

TWELFTH EDITION

# DEVIANT BEHAVIOR



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 Pearson

# Deviant Behavior

TWELFTH EDITION

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**Art/Designer:** Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.

**Full-Service Project Manager:** Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.  
**Composer:** Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.  
**Printer/Binder:** LSC Communications, Inc.  
**Cover Printer:** Phoenix Color/Hagerstown  
**Cover Design:** Lumina Datamatics, Inc.  
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#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Thio, Alex, author. | Taylor, Jimmy D., 1973- author. | Schwartz, Martin D., author.  
Title: Deviant behavior / Alex Thio, Ohio University, Jim D. Taylor, Ohio University  
Zanesville, Martin D. Schwartz, George Washington University.  
Description: Twelfth Edition. | Boston: Pearson, [2018]  
Identifiers: LCCN 2017039822 | ISBN 9780134627090 | ISBN 0134627091  
Subjects: LCSH: Deviant behavior.  
Classification: LCC HM811 .T46 2018 | DDC 302.5/42—dc23  
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017039822>

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# Preface

This new edition of *Deviant Behavior* is designed to make teaching and learning as interesting and rewarding as possible. Deviant behavior is already by itself an exciting subject, but we have tried to make it more exciting with a simple, lively, and engaging style of writing. No matter how complex and dry the theories and data about deviance may appear in scholarly journals, government reports, and most books, here they are presented in a fresh, straightforward style, with vivid and real-life contexts. In addition, stimulating, ironic, and thought-provoking remarks are often thrown in to make the book come alive. We have enjoyed working on this edition, and we hope that students will have fun reading it while learning about deviance.

## Features

The current edition retains all the features that have made the book a success for the past generation. These features include comprehensive coverage, lively writing, real-life vignettes, student-oriented illustrations, and critical analyses of theories and data. Also unique to this text are the sections on social profile and global perspective in all the chapters on specific forms of deviant behavior. The social profile sections spotlight certain groups of deviants, such as serial killers, suicide bombers, depressed teens, swinging couples, college binge drinkers, and corporate crooks. The sections on global perspective—a critically important approach in the globalization of our lives and society today—compare specific deviances in the United States with those in other parts of the world. Examples of these deviances are family violence, mental disorder, prostitution, homophobia, smoking, and official corruption. Another unique feature of this text is a list of myths and realities at the opening of each of the behavior chapters. Perhaps the most important feature is the blend of style and substance that runs through all the chapters.

A wide spectrum of theories and specific deviant behaviors is analyzed here. In addition to covering all the standard subjects, many of which have been expanded for this edition, we have dealt with essential topics, including feminism, postmodernism, shaming theory, and ethnography. We also explore cutting-edge and popular areas of deviance such as Internet trolls, suicide bombing, hacktivism, self-harm, suicide by cop, revenge porn, risky teen sex, prescription drug abuse, pro-ana and fat acceptance advocacy, and the stigma of obesity.

Students will be exposed to the full range of theories and data about deviance. We have also provided an abundance of research data that demolishes common assumptions about deviant behavior. Students will be challenged to think about and evaluate the preconceptions and biases they may have picked up from conventional society.

## New to This Edition

This updated and revised text takes into account many significant and interesting new studies by sociologists, government agencies, and other behavioral scientists. Some of the most significant updates and revisions include the following:

- *Industry-Specific Internet Resources.* This edition introduces a new section at the end of each chapter to enhance the student and faculty learning environment by providing access to key, industry-specific Internet resources (i.e., databases, think tanks, consortiums, and government and private agencies).
- Chapter 1 (*What Is Deviant Behavior?*) opens with a new vignette about the current state of deviance surrounding modern political elections, while introducing students to the relative and socially constructed aspects of deviance. This is followed with a story about the early childhood exposure to the horrors of genocide that compelled Alex Thio to dedicate his life to the study and understanding of deviant behavior. Additional critical thinking questions have been added, and further readings have been suggested on contemporary topics in deviance.
- Chapter 2 (*Positivist Theories*) includes a new opening vignette about high-profile, mass public shootings and invites students to explore and apply the positivist theories that seek to explain the root causes of these types of events. This chapter also includes updated and expanded theory and research, new recommended readings, and updated critical thinking questions.
- Chapter 3 (*Constructionist Theories*) opens with a new vignette about gaming addiction and gaming-related death. Students are asked to consider the increased influence of technology on social construction and deviance. This chapter includes new research on warrior narratives and stigma management, as well as revisions to the evaluations of postmodernist, critical, and conflict theory. Critical thinking questions have been

expanded, and further readings are recommended on feminist and critical criminology.

- Chapter 4 (*Physical Violence*) includes updated data on homicide patterns, school violence, and hate killings. New critical thinking questions have been added, along with suggested readings on global terrorism, genocide hate crimes, and mass murders.
- Chapter 5 (*Sexual Assault and Child Molestation*) includes updated data on patterns of rape, gang rape, acquaintance rape, the survivor's response, women who rape, male peer support theory, and more.
- Chapter 6 (*Family Violence*) includes new data on circumstances surrounding marital rape, wife beating, the current state of elder and child abuse, female genital mutilation, and global perspectives on family violence.
- Chapter 7 (*Suicide*) includes new research on groups with higher suicide rates, self-injury, and suicide by cop, as well as updated statistics on suicide rates and methods. Coverage of pro-ana and fat acceptance advocacy is new to this edition. The chapter also includes highlights of new research and suggested readings on physician-assisted death.
- Chapter 8 (*Mental Disorder*) begins with an updated vignette about the actress and author, the late Carrie Fisher, and her candid struggle with mental illness. Categories of deviance have been updated to coincide with the DSM-5. This chapter includes discussions about the multipath model and provides a critique of the strengths and limitations of the DSM-5. Statistics on categories of mental illness, including substance abuse disorders, have also been updated. Additional critical thinking questions have been added, and further readings have been suggested on treatment effectiveness and the "double-jeopardy" of chronic mental illness and substance abuse disorders.
- Chapter 9 (*Heterosexual Deviance*) includes new data on U.S. pornography sales, as well as updated research on child and adolescent prostitution, teen sex, societal and sexual backgrounds, sex workers' rights movements, and shifting global perspectives. Additional suggested readings have been added on the topics of violence against women in pornography, stripper memoirs, the legalities and politics of pornography, and leaving prostitution.
- Chapter 10 (*Gays and Other Victims of Stigma*) includes updated research on the impact and prevalence of homosexuality among children and at the family level. Research updates are also included in the areas of politics, education, and religion; the nature and extent of homophobia; and other stigmatized groups. This chapter also includes updated suggested readings on the topics of defeating homophobia, and both "trans" and disability studies.
- Chapter 11 (*Internet Deviance*) incorporates new research on virtual kidnapping, Internet trolls, cyberbullying, hacktivism, and revenge porn. There is also a look at the deep web, as well as a brief history of Anonymous, Silk Road, and the Pirate Bay. Updates are provided on cybercrime, critical thinking questions have been expanded, and additional readings are suggested on Internet crime remedies and a new understanding of "spam" as a cybercrime.
- Chapter 12 (*Drug Use*) offers updated data on the prevalence of drug abuse in the United States and abroad. Special emphasis is placed on changing social norms, drug laws, drug treatment, and the extent of drug use. Additional critical thinking questions have been added, and a wide variety of new research is recommended for further reading.
- Chapter 13 (*Drinking and Alcoholism*) presents new research on treatment effectiveness, as well as the extent of drinking and alcohol abuse (Alcohol Use Disorder). New data on social consequences, global perspectives, and social factors such as age, race, region, and gender are also presented. Interesting new research on high-intensity drinking is recommended as further reading, and additional critical thinking questions have been added.
- Chapter 14 (*Privileged Deviance*) includes updated research on unsafe products, modern forms of fraud, deceptive advertisement, deviance against the environment, social profiles of corporate crooks, and deviance against the government. Critical thinking questions have been expanded, and further readings are suggested on the topic of combating corporate crime by abolishing corporations.
- Chapter 15 (*Underprivileged Deviance*) includes updated research on modern motivations for robbery, patterns and locations of robberies, key distinctions between professional and amateur robbers, and new data on auto theft, carjackings, and shoplifting. Critical thinking questions have been updated and expanded; further readings on the history of organized crime and experimental theory are recommended.

## Pedagogy

Each chapter opens with a meaningful photo, a list of myths and realities, and a real-life vignette, not only to stimulate student interest but also to portray an important theme of the chapter. The summary of each chapter is laid out in a question-and-answer format to promote thinking as well as retention. The list of books for further reading is annotated to help students decide which publications will suit their need for more information. Finally,

at the end of each chapter is a set of questions designed to encourage students to think critically about the subject they have just studied.

## Supplements

**INSTRUCTOR'S MANUAL AND TEST BANK (ISBN 0134627709)** The Instructor's Manual includes chapter summaries; key concepts; suggestions for lectures, demonstrations, student activities, and research projects; annotated lists of films and videos; and additional resources pertinent to each chapter. The Test Bank portion of the manual offers multiple-choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, and essay questions. The Instructor's Manual and Test Bank are available for download at [www.pearsonhighered.com](http://www.pearsonhighered.com).

**COMPUTERIZED TEST BANK (ISBN 0134627679)** The Test Bank is also available through Pearson's new online test-generating program, *MyTest*. The user-friendly interface allows you to view, edit, and add questions; transfer questions to tests; and print tests. Search and sort features allow you to locate questions quickly and arrange them in whatever order you prefer.

**POWERPOINT LECTURES (ISBN 0134627563)** The PowerPoint slides feature lecture outlines for each chapter and include many of the figures and tables from the text. The PowerPoints are available for download at [www.pearsonhighered.com](http://www.pearsonhighered.com).

*Readings in Deviant Behavior, Sixth Edition*, compiled by Alex Thio, Thomas Calhoun, and Addrain Conyers, is available to supplement the text. This collection of readings represents the full range of deviance sociology, dealing with many different theories and data collected through different research methodologies.

*Deviance Today, First Edition*, by Thio, Calhoun, and Conyers, includes selections with high student appeal. All of the readings have been carefully edited for clarity and conciseness to ensure that students will find them easy and enjoyable to read while learning what deviance is all about. This book features articles written specifically for the text that reflects current trends, especially those dealing with noncriminal deviance as well as those that emphasize the constructionist perspective. Contact your publisher's representative for more information.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to express our profound gratitude to the numerous professors who have adopted the past eleven editions of this book for their classes. Our thanks also go to those sociologists who have enhanced the quality of the

earlier editions as well as the current one with their criticisms and suggestions, some of which were extensive and detailed. In particular, for this edition Ron Weitzer, Ivy Ken, Kenneth Leon, Jeffrey Ian Ross, Joe Donnermeyer, and Walter S. DeKeseredy were most helpful. George Washington University students who did a great deal of valuable library research for this edition include Rachel Fairchild, Jennifer Meneray, Amanda Russell, Jacqueline Hazlett, Adelaide Kahn, and Kacy Amory. Brandi Pugh of the University of Delaware was a life-saver. Finally, a special thanks to Jacob Brown and Mikayla Boise for their research assistance and recommendations.

Roy Austin, Pennsylvania State University  
 Dodd Bogart, University of New Mexico  
 Julie V. Brown, University of North Carolina, Greensboro  
 James T. Carey, University of Illinois, Chicago  
 Brenda Chaney, Ohio State University  
 Chris Cozzolino, Keiser University  
 Steven R. Cureton, University of North Carolina, Greensboro  
 Phillip W. Davis, Georgia State University  
 Walter S. DeKeseredy, West Virginia University  
 Estelle Disch, Boston State College  
 Jackie Eller, Middle Tennessee State University  
 Raymond A. Eve, University of Texas at Arlington  
 Charles E. Frazier, University of Florida  
 David O. Friedrichs, University of Scranton  
 John R. Hepburn, Arizona State University  
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 Richard C. Hollinger, University of Florida  
 Gary Jensen, Vanderbilt University  
 Margaret S. Kelley, University of Oklahoma  
 Ivy Ken, George Washington University  
 Michael Kimmel, SUNY-Stony Brook  
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# About the Authors

Alex Thio (pronounced TEE-oh), a sociology professor at Ohio University for over 30 years, unfortunately and quite unexpectedly passed away in May 2011. Although mostly known for his textbooks on deviance, introductory sociology, and social problems, with over a million copies in circulation worldwide, Professor Thio also published a number of well-regarded research articles in a variety of professional journals.

Born of Chinese parentage in Penang, Malaysia, in 1937, his family later moved to Indonesia, where he attended high school. There, his school brilliance came to the attention of missionaries and he was sent to the United States to obtain his bachelor's degree at Central Methodist University in Missouri. Later he did graduate work at Kent State University and received a doctorate in sociology from the State University of New York at Buffalo. He was hired in 1969 at Ohio University, where he taught hundreds of courses in deviance, introductory sociology, social problems, and criminology. In addition to teaching, he always enjoyed writing and was in his retirement an enthusiastic entrepreneur. Aside from this book, he is the author of the popular text *Sociology: A Brief Introduction*, Seventh Edition (2009), and, with Jim D. Taylor, *Social Problems* (2011), along with several edited volumes. Alex dedicated his career to the advancement of the social sciences. His contribution and legacy are indelible, and we are honored to continue to advance his body of work.

Jim D. Taylor is Associate Professor of Sociology at Ohio University Zanesville. A native Texan, Dr. Taylor received his Ph.D. in sociology from the Ohio State University. A lifelong motorcycle rider and enthusiast, hack songwriter/guitarist, bull rider, and former skydiver, Dr. Taylor specializes in the sociology of masculinity, deviant behavior, stigma management, and race relations. Dr. Taylor has published books on both American gun culture and social problems, as well as scholarly articles on the topics of stigma management and self-injury. His current research focuses on American

rodeo cowboy culture and the intersections of rodeo sports, masculinities, and music. Prior to working in academics, Dr. Taylor managed the background investigation and silent witness divisions for the Wackenhut Corporation. In 2009, Dr. Taylor co-founded a dropout intervention charter school (The RCCS Everest High School) in the greater Columbus, Ohio area, enrolling former high school dropouts and at-risk students. More than 200 former dropouts have graduated to date. Dr. Taylor has also worked with incarcerated students for the past decade. When not lecturing, conducting research, or writing, he loves to visit new campground destinations with his wife Katie, sons Graham and Charlie, and daughter Lily.

Martin D. Schwartz is Professorial Lecturer of Sociology at George Washington University, and Professor Emeritus at Ohio University, where he served two terms as chair. He is the 2008 Fellow of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences and has received distinguished scholar awards from the two largest divisions of the American Society of Criminology: Women and Crime, and Critical Criminology. At Ohio University he was named Graduate Professor of the Year and Best Arts and Sciences Professor; he was also the first social scientist to be awarded the university's research achievement award, the title of Presidential Research Scholar. He has written or edited (often with Walter S. DeKeseredy) 26 editions of 16 books, 75 journal articles, and another 75 book chapters, government reports, and essays. He has been a visiting scholar at the University of Melbourne in Australia and the National Institute of Justice in Washington, DC, and guest lectured in Europe, Australia, Canada, and throughout the United States. A former co-editor of *Criminal Justice*, he has served on the editorial boards of 11 other professional journals, while doing manuscript reviews for some 65 journals. He also was co-editor on two editions of the American Sociological Association's publication *Teaching the Sociology of Deviance*.



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Part I

# Perspectives and Theories

# Chapter 1

## What Is Deviant Behavior?



### Learning Objectives

- 1.1 Identify your personal definitions of deviant behavior
- 1.2 Compare sociological perspectives on deviance
- 1.3 Characterize the positivist perspective on deviance using their three major assumptions
- 1.4 Describe the assumptions of the constructionist perspective on deviance
- 1.5 Relate the main sociological perspectives to public consensus on deviance
- 1.6 Differentiate between deviance and crime

During the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign, there was no shortage of inflammatory rhetoric, sensationalism, and intrigue. Sideline viewers, whether web crawling for juicy bits, reading scandalous print news, catching raucous radio sound bites, or monitoring incendiary Twitter bombs, found months of workplace water cooler fodder. What they also found was a flurry of commentary about the concept of deviance, and various opinions on the subject. The accusations flew, with candidates regularly categorized as “racist,” “sexist,” “liars,” and “deviant.” Even the most casual of spectators were made familiar with President Trump’s claims that Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton “belongs in prison.” From the other side of the political aisle, we were informed by Hillary Clinton that Republican President Donald Trump was “highly unstable” and “dishonest.” Additional drama was introduced, as disgraced Democrat and former member of the U.S. House of Representatives, Anthony Weiner, was caught *sexting*—or using his cell phone to send and receive sexually explicit material—to an underage girl. This was Weiner’s third sexting scandal gone public, prompting many talk show hosts to pad and pepper their monologues with jokes about what they casually referred to as “Weinergate.” Weiner’s status as the estranged husband of Huma Abedin, Hillary Clinton’s long-time personal aide, gave the story traction.

These accounts, and untold others, have many questioning not only the validity, but the integrity of the current state of politics, as well as the balance of power in the United States. Can deviance be conjured up out of thin air, at the whim of the powerful players at the center of social institutions like the media and politics? While the study of deviant behavior will not necessarily settle each of these issues, it does lie at the very heart of the most serious questions being asked by people the world over. Are all of our politicians deviants? Are we destined to be ruled only by the lesser evils of the available pool of crooks and scoundrels? Is there any sense to be made out of all of this madness? The theories, studies, and application of a deviance perspective set us on a path toward understanding the social factors that impact all of these processes and problem areas in society. The concepts you will engage throughout the adventure of exploring this textbook will provide you with a better scientific foundation from which to approach these types of questions. Spoiler alert! The silver lining of the theory contained within this volume gives us reason for optimism.

## An Academic Adventure Begins

The late Alex Thio once told me that he likely never would have been fascinated with the study of deviance and deviant behavior, had it not been for the circumstances surrounding the tragic deaths of both his father and brother. He was a young boy when they died, but the loss forever changed his views on the world, his place in it, and the nature of deviant behavior. “It was such a confusing and almost frantic time,” Alex explained, describing life in Malaysia and Indonesia during the 1940s. He talked of political assassinations, massacres, exterminations, interrogations, and revolutions: “We were literally surrounded, it seemed to me.” His parents were Chinese, and they found themselves embroiled in political and military hostility. First, in Malaysia, the secret police engaged in what was called the *Sook Ching*—a rampant mass killing of hostile Chinese elements. Simultaneously, in neighboring Indonesia, a revolution was underway. The Indonesian War of Independence (or Indonesian National Revolution) lasted from 1945 to 1949 and consumed most of Alex’s childhood. As Alex explained, “trouble was brewing” long before the Sook Ching massacres of Malaysia or the Indonesian War of Independence took place. “People were disappearing. Neighbors would be found dead or savagely beaten.” It was an active program of *genocide*—in this case, an attempt at ethnic cleansing and purification through the deliberate annihilation of the local Chinese population.

Alex said it all confused him, because no one was supposed to really talk about it. He was just a boy, and this hostile world, for a time, was his “normal.” It was his “reality.” In Alex’ own words, that’s what all of that “crazy” behavior was for a

while. It was “just life,” and he knew no other. However, his view of just how normal this life of violence, paranoia, and hostility was would be radically challenged and changed in a flash.

One evening the secret police stormed their home. His father and older brother were both forced to their knees, shot in the head, and killed in front of Alex and his mother. There was no trial. There was no public outrage. Alex was never even told why they were killed. He just knew that his life had started over that day—and his ideas about what was legitimate, normal, and deviant were forever changed. While he knew this kind of thing happened to some people, until that day, he took for granted that the actions of the police were justified. Surely these things happened to “bad people who must have had it coming.” But this was different. His father and brother were “the good guys.” They weren’t “riff raff, traitors, spies or conspirators.” Alex’s family were just “normal people;” the state did this to them for the simple reason that it had the borrowed authority and power to do so. Suddenly, there were real monsters in the world, and Alex knew it. What’s more, the monsters were in charge. They were allowed to do horrible things to people without justification. Even worse, they acted with no remorse. To Alex, it appeared almost as if they were just killing for sport. It was allowed. Sook Ching was an outrage, but it was perfectly “normal” for the time, place, and local history. Much like Holocaust victims experiencing similar horrors in Nazi Germany during this period, Alex’s family, due to nothing more than cultural differences and shifts in the balance of power, found themselves defined not only as deviants, and enemies of the state, but as something less than human.

Though Alex didn’t realize it at the time—in fact, he admitted that he didn’t make the connection until years later, while in graduate school—he had begun to contemplate some of the more relevant, controversial and meaningful topics in the study of deviant behavior (many of which will be the focus of this edition). Alex would go on to dedicate his life to studying and understanding deviant behavior, and sharing what he had learned. We pay tribute to him by continuing the exploration in his proud tradition.

As Alex would find over the course of four decades as a sociologist, there is, in fact, a great deal of disagreement among people as to what they consider deviant. In a classic study, J. L. Simmons (1965) asked a sample of the general public who they thought was deviant. They mentioned 252 different kinds of people as deviants, including prostitutes, alcoholics, drug users, murderers, the mentally ill, the physically challenged, communists, atheists, liars, Democrats, Republicans, reckless drivers, self-pitiers, the retired, divorcees, Christians, suburbanites, movie stars, perpetual bridge players, pacifists, psychiatrists, priests, liberals, conservatives, junior executives, smart-aleck students, and know-it-all professors. If you are surprised that some of these people are considered deviant, your surprise simply adds to the fact that there is a good deal of disagreement among the public as to what deviant behavior is.

A similar lack of consensus exists among sociologists. We could say that the study of deviant behavior is probably the most “deviant” of all the subjects in sociology. Sociologists disagree more over the definition of deviant behavior than they do on most topics. This is partially due to the unique properties of deviance. Our very understanding of deviance is tied to various factors, including, but not limited to, the social and political climate, regional differences, economic conditions, traditions, customs, and even religious beliefs and practices. In many ways, deviance is a moving target, and an exceptionally dynamic one. Rarely will you find a more highly complex, shape-shifting phenomenon. As we will demonstrate, attempting to measure and evaluate deviance scientifically is roughly equivalent to attempting to nail JELL-O to the wall. While it isn’t impossible, it’s a difficult undertaking, and sometimes it gets a little messy. As sociologist Peter Berger (1963) was apt to point out, the subject matter of this discipline is not for everyone. We are dealing with topics for the most serious-minded, and often, the topics that put people ill at ease. However, if you like to see familiar things in a new light, and you want to be challenged and illuminated, please read on.

## Conflicting Definitions

Some sociologists simply say that deviance is a violation of any social rule, while others argue that deviance involves more than rule violation—that it also has the quality of provoking disapproval, anger, or indignation. Some advocate a broader definition, arguing that a person can be a deviant *without* violating any rule, such as individuals with physical or mental disabilities. These people are considered deviant in this view because they are disvalued by society. By contrast, some sociologists contend that deviance does not have to be conceived as only negative but instead can also be positive, such as being a genius, saint, creative artist, or glamorous celebrity. Other sociologists disagree, considering “positive deviance” to be an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms (Dodge, 1985; Goode, 1991; Harman, 1985; Heckert and Heckert, 2002; West, 2003).

All these sociologists apparently assume that, whether it is positive or negative, disturbing behavior or disvalued condition, deviance is real in and of itself, that is, endowed with a certain quality that distinguishes it from nondeviance. The logic behind this assumption is that if deviance is not real in the first place, it cannot be considered positive, negative, disturbing, or devalued. But other sociologists disagree, arguing that deviance does not have to be real in order for behaviors and conditions to be labeled deviant. People can be falsely accused of being criminal, erroneously diagnosed as mentally ill, unfairly stereotyped as dangerous because of their skin color, and so on. Conversely, committing a deviant act does not necessarily make the person a deviant, especially when the act is kept secret, unlabeled by others as deviant. It is, therefore, the label “deviant”—not the act itself—that makes the individual deviant.

Some sociologists go beyond the notion of labeling to define deviance by stressing the importance of power. They observe that relatively powerful people are capable of avoiding the fate suffered by the powerless—being falsely, erroneously, or unjustly labeled deviant. The key reason is that the powerful, either by themselves or through influencing public opinion or both, hold more power against being labeled by others as deviants. In fact, they hold more power for labeling others’ behavior as deviant. Understandably, sociologists who hold this view define deviance as any act considered by the powerful at a given time and place to be a violation of some social rule. That’s why the powerless are sometimes said to be more likely than the powerful to engage in deviance (Ermann and Lundman, 2002; Simon, 2006).

From this welter of conflicting definitions we can discern the influence of two opposing perspectives: positivism and social constructionism. The positivist perspective is associated with the sciences, such as physics, chemistry, or biology. The constructionist perspective is fundamental in the humanities, such as art, language, or philosophy. Each perspective influences how scientists and scholars see, study, and make sense of their subject. The two perspectives have long been transported into sociology, so that some sociologists are more influenced by the positivist perspective while others are more influenced by the constructionist approach. Others will borrow freely from each perspective, utilizing somewhat of a “grab bag,” or integrated theoretical approach.

In the sociology of deviance, the positivist generally defines deviance as positively real, while the constructionist more often defines deviance as a social construction—an idea imputed by society to some behavior. Each perspective suggests other ideas about deviance, so that it has been referred to in various terms. Thus the positivist perspective has also been called objectivist, absolutist, normative, determinist, and essentialist (Goode, 2005; Wittig, 1990). The constructionist perspective has also been referred to by such terms as humanist, subjectivist, relativist, reactivist, definitionist, and post-modernist (Heckert and Heckert, 2002; Lyman, 1995). Each perspective suggests how to *define* deviance, but reveals through the definition what *subject* to study, what *method* to use for the study, and what kind of *theory* to use to make sense of the subject.

# The Positivist Perspective

The positivist perspective consists of three assumptions about what deviant behavior is. These assumptions are known to positivists as absolutism, objectivism, and determinism.

## Absolutism: Deviance as Absolutely Real

The positivist perspective holds deviance to be absolutely or intrinsically real, in that *it possesses some qualities that distinguish it from conventionality*. Similarly, deviant persons are assumed to have certain characteristics that make them different from conventional others. Thus, sociologists who are influenced by such a perspective tend to view deviant behavior as an attribute that inheres in the individual.

This view was first strongly held by the early criminologists who were the progenitors of today's sociology of deviance. Around the turn of the last century, criminologists believed that criminals possessed certain biological traits that were absent in law-abiding people. The biological traits were believed to include defective genes, bumps on the head, a long lower jaw, a scanty beard, and a tough body build. Since all these traits are inherited, criminals were believed to be born as such. Thus, if they were born criminals, they would always be criminals. As the saying goes, "If you've had it, you've had it." So, no matter where they might go—they could go anywhere in the world—they would still be criminals.

Today, there is an increasing interest in genetic and biological factors that might cause deviant behavior or crime (Pratt, Turanovic, and Cullen, 2016). However, relatively few experts support the notion of crime or deviance as solely caused by our biology. In the twentieth century, criminologists shifted their attention from biological to psychological traits. Criminals were thought to have certain mental characteristics that noncriminals did not. More specifically, criminals were thought to be feeble-minded, psychotic, neurotic, psychopathic, or otherwise mentally disturbed. Like biological traits, these mental characteristics were believed to reside within individual criminals. And like biological traits, mental characteristics were believed to stay with the criminals, no matter what society or culture they might go to. Again, wherever they went, criminals would always remain criminals.

Today's positivist sociologists, however, have largely abandoned the use of biological and psychological traits to differentiate criminals from noncriminals. They recognize the important role of social factors in determining a person's status as a criminal. Such status does not remain the same across time and space; instead, it changes in different periods and with different societies. A polygamist may be a criminal in our society but a law-abiding citizen in a few Islamic countries. A person who sees things invisible to others may be a psychotic in our society but may become a spiritual leader among some South Pacific peoples. Nevertheless, positivist sociologists still regard deviance as absolutely or intrinsically real. Countering the relativist notion of deviance as basically a *label* imposed on an act, positivist Travis Hirschi (1973), for example, argues: "The person may not have committed a 'deviant' act, but he did (in many cases) do *something*. And it is just possible that what he did was a result of things that had happened to him in the past; it is also possible that the past in some inscrutable way remains with him and that if he were left alone he would *do it again*." Moreover, countering the relativist notion of mental illness as a label imputed to some people's behavior, Gwynn Nettler (1974) explicitly voices his absolutist stance: "Some people are more crazy than others; we can tell the difference; and calling lunacy a name does not *cause* it." These positivist sociologists seem to say that just as a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, so deviance by any other label is just as real.

Because they consider deviance real, positivist sociologists tend to focus their study on deviant behavior and deviant persons, rather than on nondeviants who label others deviants, such as lawmakers and law enforcers, which constructionist sociologists are more likely to study, as will be explained later.

## Objectivism: Deviance as an Observable Object

To positivist sociologists, deviant behavior is an observable object in that a deviant person is like an object, a real something that can be studied objectively. Positivist sociologists, therefore, assume that they can be as objective in studying deviance as natural scientists can be in studying physical phenomena. The trick is to treat deviants as if they were objects, like those studied by natural scientists. Nonetheless, positivist sociologists cannot help being aware of the basic difference between their subject, human beings, and that of natural scientists, inanimate objects. As human beings themselves, positivist sociologists must have certain feelings about their subject. However, they try to control their personal biases by forcing themselves not to pass moral judgment on deviant behavior or share the deviant person's feelings. Instead, they try to concentrate on the subject matter as it outwardly appears. Further, these sociologists have tried to follow the scientific rule that all their ideas about deviant behavior should be subject to public test. This means that other sociologists should be able to analyze these ideas to see whether they are supported by facts.

Such a drive to achieve scientific objectivity has made today's positivist sociologists more objective than their predecessors. They have, therefore, produced works that can tell us much more about the nature of deviant behavior. No longer in vogue today are such value-loaded and subjective notions as evil, immorality, moral failing, debauchery, and demoralization, which were routinely used in the past to describe the essence of deviance. Replacing those outmoded notions are more value-free and objective concepts as norm violation, retreatism, ritualism, rebellion, and conflict.

To demonstrate the objective reality of these concepts, positivist sociologists have used official reports and statistics, clinical reports, surveys of self-reported behavior, and surveys of victimization. Positivists recognize the unfortunate fact that the deviants who are selected by these objective methods do not accurately represent the entire population of deviants. The criminals and delinquents reported in the official statistics, for example, are a special group of deviants, because most crimes and delinquent acts are not discovered and, therefore, not included in the official statistics. Nevertheless, positivists believe that the quality of information obtained by these methods can be improved and refined. In the meantime, they consider the information, though flawed, useful for revealing at least some aspect of the totality of deviant behavior. A major reason for using the information is to seek out the causes of deviant behavior. This brings us to the next, third assumption of the positivist perspective.

## Determinism: Deviance as Determined Behavior

According to the positivist perspective, deviance is determined or caused by forces beyond the individual's control. Natural scientists hold the same deterministic view about physical phenomena. When positivist sociologists follow natural scientists, they adopt the deterministic view and apply it to human behavior.

Overly enthusiastic about the prospect of turning their discipline into a science, early sociologists argued that, like animals, plants, and material objects that natural scientists study, humans do not have any free will. The reason is that acknowledgment of free will would contradict the scientific principle of determinism. If a murderer is thought to will or determine a murderous act, then it does not make sense to say that the murderous act is caused by forces (such as mental condition or family background) beyond the person's control. Therefore, in defending their scientific principle of determinism, early sociologists maintained their denial of free will.

However, today's positivist sociologists assume that humans do possess free will. Still, this assumption, they argue, does not undermine the scientific principle of determinism. No matter how much a person exercises free will by making choices and decisions, the choices and decisions do not just happen but are determined by some causes. If a woman chooses to kill her husband rather than continue to live with him, she certainly



has free will or freedom of choice as long as no one forces her to do what she does. Yet some factor may *determine* or *cause* the woman's choice of one alternative over another, that is, determine the way she exercises her free will. One such causal factor may be a long history of abuse at the hands of her husband. Thus, according to today's positivist sociologists, there is no inconsistency between freedom and causality.

Although they allow for human freedom or choice, positivist sociologists do not use it to explain why people behave in a certain way. They will not, for example, explain why the woman kills by saying "because she chooses to kill." This is no explanation at all, since the idea of choice can also be used to explain why another woman does not kill her husband—by saying "because she chooses not to." According to positivists, killing and not killing, or more generally, deviant and conventional behavior, being contrary phenomena, cannot be explained by the same factor, such as choice. Further, the idea of choice simply cannot explain the difference between deviance and conventionality; it cannot explain why one person chooses to kill while the other chooses not to. Therefore, although positivists do believe in human choice, they commonly will not attribute deviance to human choice. Instead, they explain deviance by using such concepts as wife abuse, broken homes, unhappy homes, lower-class background, economic deprivation, social disorganization, rapid social change, differential association, differential reinforcement, and lack of social control. Any one of these possible causes of deviance might be used to illustrate what positivists consider to be a real explanation of deviance because, for example, they might wish to argue that a long history of receiving physical abuse is more likely to cause a woman to kill her husband than a lack of such a history. Positivist theories essentially point to factors such as these as the causes of deviance.

In sum, the positivist perspective on deviant behavior consists of three assumptions. First, deviance is *absolutely real* in that it has certain qualities that distinguish it from conventionality. Second, deviance is an *observable object* in that a deviant person is like an object and thus can be studied objectively. Third, deviance is *determined* by forces beyond the individual's control.

## The Constructionist Perspective

Since the 1960s the constructionist perspective has emerged to challenge the positivist perspective, which had earlier been predominant in the sociology of deviance. Let's examine the assumptions of the constructionist perspective that run counter to those of the positivist perspective.

### Relativism: Deviance as a Label

The constructionist perspective holds the relativist view that deviant behavior by itself does not have any intrinsic characteristics. The so-called intrinsically deviant characteristics do not come from the behavior itself; they come instead from some people's minds. To put it simply, an act appears deviant only because some people think it is deviant. As Howard Becker (1963) says, "Deviant behavior is behavior that people so label." So, no deviant label, no deviant behavior. The existence of deviance depends on the label. Deviance, then, is a mental construct (an idea, thought, or image) expressed in the form of a label. Deviance, in other words, is socially constructed, defined as such by society.

Since, effectively, they consider deviance unreal, constructionists understandably stay away from studying it. They are more interested in the questions of whether and why a given act is defined by society as deviant. This leads to the study of people who label others as deviants—such as the police and other law-enforcing agents. If constructionists study so-called deviants, they do so by focusing on the nature of labeling and its consequences.

In studying law-enforcing agents, constructionists have found a huge lack of consensus on whether a certain person should be treated as a criminal. The police often

disagree among themselves as to whether a suspect should be arrested, and judges often disagree among themselves as to whether those arrested should be convicted or acquitted. In addition, since laws vary from one state to another, the same type of behavior may be defined as criminal in one state but legal in another. There are great disparities in statutory rape arrests, for instance. Statutory rape laws are those dealing with otherwise consensual acts of sex involving a minor and an adult. According to Chaffin, Chenoweth, and Letourneau (2016), same-sex statutory rape cases result in higher arrests rates than those involving males and females. Similarly, a preexisting romantic relationship among male and



female couples was linked to lower incidents of arrests for statutory rape, while it increased arrest odds for same sex pairings. Incidents involving adult females and minor males resulted in lower arrest odds. There is, then, a *relativity* principle in deviant behavior: Behavior gets defined as deviant relative to a given norm or standard of behavior, which is to say, to the way people react to it. If it is not related to the reaction of other people, a given behavior is in itself meaningless—it is impossible to say whether it is deviant or conforming. Constructionists strongly emphasize this relativistic view, according to which, deviance, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.

The self-proclaimed *hacktivist* group Anonymous provides another convenient illustration of the *relativity* principle and its fragile, tenuous nature. *Hacktivism*, and relevant activities of Anonymous, involves accessing computer systems and files by illegal means, for various political and socially conscientious purposes. Anonymous creates interesting social and academic debates, in that they utilize deviant means for non-profit motives. They reportedly apply their criminal hacking skills to promote social justice, and fight inequality by exposing the crime and deceitful practices of others (Coleman, 2014; Sauter, 2014). Therein lies the source of relativity. As Anonymous has a tendency to only target social and political entities viewed largely with great contempt, it is difficult to characterize them as being at odds with society and its core values. Some see the group as harmless “pranksters” (Coleman, 2014), others see them as modern-day activists looking out for the powerless (Goode, 2015; Sauter, 2014). However, the fear (primarily the fear of the unknown) generated by Anonymous is quite real. Anonymous demonstrates a high degree of sophistication in accessing secured files from various corporate, financial, and political sectors. True to their name, Anonymous members’ identities are unknown, and little is known about the organization’s structure. This makes officials and some citizens nervous, as Anonymous could potentially direct their efforts towards more devious and criminal endeavors (Coleman, 2014). Academically, even the constructionists have to place a big question mark next to the deviance-o-meter of Anonymous. Is the behavior of Anonymous—in fact or in regard—deviant? One thing is evident: Anonymous will provoke interest in the social science community for some time to come.

## Subjectivism: Deviance as a Subjective Experience

To constructionists, supposed deviant behavior is a subjective, personal experience and the supposedly deviant person is a conscious, feeling, thinking, and reflective subject. Constructionists insist that there is a world of difference between humans (as active subjects) and nonhuman beings and things (as passive objects). Humans feel