughout history, but now, with doctors looking to expand their territory, this problem behavior has become a sign of “mental illness” that they can treat.

All of us have troubles. Some of us face a constant barrage of problems as we go through life. Most of us continue the struggle, perhaps encouraged by relatives and friends or motivated by jobs, family responsibilities, religious faith, and life goals. Even when the odds seem hopeless, we carry on, not perfectly, but as best we can.

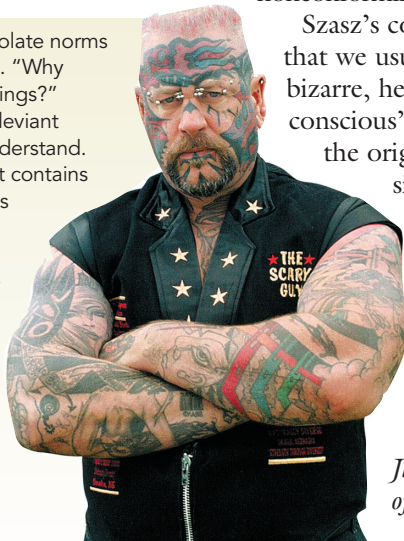
Some people, however, fail to cope well with life’s challenges. Overwhelmed, they become depressed, uncooperative, or hostile. Some strike out at others; and some, in Merton’s terms, become retreatists and withdraw into their apartments or homes, refusing to come out. These are *behaviors, not mental illnesses*, stresses Szasz. They may be inappropriate ways of coping, but they are behaviors, not mental illnesses. Szasz concludes that “mental illness” is a myth foisted on a naïve public. Our medical profession uses pseudo-scientific jargon that people don’t understand so it can expand its area of control and force nonconforming people to accept society’s definitions of “normal.”

Szasz’s controversial claim forces us to look anew at the forms of deviance that we usually refer to as mental illness. To explain behavior that people find bizarre, he directs our attention not to causes hidden deep within the “subconscious” but, instead, to how people learn such behaviors. To ask, “What is the origin of someone’s inappropriate or bizarre behavior?” then becomes similar to asking, “Why do some women steal?” “Why do some men rape?” “Why do some teenagers cuss their parents and stalk out of the room, slamming the door?” *The answers depend on those people’s particular experiences in life, not on an illness in their minds.* In short, some sociologists find Szasz’s renegade analysis refreshing because it indicates that *social experiences*, not some illness of the mind, underlie bizarre behaviors—as well as deviance in general.

The Homeless Mentally Ill

Jamie was sitting on a low wall surrounding the landscaped courtyard of an exclusive restaurant. She appeared unaware of the stares elicited by

People whose behaviors violate norms often are called mentally ill. “Why else would they do such things?” is a common response to deviant behaviors that we don’t understand. Mental illness is a label that contains the assumption that there is something wrong “within” people that “causes” their disapproved behavior. The surprise with this man, who changed his legal name to “Scary Guy,” is that he speaks at schools across the country, where he promotes acceptance, awareness, love, and understanding.



What is the medicalization of deviance? What is the argument that mental illnesses are problem behaviors, not mental illnesses?

her layers of mismatched clothing, her matted hair and dirty face, and the shopping cart that overflowed with her meager possessions.

After sitting next to Jamie for a few minutes, I saw her point to the street and concentrate, slowly moving her finger horizontally. I asked her what she was doing.

"I'm directing traffic," she replied. "I control where the cars go. Look, that one turned right there," she said, now withdrawing her finger.

"Really?" I said.

After a while she confided that her cart talked to her.

"Really?" I said again.

"Yes," she replied. "You can hear it, too." At that, she pushed the shopping cart a bit.

"Did you hear that?" she asked.

When I shook my head, she demonstrated again. Then it hit me. She was referring to the squeaking wheels!

I nodded.

When I left Jamie, she was pointing to the sky, for, as she told me, she also controlled the flight of airplanes.

To most of us, Jamie's behavior and thinking are bizarre. They simply do not match any reality we know. Could you or I become like Jamie?

Suppose for a bitter moment that you are homeless and have to live on the streets. You have no money, no place to sleep, no bathroom. You do not know *if* you are going to eat, much less where. You have no friends or anyone you can trust. You live in constant fear of rape and other violence. Do you think this might be enough to drive you over the edge?

Consider just the problems involved in not having a place to bathe. (Shelters are often so dangerous that many homeless people prefer to sleep in public settings.) At first, you try to wash in the restrooms of gas stations, bars, the bus station, or a shopping center. But you are dirty, and people stare when you enter and call the management when they see you wash your feet in the sink. You are thrown out and told in no uncertain terms never to come back. So you get dirtier and dirtier. Eventually, you come to think of being dirty as a fact of life. Soon, maybe, you don't even care. The stares no longer bother you—at least not as much.

No one will talk to you, and you withdraw more and more into yourself. You begin to build a fantasy life. You talk openly to yourself. People stare, but so what? They stare anyway. Besides, they are no longer important to you.

Jamie might be mentally ill. Some organic problem, such as a chemical imbalance in her brain, might underlie her behavior. But perhaps not. How long would it take you to exhibit bizarre behaviors if you were homeless—and hopeless? The point is that *living on the streets can cause mental illness*—or whatever we want to label socially inappropriate behaviors that we find difficult to classify. *Homelessness and mental illness are reciprocal*: Just as "mental illness" can cause homelessness, so the trials of being homeless, of living on cold, hostile streets, can lead to unusual thinking and behaviors.

The Need for a More Humane Approach

As Durkheim (1895/1964: 68) pointed out, deviance is inevitable—even in a group of saints.

Imagine a society of saints, a perfect cloister of exemplary individuals. Crimes, properly so called, will there be unknown; but faults which appear invisible to the layman will create there the same scandal that the ordinary offense does in ordinary society.

With deviance inevitable, one measure of a society is how it treats its deviants. Our prisons certainly don't say much good about U.S. society. Filled with the poor, uneducated, and unskilled, they are warehouses

Mental illness is common among the homeless. This photo was taken in New York City, but it could have been taken in any large city in the United States.



How are homelessness and mental illness reciprocal (each contributing to the other)?

of the unwanted. White-collar criminals continue to get by with a slap on the wrist while street criminals are punished severely. Some deviants, who fail to meet current standards of admission to either prison or mental hospital, take refuge in shelters, as well as in cardboard boxes tucked away in urban recesses. Although no one has *the* answer, it does not take much reflection to see that there are more humane approaches than these.

Because deviance is inevitable, the larger issues are to find ways to protect people from deviant behaviors that are harmful to themselves or others, to tolerate those behaviors that are not harmful, and to develop systems of fairer treatment for deviants. In the absence of fundamental changes that would bring about an equitable social system, most efforts are, unfortunately, like putting a Band-Aid on a gunshot wound. What we need is a more humane social system, one that would prevent the social inequalities that are the focus of the next four chapters.

CHAPTER 6 Summary and Review



What Is Deviance?

Deviance (the violation of norms) is relative. What people consider deviant varies from one culture to another and from group to group within the same society. As symbolic interactionists stress, it is not the act, but the reactions to the act, that make something deviant. All groups develop systems of **social control** to punish **deviants**—those who violate their norms. Pp. 6-4–6-6.

How do sociological and individualistic explanations of deviance differ?

To explain why people deviate, sociobiologists and psychologists look for reasons *within* the individual, such as **genetic predispositions** or **personality disorders**. Sociologists, in contrast, look for explanations *outside* the individual, in social experiences. Pp. 6-6–6-7.

The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

How do symbolic interactionists explain deviance?

Symbolic interactionists have developed several theories to explain deviance such as **crime**, the violation of norms that are written into law. According to **differential association** theory, people learn to deviate by associating with others. According to **control theory**, each of us is propelled toward deviance, but most of us conform because of an effective system of inner and outer controls. People who have less effective controls deviate. Pp. 6-7–6-9.

Labeling theory focuses on how labels (names, reputations) help to funnel people into or divert them away from deviance. People often use **techniques of neutralization** to deflect social norms. Pp. 6-9–6-12.

The Functionalist Perspective

How do functionalists explain deviance?

Functionalists point out that deviance, including criminal acts, is functional for society. Functions include affirming norms and promoting social unity and social change. According to **strain theory**, societies socialize their members into desiring **cultural goals**. Many people are unable to achieve these goals in socially acceptable ways—that is, by **institutionalized means**. *Deviants*, then, are people who either give up on the goals or use disapproved means to attain them. Merton identified five types of responses to cultural goals and institutionalized means: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion. **Illegitimate opportunity theory** stresses that some people have easier access to illegal means of achieving goals. Pp. 6-13–6-18.

The Conflict Perspective

How do conflict theorists explain deviance?

Conflict theorists take the position that the group in power imposes its definitions of deviance on other groups. From this perspective, the law is an instrument of oppression used by the powerful to maintain their position of privilege. The ruling class, which developed the **criminal**

justice system, uses it to punish the crimes of the poor while diverting its own criminal activities away from this punitive system. Pp. 6-18–6-20.

Reactions to Deviance

What are common reactions to deviance in the United States?

In following a “get-tough” policy, the United States has imprisoned millions of people. African Americans and Latinos make up a disproportionate percentage of U.S. prisoners. The death penalty shows biases by geography, social class, gender, and race–ethnicity. In line with conflict theory, as groups gain political power, their views are reflected in the criminal code. Sexting legislation was considered in this context. Pp. 6-20–6-27.

What is the medicalization of deviance?

The medical profession has attempted to **medicalize** many forms of **deviance**, claiming that they represent mental illnesses. Thomas Szasz disagrees, asserting that they are problem behaviors, not mental illnesses. The situation of homeless people indicates that problems in living can lead to bizarre behavior and thinking. Pp. 6-27–6-29.

What is a more humane approach?

Deviance is inevitable, so the larger issues are to find ways to protect people from deviance that harms themselves and others, to tolerate deviance that is not harmful, and to develop systems of fairer treatment for deviants. Pp. 6-29–6-30.

Thinking Critically about Chapter 6

1. Select some deviance with which you are personally familiar. (It does not have to be your own—it can be something that someone you know did.) Choose one of the three theoretical perspectives to explain what happened.
2. As explained in the text, deviance can be mild. Recall some instance in which you broke a social rule in dress, etiquette, or speech. What was the reaction? Why do you think people reacted like that? What was your response to their reactions?
3. What do you think should be done about the U.S. crime problem? What sociological theories support your view?

