

An Overview of Deviant Behavior

PART I

- CHAPTER 1 Introduction to the Study of
Deviant Behavior
- CHAPTER 2 Theories of Individual Forms of
Deviant Behavior
- CHAPTER 3 Theories of the Variations in Rates of
Deviant Behavior



Introduction to the Study of Deviant Behavior

CHAPTER 1

■ Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter you show know

- How deviant behavior is defined.
- Processes by which social/legal norms are created and violated and the consequences of social/legal norm violation.
- Dimensions of deviant behavior.
- Functions of deviant behavior for society.
- The theme of this book.
- A conceptual framework for the study of deviance.

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American society has come a long way since the middle of the 20th century, when strict and widely accepted standards of personal morality inhibited many of the forms of individual expression we take for granted today. Although events like chaperoned dates, blue laws (requiring stores to close on Sundays), and dry counties (in which liquor could not be purchased or served) may seem quaint to most of us today, they were very real for people who lived in this country a mere 50 years ago.

Some parts of the world, however, continue to embrace moral strictures that seem old-fashioned to most Americans today. In Saudi Arabia, for example, the widely feared Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice empowers hundreds

of volunteers—usually bearded older men—to act as religious police or morality enforcement squads. These *mutawa*, as they are known, patrol malls, restaurants, parks, and the seashore herding men into mosques at prayer time and ensuring the public separation of unmarried males and females. The *mutawa* can take people into custody for morals violations, including what they consider to be improper clothing. They have been known to disrupt mixed-gender business meetings and are infamous for their involvement in incidents wherein people suspected of “gender mingling” died in custody or in automobile chases.

Unlike the United States, which is a democratic country that practices separation of church and state, Saudi Arabia is an Islamic nation ruled by a king who is closely allied with Muslim clerics and a diffuse religious establishment. Decades of tradition, moreover, have led to an acceptance of moral regulations among most members of Saudi society. Aisha al-Hekmi, an assistant professor at the Saudi University of Tabuk, explains it this way: “The *mutawa* protect our honor, prevent moral decay and westernization of our women. We see all the moral corruption in our neighboring countries,” al-Hekmi says, “because they do not have them” (Allam, 2010).

■ Defining Deviant Behavior

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

The situational perspective shifts the focus away from the individual and to the social situation surrounding the behavior in question. Let’s imagine that the naked man running down the street was not alone but instead was among a large party of naked naturalists celebrating a Gaia festival in the midst of a nudist colony fully secured from public view. If such were the case, his behavior might seem to be quite “natural” (pun intended). Not only would such an overt display of physical nudity not have violated the social norms of the colony, it would have reinforced

them. Hence, the situational perspective is *relativistic* in that it understands deviance primarily in terms of when and where it occurs.

Some behaviors are defined the same way by both normative and situational perspectives, and activities that are mutually acceptable to both are the most obvious forms of *conformist* or *nondeviant behaviors*. Conversely, when behaviors are negatively defined socially but nonetheless are consistent with the normative structure of society, they may be viewed as *extreme forms of conventional behavior* (e.g., workaholics, overachievers in school, etc.). Finally, certain behaviors do not adhere to the normative structure of society and are almost always situationally condemned. Such behaviors are clearly deviant and often also contravene administrative statutes or criminal law; in the latter case, this would make such behaviors *crimes*. As **Figure 1–1** shows, some forms

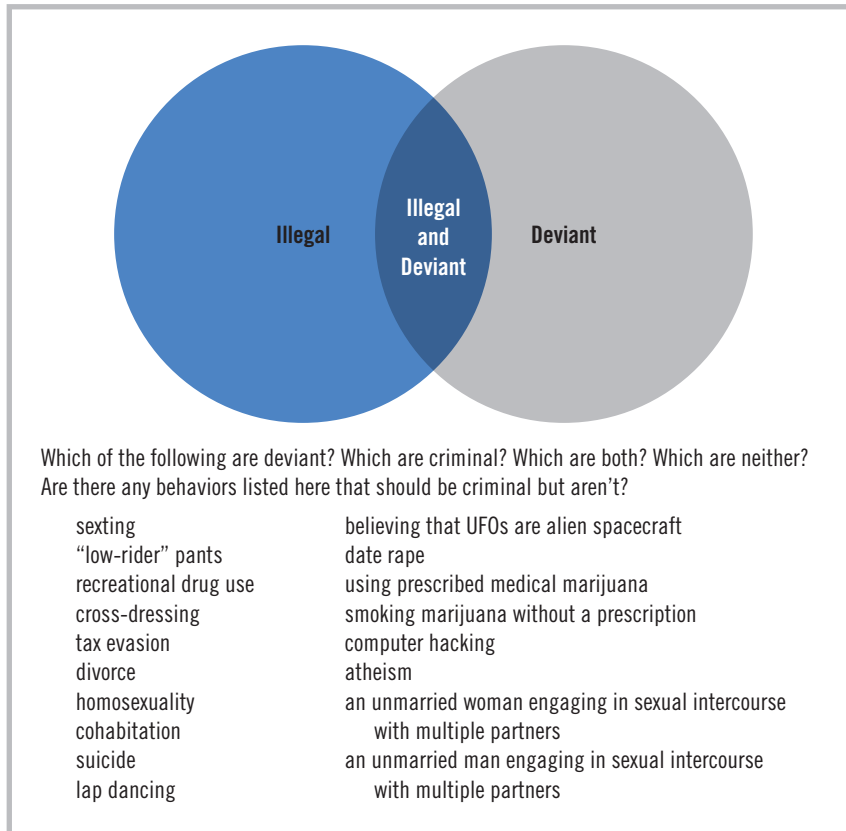


FIGURE 1–1 The Overlap between Deviance and Crime

of behavior may be against the law but may not be thought of as deviant by a majority of the population (i.e., exceeding the speed limit in certain locales), whereas some behaviors may be deviant but not criminal, and others may be both deviant and criminal. The relationship between crime and deviance is not static, of course, and forms of behavior considered deviant in the past might be legal today, whereas some of today's deviance might be criminalized in the future.

Two sociological concepts—culture and social organization—are particularly useful in determining whether certain behaviors should be classified as deviant. **Culture** refers to “a body of widely shared customs and values which provide general orientations toward life and specific ways of achieving common goals” (Palmer & Humphrey, 1990, p. 2). Culture is fundamental to the social order and relatively stable over time, yet it may provide a dynamic approach to the continually evolving challenges of everyday life. Changes in customs and values may originate



among certain segments of the society—for example, adolescents and young adults who are involved in continual changes in style of dress, patterns of speech, and forms of entertainment. Another example is special interest groups that seek to foster the acceptance of particular rights or protections, usually of vulnerable populations or the environment. These cultural changes may become institutionalized and persist through time, or they may be short-lived and disappear from the social landscape. The value of body piercing and tattooing may well dissipate over time, as do styles of dress and verbal expression. Culture provides meaning and stability to everyday life while allowing for innovation, creativity, and the reassessment of traditional customs and values. Culture, then, provides a backdrop for the establishment of acceptable behaviors. Behaviors that fall outside of defined cultural parameters are considered, in varying degrees, deviant (see also Linton, 1955).

Social organization provides the means for carrying out the complex network of

social interactions between individuals, social groups, and institutions. A central purpose of social organization is to ensure that conflict and discord in social interactions do not impede the effective functioning of society. Everyday life is remarkably devoid of mass disruption. For the most part the daily interactions of more than 6.8 billion persons worldwide are carried out in a reasonably predictable and orderly way (<http://www.census.gov/>). Millions of cars travel at high speeds in close proximity to one another, planes take off and land within minutes of each other, transnational business and commerce is conducted around the clock, and individuals communicate across time and cultures worldwide largely without incident.

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

Social norms may be classified as *expectational* or *behavioral*. **Expectational norms** refer to behaviors that are ideal for individuals who are enacting a particular social role or who are in a given social situation. Expectational norms govern the behavior of persons in positions of high responsibility (e.g., surgeons, airline pilots, heads of state) and persons in extreme life-threatening situations. Acceptable error in the operating room, at the controls of an airliner, or in the Oval Office is extremely lim-

Expectational Norms

Surgeons are understandably held to an extremely high standard of care. Gross surgical malpractice cases, however, are on the rise across the United States. Undamaged limbs are sometimes amputated, healthy organs removed, and holes drilled into the wrong side of a patient's head. Recently, The Joint Commission was empowered to revoke the accreditation of hospitals and other surgical sites if they do not comply with newly established safety regulations. The entire surgical team—surgeons, anesthesiologists, nurses, and technicians—must now take a “time-out” before making an incision in a patient. They must all agree that they have the correct patient on the operating table and that they are actually going to perform the correct surgical procedure. It is mandatory that surgeons “literally sign the incision site, while the patient is awake and cooperating if possible, with a marker that won't wash off in the operating room.”

Adapted from http://www.comcast.net/news/print.jsp?fn=/apnes/XML/1500_Health_medical/e2a5d7

The objective approach to deviance assumes that certain behaviors are naturally deviant, in that they go against widespread consensus in society. The affected norms are viewed as absolute.

—Conservapedia.com

SSRN

Mullen, E., & Nadler, J. (2008). *Moral spillovers: The effect of moral violations on deviant behavior*. Northwestern Law & Econ Research Paper No. 08-03; 3rd Annual Conference on Empirical Legal Studies Papers. <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1120444>

ited. Surgeons, for example, are expected to operate on the afflicted part of the patient's body—to always amputate the correct limb and to remove all surgical instruments from the patient's body after an operation. Yet, as we know medical malpractice, pilot error, and political misjudgment does occur, often with dire consequences.

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

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

Situational Perspective and Societal Reaction

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

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

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

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

Issues in the Study of Deviant Behavior

The study of deviant behavior can be approached through a number of important questions. In addition to perceptions of the morality or ethics involved in a deviant act or assessment of the personal repugnance of the individual offender lie several related conceptual issues:

1. How certain behaviors become defined as deviant, and how social and legal norms are created (see Weitzer, 2002)
2. Who violates social norms and why they do so
3. Possible societal reactions to norm violations



4. Consequences of norm violations for the offender and for the larger society
5. What types of social control are used for which kinds of social and legal norm violations and for different types of offenders
6. The impact of the use of formal or informal controls on subsequent social and legal norm violations

Figure 1–2 depicts the complex processes involved in the study of deviant behavior.

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

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

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

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

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

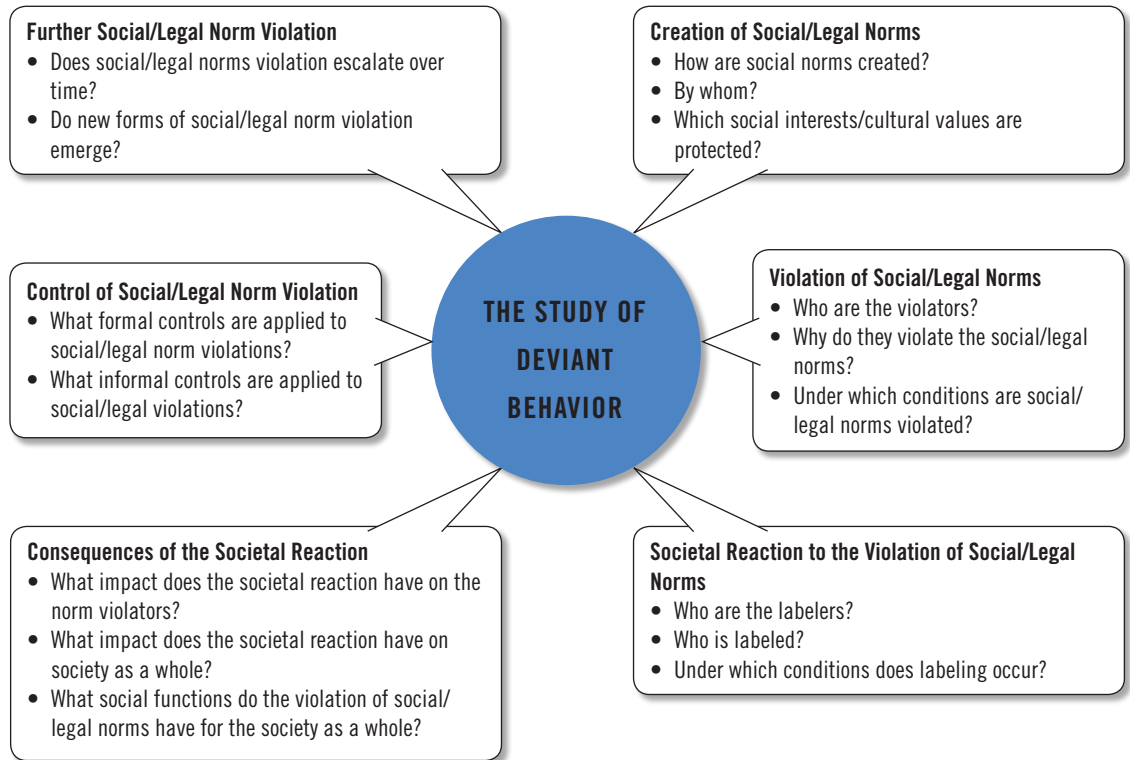


FIGURE 1–2 Issues in the Study of Deviant Behavior

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

The social reaction to the violation and the offenders varies by the severity of offense, the social characteristics of the victim and offender, and their social relationship (Black, 1976). Societal reaction or labeling theorists and researchers focus on the consequences of labeling certain

norm violators as deviant and the societal reaction to them (see Schur, 1971; Becker, 1963).

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

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

As tolerance of deviant behaviors decreases, societies may evolve into an ever-tightening spiral of more stringent social and legal norms, the propensity to define increasingly more of its members as deviant, and the development of more punitive control strategies. If this downward spiraling process is not reversed, then a repressive system of social control emerges that may well lead to the demise of the society.

■ Dimensions of Deviance

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

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

Patterned versus Idiosyncratic

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

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

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

Positive versus Negative

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

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

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

SSRN

Jackson, J., Gray, E., & Brunton-Smith, I. Decoding disorder: On public sensitivity to low-level deviance, March 10, 2010. <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1567953>***

Innovative versus Routine

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

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

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

Individual versus Group Deviance

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

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

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

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

Episodic versus Chronic Deviance

Deviant behavior may be confined to certain situations and thereby take on an episodic expression. Or, it may be persistent and transcend the immediate social circumstance. Extreme situations may give rise to forms of behavior that individuals would not engage in otherwise. Cannibalism is abhorrent to most people; however, when facing certain starvation, an individual may well eat parts of a deceased occupant of their lifeboat lost at sea. Similarly, binge-drinking partygoers may engage in behaviors that are inconsistent with their sense of morality or ethical principles.

Persistent deviance, however, transcends any situational boundaries. The behavior of a person afflicted with alcoholism or addicted to another drug or gambling is not situation-bound. Rather, the chronic deviant

persistently engages in aberrant behavior across a wide range of social situations.

■ Functions of Deviant Behavior

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

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

The Amish community, for example, has well-defined boundaries between itself and the larger society. The rejection of the conveniences and technological advances of conventional society sets the Amish community apart from its neighbors. Within the Amish community consensually held norms, values, and beliefs clearly demarcate acceptable from unacceptable behavior. Daily interaction among the members of the Amish community is carried out in an orderly and predictable way. Durkheim (1938, p. 70) argues that, “Crime is, then, necessary; it is bound up in the fundamental conditions of all social life, and by that very fact it is useful, because these conditions of which it is a part are themselves indispensable to the normal evolution of morality and the law.”

Following the lead of Emile Durkheim, sociologist Kai Erickson (2005) explains how certain behaviors are defined as deviant, the function that deviant behaviors serve in a given community, and the consequences of attempts to control deviant behavior. Erickson (2005, p. 6) argues that “Deviance is not a property *inherent* in any particular kind of behavior; it is a property *conferred* upon that behavior by the people who come into direct or indirect contact with it.” As such, “deviance refers to

conduct which the people of a group consider so dangerous or embarrassing or irritating that they bring special sanctions to bear against the persons who exhibit it” (Erickson, 2005, p. 6). Deviant behaviors mark the boundaries of a community. Each community occupies a particular “cultural space” and has a distinct “cultural identity.” Boundaries emerge then from the “networks of social interactions” that link the daily lives of the members of a community (Erickson, 2005). The boundaries of a community tend to shift over time, and behaviors that were previously considered deviant become commonplace. Yet, the effective functioning of a community depends on the establishment of boundaries that separate conformist from deviant behavior. Deviant behaviors in a sense define the community’s identity. Erickson (2005, p. 19) writes: “Every human community has its own set of boundaries, its own unique identity, and so we may presume that every community also has its own characteristic styles of deviant behavior.”

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

Other Functions of Deviant Behavior

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

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

Rapid increases in the use of illicit drugs, the emergence of newer “designer” drugs, or waves of teenage suicidal behavior may well signal

the need for societal attention to discontent among the young. Deviant behavior may also provide a means for bringing about social change. Innovative forms of deviance—for example, the use of computer chat rooms as group support for troubled persons—can provide an alternative to more visible and costly psychological care.

SCAPEGOATING AND TENSION RELEASE. The deviants in society provide an ongoing group of persons—some criminal, some eccentric, others simply

Rumspringa: An Amish Custom

The Amish live by a strict set of customs and moral principles. Yet, before an Amish youth commits to the Amish way of life, he or she typically participates in the Amish ritual of *rumspringa*, or period of “running around.” *Rumspringa* begins when Amish youths turn 16 and continues until they are married, usually between 19 and 22 years of age. Before *rumspringa* young Amish men and women have not been baptized into the Amish faith and therefore are not technically ruled by their parents or the church. *Rumspringa* then is a time for experimenting with things outside the world of the Amish. Close friendships are formed that continue for a lifetime. A central feature of *rumspringa* is participation in a youth group known as a “gang.”

Donald B. Kraybill writes the following:

About twenty-seven youth groups, called “gangs,” ranging in size from 50 to 150 members, crisscross the Lancaster settlement. By the age of 10, an Amish child will be able to name some of the groups—Bluebirds, Canaries, Pine Cones, Drifters, Shotguns, Rocky, and Quakers—and even describe some of their activities. Youth are free to join the gang of their choice. Young people from the same church district or family may join different groups. The gangs become the primary social world for teens before they marry, but the groups vary considerably in their conformity to traditional Amish values.

Some groups are fairly docile, but others engage in boisterous behavior that occasionally makes newspaper headlines. The reputation of the various groups signals how plain or rebellious a young person likely will be. . . . The more rowdy boys “dress around,” that is, shed their sectarian garb. Hatless. Wearing styled hair and store-bought jackets, they may “pass” as typical youth in a bar or movie theatre. Young men in some groups will have fancy reflective tape on their buggies and perhaps a hidden radio or CD player inside.

Members of the more rambunctious groups drive cars and sponsor dances, called “band-hops,” featuring Amish bands with electric guitars and kegs of beer. Wilder parties often involve the use and abuse of alcohol. And, youth are occasionally arrested for driving cars and buggies under the influence of alcohol.

Source: Adapted from Kraybill, D. B. 2001. *The Riddle of the Amish*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, pp. 145–146.

annoying—who can be blamed for many of the ills experienced by persons who have escaped the deviant label. The deviants can be segregated from the mass of society, treated in aggressive and demeaning ways, and stigmatized, often for life, for their deviant behaviors. Once the label of felon, psychotic, or sex offender has been applied, it most often becomes the “master status” of that person (Becker, 1963).

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

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

■ Theme of the Book

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

This theme derives from the work of two-noted British social theorists—Anthony Giddens (2000) and John Tomlinson (1999)—who argue that a reciprocal relationship exists between globalization and culture. Giddens (2000, p. 28) observes that globalization is “political, technological and cultural, as well as economic.” It has an uneven impact on local cultures around the world, strengthening the resolve of some and altering the fabric of others.

For globalization is not incidental to our lives today. It is a shift in our very life circumstances. It is the way we now live.
—Anthony Giddens (2000, p. 31)

Globalization lies at the heart of modern culture; cultural practices lie at the heart of globalization . . . this is (a) reciprocal relationship.

—John Tomlinson (1999, p. 1)

Tomlinson (1999, p. 2) views globalization as a “complex connectivity—the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interconnectivity that characterize social life.” Tomlinson’s conceptualization of globalization is consistent with that of McGrew (1992) and others (Castells, 1996, 1997; Lash and Urry, 1994), who stress the reciprocity of global cultural and economic influences. Globalization then involves the reciprocal influences of economic influences and culture. Not only does the global flow of goods and monetary resources reshape culture, but culture in turn modifies the impact of international trade.

Figure 1–3 shows the reciprocal relationships among the processes of globalization and socioculturally defined space—the immediate social context of everyday life. The processes of globalization, characterized by an intricate web of interrelationships and interdependencies, impact the makeup of socioculturally defined space by altering cultural values and meanings attached to everyday behaviors. For example, the value and meaning of time, interpersonal relationships, and material possessions are largely affected by global transmission of Western culture and economic structures. A sense of time urgency, more egalitarian relations between men and women, and the need for material goods to provide pleasure, entertainment, and a sense of self-worth are byproducts of globalization. As the needs and wants of persons in less developed areas of the world begin to parallel those common among persons in the West, a sense of relative deprivation may well follow. Dissatisfaction with one’s life circumstances and feelings of frustration about the opportunities to change them may drive some individuals to engage in self-destructive or other destructive forms of deviant behavior.

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

In brief, the processes of globalization alter the socioculturally defined space in which we live. Cultural and social change, in turn, influence individual behavior. Opportunities to engage in impersonal forms of deviant behaviors may become more attractive. The emergence of

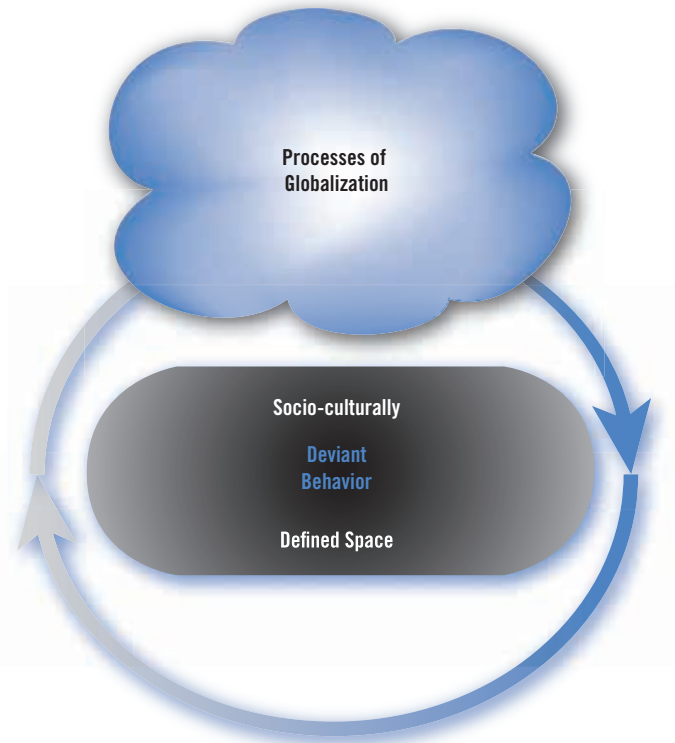


FIGURE 1–3 The Theme of This Book

cyberdeviance and transglobal terrorism with their potential to wreak widespread havoc has created the need for innovative strategies for global security, a transnational justice system, and unprecedented cooperation among the nations of the world.

The major sociological and social psychological formulations considered in the following chapters show how culture, social structural arrangements, and interpersonal relationships explain and predict deviant behavior. There is, then, an increasing need for theoretical formulations to take into account the reciprocal relationships among the processes of globalization, socioculturally defined space, and deviant behavior.

■ Conceptual Framework for the Study of Deviance

We recognize in this book that deviance is not an isolated individual activity but really a social event. For this reason, we say that deviance is diversely

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Make no mistake, all intellectuals are deviants in the U.S.

—William S. Burroughs,
Yage Letters

created and variously interpreted—meaning that different people have various interpretations regarding the who, what, when, where, and why of deviant activity.

Figure 1-4 shows that deviant behavior is the result of a coming together of a given social, cultural, and physical setting with a particular person or group of persons possessing individual characteristics, various kinds of prior experiences, and specific motivations. Figure 1-4 is meant to depict the social and psychological dimensions of deviant activity in rudimentary diagrammatic form.

Every act of deviance has a unique set of causes, consequences, and participants. Deviance affects some people more than others, even impacting those who are not direct participants in the act itself. In general, acts of deviance provoke reactions from the individuals they affect. These reactions may involve a few concerned citizens, larger interest groups, and even society as a whole. Concerns about a particular deviant event, or a series of such events, can manifest themselves in the creation of new social policies or laws. As Figure 1-4 shows, reactions to deviance, from the everyday to the precedent-setting, may color the interpretation of future deviant events.

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

The example of saggy pants commonly worn by young males from certain cultural subgroups demonstrates a number of the principles discussed here. Although the origin of saggy pants as a distinctive style of dress is somewhat unclear, it likely stems from the fact that many correctional institutions do not provide inmates with belts, because belts can be used as weapons, to bind others, and in suicide attempts. Combined with the fact that prison clothing is often ill-fitting, such administrative

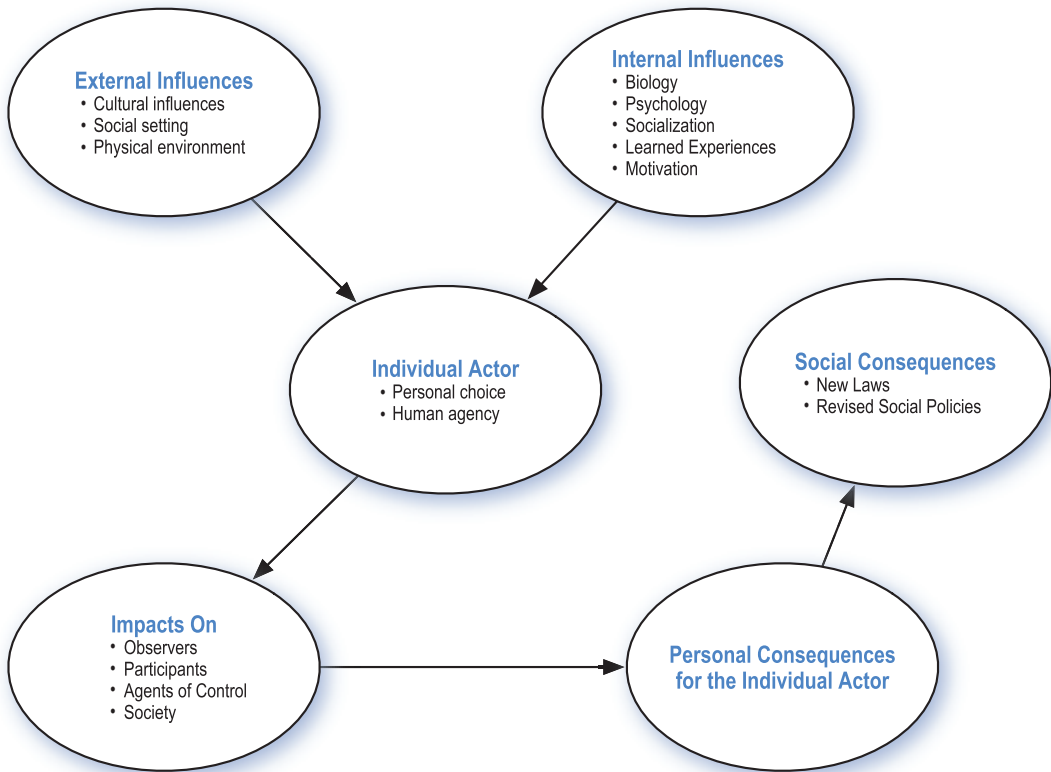


FIGURE 1–4 A Conceptual Framework for the Study of Deviant Behavior

policies have led to a common feature among inmate populations—constantly falling pants, with a need for the wearer to repeatedly pull them up. Although the wearing of saggy pants might be acceptable to members of correctional institutions—including inmates, correctional officers, and administrators—wearing them in free society, where different standards of dress traditionally apply, has led to problems. Those who wear them on the “outside” may recognize their prison origin, and such ideologically informed wearers may be expressing allegiance with their imprisoned brothers. Most wearers, however, have probably adopted the style merely because it conforms to fashion trends among the cultural subgroups of which they are members.

Understandably, not everyone has embraced saggy pants as an acceptable fashion statement. In 2010, for example, New York state sena-

tor Eric Adams rented two Brooklyn billboards on which he pasted the message “Stop the Sag!” along with a picture of a male model wearing low-slung revealing pants. Adams said he was motivated to rent the billboards after seeing a young man on the subway wearing low-hanging pants. “His behind was showing,” said Adams. “All the passengers were looking at him in disgust, but nobody was saying anything” (Saxena, 2010). Some local jurisdictions, including the town of Riviera Beach, Florida, have attempted to criminalize the wearing of sagging pants, saying they constitute a form of indecent exposure. In 2010, even the Fox TV show “American Idol” got involved in the sagging-pants controversy when it aired an audition by 62-year-old rapper Larry Platt, performing the song “Pants on the Ground.” The song quickly went viral and received millions of hits after it was posted on YouTube. The question for students of deviance, of course, is how the wearing of sagging pants can be offensive to some but desirable to others—and if either side is “right.”

■ Book Overview

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

Organization

This book is divided into six major parts. Part One: An Overview of Deviant Behavior defines deviance and offers theoretical perspectives to explain deviance. Two chapters are devoted to the explanation of deviance. The first chapter examines individual behavior. Part Two is composed of three chapters and addresses violent forms of deviant behavior including criminal homicide (Chapter 4), assault and battery (Chapter 4), domestic violence (Chapter 5), and suicide (Chapter 6). Parts Three and Four are organized around other categories of deviance, including mental illness (Chapter 7), alcohol abuse (Chapter 8), illicit drug use (Chapter 9), sexual offending

(Chapter 10), property crime (Chapter 11), white-collar and organized crime (Chapter 12), and cyberdeviance (Chapter 13). Additional chapters on positive deviance (Chapter 14) and extreme forms of everyday behavior (Chapter 15) form Part Five. These specialized types of deviance are somewhat unique to the book because they are often overlooked in the study of deviance. This book concludes with Part Six: Terrorism (Chapter 16), which provides an overview of terrorism in the United States and around the world.

■ Chapter Summary

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

- The actor
- The offended party
- The wider societal audience

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

Deviance must be understood on several conceptual levels:

- Creation of social norms, by whom, and which social interests/cultural values are protected
- Violation of social/legal norms and under what conditions
- Labeling of deviance, who is labeled deviant, and under what conditions does labeling occur
- Societal reaction to norm violators
- Formal and informal controls of social/legal norm violation
- Escalation of social/legal norms violation over time and whether new forms of social/legal norm violation emerge

Deviance may be distinguished along several social dimensions:

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

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

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

■ Key Concepts

Deviant behavior: Activity that violates the normative structure of society and is socially condemned.

Culture: A body of widely shared customs and values that provides general orientations toward life and specific ways of achieving common goals.

Social organization: The means for carrying out the complex network of social interactions between individuals, social groups, and institutions.

Social norms: Generally agreed on guides for behavior that provide boundaries for interpersonal relations.

Social roles: A set of social norms for the behavior of individuals who occupy given statuses within society.

Expectational norms: Behaviors that are “ideal” for individuals who are enacting a particular social role or who are in a given social situation.

Behavioral norms: What persons “typically” do when occupying a particular social role or in given social situation.

Processes of globalization: Complex set of processes that involve immediate worldwide communication, transnational commerce and trade, and borderless opportunities for political and cultural exchange.

■ Critical Thinking Questions

1. Imagine a society without deviant behavior—where everyone continually conforms to the prevailing social norms. Describe the daily lives of the inhabitants of such a society. What are the advantages and disadvantages of total conformity for the society as a whole and for its individual members? Is it possible that a society without deviant behavior would persist through time?

2. Imagine a society without social norms, behavioral expectations, or laws. What would it be like? How would people likely behave?
3. Devise a strategy for the definition of deviant behavior that differs from the normative and situational approaches discussed in this chapter. What forms of deviant behavior might emerge from your definition of deviant behavior? What forms of deviant behavior defined by the normative or situational approach might be omitted?
4. Why are the vast majority of deviant behaviors routine and institutionalized and so few are considered innovative or idiosyncratic?
5. Discuss examples of how the processes of globalization alter local cultural influences on everyday life. How do geographically defined cultures modify the effects of globalization? How does globalization affect forms of deviant behavior in urban areas, small towns, and rural places around the world?

