One of the first videos depicted live kittens being placed in sealed clear plastic bags and filmed while suffocating. Another depicted a live kitten being fed to a python. Animal rights activists demanded that the videos be removed from the internet and that the alleged creator and poster of those videos, Canadian Eric Clinton Newman, aka Luka Rocco Magnotta, be arrested and brought to justice for animal cruelty. Police investigations indicated that Newman legally changed his name in 2006 to Magnotta and had begun a fledgling acting career in both straight and gay pornographic movies. He also was allegedly linked to some white supremacist groups, and had three convictions for consumer fraud related to a stolen credit card on his
record. No doubt, Luka Magnotta would be defined as a “deviant” by most people’s standards. Those early revelations represented only the tip of the iceberg, however, as more information surfaced about the 29-year-old Canadian. His final post was an 11-minute video of him brutally slaying and dismembering a 33-year-old male Chinese student attending Concordia University. The video also included scenes depicting cannibalism and necrophilia. Magnotta then allegedly mailed several severed body parts to members of various branches of the Canadian government, prompting police to launch a worldwide manhunt for one of the most deviant individuals in modern history (Magnay, 2012).

**What is Deviance?**

Animal cruelty, pornography, fraud, murder, mutilation, necrophilia – not much mystery in how and why Luka Rocco Magnotta became defined as a deviant. Most deviance, however, is much less sensational and far less clear-cut. Even some of the aforementioned acts must be socially scrutinized before being defined as deviant. Take animal cruelty for example. What Magnotta did to the kittens almost certainly qualifies as animal cruelty. But other cases are not as clear-cut. For example, several years ago England outlawed the cropping of dogs’ tails and ears because it was considered to be cruel and inhumane treatment. Yet despite protests from PETA and other animal rights advocates, both procedures are still routinely performed on certain breeds in the United States by licensed veterinarians who are paid to do so by loving pet owners. Pornography has always been difficult to define, prompting the US Supreme Court to refuse to set any uniform standards deferring to “local community standards” (378 U.S. 184, 84 S.Ct. 1676). Thus, while some librarians may feel compelled to black out certain parts of the anatomy from photographs in *National Geographic*, other libraries may subscribe to far more sexually explicit magazines, and a triple XXX video store might do business only a few blocks away. Fraud is a crime in most societies, but false and misleading advertising has become widely accepted as the norm, and at least one presidential candidate declared that the United States’ Social Security system is nothing more than “an elaborate Ponzi scheme.” Although murder, mutilation, and necrophilia are almost universally condemned, even those acts must be socially defined. Soldiers who kill the enemy during combat are not only not viewed as being non-deviant, they might receive a medal and be hailed as heroes for doing so. Mutilating dead bodies is a ghastly act, but almost anybody who has witnessed a routine autopsy could argue that the medical procedure, while perfectly legal and sometimes required, is somewhat gruesome. No known society has promoted necrophilia, but a bill was introduced in Egypt to make it legal for a husband to have sex with his wife up to six hours after her death (Paperluss, 2012). The bill was not acted upon by the Egyptian Parliament, and some even reported that it was a hoax. Nevertheless, the point is that despite the unquestioned deviance of the heinous acts performed by Magnotta, *deviance* and *deviants* are part and parcel of the society in which they occur. Defining deviance requires people to make judgments – judgments about what is good or bad, right or wrong, legal or illegal. These judgments are made within personal, social, cultural, and political contexts. Let’s take a look at some of the
Defining Social Deviance and Deviants

ways that deviant behavior is defined and at the social processes involved in determining if something or someone is deviant.

The absolutist position

According to baseball legend, three umpires explained the process of calling “balls” and “strikes.” The first one stated, “It’s simple; some’s balls and some’s strikes and I calls ‘em as they is.” The second umpire responded, “Some’s balls and some’s strikes and I calls ‘em as I sess ‘em.” The third declared, “Some’s balls and some’s strikes, but they ain’t nothin’ ‘til I calls ‘em” (cited in Nimmo, 1978:77). Some people, like the first umpire, believe that defining deviance is simply a matter of defining what “is.” From this absolutist position, some things are right, others are wrong. Some things are good, others are bad. Some things are legal, others are illegal. Some things are deviant while others are not. This dichotomous view of the world revolves around the position that there is widespread consensus (if not unanimity) in agreement as to what is and what is not acceptable social behavior. From the absolutist position, there is no ambiguity about deviance and conformity: rules are rules, and you either conform to them or deviate from them, but you cannot do both, at least not at the same time.

An obvious weakness of the absolutist view of deviance is that it assumes widespread agreement on a common set of values that guide human behavior and lead to the creation of commonly accepted standards of what people should and should not do. Perhaps in a small homogeneous society, such consensus is possible, and the absolutist position may have merit. In any large heterogeneous society, however, there are many different sets of values and consensus about what constitute deviance and conformity is much more difficult to achieve. Consequently, an alternative view to defining deviance looks more at what most people do as being commonly accepted (conformity) and the behavior of only a few as being deviant.

The statistical anomaly view

A somewhat less rigid, more democratic, and yet still somewhat arbitrary view of deviance is the statistical anomaly view which looks at patterns of behavior, and determines what are the most common behaviors in a given social circumstance and declares them as constituting the norm. Anything deviating from the statistical norm is considered deviant. While this perspective does not directly correlate to the second umpire’s version of balls and strikes, it does allow for some judgment, and/or interpretation as to what is or is not deviant. For example, when the vast majority of young people in the United States waited until they were legally married to have sex (if there was such a time), premarital sex was considered deviant. Today, when the majority of people report that they are sexually active before marriage, a virgin on his or her wedding day might be the one who is considered deviant. Such was the theme of the popular movie The 40-year-old Virgin – a premise considered by many Americans to be downright ridiculous. Right-handed people comprise about 90 percent of the population, thus making left-handed people statistically deviant. In some cultures, left-handed people are considered to be unlucky, and in some cases, even dangerous; in other cultures, left-handed people are viewed as being more
creative and intuitive, perhaps even having mystical powers (Haviland et al., 2010). Baseball managers consider left-handers (southpaws) to be better suited to be pitchers and first-basemen, while rarely seeing them as viable catchers or third-basemen. Some basketball players consider being left-handed as an advantage since most defenders expect their opponents to dribble and shoot with their right hands. Conversely, any “leftie” who has used a pair of scissors, turned a door knob, or performed any one of a thousand other routine tasks designed for right-handers, knows that while they may not be “deviant,” they certainly are in a statistical minority, and must often learn to “conform” to the expectations of a right-handed world.

**Box 1.1  In their own words**

**Being deviant: A left-hander in a right-handed world**

Jack E. Bynum*

I was born in 1929 and not many years passed before it became clear that I was, “different” – with a personal and peculiar physical anomaly that set me apart from other children and made me deviant. I demonstrated a decided tendency to favor my left hand over my right hand in eating and playing. My parents and neighbors noticed my developing left-handedness and exchanged hopeful projections, “Oh, it is only temporary and irrelevant in younger children” or, “The child will outgrow it in time and settle into the ‘normal and acceptable’ right-handed behavior.”

Historically, left-handed individuals have faced serious discrimination from society. For instance, during the Dark Ages, members of this highly visible minority were stigmatized as, “unlucky,” “deviant,” and even “sinister” – possibly possessed by evil spirits. The superstitious maxim prevailed that, “right is right and left is wrong.” Consequently, up to twelve percent of the population was assigned an aberrant, marginal, social status. However, by the dawn of the twentieth century the first medical and educational research on “handedness” suggested that the cause of left-handed dominance was neurological rather than a stubborn habit or spiritual disorder. Favoring the left hand began to be perceived as probably a natural and normal condition for some individuals. In addition, evidence accumulated that attempts to force left-handed children to comply with right-handed social expectations could have serious side effects in childhood development – such as disrupting normal patterns of speech. Slowly the intolerant rejection of left-handedness softened.

During the 1930s, as I persisted in my “deviant” childhood preference for the left hand, my parents made futile efforts to train, bribe, or cajole me into using my right hand. They soon abandoned their efforts. Aside from this minor family concern, I was a happy and healthy young boy. In elementary school I loved my teachers and classmates, and was a good student – especially in reading, spelling, and basic arithmetic. But soon, my nonconforming left-handedness received broader attention. There were still some educators who insisted that the small minority of children favoring their left
hand should be encouraged to change their orientation to the right hand in order to survive socially in a right-handed world. I encountered this rigid position when elementary school teachers began teaching me to write. There were no convenient ball-point pens in those days, so penmanship involved the mastery of metal pens dipped in black ink. Teaching penmanship was standardized. Young students were instructed to grasp a pen in their right hand, dip it in ink, and transcribe their printed or cursive letters and words from left to right across a writing tablet leaving their work clearly and cleanly behind the right-moving hand and pen.

On the other hand (pun intended), left-handers, in transcribing their freshly written work from left to right on the tablet, trailed the written words with their hand – ended each sentence with ink smudged across the paper and on the offending hand. Teachers were dismayed over the resulting mess. The instructors' demand for a right-handed approach to my penmanship led to a confrontation with my mother who insisted that I be taught to write and allowed to develop my own left-handed style. So we proceeded with me making a choice between two accommodations available to left-handed writers. I could learn to write with the left hand straight and extending the pen below the emerging line of script. This would likely result in a backhanded line of occasionally overlapping letters – but safely below the advancing left hand as it moved to the right. I chose the second option. I learned to write with my left forearm and hand holding the pen crooked above the emerging line of script – thus avoiding the unsightly blotting of freshly inked words. This awkward-looking writing style does not generally produce attractive script, but it enabled me to remain left-handed while becoming literate and avoiding the original, untidy, ink-blotted alternative.

That conflict over my early writing attempts prepared me for a lifetime of struggle to satisfactorily adapt my left-handedness to a right-handed world (Rutledge and Donley, 1992). I customarily sat a little sideways in classroom chairs constructed with writing surfaces on the right side. I often encountered and learned to use tools, can openers, musical instruments, camera, computer, keyboards, and other items designed and mass-produced for the large right-handed market. Even the customer courtesy pens, attached by a short, lightweight chain at my bank cashier's window, are mounted on my right side and can inconvenience or entangle a left-handed user. A right-handed hunting rifle presented special problems for me – requiring that I reach my left hand over and across the top of the gun to activate the bolt-action mechanism. Sighting down the barrel of a right-handed rifle with my left eye, and with my left cheek resting on the stock, could produce dangerous results. Hot, spent shells were ejected from the right side of the firing chamber and stung my right cheek. Despite these handicaps, I managed to become an excellent marksman. When I went off to college, my mother taught me to do simple sewing tasks such as reattaching buttons and mending socks. Then she presented me with a pair of left-handed scissors. Later, I took those basic sewing skills and special scissors with me into the military service. I still have those left-handed scissors as a fond memory of my mother's wisdom and foresight in helping me to function in a right-handed world.
I wish I could report some noteworthy left-handed accomplishment in life that ultimately overcame all social intolerance of my deviant handedness. "Lefty" Michelangelo painted his masterpiece on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. "Lefty" Joan of Arc turned military defeat into victory for France. Five out of seven recent United States Presidents defied statistical probability by being left-handed (deKay and Huffaker, 1985). But I labored in vain to turn my handicap into full acceptance. That is – except for one brief and shining moment of public appreciation for my left-handed proclivity.

It was the beginning of my sophomore year in high school. In response to a desperate search by our coach for potential athletic ability in our small school, many male students lined up for perfunctory tryouts for the football, baseball, and basketball teams. I will never forget the moment when I was handed a baseball and told to pitch it towards home plate where a large hero from the previous year’s baseball team was routinely smashing the feeble student offerings over the fence. My only experience with baseball was occasionally playing backyard “catch” with my friends. So my first pitch failed to reach home plate. My second pitch nearly hit the batter. Then, to everyone’s surprise, the hulking batter flailed helplessly at my next three pitches and struck out. I was the most startled of all. Amazingly, my left-handed “affliction” – translated into an unfamiliar pitching stance and awkward windup – endowed me with an erratic throwing motion and a natural sharp-breaking curve. Somehow that combination baffled enough right-handed hitters to earn a place for me among the pitchers on the High School baseball team. My left-handedness was no longer perceived as an inferior and deviant aberration, but the source of positive attention and celebration in my small community.

I have doggedly soldiered on, learning to be resourceful over the decades in accommodating my left-handedness to the never-ending challenges of a right-handed world. Eventually, I became a University professor and spent forty years in a rewarding teaching career.

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Do you think being left-handed constitutes deviance? What other physical statistical anomalies might be considered deviant today? What are some of the sociological problems related to viewing “difference” as “deviance?”
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of society. The definition of deviance that we will use throughout this book is the sociological perspective which views deviance in its broadest social and cultural context understanding that conformity and deviance are socially constructed concepts.

The Sociological Perspective

The sociological perspective contends that there are no universal standards for normative behavior and, consequently, no rigid definition of either deviance or conformity. Rather, norms are socially constructed guidelines that suggest appropriate behavior in certain social situations. As we will discuss later, these norms are relative to culture, time, place, and situation, and may vary in the way they are interpreted by various actors and social audiences. From this view, sometimes referred to as the normative/relative approach, every society creates norms and uses them to evaluate, control, and sanction human behavior in various ways. Norms can be either prescriptive norms, telling us what we should do, like the informal norm of saying “excuse me” if we burp at the table, or the formal norm that requires us to pay our federal income taxes by April 15. Or, they can be proscriptive norms, telling us what we should not do, such as the informal proscription that we should not wear white after Labor Day, or the formal laws against stealing another person’s property or taking another person’s life. Simply put, conformity is adherence to norms and deviance is the violation of norms. Somewhat like the third umpire’s position, before any act can be determined to be deviance or conformity, and before any person is identified as a deviant or conformist, somebody has to make the call. The sociological perspective of deviance points out that deviance is socially constructed and the social construction of deviance is a much more complex process than calling balls and strikes.

The Social Construction of Deviance

The social construction of deviance begins with values – shared ideas about what is socially desirable. In every society, people create a culture based on core principles or values that rank people, behaviors, events, objects, and social arrangements in terms of desirability. These rankings help socially define what is considered to be right or wrong, good or bad, beautiful or ugly.

Table 1.1 Perspectives on deviance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Views deviance as …</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absolutist Perspective</td>
<td>Dichotomous. Behavior is good or bad, right or wrong, legal or illegal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistical Anomaly</td>
<td>Majority is conformity. Rare behavior is deviant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociological Perspective</td>
<td>Deviance depends on time, place, culture, act, actors, and audience. Deviance, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What perspective is closest to your own?
moral or immoral, just or unjust, and desirable or undesirable (Thompson and Hickey, 2011). Values logically lead to the establishment of norms, which we have already defined as guidelines for social behavior.

Norms, social control, and a range of tolerance

Every society creates norms to guide people’s thoughts, actions, and behaviors. Additionally, societal members create social control in the form of sanctions as ways of enforcing norms. Sociologist, Emile Durkheim (1893/1964), was among the first to point out the axiomatic quality of deviance, concluding that even in a nation of “saints,” some saints would be considered “less holy” than others. When people violate social expectations there is often some type of social penalty to bear. Conversely, when people conform to norms their behavior might be rewarded, or at least not punished. There are four major types of norms: folkways, mores, laws, and taboos.

Folkways

Folkways are informal rules and expectations that guide people’s everyday behavior. Literally interpreted as “ways of the people,” folkways are the most common form of norms. In American society, folkways provide us with basic social etiquette and govern such things as what we eat, when we eat, and how we eat. Most Americans have few qualms about eating beef (cows), pork (pigs), fish, or chicken, but balk at the thought of eating horses, dogs, or earthworms. Nevertheless, horses, dogs, and earthworms are excellent sources of protein and are considered perfectly acceptable cuisine in some cultures. In the United States, belching at the table is considered bad manners and should be accompanied by a brief apology, while in some Asian cultures it is considered to be the ultimate compliment to the chef or host. Although informal in nature, folkways should not be interpreted to be less important than other types of norms. In fact, violate too many folkways and people will not want to interact with you.

Informal norms usually are enforced with informal sanctions. For example, belching at the table might warrant a dirty look from a dining partner, spouse, or parent. A quiet “excuse me,” would more than likely absolve the offender from any further sanction. Repeated violations, however, might cause people to choose not to dine with you in the future. A child viewed as belching on purpose to irritate a parent or guests might end up being asked to leave the table, or receive a harsher penalty such as being grounded or even spanked. Gossip, ridicule, and ostracism are other forms of informal sanctions that might be applied for violation of various types of folkways.

Mores

Mores, (pronounced more-ays) are salient norms that people consider essential to the well-being of society. Mores are closely linked to values and usually have a moral (and sometimes religious) connotation to them. Mores against lying, cheating, stealing, harming others, committing adultery, and murder have existed since ancient times. Although mores are informal, their violation is generally considered quite serious and might result in sanctions ranging from
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Being fined, ridiculed, or ostracized, to being imprisoned, tortured, or put to death. Mores are considered so important for the overall social welfare that they are often codified into laws.

Laws

Laws are formal norms established and enforced by some government entity. Laws may or may not be closely tied to societal values. For example, mores against stealing and murder reflect such firmly entrenched values related to property and life that they are almost always encoded into laws. Conversely, laws against gambling represent such conflicts in values that some states run multi-million dollar legal lotteries and other state-supported gambling enterprises while outlawing casinos or pari-mutuel wagering. Meanwhile in some jurisdictions police officers find themselves in the unenviable position of being required to arrest private citizens playing poker for money or betting on sporting events while they are participating in an office pool on the Super Bowl or NCAA March Madness. Because laws are formal norms, their violation warrants formal sanctions ranging from written warnings to fines, imprisonment, and in extreme cases, possibly death.

Taboos

Some actions and behaviors called taboos, are acts so repugnant that their commission is considered almost unthinkable. Cannibalism (eating of human flesh), necrophilia (sex with a dead body), and incest (sex with close blood-related relatives) are among some of the taboos found in most, if not all societies. Taboos also reflect important values and because of the intense reaction they elicit, they are often reflections of all three of the other types of norms – folkways, mores, and laws. Ironically, some taboos are viewed as so despicable that lawmakers might think them so inconceivable that they fail to make them illegal. For example, in the opening vignette about Luka Rocco Magnotta, when the Canadian government filed for extradition after he was

Arthur Boyt only eats road kill for the meat in his diet. He certainly violates some commonly held folkways, but some might contend that he also is violating mores and perhaps even crossing into the area of doing something considered taboo. Do you consider Boyt’s eating habits to be deviant? If so, what types of norms is he violating? Source: © SWNS
arrested in Germany, the range of charges included murder, defiling a corpse, threatening the Canadian prime minister and using the mail system for delivering ‘obscene, indecent, immoral or scurrilous’ material (Carlson, 2012). Noticeably lacking from that list are specific charges of cannibalism, necrophilia, and mailing severed body parts as Canada had no national statutes specifically listing those unthinkable taboo offenses.

Range of tolerance
Although conformity to norms is expected, and often demanded, we rarely expect everybody to adhere to every single norm all the time. In fact, total rigid conformity is almost impossible. Some norms are contradictory requiring us to violate one if we attempt to conform to the other. If we should never tell a lie, but also try to never intentionally hurt somebody’s feelings, then how should a husband respond when his wife asks “Do these pants make my butt look big?” Although deviance almost always elicits social control, most norms are surrounded by a range of tolerance, a scope of behaviors that are considered acceptable and not considered deviant although they technically might violate a norm (Cavan, 1961). Speed limits provide a good example of a range of tolerance. Even though an interstate highway may have a posted maximum speed limit of 70 miles per hour (sometimes even accompanied by a sign that says “No Tolerance”), a police officer is not likely to stop and ticket a motorist driving 71. Technically, the driver is speeding and could be issued a traffic citation, but, imagine the public relations and potential legal nightmare of doing so. Although a radar gun might be calibrated accurately enough to depict a difference of one mile per hour, very few automobile speedometers are that accurate. An officer who tickets drivers for driving one mile an hour over a 70-mile-per-hour speed limit is as likely to be considered deviant as the driver he or she ticketed. What about 72 miles per hour? Would an officer ticket a driver for that speed? Most likely not. What about 73,
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74, or 75? Although each of these increments in speed are identical (one mile per hour), at some point, the speed will be viewed as excessive and not be tolerated. A driver doing 80 in a 70 mile-per-hour zone is unlikely to experience much tolerance or sympathy from a traffic officer, a judge, or even a friend or spouse. Also, other variables may enter into the equation. While driving five miles over the speed limit (75) on a 70 mile-per-hour interstate highway might be tolerated, driving 25 in a 20-miles-per-hour school zone probably would not – especially if children or a crossing guard were present. Many states now double traffic fines for speeders in work zones when workers are present, and a host of other variables such as age, race, sex, type of automobile, weather conditions, may well come into play in determining the range of tolerance for speed.

In addition to speeding, a wide range of other “deviant” behaviors are routinely tolerated, at least up to a point. Gambling was alluded to earlier and is a good example. Millions of people each year vacation in Las Vegas only to return home to states where gambling is legally prohibited. Even in many of those states, however, there are legally run state lotteries, as well as a wide range of other contests, sweepstakes, raffles, and other gambling-related activities. Almost every major newspaper prints odds and point spreads for college and professional sports, and office pools are the norm for major sporting events across the country and around the world. Ticket scalping at major sporting events is so widespread that team owners, coaches, and broadcasters openly discuss the practice. Numerous other examples abound. For example, in a society where well over half of all adults are overweight, at what point does obesity become viewed as deviant? Tattoos, once thought to be the domain of prison inmates, prostitutes, and drunken sailors, have now gone mainstream – but at what point do tattoos become excessive and perhaps viewed as extreme deviance? A certain amount of norm deviation is not only tolerated, but expected. There is a point, however, when deviance exceeds our range of tolerance, social control is warranted, and sanctions will be levied. Where that line is drawn is largely relative to culture, time, place, and situation.

Importance of culture, time, place, and situation

Since there are no universal norms and no unanimous agreement as to what constitutes deviance and conformity, sociologists contend that it is important to analyze and evaluate human behavior within a cultural context understanding that definitions of deviance and conformity will vary relative to time, place, and situation.

Culture
When it comes to defining deviance, no single variable is more important than culture, the learned set of attitudes, values, beliefs, norms, and material goods shared by members of a society. Consequently, it is culture that creates, defines, and validates norms in the first place. While children in the United States are being taught to eat with knives, forks, and spoons, Chinese children on the other side of the world are learning to eat with chopsticks. Women who bare their breasts in the Trobriand Islands are adhering to century-old norms while most women in the United States would never dare go topless in public. Norms vary so widely from one
culture to another that people who travel extensively often experience culture shock – feelings of confusion and disorientation that occur when experiencing a different culture. What is considered deviant in one culture may constitute conformity in another.

In a culture as diverse and heterogeneous as the United States, there are numerous subcultures that are smaller cultures within a larger culture that adhere to most of the characteristics of the dominant culture, but share some set of distinctive norms that set them apart from it. For example, the Old Order Amish is a subculture that adheres to most of the norms of American culture emphasizing honesty, hard work, and the importance of family, but rejects modern technology choosing to forego electricity in their homes and to travel by horse and buggy as opposed to driving automobiles (Hostetler, 1993). Teenagers tend to be part of a youth subculture that embraces basic adult values like freedom, independence, and individuality but expresses those values in symbolic ways that often violate norms of dress, hairstyle, and language established by their parents, schools, and other adult-run establishments. Within the youth subculture juvenile delinquents often form associations or gangs that set them even further apart from mainstream society (Thompson and Bynum, 2016). Motorcycle riders comprise a subculture and research shows that even that subculture has smaller subcultures within it consisting of one-percenters, neo-bikers, motorcyclists, women riders, and others (Thompson, 2013). Almost every major city has a large gay population that often locates in a particular area of the city where they create a homosocial environment replete with restaurants, shops, barbers, lawyers, doctors, real estate offices, and other businesses owned and operated by gays and lesbians who cater to the gay subculture (Thompson, et al., 2016). Tattoo parlors, topless bars, adult bookstores, pawn shops, and other businesses considered outside “mainstream society” often congregate to form subcultures in certain areas of cities so that their patrons can come and go relatively unmo- lested by those who judge them to be deviant and disapprove of their appearance, behavior, or lifestyles.

Deviants of all types often form subcultures for their protection and so that they can be surrounded by people who share similar values and norms. Subcultures serve not only to unite and protect their members, but also help neutralize some of the negative consequences experienced by its members because of their violation of dominant cultural norms. As we explore different types of deviant behavior throughout this book we will discuss some of the deviant subcultures that exist. It is important to understand that time is also an important variable in defining deviance. The aforementioned Old Order Amish would have been much less conspicuous and judged to be conformists during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but their lifestyle seems very out-of-step with today’s emphasis on technology and modernity.

Time
Have you ever sat down with your parents and gone through old photo albums? If so, you have probably been highly amused at the hairstyles and dress styles that were popular ten, twenty, thirty, or more years ago. The first person to try any new dress style or hairstyle is almost always judged to be deviant. So is the last person to try them. Few norms seem more time-bound than those revolving around fashion and grooming. Look at portraits of America’s so-called founding fathers. White powdered long wigs with ponytails, ruffled shirts, silk stockings, and buckled shoes were the norms for the time, but would be considered glaringly deviant for political leaders of today. Walk down the streets of Soho in New York City at 2.00 p.m. Go back and walk
down those same streets at 2.00 a.m. and you will see what a difference time makes in what is considered normative and what is deviant.

**Place**
Where things happen is extremely important. Some places can be considered deviant in and of themselves. Would you want to purchase and live in the home where Lizzie Borden slayed her parents? How about opening a child care center in what was formerly a house of ill repute? Even in “non-deviant” places, however, place becomes an important variable in evaluating the relativity of deviance and conformity. Cheering, booing, drinking beer, and yelling “kill the umpire” might be considered acceptable behavior at Yankee Stadium, but it would hardly be appropriate at a little league game. Imagine congregation members doing those things in church. Or, consider the reaction if students – or teachers – committed similar acts in class. Time and place interact in interesting ways sometimes. For example, people would not be receptive to cheering, booing, drinking beer, and shouting at Yankee Stadium during a religious crusade being held there. In that case, situation becomes an important variable.

**Situation**
Would you be considered deviant if you suddenly awakened, jumped out of bed, and ran outside into the street stark naked? Before you answer, what if I added the fact that your house was on fire? Situations matter. Sleeping at home, on a train, or on an airplane is perfectly acceptable. Sleeping in class is not. Public displays of affection are generally considered deviant, and in some cases, are even illegal, yet one of the most famous photographs ever taken is that of a young sailor kissing a woman in New York City’s Times Square when the end of World War II was announced. Similarly, kissing in Times Square at midnight on New Year’s eve is not only acceptable, but almost mandatory.

**Importance of acts, actors, and audience**
Sociologists point out that equally as important in defining deviance as culture, time, place, and situation, the when and where of deviance, are acts, actors and audiences the what, who, and how people react of deviance. Take the social context of acts for example.

**Acts**
It seems obvious that a significant aspect of defining deviance resides in the act. Lying, cheating, stealing, and killing, seem inherently deviant, although as we have already pointed out, even those acts require a certain amount of scrutiny and must be put in context when judged. “Little white lies” are sometimes considered okay and even appropriate, and sometimes there is a thin line between lying and cheating and what might be interpreted as “getting a good deal.” What is now referred to as “collaborative work” by two or more students was often considered “cheating” by teachers only a decade ago. Police officers, soldiers, and the state are all licensed to kill when necessary, and even everyday citizens can take another person’s life in self-defense or under other legally specified circumstances. This highlights
the fact that *who* commits a particular act quite often affects or determines whether it is considered conformity or deviance.

**Actors**

We have already indicated that police, soldiers, and other people in positions of authority may be allowed to do things that would be considered deviant if done by others. Sociological research also reveals that variables such as age, sex, race, and social class have tremendous impact on how people are treated and what behaviors are tolerated by them. Consider the range of tolerance for infants for example. A baby or toddler can do almost anything without suffering any consequences because, after all, they are babies and are “too young to know any better”. Toddlers often reach up their mother’s skirts, touch women’s breasts, or punch men in the genitals without any repercussions. If a teenager or adult did the same thing, he or she would be viewed as deviant and be sanctioned in some way. Similarly, the elderly also often enjoy a very wide range of tolerance regarding norms. Old people sometimes get away with shoplifting by “forgetting” to pay for items, and elderly men in a nursing home or hospital setting may reach up and touch a female caregiver in some of the same inappropriate ways an infant might. The big difference is that the elderly male is probably very much aware of what he is doing, but knows that his behavior will be tolerated because he is “too old to know any better”. There is probably no narrower range of tolerance for any age group than that of teenagers. Virtually everything that adolescents view as fun and exciting is either against the rules or illegal for them to do.

Sex is also an important variable related to norms. The United States has long held a double standard of tolerance for males and females. While “boys will be boys” has excused a lot of mischievous male behavior, the same tolerance was rarely afforded girls. For decades, if not centuries, males were allowed, if not expected and encouraged to be sexually active before marriage while women were chastised, punished, or disvalued for the same behavior. Nathaniel Hawthorne’s scarlet letter was usually reserved for women.

Race plays an important role in defining deviance and conformity. The behavior of members of racial and ethnic minorities is often more highly scrutinized than that of members of the dominant racial or ethnic group. While most police departments deny the existence of racial profiling, almost any police officer will tell you that it takes place, and although “Lady Justice” the symbol for the American criminal justice system may be blindfolded, ordinary citizens, police officers, prosecutors, judges, and jurors are not.

The United States has long been associated with democracy, freedom, and equality, but from its inception, some Americans have always been more equal than others. The aforementioned variables of age, sex, and race are good examples of how categories of people have experienced differential and unequal treatment. The rights of due process, privilege of voting, signing contracts, owning property, and others have always been restricted by age, and up until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were restricted by sex and race as well. Today, social class may be one of the more important variables related to life chances and life experiences. Members of the upper class tend to live longer, have better health care, and enjoy a broader range of tolerance for behavior than their counterparts in the middle and lower classes. Moreover, the upper class own and control the media, powerful forces in helping to define what and who is deviant.
The Role of Media in Defining Deviance

On a flight to Las Vegas, one of the authors was amused when a flight attendant came over the intercom and announced as the plane landed, “remember, what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas – and, often ends up on YouTube, Facebook, and all over the Internet and television.” Today, virtually all parts of the world are linked by media that include music, newspapers, magazines, books, radio, television, motion pictures, computers, smart phones, video games, and a host of other technologies. Consequently, the audience who may be involved in defining deviance and deviants can range from as small as one or two people to as large as several million – perhaps a billion people or more. Very little deviance goes unnoticed and very few deviants remain anonymous.

How do media portrayals affect our definitions and perceptions of deviance? In one word: significantly. In the late 1970s, Michael Real (1977) pointed out that we live in a mass-mediated culture and the fact that the media, particularly television, constituted not only the “first draft of reality” for many, but the “only draft of reality” for some. Traditional mass media have always been a powerful social force in shaping values, influencing norms, and affecting people's definition of reality, and today, they along with a wide array of social media are perhaps more influential than ever. Two well-known expressions in journalism tell us: “If it bleeds, it leads;” and “If a dog bites a person, it's not news, but if a person bites a dog, it is.” Consequently, we are inundated with stories about the most bizarre and sensational forms of deviance because those are the stories that sell newspapers, attract television audiences, and go “viral” on the Internet. These atypical acts of deviance reflect what Felson and Boba (2010) call the dramatic fallacy, or horror–distortion sequence, in which the media grab a horrifying story and then entertain the public with it creating misinformation, misconceptions, and a distorted view of deviant behavior. A major motivation for this sensationalism is the reliance on selling advertisements/commercials to pay the costs of printing newspapers and television programming. Can you imagine any newspaper editor, newscaster, or blogger not jumping at the opportunity to tell the story of Luka Rocco Magnotta? Book contracts and movie deals are almost certainly part of his future. Media sensationalism belies the fact, however, that most deviance is fairly mundane and often of little consequence. Moreover, media portrayals of deviance tend to reinforce the notion that we can neatly dichotomize people into categories of deviant/conformist, good/bad, right/wrong, moral/immoral, and criminal or law-abiding citizen. As sociology reminds us, however, life is not nearly that simple, and things are seldom what they seem.

Moral entrepreneurs, moral crusades, and moral panics

Mainstream media are prominent sources for moral entrepreneurship, the promotion of moral crusades, and the creation of moral panics. Howard Becker (1963) reminds us that rules, or norms, are the products of people's efforts to define deviance and deviants. He calls these rule creators moral entrepreneurs: social reformers who are not satisfied with existing rules because they believe that some type of behavior is taking place that should be controlled or eliminated. Moral entrepreneurs often have an absolute view of right and wrong, and believe that what they
view as wrong is not only deviant, but truly evil. Such strong feeling often evokes the need for a **moral crusade**, *an effort to identify wrongdoing, inform others of its existence and potentially dire consequences, and establish rules or laws to eliminate the behavior and punish the wrongdoer.* Effective moral crusades rely on the creation of **moral panic**, *the belief that the very survival of society is threatened by a particular type of deviant or deviance.* The Salem witch hunts of seventeenth century New England are a prime example, but one need not go back four centuries to witness widespread moral panics. Stanley Cohen (2011) pointed out in the early 1970s the hysteria surrounding elements of the youth subculture (most notably music) and how newspapers, magazines, and television helped create an image that music popular among youths was inspiring sex, murder, and mayhem that threatened society as we know it. This phenomenon did not begin in the 1970s, as earlier generations had been warned about the potentially dangerous effects of listing to jazz, the crooners, Elvis, the Beatles, and others that came before that time. More recently, smoking, drunk driving, violence on television, abortion, AIDS, same-sex marriage, and even the election of Barack Obama, have inspired certain members of the media to rally citizens to unite against such “obvious” threats to American civilization. Although some of these moral panics may be based on behaviors that may indeed be dangerous and potentially harmful (e.g. smoking and driving while intoxicated) their prevalence and the extent of harm caused by them has been exaggerated. Still other behaviors cited, may pose no actual threat to society at all.

Confusing crime and deviance

Partly because of media portrayals, and sometimes just due to misunderstanding, many people equate deviance with crime. When we ask our students on the first day of class to identify some deviant behaviors, they often cite murder, rape, child molestation, theft, and other criminal activities. All of those acts are indeed examples of deviance, and these forms of deviance often dominate the attention of the media. They represent, however, only a very small segment of deviant behaviors – **crime**, or those ***acts that involve the violation of formally codified norms that we have previously defined as laws***. More specifically, crimes involve only the violation of one type of laws: criminal laws. There are also a large number of civil laws involving contracts, and other non-criminal matters the violation of which may constitute deviance, but does not involve the commission of a crime, and rarely attract media attention. The vast majority of deviance, however, involves neither the violation of criminal nor civil laws. Rather, most deviance involves the contravention of informal folkways and mores that govern our everyday behaviors, and are the norms that are far more likely to be violated by most of us who may rarely or never commit a crime. Cheating on a spouse, lying to a teacher, dressing in opposite sex clothing, performing everyday activities in the nude, covering one’s entire body and face in tattoos, abusing legally prescribed drugs, being an alcoholic, or hundreds of other norm-violating activities may be considered deviant, but they are not crimes. Consequently, it is accurate to state that ***all crime is deviance, but not all deviance is crime.*** In fact, is probably safe to say that ***most deviance is not crime.*** The media often confuse deviance with crime, however, and consequently, so do many consumers of the media. That is one of the reasons we challenge you to think critically about what you see, read, and hear in various forms of media. In later chapters of this book the
distinctions between crime and deviance will be further explored as we study and analyze behaviors that fit into one or sometimes both of those categories.

Equating diversity with deviance

Another source of confusion, exacerbated by the aforementioned statistical anomaly view of deviance and the focus of media attention, is the idea that being different is deviant. Up to this point, our discussion of conformity and deviance has been related to behaviors that are judged to either comply with or violate social norms. But conformity and deviance represent much broader categories, and often people are considered to be deviant, not for something they do, but simply for being who or what they are, especially if who or what they are is considered to be a bit too different. For example, while individuality and autonomy are highly valued in American society, especially if they involve unique skills or talents, persons who “go against the grain,” question mainstream beliefs, or otherwise challenge the status quo, may very well be judged to be deviant and suffer the personal and social consequences that accompany that status. Media attention is often focused on the “oddball” in society, the social outcast, the person that they often lead us to believe may be dangerous simply because he or she is different.

Sometimes entire categories of people are viewed as being deviant because of their age, race, social class, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, or other physical or mental characteristics by those who are intolerant of social and cultural differences. Prejudice – negative attitudes based on pre-judgments, and discrimination – negative actions toward a category of people, are but two of the negative consequences faced by those considered to be too different from those who are judging them. These negative judgments often lead to stereotypes which are static and oversimplified ideas about entire categories of people. Nowhere are stereotypes more prevalent or powerful than in the media. Think of the way racial and ethnic minorities are often portrayed on television or in motion pictures. Although these portrayals have changed over the years, there still is a propensity for portraying minorities and those who are different in some way as villains and as threats to mainstream society.

Diversity is a social reality in large heterogeneous societies like the United States, but this fact notwithstanding, does not mean that differences are always acknowledged, understood, embraced, or even tolerated. Racism, sexism, ageism, and other forms of both institutionalized and informal prejudice, bigotry, and discrimination have been well documented in America’s past and present. In smaller more homogeneous societies, being different can take an even heavier toll as the range of tolerance tends to be smaller and diversity is more likely to be defined as deviant. Conversely, in larger and more heterogeneous societies, diversity is often the norm and the range of tolerance for differentness is usually larger, especially when the positive aspects of diversity are both portrayed and promoted by various forms of media.

Negative and Positive Results of Deviance

Violating social and cultural norms can have both negative and positive results both for society and for the deviant. Almost everybody is familiar with some of the negative consequences of
deviance. After all, even though we have pointed out the differences, many people equate deviance with criminal and/or evil behavior, and think that violating norms must be inherently bad. Although that is not necessarily the case, let us first turn our attention to some of the negative consequences of deviance.

Negative consequences of deviance

Indeed, deviance can and often does have negative consequences, some of which are fairly obvious and others that are not so apparent or well-known. Some of the negative consequences of deviance include, but are not limited to, the following (Thompson and Bynum, 2013:22–23).

**Personal harm**

Deviance often hurts people. Violence such as murder, assault, rape, robbery, abuse, and other forms of aggression results in real victims, physical injury, and sometimes even death. Deviance often takes an emotional toll as well. Consider family members of alcoholics, drug addicts, the mentally ill, or someone who has committed suicide. In its various forms, deviance can cause guilt, anguish, fear, distrust, and sometimes causes widespread panic among groups and even entire societies. The norm violator and sometimes his or her family also often experience personal harm in the form of retaliation, stigma, and ostracism.

**Threatens norms**

Any act of norm violation may call into question the validity of the norm being violated. In some cases, when one norm is questioned, others may be as well, especially if there is no discernible harm or recognized sanction. Hence, the old adage, “Give ‘em an inch, and they will take a mile.”

**Costs**

Deviance can be extremely expensive, both literally and figuratively. Think of the time, money, and energy spent on law enforcement, courts, probation and parole, prisons, mental institutions, drug and alcohol treatment programs, medical costs for addictions, and on and on. In addition to the financial costs, also think of the emotional and social costs when people fear one another, distrust each other, and devalue fellow members of society for who they are or what they do.

**Threatens social order.**

Deviance can be very disruptive and threaten social stability. Even isolated acts of deviance can destroy families and disrupt social order; widespread deviance can result in mobs, riots, and revolutions.

Because people are aware of the negative consequences of deviance, every society attempts to control its members’ behavior to some extent. Both informal and formal sanctions are created, and efforts are made to prevent, control, and eliminate norm violating behavior, although the elimination of deviance is impossible. Although most people are well aware of the negative consequences of deviance, fewer are cognizant of the potentially positive aspects of deviance.
Positive aspects of deviance

Despite the fact that all deviance is a result of norm violation, that does not mean that all deviance is bad, or even harmful. Emile Durkheim (1938) was among the first to point out the functional properties of deviance, a line of thinking that numerous sociologists have further developed over the years. Some of the positive aspects of deviance include (Thompson and Bynum, 2013:23–24).

Reaffirms norms
We indicated that deviance threatens norms, but at the same time, deviance also can reaffirm norms. When the harm from deviance is apparent, people realize the need to reaffirm and perhaps even strengthen that norm to avoid future potential harm. The alcoholic reinforces the need for moderation in drinking, and the morbidly obese serve as examples for why people should eat more nutritionally sound.

Social solidarity
It has been said that “nothing unites people like a common enemy.” Deviance can unite people both on behalf of, and against, the deviant. Families sometimes come together to help an alcoholic or otherwise addicted member, and people often combine to help the mentally ill, substance abusers, or others who may be considered deviant for some reason. Conversely, people also join forces to track down and punish rapists, sex offenders, or others who threaten the safety of a neighborhood or community.

“Safety valve”
Some people believe that small and non-threatening forms of deviance may be functional for “blowing off steam,” or otherwise relieving some of the pressures of everyday life, that if left to build, might result in a larger more serious form of deviance later. Halloween, Mardi Gras, vacations in Las Vegas, and other such “time outs” from otherwise routine conformity may serve such a purpose.

Creates jobs
We indicated that part of the tremendous costs of deviance includes the millions of dollars spent each year on law enforcement, courts, probation and parole, prisons, mental institutions, treatment programs, medical expenses for addictions, and other aspects of social control and deviance prevention. All of those areas represent college majors and career opportunities for millions of people, probably some of whom are reading this book in anticipation of someday working with deviance or deviants in some form or fashion.

Social and cultural change
Those who forge their own path, cut through the red tape, or otherwise violate norms to make things happen often provide leadership for social and cultural change. Whether it be fads, fashions, innovations in technology, or other norm violations, social and cultural change would never come about if everybody conformed to existing norms and never tried anything new, challenging, or non-traditional.
Summary

We began this chapter by looking at three different ways of defining deviance: the absolutist position, the statistical anomaly view, and the sociological perspective. Absolutists believe that there is a clear distinction between right and wrong, good and bad, conformity and deviance. They focus on rules believing that any behavior that violates a norm is deviance, period. Those who hold the statistical anomaly view see anything out of the ordinary or in a numerical minority as deviant. Consequently, left-handed people, members of minority religions, and geniuses all qualify as being deviant. The sociological perspective takes a much more comprehensive and complicated view of deviance and deviants leading us to understand that deviance, like most social and cultural phenomena, is socially constructed. This social construction of deviance looks at the creation of norms, social control, and a range of tolerance. Moreover, the sociological perspective emphasizes the importance of culture, time, place, and situation in defining deviance and how those definitions may vary according to the acts, actors, and audience. The sociological perspective will be the focus of understanding deviance and deviants throughout this book.

The media play an important role in defining deviance. Both traditional mass media and newer forms of social media are instrumental in shaping public attitudes about norms and behaviors and defining who is and who is not deviant. The media provide a forum for moral entrepreneurs and help to create and promote moral panics by defining so-called threats to social order and the very “moral fabric” of society. The media regularly blur the distinction between deviance and crime and often equate diversity with deviance.

Although almost everybody is familiar with many of the negative consequences of deviance – creates personal harm, threatens norms, is expensive, and threatens social order – far fewer people are aware of some of the positive aspects of deviance. Deviance can reaffirm norms, increase social solidarity, act as a safety valve, create jobs, and bring about meaningful social and cultural change.

Outcomes Assessment

1 Define deviance from an absolutist position, from the statistical anomaly view, and from the sociological approach which focuses on the normative relativist perspective and the social construction of deviance. Explain the major distinctions among these three different approaches to defining deviance.

2 Explain how deviance is socially constructed around a range of tolerance that is relative to culture, time, place, and situation in regard to acts, actors, and a social audience.

3 Explain the role of traditional mass-media and newer forms of social media in defining deviance. What is meant by the terms moral entrepreneurs and moral panics?

4 Distinguish between crime and deviance. Define each of these terms and explain what they have in common as well as what makes them different

5 Define diversity and explain how it is different from deviance.

6 Identify and list some of the negative consequences and positive aspects of deviance.
### Key Terms and Concepts

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