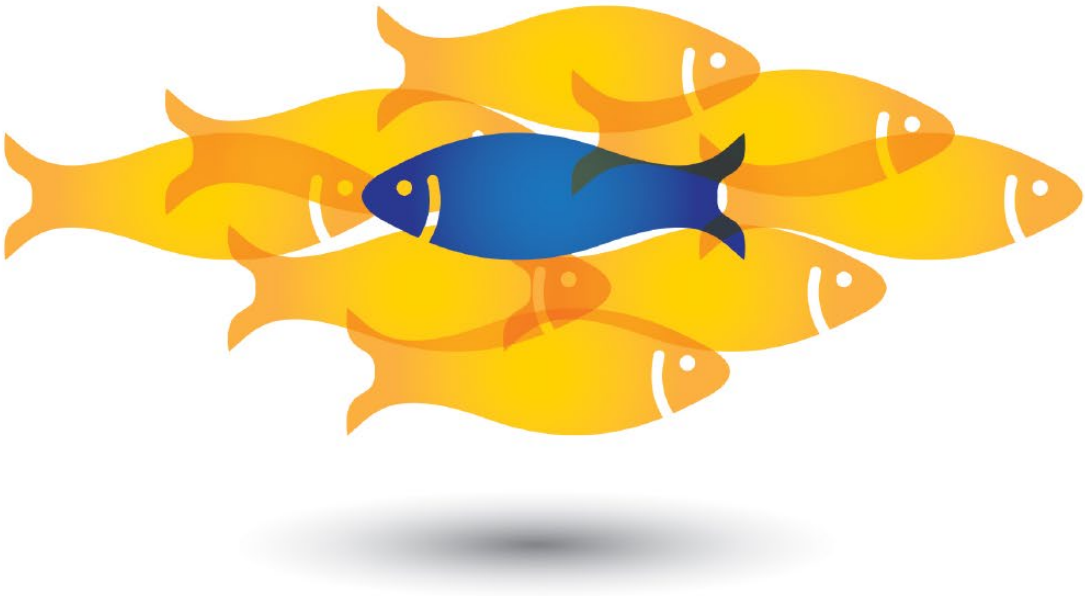
PERSPECTIVES ON DEVIANCE AND SOCIAL CONTROL



MICHELLE INDERBITZIN • KRISTIN A. BATES • RANDY R. GAINEY

SECOND EDITION

Perspectives on Deviance and Social Control

Second Edition

Michelle dedicates this book to her students, past and present, inside and outside, who offer inspiration, creative challenges, and, most importantly, real hope for a better future.

Kristin dedicates this book to Jeff, William, and Christopher, who are welcome reminders that the world can be a really cool place.

Randy dedicates this book to Beth, our new lives, and the many adventures we have yet to come.

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Perspectives on Deviance and Social Control

Second Edition

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Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
Singapore | Washington DC | Melbourne

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2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320
E-mail: order@sagepub.com

SAGE Publications Ltd.
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP
United Kingdom

SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
B 1/I 1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044
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SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte. Ltd.
3 Church Street
#10-04 Samsung Hub
Singapore 049483

Acquisitions Editor: Jessica Miller
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Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Inderbitzin, Michelle Lee, author. | Bates, Kristin Ann, author. | Gainey, Randy R., author.—

Title: Perspectives on deviance and social control / Michelle Inderbitzin, Oregon State University, Kristin A. Bates, California State University, San Marcos, Randy R. Gainey, Old Dominion University.

Description: Second Edition. | Thousand Oaks : SAGE Publications, [2018] | Revised edition of the authors' Perspectives on deviance and social control, [2015] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018030610 | ISBN 9781544308081 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Deviant behavior. | Social control.

Classification: LCC HM811 .I533 2018 | DDC 302.5/42—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2018030610

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

18 19 20 21 22 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

• Brief Contents •

Foreword **xiv**
Howard S. Becker

Preface **xvi**

Acknowledgments **xxii**

About the Authors **xxiv**

Chapter 1 • Introduction to Deviance 1

Chapter 2 • The Diversity of Deviance 21

Chapter 3 • Researching Deviance 43

Chapter 4 • Anomie/Strain Theory 73

Chapter 5 • Social Disorganization Theory 92

Chapter 6 • Differential Association and Social Learning Theories 119

Chapter 7 • Social Control Theories of Deviance 143

Chapter 8 • Labeling Theory 165

Chapter 9 • Marxist and Conflict Theories of Deviance 186

Chapter 10 • Critical Theories of Deviance 208

Chapter 11 • Societal Responses to Deviance 228

Chapter 12 • Deviant Careers and Career Deviance 250

Glossary **277**

References and Additional Reading **282**

Index **307**

• Detailed Contents •

Foreword xiv
Howard S. Becker

Preface xvi

Acknowledgments xxii

About the Authors xxiv

Chapter 1 • Introduction to Deviance 1

- Public Nudity 1

Introduction 3

Conceptions of Deviance 4

- Be Careful Who *You* Are Calling Deviant: Body Rituals Among the Nacirema 4
- How Do *You* Define Deviance? 6

The Sociological Imagination 7

- Deviance in Popular Culture 9

The Importance of Theory and Its Relationship to Research 10

- Recent Study in Deviance: The Poverty of the Sociology of Deviance: Nuts, Sluts, and Preverts 12

Global Perspectives on Deviance 13

Explaining Deviance in the Streets and Deviance in the Suites 13

Ideas in Action 14

- Now *You* . . . Use Your Sociological Imagination 16

Conclusion: Organization of the Book 18

Exercises and Discussion Questions 20

Key Terms 20

Recommended Resources 20

Chapter 2 • The Diversity of Deviance 21

- The Most Tattooed Man in the World 21

Introduction 22

Deviance and Its Varied Forms 22

- Recent Study in Deviance: Strict Conformity as Deviance 24

Physical Deviance and Appearance: Ideals of Beauty, Self-Harm, and Body Modification 24

- Deviance in Popular Culture 26

Relationships and Deviance 27

Deviance in Cyberspace: Making Up the Norms as We Go 29

Subcultural Deviance 31

Elite Deviance, Corporate Deviance, and Workplace Misconduct 32

Positive Deviance 34

Global Perspectives on Types of Deviance 35

- Social Control of Girls and Women 36
- Social Control of Homosexuality 37

Explaining Deviance in the Streets and Deviance in the Suites: The Cases of Addiction, Prostitution, and Graffiti 37

- Addiction 38
- Prostitution 38
- Graffiti 39

Ideas in Action: Guerrilla Gardening in Low-Income Areas 40

- Now *You* . . . Try an Experiment in Positive Deviance! 41

Question: So Who Are the Deviants? Answer: It Depends on Whom You Ask 41

Conclusion 41

Exercises and Discussion Questions 42

Key Terms 42

Chapter 3 • Researching Deviance 43

- Three Research-Related Stories From the Authors 43

Introduction 44

Methodological Approaches to Studying Deviance 46

- Experiments in the Study of Deviance 46
- Deviance in Popular Culture 51
- Large-Scale Survey Research 51
- Field Research: Pure Observer to Full Participant 54

Content Analysis 56

Secondary Data Sources 58

- The Uniform Crime Report and the National Incident-Based Reporting System 58
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 59
- Monitoring the Future 61
- Archived Data: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research 61

Ethical Considerations in Studying Deviance 62

Global Perspectives on Trials and Tribulations Involved in Researching Deviance Across the Globe 64

Explaining Deviance in the Streets and Deviance in the Suites: Using Content Analysis to Study Deviants Among the Business Elite and Street Bikers 66
Ideas in Action: Evaluating Programs and Policy 69
• Now *You* . . . Conduct the Research 71
Conclusion 71
Endnote 72
Exercises and Discussion Questions 72
Key Terms 72

Chapter 4 • Anomie/Strain Theory 73

• Retreating *Into the Wild* 73
Introduction 73
Development of Anomie/Strain Theory 74
Émile Durkheim and Anomie 74
Robert Merton and Adaptations to Anomie/Strain 75
Merton's Adaptations to Anomie 76
• Deviance in Popular Culture 78
Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin, Differential Opportunity 78
Albert Cohen, *Delinquent Boys* 80
Robert Agnew, General Strain Theory 81
Messner and Rosenfeld, *Crime and the American Dream*—Institutional Anomie Theory 82
Application of Anomie and Strain Theories 83
Anomie and the Abuse at Abu Ghraib 83
The American Dream and Incarcerated Young Men 84
Institutional Anomie Theory and Student Cheating 85
Critiques of Anomie and Strain Theories 85
Global Perspectives on Anomie/Strain Theory 86
Explaining Deviance in the Streets and Deviance in the Suites: The Occupy Wall Street Movement 87
Ideas in Action: Transforming Innovation Into Conformity and Legitimate Success 89
• Now *You* . . . Use the Theory 90
Conclusion 90
Exercises and Discussion Questions 91
Key Terms 91

Chapter 5 • Social Disorganization Theory 92

• "When the Towers Come Down" 92
Introduction 93
• Deviance in Popular Culture 95

Development of Social Disorganization Theory 95
Shaw and McKay's Study of Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas 97
Critiques of Social Disorganization Theory 98
Rebirth of Social Disorganization Theory 99
Empirical Tests of Social Disorganization Theory 99
Structural Correlates of Crime and Deviance 99
Global Perspectives on Social Disorganization Theory 104
Tests of Social Disorganization in Cities Outside the United States 104
More Theoretical and Empirical Advances and Divergences: Social and Physical Disorder 107
Collective Efficacy 109
Explaining Deviance in the Streets and Deviance in the Suites With Social Disorganization Theory 111
Ideas in Action: Programs and Policy From Social Disorganization and Broken Windows Perspectives 114
• Now *You* . . . Use the Theory 116
Conclusion 117
Exercises and Discussion Questions 117
Key Terms 118

Chapter 6 • Differential Association and Social Learning Theories 119

• Anorexia, Bulimia, and the World Wide Web 119
Introduction 120
Development of Differential Association Theory 120
• Deviance in Popular Culture 123
Development of Akers's Social Learning Theory 124
Techniques of Neutralization 125
Social Structure and Social Learning 127
Application of Differential Association and Social Learning 129
Critiques of Differential Association and Social Learning Theories 131
Cultural Deviance Theory and Subcultural Explanations of Deviance 132
Explaining Deviance in the Streets and Deviance in the Suites: Dating Violence 134
Ideas in Action: Programs and Policy From a Social Learning Perspective 136
• Now *You* . . . Use the Theory 138
Global Perspectives on Testing Differential Association and Social Learning Theories Outside the United States 138
Conclusion 141
Exercises and Discussion Questions 142
Key Terms 142

Chapter 7 • Social Control Theories of Deviance **143**

- Social Media Disasters 143

Introduction 144

Development of Social Control Theory 144

Nye 144

Hirschi 145

- Deviance in Popular Culture 147

Contemporary Additions to Social Control Theory 148

Power-Control Theory 148

Theory of Self-Control 148

Life Course Theory 150

Application of Social Control Theories 153

Critiques of Social Control Theories 154

Global Perspectives on Deviance and Social Control Theories 155

Explaining Deviance in the Streets and Deviance in the Suites: The Cases of Teenage Homelessness and Medical Deviance by Doctors 158

Teenage Runaways and Throwaways 158

Medical Deviance by Doctors 159

Ideas in Action: Homeboy Industries 161

- Now *You* . . . Use the Theory 162

Conclusion 163

Exercises and Discussion Questions 163

Key Terms 164

Chapter 8 • Labeling Theory **165**

- What If Harry Potter Had Been Sorted Into Slytherin? 165

Introduction 165

Development of Labeling Theory 167

How the Labeling Process Works 168

- Deviance in Popular Culture 169

Labeling and Mental Illness 170

Labeling and Delinquency 171

Application of Labeling Theory 173

Braithwaite (1989), *Crime, Shame and Reintegration* 173

Matsueda (1992), "Reflected Appraisals, Parental Labeling, and Delinquency" 174

Rosenfield (1997), "Labeling Mental Illness" 174

Davies and Tanner (2003), "The Long Arm of the Law: Effects of Labeling on Employment" 175

Lageson and Maruna (2018), "Digital Degradation: Stigma Management in the Internet Age" 175

Impact of Labeling Theory 176

Critiques of Labeling Theory 177
• Recent Study in Deviance: Defining Oneself as Deviant 178
Global Perspectives on Labeling Theory 179
Social Control of Mental Illness 179
Explaining Deviance in the Streets and Deviance in the Suites: Considering Drinking—and Not Drinking—on College Campuses 180
Ideas in Action: The "I Have a Dream" Foundation—Instilling Positive Labels 181
• Now *You* . . . Use the Theory 183
Conclusion 183
Exercises and Discussion Questions 184
Key Terms 185

Chapter 9 • Marxist and Conflict Theories of Deviance 186
• Transgender Rights 186
Introduction 187
Development of Marxist Theory 188
Conflict 189
Dialectical Materialism 189
Marxism and the Creation of Law and Deviance 190
• Deviance in Popular Culture 192
Development of Conflict Theory 192
Gusfield 193
Vold 193
Turk 195
Quinney 196
Chambliss 197
Applications of Marxist and Conflict Theories 199
Critiques of Marxist and Conflict Theories 200
Global Perspectives on Deviance and Marxist/Conflict Theories 201
Critical Collective Framing Theory and the Genocide in Darfur 201
Explaining Deviance in the Streets and Deviance in the Suites: Human Trafficking: Crossing Boundaries and Borders 201
Ideas in Action: What Can Be Done About Human Trafficking? 204
• Now *You* . . . Use the Theory 205
Conclusion 206
Exercises and Discussion Questions 206
Key Terms 207

Chapter 10 • Critical Theories of Deviance 208
• The #MeToo Movement 208
Introduction 209

Development of Feminist Criminology 210
Feminist Theory, Homelessness, and Sexual Assault 211
• Deviance in Popular Culture 212
Development of Critical Race Theory 213
Critical Race Theory and the #MeToo Movement 214
Development of Peacemaking 215
Peacemaking and Homelessness 217
Critiques of Critical Theories 218
Global Perspectives on Deviance and Critical Theories 218
Social Control and Reintegration: Restorative Justice 218
Explaining Deviance in the Streets and Deviance in the Suites: The Cases of Pornography and Illegal Governmental Surveillance 220
Pornography 220
• Is Erotica Pornography? 221
Illegal Government Surveillance 222
Ideas in Action: Navajo Peacemaking and Domestic Violence 225
• Now *You* . . . Use the Theory 226
Conclusion 226
Exercises and Discussion Questions 227
Key Terms 227

Chapter 11 • Societal Responses to Deviance 228

• Life as a Convicted Felon 228
Introduction 228
Medicalization of Deviant Behavior 229
Policing, Supervision, and the Impact of Incarceration on Disadvantaged Populations and Communities 231
Total Institutions 232
• Deviance in Popular Culture 233
Correctional Facilities and the Purposes of Punishment 234
Gresham Sykes and the Pains of Imprisonment 234
Juvenile Correctional Facilities 236
Reentry: Challenges in Returning to the Community After Time in an Institution 237
Felon Disenfranchisement 238
Public Fear and Social Control: The Case of Sex Offenders 239
Collateral Consequences: Effects on Communities and Families 240
Global Perspectives on the Social Control of Deviance 241
Social Control of Crime: Extremes in Prison Conditions Internationally 241
Explaining Deviance in the Streets and Deviance in the Suites: Considering How Money Can Matter in Local Jails 245

Ideas in Action: College Programs in Prisons 246
- Now *You* . . . Think About Social Control 248

Conclusion 248
Exercises and Discussion Questions 249
Key Terms 249

Chapter 12 • Deviant Careers and Career Deviance 250
- Shared Beginnings, Divergent Outcomes 250

Introduction 251
- Deviance in Popular Culture 252

Development of a Deviant Career and Career Deviance Approach 253
Getting Into Deviance: Onset of a Deviant Career 254
Risk and Protective Factors for Onset 257
Escalation, Persistence, and Specialization in Deviance 259
Sex Offenders: Generalists or Specialists? 260
The Case of Drinking and Driving 262
Summary of Career Deviance: Specialists or Generalists? 263
Getting Out of the Game: Desistance From Career Deviance 264
Explaining Deviance in the Streets and Deviance in the Suites: Street Prostitutes Versus Elite Prostitutes 268
Global Perspectives on Cross-Cultural Interest in Deviant Careers and Career Deviance 270
Ideas in Action: Programs and Policy From a Career Deviance and Deviant Career Perspective 271
- Now *You* . . . Think About Deviant Careers 274

Conclusion 274
Exercises and Discussion Questions 275
Key Terms 276

Glossary 277

References and Additional Reading 282

Index 307

• Foreword •

By the time sociology came to universities at the beginning of the 20th century, all the "good" topics had been snatched up by earlier arrivals: Historians got to write about wars and kings and queens, economists acquired the market as their special turf, and political science took control of the state and government. Sociology was left with whatever topics were left over, especially (chief among these less desirable subjects) the "bad behavior" nice people didn't like in the increasingly urbanized society they lived in: slums, gangs, prostitution, alcoholism, and crime. No one had to worry, then, about defining this field or justifying all these disparate topics being treated under one heading. It seemed obvious to all right-thinking people that these things were problems that needed looking into. Sociologists took them over as their own, and the nature of these problems (and the solutions to them everyone hoped the new science would provide) defined the nature of the field.

Since university disciplines like to make sense of what they are doing, sociologists soon began to look for a unifying thread, for what all these things had in common that justified calling studying them a scientific field. Once you question the commonsense idea that they all simply exemplified "bad behavior" or "social problems," you commit yourself to finding a more logical and scientifically defensible description of what you're doing. Sociologists worked hard to come up with that definition. What they came up with, in the end, was not a definition but definitions, lots of them. To go beyond saying these were all simply differing versions of badness, to define what made bad people's behavior bad, created great difficulties because people don't agree on that kind of definition. The commonsense understanding of "badness" included a mixture of very different things: drunkenness, stealing, craziness—the definition really consisted of nothing more than a list of activities that the law banned. Because legislatures make laws not to define the subject matter of a science but rather to satisfy constituents, the science part comes hard.

For many years, taking commonsense ideas of bad behavior at face value and accepting conventional definitions of what "bad" was, sociologists tried to make science by accepting and trying to prove and improve upon equally commonsense explanations of why people behaved badly. They mostly relied on one of two ideas. On one hand, some theories said that people did bad things because they were inherently bad—there were plenty of genetic theories in the early history of criminology, identifying potential criminals by physical markers of bad heredity—similar to the markers of feeblemindedness, another topic that sociology and criminology had on their hands—or because they lived in bad circumstances, which turned otherwise normal children into delinquents, sane people into the mentally ill, and healthy people into alcoholics and drug addicts.

These general ideas, scarcely worth being dignified as general theories, for many years dominated the classes taught under such titles as "Social Disorganization" or

"Social Problems." Textbooks and lectures proceeded along a well-marked path of problems, dominated by well-known kinds of crimes—starting with juvenile delinquency and following criminal types through more adult crimes like robbery, theft, burglary, and murder—and equally familiar kinds of personal pathologies, revolving around pleasurable forms of behavior that right-thinking people thought were wrong—sex, drugs, and alcohol, all three leading to mental illness. Teachers and books rehearsed the numerous and varied things that had been found to be correlated with bad behaviors and presumably to cause them: living in a slum neighborhood, coming from a broken home (that is, a household not headed by a married heterosexual couple), low educational achievement, and a long list of other phenomena usually correlated with some measure of social class so that, in some fundamental sense, the cause of all this pathology seemed to be being poor.

Such an approach did not produce a lot of results. What one study found was often contradicted by another study, and eventually, some sociologists and criminologists began to take a more neutral approach to these subject matters, seeing them not as signs of bad character or heredity but rather as signs of a mixed-up society, whose operations and organization made it likely that some sizable number of people would find it attractive and/or profitable to engage in behavior that led them into conflict with the law (as the gang members in *West Side Story* sang, "We're not depraved, we're deprived!").

Since finding the causes of bad behavior in society did not produce reliable results any more than genetic and psychological theories had, some sociologists began to look further. They asked about a larger spectrum of things and focused on what we might call "the crime industry," the agencies and organizations that made laws that defined what things were crimes, that devoted themselves to finding people who had violated these laws, adjudicating their cases and administering the punishments and forms of supervision the resolution of those cases dictated: the legislatures that made the laws, the police who found the guilty parties, the courts where their cases were decided, the jails and prisons where they served their sentences, and the parole offices and officers that oversaw those who came out at the other end of this process.

All this research is best summarized, as the authors of this book have done, by considering the variety of theories that sociologists and criminologists have created to make sense of this confusing mass of ideas and of the research the variety of ideas has engendered. Reading their crisp, informative summaries of so many conflicting ideas and then the wisely chosen illustrative examples of what you get from each approach will give students the best possible introduction to a lively and still developing field of research.

Howard S. Becker

• Preface •

While there are many textbooks and readers on deviant behavior currently on the market, this book is unique because it is framed within and written entirely from a sociological perspective. We explain the development of major sociological theoretical perspectives and detail how those theories have been used to think about and study the causes of deviant behavior and the reactions to it. We find the theories fascinating, and we think you will, too. We have provided many specific examples of deviant behavior and social control within the text so that students will have numerous opportunities to apply the concepts and theories and make connections to their everyday lives. In the following, we describe how *Perspectives on Deviance and Social Control*, Second Edition, differs from existing texts on the market.

In contrast to most of the popular readers and textbooks on deviant behavior, this book is primarily organized around theories and perspectives of deviance, rather than types of deviant behavior or a singular approach to understanding deviance. We have aimed for a combination of both depth and breadth in this book; in taking a broad sociological perspective, we focus on theory but also include full chapters on researching deviance, the societal responses to deviance, and deviant careers.

We hope this book will serve as a guide to students delving into the fascinating world of deviance and social control for the first time, offering clear overviews of issues and perspectives in the field as well as introductions to classic and current research. *Perspectives on Deviance and Social Control*, Second Edition, is intended to replace standard deviance textbooks or readers; it can be used in both undergraduate and graduate deviance courses.

Overview of Features

Perspectives on Deviance and Social Control, Second Edition, includes topics generally found in textbooks on deviant behavior, with significant focus on the major sociological theories of deviance and discussion of rulemaking and societal reaction to deviance. This book offers clear explanations and discussion of concepts and theories and carefully selected examples to illustrate relevant topics. This book features the following:

1. An introductory section explaining the sociological perspective on deviance and social control. This section provides an overview on the organization and content of the book and also introduces relevant themes, issues, and concepts to assist students in understanding the different perspectives. Along with the introduction, we have full chapters on the diversity of deviance and methods of researching deviance to introduce students to the broader issues in the field.

2. Each chapter includes five different features or sections that prompt students to engage with the material, apply the concepts, and learn more about current research. These features include the following:
    - *Deviance in Popular Culture*—offers several examples of films and/or television shows and encourages students to apply the concepts and theories to the behavior depicted in these examples
    - *Explaining Deviance in the Streets and Deviance in the Suites*—explores the impact of social class and status on different types of deviance and the reactions to such behavior
    - *Ideas in Action*—highlights examples of current policies or programs designed to address deviant behaviors from the perspective(s) covered in each chapter
    - *Now* You—asks students to apply the material they learned in the chapter to specific questions or examples
    - *Global Perspectives on Deviance*—illustrates the wide range of deviance by covering examples of research, policies, and practices from around the world
3. Each chapter includes discussion questions and exercises or assignments that will give students a chance to test and extend their knowledge of the material.
4. The book contains a glossary of key terms.

Structure of the Book

We chose very deliberately to organize our book around sociological theories rather than around types of deviance. This is in direct opposition to most of the competing texts on the market, and it is one of the reasons you might consider using our book. We believe the theoretically based approach offers students fertile ground for learning and exploring the realm of deviant behavior and social control. Once they learn the different theoretical perspectives, students will be able to apply the different theories to virtually any type of deviant behavior and, furthermore, be able to compare and contrast the theoretical models and decide for themselves which offers the most compelling explanation for the behavior. This is the kind of understanding and flexibility we hope our students achieve; while studying types of deviance is certainly interesting, being able to consider both individual and macro-level causes and explanations seems to us the larger and more important goal.

The book is divided into 12 chapters that cover an overview of the field of deviance and social control, methods and examples of researching deviance, the major theoretical traditions used in studying deviance, and a glimpse into the social control of deviance and deviant careers. The theory chapters each provide an overview of a theoretical perspective and its development, critiques of the perspective, and examples of current developments and research in that theoretical tradition. The chapters are as follows:

Chapter 1. Introduction to Deviance: We first provide the basic building blocks for studying deviant behavior from a sociological perspective. Different conceptions of deviance are described, and students are encouraged to develop and use their sociological imagination in studying deviant behavior. We explain the organization of the book and why we believe theory is so critical to understanding and researching deviance.

Chapter 2. The Diversity of Deviance: In this chapter, we offer an overview of some of the many types of deviance and show how our conceptions of deviance vary widely and change over time. We encourage students to think broadly about deviance and to always consider the culture, context, and historical period in which the "deviant" act takes place.

Chapter 3. Researching Deviance: This chapter addresses the many ways one might go about researching deviant behavior and social control. We highlight different research methods and the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Examples are used throughout to make abstract concepts concrete for students.

Chapter 4. Anomie/Strain Theory: This chapter looks at one of the first sociological theories of deviance and traces the development of anomie and strain theories from Durkheim's, Merton's, and Cloward and Ohlin's macro-level ideas on how the very structure of society contributes to deviant behavior to Agnew's general strain theory and Messner and Rosenfeld's institutional strain theory, which offer contemporary views on individual and institutional strain and the resulting deviance.

Chapter 5. Social Disorganization Theory: We discuss another early sociological perspective on deviance in this chapter: social disorganization theory, developed from early research on Chicago to explain patterns of deviance and crime across social locations, such as neighborhoods. We offer an overview of the perspective and show how it is being used today to explain high levels of deviance and violence in particular neighborhoods.

Chapter 6. Differential Association and Social Learning Theories: How do individuals learn to become deviant? This chapter covers ideas and research that try to answer that exact question. We explain the key ideas of Sutherland's differential association and Akers's social learning theories and offer an overview of the development of a sociological perspective that argues that deviance is learned through communication with intimate others.

Chapter 7. Social Control Theories of Deviance: Social control theories begin by flipping the question; rather than asking why individuals deviate, social control theories ask, If we are born prone to deviance, what keeps us from committing deviant acts? In this chapter, we trace the development of social control and life course theories and look at the importance of the individual's social bonds to conforming society.

Chapter 8. Labeling Theory: In this chapter, we look at the importance of being labeled deviant. We begin with a brief overview of symbolic interactionism, which then leads to a discussion of the labeling process and how it can affect individuals' self-concepts and life chances.

Chapter 9. Marxist and Conflict Theories of Deviance: Within the conflict perspective, power and inequality are key considerations in defining who and what is deviant in any given society. In this chapter, we begin with the ideas of Karl Marx and go on to show how Marxist perspectives have been used to study lawmaking and how the process of defining and creating deviant behavior is used to maintain positions of power in society.

Chapter 10. Critical Theories of Deviance: In this chapter, we focus on theories that examine deviance from a perspective that questions the normative status quo. We offer brief overviews of peacemaking criminology, feminist criminology, and critical race theory as alternative perspectives for studying deviance and social control.

Chapter 11. Societal Responses to Deviance: In this chapter, we offer a brief look into informal and formal social control of deviance. We discuss the medicalization (and medication) of deviance, mental hospitals, prisons and juvenile correctional facilities, felon disenfranchisement, and general effects of stigma on those labeled deviant.

Chapter 12. Deviant Careers and Career Deviance: While much attention is focused on getting into deviance, in this chapter, we consider the full deviant career, including desistance, or the process of exiting deviance.

Each chapter offers original material that introduces students to the issues, concepts, and theories covered in that chapter and contextualizes the examples used to show the wide variation in deviance and social control.

New to This Edition

Perspectives on Deviance and Social Control is a slimmed-down volume that follows the organization of our text/reader, *Deviance and Social Control: A Sociological Perspective*, Second Edition. This book offers a concise overview of the materials without including the additional readings found in *Deviance and Social Control*. In this new edition, we have updated the text, where appropriate, based on new examples and studies that illustrate the major sociological theories of deviance. While we included a chapter on global perspectives on deviance in the first edition, we have reorganized this new edition to include a section in every chapter that examines global issues in deviance and societal responses to deviant behavior or characteristics. We feel incorporating global examples into each chapter offers a better chance for students to be exposed to international perspectives while they are learning the substantive material, rather than our previous model of including global issues and examples in a separate chapter at the end of the book.

Many of the introductory vignettes that begin each chapter have been entirely changed or modified and help to provide a clear starting point for each theory and topic. In addition, the majority of inserts in each chapter including "Explaining Deviance in the Streets and Deviance in the Suites," "Deviance in Popular Culture," and "Now *You*" have been updated or changed in order to better orient students to the relevance of theory and research in understanding deviance and social control in modern society.

Key theoretical concepts have been expanded, and the new edition includes discussions of social constructionist conception, the looking-glass self, multicultural feminism, social control of mental illness, and restorative justice. Reflecting the impact of the digital world on our society, the new edition includes a closer look at the influence of the internet on deviance and subcultures and explores emerging topics such as the use of smartphones and social media, stigma management in the internet age, the #MeToo movement, and the effect of platforms like YouTube. Demonstrating recent trends and events today, the data have been updated throughout, and recent events like the Trump administration's stance on transgender individuals serving in the military, The UnSlut Project, and the Black Lives Matter movement are considered. Additionally, pressing topics impacting society and students, such as human trafficking, school shootings, and world energy consumption rates, have been added.

A great deal of thinking and work was involved in the creation of this new edition, but the work was a labor of love as we grew as scholars rethinking and investigating the subject of deviance and reactions to deviance to date. We hope instructors assigning the text appreciate the changes; we welcome your feedback for subsequent editions. Feel free to contact any or all of the authors if you have suggestions.

Digital Resources

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- Video and multimedia links that appeal to students with different learning styles.

• Acknowledgments •

First, we thank Jessica Miller for taking over as our motivating force at SAGE and for her belief in our work and the value of the second edition of this book. We also remain thankful to Jerry Westby for choosing to work with us in the first place and for shepherding our stubborn ideas for a different kind of book on deviance and social control through the initial publication process. Jessica's patience and faith in our vision and ideas for improving this second edition helped to sustain the project through difficult patches and busy schedules. We are very grateful.

We would also like to thank our graduate school mentors and friends; our time with these people in the University of Washington sociology program contributed a great deal to our lasting understanding of deviant behavior and social control: Bob Crutchfield, George Bridges, Joe Weis, Charis Kubrin, Sara Steen, Rod Engen, Edie Simpson, Ed Day, and Tim Wadsworth—thanks to you all! We hope you recognize your influence in this book, and we hope that we have made you proud. We also thank Howie Becker for being a powerful figure in the field of deviance and social control generally, for being a supportive mentor to Michelle specifically, and for writing the foreword to this book.

Michelle would like to thank Kristin Bates and Randy Gainey for being wonderful coauthors and friends. It's a continuing joy to have colleagues who are like family and who even manage to make working on endless revisions enjoyable. Sincerest appreciation to you both for sharing ideas and laughs and for being there for every step of this journey. She also offers particular thanks to friends and colleagues Charis Kubrin, Chris Uggen, Scott Akins, Kristin Barker, Becky Warner, and Debbie Storrs for many, many thought-provoking conversations about teaching and writing. And finally, she is endlessly thankful to her parents and sisters for giving her a strong and loving start to life and for their continuing support.

Kristin would like to thank her colleagues in the Department of Sociology at California State University, San Marcos, for sharing their critical perspectives, their intellectual energy, and their friendship. A special thank-you to Sharon Elise, Richelle Swan, and Marisol Clark-Ibañez. The work isn't work when I get to do it with all of you. To my students who remind me every day why I love what I do. And all my love to my parents and sisters who taught, fostered, and lived relativist/social constructionist/critical perspectives of deviance long before the livin' was cool.

Randy would like to thank his colleagues at Old Dominion University, where going to work is like going out and "playing with friends." He would also like to thank all of the students who have kept him engaged in social science research, always asking great questions and offering unique solutions. Much love to my family and friends—you rock!!!

And Randy and Kristin would like to thank Michelle for her leadership and hard work and for asking them to take this adventure with her. We always have fun with you!

We would also like to thank the reviewers of the first edition:

Keith J. Bell, *West Liberty University, West Virginia*

Angela Butts, *Rutgers University*

Seth Crawford, *Oregon State University*

Joseph Gallo, *Sam Houston State University*

George Guay, *Bridgewater State University*

Abdy Javadzadeh, *Florida International University*

Eric Jorrey, *Ohio University*

Lutz Kaelber, *University of Vermont*

Ross Kleinstuber, *University of Delaware, Newark*

Timothy O'Boyle, *Kutztown University of Philadelphia*

Robert Peralta, *University of Akron*

Andrew Rochus, *West Virginia University at Parkersburg*

Julia So, *University of New Mexico at Valencia*

Lindsey Upton, *Old Dominion University*

Brenda Vollman, *Loyola University New Orleans*

Lisa Weinberg, *Florida State University*

Lester Howard Wielstein, *California State University at Sacramento*

Janelle Wilson, *University of Minnesota Duluth*

And finally, we thank the reviewers of the second edition:

Cindy Brooks Dollar, *University of North Carolina at Greensboro*

Dorinda L. Dowis, *Columbus State University*

Joachim Kibirige, *Missouri Western State University*

Carol Cirulli Lanham, *University of Texas at Dallas*

Michael J. O'Connor, *Upper Iowa University*

Egbert Zavala, *University of Texas at El Paso*

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1

Introduction to Deviance

Public Nudity

Founded in 1972, the Fremont Fair is one of Seattle's most beloved neighborhood street festivals, featuring a weekend of eclectic activities that celebrate the quirky community of Fremont, the self-proclaimed "center of the universe." Held annually in mid-June to coincide with the Summer Solstice, the event draws more than 100,000 people to shop, eat, drink, mingle, groove, and enjoy all manners of creative expression. Artistic highlights include craft and art booths, street performers, local bands, wacky decorated art cars, the free-spirited Solstice Parade produced by the Fremont Arts Council, and many other oddities that personify Fremont's official motto "Delibertus Quirkus"—Freedom to be Peculiar.

—Fremont Fair (2010; see also Fremont Fair, 2018b)

The Fremont Arts Council (FAC) is a community-based celebration arts organization. We value volunteerism; community participation; artistic expression; and the sharing of arts skills. We welcome the participation of everyone regardless of who they are, or what they think or believe.

The rules of the Fremont Solstice Parade, which make this event distinct from other types of parades, are:

- No written or printed words or logos
- No animals (except service animals)
- No motorized vehicles (except wheelchairs)
- No real weapons or fire

—Fremont Arts Council (2018)

It is true that a parade with no logos, animals, or motorized vehicles is different from most parades that we experience in the United States. But one more thing sets the Fremont Solstice Parade apart from other parades: the public displays of nudity. Every year at the parade, a contingent of nude, body-painted bicyclists (both men and women) ride through the streets of Fremont as part of the parade. Rain or shine (and let's face it, in June in Seattle, there can be a lot of rain), a large group of naked adults cycle down the street as the crowds cheer and wave. The Fremont City Council estimates that more than 100,000 people visit the weekend fair, and pictures show that the streets are crowded with parade watchers, from the very young to elderly.

On the Fremont Fair webpage, the traditions of the "free-spirited event" are explained:

> **What is the etiquette with body paint?** We won't deny it, the Fremont Fair and Fremont Solstice Parade are partially famous for body-painted bicyclists and revelers. If you are one of the body painted participants please note: The Fremont restaurants and bars greatly appreciate if you can carry a towel with you to place on the chair/booth you dine and drink in. If you don't, they are left scrubbing for weeks to come, which is a mess and can permanently damage decor. They love to have you in their establishments, but please be respectful of their furnishings. Also, remember that many families with small children attend the fair. Please be considerate of children's eye level. Plus, if you are not on a bike you should cover it up.
>
> **Is the Fremont Fair appropriate for children?** The Fremont Fair welcomes family members of all ages! In fact, there are special activities just for kids and families. However, Solstice-goers should be aware this is a very eclectic and free-spirited event. Some Solstice guests appear in full or partial body paint, and a variety of other colorful costumes (this is typically limited to Saturday's festivities.) (Fremont Fair, 2018a)

Contrast this event with the following stories of flashers across the country during the Summer Solstice weekend in 2017. A quick Google search of "flasher in June 2017" brings up four articles about police in Arizona, Oklahoma, Texas, and Ontario, Canada, looking for men who exposed themselves in public in the months of May and June.

In each of these cities, men exposed themselves on the street or in parks to various passersby (mostly women). In each instance, the behavior of the men was reported to the police and/or reported on social media. And in at least one instance, the flasher was arrested and charged with a crime.

While all of these events center on public displays of nudity, one is celebrated while the others are vilified. Why?

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PHOTOS 1.1 and 1.2 When is a public display of nudity considered deviant? When is it celebrated?

Introduction

You might expect that a book about deviance would start with a definition of deviance. But like all things worth studying, a simple definition does not exist. For example, in the stories above, one public display of nudity was not only welcomed but celebrated by 6-year-olds and grandmothers alike, but another display led to arrest and possible jail time. Why? This chapter and this book explore how it can be that the Fremont Solstice Parade was celebrated in the same summer that a flasher was arrested and held on $50,000 bail until charged.

Conceptions of Deviance

All deviance textbooks offer their "conceptions of deviance." Rubington and Weinberg (2008) argue that there are generally two conceptions of deviance: "objectively given" and "subjectively problematic." Clinard and Meier (2015) also suggest two general conceptions of deviance, the **normative conception** and the reactionist or **relativist conception**. Thio, Taylor, and Schwartz (2012) argue that we can view deviance from a **positivist perspective** or a **social constructionist perspective**.

While none of these authors are using the same language, they are defining similar conceptions of deviance. The first conception—that of an "objectively given," normative, or positivist conception of deviance—assumes that there is a general set of norms of behavior, conduct, and conditions on which we can agree. **Norms** are rules of behavior that guide people's actions. Sumner (1906) broke norms down into three categories: folkways, mores, and laws. **Folkways** are everyday norms that do not generate much uproar if they are violated. Think of them as behaviors that might be considered rude if engaged in, like standing too close to someone while speaking or picking one's nose. **Mores** are "moral" norms that may generate more outrage if broken. In a capitalist society, homelessness and unemployment can elicit outrage if the person is considered unworthy of sympathy. Similarly, drinking too much or alcoholism may be seen as a lapse in moral judgment. Finally, the third type of norm is the **law**, considered the strongest norm because it is backed by official sanctions (or a formal response). In this conception, then, deviance becomes a violation of a rule understood by the majority of the group. This rule may be minor, in which case the deviant is seen as "weird but harmless," or the rule may be major, in which case the deviant is seen as "criminal." The obvious problem with this conceptualization goes back to the earlier examples of reactions to public nudity, where we see that violation of a most "serious" norm (law) can receive quite different reactions. This leads to the second conception.

Be Careful Who *You* Are Calling Deviant: Body Rituals Among the Nacirema

In 1956, Horace Miner published an article on the Nacirema, a poorly understood culture that he claimed engaged in body rituals and ceremonies that were unique, obsessive, and almost magical. He highlighted several of these beliefs and actions:

> The fundamental belief of the Nacirema people is that the human body is ugly and prone to "debility and disease."
>
> The people engage in rituals and ceremonies in a "ritual center" considered to be a shrine. Affluent members of society may have more than one shrine devoted to these rituals and ceremonies.
>
> Each shrine has, near its center point, a box or chest filled with magical potions. Many believe they cannot live without these magical potions and so collect to the point of hoarding them, afraid to let them go even when it is determined they may no longer hold their magic.
>
> The people have an "almost pathological horror and fascination with the mouth, the condition of which is believed to have

a supernatural influence on all social relationships. Were it not for the rituals of the mouth, they believe that their teeth would fall out, their gums bleed, their jaws shrink, their friends desert them, and their lovers reject them" (p. 504).

Miner never lets on that this fascinating culture that believes magic will transform its members' ugly, diseased bodies is actually American (*Nacirema* spelled backward) culture. But his point is made: Our understanding and interpretation of events and behaviors is often relative. If we step back from the everyday events in which we engage with little thought, our most accepted practices can be made to seem deviant.

Take a moment to examine an everyday activity that you engage in from the perspective of an outsider. What might watching television, going to a sporting event, babysitting, or surfing look like to those who have never experienced it? Can you write a description of this everyday event from an outsider's point of view?

Source: Miner (1956).

The second conception of deviance—the "subjectively problematic," reactionist or relativist, social constructionist conception—assumes that the definition of deviance is constructed based on the interactions of those in society. According to this conception, behaviors or conditions are not inherently deviant; they become so when the definition of deviance is applied to them. The study of deviance is not about why certain individuals violate norms but, instead, about how those norms are constructed. Social constructionists believe that our understanding of the world is in constant negotiation between actors. Those who have a relativist conception of deviance define deviance as those behaviors that elicit a definition or label of deviance:

> Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders. For this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an "offender." The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label. (Becker, 1973, p. 9)

This is a fruitful conceptualization, but it is also problematic. What about very serious violations of norms that are never known or reacted to? Some strict reactionists or relativists would argue that these acts (beliefs or attitudes) are not deviant. Most of us would agree that killing someone and making it look like he or she simply skipped the country is deviant. However, there may be no reaction.

A third conception of deviance that has not been advanced in many textbooks (for an exception, see DeKeseredy, Ellis, & Alvi, 2005) is a critical definition of deviance (DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2012; Jensen, 2007). Those working from a **critical conception** of deviance argue that the normative understanding of deviance is established by those in power to maintain and enhance their power. It suggests that explorations of deviance have focused on a white, male, middle- to upper-class

TABLE 1.1 ● Conceptions of Deviance

Conceptions of Deviance	Assumptions	Definition of Deviance	Example Research Question
Normative or Positivist	There is a general set of norms of behavior, conduct, and conditions on which we can agree.	Deviance is a violation of a rule understood by the majority of the group.	"What leads an individual to engage in deviant behavior?"
Relativist or Social Constructionist	Nothing is inherently deviant; our understanding of the world is in constant negotiation between actors.	Deviance is any behavior that elicits a definition or label of deviance.	"What characteristics increase the likelihood that an individual or a behavior will be defined as deviant?"
Critical	The normative understanding of deviance is established by those in power to maintain and enhance their power.	Instead of focusing on individual types of deviance, this conception critiques the social system that exists and creates such norms in the first place.	"What is the experience of the homeless, and who is served by their treatment as deviant?"

understanding of society that implies that people of color, women, and the working poor are by definition deviant. Instead of focusing on individual types of deviance, this conception critiques the social system that exists and creates such norms in the first place. This, too, is a useful and powerful approach, but there are still some things that the vast majority of society agrees are so immoral, unethical, and deviant that they should be illegal, and that the system can serve to protect our interests against.

Given that each of these conceptualizations is useful but problematic, we do not adhere to a single conception of deviance in this book because the theories of deviance do not adhere to a single conception. You will see that several of our theories assume a normative conception, whereas several assume a social constructionist or critical conception. As you explore each theory, think about what the conception of deviance and theoretical perspective mean for the questions we ask and answer about deviance (Table 1.1).

How Do *You* Define Deviance?

As Justice Potter Stewart of the Supreme Court once famously wrote about trying to define obscene materials, "I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly

doing so. But I know it when I see it" (*Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 1964). Those who do not study deviance for a living probably find themselves in the same boat; it may be hard to write a definition, but how hard could it be to "know it when we see it"?

Choose a busy place to sit and observe human behavior for one hour. Write down all the behaviors that you observe during that hour. Do you consider any of these behaviors to be deviant? Which conception of deviance are you using when you define each as deviant? Might there be some instances (e.g., places or times) when that behavior you consider to be nondeviant right now might become deviant? Finally, bring your list of behaviors to class. In pairs, share your list of behaviors and your definitions of deviant behaviors with your partner. Do you agree on your categorization? Why or why not?

The Sociological Imagination

Those of us who are sociologists can probably remember the first time we were introduced to the concept of the **sociological imagination**. C. Wright Mills argues that the only way to truly understand the experiences of the individual is to first understand the societal, institutional, and historical conditions that individual is living under. In other words, Mills believes that no man, woman, or child is an island. Below is an excerpt from Mills's (1959/2000) profound book, *The Sociological Imagination*.

> Men do not usually define the troubles they endure in terms of historical change and institutional contradiction. The well-being they enjoy, they do not usually impute to the big ups and downs of the societies in which they live. Seldom aware of the intricate connection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history, ordinary men do not usually know what this connection means for the kinds of men they are becoming and for the kinds of history-making in which they might take part. They do not possess the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and world. They cannot cope with their personal troubles in such ways as to control the structural transformations that usually lie behind them. . . .
>
> The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions. With that welter, the framework of modern society is sought, and within that framework the psychologies of a variety of men and women are formulated. By such means the personal uneasiness of individuals is focused upon explicit troubles and the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues.
>
> The first fruit of this imagination—and the first lesson of the social science that embodies it—is the idea that the individual can understand his own

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PHOTO 1.3
The salad bar can represent the restriction on choices that individuals have. We can only make our salad with the ingredients offered to us on the salad bar.

> experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances. In many ways it is a terrible lesson; in many ways a magnificent one. . . .
>
> In these terms, consider unemployment. When, in a city of 100,000, only one man is unemployed, that is his personal trouble, and for its relief we properly look to the character of the man, his skills, and his immediate opportunities. But when in a nation of 50 million employees, 15 million men are unemployed, that is an issue, and we may not hope to find its solution within the range of opportunities open to any one individual. The very structure of opportunities has collapsed. Both the correct statement of the problem and the range of possible solutions require us to consider the economic and political institutions of the society, and not merely the personal situation and character of a scatter of individuals. . . .
>
> What we experience in various and specific milieux, I have noted, is often caused by structural changes. Accordingly, to understand the changes of many personal milieux we are required to look beyond them. And the number and variety of such structural changes increase as the institutions within which we live become more embracing and more intricately connected with one another. To be aware of the idea of social structure and to use it with sensibility is to be capable of tracing such linkages among a great variety of milieux. To be able to do that is to possess the sociological imagination. (*The Sociological Imagination* by C. Wright Mills [2000] pp. 3–11. By permission of Oxford University Press, USA.)

One of our favorite examples of the sociological imagination in action is the "salad bar" example. In the United States, one of the persistent philosophies is that of individualism and personal responsibility. Under this philosophy, individuals are assumed to be solely responsible for their successes and failures. This philosophy relies heavily on the notion that individuals are rational actors who weigh the costs and benefits of their actions, can see the consequences of their behavior, and have perfect information. The salad bar example helps those who rely heavily on this conception of the individual to see the importance of social structure to individual behavior.

No one doubts that when you order a salad bar at a restaurant, you are responsible for building your own salad. Every person makes his or her own salad, and no two salads look exactly alike. Some make salads with lots of lettuce and vegetables, very little cheese, and fat-free dressing. Others create a salad that is piled high

with cheese, croutons, and lots and lots of dressing. Those who are unhappy with their choices while making their salad have only themselves to blame, right? Not necessarily.

A salad is only as good as the salad bar it is created from. In other words, individuals making a salad can only make a salad from the ingredients supplied from the salad bar. If the restaurant is out of croutons that day or decided to put watermelon out instead of cantaloupe, the individual must build his or her salad within these constraints. Some individuals with a great sense of personal power or privilege may request additional items from the back of the restaurant, but most individuals will choose to build a salad based on the items available to them on the salad bar. In other words, the individual choice is constrained by the larger social forces of delivery schedules, food inventory, and worker decision making. The sociological imagination is especially important to understand because it is the building block for our understanding of deviance and sociological theory.

The sociological imagination helps us understand the impact of social forces on both engaging in and reacting to deviance. One of the easiest reactions to or assumptions about people who engage in deviance is that they are "sick" or "mentally ill." This assumption is what we refer to as **pathologizing** individuals. It puts all the responsibility for their actions onto them without asking what impact the social forces and social structures around them might have. The sociological imagination reminds us that individuals exist in a larger social system, and they impact that larger social system just as it impacts them. One of the ways to systematically understand these impacts is to understand sociological theory.

DEVIANCE IN POPULAR CULTURE

Many types of deviance are portrayed and investigated in popular culture. Films and shows on television, the internet, and social media, for example, illustrate a wide range of deviant behavior and social control. There are often several interpretations of what acts are deviant. How do you know when an act or person is deviant? One way to develop your sociological imagination is to watch films or shows, listen to music, and engage with social media from a critical perspective and to think about how different theories would explain the deviant behavior and the reactions portrayed. Films, music, and social media offer examples of cultural norms, different types of deviant behavior, and coping with stigma.

Television—reality shows and the TLC network in particular—features a number of programs offering an inside view of people perceived as deviant or different in some way and how they deal with stigma from various sources.

The internet may be one of the best places to go for examples of deviance and social control. It is all right at our fingertips all the time.

In each of the chapters that follow, we will suggest one or more features of pop culture for you to watch from the theoretical perspective outlined in the chapter. We think you'll soon agree: Deviance is all around us.