

Sociology

- 1 Work with a partner. Describe what you can see in the photos. Are these activities legal or illegal in your country? What do you think about each one?
- 2 The text you are going to read is about crime and deviance. What do you think the difference is?

With a partner, try to write a definition for each one. Then read the text to see if you were correct.

crime:

deviance:

Crime and deviance

a legal versus a social concept

Crime and deviance are both acts that involve breaking a rule. However, the crucial difference between them is that a crime breaks a legal rule. By contrast, deviance refers to behaviour that does not conform to a society's norms. Deviant behaviour can also be illegal. Examples of legal deviance include sitting in a seat designated for people with disabilities or even something as minor as not doing homework. Many sociologists summarise the distinction between the two as follows: all criminal behaviour is, by definition, deviant but not all deviant behaviour is criminal.


It's worth noting that, despite the name, not all deviant behaviour is negative. This can be seen if we look at the three categories into which deviant behaviour tends to fall:

- 1 Admired behaviour**
This is behaviour that is considered good or admirable, yet still doesn't conform to society's norms. An example of this might be extreme heroic behaviour, such as risking your own life to save someone else's.
- 2 Strange or odd behaviour**
This is deviant behaviour that is simply considered different to normal behaviour. An example of this might be extreme hoarding, where a person lives in extremely cramped conditions because of their inability or lack of desire to throw anything away.
- 3 Bad behaviour**
This is behaviour that can be law-breaking (and is therefore criminal), or behaviour that is close to being illegal. An example might be antisocial behaviour, such as littering in a museum or art gallery.

Since deviance is a socially-defined construct, whether a certain type of behaviour is considered deviant depends on the social setting or context. It is therefore claimed that it is a relative, rather than absolute, concept. That is, different societies at different periods of time will consider different types of behaviour deviant. For example, Rosa Parks was arrested on December 1st 1955 for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white passenger in Montgomery, Alabama. Her non-violent protest was considered deviant behaviour at the time, when racial segregation was the accepted norm in some parts of the world, but it wouldn't be considered so nowadays. Certain deviant behaviours today will be considered absolutely normal at some point in the future.

Control of criminal and deviant behaviour tends to fall into two groups: formal and informal social control. Formal social control involves the written rules laid out in law or codes of conduct and the way people's behaviour is controlled through formal systems such as the police, courts and prisons. Informal social control is enforced through social pressure from different groups and allows society to uphold its own norms. In addition to positive sanctions for good behaviour (such as praise) it can include negative sanctions for bad behaviour (such as disapproval or rejection by the social group). It is thought that this kind of control is extremely successful in preventing undesirable behaviours.





3 Read the text again. Make a list of all the examples of deviant behaviour that are given.

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4 Read the text in more detail. Choose the correct option in each pair of sentences.

- 1 a Deviant behaviour is sometimes, but not always, legal.
b Deviant behaviour is always legal, whereas crime is always illegal.
- 2 a Criminal behaviour can never be deviant.
b Criminal behaviour is always deviant.
- 3 a Deviant behaviour is, by definition, a negative act.
b Deviant behaviour is usually negative, but can sometimes be positive.
- 4 a Hoarding is an illegal activity.
b Hoarding is an example of unusual behaviour.
- 5 a Something that is deviant behaviour in one country won't necessarily be deviant in another.
b All countries have the same ideas about what is considered deviant behaviour.
- 6 a Justice through the court system is an example of formal social control.
b Formal social control is the only way to control both crime and deviant behaviour.
- 7 a Society leaves control of deviant behaviour to the police and other state regulators.
b Positive and negative sanctions are one way that society can control legal deviant behaviour.

5 Work with a partner and discuss the questions.

- 1 Look at the list of deviant behaviour that you made in exercise 3. Would these acts be considered deviant behaviour in your country? Why/Why not? Can you think of any other examples of deviant behaviour?
- 2 What do you think is the best way of controlling deviant behaviour? Do you think positive or negative sanctions work better? Why/Why not?

?? DID YOU KNOW?

According to sociologist Bruce Western, people who commit crimes in the US today are twice as likely to go to prison than they were a generation ago.

PROJECT

- 1 Work in groups. Choose one example of deviant behaviour from this worksheet. Research whether it is legal or illegal in a number of different countries around the world. If it is legal, try to find out whether it is considered deviant or not in that particular country.
- 2 Put together your information into a short presentation and present it to the rest of the class.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

absolute [adj]: measured in itself, not in relation to anything else

construct [n]: a complicated idea formed by putting together a number of simpler ideas

cramped [adj]: small and crowded

hoarding [n]: the act of collecting or keeping large amounts of something because it might be useful later

sanction [n]: a reward for keeping to the rules or a punishment for breaking them

uphold [v]: to show that you support something such as an idea by what you say or do