



## Deviance and a Social Construct : An in Class Activity

### Suggested Citation:

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### Abstract:

Purpose: To learn how deviance is socially determined Time: 30 minutes Preparation: Copy and pass out handout

### Details:

<b>Resource Types</b>	Class Activity
<b>Authors</b>	Monika J Ulrich University of Arizona
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<b>Subject Area</b>	Social Control
<b>Class Level</b>	College 200
<b>Class Size</b>	
<b>Language</b>	English

### Usage Notes:

### Learning Goals and Assessments:

Goal  
Assessment  
Goal  
Assessment  
Goal

## **Assessment**

### **Resource Files:**

Deviance and Social Control - Module 35.doc  
citation.docx

## ***DEVIANCE AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT: AN IN CLASS ACTIVITY***

Monika J. Ulrich

Purpose: To learn how deviance is socially determined

Time: 30 minutes

Preparation: Copy and pass out handout

### ***Instructions to Students:***

You are an adoption social worker trying to choose the best home for placement of a child. You are examining ten homes. Please rank these homes from 1-10 based on your choice for a home (1 is your first choice...). Everything else in these homes is the same, except for these characteristics:

- A. \_\_\_\_\_ This family has replaced their normal toilets with composting toilets. Their toilets are filled with sawdust, and after use, they remove the feces and place it in a compost bin in the back yard. Later, they use that compost on their plants.
- B. \_\_\_\_\_ This family shares a bed with all of their children, infants through teenagers.
- C. \_\_\_\_\_ This family is Native American and practices a weekly ceremony which involves being in an extremely hot sweat lodge for about three hours at a time. They plan to include their new child in this practice.
- D. \_\_\_\_\_ This family practices social nudity. They live in a “nudist colony” and do not wear clothing in their community.
- E. \_\_\_\_\_ This family involves married parents who date and have sex with other people. They believe that they are in a stable marriage and that dating other people strengthens their relationship.
- F. \_\_\_\_\_ This family includes a transsexual adult. This parent was born as a woman and now lives as a man and will be the child's father.
- G. \_\_\_\_\_ This family believes in opening their home to all. At any given time, they have various friends sleeping over, renting spaces, or otherwise living in their home. They also have about 15 animals (cats and dogs).
- H. \_\_\_\_\_ This family adheres to extremely traditional gender roles. The wife does not speak unless spoken to, does not have access to family money, and prepares a separate meal for her husband which he eats without her.
- I. \_\_\_\_\_ This family is Christian Scientists. As part of their religion, they do not believe in using any medicine, even for emergencies.
- J. \_\_\_\_\_ This family is openly racist and part of a group trying to exclude African-Americans from employment in the United States.

### ***Instructor's Notes:***

I initially have students do this handout alone, then have them get together in small groups and discuss their results. I ask students to circle those behaviors that they saw as “deviant.”

As a class, we compare people's top and bottom choices. We usually find that students are disturbed differently by different behavior. We initiate a discussion on how deviance is defined differently by different people. I then explain how in different historical eras and cultures, each of these practices would be considered perfectly normal, not deviant, behavior. We then talk about how definitions of deviance change over time and are not static. I

conclude by explaining that there is no objective definition of a “deviant” or “not deviant” behavior but that it is relative to the culture and individual.



## The Simpsons Help Us Understand Deviance and Social Control

### Suggested Citation:

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Larsen, Elizabeth A. 2013 "The Simpsons Help Us Understand Deviance and Social Control." Assignment, Class Activity, Lecture, PowerPoint, Video published in *TRAILS: Teaching Resources and Innovations Library for Sociology*. Washington DC: American Sociological Association. (<http://trails.asanet.org>)

### Abstract:

Marge in Chains, an episode from the 4th season of the popular animated television show, The Simpsons, provides a wealth of opportunities for students to actively engage with concepts related to deviance and social control. Students first read about deviance and social control in any introductory textbook. I use Schaefer's *Sociology in Modules*. In class, we review these concepts using a PowerPoint presentation. Then I show this episode of Simpsons. It is not necessary, and may be distracting, to show the entire episode. I usually forward the DVD to the third track and begin there, as the deviance concepts start popping up in force after a minute or two. While they watch the video, students have a worksheet in front of them in which they answer both factual questions about the plot and about deviance concepts that are being depicted. Afterward, we discuss all the answers as a class to make sure that each student has a good artifact from the experience that they can use as they study for the deviance portion of the upcoming test. Student feedback from this learning experience has been singularly positive as a means for developing a real sense of what these concepts might "look like" in real life, albeit the real life of The Simpson family.

### Details:

<b>Resource Types</b>	Assignment, Class Activity, Lecture, PowerPoint, Video
<b>Authors</b>	Elizabeth Anne Larsen
<b>Date Published</b>	2/6/2013
<b>Subject Area</b>	Deviant Behavior/Social Disorganization
<b>Class Level</b>	College 100
<b>Class Size</b>	Any
<b>Language</b>	English

### Usage Notes:

I use this activity in my Principles of Sociology course, but it could also be used in courses such as Deviance and Social Control, Criminological Theory, and other similar classes. It is important to confine viewing to the portion of this episode that involves deviance concepts. Thus, the first few minutes can safely be skipped, then watch the video until the conclusion of the episode. The only pitfall I have found is that it is important to advise students to focus on the deviance concepts, even though, admittedly, they may find other aspects of the video humorous and interesting as well. Students usually look relieved at the completion of this activity, as it really helps them to grasp how a number of important deviance concepts and processes actually work. Now they can visual these things and remember them.

#### **Learning Goals and Assessments:**

<b>Goal</b>	Apply the concept of labeling (Becker) and primary/secondary deviance (Lemert) to events in this episode.
<b>Assessment</b>	Show of hands in the classroom and success on the deviance and social control portion of the test.
<b>Goal</b>	Apply the concepts of the degradation ceremony (Garfinkel) and reintegration ceremony to events in this episode.
<b>Assessment</b>	Show of hands in the classroom and success on the deviance and social control portion of the test.
<b>Goal</b>	Apply other concepts of deviance, including , effect of deviance on community (Durkheim), sanctions, self-fulfilling prophecy, differential association (Sutherland), and retrospective interpretation to events in this episode.
<b>Assessment</b>	Show of hands in the classroom and success on the deviance and social control portion of the test.

#### **Resource Files:**

DevianceSocialControl.pptx

MargeInChainsWorksheetMYCOPY-03-06-10.docx

## Marge in Chains

1. (Labeling) What was the behavior that Marge engaged in?

LEFT THE STORE WITH A BOTTLE OF BOURBON FOR WHICH SHE DID NOT PAY.

2. (Labeling) Who noticed it?

APU, THE CASHIER AT THE CONVENIENCE STORE.

3. (Labeling) How was the behavior interpreted; what does the observer say she did?

APU SAYS THAT SHE STOLE IT.

4. (Labeling) What was the sanction, or consequence? Was it negative or positive?

30 DAYS IN PRISON

5. (Garfinkel) Was there a degradation ceremony? If so, what happened?

YES. COURT TRIAL. SHE WAS FOUND GUILTY.

6. Was there a reintegration ceremony? If so, what happened?

WELCOME BACK MARGE BANNER ON ROOF, WHOLE TOWN SHOWED UP, 3 CHEERS, ADJUSTED STATUE IN HER HONOR.

7. (Lemert) Did Marge engage in primary deviance?

SHE MAY HAVE, IF SHE ACTUALLY DID STEAL THE BOTTLE OF BOURBON.

8. (Lemert) Did Marge engage in secondary deviance?

NO. SHE DID NOT ENGAGE IN FURTHER ACTS OF DEVIANCE.

9. (Durkheim) How did Marge's absence affect the community?

RIOTING, LOOTING FIRES, KILLER BEES, POLICE DOGS, COULD NOT AFFORD LINCOLN STATUE

10. (Labeling) Did Marge accept the deviant label?

NO, SHE DID NOT CHANGE HER BEHAVIOR TO FIT THE DEVIANT LABEL.

11. (Differential Association) Did Marge develop an excess of associations favorable to violation of law over those unfavorable to violation of law? How did her associations with Phillips and with Tattoo Annie and others affect her?

NO. SHE BEHAVES EXACTLY THE SAME AS BEFORE, EVEN AFTER ASSOCIATING WITH CRIMINALS.

12. What is the difference between these two statements?
- Police Chief – Marge Simpson was arrested for shoplifting?
  - Mayor – Marge Simpson is a shoplifter?
- A. REFERS TO A FACT.  
B. REFERS TO HER IDENTITY AND IS A JUDGMENT OF HER CHARACTER.

13. (Retrospective Interpretation) What were some of the comments made by the minister, the doctor, and their wives about Marge and
- Her husband                      DOESN'T EARN VERY MUCH
  - Family                                IS A MESS
  - Cooking                                HAIR ON A MARSHMALLOW SQUARE
  - Physical appearance      WEBBED TOES
  - Alcohol use?                        DRINKY-DRINKY GESTURE
  - Why do they follow her to the bathroom? DON'T TRUST HER NOT TO STEAL SOMETHING.

14. Do you think Marge stole the bourbon? Why or why not?

LINES UNDER EYES SUGGEST SHE WAS TIRED AND FORGOT SHE WAS CARRYING IT

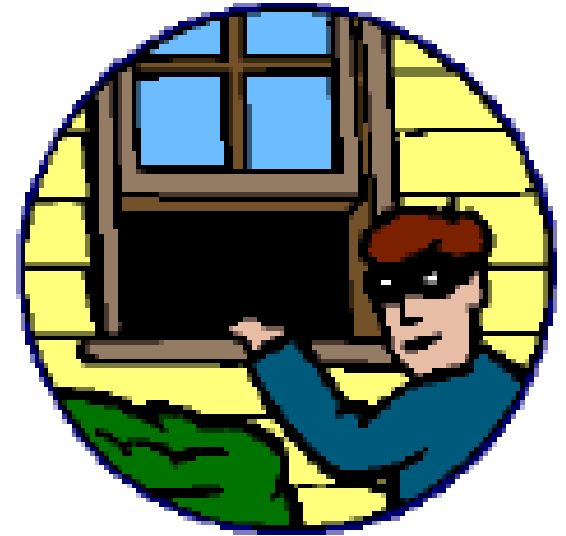
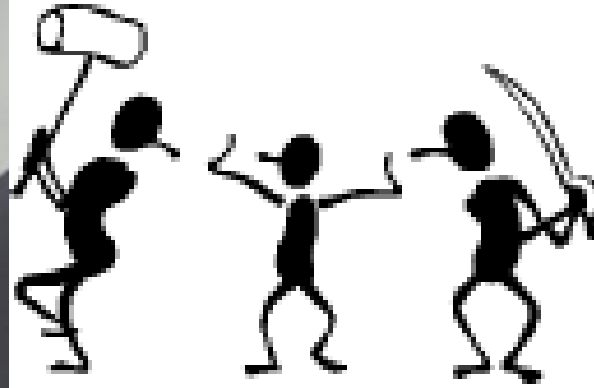
15. According to labeling theory, does it matter whether she stole it or not? Explain.

NO. IT ONLY MATTERS THAT SHE WAS OBSERVED, LABELED, AND PUNISHED.

16. At one point, Bart is eating lunch with a friend on a bench outdoors. A well-known bully, Nelson, approaches and taunts Bart, calling Bart's mother a jailbird. Bart counters by saying "So is yours!" Nelson replies, "Oh yeah! Let's play." One theory of deviance suggests that if Bart spends too much time with Nelson, he may learn techniques for committing crimes and/or may learn attitudes favorable to breaking the law. Which theory of deviance is this?

DIFFERENTIAL ASSOCIATION THEORY





## Deviance and Social Control



# The Sociology of Deviance

- Going beyond studying the individual to emphasize the context under which the deviant behavior occurs.

# DEVIANT BEHAVIOR

- Deviant behavior refers to actions that transgress commonly held norms.
- What is regarded as deviant can shift from **time** to time and **place** to place; “normal” behavior in one cultural setting may be labeled “deviant” in another.

# Review: Types of Norms

## ■ Folkways (weakly enforced)

- the patterns of conventional behavior in a society, norms that apply to everyday matters.
- Gentle social pressure and imitation. Breaking or questioning a folkway does not cause severe punishment, but may cause the person to be laughed at, frowned upon, or scolded. Some examples of folkways in western culture include respecting the privacy of strangers and eating food with the proper utensil.

## ■ Mores (strongly enforced)

- norms of morality. Breaking mores, like attending church in the nude, will offend most people of a culture.

## ■ Taboos (forbidden)

- the most extreme form of mores as they forbid a society's most outrageous practices, such as incest and murder.

# Durkheim on Deviance

- Deviance is present in all societies.
- Deviance is normal so long as it is not excessive.
- Deviance will be present even in a “community of saints.”
  - Little faults and flaws will be magnified to the same scandalousness as serious offenses, and thus will become known as crimes.

# Durkheim: The Functions of Deviance

- Help make the norms of society clearer to the majority population
- Unite the non-deviant members of society (social capital)
- Promote social change

# Differential Association Theory

## Sutherland, 1947

- Criminal behavior is learned.
- Learned in interaction with other persons in a process of communication.
- Communication in intimate groups, such as with peers.
- Learning involves techniques for committing crime and learning definitions of the legal code as favorable or unfavorable.
- A person becomes delinquent because of an excess of associations favorable to violation of law over those unfavorable to violation of law. This is Differential Association.

# STRUCTURAL STRAIN THEORY

## (Merton, 1957)

- The legitimate means of achieving wealth do not always lead to this goal and not everyone has access to these legitimate means, such as higher education, anyway.
- In this situation, there is great pressure to try to get ahead by any means, legitimate or illegitimate.
- *According to Merton, then, deviance is a by-product of economic inequalities. To address the issue of crime we would need to first address the overarching issues of poverty and economic inequality.*



# Merton's Typology of Responses to Structural Strain 1957

Merton believed that people respond to structural strain and that their responses involve some combination of acceptance and rejection of valued goals and means.

Mode of Adaptation	Goals	Means
Conformity	+	+
Innovation	+	-
Ritualism	-	+
Retreatism	-	-
Rebellion	+/-	+/-

 Acceptance/achievement of valued goals or means

 Rejection/failure to achieve valued goals or means

15 16

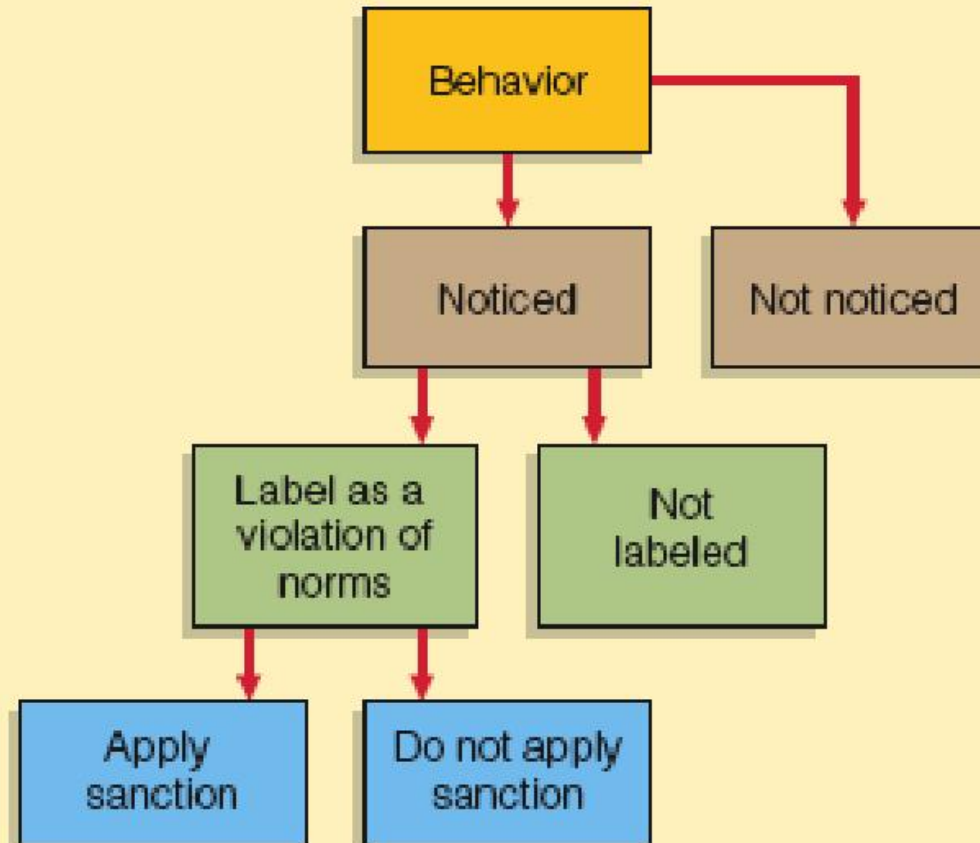
# Labeling Theory – Becker 1963

- Interested in how some behaviors come to be defined as deviant and why certain groups, but not others, are labeled as deviant.
- Assumes that no act is intrinsically criminal (or normal).
- Assumes that labeling someone as deviant will reinforce their deviant behavior.
- Power, rule makers and rule breakers

# Labeling Theory -- Becker 1963

## Major Assumptions

1. Rules are socially constructed.
2. Rules are enforced uniformly or consistently.
3. Deviants are those whose behavior people have noticed, *and* labeled as such, and applied sanctions.



# Primary/Secondary Deviation

- **Edwin Lemert (1972)**

- Primary – the initial (or first) act of transgression
- Secondary – when the individual comes to accept the label and sees him/herself as deviant.

- **Harold Garfinkel (1956)**

- Degradation Ceremonies – old identity destroyed and replaced with new, denounced one. Example would be a court trial in which one is convicted and sentenced to prison.

# Retrospective Interpretation (Garfinkel, 1956)

- The significance of past events, is continually being re-evaluated based on the newly uncovered details of the current situation.
- The “facts” are re-constructed to fit the new conclusion.
- What he is now is what, “after all, he was all along.”  
(Garfinkel, 1956)

# Stigma

- A concept created by Erving Goffman (dramaturgical analysis, total institutions, resocialization, impression management)
- a severe social disapproval of personal characteristics or beliefs that are perceived to be against cultural norms.
- Literally, a mark or brand that makes someone discredited, or discreditable.
- Criminal record, physical disability, obesity, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, etc.

# Anomie

- A concept created by Durkheim (suicide and social factors, social facts, functionalism, etc.)
- It describes the breakdown of social norms and values. Old norms are breaking down but new norms have not yet arisen to replace them.
- Anomie in common parlance is thought to mean something like “at loose ends.”

# Social Control

- Socialization almost always brings about conformity, and conformity is voluntary.
- When conformity cannot be achieved voluntarily, other mechanisms of social control may be used to enforce norms and expectations.