
DO THE WRONG THING:
VARIATION IN DEVIANCE

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Consider the following simple scenario: A woman takes a rifle and purposefully shoots a man in the head, killing him. Was that incident a murder, an act of self-defense, or a heroic deed? The answer to this question lies in the culturally defined circumstances in which the action is embedded. To evaluate the situation, we need to know the statuses of the individuals involved—what are their social identities? We need to know what rights and duties the culture has used to define these identities. We need to know their relationship—were they husband and wife, thief and homeowner, mass murderer and police officer? In addition, we need to know the details of the situation. Even were we to discover that a wife had shot her husband, we would need the surrounding details—had he abused her, was he threatening her, had he a history of uncontrolled violence? Finally, we need to know the cultural rules that define acceptable, commendable, and deviant behaviors.

Deviance, Norms, and Cultural Relativity

Deviance refers to any human attribute (behavior, appearance, belief) that departs sufficiently from a norm to elicit a sanction (a response from others intended to terminate, or at least moderate, the unacceptable behavior). Technically, deviance involves both positive and negative departures from the normative, but virtually all social scientists use the term deviance to refer to acts that are viewed negatively by society's members, and I shall do so here. Whether judged positively or negatively, there is no such thing as an act that is considered universally to be deviant. Instead, deviance is culturally defined and, as such, judgments of deviance are relative to each of the approximately four thousand cultures that comprise the repertoire of human beliefs and behavior.

Thus, our judgment of the shooting described above must be specific to the set of circumstances in which the act occurred, and to the culture that defines those circumstances. For example, the Inuit are known occasionally to condone infanticide and geronticide when a lack of resources dictates that some must die so that others may live. However, no one suggests that such behavior is desirable, rather it is necessitated by harsh circumstance.¹

Different cultures possess varying social norms, standards of acceptable behavior. Social scientists often distinguish between *folkways*, patterns of expected behavior that may be violated without significant censure, and *mores*, important cultural rules such as the incest taboo that carry an intense emotional and cultural "charge" and that are seldom violated. Thus, the assessment of deviance must be relative to social norms and these, in turn, vary across cultures.

Indeed, one of anthropology's most significant contributions to the study of deviance involves the assertion that deviance is culturally defined.

Like a well-travelled sailor who creates problems for stay-at-home map makers, anthropology has bedeviled those who would define deviance in universal terms, because anthropology insists on the relativistic nature of deviance across cultures. For instance, kissing is a well-accepted component of romantic behavior in many Western countries, but some cultures, when they first encountered kissing, thought it quite deviant. Consider kissing shorn of the automatic associations our culture provides: Two people place their mouths together, intertwine tongues, and exchange saliva. Seems a bit strange, perhaps even repellent, doesn't it? In many cultures not only was kissing regarded as deviant, so was the concept of romantic love. Accordingly, traditional Chinese actually saw strong emotional attachments between husband and wife as deviant and dangerous to the wider family. Husbands and wives were prohibited from displays of affection.²

In order to understand why romantic love is appropriate in one cultural context and deviant in another, you must acquire more information on cultural contexts and histories. Conceptions of love in Western cultures can be traced to the customs associated with courtly love and the code of chivalry of Europe, beginning in the eleventh century.³ In contrast to the West's increasing concern with the individual, traditional Chinese society placed great emphasis on the extended family, its longevity and coherence. Chinese descent was in the male line and wives joined their husbands' households. Consequently, wives could threaten the viability of the extended family by pressuring their husbands to secede from the extended family and establish a separate farm. Since marriages were arranged by parents who thought emotions were too insubstantial a basis for a union, and since a strong husband-wife attachment could provide wives with undesirable affectional leverage, Chinese culture held emotional displays between husbands and wives to be undesirable and even deviant.⁴

People are often surprised to discover that elements of behavior that they believe to be natural and biologically given are more often the result of culturally constructed patterns of meaning. Since gender is a constructed concept, its content is highly variable, yet virtually all cultural members believe that their gender assumptions recognize biological truths rather than cultural constructs. Thus, as a female praying mantis finds it only natural to eat her paramour,

many of us have a sense of “normal” male and female behavior, departures from which are clearly unnatural and deviant.

Judgments of deviance reflecting gender biases are very common across cultures. Thus the Hopi of the American Southwest believe that men should do the community’s weaving;⁵ the people of Inis Beag believe that it is deviant for a woman to experience an orgasm;⁶ and, in contrast to most Western cultures, the Sambia of New Guinea believe that all men must spend their first thirty years in homosexual relationships.⁷ In each instance, these beliefs are deemed to reflect the natural order of things—anything else would be unnatural and deviant.

Sanctions

If deviance is variable, so are its sanctions, as described by A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, an early anthropologist.⁸ Sanctions are behaviors of individuals or acts of the apparatus of the state that are intended to promote conformity to social norms. They can be as simple as spontaneous expressions of approval or disapproval by members of society acting as individuals. These informal sanctions can range from a frown of disagreement to ridicule and gossip. The foundation for such sanctions are the internalized norms and values of the society. For informal sanctions to be effectively employed, these elements of world view must be shared and, more importantly, offenders must care about the opinions and attitudes of those around them. Such conditions are found principally in small social units where people know one another well and where there is often a high degree of interdependence. Thus, small towns are commonly characterized by active gossip networks and a reliance on informal sanctions to control most day-to-day deviance.

In large social units, such as cities, informal sanctions lack efficacy because people seldom care about the attitudes of unfamiliar others. In such social groups there is an increasing need to rely upon formal sanctions. These are sanctions imposed by constituted authority, whether that be the Sultan’s soldiers, the Chief’s warriors, or the Supreme Court of the United States. These sanctions are formal because they require the machinery of a centralized polity, and such organizations generally rely upon established procedures and precedent to evaluate an act as deviant and, then, to determine the appropriate sanction.

The study of deviance is important partly because of the threat

deviant behavior poses to social stability. Also, as an examination of a cook's kitchen reveals much about culinary preferences, the study of how deviance is defined illuminates areas of social and cultural importance. When a society's members define what is acceptable and unacceptable, they are making fundamental statements about their perception of the world, human nature, and cultural values. In short, the study of deviance can quickly and easily reveal areas of cultural significance and it can also force the investigator to deal with cultural variability. Thus, I found in my fieldwork that several practices forbidden by the State of Kelantan, such as cockfighting and gambling, were highly regarded by villagers who saw them as means for social advancement.⁹ Thus, an anthropologist has noted that responses to deviance in a North Atlantic fishing community vary greatly depending on whether the respondents are traditionalists or modernists, and on whether the offender is a local or someone from another community.¹⁰

If sociocultural contexts were perfectly integrated and if people conformed to all of their culture's edicts, then cultures, like salt crystals, would be static entities lacking any flexibility and destined either to persist unchangingly or to melt away. Deviance involves departures from the ideal that result in behavioral and conceptual alternatives; this creates a flexibility in the sociocultural system that would otherwise be absent. Thus, for many cultures facing pressures for change, yesterday's deviant behavior may become today's accepted cultural pattern.

THE PROPERTIES OF DEVIANCE

Deviance and Power

Behind concepts of the desirable and definitions of deviance is always the question of power. While cultures are not political entities governed by boards of directors, their content is subject to influence by culture participants. Thus, the definitions of proper and improper usually incorporate the perceptions and desires of those individuals and groups who have differential access to social and cultural power, and thus have an unequal role in defining social norms.¹¹

Consider standards of attire in our culture. Both men and women who wish to attain positions of influence and to associate with the powerful must necessarily dress "appropriately" or be

viewed as deviant. Such apparel is invariably expensive and is therefore less available to those with limited resources. Indeed, dress codes for the polite society of a hundred years ago, and earlier, virtually required the assistance of servants for both men and women, thereby assuring that only the wealthy could appear well-dressed. Those who do not or cannot conform to the code can be regarded as lower class or deviant.

While power frequently derives directly from an unequal control of resources, this need not always be the case. In many countries, religious authorities play a major role in defining what is and what is not acceptable. A classic example of a narrowly defined social dress code derives from those Islamic countries where women are required to wear the *chador*, a loose black robe covering the entire body and most of the face. In Iran, women who appear in public without the chador are regarded as deviant and may be subject to both formal and informal sanctions.

The example of dress code represents one of numerous channels by which the powerful can define values, norms, and concepts of the desirable. In private clubs, some professions, and even everyday environments, certain individuals, such as women and members of minority groups, may be treated as deviant. Consider the likelihood that a black man strolling through a white residential neighborhood will be stopped and questioned by the police. Similarly, in Japan and India there have been "untouchables," who were identified as deviant and strongly discriminated against.

Some power is exerted quite consciously, as when members of a private club vote to exclude Jewish members. However, most of the biases that color opportunity and access more frequently derive from insidious and less mindful sources. Thus, the qualified woman who is refused a job as a firefighter may find that most males genuinely believe such a profession is deviant for women. Their perceptions derive from gender role conceptions, which they have been acquiring throughout their lives and which operate on an effectively unconscious level. As I have suggested previously, the members of many cultures harbor strong gender notions that can influence access to power.

Deviance and Scale

The reactions of a society's members to deviant acts are often predicated on their perception of the degree to which those acts may interfere with the members' pursuits of their own interests. If some-

one's behavior departs from cultural norms and/or values in a fashion that hinders others' attempts to realize their ends, these others will be concerned with altering the discrepant behavior toward closer conformity with cultural ideals. However, the degree of their concern and the forms it takes can vary considerably with the scale of the social unit.

The differences between life in small social units such as villages and neighborhoods and life in large social units such as cities reflect, and to some extent define, the contrasting natures of these two units. In comparison to large social units, small social units tend to exhibit more consistent and better integrated social and cultural values. There is generally greater interdependence of members among small social units, while the members of large social units are often relatively independent of one another. Partly as a consequence of this oppositeness, members of small social units tend to have access to much more social information on co-residents than do members of large social units. Finally, there generally is less inequality among members of small social units than there is among people in large social units.

Imagine an act of violence occurring between a man and woman in a city setting, compared to the same act in a small rural village. In both settings, the man attacks the woman with a club in full view of passersby. In the city, the tendency (all too well documented) is for people to observe, but not to interfere. They have no relationship with the victim, nor are they aware of the circumstances behind the act they are witnessing. In the village, observers would likely have a relationship with both the victim and the attacker, they would know the background of the interaction, and they would be far more likely to attempt to terminate the confrontation.

All societies contain small social units, but only the more complex ones also contain, and are sometimes better characterized by, large social units such as cities. Consequently, the kinds of dynamics concerning deviance that one finds in small-scale units may well typify the approach of some entire societies, while others, containing social units for which informal sanctions are inappropriate, rely more upon formal mechanisms such as courts, police apparatus, and so on.

In large social units, deviance is treated through formal mechanisms that often specify penalties, or at least a range of penalties, for particular offenses. In small social units, people not only engage in finer discriminations concerning deviance, but they also

respond to deviance with greater variability, attempting to promote conformity through a range of initially informal and later formal sanctions. These sanctions can range from gossip, to the application of social pressure by relatives and friends, to threats of embarrassment or harm.

Small social units such as villages, whether in simple or complex societies, are composed of people who know one another well. In such a social context, individuals will often share some common history, perhaps at work or through school. They may interact in a variety of contexts as neighbors, friends, or even relatives. In short, they know each other three-dimensionally, and this wealth of interpersonal knowledge influences judgments of deviance when one of their number goes astray. Thus, judgments of deviance will not be absolute, but will instead reflect factors like the reputation and position of the offender, the details surrounding the offense, and even the nature of the victim who may, in some circumstances, be seen as deserving of the offense. Thus, a man who beats up the town bully because of provocation will likely find his behavior excused or even praised by others. However, the same act carried out by an outsider, or by the bully himself, would likely be sanctioned by other members of the community.

The preceding points are well illustrated by behaviors in a peasant society in which I have worked for more than two decades. Among the Kelantanese of Malaysia, members of small social units will exhaust all informal means of controlling deviance before calling in outside authorities who represent the state and formal sanctions.¹² Kelantanese villages are small, nucleated, and residentially stable. Consequently, most villagers know one another well, many are interrelated, and there is often a good deal of interdependence in the farming of wet rice and other agricultural tasks. For villagers to continue as successful residents, they must heed the opinions of their co-residents. Failure to do so can result in social exclusion and the loss of the assistance of others. This gives informal sanctions a great deal of power and usually allows villagers to avoid involving the external power structure.¹³

Soft versus Hard Deviance

Arguably, all of us are deviant to some degree. Erving Goffman has perhaps exaggerated the situation in arguing that "...in an important sense there is only one complete unblushing male in

America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record in sports."¹⁴ Note that this definition implies that anyone who deviates from this cultural ideal, including all women and members of ethnic groups, has reason to blush.

Obviously, Goffman is defining normal in very narrow terms. And just as obviously, many of us who depart from this model do so without significant censure or sanction. People are quite capable of discriminating between those who simply fail to manifest desired normative behavior (the overweight, the discourteous, the stingy, etc.) and those whose behavior actively threatens the social order and the interests of others (violent people, thieves, revolutionaries, etc.). Recognizing that such judgments of deviance span a continuum, it may still be useful to employ a simple dichotomy distinguishing between *soft deviance*, behavior that in the view of culture participants departs from social and cultural norms but does not actively threaten the social order, and *hard deviance*, behavior that in the opinion of culture participants not only departs from the normative but also jeopardizes the social order.

In the case of soft deviance, social members may regularly tolerate behaviors that depart from cultural norms and ideals. This is particularly true of small social units where soft deviants may be viewed as eccentric, erratic, idiosyncratic, odd, outlandish, peculiar, quaint, queer, singular, uncouth, unusual, or weird, but not seen as deviants requiring combined social action on the part of the unit's members. Such deviants are known three-dimensionally to their co-residents and are often viewed in a nondichotomous fashion. Thus, someone with a drinking problem would be referred to as "George, who drinks ..." or even "George with the drinking problem ..." rather than as "George, the drunk."

In small social units, deviance is treated as though it were a long and somewhat elastic continuum. Depending on contextual considerations (discussed later), a soft deviant may or may not incur sanctions. However, whatever sanctions do occur will be informal, consisting of expressions of disapproval in one form or another. Even in those rare circumstances when violence is part of a sanction, it will likely be employed by one or more locals acting as individuals, rather than by representatives of the state.

As with judgments of deviance in general, the hardness or softness of deviance depends on cultural values and social organization. For instance, the Semai of the Malay Peninsula are known for

their pacific nature and for their avoidance of violence in virtually any form. The Semai, a horticultural people, have long lived in interior jungles and have placed great emphasis on mutual interdependence and support. In this context, violence challenges social values, the cultural order, and the well being of group members. In many cultures, striking another person without considerable provocation is considered deviant, usually a form of soft deviance unless the violence has been excessive. Among the Semai, however, any blow to another social member is referred to by a word that means both "to strike" and "to kill."¹⁵ There are no circumstances that would excuse such behavior.

In large social units, because of their reliance on formal sanctions, soft deviance is often less easily tolerated. There is also a tendency to treat soft deviance in a dichotomous fashion. Either it is ignored by those charged with enforcing formal sanctions or the response is rather severe. Thus, if "George the drunk" comes to the attention of authorities, he is apt to find himself under arrest, incarcerated as a public nuisance.

Hard deviance, because of the jeopardy to social order, cultural clarity, and even self-conception that it represents, is seldom tolerated in either small or large social units. Such threatening conduct frequently elicits formal sanctions, even from small social units. Accordingly, individuals who imperil the well-being of others or the integrity of the social unit will often find themselves subject to prompt, stern measures designed to eliminate their menacing behavior. Thus the Islamic Shi'ite code, employed in Saudi Arabia, Iran, and elsewhere, specifies that thieves shall lose their hands, and murderers their heads. These penalties are carried out publicly so that others may heed the consequences of such deviance.

Deviance and Context

As deviance is not an absolute across cultures, neither is its evaluation absolute in any given cultural setting. There are exceptions to all conventions and to nearly all rules.¹⁶ A deviant act is carried out by a given individual under a circumscribed set of circumstances, and against a particular person or group. Societal members, particularly those in small social units, will weigh all of the preceding particulars before judging the act and the actor.

In assessing the actor, people will want to know the past history of the person. Has he or she given similar offense in the past?

In the case of previous offenses, were sanctions employed and were they successful? Finally, if somewhat cynically, how well-connected is the person? If an offender has committed similar misdeeds in the past, has shown little remorse for those misdeeds, and is already a marginal member of society, the judgment against that person is likely to be quite harsh. In contrast, if it is a first act of deviance carried out by a penitential and well-regarded social participant, the actor may be excused from any penalty. Consider the difference between an act of violence carried out by a known drug offender from a welfare family and the same act performed by, let us say, a well-known and respected sports celebrity. While the physical act may be the same, the assessments people make of it will vary markedly.

The conditions surrounding the act also matter. Was it performed privately or in a fashion that openly challenged social authority? In the latter case, sanctions are often swiftly invoked, partly to punish the offender and partly to serve as a warning to others that public challenges to social order will not be tolerated. Was there provocation for the act? If the provocation was sufficient, it may largely excuse the offense. Provocation itself is something that must be judged in a particular cultural context. Thus, we have the well-known historical penchant of some Mediterranean and Latin American cultures to excuse murder when it appeared to be a "crime of passion," and the tendency of people in the Antebellum South to acquit those who were tried for killing Blacks.

Finally, in assessing the degree of deviance involved in an offense, societal members care about the nature of the person or persons against whom the act was directed. To what extent are the victims upstanding, well-connected, and essentially blameless members of the social unit? The higher the status of the victim(s), the more egregious is the offense, and the greater the likelihood of significant sanctions.

An excellent ethnographic example of the importance of context in reactions to deviance is provided by Gertrude Dole's study of the Kuikuru of the Xingu Reservation of Brazil. The Kuikuru are a tribal society in which nearly everyone lives in small social units with a large number of crosscutting ties of friendship and kinship.

Individuals apt to be suspected of sorcery or witchcraft (hard deviance) include "unfriendly, quarrelsome, stingy, uncooperative persons."¹⁷ Dole reports an instance where a purported witch who was assassinated was clearly marginal and lacked male relatives who could avenge the death. She analyzes a case that exemplifies

several of the principles characteristic of the assessment of deviance in small social units. When two multifamily dwellings burned down, the local shaman focused blame on a person who had left the group some years earlier.

Dole's analysis of this event emphasizes several features that are congruent with and supportive of the importance of contextual judgments. She notes that the person blamed was already perceived to be marginal and had only one brother, a weak individual who was disliked and who also had left the community. Further, the accused had already incurred the resentment of many villagers, since he had neither claimed nor released a girl who had been promised to him some years earlier, and she was the only available potential mate for a number of young men in the settlement. Dole makes it clear that the nature of the individual is a very important factor in assessing both guilt and nature of the sanction to be employed. She also notes that the shaman, when making the accusation, first sounds out public opinion and ultimately "deduces, formulates, and expresses the will of the people."¹⁸

THEORIES OF DEVIANCE

People who depart markedly from the norms and mores of society have always challenged and fascinated those who conform. Deviance raises questions about human motives, perceptions, and even human nature. Both social scientists and laypersons have tried to reduce the threats of deviance by developing explanatory theories that can explicate and thus somehow control this phenomenon.

Following Stephen Pfohl,¹⁹ major approaches to deviance include the *demonic* perspective, arguing that people act in deviant fashions because supernatural forces cause them to. In this early perspective, deviance is beyond the control of the individual, and sanctions often focus upon addressing the supernatural. This perspective was popular in Medieval Europe with its accusations of witchcraft and fears of Satanism, and it is also often found in tribal societies, where it is believed that people misbehave because they are possessed by malevolent spirits.

In another approach, the *rational* argument, individuals are seen as breaking rules as a result of calculated self-interest. Thus, a student who wants to cheat may first weigh the advantages to be

derived from cheating against the likelihood of being caught and penalized. Here the individual is found to be fully in control of deviant acts, and the focus is upon sanctions that will control behavior and deter further deviance. This approach seems to be largely a product of the European Enlightenment and subsequent theories concerning "social contracts." This perspective is seldom found in other cultures.

A third position, the *pathological*, argues that some individuals are inherently deviant due to their physical nature. In this circumstance, sanctions often consist of addressing the physiology of the offender through medication, electro-shock therapy, and the like. Across cultures, deviants are often held to be physiologically different from "normal" people, especially if they are members of a minority group. Among the Chinese, some offenders were believed to be born deviant as the result of circumstances surrounding their births.²⁰

Yet another approach to explaining deviance argues that it results from rapid social change and the concomitant breakdown of established order and beliefs. Here sanctions focus on maintaining social order and addressing social problems, rather than simply on individuals. This perspective is largely the product of Western theorists but it has found its greatest utility in dealing with developing nations, where rapid social change has often resulted in serious social dislocation and a marked increase in various forms of deviance. Accordingly, in addition to other causes, rapid modernization in Malaysia, by making the economic conditions of peasants less secure, is argued to be responsible for acts of resistance and other forms of deviance.²¹

Then there is what is often termed the *learning* perspective, which argues that deviance is learned from others either by example or through actual instruction. Sanctions generally focus on altering that which is learned or controlling behavior through learning techniques such as behavior modification. This explanation, too, is found across of a variety of cultures, where it is argued that one person's deviance may be the result of exposure to "bad influences." For example, members of Taiwan's many street gangs are believed to have been socialized into their deviant pastime by other members.²²

Functionalism is still a major sociological approach to deviance and involves arguments that deviance actually has certain benefits for society. Thus, it is sometimes argued that, in addition to adding social variability, deviance can help to define social boundaries and

promote the integration of the wider sociocultural whole.²³ Accordingly, the inhabitants of many rural villages in this country are aware of some of the more colorful urban fashions, such as green hair and pierced cheeks. They may even acknowledge the right of others to dress as they choose, but not in *their* villages.

In the functionalist perspective, deviance is often explained as the result of a disjunction between desire and opportunity. Consequently, deviants are often those who find themselves frustrated in their pursuit of valued ends by the absence of appropriate means, necessitating recourse to illegitimate channels.²⁴ There have been several important studies of deviance in anthropology that have utilized a functional perspective, including Malinowski's classic description of deviance among Trobriand Islanders,²⁵ and Evans-Pritchard's study of Azande witchcraft.²⁶

Without question, the most popular current approach to the study of deviance in the social sciences is *labeling theory*. Labeling theory argues that deviance is not a given, but rather is subject to negotiation and change. This comparatively recent product of social theorizing focuses upon the manner in which society defines and thereby creates deviance and deviants. One effect of labeling people as deviants is to move them to a more peripheral position in the social order where their participation is curtailed. Given limited opportunities for participation, these deviants may then be pressured by circumstances to engage in still more deviance, a phenomenon termed *secondary deviance*. This perspective emphasizes the role of power in defining deviance and stigma, disvalued traits. The concern is less about sanctions for deviance than about understanding the manner in which definitions of deviance are created.

Anthropology has applied labeling theory relatively recently, and part of anthropology's contribution has been to critique and modify this theory as it applies to small social units.²⁷ Probably the best treatment extant of labeling theory from an anthropological perspective is that provided by Henry Selby in his description of Zapotec peasants of Mexico.²⁸ He notes that, in contrast to the situation in large social units, Zapotecan villagers are reluctant to label one another as deviants. Indeed, they may even work hard to reincorporate an offender into the community. Elsewhere, I have made a similar argument for the Kelantanese.²⁹ It is clear that labeling theory has utility for anthropology but it is also obvious that it was developed to address the circumstances of large, complex social units such as are characteristic of Western states.

RETHINKING THE APPROACH TO DEVIANCE

Upon close examination, deviance reveals several components that bridge disciplinary boundaries. As yet, there is relatively little communication between psychology, sociology, and anthropology on this topic. But the manifold facets of deviance suggest the utility of studying deviance in both a cross-disciplinary and a cross-cultural fashion.

Although it can be argued that deviance has some useful social functions, it is also clear that deviance represents at least three significant threats to both the sociocultural order and the individual. First, deviance threatens conceptual order. All cultures possess a worldview, a set of values and a series of assumptions about the nature of human behavior and social life that are not supposed to be challenged. Deviant beliefs and actions disturb these cultural waters by offering alternatives to what is "natural" and unquestioned. Deviance also has the potential to threaten the social order by challenging its structure and power relations. Social life must have a degree of predictability, which is facilitated by social contracts, understandings about trust, acceptable behaviors, and so on. Deviance can even involve a violation of reciprocity, perhaps the most fundamental expectation of social relationships. Finally, deviance can threaten individuals both physically and, perhaps more fearsome, in terms of psychological concerns. By presenting alternatives to unexamined assumptions about "self" and about culturally defined goals, deviance can assault self-concepts and psychological equilibrium.

There is a tendency on the part of many social scientists to treat deviance as an object, readily capable of quantification. The thinking seems to be that deviance is dichotomous: Either it has occurred or it has not. However, in many respects deviance can and probably should be regarded as a process rather than as a "thing," as a variable rather than as something present or absent. Deviance is not characterized by fixed rules or expectations, but rather is defined by judgments made, either formally or informally, according to sets of shifting social and cultural concerns. This is particularly true for the everyday sorts of rule-breaking—soft deviance—that we all engage in.

Unless you are one of the curious few who travel interstates at

fifty-five miles per hour, you frequently exceed the speed limit by as much as ten to fifteen miles per hour. In deciding how fast you can travel, you gauge weather conditions, road surface, traffic density, the average speed of other cars, and the likelihood of police surveillance. In turn, police will weigh many of the same factors before deciding that your "deviance" warrants a sanction. This does not mean that rules are of no moment, simply that they are not followed in any automatic or narrow fashion. We still adjust our choice of speed with respect to the posted limit, and a fifty-five miles-per-hour limit *is* different from a sixty-five miles-per-hour limit. However, such rules are influences on behavior, not determinants.

Arguably, most deviance, though certainly not the more noticeable deviance, is what I have termed "soft." That is, the majority of us each day violate a variety of normative expectations and cultural rules, and we commonly do so quite consciously. Sometimes we pick our noses, eat the last piece of cake, and go skinny dipping. Consequently, the warp and woof of the cultural fabric are both more elastic and less confining than many classical approaches to the study of culture would suggest. Each of us treats the fabric of culture as though it were spandex rather than starched linen, and we are the ones who determine to what degree we will stretch the fabric from its original shape. The role of individual interpretation in the definition of deviance suggests that we should pay more attention to the role of psychology in deviance and to the manner in which psychological and sociocultural variables interrelate.

There is a tendency for all of us to think well of ourselves or, at the least, not to think poorly of ourselves. Few people would identify themselves as deviant. When most people break rules and/or knowingly engage in deviance, they generally construct a rationalization for others and, perhaps more importantly, for themselves. The psychological techniques that people utilize in rule breaking have been only poorly explored. Clearly, some of the major stratagems employed by people everywhere are compartmentalization, rationalization, and what I term invidious comparison, a tendency to excuse our behavior by pointing to the misdeeds of others.

Compartmentalization involves an effort to separate behaviors and/or beliefs that would be conflicting. For instance, in Kelantan, a strongly Islamic state in Malaysia, women traditionally have had high status and significant social privileges. Those villagers who maintain the traditional prerogatives of women, including equal inheritance rights, do not see a conflict between their behavior and the strictures of Islam, which dictate that a woman should inherit

just half of what a man inherits. They manage this feat by compartmentalizing the two sets of cultural expectations. They can espouse both without realizing how they contradict each other. Thus, they often give daughters an extra portion of property prior to the death of parents, so that upon the Islamic division of the inheritance, sons and daughters will end up with equal inheritances.³⁰

Rationalization is employed by people to excuse what might otherwise be questionable behavior. Accordingly, you speed on the highway because of the importance attached to your own time; you break an appointment in order to honor one that is more "important"; you deceive your parents in order to spare their feelings; you divulge a secret because if you didn't, someone else would; you cut class because the instructor is boring and the lecture not really worthwhile; and so on.

Similarly, invidious comparison is applied by many of us in excusing our deviant acts. We don't pay our full taxes because "no one does"; we can engage in shady business practices because others do so; spouses can engage in adultery because "everyone does it"; and so on.

We need a better understanding of how everyday deviance is manifested both here and across cultures. Hard deviance frequently has roots in soft deviance and soft deviance is ubiquitous. To some extent, virtually all humanity engages in deviant behavior. We must have a better sense of the psychological and sociocultural dynamics of these behaviors if we are to understand the causes of deviance and how it varies. To paraphrase Walt Kelly, a well-known and clever cartoonist of the 1950s and 1960s, "We have met the deviant and he is us."

NOTES

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11. Those with power seek to retain and even to expand it. In many societies this means that position, whether caste or profession, is heritable. In other societies, continued access to power is secured through more subtle means. Thus, in many countries, ours included, the wealthy can afford to send their children to expensive educational institutions where they not only receive a fine education but also have the opportunity to associate with other members of the same elite stratum. Such patterns of association are excellent mechanisms for gaining access to social opportunities.
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SUGGESTED READINGS

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is that deviance is deviance (variation from expected behavior or form) while wrongdoing is (uncountable) violation of standards of behavior. deviance. English. (wikipedia deviance). Noun. (en noun). (sociology) Actions or behaviors that violate formal and informal cultural norms such as laws and customs. A person or thing that differs from the expected. Related terms. * deviant * deviation. wrongdoing. English. Alternative forms. * wrong-doing. Wrong thing may different form for person to along with the circumstance, but given that liberty one can clearly see that the wrong thing is very wrong to do because of a reason. According to is no way for doing anything right or wrong thing. Rate this: +14 -10.Â Frie said: (Oct 23, 2017). Yes, I agree with it as there is no right way to do something bad but here the word thing means whether it is right or wrong like if a person is stealing something for a sake of feeding his family is right for him but wrong for others. In other cases like murdering someone is wrong for both. Rate this: +36 -19. PDF | Normalization of deviance is a term first coined by sociologist Diane Vaughan when reviewing the Challenger disaster. Vaughan noted that the root | Find, read and cite all the research you need on ResearchGate.Â create insidious barriers to doing things the right way because we. fail to see these for the hazards they are. For example, a workplace. What do these things have in common? All, in one way or another, describe deviant behavior or beliefs. What is deviance?Â Humanity is diverse; thereâ€™s a huge variation in definitions of right and wrong, true and false; humans are fallible, that is, they are unable or unwilling to conform to all of the many rules of the society. Or, since every society is made up of subcategoriesâ€™diverse social circlesâ€™some nor-mative violations, and the negative reactions they touch off, are inevitable.Â In other words, the terms deviance and deviant are absolutely nonpejo-rative. This means that they are descriptive terms that apply to what others think and how they are likely to react. DEVIANCE The term "deviance" usually refers to some behavior that is inconsistent with standards of acceptable conduct prevailing in a given social group, although the term has also been used to designate personal conditions, ideas, or statuses that are stigmatized or disreputable.Â Still another variation of the reactive/labeling approach does not limit itself to behavior but includes as deviance, statuses, states of being, or physical conditions (Lemert). According to this approach, "deviance" inheres in disreputable or pejorative statuses, styles of life, or physical attributes; therefore, deviance is a condition not a behavior or set of behaviors.Â Some scholars merge different definitions of deviance in an effort to produce more effective, though more complicated, "integrated" approaches.